



Mount Calvary Connected

November 25, 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 Scott,

In recent weeks our confirmation class has begun to look at the first article of *The Apostles' Creed*. By way of reminder, the first article of the creed states, "I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth." The proximity joining together the words "believe" and "God" is significant. The words "God" and "good" are very closely related. To believe in God is to trust that God is the measure of all goodness and the source of all goodness. Even in a year of disruption and widespread death, it's been heartening to hear our confirmation students be able to connect very easily the goodness in their lives with the goodness of God. Their ability to make this connection has been repeated week after week and with the specific instances of God's goodness varying rather than staying the same. Whoever has any doubt that the Holy Spirit is continuing to work even in the midst of the most trying and unusual of circumstances should come and listen to our confirmation students. They are an inspiration to me and I give thanks for them.

If finding indications of God's ongoing goodness in our lives has been more difficult for you as of late, perhaps revisiting Martin Luther's smaller catechism might be helpful. As those who worship the One who was, is, and shall be, we give thanks not just for what is, but also for what has been and what shall be. To reference a pattern of call and response used in some corners of the Church, God is good—all the time. Though lifelong sinners like the rest of us, Martin Luther and other Christian thinkers of note have sometimes been proof of God's ongoing goodness. The overwhelming majority of the words found in Luther's smaller catechism likely fall into this category. With Thanksgiving Day soon upon us, it may be that Luther's explanation of the first article of the creed might help to remind us of just how good God is all the time.

In explaining the words "I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth," Luther writes:

I believe that God has created me together with all that exists. God has given me and still preserves my body and soul: eyes, ears, and all limbs and senses; reason and all mental faculties.

In addition, God daily and abundantly provides shoes and clothing, food and drink, house and farm, spouse and children, fields, livestock, and all property—along with all the necessities and nourishment for this body and life. God protects me against all danger and shields and preserves me from all evil.

And all this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all!

For all of this I owe it to God to thank and praise, serve and obey him. This is most certainly true.

When combined with the ongoing inspiration of the Holy Spirit, may Luther's words and the example of our confirmation students give us ample reason to give thanks this week and always. As your pastor, I can say that I might very well look back on our last year of ministry and say it's been the best I've ever known. Things were different, things were ever-changing, but we rose to the occasion again and again. Thanks for allowing me to be a part of that thanks-inspiring feat!

Pastor Scott

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.

Evangelism Committee Meeting

Will be held on Tuesday, December 1, at 6:30 pm in the conference room.

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.

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.

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:

Thank you to everyone for the cards, prayers, and concerns for the loss of my wonderful husband, Bill.
Barb Kane

Marley Family is moving to Maryland to be closer to their kids and grandkids. They will miss their friends and church in Johnstown.

Deb Zilch is recovering at s nursing facility closer to her home.

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 Randy Whetzel, Sr. by the Whetzels.

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

Birthdays for the Week Nov. 29 - Dec. 5.

week for this and other online offerings from Mt. Calvary on our church Facebook page: Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church of Johnstown, PA.

Nov 29 - Jeremy Brehm, Samantha Cannonie, Tina Cominsky, Tori Sterner

Nov 30 - Linda Birch, Kirstyn Davis, Deborah Ferrin, Patti Sliko

Dec. 1 - Cathy Gawlas

Dec. 2 - Erin Borodach, Alex Palasick

Dec. 3 - Kelly Costlow Molly Miller, Brittany Morgenstern

Dec. 4 - Angela Meyers

Dec. 5 - James Balogh, Betty Weaver

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, Betty, Lucy's Family, and Lesile.

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 22nd.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

P: O God of power and might, your Son shows us the way of service, and in him we inherit the riches of your grace. Give us the wisdom to know what is right and the strength to serve the world you have made, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

A: Amen.

FIRST READING: EZEKIEL 34:11-16, 20-24

Because Israel's kings proved to be bad shepherds, Ezekiel declares that the LORD will assume the role of shepherd in Israel. The LORD will also set over them a shepherd-messiah, "my servant David," who will feed and care for the people.

¹¹Thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. ¹²As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. ¹⁴I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. ¹⁶I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.

²⁰Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, ²²I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.

²³I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

PSALM 100

P: Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all you lands!

A: Serve the LORD with gladness; come into God's presence with a song.

P: Know that the LORD is God, our maker to whom we belong; we are God's people and the sheep of God's pasture.

A: Enter the gates of the LORD with thanksgiving and the courts with praise; give thanks and bless God's holy name.

P: Good indeed is the LORD, whose steadfast love is everlasting, whose faithfulness endures from age to age.

SECOND READING: EPHESIANS 1:15-23

In this passage, God is praised for revealing ultimate divine power in raising Jesus from the dead. The resurrected, exalted Christ is Lord of both the church and the entire universe, now and in the age to come.

¹⁵I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the

age to come. ²²And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 25:31-46

Jesus compares himself to a king who moves among his subjects to see how he is treated: what is done for the least of those who belong to his family is truly done for him.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ³¹“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me.’ ⁴¹Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴²for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ ⁴⁵Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

SERMON BY PASTOR SCOTT

Unless it's in Bible study, through a devotional practice, or on a rare Church holiday, we won't be hearing much from Matthew after today. Next weekend Mark will become the featured gospel for a year, with plenty of John mixed in for good measure. The following year Luke will take center stage. But even as we prepare to move away from Matthew for a good while, his unique representation of our faith will likely go with us. Matthew is an insistent writer.

As he does again today, one of themes to which Matthew turns again and again is The Final Judgement. Today we get talk of eternal punishment for some. More often it's that some will spend eternity looking outside in; getting no break from darkness, weeping, and gnashing of teeth. Perhaps like you this repeatedly grim and gruesome portrait of what is to come for some bothers me. I love people. I believe deeply in the value and sanctity of every last member of God's creation. I don't want anyone, no matter how different they may be from me, to end up in an outer darkness where teeth shall be gnashed down to nothing and where cries of sorrow and suffering shall be unending. When Matthew goes there as often as he does it gives me the willies. To be sure, nowhere to be found in Matthew is the sweet nothing that everyone goes to heaven no matter who they've been in life. Matthew is coarse and combative. He pulls no punches and registers his points as colorfully and often savagely as he can. But Matthew loves people as much as any of us; maybe even more.

Like so many New Testament writers, Matthew is convinced the broken and sinful world we've all come to know isn't built to last. In his view and the view of Scripture in general and the New Testament in particular, the broken and sinful world we've all come to know is going to collapse and fall to pieces and not

everyone is going to be welcomed into God's eternal alternative; the one we call the Kingdom of God. As Matthew says so often, some are going to end up outside looking in; weeping and gnashing their teeth; experiencing eternal punishment. But like me, and I hope you, I'm inclined to believe Matthew doesn't want this to happen to anyone. I think it's why he keeps ringing his alarm bell about the Final Judgment. I think it's why, as he does again today, Matthew keeps telling us what shall be required to inherit the Kingdom of God so our teeth might remain intact. Like a good parent filled with overwhelming, almost unspeakable love for their child, Matthew in the plainest language possible keeps crying out, "Keep your hands off the stove and where they can be safe for all eternity." And for this we should say thank you to Matthew and the Holy Spirit who inspired him. Thanks to Matthew and the Spirit, we do know the Kingdom of God shall prevail and what citizenship in it will require.

What it's going to take is a lived faith; a faith that lives out Jesus' priorities and principles. Thankfully, the scriptures tell us this lived faith is the gift of the Holy Spirit; a gift the Spirit most often imparts when we gather as we are now—together and around God's word and sacraments. But here's the thing. As much as the Holy Spirit is in our corner, as much as the Spirit can be counted upon to supply every last thing we need to live out the Christian faith, we can rebel and resist. When it comes to the Holy Spirit's gift of a living faith, we can't say yes, but oh my can we say no. It's why in a couple of weeks we'll hear Scripture plead that we not quench the Holy Spirit. As the scriptures know so well, quenching the fire of the Holy Spirit shall spell death for the lived faith the Kingdom of God shall require. We don't want this to happen to us. We don't want it to happen to anyone. But there are other faiths, other lifestyles, other philosophies that lead us away from what the Holy Spirit would have us believe and do.

By way of example, towards the end of my basic training at Fort McClellan, Alabama, one of our drill sergeants had this to say. You can rest assured our female drill sergeant was not around when he said it. He said, "Soldiers, as you prepare to leave, many of you now beginning your first, full-time job, remember that real men are not built for monogamy, but they do always take care of their wife and kids." As a Christian and the son of a father who counted his greatest accomplishment in life as being faithful to my mother, I was shocked that such a thing would even be said. But there was another philosophy that gathered a little more currency with me during my time at Fort McClellan. From the moment I started basic training, I was told that my aim in life was to become and remain a lean, mean, fighting machine. If you're going to be a soldier who survives the rigors of military service, it's a philosophy, a lifestyle, a lived faith that makes some sense; even if the mean part of it can and has been overdone in more than one theater of war. Having long ago exited military service, it's no longer a philosophy to which I adhere, but perhaps it can be used to illustrate when we are in fact living the faith the Holy Spirit gives rather than one of the many other faiths the world would have us live.

Start with the mean part. As I've already suggested, even within the realm of military service, being mean can be quite problematic. But if it can be problematic for the soldier, it is entirely so for the Christian. It's kindness, not meanness, which the scriptures list as a consequence of Christian faith. And the people Jesus lauds today, those who care for the hungry and the hurting, certainly are kind.

As for the idea that we might be some kind of fighting machine, this too is out of bounds for the Christian. "Do everything without grumbling or arguing" says the letter to the Philippians, as the 2nd letter to Timothy also enjoins us to steer clear of that which produces quarrel. But even as I reject the idea that we're in anyway called to be mean fighting machines, I will say this. There's a lot of room for being lean in the faith the Holy Spirit calls and empowers us to live. In fact, it might even be said that becoming and remaining lean is a primary aim of the faith the Holy Spirit gives us for here and now use.

Now as I'm thinking of it, to be lean isn't to be starved, malnourished, or emaciated. To be lean is to have and use what you need to be healthy and to give that which personal health doesn't require to those who need it to become healthy themselves, be it physically, emotionally, or spiritually. To be lean in this way is to recognize that my neighbor will benefit when I'm healthy enough to help them and that I shall benefit when my neighbors are healthy enough to help me. In ways various and numerous this is what Jesus is always telling

us, including today. When communities are strong and healthy, everyone wins. It's not that Jesus calls us to be starved, malnourished, or emaciated. This will only serve to hurt us and thereby hurt the various communities to which we belong. What's in view is that Jesus is calling us to be lean so that overconsumption on our part doesn't weaken the strong and healthy communities we all need to win to the greatest extent possible. It's why Jesus today praises those who empty themselves of the time, talent, and treasure that would make them more than lean and leave others less than lean. And so, let me call all of us today not just to be done with being mean and quarrelsome, but also to direct considerable energy to becoming and remaining lean; in the sense that we keep and use what we need to be healthy and give away what others need to be healthy themselves.

Will this be easy? Anyone who's ever tried to become and remain physically lean, myself included, knows that it will not be. But it can be done to a greater and greater extent. Again, the Good News is that the Holy Spirit gifts us with all we need to live out the faith the Kingdom of God shall require. Will it still be a climb? Yes, it will be. Will we have to learn more and more to drown out the world that calls us to come down from the mountain so that we might remain tuned in to the Holy Spirit who calls us up the mountain? Again, yes it will. But as someone who's always thought parables like the one we've heard today seek effort rather than perfection or completion, maybe it is the climb, not scaling the mountain, that ultimately matters. 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: Sovereign of all, train our ears to hear your cry in the needs of those around us. Bless all social ministries of the church through which we seek to serve others as we ourselves have been served. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: You cause rain to fall on the just and unjust alike. Direct our use of creation to provide for the needs of all people in ways that are sustainable for the earth. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: Bring peace to every place where conflict rages (especially). Grant opportunities for ending divisions among us and usher in your reign of unity and reconciliation. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: Heal the sinful divisions we erect between us and release us from systems of oppression and prejudice. Restore our capacity to see your image in those whose dignity we have stripped away (especially). Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: Pour out the gifts of your Spirit on children and youth throughout the church. Sustain those who work in children's ministry, youth ministry, and campus ministry as they nurture the gifts of young people. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: Thank you for saints now departed who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and tended to the sick. Inspire us by their example, that we may see your presence in those in need around us. 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.