

GOOD NEWS FROM ST JOHN

April
2020

NEWS FOR ALL

SUNDAY WORSHIP

9:00am

Sunday School
9:15am—10:00am
(during the school year)

Holy Communion
1st & 4th Sunday

PASTOR

Gail Sowell
Office Hours: 9am-1pm
Tuesday-Friday
(And by appointment)

SECRETARY'S HOURS

Monday-Friday
9:00-1:00

ADDRESS

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Items for print MUST be submitted by the 20th of the preceding month.

Pastor's Ponderings

Do you fear death? Are you trying to live a good, moral life—trying to climb Jacob's ladder—so you'll go to heaven? Does the Bible serve to "scare you out of hell" more than drawing you to heaven?

God's been speaking to me (well, urging my heart) about several things during my morning devotions these last few weeks. One of those is how very sad it is when people come to church, or worship outside the church, just because it seems to be the straightest path to an eternal life they might prefer to the "alternative" death so many believe in.

In his first letter to the Corinthian church Paul writes, "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied." But my sadness is for those who don't have fellowship with God in *this* life, whose goal is eternal life but for whom God is relatively absent in the here and now.

I count it a great blessing that I awaken each morning to an hour of time spent with Jesus. The four devotionals I'm using this year offer various insights to God's presence, leading and guiding in my daily—sometimes hourly—life. On the rare days I miss that early prayer time, my life is diminished; it takes a bit more to stir my faith for whatever the day may bring, and I'm not as open to perceiving God "everywhere and always."

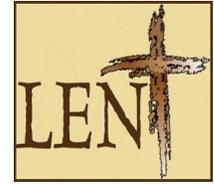
With the resurrection of Jesus, God broke the bonds of sin and death and cracked the heavens open to his glory and for our sake. Can you imagine your life without Jesus? How would your life be different if you didn't know that Jesus (God-in-the-flesh!) died to give you eternal salvation? If your life now wouldn't be dramatically different without Jesus, you're missing out on the best part of our Christian faith: friendship with God *now*, the comfort and consolation of the sure and certain knowledge that your sins are forgiven, and the delight of walking with our Savior.

Walk with Jesus through this Lenten season and during Holy Week! Prepare your heart and soul to celebrate the eternal joy of Easter!

Pastor Gail



St. John Family News!



LENT has begun. Soup Suppers and midweek services have been alternating between St. John and St. Stephen. Many thanks to ALL who have hosted, donated supplies, cooked, served, cleaned up and supported with your attendance.

Thanks to our Sunday School department!

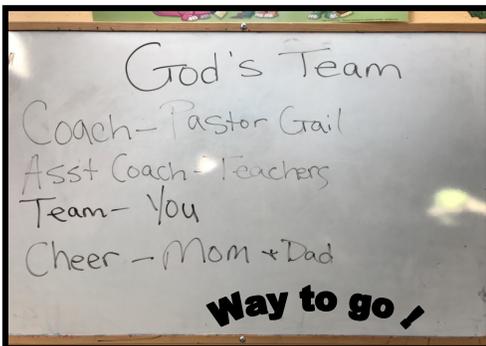


Much appreciation to our Sunday School department teachers, students, and parents, for hosting the first Lenten Soup Supper at St. John on March 4th. Supper is followed by an informal time of worship and a meditation presented by Pastor Gail.



Come and join us as we journey toward the cross with Jesus, **TOGETHER.**

A Sunday School Slam-Dunk!



The fun of basketball season translated into a Sunday School lesson!

The students created team jerseys to wear as a reminder that *we are all on God's Team.*

Thanks to Lana Strasser for sharing these photos!





We celebrated the life of our dear St. John member *Harvey Willhite* as we bid him a fond farewell at a memorial service here on Saturday, March 14th. His spontaneous, light-hearted presence will be missed, but we are glad to have been blessed with his fellowship on life's journey. Our love and heart-felt condolences go to his family, along with prayers for God's strength and comfort on their behalf.



From the President's Desk

To the Congregation:



APRIL GIVING EMPHASIS
Cemetery Fund !

Over the course of the last couple of years, very few contributions have been made to the *Cemetery Fund* and the *Improvement Fund*. After consulting with the church Council, we have decided to make a more concerted effort to add to these funds.

I have decided to set aside **April** as a time for everyone to make the effort to make a contribution to the **Cemetery Fund**, and then we will do the same for the Improvement Fund in September.

There will come a time when we will need to spend money in these areas, and it is easier on everyone if we plan ahead and make a small donation now instead of a large one later. You can use the envelope in the family offering box, or just put it in a plain envelope with your name and CEMETERY FUND on it.

We have people who donate their time and effort to keep the cemetery looking good, but there are costs involved. Please find it in your heart to do your part.

**Council will meet on April 14th
at 6:30pm.**

Council President, Cal Tackes

THE BUILDING MAY BE EMPTY, BUT THE CHURCH CONTINUES TO MINISTER

Palm Sunday Brunch—Benefit for Nowak Family

Thanks to Rick Mueller and the Youth Account, Council has approved the suggestion that our Palm Sunday Brunch be a **benefit meal** for the Nowak family.

All food would have been provided by the Youth Fund, and those who previously WOULD have purchased food, were invited to instead make a financial donation for the benefit.

Anyone who desires to bless the Nowak family in a financial way, is encouraged to still do so, even though the on-site event has been cancelled. A LOCKED offering box has been put in place inside the first door of the EAST back door of the church building. Just put your donation in an envelope marked NOWAK FAMILY, and it will be forwarded to them.

After fighting cancer for more than a year, Jolene is presently in Milwaukee undergoing a new treatment. If you'd like to do an additional fundraiser for the family, there is money in the St. John Charities Account to help you get started. Please speak to Cal (President) or Rick (Vice President) for further information.



CHRIST IS ALIVE AND SO IS HIS CHURCH!

To remain steadfast in the work of his kingdom, the united **prayers** of his people and their unbroken commitment to **GIVE** is essential! Please remember that YOUR offerings are still needed, and make use of the offering drop box inside the east, back door. The money counters are committed to counting and making deposits weekly so that St. John's caring ministry and financial testimony will remain **STRONG!** *Thank you for your faithfulness!*

A REMINDER! A COORDINATOR is NEEDED for Breakfast in the Park, scheduled for June 13th. It will be here before you know it!

St. John Women of the ELCA



Our next Bible Study, on Tuesday, April 14, at 1pm at St. John, *will most likely be cancelled.*

The next General Meeting is Sunday, May 3 after the service. Please come join us. We need your input!

WOMEN'S STEWARDSHIP PROJECT—for April, May, and June is Baby Layette kits. Items needed are:

Light-weight cotton T-shirts (NO Onsies)

Long or short-sleeved gowns OR sleepers without feet

Receiving blankets, medium-weight cotton or flannel OR crocheted/ knitted with light-weight yarn (between 36" and 52" square)

Cloth diapers, FLAT-fold preferred

Jacket, sweater, or sweatshirt with a hood (or include a baby cap)

Socks

Hand towel (dark color recommended)

Bath-size bars of gentle soap (8-9-oz. size, in original wrapping)

Diaper pins or large safety pins

Items must be *like new* if not new. Yard sale season will be starting soon.

A bassinet will be placed in the Narthex for your donations. *Thank you!*

***The Synod Women's Organization Convention**, scheduled at Bethany Lutheran Church in Rice Lake for April 17th-18th, **has been cancelled** due to the precautions associated with the current Covid-19 Pandemic.

Our Synod website: nswi.org has excellent information and resources in light of the current pandemic, as well as the current list of scheduled/cancelled events. Check it out!

"Gather" magazine has a Facebook page. You are invited to join them for a virtual Bible study beginning Friday, March 20th. This month they're reading "Walking with neighbors is a Lenten practice." *You want me to love WHO Lord? And serve them too?*

There's also a website gathermagazine.org that you can visit for a peek at Bible studies, articles etc. to keep you in touch with other Lutheran Christian women during this time of social distancing.

stay tuned! "Normal" activities will eventually RESUME!

Don't unplug!

May 10th (Mothers Day) is the LAST day of Sunday School!

May 25th is Memorial Day. The VFW Honor Guard will be at St. John Cemetery around 9:15am.

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Thanks for keeping these dates in mind as you plan your summer, we need YOU!

Brat Fries in Stratford at ProVision on Friday, May 29 and Friday, June 5th.

Worship in the Park, at Oak Street Park on Thursday, June 11th at the beginning of Edgar Carnival Days.

Breakfast in the Park, at Oak Street Park in Edgar on Saturday, June 13th.

*We still are seeking a COORDINATOR for this event which also features a side **Basket Raffle**.

And of course you'll want to make sure to get the **STEAM SHOW** on your calendar for August 28-30!

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The ARMY of the Church Mice



Hello, friends, we the CHURCH MICE of St. John and St. Stephen have united to serve YOU in this time of trial! You take such good care of us, you let us play with the children at St Stephen (and eat up their leftover snacks) And at St John we get LOTS of snacks because Pastor Gail and Rose eat an awful lot. (Maybe we weren't supposed to say that but it is true). (We have to say tho, that Pastor Gail's dogs eat up some of the crumbs that should be ours when they come to visit Auntie Rose on Mondays).

You may wonder what 8 small creatures like us can do (well except for Frederick who is not so small really) We already recruited the field mice outside St John to help patrol the parking lot so no one comes inside 6 feet. (We don't know why they made it 6 feet, it should probably be 4 feet because that's how many feet each of us have.) Alas one of the field mice already died in the line of duty, we're not sure how she died but Rose shrieked so loud when she saw her sweet little body it could've scared her to death! So listen up Rose, no more screaming at mice, we're trying to help you!

While you people are praying for people all around the world, we church mice are praying for the animals. What will happen to the pets of people who die? This is a very sad time for all God's creatures, great and small.

The 8 of us hope you will stay safe and come back soon. We'll be waiting for you!



Love, Tully, Merry Twinkle, Timothy, Belladama (St J mice) and Miri, Frederick, Cleo and Patrick (St S mice)





From Pastor Gail

Regarding Reconciling Ministry:

The United Methodist Church will soon be taking a vote on the same issue that split the ELCA in 2009, namely, full acceptance of all people regardless of sexuality issues. Our sister congregation in Christ, First United Methodist of Wausau, is inviting all members to affirm the following *Reconciling Statement*:

In response to God's unconditional love for all people made known to us in Jesus Christ, we are called to be a welcoming and affirming community. We, the first United Methodist Church of Wausau, are believers and seekers who include and welcome persons of all races, ethnicities, backgrounds, sexual orientations, gender identities, and physical and mental abilities. Whatever your story, we embrace who you are. We welcome into the full life of this church all those who God sends us. Centered in Christ, we commit ourselves to building and living as a community where all are loved.

This is the gospel we believe Jesus lived and died for: *all* people are part of the community! In these weeks of physical distancing, we are still a social body: the communion of saints, the fellowship of believers, the body of Christ. While we're absent from each other, I invite you to ponder these words and what they mean to us as *Christians*, those who live and love others as Jesus lived and died for us.

Please note: I am *not* suggesting that either congregation adopt this statement! It speaks to my heart, but I believe there are some, maybe more than a few, at St. John/St. Stephen who would feel very uncomfortable with it. I simply present it for your prayerful pondering in this time of physical distancing.

Is this a statement you could accept for St. John/St. Stephen? If not, what part do you disagree with? find offensive? This is something I had planned to bring up at the next Council meeting. Since we're not sure when that will be, I invite you to give feedback to anyone on either Council, or to me directly: liag47gps@yahoo.com, 715/352-2492.

May the perfect peace and wisdom of God be with you always!

For My Friends!

I thank you God, sincerely
for the friends I have today,
and all that they have done for me
to help me on my way.

I thank you that I met them
in good fellowship and cheer,
and that in time of need or stress,
they always have been near.

The friends who have inspired me
to make another gain,
however loud the thunder or
discouraging the rain.

I thank you for my faithful friends,
in places near and far,
whose kindly deeds have made my days
as faithful as they are.

Whose happy songs have done so much,
to make my dreams come true,
And who by their example,
God, have drawn me close to you.



*A friend is someone who knows the
song in your heart,
and can sing it back to you when
you've forgotten the words.*

*Many thanks to the dear friend who shared
these good words to pass on to BLESS YOU!*

A Coffee Mug**Reflection**

"A pastor is obedient to God's calling, responsive to His grace, faithful to His service, committed to His people, and representative of His love" (Roy Lessin). These words are on a coffee mug given to me 12 years ago—and I was unaware of them until today. Oh, I knew there were words there, but they were on the "other" side. As a southpaw (left-hander) I drink with my right hand, and I know well what's printed on that side of the mug: *Pastor* (with the sign of the cross). But I was amazed this morning when I washed my "Sunday" mug and put it back on the shelf, and realized the 12-year-gap in recognizing the entirety of this cup.

That's sort of a metaphor for me for our life right now. All of a sudden it seems we have no control over anything. We're not used to being told what we can and can't do. And I, for one, am amazed at how eager I am to avoid contracting the coronavirus. For years I've been saying I'm "ready to go at any time"; and I've really meant that. But now I'm saying, "sure, God, but not really quite yet."

We're approaching the end of this Lenten season; Palm Sunday is April 5th, followed by Holy Week, followed by the Resurrection. Please continue to walk with Jesus toward the cross! Be aware of his presence in your every-day life. As we wander in the wilderness of COVID-19, this "other side" of the cup of our life, remember to "be at peace among yourselves. . . . encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. . . . Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. . . . The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you" (1 Thessalonians 5:13-28, selected verses).

A WONDERFUL Easter Sunday School Message !



Reflections from Rose



Life certainly is an adventure journey! The way everyday life looks is changing almost on a daily basis. I pray you are well, and have all that you need to take care of yourself and your dear ones in this somewhat chaotic time. If there's anything we can help with, give us a call at St. John or call Pastor Gail. You might get tired of hearing this, but it's true...you are very much in our thoughts and prayers. I will probably only be in the office on Mondays and Thursdays for awhile,

but we will be keeping in good communication to continue to hold each other close, even though we may have to stay 6 feet apart at all times!

Speaking of adventure, it's true! Pastor Gail came to my rescue recently when I rounded the corner and found the frozen corpse of a mouse that had met her demise. YIKES! I don't know why they freak me out so much...I used to have a pet mouse that I really enjoyed. But the idea of them being free to scramble about my toes is terrifying!

Another new adventure I've begun just this week is life with a 1 year old lab-boxer little fur-baby. Raven is her name. We found each other at the Humane Society. She is SOOO SWEET! She's still getting to know us, so is on her best behavior. We are enjoying her so much.

Whatever adventures we are on, we need to remember that NOTHING can separate us from the love of God. Also, no matter what, our God is still on the throne. Nothing surprises Him and nothing is stronger than He is. He can take things that start out as evil and use them to accomplish good.

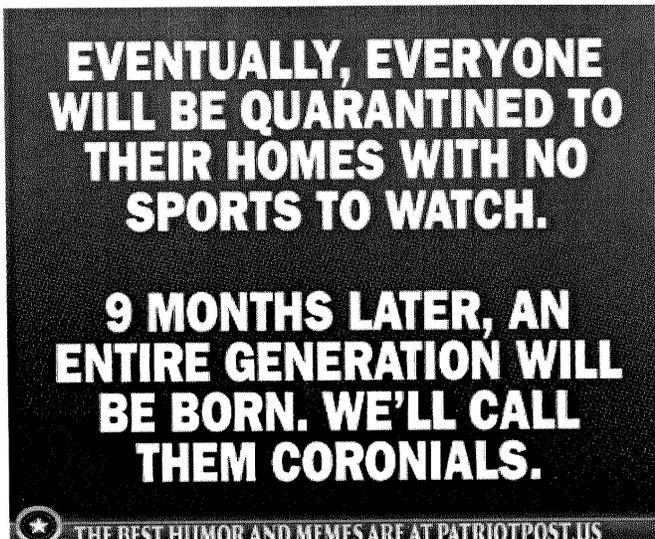
Maybe you can even see ways that's happening in our present pandemic. People becoming more aware of the needs of their neighbor, families pulling together to be strong and accomplish what needs to be done, and individuals willing to go the extra mile to see to it that all are well-cared for.

It's possible to be tempted to fear in these days, and many succumb. But God tells us so often in His Word NOT to fear. Isaiah 41: 10 *"So do not fear, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."*

Stay well, walk in wisdom, be filled with an awareness of God's presence and His peace. Until next time...

—Rose

It's important to keep your sense of humor intact /



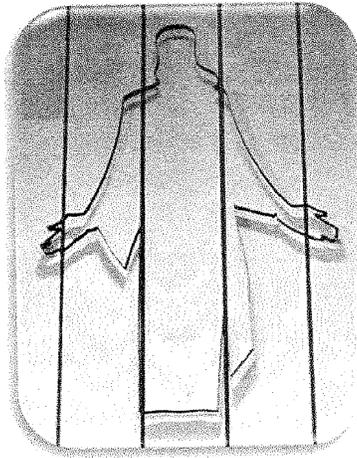
The lawn-mowing season will begin again SOON! St. John is inviting bids for the Cemetery Lawn mowing this season. If interested call the office or talk to someone on the Cemetery Board:

Leon Werner, Ron Runge, or Terry Borchardt

Our seasonal sign-up sheet for **volunteers** to mow the Church and Parsonage lawns will be posted soon. Call to reserve YOUR spot now!



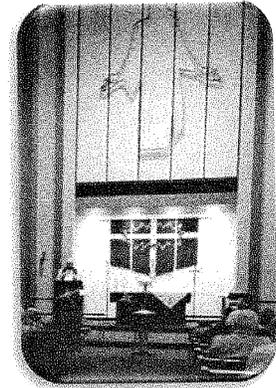
From Bishop Laurie of our Northwest Synod



Cookie Cutter Jesus: An Easter Message

I visit a different church in our Synod nearly every Sunday. This Sunday I discovered a 15 foot cookie cutter outline of the figure of Jesus hanging high above the altar.¹ I kept staring at the shape during the first hymn thinking about the outstretched arms of Jesus and realized this as an *Easter* cookie cutter. This is the resurrected Jesus who showed the wounds of the nails in hands when he appeared to Mary Magdalene and the other women. These are the women who became the first witnesses to announce that Jesus had risen from the dead to the other disciples.² I was still thinking about the cookie cutter shape of Jesus when the last hymn was sung. After worship I visited with a long time member of that congregation, Shirley³. I remarked how I

appreciated the 15 foot cookie cutter Jesus above the altar. Shirley smiled and then told me this story: The church sanctuary was built in the 1970s. Everyone was so excited for the first worship service. The construction workers were busy putting the finishing touches on the sanctuary. The metal shape of Jesus was lying flat on the floor in the church waiting to be hung above the altar. At the time Shirley's daughter, Kari was about 3 ½ years old. Shirley and little Kari were checking out the progress in the sanctuary. Kari, a normal curious child, stepped into the cookie cutter frame and stood in the middle of the Jesus shape. Kari said to Shirley, "Look mommy, I'm standing in Jesus' hand." It was a sweet memory of that long ago moment. Shirley then went on to finish that story. She told me that her daughter Kari died of complications from cancer treatment two years ago. She was only 46. Shirley said that she finds comfort in knowing that her daughter is now resting forever "in Jesus' hands." She often thinks about Kari when she sees the shape of Jesus above the altar. She envisions her daughter in Jesus, resting in Jesus. This Easter, remember we are "in Jesus." We have been baptized into his death and resurrection. We are people who believe "in Jesus."



Friends, as I write this I realize that we are living in complicated times, COVID-19 frightens, cancer kills, politics are ugly, wars rage, immigrant and refugees suffer, racism, gun violence, sexism, climate change, drug abuse are real concerns and yet here we are standing "in Jesus." During this season of Easter, no matter where you are on your spiritual journey, know that the resurrected Jesus reaches out his nail scarred hands to us all, appearing to us in our grief, in our scariest moments, in our despair. This Easter Jesus walked on the road to Emmaus with the two grieving disciples. This is the resurrected Jesus who appeared to the terrified disciples in the locked room and said "peace be with you." This is the resurrected Jesus who ascended into heaven and says to us all, "Go and make disciples of all nations and remember I am with you ALWAYS to the end of the age." You are "in Jesus." Go in peace and share this Easter good news with the world.

Bishop Laurie Skow-Anderson

¹ I bake and decorate hundreds of rolled out cookies every year and have a collection of old cookie cutters.

² The women at the tomb were the first witnesses to the resurrection. 2020 is the 50th Anniversary of the ordination of women pastors in the United States. Save the date, November 7, 2020 is the Synod's Day of Celebration for the 50th Anniversary at Luther Park's new ministry center.

³ Thank you to Shirley Bostrom for giving me permission to share this part of her story.

Footnote 4

Romans 6: 3-4 *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized in Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into his death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*

2 Corinthians 5: 17 *So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new!*

GOOD NEWS

St. John Lutheran Church ELCA
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We're on the Web
www.stjohnelcaedgar.org

April 2020



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Deadline for May 2020 News



April 20th

ST. JOHN/ST. STEPHEN LUTHERAN PARISH ELCA, EDGAR, WI
Joint Mission Statement: *"Saints united to be the body of Christ in
the world, freed by grace to live faithfully, witness boldly,
and serve joyfully."*