



Mount Calvary Connected

September 8, 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/

My Hopes and Fears for My Children as They Go Back to School

By Anglican priest, Tish Harrison Warren

As I sent my kids back to school this year, I sent them with my prayers.

I love the beginning of a new school year. I love meeting my kids' new teachers. I derive over-the-top joy from new school supplies. I savor the excitement my kids have about seeing old friends, meeting new ones, and their plans, goals and hopes for the year. Certain churches, including my own, start each school year with the "Blessing of the Backpacks." Kids bring their backpacks to church one Sunday in late August and lay them near the altar. Then we as a church pray for students, teachers and schools in our city. It's a tactile way of "blessing and sending" our kids into the tasks and challenges that lay ahead and a joyful and moving way to start the year.

We thank God for the gift of education, for another chance to learn about the world. In the last busy weeks of summer vacation, amid rummaging through school supply bins or rounding up immunization records, I can forget what an unbelievable gift it is that my children can spend their childhood learning to read, write, add and subtract. It's a gift that most in human history did not have and that millions of children around the world, especially girls, do not have today. It is good to take a moment to recall what a privilege it is that, because of the work of people who came before us, we've inherited a system where it is simply assumed that all of us — not just the richest among us — will be able to educate our kids.

So we pray for the children in our midst. We pray that they will learn, grow, and discover truth, beauty and goodness. They are learning to think, learning to notice, learning to take up the enormous responsibility of seeking to understand the world and act wisely in it.

There is so much joy, newness and hope buzzing in the air this time of year.

But it's always a bit more complex than that. For me, there is a sense of lament as well. The new school year is also a time when, yet again, I must practice letting my kids go. A mentor of mine whose children are now adults told me that for each new stage they entered, he felt delight and joy, and at the exact same time, he grieved losing the stage before. This is the complex melody of parenting. From the time the cord is cut till your children grow into adults, parenthood is a long practice in loving deeply yet letting go. Over and over again.

But the toughest part about this time of year isn't merely letting my kids go. It's that I must let them go into a hard and sometimes heartbreaking world. With prayers from their church and their parents, we send them out — into conversations that I don't monitor, relationships I can't control, a system that I am not in charge of. They could face "mean girls" and bullies. There will be misunderstandings and conflicts, difficulties and failures, disappointments and frustrations. I can't rescue my children from it. I can't make a world for them that is never painful, confusing or unfair. There's sorrow in that for me, every year.

Our worries for our kids can be even darker. The start of school marks another year that we have not made our children safe from violence in schools. Just three months ago I stood on the edge of a playground at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, after a shooter killed 19 children and two adults. I couldn't take my eyes off the empty swings. I could not stop thinking of kids who had swung happily on them. Kids who went to school bearing their backpacks and lunchboxes and did not come home. I have thought of their parents a lot in the past couple of weeks and the grief they bear as they watch their neighbors' children begin a new year.

A year ago, two friends and I, all mothers, co-wrote a short book of prayers for children. We decided to include a prayer for the beginning of the school day. As we workshopped a draft, we discussed what we should cover in it. It began, "Dear God, Bless our school and our teachers and all of our helpers. Give me courage to be a good friend." We edited a few more lines about kindness, curiosity and the gift of learning about God's world. Then, our conversation grew sad and serious. We knew we had to address the need for safety — something so many parents think about as they drop their kids off at school each day. We were writing for 4- through 9-year-olds. How does one possibly address the reality of gun violence with such tiny kids? But how could we ignore it? These tiny kids have lockdown drills. These kids know that violence lurks amid the happiest of lives and classrooms. They know this in a way I did not when I was their age. The prayer ends "And please keep everyone safe all day long." That's the best words we could come up with, the best we could offer.

I left that writing session feeling angry, angry that we had to think about mass violence when writing a prayer for second graders, angry that we as a country have failed children, angry at how children live in a world where adults do not keep them safe. It felt wrong because it is wrong.

According to Everytown, last year alone, there were "at least 202 incidents of gunfire on school grounds, resulting in 49 deaths and 126 injuries nationally." Gun violence is a scourge on American life and in 2020 gun-related deaths were the leading cause of death for those under 19 years old. Even so, I understand rationally in the cold light of day, that statistically the chance of children dying in school shootings is low. But it still rattles a mother's heart. It's the nightmare, the fear that you can't shake. It's the ever-present shadow of "What if?" And it's the exasperation that parents even have to carry

that worry, the horror that I live in a society that is more committed to adult autonomy than to the safety of children.

Still, this year, yet again, I sent my children into their work in the world. I do so each year because it is a world full to the brim with beauty, wonder, mystery, laughter and loveliness and I want them to get to know all of it, to revel in it, to play in it, to explore it. I want them to learn to be faithful, thoughtful, and wise within it. But it is also a world where, each year, we ask our kids to face more than they should ever have to. When I send my kids off to school, I am sending those I love most into the unknown, into a world of joy and pain and into a world that I can't control. So this year, I will bless them and send them out again, with my prayers, and I'll wait, with anticipation, to see them again at the end of the day and to hear how their day was.

Upcoming Meetings/Events

Social Ministry Meeting: September 8th at 6:30 p.m.

Touch a Truck: September 10th from 10-2

God's Work, Our Hands: September 10th after the 5:30 p.m. service

Children's Sunday School: starts September 11th

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

Pond Cleaning/Weeding Event: September 15th at 6:00 p.m.

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

Church Council: September 20th at 6:30 p.m.

Walk Thru Basket Party & Bake Sale: September 24th (10-2) and September 25th (9-2)

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.

Assistance Needed!

A beloved sister in Christ from our congregation who is going through some medical difficulties without any nearby family is currently unable to drive and in need of transportation for two important upcoming medical appointments.

One is Monday, September 12th at 2:30pm in Pittsburgh; the other is Thursday, September 15th at 11am in Greensburg. Compensation will be provided.

If you think you may be able to assist, contact Pastor Scott or Pastor Jonathan as soon as possible.

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 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.



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!

T-shirt and Sweatshirt Sale

WELCA will be sponsoring a Mt. Calvary spirit wear t-shirt and sweatshirt sale soon. It will be through F/X on-line store. Sizes, colors, and items will be announced soon, along with instructions on purchasing! Great for Fall and early Christmas gift shopping!! Watch for more details to be announced.

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.

Birthday Cards

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 11 – September 17, 2022

Sept. 11 - Phyllis Nider

Sept. 12 - Ethel Warshel

Sept. 13 - Janice Mertz

Sept. 14 - Nancy Conjelko, Bernice Cononie, & Mari Grace Lingenfelter

Sept. 15 - Parker Daily, Dianne Lesser, Cara Lonsinger, Dawn Poydence, & William Smith

Sept. 16 - Loretta Zerby

Sept. 17 - Abigail Mattern

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, Teplitza 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, Jaci, Dominic Megia, & Jackie Hauger.

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, September 4, 2022

Prayer of the Day

P: Direct us, O Lord God, in all our doings with your continual help, that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy name; and finally, by your mercy, bring us to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God!

Psalm 1

P: Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor lingered in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seats of the scornful!

A: Their delight is in the law of the Lord, and they meditate on God's teaching day and night.

P: They are like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do not wither; everything they do shall prosper.

A: It is not so with the wicked; they are like chaff which the wind blows away.

P: Therefore the wicked shall not stand upright when judgment comes, nor the sinner in the council of the righteous.

A: For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked shall be destroyed.

Second Reading: Philemon 1-21

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.

For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God!

Gospel: Luke 14:25-33

Now large crowds were traveling with [Jesus;] and he turned and said to them, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.”

P: The gospel of the Lord.

A: Praise to you, O Christ!

Sermon by Pastor Jonathan Adams

Anyone who has ever built something has probably heard the old adage, “measure twice, cut once.” The idea being that before you plug in that table saw, you better know not only exactly how long that 2x4 needs to be, but exactly where to cut it to get it that length. You can measure as many times as you want or need, but once you’ve made the cut, if it’s in the wrong spot, you may be out of luck.

For professional carpenters or builders, some of which we have in this congregation, or even Jesus himself, that idea of measure twice and cut once is second nature, but for more amateur handymen like myself, it's not always so easy. I can be headstrong when I really want to get a job done. I don't know that I've ever wasted a perfectly good piece of lumber by mis-measuring, but I've certainly done steps out of order, attached things the wrong way, or generally goofed things up by not fully planning a project before getting started.

But like I said, Jesus was a carpenter, one from a long line of skilled carpenters. "Measure twice, cut once," would have been second nature for him. Considering all of the things necessary for a project before getting started would have practically been in his DNA. So it's no surprise that it would be part of his advice to the people following him: consider the cost of bearing my cross before you get in too deep.

It's a theme we hear in that message, and in much of the other scripture readings shared today.

Moses reminds the Israelites of the Ten Commandments, of the importance of following the one true God, rather than any other false idols that might present themselves. He wants them to know that even as they are preparing to enter into the promised land, that there are still expectations, that there are still responsibilities. In order to fully receive and appreciate the blessings promised to them, they need to be ready to jump in with both feet, not trying to hedge their bets and keep one foot planted on the other side, connected to some other God, but ready to whole-heartedly follow through thick and thin.

And in Paul's letter to Philemon, what better example of someone who followed God wholeheartedly, who knew the cost of being a disciple, than Paul, who's writing this particular letter from prison, a place he had ended up because of the ministry he was doing in Jesus' name.

Paul knew the cost of discipleship, he would ultimately pay it with his life.

But still, he did the work.

So Jesus tells us, measure twice, cut once. Don't plan to build a tower without sitting down and figuring out what you need. Don't wage a war without figuring out the strength of your army. Don't claim to be my disciple if you think the road will be easy. That you won't have to change. That you won't have to cut things out of your life. That you won't have to work hard.

Measure twice. Cut once.

There's a church in our area, that I've had several people describe to me as being almost cult-like. The thing that has led these otherwise kind and generous people to describe another church as a cult is the pastor's theory on evangelism that they've heard.

When someone joins this church, they are told that it is their job to begin to work on getting all of their friends and family to attend, too. Sounds pretty reasonable. It's something that you've probably been asked to do by a pastor once or twice, either directly or indirectly.

But where it becomes uncomfortable is the second part of the instruction...

This pastor tells folks that they are to get their friends and family to join the church. And if they don't? They are to cut them off. The church will be their new family. The church will be their new friends. They don't need those other people in their lives anymore.

Now that sounds pretty harsh. But is it really so different from what we hear Jesus saying in the first part of the Gospel today? "If you don't hate your family, you cannot be my disciple."

Measure twice. Cut once.

Now, please don't hear me saying that I want you to cut off your children or grandchildren or siblings that you can't convince to come to church.

But I do think it is a stark reminder of that lesson that Moses tried to teach the Israelites... We worship only one God. Don't let anything else come between you and your relationship with God, even if it's your family.

It's hard to build anything without cutting. So as we continue our journey as disciples, building up ourselves as followers of Christ, think about the cost, be ready to jump in with both feet, to wholeheartedly follow God, even if that means cutting some of the negativity out of your life.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

P: As scattered grains of wheat are gathered together into one bread, so let us gather our prayers for the church, those in need, and all of God's good creation.

P: We pray for the church around the world and for the mission of the gospel. Refresh the hearts of your people, deepen our understanding of every good thing we share, and strengthen our partnerships in the faith. God of grace,

A: hear our prayer.

P: For the well-being of the earth and all its creatures: for trees and forests, for all that will yield fruit this season, and for streams and other bodies of water. God of grace,

A: hear our prayer.

P: For the nations and those in authority: for the elected leaders of our towns, states, and country, and for international organizations. Grant wisdom to those who govern and raise up citizens who make decisions in the best interest of their neighbors. God of grace,

A: hear our prayer.

P: For all in need: for those who suffer from disease, who struggle with homelessness or food insecurity, for those whose family life is difficult, and for all in this community who need your care (especially). God of grace,

A: hear our prayer.

P: For this community of faith: for all our labors—begun, continued, and ended in you—that they glorify your holy name. Bless your people with the strength to live into their many vocations for the sake of the world. God of grace,

A: hear our prayer.

P: We give thanks for the saints who now rest from their labors (especially Peter Claver, priest and missionary). Give us faith, like them, to love you with all our hearts, and by your mercy, bring us to everlasting life. God of grace,

A: hear our prayer.

P: Gathered together in the sweet communion of the Holy Spirit, gracious God, we offer these and all our prayers to you; through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

A: Amen.

Blessing

P: Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us. Almighty God ✠ bless you with grace, mercy, and peace, now and forever. **Amen.**