



Mount Calvary Connected

December 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/

Readings & Sermon from the Past Sunday

Listen to the readings and the sermon from this past Sunday on our website: <https://www.mt-calvarylutheran.org/sermons/>

A Message from Pastor Scott

Your Stewardship and Administration Committee met last evening to develop a budget for next year which your Congregational Council will soon review and then eventually approve for your approval at this year's annual meeting. Alternating between Saturdays and Sundays, this year's annual meeting will be held after the conclusion of worship on Sunday, January 15th. As is the case with virtually every congregation in our denomination, speaking and voting rights at an annual meeting are limited to baptized and confirmed members who have communed and made a contribution of record to the congregation in the year prior to the annual meeting or in the year of the annual meeting. In order that all the proper verifications can be made, these requirements must be fulfilled prior to the day of the annual meeting itself.

As it pulled together its proposed version of next year's budget, your Stewardship and Administration Committee decided not to add expenses or to ask for increased offerings during these times of economic uncertainty. Beyond one, relatively modest building project your Council and Property Committee have working on and will soon introduce to you, the objective will be to stay the course in 2023. This is something we can do because our partnership has produced much fruit.

Due to the adverse effect the pandemic has had on levels of church participation long after vaccines and boosters became available, it's presently not hard to find churches which are underwater

financially. These days it's not uncommon to find churches which find themselves down by fifty thousand dollars or more. I have seen it again and again, but not at Mount Calvary. Together we have kept our head above water and so we have the flexibility to stay the course now until things become more certain for all of us economically. The only assumption of the budget proposed by your Stewardship and Administration Committee is that we will continue present levels of giving in 2023 and increase giving when and if our circumstances allow. When many other congregations are paring back expenses, this is a real tribute to our partnership.

The other reason we can stay the course for the time being is because we have been in the black for seven, consecutive years. If needed, we now have much more padding and cushion to fall back on than we did when our partnership began. This too is not the norm in today's Church. Thanks so much for helping to make it a reality here at Mount Calvary. And please do thank the fine and dedicated servants who have so effectively stewarded our congregation's resources in recent years. In particular, please thank the members of your Stewardship and Administration Committee—Sean Horn, Joan Hunter, Bill Lonsinger, Stan McQuaide, Kevin Oleksa, and Mark Williams. These individuals and their committee have been an ongoing asset for Mount Calvary. Please let them know you appreciate their work and then take a moment to thank your appointed treasurer—Bev Coughenour. Coming up with accurate and timely financial reports was once an uncertain adventure at Mount Calvary. It is no longer thanks to Bev and her exemplary work. She too is a real asset for Mount Calvary.

In Thanksgiving for our Fruitful Partnership,
Pastor Scott

PS: As good as things have gone, please remember that December is our most important month financially. If you are behind in your giving and can make it up, please do so by the end of the year. If you have the wherewithal to compensate for another member's financial difficulty, please do that as well. It's one way we can bear one another's burdens as Scripture enjoins, e.g. Galatians 6:2.

Upcoming Meetings/Events

Lunch with Santa: Dec. 11th at noon

WELCA Lunch at Perkins: Dec. 12th at 11 a.m.

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

Children's Christmas Pageant: Dec. 18th at 8:45 a.m.

Last day for sock/toy collection: Dec. 18th

Church Council Meeting: December 20th at 6:30 p.m.

Christmas Eve Services: Dec. 24th at 4:00, 7:00, & 10:00 p.m.

Hymns & Lesson: Dec. 25th at 8:45 a.m.

Coffee Hour

The evangelism team will be having a coffee hour the first Sunday of every month. We will be offering refreshments before the Sunday service from 8 a.m. until 8:45 a.m. Hope to see you there!

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.

Visits to Shut-Ins, Hospital, & 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!

Scheduled Worship Help

Ushers:

Saturday, December 10: Kevin and Chris Oleksa

Sunday, December 11: Noelle Berkey and Kierisa Hockensmith

Saturday, December 17: Dave and Stacey Saloka

Sunday, December 18: Todd and Jill Moss

Saturday, December 24:

4:00: Mark and Deb Rychak

7:00: Kevin and Chris Oleksa

10:00: Todd and Jill Moss

Sunday, December 25: Todd Moss and helper

Readers/Communion Assistants:

Saturday, December 10: Bill and Jan Layton

Sunday, December 11: Tiffany Swartz

Saturday, December 17: Courtney Haluska and Kevin Oleksa

Sunday, December 18: Deborah McQuaide

Saturday, December 24:

4:00: Pastors

7:00: Kadiya Lingenfelter and Deborah McQuaide

10:00: Hayden and Mari Grace Lingenfelter

Sunday, December 25: Ray Leverknight

Those interested in volunteering may contact Pastor Scott to sign up.

Children's Sunday School

Children's Sunday School for youth in preschool, elementary, and middle school is ongoing! See Pastor Jonathan for more information.

Christmas Pageant

There is still time for preschool and elementary-aged children to be a part of our December 18th Christmas Pageant. Practice is held at 8:30 a.m. Sunday mornings. There are parts for all, regardless of ability or "shyness".

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.

Giving Tree

December contributions will go towards the Helping Hands ministry. Several families are being helped. There are paper ornaments on the narthex table with suggestions for donations. Please return items or money by December 18th so gifts can be delivered.

“A big dream to end child homelessness”

by Lindsey Queener

Roxana Boroujerdi had spent decades as a social worker serving youth in Everett, Wash., when she opted for a change of pace in her career: She opened an ice cream business. That might seem like a major shift but, at its heart, Boroujerdi said, the work was similar. “There’s nothing that brings me more joy than seeing a happy kid,” she said.

With that, her transition to being the “Fun Times Ice Cream Lady” was complete.

But as she served ice cream—and found it difficult not to give out a joy-inducing dairy treat to every smiling kid who came to Fun Times—she started to hear more from community organizations about children and their families struggling with hunger and housing instability. Boroujerdi began to volunteer with those groups and was struck by how many families needed assistance and had few options for support.

According to the 2021 Snohomish County Point-in-Time homelessness count, 1 in 4 children in Everett are food insecure and 1 in 4 households report being one paycheck away from homelessness.

To help, Boroujerdi, a member of Faith Lutheran in Everett, took on a leadership role with the congregation’s feeding ministry, Faith Family Food Bank. Since 2014 the ministry has been open weekly, with volunteers serving hot meals in the fellowship hall on Tuesdays and distributing groceries on Fridays.

At the height of the pandemic, the food bank continued to serve its neighbors, with nearly 1.5 million to-go meals and bags of groceries distributed in 2020 alone. Last year, it served even more. But Boroujerdi recognized that food alone wasn’t enough for the families she serves, many of whom are unhoused.

“I was naïve—I thought my little food bank could end hunger in Everett,” she said. “It’s only gotten worse.”

In search of a more comprehensive solution, Boroujerdi began to wonder if the empty lot behind the food bank could address housing insecurities for families. Those thoughts turned into a big dream: the construction of a Faith Family Village to accompany the congregation’s feeding ministry. With support from the city and land use permits approved, Faith Family Village will consist of eight 100-square-foot homes made by Everett-based company Pallet.

Each unit, which can house up to a family of four, has beds, electricity, heating and air conditioning. Faith volunteers and neighbors have already started donating bedding, storage bins and towels.

Families will be able to occupy the units for up to 90 days while they partner with social workers from a neighboring organization to secure permanent housing.

The pallet homes will provide not only shelter to residents, but also dignity and privacy while they access the resources and support needed to find a long-term solution.

Believing change is possible

While researching the homes, Boroujerdi was invited to spend the night in a vacant one at an existing pallet village about 45 minutes from her home. She agreed, saying, "If I'm going to walk this walk, then OK, I'll spend the night!" She was impressed by the experience and had breakfast and lunch in the village's community space, which includes restrooms and a common area in addition to its kitchen.

That experience led Boroujerdi and the Faith Family Village planning team to draft a funding proposal to ELCA World Hunger's Big Dream Grant program. Their hope was that the grant could support the remodeling of Faith's preschool building into a kitchen and community hub.

"Without proper food and a safe warm place to live, how will people, especially our children, ever be able to become equal members of our society?" wrote Boroujerdi in the grant proposal.

ELCA World Hunger launched the Big Dream Grants program in 2019 with \$250,000 across five grants to support ministries that are building and designing innovative and lasting solutions to hunger, poverty and economic inequality. Prior to the program's launch, the Domestic Hunger Grants program was the only option for ministries seeking funds from the ELCA for hunger-related projects. The Big Dream Grants program expanded this effort, allowing for more significant investment in a few ministries that demonstrate excellence and innovation in their work.

As pandemic protections expire and emergency resources are depleted, low-income renters around the country are struggling more than ever. With rising inflation, skyrocketing rents and increasing homelessness, more than half of Big Dream Grant recipients are ministries working on creative and sustainable solutions to end hunger and poverty.

This year record levels of gifts to ELCA World Hunger made it possible to say yes to the big dreams of 12 partner ministries, totaling nearly \$1.5 million. This amount includes the community hub space at Faith Family Village, which received a \$75,000 grant in June toward the work of the food bank as it prepared to install the pallet homes this fall.

The remodeled space, which is beside the empty lot where the Faith Family Village pallet homes will be, will provide kitchen facilities, tables and chairs for family dinners. A multipurpose space will allow for such activities as homework, tutoring, English Learner classes, budget grocery shopping and meal prep classes, recovery group meetings and more.

ELCA World Hunger funds will also support the Faith Food Bank's goal of providing specialty items in a systematic way to the diverse community it serves. Lastly, funding will assist with a community garden next to Faith Family Village for use in classes and cooking demonstrations.

At press time, Faith planned to start breaking ground on the village in October.

“I believe these homes can really make a difference in kids’ lives,” Boroujerdi said. “This was always our big dream—to help families and their children and [to] believe change is possible.”

Lindsey Queener is the communications manager for ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response.

Backyard Ministries Socks/Toys Collection

Please take a labeled bag, fill it with a pack of socks and a small toy, and return it to the bin in the narthex before December 18th. Thank you for your continued support!

World Hunger

You can give a gift to World Hunger in memory of or in honor of someone. Those envelopes are in the Narthex. Donations are due by December 11th, 2022.

Updates from Our Members & Community

Johnstown Campus Lutheran Home - Christmas gifts for residents

Name Angel tags are available if you want to buy a gift for a resident of the Johnstown Campus. Please call Lois Galus at 814-242-3470 to request a name for gift buying if you do not see her. Help make someone's Christmas special this year by giving a gift to a Johnstown Campus resident. If you have any questions, please call Lois at the above #.

Thank You Notes

Dear Church Family,

Thanks so very much to all the talented Ladies who contributed to all the goodies I received! I am enjoying them bit by bit!

With Love and Thanks,
Jackie Janak

Hi Friends @ Mt. Calvary,

Thank you so much for remembering me. Mt. Calvary is a Great Church simply because the members have made it so. I hope you all have a wonderful Thanksgiving and a joyous Christmas.

Love you all,
Helen LaTulippe

Mr. Calvary Family,

Thank you for the delicious homemade cookies! My wound has healed and I am back in Physical Therapy for strength and walking which is going well. My caregiver has encouraged me to get a Reserve-A-Ride from CamTran so I can get out with my scooter! The first time out was on my birthday. Ebony has been a blessing for me and Rosie. Rosie has been going with us also which she loves. Thank you for all your prayers, cards, and calls, I am truly blessed with my Mt. Calvary Family. If my scooter

would fold I would be back but I can watch and listen to it. Love and blessings to all on Saturday, hopefully you will hear my voice singing.

Deb Zilch and Rosie

Altar Guild

We are reorganizing for 2023. We can never have too many helpers for this important service, so if we haven't approached you yet, please tell anyone you see cleaning up after services that you'd like to help. Join us any time. We'll show you what to do!

Alpha Course

Mt. Calvary will be hosting the Alpha Course beginning February 21st. The 11 weekly sessions will explore Christian faith. Watch for sign-up information in early 2023.

Birthdays and Anniversaries for the Week: December 11 – December 17, 2022

Dec. 11 - Ellie Dye

Dec. 12 - Dalton Blough, Marcus McKool, & Keegan McQuaide

Dec. 14 - Rian Barker & Leona Cannarella

Dec. 15 - Nicole Gusmenotti

Dec. 17 - Morgan Rickley

Dec. 13 - Rodger & Debbie Thomas

Remember those that prayer has been requested for:

Linda & Dick, Claudia Plows, Maddie Pierce, Gladys Haupt, Bill & Linda, Jose & Family, Dave, Tom, Lt. Hunter Bergman, and Lt. Dylan Merchant, Harold, Rick, Shirley, Debbie, David, Lauren, Billy, Barb, Sara Solarczyk, Jackie Janak, Jack, Corinne, Joan, Dan, Natalie Zerby, Pastor Scott Custead, Luella Koontz, Al Lindner & Family, Bob, Dawn, Stacy & Josh, Bob Trotter, Bill Layton, Deb Zilch, Bennett, Cassy Sojak, Paul Miller, Keith Mayket, Ruth, Pete, Teplitz Family, Ken, John Nerone, Dane Wisner, Jeff, Irene, Karen, Erin, Susan Dyers, Bob McMullen, Wyatt George, Larry Hockensmith, Jean Pellon, Mike, Corey, Pastor Jonathan & Family, Roxanne Horner, Miriam Horner, Becky Lilja, Kathy P., Al Johnson, Chris, Donna & Danny, Cheryl, Jennifer & Family, Jaime, Matt & Ashley, Landon, 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, Tim Miller, Cathy T., Paul Brodt, Kim Stayrook, & April & Schuyler.

Condensed Worship for Sunday, December 4, 2022

Prayer of the Day

P: Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming, nurture our growth as people of repentance and peace; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Isaiah 11:1-10

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God!

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

P: Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the king's son;

A: that he may rule your people righteously and the poor with justice;

P: that the mountains may bring prosperity to the people, and the hills, in righteousness.

A: Let him defend the needy among the people, rescue the poor, and crush the oppressor.

P: May he live as long as the sun and moon endure, from one generation to another.

A: Let him come down like rain upon the mown field, like showers that water the earth.

P: In his time may the righteous flourish; and let there be an abundance of peace till the moon shall be no more.

A: Blessed are you, Lord God, the God of Israel; you alone do wondrous deeds!

P: And blessed be your glorious name forever, and may all the earth be filled with your glory. Amen.
Amen.

Second Reading: Romans 15:4-13

Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name"; and again he says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people"; and again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him"; and again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope." May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God!

Gospel: Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

P: The gospel of the Lord.

A: Praise to you, O Christ!

Sermon by Pastor Scott Klimke

Who knows? Who knows? Who knows? I raised that question last week and in a lot of cases only God knows. But as we trust in God's superior wisdom, knowledge, and love, "Who knows" is a natural response to what we hear during Advent. How will swords be beat into plowshares and spears into

pruning hooks? Who knows! But we heard Isaiah say it would happen last week and Psalm 46 makes the same promise. And this week, in a later chapter of Isaiah, the prophet is at again. This week we hear that all of God's critters, once at war and still at war, will come to live in peace and tranquility.

How's that going to happen? Who knows! But somehow, somehow God shall make it happen; meaning we can be people of defiant hope. But the somehow, somehow part of the equation does caution us against claiming to know more than we in fact know about the remainder of God's plan. Who knows! And yet, as we're humble and hopeful before the love of God which is as reliable as it is mysterious, we're not left completely in the dark. There is a common assertion which unites last week's reading from Isaiah and this week's reading from Isaiah. As you might recall, last week, the prophet said that there would be a word which would travel out of Jerusalem; a word that would transform the world into a place of peace; a word that would literally inspire the nations of the world to beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Brothers and sisters, the word of which Isaiah spoke is our word. It's the word of Jesus Christ. It's the word that traveled out of Jerusalem nearly two thousand years ago when the Holy Spirit descended upon the first disciples at Pentecost. It's the word that we and the rest of the Church continue to preach and teach today. Did you know the word in your possession, the word of Jesus Christ you are to share, the word of Jesus you are to live, is so powerful and potent?

If not, Isaiah's back at it again today. Today, nine chapters after last week's reading, the prophet is still talking about a divinely inspired word that will lead the world to become a place of peace and tranquility. It's true that there's no further talk of nations beating their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, but the imagery Isaiah uses is still arresting and inspiring. Today, we hear of the wolf living with the lamb and the leopard lying down with the goat. Today, we hear about cows and bears grazing together and about lions eating straw like oxen. As was the case last week, what the prophet has in mind is nothing less than the transformation of the world into a place of peace. And once again this week, a divinely inspired word is responsible for the transformation.

Early on in today's vision, the prophet speaks of the Holy Spirit descending upon a particular figure who is a descendant of David. If you didn't notice it earlier, he uses the very language we use today when we speak of the Spirit who is received in and through holy baptism. To be specific, Isaiah says that a particular descendant of King David shall receive a spirit of wisdom and understanding; a spirit of counsel and might; a spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And then, just two verses later, Isaiah says the Holy Spirit shall give the particular descendant of King David he has in mind a word that shall rid the world of violence and wickedness. We Christians, of course, believe the descendant of King David the prophet is talking about is Jesus Christ. And what's more is that through the Holy Spirit, we also believe that in our own time and place we continue to pass on the peacemaking, world altering word that Isaiah talks about. Did you know the word in your possession, the word of Jesus Christ you are to share, the word of Jesus Christ you are to live, is so powerful and potent?

If not, it may be because you believe peace lies outside of your ability to create. In spite of what the Bible says so often, I'm afraid many of us have come to regard peace as a pie in the sky ideal. After ongoing war in Ukraine and more and more mass shootings in our own country, no one could blame us for concluding that violence and wickedness are here to stay. But as understandable as such a conclusion might be, it's not the position which our Lord and Savior calls us to adopt. It's hope, not apathy and pessimism, that is to define us as Christians. We're called to be people of love. We're called

to hunger and thirst for righteousness and justice. We're called to be people of peace. One wonders what it will take for us to live up to these callings.

Perhaps a few comments about how the word of Jesus Christ works might help. Being the practical people we are, we're probably going to need some specifics before we believe and trust what the prophet Isaiah has been saying in recent weeks. And so, let me say the word of Jesus Christ makes peace by seeing, embracing, and celebrating those who have previously felt unseen. Remember! In today's first reading, the main thing Isaiah's Spirit-filled descendant of King David does is see the unseen. To be specific, we're told that he judges the poor rightly and the meek with equity; not depending upon what others want him to see and hear. And brothers and sisters, when you get to the bottom of things like our reading from Isaiah says Jesus will, it does come down to seeing, embracing, and celebrating those who have previously felt unseen.

I mean: Who are the poor? Generally, they're those who go unseen by the privileged. And who are the meek? Generally, they're those the powerful don't see; often running over them in the process. And for that matter, who are the violent, the greedy, and the wicked? Generally speaking, they're those who have gone rogue because they've seen how terrible things go for the unseen. Brothers and sisters, it may be short, it may be sweet, it may be simple, but it's true. Peace cannot emerge until we all feel seen and celebrated; until none of us worry that we shall be overlooked or forgotten. For as long as we fear that we shall go unseen, we're going to fend for ourselves no matter what it might mean for our neighbor or for the rest of creation. And there's no way peace can emerge in that kind of dog-eat-dog world. And so, if we are to answer our Lord's call to hold out and on for peace, we need to see, embrace, and celebrate the unseen. We need to say to them, "I see you, and more importantly, so does Jesus Christ." It's only under those kinds of conditions that peace can ever emerge. And we all can do things to encourage such conditions to come forth. Let me close by giving you an example of what I mean.

In April of 2006, my sister Amy gave birth to her fourth child named Landan. About a year later, Amy was diagnosed with cancer. She essentially lost the next year of her life to surgery and highly intensive chemotherapy. In the meantime, with Amy weak, bedridden, and hospitalized much of the time, Landan kind of lost his mother. And even at the tender age of one, he knew it. For a time, and a very important one at that, I'm convinced Landan felt unseen and that feeling has had consequences. It all came to a head when shortly after Christmas one year Julia and I went out to Wisconsin. I had been hearing of how Landan had been acting out at school and how he had become something of a thief. I suspected he was begging for attention; having previously felt unseen. And so, during the trip, I said to my nephew, "Landan, I love you!" And in response, a five-year-old child quickly looked me in the eye and said, "No, you don't" It was then that I was all but convinced that Landan had come to feel unseen. It was then that I vowed to show and to tell Landan I loved him as often as I could. This is why I placed my hand on Landan's shoulder as he cried profusely at his mother's funeral. This is why earlier this year I praised Landan when his football exploits generated press coverage in his area. And when combined with the affirmations of others, the approach seems to be working. Landan is turning out to be a fine young man, if I don't say so myself. And I know each of you knows at least one person like Landan or that you could very easily meet one, if you don't. May you tell them and show them that you see them and that even more importantly Jesus Christ sees them as well. It will be then that you know just how powerful and potent the word in your possession is. Amen!

Prayers of Intercession

P: As we prepare for the fullness of Christ's presence, let us pray for a world that yearns for new hope.

P: God, you renew the church in every age. We give thanks for hymn writers and theologians (especially John of Damascus, whom we commemorate today). Inspire teachers, writers, and musicians to delight and instruct your people. God, in your mercy,

A: Hear our prayer.

P: You give us a vision of creation in harmony, when hurting and destruction will be no more. Teach us to be stewards of the earth and companions to its creatures. Restore to balance and wholeness what human greed has harmed. God, in your mercy,

A: Hear our prayer.

P: You defend the cause of all who are poor and oppressed. Raise up leaders who will govern with equity and serve the common good. Guide judges, lawmakers, and public officials to protect the rights of those who cannot advocate for themselves. God, in your mercy,

A: Hear our prayer.

P: You deliver those in need from suffering and fear. Come to the aid of any who are exploited or abused, especially children, elders, and victims of human trafficking. Provide safety and help to our neighbors without shelter, refugees, and those fleeing violence. God, in your mercy,

A: Hear our prayer.

P: You urge your people to welcome one another as you have welcomed us. Nurture ministries of hospitality and care in this and every congregation. We pray for people who are homebound, hospitalized, or separated from loved ones (especially). God, in your mercy,

A: Hear our prayer.

P: You embrace all who have died trusting in your promises, and we give thanks for their faithful witness. Sustain us in hope until we are united with them in the joy of your eternal presence. God, in your mercy,

A: Hear our prayer.

P: God of our longing, you know our deepest needs. By your Spirit, gather our prayers and join them with the prayers of all your children. In Jesus' name we pray.

A: Amen.

Blessing

P: May God direct your ways in peace, make you abound in love for one another and for all, and strengthen your hearts until the coming of our Lord Jesus. Almighty God, Father, ✠ Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever. **Amen.**