



Mount Calvary Connected

August 18, 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 Scott

"It is far, far better and much safer to have a firm anchor in nonsense than to put out on the troubled seas of thought,"

- John Kenneth Galbraith, "The Affluent Society," 40th anniversary edition (1998).

I ran across the above quotation this week. It was too good not to share with you. The idea that it's easier to invest in fantasies and conspiracy theories than it is to pursue the truth certainly speaks a salient word to our society at the present moment. Almost daily it seems our lives are bombarded with what discerning and discriminating minds would quickly call nonsense. But somehow anything passes for truth these days.

Close to six years ago, Democrats were furious with the FBI because it reopened an investigation weeks before the general election. Six years later, now it's people on the other side of the aisle who are angry with the FBI. Might it be that the FBI is less partisan than it's made out to be? Also, in the wake of the 2016 election, it was Democrats who were crying foul; blaming a foreign country that still hasn't figured out how defeat the outmanned, outgunned nation of Ukraine for their loss of the White House. Now, for going on two years, it's been the other party crying foul; this time blaming computers that ring up our groceries and pay our bills just fine but evidently are less accurate on election day. How can the irony of this be lost on so many people? Why does that which doesn't pass even the most basic of credibility tests continue to persist as gospel? John Kenneth Galbraith must have been on to something when he wrote, "It is far, far better and much safer to have a firm anchor in nonsense than to put out on the troubled seas of thought."

Unfortunately, Mr. Galbreath's insight can apply to church people as much as it can to anyone else. In the gospels, Jesus finds it necessary to say to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things, but on human things," (Matthew 16:23). Earlier in the story, we learn that Satan is an inventor of fantasies and falsehood who erroneously claims this isn't our Father's world and who just as misleadingly suggests Scripture promises God will rescue those reckless enough to throw themselves off a tall building, (Matthew 4:1-11). With Peter being a case in point, it couldn't be clearer that, like everyone else, church people, too, can find it far, far better and much safer to have a firm anchor in nonsense than to put out on the troubled seas of thought.

I'd suggest we become like Peter, putting our mind not on divine things, but on human things, when we trust ourselves more than we trust God and those God has placed in our lives for our benefit. In failing to trust Jesus, Peter wasn't just failing to trust God. He was at the same time failing to trust a flesh and blood human being who God had very deliberately placed in his life. It sure does seem we become mired and anchored in nonsense when we fail to trust God and those God has placed in our lives for our benefit. If the truth is ever going to emerge, distrust has to give way to trust.

When we fail to trust one another, we fail to ask questions, as we also fail to listen to what we hear in return. Let's not let this happen at Mount Calvary Lutheran Church. As society at large is pointing fingers at one another and assuming the worst without any dialogue or due diligence of the facts, let's be in open and honest conversation with one another. It's the only way I know how to communicate. I may not always be able to share everything, but I will share what I can. I may not always change my mind, but you can count on an honest hearing and evaluation. Should we remain in open dialogue with one another, I think we'll find this to be true for most people. After all, the Holy Spirit who gives us faith is the Spirit of truth, (John 14:17). It just goes to show that it's only when we quench the Spirit and let faith give way to fear that we find it far, far better and much safer to have a firm anchor in nonsense than to put out on the troubled seas of thought.

Your Sibling in the Way, the Truth, and the Life,
Pastor Scott

Upcoming Meetings

Bible Study on Psalms: August 31st at 6:30 p.m.

Property Committee: September 13th at 6:00 p.m.

WELCA: September 19th at 6:00 p.m.

Church Council: September 20th 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!

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.

Usher Teams

We are looking to recruit teams of ushers staffed with at least four people. Each group will be assigned to Saturdays or Sundays and a month which works for them. Once the day and month have been arranged, it will be up to the people on the team to determine who will be taking the various weeks in the assigned month. Please be in contact with Pastor Scott should you wish to become a part of a team or have already recruited a time of four.

Scheduled Worship Help

Saturday, August 20:

Greeters/Ushers: Volunteers needed!

Communion Assistants: Volunteers needed!

Sunday, August 21:

Greeters/Ushers: David Raho

Communion Assistants: Volunteers needed!

Saturday, August 27:

Greeters/Ushers: Pat Bittner & Linda Barnhart

Communion Assistants: Missy Brodt & Cindy Solarczyk

Sunday, August 28:

Greeters/Ushers: Volunteers needed!

Communion Assistants: Todd Moss & Noelle Berkey

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.



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>

God's Work, Our Hands

Mt. Calvary will be participating in God's Work, Our Hands Sunday this year by packing bags for the Jared Box Project. Instead of Sunday, we will be packing the bags on Saturday, September 10th after the 5:30 p.m. service. This will allow for both Pastor Scott and Pastor Jonathan to be able to attend. A light dinner will be served, and all are welcome. We hope to see you there!

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!

Pond Cleaning/Weeding Event

The Property Committee will be hosting a pond clean out/weeding on Thursday, September 15th at 6:00 p.m. Bring your favorite tools!

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.

Annual Clothing Sale

The Social Ministry Team will be having their annual clothing sale on Saturday, October 8th from 9-1 p.m. 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!

Bosco's "Friends Helping Friends" Shopping Passes

WELCA is selling Bosco's "Friends Helping Friends" discount shopping passes again this year. Your \$5.00 donation entitles you to a shopping pass to Bosco'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.

Updates from Our Members & Community

Pastor Scott will not be in on Friday, August 19th.

Birthdays and Anniversaries for the Week: August 21 – August 27, 2022

Aug. 22 - Kaitlyn Horvath & Samantha Wilson

Aug. 23 - Benjamin Hiltz

Aug. 24 - James Ivory, Stanley McQuaide, Donald Osborn, & Pamela Verostick

Aug. 25 - Cynthia Colvin, Jennifer Hershberger, John Kist, Albert Roth, Deborah Rychak, & Michele Stephenson

Aug. 22 - Brian & Deborah Wechtenhiser (41 years)

Aug. 23 - Robert & Kimberly McMullen (36 years)

Aug. 26 - William & Cara Lonsinger (27 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, Terrie, Jo Ann, John Alt, & Jan Mertz.

Financial Update

When your elected leaders reviewed financial reports through the end of July at this week's council meeting, there was once again stability. Even with great decline in the markets, the overall holdings of the congregation are up from where they were a year ago. Receipts are ahead of last year and ahead of budget. Just as positively, expenses are down from where they were a year ago and running under budget. This is all incredibly positive. We just need to avoid complacency. People come and go and it happens more often than usual in Johnstown. We need to be inviting and welcoming to overcome their absence. We also need to be increasing our giving when possible to offset the losses not covered by the addition of new faces and families. Thanks a bundle for your support!

Condensed Worship for Sunday, August 14, 2022**Prayer of the Day**

P: O God, judge eternal, you love justice and hate oppression, and you call us to share your zeal for truth. Give us courage to take our stand with all victims of bloodshed and greed, and, following your servants and prophets, to look to the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: Jeremiah 23:23-29

Am I a God near by, says the Lord, and not a God far off? Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord. I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, "I have dreamed, I have dreamed!" How long? Will the hearts of the prophets ever turn back—those who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart? They plan to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, just as their ancestors forgot my name for Baal. Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let the one who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? says the Lord. Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God!

Psalm 82

P: God stands to charge the divine council assembled, giving judgment in the midst of the gods:

A: “How long will you judge unjustly, and show favor to the wicked?

P: Save the weak and the orphan; defend the humble and needy;

A: rescue the weak and the poor; deliver them from the power of the wicked.

P: They do not know, neither do they understand; they wander about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken.

A: Now I say to you, ‘You are gods, and all of you children of the Most High;

P: nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, and fall like any prince.”

A: Arise, O God, and rule the earth, for you shall take all nations for your own.

Second Reading: Hebrews 11:29-12:2

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace. And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God!

Gospel: Luke 12:49-56

[Jesus said:] “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” He also said to the crowds,

“When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, ‘It is going to rain’; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat’; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?”

P: The gospel of the Lord.

A: Praise to you, O Christ!

Sermon by Pastor Scott Klimke

I was at PNC Park on Thursday night. It was a great night to be outside. It was also great to be with forty-thousand other people the papers tell me. I haven’t been around so much joy in a long time. Billy Joel was in prime voice and had a multigenerational crowd in the palm of his hand throughout a great concert. Again, I haven’t been around so much joy for a long time.

One reason everyone was so excited was likely due the familiarity of it all. Early in the show, Billy Joel said, “I don’t have anything new. Just the same old stuff.” It’s true. There’s been no new album or collection of songs since 1993, but what was recorded in the little over twenty years before then was very good. People have come to love Billy Joel’s music and they know it by heart. This was the sing-a-long of all sing-a-longs. Normally it takes a crowd some time to warm up. Not Thursday night. The stadium was awash in cell phones turned to flashlight when just four songs in Billy Joel began to sing, “I love you just the way you are.” Throughout the night, it became pretty clear that people needed a break. All that’s been different and disturbing in recent years seems to have worn people down. Folks needed a good healthy dose of the familiar; a reprieve from a world of change. They got it. To quote one of Billy Joel’s biggest hits, one of the reasons we go to a concert is “to forget about life for a while.”

We all need these kinds of breaks. We all need rest. We all need refreshment and the opportunity to recharge and recollect. God knows this. On the seventh day of biblical history, God rested. If even almighty God needs rest, we most certainly need it more. Wanting to register this point unmistakably, God eventually commanded us to remember the Sabbath and to keep it holy. Gatherings like the one I attended on Thursday night are good. They provide the opportunity to get away from it all and to rediscover the joy of living anew. But as good as unbroken moments of the familiar are, we don’t want to turn rest into an idol.

This can happen. We can come to prize rest, unbroken moments of the familiar, so much that we can become change-averse; work-averse; challenge-averse. This won’t do if God is on the move more often than at rest and Scripture does describe God as one who neither slumbers, nor sleeps. As God rests on the seventh day, God works the six days before. When we try to bury God on Good Friday, doing our best to slow down God forever, God breaks free of the tomb of our construction and keeps moving. As our reading from Jeremiah says, God can and will bring the hammer; in the process interrupting our unfaithful desire and tendency to rest in the familiar too often and for too long. And when it’s not the hammer, there’s the fire and division that Jesus brings in our reading from Luke. And so, we need rest, we need Sabbath, we need unbroken moments of the familiar, but not too much. Six days out of seven we’ve got work to do.

And what is this work? Most generally it's the work of God which to become our work and passion. More specifically, it's the work of including those who are still looking in from the outside. If you want to know what God's program for us is, look no further than our psalm. The work of God which is to become our work is to save the weak and the orphan; to defend the humble and the needy; to rescue the weak and the poor. Make no mistake about it! This is the work of God which is to become and remain our work. Working for positive change and progress more than we rest, we are to include those who haven't been included yet. And I suppose this is another reason Thursday evening's concert was so joyful.

The bottom line is that Billy Joel's songs are so varied in style and content that sooner or later you're going to be included. On Thursday night, it was a joy to see women all over the stadium hugging and singing along to the song "She's always a Woman." On Thursday night, it was a joy to see people old enough to be my parents up on their feet dancing and carrying on when Billy Joel turned to music owing a lot to the doo-wop of ages past. On Thursday night, it was a joy to see people of more than one color playing instruments which wouldn't have been played as they were if our country couldn't be multicultural. And how can I forget the parents who brought along their kids. I saw them inside and outside of the stadium. Sometimes the kids were rocking out more than the moms and dads who had brought them along to see a performer who stopped making music long before they were born. On other occasions, it was the parents showing their kids they were anything but a bump on a log. It was all a joy which kept including more and more people. This is how the work of God can be.

When the party keeps growing, when more and more are included, it can be absolutely wonderful; joyful; over-the-top good. But unfortunately, we can and do work against these moments of exuberance; squeezing all the joy out of the party by resting in the status quo rather than channeling the resurrection power which by definition works against the status quo. As I think I've told you before, in its original Greek, the word for resurrection pairs the prefix "against" with the noun for things like balance, rest, and stasis. To be a resurrection people as we are by way of baptism and the Holy Spirit is to be a people who work against the status quo by including those the status quo doesn't yet include. But again, we can resist this identity; prizing rest and routine more than we prize new people and new chapters. And as our reading from Luke informs us, sometimes we should.

This is one the tensions built into our collection of appointed scriptures. You've got a psalm that champions inclusion and a gospel reading that finds Jesus saying he brings division. Evidently, hospitality has its limits. As Jesus speaks about divided families today, it becomes clear that sometimes even members of our own family aren't to be welcomed if it shall find us straying from Jesus too much. The question becomes: When do hospitality and inclusion find us bending away from Jesus more than we should? Our reading from Luke says it can happen, but when?

It's here where we encounter one of the biggest questions confronting today's Church. Things are possible today which weren't once possible. Things are legal today which once were illegal and there's also the illegal that was once legal. When does it all go too far? When does it all not go far enough? I wish I had a comprehensive answer. I don't. I wish today's reading from Luke would answer the question it raises about the limits of inclusion and hospitality. It doesn't. The ambiguity isn't helpful. But it does serve to remind us that we aren't God; that as God works and things give way to the unfolding purpose of God there are going to be moments when we need to pray and to wait for the

Holy Spirit to speak next steps into our lives. It seems to me that our moment in history is one of these times. As we wait and pray, all I can really say is this.

In Luke's gospel, the gospel we've heard from today, there's always room in God's heart and house for sinners who repent. Sons who disgrace themselves and their families are welcomed back home and with great fanfare. Just one sinner who repents leads to incredible rejoicing in heaven. Thieves who repent at the last possible minute are promised Paradise. Together and apart, this tells me that hospitality and inclusion are going to be A okay whenever they welcome those who are ready to work with God anew and afresh, whether it be by reducing the gap between the haves and the have nots or by inviting every generation on a shared journey not to just any old kind of growth, but to growth in Christ. Even as there is much yet to be resolved through prayer and waiting on the Spirit, I'll go on the record with this. Even as they continue to sin like the rest of us, anyone who wants to become more like Jesus should be most welcome here. As prayer and the Spirit handle the rest of it, may this become and remain our standard. Any and all who want to become more like Jesus are most welcome here. Amen!

Prayers of Intercession

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

P: Arise, O God, and sustain your church. We pray for all who dedicate their lives to serving your people. Renew our commitment to our siblings in faith around the globe and bless the work of our ecumenical and interfaith partners (especially). Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: Arise, O God, and sustain your creation. We pray for all places affected by natural disasters (especially). Transform the devastation of floods and fires into fertile ground for new life and growth. Fill heaven and earth with your life-giving Spirit. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: Arise, O God, and sustain the nations. We pray for all elected officials. Kindle in them a desire to administer your justice. Strengthen their resolve to defend those who are vulnerable and to stand publicly against all forms of oppression. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: Arise, O God, and sustain those who are oppressed. We pray for people harmed by racist discrimination, ableist discrimination, and all people discriminated against based on their gender identity or sexual orientation. Rescue us from all systems that degrade our fellow human beings. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: Arise, O God, and sustain this assembly. We pray for this community, celebrating with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep (concerns may be named). In our joy and in our tears, be near us. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, we remember the saints (especially Maximilian Kolbe and Kaj Munk) who have gone before us. May we run with perseverance the race set before us until we find our rest in 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: The love of God surround you; the grace of ✠ Christ release you; and the Holy Spirit be your guide and strength, now and forevermore. **Amen.**