



Mount Calvary Connected

March 31, 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!

Pastor Scott Klimke

Cell-Phone: 570-367-3421

Email: sklimke6@gmail.com

Pastor Jonathan Adams

Cell-Phone: 412-817-6704

Email: revjonoadams@gmail.com

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 and click "Live Radio Broadcast" from the home page on Sunday mornings.

Weekly worship bulletins can be found at: www.mt-calvarylutheran.org/bulletins/

A Thank You from Pastor Jonathan Adams

A few weeks ago, we shared in worship that I will be undergoing heart surgery later this spring. I've been enormously grateful in the time since then for those who have offered their prayers, or even shared their own experiences with open heart surgery. But I'm also aware that some may have missed that announcement, or are still curious, and so I wanted to take just a bit of time to explain how we ended up where we are.

In elementary school, a heart murmur led to the diagnosis of a congenital heart defect called a bicuspid aortic valve. The aortic valve separates your heart's pumping chambers from the arteries that carry oxygenated blood throughout your body. A "normal" valve has three leaves or "cusps" that open and close to control the flow of blood, but I was born with only two. This means that the valve never completely seals when it closes, causing the heart to have to work a bit harder to maintain the same flow. Many people with this valve defect go well into adulthood without it being diagnosed, and often into their 60's or later before it needs replaced.

But along with that valve defect comes the risk of an aneurysm elsewhere in the aorta; it becomes larger and thinner over time and is eventually at risk of breaking open. When my valve defect was diagnosed, they also identified an aneurysm in the section of the aorta closest to the valve, and have watched it carefully ever since. Each year, my cardiologist performs a series of scans to measure any change or growth, waiting until a point in time where the risk of rupture has become too great.

We now know that this valve defect is hereditary on my mom's side. My mother, grandmother, and great aunt have all had the same congenital defect and have had surgery to repair it. My mom's was

actually undiagnosed until Labor Day several years ago when it partially ruptured, leading to a late night flight to Pittsburgh straight into emergency surgery.

That's exactly the sort of thing we're hoping to avoid. And after a series of appointments in February and March, my cardiologist and a cardiothoracic surgeon (the same one who performed surgery on both my mom and grandma) agree that given the current size of the aneurysm and my mother's experience with hers rupturing, that I'm at the point where surgery is prudent.

And so, in just about two months, I'll travel to UPMC Shadyside, where the damaged section of my ascending aorta will be removed and replaced with a synthetic material. I'll probably be hospitalized for about a week, and then need to recover at home for several more weeks after that. This will likely not be the last time I need heart surgery, but the surgeon is confident that this should keep me "good to go" for at least another 10-15 years.

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't anxious about the upcoming surgery and recovery. But at the same time, I've known this day would come for most of my life. I'm looking forward to having some resolution that will allow me to breathe easier for another decade or two. And as I already said, I am so grateful to go into it knowing that I'll have dozens of prayer warriors on my side among my family, friends, and both of the churches that I serve.

So again, from the bottom of my heart, thank you for your prayers and well wishes for me and my family; they mean more than you will ever know.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Jonathan

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.

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!

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.

Upcoming Meetings

Bible for Beginners: April 6th at 6:30 p.m.

Evangelism Committee: April 7th at 6:30 p.m.

Easter Egg Hunt: April 10th after Sunday worship service

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

All Parish Committee: April 12th at 6:30 p.m.

Bible for Beginners: April 13th at 6:30 p.m.

Good Friday Cross Walk: April 15th at noon

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

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

Social Ministry Committee: April 21st at 6:30 p.m.

Youth Committee: April 21st 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.

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.

2022 Offering Envelopes

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

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!

Annual Flea Market

May 7, 2022

Please no clothing or shoes at this time. Items must be dropped off at the church during office hours, Monday through Thursday between 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. Thank you!

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!

Scheduled Worship Help

Saturday, April 2:

Greeters/Ushers: Kevin & Chris Oleksa

Communion Assistants: Kierisa Alt Hockensmith & Levi Hockensmith

Sunday, April 3:

Greeters/Ushers: Joan Hunter & Carmen Landon Schellhammer

Communion Assistants: Noelle Berkey

Saturday, April 9:

Greeters/Ushers: Pat Bittner & Linda Barnhart

Communion Assistants: Deb Rychak & Joan Bunnell

Sunday, April 10:

Greeters/Ushers: Volunteers needed!

Communion Assistants: Volunteers needed!

Thursday, April 14:

Greeters/Ushers: Kevin & Chris Oleksa

Communion Assistants: Missy Brodt

Friday, April 15:

Greeters/Ushers: Kevin & Chris Oleksa

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.



Youth News

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 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), cellphone (412-817-6704), or Facebook.

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!

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.

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 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!

Afghan Blanket Drawing

Anita Brodt donated a beautiful afghan for our Good Gifts campaign. Chances are \$1.00. Since Anita is an educator, it would be wonderful if we could raise at least \$40 to send a girl to school in honor of Anita. The drawing will be held at the end of April.

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

**Birthdays and Anniversaries for the
Week: April 3 – April 9, 2022**

April 3 - Donald Bachota

April 9 - David Evans & Mattison Evans

April 4 - Craig & Brenda Kuyat (35 years)

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, 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, 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, Mabel Ann, Betty, Cathy, and Cindy.

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.

Condensed Worship for Sunday, March 27, 2022

Prayer of the Day

P: God of compassion, you welcome the wayward, and you embrace us all with your mercy. By our baptism clothe us with garments of your grace, and feed us at the table of your love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Joshua 5:9-12

The Lord said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt." And so that place is called Gilgal to this day. While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God!

Psalm 32

P: Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sin is put away!

A: Happy are they to whom the Lord imputes no guilt, and in whose spirit there is no guile!

P: While I held my tongue, my bones withered away, because of my groaning all day long.

A: For your hand was heavy upon me day and night; my moisture was dried up as in the heat of summer.

P: Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and did not conceal my guilt. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.

A: Therefore all the faithful will make their prayers to you in time of trouble; when the great waters overflow, they shall not reach them.

P: You are my hiding-place; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance.

A: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go; I will guide you with my eye.

P: Do not be like horse or mule, which have no understanding; who must be fitted with bit and bridle, or else they will not stay near you."

A: Great are the tribulations of the wicked; but mercy embraces those who trust in the Lord.

P: Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the Lord; shout for joy, all who are true of heart.

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God!

Gospel: Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to [Jesus.] And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

So he told them this parable: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

“Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with

me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.”

P: The gospel of the Lord.

A: Praise to you, O Christ!

Sermon by Pastor Jonathan Adams

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from Christ Jesus our Lord who welcomes us each with open arms and reminds us how much we are loved. Amen.

You know, I’m not old enough to have seen *The Brady Bunch* when it was new and hip. The last new episode aired more than fifteen years before I was born. But I still managed to watch it a lot when I growing up. Like many of you here, I could sing along to the theme song if it started playing right now, and I could probably even describe to you the plot of at least a handful of episodes, like the one where they’re on a family vacation and stop to visit a ghost town and somehow get locked in a jail by a guy looking for gold?

I don’t know... Maybe I don’t remember it as clearly as I thought.

But I do remember one thing plain as day: I can still vividly imagine Jan Brady’s chorus of “Marcia, Marcia, Marcia!” as she complained about the attention her older, prettier, more popular sister received. Does Marcia *really* deserve all the attention she gets?

We hear that same sort of tone in today’s gospel as the older brother complains about his younger, more reckless brother being welcomed back into the family. It seems obvious, at least in the older brother’s mind, who should be the one best loved by the father. You can practically picture Jan Brady standing there, rolling her eyes as the prodigal son is welcomed back with so much fanfare and celebration. Does the younger brother *really* deserve all the attention he gets?

Even the best of us have our Marcia moments, or rather, our moments where we’re jealous of the Marcia of the world. Times where we crave and covet the attention another person receives. What makes them so much better? Do they really deserve all the attention they get?

And the worst part of it all? The part that can drive us all a little crazy sometimes? Is that sometimes, every once and a while, the Marcia’s of the world are just lucky, and for whatever reason, they really don’t deserve the attention. They have good genes, or they’re in the right place at the right time.

Or maybe, as in the case of the prodigal son, they’re lucky enough to have a father who really loves them. Who truly, unendingly and unconditionally, and yes, sometimes undeservedly, loves them.

But for as much as the father loved the undeserving runaway brother, he also loved the loyal older brother. And, you see, it wasn’t that the father loved one son more than the other. He loved both of them unconditionally, like a parent should. And even though the younger son had run away, squandered his inheritance and even brought shame to his family, the father still loved him.

I can't imagine what it must be like to experience that kind of relationship, to be loved unconditionally regardless of whether I'm a sinner or saint.

We know it through our baptism... Dunked into the waters of baptism, we became truly part of the family of God. On that day, we were given a tangible symbol to remember, as God's unconditional love was poured over us in the form of something as simple as water. God has claimed us and given us his love, and regardless of whether we go out and squander all the gifts he has given us, or are jealous of one another, God still loves us, each one of us, independently of any individual's merit. And when we remember that love, when we come crawling back from whatever dark corner of the world we've wandered to, to remember our baptism, God eats that up.

And even better, as Christians, it is part of our calling to share that love with everyone we meet.

A while back, I discovered a "welcome statement" online from a church bulletin that really struck me. The note I saved with it says it was originally from a Roman Catholic church somewhere in Florida, but it seems that it has grown legs in the years since I first discovered it, with dozens of churches copying and adapting it for their own.

It begins: We extend a special welcome to those who are single, married, divorced, filthy rich, dirt poor, y no habla Ingles. We extend a special welcome to those who are crying new-borns, skinny as a rail or could afford to lose a few pounds.

We welcome you if you can sing like Andrea Bocelli or like our pastor who can't carry a note in a bucket. You're welcome here if you're "just browsing," just woke up or just got out of jail. We don't care if you're more Catholic than the Pope, or haven't been in church since little Joey's Baptism.

We extend a special welcome to those who are over 60 but not grown up yet, and to teenagers who are growing up too fast. We welcome soccer moms, NASCAR dads, starving artists, tree-huggers, latte-sippers, vegetarians, junk-food eaters. We welcome those who are in recovery or still addicted. We welcome you if you're having problems or you're down in the dumps or if you don't like "organized religion," we've been there too.

If you blew all your offering money at the dog track, you're welcome here. We offer a special welcome to those who think the earth is flat, work too hard, don't work, can't spell, or because grandma is in town and wanted to go to church.

We welcome those who are inked, pierced or both. We offer a special welcome to those who could use a prayer right now, had religion shoved down your throat as a kid or got lost in traffic and wound up here by mistake. We welcome tourists, seekers and doubters, bleeding hearts ... and you!

Chances are, you heard yourself mentioned in that list long before I go to the last word. And, chances are, you also heard folks mentioned that are far different from you, or anyone you know...

But just as all of these sorts of people are welcome in that particular church, all of them are also children of God. Children whom God loves. Children whom GOD would welcome with open arms. And I think the question as far as how to live our lives becomes how we respond to knowing that God loves

all those *other* people, too. Are we jealous, like Jan Brady? Like the older brother? Angry that God would love these other people?

Or, do we give thanks that God loves all those sorts of people? Do we swallow our pride, swallow our differences, and recognize that because God loves and welcomes all these other people, that God will ALWAYS love and welcome us?

Whoever first wrote that welcome statement understood the kind of compassion and love showed to the prodigal son by his father, and they aren't jealous. How great it is to appreciate God's love for us by turning around and sharing that love and compassion with others. Truly, the members of this church in Florida understand the kind of compassion showed to the prodigal son by his Father, and THEY aren't jealous.

So, regardless of whether you're a Marsha or a Jan, (and we all have moments where we're both) keep this in mind: high school boys may have preferred Marsha Brady to her younger sister, but to God, it makes no difference. There's no need to be jealous. Be thankful that the father welcomed the prodigal son. Because it means that God will always welcome you, too. 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: Jesus formed the disciples in the ways of extravagant mercy and profound welcome. Lead your church to be a community marked by forgiveness, hospitality, and celebration. Send us to transform a world plagued by fear and condemnation. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: You make the land to produce a harvest that sustains your entire creation. Equip farmers and farm workers who till the soil. Nourish the earth with ample rainfall and abundant sunshine. Heal grounds tainted by pollution or misuse. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: Countries are divided and leaders often harbor grudges. Reconcile nations that experience conflict (especially). Act quickly to bring an end to war. Anoint peacemakers trained in the art of diplomacy and foster a spirit of collaboration among political rivals. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: Your people cry for help in times of distress. Resolve disagreements among family members. Save those experiencing financial hardship. Hear our prayers for those who are sick or grieving (especially). Console us with the promise that everything can become new. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: Your love comes to us when a table is set and a feast is prepared. Bless the feeding ministries of this congregation (especially). Bring an end to hunger in our community and around the world. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: The one who was dead is alive again. We give thanks for those who have died, confident that steadfast love surrounds them. Shelter them in your love until we are gathered at your heavenly banquet. 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: Now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of salvation. Holy God, speaking, spoken, and inspiring, ✠ bless you, unbind you, and send you in love and in peace. **Amen.**