



ONE VOICE



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

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From the Pastor's Desk

"So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name." Psalm 63:2-4



When King David wrote this Psalm, he was hiding out in caves and other places in the wilderness. David was hiding from King Saul who had become jealous of David and sought to kill him. So David is on the run. David misses his friends, especially his close friend, Jonathan, the son of King Saul. But what David misses most is worshipping the Lord in the sanctuary of the Tent of the Tabernacle. God had revealed his presence and glory as the Lord led the people through the years of traveling in the wilderness by a pillar of fire or a pillar of cloud settling in the Tent of the Tabernacle. David will bless the Lord where ever he is, lifting up his hands and calling upon the Lord. David knows God hears him and is present with him in the wilderness. At the same time, he misses worshipping God in the sanctuary.

We can relate to David missing the sanctuary. We are going on the fourth month since we were able to worship together in our sanctuaries. Like David, we have been able to worship the Lord where we find ourselves, for the Lord is always present. We have sat upon our couches and recliners and tuned in and watched a recording of a worship service and we have worshipped together, just not in person. I am really excited and looking forward to worshipping in person on the third Sunday of this month. It will be a joy to gather together, to see the faces of our brothers and sisters in Christ and worship our Lord together in person.

Worshipping together isn't the only community we are missing. Usually the month of July is a time of enjoying summer and community celebrations. We gather together on July 4th to remember the birth of our nation and to celebrate our freedoms.



We usually gather for a parade. We visit with neighbors. Families reunite and enjoy the parade and other festivities. In Scarville, we watch the parade. We sit

in the park with family and friends and we listen to music, eat the hamburgers grilled by our volunteer firefighters and eat ice cream and bars made by the ladies of the community. Some go boating or swimming or have their own family barbecues. Then



as the sun begins to settle for the day, we gather to watch the wonder and awe of the beauty of fireworks. But as we know most parades have been canceled. Some fireworks are being rescheduled so we may be able to see them.

The State of Iowa has just re-opened the high school baseball and softball season. So parents and grandparents and neighbors and friends can sit around the fence, social distancing to watch a game. Yet, there are still many beaches closed. The Lake Mills pool is looking to open, but not open yet. July Jubilee and other town celebrations have been cancelled. The County Fairs have been canceled. The

Iowa and Minnesota State Fairs have been canceled. Major League baseball has been canceled. A lot of resorts are canceled or restricted on how many people can be in the campground. It is opening up, but we are missing the summer days of enjoying getting together as family and friends to create memories at ball games, town gatherings or watching a sporting event together.

What we have discovered is the most important part of the events that we are missing is the gathering of the family members, the friends and the neighbors. It is the relationships and spending time together which creates the warm memories. Spending time together strengthens the bonds that we already have with each other. What we have been doing is finding different ways to do things together. So instead of going to a major league baseball game, the family may have a picnic in the backyard and play some outdoor games together. Instead of going to a race track, maybe friends get together for a bonfire. Instead of going to a big campground, maybe the family uses a fire ring in the backyard to make s'mores. We are only limited by our imaginations of how we can be together safely and still have family fun.



When we open our church buildings to worship in person, it will be good to be together. But it will be different. The CDC, Iowa Health Department, Doctors from Mayo, every medical professionals recommend no singing. As we sing our voice droplets can be propelled from twenty to forty feet, even with masks on

our faces. There will be some other things that will be different, like no physical touching when we share the peace, no fellowship after or before the service. It will be different.

But what won't be different is the presence of our Lord. What won't be different is the Holy Spirit dwelling within us speaking to our hearts to create faith. The Holy Spirit will still blow through our sanctuaries joining the prayers of our hearts together, laying them before the Father's throne. Though we will hum hymns of praise instead of sing, our hearts will sing praises to our Lord. The Lord is always present to bless. The Lord is always present to love. As David declared in the wilderness, longing for the intimacy of the sanctuary, *"Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name."* So when we gather together and worship or worship together apart, the Holy Spirit will do its work of creating faith, giving us the peace of being declared forgiven, give us the joy of being claimed and love as Children of God. The Holy Spirit will continue to bless us with God's love, creating new wonderful memories of family and friends together. Enjoy the summer.

Pastor Randy



WANDERINGS AND WONDERINGS



Re-opening for in-person Sunday worship!?

When we first decided to suspend in-person worship, I thought this day of re-gathering would be a day of celebration and excitement. All ready to gather. A full church. You may remember, because we weren't worshipping together for Easter, we talked about that first Sunday back, we would have an Easter Celebration. Easter has come and gone. Pentecost has come and gone. Some funerals were postponed, and some funerals have been had, but not like we are use to – being able to support one another in person – heart, soul and presence.



That was three months ago, and we still have another month before we are going to try gathering together. Some of us have been able to worship, in our living rooms. A good substitute, but not the “real thing”. (It is the “real thing”, but not what I want or am use to.) Others do not have the technology to do that, that has troubled and grieved me. They have read their Bible, done their devotions, but have lacked the sense of a gathered community. We all have missed out. And have missed one another.

I thought closing was a very difficult decision. I remember the night at Parish Council we decided that we should not be shaking hands during or after worship. That bothered me and I didn't really agree with that decision but was going to live with that decision. That was Tuesday, by Saturday of that week, I was wondering if we should have worship on Sunday. And that was the last Sunday we worshipped together.

I have found re-opening an even more difficult task. We have good leaders throughout the parish who have taken on this task of preparing us and finding a safe way to do this. We have good leaders, but we have not been in agreement about all these matters, when, how, what we can and should be doing. Whether we should open... how we should open... what are the necessary risk management issues that we must highlight and live with. Thoughtful and some passionate discussions. I want to say how much I have appreciated those who voiced the disagreements, all these issues/concerns/views need to be heard.



We will be gathering in-person before long. We will be like all others who have already been gathering – tentative, cautious, excited but uncertain. Most

congregations have begun with a fraction of previous worshippers, and those numbers have grown very slowly. I have heard some say that they will continue to stay away from crowds until a vaccination is found – that might be a while. Be sure that you are comfortable and careful returning. Respect your vulnerabilities. Be sure not to pressure others or make anyone feel guilt for whatever they decide. Be respectful of the guidelines that our parish and congregational leaders have laid before us.

Before we re-open for worship, a letter will be sent to your home with the plan that has been developed, and congregationally modified. by the parish so that everyone knows what to expect. No surprises.

Worship will be different than it was when we closed down. Spacing. Communion practices, some are choosing to wait with Communion. No singing. Wearing masks. It won't feel right, even if it is right and necessary at this time.

Everything will be about “risk management” for quite some time. How we look out for one another. How we look out for ourselves. “Risk management” changes as one moves forward and learn more. There will be modifications. There will be mistakes – in all directions, we pray and hope that the cost is manageable – realize that there are no promises.

As leaders, with this movement to re-gather, we are not saying “All Clear!” or “All is well!” So, we still have to respond personally with wisdom, within our comfort levels, recognizing and respecting each other's and our own vulnerabilities.



We will be worshipping together – some in-person and some in-spirit. God will be with us. Christ will be our center. The Spirit will continue to hold us together. God's Word will continue to be proclaimed in thought, word, and deed.

We are the children of God – loved, forgiven, and called. This is not the first time nor the first place that the church has been in this position, struggling to gather for worship. And it will not be the last. But the people of God have always prevailed, by the power and love and will of God. So will we.

Thanks for your partnership.

Wanderings and Wonderings, Pastor Bill Peters

