



Mount Calvary Connected

November 19, 2020

Mount Calvary Connected is a weekly newsletter that will be sent out each Wednesday while the church is pressing "pause" on in-person gatherings. Our goal is to keep you connected to your faith and your church with messages from our pastors, health information, and ways to share Christ's love during our current national crisis.

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A Message from Pastor Jonathan,

As recently as just a month or two ago, it seemed as if very few people within our congregation or even the community around us had had personal experiences with COVID-19. Certainly, there were our healthcare professionals who were seeing it on a regular basis, and a handful of folks who had family or friends in other parts of the state or country who had contracted the virus, but for the most part we were somewhat insulated.

But in the past few weeks, so much of that has changed as we face a local surge of infections greater than any other time in the last nine months. I'm afraid that nearly everyone has a COVID-19 story by now, a friend or family member or neighbor who was infected, or maybe even your own brush with it.

Meanwhile, the school districts around us continue to close or change their operations in response to cases among students and staff; separating students from their friends and teachers. And a new round of orders from the PA Department of Health encourages limiting holiday gatherings and travel, separating us from beloved family members and beloved traditions.

There's some hope to be found in news of progress toward vaccines, and in the progress that hospitals have made in treating those who are most ill. But even so, after things were seeming to settle down a bit, it's easy to look at all of this, everything going on around us, and feel a bit overwhelmed.

Thankfully, as Christians, we do not place our hope in the work of political leaders or even physicians and healthcare workers. **As Christians we place our hope in God.**

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he writes, *"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."* -Romans 8:38-39

As we head into the holiday season with Thanksgiving, Advent and Christmas ahead of us –even as we may be separated from beloved friends and family, even as we may be separated from beloved traditions – there is nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. That is where we as Christians place our hope.

That particular passage from Romans has brought me comfort at so many different points in my life: after losses of family members and friends, and on days where everything seemed bleak and hopeless. And so I hope that it might bring you some hope now, no matter what the days ahead may bring, no matter how far separated we may feel from everything and everyone we know, we know that nothing can separate us from God's love.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Jonathan

LIVE STREAMING WORSHIP SERVICE INFORMATION

At Mount Calvary Lutheran church, we strive to spread the good news of the gospel by any means available. Today's technology allows us to provide alternatives to in-person worship. This includes social media such as Facebook, internet live streaming, recorded sermons, and through FM radio broadcasts.

Mt. Calvary hosts live broadcasts of the liturgy at 8:45 AM Sunday mornings. The broadcast can be heard by tuning your radio to 88.3 FM if you are near the church. We can also stream the service live over the internet. By clicking the following link, you can gain access to the live stream audio. <https://streams.radiomast.io/96172026-6cba-407b-9090-e150b471ae0e>

We want you to stay connected to Mount Calvary, even if you cannot be here in person. Help us spread the good news of the gospel by inviting friends to tune in, as well. Everyone is welcome to use any of these methods to join us and hear the message and teachings of Jesus Christ. Facebook Live versions of the service will be made available on Wednesdays most weeks, but on other days as well depending upon the schedule of the preaching pastor. Our Facebook page is found at Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church of Johnstown, PA.

Salvation Army Bell Ringing

Mt. Calvary will be volunteering to ring bells for The Salvation Army's Red Kettle Collection. This year we will be doing it on Saturday December 12 from 10-5 at Market Basket. A sign up sheet is on the table in the narthex if you would like to volunteer. If you are unable to attend services, but still would like to sign up for a block of time, please contact Mike Kozak at 244-6880. Thank you!

Luther Home Christmas Gifts

Lois Gallus will be getting names for Christmas gifts for residents of Lutheran home, if interested please contact her at 241-3470.

Family Kitchen Volunteers

Mt. Calvary will be helping serve food at the Family Kitchen on **Sunday December 6 from 11-1**. Due to social distancing, we will be filling containers with food and then will hand them out the door to those in line. If you would like to volunteer, or have any questions, please contact Mike Kozak at 244-6880.

Harvest Home Food Collection

We will be collecting much needed non-perishable food items now through **December 13** to be distributed to a local Food Pantry. A table will be set up in the narthex for your generous contributions.

WELCA ACTIVITIES

14 bags of gifts including card games, snack packets, books, socks and puzzle books and drink boxes were packed for men residing at Torrence State Hospital. WELCA partners with other churches in purchasing these items. We will receive these gifts at the church, and they will be transported to the Hospital.

WELCA usually hosts the PIE SOCIAL after the Thanksgiving eve service. But this year, due to COVID-19 we have decided to cancel the event.

We pray for your health and happiness. WELCA also voted to cancel meetings until further notice. We are being proactive and hopefully no one from Mt Calvary stays healthy.

Backyard Ministries Socks and Toy Collection

As we enter the holiday season, they are asking that we once again collect a pack of socks and a \$1 toy for the children of Coopersdale. Just like the hats and gloves, labeled bags (size and gender) will be in the narthex. Once you have the items, you can return them in the bag to the blue bin outside the church, or the labeled bin in the narthex. All donations must be in by Wednesday December 16. If you have any questions, please contact Mike Kozak at 244-6880. Thank you for your continued support!

Family Kitchen Christmas Collection

Each year the Family Kitchen has a Christmas dinner where they give the attendees a gift basket. This year Mt. Calvary is responsible for providing boxes of cereal for the baskets. If you would like to donate a box of cereal, you can place it in the blue bin outside the church, or the labeled bin in the narthex. All donations must be in by Wednesday December 16. If you have any questions, please contact Mike Kozak at 244-6880.

Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries (ALSM) Virtual Shopping Event November 6th – November 25th

Enjoy shopping from the safety and convenience of your home and support ALSM with your purchases. Each vendor is donating a portion of sales. Vendors will post to ALSM's Virtual Shopping Facebook group available products as well as links to order. To join the group visit <https://www.facebook.com/groups/842577266570159> Thank you for your support of ALSM. We wish you a Happy Thanksgiving and a Blessed Christmas

The Giving Tree

The Giving Tree will be set up in the narthex. On the tree you will find gift tags with "Bag of Candy" written on them. Take a gift tag for candy and place candy under the tree. Also on the tree will be envelopes marked with different denominations. Return your envelope designated "Helping Hand Mission" in the offering plate or drop o at the Church Office. All donations will go to the Helping Hand Mission in Portage, PA. Mt. Calvary has been reaching out to the Helping Hand Mission for many years. Thank you for being a "Helping Hand"!

Christmas Pageant

A slightly different holiday season calls for "A Slightly Different Christmas Pageant!" This year's Christmas program by the youth of the church is entitled "A Slightly Different Christmas Pageant" and will be social-distance friendly with families contributing pre-recorded segments that will be edited into a video to be shown in worship and online. If you have kids, watch for information from Pastor Jonathan about how to participate!

Poinsettias – World Hunger

You are invited to contribute toward a Poinsettia or World Hunger as a "Memorial" or in "Honor" of someone. All contributors will be listed in the Christmas Eve Bulletins and the poinsettia will decorate the Sanctuary. Please make checks payable to Mt. Calvary and mark either "*poinsettia*" or "*world hunger*" on the memo line. Please fill in the blanks below, then drop off in the offering plate or the church office.

The deadline for orders is November 30.

No orders can be accepted after this date

In Memory Of: _____

In Honor Of: _____

Given By: _____

Offering Envelope Number: _____

World Hunger Offering Amount: \$ _____

Total Number _____ of Poinsettias Ordered X \$8.75 Each = \$ _____

About Our Members:

Bill Kane passed away on November 5, 2020

Deb Zilch's surgery went well she has another appointment next week.

Reminder to please pray for our members and their families that are affected by COVID 19.

Given to the Glory of God!

Flowers: In memory of our daughter, Vicki Sliwa by Tom & Janet Donaldson.

Kid's Corner

with Pastor Jonathan

Each week, Mt. Calvary will be publishing "Kid's Corner" as an offering for our children and families. Kid's Corner is part Sunday school lesson, part children's sermon, and all about sharing God's love. Join us each week for this and other online offerings from Mt. Calvary on our church Facebook page: Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church of Johnstown, PA.

Birthdays for the Week Nov. 22 - Nov. 28.

Nov 23 - Linda McMullen

Nov 24 - Marley Stroz

Nov 25 - Joshua Noble

Nov 26 - Brendan Gorham

Nov 27 - Brittany Hiltz, Jonathan Perry, Gerald Pozun, Deborah Roth

Nov 28 - Tara Foust

Nov. 24 - John and Sandy Plunkard (47 years)

Remember those that prayer has been requested:

Larry, Bernie Gorba, Linda, Betty Mountain, Sally, Alison, Joe, Kane Family, and Pastor Paul Tomkiel's Family. Dolly & Chis Palm, David, Karen, Lauren, Billy, Brooke, Tom, Shiloh, David, Jennifer, Adam, Midge, Joanne, Rick, Bob Jones, Patti Sliko, Joe, John, Scott, Carlye, Mark, and Betty.

Support of Mount Calvary

Through the end of October, Mount Calvary's monthly expenses have been averaging about \$17,655. This is in the neighborhood of \$4,260 a month less than budgeted. Thanks to your generosity and the faithfulness of your leadership team, Mount Calvary has not yet had to dip into reserves in spite of all the disruption introduced by the pandemic. We're a team and the entire team deserves a thank you!

Thus far this fall monthly giving has a dropped a bit from where it was earlier in the year. This is not entirely surprising since September and October have more often than not proved to be lighter giving months. But let's remain vigilant and take nothing for granted. Provided we all do our part, there's no challenge we cannot overcome.

CONDENSED WORSHIP FOR THE WEEKEND OF SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 15th.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

P: Righteous God, our merciful master, you own the earth and all its peoples, and you give us all that we have. Inspire us to serve you with justice and wisdom, and prepare us for the joy of the day of your coming, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

A: Amen.

FIRST READING: JUDGES 4:1-7

Deborah was a prophet and judge who, with her general, Barak, led a victorious holy war against a stronger Canaanite force from the north.

¹The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died. ²So the LORD sold them into the hand of King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-ha-goiim. ³Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD for help; for he had nine hundred chariots of iron, and had oppressed the Israelites cruelly twenty years.

⁴At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. ⁵She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment. ⁶She sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you, 'Go, take position at Mount Tabor, bringing ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. ⁷I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your hand.'" "

PSALM 123

P: To you I lift up my eyes, to you enthroned | in the heavens.

A: As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters, and the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to you, O LORD our God, until you show us your mercy.

P: Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy, for we have had more than enough of contempt,

A: too much of the scorn of the indolent rich, and of the derision of the proud.

SECOND READING: 1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11

Though we do not know and cannot calculate the day of Christ's return, we live faithfully in the here and now as we anticipate the day when we will be given eternal salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. ²For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! ⁴But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; ⁵for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. ⁶So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; ⁷for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 25:14-30

Jesus tells a parable about his second coming, indicating that it is not sufficient merely to maintain things as they are. Those who await his return should make good use of the gifts that God has provided them.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹⁴“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ ²¹His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ ²²And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ ²³His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ ²⁴Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ ²⁶But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter?’ ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ”

SERMON BY PASTOR SCOTT

At this time of year, the biblical readings we hear each week draw increasing attention to the gap that separates the expectations of the Church from the expectations of society at large. When I was preparing this sermon and service, it was around the time that clocks were set back for an hour. It struck me that this was completely out of step with how a couple of our readings set the clock all the way forward to the Final Judgment. This is how it goes every year as fall draws to a close. Society at large sets its clock back; expecting more of the same. The Church sets its clock all the way forward; expecting the arrival of circumstances so different that we might as well call them a new heaven and a new earth. But as the Church draws attention to the divide separating its vision and the vision of society at large, there’s no guarantee it will be heard and heeded. To be heard and heeded the Church is going to need strong and faithful spiritual leadership.

As I see it, the need for strong and faithful spiritual leadership is made plain by our reading from Judges. In what can prove to be a footnote we might very well miss or ignore, it’s said that Israel falls asleep, falls into sin, after the death of Ehud. Ehud is one of the spiritual leaders, one of the judges, after which the seventh book of the Bible is named. His presence, it would seem, makes a difference. When Ehud is alive and active, Israel stays awake. When Ehud is dead, Israel falls asleep. The message seems clear enough. To keep its distinctive vision alive, to keep its clocks set forward to history’s most decisive moment, the Church shall require strong and faithful spiritual leadership. And let’s be clear. This applies not only to my leadership, but to your leadership as well.

For starters, I want all of us to note today that Ehud’s successor is Deborah not David, Don, or Daniel. In our reading from Judges, Israel’s next spiritual leader is a woman, not a man. So much for spiritual leadership being a mantle worn by just one of the sexes. As far as the Bible is concerned, spiritual leadership is a mantle worn by all, whether they be male or female, clergy or lay. It’s why in the Old Testament the entirety

of Israel is called a priestly kingdom and a holy nation and in the New Testament the same language is applied to all of us in places like 1st Peter and the book of Revelation. According to the Bible we're all spiritual leaders and if we don't all rise to that office then it's likely that those who do will be drowned out by the snores and sighs of all those who have fallen asleep. Without strong and faithful spiritual leadership on the part of all converts to the Christian faith and cause are going to be far and few between; meaning the customs and expectations of society at large shall come to dwarf those of the Church more than they already do today. Without a doubt, the time for strong and faithful spiritual leadership on the part of all is now, not later. But as we seize this moment of both opportunity and necessity, what is our lived and spoken message to be?

Well, according to our reading from 1st Thessalonians, plain, old-fashioned faith, hope, and love shall do. According to St. Paul's inspired words, we keep ourselves and others awake while society at large is sleeping when we put on the breastplate of faith and love and for a helmet the hope of salvation. How strikingly different this attire is from the attire worn by the Roman soldiers who were raising havoc in Jerusalem and elsewhere when the New Testament was written! How strikingly different this attire is from those who today try to advance their agenda through violence, intimidation, and tough talk! Again, we see and hear that the Church is to be the Church, not society at large. But what are faith, hope, and love as described by today's readings?

Let's start with faith. It's a word that can carry multiple meanings. With respect to salvation, faith is the Holy Spirit's gift of belief in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior; a gift that naturally leads to all kinds of other things. One of the here and now consequences of this kind of faith is the trust that our salvation in Christ is so secure that we can stop worrying about it and instead worry about all the things God would have us do now. When our readings talk about faith today, this is what they have in mind. They refer to the trust that each of us has been given a here and now place in God's plan and the gifts to carry that plan through to completion. As Jesus' parable about timid and untimid investing makes abundantly clear, we have faith in the sense of today's readings not when we hold our God-given gifts back, but when we put them in play to the fullest extent possible. To use a sports analogy, when we have faith in the sense of today's readings, we don't burn clock or take a knee, but instead look to run up the score for the sake of the Kingdom of God. And so, if our clocks are to be set forward as so many others set theirs backward, we'll want to be asking ourselves how often and to what extent our time, talent, and treasure are in the game for God and neighbor.

Now as for hope, this too is a natural byproduct of the Holy Spirit's one gift of belief in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Christian hope looks beyond the odds championed by society at large and remains intent on the possibility of deep and transformative change. By way of example: 1) David can beat Goliath 2) Israel can escape from twenty years of oppression as it does in our reading from Judges, 3) We can get beyond red and blue and back to being one nation under God, 4) We can do a better job of making life for the corona virus more difficult, and 5) We can stop kicking the can of tomorrow down the road and start getting serious about it now. This is Christian hope. It's defiant. It's audacious. It's knows no marathon it cannot run. And so, if our clocks are to be set forward when so many others are setting theirs back, another thing we'll want to be asking ourselves is how often our disappointments and frustrations are tempered by the confidence that this too shall pass; particularly when we get our time, talent, and treasure in the game to the greatest extent possible.

And then, last, but not least, there's love; also born of the Holy Spirit's one gift of belief in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. But it's not just any, old love we're talking about. When St. Paul and the others writers of the New Testament bring love to the fore they're able to draw on the fact that the Greek in which the New Testament was written has more than one word for love. The word for love that's used is always the word for Christ-like love. This is the love that lays down its life for the sake of its friends. This is the love that will not sacrifice the greater good—the health of the whole community—for the sake of self. This is the kind of love that actually listens to St. Paul when in our reading from 1st Thessalonians he bids us to encourage one another and to build each other up. For when church becomes about us, rather than just me, church becomes a community in which we're all invested and this is what Christian love always seeks—the strongest

communities imaginable—the best possible set of circumstances for everybody. And so, as we ask ourselves about how defiantly hopeful and deeply committed and engaged we are with respect to the use of our time, talent, and treasure, let's also make sure the aim of our hope and engagement is gain not just for self, but gain for all. It will be then that we love as Christ first loved us, as we also live out the rest of his example; trusting that God has put us all here for reason and that God's design for our lives shall not fail, even when opposed by evil, empires, crosses, and tombs. Amen!

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

P: Longing for Christ's reign to come among us, we pray for the outpouring of God's power on the church, the world, and all in need.

P: Lord of the church, ignite your people with the passion of your love. By the fire of your Holy Spirit, unify us across ministries, congregations, and denominations, and refine us to participate in your activity throughout the world. Hear us, O God. **A: Your mercy is great.**

P: Lord of creation, we stand in awe at the works of your hands and praise you for the beauty of nature (*local places of natural beauty may be named*). Bless the earth for your glory and restore its integrity where exploitation has caused ruin. Hear us, O God. **A: Your mercy is great.**

P: Lord of the nations, sound forth your justice in the ears of all leaders. Increase concern for those who are most vulnerable, especially as international leaders forge trade agreements and cooperate to end human rights abuses. Hear us, O God. **A: Your mercy is great.**

P: Lord of all in need, search out all who cry to you in distress. Scatter the heavy clouds of depression, chronic illness, unemployment, and loneliness with your radiant light. Send us as encouragement and signs of your healing. Hear us, O God. **A: Your mercy is great.**

P: Lord of the stranger, stir up holy restlessness in us to extend love to those at the margins. Release our desire for control and open us to learn from the perspectives of others. Hear us, O God. **A: Your mercy is great.**

P: Lord of the living and the dead, we give you thanks for all the saints at rest from their labors (*especially*). Rouse us to live by their example, that saints yet to come may also know your love. Hear us, O God. **A: Your mercy is great.**

P: Receive our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, until that day when you gather all creation around your throne where you will reign forever and ever. **A: Amen.**