



# Mount Calvary Connected

February 24, 2022

*Mount Calvary Connected is a weekly newsletter sent out at the end of each week. Our goal is to keep you connected to your church and your faith with messages from our pastors, information about upcoming activities at Mt. Calvary and more!*

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## 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 also stream these services live over the internet. Simply visit [www.mt-calvarylutheran.org](http://www.mt-calvarylutheran.org) and click "Live Radio Broadcast" from the home page on Sunday mornings.

Weekly worship bulletins can be found at: [www.mt-calvarylutheran.org/bulletins/](http://www.mt-calvarylutheran.org/bulletins/)

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## A Message from Pastor Scott & Article by Tish Harrison Warren

"Are you on fire?" Both on the way home yesterday and on the way to work this morning, I heard a trio of voices sing that question back and forth to one another in a way that moved me as much as it did when I first heard it back in the late 80's thanks to a group known as The Indigo Girls. For the Christian, talk of being on fire has a particular resonance. As Christians, we're on fire when we're enflamed with the Holy Spirit's faith-making presence. And so, Christians, I ask you, "Are you on fire?"

Your answer will likely depend upon the degree to which you have been involved with a worshipping community. For a long time, and with the overwhelming support of Scripture, tradition, and experience, the Lutheran movement has held that the Holy Spirit is most likely to enflame us with faith when we gather together and around not just the preached word of God, but also the sacraments of holy baptism and holy communion. For a time, and rightly so, the onset of the pandemic led us take a break from in-person gatherings and the sharing of sacraments, but many are beginning to feel that our break from these means of grace has grown too long and is beginning to have an adverse effect on the degree to which we are on fire with the Spirit's gifts of faith, hope, and love. At this month's council meeting, several of your elected leaders expressed this very perspective and I've had one particular colleague saying the same for a good while now.

What follows is a piece written by Anglican priest Tish Harrison Warren which gives extended voice to the fear we've put in-person worship on hold for too long and our fire as the Church is therefore in danger of going out. You should know the week after the piece was published its writer acknowledged there is no fair and judicious way to abandon all of the alternative forms of worship the Church has developed since the pandemic began. I agree. Our radio broadcasts and worship videos are reaching

people we otherwise wouldn't reach. But I also think it is time to evaluate whether some of us have slipped into bad habits over the past two years. Put simply, there is no way to make up for the fire lost when we unnecessarily keep ourselves away from the gathered worship community and the sacraments through which the Holy Spirit has been lighting fires for nearly two thousand years now. With so much history behind us, I'm afraid there is no credible way to argue otherwise and still be labeled "orthodox."

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### **"Going to church in person should not be optional"**

by Tish Harrison Warren

Over the past two years a refrain has become common in churches and other religious communities: "Join us in person or online." I was a big proponent of that "or online" part. In March of 2020, we knew little about the new disease spreading rapidly around the world but we knew it was deadly, especially for the elderly. My church was one of the first in our city to forgo meeting in person and switch to an online format, and I encouraged other churches to do the same.

Since then Sunday mornings have varied. Our church met online; then met indoors with limited attendance, masks and social distancing; then met outdoors; then, after vaccines, indoors again. Precautions rose and fell according to our city's threat level. But even as most churches now offer in-person services, the "or online" option has remained. I think this is good, given how unusual the past two years have been.

Now I think it's time to drop the virtual option. And I think this for the same reason I believed churches should go online back in March 2020: This is the way to love God and our neighbors.

For all of us — even those who aren't churchgoers — bodies, with all the risk, danger, limits, mortality and vulnerability that they bring, are part of our deepest humanity, not obstacles to be transcended through digitization. They are humble (and humbling) gifts to be embraced. Online church, while it was necessary for a season, diminishes worship and us as people. We seek to worship wholly — with heart, soul, mind and strength — and embodiment is an irreducible part of that wholeness.

We are not in 2020 anymore. Even for vulnerable groups such as those over age 65, Covid has a roughly similar risk of death as the flu for those who are fully vaccinated, and the Omicron variant seems to pose even less risk than the flu. A recent C.D.C. study found those who are fully vaccinated are 90 percent less likely to be hospitalized because of Covid-19 than those who are not. Certainly, the Omicron variant brought a surge in cases and hospitalization that has threatened to overwhelm hospitals in certain regions, but it appears that Omicron is waning.

There is still risk, of course, but the goal was never — and ought never be — to eliminate all risk of illness or death. Throughout the past two years, we have sought to balance the risk of disease with the good of being present, in person, with one another. And the cost of being apart from one another is steep. People need physical touch and interaction. We need to connect with other human beings through our bodies, through the ordinary vulnerability of looking into their eyes, hearing their voice, sharing their space, their smells, their presence.

Whether or not one attends religious services, people need embodied community. We find it in book clubs or having friends over for dinner. But embodiment is a particularly important part of Christian spirituality and theology. We believe God became flesh, lived in a human body and remains mysteriously in a human body. Our worship is centered not on simply thinking about certain ideas, but on eating and drinking bread and wine during communion.

“Christians need to hear the babies crying in church. They need to see the reddened eyes of a friend across the aisle,” Collin Hansen wrote in his Times essay about online church. “They need to chat with the recovering drug addict who shows up early but still sits in the back row. They need to taste the bread and wine. They need to feel the choir crescendo toward the assurance of hope in what our senses can’t yet perceive.”

These are not mere accessories to a certain kind of worship experience. These moments form and shape who we are and what we believe.

One might ask, why not have both? Why not meet in person (with Covid precautions in place) but also continue to offer the option of a live-streamed service? Because offering church online implicitly makes embodiment elective. It presents in-person gatherings as something we can opt in or out of with little consequence. It assumes that embodiment is more of a consumer preference, like whether or not you buy hardwood floors, than a necessity, like whether or not you have shelter.

Throughout the pandemic, everyone has had to evaluate what is and isn’t essential. We as a society have had to ask whether in-person church attendance is more like going to a restaurant or more like elementary school education — whether it’s something that is a nice perk in life or something that is indispensable. There was a time, of course, at the beginning of the pandemic, when, like churches, schools went entirely online. But around the globe, experts believe that the costs of school closures currently outweigh the risks of Covid-19. In Christian theology and practice, physically gathering as a church should be seen as similarly essential and irreplaceable.

There are some brass-tack realities of phasing out an online meeting option. First, church leaders should conform to local government protocols and strongly encourage members to be fully vaccinated.

Second, no longer offering a streaming option will unfortunately mean that those who are homebound or sick will not be able to participate in a service. This, however, is not a new problem for the church. For centuries, churches have handled this inevitability by visiting these people at home in person. A small team of “lay eucharistic ministers” at our former church volunteered to go to the home of anyone who could not make it to church and wanted a visit. They would meet one-on-one with people, caring for them, reciting a short liturgy together, serving communion and catching up. This asks more from a congregation in terms of time and commitment than streaming a service online. It requires volunteers who are trustworthy and trained. But it gives the gifts of personal, embodied presence, and even friendship and love.

Last, many church leaders will need to face our real fear of appearing to not take Covid seriously enough. I still think the biggest religion story of 2020 was how across the nation, religious communities of all faiths and ideologies pivoted almost overnight to move church online in an effort to love those around us. By April of 2020, the Protestant research group Lifeway found that only 1 percent of

churches with more than 200 members met in person (and only 4 percent to 7 percent of Protestant churches of any size). Still, what dominated the headlines during this time seemed to be every conservative, Covid-denying pastor who insisted on holding superspreader events.

For those of us religious folks who have taken the pandemic seriously, there is residual shame around this. It was embarrassing for people to use the language of God to endanger lives. We don't want to appear to be one of these kinds of religious people, so we can be hesitant about phasing out any precaution. But this ought not lead churches to, as The Times's David Leonhardt wrote regarding Covid and childhood education, try "to minimize the spread of Covid — a worthy goal absent other factors — rather than minimizing the damage that Covid does to society." It's time to begin to relinquish our online habits and the isolation they produce.

About four years ago, my family had a group of people from our church in their early 20s over to our house. We shared a meal and we asked them what hopes and challenges our church offered to their generation. Their answers surprised me. Over and over, they said, one of the hardest and best things about church was that they had to sit with people of different ages, classes and political beliefs. It was a practice they found inconvenient, yes, but truly grounding, nourishing and good.

Throughout history, the mere fact of meeting together in person to sit, sing and talk to others was never all that countercultural. Being physically present to others was the default mode of existence. But for these digital natives, the stubborn analog wonders of skin, handshakes, hugs, bread and wine, faces, names and spontaneous conversation is part of what intrigued them and kept them going to church.

A chief thing that the church has to offer the world now is to remind us all how to be human creatures, with all the embodiment and physical limits that implies. We need to embrace that countercultural call.

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### **Adult Sunday School**

Adult Sunday School is ongoing! We were happy to see some new faces and hope that even more join us! We meet in the conference room/library each Sunday after worship.

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### **Bible Basics Course**

Pastor Scott will be leading a Bible basics course for six weeks, starting on Wednesday, March 9th. Each week we'll gather at 6:30 p.m. and discuss how the most recent readings in worship can be connected to the larger themes of the Bible. Should there be an interest, we may continue this practice after Lent concludes.

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### **Upcoming Meetings**

Property Committee: Tuesday, March 8th at 6:00 p.m.

Stewardship and Administration Committee: Thursday, March 10th at 6:30 p.m.

Council: Tuesday, March 15th at 6:30 p.m.

WELCA: Monday, March 21st at 6:00 p.m.

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### **Easter Flowers**

The Easter flower order envelopes are now available on the table in the Narthex. Three choices for flowers: 5-bloom lilies, 6-bloom tulips, or 3-bloom hyacinths. The deadline to place an order is March 28th.

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### **2022 Offering Envelopes**

Offering envelopes for 2022 are available in the narthex. Thank you in advance for your contribution!

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### **Help Wanted**

The Property Committee is looking to recruit a number of small job volunteers. Tasks might include replacing light bulbs, changing hardware on a commode, getting a lawnmower or snowblower ready for use, etc. The Committee believes we have a lot of talent in the congregation and wants to make greater use of it. Every small job handled by a member equals one less call that needs to be made to a vendor who may have a minimum visit charge or an hourly rate of \$50 or more.

Interested parties should contact Mark Rychak or one of the pastors. A message could also be left with the church office at 814-266-4859. Thank you!

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### **Scheduled Worship Help**

#### **Saturday, February 26:**

**Greeters/Ushers:** Noelle Berkey & Todd Moss  
**Communion Assistants:** Deb Rychak & Chris Koshute

#### **Sunday, February 27:**

**Greeters/Ushers:** Ruth & Jerry Pozun  
**Communion Assistants:** Ray Leverknight

#### **Saturday, March 5:**

**Greeters/Ushers:** Volunteers needed!  
**Communion Assistants:** Volunteers needed!

#### **Sunday, March 6:**

**Greeters/Ushers:** Volunteers needed!  
**Communion Assistants:** Volunteers needed!

There are sign up sheets in the Narthex for Greeters/Ushers and Communion Assistants. Please sign up for the dates that would suit you best. We appreciate you volunteering. If you have questions about these roles, please contact Christine Koshute at [814-421-4921](tel:814-421-4921) or Chris Oleksa at [814-244-9851](tel:814-244-9851).

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# Youth News

**Snow Camp 2022:** Snow camp is BACK at Sequanota! Plans are in the works for the annual "snow camp" to return to Camp Sequanota on February 25th & 26th. This is an overnight event for youth in 6th through 12th grade. Registration opens January 15th, and we'd love to have a group. Contact Pastor Jonathan for details!

**Childcare is now available during Sunday morning worship:** Hannah Salamon is a Richland Learning Center staff member who will be joining us each Sunday along with Pastor Jonathan and other volunteers to provide childcare for infants through age 5. For the time being, drop-off for this service will take place in Sander Hall. Speak with Pastor Jonathan for more information.

**Pastor Jonathan LOVES to get out and see our Mount Calvary youth in action doing the things they enjoy!** Be sure to share your schedules for sports, concerts, recitals, etc. You never know where he might show up!

Pastor Jonathan's office hours at Mount Calvary are Mondays & Wednesdays, 10am-3pm. He is available outside of those hours via email ([RevJonoAdams@gmail.com](mailto:RevJonoAdams@gmail.com)), cellphone (412-817-6704), or Facebook.

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## Giving Tree

A total of \$601 was collected from the Giving Tree for September-November and was donated to Nardecchia Spay and Neuter. Donations will now be given to The Helping Hands Mission in Portage through February. Thank you for your continued support!

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## Backyard Ministries Snack Collection

The Social Ministry Team wanted to share the following Facebook post from Backyard Ministries. It shows how much of an impact our snack collection has on the children of Johnstown.

"Why do we go? Yesterday we gave out cookies to kids getting off a bus in a Johnstown neighborhood. The kids were laughing, smiling, and repeatedly saying thank you. Just 48 hours earlier, the same bus was delayed at school for hours by a hostage situation in the neighborhood. Why do we go? Because the kids have nowhere else to go. Because Jesus goes!"

Again, thank you for your continued support!

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 Looking for a fun way to be involved during church services?   
 Looking for a way to meet other church members with similar interests?   
 Looking for a way to be creative and use your long forgotten, hidden away secret talents??   
 When you're sitting in the pew each week, do you wish you could do more than listen to the contemporary music, traditional hymns, or both?   
 Look and wish no more! Don't just sit there! Come join the Music Ministry as we revitalize and reorganize our singers, musicians, bell ringers, and more...   
 Don't think you're not good enough. Even if you're learning an instrument in school, or you haven't dusted off that flute, clarinet, violin, trumpet or guitar in quite awhile...join us.   
 We'd love to know if you like to sing, or play an instrument with others. Even If you can count a beat and read one or two notes at a time, you can join us in the bell choir!   
 Please reach out and let us know you'd like to join us. Text or call Joan Hunter at 814-955-2737 or joan20457@gmail.com, or Dan Gresh. Stop and talk to either of us after services by the organ/piano. We would love to talk to you about your musical interests.   
   
 

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### ELCA Good Gifts Collection

During Lent this year, Mt. Calvary will be donating to the ELCA Good Gifts Program. Each week we will focus on a different area of need that can be used throughout the global community. The Giving Tree will also coincide with the weekly themes. The following is a schedule of the themes and what the donations could possibly be used for:

February 27: Kickoff with Sunday School students

March 5-11: Healthcare: (Hygiene kit \$25, personal protective equipment \$25, food for orphans \$25/1 month, mosquito net \$10, clinic visit for a child \$10, vaccination for a child \$30, stock a health clinic for a week \$75)

March 12-18: Education: (Send a girl to school \$40, computer for a community center \$800, one month of internet connectivity \$100, school supplies \$10/child, \$300/classroom)

March 19-25: Water: (Water well \$2500, water filter \$30, irrigation project \$100, latrine \$150)

March 26-April 1: Agriculture: (Community vegetable garden \$200, fruit tree seedling \$10, fruit tree farm \$150, seeds and gardening tools \$50)

April 2-April 8: Biblical: (Bible \$12, motorbike for a pastor \$375, Sunday School start-up kit \$65)

Any questions, please contact Mike Kozak at 244-6880. Thank you for your continued support!

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**Birthdays and Anniversaries for the  
Week: February 27 – March 5, 2022**

**Feb. 27** - Jack Daily, Joseph Dallman, & Tracy Intihar

**Feb. 28** - Carla Enos & Dianne Thoburn

**March 1** - Remi Reininger

**March 2** - Alexander Pozun

**March 3** - Ashton Spangler

**March 4** - Jennifer Knepper

**March 3** - Danny & Barbara Malcolm (49 years)

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

Jennifer & Ryan, Linda & Dick, Dolly & Chiz Palm Family, Claudia Plows, Maddie Pierce, Gladys Haupt, Bill & Linda, Jose & Family, Dave, Tom, Lt. Hunter Bergman, and Lt. Dylan Merchant, Harold, Rick, Midge, Shirley, Debbie, David, Lauren, Billy, Barb, Sara Solarczyk, Jackie Janak, Jack, Corinne, Joan, Dan, Natalie Zerby, Pastor Scott Custead, Luella Koontz, Al Lindner and Family, Bob, Dawn, Stacy & Josh, Florence Barker, Bob Trotter, Jean Pellon, Bill Layton, Deb Zilch, Bennett, Cassy Sojak, Paul Miller, Keith Mayket, Ruth, Pete, the Teplitz Family, Ethel Warshel, Melanie, Ken, John Nerone, Dane Wisner, Jeff, Don, Dorothy, Irene, Karen, Erin, Susan Dyers, Bob McMullen, Wyatt George, Larry Hockensmith, Jean Pellon, Mike, Corey, John Rychak, Pastor Jonathan & Family, Roxanee Horner, Lynn Palm and son, Alex, and Alex's wife, Becky Lilja, Kathy P., Al Johnson, Chris, Donna & Danny, Cheryl, Jennifer & Family, Jaime, Dorothy, Matt & Ashley, Landon, the Family of Attorney Gary Costlow, Max Lawn, Linda Haberkorn, Lorraine, Joe, Donna, Danny & Family, Becky Jo, Bill, Linda & Family, Mary, Cheryl, Mary Jane, Janice, Dennis, Rick, and Don.

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**Financial Update**

If you haven't picked them up yet, please remember an annual report and a 2021 giving statement are available for every household with voting members in it.

As for 2022, January featured the need for a new water heater (\$1,413,72). With such a large facility to maintain, we are always subject to these kinds of unanticipated and undesired expenses. Thankfully, giving to the current fund exceeded giving to the same fund a year earlier and most other expenses were in line with what had been planned. When special gifts and movement in our financial portfolio are excluded, this led to a breakeven January. Thank you! When we all do our part, maintaining prior patterns of giving and increasing where possible, things have a way of working out on paper and in actual fact.

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**Condensed Worship for Sunday, February 20, 2022**

**Prayer of the Day**

P: O Lord Jesus, make us instruments of your peace, that where there is hatred, we may sow love, where there is injury, pardon, and where there is despair, hope. Grant, O divine master, that we may seek to console, to understand, and to love in your name, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**First Reading: Genesis 45:3-11, 15**

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.'" And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

P: The word of the Lord,

**A: Thanks be to God!**

**Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40**

P: Do not be provoked by evildoers; do not be jealous of those who do wrong.

**A: For they shall soon wither like the grass, and like the green grass fade away.**

P: Put your trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and find safe pasture.

**A: Take delight in the Lord, who shall give you your heart's desire.**

P: Commit your way to the Lord; put your trust in the Lord, and see what God will do.

**A: The Lord will make your vindication as clear as the light and the justice of your case like the noonday sun.**

P: Be still before the Lord and wait patiently. Do not be provoked by the one who prospers, the one who succeeds in evil schemes.

**A: Refrain from anger, leave rage alone; do not be provoked; it leads only to evil.**

P: For evildoers shall be cut off, but those who hope in the Lord shall possess the land.

**A: In a little while the wicked shall be no more; even if you search out their place, they will not be there.**

P: But the lowly shall possess the land; they will delight in abundance of peace.

**A: But the deliverance of the righteous comes from you, O Lord; you are their stronghold in time of trouble.**

P: You, O Lord, will help them and rescue them; you will rescue them from the wicked and deliver them, because in you they seek refuge.

**Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50**

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven. What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

P: The word of the Lord,

**A: Thanks be to God!**

**Gospel: Luke 6:27-38**

[Jesus said:] "But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

P: The gospel of the Lord.

**A: Praise to you, O Christ!**

**Sermon by Pastor Scott Klimke**

In my work as a pastor, sometimes I say, "Real men wear pink and cry." At other times I say, "Real women aren't afraid to say, 'No.'" These words obviously don't work in every case, but they do speak to how men and women often react differently, even as they're responding to the same issue; with the issue in this case being the quality our reading from Luke encourages and that's vulnerability.

Before I say more about our reading from Luke and vulnerability, let me first finish what I've begun to say about men and women. When the unknown and the unfamiliar come calling, when vulnerability is required, men often underreact; doing their best to run away from vulnerability. Never wearing pink and never crying are attempts to maintain a predictable, undynamic status quo where vulnerability is never required. I can be John Wayne all the time if I ignore or run away from that which requires me to be more than John Wayne.

For their part, women often don't try to run away from vulnerability. What they often try to do is run past vulnerability. When things become uncomfortable, when the need to be vulnerable comes knocking, women often say, "Yes, yes, yes" and think, "Do, do, do" in the hope that a supersized response will send the uncomfortable packing. When it comes to women and men, it's overreaction in one case and underreaction in the other. These are really just two different bites at the same apple.

Male or female, female or male, it's not easy to be vulnerable. Familiar usually feels better than unfamiliar. It's easier to drive straight than up, down, or around. It feels safer to be self-reliant than it does to recognize that we live in a relational, interdependent world where we're never going to be able to escape from our lifelong need for God and others. And so, we stick to our comfort zones. Trying to escape the need to be vulnerable, it's straight and self-reliant the whole way. But in spite of efforts to run away or to run past, the need to be vulnerable won't go away. We can't run away from it or past it. With this in mind, the key to being vulnerable is discovering the difference between doing too little and too much. And make no mistake about it. Our reading from Luke does call us to be vulnerable.

Today's reading from Luke comes from the sermon that Luke calls The Sermon on the Plain, as opposed to Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. As is typical with this variously named sermon, Jesus is trying to differentiate the Church from other human movements; with the key difference in this case being the Church's willingness to be vulnerable; vulnerable enough to depend upon God and others.

In keeping with what it means to be vulnerable, we aren't supposed to run away from that which rocks the boat. We're to turn the other cheek and open ourselves up to more rocking of the boat. We're also to pray for our enemies. Then, there's Jesus' economic program. I suppose we could hear it as a call to go supersized; a call to do, do, do after we've said, "Yes, yes, yes." But really, Jesus' economic program is a call to be vulnerable; vulnerable enough to depend upon God and neighbor. Why should we give to everyone who asks and seek no damages when our economic standing is harmed? We should do these things so that we have no choice but to be vulnerable enough to depend upon God for assistance. It's not, "Do, do, do," and never say, "No." It's be vulnerable. It's open yourself up to your lifelong need for God and others. And all this emphasis upon vulnerability and a life of faith doesn't come out of left field. All we have to do is think of what various scriptures and sermons have in mind when they preach faith. To have faith in the Christian sense of the word is to trust that someone else isn't going to let you down; that someone else is going to hold up their end of the deal, with God supplying salvation and siblings in Christ supplying Christ-live love. And in its dependence upon others, this is to be vulnerable. How do we get better at it?

The first step will be for us to recognize what's been implied up to now. Relationships and vulnerability go hand in hand with one another. Relationships are the arena where vulnerability plays itself out. And my, oh my, do we humans struggle with relationships. Might this be why we also struggle with

vulnerability? Probably so. You learn to be good at relationships by learning to be good at vulnerability. And the entire book of Genesis is a testament to how we do struggle with relationships.

In today's reading from Genesis, what has been a real row between Joseph and his brothers is on its way to positive resolution. As is often the case with interpersonal conflict, the feud between Joseph and his brothers involves more than them. The simple way to tell their story is to say that Joseph's brothers are jealous of him and that their jealousy gets out of hand. But what's ultimately responsible for this jealousy? Joseph's brothers are mad at him because their dad Jacob favors Joseph and not them. And this from a dad who once had to put up with his own dad Isaac favoring Jacob's brother Esau more than he favored him. My, oh my, does dysfunction perpetuate itself; being passed from generation to generation sometimes. Simply put, at the end of the day, it's not really Joseph who is the problem. It's Jacob's favoritism that's the problem.

But are Jacob's less favored sons vulnerable enough to call for more and different from their father; at the same time being vulnerable enough to live with the possibility that more and different might never come from their father? Absolutely not! First, Joseph's brothers run away from the need to be vulnerable; blaming their problems on Joseph rather than upon their source—Jacob's favoritism. Then, they run past the need to be vulnerable; figuring if they just take the supersized step of selling Joseph into slavery in a foreign land the need to be vulnerable with their dad will disappear. On one hand, the brothers do too little; running away from their real problem. On the other, they do too much; running well past their problem. Again, the key to being vulnerable is discovering the difference between doing too little and too much. Don't run from problems. But also, don't run past your problems, thinking you've solved them, when you really haven't.

This brings me to something else I often find myself saying when I interact with those who are having trouble with relationships and the vulnerability every healthy relationship requires. When I'm not saying bring out the pink and the tears or bring on the word no, I'm often saying, "Hope for more. Pray for more. But don't expect more." This approach finds us not doing too little, as it also finds us not trying to do too much and more than we can ever in fact really do. On the one hand, to hope for more and to pray for more, with our hopes and our prayers lived as much as they are spoken, is to never say, "Never." And when never say, "Never," or at least are very slow and reluctant to say, "Never," it's hard to say too little is being done. But as this is true, we don't want to weigh down our hopes and our prayers with expectation.

This is to run past the other person in the relationship in the hope of escaping the need to be vulnerable. If it's a real and genuine relationship we're after, we don't want to do this. God hears our prayers and the hopes they express, but God may not always endorse our prayers and their attendant hopes; with God always knowing best. For a real and genuine relationship to exist, we have to be vulnerable enough to accept this. The same goes for having real and genuine relationships with other human beings. It's more than appropriate for us to ask others to play ball with our prayers and the hopes they express, but we also have to be vulnerable enough to give others the freedom to pick up their bat and their ball and go home before an inning has been played. If a relationship is to be mutual and genuine, it can be no other way and accepting this, much less embracing it, requires a lot of vulnerability on our part. Wearing our desires in ways that others can see, we hope for more and we pray for more; which is itself to be vulnerable. And then we're also vulnerable enough to give others the freedom to respond as they see fit. It's what you call not doing too little and not doing too much.

It's what you call being vulnerable; vulnerable enough to express our need for others and vulnerable enough to honor and respect their freedom; knowing that in God's case that freedom is always sooner or later used for good. Amen!

### **Prayers of Intercession**

P: The Spirit of the Lord is poured out upon us in abundance; so we are bold to pray for the church, the world, and all that God has made.

P: You teach us to love our neighbors and enemies alike. Encourage your church to follow the leading of your love, especially when it is risky or difficult. Help us to show mercy just as we have first received mercy. God of grace,

**A: hear our prayer.**

P: Nurture fields that lie dormant, resting until it is time to bloom again. Bless farmers and all who cultivate fields and urban gardens. Give favorable weather for planting. Bring forth from buried seed an abundant harvest, and guard against famine and disease. God of grace,

**A: hear our prayer.**

P: Look upon our world with mercy, that we delight in an abundance of peace. Protect all whose lives are marred by war and civil unrest. Release political prisoners and amplify the voices that challenge us to seek forgiveness and pursue nonviolence. God of grace,

**A: hear our prayer.**

P: Your people cry out for mercy. Console hearts that long for forgiveness. Mend broken relationships. Heal bodies that suffer chronic pain or illness. Strengthen and deliver all whose spirits are troubled (*especially*). God of grace,

**A: hear our prayer.**

P: You bind us together into one family. Teach us to forgive one another and to resolve conflicts with humility and patience. Bless families of all shapes and sizes, and show love to those who are lonely or grieving. God of grace,

**A: hear our prayer.**

P: We praise you for the saints who have inherited the fullness of your kingdom (*especially*). As you have raised them to imperishable and eternal life, sustain us in faith by the promise of resurrection. God of grace,

**A: hear our prayer.**

P: Since we have such great hope in your promises, O God, we lift these and all of our prayers to you in confidence and faith; through Jesus Christ our Savior.

**A: Amen.**

### **Blessing**

P: Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us. Almighty God ☩ bless you with grace, mercy, and peace, now and forever. **Amen.**