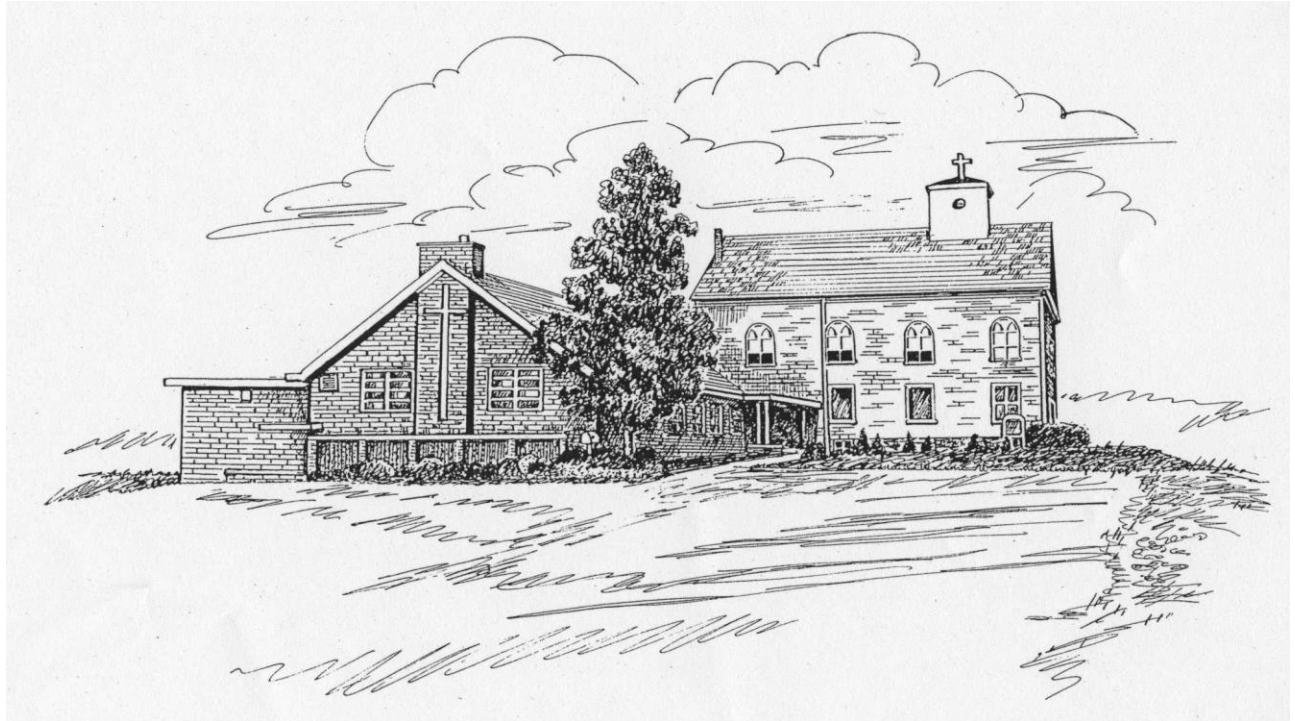


WISPS OF STRAW



St. James Lutheran Church Newsletter

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

Pastor's Letter

Joy Is A State of Being

My article is late again, not because I put it off, but because I struggled with it. I wrote it and re-wrote it and every time I ended up with a negative article. I don't want to be a negative person. I wanted to write about joy, but I ended up writing about all the things that take our joy away. Then I realized I was focusing on the problem, not on the solution.



SO, I decided to take a third stab at my article and commit to focus on the solution. However, before I can focus on the solution, I need to at least identify the problem: there are situations, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors and persons that suck the joy out of us. The Christian needs to resist joy-suckers and more importantly the Christian needs to resist *being* a joy-sucker.

So, what is the remedy, the solution, the strategy to resisting joy-suckers? It starts with the recognition that joy is indeed a state of being and it should not be confused with the emotion "happiness". Even though my go-to dictionary, Merriam-Webster defines "joy" as an "emotion" and links it to happiness, I disagree. Deeply faithful Christians can remain in a state of joy even though they are unhappy. For example, sitting in a funeral feeling sad that our loved one has died, but singing a hymn like *Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won!* (LBW #133), which begins,

*Jesus lives! The victory's won! Death no longer can appall me!
Jesus Lives! Death's reign is done! From the grave will Christ recall me.
Brighter scenes will then commence; This shall be my confidence.*

No, I believe that while happiness is fleeting, TRUE joy is a state of being. It is a state in which I can choose to live or I can exit that state at any time. The Enemy often calls me to cross the boundary of the State of Joy. I am embarrassed to admit how often I acquiesce.

Recently, I found myself heading down the river out of the State of Joy and directly toward the State of Desolation. This is despite the fact that in my own life, I have come up with dozens of devices to remind me to choose joy. I sign my emails "In Joy" to remind myself that joy really is THE state of being I WANT to be in. I begin each worship service with the invitation, "Regardless of how you feel about yourself; regardless of what you think others think of you; God rejoices that we are present in His house." to remind myself that Jesus promised *his joy would be in me and my joy would be complete*. (cf. John 15:11 and John 16:24) I worship regularly and sing the hymns heartily because in doing so sometimes the testimony of the great cloud of witnesses about which Paul speaks calls me back from the State of Desolation and returns me home, to the State of Joy. When I recognized that I was sailing in the wrong direction, and I had to bring my little boat about, I employed every device at my disposal to turn the little boat that is my life around.

And miracle of miracles, as I was fighting the sails and struggling with the rudder, the Great Cloud of witnesses spoke to me Saturday night (2/4) and again today, Monday (2/6). Dave Miller did not know it, but the hymn he chose to end our Saturday evening service is one of my favorites: *My Life Flows On In Endless Song* (I share verses 1 & 2):

*My life flows on in endless song;
Above earth's lamentation,
I catch the sweet, though far-off hymn
That hails a new creation.*

*Through all the tumult and the strife;
I hear that music ringing.
It finds an echo in my soul.
How can I keep from singing?*

I think it was the refrain that hit me:

*No storm can shake my inmost calm,
While to that Rock I'm clinging.
**Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth,
How can I keep from singing?***

I left the service Saturday night realizing how far out of the State of Joy I had drifted. Thanks, Dave, for bringing the Great Cloud's testimony to someone who desperately needed to hear it! And then today, as I re-re-writing this article, Karen shared with me what one of her Facebook-friends had posted:

Ships don't sink because of the water around them, ships sink because of the water that gets in them. Don't let what is happening around you get inside you and weigh you down.

Thanks, Karen for bringing the Great Cloud's testimony to someone who desperately needed to hear it. So, how do we resist joy-suckers and how do we resist being a joy-sucker? This is what I have learned (yet again):

1. Choose joy.
2. Surround yourself with joy-filled people.
3. Listen for God whispering to you through the words of others.
4. Get your rest.
5. Eat well.
6. Exercise.
7. Actively love another: a spouse, a sibling, a parent, a pet, a friend.
8. Appreciate creation
9. Each day share an expression of gratitude with another person.
10. PRAY

I hope in some small way, this can help you navigate to the State of Joy we all seek.

Pastor Kelly

Lent: A Journey From Darkness to Light

Lent is fast approaching, 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 Lenten season:

Ash Wednesday, March 1st

Our service will be at St. James, at 7:00 pm. In this service, we will hear God's call to repentance, celebrate holy communion and for those who desire it, receive the imposition of ashes. The ashes we receive will be made by burning the palms from last year's Palm Sunday. This reminds us that all earthly triumphs ultimately end in ash.

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.

Attention Thrivent Members

Choice Dollars for 2016 will expire on March 31st unless directed to a charity of your choice. Some 2017 Choice Dollars may also be available. Please take the time to direct them to St. James. If you need help, contact your Thrivent representative or call Member Services at 800-847-4836 between 8:00 am and 7:00 pm Eastern Time.

Shack Discussion Group

God is SO good! When I felt that God was calling me to lead a discussion on *The Shack*, I worried that no one would come (I always worry that no one will come ☺). Well, God has once again blessed us! For our first meeting, we had 18 people attend. It was amazing, besides Bernie and me, there were 8 people from St. James, 7 from Grace and 1 person from another church. Wow! The discussion group will continue on Monday evenings from 7-8:30 pm, at the parsonage. Feel free to stop in, there is always room for more! And don't feel like you need to commit to come each week, come as you can and participate as you like! We are planning to have a group outing to the movie version of *The Shack* when it is released in March. If you would like to come to the movie outing but can't attend the discussion group, just let me know at (kbak68@comcast.net or 215-872-0949).

Haren Kelly

Church Cleanout

The Sunday School area has been cleaned of many items no longer needed. For about two weeks to be announced in the bulletins, they will be available for anyone to take what they can use before it is disposed of.

First Holy Communion



For those 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 services from March 12th through April 9th. This year the money collected will be donated to Habitat for Humanity.

Spring Bake Sale

This year the proceeds from the bake sale after breakfast on Saturday, March 4th, and at the Saturday and Sunday services that weekend, will go toward replacing the somewhat worn altar linens (paraments) at St. James.



Have a great Straw Church breakfast and pick up a luscious dessert for dinner!

“When did we visit YOU, Lord?”

Jesus answers this question in Matthew chapter 25. He says that whenever we visit the least in the kingdom we visit Him. Visitation is such an important ministry of the church. The ministry of visitation is NOT limited to the pastor. Visitation has been a ministry of the church since the time of Acts.

It is important that visits are helpful and not unintentionally hurtful. In the very near future I will be offering a class on lay visitation. We will explore not only the Biblical and theological foundations for visitation, but some practical tips as well. In the end, we hope to have trained volunteers who will visit our homebound members (bringing communion if desired) and others who are experiencing difficult situations in their lives. Keep your eyes and ears open for more information, or contact me (kbak68@comcast.net or 215-872-0949) to indicate your interest and I will make sure you receive the information in advance!

Karen Kelly

Worship Leading Volunteers

Ever sat in worship and thought, *I wonder if I could read the lessons sometime?* Ever felt nudged to serve as worship assistant or communion assistant? Ever been to another church where you were greeted warmly upon entering and thought, *Why don't we do this at St. James?*

Well, now you can! We are seeking volunteers to serve as greeters, read the lessons, assist with communion, serve as ushers, help set up and clean up communion, and count the offerings. What a privilege to be able to serve God and the congregation in this way.

And not to worry, we will be having training to be held after worship on both **Saturday, February 18th** and **Sunday February 19th**. There will be food, fun and resources provided so that we can rejoice together in this ministry of worship. A make-up session will be offered one evening during the week for those who are unable to attend either weekend training session. If you are interested, PLEASE sign up in either the narthex or the lobby outside Ed Frey Hall.

Pastor Kelly

Church Council and Officers

At our congregational meeting in January we elected several new council members: Sue Agans, Mark Aloise, Karoline Avard, Janet Bray, Hayley Hardenbegh, Dawn Peppe, Lea Raub, and Jan Rosetti. At the reorganizational meeting of Council, these people were elected as officers: Karoline Avard as president, Jamie McLain as vice-president, Janet Bray as secretary, Jan Rosetti as treasurer and Luann Beatty as financial secretary. The officers will each serve one-year terms, and the council members will each serve terms to be determined once the expiration dates of seats left vacant by the resignation of former Council members has been determined. Please pray for Pastor. Kelly and all the council members as they seek God's guidance in leading St. James. ***The committees can always use any help members are willing and able to provide. Contact Karoline Avard (luv2writeksa@gmail.com or 908-619-8885) if you can volunteer your time and talents.***