

The Valley Evangel

Serving the Members and Friends of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Scottsdale, Arizona

February 2021

Worship and Study

Sunday Divine Service: 9 a.m.

Sunday School & Adult Bible Class: 10:15 a.m.

Thursday Internet Study Group: 7 pm (ask Pastor Webber for log-on information)

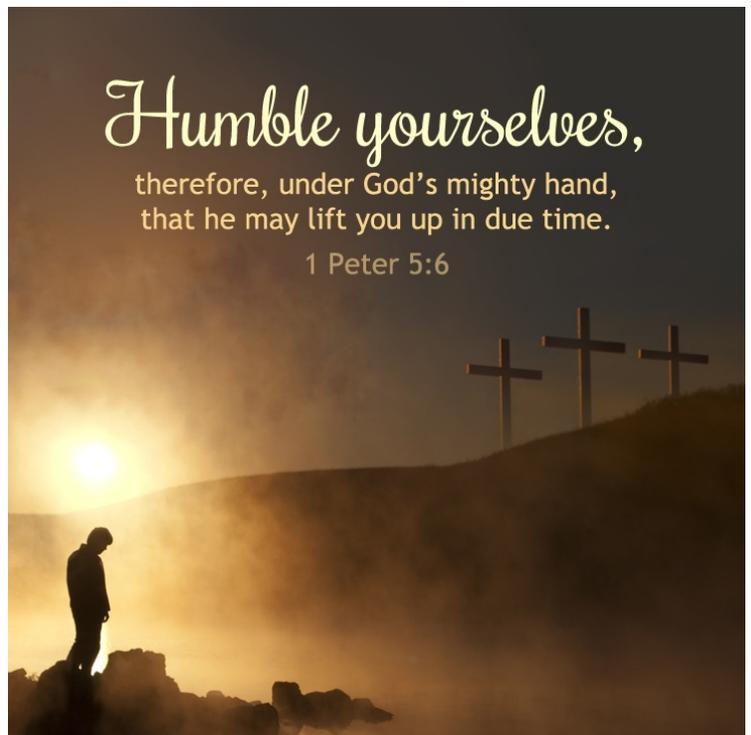
Newsletter Editor: Pastor David Jay Webber

From the Pastor's Desk

Lent is once again upon us. This will be the second Lenten season we have observed, while encumbered with the coronavirus pandemic and with all the restrictions and inconveniences this has brought upon our community, our state, our nation, and the entire world. Lent is a time for Christians to be humble before God, and to acknowledge their complete dependence on him for all things. And I don't think anyone would deny that the pandemic is helping us to become refocused on our need always to turn to the Lord for the forgiveness, life, and salvation that we need for our souls; and for the daily bread – in all of its applications – that we need for our bodies. So, Lent is upon us, with a year of practical lessons about all these things now behind us. But there is still more for us to learn. Much more. In Lent, may we be open to learn, not only from experience, but also and especially from God's Word, about human sin and divine grace; about human weakness and divine strength; about human foolishness and divine wisdom; about human shortsightedness and divine plans for eternity.

We read in Proverbs 16:1: "The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD" (ESV). This is a more literal translation. A couple paraphrases of this verse can perhaps bring out its meaning for us: "We can make our own plans, but the LORD gives the right answer" (NLT); "We humans make plans, but the LORD has the final word" (CEV). A year ago, at the beginning of Lent in 2020, we all probably had a lot of plans for ourselves, for the year that was to come. But many if not most of those plans came to nothing. This year, after hard lessons learned, we certainly have fewer plans for ourselves. And the ones we do have are less definite. This can prepare us, at a human level, to be more open to learning what God's plans for us in the coming year may be; and to be more attentive to the duties and opportunities that he is giving us, but that we otherwise might not have noticed.

Let us be open in particular to learn the lessons St. Peter teaches us in his First Epistle, about



humility before one another, and even more so about humility before God: “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (5:5-7, ESV). The ashes that are customarily received on Ash Wednesday are emblematic of this humility. Our lives and all things are in God’s hands, not in ours. We regret and repent of all those times when we have sinfully exalted ourselves and have not honored God in our thoughts, words, and deeds. We ask for the Lord’s forgiveness for the many times we have overlooked the needs of our neighbors, and have not fulfilled our duty of love toward them. And in the season of Lent, we receive the forgiveness that Jesus won for us. We are transformed by the indwelling of the Spirit of Jesus. We are inspired and led by the teaching and example of Jesus. Join us on this journey!

– Pastor Webber



New Members Are Joining

New Members

During the service on January 17, Michael Krueger was received into communicant membership by profession of faith, and his children Charlotte and Christopher were received as baptized members. Also on that day, we acknowledged the transfer of Mark Davidson (our organist) from a sister congregation in Wisconsin, so that he too is now an official communicant member of our congregation. Welcome all! “So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily” (Acts 16:5, ESV).

President Moldstad Now in the Nearer Presence of Christ

On Friday, January 29, we received the shocking news that Evangelical Lutheran Synod President John A. Moldstad, age 66, died unexpectedly at his home earlier that day, of an apparent heart attack. Vice President Glenn R. Obenberger has now become our new synodical president, and will continue to serve in that office until the next convention, when an election will be held to fill the remainder of President Moldstad’s term. Our prayers are with Joslyn Moldstad and the entire Moldstad family, as they both grieve and rejoice in the victory over sin and death that is ours in Christ. And our prayers are with President Obenberger, as he leads our church body forward in these difficult and challenging times. “...the time of my



departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:6b-8, ESV).

I Chose to Love You

If you have a spouse or a boyfriend or girlfriend you're probably expecting to receive a card for Valentine's Day or maybe to write one. And what will that card say? What do you hope that card says? Maybe something like this.

*"I love you because you're so beautiful." "I love you because the way you make me feel."
"I love you because you love me."
"I love you because you're so funny."
"I love you because you're so exciting and energetic."
"I love you because you bring joy into my life."*

What if you received a card that said this? *"I love you because I chose to love you."* Would that seem to be rather cold and insensitive? After all, don't we want to hear about the wonderful traits that we have? Or to hear the reasons why people love and adore us? Don't we want to hear that we are beautiful and exciting and funny and all of those things?

But what happens as you grow old? What happens when youth and beauty fades? What happens when you might get sick or in an accident and aren't able to be as active or fun as you once were? What then? Love that is based on such things will also disappear and fade away.

Perhaps it is better for someone to say that they love us because they *"chose to love us!"*

There was a young man who had a serious conversation with the girl he was dating. She explained how so many things had gone wrong for her. She had lost a parent at an early age. She had a sibling who was an alcoholic. There were many problems and difficulties within her family. Yet, upon hearing all this, the young man decided: *"I'm going to love this girl. I'm going to take care of her. I'm going give her a better life in the future."* But even still, he had to admit that part of his decision to marry her was because of how she made him feel, and how he was attracted to her.

Perhaps a better picture of *"unconditional love"* or of *"choosing to love,"* is the picture of a parent. In a sense, a parent chooses to love their child. The parent is committed to care for that child in spite of the awful things that child does; in spite the many times they will have to wake up in the middle of night to feed that child or to change a dirty diaper; in spite of the many times that child might say or do something that hurts them. Parents demonstrate amazing love to unworthy children! But even children at times can push the limits

of their parent's love—leading those parents to act out in selfish anger.

The best and perfect picture of *"unconditional love,"* or *"choosing to love,"* is the picture of our God's love for us. The Apostle Paul explains this kind of love in Romans 5:



But God shows his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

This verse tells us that God didn't love us because we were so lovable; or because of the way we have made him feel; or because we are so beautiful or good or any of those other things. Instead it was the opposite! *"While we were still sinners God loved us!"* We should have been totally unlovable and yet he cared about us so much that he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins—to be our Savior. God's love isn't based on the way that we make him feel or on anything that we've done for him. Instead, it's based on his own mercy, his own goodness, and his own promises.

God spoke to his people through his prophet Jeremiah, saying:

I have loved you with an everlasting love. (Jeremiah 31:3)

Not only did God choose to love us and send His Son Jesus to save us, but God's love stands forever. What a comfort this is to us! No matter what we have done, his love remains. This assures us that we can always return to him, repenting of our sins, knowing that we have his love today and forever.

So on this coming Valentine's Day, should you expect to receive a card that says *"I love you because I chose to love you?"* Are you going to write that in a card? Probably not. But this is God's declaration of love to you! God declares his unconditional love for you. Because he chose to love you, he sent Jesus so that your sins might be forgiven and that you might have life forever in Heaven.

Thank You, Lord God, for choosing to show your love to me. Because of this love, found through Christ, I know I have forgiveness of sins, peace with you, and eternal life waiting in heaven. Amen.

– Adapted from PeaceDevotions.com by the ELS Board for Home Outreach

Our Lenten Worship Schedule

On Ash Wednesday, February 17, we will hold two services: a Vespers service at 4 p.m. and the Divine Service (with Holy Communion) at 7 p.m. Each service will have different hymns and a different message, so some people may wish to attend both of them. And each service will include the imposition of ashes, for those who wish to receive this emblem of humility and repentance as we together begin our Lenten journey. Ashes will be imposed on foreheads this year with the use of disposable cotton swabs. This is in keeping with the social distancing precautions that we are following, since the pastor's thumb will not touch anyone's skin, and each swab will be used only once.

Midweek Lenten services will not be held this year. As a congregation we will mark the weeks of this special season in our Sunday morning services, and during Holy Week we will observe Maundy Thursday on April 1 and Good Friday on April 2.

Ash Wednesday



*Remember that you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.*

Providence in the Face of Life's Tragedies

Evil abounds, even in the lives of those who live in God's family. The most piercing question believers and unbelievers scream into the ear of God or the dark of the night is "Why?" "Why is there evil in the world if God is good and almighty?" This is the ultimate of human questioning in a fallen world. Variations abound. In the realm of eternal salvation the question is phrased, "Why are some saved, and not others?" In the realm of daily life the question takes the form of demanding to know why my brother died young, why my company failed just before my pension was vested, why my attempts to win the right spouse always end in shame. "What did I do to deserve this?" we cry out as we notice that worse scoundrels than we are getting off scot-free. "Why is life so unfair?" we ask, but the concept of "fair" provides inadequate protection against the onslaught of evil.

Jesus' contemporaries posed the question to him more than once. His disciples wanted to know whether the man who had been born blind had brought his condition upon himself or whether his parents were at fault. It is not clear exactly what Jesus meant when he replied, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him" (John 9:2-3). The text does not make clear whether Jesus' "that" refers simply to the result of the situation or to its actual purpose. Jesus may have been refusing to indulge in speculation regarding the "why?" of the situation and simply commenting, "Whatever the cause, the result of his blindness is that God's work is to be made manifest here." However, to the Jewish mind, with its utter confidence in God's control of all things, Jesus may have been saying, "God had a purpose in this man's blindness: to give the opportunity to show forth what God is doing in me." We cannot tell from the text.

This same approach guided Jesus' address to two questions posed at another time by events around him. He cited two examples of the seemingly unfair way in which tragedy befalls people. Pilate's police had mingled the blood of some Galileans with their sacrifices. Jesus used this incident to meet the obvious question: "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?" "Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?" Jesus refused to answer the question. Instead, he used these incidents to call for repentance. He rejected the equation of such evils with a certain quantity of sin. Such a verdict stems from a false understanding of God's judgment. God's judgment is designed not first of all to punish but to call to repentance. "No," Jesus said. They were not the worst offenders; these Galileans had not sinned more than their fellow Galileans. Such questions missed the point. The only point that Jesus drew from these incidents was the need for personal repentance by all (Luke 13:1-5). He wanted the whole life of all his human creatures to be lived in being turned back to himself.

– Excerpted from Robert Kolb, *The Christian Faith: A Lutheran Exposition* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993). (Do you want to read more? This book is in our parish library!)

Redeemer Lutheran Church

February 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3	4 Internet Study Group 7pm	5	6
7 Epiphany 5 Divine Service 9am; Sunday School & Adult Class 10:15am	8	9	10	11 Internet Study Group 7pm	12	13
14 Transfiguration Divine Service 9am; Sunday School & Adult Class 10:15am	15	16	17 Ash Wednesday Vespers w/ imposition of ashes 4pm Divine Service w/ imposition of ashes 7pm	18 Internet Study Group 7pm	19	20
21 Lent 1 Divine Service 9am; Sunday School & Adult Class 10:15am	22	23	24	25 Internet Study Group 7pm	26	27
28 Lent 2 Divine Service 9am; Sunday School & Adult Class 10:15am						

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About Redeemer Lutheran Church

Our mission is faithfully to preach the Word of God, both Law and Gospel, in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church; correctly to administer the Holy Sacraments for the forgiveness of sins; and to reach out to those who have not yet come to faith in Christ Jesus.



We're on the Internet!

redemerscottsdale.org

Video recordings of our services are posted each week on the church website, and on our YouTube and Facebook pages.