



ONE VOICE



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

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From the Pastor's Desk

"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized in to Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." Romans 6:3-4



Since we are staying at home more than normal, when I am able to drive somewhere or go on a walk I have noticed the newness of life that is coming. The grass was starting to get green and then it was covered with snow once again. That was a bummer. But then the sun and the warm winds melted the snow once again. Now the grass is even greener and starting to grow. I have seen Canadian Geese flying back north. I



have seen swans, ducks and cranes swimming in ponds of water. I have seen the Winnebago River rise to its spring levels of brimming over its banks as the snow melts and the spring rains come. I have seen Robins now for weeks. I have seen Robins, doves, black birds start collecting pieces of grass or long twigs to make nests. I have seen tulips and Iris flowers push its way through the snow and it won't be long before they blossom. I have seen and heard motorcyclists on their motorcycles driving



down the blacktops. I have seen husbands and wives and families going out for walks in the sunny afternoons. I have seen bicyclists peddling into the warm wind with the sunshine on their backs. And most exciting, the last couple of days I have seen farmers driving their tractors in the fields, pulling field cultivators and putting on anhydrous. All of these are sure signs of spring.

After what seems like a long winter, a cold winter nap, the warmth of spring stirs our heart to joy and hope. After spending a long time in doors, and now with the "shelter in place" restrictions, the chance to go out doors and wave at neighbors we meet along the way is a breath of fresh air. All these signs of winter giving way to spring are signs of newness of life. It is a reminder of God's faithfulness. God promised Noah as he left the ark and signs of life began to return to the earth, "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease." The long winter has slowly let go of its grip and the warmth of spring with the promise of summer is coming.

All these signs of newness of life are so uplifting to our spirits this spring, as we have been daily bombarded by the news of the Coronavirus. We get daily updates of how many people have been infected worldwide and in the United States. We receive daily updates on how many have been infected and died in our states and in our area. We have also received good news of how many have recovered, how many have moved out of ICU and ventilators into a regular room. Along with the infections of the Corona virus, we hear stories of how the virus has affected all aspects of our lives. Schools have closed and we see pictures of students sitting at home with a lap top working on their school lessons their teachers have worked so diligently in providing. We hear restaurants working on having their food available for take-out orders. We hear of businesses closing. Recently we have



been hearing about workers at meat packing plants being infected with the corona virus and the plants shutting down. The plants need to be shut down for the protection of the lives of the workers. But at the same time the shutdown affects the farmers with an abundant of hogs and cattle for sale, driving down the prices of hogs, cattle and corn. With people staying home the price of gas is driving for the gluttony of oil and gas not being consumed, which in turn is shutting down Ethanol plants again affecting price of corn and availability of good feed for cattle. Over and over again the news is weighing down our spirits and we could use some good news.

The awakening of the earth from the spring weather, the return of the geese and the songbirds are signs bearing witness to the promise the Lord made of a cycle of seedtime and harvest, cold and warmth, winter and summer. But the cycle of seedtime and harvest was just a part of our Lord's promise of life and newness of life.

We just celebrated Easter, the celebration of our Lord rising victoriously over death. Of course Easter is preceded by our Lenten journey and Holy Week which refocuses our attention from our busyness to focus upon our Lord's suffering. Our focus upon the cross and all the suffering surrounding the cross of our Lord is a witness to the Lord's love for you. Our Lord knows and understands the brokenness of our lives and the brokenness of the world in which we live. He hears our prayers and knows our longings for hope, and peace as we journey through difficult days, some made more difficult by the pandemic. So Jesus took on all the weight and burden of sin and death and carried it all the way to the tomb. Then he arose, picking up his life again handing defeat to sin and death.



Apostle Paul describes how we are connected to Jesus' death and resurrection. *"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ...so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."* Jesus has given you newness of life and eternal life. Jesus gives you newness of life, each day as you rise and remember your baptism, you have been made new; justified and reconciled with the Father, given a new slate just as if you never sinned. You have the newness of life of being claimed by the love of God that would go as far as the cross and the grave for you. You have newness of life of God gifting you with the Holy Spirit to dwell within you. You have newness of life of the peace of Jesus always walking with you.



The signs of spring are signs of life awaking, bearing witness to the true newness of life that our Lord has gifted you. Jesus lives and now so do you.

Pastor Randy



WANDERINGS AND WONDERINGS



We have been at this COVID-19 virus stuff for over a month now. If I were not so parochial, and had been paying attention and not so oblivious to “world” matters, I would have been at least aware of this, and praying about this for 6 months already. But for this last month, it has been wearing on us.

And I am tired of it. This past Wednesday it was getting the best of me ... I was getting impatient (with people, particularly on this issue) ... irritable ... overwhelmed, again. I was working on the newsletter and bulletin announcements – it seemed everything I was looking at read “Canceled due to COVID 19”. I actually haven’t figured out how to do this on the printed page, but it felt like it was flashing at me like a big neon sign. Covid 19 ... COVID 19 ...

COVID 19 ... COVID 19! This was out of control ... I felt out of control. I don’t like that feeling of being “not in controlled.”

And then it dawned on me ... this virus is not controlling us. Granted, those who have the virus are victims - tragically. But most of us are not victims. We are making decisions and choices, and acting on them even when they inconvenience us, for a reason. We haven’t cancelled worship, Bible studies, meetings, Sunday School, Confirmation, etc. closed restaurants, businesses, parks because of COVID 19. We have closed things down ... practice social distancing ... wear masks ... why? **Because we care about each other.** Because we love each other like Jesus loved us. We have learned that the reason I wear a face masks, is not so much that it keeps “me” safe – no – it keeps “you” safe. We choose to keep each other safe.

Let me be clear and honest with the situation at hand – there are some places in our country and world where the situation is different from our own and what I’m saying does not apply. The inconveniences that we are suffering through are ones we have responsibly chosen, and we have taken control of, for the sake of loving our neighbor.

Now the odd part of this. Somewhere we have been led to believe, that “loving our neighbor” is supposed to make us feel good? Isn’t this theme of “loving one another” meant to minimize our hardships, suffering, and difficulties? I would like to tell you that, but the picture of Jesus hanging on the cross is still too fresh in my mind. And I would like to believe that all the post-Easter stories, of Jesus’ resurrection appearances, made

everyone’s life happier, easier, and without suffering – but it didn’t. Jesus died, Jesus rose, so that we might experience life in Him.

I have been watching a series set in the early middle ages. And one connects with, and likes, the primary character quickly. He was to be a lord, but it was taken from him. He is far from perfect. Sometimes not even good. Bold. Brash. Hasty. Headstrong. At times set on revenge. Selfish. But has a good heart. Loyal to a fault.

After saving another character’s life, he is betrayed by that person. Sold into slavery. Harsh and cruel situation. Whipped and treated as if his life is an inconvenience to his masters. Shackled to the bottom of a boat as an oarsman with other slaves – rowing across the North Sea in early winter. More than most can bear. His friend loses his mind, though chained to the boat, he lunges at the slave master. The main character grabs his friend, shelters him from the whip of the slave master and tells him. “Remember, you are not a slave ... you are a warrior!” Over and over again, until he believes those words.

Later, his friend is dead, and the main character is now broken in spirit, too weak to walk, nearly dead himself. And he is rescued by his brother, who has been searching for him all winter. He falls into his brother’s arms, weeping, broken, waiting to die. And his brother looks him in the eye and says, “You are not a slave, you are my brother!”

With tears in my eyes, I could not but help think of the words in Isaiah and our Baptismal liturgy, “I chose you ... You are my child ... a child of God!” That is what gives us hope, even when we are broken. That is what gives us life, even as we are dying. That is who I am, always!

Jesus did not die on the cross as a victim ... but as the Son of God! The disciples did not proclaim “He is risen!” as a victim that authorities hunted down ... but as Apostles of the Most High with Good News for all! We too are not victims, whether we suffer illness or the self-imposed inconveniences ... but we are children of God who love and care for one another!

God is control. We are not going to play the victim, because we are Children of God. So if we cancel something, let it be known that we have canceled not because of a virus, but because as children of God, we love and seek to care and protect one another.

Wanderings and Wonderings, Pastor Bill Peters

