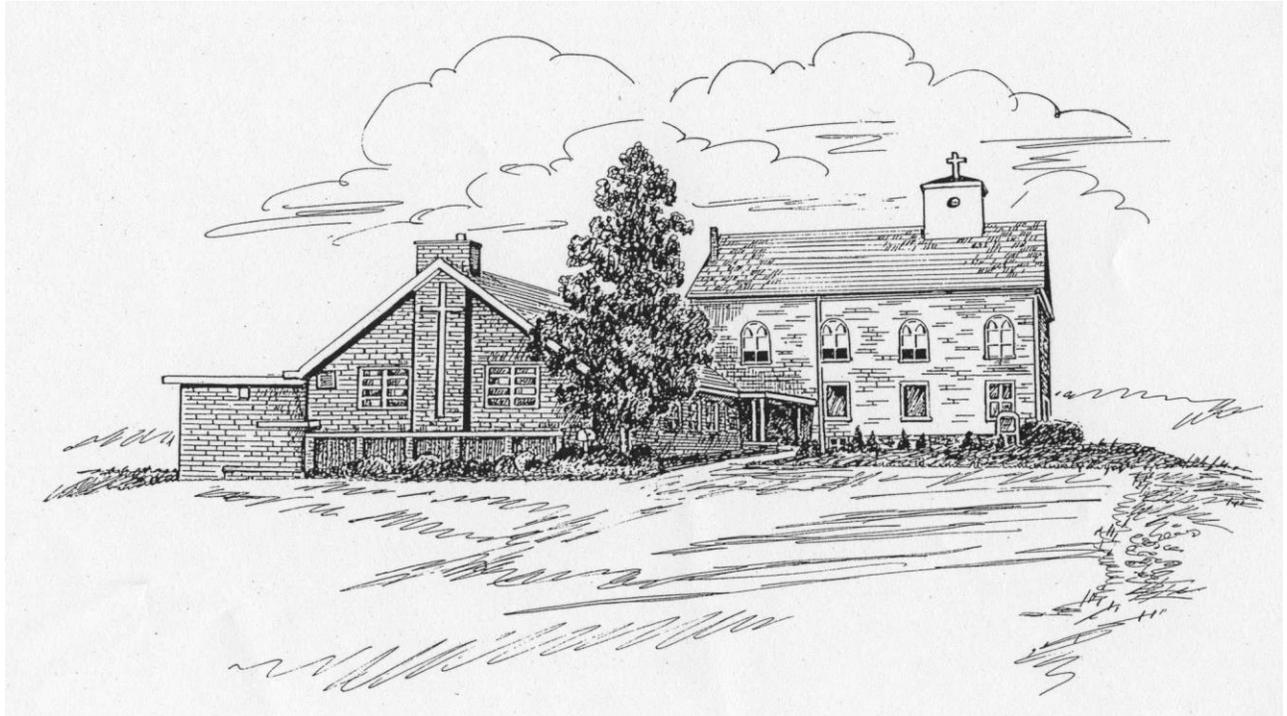


WISPS OF STRAW



St. James Lutheran Church Newsletter

March 2017

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*“Serving Christ in Word and Deed”
more than 265 Years*

Pastor's Letter

The Lenten Journey

Forty days, not counting Sundays. Forty days from Ash Wednesday through Good Friday. Lent used to be a time of sacrifice, and Christians were expected to "give something up for Lent." Some Christians still do. And maybe "giving something up for Lent" is a good idea.

But what shall we give up? Shall we forgo chocolate so that we can appreciate those bunnies even more on Easter Sunday? Shall we stop enjoying a glass of wine or a cocktail since they are empty calories anyway? Or maybe we should give up procrastination — well, let's not rush into things.



Or maybe, Lent is about giving up those things that separate us from God, from each other and from ourselves — those things that take us away from God's perfect plan for our lives. The forty days of Lent allow us a wonderful opportunity to do several things, all with the goal of growing in our discipleship. When we grow in our discipleship, we grow in our relationship with God; when we grow in our relationship with God, we grow in our relationship with others; and when we grow in our relationship with others, we grow in our relationship with self. That may sound odd, "growing in our relationship with self", but there is a theological / psychological school of thought that suggests that humans try to work out our inner angst via our relations with others. For example, when one acts judgmental towards others, it is because one has already judged one's self. Just another example of how we push God out of the way. I heard a truism once: EGO stands for Edging God Out. Could be true.

But in Lent, we have the opportunity to honestly work on our discipleship, and thus on our relationship with God. Lent can, and should, be a time not only of giving things up, but of gaining things. In Lent, we can gain understanding about our faults, we can gain reliance on God's mercy and grace, and we can gain a deeper understanding of the infinite value of the infinite gift of Christ on the cross. If we give things up, we should give them up so that they no longer have a hold on us and in order to make room for the things we hope to gain in Lent. Hands which clutch tightly to something cannot be open to receive a blessing.

So, how might we have a meaningful Lent? I would suggest that we become diligent about using spiritual practices as a way of intentional contact with God. In the Ash Wednesday service, I, as pastor, made this invitation to the congregation: "As disciples of Jesus, we are called to a discipline that contends against evil and resists whatever leads us away from love of God and neighbor. I invite you, therefore, to the discipline of Lent — self-examination and repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving and works of love — strengthened by the gifts of word and sacrament. Let us continue our journey through these forty days to the great Three Days of Jesus' death and resurrection."

This is a great way to start. I encourage each of you to engage in self-examination. Now is a really good time to do what is called a moral inventory. I invite you to write out a list of all the times in the last year when you were uncharitable, unforgiving, selfish, slothful, arrogant, rude, tight-fisted and all the other sins of commission and omission. Don't try to do it all at once, but sit down each day and just add a few more violations of your covenant with God. Save this list and bring it to worship on Good Friday. And as you make that list, resolve to repent: to do these things no more. Next, commit to daily prayer. As you pray, here is a good ratio to remember: 1/3 of your prayer should be confession and asking for mercy; 1/3 of your prayer could be asking of God; and 1/3 should be listening. The asking part we generally do very well. The confession and mercy we do not usually do as well. But the listening part is often hardest for us. This is because 1) we are too busy talking and 2) we are too accustomed to listening with our ears and not our hearts. Lent is a good time to learn "heart-listening." Next on the list is fasting. We don't fast well in this country. Fasting is not just skipping a meal. Fasting is the intentional experience of hunger to awaken our awareness of need. Proper fasting takes a long time to learn, so maybe in Lent we just do something like give up a big meal one dinner per week. (Here is a tip: come to the Lenten Soup Suppers and you will only be able to eat salad, bread and soup. This can be an effective way to fast!). Next on our list of spiritual practices is the least popular: sacrificial giving. Ask God what He would have you sacrifice in Lent in order to increase your giving to God. In other words, ask God, "What would you have me stop spending money on and instead give that money as part of an increased offering?" And the final spiritual practice is works of love. What do "works of love" look like? Works of love are those times when we offer ourselves in service to others. We could serve in worship in church, we could visit patients in a nursing home, we could help a neighbor, we could pick up trash on the road, we could do the dishes so our spouse doesn't have to, we could sit with our children as they do their homework, we could volunteer in the community.

By following these spiritual disciplines, we will grow in our discipleship. This I can guarantee. And as we grow in our discipleship we will find that we have received far more than we have given up. I will be praying for each of you as we go through this Lenten season. If there is something in particular you would like me to pray for, please let me know. And please keep Karen and me in your prayers, not only in Lent but always.

Have a blessed Lent!

Pastor Kelly

Easter Services



The full schedule of Easter worship services will appear in upcoming weekend bulletins, and will also be sent by email to everyone on Wisps distribution.

Lent: A Journey From Darkness to Light

Lent has begun, so be sure to block time off on your calendars so that you can **fully experience the power of this season**. Lent is especially a time when we want to tend to our spirit. We can't appreciate the full release of Easter if we don't consider our life through the lens of Lent. This year, we will be doing Lenten Evening services in conjunction with Grace Lutheran Church. Following is a brief overview of the remaining Lenten season:

Wednesdays in Lent, services at 6:15 pm

During the Wednesdays in Lent, we will gather with the folks from Grace for a time of fellowship, a simple meal, a Biblically guided discussion on relationships, and a brief time of worship. We will **gather at Grace** (located on Roseberry St.) on 3/8, 3/22, and 4/5 and we will **host** the folks from Grace **at St. James** on 3/15 and 3/29. Each evening the host church will provide: soup, salad and bread. The simplicity of this meal serves to remind us of at least three things: 1) how much we typically complicate our lives; 2) that so many in the world would delight in such a feast; 3) how difficult we find it to even sacrifice one meal per week. As the meal continues, we will begin a discussion on the Biblical model for relationships. Karen and I will lead each discussion and focus on topics such as: honesty and accountability; boundary setting; repentance and forgiveness; and mutuality. We will be able to continue eating during the discussion. Then, **as a community**, we will clean up from the meal. Once we have cleaned up from the meal, we will celebrate worship with a brief service using Holden Evening Prayer. The services will end about 7:30. It is okay to come late; arrive when you are able.

Passion Sunday, April 9th

This is the day when we remember Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem and how quickly the situation changed. Triumph turned to tragedy because of our sinfulness. **A special note: those who have been prepared will receive their First Holy Communion on this day.** (See article on next page)

Maundy Thursday, April 13th, 7:00 pm

The term *Maundy* comes from the Latin *mandatum* which means "command." On Maundy Thursday, we will remember that Jesus gave us a new commandment, "to love one another." This powerful service will have many elements. We will confess our sins and hear assurance of God's forgiveness. We will hear God's word. We will recall Jesus' commandment through the act of foot-washing. This may be something new at St. James. We will have several persons who have agreed to participate in the foot-washing, and then anyone in the congregation may come forward to have their feet washed. Those desiring to do so should be sure to wear shoes that are easily removed and replaced. Finally, the service ends with the stripping of the altar to remind us of the humiliation of Christ. ***We will depart in silence with neither conversation nor greeting.***

Good Friday, April 14th, 7:00 pm

On this most solemn of days, we gather in community sensing the separation we have created between us and God. We will worship following the order called Tenebrae, which means "shadow." The Word, the prayers, and the Solemn Reproaches all lead us to the point where we experience the full darkness of the journey. This makes Easter all the more a joyous light of glory! Make plans now to travel the journey from darkness to light.

† *In Memoriam* †

Anna E. Lanning of Phillipsburg, formerly of White Twp., NJ, went to be with her Lord on Friday, February 10th. She faithfully served St. James on Council and in the choir. Anna was also an Assistant Girl Scout Leader in Belvidere, NJ.

We offer our condolences and prayers for her family and friends

Straw Church History

Many new and exciting things are happening regarding the history of our church. Totally new historic facts have come to light as a result of our application and acceptance on the State and National Historic Registers. The 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Lutheran Reformation will take place October 31st, 2017. These and other events of our rich history should be acknowledged and celebrated.

Your Historical Committee will hold a reorganization meeting Monday morning March 27th at 10:00 am in Frey Hall. We invite anyone who is interested in exploring and documenting our history to join in. Meeting attendance is very flexible, as most work will be accomplished as individual or group projects. Please join us with some energy, enthusiasm and **ideas**. Contact Pastor Kelly or Dave Morris (908-859-0723 or dhmcsm22@yahoo.com) for more information. And bring a friend!

First Holy Communion

Parents who believe their child is ready to receive instruction on First Communion, please take note. Pr. Kelly will be offering first Holy Communion instruction in two sessions. Both sessions will be on a Saturday and will meet from 10:00 am to noon at the parsonage, 481 Barrymore Road, Phillipsburg. The first session will be **Saturday, April 1st** and the second session will be **Saturday, April 8th**. Typically, students will be in the fifth grade, however, if a parent believes a younger child is ready, just discuss this with the pastor. Please let Pr. Kelly know at 609-741-9234 or email kbak58@comcast.net if you plan to have your child participate. As mentioned in a separate article, the children will receive their First Communion on Passion (Palm) Sunday, April 9th.



Links of Love

Social Ministry will again be selling Links of Love at all services through April 9th. This year the money collected will be donated to Habitat for Humanity of Warren County.

Spring Bake Sale

The Bake Sale on March 4th and 5th raised \$338, which will be used toward replacing our worn altar linens. Thanks to all who bought and all who baked!

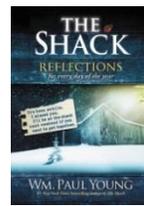


Shared Ministry Update

The conversation between St. James and Grace Lutheran Churches has begun and continues. In January, representatives from St. James, Grace, the office of the Bishop and Pr. & Deacon Kelly met to figure out how this might work. On March 26th, that conversation will continue and expand with two additional representatives from St. James and one additional representative from Grace. This meeting is largely about getting to know each other, setting guidelines, and understanding how this conversation will unfold. Bob Babcock, Polly Sue Newbold and Jason Raub represent St. James. Earle Conrad, Joe Fassl, and David Gulick represent Grace. Rev. Aaron Richter, Assistant to the Bishop, Pr. Bernie Kelly, and Deacon Karen Kelly are the rostered leaders guiding this conversation. Please keep all the representatives and the conversation in your prayers.

Karen Kelly

The Shack Discussion Group *Continues*



We have been meeting for several weeks now and discussing The Shack. We have 19 people participating: 10 from St. James, 8 from Grace and 1 from another congregation. The conversations have been very engaging and inspiring! We are tentatively scheduled to see the movie version of The Shack on Monday, March 20th, at 7:30 pm at the Regal. If you are interested in going to see the movie with us, please contact me (Karen Kelly, at 215-872-0949 or kbak58@comcast.net) for more information.

Karen Kelly

Coincidence is when God chooses to remain anonymous.

Scenes from Catechism

