



Mount Calvary Connected

August 4, 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 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 Message from Pastor Jonathan

I'm back!

This week has been my first "back in the saddle" at both Mount Calvary and Benscreek after the summer's adventures with heart surgery. It has been a wild ride, but other than working on rebuilding some strength through cardiac rehab, I feel the healthiest I have in years! I'm ready to hit the ground running as we look toward the Fall! But first, a thank you...

Some of you may have heard me say this in the past, or read it on my Facebook. But one of my favorite moments in all of American film is the very beginning of the Jimmy Stewart classic, "It's a Wonderful Life." You hear the voices of various residents of Bedford Falls praying for Jimmy Stewart's character George Bailey, and then the angels, "We'll have to send someone down. There's a lot of people asking for help for a man named George Bailey."

I think the first time that scene really struck wasn't even when I was watching the movie, but rather when my brother's first daughter was born premature and admitted to the NICU. I knew that there were so many people praying for their family, and I couldn't help but think, "Surely, God and the angels must take notice." And right or wrong, I've carried that thought with me. Certainly, God hears every prayer, and there are not people whose prayers or heard first or louder. But when so many people pray at the same time for the same person, surely, God might take notice.

And when my wife Bekah and I walked into Shadyside Hospital on the morning of Friday, June 3 to be checked in for my surgery, that thought gave me a strong sense of peace. I knew that there were so

many people among my family, my neighbors, both churches, and beyond, that were praying for me, and I knew that God was on my side.

So... Thank you. Thank you to everyone who took a moment to pray for me and my family in these past few months. Thank you to everyone who prepared meals or gave generous gifts. Thank you to everyone who took the time to sign and address a "Get Well" card. The noticeable uptick in greeting card envelopes even caused our mailman to check in one day to ask what was going on and if we needed anything. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

And as we change gears, ready to hit the ground running, thank you also to everyone who sent me pictures of their "Flat Jesus" going on adventures this summer. There's still time to send them in, and as we get into September, I'll be printing them out to decorate a bulletin board at church, and creating a slideshow to share in worship and online. It has truly been inspiring to see people bringing their faith out into the world.

I'm also very much looking forward to reconnecting with our younger families on Saturday, August 20th for ice cream(!) after the Saturday night service, and we're building steam to kick off another year of Sunday School on September 11th.

There's more information about some of those things further down in today's publication, and you'll see more in the coming weeks both online and in worship.

In so many ways, this summer's surgeries have given me a new lease on life, and I'm excited to continue to build our ministry partnership here at Mount Calvary.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Jonathan

Upcoming Meetings

All Parish/Evangelism Committee: August 4th at 6:30 p.m.

Property Committee: August 9th at 6:00 p.m.

Social Ministry Committee: August 11th at 6:30 p.m.

WELCA: August 15th at 6:00 p.m.

Church Council: August 16th at 6:30 p.m.

Bible Study on Psalms: August 17th at 6:30 p.m.

Bible Study on Psalms: August 31st 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.

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!

Get Well Cards for Pastor Jonathan

Cards can be mailed to:

Pastor Jonathan Adams
219 Ohio Street
Boswell, PA 15531

If you'd like to send a meal to Pastor Jonathan & his family to help during his recovery, visit the Meal Train website: <https://www.mealtrain.com/trains/n15v0q> Thank you!

Backyard Ministries Summer Club Volunteer Opportunity

For the past 5 years, members of Mt. Calvary have been volunteering their time one day a week, for one hour to spend with the children of Coopersdale during the summer months. We have a core of about 5 people, but when one or more can't show up on a certain week, it makes things more difficult.

If you want to make a difference in underprivileged children's lives and share the word of God with them, then please consider this opportunity! All you need to do is show up. We already have games and activities, as well as the Bible lesson to share each week. If you are interested, or would like more information on this rewarding experience, please contact Mike Kozak at 244-6880. Thank you!

Giving Tree

For the months of July and August, the Giving Tree will be used to collect \$5 donations for the Jared Box Project. This is a charity that helps brighten the spirits of children in our local hospitals. The money collected will be used to purchase a small bag of activities for each child. The bags will be packed and delivered on God's Work, Our Hands Saturday, September 10th. Thank you for your continued support!

Computer & Internet Connection Now Available

Members may use the computer in the library during office hours: Monday – Thursday 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Scheduled Worship Help

Saturday, August 6:

Greeters/Ushers: Volunteers needed!

Communion Assistants: Debbie Ferrin & Pat Bittner

Sunday, August 7:

Greeters/Ushers: Noelle Berkey (one needed!)

Communion Assistants: Todd Moss

Saturday, August 13:

Greeters/Ushers: Volunteers needed!

Communion Assistants: Pat Bittner & Joan Bunnell

Sunday, August 14:

Greeters/Ushers: Volunteers needed!

Communion Assistants: Ray Leverknight

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

Mt. Calvary's Adventures of "Flat Jesus": This summer, Pastor Jono Adams invites you to adopt "Flat Jesus" and take him on your summer adventures! Please see the additional information below or visit Mt. Calvary's website.

Pastor Jono's Sunday school class, and the nursery/childcare has concluded for the summer. We look forward to seeing you all later this year!

Youth/Family Ministry Ice Cream Event: August 20th after the 5:30 p.m. service

Lutheran Day @ the Curve: Sunday, August 21st @ the Curve Baseball Field in Altoona

IGNITE - Elementary Youth Retreat (Grades 2 - 6): September 24-25 @ Camp Sequanota

PLUNGE - Jr. High Retreat (Grades 6 -9): October 1-2 @ Camp Sequanota

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.

Mt. Calvary's Adventures of "Flat Jesus"

This summer, Pastor Jono Adams invites you to adopt "Flat Jesus" and take him on your summer adventures!

"Flat Jesus" was inspired by a children's book by Jeff Brown called, "Flat Stanley." In the book, a boy named Stanley becomes flattened and is able to be mailed to different places, having all kinds of exciting adventures.

"Flat Jesus" is a way to keep our church family connected as we enter into the summer traveling season. Bring home a "Flat Jesus" and take him with you as you travel...or to whatever you do this summer. Take a picture of him doing lots of different things: going out to dinner, having fun at the beach or the mountains, hanging out with friends or cousins, or whatever you are doing! It will be an amazing adventure! It is a great way to remember that Jesus is always with us, wherever we go. And it just might start up a conversation with someone about what you are doing...and why!

AND THEN... SHARE HOW JESUS IS ON THE MOVE!

When you have taken photos of "Flat Jesus," you can share your "Flat Jesus" pictures:

1. By emailing photos to RevJonoAdams@gmail.com or texting them to 412-817-6704.
2. By uploading your picture directly to Facebook. Tag Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church of Johnstown, PA. Add the hashtag #flatJesus and/or #jesusisonthemove

It will be so exciting to see where Jesus is on the move this summer as you share your adventures! And remember, Jesus is with you ALWAYS!

We'd LOVE to see at least one "Flat Jesus" photo from every family in church. And if we get enough, we'll combine them into a video at the end of the summer!

If you won't make it to church to pick up a printed "Flat Jesus," but still want to participate, you can download and print your own by visiting Mt. Calvary's website: <https://www.mt-calvarylutheran.org/mt-calvarys-adventures-of-flat-jesus/>

Flat Jesus has been to a LOT of different places this summer with a LOT of different people! But there's still time to take your faith (and Flat Jesus) with you on those last-minute end-of-summer trips!

Make sure to send your pictures to Pastor Jono via email at RevJonoAdams@gmail.com or cellphone at 412-817-6704. All pictures received will be printed to go on a bulletin board at church and shown in a video!

Youth & Family Ministry Ice Cream Event

Summer is ALMOST over, but NOT YET! Join us after the Saturday night 5:30 p.m. worship service on August 20th for an ice cream social for Mount Calvary youth and their families. Welcome back Pastor Jono and all of our friends who've been away these last few months. We'll even have popsicles for our lactose intolerant friends!

RSVPs for "ice cream eaters" are GREATLY appreciated, (who wants to run out of ice cream?!?!) and we'd love to have a few "ice cream helpers" who can help with set-up, tear-down, and serving. Let us

know you're coming (or helping) on Signup Genius at: <https://rebrand.ly/SummerIceCream22>

Walk Thru Basket Party

We are having a Walk Thru Basket Party on September 24th (10-2pm) and September 25th (9-2pm). Tickets are \$5 for 26 chances. Winners will be drawn on Facebook Live at 2:30pm on September 25th and contacted via phone/email.

We are asking for your support of the event with the following: purchase tickets, filled baskets, gift certificates, or cash. Tickets will be on sale before and after church services.

Touch a Truck!

Saturday, September 10th from 10-2 p.m.

There will be all types of vehicles to explore, including fire, police, rescue, and commercial trucks. Snacks and drinks will be provided. There will be a special appearance by Po Poore!

Clothing Sale

The Social Ministry Team will be having their annual clothing sale on Saturday October 8th. We now have a storage area downstairs at the church that allows us to start collecting items earlier. If you have any clothes you would like to donate, please bag them by size and gender. This makes it easier during the sorting process. You can drop the clothes off at any time. If the church is locked, and no one is available in the office, please leave them by the blue bin outside. It will be checked daily. If you have any questions, please contact Mike Kozak at 244-6880. Thank you!

Boscov's "Friends Helping Friends" Shopping Passes

WELCA is selling Boscov's "Friends Helping Friends" discount shopping passes again this year. Your \$5.00 donation entitles you to a shopping pass to Boscov's on October 19th, giving you a 25% discount on most purchases. Proceeds benefit WELCA's many activities throughout the year. Let any WELCA member know you'd like to purchase a pass or watch for someone selling them in the Narthex after services.

14-Day Biblical Pilgrimage Adventure to Israel

Jerusalem Seminary in Conjunction with Redstone Presbytery and Friends

October 15 to 28, 2022

Please see email sent May 31st for trip information, including the itinerary, or visit:

<http://redstonepresbytery.org/>

Lutheran Disaster Response: U.S. Flooding

Beginning on July 27th, a line of severe storms dumped record amounts of rain on eastern Kentucky, overflowing rivers and creeks onto streets and neighborhoods. The death toll in Kentucky is expected to rise as search and rescue efforts continue. The number of people missing is still unknown. Rising waters are damaging infrastructure, including roads, bridges and power lines, which hinders rescue efforts.

The flooding has destroyed hundreds of homes and other buildings and left families with nothing. These severe floods are not limited to Kentucky; there has been flooding in Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, West Virginia and other states in the region.

As the waters recede and the full scope of the damage is assessed, Lutheran Disaster Response will work with the Indiana-Kentucky Synod and local communities to focus on long-term needs. We anticipate that the response will include rebuilding homes, replacing lost household items, and providing emotional and spiritual care to survivors.

Please consider donating to this cause. Gifts to "U.S. flooding" will be used in full (100%) to assist those affected by floods.

Give now for Eastern Europe Crisis Response

On February 24th, Russian forces invaded Ukraine, launching land, sea, and air attacks. Airports are now shut, and few railway lines are operational. Civilians fleeing the violence are heading toward Ukraine's western districts and such neighboring countries as Poland, Moldova, Slovakia, Romania, and Hungary. Millions of people are seeking refuge in neighboring countries. There are major humanitarian concerns for both internally displaced people and refugees. Many of these Ukrainians fleeing their homes need shelter, basic necessities, and pastoral care.

Lutheran Disaster Response is accompanying our companions in Ukraine, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, and Moldova, as well as such ecumenical partners as Lutheran World Federation and Church World Service, in their humanitarian responses to the crisis. These partners provide refugees with immediate support and supplies such as food, blankets, water, and hygiene kits.

Your gifts designated for "Eastern Europe Crisis Response" will be used entirely (100%) to provide support for people impacted by conflict in the region.

Birthdays and Anniversaries for the Week: August 7 – August 13, 2022

Aug. 8 - Thomas Hockensmith & Michael Zerby, Jr.

Aug. 9 - John Daily, Jr., Jacob Gusmenotti, Corey Katrancha, & Delores Locher

Aug. 11 - Krystiana Given & Caleb Hockensmith

Aug. 12 - Davanee Anderson, Philip Bryant, Jr., James Custer, Ashlyn Kobal, & Kaia Selepack

Aug. 13 - Beth Esposita

Aug. 8 - Frank & Nancy Robison (58 years)

Aug. 11 - Julian & Felicia Beglin (21 years)

Aug. 13 - Stanley & Lucille Badowski (24 years)

Remember those that prayer has been requested for:

Linda & Dick, Claudia Plows, Maddie Pierce, Gladys Haupt, Bill & Linda, Jose & Family, Dave, Tom, Lt. Hunter Bergman, and Lt. Dylan Merchant, Harold, Rick, Shirley, Debbie, David, Lauren, Billy, Barb, Sara Solarczyk, Jackie Janak, Jack, Corinne, Joan, Dan, Natalie Zerby, Pastor Scott Custead, Luella Koontz, Al Lindner & Family, Bob, Dawn, Stacy & Josh, Bob Trotter, Bill Layton, Deb Zilch, Bennett, Cassy Sojak, Paul Miller, Keith Mayket, Ruth, Pete, Teplitz Family, Ken, John Nerone, Dane Wisner, Jeff, Irene, Karen, Erin, Susan Dyers, Bob McMullen, Wyatt George, Larry Hockensmith, Jean Pellon, Mike, Corey,

Pastor Jonathan & Family, Roxanne Horner, Miriam Horner, Becky Lilja, Kathy P., Al Johnson, Chris, Donna & Danny, Cheryl, Jennifer & Family, Jaime, Matt & Ashley, Landon, Max Lawn, Linda Haberkorn, Lorraine, Joe, Donna, Danny & Family, Becky Jo, Bill, Linda & Family, Mary, Mary Jane, Janice, Dennis, Rick, Don, Mabel Ann, Betty, Cathy, Cindy, Jill, Theresa & Family, Dean, Madi & Family, Patty & Family, Sydney & Family, Paulette, Ron, Andrea, Mary Ann, Midge, Rayford, Lois A., Nicole, Trent, Kyle, Anna, Beverly, Sondra, E. Warshel, Audrey Rubis, Carol, Katey, Janice, Trina & Family, Jake Wissinger, Candi Walker, Dave Brehm, Chrissy-Baby Emma, Wyatt, Gerald Barrick, the Shreffler Family, Louise, Kim, Devin, Laura & family, & Dorothy.

Financial Update

When the council reviewed financial reports through the end of June on Tuesday, things were largely as they've been for some time. There's stability at Mount Calvary. Even with the volatility affecting the savings and investments of so many, our overall holdings are up a tad from a year ago. Income is over budget and expenses are under budget.

The biggest danger before us is not to fall into a false sense of security. The pandemic threw not just Mount Calvary, but much of the Church into neutral for what has been over two years now. Every minute in neutral is a minute lost and as the minutes add up so do the losses. It's why inviting and welcoming without interruption and maintaining or increasing giving when possible are important.

They stave off the losses that are inevitable even when it's full steam ahead and are now more important than ever since things haven't been full steam ahead for some time.

Condensed Worship for Sunday, July 31, 2022

Prayer of the Day

P: Benevolent God, you are the source, the guide, and the goal of our lives. Teach us to love what is worth loving, to reject what is offensive to you, and to treasure what is precious in your sight, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23

Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

I, the Teacher, when king over Israel in Jerusalem, applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to human beings to be busy with. I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind.

I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me—and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish? Yet they will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. So I turned and gave my heart up to despair concerning all the toil of my labors under the sun, because sometimes one who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by another who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. What do mortals get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun? For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest. This also is vanity.

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God!

Psalm 49:1-12

P: Hear this, all you peoples; give ear, all you who dwell in the world,

A: you of high degree and low, rich and poor together.

P: My mouth shall speak of wisdom, and my heart shall meditate on understanding.

A: I will incline my ear to a proverb and set forth my riddle upon the harp.

P: Why should I be afraid in evil days, when the wickedness of those at my heels surrounds me,

A: the wickedness of those who put their trust in their own prowess, and boast of their great riches?

P: One can never redeem another, or give to God the ransom for another's life;

A: for the ransom of a life is so great that there would never be enough to pay it,

P: in order to live forever and ever and never see the grave.

A: For we see that the wise die also; like the dull and stupid they perish and leave their wealth to those who come after them.

P: Their graves shall be their homes forever, their dwelling places from generation to generation, though they had named lands after themselves.

A: Even though honored, they cannot live forever; they are like the beasts that perish.

Second Reading: Colossians 3:1-11

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God!

Gospel: Luke 12:13-21

Someone in the crowd said to [Jesus,] "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And

the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

P: The gospel of the Lord.

A: Praise to you, O Christ!

Sermon by Pastor Scott Klimke

Today, in our reading from Colossians, we meet a classic pair in the Christian tradition. In life, some pairs complement one another. Think sugar and spice. But there are also pairs which do not complement. Think oil and water or cats and dogs. The pair we have in our reading from Colossians is of this latter type. It’s a pair which doesn’t mix. It’s the pair in the Christian tradition called the old self and the new self.

According to our reading from Colossians, the old self has been buried with Christ; drowned to death by the waters of baptism. As for the new self, our reading from Colossians says it’s been raised with Christ out of baptism’s underwater tomb by the same Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead—the Holy Spirit who give us faith. It’s a classic pairing—old self and new self. We can also think of it as sinner and saint.

Now even though sinner and saint or old self and new self aren’t at all complementary, Luther used to say we are these two things simultaneously. It was his way of saying the old self doesn’t die without putting up a lifelong fight, even as the new self is here to stay thanks to God’s grace. Our reading from Colossians says much the same when for verses it exhorts us to live lives consistent with the new self we receive through baptism and the Holy Spirit’s gift of faith. If the old self were already dead as a doornail, this simply wouldn’t be necessary. But it is necessary and all the moral and ethical exhortation we find in Scripture tells us so.

If we’re going to be realistic, we have to concede that lifelong sinners like us don’t get to be as good as new overnight. Often, we have to be put through the wringer before we get even just a little bit better. And if the goal isn’t just better, but as good as new, it’s probably going to take a lot of trips through the wringer before the promise of our baptism is fulfilled in a new self. It’s why Christianity has another pair, this time a complementary pair, called law and gospel.

Law and gospel is the wringer God runs us through so that fear might be wrung out of our lives and faith in God and love for neighbor wrung into our lives. This is a wringer that gets a lot of use since the old self baptism buries does put up a lifelong fight. As clothes grow dirty and in need of washing, so do we backslide in our faith; slip sliding away from new self to old self. When this happens, on goes God’s wringer again; cycling us through law and gospel once more just as dirty clothes so often cycle through water and a capful of Tide. Using the wringer of law and gospel to do so, God is so anxious for us to be as good as new that Luther held every sincere and honest encounter with Scripture is an encounter with law and gospel.

If the language of law and gospel is unfamiliar, think bad news and good news. Think wrath and grace. Think judgment and amnesty. When God speaks law, we’re damned far beyond the hope of any kind of personal repair. When God speaks law, we’re back to being our old self when no hope of being any other self. But when God speaks gospel, back comes the new self. Gospel lifts the punishment of our

well-earned damnation and finds God completing the repair we can't complete ourselves—giving birth to the new self. This is law and gospel. The law leaves us shaking in our boots. The gospel soothes our bitter woes. The law takes the wind and the life right out of us. The gospel breathes it back in. Going through the wringer of law and gospel is liking riding the most frightening, but also most exhilarating roller coaster you can imagine. And if the old self is to give way to the new self, we do need to be put through the wringer of law and gospel.

By way of example, many, many years later I still vividly remember being out for a bike ride with my sister. Outside the home of our neighbors Orville and Ada Hauk I wiped out. With my head banging into a roadway or sidewalk, I don't remember which, I uttered a profanity—a word that my parents and elders never used in my hearing. Like you'd expect a little sister to do, Amy reacted with an apparent desire to get me in trouble. She didn't stick around to see if I was alright. She rode straight home where I feared she was repeating the naughty word which had traveled out of my mouth. Even though I was cut and bleeding, I avoided going home for as long as I could. I feared the worst. With the word I had uttered quite unsavory, maybe my father's belt awaited me. Maybe I'd be grounded for life, forced to dry dishes forever, or made to eat boatloads of the butternut squash my family loved, but I abhorred and detested.

And yet as I feared the worst, knowing I had set myself up for punishment, sooner or later I had to go home and I did. I entered the back door of the home at 711 Florida Avenue in the village of North Fond du Lac, Wisconsin expecting wrath; law; punishment. There was only gospel; grace; forgiveness. My kid sister Amy was growing up. Amy had not been a tattletale. She hadn't spilled the beans. There was no belt, no grounding, no KP duty for life, and thank goodness no endless supply of butternut squash. There was instead gospel and it left me that much more ready to hang out with my sister Amy again. This is what the wringer of law and gospel does. Having been damned and forgiven, buried and raised, paid in full and let off the hook, a new self comes forth; a new self much more appreciative of God; a new self far more ready to live in relationship with God; a new self inspired to sing God's praises and to serve God through the love of neighbor. And believe me the wringer of law and gospel is present in today's readings from Scripture.

The law we hear today is that we aren't very aware of our circumstances and surroundings. When I walk our dog Hope, she's aware of every rabbit, every chipmunk, every cat, every dog, every deer, every candy wrapper, every moving leaf. Before I'm aware of what's going on, Hope pulls away at her leash and collar; leaving one or more of the muscles in my left arm perpetually tender. We humans aren't like this. As the author of Ecclesiastes did, we can spend a lifetime avoiding the writing on the wall; only to discover as today's reading from Ecclesiastes attests that it's all vanity. We're caught in a trap and we can't walk out. We got to get out of this place if it's the last thing we ever do, but we won't ever do it. The truth is that left to our own devices we are born as much to die as we are born to live. We can have the world by the tail one day only to have the world turn around and eat us for lunch the next. It's what happened to the farmer in the parable Jesus tells today. One minute he had more than he had previously imagined he ever could have. The next minute it was all gone and he had nothing forever and ever. This is us. We're not very aware of our surroundings and our circumstances. We can lose track of things in a hurry; including what I'd call the brass tacks of life. But as we're oblivious and unaware, God is clear-sighted and aware. This is the gospel today.

The book of Romans tells us that absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus; including those times when we at our most oblivious and unaware. In his own way, the author of Ecclesiastes knew this too. Unable to walk out of the trap into which we're born, unable to get out of this place if it's the last thing he ever did, the author of Ecclesiastes concluded it was best to be done with all the vanity and fear God instead. If we were ever going to make it past the grave and all of our other limitations, God was going to have to pull it off; as God has now forever done through the gift of Christ crucified and risen and the Holy Spirit's equally important gift of faith. This is law and gospel. We're oblivious and unaware; wasting our lives on that which won't make a difference in the end. God is clear-sighted and aware, with absolutely nothing able to separate us from his love in Christ Jesus. And so, having been put through the wringer of law and gospel again today, let's do this for a while! Let's relax. Let's eat. Let's drink. Let's be merry. Not because we've built bigger barns, but because God has covered the bases we so often leave uncovered through our ever forgetful, often oblivious, frequently unaware lives. And then, after we've celebrated God's victory in Jesus and the Holy Spirit's gift of faith, let's turn over a new leaf like a new self would. Let's say thank you to God by using God's gifts of time, talent, and treasure as proof for others that they also can never, ever, ever be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Amen!

Prayers of Intercession

P: Trusting in God's extraordinary love, let us come near to the Holy One in prayer.

P: O God, you are wholeness. Where there is division in your church, bring reconciliation and healing. Guide the work of theologians, Sunday school teachers, seminary professors, and all who provide instruction for the building up of your church. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: O God, you are the source of all life. Where creation cries out in distress, bring relief and renewal. Bless farmers, ranchers, distributors, and all who provide our food. Nourish the land and all its habitants. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: O God, you are wisdom. Where nations and communities yearn for peace, bring justice. Strengthen those who toil for the welfare of others, especially military personnel, police, first responders, and activists, and for the healing of the nations. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: O God, you are life. Where your people are overwhelmed with the busy-ness of life, bring encouragement. Accompany all who experience emotional, mental, or physical distress (especially). Renew us at your table of mercy. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: O God, you are our treasure. Where scarcity and anxiety pervade your church, bring abundance and vitality. Guide the work of church councils and committees and give them clarity for the work of ministry in this place (specific ministries may be named). Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: O God, you are resurrection. We give you thanks for all your saints (especially). Inspire us by their example of faithful living to set our minds on things above and to be rich in love toward you. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: Receive the prayers of your children, merciful God, and hold us forever in your steadfast love; through Jesus Christ, our holy Wisdom.

A: Amen.

Blessing

P: May God, whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine, grant you the gifts of faith and hope. Almighty God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever.

Amen.