



Mount Calvary Connected

May 6, 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

Pastor Jonathan Adams

Cell-Phone: 412-817-6704

Email: revjonoadams@gmail.com

A Message from Pastor Jonathan

This past Sunday was a fun one for my wife Bekah and I. Two of the assigned scripture readings for worship, 1 John 4:7-8 ("Beloved, let us love one another...") and John 15:5 ("I am the vine and you are the branches..") happen to be the inspiration for two beloved camp songs that we grew up with at Camp Lutherlyn. They're the sorts of songs that whenever you hear the words, you can't help but want to sing. Or at least, I can't help but want to sing, (my brother and I have a habit of bursting into song when we hear song lyrics in everyday conversation). But even so, after my second service at Benscreek, Bekah and I had a bit of a laugh about how hard it is to hear the words of those scripture readings while keeping a straight face and not getting up and jumping around to sing.

But more than just a reminder of favorite church camp songs, the reading from 1 John spoke to me this past Sunday in a way that it had never done so before, and my mind was drawn to focus on the last two verses. Two verses which I've included below, not from the New Revised Standard Version which we're used to hearing in worship, but from "The Message," a contemporary paraphrase of the bible. It reads:

If anyone boasts, "I love God," and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both.

I think this passage embodies why so many people are skeptical of Christianity and organized religion. When outsiders see Christians who claim to love God but ignore the needs of their neighbors, or when they see people who call themselves Christian doing horrible things, it stinks of hypocrisy, and it leaves these people looking in at us with a sour taste in their mouths.

That's not to say that we don't all have moments of weakness, but we have to realize that our actions in the world reflect our faith and our God. We might be trying to point others toward God, all the while there are others who are pushing them away.

All of that is the struggle of being a Christian in today's world. As I've said time and time again, we can no longer assume that people know what it means to be Lutheran, or even Christian. We have to constantly be working to counteract bad theology and bad behavior. There are people out there who claim to love God, but refuse to love their neighbors. We need to do both, and trust that God will point us toward those who are most in need, and that God will give us the gifts we need to share that love.

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

Flowers

To the Glory of God and in honor of police officers during National Police Week and always by Bill & Jan Layton.

May/June Giving Tree

During the months of May and June, coupons for Stivers Nursery will be for sale after the weekend services and available in the church office. **Baskets are \$16.00 and flats are \$12.50.** Mt. Calvary will receive \$5 for every basket and \$3 for every flat purchased. The money raised will be used for the Giving Tree and donated to The Cambria City Mission at the end of June. Thank you for your continued support!

Weed and Feed

The Property Committee will have a weed and feed night on **Thursday, May 13, at 5:00 PM.** Please bring your shovels, rakes, etc. There will be plenty of mulch to spread. Many hands will make light work. Food will be provided.

Backyard Cookie Collection will be Thursday, May 13, 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!

Calling Graduates & Families

The Youth Ministry team would like to honor all those graduating as part of the class of 2021 (high school, trade school, college, etc.) To ensure we don't miss anyone, please forward information about graduates to Pastor Jonathan, including their name, where/what they're graduating from, and a recent photo if you have one.

Memorials

Linda McQuaide - Dana Begley

Tim McQuaide - Dana Begley

Jim Balogh - Eric & Janet Lynam, Shirley Glova, Cindy Solarczyk, Brian & Lori Hiltz, Linda McMullen, Laura Kern Nehrebecki

Peg Felix - Linda McMullen

Edith Miller - Linda McMullen, Claudia Plows, Nikki Stein, Chelsea Lichey, Debbie Morgart

Catherine Kinzey - Stanley & Maryan Yoder, Brian & Lori Hiltz, Cindy Solarczyk, Linda McMullen

Bill McMullen - Brian & Lori Hiltz, Cindy Solarczyk

Weekly Wednesday, Drive in Services

Wednesday evening drive-in services have resumed at 6:30 pm. 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!

Church Directory

We would like to update the church directory. Many people are going to only cell phones instead of landlines. Please call the church office to update your number and any other information that has changed, address, email etc.

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.

Birthdays and Anniversary for the Week May 9 - May 15, 2021.

May 9 - Bertha Ford, Susan Given, Donald McMullen, Amilia Pawlowski, Daniel Trevorrow

May 10 - Kierisa Hockensmith, Walt Mattern

May 11 - Ruth Fresh, Chuck Poydence

May 13 - Ella Leonardis

May 14 - Robyn Berkebile, Hunter Leonardis, Sue Sterner

May 15 - Garrett Haluska, Jim Miller

May 13 - Gary & Betty Schofield (58 years)

About Our Members:

Pastor Scott and fellow members of Mt. Calvary,

Our love and thanks for the many calls, cards and warm wishes we received after Bill's passing. It touched our hearts and will always be remembered.

In God's love, Linda McMullen & Family

Pastor Scott & members of Mt. Calvary Luther Church,

We thank you for your prayers and my hospital visit.

The procedure went well and I'm (Brent too) on the way to getting back to all the activities we enjoy, not the least of which is church.

See you there,

Brent & Ida Mary Williams

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

Remember those that prayer has been requested:

Linda & Dick, Irene, Vic, Midge, Kevin, Anita, Claudia, Bill, Liam, Dolly & Chis Palm, David, Karen, Lauren, Billy, Patti Sliko, Pat, McMullen Family, Maxine Hale, Pastor Greg Harbaugh & Family, Pastor Toby Holland & Family, Linda Sell, Patti Finnegan, Richard Isaac Pentz, Michelle Roberts, Jill McEntee, Cissy, Luella, Nancy, Cadence, and Maxine Hale.

NEW Financial Update through April

Though still in the red for the year, Mt. Calvary's financial position improved as February gave way to March. Positively, things have gotten even better in the month of April. This was anticipated, but it was still reassuring to see all the pieces come together. For this year's plan to work, we all just need to do our part by maintaining what we gave the prior year or going back to the levels of giving in place before the pandemic disrupted so much. As to committee expenditures, all but the Property Team are currently under budget. Once winter-related expenses give way to spring and summer, much of the current overage related to property expenditures should work itself out.

CONDENSED WORSHIP FOR THE WEEKEND OF SUNDAY, MAY 2, 2021.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, you give us your Son as the vine apart from whom we cannot live. Nourish our life in his resurrection, that we may bear the fruit of love and know the fullness of your joy, 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 8:26-40

Led by the Spirit, Philip encounters an Ethiopian official who is returning to his African home after having been to Jerusalem to worship. Philip uses their encounter to proclaim the gospel to him. Upon coming to faith in Jesus, he is baptized by Philip.

²⁶An angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) ²⁷So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." ³⁰So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. ³²Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. ³³In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."

³⁴The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" ³⁵Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" ³⁸He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. ³⁹When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way

rejoicing. ⁴⁰But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

SECOND READING: 1 JOHN 4:7-21

We love God and others because God first loved us. We cannot say we love God, whom we have not seen, while hating fellow Christians, whom we regularly see. Love toward God is to be matched by love toward others because the essence of God is love.

⁷Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

¹³By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. ¹⁵God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. ¹⁶So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. ¹⁷Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. ¹⁹We love because he first loved us. ²⁰Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. ²¹The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

GOSPEL: JOHN 15:1-8

On the night of his arrest, Jesus taught his disciples about the relationship they would have with him. Those who abide in his word and love bear fruit, for apart from him, they can do nothing.

Jesus said: ¹"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ²He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."

SERMON BY PASTOR SCOTT

I've mentioned it before, but John is the Lutheran gospel. Along with the letters of Paul, the writings of John are where our movement within the Church has found its greatest inspiration and support. It's not that we take John and Paul and leave the rest. It's that we find John and Paul bearing the clearest and most consistent witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ; with the rest of the Bible supplementing and amplifying what we hear and read in the letters of Paul and the writings of John. Not surprisingly, this affinity for John and Paul goes all the way back to our movement's founder—Martin Luther himself.

One of the reasons Luther was so drawn to John was that he was a very anxious man. German to the core Luther had a good bit of what's come to be known as German perfectionism. Growing up in a very German-American family, in a very German-American part of the country, I know all about this disposition. My father could not live with one hair amiss, one weed in his lawn, or one bug stain on his bumper. Luther was the same way. If the slightest thing was off, including with himself, Luther would notice it and grow anxious.

Luther was also a Roman Catholic prior to his excommunication by the pope in 1521. If there's anything to what's sometimes described as Roman Catholic guilt, Luther had it in spades. Church often made him feel terrible; with it drawing attention to his every blemish and raising troublesome questions about whether he had or could do enough to please a god he perceived to be angry and wrathful. Church would often plunge Luther into deep despair, doubt, and dread; with the German word for this inner turmoil being "anfechtung." But as anxious as he was, as subject to bouts of "anfechtung" as he was, Luther did eventually find solace and comfort in the writings of John and then again in the writings of Paul.

Now there's nothing from Paul's writings in our appointed readings from Scripture today. But we do have two readings from the writings of John. These readings give voice to much which can combat our insecurities when they come knocking. Start with how our reading from 1st John emphasizes that God's love is given, not earned. When insecurity about our relationship with God overcomes us, we begin to worry that we have to win or attract or awake God's love as if God and us were potential partners in a romantic relationship. To put in metaphorical terms, we come to think that we have to wear our Sunday best all the time if God is ever going to ask us to dance or out for a bite to eat. But the writings of St. John tell us this isn't how it works at all.

God's love isn't earned or won, anymore than it's attracted or awakened. God's love is given. God's love is a gift. Verse ten of our reading from 1st John makes this clear. It says, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins." There it is. The Good News we celebrate and proclaim. We don't have to win God's love. God's love is given. God's love is experienced, not earned. God's love is a gift which includes the forgiveness of our sins in Jesus Christ. Whew! Isn't that a relief! Glory, glory, hallelujah! I guess we can just be happy and stop worrying so much; enjoying the salvation God's love has freely won for us through Jesus Christ.

But wait a minute! Doesn't the Bible say that I have to have faith and that faith without works is dead? Well, yes. Yes, it does. But this need not produce worry or dread. Talk of faith's necessity and of how faith must produce works doesn't have to spell doubt, despair, and dread for us; plunging us into our own personal version of Martin Luther's many battles with "anfechtung." Start with the works part! In our reading from John, Jesus does say the faithful shall bear fruit. But he also says that apart from him we can do nothing. Jesus is the vine. We're the branches. He's responsible for all the fruit and the growth. And then there's the Father who prunes our lives and our faith so they might produce even more fruit. "I am the vine and my Father the vine-grower," Jesus says right off the top today. And just as the fruits of faith are not self-produced, so also is faith itself not self-produced.

In the verses just prior to today's reading from John, Jesus says it's the Holy Spirit who shall teach us everything. It's the Spirit who teaches us why to believe. It's the Spirit who teaches us how to believe. It's the Spirit who teaches the works that faith produces naturally. The whole notion that faith and its fruits are some sort of self-produced add-on to what God has freely done in Jesus Christ is completely out of step with what we hear and read today. God's love is a gift. God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ is a gift. Christian faith and its fruits are a gift, with all three members of the Holy Trinity deeply involved and invested in the giving of this gift according to Scripture. I guess we can relax and rejoice. Maybe it's time for the very first verse of a Grammy-winning song from Bobby McFerrin called "Don't Worry! Be Happy!"

And so, can we do it? Can we just relax and be happy? It's certainly a possibility, a glorious freedom, that God's Good News makes available to us, but I'm not certain we always take advantage of it. If we're not worried about ourselves, we're worried and anxious about our family and friends; about our job; about our

church; about our community; about our country. These are anxious times. The disappearance of blue-collar America, growing economic inequality all across the globe, a worldwide pandemic, escalating gun violence, a hotter planet with more extreme weather swings, the ongoing blight of prejudice in all its forms, the numerical decline of the Church all across the Northern Hemisphere—these are all developments which speak to the anxiety, to the *anfechtung*, our times can produce. But brothers and sisters the future doesn't depend upon us.

“Apart from him, apart from Christ, we can do nothing,” we're told today. This applies to our past. This applies to our present. This applies to our future. We're the fruit. Christ the vine. And let's not forget that our reading from John also informs us that God the Father is completely invested in his Son's success and in his success through us. If we can't believe that the Holy Trinity who has gotten us and the rest of the creation this far also has the future handled, we might as well turn out the lights, lock up the doors, and never come back again. But thanks be to God, we can believe that the Holy Trinity who has brought us this far does have the future handled! This belief, this faith, this trust is the Holy Spirit's gift to us. Let's take advantage of this gift. Roll the Bobbie McFerrin again!

Don't worry! Be happy! Addressing more than one corner of our lives, this is the Bible's message to us. It's not about us. It's about God. It's God's time, God's gifts. If we have to do anything, it's to be thankful enough and attentive enough to connect the dots that appear by way of God's grace. It's certainly how it once worked for Philip in our reading from Acts. The Lord, as in Jesus, told him where to be. The Spirit told him who to address. And with the aid of the Bible, the Ethiopian official told him which questions and issues needed addressing. Being thankfully attentive to God's movements in his life and his world, all Philip did was connect the dots that were already there to be connected. As we're happy, as we tell worry to take a hike, let's follow the same script ourselves; connecting the dots God leaves for us to connect. And let's not go thinking that being thankfully attentive to God's movements in us and around us is some kind of self-created disposition. In his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul tells us that joy is one of the fruits God grows and you certainly can't be joyful unless the Spirit also allows you to identify reasons for joy and thanksgiving in you and around you. Again, it's not about us. It's about God. It's God's time, God's gifts. Apart from him we can do nothing. But with him we can do everything. As St. Paul says in his letter to the Philippians, I can do all things through He who strengthens me. Amen!

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

P: 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.

P: God of all fruitfulness, you abide in your church and your church abides in you. Cleanse us by your word and give yourself to the whole church on earth so that it bears fruit and witnesses to your love. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: You have created the heavens and the earth. As we wonder at the beauty of creation, may we seek vital connections among all that depends on the earth for life. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: You rule the nations with justice and love. Give the leaders of the earth assurance of your abiding presence, that they lead not by fear but with love for those they are called to serve. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: You have loved us so that we can love others. We pray for all in need of your love: those who are poor, lowly, outcast, weak, or fearful. Provide for the needs of all (especially). Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: You gather us with all the saints by the power of your Spirit (*especially with Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria and those we name before you*). With them, may our hearts live forever in your keeping. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: 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.

A: Amen.