



Mount Calvary Connected

October 20, 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!

| | |
|---|---|
| Pastor Scott Klimke Cell-Phone: 570-367-3421 Email: sklimke6@gmail.com | Pastor Jonathan Adams Cell-Phone: 412-817-6704 Email: revjonoadams@gmail.com |
|---|---|

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/

“What if burnout is less about work and more about isolation?”

By Rev. Tish Harrison Warren

Until the past few years, I rarely heard the term “burnout.” Then it was everywhere — in memes, news articles, tweets and the mouths of weary and discouraged friends.

As discussions of burnout have become more common, I’ve sometimes wondered: Am I burned out? As a working mom, I certainly feel exhausted much of the time. In May, The Times reported that 68 percent of working moms say they are burned out.

But how does one know what’s just the normal wear and tear of life versus when it’s something more dire? Further, if people are burned out, what can they do about it, and what role might God play in responding to burnout? With these questions in mind, I approached the psychiatrist and author Curt Thompson.

In his private practice and his books, Thompson explores, as he put it, the “intersection of neuroscience and spiritual formation.” To be honest, being an incurable pragmatist, I came to my conversation with him wanting a quick and easy five steps to cure burnout. But our talk was surprising in ways that touch on why I was drawn to speak to him in the first place. Instead of offering me life hacks or discussing work-life balance, he pointed to less understood aspects that contribute to burnout: loneliness and isolation.

This interview has been edited and condensed.

What is burnout?

“Burnout” is a euphemism. There are a number of different things that we can experience that we call burnout. The imagery is a match that’s burned out. It’s some phenomenon that once had energy to do whatever it was intended to do but all the fuel is spent.

Functionally, as a psychiatrist and as a Christian, I believe that we were made to be generative. We want to make things, whether I'm going to make art or I'm going to be creative with the patients that I see or with the students that I teach or with the congregants that I'm pastoring. When people feel burned out, they don't have any fuel left to create. Even down to the point of "How do I create meals for my family?" Simple things. It's the sense of "I can't make things happen that need to happen."

What has led to the widespread burnout that many of us are experiencing?

The pandemic certainly was causal, to some degree. But in many respects, it was simply revelatory. It revealed things that were already there, things that have been under the hood, waiting for something to come along and pull the curtain back.

We know that the brain can do a lot of really hard things for a long time, as long as it doesn't have to do them by itself. We only develop greater resilience when we are deeply emotionally connected to other people.

Yet we were committed to any number of different practices long before the pandemic that have us moving further and further away from each other. For example, I am less deeply known by my neighbors. My children are not spontaneously known by other children in the neighborhood. They don't go to the playground and play pickup games.

By virtue of how modernity and the Enlightenment's emphasis on the individual has atomized us, we have been practicing isolation for much longer than we know. We build it into our daily routines. We build it into our social media behavior. We have practiced liturgies of isolationism.

In being isolated, we practice believing that joy and life and delight in the world has to do with the acquisition of something. If we can have the best job. If we can have the best marriage or the best relationship or whatever it is. If we can reach a benchmark, if we personally can acquire that, then we will be OK. That's just another aspect of our isolationism.

It sounds as if you're saying that burnout comes in part because we are deeply isolated. When I have written articles on loneliness, I've gotten beautiful letters back from readers. Many of them say similar things: "I know that I'm isolated. I'm lonely. And I feel ashamed or embarrassed about that. But I don't know what to do about it." What does one do in that situation?

The temptation will be that an individual reader will think: "What can I do on my own to resolve this thing that I feel, whatever this is?" But no individual can resolve this on their own.

If your resource is going to be your primary care physician, call them. Make an appointment. If your resource is a church or a religious setting, call the pastor, call the priest.

Assume that if you're burned out, your brain needs the help of another brain. Your brain is not going to be OK until or unless you have the experience and opportunity of being in the presence of someone else who can begin to ask you the kind of questions that will allow you to name the things that you're experiencing.

The moment that you start to tell your story vulnerably to someone else, and that person meets you with empathy — without trying to fix your loneliness, without trying to fix your shame — your entire body will begin to change. Not all at once. But you feel distinctly different.

I'm not as lonely in that moment because you are with me. And I sense you sensing me. That's a neural reality.

It is also something that immediately begins to dismantle the neurophysiological response of shame. And when you begin to dismantle that, your sense of loneliness begins to be transformed. What you need is more practice revealing what's hard about your life with people who are willing to do the same with you.

When someone comes to me and she's burned out, it won't help to give her five things for her to go do to fix her burnout. Remember, she doesn't have fuel to go do those five things.

So I would say pick one person, pick two people, and say: "John, I would like to begin to meet with you once a week and just talk about where we are, talk about our stories. Let's talk about what's been hard, and not try to fix things but to be present with each other."

And here's the thing. We have been practicing being separate from ourselves and separate from one another. This didn't happen in the last 10 years. We've been practicing this for generations. So it's going to take some time.

What you're talking about is such a major shift in society and a less isolated way of living. It's hard to hold on to that when you actually are burned out because you say, "Well, that's all well and good, but I've got to get through my morning and I don't know how to do it."

This is what happens in my office. People come in with a package of symptoms. And burnout could be one of them. And what they really want is to be not sick. They don't want to be well. It hasn't occurred to them that they are going to have to change their life if they want their life to change.

If folks are like, "Well, yeah, but I got to get through Wednesday," I would say: "No. You actually don't just have to get through Wednesday." Wednesday you're going to start to call people, so that by Wednesday evening or Thursday you're going to go have tea with them. And you're not going to stop calling people until you get somebody on the line. If you want this to be different, you cannot continue to live your life the way you've been living it.

For folks who don't feel like they have friends or people to call, would you say to join a pottery class? Join a church? Get yourself in the presence of other people?

Yes. And if that person was in my office and they say, "I don't feel like I have friends to call," I would say: "Tell me about these friends that you don't have that you can't call. Who are the people that you're thinking of that you don't have?"

Unless they're hermits living in the Alaskan tundra, they actually do have people that they could call, but that they are afraid to call. By all means, you can go to a pottery class, you can go to a painting class, you can do all those things. But I think it's important for us to be clear that saying things like "I don't have friends to call" is a way that we tell a story that helps us avoid being afraid.

So where is God in the midst of burnout?

I would say God's where he always is. He's right in the room.

And to the degree that we cut ourselves off from parts of our stories (those parts that are too painful for us to want to recall), we will be increasingly disabled from even imagining, let alone sensing, God's presence in the room. God abides in those painful parts of our stories because those are the very parts that he longs to heal and redeem.

We practice forgetting God. We practice not paying attention to him. And then it becomes easy for us to blame him for a sense of his absence when what we've done is practice cutting ourselves off from parts of our own minds.

Because, by the way, we have all this loneliness and burnout and so forth, as if it's just this state of mind that we're in. But nobody walks into my office with just burnout from the last six months. At some point, pretty quickly, we are going to be talking about what happened to you when you were 15. When you were 6. When you were 20.

So I would say that God is waiting. God is eager for us to have the experience of being seen, soothed and made safe and secure by him. But it will require us being willing to take the risk of allowing ourselves to look at him looking at us.

And I want to say that your longing to not be burned out is a longing for so much more than that. It is a longing for beauty and goodness that you want and you don't even know how badly you want it. But that you want it is because you've been made to want it by the maker of all good things. And I want to honor that and say to people, "That's right." And that's why I want you to go find the friends that you think you don't have and tell them, "We're going to have a conversation like we've never had before."

Rev. Tish Harrison Warren is a priest in the Anglican Church in North America.

Upcoming Meetings/Events

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 the Lord! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart" (Psalm 111:1). Give thanks for God's trustworthy grace, activity in the world and daily blessings that renew and sustain us.

Rejoice in the promise that God hears the cries of those who suffer injustice, inequality and persecution; pray for the Spirit to help us persist in our prayers for our neighbors in need and our endeavors to make our church, society, institutions and laws just, equitable, inclusive and compassionate.

"From where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1-2). Pray that our faith in God's love and care will be resilient and that we will be aware of people near us whom God works through to assist and accompany us in times of need and distress.

Pray for abundant autumn harvests and for agricultural workers, farmers, ranchers and those who serve in distribution chains around the world as they strive to feed themselves and nourish people everywhere.

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 22: Todd Moss and Kevin Oleksa

Sunday, 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.

“Church closures yield growth”

By Michael Cooper-White

We recognize the wisdom of Ecclesiastes when it comes to the life cycles of all living beings. As individuals, we know our lives will end someday. But it’s often more difficult to accept the reality that all human organizations, including our congregations, have life spans as well.

A 2021 study by the Center for Analytics, Research & Development and Data, affiliated with the United Church of Christ, found that, during the previous decade, between 3,850 and 7,700 U.S. congregations closed each year, or 75 to 150 per week. Some who study church trends believe the pace will quicken in the wake of the pandemic.

Closure of a ministry inevitably brings sadness and often a sense of failure or a measure of anger or guilt. One often hears: “If only we could attract a few more members, we’d keep going.” “If we had a young, dynamic pastor this wouldn’t be happening.” “I’m devastated to lose this church where I was married, where my kids were baptized and where I imagined my funeral taking place.”

Congregational decline and demise occur for many reasons. In rural communities that are depopulating, churches can lose members to the point where those remaining are unable to carry out the tasks required for vital congregational life. Buildings may deteriorate for lack of attention and maintenance funds. Offerings dwindle to the point where funds aren't available for even a part-time pastor or one shared with another congregation or two.

In other geographic areas where the overall population may be stable or growing, a ministry may decline due to prolonged conflict that drives people away. Outright racism or subtler insensitivity keep some congregations from welcoming new neighbors who differ from the current members.

Today's widespread decrease in commitment to religious communal life is another major contributor to decline. Many who do seek a church are drawn to well-funded congregations that can offer enticing programs.

How will we die?

For everything there is a season ... a time to be born, and a time to die (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2).

"How will we die?" The question is as relevant for a congregation as for each of us as individuals. The conclusion of a ministry can sometimes leave a mess in its wake. Without a plan, a small remaining group of members may squander resources and even incur unpaid debt. Appropriate disposition of assets may not occur, leaving to others—often the synod—the tending of an unsalable property or deteriorating cemetery. The remaining members may be left without pastoral care rather than assisted in finding a new church home.

By contrast, the ending of a ministry can also be a congregation's final gift and enduring legacy of faithful stewardship. If handled carefully, its death may spread seeds of new life elsewhere. Its assets may support other ministries. Some church buildings are sold and either demolished or converted into residential or commercial spaces, yet other properties continue serving vital needs in a community.

Across the ELCA, closing congregations' assets are being used to support vibrant, ongoing ministries and new outreach initiatives.

First Lutheran in central Los Angeles was a vibrant congregation for more than a century, but by the late 20th century it had dwindled so badly that it had no future. Working with the Southwest California Synod, its remaining members committed a portion of assets from its valuable property to endow the First Lutheran Chair of Lutheran History and Theology at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley, Calif. This endowment ensures that seminarians will be well-grounded in our Lutheran tradition.

When the few remaining members of Emmanuel Lutheran in Baltimore knew they couldn't go on, they wanted their legacy to undergird a dynamic, multicultural congregation in the city, Amazing Grace Lutheran. This diverse church serves its economically challenged neighborhood through a community garden, a prayer labyrinth, a food ministry, wellness initiatives, a children's summer camp and many other ways.

Jill Schumann, treasurer of Amazing Grace, describes the financial resources provided from the sale of Emmanuel's property as "catalytically transformative." The legacy gift has also leveraged funds from

foundations and other benefactors. Emmanuel's gift has freed Amazing Grace to stop worrying so much about money and "focus on our mission of connecting people with the life-changing power of Jesus Christ," she said.

Buildings transformed

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies it bears much fruit (John 12:24).

Across the ELCA, closing congregations' assets are being used to support vibrant, ongoing ministries and new outreach initiatives.

In recent years the Nebraska Synod has creatively repurposed several congregations' properties. The synod sold St. James Lutheran's property in the small town of Edgar, Neb., to facilitate creation of a community center and coffee shop. In Omaha the former American Lutheran now houses Nile Lutheran Chapel, a thriving Sudanese community expected to become a new ELCA congregation.

A similar "mission restart" is afoot in Seattle, where Bethany Lutheran Church closed in 2016. Emmaus Table, an inclusive, intergenerational worshiping community grounded in Lutheran expression, has been developed by the Northwest Washington Synod. The community meets at Bethany's former building, now called 7400 Woodlawn and repurposed to connect and engage with its Green Lake neighborhood.

A Tigrayan congregation uses the building, along with a preschool and the Emmaus partner Community Loaves, which provides home-baked bread to area food banks.

In Milwaukee, Capitol Drive Lutheran Church gave its building to the Table, which is described as "an innovative synod-authorized ministry." The Table began offering worship services there this year. The building also houses a culinary school, a yoga studio and an art studio.

Similarly, after the merger of two congregations in Midland, Mich., the former building of St. Timothy Lutheran became a community literacy center.

When Grace Lutheran Church in Two Taverns, Pa., concluded its ministry, the funds were distributed to 10 agencies in the Lower Susquehanna Synod. Recipients were chosen carefully to carry forward Grace's historic commitments to serve youth, a local fire company, Scouting and several agencies that assist food-insecure and unhoused people.

Deborah McClellan, a deacon and the last rostered minister to serve at Grace, assisted the congregation in selling the church building to a startup funeral home that promotes green burial practices.

After First Lutheran Church of Glendale, Calif., closed, its property became the Lutheran Center, where the Southwest California Synod office shares space with an Episcopal seminary and continuing education center. And in Houston, the Gulf Coast Synod keeps its offices in a former congregation's building, out of which it hopes to start a worshiping community.

Many arms of the church remind us how important it is to have a will as we position our assets to serve family members and others after we die. Congregations must also contemplate a time when the doors

must close and the lights are turned off one final time. Such planning might seem an act of faithlessness or throwing in the towel, but in truth it shows confidence in God's power to bring new life out of death.

Michael Cooper-White is president emeritus of Gettysburg (now United) Lutheran Seminary and director of Lutheran formation at Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York.

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 23 – October 29, 2022

Oct. 23 - Christine Koshute & James Koshute

Oct. 24 - Robert Miltenberger

Oct. 25 - Josh Daly, David Friedman, & Paige Williams

Oct. 26 - Cathryn Bergman, Glenn Katranca, Jr., Joanne Miller, & Harrison Ondesko

Oct. 27 - Stephen Bower, James Conjelko, & Roman Shaffer

Oct. 28 - Olivia Mayket

Oct. 29 - Gerald Barrick, Robert Colvin, Jr., DeSon Herring, & Zachary Swartz

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

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.

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!

Clothing Sale - Thank you!

Thank you for all of the clothing donations! The sale brought in \$485 and will be split evenly between Helping Hands Ministry, Precious Life, and Hozanna House. The remaining clothes were donated to the following locations:

Men's - Franklin St. United Methodist Men's Store

Women's - St. Vincent DePaul of Johnstown and St. Francis Sharing and Caring of Davidsville

Children's - Johnstown Elementary School

The Social Ministry Team would like to thank everyone who donated, helped setup/sort clothes, and who worked the day of the sale. It would not be possible to do this every year without the generous members of this congregation!

Basket Party – Thank You!

Many thanks from the Basket Party Committee for the fantastic total of \$3,489.46. Thank you to everyone who contributed to the Basket Party by making or donating baskets, and for supporting us in this endeavor. Stay tuned to find out what we'll do with the money earned.

--Basket Party Committee, 3 Debbie's, 2 J's, and a girl named Sue

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, Dorothy, Jo Ann, John Alt, Jan Mertz, Denny, Jill Lisson, Jaci, Dominic Megia, Jackie Hauger, Sharon, Barbara, Louise & Family, Dennis, Mary M., & Joel Penrod.

Financial Update

When the council gathered to review financial reports this week, net income through the end of September was still positive. As compared to last year, member gifts and other income are now essentially equal to where the same measures stood a year ago. Positively, overall expenses are lower than they were a year ago, even as continuing issues with our electrical supply wreak havoc on more and more equipment. We give thanks to Mark Rychak and the rest of the property team for the ways in which they are working with our insurance company to help defray the overall cost of replacing so much equipment this past year due to issues with our electrical supply.

As has been the case for some time now, maintaining the financial stability we have now enjoyed for a good number of years will involve continuing to invite and welcome newcomers into our church and maintaining or increasing our personal giving as we can. Thanks in advance for your help with doing both of these things.

Condensed Worship for Sunday, October 16, 2022

Prayer of the Day

P: O Lord God, tireless guardian of your people, you are always ready to hear our cries. Teach us to rely day and night on your care. Inspire us to seek your enduring justice for all this suffering world, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: Genesis 32:22-31

The same night [Jacob] got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip.

P: The word of the Lord, **A: Thanks be to God!**

Psalm 121

P: I lift up my eyes to the hills; from where is my help to come?

A: My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

P: The Lord will not let your foot be moved nor will the one who watches over you fall asleep.

A: Behold, the keeper of Israel will neither slumber nor sleep;

P: the Lord watches over you; the Lord is your shade at your right hand;

A: the sun will not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

P: The Lord will preserve you from all evil and will keep your life.

A: The Lord will watch over your going out and your coming in, from this time forth forevermore.

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

P: The word of the Lord, **A: Thanks be to God!**

Gospel: Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

P: The gospel of the Lord. **A: Praise to you, O Christ!**

Sermon by Pastor Scott Klimke

Had Jacob won? Had he done as well as he could? We don't know exactly what the father of Israel's twelve tribes was thinking as the sun set in our reading from Genesis. But this could have been it. Had he won? Had he done as well as he could?

Jacob had previously managed to steal his older brother Esau's blessing as their father Isaac lay blind and dying. But was this a win? The potential victory had been achieved by way of deceit and betrayal and Jacob had to get out of dodge quick to survive his brother Esau's plans for deadly reprisal. Was this really a win?

Once out of dodge, Jacob also managed to marry the love of his life Rachel—the mother of Joseph and Benjamin. But he had to work seven years for the right; only to discover Rachel's sister Leah in his wedding bed. And then to be given Rachel as well, Jacob had to agree to seven more years. Crafty Uncle Laban drove a hard bargain. He was as slippery and deceitful as Jacob had been and his shenanigans with Rachel and Leah were just the start. Again and again, crafty Uncle Laban tried to break Jacob's back. Eventually, Jacob and his family escaped Laban's web of cons and traps, but only after a confrontation narrowly decided in Jacob's favor by another lie. This time told by his wife Rachel. And now on his side of the Jabbok River in our reading from Genesis, Jacob was preparing to meet his formerly furious brother Esau who had a whole army of men with him. Had Jacob won? Had he done as well as he could?

"Of course, he had," you might say. "Jacob," you might say, "managed to wrestle a blessing and a new name out of God." But what kind of a win was this? The battle royale didn't bring an end to the sometimes mysterious and bewildering distance between God and God's children. Hundreds and hundreds of years, including slavery in Egypt, would come and go before God would finally reveal God's personal name to a descendant of Jacob's named Moses. What's more is that Jacob walks away from his prayerful wrestling match with God limping, as he also is not spared his forthcoming encounter with Esau and his army of men. Is this really a victory? Had Jacob won? What does winning entail for people of faith like you and me? Might here and now winning come down to continuing to communicate with God even as there is sometimes silence and even as all we ever get is just part of an answer?

As we weigh this possibility, we can also turn to the example of the widow in our reading from Luke. Had she won? We're told this widow pestered an unrighteous judge until he finally relented and gave her justice. We could call this a win, I suppose. But is it really a win?

In ancient Israel, ninety percent or more of the population lived in squalor and poverty. If by chance there was any money, a widow couldn't inherit it. The rare assets would in this case go to a son or the oldest surviving brother of the deceased husband and they would have to be righteous enough to take care of their widowed mother or sister-in-law. I'm afraid not everyone's that honorable. This was a patriarchal system that left widows in a perilous position; explaining why in places like the letter to James we're told that pure and undefiled religion has much to do with caring for widows in their distress. Had the widow's encounter with an unrighteous judge done anything to bring an end to patriarchy? It doesn't seem like it. It also may be that the widow herself got nothing more than a temporary reprieve from a highly sexist system. Can we really call this a win? What does winning mean for us? Might winning now involve nothing more and nothing less than continuing to dialogue with God even as the dialogue sometimes seems to be one-sided and even as it only produces small and incomplete victories?

And what about this as well! Did the unrighteous judge remain in office after granting the widow a modicum of justice? There's no suggestion whatsoever that he was removed from office or that he became any more righteous in his dealings with God and neighbor. Can the continuance of a rigged and self-serving system be in any way associated with the word "justice"? I would say our reading from Luke is quite loose with its language when it suggests a corrupt and unrighteous judge dispensed what we really could call justice. And yet, Jesus' parable as relayed by Luke does seem to portray the persistent widow as walking away from the judge with something like a win. What is winning for people of faith like you and me? Might it be coming to regard setback and defeat as temporary; as unfortunate U-turns in God's good path forward? Might it be coming to regard partial victories as harbingers of greater victory to come? In our here and now, might winning simply involve continuing to dialogue with God as so much is in flux and up in the air; confident that there is a place for each of us in God's plan and that God and God's people shall eventually win, never to lose again?

To test the value of the suggestion I've been making, we can return to our reading from Genesis. As Jacob limps away from Peniel, he does eventually encounter Esau who has four hundred men with him. Just five chapters earlier Esau had vowed to kill Jacob after burial-related rituals for their father Isaac had come to a close. Now just five chapters later, Esau runs to meet Jacob, hugs him, kisses his former betrayer, and weeps. Sensing an opportunity to lock in this good favor, Jacob offers to give Esau what can be seen as a payoff for what he had stolen from his older brother earlier. Esau doesn't bite. He's got enough and wants nothing more. In fact, it's ultimately Esau who gives his formerly duplicitous brother something. Who's the winner here? Jacob or Esau?

I'd say Esau. After they part ways, Jacob shall go on to bury his beloved wife Rachel prematurely and have his favorite son Joseph sold into slavery by his brothers; only to be told by those brothers that Joseph is dead. By the time we get to the end of the book of Genesis, I'd say victory does eventually come for Jacob, but winning is a long time in coming. But as for Esau, I'd say he's a winner already at the time of his most gracious encounter with his formerly deceitful and treacherous brother Jacob. In spite of earlier losses and defeats, Esau has come to trust there's still a meaningful place for him in God's plan and that eventually all things shall work together for good for those who love God and are called according to God's purpose. For people of faith like you and me, this is winning. In good times and bad, it's continuing to believe and to pray and to love and to give and to worship as if there's a meaningful place for us in God's plan and as if everything's going to work out for the good in the end.

And so, if things aren't going your way right now, don't get too low. Your place in God's good plan will be vindicated or become clearer. And, wins, even though they may be partial, are on the way too. But if on the other hand you feel on top of the world right now, don't get too high. The Bible never would have been written and Jesus never would have died on a cross if winning was as easy as you presently might think it is. In, by, and through the Holy Spirit, may we all just keep dialoguing with God; trusting it shall eventually bear fruit. And may we also just keep walking along; limping along; trusting that for now winning for us is refusing to abandon the faith that there is a meaningful place for each of us in God's plan and that eventually all things shall work together for good for those who love God and are called according to God's sometimes mysterious purpose. Amen!

Prayers of Intercession

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

P: For all the baptized, that they become skilled in compassion and grace and equipped to share the good news with all. Grant your followers persistence in proclamation and prayer. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: For air and sky, clouds and sun, that they provide rain to parched land and relief to flooded ground. Renew and restore our polluted atmosphere and empower us to be worthy stewards of creation. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: For judges, juries, and all who work in the judicial system, that they desire wisdom, seek truth, rule with fairness, and have the courage to do what is right. Eliminate oppression and injustice in our criminal justice system. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: For all who are lonely, especially those who have newly arrived in an unfamiliar city or country, political prisoners without recourse to justice, hospital patients without visitors, and any who are ill or grief-stricken (especially). Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: For those in our congregation and community engaged in advocacy work, that with the persistence of the widow, they lift their voices in seeking justice on behalf of others. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: For those who have taught us faith and now rest in your heavenly peace, that we remember and give thanks for these saints who shared the gospel through word and deed. 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: Mothering God, Father, ✠ Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you and lead you into the way of truth and life.
Amen.