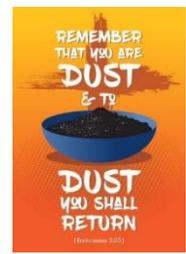




# ONE VOICE



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

Pastor Randy Baldwin & Pastor Bill Peters

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## From the Pastor's Desk



*"They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in the truth."* John 17:16-18

As we leave the month of January and enter into the month of February, we leave behind the holiday seasons. Christmas and New Year celebrations are over. This year the Inauguration of a new President is over. Now we are getting back into the routines, which are still being interrupted by the Pandemic. Some students are in school in person. Some are on-line. Some have a combination of the two. Checking the calendar to see who is to be where and when is part of a new routine.



I know parents and grandparents love to watch their student athlete compete when the games or matches are allowed. But that is opening up from just two people per student to more people. In Iowa, our restaurants are open, but at half-capacity, which is better than not all. Some still have doctor appointments, which can be in person or virtual or postponed.

Work still demands our attention and energy. Families still have crazy schedules trying to get students to practices and other extra-curricular activities. We are either "Zooming" on the computer or just zooming around in person. We are on the go.

In the middle of February, Wednesday the 17<sup>th</sup>, to be exact is Ash Wednesday and the beginning of our Lenten Journey. Lent originally was used as a time to teach new converts about Jesus, Jesus' teaching, the doctrine of the Trinity, the Lord's Supper, baptism and how to live out your life as a follower of Jesus. After the forty days of instruction, the new convert was baptized on Easter morning. Then they received a white gown and could participate in the Lord's Supper for the first time. As years went by and the Church became a legal religion and the official religion of the Roman Empire, the liturgical year was developed. Lent is a time of discipline, a time set aside for prayer, worship and fasting. The discipline helps us to focus on Jesus' suffering, his death and preparation for the celebration of Easter, Jesus' victory over the power of sin and death.

Lent is a good time to remember Jesus' words in his prayer for us, his followers. Jesus is lifting up his disciples and us, those who would come to believe on because of their witness, asking the Father to watch over us. Jesus says we are not of the world, just as he is not of the world. At the same time, Jesus says we are sent into the world, just as he was sent into the world.

With the help or the burden of modern technology our lives are lived at a very fast pace. I remember my summers on my Grandparent's farm. We had chores of milking the cows, feeding the cows, picking up eggs, feeding the chickens and feeding the pigs in the morning. Then we would milk the cows, feed the cows and the pigs once again late afternoon. In between time, the day was ours; unless it was



time to bail hay or bail straw, or walk the beans. Lots of time in between chores. But we don't have lots of time in between our activities today. We finish one activity and begin another, with our phones, we are probably working on something while we are traveling or transitioning from one major task to the other. Go, go, go.

Living life at such a fast pace, adding societal pressures, like the pandemic, racism and political divisiveness to our lives just keeps us on the constant move. When so many things in the world demand our time and our attention, it is difficult to remember and to live as though we are in the world, but not of the world.

Lent gives us an opportunity to step off the fast paced merry-go-round for a while. The discipline of Lent, calling us to worship and prayer reminds us that we are in the world, but not of the world. Lenten themes usually change our focus from the world to Jesus' Passion, his suffering of broken relationships of friends abandoning him, suffering mockery and rejections, suffering beatings, the whip and crucifixion, and suffering death itself. As we change our focus from the world to our Lord's suffering, we are shifting our focus from how the world defines us and how God defines who we are. The world defines us according to what status or prestige assigned to our vocation, our bank accounts and some moving definition of physical attractiveness. As we focus upon the cross and the suffering of our Lord, we begin to glimpse how God defines and perceives us. The cross and the suffering of our Lord reveals the depth of God's love for you and me. Jesus defines our worth, as his suffering and death and resurrection. Jesus and the Father, define you as a loved child of God, an inheritor of the very Kingdom of God. Jesus defines you as citizen of the Kingdom of heaven, not belonging to the world, but belonging to God's reign of love. This is what is at the heart of Jesus' prayer for you, "sanctify them in the truth." Jesus wants you to know your true value, your true identity as a child of God. The word sanctify means how you live out your life. Jesus is asking the Father that you would know the truth of God's love for you, so you can live in the joy and peace of the truth of God's love. Earlier in his conversation with his disciples Jesus said, "I give you my peace, not the peace of the world, but my peace."

Lent is a time to hear the truth of God's word, to focus upon our relationship as a Child of God and as brothers and sisters in Christ, so we don't get so caught up in the world, that we forget who we really are. So take some time this Lent to get off the merry-go-round, catch your breath, and focus upon God's love for you.



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*Pastor Randy*



# WANDERINGS AND WONDERINGS



Where do we see Jesus in our world? We remember the Christmas stories of the shepherds ... wise men ... maybe we might even include the angels. Anna and Simeon. John the baptizer at the river Jordan. And now we are hearing the stories of those to-be disciples, some of whom nearly miss seeing as they are looking and anticipating some different than “Jesus”.

Where do we see Jesus? Do we? Are we looking?

I have a couple of personal stories like the ones that follow, that I’m not proud of, but I’ve tried to learn from. I will not pretend to say or believe that I will not make such mistakes again ... I will. But I can say because of those experiences, Jesus has become more visible.

*(These stories are written in “Let Me Tell You a Story: What we Overhear About Jesus” by Tony Campolo)*

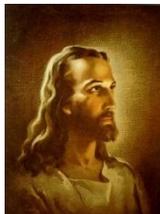
*If you have the eyes to see, you will see Jesus – especially in the poor and the oppressed. Maybe not as dramatic, but I had such an encounter on a landing strip just outside the border of the Dominican Republic in northern Haiti. A small airplane was supposed to pick me up and fly me back to the capital city. As I stood there searching the sky for the airplane a woman came toward me holding her child in her arms. The baby was haggard. His arms and legs hung from his little body as though they were sticks. The child’s stomach is swollen four or five times the normal size, not because he had had too much to eat, but because he had nothing to eat at all. Digestive fluids had eaten up the insides of the child and the swelling was the inevitable result.*



*The woman held up her child with his rust-colored hair and shrunken face, and she began to plead with me, “Take my Baby! Take my baby! Please, mister, take my baby. If you don’t take my baby, my baby’s going to die. Take my baby. Please, take my baby!”*

*I tried to tell her there was nothing I could do to help her. Tried to explain that I couldn’t take her baby. I tried to look away, but no matter which direction I turned she was in my face, pleading with me to take her child. “Make my baby your baby,” She kept saying. “Feed my baby. Take my baby to a hospital. Save my baby. Please! Please! Please!”*

*I was relieved when the little Piper Cub airplane came into sight. The minute it touched down at the end of the grass landing strip I ran across the field to meet*



*it. But the woman came running after me screaming, “Take my baby! Take my baby! Take my baby!”*

*I climbed into the plane as fast as I could and closed the door. I told the pilot to rev up the engine and get us out of there. He got the engine up to speed, but not soon enough. The woman was alongside the plane, holding her dying child in one arm and banging on the door with the other. But the airplane pulled away from her and went slowly down the landing strip, then into the air.*

*I was halfway back to the capital when it hit me, and I realized whom I had left behind on that grass landing strip. It was Jesus! I don’t really know the name of the child, but I could hear the words of Jesus, “for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.”*

*I saying in return, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?”*

*And Jesus answers, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.*

*I believe that Jesus mystically presented Himself to me through that child, and when I rejected that child, I rejected Jesus. It’s good news to me that I am saved by grace and not of works. Because only by the grace of God can I be saved from such failures.*

Here is a story ... and prayer ... we can embrace as we move forward. A friend of mine was taking a tour of an inner-city church with a huge social ministry that included a soup kitchen. He was there just before the noon hour. The kitchen crew had gathered in a huddle to pray before they opened the door and let in the hungry street people. Among the prayers lifted up was one by an elderly worker who simply said, “Lord, we know You’ll be comin’ through the line today, so help us to treat You well!”



With this in mind we sing,  
**“Open our eyes, Lord ... We want to see Jesus ... To reach out and touch Him ... And say that we love Him ... Open our ears, Lord ... And help us to listen ... Open our eyes, Lord ... We want to see Jesus**  
 “(“Open our Eyes” by Bob Cull)



Wanderings and Wonderings, Pastor Bill Peters

