

“The CHIMES” – March

Volume 55, No. 3

2020

Continuing the Conversation...

“Jesus said, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” —Matthew 22:37-40

“Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.” —1 John 4:11-12



Last month I gave up my newsletter space so you could hear from Bishop Jung on the state of the United Methodist Church. We still have a couple of months before General Conference and any decisions about a way forward, but I want to do my best to share my thoughts on the proposed “Protocol

of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation” since that seems to be the plan getting the most attention. And remember, no matter how things work out at General Conference, nothing is going to change quickly. We are Methodists, we move slowly through processes.

My personal thoughts here have come together after months of angst and soul searching. I have always been a processer and don’t come to important decisions quickly or easily. An article I recently read on UMNews by Reverend Steve West resonated with my spirit and has helped me put my thoughts into a more coherent form that I share with you now.

First, let me begin with a bold statement: if the protocol passes I’m not leaving the United Methodist Church. As I have pondered all of this, I can name several reasons for my decision, starting with: I took a vow before God and a few hundred people when I was ordained. My call into ministry and ordination as a UMC pastor is first of all to faithfully follow Jesus and make disciples as I lead his people; but I also vowed to be faithful to the United Methodist Church and uphold its *Discipline*. I believe I have done that, it is always my intentional goal anyway. I was familiar with the *Book of Discipline* before I took my vows and knew what I was signing up for. I take vows very seriously because

Scripture has much to say about that and Jesus made it clear vows are not to be taken lightly.

Speaking of vows, I feel leaving the United Methodist Church would be hypocritical when, for nearly 18 years, I have welcomed members into God’s church by asking them to take a vow to be loyal to the United Methodist Church and support it. Yes, I take your vows seriously too; that is why I don’t lightly invite people into full membership in the UMC. I want to make sure potential members know just what they are getting into, what the expectations of membership are, and that they need to take their membership vows seriously.

Some may counter, “This is not the church I vowed to support.” To that I say, “This is the same messy church God called me into several years ago with many of the same people and same arguments going on. When I responded to God it was right here in the middle of it all.”

Second, the United Methodist Church is not perfect, but diversity of thought is one of the things I love about it. John Wesley taught Christianity was essentially about love for God and neighbor, growing through the means of grace, and staying connected even when we “agree to disagree.” (1770 eulogy for George Whitefield by John Wesley).

We have made it through divisive issues such as slavery, voting rights, temperance, civil rights, and even ordaining women. And yes, people have argued all of these issues and many more using their interpretation of Scripture. You can be sure that none of us has a pure, straight-from-God interpretation of Scripture; we all read it through the lens of our background as Americans who have grown up in particular families, with their particular background and understanding of how the world and God work.

The United Methodist denomination is widespread in our diverse United States, so there will always be cultural issues. Grappling with differing cultural issues that influence one’s understanding isn’t something new with us, even the first disciples had issues to work out as they determined what it meant to be Christ followers. When I consider who Jesus called and what the church has looked like throughout history, it has always been diverse and messy and will remain so...at least until Jesus comes back and brings us fully into God’s

kingdom. If I must decide whether to stay and work things out or not, I choose to stay where God has called me.

As far as I can tell in what I have read, there is no plan going to General Conference that involves telling pastors they have to perform weddings (or any other ministry) they're not comfortable with, telling local churches they have to do something inappropriate for their context, or telling conferences that they can't set standards for ministry. We have nothing to fear. We will still be free to be the United Methodist Church that God has called us to be in Sparta. I respect that there are some who may leave the United Methodist Church because of their convictions, but I will stay precisely because of mine.

Our founder, John Wesley, said that separating "from a body of living Christians with whom we were before united is a grievous breach of the law of love" and so it "is only when our love grows cold that we can consider separation" (1786 sermon *On Schism*). Has your love grown cold? Mine hasn't.

Third, the United Methodist Church is not perfect, but it's my home. I wasn't born into the UMC, but I have "grown up" in this church, it has helped shape the person I am. In the excitement of some to create a new Methodist denomination(s), it can be easily forgotten that there are so many positive things to be lost by leaving.

Together we have created the United Methodist Committee on Relief, the Upper Room, the Walk to Emmaus, the Academy for Spiritual Formation, Africa University, and all sorts of regional treasures like Harbor House in Superior and the United Methodist Children's Services in Milwaukee just to name a few of our connectional ministries. I love that about us! No church is perfect, but there is much to be lost by leaving.

I respect those who can't live with differing practices across the country, but our DNA is connectional, not congregational. Because of human nature and what history shows us, I believe that any new denomination that forms over cultural disagreements will end up splitting again over the next thing groups disagree on.

Fourth, the debate is incorrectly framed as being about biblical authority, when it is really about culture wars. **Hear me well:** I hold the Bible in high esteem and authority under the lordship of Christ. It was inspired by the Holy Spirit, written by human hands, and codified by holy councils. God was in all of that. God is still in it, alive and well.

Wesley didn't teach fundamentalist ideas such as inerrancy and infallibility. Instead, he taught the

importance of interpreting Scripture faithfully through tradition, reason, and experience. He said in our Articles of Religion that the Bible contains everything necessary for salvation, but he didn't say it spells out everything.

How do I interpret the Bible over complex issues like acceptance of LGBTQ Christians? I'm still working that out, but the reason we call it the Word of God is because it reveals Christ, whom the Bible calls the Word. Yes, Jesus is the true Word of God. So I do my best to read the Bible through the lens of Christ, who fulfills the law and confounds the Pharisees, knowing I have my own cultural background and bias that influences me.

I don't worship the Bible. I worship the Triune God through Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit, so to make sense of the Bible, I read it through the person of Christ. Asking, "What would Jesus do?" or more importantly "What would Jesus have me do?" Jesus loved every broken person he encountered. The only people he criticized were the Pharisees who had lost sight of God's love because of religious rules based on their narrow interpretation of Scripture. The Bible says God is love, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God (1 John 4:7), so I believe it.

Fifth, the schism being proposed is over social issues that are neither discussed in the Gospels nor addressed in our ancient creeds. Jesus didn't mention the issues that threaten to divide us, but there's something else that he most certainly did talk about: our unity, in fact that's what Jesus prayed for in John 17. There are moral issues addressed in Scripture we should grapple with; but do we? Our Wesleyan tradition is, once again, to interpret Scripture through tradition, reason, and experience. I believe in the virgin birth, the resurrection, the humanity and divinity of Christ, the Trinity and the things addressed in traditional orthodoxy (belief or practice). I also follow the tradition of Wesley, who asked in his sermon *Catholic Spirit*, "Is your heart right [with God] as my heart is with your heart?" If our hearts are right with God then I can respond with Wesley, "Give me your hand" (1771 sermon *Catholic Spirit*). Hand in hand we can believe in, work toward, and hope for a better future through the love, power, and grace of God.

Sixth, I consider the way Jesus treated people, for instance his interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). This was an interaction that was culturally wrong for so many reasons. But he offered her living water, then, after revealing that he knew about her past, he took the time to have a serious discussion with her about the religious issues on her mind. I also notice what he did NOT say. He gently pointed out that she was committing adultery (that's one of the big Ten),

but he didn't say, "Oh, now I take back what I said about living water." Christ's offer was still good, and then they had a fascinating and freeing discussion about faith and she became an evangelist, telling all she met about Jesus. So I choose to do my best to accept people for who they are and invite them to God's table for relationship with Christ; he is the only one who can do any kind of transforming work that needs to be done. I am so grateful that someone in my life made that same invitation to me. God handles the rest, and I trust God to work it out.

Seventh, I believe in God's grace. Do our churches reprimand people, who are divorced and remarried, not allowing them to serve in ministry? I'm not saying we should hold remarried people, or anyone for that matter, in judgment. I'm saying that if we offer grace in one situation addressed in Scripture and not in another, it's clearly not about biblical authority but about culture wars. I am also wary of the whole judgment thing when I recall Jesus saying, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone..." (John 8:7).

Eighth, I believe in the church. We are the body of Christ. I don't have all answers about the future, but leaving the church God has called me to is out of the question for me. Our divided and divisive culture needs a witness to love that rises above our differences, not giving in to the widespread "us vs. them" and "either/or" mentality.

As you read the Gospels, you will note that the biggest criticism Jesus got was that he "ate with sinners." Who am I to decide that I can't be in communion with someone I don't agree with? Jesus even communed with and loved people he knew were going to betray and deny him. The only people Jesus didn't tolerate were the religious elites who were intolerant. I'm not perfect and I don't claim to have all the answers, but I do know I don't want to be one of those that Jesus won't tolerate.

Finally, as I do my best to faithfully follow Jesus, I know that God is big enough to sort it all out and will include who he will include in the church. My job as part of Christ's body called to lead and make disciples is to not get in God's way and to love the people he puts in my life the best I can. This is why I'll stay United Methodist.

Some of you may find my response wishy-washy. Others may be disappointed where my convictions have landed. Still others may think, "Yes! She really is human and struggles with this stuff like the rest of us." Some may even read things into this letter that I am not saying, after all, we even read each other's writing through our own lens of interpretation filtered through our backgrounds and biases.

But again, know that I have put much thought and prayer and even some conversation into sorting this all out, and I'm sure God's not done with me yet as I continue to seek an ever fuller relationship with God through the work of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, God is the One I have to answer to in all I do. As always, if you would like to discuss or clarify any of this with me, I would be happy to sit down (maybe over coffee or lunch) and hash it out with you. I am as open to respectfully hearing where you are as I am in sharing where I am.

God bless you as you seek to know and love God fully!

Pastor Loretta

General and Jurisdictional Conference Informational Sessions with the Wisconsin Delegation

The Wisconsin Delegation has scheduled informational sessions throughout the Wisconsin Annual Conference in the coming months. The purpose of these gatherings is to provide information and answer questions about what is coming before the General Conference in May and Jurisdictional Conference in July. **These sessions are open to all who are interested; the one closest to us is: March 21, 1:15 p.m. at Tomah First UMC.**



Ecumenical Lenten Lunch and Devotions Schedule

Each lunch begins at noon, with music and speaker lasting until around 1 p.m.

Wednesday, March 4

Lunch Site: United Methodist Church

Speaker: Pastor Brian Young

Wednesday, March 11

Lunch Site: Congregational United Church of Christ

Speaker: Rev. Jo Glasser

Wednesday, March 18

Lunch Site: Faith Evangelical Free Church

Speaker: Pastor Loretta Waughtal

Wednesday, March 25

Lunch Site: Trinity Lutheran Church

Speaker: Father Eric Burns

Wednesday, April 1

Lunch Site: St. John's Episcopal Church

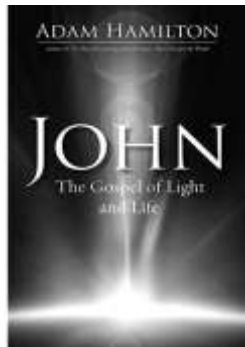
Speaker: Pastor Mark Kvale

Friday, April 10 Ecumenical Good Friday Service

Stay tuned for details...

This Lenten Season Encounter the Gospel of John

This year's Wednesday evening Lenten services will feature a combination of traditional worship elements and DVD presentation with brief discussion using Adam Hamilton's *John: The Gospel of Light and Life* as we anticipate a season of spiritual growth and life-changing renewal while exploring the major themes of John.



John's Gospel is unique among the Gospels, largely set in and around Jerusalem, whereas the others record Jesus' ministry in Galilee. Plan to come and explore this uniqueness for yourself as John explores the questions of the identity and meaning of Jesus, inviting us to do the same.

This series is structured to help you explore the major themes of John as we read through the Gospel, so there are suggested Scripture readings listed below for you to read before each week's service. I encourage you to approach the text actively, putting yourself into its pages and pondering how its words speak to the meaning of Jesus for your life. To help you do that, you are encouraged to answer these three questions with each passage you read: 1) What is said in this passage about Jesus? 2) In this passage, how does Jesus bring life to me? 3) What response do these verses require of me?

Please note that there is a simple supper of soup and bread offered before the worship services. Please find a partner and sign up to provide supper and clean up after supper for one of the evenings. Sign-up sheets can be found in the gathering area of the sanctuary. Pastor Loretta and the confirmation students have already committed to providing supper on March 11. It's a nice time of fellowship to begin the evenings.

The schedule follows:

Wednesday, March 4 (supper at 5:30, chapel at 6)

Miraculous Signs (read John 2-5)

Wednesday, March 11 (supper at 5:30, chapel at 6)

"I Am" Sayings (read John 6-11)

Wednesday, March 18 (supper at 5:30, chapel at 6)

Farewell Discourse (read John 12-17)

Wednesday, March 25 (supper at 5:30, chapel at 6)

Arrest, Trial, and Crucifixion (read John 18-19)

Wednesday, April 1 (supper at 5:30, chapel at 6)

Eternal Life (read John 20-21)

An offering will be taken that will support Family Promise of Monroe County and Sojourner's Journey Men's Home.

Lenten Study Opportunity

Paul Foulke will be leading a 5-week Lenten study on **Monday evenings beginning March 2 at 6 p.m.** Paul will be using the same video series as the Wednesday evening services, but will dig deeper into the study components of *John: The Gospel of Light and Life*. The cost of the accompanying book is \$11.33 each. The study group meets in classroom #5 in the education wing. Let Paul know as soon as possible if you are interested in joining this study.

2020 Walk to Emmaus Weekends

Men's Walk ~ April 16-19

Women's Walk ~ April 23-26

Camp Fairwood, Westfield, WI

If you are looking to grow in your faith, this weekend is for you. More information is available in the church office, or talk to one of our Emmaus alumni.

Online Giving

"Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine."—Proverbs 3:9-10

On-line giving is safe, secure, and easy. Setting up an online account is simple. Just click on the "Give Online" link at the bottom of our web site (<https://lewaughtal.wixsite.com/spartaumc>) and follow the instructions. You can make one-time payments or set up recurring payments (weekly, bi-monthly, monthly, etc.). If you need help setting up or changing your account contact the church office. If you already give online, remember that you must re-sign up each year.

Pastor Loretta has been using this convenient way of giving for a year now and loves it! She reports, "I don't have to remember to bring my check every week (Sunday mornings can get pretty hectic for me) and even when I'm gone my offering shows up like clockwork. It is also simple for me to check on my giving through the reporting on the web site. It makes my giving so much easier!"

Birthday Party for Jesus Update



If you recall the very successful Birthday Party for Jesus hosted by the B.A.S.H. children in December, you know that we collected 14 pillows, 19 pillow cases, 2 sheet sets, 30 blankets, 202 pairs of socks for Harbor House in Superior.

Lynn and Larry Humphrey were able to deliver those items to

Harbor House last month. Let's join in giving a big thank to the Humphreys for braving the unpredictable Wisconsin weather to deliver our gifts. The staff at Harbor House were so grateful for all of the items, but were especially excited for the pillows. They had recently run out of pillows. This connectedness in ministry is an important part of what it means to be United Methodists.



A Note of Thanks...

Dear Sparta United Methodist Church,

Thank you for your generous gift of time to Family Promise of Monroe County. Our non-profit organization is run solely by local volunteers such as you. Because of your assistance, our first family had the opportunity to receive a simple act of kindness in the hospitality offered. Providing shelter, meals, and comprehensive assistance was quickly provided on such short notice as they arrived. Thank you for being prepared! Family Promise could not have done it without you. Our volunteers are the HEART of our organization and of our success.

Thank you again for your kind spirit and commitment to offering us a helping hand!

Sincerely,

April Buchanan Butler, Executive Director
Family Promise of Monroe County



Giving: When Propensity meets Capacity

"[Do Not Rob God] Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, 'How are we robbing you?' In your tithes and offerings! You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you! Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing..."

—Malachi 3:8-10

"To give away money is an easy matter and within anyone's power, but to decide to whom to give it, how much to give, when to give, and to give for the right motive and in the right way, is neither in everyone's power nor an easy matter. Hence, it is that such excellence is rare, praiseworthy, and noble." (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, Chapter 9)

Recently a church asked me to help determine their congregation's capacity for giving. Here is my simple answer: any congregation's capacity to give is at least 10% (the tithe) of its annual income.

I usually estimate a church's congregation-wide annual income as the median income within a 5-mile radius of the church times the number of giving units in the church. (So that I do not inadvertently overestimate congregational income, I usually work with 90 percent of this number.)

Ten percent of total congregational income is the tithe and is our best scripturally based estimate of congregational capacity to give.

God proposed the tithe as a target for giving to support the church, with other charitable giving to be over and above that amount. (Our denomination's stance is that "tithing is the minimum goal of giving" (Book of Discipline ¶630.5e) and "God's standard of giving" (¶304.1c)).

In Wisconsin, our actual giving averages 2.9%. We are spending much of God's share on ourselves. How much could our churches accomplish if we tithed and had more than three times as much in giving?

In my talks with United Methodists around the state, I hear a lot of anxiety about the state of our churches, often because they are experiencing budget shortfalls. What they often propose is cutting more costs or getting new people to pay for the church.

Yet, we could reverse the trajectory of United Methodism by simply giving what God has asked us to give. That is the revitalization we need.

Jim Wells, Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation
Visit the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation at
www.wumf.org or Facebook/wumf.org
Or call 1-888-903-9863

Trustees Update

The trustees have been keeping busy so far in 2020 with projects and maintenance in the church and parsonage.

● Pete Foss repaired the lighted sign on K Street; it needed a new electronic light sensor so that it would come on automatically when it gets dark out. Thank you Pete; that light had been missed!

● Pete is also working on getting some security cameras that will work with our computer system up and running. The cameras were donated to the church by Larry and Lynn Humphrey. Thank you all!

● The Trustees voted to hire Don's Plumbing, out of Tomah, to do needed work in the main parsonage bathroom. The bathtub and surround were replaced, new linoleum was put down because there had been water damage on the floor around the tub, a new faucet on the sink was installed, and air admittance valves were installed on the kitchen and powder room sink drains to correct drain problems. Pastor painted the bathroom after the drywall was patched around the new tub surround. The price quote for this project was \$3,745. The actual bill may come in slightly higher because some of the subfloor had to be replaced because of rotting from the water damage.

● Trustees were also responsible for getting an old large screen TV that no longer worked moved out of one of our classrooms, as well as finding homes for some more of our old heavy tables that are no longer used. All of this helped in making room for Family Promise just in time for the arrival of our first guests.

● The doors on the K Street entrance were recently re-keyed when it came to our attention that there was someone letting themselves in that should no longer have had access to a key. I have tried making contact with that person to get the key with no luck. Twenty-five new keys have been made that are numbered and have "do not duplicate" stamped on them. Each person who is approved to have a key will sign for their key and be responsible for the cost of replacing it if they lose it.

● Something exciting on the horizon: we have received a \$10,000 gift designated for **audio visual equipment** in the sanctuary. This very generous gift is not quite enough to cover the full amount needed to put large screens in the sanctuary along with a camera for recording our services and the required computer system. We are hoping that we can make this all happen before the end of the year. **One important piece of this project that we will absolutely need is people willing to learn how to run the system.** I say people, because we need more than one person who is willing to care for

this important worship element; people need to be gone sometimes or just need a break. If you are interested in helping with the needed funding or learning to run the equipment let a trustee or Pastor L know.

● **Church roof update:** our latest figure for this important project is \$17,703 collected. We only need \$297 to make it to our \$18,000 goal! Let's get it done before the end of March so the next update can say, "We did it!"

Respectfully submitted by Dave Kemp



Family Promise Update

During the week of January 26 – February 1, we hosted the first family accepted into the Family Promise Program and what a week it was getting to know the family. We were so blessed by our church family's generosity of meals, clothing, and time. Thank you to all that donated time, food, clothing, or were part of the cleaning of the rooms in the Sunday School wing.

We will be scheduling another training session for anyone who would like to help with hosting the Family Promise families. It was very humbling to realize firsthand what some of the families in our town are facing and all the obstacles that they must get over to get themselves out of the situation they are in. When they said so many people are just a few paychecks away from being in this the same situation it changes one's perspectives.

Please pray for those in this situation and that they find the help they need to get their lives back on track.

Thank You, Lynn



BASH News:

We kicked off the month of February with a Summer Camp Cookout informational meeting. Toni Burrows talked to kids and parents about summer camp options. The kids had a good time eating hotdogs, chips, fruit and S'mores! We have a few families interested in sending kids to camp this summer. If anyone has any questions or would like to help a kid go to camp, please see Toni Burrows, Pastor Loretta, or myself.

We will be making a change to the Sunday the kids will sing in March. **Ellen has asked us to switch to sing on March 29, so mark your calendars!**

Thank you to all the parents who joined us on our Camp Cookout and to those that spoke about their camp experiences. Thank you to Toni, Betsy, and Margie for your help putting on the cookout!

God's Blessings, Lynn

A Note of Thanks...

I'd like to thank my many helpers that delivered Pictorial Directories to people they visit that are unable to make it to church. I have our "snowbird" directories reserved for their spring return.

If you have any children, teen, or young adult books that you no longer need and would like to donate, please let me know and I will get them from you or you may leave them in the Library. These are the types of books that rarely get donated for our Little Free Library or for our Family Promise guests to enjoy.

Thank you. Margie Lakowske
Records and History Committee

We Are - Keeping the Eternal Flame Glowing



March Pizza and a Movie

Who: Everyone is invited

What: Pizza and the movie...

"Beautifully Broken"

Where: Sparta UMC Small Kitchen and Chapel

When: **Saturday, March 28**

6 p.m. for Pizza / Movie begins at 6:30 p.m.

RSVP: Please contact Toni Burrows at 608-343-3029 before 12 Noon on March 28, if you will be attending, so we know how much pizza to order

Beautifully Broken

A refugee's escape, a prisoner's promise, and a daughter's painful secret converge. As three fathers fight to save their families, their lives become intertwined in an unlikely journey across the globe. Rated PG-13

Nurture News:

Submitted by Cyndi Wise

The season of Lent:

March 4 – Ecumenical Lenten Luncheon and Devotions series **begins at noon** on this date and continues each Wednesday during Lent. Sparta UMC will be hosting the first of these luncheons. A short devotional message will follow lunch and will be finished by 1:00 p.m. All are welcome to attend.

March 4 – Lenten Soup and Bread Suppers on Wednesday evenings during Lent begin at 5:30 p.m. A time of worship and the video series based on *John: The Gospel of Light and Life* will follow at approximately 6:15 p.m. in the Chapel. (More volunteers are needed to prepare and serve these Wednesday night suppers. There is a sign-up sheet for this up in The Gathering Place by the Sanctuary.

► The FREE daily Lenten devotional booklet "*By His Wounds We Are Healed*" is available at the church.

Looking Ahead:

April 9 – Maundy Thursday – The 24-hour Prayer Vigil will begin at 12 noon. A Tenebrae Service will be held that evening at 7 p.m. in the Sanctuary.

April 10 – Good Friday – More details will be coming soon regarding Good Friday events.

April 12 – Easter! Blossoming of the Cross!

Thank you, Dave Kemp, Jeff Hemmersbach, Todd Loeffelholz, John Lodico and Scott Naeseth for preparing and serving the annual Shrove Pancake Breakfast. About 40 folks thoroughly enjoyed the delicious pancakes and sausages served with a smile! You **always** do such a good job!

Thank you, Aubrey Ebert for sharing your artwork, which is displayed on the bulletin board across from the Library. Your canvas paintings are **lovely**, and they are just a small sampling of your work. You are talented in so many ways!

Our Deepest Sympathy to:

The family and friends of Vivian Webster, for the loss of Vivian.

A Note of Thanks...

Thank you, United Methodist Women, for the beautiful mum altar plant. It brightens our days and warms our hearts.

God Bless,
Winnie and Karen Joos

Pictorial Directory Updates

Phyllis Aney correction:

Phone number: 608-269-6461

Hank & Barb McGreevy correction:

Phone Number: 608-487-9912 is no longer valid

Dave & Beth Wilms address correction:

P.O. Box 335

Marshall, MN 56258-0335

Liz Risseuw address correction:

635 South K St., Lot 24

Sparta, WI 54656-2337



Engage in Healthy Behaviors by the Source of Spiritual Power – Galatians 6:14

You may know well the verse that indicates your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

“Don’t you realize that *your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit*, who lives in you and was given to you by God?” ~ 1 Corinthians 6:19 ~

The truth and reality of this verse is likely a motivation for you to care for your body by making healthy choices. Engaging in physical activity, eating well, drinking lots of water, being free from drugs and other addictions, refraining from the use of tobacco, limiting, if not abstaining from, alcohol consumption and getting plenty of sleep are a few key behaviors that contribute to good health. It’s likely that you desire for these behaviors to be a part of your lifestyle.

Yet you may be trying to muster up the willpower and strength to engage in these healthy behaviors in your own power and self-control. And consequently, you may be failing miserably at some or many of these behaviors.

This could be because your focus is on the behaviors instead of the Savior and his work on the Cross.

“*You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.*” ~ 1 Corinthians 6:20 ~

How often and how deeply do you dwell on the Cross of Christ and on the Man who died for your sins? *How frequently* are you grateful, deep in your heart, of the sacrifice that Jesus made for you?

Paul writes the following – “*As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified, and the world’s interest in me has also died.*” ~ Galatians 6:14 ~

I could write endlessly about how to choose nutritious foods in the grocery store and how to engage in physical activities to become more fit and about habits that are conducive to sleeping well but those instructions will carry no power. They will merely be facts.

The apostle Paul preached the gospel of the Cross, even though it seemed foolish to others. When he did, the spiritual power of God was released into the lives of those who heard it!

“... *it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe... we preach Christ crucified.*” ~ 1 Corinthians 1:21, 23 ~

Dietary, physical activity and other health-related guidelines are there to direct us and provide us with the means to be healthy. Where many of us, and perhaps you, fail is that we make following these guidelines like the laws found in the Bible. We try to live according to these ‘laws’ independent of our relationship with Jesus. We do not regularly look to the Cross. And so we fail time and time again in our attempts to engage in healthy behaviors.

“*My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God...*” ~ Galatians 2:20, 21 ~

God desires that you and I rest in the fact that his Spirit lives within us and that he will daily give us the *grace* and associated spiritual power to make healthy choices. And God wants you to dwell, or meditate, on what Jesus did on the Cross for you.

This attitude and behavior is the key to opening the door for you to experience the power of God’s Spirit in your life and to be able to live a life that glorifies Him, including your health-related behaviors.

And your desire to be healthy is to be rooted in your desire to glorify God by best using the gifts and talents he has given you to serve in his kingdom. Then He will be most glorified!

“*For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*” ~ Ephesians 2:10 ~

The wonderful thing is that these healthy behaviors will be just one area of your life that will benefit. All areas of your life will be different because the love, grace, and Spirit of God will reach down into your whole being and transform you to be more like Jesus!

In Christ’s Love,
Priscilla Hemmersbach, RN
Parish Nurse

Administrative Council Update:

As we move forward in our quest toward accountable leadership instead of our current model of ad council and committees, Pastor L shared information with us from a book she is reading called *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going: Leading in a Liminal Season*. Her hope is to help us think seriously about who we are as a congregation so we move forward very intentionally and authentically as the church God calls us to be.

She shared from the book, "Any grouping of people is more than the sum of its parts; it is a system with its own life, an entity in many ways like a person. Each family, community, church, business, even nation or culture has characteristics and experiences that constitute a life of its own. Like the individuals who make them up, groups can be seen as growing and learning, yearning and dreaming, decaying and dying. An obvious question in this context is whether social systems might be said to have (or be) souls...If a group derives its being, energy, and characteristics from the mutual interactions of its constituents, then it can be said to have at least some soul qualities." (pg. 51)

In other words, we are not just a group of individuals doing our own thing or the same old thing in a big, beautiful, old building. The soul is a driving force of the divine spark in the institution. The soul is the authentic and truest self of the institution; the source of its divine calling, character, and destiny; the protector of institutional integrity.

Soul is NOT: the collective leadership voice, Holy Spirit movement, organizational culture, or spirituality. A faith-based organization has many ways to express its spirituality. Each expression grows from a conscious quest for God in the collective human experience. Ritual, worship, sacraments, and prayer practices are obvious expressions of spirituality in institutional life.

Four styles of spirituality that may help us define who we are include: thinking, feeling, being, doing. Each faith community has its own preferred type of spirituality, represented by some blending of the four basic types. Most congregations express a strong preference for one or two types of spirituality and a lesser attachment to the other styles.

Congregations that favor "**thinking**" spirituality are attracted to sermons, lectures, and study as a way of experiencing God. These congregations value understanding ideas about God. They value the written word and sound doctrine. They demonstrate a love of order and desire for things to be rational and logical. Their experience of God comes from considering the truth of God with their minds.

Congregations with a heart spirituality know God by "**feeling**" God's presence. A congregation that favors this spirituality type over the others will experience highs and lows in religious feelings. Witness and proclamation are important to them. Heart spirituality is most often engaged through spontaneous experiences, through music, testimony, and more informal worship.

A congregation with a "**being**" spirituality values the journey. In fact, the quest is more important than an arrival. Being is more important than doing. This spiritual type values a mystical approach to God. They enjoy pausing to listen for God or wondering at God's creation. This congregation enjoys contemplation, wordless prayer and experiences of silence and stillness.

Some congregations embrace a spirituality of "**doing**." These congregations experience God's presence best when they are actively working to advance a cause for which they are passionate. They are rooted in social concerns and are often impatient with the passivity of the other types.

Do you see us as a congregation in any of the above descriptions or in a combination of them? It is important for us to understand who we are and what our story is. "In a healthy congregation, the spirituality of a congregation is an expression of the soul, but it is not the soul itself. In fact, a congregation can grow unhealthy by practicing a spirituality that is not an authentic reflection of its soul." (pgs. 57-58)

If the soul is the authentic and truest self of the institution; the source of its divine calling, character, and destiny; the protector of institutional integrity—then wounding the soul diminishes the integrity and the authenticity of the organization. Without integrity and authenticity, vitality is not possible. Pastor L shared that her hopes and prayers for this church is vital ministry well into the future.

If you would like a full report of discussion from the ad council meeting, you can read the minutes on the bulletin board outside the entrance to the Fellowship Hall.

