



Mount Calvary Connected

September 1, 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

Tonight, my beloved West Virginia Mountaineers take on the Pitt Panthers in football in the first "Backyard Brawl" rivalry game in eleven years. It's a long-awaited revival of a matchup that has taken place 104 times since 1895, and I am pretty excited.

If I'm being honest, West Virginia football has been less than inspiring these last few years; the team's performance has been unimpressive, and our affiliation with the "Big 12" conference means we haven't played many games against regional opponents, and our rivals are supposedly schools like Oklahoma or Iowa State. It's nice to be starting the season with a game that should be a decent match up, and will be hard-fought against an old familiar foe.

Today, I'm decked out. I'm wearing one of the several WVU polo shirts I own. My new truck, which received a WVU emblem the day we bought it, is also sporting a small flag from the rear window with the iconic "Flying WV" logo. It's obvious who I support in this, and not counting the tuition I paid as a student, I have no doubt spent thousands over the years on various WVU apparel, stickers, gifts, and tickets to sporting events; I have spent thousands making it clear where my allegiance lies, and I love meeting others who share the same passion.

And here comes the possibly difficult question: Why should our faith be any different? For all the thousands of dollars I've spent on things to let people know I'm a WVU fan, I can hardly even think of a few hundred dollars spent on letting people know I'm a pastor, or even a Christian.

I'm not saying we need to spend money to be able to share our faith, but why shouldn't we be just as proud to proclaim our allegiance to Christ as we are to proclaim our allegiance to an alma mater or a hometown professional sports franchise?

This past weekend, we went to the Westmoreland County Fair with my brother's family. Knowing it was warm and sunny as we were getting ready, I searched my dresser for a lightweight and light-colored t-shirt and ended up pulling out my gold "God's Work, Our Hands" shirt with that slogan on the front and Mount Calvary's name along with the ELCA logo on the back.

I was surprised when, over the course of the evening, I had numerous random people complimenting my shirt. Some just liked the sentiment, others were admitted Lutherans who recognized it more directly. It was such a seemingly small, random choice to wear it, but in that moment, I was proclaiming my allegiance to Christ, if only passively.

What sort of amazing things could happen if we invested even a fraction of the energy and effort we put into sharing our love for things like sports teams, brands, or hobbies, into sharing our love for God? I tend to believe that we might see a resurgence of the church akin to what we read about in the book of Acts, "...and about three thousand were added to the believers that day."

So, you can start small, but spend some time this week thinking about how you can passionately share your love of God with a neighbor.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Jonathan

Upcoming Meetings

Discipleship Meeting: September 1st at 6:30 p.m.

Bible Study on Psalms: September 7th at 6:30 p.m.

Social Ministry Meeting: September 8th 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.

Bible Study on Psalms: September 28th 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 "Simply the Best" Contest

Voting is now open for the 2022 "Simply the Best" contest!

Mt. Calvary has been nominated once again for "Best Place of Worship" and our partners at the Richland Learning Center have been nominated for "Best Preschool/Daycare."

Please cast your votes by September 2nd at 5 p.m. by visiting the website:

https://www.tribdem.com/site/simply_the_best.html

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!

Giving Tree

The Giving Tree collected \$330 for the months of May and June and was donated to The Precious Life Baby Bottle Campaign. The donations for September and October will be going toward the Hozanna House Project. This is a mission who works on local projects, such as cleaning up areas of town, painting or repairing houses, etc. Monetary donations, as well as volunteer opportunities will be available. Thank you for your continued support!

Choir Reorganization

Several people have been asking about starting up a new choir! Between time lost over COVID and losing a couple of longtime choir members, we will be needing to start fresh!

Over the years at Mount Calvary, we have sometimes worked with small numbers and sometimes included large groups of over twenty singers. Some have been strong musicians and others of modest ability. We have sung in unison and in parts. We have occasionally included ambitious music such as that of Mozart and Handel, and even sung significant portions of the Messiah! The one constant is that we have worked with people who are available and are willing to give freely of their time. This is an opportunity where anyone can participate.

By singing in the choir, you yourself become a stronger musician. Singing is a form of prayer. Singing touches our souls. Singing in a group connects us in a spiritual way.

For this September, it might be nice to tiptoe gently into a new season. I am thinking of beginning with some rounds and two-part singing. If this takes off, we certainly can be more ambitious!

Peoples' schedules are busy. In recent years, we have done Wednesday evening rehearsals for those who can make it. Sometimes I meet people individually. Sometimes people join in last minute at the choir warmup before the service. I often record parts and, these days, can send an audio text to help people be better prepared.

Since I do not know everyone in the congregation and may not have invited you to sing, let me know if you would like to give it a try! Thanks so much!

Talk to Dan Gresh after any church service or text or call at 814-659-5109

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

Usher Team for Saturdays (September):

Linda Barnhart, Pat Bittner, Joan Bunnell, Janis Daily

Usher Team for Sundays (September):

Ray Leverknight, Jeff Penrod, Cathy Prisk, Jim Prisk

Readers/Communion Assistants (September):

Saturday, September 3: Cindy Solarczyk and Jack Weisbrodt

Sunday, September 4: Deborah McQuaide

Saturday, September 10: Bill and Jan Layton

Sunday, September 11: Laura and Carter Bower

Saturday, September 17: Mari Grace and Hayden Lingenfelter

Sunday, September 18: Noelle Berkey

Saturday, September 24: Cindy Buday and Claudia Plows

Sunday, September 25: Mike Kozak

There are sign up sheets in the Narthex for Greeters/Ushers and Readers/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

Children's Sunday School for youth in preschool, elementary, and middle school starts September 11th. We are excited to see our friends once again! See Pastor Jonathan for more information.

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.

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.

Bake Sale

Calling all Bakers! WELCA is hosting another one of our famous bake sales during the walk-through Basket Party on September 24th and 25th.

Please contribute your favorite baked goods. Especially popular and requested are fudge, gobs, gob cake, no-bakes, scones, nut rolls, assorted muffins, assorted mini-breads, sugar free items, and believe it or not, dog treats!!

Baked goods can be dropped off either morning of the basket party, or by making other arrangements with any WELCA member.

Pet Blessing Service

Pastor Jonathan will be holding a pet blessing event in the pre-school yard on Wednesday, October 5th at 6:00 p.m.

Watch for details and have your special family members visit our church that day.

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!

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.

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.

Ethel Warshel's birthday is coming up on September 12th. She misses her church family, so let's brighten her day with some birthday cards! Cards can be mailed to:

Ethel Warshel
402 Friendship Drive
Fleetwood, PA 19522

**Birthdays and Anniversaries for the
Week: September 4 – September 10, 2022**

Sept. 4 - Paul Bergman
Sept. 5 - Sage Brehm & Chad Wolfhope
Sept. 6 - Reese Hutzel, Nancy Strihan, & Erin Powell
Sept. 7 - Chelsea Hiltz
Sept. 8 - Brandt Hutzel & Philip Reitnauer
Sept. 10 - Margaretta Borodach & Kathy Carr

Sept. 9 - Frances & Catherine Prisk, Jr.

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, Jo Ann, John Alt, Jan Mertz, Denny, Jill Lisson, & Abel.

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 28, 2022

Prayer of the Day

P: O God, you resist those who are proud and give grace to those who are humble. Give us the humility of your Son, that we may embody the generosity of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: Proverbs 25:6-7

Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great; for it is better to be told, "Come up here," than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God!

Psalm 112

P: Hallelujah! Happy are they who fear the Lord and have great delight in God's commandments!

A: Their descendants will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.

P: Wealth and riches will be in their house, and their righteousness will last forever.

A: Light shines in the darkness for the upright; the righteous are merciful and full of compassion.

P: It is good for them to be generous in lending and to manage their affairs with justice.

A: For they will never be shaken; the righteous will be kept in everlasting remembrance.

P: They will not be afraid of any evil rumors; their heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord.

A: Their heart is established and will not shrink, until they see their desire upon their enemies.

P: They have given freely to the poor, and their righteousness stands fast forever; they will hold up their head with honor.

A: The wicked will see it and be angry; they will gnash their teeth and pine away; the desires of the wicked will perish.

Second Reading: Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?" Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God!

Gospel: Luke 14:1, 7-14

When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

P: The gospel of the Lord.

A: Praise to you, O Christ!

Sermon by Pastor Scott Klimke

When I last had the privilege of sharing the word of God with you, I said the aim of God and the faithful is to include the uninvited. The immediate inspiration for this claim was the appointed psalm. Guess what! Today’s psalm is nearly a carbon copy of the psalm we had two weeks ago. It says the righteous, those who do it right, are merciful, compassionate, generous, just, and mindful of the poor. Here too we have the claim that we worship and serve God when we include the less-included or the altogether uninvited. Might it be that the enduring aim of God and the Church is “we;” the biggest, broadest, best community possible?

I’d sure say so. That which is central in the life of the Church all traffics in the way of “we.” Start with faith in Christ. Faith in Christ is what we need to receive the benefits of Jesus’ death and resurrection. And faith is nothing other than a churchy word for community. Faith brings together the estranged. Faith makes a “we” out of God and rebellious, go it alone, think too little or too much of yourself people like you and me. This is faith. It’s a “we” thing.

Think too of the cross. In the cross, we have the joining of the vertical and the horizontal. What’s this all about? Well, the horizontal takes up everything under our feet and around us. The horizontal is the community of the created; the community of those who owe their life to others. And the vertical? It’s what is above and otherwise out of reach. The vertical is the heavenly; the divine; the eternal. And in the cross, these two things, the vertical and the horizontal, the community of the created and the

community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit come together. The cross is a “we” moment. Now turn to Jesus, the one who hangs from the cross.

In the Jesus, we have the divine and the human in equal proportion. Jesus is fully God and fully human and these two sides never go to war. They remain a “we” through thick and thin. It’s why Jesus is described as sinless, perfect, without blemish. Jesus is the embodiment of the “we” God and God’s allies are always prizing and pursuing. In Jesus, we have eternal community between God and humankind.

And one last thing while we’re on the essential, always there, never far from the surface topic of “we.” Today we’ll celebrate holy communion. Like the other sacrament of baptism, this is a sacrament that features a physical, earthly, non-human element. Why does baptism need water and communion grain and grape? In what should be no surprise by now, it’s a we thing. The physical, earthly, non-human stuff of the sacraments is meant to communicate that it’s not just God and humankind that belong together, but God and all of creation, both human and nonhuman, that belong together. The sacraments are one last illustration of what I’ve said. “We” in the biggest, broadest, best possible way pervades the Christian tradition. “We,” as in huge, healthy, harmonious community, is always the goal for God and God’s partners in mission and ministry. And this means the same thing for us day after day.

Day after day the goal is for us to get out of “we’s way”. Or to put it more positively, day after day the goal is for us to get on “we’s way” more and more. There’s a lot that can stand in the way of this happening. Rigidity, being stuck in the mud, closed hearts and minds would be representative of the challenge before us day after day. The Bible tells us love doesn’t insist on its own way; meaning love isn’t rigid, stuck in the mud, or impervious to the needs of others. And love is a very, very “we” kind of thing. Love builds and sustains community. Love brings together. Love connects and joins. Love is not rigid or stuck in the mud. Love responds and adapts to the needs of we in real time and space. But again, there’s much more that can stand in the way of this happening than being so rigid we insist it’s our way or the highway.

If it’s not rigidity that gets in we’s way, it may be the anti-we ways of society in general. In today’s reading from Luke, Jesus is pushing back against the culture of his time. In the ancient Mediterranean world, what the culture as a whole encouraged was the daily playing of honor shame game. The goal of the honor shame game is always to outdo the other. The goal of the honor shame game is always to acquire more honor and glory for yourself as you take honor and glory away from others. And if you’re not acquiring honor and glory, you certainly don’t want to lose any; bringing shame to yourself and your family. Ladies, protect your honor by covering yourself up and staying out of sight as much as possible. Do not, do not get pregnant out of wedlock. Gentlemen, never lose a fight, an athletic contest, or a battle of wits. This is the honor shame game.

It explains why our reading from Proverbs speaks against those who keep trying to inch closer and closer to the throne. This is the honor shame game. If I can take a selfie with Queen Elizabeth, my honor totals ring up like the spinning wheel on Wheel of Fortune. Honor and shame also explains why people are angling for the best seats in our reading from Luke. It’s a scene reminiscent of how in the gospels James and John do their best to corner Jesus into giving them seats at his right and left in the Kingdom of God. James and John want more honor than the other disciples. They want to be better

than everybody else and think seating arrangements in heaven will somehow accord them the honor and the status they crave. But if all you're doing is angling after that which will supposedly increase your personal stock and cachet, you're not going to have much time for we, are you?

To get on "we's way" and stay there, we're going to have to be critical of the surrounding culture and its various and sundry attempts to make us individualists who care little about community and the way of we. And there's a compelling reason for us to be this self-critical. Over the long haul, the way of we and community wins as the way of me loses. After refusing to give up on we, even if it meant death on a cross, Christ's resurrection from the dead tells us this. We shall live beyond the grave. Me dies never to rise again. The same message is communicated today when Jesus has this to say about the end of time. In the end, he says, "Those who exalt themselves shall be humbled and those who humble themselves shall be exalted." There's no better reason to remain mindful of how the surrounding culture can pull us off the way of we than our salvation. And today, as in the past, we do need to remain mindful.

Close to two thousand years after the gospels were written, we can still fall prey to the honor shame game. We don't need the biggest or the best. We just think we do. We also don't need the latest or the most cutting edge. We're just told we do. Along with the continuing allure of the honor shame game, there's also our current society's tendency to say an awful lot about rights, but not nearly as much about responsibilities. This isn't good for "we." There's also the push towards polarization where half the country is good and half the country is bad, even though we know almost nothing about most of those we are so quick to exalt or to humble. And unfortunately, this is probably just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to all the societal forces and trends that can pull us off we's way. In, by, and through the Holy Spirit, let's not let society get the upper hand. Let's instead remain Christian through and through. For "we," both Easter and our Lord tell us, is the way to go. Again, over the long haul, "we" is the way to victory not defeat. It's something we'll see in ways unmistakable when in keeping with Jesus' promise today the time arrives when those who exalt themselves shall be humbled and those who humble themselves shall be exalted. Amen!

Prayers of Intercession

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

P: For the church and its leaders, we pray. Uphold all deacons, pastors, and bishops who serve and teach your people (national, synodical, and local leaders may be named). Awaken in your church a spirit of invitation that reaches ever outward. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: For the well-being of creation and its inhabitants, we pray. Stir in us reverent awe for the beauty of the natural world, for oceans and lakes, rivers and streams, forests and deserts (local places may be named). Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: For the nations and peoples of the world, we pray. Sustain the efforts of those who pursue justice and equity for all. Defend and accompany all immigrants and refugees and all who are persecuted for their ethnic origin or religious beliefs. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: For all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit, we pray. Be present with those who live in isolation or fear, especially those who are incarcerated or detained. Comfort all who are sick or grieving (especially). Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: For this congregation and its ministries, we pray. Prepare children, teachers, and youth ministry directors for a new year of learning. Embolden our witness to invite others to the table. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: For all the saints who confessed God's name (especially Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, and Moses the Black), we give thanks. May we cling to the promise of our risen Savior, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever. 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: Live your lives in Christ, rooted and built up in him, and abound in thanksgiving; and the blessing of the holy Trinity, † one God, be upon you and remain with you forever. **Amen.**