

A publication for the family of Zion Lutheran Church, 202 Erie St., Stratford, ON N5A 2M8

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PASTOR'S DEVOTIONAL

"Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" – Isaiah 43:18-19

Preparing for our return to in-person worship was one of the greatest challenges I have faced in my many years of ordained ministry. So many of the elements of worship that I had considered essential and non-negotiable are not possible at this moment; this includes congregational singing, reciting the Creed, shaking hands at the Sharing of the Peace, and distributing both bread and wine at Holy Communion. Limiting seating in our Sanctuary and requiring reservations for Sunday worship would have been unthinkable at the beginning of the year; not being able to greet the congregation after worship goes against every instinct I have as a pastor called to serve among God's people. This has also extended to my weekday ministry; for the past six months I have been unable to lead worship in area retirement homes, bring Holy Communion to our homebound members, and make regular visits to people in the hospital or long-term-care facilities. It has been a challenging and unsettling time as we try to be faithful to our call to be the Church of Jesus Christ while practicing love for our neighbours by observing safety and social distancing guidelines during the pandemic.



The turning point for me happened a few days before our first in-person worship service on Sunday, September 6. I was going through one of my frequent periods of frustration over what I cannot do in worship when it dawned on me that I was looking at things from the wrong perspective; instead of lamenting everything that we *cannot* do at the present time, I need to focus on all of the things that we *can* do in these challenging times. Even though we were unable to gather in-person for worship for almost six months, we were able to communicate and share God's Word through the internet and other electronic means at our disposal. While visiting in person was extremely limited, we were able to keep in touch with one another through phone calls and emails; even old-fashioned letter writing is making a comeback! While we cannot sing as a congregation, we have talented musicians in our midst who are providing us with wonderful musical offerings. While we

cannot distribute the cup in Holy Communion, we receive the full blessings of the sacrament through the bread, believing that Christ is truly with us as we partake of his sacred Body in the Lord's Supper. As the Lord spoke through the prophet Isaiah, now is not the time to look to the former things that are not possible in this age of pandemic; now is the time to look to the new things that God is doing in our midst that make it possible for us to be the church and share God's love even in these most difficult and uncertain times.

One of the best books I have read during these past months is Walter Brueggemann's *Virus as a Summons to Faith*. The renowned professor of Hebrew Scriptures looks to the prophets for a word that summons us to look not to what we have lost from the past but what God is doing here and now, the "new thing" that gives us hope for ourselves and a call to share this word of light and life in our ongoing mission and ministry:

1. "In our moment of fear and insecurity, we may be tempted to hold on to what was once safe and secure. Prophetic tradition knows, on the contrary, that the future does not reside in old, treasured realities. It belongs, rather, to bold faithful thought that evokes bold faithful action ... The new thing God is making possible is a world of generous, neighbourly compassion. It is before our very eyes! The God who does this new thing has also said, 'Do not remember former things.' We have so much we will do well to forget."

I must admit that I am yearning for the day when we can once again shake each other's hands, lift our voices together in song, and take the cup at the Lord's Supper. I will rejoice when I can visit with people in their homes, lead worship with my friends in local retirement communities, and have coffee with my colleagues. I will continue to lament what we have lost due to the COVID-19 virus; but at the same time I rejoice in the new things that God has set before us, the new possibilities for sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with one another, the new ways in which we can stay connected and support each other. There is so much we *can* do in sharing the love of Jesus Christ and rejoicing in the sure and certain hope that nothing can separate us from one another or from the love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord – now and always!

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Jeff Laustsen

WORSHIP FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS



One of the hallmarks of our Lutheran worship traditions is flexibility. Our Augsburg Confession teaches that "it is not necessary for the

true unity of the Christian church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere." While we have shared the same hymnals and worship books throughout our history (including our current worship book, Evangelical Lutheran Worship) each congregation has the freedom to worship in a style that reflects its culture and context, gathering around the Word of God and the Holy Sacraments that are at the heart of who we are as the assembly of all believers in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This history of freedom and flexibility in worship has been put to the test in 2020 as we have responded to the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic. In March, we were forced to close our building to in-person worship and all other public gatherings; we quickly shifted to offering sermons and other worship materials on our congregational website, which continued throughout the months in which our building remained closed. These online worship services continue to be offered every week at www.zionstratford.com, and we are thankful to everyone who continues to make this worship opportunity possible.

On Sunday, September 6, we were able to reopen our building to in-person worship; but worship is quite different from how we once experienced it due to the guidelines that have been instituted to keep everyone who comes into our building safe and well. The seating capacity of our sanctuary is greatly reduced, so we are asking people who are coming to worship to call the church office before Friday at 1:00 pm to reserve a place at the service. When people arrive on Sunday mornings, they are greeted by congregation members who confirm their attendance and ask a few screening questions regarding the virus. Ushers greet worshipers and guide them to available seats, giving them the worship program that contains everything needed for the service. While we are unable to sing hymns as a congregation, our musicians are offering beautiful musical offerings that greatly enhance our worship life. We hear the Word of God read and proclaimed, and we are able to receive the Lord's Supper under appropriate guidelines. We pray for all God's people, and we share our offerings as we enter or exit our worship space. It is a different way of worshipping, but one that is most appropriate for the times in which we are living; we know that even though the order of worship has changed, God's loving presence and the strengthening presence and power of God's Word are with us always.

We will continue to offer worship both in-person and online for the foreseeable future. While none of us knows with certain what challenges the COVID-19 virus will present us, we will continue to seek to be faithful in worship and serving our Lord in such a time as we find ourselves. We look forward to worshipping with you in whatever form you choose, and we pray that the "peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7).

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Jeff Laustsen



DESPERATELY SEEKING INSTRUMENTALISTS / SOLOISTS



We are certainly delighted that we have been allowed to reopen for Worship! However, during these uncertain times, it is clear that singing, one of the most basic activities we have used for centuries to celebrate our faith, may still not be allowed for many months to come. Music will still be a part of our Worship and we are very fortunate to have our regular accompanists, Sandra Mogensen and Marco Burak and I certainly hope to contribute as often as needed.

In this Amber phase of reopening we are allowed to include solo singers and instrumentalists in our services. I am putting out the call to anyone who may be willing to contribute their talents in these areas to bring some joy and healing to our regular 10:00 a.m. services. Please do not be nervous as I will work with you until you feel comfortable to perform. I will also occasionally be bringing in other local musicians who may not be members of our congregation.

Please leave your contact information with Jane in the church office if you feel you could participate in our services in this way. I look forward to hearing from you,

Minister of Music — Paul Shilton

SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS



While we remain in the “AMBER” Phase of reopening, Sunday School is not allowed!

We will keep everyone informed by either the Church Newsletter or bulletin. Another way of keeping up to date on Sunday School is by joining our Sunday School Facebook page. You type in “Zion Stratford Sunday School” in your search bar. This will also be used once Sunday School is up and running as we will post when there is no Sunday School due to inclement weather, when the Christmas Concert is, or anything else that is happening in our Sunday School.

In the meantime, please be safe and stay healthy!

Paula McNaughton
Sunday School Coordinator

PRAYER FOR THE SAFETY OF RETURNING TO SCHOOL IN A PANDEMIC



Father please hear us when we tell You of our concerns of sending our children and educators back to school.

Know that we are striving to make all of the right decisions and need Your love and power to help us overcome any difficulties.

Please watch over everyone as times and routines are about to change once again.

We know that we can do anything through You, so please help us ensure health and semi-normalcy in the coming months.

We give our hearts to You, now and forever. Amen

~Author Unknown

CONTRIBUTION STATEMENTS

Contribution statements for the period from January 1, 2020 to September 20, 2020 are being mailed with this Newsletter.

For those who receive the Newsletter via email, your statements will come to you in the mail.

A heartfelt "Thank You" to everyone for your generosity.





Jean Allen - Sept. 5

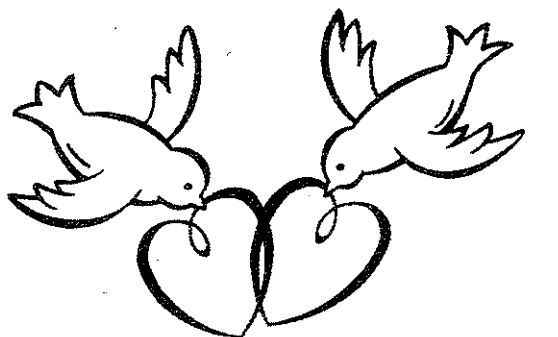
Inge Fleischauer - Sept. 18



Michael Amos Lallemand

Sept. 20

*Son of Andre & Katherine
Lallemand*



Rachel Luckhardt

&

Brett Adair

Sept. 19

THANKSGIVING ENVELOPES



Due to COVID-19 restrictions, there will not be the usual "Thanksgiving" Envelopes placed at the back of the Church.

If you wish to make a contribution, you are more than welcome to do so by placing it in an envelope ensuring that your envelope number and your name are on the outside of the envelope.

You can either put your contribution in the offering plate located at the back of the Church when you attend Worship; or, if you are not comfortable in attending Worship, you can drop it off in our mailbox or at the office Monday to Friday between 8:00 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.

OCTOBER VOLUNTEERS

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

DATE	COMMUNION ASSISTANTS	GREETERS	READERS	USHER CAPTAINS	COUNTING CAPTAINS
Oct. 4	N/A	Volunteers Needed	Stephen Fischer	Brian Coe	Audrey Miller
Oct. 11	N/A	Volunteers Needed	Isabel Cook	David Doherty	N/A
Oct. 18	N/A	Volunteers Needed	Marg Lamont	Steve Lamont	Audrey Miller
Oct. 25	NA	Volunteers Needed	Mary-Lou Drown	Jerry Terhaerd	Dan Neumeister



A CORONAVIRUS PRAYER



Jesus Christ, you traveled through towns and villages “curing every disease and illness.” At your command, the sick were made well. Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the coronavirus, that we may experience your healing love.

Heal those who are sick with the virus. May they regain their strength and health through quality medical care.

Heal us from our fear, which prevents nations from working together and neighbors from helping one another.

Heal us from our pride, which can make us claim invulnerability to a disease that knows no borders.

Jesus Christ, healer of all, stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow.

Be with those who have died from the virus. May they be at rest with you in your eternal peace.

Be with the families of those who are sick or have died. As they worry and grieve, defend them from illness and despair. May they know your peace.

Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers and all medical professionals who seek to heal and help those affected and who put themselves at risk in the process. May they know your protection and peace.

Be with the leaders of all nations. Give them the foresight to act with charity and true concern for the well-being of the people they are meant to serve. Give them the wisdom to invest in long-term solutions that will help prepare for or prevent future outbreaks. May they know your peace, as they work together to achieve it on earth.

Whether we are home or abroad, surrounded by many people suffering from this illness or only a few, Jesus Christ, stay with us as we endure and mourn, persist and prepare. In place of our anxiety, give us your peace.

Jesus Christ, heal us.