



# Mount Calvary Connected

June 23, 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](mailto:sklimke6@gmail.com)

**Pastor Jonathan Adams**

Cell-Phone: 412-817-6704

Email: [revjonoadams@gmail.com](mailto: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](http://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/](http://www.mt-calvarylutheran.org/bulletins/)

---

## A Message from Pastor Scott Klimke

One of the last times I wrote to you I suggested there were signs that Mount Calvary was starting to come out of the pandemic. I still see those signs. People are once again out looking for a place to worship and they are stopping in at Mount Calvary more and more. Thankfully they've been coming back too. But in spite of the signs of progress, there's still a long way to go in our recovery from the pandemic. I remember seeing Bruce Springsteen, one of my favorite musicians, on the fifteenth anniversary of 9/11. One of his last songs suggested it was still going to be a "long walk home." It felt true back then and it feels even truer now.

Recently, I was able to compare Mount Calvary's experience of the pandemic with about twenty other Lutheran congregations of our size. What I discovered is that there's not a single congregation which the pandemic didn't upend. In your average Lutheran congregation of our size, last year found in-person attendance at 51% of its pre-pandemic level. Not a single congregation experienced an in-person attendance increase or came at all close to equaling what had been their prior in-person attendance patterns. As concerning as it is, I'm sorry to report that more than half of the congregations surveyed failed to reach even 50% of their pre-pandemic worship figures. To be sure, Mount Calvary itself knows something of the struggle at hand. But Mount Calvary has also been ahead of the curve by a good bit, with last year's in-person attendance figures coming in at 70% of what they have been previously. Of the twenty or so surveyed, only two congregations did better and one of them exceeded Mount Calvary's performance by just 3%.

I share the above to reassure and to challenge. There is simply no evidence that Mount Calvary's version of the struggle at hand is especially grievous. Engaged in a struggle as we are, we may feel it, think it, or hear it, but the sky isn't falling. Even as the changes brought on by the pandemic seem to

drag on forever, your efforts and the efforts of the leaders you have called and elected have not been in vain! Considerably more people are back to in-person worship than elsewhere. Every week two thirds of the people we see have arrived or become more active in the last decade. And during our partnership, financial asserts available for mission and ministry have increased by nearly \$190,000 and that's after spending over \$180,000 on facility upgrades in the three years prior to the pandemic. Like before the pandemic, there's still much to celebrate at Mount Calvary. But we are involved in a "long walk home."

For people of faith, this is nothing new. The descendants of Jacob and Joseph got stuck in Egypt for 430 years. Moses and the rest of the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. The Babylonians sent Israel off to captivity in a foreign land for 70 years. Along with the rest of the Church, we ourselves have been waiting for Jesus to bring God's good intentions for us and the rest of creation to eternal fruition for close to 2000 years. There's a reason the Bible emphasizes faith. You need it when the walk home is so often long. But in addition to faith, those involved in a lengthy walk home also need to keep up with practices which have proved to be winning practices over the long haul.

As every Lutheran congregation like ours struggles to come back from the pandemic, those who get back home the quickest will be in worship—the place where the Holy Spirit most often blesses the Church with faith. Those who get back home quickest will also invite, welcome, feed, include, and be as generous as they can be with time, talent, and treasure. There's nothing new or revolutionary about any of this and that's to be expected. With the Church having been around for close to two thousand years now, there's very little which is new or revolutionary anymore. But there are winning practices. They are worship first and then inviting, welcoming, feeding, including, and generosity in all of its forms. These winning practices are directly responsible for the small and large victories we can continue to celebrate at Mount Calvary and will be just as responsible for how long it will ultimately take us to walk back to something more like what we used to call home.

Your Partner in Mission and Ministry,  
Pastor Scott

---

### **Upcoming Meetings**

Youth: June 29th at 5:30 p.m.

Planning Meeting for 1st Cruise-In: June 29th at 6:30 p.m. in the new lounge

WELCA: July 18th at 6:00 p.m.

Church Council: July 19th at 6:30 p.m.

The Property Committee will meet on the second Tuesday of every month at 6:00 p.m. in the old lounge.

---

### **Pond Cleaning Event hosted by the Property Team**

Thursday, July 7th at 5:30 p.m.

We need as much help as we can possibly get for this pretty big project. Some helpful tools to bring are weed eaters, sickles, and hedge trimmers. Hope to see you there!

---

### **2022 Offering Envelopes**

Offering envelopes for 2022 are available in the narthex. Thank you in advance for your contribution!

---

### **Help Wanted**

The Property Committee is looking to recruit a number of small job volunteers. Tasks might include replacing light bulbs, changing hardware on a commode, getting a lawnmower or snowblower ready for use, etc. The Committee believes we have a lot of talent in the congregation and wants to make greater use of it. Every small job handled by a member equals one less call that needs to be made to a vendor who may have a minimum visit charge or an hourly rate of \$50 or more.

Volunteers who can be available on short notice are needed to help with set-up, serving, and tear-down after funeral luncheons.

Interested parties should contact Mark Rychak or one of the pastors. A message could also be left with the church office at 814-266-4859. Thank you!

---

### **Get Well Cards for Pastor Jonathan**

Cards can be mailed to:

Pastor Jonathan Adams  
219 Ohio Street  
Boswell, PA 15531

---

### **Blessing of the Bikes**

The event will take place on June 26th at 10:30 a.m. at Mt. Calvary. Free lanyards will be given to the first 100 bikers. Refreshments will be provided. All bikers are welcome to attend our 8:45 a.m. service prior to the blessing.

---

### **Backyard Ministries Summer Club Volunteer Opportunity**

For the past 5 years, members of Mt. Calvary have been volunteering their time one day a week, for one hour to spend with the children of Coopersdale during the summer months. We have a core of about 5 people, but when one or more can't show up on a certain week, it makes things more difficult.

If you want to make a difference in underprivileged children's lives and share the word of God with them, then please consider this opportunity! All you need to do is show up. We already have games and activities, as well as the Bible lesson to share each week. If you are interested, or would like more information on this rewarding experience, please contact Mike Kozak at 244-6880. Thank you!

---

### **Backyard Ministries Snack Collection**

If you would like to continue to donate prepackaged snacks please continue to drop them off at the church. We have decided that we will also start accepting monetary donations. If you would like to contribute, and this is an easier way for you to do so, please drop off any donations at the church office. Thank you for your continued support!

---

### **Scheduled Worship Help**

#### **Saturday, June 25:**

**Greeters/Ushers:** Jim & Chris Koshute

**Communion Assistants:** Volunteers needed!

---

**Sunday, June 26:**

**Greeters/Ushers:** Jerry & Ruth Pozun

**Communion Assistants:** Todd Moss

**Saturday, July 2:**

**Greeters/Ushers:** Jerry & Ruth Pozun

**Communion Assistants:** Pat Bittner & Cindy Solarczyk

**Sunday, July 3:**

**Greeters/Ushers:** Mary Ann Mapes & Bill Eschrich

**Communion Assistants:** Volunteers needed!

There are sign up sheets in the Narthex for Greeters/Ushers and 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.

---



## Youth News

**Mt. Calvary's Adventures of "Flat Jesus":** This summer, Pastor Jono Adams invites you to adopt "Flat Jesus" and take him on your summer adventures! Please see the additional information below or visit Mt. Calvary's website.

**Pastor Jono's Sunday school class, and the nursery/childcare** has concluded for the summer. We look forward to seeing you all later this year!

**Allegheny Synod Youth Day @ Kennywood:** Friday, July 1st

**Synod Day @ DelGrosso's Amusement Park:** Monday, August 1st

**Lutheran Day @ the Curve:** Sunday, August 21st @ the Curve Baseball Field in Altoona

**IGNITE - Elementary Youth Retreat (Grades 2 - 6):** September 24-25 @ Camp Sequanota

**PLUNGE - Jr. High Retreat (Grades 6 -9):** October 1-2 @ Camp Sequanota

**Pastor Jonathan LOVES to get out and see our Mount Calvary youth in action doing the things they enjoy!** Be sure to share your schedules for sports, concerts, recitals, etc. You never know where he might show up!

Pastor Jonathan's office hours at Mount Calvary are Mondays & Wednesdays, 10am-3pm. He is available outside of those hours via email ([RevJonoAdams@gmail.com](mailto:RevJonoAdams@gmail.com)), cellphone (412-817-6704), or Facebook.

---

### **Mt. Calvary's Adventures of "Flat Jesus"**

This summer, Pastor Jono Adams invites you to adopt "Flat Jesus" and take him on your summer adventures!

"Flat Jesus" was inspired by a children's book by Jeff Brown called, "Flat Stanley." In the book, a boy named Stanley becomes flattened and is able to be mailed to different places, having all kinds of exciting adventures.

"Flat Jesus" is a way to keep our church family connected as we enter into the summer traveling season. Bring home a "Flat Jesus" and take him with you as you travel...or to whatever you do this summer. Take a picture of him doing lots of different things: going out to dinner, having fun at the beach or the mountains, hanging out with friends or cousins, or whatever you are doing! It will be an amazing adventure! It is a great way to remember that Jesus is always with us, wherever we go. And it just might start up a conversation with someone about what you are doing...and why!

**AND THEN... SHARE HOW JESUS IS ON THE MOVE!**

When you have taken photos of "Flat Jesus," you can share your "Flat Jesus" pictures:

1. By emailing photos to RevJonoAdams@gmail.com or texting them to 412-817-6704.
2. By uploading your picture directly to Facebook. Tag Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church of Johnstown, PA. Add the hashtag #flatJesus and/or #jesusisonthemove

It will be so exciting to see where Jesus is on the move this summer as you share your adventures! And remember, Jesus is with you ALWAYS!

We'd LOVE to see at least one "Flat Jesus" photo from every family in church. And if we get enough, we'll combine them into a video at the end of the summer!

If you won't make it to church to pick up a printed "Flat Jesus," but still want to participate, you can download and print your own by visiting Mt. Calvary's website: <https://www.mt-calvarylutheran.org/mt-calvarys-adventures-of-flat-jesus/>

---

### **Giving Tree**

The Giving Tree for May and June will go to The Precious Life Baby Bottle Campaign that runs through Birthright from Mother's Day to Father's Day. There will also be a basket in front of the tree to collect clothes for toddlers. Thank you for your continued support!

---

### **1st Annual Cruise-In**

Sunday, July 24th from 1-4 p.m.

Mt. Calvary parking lot

Open to all cars, trucks, and bikes. A gift bag will be given to the first 25 vehicles. There will be food, dessert, and a DJ. Any questions, please contact the church office at 814-266-4859.

---

### Planning Meeting for 1st Cruise-In

The planning meeting will take place on Wednesday, June 29th at 6:30 p.m. in the new lounge. People are needed to help with food prep, serving, parking cars, passing out free gifts, etc. If you have any questions prior to the meeting, contact Deb Rychak @ 814 421-8992.

---

### Walk Thru Basket Party

We are having a Walk Thru Basket Party on September 24th and September 25th. Tickets will be on sale in July. We are asking for your support of the event with the following: purchase tickets, filled baskets, gift certificates, or cash. More information to follow in the coming weeks.

---

### 14-Day Biblical Pilgrimage Adventure to Israel

Jerusalem Seminary in Conjunction with Redstone Presbytery and Friends  
October 15 to 28, 2022

Please see email sent May 31st for trip information, including the itinerary, or visit:  
<http://redstonepresbytery.org/>

---

### Give now for Eastern Europe Crisis Response

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9).*

Friends, I write to you again about our neighbors in Eastern Europe. First, I thank you for your outpouring of prayers and generosity — you are making a difference in the lives of people impacted by the war in Ukraine.

Your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response during this crisis are already at work. Because of your generosity, \$1 million will support the Lutheran World Federation and these member churches:

German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine  
Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland  
Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia  
Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Romania

They are distributing hygiene supplies, food, medicine, bedding and psychosocial and pastoral care to refugees and internally displaced people, most of whom are women and children.

**Your support has made this possible, but more work remains. Your gifts to “Eastern Europe Crisis Response” will be used to in full (100%) to address the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and neighboring countries.**

Additional responses through partners in these countries and others in the region are expected in the coming weeks and months, and Lutheran Disaster Response is committed to accompanying those partners as the situation evolves. We pray for the Roma communities and foreign nationals who are facing racial and ethnic discrimination at the borders as they flee Ukraine. Our companions are ensuring that people in these marginalized groups will be treated with respect and dignity as they seek safety.

We know there are many organizations that you can choose to support, but it is only by giving to Lutheran Disaster Response that guarantees your gift will fund ELCA-supported work through faith partners in the region.

I invite you to watch this [video](#) from Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton about the situation in Eastern Europe and the ELCA's response.

Together we pray for our siblings in Ukraine and Eastern Europe. May God be with them in their time of need.

In Christ's service,



The Rev. Daniel Rift  
Director, ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response Fund  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

---

**Birthdays and Anniversaries for the  
Week: June 26 – July 2, 2022**

**June 27** - John Marsh

**June 28** - Lilianna Swartz

**June 29** - Ruth Pawlowski

**June 30** - Beverly Specht

**July 1** - Leah Hockensmith, Rosemary Manotti, & Corey McKool

**July 2** - Madelyn Horn, Spencer Kovalsky, & Edward Wingard IV

**June 27** - Derrick & Jennifer Nash (26 years)

**July 1** - David & Vicki Karnes

**July 1** - William & Jan Layton

---

**Remember those that prayer has been requested for:**

Linda & Dick, Dolly & Chiz Palm Family, 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, Melanie, Ken, John Nerone, Dane Wisner, Jeff, Dorothy, Irene, Karen, Erin, Susan Dyers, Bob McMullen, Wyatt George, Larry Hockensmith, Jean Pellon, Mike, Corey, John Rychak, Pastor Jonathan & Family, Roxanne Horner, Miriam Horner, Lynn Palm & son, Alex, & Alex's wife, Becky Lilja, Kathy P., Al Johnson, Chris, Donna & Danny, Cheryl, Jennifer & Family, Jaime, Matt & Ashley, Landon, Max Lawn, Linda Haberkorn, Lorraine, Joe, Donna, Danny & Family, Becky Jo, Bill, Linda & Family, Mary, Mary Jane, Janice, Dennis, Rick, Don, the Chavis Family, Mabel Ann, Betty, Cathy, Cindy, Jill, Theresa & Family, Dean, Madi & Family, Patty &

Family, Williams Family, Sydney & Family, Paulette, Ron, Toby, Andrea, Mary Ann, Midge, Rayford, Lois A., Dwane, Nicole, Trent, Kim, Uvalde, Texas; Kyle, Anna, Beverly, Sondra, & E Warshel.

---

### **Financial Update**

When the congregational council recently reviewed financial reports for May, very little had changed. By way of example, last year's property expenses and this year's property expenses were separated by just \$250.14 and last year's wages and this year's wages were separated by just \$74.89. This stability in Mount Calvary's largest areas of expense speaks to the great job being done by your elected leaders. Have you said, "Thank you" to one of those leaders lately? Are they regularly a part of your prayer life?

There's also stability when it comes to the income side of the equation. We continue to feel the impact of the pandemic slowdown and even more so the impact of members moving out of our area, but May income was still slightly higher than it was a year ago. This too speaks to the effective job being done by your elected leaders. Please pray for them. Please be encouraging and grateful. They're doing a great job. Along with those effective leaders, may we all just continue doing our part; maintaining our previous giving as a baseline and increasing when and where possible.

---

### **Condensed Worship for Sunday, June 19, 2022**

#### **Prayer of the Day**

P: O Lord God, we bring before you the cries of a sorrowing world. In your mercy set us free from the chains that bind us, and defend us from everything that is evil, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

#### **First Reading: Isaiah 65:1-9**

I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask, to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, "Here I am, here I am," to a nation that did not call on my name. I held out my hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices; a people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and offering incense on bricks; who sit inside tombs, and spend the night in secret places; who eat swine's flesh, with broth of abominable things in their vessels; who say, "Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you." These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all day long. See, it is written before me: I will not keep silent, but I will repay; I will indeed repay into their laps their iniquities and their ancestors' iniquities together, says the Lord; because they offered incense on the mountains and reviled me on the hills, I will measure into their laps full payment for their actions. Thus says the Lord: As the wine is found in the cluster, and they say, "Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it," so I will do for my servants' sake, and not destroy them all. I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah inheritors of my mountains; my chosen shall inherit it, and my servants shall settle there.

P: The word of the Lord,

**A: Thanks be to God!**

#### **Psalm 22:19-28**

P: But you, O Lord, be not far away; O my help, hasten to my aid.

**A: Deliver me from the sword, my life from the power of the dog.**



P: Save me from the lion's mouth! From the horns of wild bulls you have rescued me.

**A: I will declare your name to my people; in the midst of the assembly I will praise you.**

P: You who fear the Lord, give praise! All you of Jacob's line, give glory. Stand in awe of the Lord, all you offspring of Israel.

**A: For the Lord does not despise nor abhor the poor in their poverty; neither is the Lord's face hidden from them; but when they cry out, the Lord hears them.**

P: From you comes my praise in the great assembly; I will perform my vows in the sight of those who fear the Lord.

**A: The poor shall eat and be satisfied, Let those who seek the Lord give praise! May your hearts live forever!**

P: All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; all the families of nations shall bow before God.

**A: For dominion belongs to the Lord, who rules over the nations.**

### **Second Reading: Galatians 3:23-29**

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

P: The word of the Lord,

**A: Thanks be to God!**

### **Gospel: Luke 8:26-39**

Then [Jesus and his disciples] arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me"—for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

P: The gospel of the Lord.

**A: Praise to you, O Christ!**

### **Sermon by Pastor Scott Klimke**

"What does this all have to do with me and/or us?" As we find ourselves two to three thousand years removed from the scriptures we hear each week, this question is probably inevitable. It's also quite faithful. God's living word cannot live in us until we hear it; until we ask and hopefully answer the question of what this all has to do with me and/or us.

Today, one such point of connection can be found in the distance that comes to separate Jesus and an ancient sibling in Christ. For a time, Jesus and this ancient sibling in Christ were together and to great effect. After being exorcized of a whole legion of demons, our ancient sibling in Christ understandably wanted to be with Jesus forever. It didn't happen. Jesus came for a time and then went. This is our pattern as well. Often quite positively, Jesus gathers with us as we gather in his name and around the word of God and the sacraments of God. Then Jesus leaves as we ourselves leave. We know that somehow, someday Jesus is with us through it all, but there's still separation and distance; leading us to pray, "Come, Lord Jesus, come." And whether it existed two to three thousand years ago or now, here's the thing about distance. Distance opens the door for doubt and all the temptations that doubt isn't prepared to handle.

Be it now or long ago, when there's distance and that which remains unresolved in a relationship, people are going to be tempted to travel off in all sorts of directions. As identified by our reading from Isaiah, idolatry is one possibility. Disagreement and divide can be another as our reading from Galatians itself testifies. Frankly, this letter probably would have never been written if Paul and other early Church luminaries like Peter and James the brother of Jesus weren't engaged in a dustup about whether circumcision was or was not necessary for every Christian male. This is distance and matters of spiritual consequence unresolved. You get anything but uniformity. Who's right and who's wrong? Or perhaps most accurately, who's closest to being right about God and the good? As long as Jesus is on one side of the sea and we another, it's all a matter of faith and faith needs encouragement. Here too our scriptures speak to us despite the passage of considerable time.

As faith seeks and needs encouragement, our reading from Luke suggests it won't be found in large and overwhelming public support for the Church. Even after redeeming and reforming a man who had become a public menace, Luke reports Jesus was still asked to leave the land of the Gerasenes. As far as we can tell from what Luke relates by way of details, when Jesus got in his boat and traveled to the

other side of the sea, only the one he had exorcized believed in him. This ancient sibling in Christ was alone in his faith; alone in his spiritual commitments and sensibilities. Does this sound at all familiar?

If it does, our reading from Isaiah agrees with Luke that it's not cause for alarm. The prophet contends some shall survive God's eventual reckoning for sin, but he also says they shall be as wine is to grapes. If you don't know how many grapes it takes to make a glass of wine, I recently learned seventy-five grapes are required. Is Isaiah suggesting there shall be seventy-five idolators for every person of faith? At the very least, he, like Luke, is suggesting the faithful may often be in the minority. With matters spiritual disputed and up for grabs, faith shall need much encouragement if it is to conquer as 1st John says it can. If not from public support for the Church, where is this oh so necessary encouragement to come?

Jesus is one answer. Up to now, every branch of Christianity has rightly emphasized how effective Jesus was and is at his work. This is in fact much of the argument that Paul makes all throughout the letter to the Galatians. As he does his best to turn back those who insist upon circumcision for all, Paul repeatedly stresses that Jesus is the main course with much of what went on previously the appetizer. With the main course now served, with Jesus crucified and risen from the dead, our need for appetizers like circumcision and the diet prescribed by the Old Testament has evaporated. And so, as we interact with our own doubts and those of others, we should continue to say things like, "Look to the cross. Remember how on Good Friday Jesus said his work was forever finished. Hold on to the Good News that Jesus was so good at his work that God raised him from the dead so he might continue it forever." All of this is good. All of it encourages faith as our present distance from God continues and as our neighbors increasingly go their own way. But along with emphasizing the flawless faithfulness of Jesus, some churches, including our own, have also lifted up the sacraments as an antidote for doubt. They've said, "When in doubt, remember your baptism. Remember that you've been marked with the sign of Jesus Christ that time cannot erase." Along with this, they've also said, "When in doubt, eat and drink of the risen Christ at his table." But today these churches are in decline, as others which emphasize the sacraments far less have taken their place. Is there anything to learn from this or should we continue to identify the sacraments as antidotes for doubt?

Though it might not appear to do so at first, our reading from Luke weighs in on this question today. What happens to a possessed man is eerily similar to how baptism came to be administered in the Church. At first, this man is naked, just as the baptized used to be prior to their baptism. Then, there's an exorcism which recalls how even today baptism continues to be preceded by renunciations of Evil. Next, Evil is drowned in water, just as the word and water of baptism drown sin, death, and the devil today. Formerly naked, the exorcized man is then clothed, just as the baptized were once clothed in white not before, but after their baptism. And to top it all off, the man who starts out in so much trouble in our reading from Luke ends up at the feet of Jesus, just as we the baptized sit at the feet of Jesus today awaiting words of hope and direction from our Lord and Savior. The similarities are just too great to overlook. As the Spirit inspired Luke to write for those in need of the same encouragement we continue to need today, the evangelist was led to turn our ancient siblings in Christ back to baptism. Evidently, baptism was worth remembering. Evidently, the sacraments were to be a source of encouragement for faith hobbled and harassed by doubt. And St. Paul and our reading from Galatians would most assuredly agree with this positive valuation of the sacraments.

As the Galatians themselves did battle with their own doubts and temptations, St. Paul didn't just lift up the flawless faithfulness of Christ. He also directed the Galatians to their baptisms; reminding them and us that to be baptized with Christ's death and resurrection is to be clothed in Christ. It's precisely why every Lutheran funeral begins with a reminder of baptism and why Luther encouraged a daily return to baptism. Baptism is the unfailing assurance that the oh so effective work of Jesus includes you and me. Baptism is the unfailing assurance that we need not worry about public opinion because Jesus, the Lord of lords and King of kings, has already declared us to be on the right side of history; making us inheritors of the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. As intended, may these unfailing assurances of baptism send doubt packing, give our faith a real shot in the arm, and leave us more ready than ever to witness in word and deed to God's good intentions for us and our world. Amen!

### **Prayers of Intercession**

P: United in Christ and guided by the Spirit, we pray for the church, the creation, and all in need.

P: Holy God, you hear the cries of those who seek you. Equip your church with evangelists who reveal the continuous call of your outstretched hands and your promises of a home in you. God of grace,

**A: hear our prayer.**

P: You hear the cries of the earth. Restore places where land, air, and waterways have been harmed. Guide us to develop and implement sources of energy and food production that do not destroy the earth. God of grace,

**A: hear our prayer.**

P: You hear the cries of those who are marginalized or cast out. On this Juneteenth observance, guide us continually toward the end of oppression in all its forms, especially white supremacy. Bring true freedom and human flourishing to all your beloved children. God of grace,

**A: hear our prayer.**

P: You hear the cries of those who suffer. Come to the aid of all who are homeless, naked, hungry, and sick (especially). Bring peace to any experiencing mental illness, that they can clearly recognize your loving presence. God of grace,

**A: hear our prayer.**

P: You hear the cries of those who celebrate and those who grieve on this Father's Day. Nurture mutual love and tender care in all relationships. Comfort those for whom this day brings sadness or longing. God of grace,

**A: hear our prayer.**

P: We give thanks for the faithful departed whose lives proclaimed all you had done for them (especially). At the last, unite us with them as we make our home in you. God of grace,

**A: hear our prayer.**

P: God of every time and place, in Jesus' name and filled with your Holy Spirit, we entrust these spoken prayers and those in our hearts into your holy keeping.

**A: Amen.**

**Blessing**

P: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy. The Lord look upon you with favor and ☩ give you peace. **Amen.**