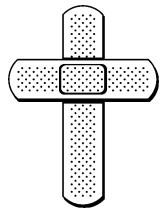


PASTOR'S DEVOTIONAL

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words." – Romans 8:26.

For most of my life, my powerful voice has been one of my most defining characteristics. It began when I was the Drum Major of our high school's marching band, shouting over the drums and brass sections during our halftime shows during Saturday afternoon football games. It continued in both university and seminary, when I joined our school choirs and sang in many concerts both on campus and in tours of the northeastern United States. When I began to lead worship in our seminary chapel and during my internship at Bethel Lutheran Church in Jamestown, New York, I began to appreciate how my voice would be an asset in preaching and worship leadership. My voice has served me well over the years as a pastor, as a member of several community choruses, and in my recent foray into community theatre. I am still well-known as "the tall pastor with the big voice."



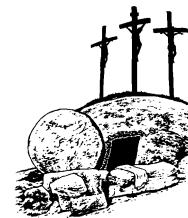
But last month, my normally reliable voice began to fail. I caught the nasty cold virus that has been going around the area, one of the worst and most long-lasting colds I've ever experienced. In addition to the usual cough and cold symptoms, it began to affect my voice. At first, it was my singing voice that suffered; I had trouble hitting the high notes, and before long I couldn't produce any good sounds in any range. The cold then went after my speaking voice; if you were in worship on Sunday, March 5, you might have thought that I was resurrecting my Lurch character from *The Addams Family* – but sadly, that was all the voice I had that morning. The voice that was so reliable and useful in my life and ministry had failed me; to say that I was frustrated would have been an understatement.

My voice is slowly returning, but this ordeal has taught me to appreciate the gift of my voice and to make certain I take good care of this asset that is so useful to me in so many aspects of my life. It has also been an occasion in which I have thought of what it means to be voiceless – not only in the physical sense, but those situations in which we cannot find our voice, cannot find the words

that seem appropriate to what we are experiencing. It may be when a member of our family has died, and we can't find the words to express our grief with one another. It may be a situation in which someone comes to us for advice, and we don't know what words will be most helpful. It may be a time when someone asks us to pray for them, and for some reason we can't summon the words or find a voice to bring before God the petition that will bring them comfort and peace.

Our voices may fail us; we may not find the words to express what is in our hearts. It is in these moments of weakness, these occasions of voicelessness, that we turn to the one who gives voice to our deepest thoughts and emotions. In his letter to the Romans (which we have been studying in our Monday evening Bible Study class), St. Paul reminds us that it is precisely at the moment in which we are the weakest that Christ comes to us. As we are powerless to make ourselves right with God, but rely on God's gracious love in Jesus Christ to restore the relationship that sin had broken (*"But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us."* – Romans 5:8), when we find that our voices cannot express what is in our hearts, God sends the Holy Spirit to help us in our weakness, interceding within the Christian at the point where he or she finds no words to express in God's presence. The Holy Spirit empowers us to bring all of our prayers to God in *"sighs too deep for words"* (Romans 8:26), so that we can truly exercise our privilege as God's people to carry *"everything to God in prayer."*

- "The Christian, precisely at the point of weakness and uncertainty, of mobility and struggle, becomes the place at which the triune God is revealed in person." – N.T. Wright.



This month, we will once again gather for worship in Holy Week to survey *"the wondrous cross on which the prince of glory died."* As we remember our Lord's suffering and death for the sake of all humanity, we may not find the voice or words to adequately express our emotions, our deepest feelings over what our Saviour has given us with his *"holy, precious blood and his innocent suffering and death."* (*Small Catechism*). Perhaps all we can do when asked *"were you there when they crucified my Lord"* is to *"tremble, tremble, tremble."* But it is at this moment of weakness, this hour of voicelessness that the Word of God speaks to us, boldly proclaiming that the death of Christ on the Cross is the moment of our liberation, because it is through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that we have been given *"a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"* (1 Peter 1:3), so that our tongues might be freed and our voices restored so that we might sing *"my great Redeemer's praise, the glories of my God and king, the triumphs of his grace!"* (ELW Hymn 886).

- "When everything is hopeless for us and all things begin to go against our prayers and desires, then those unutterable groans begin. Then 'the Spirit helps us in our weakness

(Romans 8:26). For unless the Spirit were helping, it would be impossible for us to bear this action of God by which he hears us and accomplishes what we pray for. Then the soul is told: 'Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!' (Psalm 27:14)." – Martin Luther.

My ordeal with voicelessness has taught me never to take this gift for granted, to be a good steward of the voice I use to speak, to sing, and to share God's love. But should another virus take it from me, I have that confidence of faith that all that is in my mind and heart will still be heard by our God who gives us the Holy Spirit so that we can give voice in all circumstances to give thanks and praise to God for the hope that is ours in the good news of this season: that **Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Jeff Laustsen

WORSHIP & MUSIC REPORT

On March 4, a meeting was held for all persons involved in preparing the worship space. This includes furnishings, vessels, elements, linens and paraments used in our services. The meeting was chaired by Pastor Jeff.

The candelabras that are used on special occasions have been refurbished and returned. The altar candle holders are presently being refurbished and will be returned when completed. We should all be aware that any brass is NOT to be handled without wearing white gloves (they are supplied). Just a note ... the oil in our fingers will leave dark marks on the vessel. Refurbishing is very expensive. You may have noticed that we now use oil candles ... so no more cleaning up wax.

REMINDER: A Pot-Luck supper will be held on Maundy Thursday, April 13 at 5:30 PM. All are welcome!

Peace,
Elsie Dahm, Worship & Music Chair



HIGHLIGHTS FROM CONGREGATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING



The members of Congregational Council are all very excited that the kitchen and washroom renovation projects are in their final stages, nearing completion. Council members and a few other volunteers gathered in the Fellowship Hall on Saturday, March 18, 2017 with buckets, step stools, mops and cleaning cloths to wash away the drywall dust from floors, walls and furniture. It was a great opportunity for us to physically work together and share some laughs.

At our first meeting following the Annual General Meeting, officers were elected and Committee Assignments established as follows:

Chairperson	- Kevin Tuer
Vice-Chairperson	- Alison Johnston
Secretary	- Audrey Miller
Treasurer	- Gerald Cook

Committee Assignments:

Worship & Music	- Elizabeth Forrest, Lynnette McLeod, Ellen Wolfe
Congregational Life	- Stephanie Sousa, Lois Lemon, Liz Bomasuit
Finance	- Gerald Cook, Ron Deichert, Audrey Miller
Property	- Paul Hansen, Kevin Tuer, Alison Johnston

Chair Racks have been purchased for the Fellowship Hall, allowing for easier storage, stacking and unstacking of the chairs for events. The metal racks were handmade by a member of St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Milverton.

Our monthly discussions using the book "Living Lutheran: Renewing Your Congregation" will conclude with a one day retreat on Saturday, March 25, 2017. We will be crafting a purpose statement and guiding principles to bring forward to the Congregation.



ZION WOMEN OF FAITH

On behalf of the WOF we would like to thank everyone for making The World Day Of Prayer so meaningful and successful. We thank Avon Mennonite Church for accommodating us. In particular we thank Mary-Lou Drown for planning the service and a special thank you to Lynne Hopcraft, Carol Smith and Andrea Barstad

for providing the beautiful music everyone so enjoyed. Thank you to our ladies who prepared and served the lunch.

Monthly Meeting will be Wednesday, April 26 at 7:30 PM. Speaker to be announced.

Coming Up: Grand Bend Theatre tickets for June will be available in May.

Respectfully Submitted, Joanne Young, WOF President

FRIENDSHIP MEAL



Community Meal

Our Friendship Meal continues to serve people in need in our community. We are now serving around 100 people a month which unfortunately indicates that things are difficult for some people. Friendship Meal will be Friday, April 28 at 5 PM. Volunteers are needed to prepare, cook, serve, and clean-up. That could mean you and you are welcome to help out. Indeed, we need you! Questions? Please call Sister Jean Widmeyer (519-273-6810).

Starting Again



ZION TABLE FOR SENIORS

Our next gathering of Zion Table For Seniors, our ministry which promotes fun, food, and friendship, takes place on Tuesday, April 25 at 12 noon. Please let Doris Bartlett (519-271-9622) or Rita Mueller (519-271-6539) know by noon, Monday, April 17 if you can attend. Lunch cost is only \$12. Our after dinner entertainment will be the musical talents of Randy Grey from St. Thomas.



MARK YOUR MAY CALENDARS

Join us on Sunday, May 28th for our **PIG ROAST** lunch. We will officially welcome our new Vicar Jason Ashby and the end of year Sunday School program. Mark your calendar, as we gather to celebrate after the 10 AM service.

FYI: The Committee is working on a bus trip to a Toronto Blue Jays game. It is tentatively scheduled for Saturday, May 27th. Watch the Sunday bulletins and May newsletter for more information.

Your Congregational Life Committee

+ IN MEMORIAM +

Donald Wittig, January 13
Ralph Cook, March 7

BAPTISMS

Aidan Ryan Ehgoetz, February 19

STEWARDSHIP THOUGHT

It's tax time again!

To coincide with tax time, are you aware of what percentage of your gross income you are giving to charity?

Your tax return for 2016 tells you not only how much income God entrusted to you last year, but also what portion you gave away.

In order to calculate what percentage you gave away, simply take your total charitable contributions and divide by your total gross income. Take the answer and move the decimal point over two places. This is the percentage you gave away in 2016.



Example: Total gross income is \$42,653.00. Charitable contributions are \$1,250.00. \$1,250.00 divided by \$42,653.00 equals .0293. Move the decimal point over two places and the percent that this individual gave to charity was 2.9%

Once your percentage of what you gave away has been calculated, the question you need to ask yourself is, am I pleased with the number? If so, great! If not, maybe plans should be made now to improve your giving in 2017.

Something to prayerfully consider.

APRIL VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers assist with our Sunday morning worship services. Listed below are those who serve in April as a reminder and as a thank you for serving.

Date	Communion Assistants	Greeters	Readers	Usher Captains	Counting Captains
Apr 2	Wayne Young & David Bennewitz	Wayne & Barbara Higgins	Lynnette McLeod	Brian Wilker	Kevin Tuer
Apr 9	N/A	Darrell & Judy Renecker	Marilyn Sylvester	Fritz Steigmeier	Liz Forrest
Apr 13	Wayne Young	Ron & Deb Deichert	Marg Lamont	Brian Wilker	N/A
Apr 14	N/A	Ed & Darlene Illman	Mary-Lou Drown	Fritz Steigmeier	N/A
Apr 16	Liz Bomasuit & Judith Hammond	Gerald & Isabel Cook	Nancy Schaff	Steve Lamont	N/A
Apr 23	N/A	Tim & Susan Iredale	Doug Peterman	Steve Lamont	Liz Forrest
Apr 30	N/A	Jim & Kathy Schellenberger	Linda Weitzel	Ed Illman	Lois Lemon