



Mount Calvary Connected

October 13, 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

In the last week or so, I spoke to a member of our church who had noticed his birthday wasn't listed in our weekly newsletter. The person in question has belonged to Mount Calvary since 1960, but we never managed to record his birthday until October of 2022. Perhaps we had his birthday back when he and his family joined the church sixty-two years ago, but when a new membership book was created in the late 1970's the birthday we may have once had was not documented. This left no birthdate to be entered into the database from which our list of birthdays and anniversaries is presently drawn and for whatever reason the corresponding hole or blank in our database was never filled. If this were an isolated incident, there would be no need to report it to you. But I am sad to report it is far from an isolated incident.

What has become painstakingly clear in recent months is that the new membership record begun in the late 70's and continued all the way up to the beginning of my pastorate in 2016 is full of blanks and holes. This in turn has led to all kinds of blanks and holes in our database. To complicate matters further, even when there is information entered into our database, it's too often incorrect. The member who called about his birthday may not know this, but according to our database he joined Mount Calvary on the 1st of January in 0 AD, if 0 AD ever even existed. (I don't know that it did). He also wasn't marked as confirmed, even though he was an adult at the time of his transfer into the congregation. And to top it all off, we also do not have the member's actual date of baptism and confirmation on file. To put it as simply as possible, we have a royal mess on our hands and I've only shared the tip of the iceberg with you.

Since discovering the issues noted above, and many others, Pastor Jonathan, our secretary Terrie Crisi, and I have been chipping away at the problem at hand. We have also enlisted some volunteers from the congregation who have been giving a night or more a week to the project underway. But please

understand we are engaged with no small undertaking. One of the ways you can speed up our efforts to augment and correct our membership records is to assume that none of the information for you or your family is correct and/or complete. Terrie Crisi is available by phone from 9 to 1 on Monday through Thursday. You could call her to see if the records for you and for your family are correct and up to date. If they aren't correct and up to date, perhaps you have the information necessary to fill in some of the missing holes or blanks. And if you can't reach Terrie, you could speak to Pastor Jonathan, Mary Ann Mapes, Jerry Pozun, Cindy Solarczyk, or me.

As the effort underway continues, perhaps we will also make some forms available in the narthex you can fill out and return and may even add a link to our newsletter which would also allow you to provide us with missing or correct information as well. In the meantime, thank you for your help in advance and please register this as a prime example of why it's always important for congregations to be asking if they are staffed and structured for mission. If congregations aren't staffed or structured effectively, there's less time for mission and that's never helpful; particularly as we attempt to rebound from the pandemic and continue to cope with the aging and declining population of our area.

Your Partner in Mission and Ministry,
Pastor Scott

Upcoming Meetings/Events

WELCA: October 17th at 6:00 p.m.

Church Council: October 18th at 6:30 p.m.

Youth & Family Ministry Committee: October 20th at 6:30 p.m.

Youth & Family Trip to Weakland Farms: October 23rd at 1 p.m.

Bible Study on Psalms: October 26th at 6:30 p.m.

Stewardship and Administration: October 27th at 6:30 p.m.

Deadline for T-shirt & Sweatshirt Sale: October 31st

Property Committee: November 7th at 6:00 p.m.

Prayer Ventures

Praise God for the example of Jesus pausing on his way to Jerusalem to heal the 10 lepers, which encourages our faith in the power of God to heal and renew and calls our attention to the needs of people around us.

Remember in prayer young adults who are working, serving in the military or engaged in nontraditional education opportunities, that they might know that God has purpose for them and that their gifts, knowledge, interests, life experiences and work are valued by the church, their communities and the world.

Pray that we will live and serve with confidence in God's promises, listen to and respect one another, and reflect the love and ways of God in all that we do and say as people of faith and disciples of Christ.

Giving Tree

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!

Scheduled Worship Help

Usher Team for Saturdays (October):

Jerry Pozun, Ruth Pozun, David Saloka, and Stacey Saloka

Usher Team for Sundays (October):

Family of Keith & Wendy Mayket and Family of Chris & Tiffany Swartz

Readers/Communion Assistants (October):

Saturday, October 15: Bill Layton and Cindy Solarczyk

Sunday, October 16: Joan Hunter

Saturday, October 22: Todd Moss and Kevin Oleksa

Saturday, October 23: Noelle Berkey

Saturday, October 29: Anita Brodt and Missy Brodt

Sunday, October 30: Joan Hunter

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.

"The Land Mourns"

by Rev. Andi Lloyd

In 2005, Australian philosopher Glenn Albrecht published a paper naming a new emotion: solastalgia. The word describes the pain we feel when we see environmental change in the places we call home. In justifying his decision to make up a new word, Albrecht pointed out that English has very few words that connect emotional and environmental states. Albrecht found plenty of examples of solastalgia: among Australian farmers during lengthy droughts, residents of Louisiana following Katrina, and survivors of the tsunami in Southeast Asia in 2004.

In the years since, environmental scientists and environmental psychologists have honed the concept further, arguing that what we feel in this time of climate change is outright grief: a grief unique enough and pervasive enough to have its own name. Ecological grief, or climate grief.

Climate grief is a new name for what is, for me, a familiar emotion. Before I was a pastor, I was a scientist. For nearly 25 years, I studied the effects of a warming climate on the forests of the far north: the Alaskan boreal forest, the Siberian taiga. I knelt in front of trees, measured them, and counted their growth rings to learn their histories. I listened to their stories of life in a time of climate change: stories that spoke of an imperiled landscape, of an imperiled world.

Back then, I never spoke my grief out loud. In paper after paper and grant after grant, I'd write some version of the same sentence. "If current trends continue," the sentence would begin, followed by a description of what would happen if current trends continued.

Well, current trends continued. And now, here we are. Awash in grief. I've been wondering what would have happened if I had found room in the language of science for the language of lament. As a pastor, I now know that the language of lament has power.

The prophet Hosea knew that power. Hosea's is an ecological lament. His world, like ours, is awash in grief. All of creation is grieving, or languishing, or outright perishing. "Therefore the land mourns," he says, "and all who live on it languish" (4:3).

The land mourns. It's an assertion that hits our 21st-century ears strangely. What are we to make of it? The temptation is strong to glide right past that verb or to set it aside as mere literary device. But in *The Hebrew Bible and Environmental Ethics*, Mari Joerstad invites us to be curious about such strangeness. She invites us to take such sentences seriously—not literally, but seriously.

Mourning is an outward expression of inward grief, but it is also an assertion that grief is not a private affair but a communal concern. For the ancient Israelites, mourning entailed public lament, marking oneself with ashes and torn clothing. Those outward signs spoke the truth of loss. They invited compassionate response and neighborly solidarity—standing with those whose lives were passing through shadowed valleys.

In the Hebrew Bible, mourning is an expansive practice. The people mourn, of course, but so do the land, the pastures, and the deep springs. Even gates and walls lament. The Hebrew verb *abal*, translated here as "mourn," also carries the meaning "to dry up, to wither." Where a widow might put ashes on her head, the land and pastures and springs mourn by withering and drying up—all ways of speaking aloud the truth of inward grief.

Therein lies the power of lament: to speak the truth that all is not well. Walter Brueggemann writes that grief, spoken aloud, is "the counter to denial." Lament is prophetic speech. It bears faithful witness to all that is not right with the world and to all that is not right with ourselves. To take the land's mourning seriously is to ask about its grief—to wonder what truth the land's grief spoke to the people in Hosea's day and what truth it might speak to us now.

Hosea gives us a glimpse with the first word of the sentence, "Therefore the land mourns." Therefore points us to what comes just before this verse. The land mourns because the people have gone astray, in all the familiar ways:

There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land. Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed. (4:1–2)

The therefore that follows deepens the strangeness of verse 3: the land isn't mourning solely for its own sake. This is not an ecological lament in the way we might think about such a thing these days; the land does not grieve pollution or strip-mining or any material injury to itself. The land's lament, to which Hosea gives voice, is wider than that.

The land's lament speaks a foundational ecological truth: when one part of creation goes awry, the whole suffers. The land's grief at what the people have done points to the fundamental reality of our interconnection. Perhaps it is the boundedness of our bodies that makes it so easy to overlook the truth of our connectedness. We appear so discrete, so unitary, but we are not.

If we could see our interconnectedness, I imagine it would look like a fabric: threads running between each of us and every person on whom our lives depend; threads tracing the path from each of us to each nonhuman creature that interacts with our life—the food on our table, that tree that we smile at every morning, the birds that sing us awake; still more threads traveling from each of those creatures to all of the creatures on which they depend—their pollinators, their food, the earthworms that till the soil in which they grow. And finally, there are the shimmering, gossamer threads, spun of some gorgeous hue, running from each creature and each human to God.

Our lives are held, connected, one to the other and all to God: we are bound up in a beautiful, multicolored, homespun fabric. That fabric is an ecological truth: it describes the deeply interconnected and interdependent world that I came to know as an ecologist. And that fabric is a theological truth, reflecting the world as God made it to be—a relational world, a connected world, an interdependent world.

The land's mourning speaks simultaneously of a vision of the world as it ought to be—that beautiful fabric—and the truth of the world as it is: too much injustice and too little love fraying the threads that hold us all. The land feels those fraying threads. The land grieves those fraying threads. The land mourns.

Now, as then, the fabric that connects all of creation is badly torn: torn by manifold injustices wrought and perpetuated by the exploitative systems in which we live, torn by ideologies of scarcity that teach us to love too narrowly and too little. To mourn is to speak that truth to the lies that prop up the denial on which the status quo depends.

To take seriously the land's mourning is to acknowledge that the grief that we feel—solastalgia, ecological grief, climate grief—is wider than our own lives. In that acknowledgment is an invitation to become even greater participants. What might happen if we used creation's lament as inspiration for what to do with our own too rarely acknowledged grief? If we engaged, in other words, in biomimicry?

Biomimicry is literally the copying of life. The practice of biomimicry looks to nonhuman nature for inspiration for architectural design, technological design, and even the transformation of human cultural systems. Humans try to solve problems by carefully studying the natural world and imitating what we see there. We do this because we observe that nature has often developed efficient and intricate means to an end. Often solutions that the human mind cannot find are available in nature, if we look closely.

Otis Moss III has extended this concept to what he calls theological biomimicry. "When we recognize the interdependence and interconnection in nature," he told the *Century* in 2017, "we begin to build

human systems that are interdependent and interconnected, based on justice and love” (see “Chicago church connects sustainable food, economic empowerment” September 20, 2017). This work moves us closer to God’s vision of the world as it ought to be: a world of justice, interdependence, and mutual flourishing.

When we undertake this work, in this time of climate change, we become participants in the holy work of lament. We join our voices to the creation-wide expression of grief that is, even now, pouring forth. To do so is to recognize our interdependence and to affirm our interconnectedness by stepping into a deeper solidarity with one another and with all of God’s creatures.

In that kind of boundary-crossing solidarity, we begin to weave together those beautiful but frayed threads, the ones that hold us in right relationship with one another, with all of creation, and with God. Mourning together, in true solidarity, we name the truth of what’s wrong. And in so doing, we begin to make it right.

Religious leaders can help with that project. We can create brave spaces for lament. We can build communities in which we learn how to practice solidarity with those who mourn, to honor the grief of those who weep. We can, in our preaching and praying, our rituals and our liturgies, expand the circle of compassion to include the whole of what God made, human and nonhuman neighbors alike. If we do that, then we will begin, together and with God’s help, to weave anew that beautiful fabric.

Rev. Andi Lloyd is pastor of Trinitarian Congregational Parish of Castine in Castine, Maine, and a former professor of biology at Middlebury College.

Backyard Ministries Hat/Glove Collection

Once again, Mt. Calvary will be collecting hats and gloves for the children of Coopersdale. Please take a labeled bag, fill it, and return it to the bin in the narthex. This year, there will also be the opportunity to provide a monetary donation, instead of purchasing the items. A basket will be in the narthex for this option as well. Thank you for your continued support!

Birthdays and Anniversaries for the Week: October 16 – October 22, 2022

- Oct. 16** - Jackie Janak & Bonnie Kishlock
- Oct. 17** - Nancy Moore
- Oct. 19** - Christian Goehres & Mary Huerth
- Oct. 21** - Paige Heider
- Oct. 22** - Anne Brodt & Joan Bunnell

- Oct. 16** - Matthew & Kierisa Hockensmith
- Oct. 16** - Robert & Doris Loftis
- Oct. 20** - Brett & Wendy Reitnauer

Give Now for Hurricane Ian Relief

Hurricane Ian made landfall in Florida on Sept. 28 with near Category 5-strength winds, dumping record amounts of rain and causing catastrophic, life-threatening flooding. The western coast of Florida was hit particularly hard. Wind gusts of over 130 mph have downed power lines, leaving millions of residents without power.

In response to Hurricane Ian, Lutheran Disaster Response is partnering with the Florida-Bahamas, Southeastern, North Carolina and South Carolina synods, as well as Lutheran Services Carolinas, to provide both immediate and long-term support. We anticipate relief will include water, food supplies, tarps, cleaning materials and other needs for those who have lost or damaged homes.

Your gifts will support survivors of Hurricane Ian. Gifts to "Hurricane Response" will be used in full (100%) to assist those affected by hurricanes until the response is complete.

Updates from Our Members & Community

Help Us Fill in the Blanks!

Our birthdate, wedding anniversary, and church membership records are incomplete. We have been working on moving records from paper to electronic and it's a huge undertaking. Please help Terri or one of our volunteers if they contact you for missing information. You can be a bigger help by calling the church office to verify birth and anniversary dates with Terri. Thanks for your cooperation!

Visits to Shut-Ins, Hospital or Nursing Home Patients

Never hesitate to contact the church office if you, or a loved one, desires a visit from one of our pastors, or a lay visitor. If you, or someone you know is homebound, hospitalized, or in a nursing/care home, and wants or needs a visit or more frequent visits, we are happy to do so. We never want anyone to be missed. We try to get information on those hospitalized or placed in nursing homes, but please don't assume that info is given to us automatically. Call us!

Sign Up Sheets for All Saints' Day

Sign Up Sheets for All Saints' Day for DEATHS and BAPTISMS since November 1, 2021 are on the table in the Narthex. Or you can call Terrie in the office at 814-266-4859 and give this info to her.

Stories of Faith in Action

"Where All May Dwell"

Winston-Salem, N.C., for a few years when she heard the rumblings. Many of the guests opened up to her, told her stories. One need kept arising.

"I heard very loudly that there was a deep hunger for a faith community that looked like them," Norris said. They craved space where they could worship God and not feel judged for their housing status, their past or their appearance. Heeding their calls led Norris to Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, to become a pastor.

By 2020, Norris was ordained and serving as the mission developer for the Dwelling, an ELCA faith community designed for, but not exclusive to, people in Winston-Salem who are or have been homeless. (Funding comes from partnerships with Augsburg, the North Carolina Synod, the Moravian Church in America and the ELCA churchwide organization, which draws on Mission Support for the Dwelling's grant.)

Starting a church during a pandemic wasn't ideal. Safety restrictions made worship impossible, and the population Norris had hoped to reach became especially vulnerable. So she did what many ELCA leaders and congregations were forced to do: she pivoted.

After assessing community needs, Norris determined that free mobile showers would be the Dwelling's anchor ministry. Visitors could take showers and receive clean underwear, socks and T-shirts donated by nearby members of the Dwelling's synod.

"It was really a profound way to start," Norris said. "Showers provide a sense of dignity and are therapeutic. I don't know a better way to remind people of their baptism."

Eventually the showers became permanent, with participants volunteering to help the program. By Christmas Eve, area restrictions for gatherings had been relaxed, and Norris held the Dwelling's first service. In January 2021, it began offering regular Sunday worship.

With a living room for its sanctuary, couches and chairs for its pews, and free-flowing food, the Dwelling takes seriously its mission of hospitality. "It has a feather touch, where you can come in and get comfy," said member Cheryl Morrison. "It's OK to talk to the person next to you, get up to get a cup of coffee, doughnut or muffin."

"This is a church for God's people — the homeless — and they are the foundation of what makes this church work, which in my eyes is extremely special."

"This is a church for God's people — the homeless — and they are the foundation of what makes this church work, which in my eyes is extremely special," added Ryan Sprinkle, a council member. "You have people right off the street with their backpacks."

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, Linda Haberkorn, Lorraine, Joe, Donna, Danny & Family, Becky Jo, Bill, Linda & Family, Mary, Mary Jane, Janice, 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, El 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,

Condensed Worship for Sunday, October 9, 2022

Prayer of the Day

P: Almighty and most merciful God, your bountiful goodness fills all creation. Keep us safe from all that may hurt us, that, whole and well in body and spirit, we may, with grateful hearts, accomplish all that you would have us do, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: 2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me."

But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel." So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage. But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean. Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel."

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God!

Psalm 111

P: Hallelujah! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, in the congregation.

A: Great are your works, O Lord, pondered by all who delight in them.

P: Majesty and splendor mark your deeds, and your righteousness endures forever.

A: You cause your wonders to be remembered; you are gracious and full of compassion.

P: You give food to those who fear you, remembering forever your covenant.

A: You have shown your people the power of your works in giving them the lands of the nations.

P: The works of your hands are faithfulness and justice; all of your precepts are sure.

A: They stand fast forever and ever, because they are done in truth and equity.

P: You sent redemption to your people and commanded your covenant forever; holy and awesome is your name.

A: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who practice this have a good understanding. God's praise endures forever.

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 2:8-15

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David—that is my gospel, for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. The saying is sure:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;
if we endure, we will also reign with him;
if we deny him, he will also deny us;
if we are faithless, he remains faithful—
for he cannot deny himself.

Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God!

Gospel: Luke 17:11-19

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

P: The gospel of the Lord.

A: Praise to you, O Christ!

Sermon by Pastor Scott Klimke

We've been a busy church as of late. Have you been a part of all that's been happening? Before I say more, let's just review all that's been going on as of late. In late June, we held a blessing of the bikes event in conjunction with the conclusion of this year's installment of Thunder in the Valley. In mid-July, we held a community cruise-in for car aficionados. Then in early September, we held a Touch a Truck event geared towards parents and their children which drew more than a hundred families.

Not satisfied, we held a walk-thru basket party and bake sale a couple of weeks later which raised thousands of dollars for our ministry. Around the same time, we began to sell handsomely carved wooden pumpkins made by one of our members; with the proceeds going to charity. As worship begins this week, only two of those pumpkins are left. May they be gone by the end of the weekend. And then, as the first full of week of October got underway, we offered a well-attended animal blessing event and then a few days later our getting to be quite well known and appreciated clothing redistribution event. Filled to the brim with donated clothing before the event began at 9, perhaps two-thirds of what had been made available was gone just a couple of hours later; with a steady stream of people still coming through the door when I left. We've been a busy church as of late. In some small, but still significant way, have you been a part of it all?

Having now asked that question for the second time, let me tell you why I've returned to it a couple of times already. I've been inquiring about your level of involvement with our shared ministry because the scriptural readings we hear this weekend demand that the question be asked. In my career as a preacher, I can think of few times when appointed scriptures and congregational happenings have matched up so well. I mean inherent to an annual clothing drive and redistribution event like the one we just held is the conviction that a throwaway culture is not good. Rather than being thrown away, clothes and much more can be repurposed in beneficial ways. And often, the benefit accrues to those who have come to feel thrown away themselves. And this is good on both counts. When we throw away people or things, we throw away people and things that God can use for good. And this is the very message some of our appointed scriptures convey today.

Some of our appointed texts, as I'll get to in just a bit, convey that God is a masterful Creator and conversationist. God doesn't waste anyone or anything. When given the opportunity, God proves able and ready to use every last one of God's creations for good. And that's why I keep asking about how involved we all are with our shared ministry. No one here today is throwaway material. We're all made in the image of God. We're all beloved children of God. We all have something God is itching to share for good. It's just not biblical or creedal to throw ourselves or any other one of God's creations away.

By way of illustration, in recent weeks, I've been talking to those in confirmation about the first article of The Apostles' Creed. For us, it's a matter of faith that God the Father is almighty and the creator of heaven and earth. Does this mean it's essential for us to become and remain six-day creationists who can have no time or place for scientific discovery and the advancement of human knowledge? Not at all. Stack the first two chapters of the Bible up against one another and you'll quickly discover that their accounts of creation are quite different. Those who edited and pulled together the Bible made no effort to hide these disparities. This is pretty telling when it comes to motive or authorial intent. The point wasn't to produce a science book. The point was to produce a faith book. And on the level of faith, what both Genesis chapter one and Genesis chapter two tell us is that God doesn't make junk; doesn't make throwaway people or things. In Genesis chapter one, each day's creation is called "good" and then when in place and held together the same chapter informs us that the entirety of creation is

“very good. As for Genesis chapter two, it tells us that the relationships and the community that God’s creative work enable are also good with the notice that it’s not good for us to be alone. God doesn’t make junk. God doesn’t make throwaway material. Everyone and everything have the potential to be useful and beneficial. And when we realize this, putting back together the puzzle pieces that sin breaks apart, we work with God rather than against God.

Think of the servant girl who alerts Naaman’s wife to the existence of Elisha in our reading from 2nd Kings. She’s abducted from her homeland, maybe abused afterward, and enslaved in a foreign land. Who treats another human being like this? To use the modern language for it, who engages in human trafficking? Those who throw themselves and others away. Those who keep the puzzle pieces apart rather than bringing them back together. But what happens in our reading from 2nd Kings when the servant of Naaman’s wife and then the servants of Naaman himself are treated like human beings, like masterworks of God created in God’s image? When they’re recognized as people with a voice which should be heard, as puzzle pieces crying to be put back into place, what happens is that healing and wholeness follow. When we put the puzzle pieces back together, when we make use of ourselves, one another, and all of creation, good things happen. God’s good and gracious plan takes a step forward. And so, are you ready to put yourself in the game we call ministry, or if already involved, to invite others to join you in that game?

If you still need some incentive and inspiration to do so, let’s now turn to our reading from Luke. In this reading and in a famous parable of Luke’s we heard earlier this year, a Samaritan is lifted up as a role model, while presumably nine Jews are lifted up as those we shouldn’t emulate. The rhetorical impact of this contrast is likely hard for us to appreciate today. If we wanted to make it more apparent and appreciable, we might say there were nine Republicans and one Democrat and only the Democrat came back to say thanks. Or, that there were nine Democrats and one Republican and only the Republican came back to say thanks. In our current climate of polarization where people don’t come out of their bunkers, this probably gets us closest to how Jews and Samaritans once felt about each other. But rather than becoming a part of the ongoing feud, Jesus rejects the hard feelings separating Jew and Samaritan and sees the image of God in everybody. He heals both insider and outsider and then by celebrating the Samaritan affirms that good things happen when we bring outsiders in; when we put the puzzle pieces back together. When we really and truly recognize that God doesn’t make junk or throwaway material, we do what I’ve said we do. We stop working against God and start working with God so that some new part of God’s good and gracious plan might come forth.

And so, are you ready to be a congregation who uses everyone and everything; a congregation that uses God’s good creation from nose to tail? I sure hope so. There’s a lot of need in Johnstown. Being a bit of a researcher, I’ve yet to find a community with population decline greater than our own. I’m sure it can be done, but that would be beside the point. Even if it’s worse elsewhere, there’s a lot of need here. And then there’s coming back from the pandemic on top of all of our local needs. If God’s good and gracious plan and purpose is to advance as far as it can, we’re all going to have to be involved. In, by, and through the Holy Spirit, may it happen. When we make use of all available people and things rather than throwing people and things away, let’s not forget we work with God rather than against God. Amen!

Prayers of Intercession

P: In gratitude and humility, let us join together in prayer on behalf of all of God’s creation.

P: Gracious God, we give you thanks for bishops, pastors, and deacons, including our Pastors at Mt. Calvary. Inspire leaders of the church to proclaim your mighty deeds, that your saving faith may be known to all. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: Majestic God, we give you thanks for land and water, seedtime, and harvest. Break down boundaries we construct between ourselves and the rest of your creation. Bring renewal and restoration to places affected by pollution and deforestation. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: Mighty God, we give you thanks for those in our community, nation, and world who work for justice and peace. Guide those who govern to act on behalf of those marginalized by race, ethnicity, or religion. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: Merciful God, we give you thanks that you hear the cries of those in need. Restore to community those who are stigmatized by illness, feel rejected, or who live in isolation. Send healing to all who suffer (especially). Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: Faithful God, we give you thanks for the healing ministries of this congregation. Equip those who visit, care, and pray for the sick. Give insight to doctors, nurses, home health aides, and all practitioners of medical arts. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: Eternal God, we give you thanks for your faithful people who have gone before us to your glory. Renew our trust in your eternal promises of mercy, redemption, and new life. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: With grateful hearts, we commend our spoken and silent prayers to you, O God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

A: Amen.

Blessing

P: May Christ, the wisdom and power of God, and the source of our life together, keep you united in mind and purpose. And the blessing of almighty God, the Father, the ✠ Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with you always. **Amen.**