

Parish Happenings

February 2021

FROM PASTOR CHAD

As we spend February close to home, socially distanced, and buried in snow, it seems hard to imagine the days are lengthening, but for those of us paying attention to the church year we are reminded by Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent, if not the ever extending hours of daylight, that Spring is on the way. Of course for baseball fans the hope of spring arrives (this year) on February 16 when pitchers and catchers are required to report for Spring Training. Ever do we baseball fans have hope for our team at the start of each new season. I always feel that Lent and Spring training have that sense of hopeful expectation in common.

During the 40 days of Lent that begin on Ash Wednesday (February 17 this year) we are invited by the church calendar to slow down and deepen our awareness of God's presence in our lives. It is time to remember the fundamentals of our faith and examine the edges we've ignored. What new thing, new spiritual practice, new mission, or new hopefulness is God placing before us?

This week our scripture reading from Mark's gospel recounts a regular practice of Jesus's life and ministry. "In the morning, while it was still very dark, he [Jesus] got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed." (Mark 1:35) Jesus has spent the prior day, into the evening, healing the sick and the demon possessed. Though there are many more people who would pursue him he sneaks off in the early morning hours to a *deserted* (and presumably quiet) place to pray.

This is a fairly busy time for Jesus too. He's starting a new ministry initiative, he's got new disciples to train, there are people clamoring for his special healing skills, his cousin has just been arrested, the authorities are starting to ask questions, and who knows what else. Yet, he sneaks off to a quiet place to pray.



Photo by Jason Leung on Unsplash

After saying
farewell to them, he
went up on the
mountain to pray.

Mark 6:46

Jesus, despite the business of his teaching and ministry or pressure from his disciples, will continue, as the gospel progresses, to sneak off and pray. Most famously in a place called Gethsemane (Mark 14:32) on the night of his arrest. There is nothing that stops him from taking time for prayer. I'm pretty convinced Mark was making the point that this prayer habit of Jesus is something we should pay attention to.

We all live busy lives, even in a pandemic, we balance jobs, families, volunteer commitments, church commitments, hobbies, etc. It becomes easy to push time for prayer off our agenda completely. But, reading the Gospel of Mark, should give us cause to reconsider.

The 40 days of Lent are traditionally a time of penitent reflection and the practice of giving something up for Lent is common. The practice of giving something up is a way of giving us a greater awareness of God's presence in our daily lives. This can also be accomplished by taking on new practices. A few years ago we spent all of Lent exploring prayer. I want to suggest that this year we simply add time to find a quiet place, for just a few moments, for prayer each day during Lent. There are many ways to pray and how is not nearly important as being intentional about praying.

Richard Foster describes how our relationship to prayer is similar to the relationship many of us have to our automobiles. Taking his lead I'd say that we should approach the daunting discipline of prayer like we do our computers. Most of you know that I am constantly in a wrestling match between my distaste for technology (and the unintended dangers it presents to humanity) and being a total Apple fan boy. The thing about my experience with owning Macs is that from a computer standpoint they just work: I don't know how they do what they do, I don't code, I don't understand microprocessors or much computer science, but I keep using my Mac because it does what it is supposed to do.

Most of us know very little about what lights up our computer screens and cell phones, yet we manage to send emails, post on social media, and process vast amounts of information with these mostly mysterious devices. Sometimes we think we've got to have prayer all figured out, or we have to do it in just the right way for it to work. In actuality we just need to get our hands on the keyboard, trackpad, or touch screen and go for it. A little instruction goes a long way when using a computer, but whether it's a cell phone or a tablet or a desk top they are all fairly intuitive and you learn by doing. The example of Jesus can get us started and church tradition has some time tested prayer practices to get us started, but mostly we all need to just start experimenting with prayer. Like learning to use that new cell phone prayer skills tend to come with practice and experience.

May our hearts find their true home through the daily practice of prayer during these 40 days of Lent in 2021,



ASH WEDNESDAY WORSHIP

We are unable to gather for services and the imposition of Ashes like we have become accustomed to in past years. So, instead, Ash Wednesday reflections will be posted online. Everyone who would like to participate is then welcome to receive the imposition of ashes between 12 p.m. and 5 p.m. on the 17th. You can bring the whole family, remain in your car and receive ashes from Pastor Chad.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The session has been exploring many different upgrades and maintenance concerns in our sanctuary for several years now. As we look to gathering in the sanctuary for worship (when it becomes safe to do so) there are ongoing concerns about ventilation. The session has decided to use some previously set aside memorial funds to take care of some deferred maintenance on our stained glass windows. This will accomplish several goals:

- deferred maintenance to protect the stained glass from the elements
- restoring the originally functioning ventilators at the bottom portion for the windows
- functioning ventilators will improve air flow for ventilation and removing hot humid air in the summer
- protecting the stained glass now from damage and future more expensive repair and restoration.

This work is scheduled to begin on March 15, 2021 and should take a few weeks.



BIBLE STUDIES

Women's Bible study meets the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the month (February 3 and 17),

from 7:00-8:30 in the Parish Hall. We are using Rachel Held Evans' "Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again". Please join us!

Men's Fellowship: There's plenty of bible study, but that's not all. Join us on Saturdays at 8 a.m. on Zoom. We share life and wrestle with scripture together. At the present we're spending time in the Gospel of Judges. Contact Chad to join.

LET IT SNOW, LET IT SNOW, LET IT SNOW!

The Buildings and Grounds Team is putting together a list of people who would be willing to help with some of the snow blowing and shoveling during the winter months. No experience necessary; training provided! When it snows, we have our parking lot and driveways plowed, but the sidewalks, walkways, and front steps need to be cleared by us. Of course, the workload may be lighter this year due to the fact that we are currently worshipping remotely. However, Happy Face is still in session and the church office is still open, so there is some clean up that will need to be done. This is NOT a commitment to head to the church every time it snows. We'd like to have a list of people who we can contact as the need arises. If you are willing to be added to the list, please contact Warren Newman at wnewman115@gmail.com or 908-763-6094.

Lower Valley Presbyterian Church
445 County Road 513
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The Vision of our Church

Lower Valley Presbyterian Church is a community of believers who worship God in word and deed, nurture each other through prayer, friendship, and education, and seek to serve others in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Our four areas of ministry are faith development, caring for each other, outreach ministry and supporting ministry.