

February, 2024

**MARK: MY WORDS**

It is always jarring. As this is being written, the final clearing of Christmas decorations has just taken place; and yet we are already facing Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent! The church calendar plays a part in that this year: the six weeks begin on Valentine’s Day and Easter falls on March 30, ten days earlier than last year.

 And yet the progression from Christmas—through the season of Epiphany—leads naturally to Lent, the Three Great Days (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday), and finally to Easter. Jesus is born ultimately to die and rise again. As Biblical scholar Gerald Sloyan points out, “In our Christmas is our Good Friday and our Easter. The incarnation happened, quite simply, so that the redemption could take place.”

 That theme of sacrifice modeled and fulfilled in the life of Jesus—that emptying of Himself and “being born in human likeness” (Philippians 2)—is the focus of *our* journey with Him in these forty days. As an essay in our worship planning resource, *Sundays and Seasons* states,

When we enter the season of Lent, many people have one thing on their minds, and it is the idea of sacrifice. This idea has become increasingly common with the popular spiritual practice of giving something up for Lent. Giving something up for forty days can lead to increased clarity and personal awareness, but as our Ash Wednesday text from Matthew warns us, we also risk turning our faith into a public spectacle devoid of any true spiritual progress. ... The challenge (is) to take the familiar and most common themes of Lent—sacrifice, confession, reflection, journey, and baptism—and inspire people to take action in their lives, both publicly and personally…

… But Lent does serve as a great opportunity to focus on what keeps us from that service and allows us to ask the question, What do we need to sacrifice (both as individuals and as a society) to grow closer to God and one another? Because of the often-individualistic nature of faith in modern Christianity and the encouragement that comes with Lent to become a better person through a forty-day sacrifice, it is easy to default into preaching sermons that focus on just that—the individual. Our challenge is to encourage one another to look at the communal (institutional, systemic) sins that are hurting our most vulnerable neighbors and also hurting us.

 The essay highlights a crucial fact: our Lenten journey is a *communal* one. As the Creed states, we are “the *communion”* or community “of saints.” Therefore, in our confession each week (and not only during Lent) we state that “*we* have sinned against You and our neighbor …*we* have failed to …*we* are in need of Your mercy and forgiveness.” The entire Christian experience is one that we take with others because we need their support, encouragement, strength, and wisdom.

 So, while we are aware of our personal need to “repent,” to “turn around” our thoughts, words, actions, and mindsets from those that wound and hurt others to those that bring life, hope, joy, and peace, we also are called, as the essay states, to “take action in our lives” *together* to bring those gifts to the most vulnerable and hurting among us.

 That is the work for which the Spirit prepares Jesus in the Gospel reading for the First Sunday in Lent when the Spirit drives Him into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. Strengthened by experience Jesus then returns and begins His ministry to the sick, the possessed, the lost, and the dying.

 And it is that mission to which we are called again in these Forty Days.



**ASH WEDNESDAY**

 The next two articles regarding worship during Lent are tentative at this point as we do not have a permanent musician. Our wonderful pianist, Maggie Martin, is unavailable to play on Wednesdays in general, so we are unsure whether we will be able to hold services as we have previously done.

 Last year, we held a morning service on Ash Wednesday for those who did not want to come out to the evening liturgy. We would like to offer that option again this year; but until we are sure we can find someone to play, that possibility remains open-ended.

 The same goes for the evening service. One approach would be to do an entire spoken service in both the morning and evening, leaving out any hymns or liturgy. While not an ideal solution, it would be preferable to not having any worship on that day at all.

 **For now, we will schedule a morning service on Wednesday, February 14, at 10:00 a.m. and an evening service at 7:00 p.m.** If there is any change in those plans, we will inform the congregation as soon as possible.



**MID-WEEK LENTEN SERVICES**

 As above, these services are tentative as of this writing. The hope is to continue our tradition of using Marty Haugen’s “Holden Evening Prayer” as the musical basis of our weekly worship services complemented by some Scripture readings, a brief homily, and some hymns.

 This year, we will utilize a series from our worship resource, *Sundays and Seasons,* based upon a passage from this year’s appointed Gospel of St. Mark. It is entitled, “You Shall Love the Lord Your God,” from Mark 12:28-30 when a scribe asks Jesus which commandment is the greatest. Jesus responds, “The first is, Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” Each of these will be highlighted at the mid-week services in this order:

 **Wednesday, February 21** “Hear, O Israel”

 **Wednesday, February 28** “You Shall Love the Lord Your God With All Your Heart”

 **Wednesday, March 6** “You Shall Love the Lord Your God With All Your Soul”

 **Wednesday, March 13** “You Shall Love the Lord Your God With All Your Mind”

 **Wednesday, March 20** “You Shall Love the Lord Your God With All Your Strength”

 **All services will begin at 6:00 p.m.** and will conclude by 6:30 p.m. As always, we hope you will attend these liturgies as part of your Lenten discipline and preparation for Holy Week and Easter.



**THE COMMEMORATION OF MARTIN LUTHER**

February 18 is the Commemoration of Martin Luther on the church calendar. This article has appeared in the last several years’ February newsletter, but it is always good to have our understanding of the person for whom our denomination is named renewed. Many Lutherans are unaware of details of Luther’s life; and since we as a church body take our name from him, it is always good to reacquaint ourselves with that knowledge.

Throughout the church year, we remember and give thanks for the lives, witness, and examples of many of the heroines and heroes of the faith. February brings us an especially important one for us who share a Lutheran heritage and history.

 On February 18, 1546, Martin Luther died at the age of 62 in his hometown of Eisleben, Germany. He had long suffered from poor health due to a variety of illnesses and conditions: [Ménière's disease](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%A9ni%C3%A8re%27s_disease), [vertigo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vertigo), fainting, [tinnitus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tinnitus), a [cataract](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cataract) in one eye, [kidney and bladder stones](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kidney_stone_disease), [arthritis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthritis), an ear infection that ruptured an ear drum, and [angina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angina).

 As one would expect, as his condition worsened, so did his mood, his writings, and sermons. It was during this time that he wrote some of his most hateful and incendiary comments about the Jewish people of Germany and Europe. Those are some of the most shameful aspects of his legacy; and over the last several decades, Lutherans worldwide have recognized the harm that they brought and repented of his vitriol to those against whom his writings were used as justification for oppression and violence.

 Like all of us, Luther was a complex person. He is regularly included in the group of those who had some of the greatest influence on historical developments of his time, but also one whose failings, shortcomings, and sins are as great as his accomplishments. In his own words, he, with the rest of us, are “saints and sinners” at the same time, and always in need of the gracious and merciful compassion and forgiveness God grants in Christ that he so powerfully articulated and championed throughout his life and ministry.

 His famous last words are, “We are all beggars. It is true.” Perhaps that better sums up his theology and teaching better than the dozens of volumes of his sermons and teachings that we possess. That belief fits particularly well in the Lenten season in which this commemoration falls. May God grant us, with Luther, the humility, the will, the faith and hope to “beg” God for His mercy and receive it always with joy, trust, and thanksgiving.



**WORSHIP CLOSURE INFORMATION**

 Because of the recent snow and bitterly cold weather, there was a discussion about whether to cancel worship. This is a reminder about how to find that information should extreme weather conditions make that a possibility:

* An email will be sent to those on the church email list
* You may tune to WEFM 95.9 for an announcement during their broadcast
* The church Facebook page (/www.facebook.com/stpaulmichigancity)
* You may dial the church office number (219-874-7293) and when the automated menu begins press the # button for a recorded announcement

Perhaps the quickest and easiest way to get that announcement is the last option of calling the church number. I will post the information there no later than noon on Saturday. We will make every effort to ensure that everyone is informed as quickly as possible should such an action be taken by the Church Council.



**DECEMBER, 2023, SUMMARY OF ACTIONS**

* Bob Kiser and Judy Hunt are investigating a possible grant to build a new playground.
* Water pipes in the church will be replaced beginning week of January 8 at a cost of approximately $36,000. A motion carried to include two new toilets in the Luther House.

Please note that copies of Council meetings are placed in the Narthex after approval at the monthly meetings.

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**IN MEMORY OF BETTY YOURIST**

**General Fund** from Norma Milzarek, Bob & Karen Kiser, Marjory & Mike Bockover,

Real Help Foundation in St. Joseph, Michigan

**Altar Guild** from Jim & Sandy Galinowski, Al & Sue Green, Pamela & William Hackett, Virginia Murray

**IN MEMORY OF DARLENE BAKER**

**General Fund** from Bob & Karen Kiser, , Richard & Mary Wolsiefer, Donna Ottersen, Chip & Audrey Claussen, Rev. Pamela Thiede, Warren & Karen Schacht, Michael & Debora Dill, Cinde Troutman, Melinda Nagle, Ivye Benson, Norma Milzarek, Paul & Lora Brooks, Janet Bakken, Tim & Stacie Crozier, Richard & Karen Fleming, Virgil & Patricia Miller, Tim & Laura Mellen, Sue Koziel, Marjory & Mike Bockover, Jeff Timmrick

**Altar Guild** from Al & Sue Green, Virginia Murray, Steve Baker, Jim & Sandy Galinowski

**IN MEMORY OF ED WERNER**

**General Fund** from Bob & Karen Kiser, Janet Bakken, Marjory & Mike Bockover,

Donna Ottersen, Brad & Kelly Neulieb, Sharon Applegate

**Capital Improvement Fund** from Rev. Pamela Thiede

**IN MEMORY OF PATRICIA SIDDAL**

**General Fund** from Marjory & Mike Bockover

**IN HONOR OF WIFE, VICKI CLAUS**

**General Fund** from Richard Claus



**February Birthdays February Anniversaries**

 1 Jary Tannehill 20 Tim & Laura Mellen

 2 Heather Hazel 21 Charles & Sherry Payne

 5 Richard Cains

 7 Susan Koziel

 Martha Schroeder

 9 Janet McMahon

 10 Emma Haring

 12 Susan Green

 13 Jacob England

 14 Wayne Dolson

 15 Dena Slisher

 16 Barbara Bass

 17 Dale Prybylla

 19 Kimberly Summers

 22 Amelia Moore

 Aaron Petri

 23 Katherine Summa

 24 Molly Robbins

 25 David Murray

 26 Kayla Bergquist

 Chloe Fisher

 Karen Schacht

 27 Chip Claussen

 Suzann Dolson

 28 Bernhard Neitzel



**Long-Term Prayer List**

Julie Brooks Laura Dovey Marla Furness

Sue Granacki Jim Gleason Dolores Hackett

Jayla Jacobi Jess Kalvaitis Christine Kiser

Pastor Al Lorentzen Bethany Manning Christian Martinez

Kim Mitchell Virginia Murray Shane Nevels

Jan Paholski Kay Peglow Barbara Reichert

Joan Seifert Jary Tannehill Mark Tannehill

Kathy Thielman Jana Thomas Margie Torres

Venia Wendt Brian Wiseman



 Monday 8:00 a.m. – 5 p.m.

 Tuesday 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon

 Wednesday 8:00 a.m. – 5 p.m.

 Thursday 9:00 a.m. – 12 noon

 Friday 8:00 a.m. – 12 noon

**St. Paul Lutheran Church Staff**

 Pastor Rev. Mark Reshan

 Secretary Libby Pollock

 Accompanists Jary Tannehill, Mark Tannehill, Jacob Tannehill

 Custodian Mark Kloess

Thank$ for $haring

This month,we will see you at Galveston on Thursday, February 29—Leap Day! Here are two coupons: one for you and one for a friend.

 