



ONE VOICE



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

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From the Pastor's Desk

"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD.'" Psalm 122:1



Last year at this time, we began to see the rise of the Pandemic hitting our nation. The President called for a fifteen-day shut down. But as we know the shutdown went much longer than fifteen days. Businesses were closed. Churches were closed. Schools were shut down for a while. Then the schools figured out a hybrid of in-person and online or some just one or the other. Funerals and weddings were limited to twenty people. Masks and social distancing became a part of our new norm. In the state of Iowa, our Governor recently lifted most of the restrictions upon businesses and schools and churches. Some are glad, some are still apprehensive about large crowds and being too close to people.

Anyway, when the shutdowns happened, we almost enjoyed staying home for a day or two. Then we started to figure out, we can't just stay home. We started to work to find ways that we could continue with school, work, worship services in a different way. Restaurants worked at providing takeout orders and then smaller capacities.

Pastors scrambled to put worship services online, having worship services in the parking lots and other ways we could have worship services. At One in Christ, we scrambled to figure out how to put the service on Facebook, something we talked about, but suddenly needed to do. We came up with plans for how to have in-person worship services. We figured out how to do confirmation classes. So we Pastors figured out like you, how to be busy in an environment that was partially shut down. It seems, we truly only know how to shift out of high gear for a short period of time.

So, we find ourselves busy in different ways, but busy still the same. We may save less time in our vehicles as Zoom meetings have become popular. But it is in our nature now, that gee, if I just saved a half-hour of travel time by having a Zoom meeting, that means I can work on some other projects. We have discovered that we live in a time of history, where everyone not only counts the hours, but the minutes and seconds and we have a way to fill them up.

The Psalmist declares, "I was glad when they said to me, "let us go to the house of the Lord." This comes to mind as we enter the month of March during the season of Lent. I have always enjoyed the season of Lent. When I told my friends that, they looked at me like I was weird. Why do you like Lent? Do you enjoy the sacrifice of giving up something for Lent? Do you like focusing upon Jesus' suffering? Why would you like Lent? I would smile and say, "I simply enjoy taking time out of my week, for another hour of worship."



Lent is a time of forty days, minus Sundays, leading up to Easter. The Sundays are excluded as every Sunday is a mini-celebration of Easter. In the early church, the season of Lent was the time new converts to Christianity underwent, catechesis, that is a time of learning about Jesus, the Covenants of God, the sacraments, and what it meant that Jesus the Son of God, suffered, died, was buried and rose from the dead. At the end of the forty days, on Easter morning the new converts were baptized. White robes symbolizing the righteousness of Christ were placed around their shoulders and they were able to participate in Holy Communion for the first time. As the Church became a pillar of the Roman Empire, Lent became a season, a season of discipline preparing for the celebration of Easter. On Ash Wednesday, we begin our Lenten journey, beginning the discipline of Lent; prayer, reading scriptures, and fasting. It is a time to re-focus from the world, to focusing upon Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection that he might redeem us from the powers of sin and death.

It is good to get off the fast track for awhile, to take time to worship. It is good to re-focus upon the good news our Lord Jesus reveals, that God loves us so much, Jesus thought we were worth dying for and He suffered the cross and death. When we take time to focus on the cross, we can't help but ask the question, "Why did Jesus do that?" When we hear Jesus say, "It is necessary, that he suffer and die? It stops us in our tracks. It is necessary because our sin breaks our relationship with God and one another. It is necessary because, Jesus refused to leave us in the brokenness of our sin and death. It is necessary because Jesus refuses to let sin and brokenness separate you from him and the Father. It is necessary because Jesus and the Father love you that much. We don't hear that kind of news in the world. When we are rushing here and there to get things done our focus becomes narrowed to finishing everything on the list.

The season of Lent offers us a time to stop for a few hours. The discipline of Lent calls us to a time of prayer, to begin our day with prayer or end it in prayer or to pray in the middle of the day or all of the forementioned. Anytime spent in prayer, in conversation with our Lord is a time well spent. The season of Lent reminds us that Jesus calls us to be in the world, but we are not of the world. The season of Lent may add another event to our schedule, but it is a breath from the Holy Spirit to renew us with the good news of God's love for you.

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the House of the Lord."

Pastor Randy





WANDERINGS AND WONDERINGS



The disciples begged Jesus to teach them to pray, so he prayed, “Our Father (Daddy), who art in heaven ... Speaking from my own experiences of learning to pray, I wonder how many prayers Jesus taught them till he finally found one that stuck. And we can say ... it was a good one!

During the Lenten season, we hear a host of Jesus prayers. Not every prayer has Jesus on his knees, but every prayer opens the “soul of God” into our soul as His children.

Prayer is more than talking to God. So often our prayer time doesn’t sound much different than we use to sit of Santa’s lap – about us, about what we want, about what we want Santa to do, and occasionally, about how God Santa has been to us in the past.



No prayer is more than that. Sometimes we say prayer is “conversation” with God – speaking and listening. Let me suggest prayer is more than “conversation” wit God, prayer is about relationship ... our relationship with God ... and our relationship with God’s children. There is a vertical dimension to our prayer life ... and a horizontal dimension. Prayer is about relationship. We pray ... and pray ... and pray ... until we become a “chip off the old block.” Until we faithfully represent God in this world. Prayer is the relationship ... an effective prayer life leads us to be the “image of who created us.”

I have a powerful story about “a mom who took her children to a crowded restaurant one day. Her six-year-old son asked if he could say the grace. He prayed: “God is great and God is good, Let us thank him for the food, and God I would thank you even more if **Mom** gets us ice cream for dessert. And liberty and justice for all! Amen!” Along with the laughter from the other customers nearby, the woman at the very next table growled loudly: “That’s what’s wrong with this country. Kids today don’t even know how to pray. The very idea... asking God for ice cream! Why I never.” Hearing this, the little six-year-old boy burst into



tears and he asked his mother: “Did I do it wrong? I’m sorry. Is God mad at me?” The little boy’s mother pulled him over into her lap. She hugged him tightly and assured him that he had done a terrific job with his **prayer** and God was certainly not mad at him. Just then an elderly gentleman walked over to the table. He winked at the little boy and he said: “I know God really well. We visit every day and I happen to know that God loved your **prayer**. It may have been the best one He has heard all day.” “Really?” the little boy asked.. “Cross my heart,” said the man. Then he leaned over and whispered into the little boy’s ear. Pointing at the woman at the next table who had made the remark that started the whole thing, he said: “Too bad she never asks God for ice cream. A little ice cream is good for the soul sometimes.”

Naturally, the mom ordered ice cream for her kids at the end of the meal. The little six-year-old boy stared at his for a moment and then he did something that no one in that restaurant that day will ever forget. He picked up his sundae and without a word walked over and placed it in front of the woman at the next table. With a big smile he said to her: “Here, this is for you. Ice cream is good for the soul sometimes and my soul is good already!’ The people in the restaurant applauded and somewhere in heaven Jesus was smiling... because that little boy had already learned how to look at others with the eyes of sacrificial love. Sight (true sight) is always a matter of the heart... not the eyes.”



Prayer is more than saying the right words. Prayer is more than being silent so we can listen to God. Prayer is centered in the relationship. Prayer is walking with God. Prayer is becoming what we were created to be – “the image of God.”

Wanderings and Wonderings,
Pastor Bill Peters