

St. James Lutheran Church Newsletter



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Online Worship

Online worship services are being recorded and are available on our website. If you don't have a computer and someone who is with you has a smartphone or tablet, these services can be played anytime by going to our website, www.sjnc.net, selecting **Publications** and **Online Worship**.



CD MINISTRY

Do you have a CD player and would like to receive an audio copy of each week's worship service? If so, call the church office and let us know. 704-786-0166



On September 1, Governor Cooper announced a transition into phase 2.5. We will find out in the days to come exactly what that means, but what we know for sure is that our wilderness journey through the challenges and opportunities of Covid 19 are far from over. What we also know is while it may not look or feel like it, God is present and at work shaping and changing and empowering us not to return to life as usual when this is over, but to live as God's people in an ever changing world by embodying and bearing witness to God's unchanging love and faithfulness. That, as Bishop Tim reminds us, is the Biblical witness and our hope.

So continue to wear your masks in public; wash your hands often; check on your neighbor; be generous as you are able; be patient with one another, give thanks for what you do have instead of worrying about what you don't have; pray for our elected officials, healthcare workers, first responders, law enforcement officers, protesters, and the vulnerable sister and brother seeking food and shelter and work and justice; spend some time in God's word with your family; join us for on-line worship; and take a deep breath and remember God is still at work giving life to dry bones. And for that we say, thanks be to God!

Tommy Bradshaw



Faithful Adaptation

In 586-87 BCE King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon, after a long siege, laid waste the holy city of Jerusalem, destroyed the supposed indestructible temple home of Yahweh and the ark of the covenant, deposed the Davidic dynasty, and took away all of the Jewish leaders to exile in Babylon. “Devastated” would be an understatement for ancient Israel, as their foundational and presumed eternal covenantal identities were ripped away: land, descendants, perpetual Davidic rule, and blessings evaporated.

So much of the hope and promise of Scripture comes from this time of exile. “By the rivers of Babylon, there we lay down our harps and wept when we remembered Zion” (Ps. 137) as the Babylonians taunted them with suggestions that either their God never existed or that their god Marduk was stronger. Ezekiel 37’s valley of dry bones—“clean cut off” with no hope for life—that yet come together and dance was a vision of hope amid hopelessness for these exiles. And Isaiah 40-43 offers a vision of comfort and restoration, a way out of no way, a highway made straight in the desert to take the exiles home. Fulfillment was in short supply. Hope and promise were what sustained a remnant to return.

That exile lasted nearly 50 years, and when finally the Persians defeated Babylon and Persia’s King Cyrus allowed the Israelites to go home, it wasn’t at all the Jerusalem or the Israel they remembered. Ezra and Nehemiah helped restore the law and the temple, but it was never the same again. God’s promises and presence remained, but if Israel were ever to thrive again, they would have to be faithful, patient, and persistent. There would be no on-demand return to all they remembered. They would have to adapt.

We know that many long, arduous, biblical trials were associated with the number 40, which simply meant “a really long time.” Rain with Noah for 40 days and 40 nights. 40 years with Moses in the desert. 40 days of temptation in the wilderness for Jesus. Remnants of that biblical number persisted in Caldwell County during my childhood. I remember my dad describing a crowded store by saying, “There must’ve been 40-‘leven people in there!” Getting through each of those long biblical struggles meant finding the delicate balance of faithfulness to essentials, patience, and willingness and ability to adapt.

Fast forward to our 2020. Remember March, when we were annoyed that our inconveniences and stay-at-homes and distancing and masking and sanitizing might last an unthinkable 4-6 weeks? Now in September, we’re still in Phase 2 with nearly 185,000 dead in America and counting, not to mention so many grieving, suffering lingering side effects, living in fear of infection, unemployed, and on and on. And our congregations in the NC Synod—some gathering in some ways, some waiting, quite a number increasingly threatened with their demise hastened by the limitations of this virus. There is no safe and immediate end in sight. Where is our God? Is our God? How long, O Lord? As with the biblical narratives, just adaptation without faithfulness or faithfulness without adaptation will fall short. We need both.

Many of our congregations have adapted very well to online platforms, even increasing the number of people reached. Others are just now venturing cautiously into the re-gathering arena. Amid much uncertainty, one thing I do know is that most of our leaders, despite their willing and creative and adaptive spirits, are weary. Not okay. Political and racial tensions threaten us just as much as the virus. Is there a way home? Will we even recognize that home when we get there? And will our people adapt?

None of us knows for sure. There’s a lot I don’t know and can’t predict. I do suspect a few things though:

1. A number of our congregations that really were on the bubble of being able to afford full-time pastoral leadership will risk their very survival if they refuse to risk sharing ministry with others, including sharing a pastor (yoking).
2. Technology won’t go backwards, even if a vaccine is effective or the virus mysteriously disappears. Many have adapted to online and on-demand options. Even when we can re-gather safely and freely, many of our folks will expect it. If we don’t offer it, they will find it elsewhere.
3. The synod staff for the near-term will continue to explore, share, and equip congregations and rostered ministers to adapt, but realizing the toll on emotional energy as well as time, the staff will also try to fill some gaps to help the great majority of our congregations who have only one or no full-time pastoral staff members.

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These will include things like Bible studies, continuing to provide weekly sermons and call-in devotions, confirmation classes, Wednesday morning check-in calls, regular zoom gatherings of council presidents and treasurers, and other programmatic pieces as needful and requested.

4. Cancellation of ELCA and synod-sponsored large in-person gatherings in already basically suspended for the rest of this calendar year and likely will continue for the future well into if not through 2021. While no decision has been made and won't soon be, there is a strong possibility or likelihood that our June 2021 Synod Assembly, including the election of a bishop, will happen either partially or completely online.

Governor Cooper will tell us within the next 10 days where we are in gathering protocols as a state. Our synod re-gathering task force will meet Sept. 10, and Synod Council will meet Sept. 11 and 12, at which time we will update our synodical recommendations for safe re-gatherings. You've likely correctly discerned by now that we will not be offering less restrictive recommendations than the state itself makes.

In the meantime, through this protracted challenge, and on whatever other side we come out of it, we're here for you. And we trust with you that God even now is up to something transformative. We may even get back to Jerusalem someday. But it won't, and can't be, just like we left it in February. And that's not entirely a bad thing with the God who continually makes all things new anyway. Hang in there. Walking with you,

Jim

- ◆ **Ralph & Sandy Barnhardt**
 - ◆ **Joan and Pat Mahoney**
 - ◆ **Richard Benz**
 - ◆ **Phyllis Harward**
 - ◆ **Clary Phillips**
 - ◆ **Cliff Caffrey**
 - ◆ **Alex Barnhardt**
 - ◆ **Don Eng**
 - ◆ **Richard Benz**
 - ◆ **Alison Monk**
 - ◆ **Mike Holt**
 - ◆ **Richard Benz**
 - ◆ **Graham Knight, friend of Elizabeth Hurley**
 - ◆ **The Family of Jeremy Jay** on the death of his grandfather, Bob Krauth
 - ◆ **Our homebound members, all in need of prayer**
- In Our Thoughts
& Prayers*





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| Sept. 1 | Kathleen Francus |
| Sept. 2 | Kathryn Radcliffe |
| Sept. 3 | Ken Hardison, Jr. |
| Sept. 4 | Kim Haberman
William Propst |
| Sept. 5 | Simon Lovelace
Ashleigh Matthews |
| Sept. 6 | Sophie Horton
Trey Horton
Dylan Urso
Paul Winderhalter |
| Sept. 8 | Laura Overby
Edith Propst |
| Sept. 9 | Dianne Lambert |
| Sept. 10 | Ryan Patterson
Alisa Wickliff
Libby Williams |
| Sept. 11 | Riece Pittard
Terri Fleck |
| Sept. 13 | Will Gillon |
| Sept. 16 | Collins Whisnant |
| Sept. 17 | Evelina Matthews |
| Sept. 19 | Trevor Matthews |
| Sept. 20 | Peter Muniz
Camron Trott
Carson Trott |
| Sept. 22 | John Patterson
Patricia Propst |
| Sept. 23 | Annette Propst |
| Sept. 24 | Lois Marlow
Andy Yoos |
| Sept. 27 | Jeff Faggart
Tommy Propst |
| Sept. 28 | Francie Davis
Miles Marlow
Christopher Miller |
| Sept. 30 | Jo Eng
David Hartgen
Katie Popovici |

SUNDAYS IN SEPTEMBER

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2020
14TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST



Conflict is a part of relationships and life in community. Jesus' words in today's gospel are often used in situations having to do with church discipline. The prophet Ezekiel tells of warning the wicked to turn from their ways, and Paul reminds us that love is the fulfilling of the law. We gather in the name of Christ, assured that he is present among us with gifts of peace and reconciliation.

Gospel: Matthew 18:15-20

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2020
15TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST



In today's second reading Paul questions why we judge one another, since we all stand before the judgment of God. Yet we do sin against one another, and Jesus' challenge that we forgive seventy-seven times reveals God's boundless mercy. When we hear the words of forgiveness in worship and sign ourselves with the cross, we are renewed in baptism to be signs of reconciliation in the world.

Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2020
16TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST



Matthew narrates one of Jesus' controversial parables in which Jesus says that the reign of God is like that of a landowner who pays his workers the same wage no matter what time of day they began to work. When God changes God's mind about punishing Nineveh for their evil ways, Jonah is angry. Yet God is gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love. In baptism we receive the grace of God that is freely given to all. As Martin Luther wrote, in the presence of God's mercy we are all beggars.

Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2020
17TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST



Jesus' parable about two sons who don't do what they say reveals surprises in the reign of God. In the reading from Ezekiel the people claim the ways of the Lord are unfair, while God offers repentance and new life. Paul urges us to look to Christ as a model of humility, putting the interests of others above our own. Nourished by the broken bread and shared cup, we offer our lives for the sake of our needy world.

Gospel: Matthew 21:23-32

EMAIL SCAMS



Have you recently received requests from Pastor Tony asking you to buy gift cards or call quickly? Rest assured, those emails are NOT coming from him. His account has not been hacked, rather, his account is being spoofed. (Emails look like they're coming from him but they're not.) It's annoying but there's absolutely nothing to be done about them. Except, we encourage you

to be vigilant in two ways:

1. Always look closely at the **From:** of the email to confirm that it's from **tony@sjnc.net**
2. **DO NOT** reply to or click on anything in these emails.

Pastor Tony **will not** email you asking you to purchase gift cards or send money! So please don't reply to these emails. **When in doubt, call the church office: 704-786-0166.**