



# ONE VOICE



MISSION  
SUNDAY

Churches: ♦Bethany ♦Immanuel ♦Lunder ♦Silver Lake ♦Winnebago

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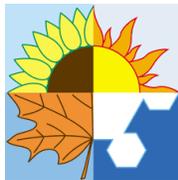
## From the Pastor's Desk

*"For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him."*  
Psalm 103:11



As I think about the month of September, I think of it as a time or a season of change. We transition from summer to fall. Already our schools have begun and we have seen the school buses rolling through the countryside picking up our students. The buzzer sounds in the school and the school is once again full of students moving from one class to another. Our college students have finished their summer jobs and are back on campus, reuniting with friends, listening to lectures, beginning projects and easing back into the world of Academia. The weather slowly changes as we have summer like weather in the beginning of the month. Then about in the middle of the month we begin to feel the cool crisp mornings and evenings. Shorts and sandals are put away for the season and blue jeans, sweatshirts and tennis shoes are brought out to wear once again. Our attention switches from baseball to football and volleyball. The crops enter into the last stages of the growing season leading to the season of harvest. Yes, September is a month in which we experience a lot of changes.

Living in Northern Iowa and Southern Minnesota, we have come to know and appreciate the different seasons and the changes they bring. Each season has its own beauty and different activities with different expectations. Spring, we love the new found warmth, the waking up of the earth as the snow melts and the cold days of winter give way to warm days of spring. Spring is a time of planting seeds, a time of hope, a time of new beginnings. Summer is a time of growing and hopefully some time to get outdoors to enjoy God's beautiful creation. Fall is the time of harvest and returning back to routines with school and colleges in schedule. Winter is a time of rest for the land, a time of white snowy landscapes and frost decorated trees with its sports of snowmobiling, ice fishing, skiing and more. Living in a place where the seasons bring their changes, bear witness to us that change is simply a part of our lives.



Some of us deal with change better than others. As a group, Lutherans really don't like change much, but it comes anyway, just like summer transitions into fall. We can't stop summer from transitioning into fall, neither can we stop change in other aspects of our life. If it seems like technology has changed the rate of change in our lives, you are correct. About ten years ago, it was reported that our medical knowledge about our bodies doubles every year and a half. I am sure that as computer programmers write different programs trying to organize data and information, to help people solve different problems, our knowledge about many things has doubled in shorter time than a year and a half. Just look at how smart our cars and phones have become in the last few years. The changes are amazing. Sometimes the changes are coming so



fast, that we are not sure how to deal with all the changes in our life.

We find ourselves using more and more screen time to learn about changes and try to keep up. Many people use social media, to learn about all the different things going on in the lives of family and friends, from having a good day or a bad day to sharing life changing events like a birth of a child.

More of us are getting our news on the internet, as we hear about earthquakes around the world or fires burning thousands of acres in national forests and places where people live. We also hear of shocking stories of violence, like stories of mass shootings, which are a part of change we are experiencing, which we don't understand and brings more brokenness and hurt into our lives.

As changes come faster and faster, we seek to find some solid footing, a strong foundation that keeps us steady. The Psalmist tells us about a foundation that is always steady, unchanging. *".... so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him."* Throughout the Psalms, plus from Genesis to Revelation, the scriptures bear witness to God's steadfast love, God's faithfulness from generation to generation. God's love for you is steadfast, unchanging. Jesus talks about this when he is explaining to the crowds that he is the Good Shepherd. Jesus says he is the Good Shepherd. He knows his sheep and his sheep know him. Plus, no one will ever take his sheep out of his hands. Apostle Paul also lifts up the steadfastness of God's love for you as he writes in Romans, *"Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famines, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."* God's love is steadfast and present in all the life changes and powers we may experience that Paul listed and more. God's



love for you is the solid rock upon which you can stand in the midst of life's changes that keep coming at you at warp speed. Though your world may suddenly seem it has become a strange unrecognizable place, because of some change; loss of a loved one, sudden loss of health, great culture changes, fast pasted schedules hardly allowing you to catch your breath to process what is all happening, God's love for you is steadfast, constant. Though everything else changes, God's love for you remains. Your Heavenly Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are always present with their love to claim you, to give you the gift of peace and joy. The world is changing, but God's love for you is steadfast. Rest in God's steadfast love for you.

*Pastor Randy*



# WANDERINGS AND WONDERINGS



I, as have many, been struggling to understand the seeming decline of the church – in attendance, activity levels, conflict within the ranks, scheduling competition, the list goes on. We continue to look for answers. And on some days, it is discouraging. Now I'm talking about this in the big picture of things. Because I have to say, when I look around locally, at many of you, I find myself smiling...and thanking God.

But "big" picture, is discouraging and I wonder what is going to come of it all. What I say next, I say this with complete confidence and assurance, the church is going nowhere. It is God's church, not ours. And God is going nowhere, God will not let it fail. But...it might not look like what I'm "use to" or be what think "I like". It will change. ☺

So we look for a quick fixes...and there is not one. (I discovered long ago, by experience and the Bible, God rarely uses quick fixes.) The answer is about being faithful...trusting God...and waiting for the God given opportunities...and hoping that I recognize them when they come. **God is faithful, and there lies my hope.**

The recent Sunday morning readings in Hebrews and in Luke, have given me a different perspective of these "churchly" struggles and concerns. Luke has been reminding us that Jesus didn't intend to make everything smooth and easy – Jesus pretty much affirms that he brings conflict and division. In ways that we don't want to hear about. Not everybody in this world likes God's way of doing things. And the writer of Hebrews reminds us that many of God's people were faithful, but never experienced the fullness of God's promises.

Here's my conclusion for the moment – maybe we are living in a world and a time where people just don't like doing things God's way, even in the church. God still claims us...still loves us...is still working in us...still working through us. But our resistance is pretty strong to God's ways, so we struggle. What things am I noticing? Accepting others who are different from us. Forgiving. Working to be united. Racial, gender, economic, political differences and issues. Being other-centered - not being so self-absorbed and self-centered. Compromising while not being compromised. The list goes on, and you will have to do a lot of talking to convince me that our world likes those Godly qualities.

Here's the really important thing we need to understand: When we accept ourselves and all other people as children of God, we reflect the love of Jesus Christ. That is when we truly become Christ-like when we can accept others as he accepted us.

So I have a story to tell, with two things to think about – how counter-culture this response is and how this might make God smile.

*Ken and Joel are friends. They met in seminary and were in the same ministry assessment group. Joel was a big guy. He did his undergraduate work at Dartmouth, where he played football. Their mutual athletic interests were a common bond, and the friendship grew. They enjoyed jogging together at a local park.*

*One day they were running around the small lake located there, and Ken noticed that Joel was smiling. "What are you smiling at?" Ken asked.*

*Joel pointed to a little girl fishing with her dad. She was imitating every move the dad made. If he cast, she cast. If he fixed his hat, she fixed hers. If he sat down, she sat down. "Just something about a child imitating her father that makes my heart smile," Joel replied.*

*Now there was a guy in their ministry assessment group, Ken says, that for some reason, seemed to always be out to get Joel. No matter what Joel said, this guy would contradict him and take pains to point out how shortsighted Joel's comments were. The ministry assessment group was intense and was an environment where they were to evaluate one another in many different areas. This person was continually negative, demeaning and rude to Joel.*

*One day it reached a boiling point, and some really harsh words were exchanged. They left the group and Joel angrily said, "That guy has pushed me too far. He makes me want to run him over like I used to do on the football field!" Remember that Joel was a big guy. "The veins in his thick neck were bulging," says Ken, "and it was enough to even make me shake in my shoes. I would not want to be on the receiving end of anything from him," Ken admits.*

*A few days passed, and it was almost time for another group meeting. The entire group could not wait to see what fireworks might occur between Joel and his enemy. The*

*day before the group meeting, Joel and Ken were jogging in the park together. They were circling the lake, and Ken asked Joel, "So have you decided how you are going to deal with that guy?" "Yes, I sure have," Joel replied. Ken waited for Joel to continue. "I have decided (and then he paused)... to forgive him." "Say again?" Ken said. "I have decided to forgive him," Joel stated rather emphatically. Ken smiled.*

*"What are you smiling at?" Joel asked. "There's just something about a child imitating his father that makes my heart smile," Ken said.*

**It makes God smile when we imitate Christ.**

*Wanderings and Wonderings, Pastor Bill Peters*



