

PASTOR'S PAGE

Ash Wednesday is Coming

Every so often, it happens. Someone you desperately love or deeply respect manages to do something impossibly dumb -- at least in your opinion. Your son decides to drop out of college to become a professional poker player. Your teenage daughter dents her car not 10 minutes after you toss her the keys. Your elderly dad really lived by these words found on the bumper of their motorhome: "I'm spending my children's inheritance!" You find out that your best friend is ditching his lovely wife for a co-ed he found on Facebook. Impossibly dumb.

If you're like most people, when you're sideswiped by someone else's stupidity, the only sentences you can muster to express your unbelief are thoughtful, compassionate phrases like: "You're kidding me!?" "Say what?!" or "Shut up, you're lying!" And of course, everyone's favorite, the simple yet sufficient, "Really?!" As in, "Really?!" or "Really?"

We're not alone in our moments of dumbfounded disbelief. God has them too. Reading through Joel we can almost hear God saying, "Honestly? I bring you out of slavery and you insist on worshiping statues and sacrificing to fertility gods?" or "Are you kidding me?! You've seen my power; you know of my might and yet you refuse to repent and run from your sin? Seriously?"

Hearing God's frustration, we can almost empathize. "I know how it feels, Lord. People are dumb"; that is, until we realize that we -- yes we, the followers of Jesus Christ today -- are part of the very problems prophesied against in God's rants. Sit with that truth for a moment. You frustrate, you disappoint, and you anger God. Not a pleasant thought, but it's an honest one. Year after year we enter this season; we reflect on our sin, only to step right back into a life where we pretend God doesn't exist. We insist on worshiping -- giving our heart and devotion to -- created things like accolades at work, the security of a dollar saved, or toned arms and tight abs rather than the Creator himself. Meanwhile, God says, "Seriously?"

We treat faith in Christ as an accessory of life rather than the central piece of our identity. We earn doctorate degrees in self-justification, avoiding obedience to Christ by telling ourselves that we deserve a little fun on the side or that God understands our need to look at this or dabble in that. We hide addictions from our friends, our fears from our spouse, our indiscretion from our employer. We refuse the grace of transparency and community and instead pray that God helps us stay in hiding rather than drag us to the light and expose our sin. All the while God whispers, "Are you kidding?"

This is who we are. And there's just one thing such repeated and unrelenting rebellion deserves: death. In fact, that's exactly what Joel prophesied in his scathing sermon to the southern kingdom of God's people. *"Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain,"* writes Joel on God's behalf. *"Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations"* (Joel 2:1-2, ESV).

"A day is coming -- the Day of the LORD," proclaimed Joel, "when God would be mocked no more, grieved no more, made to shake his head in shame or pound his fist in frustration no more. A day is coming when darkness will hover over the land and those who insist on doing the impossibly dumb will die." "Really?" Yes, *really*.

Of course, those of you who know your Bible history know that Joel's "day of the LORD" did, in fact arrive. It came about when the southern kingdom was overtaken by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. It showed up again at the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 and is promised to arrive in its fullness -- for all those who remain in love of self rather than in fear of God through trust in Christ -- at some future day of reckoning.

As Ash Wednesday approaches, we gather to mark ourselves as those who deserve to have the darkness of judgment surround us. We gather to honestly examine our rebellious state and that we grieve God. We gather to mourn, in ashes and dust, the truth that because of our sin, we are a doomed, dying people. "Seriously?" Yes. Seriously.

But wouldn't you know it? God gets the last word. We may get sideswiped by the stupidity of others, but God -- though angered by our sin -- is never thrown off balance or out of character by it. Having told us what we rightly deserve, God approaches with what God longs to give us: a second chance. Most people, when burned over and over by someone's bad decisions, eventually put their guard up. We trust them a little less. We question them a little more. Eventually, if they insist on surprising us, disappointing us, or hurting us, we may do what Dr. Phil tells us to and cut them out of our lives altogether. But that's not how God works.

Listen to Joel: *"Yet even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster*" (Joel 2:12-13, ESV).

These words should make us shake our heads in disbelief. Only this time not from being deeply disappointed by someone we love -- no, the opposite. We shake our heads at the relentless love of someone we constantly disappoint. "Return to me," God says and "I will be gracious to you." When we, if in his position, would be right to cut the cord and save ourselves the future disappointment, God extends a welcoming hand and invites us into a restored relationship.

A heart that's broken over sin is ready for the remedy of sin: God's grace through Christ. Again, that's why Ash Wednesday is so important. When we come in repentance toward God, it is not only an act of contrition. We mark ourselves in an ashen cross as a declaration of our depravity, but also as a sign of our trust in God's restoration and forgiveness as we walk in the Way and the Truth and the Life. It's a way of humbly proclaiming that though we deserve to be crushed on the Day of the Lord, we will have life through Christ on the cross, whom we trust as our forgiving Lord. And that kind of broken -- yet hopeful -- heart, God will not deny. God welcomes you home.

Reflect on the following: It makes no sense that God would forgive us. It makes no sense that God would still love us. It makes no sense that God would offer us grace and mercy. It makes no sense that God would call us his child. It makes no sense that God would receive us back simply because we have a broken heart clinging to Christ. Yet that's exactly what God does.

"Really?" Yes, REALLY!!!

Yours in Christ,
Rev Robert Steele

"God to Mortals: "Really?", Homiletics, February 2012

MARCH BIRTHDAYS

- 3-1: Joanne Stangel
Milly Menzer
- 3-8: Ivan Hazen
Alaric Hazen
- 3-09: Elanore Faucher
- 3-11: William Paltzer



- 3-20: Joanie Schnettler
- 3-22: Shirley Ottman
- 3-23: Jerry Sabrowsky
- 3-24: Barbara Vogt
- 3-25: Katelyn Regutis

- 3-26: Vicki Lindstrom
- 3-29: Rev Robert Steele

MARCH ANNIVERSARIES

- 3-03: Bill & Judi Strenger
- 3-18: Jason & Jill Mengel



If we missed a member's birthday or anniversary, please contact the church office, and let us know.

NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Here we go rolling into March. Let's hope we get more of the lamb than the lion related to the weather. As we head into the Lenten season, the ladies are planning soup suppers again this year starting Wednesday, March 2nd. They are still looking for volunteers to sign up for making a soup, serving, making desserts, or clean-up activities for several weeks. If you enjoy the soup suppers, please consider pitching in. There is a lot of planning and work that goes into it. Contact Gina Fibiger to volunteer (or see the sign up sheets in the back of church, and thanks to those who are working hard so that everyone can have a warm supper and fellowship before the services this season.

It was recently announced that we were going back to a single Sunday service starting in March. The Covid numbers are declining and providing the two services on separate days was always a temporary plan. There was also financial burden on the church for additional organists and substitute Pastors, and it demanded more of the volunteers. We are still looking for another Elder. If you have been an Elder in the past, the group would appreciate you joining again. Please reach out to Andy Fibiger to volunteer as an Elder.

As was announced in last year's voter's meeting, Bethany's insurance premium went up by a lot with Cincinatti insurance. I'm glad to say that we now have a new insurance company, Church Mutual, who specializes in insuring churches. There are significant savings with even better coverage than we had before. God really blessed our congregation with that find. Many thanks to Pastor Steele for suggesting we check them out, and to Ryan Brooks for being part of the quote review. As a requirement of the new insurance policy, the Board of Education is implementing a Child Protection Policy for Sunday school, confirmation, and music program participants which includes a code of conduct that people who work with children must be trained on annually. This is something that all churches are being required to have and protects both the children and workers. Many thanks to Gina Fibiger, Andy Fibiger, and Pastor Steele for their work in creating this policy and implementing it to protect our members.

Since last month's letter, Kevin Werner agreed to serve a term as Trustee, and already got in the action this past week as we had some boiler fans and igniters go out. The Council approved funding to repair them from the building improvement fund. Thank you to the members who donate to that fund so we can respond to emergencies like these. Thanks to Ryan and Kevin for taking care of the church so we can be warm while we worship.

As of writing this letter, we are still looking for a Council Secretary. The Council Secretary position is taking notes one meeting per month and during the November Voter's meeting. The meeting notes have a consistent format and agenda, and we can even provide a laptop for the notes. Please reach out to me if you have questions about volunteering for the Church Council Secretary position.

I hope to see everyone at the soup supper next Wednesday before we worship our Lord and Savior.

God Bless and to God be the Glory!

Todd Matte - Council President



Lutheran Bible
Translators

MARCH/APRIL CHARITY OF THE MONTH

Use your Designated Offering envelopes during the months of March and April to support **Lutheran Bible Translators**. The mission of Lutheran Bible Translators is to help bring people to faith in Jesus Christ by making the Word of God available to those who do not yet have it in the language of their hearts. To learn more about LBT, visit their website at www.lbt.org

LENTEN SOUP SUPPERS

Please join us in the "Betty and Clyde Bawden Kitchen and Fellowship Hall" prior to each Lenten Service beginning at 5:00pm for our Lenten Soup Suppers. Enjoy homemade soups and fellowship. **Please sign up on the sheets on the table in the back of church if you'd like to attend.** You can also email or call the church office to sign up. A free will offering will be taken each week to benefit a different cause. The first week (March 2) will be hosted by Dori Matte with proceeds to benefit Project Angel Hugs.



HELP NEEDED!

Please take a look at the sign-up sheets in the back of church and consider helping. We are in need of people to help serve, clean up, and donate desserts.



Dear Members of Bethany,

Over the past two years, we have gone through some challenging times due to the pandemic. We had to offer two services to keep our congregation distanced, which has divided our congregation and taken away a lot of the fellowship we used to enjoy on Sunday mornings when we all worship together. With vaccines being readily available and newer variants of the disease weakening, it has made it safer for people to congregate like they used to, as we witness people gathering in large numbers for sporting events, concerts, at schools, etc. This, along with the low attendance numbers at each of our services, no longer justifies continuing with two services. We are happy to announce that we are going back to one service on Sunday mornings at 10:00 am, where we can worship together, as we did before. This will be the new schedule moving forward, including summer.

We look forward to seeing everyone together again on Sunday mornings, beginning Sunday, March 6th. **Our last Saturday service is this week Saturday, February 26th.**

Gods blessings to you all,
Andy Fibiger, Head Elder

DEADLINE TO DIRECT THRIVENT CHOICE DOLLARS

MARCH 31st IS THE DEADLINE TO DIRECT YOUR CHOICE DOLLARS FROM 2021, OTHERWISE THESE FUNDS WILL BE LOST.

All Thrivent members at Bethany please remember to direct your "Thrivent Choice Dollars" to Bethany Lutheran Church if you have not already done so.

Thrivent cards on the shelf near Pastors office will help guide you. If you are unsure if you have funds available to direct just call 1-800-847-4836 to check. Any questions please see Lynn Luebke, Dave Prange, or Mary Madden and they would help you also.

Thanks to those who have already directed their dollars. These dollars help fund programs, events and missions for Bethany.

Direct your
Thrivent Choice
Dollars
Today!



TM



EASTER FLOWERS

At the time of this printing, information for the Easter Flower orders was not yet available. Please watch upcoming bulletins for order forms to be available or contact the church office.

ALTAR GUILD MEETING

The Altar Guild will meet on Monday, March 7 at 6:00pm at church. Anyone interested in joining the Altar Guild or learning what we do is welcome to join us!



Love INC



Bedding & Linens Ministry in Need of New Pillows & Comforters

- Pillows (New)
- Comforters – Queen and Full size (New or gently-loved)
- Blankets – Queen and Full size (New or gently-loved)

Any donations can be placed near the gray Love INC tub outside Pastor's office. Thank you!

A Prayer for Lenten Simplicity

Free me, Lord Jesus, from anything that obstructs my way to you. Clear away the clutter of petty grudges. Remove smudges of resentment and bitterness.

Cleanse me of thoughts filled with anger envy, or self-pity.

Create space in my life for more kindness and less spitefulness, greater generosity and stronger compassion.

Enlarge my heary with a spirit of gratitude this Lent, so that I recognize the simple gifts that lay in abundance all around me.

In your sacred name, I pray. Amen.



THOSE SERVING IN GOD'S HOUSE THE MONTH OF MARCH 2022

Wednesday, March 2
6:00 p.m.
Ash Wednesday w/HC

Elder: Brian Faucher
Ushers: Brian Faucher, Dan Fibiger
Acolyte: Elanore Faucher
Altar Guild: Lynn & Gerry Luebke

Sunday, March 6
10:00 a.m.
w/Holy Communion

Elder: Lee Gumm
Ushers: Steve & Diane Marotz
Acolyte: Isaac Hasler
Alter Guild: Liz & Ken Buesing
Scripture Reader: Todd Matte
Door Locker: Diane Marotz

Wednesday, March 9
6:00 p.m.

Elder: Shua Yang
Ushers: Mattes
Acolyte: Maggie Faucher

Sunday, March 13
10:00 a.m.

Elder: Gerry Luebke
Ushers: Thompson, Rademacher, Kuehlman
Acolyte: Colin Mengel
Altar Guild: Sue & Dave Prange
Scripture Reader: Mary Ann Fibiger
Door Locker: Ryan Brooks

Wednesday, March 16
6:00 p.m.

Elder: Jason Mengel
Ushers: Hazen
Acolyte: Ryan Mengel

Sunday, March 20
10:00 a.m.
w/Holy Communion

Elder: Andy Fibiger
Ushers: Fibigers
Acolyte: Winston Hasler
Altar Guild: Barb & Lee Gumm
Scripture Reader: Sharon Werner
Door Locker: Steve Marotz

Wednesday, March 23
6:00 p.m.

Elder: Lee Gumm
Ushers: Ray & Shirley Ottman
Acolyte: Aidan Brooks

Sunday, March 27
10:00 a.m.

Elder: Gerry Luebke
Ushers: Dave & Sue Prange
Acolyte: Katelynn Regutis
Altar Guild: Barb & Karl Kaeppler
Scripture Reader: Lee Gumm
Door Locker: Dan Menzer

Wednesday, March 30
6:00 p.m.

Elder: Brian Faucher
Ushers: Jerry Sabrowsky, Derek MacKenzie
Acolyte: Elanore Faucher

March 2022

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		01	02 3:15pm Confirmation 5-8 grade 5pm Soup Supper 6pm Ash Wednesday Worship	03	04	05
06 8:45am Sunday School Bible Study 10am Worship w/HC	07 6pm Altar Guild 6:30pm Elders	08	09 3:15pm Confirmation 5-8 grade 5pm Soup Supper 6pm Lent Worship	10	11	12
13 8:45am Sunday School Bible Study 10am Worship	14 5:45pm Bd of Ed 6:15pm Finance 7pm Council	15	16 3:15pm Confirmation 5-8 grade 5pm Soup Supper 6pm Lent Worship	17 	18	19
20 8:45am Sunday School Bible Study 10am Worship w/HC	21	22	23 3:15pm Confirmation 5-8 grade 5pm Soup Supper 6pm Lent Worship	24	25	26
27 8:45am Sunday School Bible Study 10am Worship	28	29	30 3:15pm Confirmation 5-8 grade 5pm Soup Supper 6pm Lent Worship	31		