



# Mount Calvary Connected

March 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

Something I read recently struck a chord with me. The sentence and sentiment involved were simple, but also profound. The words written were: *It's not easy to change gears*. How true and how obvious in today's society. *It's not easy to change gears*.

Personally, I know how difficult it is to change gears. I wanted to quit smoking for a long time and attempted to do so on multiple occasions. It took twenty years before I finally switched gears. Back in June, I pledged to find a schedule or a routine that would better balance my personal and professional needs so that I might become spiritually and emotionally and physically healthier. Progress has been made, but I'm also not as far along as I'd like to be. *It's not easy to change gears*.

Like me personally, our country is also having immense difficulty changing gears. A few weeks ago, I read a pretty convincing article by an author whose thorough and thoughtful way has impressed me before. His contention was that our society is now living in four silos, with each silo closed off from the other three. I've run across other articles which suggest something similar about our nation's discombobulated approach to COVID-19. Rather than there being one tent big enough for all, there's again been four silos, with too few concluding that the other silos have anything to offer. Can you say, *"It's not easy to shift gears!"*

Unfortunately, the Church can also find it far from easy to shift gears. If you read the Bible and study Church history, it becomes clear that we've been arguing about issues of purity and holiness forever and ever. We've forever and ever been frightened by those who are different and have tried to justify our fears on religious grounds. In seminary, I remember reading a holiness code the Church published

in what has rightly or wrongly come to be known as “the Dark Ages.” The list of all one could not do before receiving holy communion, down to the hours before church it could not happen, would make most of us both squirm and laugh today. It certainly made me laugh and then grieve how often the Church has missed the mark. But as much as we might laugh at an ancient text and be tempted to laud our subsequent development, we’re still arguing about issues of purity and holiness. Why??? Through the gift of Christian faith, it’s the Holy Spirit, not us, who makes people pure and holy. This is as basic as basic can be, but we keep fighting it. *It’s not easy to shift gears.*

But sometimes, gears do need to be shifted. This is particularly true for people of Christian faith. Jesus once said, “No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God,” (Luke 9:62). The weekend after next we’ll be reminded of how St. Paul once wrote, “This one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus,” (Philippians 3:13-14). Is it any wonder that Jesus’ call to discipleship is often, “Follow me?” Shifting gears is to be our stock and trade, but with it being so difficult where do you start?

This weekend’s reading from Luke, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, suggests we start with our relationships. To shift gears, sometimes we need to say, “I’m sorry,” as the younger son who squandered his father’s fortune eventually did. To shift gears, there are other times when we need to say, “Apology accepted,” as the father does in the parable and as the older son in the parable does not. These two, simple exchanges, “I’m sorry” and “Apology accepted,” can throw things back into gear quickly. When you get down to it, we’re all a product of our relationships and our ability to shift gears is a testament to the strength or weakness of our relationships. Relationships require repentance and forgiveness if they are to remain healthy and strong over time. May we therefore not be paralyzed by all the paralysis we see when we look in the mirror and also when we look away from the mirror. May we instead do what we can, doing far more than we realize in the process. When it’s time, may we say, “I’m sorry.” When it’s time, may we also say, “Apology accepted.” If it happens, I can already hear the gears shifting.

Pastor Scott

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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. Every Wednesday, 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. Bring a friend!

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### **Good Friday Crosswalk**

April 15th – Rain or shine

The event begins at Beulah United Methodist at noon and then moves up Bedford Street and Scalp Avenue to arrive at Mt. Calvary around 3 p.m. There will be 5 other worship stops along the way.

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### **Upcoming Meetings**

Bible for Beginners: Wednesday, March 30th at 6:30 p.m.

Property Committee: April 12th at 6:00 p.m.

WELCA: April 18th at 6:00 p.m.

Council: April 19th at 6:30 p.m.

The Property Committee will meet on the second Tuesday of every month at 6:00 p.m. in the old lounge.

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### **Holy Week Schedule**

Weekend of the Passion (April 9th and 10th):  
Saturday at 5:30 p.m. and Sunday at 8:45 a.m.

Maundy Thursday (April 14th) at 7:00 p.m.

Good Friday (April 15th) at 7:00 p.m.

Easter Weekend (April 16th and 17th):  
Saturday at 5:30 p.m. and Sunday at 7:00 a.m., 8:45 a.m., and 10:30 a.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.

Volunteers who can be available on short notice are needed to help with set-up, serving, and tear-down after funeral luncheons.

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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### **Annual Flea Market**

May 7, 2022

Items can be donated after April 1st. Please no clothing or shoes at this time.

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### **Yarn Collection**

While everyone is cleaning out and getting ready for the flea market, if you find leftover yarn of any size, the Prayer Shawl group would appreciate it if you would bring it in and donate it to our cause. There will be a bin in the narthex where you can place it. Our supplies are getting low and we could use your help. Thank you so much!

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### **Scheduled Worship Help**

#### **Saturday, March 26:**

**Greeters/Ushers:** Jerry & Ruth Pozun

**Communion Assistants:** Cindy Solarczyk & Deb Rychak

#### **Sunday, March 27:**

**Greeters/Ushers:** Jim & Chris Koshute

**Communion Assistants:** Volunteers needed!

#### **Saturday, April 2:**

**Greeters/Ushers:** Volunteers needed!

**Communion Assistants:** Volunteers needed!

#### **Sunday, April 3:**

**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 or Chris Oleksa at 814-244-9851.

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**Easter Pageant - Palm Sunday:** Our Easter pageant for young people will be held on Palm Sunday, April 10th. Children, and parents who can help, are invited to participate in this meaningful event! And AFTER worship, we'll hold an Easter Egg hunt for all pre-school and elementary school aged children! Candy donations are greatly appreciated. See Pastor Jonathan for more information about either!

**Holy Communion:** Is your child ready to learn about Holy Communion and receive the sacrament for the first time? Information was sent out this week about a series of First Communion "retreats" with the hope of helping children to join us at the table during Holy Week and the Easter season. If you're interested in having your child participate but haven't already been in touch with Pastor Jonathan, let him know!

**Youth Committee:** Volunteers are needed to help plan and coordinate events for children of all ages, especially this summer as Pastor Jonathan will be unavailable for a period due to major surgery. If you're willing to help out (even just for one event) please let Pastor Jonathan, Pastor Scott, or any member of church council know!

**Summer Camp at Sequanota:** We are blessed to have a GREAT Lutheran church camp practically in our backyard just twenty-five minutes away at Camp Sequanota near Jennerstown. Registration is now open, with programs for all school-aged kids. Talk with Pastor Jonathan to brochure, or visit [www.sequanota.com](http://www.sequanota.com) for more information.

**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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### **Palm Sunday**

Palm Sunday will be a BIG DAY for the youngest members of our congregation! We're inviting all children to participate in a mini-pageant at the beginning of worship to help us celebrate this important start to Holy Week. Any child who can hold and wave a palm is welcome to participate! Plan to have your children in Sander Hall by 8:30 a.m. on Sunday, April 3rd, and again on Palm Sunday, April 10th, so that they can learn what to do!

And AFTER worship, we'll hold an Easter Egg hunt for all pre-school and elementary school aged children! Candy donations are greatly appreciated. See Pastor Jonathan for more information about either!

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### **Family Cookout**

Save the date! Saturday, May 14th, the youth and family ministry team will be sponsoring a cookout picnic for all families with school-aged children after the 5:30 p.m. worship service. There will be food, friends, and games. We hear that Pastor Jonathan may even make some of his famous smoked pulled pork.

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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:

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!

**Give now for Eastern Europe Crisis Response**

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9).*

Friends,

I write to you again about our neighbors in Eastern Europe. First, I thank you for your outpouring of prayers and generosity — you are making a difference in the lives of people impacted by the war in Ukraine.

Your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response during this crisis are already at work. Because of your generosity, \$1 million will support the Lutheran World Federation and these member churches:

German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine  
Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland  
Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia  
Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Romania

They are distributing hygiene supplies, food, medicine, bedding and psychosocial and pastoral care to refugees and internally displaced people, most of whom are women and children.

**Your support has made this possible, but more work remains. Your gifts to “Eastern Europe Crisis Response” will be used to in full (100%) to address the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and neighboring countries.**

Additional responses through partners in these countries and others in the region are expected in the coming weeks and months, and Lutheran Disaster Response is committed to accompanying those partners as the situation evolves. We pray for the Roma communities and foreign nationals who are facing racial and ethnic discrimination at the borders as they flee Ukraine. Our companions are ensuring that people in these marginalized groups will be treated with respect and dignity as they seek safety.

We know there are many organizations that you can choose to support, but it is only by giving to Lutheran Disaster Response that guarantees your gift will fund ELCA-supported work through faith partners in the region.

I invite you to watch this [video](#) from Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton about the situation in Eastern Europe and the ELCA’s response. To share this information with your congregations, download this [bulletin insert](#).

Together we pray for our siblings in Ukraine and Eastern Europe. May God be with them in their time of need.

In Christ’s service,



The Rev. Daniel Rift  
Director, ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response Fund  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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**Birthdays and Anniversaries for the  
Week: March 27 – April 2, 2022**

**March 27** - Ethan Wasnick & Logan Wasnick

**March 28** - Ruth Marley

**March 29** - Jon & Shannon Dusack (19 years)

**March 30** - Holly & Charles Cowfer (31 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 Teplitza 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, Don, the Chavis Family, and Betty.

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**Financial Update**

Through the end of February, income is slightly over budget and expenses are slightly under budget.

We have had a good start to 2022. Thank you! Now we all just need to continue to do our part; maintaining prior patterns of giving from year to year as a baseline and increasing our giving whenever possible, as we also invite and welcome new people into the life of the congregation.

In our area, doing ministry requires being ever mindful of how an aging community where relocation to another area is common reduces our active membership by 8-10% per year. To just hold even, much less grow, the time, talent, and treasure of all these siblings in the Lord will need to be replaced from year to year. It's something we have managed to do for six years in a row now, but if it is to continue it will require us to be both resolute and intentional when it comes to our evangelism and stewardship practices.

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## Condensed Worship for Sunday, March 20, 2022

### Prayer of the Day

P: Eternal God, your kingdom has broken into our troubled world through the life, death, and resurrection of your Son. Help us to hear your word and obey it, and bring your saving love to fruition in our lives, 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: Isaiah 55:1-9

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you. Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

P: The word of the Lord,

**A: Thanks be to God!**

### Psalm 63:1-8

P: O God, you are my God; eagerly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

**A: Therefore I have gazed upon you in your holy place, that I might behold your power and your glory.**

P: For your steadfast love is better than life itself; my lips shall give you praise.

**A: So will I bless you as long as I live and lift up my hands in your name.**

P: My spirit is content, as with the richest of foods, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips,

**A: when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the night watches.**

P: For you have been my helper, and under the shadow of your wings I will rejoice.

**A: My whole being clings to you; your right hand holds me fast.**

### Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that

followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play." We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

P: The word of the Lord,

**A: Thanks be to God!**

### **Gospel: Luke 13:1-9**

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. [Jesus] asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

P: The gospel of the Lord.

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

### **Sermon by Pastor Scott Klimke**

We had a nice turnout again at this week's Bible basics get together on Wednesday night. We talked about Jerusalem and its prophets, priests, and kings; with Jesus now being our own prophet, priest, and king. With respect to prophets, one of things prophets do is call people to repentance. Jesus certainly wears this prophetic mantle in today's reading from Luke; twice calling us to repent or die. It might be best to cast this sobering call to repentance in the language of love; something Scripture often does.

In the Bible, God can rage like a jilted lover. In the Old Testament, God and us get married; with God carrying us out of Egypt and into the land of milk and honey. Once in the land of milk and honey, our eyes and hearts wander and we grow unfaithful. God, for a time, rages like a jilted lover. In the New Testament, God and us get married; with God joining us to heaven's life through the sacrament of holy

baptism; blessing us with the wisdom of the Word; spoiling us with the plenty of the Lord's table; binding our hearts to the heavenly bridegroom's heart through the Holy Spirit. But again, over time, our eyes and hearts wander and we grow unfaithful. God, again, rages like a jilted love. In response to our unfaithfulness, God says, "What shall I do with this hard-hearted and stiff-necked people. Oh, how there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth when I'm done with them. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often have I desired to gather together your children like a hen gathers her brood under her wings and you were not willing." But eventually, after God cries all the hurt out, after God works the anguish and the anger out of God's system, God repents and turns back to us in love, saying, "Won't you be mine? Let's give this another go!"

This is the carousel God and humankind have been riding for who knows how long. Again and again, it's been round and round from love to anguish and from anguish to love. Every time God is ready to move on, someone has prayed or said, "Give it more time. Give it another year." God has listened. It's why more than one verse in Scripture says that God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. But no one knows how long the patience of God shall endure and this Lent we've been told not to put the Lord our God to the test. And when it comes to love, this much is sure and certain. Love can't be faked for very long. Over time love shows itself to be true or false; with there being no real, in between.

When trial arrives, your friends stay and everyone else goes. This is love. When temptation comes knocking, love doesn't even open the door. That which is not love is prone to roll out the red carpet for temptation. Love is patient and kind. Love is not arrogant, boastful, or rude. Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. Love does not insist on its own way. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. Again, love over time can't be faked. I think of the popular music chorus which goes: You can't hide your lying eyes and your smile is a thin disguise. Thought by now you'd realize there ain't no way to hide your lying eyes.

And so, how will it be for you and me when the patience of God comes to an end and it's time for God and us to get married or divorced? Will our lying eyes expose us? Will our smile no longer disguise our duplicity? Will we regret the misplaced conclusion that we could pull a fast one over on God? Certainly, and thankfully so, the hope is that this will not be the case.

In today's reading from 1st Corinthians, St. Paul suggests all of Scripture is written in service of the end when we will stand or fall before the can't be fooled eyes of God. Sometimes, Scripture tries to seduce love out of us with talk of fine wine and rich food as in today's reading from Isaiah. Sometimes, Scripture tries to warn and instruct love out of us as in today's reading from 1st Corinthians. Sometimes, as in the case of our reading from Luke, Scripture tries to scare love out of us with Jesus or someone else saying, "Repent or die." It's all done in service of that end when our hearts will or will not belong to God. All of which is to say that in ways various and many, Scripture strives for a happy ending, but Scripture also does not describe God and us as a natural and effortless match.

In today's reading from Isaiah, we hear that God's thoughts are not our thoughts and that God's ways are not our ways. I suppose we could hear this as a recipe for love. After all, opposites do attract. I know. Twenty years ago this June, I married my opposite. I'm an extrovert. Julia an introvert. Julia's an early riser and I'm a night owl. I was a city slicker and Julia a farm girl. I was a cowboy and Julia was a cultured, country club kind of person. Julia was neat. Me not so much. The list could go one and on.

Opposites do attract. But if the marriage is to work, the differences begin to dissipate as two people melt into one another and become one, new and improved person. By way of example, I made the bed today. If Julia wasn't in my life, the bed would never get made. I've become more sensitive and in touch with my feelings and Julia has toughened up a bit. I'm ready to cook and prepare with things dill, coconut milk, and fish sauce, but I don't use them because I know Julia doesn't like them. This is how it goes when two opposites attract and then become their own new and better person over time. But I have to say the gap between God and us is not the gap between two humans. Like our reading from Isaiah says, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are God's ways and thoughts higher than our ways and thoughts." Should we desire a happy ending and a storybook romance, we had best not underestimate the task before us. Thankfully, the task is not ours alone.

In the eighth chapter of Romans, St. Paul assures us that Jesus is at the right hand of God where our Lord intercedes for us. We're told something very similar in the seventh chapter of Hebrews. Putting it somewhat differently, we're also told that Jesus is our advocate with God the Father in the second chapter of 1st John. Jesus really, really wants God us to work. Having seen the musical "The Music Man" on Thursday night, I can say that Jesus wants God and us to work as much as Mrs. Paroo wanted Harold Hill and her daughter Marian to work. If Jesus once prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," he's still praying the same today. In our parable from Luke, Jesus can very easily be heard to be the gardener who says, "Give it more time. Give it another year." Jesus doesn't want his death for you and for me to be in vain. As we'll hear again on Maundy Thursday through the appointed gospel, Jesus shall love us to completion; warming the heart of God the Father when it goes cold for us and sending the Holy Spirit to bind our hearts to God's when those two hearts grow distant.

Speaking of the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Holy Trinity might be thought of as the manure in today's parable from Luke. The Holy Spirit shall be our guide and our counselor until we live in the house of the Lord forever. The Holy Spirit is the manure Christ uses to fertilize our lives to the point where faith, hope, and love can't help but bloom. This happens so thoroughly and naturally that sometimes it escapes our notice. In fact, in another one of Jesus' parables, those who get married to God forever don't even know how their formerly lying eyes have become eyes of love and sincerity. This says to me that we need not question how effective Jesus is in his work of intercession or how effective the Holy Spirit is at binding our hearts to God. Our role isn't to question and second guess. It's to trust. It's to work the program that leads to the Holy Spirit growing faith and its fruit in our lives. And it's with that program in mind that I now say to you, "Do not cease to gather with one another as some have. Remember your baptism. Receive the word read, preached, prayed, sung, and confessed. Eat the holy meal." With the Holy Spirit doing the gardening, all this heavenly manure will grow us into a garden of love beyond compare. Rather than dying, we'll live through the Spirit's use of these mutual gatherings around word, water, wine, and bread. Amen!

### **Prayers of Intercession**

P: Drawn close to the heart of God, we offer these prayers for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

P: We pray for the church around the world in all its forms: for pastors, deacons, bishops, chaplains, and mission developers; for church councils, committee chairs, and all lay ministry leaders; for congregations that contemplate difficult decisions about the future of their ministry. Merciful God,

**A: receive our prayer.**

P: For the health of this planet and the well-being of its creatures: for lands impacted by droughts and at risk of wildfires; for fig trees and vineyards that produce fruit for our nourishment and delight; for animal habitats threatened by climate change. Merciful God,

**A: receive our prayer.**

P: For those called into positions of civic responsibility: for judges, attorneys, and court administrators tasked with uncovering truth and delivering justice; for activists and community leaders who cast a vision of a more compassionate and equitable society. Merciful God,

**A: receive our prayer.**

P: For those who call upon you for mercy: for all who live in poverty and experience hunger; for any who feel tested beyond their strength; for those who are hospitalized or near death, and for all in need of healing (especially). Merciful God,

**A: receive our prayer.**

P: For the advocacy efforts of this congregation: for those whose faith leads them to speak difficult truths and engage in difficult conversations with policymakers; for those who promote mercy over vengeance or retaliation. Merciful God,

**A: receive our prayer.**

P: For those whose earthly journeys have ended, we give thanks. With (names and) all the saints, we praise you for the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Merciful God,

**A: receive our prayer.**

P: Accept the prayers we bring, O God, on behalf of a world in need, for the sake of Jesus Christ.

**A: Amen.**

### **Blessing**

P: God, who fills the creation with abundance, Christ, who spreads his arms in forgiveness, Holy Spirit, who draws ever near to us, ✠ bless you and bring you to life everlasting. **Amen.**