



Mount Calvary Connected

March 23, 2023

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 Jonathan Adams

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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 Jonathan Adams

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

In today's newsletter, your council president Joan Hunter shares a message about how we can be more welcoming and inclusive as a church family. Personally, I won't say much in hopes that you read her message. But I do want to share this:

I've recently read some data suggesting that across the country, church attendance and participation is growing, and in some areas, it may soon surpass what it was pre-pandemic. This is certainly something to be cautiously optimistic about, but what is most fascinating is that often times, this growth is being driven by "new" people; churches that are growing are not just re-gaining people who'd fallen away during COVID or before, they are literally reaching out to people who have not previously been involved in their church, or any church at all.

This means that as always, inviting, welcoming, and including new people are among our highest priorities. And while some of that is driven by a pastor, much of it is in fact comes from the people of the congregation itself.

So please, read what Joan shares with you and consider how you might take even a small step toward helping Mount Calvary continue to be a welcoming and inclusive community.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Jonathan

A Letter from Council President, Joan Hunter

I was going through folders Pastor Scott left for me, and found this article. It was ripped out of a publication called "Pine Hall Visions," and was written by Lynette Hawkins. Not sure what that is, or who Lynette is, but it gives us all something to think about next time we bump into an unfamiliar face sitting next to us or standing behind us in the Narthex. I've shortened it for this newsletter:

"...Reasons Why First-Time Guests May Not Return"

First time visitors notice a lot within the first 4-8 minutes of stepping into our church. From what happens in the parking lot to the pews, first impressions can shape a visitor's feeling about our church...Some of the biggest reasons 1st time visitors may not come back relies on what happens in these early moments.

What do our guests really notice when they visit for the first time? ...Addressing items on this list may help create a welcoming church that gets repeat visits or new members.

No welcome from the parking lot to the pew.

Not having help knowing where to go or what to do.

People in pews who won't budge from "their" seat.

No sincere greeting extended from pastor or members.

No warmth or hospitality extended.

Lack of joy or spiritual atmosphere.

No sense of family in the church community.

No one reaches out to strangers or outsiders.

Very few activities or ministry for children.

Overly public recognition and attention, leaving visitors feeling uncomfortable.

Lack of vision or purpose in the congregation.

Members and ushers appear to be focused on "members only" conversations.

No one invites them back.

Not everyone is comfortable reaching out, saying hello, or making eye contact with people we don't know. Believe me, it gets easier the more you do it! Even if you make eye contact, smile, say or wave hello, might make a difference in whether someone comes back or not. For those of you who are extroverts (you know who you are), don't assume someone doesn't look familiar because they "go Saturday night," or they "go Sunday morning." ASK the person! There is no harm in saying hello, and finding out if that's true, or they truly are visiting us. You just might make a new friend!

Written with respect and excitement for Mt. Calvary's future,
Joan Hunter, Church Council President

Upcoming Meetings & Events

Ask – A Lenten Series (Benscreek) - Wed., March 29th at 7 pm
Stewardship/Administration Meeting - Thurs., March 30th at 6 pm
Coffee Social – Sun., April 2nd at 8 am
Maundy Thursday Service (Mt. Calvary) - Thurs., April 6th at 7 pm
Good Friday Cross Walk - Fri., April 7th ends at 3 pm at Mt. Calvary
Good Friday Service (Benscreek) - Fri., April 7th at 7 pm
Easter Service (Mt. Calvary) - Sat., April 8th at 5:30 pm
Easter Sunrise Service (Benscreek) - Sun., April 9th at 7 am
Easter Sunday Service (Mt. Calvary) – Sun., April 9th at 8:45 am
Annual Weed and Feed - Thurs., April 13th at 5 pm
WELCA – Mon., April 17th at 6 pm
Church Council Meeting – Tues., April 18th at 6:30 pm

Easter Flowers - Last chance!!

Easter Flower envelopes are available in the Narthex. The cost for each plant is as follows:

5 Bloom Lilies- \$12.00

6 Bloom Tulips- \$12.00

3 Bloom Hyacinths- \$12.00

Easter Flower orders have been extended through this weekend. Terrie will be placing the order on Monday. This is your last opportunity to order!

The Good Friday Cross Walk

The Good Friday Cross Walk will take place Friday, April 7th, gathering and departing from Beulah United Methodist Church at noon, and making devotional stops along the way before arriving at Mount Calvary for 3pm. If you're interested in participating, see Pastor Jonathan or Ray Leverknight for more information.

Donate your gently worn, used and new shoes!

From March 1st - May 1st, Mt. Calvary is partnering with the Greater Johnstown YWCA to raise funds for a new lunch/storage counter for their daycare. The more shoes collected, the more money we raise! A list of participating drop off locations and more information can be found here!

Furry Friends

During March, you'll notice a marked bin in the Narthex for donations for the Cambria County Humane Society and Second Chance Stray Cat Rescue. The list of on-going needs is quite large and includes just about anything imaginable for puppies, dogs, kittens and cats. More information is available on the bin, on our website, or contact Erin Powell 814-244-0221 or erin.powell03@gmail.com.

Give a Gift to World Hunger

If you would like to give a Gift To World Hunger this Easter Season, the envelopes are in the Narthex. Donations are due by April 1st.

Save the Date!

The property committee will not be having its usual April meeting. We will however, be hosting our annual Weed and Feed. It will be held Thursday, April 13 at 5 pm.

Bring your favorite gardening tool. A light meal will be provided. Hope to see you there!

7:00 AM Easter Sunday Sunrise Service

Sunrise Service will be held at Benscreek Lutheran Church's picnic grove. If the weather cooperates, the service will be held outside. If not, it will be moved indoors in the same picnic area. Directions will be provided, OR for those who don't want to drive, sign-up sheets are in the Narthex for those who want to carpool. We will meet at Mt. Calvary at 6:00 am, and leave by 6:20 am.

Please sign the sheet and indicate whether you can drive, or you will need a ride. Sign-ups will help Benscreek plan for the coffee and donuts served after the service.

Readers/Communion Assistants:

March 25 – Kevin Oleksa

March 26 – Ray Leverknight

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

Featured Article

Jesus is the question

He might be the answer, too. But he doesn't offer much in the way of tweetable platitudes.

by Debie Thomas

I grew up in the era of evangelistic T-shirts. I was too shy to wear any myself, but I had friends who did. "WWJD?" "Cross-trained." "Made to worship." "Be still and know."

One of the T-shirt slogans I saw often was "Jesus is the answer." Kids would sport the slogan in bright, colorful letters, hoping to strike up conversation with peers who weren't Christians. Their faith was earnest, and I respected it. But every time I read the words "Jesus is the answer," I wanted to ask, "What's the question?" What question is Jesus the answer to?

Being a little church nerd, I would head to my Bible to figure it out. I needed to find a one-liner that would make sense of the slogan. Something we might now post on Facebook—pithy and clickable.

I never found it. Not because I didn't look hard, but because the Jesus of the Gospels doesn't offer much in the way of tweetable plati-tudes. He seems far more interested in asking questions—hard questions. "Who do you say that I am?" "Why are you so afraid?" "Do you want to get well?" "You don't want to leave, too, do you?" "Do you love me?" Strange, for a man who's supposed to be the answer.

Lately I've been asking myself the questions Jesus asked and trying to dwell with them one at a time. Most recently, I've been sitting with the first question Jesus asks in John's Gospel. He's just been baptized and

publicly identified as the Lamb of God by his cousin John. When two of John's own disciples decide to follow Jesus instead, Jesus turns, looks them in the eye, and asks a question that would have stopped me in my tracks: "What are you looking for?" (John 1:38).

So much for small talk; Jesus goes straight for the jugular. What longings keep you up at night? What hopes and hungers are you afraid to name, even to yourself? What fills you with joy? What breaks your heart? What are you looking for?

I wonder if the two who hear the question have any idea how to answer it. Maybe they don't. Maybe no one has ever asked them a question so inviting or vulnerable-making before. Maybe they've never considered the possibility that their own deep wants matter to God and profoundly affect their spiritual well-being and growth.

Maybe that's why Jesus asks. Because he knows that if they just take in the question, their lives will change. Their wanting will shape their finding. Their hungers will trigger transformation.

So, I turn the question on myself. What am I looking for? Do I know?

I live in a culture that tries so hard to answer the question for me. For as long as I can remember, I've been taught to want certain things fiercely. Success. Independence. Recognition. Security. So I've strived and strived, often feeling like a failure because I haven't attained all the things I'm supposed to want.

All the while, deep beneath the surface, Jesus' question burns hard and bright. What am I looking for? What is causing me to move so frantically through the world, one ambition piled on top of another, no achievement or accolade ever quite enough to calm my anxious heart? What am I looking for when I go to church on Sunday? When I pray? When I engage in ministry?

I know that my foundational calling is to look for God. To want God in my life—more than I want anything else. But I also know how easily habit, doubt, disappointment, weariness, or just plain boredom can dull my wanting. I know how fast I can step back and choose something smaller and safer. Close off my heart, stick a smile on my face, and go through the motions because I'm too depleted or jaded to yearn for more.

When Jesus asks his two would-be disciples what they're looking for, they dodge the question by answering with a question of their own: "Where are you staying?" As in what does your home look like? Where do you abide? Most importantly, perhaps, what shape will our lives take if we decide to hang out with you?

Jesus' response is both simple and profound: "Come and see" (John 1:39).

The only way to know where Jesus abides is to follow him all the way home. We can't know him in the abstract—he won't fit on a T-shirt. He's not the type who remains in stasis—he moves. That means we have to move too.

So he invites us to come and see, to walk the path for a while—as pilgrims, not tourists. If the path feels murky, it'll get clearer as we walk it. If we don't know what we're looking for, our patient sitting with the question will reveal what's hidden. Our wanting will shape our finding.

As I keep asking myself what I want, I realize that the asking itself is at the heart of discipleship. The point is not to rush headlong toward an answer but to undertake a journey in a spirit of holy curiosity and anticipation. To “come and see” over the full arc of my lifetime, cultivating a hunger for God that grows deeper over time.

It’s a generous question, followed by an even more generous invitation. What are you looking for? Come and see. Come and discern what you desire most deeply. Come and cultivate that desire in the gracious company of a God who welcomes your questions, who holds your longings close, who promises to transform you into who you really are.

Maybe Jesus is the answer because Jesus is the question. He’s the beginning and the end of what we’re looking for, but it’s okay with God if we can barely wrap our minds around that. We don’t need to know at the outset. All we need to do is ask the question, to come and see.

Debie Thomas is minister of lifelong formation at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Palo Alto, California, and author of Into the Mess and Other Jesus Stories.

Original Article: Jesus is the question | The Christian Century

Birthdays & Anniversaries March 26 – March 31, 2023

Anniversaries

Mar. 29 - Jon & Shannon Dusack

Birthdays

Mar. 26 - Robert McMullen, Tiffany Swartz, & Deborah Wicks

Mar. 27 - Sunniva Pawlowski, Ethan Wasnick, & Logan Wasnick

Mar. 28 - Keith Mayket

Mar. 29 - Caren Hill

Mar. 30 - Jon Adamy, Shannon Dusack, Karen Giunta, & Kathy Ling

Mar. 31 - Jackie Carpenter

Remember those that prayer has been requested for:

Kim; Devin; Laura & Family; Dorothy; Jo Ann; John Alt; Jan Mertz; Denny; Jill Lisson; Jaci Hauger; Sharon; Barbara; Dennis; Mary M.; Joel Penrod; Tim Miller; Cathy T.; Paul Brodt; Kim Stayrook; Alan; Pastor David Louder; Frank Robison; Sandy; Louise; Brooke & Bill; Chuck; Dawn; Cherie; Sandy; Lorrie; & Bill; Jamie Bloom; Nancy Moore; Wilma Hiltz; Johnny Nerone; Cheryl & Roger; pray for the Alpha Course participants that they may receive the holy spirit; James; Denny & Ellen; Bill; Sue; Stan McQuaide; El Warshel; Kathy Price; Beth Oldham; Stacy & Josh; Bill; Janet; Landon; Harold; Gonzales Family; Mary; Elaine, Patty and Betty Shaffer.

Condensed Worship

Saturday, March 18, 2023 & Sunday, March 19, 2023

Questions that Change, Questions that Change You

Prayer of the Day

P: Bend your ear to our prayers, Lord Christ, and come among us. By your gracious life and death for us, bring light into the darkness of our hearts, and anoint us with your Spirit, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

A: Amen.

First Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one."

Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah. The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God.

Psalmody: Psalm 23

L: The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.

A: The Lord makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters.

L: You restore my soul, O Lord, and guide me along right pathways for your name's sake.

A: Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

L: You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is running over.

A: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Second Reading: Ephesians 5:8-14

Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God.

Gospel: John 9:1-41

P: The holy gospel according to John.

A: Glory to you, O Lord.

As [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.” They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.” The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.” So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” The man answered, “Here is an

astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out. Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him. Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”

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

Sermon

Lent 4A – March 18/19, 2023 - John 9:1-41

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from Christ Jesus our Lord who encourages us to ask the right questions. Amen.

Something that I became very accustomed to in a very short period of time during seminary was just how often our professors would answer questions in ways that were completely and utterly unexpected.

The example of this that comes to mind most vividly is that frequently, you would ask something that was an “either/or” question, expecting an “either/or” answer, and the professor would respond simply...

Yes.

For example, you might raise your hand and ask something like, “Dr. Carlson, was Jesus frustrated with Judas betraying him, or did he just accept it because he knew what had to be done?”

To which, Dr. Carlson, a well-renowned New Testament scholar, would grin and answer...

Yes.

The gist of that sort of answer, a yes, or maybe a no, in response to a question that was intended to be an either/or sort of prompt, was important to remind us that things in scripture, and in faith itself, are not ever nearly as black and white as we want them to be. And the grin that would accompany that answer would seem to suggest, you’re asking the wrong question.

And so, Jesus’ response to the question that begins our reading, the question of, “who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus’ response of “neither” should have the same effect, reminding us that faith is not black and white...

And also encourage us to realize, we’re not asking the right question.

But Jesus moves on. He gives sight to this man born blind. He literally gives him a vision of the way that God intends the world to be, freeing him from the restrictions of what the world has turned us into.

But people are not happy for the man born blind. They have lots of questions. They want to know how it happened, and who did it. They demand to know the details. And as the interrogations continue, it becomes clear, these are not open-ended questions, these are not the sorts of questions inviting conversation or learning. These are questions where the Pharisees have a very clear idea of the right answer in their mind.

And the man who had experienced amazing grace, the man who had been blind but now could see... He wasn't giving the right answers.

He had been changed, but the questions he was being asked hadn't. To so many people, he was still the man born blind, he was still the one they whispered about in the streets, the one that they wondered, who had sinned for this horrible punishment to have been inflicted upon him.

For as much as the man might say or explain, people simply could NOT wrap their minds around it.

They couldn't realize that they were asking the wrong question. ...And if you're asking the wrong question, you'll never find the answer you truly need.

During one of our Wednesday evening gatherings a few weeks ago, I asked folks to share with each other, and with me, the big faith questions that they were maybe afraid to ask, or maybe afraid to have to answer. The questions that kept them up at night.

And one of those questions, one of those that was shared as something that concerns believers, and is sometimes used as ammunition by non-believers...

Why does God let bad things happen to good people?

I shared that there's an entire area of theological study devoted to that single question. It even has a big fancy name: theodicy. And that question burns us, can do incredible damage to people's faith, can build walls separating us from God when we'd much rather have bridges.

I shared that there's not an easy answer to that question. But today, I share that maybe it's not the right question.

Maybe instead of asking "Why does God let bad things happen to good people?" we should focus instead on "How is God with good people when bad things happen?"

When we change the question, it changes the answer. In this particular case, it takes an unanswerable question and makes it a bit more manageable. We believe that God is most certainly with all people in the midst of their trials and tribulations, that God holds the hands of the suffering, that God guides the helpers, that even on the worst days of our lives, God is there in our midst.

If you change the question. It can change you. It can give you sight to see things that you previously hadn't. It can bring you closer to God. Amen.

Prayers Of Intercession

L: Sustained by God's abundant mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all of creation.

L: Eternal God, you seal us by the Holy Spirit and mark us with the cross of Christ forever in baptism. Inspire us by your love as together we strive for justice and peace in all the earth. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

L: Creating God, by your word you have made all things, and you hate nothing you have made. Teach us to perceive the beauty of the breadth of your creation, from the grandest mountain range to the smallest springtime bud. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

L: Powerful God, you anoint kings and establish rulers. Guide the work of heads of state and elected officials. Encourage them to lead with justice and to remove barriers that impede the well-being of all. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

L: Shepherding God, you lead us beside still waters and restore our souls. Keep watch over those who weep; tend all who are sick and comfort those who grieve. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

L: God our host, you fill us at your table with more than we could ever ask. Feed us with hunger for justice. Equip the feeding ministries of this congregation and community. Nourish us so we can nourish our neighbors. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

L: God of history, with thanksgiving we remember our ancestors in faith who cared for your people (especially Joseph, Guardian of Jesus). We praise you for the ways they formed the faith of others and continue to inspire us. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

L: We lift our prayers to you, O God, trusting in your steadfast love and your promise to renew your whole creation; through Jesus Christ our Savior.

A: Amen.

Blessing

P: May God who has called us forth from the dust of the earth, and claimed us as children of the light, strengthen you on your journey into life renewed. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord's face shine upon you with grace and mercy. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you ☩ peace. **A: Amen.**