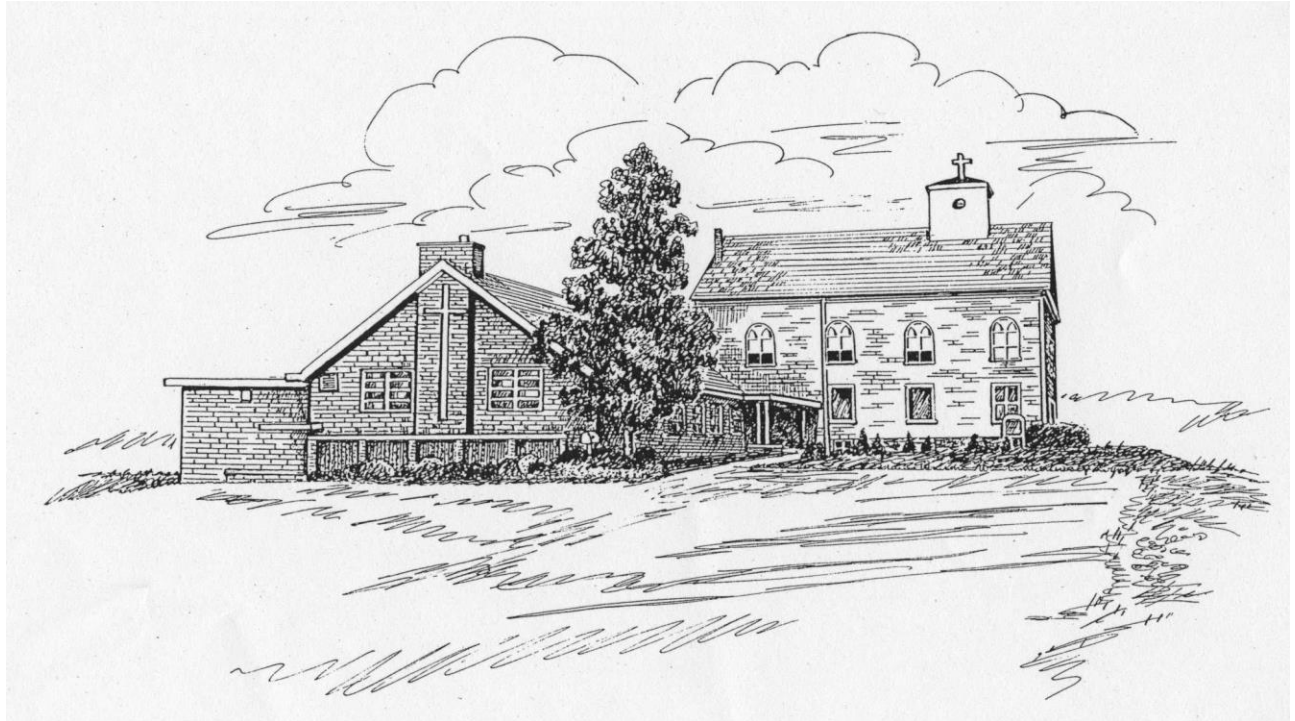


# *WISPS OF STRAW*



## *St. James Lutheran Church Newsletter*

*January 2017*

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*“Serving Christ in Word and Deed”  
over 265 Years*

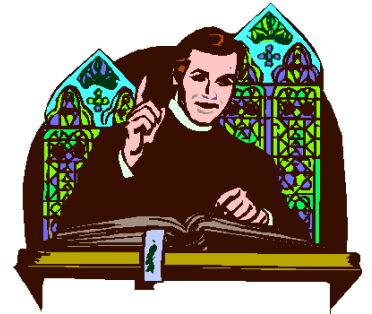
# Pastor's Letter

## A New Time

*What shall I return to the LORD for all his goodness to me?*  
Psalm 116:12 - New International Version

It's a new year, a time when we try to live into our resolutions. I write this article on Epiphany, Friday, January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Last year, I had told George Scherer, our newsletter editor, that I would be better about getting my articles to him in a timely manner. Clearly I have not done well with my resolution, and I apologize to George and to all of you.

But it got me to thinking, why is it often so hard to keep our New Year's resolutions and why do we even need to make them in the first place? I mean, if we want to live our lives differently by quitting a bad habit or developing a good one, why do we need to wait until January 1<sup>st</sup> to start the effort? I think the reason is at some level we get comfortable and complacent. Unless there is a compelling reason to change, we put off changing. For most of us, we resonate with the Billy Joel lyrics: "I've loved these days." While I may want to lose weight, I've loved the rich food I've been eating. While I see the benefit to living within my budget, I've loved the pleasure of impulse spending. While I know that exercise promotes good physical, emotional and spiritual health, if I am honest with myself I rather enjoy sitting in my La-Z-Boy recliner watching reruns on TV. And so, when the new year rolls around, it is a time of taking stock of our lives and we are motivated (if not compelled) to try to live our lives differently. Sometimes, guilt, or fear, or shame will provide the compulsion we need to actually live into the resolution. My late father-in-law found a compelling reason to quit smoking the day he was diagnosed with lung cancer. I have a friend who found a compelling reason to quit drinking when he woke up lying on some railroad tracks. I have another friend who was compelled to actually begin saving money for retirement when his advisor made him make a list of things he would do without in order to live within his projected future income.



Fear, guilt, and shame can be great motivators. But they are all *negative* motivators. There are also *positive* motivators. A desire for advancement compels another friend to pursue their bachelor's degree part-time even though they are well past typical college age. Keeping the romance alive in a marriage is often the motivator for husbands and wives to intentionally have "couple's time." The desire to help our son and daughter-in-law and to connect with our granddaughter compels Karen and me to travel to Princeton each Wednesday. Whether motivated by positive or negative forces, we won't experience the benefit of change until we take action.

The Biblical quote above gets us connected to the positive motivator of *gratitude*. The Psalmist asks, and so should we, "what will I return to the Lord for all His benefits to me?" How will I show my gratitude for all the wonderful, amazing, incredible blessings I enjoy? How can I say thank you in a way that sufficiently shows my gratitude? Obviously, there is nothing God *needs* from us. But what does God desire? The wonderful hymn *In the Bleak Midwinter* does a fine job answering that question:

*"What can I give him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;  
if I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;  
yet what I can I give him: give my heart.*

So, what are you willing to return to the Lord for all His benefits to you? What changes are you willing to make in order to draw closer to the Lord in gratitude? Are you willing to return some of the time He has given you by weekly worship and Kingdom work? Are you willing to return some of the treasure He has provided you through the job he bestowed on you or the investment returns He has directed to you? Are you willing to return some of the forgiveness, or grace, or love He has showered on you by forgiving and showing grace and love to others? I hope you are. I hope 2017 is the year that each of you resolves and acts to deepen your relationship with Christ. As for me, I want to return even more to the Lord. Can we encourage each other?

*Pastor Kelly*

## *Come and Join a Discussion of The Shack*

How do you imagine the Trinity? Have you ever felt abandoned by God? Angry at God? Lost? How would you imagine God working in and through the hard times of your life? The book [The Shack](#), by Andrew Paul Young explores all these important themes in a touching and compelling story. Would you like to read (or re-read) this amazing book and discuss it with others?

Deacon Karen Kelly will be hosting a book discussion beginning Monday, January 30<sup>th</sup>. The group will meet each Monday from 7:00 - 8:30 pm in the parsonage at 481 Barrymore Street, Phillipsburg. You DO NOT need to read the book in advance, you can read it and discuss it week by week. But we do ask that you sign up in the lobby or narthex so that we may get an accurate count and order books in advance. We will also be inviting members of Grace Lutheran Church to join in. Please contact Karen if you have any questions ([kbak58@comcast.net](mailto:kbak58@comcast.net) or 215-872-0949).

Bonus: The Shack has been made into a major motion picture set to be released March 3. For those who would like, we will be organizing a group trip to watch this film together!

# *Vendor Craft Fair Another Great Success*

The 2016 Vendor Fair, including the Cookie Sale and food service, raised on the order of \$2,000 for the church. Thanks to our vendors, those who contributed the cookies, who worked in the kitchen, and all who came out to support both our vendors and St. James.

## *From Pastor & Karen*

We would like to thank the congregation so much for all the love expressed in so many ways over the Christmas holidays. We thank you for your cards, your baked goods, your invitations, your meals and especially for the very kind and extremely generous gift the congregation gave us at the late Christmas Eve service. We are so touched by the kindness, generosity and love you have shown us. Each of you is a blessing to us.

*"The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places"*  
Ps. 6:6

*Pr. & Karen*

## *A Look Ahead*

Despite the Christmas season being barely over, we are now only about six weeks away from Ash Wednesday, March 1<sup>st</sup>, the beginning of the most solemn and reflective time of the Christian calendar.



The next issue of Wisps, as well as future weekly bulletins, will contain news of the Lenten activities planned here at St. James.

## *Social Ministry*

The Christmas Links of Love campaign raised \$265, which has been given to Food for the Poor. Thanks to all who contributed to this expression of Christian love.

We are still looking for someone to head up our monthly Senior League. Please contact Sharon Risko (909-859-1743 or [thevillagegirl@yahoo.com](mailto:thevillagegirl@yahoo.com)) if you can perform this important ministry.

*We were called to be witnesses  
not lawyers or judges*

## *To Thrivent Members*

As your Choice Dollars become available, please be sure to have them directed to St. James. It's a no-cost way to help support your church.

## *Chuckle Corner*

*Actual announcements taken from church bulletins*

Thursday night, potluck supper  
Prayer and medication to follow

Remember in prayer the many who are sick  
of our church and community

## *Christmas Pageant – Behind the Scenes*

Our Sunday School put on a superb pageant performance this Christmas, and certainly deserved the time to relax a bit on occasion. Thanks to all those who performed, and who helped them bring it off.



## *Decorating the Sanctuary Christmas Tree*

After woeship on Sunday, December 18<sup>th</sup>, an energetic crew of volunteers decorated the huge tree in our sanctuary. A happy time was had by all, and the results added a real touch of beauty to our Christmas celebration.

While perhaps not as much fun, taking the tree down afterwards is just as necessary, and we thank those who stepped up to do that task as well.

