



# Mount Calvary Connected April 8, 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**

Cell-Phone: 570-367-3421

Email: [sklimke6@gmail.com](mailto:sklimke6@gmail.com)**Pastor Jonathan Adams**

Cell-Phone: 412-817-6704

Email: [revjonoadams@gmail.com](mailto:revjonoadams@gmail.com)

## A Message from Pastor Jonathan

When I'm making plans to visit someone at their home or workplace for the first time, one of the questions I typically ask is whether or not there is anything I need to know about finding it and getting inside. It seems like a silly question, but more often than not, there actually are special instructions like, "come around to the side door," "our driveway is actually a mile away from where Google Maps says it is," or "knock loud, the doorbell doesn't work."

I still remember the first time I picked up my wife Bekah at her parent's house for a date... They had purposely left the garage door open and expected me to come straight into the house through the garage. She and her dad thought it was hilarious that I actually came up to the front door and knocked! How was I supposed to know?!?

When we are accustomed to something familiar, we tend to make assumptions that other people know the same things we do. Bekah's family typically only ever uses the front door to let the dog out to pee, get the mail, or greet the UPS guy, and they assumed I would know they otherwise come and go through the garage, but I didn't

We make all sorts of assumptions like that in all aspects of our life, and church is no different. We assume that our friends and family know about faith, about which church we go to, and why. We assume people know what our church does for the community. We assume that people know that God loves them. Those are all some pretty costly assumptions to be making!

God's grace is not an "insider's only" perk, it is a gift freely given to the world, and as Christians, we are called to be part of sharing that grace, and helping people to know God's unconditional love.

In the days before Easter, the results of a Gallup poll were released sharing that for the first time in the 80+ year history of their research, fewer than 50% of Americans belong to any church, synagogue, or mosque. These are the folks that religious commentators call "nones" because when asked their religious preference, they're most likely to say: "none."

It would be easy to take this as a distressing or even depressing metric, but I think it's a firm reminder of the work that we have cut out for us, and maybe more importantly a reminder that we can't make assumptions about the faith of our neighbors. Just a few days ago, we celebrated the greatest news that the world has ever known in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but we simply cannot assume people know why that story is important to us, or why our faith community at Mount Calvary helps us.

So stop assuming your neighbors know, and share the good news!

Yours in Christ, Pastor Jono

## 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](http://www.rebrand.ly/MtCalvaryWorship)

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### **Backyard cookie collection will be Thursday, April 15, 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!

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### **Stimulus Challenge**

A member of our congregation has challenged others to put their economic stimulus money to good use!

One morning in March, a member of the congregation presented Pastor Scott with a check for \$140. She shared that she had received her “economic impact payment” (stimulus check) and since she had not been adversely impacted by the pandemic she was giving a portion of it as a tithe, and wanted to challenge others to do the same.

Since sharing this news, other families in the congregation have come forward and over a thousand dollars has been collected. Soon, we’ll poll those who contributed to this challenge and mutually decide on a worthy cause in the community to direct the money toward. But, in the meantime, there is still opportunity to make YOUR tithe!

If you’d like to make a gift, simply write a check to Mount Calvary, with “Stimulus Challenge” in the memo line. Checks can be included in the offering plate during worship, dropped off at the church office during business hours, or mailed to the church at Mount Calvary Lutheran Church, 1000 Scalp Ave, Johnstown, PA 15904.

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### **Weekly Wednesday, Drive in Services**

Our weekly Wednesday evening “drive-in” services are planned to start back up on Wednesday, April 14<sup>th</sup>. Beginning Wednesday, April 14<sup>th</sup>, we will be resuming our Wednesday evening drive-in services each week at 6:30pm. This relaxed service set in the back parking lot of the church property allows folks to participate in a full liturgy from the comfort and safety of their own car.

Download a bulletin from: <https://www.mt-calvarylutheran.org/bulletins/>, bring your own bread for communion, and tune your radio to 88.3FM and you are set! See you there!

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### **Church Meetings**

Evangelism Meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 13 at 6:30 pm.

All Parish, Youth, and Property committee meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 20 at 6:30 pm.

Council Meeting will be at 7:30 pm, Tuesday, April 20.

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### **Tuesday Noon Recitals at First Lutheran Church**

**April 13** - Johnstown Christian School Bell Choir Kristen Lloyd, Director

**April 20** - Bruce Schettig. Classical Guitar

**April 27** - Henry Davis. Piano. Gospel Improv

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Note: Because of Covid-19 restrictions lunch is not served after recitals. Attendees must wear masks and follow social-distance guidelines.

Invite family and friends to this weekday gift of music

### **Birthdays for the Week April 11 – April 17.**

**Apr. 11** - Jason Berkebile

**Apr. 12** - John Belinda, Pat Conklin,, Robin Forosisky, Wendy Truscello

**Apr. 13** - Lakyn Costlow, Brian Hockensmith, Madison Leonardis, William McMullen

**Apr. 14** - Katie Decker, Matthew McNiesh Carol Wargo

**Apr. 15** - Justin Kemp, Shirley Sholtis-Glova

**Apr. 17** - Stanley Badowski, Shawn Moore

### **About Our Members:**

Catherine Kinzey passed away on Monday, March 29, 2021

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

### **Remember those that prayer has been requested:**

Dolly & Chis Palm, David, Karen, Lauren, Billy, Patti Sliko, Mark & Kayleigh Lucia, Palmer, Maxine Hale, Sandy, Alex, Dave, Joyce Morgenstern, Kadence, Jack, Denny, Gina, Rick, Linda & Dick, Colley Family, Jose and Family, Irene, Midge, Vic, Felix Family, Miller Family, Kevin, Kinzey Family, Anita, Claudia, Bill, Liam, and Brown Family.

### **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](http://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, APRIL 4, 2021.**

### **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

God of mercy, we give you thanks that Jesus is no longer dead, but alive and the Lord of life for all. Increase in us the risen life we share with Christ, and help us grow into the fullness of eternal life with you, 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: ACTS 10:34-43**

*Peter crosses the immense religious and social boundary that separates Jews from Gentiles in order to proclaim the good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, so that God's forgiveness in Jesus' name would reach out to all people.*

<sup>34</sup>Peter began to speak to [the people]: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup>but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. <sup>36</sup>You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. <sup>37</sup>That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: <sup>38</sup>how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. <sup>39</sup>We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; <sup>40</sup>but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, <sup>41</sup>not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup>He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup>All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

### **SECOND READING: 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11**

*The core of the Christian faith and Paul's preaching is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As the crucified and risen Christ appeared to the earliest of his followers, so we experience the presence of the Risen One in the preaching of this faith.*

<sup>1</sup>Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, <sup>2</sup>through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

<sup>3</sup>For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>4</sup>and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup>Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. <sup>7</sup>Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. <sup>8</sup>Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. <sup>9</sup>For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup>But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. <sup>11</sup>Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

## **GOSPEL: MARK 16:1-8**

*The resurrection of Jesus is announced, and the response is one of terror and amazement.*

<sup>1</sup>When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint [Jesus' body]. <sup>2</sup>And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup>They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" <sup>4</sup>When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. <sup>5</sup>As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup>But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. <sup>7</sup>But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." <sup>8</sup>So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

## **SERMON BY PASTOR SCOTT**

When you stack our appointed readings up against one another, quite a contrast emerges with respect to the mouth. First, in our reading from Acts, we've got Peter commanded to teach and preach and in fact preaching and teaching. Peter is a witness; someone who uses his mouth for the sake of Christ's ongoing mission and ministry on earth. Then, in our reading from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, we have Paul writing to the Christian community at Corinth. At one point he writes, "I handed on to you as of first importance what I had in turn received." Paul has been schooled about the Good News of Jesus Christ and now he's schooling others about the same Good News. Paul is a witness; someone who uses his mouth, as well as his hand, for the sake of Christ's ongoing mission and ministry on earth. Hear the pattern. Same thing emphasized in both our first and second reading. And then the pattern is broken. In our reading from Mark, the first Easter witnesses don't become witnesses. In spite of a command to bear witness with their mouths, they say nothing at all to anyone. This is quite a contrast. It's open mouth, open mouth, closed mouth. It's almost as if we've got open tomb, open tomb, closed tomb. What's the deal here?

The deal is we've got positive and negative punctuation of the same reality. Without us and our mouths, Easter only goes so far. Without us and our mouths, the open tomb remains closed for all intents and purposes down here under the sun. And so, by way of positive or negative illustration, what we've got today can in one way be thought of as a plea; a plea to help the Church say to as many as possible, "Christ is Risen! Raise a Hallelujah with us!" But then again, what we've got before us today can also be thought of as an invitation; an invitation to use our mouths to beckon the world closer and closer to the forthcoming paradise God has promised through the empty tomb. But in the end, whether it's a plea or an invitation, the point that's punctuated today is the call to use our mouths for the sake of Jesus' ongoing mission and ministry in the world.

Pretty simple, right! Are we or are we not witnesses? Are our mouths open; keeping the tomb more open than it would otherwise be? Or are our mouths closed; rolling back the stone God has rolled away for all intents and purposes? It is pretty simple when you get down to it. But if our mouths are to be open and under the management of the Holy Spirit, what shall we say?

How about, "Everything's going to be okay. Better days are on the way?" How about, "Absolutely nothing in all of creation, not even death, shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus?" How about, "All things shall work together for good for those who love God?" These are all words of faith. These are all words of hope. We and our neighbors need words of faith and hope now as much as ever.

By way of illustration, I recently read an article about news coverage which caught my eye. Some researches in our country recently did a study to determine where coverage of the virus was most negative. The answer: The most negative news was repeatedly encountered on national news outlets of every political

persuasion right here in the United States of America. The left and the right were equally guilty of being unduly negative. One side did denial and conspiracy too often. The other side cried wolf too often; identifying wolves in good times and bad. Consider these statistics. They're rather shocking. National news outlets of all stripes in our country were two-thirds more likely to be negative than their international peers and a third more likely to be negative than medical and scientific journals. And why was this so? The researchers concluded Americans have an unusual appetite for negativity; that national news outlets of every bent are reporting what they think we want with all their the sky is falling pieces. As a Christian, I'd put it somewhat differently. I'd say our native state, our original state, is sin. Doubt, despair, and disbelief are where we're going to land and stay unless the Church, people like you and me, fill the airwaves with words of faith and hope. Let's do it.

While we're at it, let's also say this too. After "God and the good are going to win," let's say, "How can I help?" In Mark's gospel, today's featured gospel and our featured gospel until a new Church year begins in December, the Church is to be above all a servant Church. Very early on in Mark's gospel Jesus saves Simon-Peter's mother-in-law and she becomes a servant immediately thereafter. This sets up much of what is to come as Mark keeps writing and we keep reading. It sets up Jesus' declaration that he has come not to be served, but to serve; giving his life as a ransom for many. It sets up Jesus' description of the Church he desires. In his Church, the greatest of all shall be the servant of all. And since I've already mentioned one form of media today, let me mention another with regard to being a servant. You don't become a servant when you use Facebook, Twitter, and other forms of social media to pontificate on every little thing you know better than everybody else; declaring yourself to be more of an expert than the experts themselves and cutting down anyone who disagrees with you. You become a servant when you ask, "How can I help," and then follow through on what you hear in return. Words of neighborly help—we need them right now. Words of faith and hope—we need them too. But what shall condition us, what shall empower and equip us, to use our mouths to speak these words.

Our reading from Mark says it's going to be time with Jesus. In our reading from Mark, the Easter witnesses who don't become witnesses are supposed to tell the disciples where they can experience Christ and his resurrection. The implication, a rather clear one I'd say, is that time with Jesus shall bring the disciples along to the next stage in their Christian journey, with good and godly use of the mouth surely becoming a part of that journey eventually. The only problem is the disciples are never told where they can hang out with Jesus and experience the truth and power of the resurrection. What we get because of this is silence; dead silence; keep the tomb functionally closed silence. Let's not make the same mistake ourselves. Let's use our mouths to tell others and ourselves where Jesus and his resurrection can be experienced most often and that's in a church gathering like this one.

In support of this point, look no further than our reading from Acts. In this reading we're told the first disciples ate and drank with the resurrected Christ. We're told the same thing in all the gospels and also in the letter from which our second reading was drawn—St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Hmm! Christians eating and drinking with the resurrected Christ. That sure sounds like holy communion to me. The fact is the Bible is very clear on where we experience Jesus and his resurrection most often. It's in church, with church being understood as some sort of gathering around God's word and God's sacraments. And so, let's not forget to use our mouths so that Mount Calvary and other places like it no longer remain the best kept secret in town. When and if this happens, I think we can rest assured that Jesus will see to it that words of faith and hope, as well as words of neighborly service, follow. Amen!

## **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Alive in the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we bring our prayers before God who promises to hear us and answer in steadfast love.

Praise to you for your power revealed in the resurrection! Fill your church with the power of your love that is stronger than death. Send us to tell the good news wherever death holds sway. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Praise to you for your life at work in the resurrection! Fill all of creation with your life. Bring it to blossom and flourish; use it to remind us of your persistent grace. Cultivate our care for what you have made. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Praise to you for the peace made possible in the resurrection! Fill the nations with your peace. Draw together people of all nations and languages; reveal new possibilities and inspire new beginnings. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Praise to you for the hope of the resurrection! Fill all in need with hope: those who are afraid or confused, those who are sick or suffering, those who are dying, and those who grieve (*especially*). Assure them of your promises. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Praise to you for the joy of your resurrection! Fill this assembly with joy as we are called your beloved in baptism. Multiply that joy so that we share it at home, at work, and in our community. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Praise to you for your faithfulness revealed in the resurrection! Fill us with trust, that we join with (*Benedict the African and*) all who have gone before us in proclaiming: “your mercy endures forever!” Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

In the hope of new life in Christ, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

## **PASTOR SCOTT’S MAUNDY THURSDAY SERMON**

Today begins what’s known in traditional Church circles as “the Triduum.” Related to the Latin word for “three,” “the Triduum” refers to the great three days of the Christian faith—Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the celebration of Easter from sunset on Saturday until sunset on Sunday. In these three days, it’s long been held one finds the heart and soul of the Christian faith. One can hear this in the creed “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ shall come again.” The only part of that formulation we don’t have in the Triduum is “Christ shall come again.” And we don’t have to wait very long for this missing element to appear since it shows up towards the end of the Easter season on Ascension Day. In the Triduum, the three-day festival that begins tonight, we’ve got the nuts and bolts of our faith. We are first and foremost a movement or a people who preach and teach Christ crucified and risen. But there’s a part of this good news, a part of this gospel, that we perhaps don’t appreciate as much as we should.

When God raises Jesus from the dead, God is passing judgment on all who have opposed or rejected his Son. When God raises Jesus from the dead, God validates or vindicates everything Jesus has said and done prior to the grave. This Jesus, God says, has a mission for our lives together and for our lives apart. Pontius Pilate and Rome, the superpower of the time, might have thought they had a better blueprint for life, but God did not. When God raised Jesus from the dead, he forever said, “This is the guy. Listen to him. He’s got a mission for you and it’s in your best interests to make it your own.” And already tonight we begin to look forward to this vindication and validation of Jesus’ mission for our lives on the part of God.

That Jesus has a mission for our lives, a mission that God shall soon uphold through the resurrection, is embedded in the name for this celebration. “Maundy,” as in “Maundy Thursday,” is derived from the Latin word “mandatum;” responsible for our own closely related word “mandate.” And on Maundy Thursday, Jesus definitely hands down some mandates; in the process giving us his mission for our lives in the simplest form possible. There’s the mandate to wash one another’s feet, the mandate to celebrate holy communion, and the mandate to love one another as he has first loved us. Tonight, Jesus gives us our marching orders, and again, through the resurrection in a couple of days God shall forever endorse these marching orders; making them our mission. One might say that Jesus tonight begins to pressure us to act and to live a certain way and on Easter God ups the pressure even more. It’s a sequence which may not sit very well with us because we’re already under a lot of pressure. Under a lot of pressure as it is, tonight and throughout the weekend we may just want a Savior named Jesus and not a Lord named Jesus. If this is where we’re at, it’s somewhat understandable as to why we would be.

Just think of the pressure with which we’re already contending. For over a year now, the pandemic has added worries to what we were already worried about. We’ve been under the pressure to keep ourselves and others alive. We’ve been under the pressure to remain attentive to little things like handwashing and how long we stay in close quarters without a mask and we don’t know when all this is going to lighten up. And pandemic pressure isn’t our only pressure.

Prior to the pandemic there was already another epidemic under way—the opioid epidemic. Here in Johnstown and up in Centre County I’ve seen and felt how addiction to has pressured people to do all that they can to save a loved one before it’s too late and worried and worried that they won’t succeed in this endeavor. Think also about increased life expectancies. Even with the numbers dropping during this year of the plague, we know that modern medicine has been enabling people to live longer and longer. This allows us to enjoy those we love more, but it also increases the pressure to take care of them as they age and grow frailer. I know a lot of people who have been contending with this kind of pressure too. And then there are the young families working two or more jobs and ferrying their children around to an ever-growing list of activities. This too becomes a pressure cooker. And to top it all off, there’s the pressure of the everyday, rat race itself. The pressure of just trying to be a good person who does good things at work, at home, and out in the community. Given all the pressure we’re already under, it would be understandable if we let out a sigh when Jesus begins to pressure us himself this evening, with God the Father following suit through the resurrection. We might say or think, “Back off. Ease up. Stop piling on. Give me a break. Lay off. I thought you said your yoke was easy and your burden light.” If they exist, now or later, how might we offset such feelings so we can get around to doing what our Lord Jesus would have us do?

Well, let’s start with the promise I’ve referenced. The one where Jesus says, “Come to me all you who are weak and heavy-laden and I will give you rest. My yoke is easy and my burden is light.” This is a favorite at funerals; sometimes being heard as an invitation for the weak and heavy-laden to enter the Church Triumphant. I think we can hear it in this way and am glad we can. But it’s also important to recognize that it’s a promise also meant for the living and the healthy and I don’t think it’s point for people like us is that Jesus is going to be lax and undemanding. This is, after all, the guy who elsewhere describes discipleship as the process of denying ourselves, taking up our respective crosses, and following after the one who was abused, nailed to a tree, and stuck with a spear. That doesn’t sound too light or easy. It sounds pretty demanding. But you know what! Sometimes, the end result more than justifies the work involved and I’d suggest this captures a good bit of what Jesus was trying to say when he described his yoke as easy and his burden as light.

With Jesus as our Lord, there shall be no bait and switch. With Jesus as our Lord, there shall be no fine print we discover later much to our chagrin. Do it Jesus’ way and things will work for our benefit. Period. Period. Period. This is why Jesus’ yoke is easy and his burden is light. The rewards more than justify the cost of discipleship. And this does accord quite nicely with what Lutherans have said God is after when he turns up the pressure in our lives. We’ve said that when God turns up the pressure it’s because God is worried the

other pressures of life are going to lead us to miss out on the abundant and much superior life we can have in him. We've said when God turns up the pressure it's to drive us away from death and towards life; with Jesus being the source of that life both now and later. In Jesus, we've said, we don't have a Lord who piles it on just to pile it on. We've said that in Jesus we have a Lord who died for us and whose past and present goal for us is the best possible life we can have both now and later.

And so, with the benefits far outweighing the costs, with our Lord always having the best, possible life for us in mind, let's serve one another, even if it might not involve foot washing itself. Serving one another, keeping our pride and ego in check, will get us in the habit of keeping this community and its needs first; which is how we love one another as Christ first loved us. And finally, let's also experience how Christ comes to love us anew each and every time we obey his command to celebrate holy communion. What we'll discover through this obedience to the mandates and the mission we receive tonight is that love, our love for another and Christ's eternal love for us, is what leads us away from death and towards life; making the pressure to love a pressure we should never ignore. And so, as St. John the author of tonight's gospel puts it in the first epistle bearing his name, "Let's love, not in just word or speech, but in truth and action too." Though heavy at times, the rewards of love shall eventually make it feel as easy and light as Jesus has promised his yoke and burden will be. Amen!

### **PASTOR SCOTT'S GOOD FRIDAY'S SERMON**

We're now drawing close to end of the first day of the Triduum—Christianity's great three-day festival that begins on Thursday evening and continues up until sunset on Sunday night. This year I've noticed there's a rhythm to these proceedings that works its way into the order of Christ's words from the cross. If you went to church last night, you likely remember everything was about love, compassion, and mercy. The gospel appointed for Maundy Thursday begins by informing us that Christ loved his disciples to the end and concludes by informing us that Christ-like love for one another is to be our mission form here forward. And lo and behold, this emphasis upon love, compassion, and mercy initially shows up today as well. First, Jesus pleads that those who reject and torment him be forgiven. Then, he himself forgives a repentant criminal, with paradise for the repentant one the end result. And next, Jesus instructs his mom and St. John to form a new family of Christ-like love otherwise known as the Church. Today, as on Maundy Thursday, everything is initially about love, compassion, and mercy. But then, we hit a turning point that gets us into Good Friday proper.

Perhaps repeating the opening words of Psalm 22, Christ cries from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Suddenly, Jesus, who's been all about love up to now, wonders if he himself is loved. And herein lies the central drama for Jesus and for us when we feel unloved, forgotten and forsaken in our work as God's people. When the chips are down and the going gets tough and lonely, will we carry on? Will we be faithful? Will we remain committed? Will our passion for God's work offset the pain it sometimes brings about?

In Jesus' case, this drama, this whirlwind separating the wheat from the chaff, isn't ultimately resolved until Jesus says, "It is finished forever and ever and ever" from the cross. But we do get a good idea how things are going to go when Jesus earlier says, "I thirst." If only our own periods of doubt and torment would resolve themselves so quickly. For Jesus, it's "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" one minute and "I thirst" the next. This generally isn't how it goes for us. Trial and temptation seem to linger in our lives; so much so that we've been taught to pray, "Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil." But more on our own issues later. First, let's detail how the word "I thirst" does indeed reveal Christ's passion for his work as God's Son and our Savior. The events of last evening can be quite helpful in this regard.

In John's gospel, Jesus ends his disciples' resistance to his arrest with these words. He says, "Am I not to drink the cup the Father has given me?" Pretty clearly, Jesus' God-given cup is the cup of being our Savior;

of going to the cross and beyond for you and me. And when Jesus says “I thirst” he lets it be known that what has felt like the loveless hour of the cross hasn’t left him in a different place than when he told his disciples to stop resisting the night before. Bleeding and suffering, feeling abandoned and alone, Jesus won’t cave. He’s still ready to drink the cup the Father has given him. In fact, even as he undergoes a time of trial and temptation the likes of which most of us will ever know, Jesus thirsts for the cup the Father has given him.

This is how passionate Jesus is about being your Savior and mine. There’s nothing, not even death and the fear of eternal abandonment, which will deter him from being your Savior and mine. Jesus lives to be our Savior. And with him now forever raised from the dead, never to die again, this is good news for us through and through. But this is Jesus not us. He moves from ebbing passion for God’s work to full throttle passion for God’s work in a matter of moments. It’s undoubtedly good that he’s this passionate about being our Savior, but we aren’t Jesus. We’re sinners as often as we are saints. Bouts of ebbing passion for God’s work tend to be more common for us than they were for Jesus. Is there anything we can learn from Jesus which might get us back to full throttle passion for God’s work more quickly than we generally do?

Well, let’s first be clear that full-throttle passion for God’s work is the goal for us. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,” Jesus says. According to this promise drawn from the Sermon on the Mount, it shall be our passion for the world of God’s desire, a world where every relationship is right, that shall identify us as members of the blessed and beloved community otherwise known as the Church. If St. John says love shall identify us, the Sermon the Mount says they will know we are Christians by our passion and our zeal for God’s work. And let’s face it. We’re not going to hunger and thirst for righteousness from afar.

If I’m not in my mother’s house, I can’t smell her food cooking and I won’t hunger for it as much as if I were in her home smelling the delectable aromas wafting all about. Passion and zeal for God’s work follow the same rule of thumb. The farther I am away from the problems which need fixing the less I’m going to hunger and thirst for the fix. Distance breeds apathy and ignorance not passion and zeal. Prior to sharing a room and a bunk with Lennox Wildman in the United States Army, I had no idea what it was like to be a black, Jamaican immigrant growing up in Bedford-Stuyvesant, New York. I never had to worry about having the shoes stolen off my feet on Flatbush Avenue. Lennox did and in sharing some of his stories and experiences with me he overcame some of my apathy and my ignorance. He lit a fire for equality and justice and equity that still burns. Lennox left me hungering and thirsting for righteousness more than I was before. But again, this wouldn’t have happened from afar. Passion and zeal aren’t born of abstraction or isolation. Passion and zeal are born of convicted hearts; hearts that have been touched and moved by up close, in-person encounters. To have passion and zeal you have to do away with your deficits in the areas of empathy and sympathy. Might this be why the Word otherwise known as Jesus because flesh and pitched a tent among us?

I certainly think so. It wasn’t before, but after Jesus spent thirty years in our skin and shoes that he worked up the passion to say from the cross, “I thirst.” Up in heaven where he was before the Incarnation began, the lepers, the ill, the hungry, the possessed, and the marginalized weren’t nearby. They were way down under the sun. This all changed when the Word who was in the beginning, the Word who was with God, the Word who was God became flesh and pitched a tent among us for something like thirty years. Suddenly, the lepers, the ill, the hungry, the possessed, and the marginalized were right there all the time. There were families in need of more joy than they could muster themselves. There were peasants being fleeced in the Temple. There were parents of sick and dying children. There were women traded like cattle and stoned for what menfolk did too. There were vast throngs of humanity hungering for the Bread of Life. There were cripples like the one at Beth-zatha. There were plenty who were lost and needed to be found; plenty who were blind and needed to see. Put it altogether and this would have ended any empathy or sympathy deficit Jesus might have had. The end result was that Jesus became so passionate about his work as God’s Son and our Savior that he said, “I thirst” from the cross.

And so, the next time you’re having some trouble shaking a bout of trial and temptation, the next time your passion and zeal for your own part of God’s work is lagging, do this. Go be with the people. It’s what I

used to say in seminary when I grew tired of living up on a hill separated from the community down below. I'd say, "Let's leave the lab and go be with the people." It's how passion and zeal for God's work is awakened. We come to hunger and thirst for righteousness when we come to know and to feel for those in need of righteousness and this requires coming close to them. As Jesus once left the glories of heaven to draw close to us, let's leave our comfort zones and our cocoons and go be with the people. The people themselves will renew our passion and zeal for God's work in no time at all. Amen!