



Mount Calvary Connected March 18, 2021

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.

Pastor Scott Klimke

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Email: revjonoadams@gmail.com**A Message from Dr. Harold Ashcraft**

Here we are, a year into the COVID pandemic. While we are making progress, we are not completely out of the woods yet. The number of new cases per day is now down to what we considered a surge last summer. Of the new cases, up to 40% of them consist of new, highly contagious variants such as the British variant. We have lost over half a million Americans to COVID; more than we lost in WWI and WWII combined.

Sadly, throughout the pandemic, many Americans have questioned the number of deaths, thinking that the whole pandemic is exaggerated. Those of us in health care know that the numbers are not exaggerated, but two additional statistics confirm the grim numbers. The first is excess mortality—the deaths over the statistically expected number in a specific area over a specific length of time. In the USA, the excess mortality has remained very close to the counted COVID deaths. The second is life expectancy. The USA has had a sharp decrease in life expectancy over the past year. The fall in life expectancy can't happen if very sick and terminally ill people are dying a few weeks early. It can only fall if many people are dying years ahead of when they would have normally died. The excess mortality measurement also shows how the USA did much worse than other developed countries. Countries that handled mask wearing and social distancing well did much better than the USA. In fact, countries like Denmark, Norway and Finland had a negative excess mortality. Their death rate dropped! How did that happen? Measures to stop COVID significantly reduced influenza deaths and working from home cut back on motor vehicle fatalities so countries that handled COVID well actually supported their economies better than we did and reduced their death rates.

Even so, things are improving now, but this is still a very dangerous pandemic and the USA could easily have two or more very bad surges. What can we do? Masking in public remains very important. Social distancing and maintaining at least six feet of distance in public also remains very important. Not only do these measures help keep us safe, but they also reduce the ability of the virus to mutate into dangerous new variants. The virus cannot mutate if it is not infecting people.

Vaccinations are also an extremely important part of defeating COVID. The vaccines that are currently available all do very well at stopping serious illness while producing very few significant side effects. We have seen a few serious allergic reactions so all current vaccines are given in a setting where people can be safely monitored. Most of these reactions occurred in people with known serious allergic reactions in the past. Diseases of the immune system such as Guillain-Barre Syndrome (causes sudden weakness) have simply not occurred. This makes the vaccines in use quite different from the Swine Flu vaccine of 1976. As we continue to monitor the situation, I am convinced by the data that all three current vaccines are safe and would not hesitate to get any of the three and in fact have already received the vaccine offered by Pfizer.

What about singing? Unfortunately, singing, chanting, and shouting continue to be high risk activities. The state of Massachusetts recently started permitting live music performances, but without singing, woodwinds, or brass instruments. Only pianos, string instruments, and drums are presently permitted.

What can fully vaccinated people do differently? Two weeks from their last injection, they can now meet in small groups with other fully vaccinated people without masks and they can be with low-risk

unvaccinated people such as healthy children without masks. However, the general guidelines for masking in public and social distancing remain in effect for everyone, including the fully vaccinated.

What about church services? The church services at Mount Calvary Lutheran Church have been carefully thought out to keep everyone safe. We will continue to monitor state and national guidelines and incorporate new standards as quickly as possible. However, we are months away from full herd immunity, so we need to remain patient. I did not like seeing Cambria County as one of the most dangerous areas in the country and I don't want to see that happen again. We know what we need to do and we need to keep reminding ourselves that these precautions are mostly to keep those around us safe. A human life is worth a little discomfort.

Your Brother in Christ, Dr. Harold Ashcraft

A Message from Pastor Scott

At last night's council meeting, we spoke about mission at length. With it being a real positive, this is the second month in a row our conversation broke down in this way. The next step for Mount Calvary is to devote less energy to issues of "management" and more energy to issues of "mission."

"Management" involves all the organizational details necessary to support our facility, our worship life, and many of our programs. These details are important and should receive the attention they require, but they do not make the Church, the Church. "Mission" makes the Church, the Church. Jesus has given us much to do in our here and now and we attend to issues of mission when we consciously and actively seek to live and love as our Lord has instructed. To be sure, Jesus has identified way too many missions for any individual or congregation to tackle all by themselves, but we can't let what can come across as the overwhelming number of possibilities paralyze us. One small step at a time, mission happens when the Holy Spirit's tug upon the heart of a congregation and/or individual is paired with the needs and opportunities in the surrounding community. Arriving at this kind of match takes effort and discernment and I'm happy to report your elected leaders have been living into this reality more fully as of late. Research on a whole host of potential missions is underway and new ideas keep presenting themselves each time we talk. It's been heartening to see how ready and anxious folks have been to talk about issues of mission.

Perhaps ironically, or maybe no so ironically, one indication that more mission-centered effort is timely presented itself when I came to work today. A member of our congregation was waiting with a check in the amount of \$140. This was one-tenth of their latest stimulus check. Perhaps like you, they were in a position to use at least some of their stimulus monies to help the less fortunate. They wanted me to challenge you to use your stimulus dollars in a similar fashion as long as it would not burden you or your family. As a result of this challenge, I've been instructed to hold on to the check I received this morning so it might be paired with the stimulus-enabled gifts you might submit in the days and weeks to come. The idea would be to pool all of these gifts for a mission not already identified in our current budget. This is what you call mission-driven thinking and giving. It makes Jesus and the other members of the Holy Trinity smile each and every time it happens. If you'd like to participate in the challenge initiated by one of your siblings in Christ, please write "stimulus challenge" on the memo line of your check and you'll eventually be invited to a meeting about how to spend all of the pooled dollars.

As you weigh your response to the giving challenge I've shared, please be apprised that your council has also finalized its Holy Week and Easter schedule. On Maundy Thursday, there will be one in-person service at 7 PM. On Good Friday, there will be a drive-in service held in our rear parking lot at 3 PM and an in-person service held at 7 PM. On Holy Saturday, in-person Easter services will be held at both 5:30 and 7:15 PM. The next morning, on Easter Sunday itself, in-person services will be held at 7, 8:45, and 10:45 AM, with a drive-in service again held in our rear parking lot beginning at 9:30 AM. Masks will be required for all in-person services with six feet separating each individual or group. Bulletins for the drive-in services will eventually be posted on our website. Communion bread or crackers should be brought for the service on Maundy Thursday and for the celebration of Easter on Saturday or Sunday. With many people already having done so, those

planning on attending in-person services to celebrate Easter are asked to call the church office in advance whenever possible. With flexibility encouraged on your part, this will ensure none of the services are so overbooked that there will be no room left for visitors or those who have not preregistered.

Your Partner in Mission, Pastor Scott

Holy Week and Easter Services

Maundy Thursday: 7:00 pm in house
Good Friday: 3:00 pm drive in behind the church
7:00 pm in house
Easter Saturday: 5:30 and 7:15 pm in house
Easter Sunday: 7:00, 8:45, and 10:45 am in house
9:30 am drive in behind the church

LIVE STREAMING WORSHIP SERVICE INFORMATION

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>

Weekly worship bulletins can be found at: www.rebrand.ly/MtCalvaryWorship

The Passion of Christ,
First Four Wednesdays in March at 7 PM
Sequential Viewing and Discussion of the movie "The Passion of the Christ"



Devotionals

Christ in the Home and the Portal of Prayer devotional are available in the narthex.

Easter Egg Hunt

Mount Calvary will be hosting an Easter Egg Hunt on Saturday, March 27 at 4:30pm before the evening worship service. All children and youth are invited to participate. Weather permitting, the event will be held outside around the church; or socially-distanced and spread throughout the inside of the building if necessary.

We're currently looking for additional volunteers to help with setup (confirmation students will receive bonus points for volunteering), as well as donations of candy. Contact Pastor Jonathan in the church office on Mondays or Wednesdays or at RevJonoAdams@gmail.com for more information.

Backyard cookie collection will be Thursday, April 1, 2021.

Cookies can be placed in the bin outside the church, or the labeled one inside. If you have any questions, please contact Mike Kozak at 244-6880. Thank you for your continued support!



As we close in upon Holy Week and Easter, we are again planning to provide our congregation's younger families a special devotional activity kit for Holy Week called "Holy Week in a Box." This kit will have different scripture, prayer, and hands-on activities for Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday, to help you commemorate and celebrate these important and holy days with your children.

If you received the 2020 "Advent in a Box" in the mail, you're already on the list and don't need to do anything else if you'd like it mailed to you again. BUT, if you'd like to opt out of receiving a Holy Week box, or make arrangements to pick it up in person, OR if you didn't get the Advent Box but would like a Holy Week box for someone you know, contact Pastor Jono or use the form at the link below: <https://rebrand.ly/HolyWeekBox>

Lilies/Tulips – World Hunger

You are invited to contribute toward a Lily/Tulip or World Hunger as a “Memorial” or in “Honor” of someone. All contributors will be listed in the Easter Bulletins and the Lilies/Tulips will decorate the Sanctuary. Please make checks payable to Mt. Calvary and mark either “Lily”, “Tulip”, or “World Hunger” on the memo line.

Cost is \$9.50 . for either type of flowers.
The deadline for orders is March 22. You can find a form in the email or the letters that are mailed out each week. There are some envelopes in narthex.

In Memory Of: _____
In Honor Of: _____
Given By: _____
Offering Envelope Number: _____
World Hunger Offering Amount: \$ _____
Total Number _____ of Lilies _____ Tulips _____ Either Ordered X \$9.50 Each = \$ _____

Birthdays for the Week Mar 21 - Mar. 27.

- Mar. 21** - Evan Beglin, Jordan Hudson, Jaclynn Stahl, Randy Whetzel, Ethan Zukus,
- Mar. 22** - Dan Bantley, Susan Seese
- Mar. 23** - Draven Herring, Brenda Kuyat
- Mar. 24** - Jeanne Hockensmith
- Mar. 25** - Terry Kennedy, Shannon Lamoreux
- Mar. 26** - Robert McMullen, Tiffany Swartz, Deborah Wicks
- Mar. 27** - Ashlee Colvin, Sunniva Pawlowski, Ethan Wasnick, Logan Wasnick

About Our Members:

Mark and I wanted to thank our church family for their thoughts and prayers, food, cards and inquiries during our illness. We feel humbled by all of the people that reached out to us.
Mark and Deb Rychak

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

Remember those that prayer has been requested:

Catherine Kinzey, Heidi and Florence George, Linda & Dick, Lauren, Mark & Deb Rychak, Jim & Dot Karl, Dolly & Chis Palm, David, Karen, Lauren, Billy, Patti Sliko, Mark & Kayleigh Lucia, Palmer, Maxine Hale, Sandy, Alex, Dave, Joyce Morgenstern, Kadence, Jack, Denny, Gina, and Rick.

Financial Update through February

Mount Calvary went into the red during the month of February. Two factors were largely responsible for this development.

On the expense side, approximately \$1300 was required to repair a water leak and weather-related expenses exceeded expectation, with the difference hopefully resolving itself over time once warmer weather arrives.

On the income side, we continue to reckon with the relocation of one of our largest donors, the varied timing of once-a-year gifts, and the reduced giving caused by the disruption of our normal worship schedule. With much of it already expected, none of this represents an impassable hurdle for us. For our current plan to work, everyone simply needs to repeat their 2020 giving, regardless of the form of worship they are using at present and regardless of how often they choose to worship. Where possible, increases in excess of 2020 giving or a return to generally higher levels of 2019 giving would also be most helpful. If we all do our part, we can very easily overcome a sluggish start to the new year without breaking the bank. Because we live in an aging community where retirees and younger professionals regularly relocate, our giving patterns and histories are always going to require vigilance on our part. It's just part of doing mission in Johnstown; the place we call home.

If it helps, credit card donations can be made through our website at mt-calvarylutheran.org and non-credit card donations can be mailed to our church at 1000 Scalp Avenue, Johnstown, PA 15904.

CONDENSED WORSHIP FOR THE WEEKEND OF SUNDAY, March 14, 2021.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, rich in mercy, by the humiliation of your Son you lifted up this fallen world and rescued us from the hopelessness of death. Lead us into your light, that all our deeds may reflect your love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING: NUMBERS 21:4-9

Though God provides food and water for the Israelites in the wilderness, they whine and grumble. They forget about the salvation they experienced in the exodus. God punishes them for their sin, but when they repent God also provides a means of healing: a bronze serpent lifted up on a pole.

⁴From Mount Hor [the Israelites] set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. ⁵The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." ⁶Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. ⁷The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." ⁹So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

SECOND READING: EPHESIANS 2:1-10

While we were dead in our sinfulness, God acted to make us alive as a gift of grace in Christ Jesus. We are saved not by what we do but by grace through faith. Thus our good works are really a reflection of God's grace at work in our lives.

¹You were dead through the trespasses and sins ²in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

GOSPEL: JOHN 3:14-21

To explain the salvation of God to the religious leader, Nicodemus, Jesus refers to the scripture passage quoted in today's first reading. Just as those who looked upon the bronze serpent were healed, so people will be saved when they behold Christ lifted up on the cross.

Jesus said: ¹⁴"Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

SERMON BY PASTOR SCOTT

The theme for this service, "In the Key of Life," owes its language to a musical album entitled "Songs in the Key of Life." Released in the fall of 1976 by Stevie Wonder, the record went on to win the Grammy for album of the year. Let's take a moment to reacquaint ourselves with one of its most popular songs.

"Isn't she lovely? Isn't she wonderful? Isn't she precious?" Stevie Wonder wrote and sang these words in response to the birth of his first child—a baby girl named Aisha. Before the first minute of her life had even run its course, an awed and overwhelmed father knew his daughter was something real special. And this in spite of the fact that as a blind man Stevie Wonder couldn't even see his daughter. In my opinion, his blindness adds depth and meaning to the song. Whether we have all our senses or not, there are moments in life when we know with all of our being that God is playing in the key of life. At those moments, the stars align and everything falls into place; life is gift sublime; everything makes sense and there are no questions; only joy and celebration. If this is how things always went, life itself would be the only scripture and sacrament we'd ever need and worship's only purpose would be the praise of the gracious Creator responsible for it all. But where are we

now? Gathered around the Bible and about to celebrate the holy meal instituted by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Evidently life itself isn't always enough to convince us that God is playing in the key of life.

A couple of weeks ago the opening segment of *60 Minutes* featured interviews with some of those who have had loved ones killed by COVID-19. Families with children torn apart by death and left in economic peril. Weddings cancelled by death and the funeral a fraction of its former self for reasons of public safety and health. Try telling these folks that God is playing in the key of life. For me, entering into their grief and their anger and their confusion was as devastating as coming into contact with those who had loved ones stolen away from them when the twin towers came crashing down in New York City close to twenty years ago. It was a raw and emotional experience. It's a big part of why we gather for worship. We need scripture and the sacrament to tell us what life sometimes won't—that God is in fact playing in the key of life. And with one in three or one in four Americans having now had a friend or family member killed by a most unwelcome viral guest, we're going to need worship to reassure us of God's good intentions an awful lot in the weeks and months to come. The problem is that sometimes the scriptures aren't as clear about God's intentions as we'd like them to be. Today's reading from Numbers is a case in point.

In this reading, Israel does what it does so often while in the wilderness. The people of God whine and complain and moan. God and Moses are reminded that to be a leader is to be a lightning rod and God isn't particularly fond of the experience. But then God does what good leaders don't do. God gives in to God's hurt feelings. God flies off the handle and sends a bunch of poisonous snakes to bite many of the Israelites to death. It certainly humanizes God well before God descends down the birth canal in the person of Jesus Christ. But if we're looking for reassurance that God is playing in the key of life and not in the key of death this whole episode can be troubling. What are we to do when the scriptures add to our grief and our confusion and our anger instead of providing the comfort and the consolation we need?

Well, I suppose we could stop coming to worship or steer clear of the Bible whenever possible. We also could edit out the portions of the Bible we don't like. But these aren't good options. Worship is where the Holy Spirit makes and sustains faith, with faith being a matter of profound consequence both now and later. As to Scripture, it's a means of grace; along with baptism, communion, and the gathered community one of the means the Holy Spirit uses to create and sustain faith. And as for editing the Bible so that it coalesces with our sense of things, this would be a heresy; an act that would mark us off as a maverick and a free agent rather than a member of the holy, catholic Church and communion of saints. All things considered, when we encounter a difficult scripture, it's best to stick with it and work things through to a faith-friendly conclusion. One of the ways we do this is to isolate a scripture's main point; following the rhetoric to its intended landing as we hold onto the baby and throw out the bath water.

When it comes to our troublesome reading from Numbers, I'd say the main point is that repentance and contrition on our part will always reveal that God does in fact play in the key of life. In our reading from Numbers, when Israel confesses its sin, when Israel turns back to God in prayer, God is there with life. Rather than producing a systematic theology about how bad things come about, a sequence the Bible generally traces back to us and our sins, I'd say the main point of our reading from Numbers is that God doesn't give up on us no matter how tempting our whining and moaning and complaining might make this. As we're reminded throughout Lent, God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. It's not that we won't go our own way sometimes. We will. But when the Holy Spirit brings us back through repentance and contrition God will be there; waiting to start playing in the key of life. Again, I'd say this is the main point our reading from Numbers is trying to register and it is comforting and reassuring as far as I'm concerned. But I'm just one member of the holy, catholic church and the communion of saints. Our reading from John makes it clear that other members of the Body of Christ have found additional ways to put our reading from Numbers into a comforting and faith-encouraging context. This too is an option for how to deal with difficult scriptures. We look to the wider Church and the rest of holy writ for resolutions to the problem at hand.

Now if we do look to our reading from St. John's gospel in this way, here's what we'll find. St. John looks back on our reading from Numbers and transforms the whole snakes in the wilderness episode into an episode that emphasizes how in the midst of our grief and our confusion and our anger sometimes we need symbols, hard and fast signs or emblems, to reassure us that God does in fact play in the key of life. As our

reading from Numbers tells us, every time Israel repented out in the wilderness, the bronze serpent set high on a pole served to remind and to reassure Israel of God's good intentions. Israel took in this symbol, looked at this hard and fast sign or emblem, and received life and healing in return. And as St. John rightly recognizes today the cross functions in a very similar way for us. We look upon the cross, we wear the cross around our neck, we trace the cross on our forehead, we lift high the cross, we hear and read about the cross, and receive life and healing in return. The cross is the reminder that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that whoever believed in him might not perish, but have eternal life. When you get down to it, the cross is the ultimate reminder that God plays in the key of life; telling us that God will suffer and sweat and even die if it will open the door for life. And so, like Israel once did out in the wilderness, let's turn back to God and pray today; expecting life in return. Specifically, let's pray, "Jesus, keep me near the cross, for near the cross your love and mercy, your songs in the key of life, shall find our trembling souls." Amen!

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

P: Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all in need.

P: You sent your Son that the world might be saved through him. Inspire the witness of the church throughout the world. Empower missionaries, Bible translators, and ministries of service in your name. Bless our partners in ministry (specific mission partners may be named), our ELCA global partner churches, and Young Adults in Global Mission. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: From east to west your steadfast love is shown. Nourish seas and deserts, wilderness areas and cities. Give water to thirsty lands; nurture spring growth that feeds hungry creatures; bless farmers as they prepare for the growing season. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: You sustained your people in the wilderness. Give courage to all who lead in times of crisis and scarce resources. Prosper the work of those who aid victims of famine and drought (especially). Bring peace in places where scarce resources cause violence. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: Your mercy endures forever. Deliver all who cry to you, especially those who are hungry or without homes. Give life in places where death seems triumphant; give healing to those who are sick and comfort to those who mourn. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: By grace we have been saved. Fill this congregation to overflowing with that grace, that we show mercy to others. Nourish any in our midst who are hungry, especially children, and bless our ministries of feeding and shelter (especially). Give us patience and courage when the way seems long. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: Your Son was lifted up that whoever believes might have eternal life. We praise you for all who have died in Christ. Bring us with all the saints into the fullness of your promises. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: We entrust ourselves and all our prayers to you, O faithful God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

A: Amen.