



# Mount Calvary Connected

August 11, 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](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/)

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### A Reflection from Pastor Jonathan

At four years old, our daughter Annabelle has not had much exposure to organized sports or activities. She's done swim lessons, a one-off dance class here or there, and attended dozens of local football, softball, baseball, and soccer games in support of church members, neighbors, and family. But we've mostly avoided getting her involved in too much.

It's a delight to watch her on the playground though, to see the ways that she interacts with other children, both the ones she knows, and the ones she gets to know almost immediately after running up and introducing herself "Hi, I'm Annabelle, I'm four." While we'll certainly support her being well-rounded and getting involved in whatever activities she chooses in the future, Peter Marty's recent article in The Christian Century reminds us to slow down and savor the unstructured nature of playground play...

### Good citizenship starts on the playground

**By Rev. Peter W. Marty**

Families with children who play organized club sports assume some extraordinary demands. Nowadays, children as young as fourth grade can hit the road with their families in tow, competing in sports tournaments across multistate regions, often for as many as 25 weekends a year. The time, devotion, and financial outlay these families assume for their budding soccer or baseball star resembles a kind of religion. Whether or not Junior will ever play professionally—I meet plenty of parents who think he might—the commitment of the family to tease out such a dream easily overshadows their interest in any other religion people tend to practice on weekends.

My brothers and I never participated in Little League or club sports, nothing beyond our public-school teams. It's not entirely clear to me why our parents prohibited our participation, though I think it was

some combination of their own lack of interest in athletics, their reluctance to deal with the scheduling hassles for a large family, and their desire to be free to travel with us whenever and wherever. We brothers knew no other life than the fun one played out with friends in a public park at the end of the street. There we designed our own games, made up and enforced our own rules, and mediated the conflicts we encountered. It was an adult-free environment where every dispute was settled without outside intervention. No parents, referees, or umpires to supervise our play.

Our favorite was sandlot football, played in all weather but the dead of winter. After we divided up into teams, the agreed-upon quarterback for the next set of downs took charge. I designed thousands of plays, my right index finger diagramming running and passing routes on my left palm. In the huddle, we'd whisper excitedly, periodically modifying the plan. Somebody usually wanted to go long, which gave each quarterback the chance to show off his arm.

When the ball carrier argued that the defensive player missed touching him with both hands, the game would pause until we collectively resolved the dispute. If the final score was lopsided, we switched up players to try to even out the next game. Every game was a cooperative venture that included all of us working together to negotiate consensus. It was never easy but always satisfying.

In a powerful 2015 essay on unsupervised childhood play, economist Steven Horwitz suggests that more parent-free play among children would teach social skills valuable to good citizenship. Drawing on Alexis de Tocqueville's 19-century assessment that citizens in a vibrant democracy must develop and perfect the "art of associating," Horwitz believes that free play for children, without third-party referees or hovering parents, is the ideal school for learning this art. Through self-designed play, children develop empathy, learn tolerance for risk, meet the discomfort of failure, practice compromise, solve problems together, and acquire fundamental skills for living cooperatively with others.

The heart and soul of democratic civil society is dependent on these sorts of things. Group problem-solving and shared understandings are critical to the societal order, perhaps even more crucial in fractured and polarized times.

We probably ought to pay more attention to the sharp decline in unsupervised play among this generation of youth. If strengthening democracy happens gradually and incrementally, it's worth reminding ourselves that good citizenship develops one sandlot touchdown, one frustrating strikeout, and one playground argument at a time.

*Peter W. Marty is editor/publisher of the Century and senior pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Davenport, Iowa.*

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### **Upcoming Meetings**

Social Ministry Committee: August 11th at 6:30 p.m.

WELCA: August 15th at 6:00 p.m.

Church Council: August 16th at 6:30 p.m.

Bible Study on Psalms: August 17th at 6:30 p.m.

Bible Study on Psalms: August 31st 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.

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### **2022 Offering Envelopes**

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

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### **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!

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

Cards can be mailed to:

Pastor Jonathan Adams  
219 Ohio Street  
Boswell, PA 15531

If you'd like to send a meal to Pastor Jonathan & his family to help during his recovery, visit the Meal Train website: <https://www.mealtrain.com/trains/n15v0q> Thank you!

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### **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!

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### **Giving Tree**

For the months of July and August, the Giving Tree will be used to collect \$5 donations for the Jared Box Project. This is a charity that helps brighten the spirits of children in our local hospitals. The money collected will be used to purchase a small bag of activities for each child. The bags will be packed and delivered on God's Work, Our Hands Saturday, September 10th. Thank you for your continued support!

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### **Computer & Internet Connection Now Available**

Members may use the computer in the library during office hours: Monday – Thursday 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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### **Usher Teams**

We are looking to recruit teams of ushers staffed with at least four people. Each group will be assigned to Saturdays or Sundays and a month which works for them. Once the day and month have been arranged, it will be up to the people on the team to determine who will be taking the various weeks in the assigned month. Please be in contact with Pastor Scott should you wish to become a part of a team or have already recruited a time of four.

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### **Scheduled Worship Help**

#### **Saturday, August 13:**

**Greeters/Ushers:** Volunteers needed!

**Communion Assistants:** Pat Bittner & Joan Bunnell

#### **Sunday, August 14:**

**Greeters/Ushers:** Bill Eschrich

**Communion Assistants:** Ray Leverknight

#### **Saturday, August 20:**

**Greeters/Ushers:** Volunteers needed!

**Communion Assistants:** Volunteers needed!

#### **Sunday, August 21:**

**Greeters/Ushers:** David Raho

**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.

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## *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!

**Youth/Family Ministry Ice Cream Event:** August 20th after the 5:30 p.m. service

**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.

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### **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](mailto: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/>

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Flat Jesus has been to a LOT of different places this summer with a LOT of different people! But there's still time to take your faith (and Flat Jesus) with you on those last-minute end-of-summer trips!

Make sure to send your pictures to Pastor Jono via email at [RevJonoAdams@gmail.com](mailto:RevJonoAdams@gmail.com) or cellphone at 412-817-6704. All pictures received will be printed to go on a bulletin board at church and shown in a video!

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### **Youth & Family Ministry Ice Cream Event**

Summer is ALMOST over, but NOT YET! Join us after the Saturday night 5:30 p.m. worship service on August 20th for an ice cream social for Mount Calvary youth and their families. Welcome back Pastor Jono and all of our friends who've been away these last few months. We'll even have popsicles for our lactose intolerant friends!

RSVPs for "ice cream eaters" are GREATLY appreciated, (who wants to run out of ice cream?!?!) and we'd love to have a few "ice cream helpers" who can help with set-up, tear-down, and serving. Let us know you're coming (or helping) on Signup Genius at: <https://rebrand.ly/SummerIceCream22>

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### **Pond Cleaning/Weeding Event**

The Property Committee will be hosting a pond clean out/weeding on Thursday, September 15th at 6:00 p.m. Bring your favorite tools!

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### **Walk Thru Basket Party**

We are having a Walk Thru Basket Party on September 24th (10-2pm) and September 25th (9-2pm). Tickets are \$5 for 26 chances. Winners will be drawn on Facebook Live at 2:30pm on September 25th and contacted via phone/email.

We are asking for your support of the event with the following: purchase tickets, filled baskets, gift certificates, or cash. Tickets will be on sale before and after church services.

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### **Touch a Truck!**

Saturday, September 10th from 10-2 p.m.

There will be all types of vehicles to explore, including fire, police, rescue, and commercial trucks. Snacks and drinks will be provided. There will be a special appearance by Po Poore!

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### **Clothing Sale**

The Social Ministry Team will be having their annual clothing sale on Saturday October 8th. We now have a storage area downstairs at the church that allows us to start collecting items earlier. If you have any clothes you would like to donate, please bag them by size and gender. This makes it easier during the sorting process. You can drop the clothes off at any time. If the church is locked, and no one is available in the office, please leave them by the blue bin outside. It will be checked daily. If you have any questions, please contact Mike Kozak at 244-6880. Thank you!

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### **Boscov's "Friends Helping Friends" Shopping Passes**

WELCA is selling Boscov's "Friends Helping Friends" discount shopping passes again this year. Your \$5.00 donation entitles you to a shopping pass to Boscov's on October 19th, giving you a 25% discount on most purchases. Proceeds benefit WELCA's many activities throughout the year. Let any WELCA member know you'd like to purchase a pass or watch for someone selling them in the Narthex after services.

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## **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/>

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### **Lutheran Disaster Response: U.S. Flooding**

Beginning on July 27th, a line of severe storms dumped record amounts of rain on eastern Kentucky, overflowing rivers and creeks onto streets and neighborhoods. The death toll in Kentucky is expected to rise as search and rescue efforts continue. The number of people missing is still unknown. Rising waters are damaging infrastructure, including roads, bridges and power lines, which hinders rescue efforts.

The flooding has destroyed hundreds of homes and other buildings and left families with nothing. These severe floods are not limited to Kentucky; there has been flooding in Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, West Virginia and other states in the region.

As the waters recede and the full scope of the damage is assessed, Lutheran Disaster Response will work with the Indiana-Kentucky Synod and local communities to focus on long-term needs. We anticipate that the response will include rebuilding homes, replacing lost household items, and providing emotional and spiritual care to survivors.

Please consider donating to this cause. Gifts to "U.S. flooding" will be used in full (100%) to assist those affected by floods.

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### **Give now for Eastern Europe Crisis Response**

On February 24th, Russian forces invaded Ukraine, launching land, sea, and air attacks. Airports are now shut, and few railway lines are operational. Civilians fleeing the violence are heading toward Ukraine's western districts and such neighboring countries as Poland, Moldova, Slovakia, Romania, and Hungary. Millions of people are seeking refuge in neighboring countries. There are major humanitarian concerns for both internally displaced people and refugees. Many of these Ukrainians fleeing their homes need shelter, basic necessities, and pastoral care.

Lutheran Disaster Response is accompanying our companions in Ukraine, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, and Moldova, as well as such ecumenical partners as Lutheran World Federation and Church World Service, in their humanitarian responses to the crisis. These partners provide refugees with immediate support and supplies such as food, blankets, water, and hygiene kits.

Your gifts designated for "Eastern Europe Crisis Response" will be used entirely (100%) to provide support for people impacted by conflict in the region.

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### **Updates from Our Members & Community**

Terrie Crisi, our church secretary, has been out ill. Her return date is not yet known. Please be patient as you interact with the church office until Terrie is able to return.

Pastor Scott will not be in on Friday, August 12th and Friday, August 19th.

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**Birthdays and Anniversaries for the  
Week: August 14 – August 20, 2022**

**Aug. 14** - Mark Rychak & Robin Wechtenhiser

**Aug. 15** - Felicia Beglin & Luella Koontz

**Aug. 16** - Michael Stayrook

**Aug. 19** - Roxanne Horner

**Aug. 20** - Bettie Shaffer

**Aug. 19** - Dan & Karen Bantley (50 years)

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**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, Max Lawn, Linda Haberkorn, Lorraine, Joe, Donna, Danny & Family, Becky Jo, Bill, Linda & Family, Mary, Mary Jane, Janice, Dennis, 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, E. 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, & Terrie.

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**Financial Update**

When the council reviewed financial reports through the end of June on Tuesday, things were largely as they've been for some time. There's stability at Mount Calvary. Even with the volatility affecting the savings and investments of so many, our overall holdings are up a tad from a year ago. Income is over budget and expenses are under budget.

The biggest danger before us is not to fall into a false sense of security. The pandemic threw not just Mount Calvary, but much of the Church into neutral for what has been over two years now. Every minute in neutral is a minute lost and as the minutes add up so do the losses. It's why inviting and welcoming without interruption and maintaining or increasing giving when possible are important.

They stave off the losses that are inevitable even when it's full steam ahead and are now more important than ever since things haven't been full steam ahead for some time.

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**Condensed Worship for Sunday, August 7, 2022**

**Prayer of the Day**

P: Almighty God, you sent your Holy Spirit to be the life and light of your church. Open our hearts to the riches of your grace, that we may be ready to receive you wherever you appear, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**



**First Reading: Genesis 15:1-6**

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.” But the word of the Lord came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.” He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

P: The word of the Lord,

**A: Thanks be to God!**

**Psalm 33:12-22**

P: Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord! Happy the people chosen to be God’s heritage!

**A: The Lord looks down from heaven, and sees all humankind.**

P: God sits firmly enthroned and watches all who dwell on the earth.

**A: God fashions all their hearts and observes all their deeds.**

P: A king is not saved by the size of the army, nor are warriors rescued by their great strength.

**A: The horse gives vain hope for victory; despite its great strength it cannot save.**

P: Truly, your eye is upon those who fear you, O Lord, upon those who wait for your steadfast love,

**A: to deliver their lives from death, and to keep them alive in time of famine.**

P: Our innermost being waits for you, O Lord, our helper and our shield.

**A: Surely, our heart rejoices in you, for in your holy name we put our trust.**

P: Let your lovingkindness, O Lord, be upon us, even as we place our hope in you.

**Second Reading: Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16**

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, “as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.” All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

P: The word of the Lord,

**A: Thanks be to God!**

**Gospel: Luke 12:32-40**

[Jesus said:] “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. “But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

P: The gospel of the Lord.

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

**Sermon by Pastor Scott Klimke**

I’ve never looked for a needle in a haystack, as in literally. I hope it doesn’t become necessary for this to change. But I have read a lot and this can sometimes be like finding a needle in a haystack. Books and articles can be difficult to digest and understand and the Bible is a book with a lot of articles in it. On Wednesday night, some of us began to work with Psalm 119. It’s an oft-used psalm in our worship life that’s quite unique. Psalm 119 is an acrostic composition. This means the first letter of each verse corresponds to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in descending order. To put it in English, verse one starts with an “A”, verse two starts with a “B,” and so it goes until the final verse begins with a “Z.” But when it comes to Psalm 119, this is taken to new heights. It Hebrew alphabet isn’t spelled out just happen once or twice. It happens eight times. With there being twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet, this means you end up with a psalm or poem that’s one hundred and seventy-six verses long and filled with repetitive language and concepts. What’s the point of this psalm or poem? Where’s the needle in the haystack to be found? Though progress was made, as of Wednesday evening, I can’t say any of us working with Psalm 119 knew. I’m confident we’ll get there, but it’s going to take some time.

Now take up it a notch and realize that Psalm 119 is just one, long article in a book that itself is over thirty-one thousand verses long. If the one hundred and seventy-six verses of Psalm 119 can be hard to corral or tame, how much harder this is going to become when it all involves all of Scripture. When you’re dealing with over thirty-one thousand verses, you’ve certainly got quite a haystack on your hands. What’s the point? Where’s the needle to be found?

Hopefully you already know Jesus is the point; the needle that stitches together all the verses and pages of Scripture into a cohesive whole. The book from which today’s second reading is drawn tells us this. The book of Hebrews begins by telling us that in ages past God spoke to us in many and various ways through the prophets, but now, in this last phase of God’s plan, God has spoken to us through his Son Jesus. Jesus is God’s final and most definitive word the book of Hebrews says; even more final and definitive than the Bible itself. The opening verse of John’s gospel says much the same. Calling Jesus

“THE Word of God,” as in THE Word of God, this verse says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Here too Jesus is the point; the needle sewing together everything God will ever say or do.

But this too must be said. When you’ve been around from the beginning, as Jesus has, a lot of water’s gone under the bridge. When you’ve walked the face of the earth for thirty or more years as Jesus once did, your biography is more than a one sentence story to tell. And when you’ve been the Head of the Body known as the Church, as Jesus has since the day of his resurrection some two thousand years ago, you’ve certainly seen a lot come and go. Thankfully the book of Hebrews also tells us that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. But there’s still some complexity here; still a vast ocean of experience. Seen in this way, Jesus too can become a haystack. Where’s the needle to be found?

As we search for the needle that sews all of Jesus’ parts and years together, our reading from Genesis can be of great help. In this reading, God promises aged, childless Abram that his descendants shall be as numerous as the stars of heaven. Earlier in Genesis, God also promises all these descendants of aged, childless Abram shall turn out to be a blessing for all the families of the earth. This is quite the promise. A lot stands in the way of its fulfillment. On the level of biology alone, Abram’s wife Sarai is beyond childbearing age. Then, Isaac’s wife Rebekah struggles to conceive. Then, the love of Jacob’s life, Rachel, has her own struggles getting pregnant. And many years later, Mary, the mother of our Lord, is still a virgin when she’s told our Savior has become flesh in her womb. Aye, yi, yi! Aye, yi, yi! Does it ever look like the needle is going to get lost in the haystack. But it doesn’t happen. God’s plan for all the families of the earth hurdles over the constraints of biology and continues to move forward in the descendants of once aged, childless Abram. Might this be the point when it comes to Jesus? You can’t bury God’s love and its designs?

Before answering too definitively, let’s remember also the failings and the foibles of Abram and his descendants. Jesus is sinless and completely true all the way through, but not the others. Even after the promise he receives today and then several more times to boot, Abram grows impatient with God and has a child out of wedlock; a baby boy who comes to be named Ishmael. For his part, Isaac grows up to give his wife Rebekah over to a powerful man named Abimelech out of fear for his life and this takes place just after God has told Isaac, like Abram before, that his descendants shall be as numerous as the stars. Then, there’s Isaac’s kids, Esau and Jacob. Esau is so dumb that he hands over his birthright for a bowl of Cheerios and Isaac is so deceitful that he lies to his own father, taking complete advantage of a blind and dying man in the process. Is God really going to stick with this impatient, conniving, fearful bunch? It happens all the way up to Jesus who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And as we ourselves stumble and sin like the Old Testament personalities I’ve named, God shall stick with us too, our reading from Luke assures. There, Jesus says to broken and imperfect you and me, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

This is the point when it comes to Jesus. This is the needle to be found in the haystack of Jesus’ eternity. The grace of God shall carry on. The grace of God shall not be deterred or defeated. All things shall work together for good for those who love God; for those who are called according to God’s purpose. And let’s not forget it’s not just our sins and our stumbles which have done their best to erase this Good News forever written in Jesus Christ, THE Word of God. To go back to the story of Abram and his descendants, Crafty Uncle Laban is out to leave Jacob broke. Joseph is sold into foreign slavery and

unjustly imprisoned. Moses is born when a death sentence has been imposed on every male Israelite baby. Israel is first stuck in Egypt and then at the Red Sea. The people of Judah and Jerusalem are carted off to Babylon. King Herod the Great wants Jesus and all the infants and toddlers of Bethlehem dead. A cross is erected and used at a place called Golgotha. The resulting dead body deposited in a nearby grave. But none of it works. The grace of God carries on. The grace of God is not deterred or defeated. Jesus rises from the dead and now sits at the right hand of the Father and he shall come to judge the living and the dead. Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Fear not, little flock, for the grace of God, the love of God, the mercy and goodness of God shall follow after you all the days of your life until you dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

And little flock, in case it has to be said, let me say it. To fear not is to have faith. It's to believe. It's to trust. I guess it's why Jesus' first sermon called us to repent and believe; to repent and believe; to repent and believe. And how were we to believe? Through the Holy Spirit's faith-gifting activity and presence which we're most likely to encounter and benefit from when we gather together as we are now around the word of God, the bath of God, and the table of God. I guess that makes these don't miss gatherings. After all, wasn't it here where we heard Jesus say, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom?" It was. And it shall also be here where we continue to find the needle buried in what can otherwise become the haystack of Jesus Christ; the needle that points to the Good News that absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God because absolutely nothing can deter or defeat the love of God, the grace of God, the goodness and mercy of God. Amen!

### **Prayers of Intercession**

P: Trusting in God's extraordinary love, let us come near to the Holy One in prayer.

P: Let your lovingkindness be upon your church. Fill all who proclaim the gospel with your Spirit. Equip your flock to speak your word of promise and hope in the midst of fear and uncertainty. Merciful God,  
**A: receive our prayer.**

P: Let your lovingkindness be upon your creation. Dwell among us and sustain our earthly home. In places of famine, provide nourishment. In places of plenty, fashion us to be good stewards of your bounty. Merciful God,  
**A: receive our prayer.**

P: Let your lovingkindness be upon your world. Be our helper and our shield in places torn by strife and violence (especially). Raise up courageous leaders to govern with compassion and justice. Merciful God,  
**A: receive our prayer.**

P: Let your lovingkindness be upon your children. Look upon all who wait for your steadfast love. Console those who grieve and embrace those who cry out to you (especially). Help us to trust your promise and not be afraid. Merciful God,  
**A: receive our prayer.**

P: Let your lovingkindness be upon this community. Fashion our hearts to strive for the way of peace. Strengthen the outreach ministries of this congregation (specific ministries may be named) and all who care for those in need. Merciful God,

**A: receive our prayer.**

P: With thanksgiving we remember all who have died in faith and now rest in you. As they placed their hope in you, so strengthen us to trust in your promise of new life. Merciful God,

**A: receive our prayer.**

P: Receive the prayers of your children, merciful God, and hold us forever in your steadfast love; through Jesus Christ, our holy Wisdom.

**A: Amen.**

### **Blessing**

P: God, creator of all things, speaking reformation into being; Jesus Christ, savior of the world, raising the dead; Holy Spirit, living voice, calling and enlightening the church: Almighty God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever. **Amen.**