

GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH



Grace
Lutheran Church

**FEBRUARY 2024
GRACE VINE
NEWSLETTER**



Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Mark 9:2-9

Letter from Pastor Kris



Rembrandt's Return of the Prodigal Son

In 1983, Catholic priest, professor, and pastor, Henri Nouwen, walked into a meeting. He had just come off of a six-week lecture tour in the U.S. calling on various Christian communities to do what they could to bring an end to violence in Central America and was in the midst of discernment process to figure out where God was calling him.

The person he met with had a large poster of Rembrandt's *Return of the Prodigal Son* pinned on the door of her office. Nouwen was captivated by it, "I felt drawn by the intimacy between the two figures, the warm red of the man's cloak, the golden yellow of the boy's tunic, and the mysterious light engulfing them both. But, most of all, it was the hands – the old man's hands – as they touched the boy's shoulders that reached me in a place where I had never been reached before."* The image on that poster stayed with Nouwen for nearly three years when an opportunity was afforded

him to see the original painting at a hermitage in Saint Petersburg (then Leningrad), Russia. As Nouwen walked into the room where the painting was on display, this painting of a homecoming became to Nouwen a homecoming of itself.

In this year's mid-week Lenten series you are invited to reflect with Nouwen on the parable of the prodigal son as expressed by Rembrandt in his masterpiece *Return of the Prodigal Son*. We'll begin on Ash Wednesday taking up the topic what it is to be lost. We'll then look at the nature of the "far distant country" and then what returning means and reclaiming sonship. In week four we'll discuss the joyless older son who takes up the entire right side of the painting, shares so many qualities with the father, but is as lost as the younger son had once been. We'll also discuss Nouwen's observation of Christ in the older brother. In week five we'll talk about the old, blind father and his hands of blessing and infinite mercy. Finally, in week six as we prepare for the joyful exuberance of Palm Sunday and to enter once again into the most holiest of weeks, we'll talk about the father's call to feast and celebration and God's call on us to become like the father.

Join us Wednesdays at 6pm beginning February 14th (soup supper potlucks will begin Feb 21)

Your partner in ministry,
Pastor Kris

*Nouwen, Henry [Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming](#), pg.4; Doubleday Publishing, New York, NY. Copyright Henry J.M. Nouwen; 1992.

Letter from Pastor Smee

Forgive us as we forgive...

Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; that's why she loved much. But the one who is forgiven little, loves little. – Luke 1:53

Forgiveness is a very difficult thing. Forgiveness is not transactional. It is not a situation of quid pro quo – “If I do this, then you do that.” That is actually how we spend the majority of our lives. “If I feel really, really sorry, then God will forgive me my sins.” The emphasis is placed on how I feel, not on how God decides. That is dangerous because then I hold all the cards. “I feel sorry, so God must forgive me.”

That is where our sin becomes small and our Savior even smaller. Sin becomes something that is no big deal and so we just say sorry and walk away. We lose the reality of our need for Christ. We lose the reality of the need to have our relationship with God made right. We lose the focus of life in seeing in each person a sinner in need of saving.

Forgiveness in its true intent from Scripture is one of taking out the trash. The word in the Greek is to let something go. To discard it. When God comes to us in Jesus, He speaks to us this Word of forgiveness that is eternal – “Because of Jesus, I forgive you all your sins.” That in and of itself solves all our problems because He speaks two things there: 1) the past is gone and we are right with Him; 2) we no longer have to guess how He feels about us. By forgiving us, or letting our sins go, we know He truly loves us because true love, agape love, deciding love that loves the unlovable, is one that forgives and forgets, which is what we struggle with.

I love the story in Luke 7 of the known sinful woman coming to Jesus and washing His feet with her tears. I love how He makes the pharisee understand the reality of sin and the necessity of forgiveness. He puts Simon's sins back on him because Jesus makes Simon realize, because this realization is necessary as long as forgiveness to him is minimal, as long as sin is seen as such a small and insignificant thing, then the forgiveness of God will seem as incidental. But when we realize that we are THE sinner, then Jesus becomes such a magnificent Savior. He becomes One who actually forgives real sin and real sinners. Our sin doesn't become some sort of bargaining chip we move around the board in hopes that God or others won't notice. Instead, we see ourselves as the worst of the worst, and know that everyone else is in the same boat.

When we pray this petition of the Lord's Prayer, it should convict us because we know that we have not forgiven others as God has forgiven us. In fact, we are more prone to condemnation than forgiveness. We ask, if anything, that God would hear us despite our sins, that He would mold us into the type of forgiver that Jesus is, who looks at the greatest of sinners and forgives. That He even forgives His own murderers. But also, we pray in this prayer that God would help us see our sin more and more so that we might know ourselves as forgiven sinners, and because of our own frailty, He would help us to bring those who have sinned against us to His throne of grace to receive the mercy that is there.

In His name,

Pastor Smee



Based on Matthew 5:14 & John 8:12

You are the light of the world! Jesus says to His disciples, you are the light of the world. He doesn't say you are to be light. And He doesn't say you have the light. You are the light of the world! In *Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, "The light is not some instrument put in their hands, such as their preaching. It is the disciples themselves. The same Jesus who, speaking of himself, says, 'I am the light,' says to his followers: 'You are the light in your whole existence, provided you remain faithful to your calling'" (Bonhoeffer, 117).

If one small flickering candle can light up an entire room, what impact does one generous act of kindness do to light up the human heart?

On Christmas Eve, our new house church community purchased beautifully wrapped boxes of chocolates and gave them to many of the retailers in our village. One of our visits was to a young couple who had just opened a small hotel. They were also expecting their first child. We had no idea if they were people of faith and we had no idea how we would be received. We wished them Merry Christmas and, in addition to the chocolates, we also offered a prayer of blessing for their business. You should have seen their faces. They lit up with huge smiles, saying repeatedly, "Wow, I can't believe you did this — this is great!"

In being Christ's light, we are also given a remarkable responsibility. Stewards of the light are not to keep this light hidden away within the walls of the church, but they are to carry it out, protecting it, cupping its flame in their hands (holding fast to the Word) in a world that wants to so often extinguish it. In Luther's commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, he writes, "Those who are called to be the light are called to instruct souls and point them to the eternal life ... he who wants to be light must see to it that he does not creep into a corner, but stand forth publicly and be not afraid."

How are you being the light of Christ to others in your neighborhoods and community? Stewards of the light use "all" the available resources to push back the darkness in our world — time, talents, treasure and testimony. The light of Christ shines brightest when generosity is our first response. When we give without calculus and beyond measure from our wealth and possessions, our ministries and congregations are strengthened, and our witness is intensified.

You are the light of the world! From Genesis to Revelation, the light of Jesus Christ (God's love for and His covenant with creation) peppers the whole biblical landscape. As the light of God's love never fails to illuminate, let us rejoice in the incarnation of God in Jesus who continues to call us to shine!

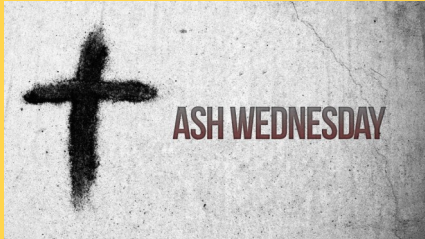
Written by the Rev. Dona Johnson. Rev. Johnson is chair of the NALC's Living and Giving Stewardship Team and is pastor of a mission start in Sedona, Arizona.

**OPEN HEARTH
2024 COASTAL YOUTH RETREAT**

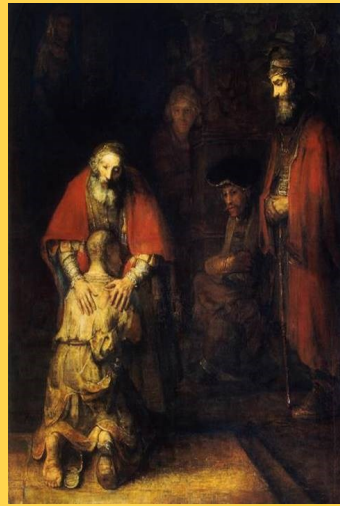
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CALIFORNIA

FEBRUARY 16TH-19TH

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. - 2 Corinthians 12:9



Ash Wednesday Service Feb 14 at 6pm.



**Midweek
Lenten Sermon
Series:
Nouwen,
Rembrandt, & the
Return of the
Prodigal Son**

**Wednesdays @ 6pm
Starting Feb 14**



Lenten soup suppers Wed evenings 6pm
starting Feb 21.

**Naomi's Friends meet the 2nd &
4th Thursday of each month at
Ale's Crab House @ 11 am.**

Naomi's Friends



Church Council meetings are held on the third Tuesday of each month from 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm in the Conference Room. If a regularly scheduled council meeting needs to be rescheduled, the congregation will be notified through the weekly MailChimp mass emailer as well as the bulletin.



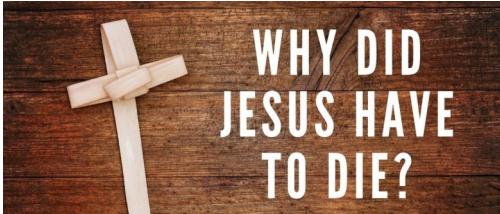
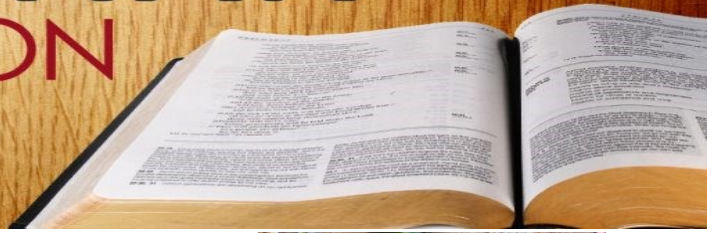
Grace Care Center

Grace fulfills an important need in our community for assistance with non-perishable foods and hygiene items. (SOCKS are always needed). They are in need of men's and women's winter clothing, baked beans, cranberry sauce, stuffing, and canned yams and donations of cat and dog food for their people and pets program. Bring contributions to the church office or the care center during their regular hours.



**(Older Wiser Lutherans)
Meets for games, fun, and entertainment in
the Fellowship Hall the 2nd and 4th
Tuesday of each month at 1:30 pm. All are
welcome to attend.**

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION



Peace Bible Study meets the third Wednesday of the month at 9 am in the CR. The study is called *Why Did Jesus Have to Die?*. All are welcome.

TEAM 784

*...tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD...
Psalm 78:4*

Join us each Sunday morning at 9:15 am in the conference room for a time of intergenerational fellowship, study, and prayer.

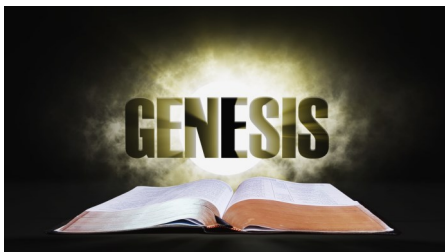


LIMBO Young Adult Life group meets Mondays at 6:30 p.m. at the Smee's home.

Intergenerational Catechism Class



Join us Sunday mornings at 9:15 am in the fellowship hall.



Join "A Bible and a Pencil" Bible study via Zoom on Tuesdays at 1:00 pm. The study is on the book of Genesis. Please contact Mark Brynestad for further information regarding this class.



An in-depth Bible study of The Gospel of Matthew via Zoom on Tuesday nights, 7:00, under the instruction of Mark Brynestad. Please contact Mark Brynestad for further details.

Scripture Readings for February

Date	Gospel Reading	Additional Readings
Feb 4th	Mark 1:29-39	First Reading Isaiah 40:21-31 Psalm 147:1-11 Second Reading 1 Corinthians 9:16-27
Feb 11th	Mark 9:2-9	First Reading Exodus 34:29-35 Psalm 50:1-6 Second Reading 2 Corinthians 3:12-13, 4:1-6
Feb 18th	Mark 1:9-15	First Reading Genesis 22:1-18 Psalm 25:1-10 Second Reading James 1:12-18
Feb 25th	Mark 8:27-38	First Reading Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 Psalm 22:23-31 Second Reading Romans 5:1-11

Scripture Readings



February 2024

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4 Worship 8:00 & 10:15am 9:15am TEAM 784 9:15am Catechism Class 6pm Youth group	5 LIMBO 6:30pm	6	7	8 Naomi's Friends @ Ale's Crab House 11am Parkinson's Support Group	9	10
11 Worship 8:00 & 10:15am 9:15am TEAM 784 9:15am Catechism Class 6pm Youth group	12 LIMBO 6:30pm	13 OWLS 1:30pm	14 ♥HAPPY Valentine's DAY♥ 6pm Ash Wed Service	15	16 4pm Youth Retreat San Louis Obispo	17 Youth Retreat San Louis Obispo
18 Worship 8:00 & 10:15am 9:15am Catechism Class Youth Retreat San Louis Obispo	19  Office Closed	20 Council Meeting 7pm	21 Peace Bible Study 9 am 6pm Soup Supper	22 Naomi's Friends @ Ale's Crab House 11am	23	24
25 Worship 8:00 & 10:15am 9:15am TEAM 784 9:15am Catechism Class 6pm Youth group	26 LIMBO 6:30pm	27 OWLS 1:30pm	28 6pm Soup Supper	29		

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Equip
Share
Grace
Lutheran Church

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Ridgecrest, CA 93555

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

For God so loved the world that
he gave his only Son, so that eve-
ryone who believes in him may
not perish but may have eternal
life.
John 3:16 (NRSV)



www.gracelutheran.org
www.facebook.com/gracelutheran.org

We're on the Web at:

Rev. Kris Madsen, *Senior Pastor*
Rev. Carleton Smece, *Family, Youth, and Education*
Michelle Koenig, *Office Manager*
Jane Kuhlman, *Music*
Paul Jauregui, *Custodian*



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Worship Services Sundays at 8 & 10:15 am
Team 784 Sundays at 9:15 am

