

Parish Happenings

June 2021

FROM PASTOR CHAD

I believe that God takes an interest in our lives: our suffering, our pain, our joys, our shortcomings, and our faithfulness. The bible, after all, is a witness to God's deep interest in relationship and connection. It tells the stories of ordinary people their struggles, triumphs, and profound weaknesses. Sure, some of the stories are about kings and great leaders, but notably the heroes and heroines are regular people (who sometimes do great deeds only after being plucked from obscurity) with the same collections of strengths and weaknesses that we have. God is concerned with each of us and with God's mission to bring wholeness to all of creation.



George Floyd Square last Tuesday in Minneapolis

Perhaps it is worth the reminder that the core of our faith are what we affectionately call "The Ten Commandments" (as the students and I recently discovered there is a pretty good case for there only being 9 commandments, but we'll save that for another day). This law was of course a gift from God to the Hebrews and meant to bless both our relationship with God and with other people. It was a structure for living with God and other people though I'd argue that we could understand them to shape how God intends us to live with all creation.

At this point I feel the need to reflect on the fact that scripture never suggests that these commands shape solely the lives of individuals. God's interests aren't limited to how individual human beings live on an individual basis. Throughout scripture God shows great concern for the bigger story of all creation that we have all been born into.

God's gift of the Ten Commandments is meant to help a whole community live in relationship to God and in harmony with one another. As the Hebrew people become the nation of Israel the bible consistently addresses God's concerns around justice and wholeness. The gift given to the Hebrew people wandering in the desert is meant to bless the whole world and all the people in it. These people were called to bless all the nations not because they worked harder, acted more faithfully, or were especially suited for the job (one might argue the opposite based on the stories of failure), but because God chose them.

For generations American Christianity has focused a great deal of attention on individual salvation, individual moral obligations, and our individual relationship to God and neighbor. All good stuff, but this emphasis seems a bit over done when set against the bulk of the concerns of stories in the bible. A good many of these stories are corporate in nature. The prophets, for example, often speak about the sins of the whole worshipping community. And these prophets hold the whole people

accountable for the sins of their leaders and systems of injustice that don't provide for "the widow, the orphan, and the alien".

Far too often we American Christians have conveniently ignored the corporate reality of sin. It works fairly simply and you can easily see the appeal. 'If I focus on my personal individual morality and carefully check the boxes while turning away from the injustice that the larger systems of culture and country (that I can claim to have no real power to change) then I can feel "safe" and "saved" and "happy" and "fulfilled" despite the suffering of those who the systems of power historically crush.'

The thing is God cares just as much about my individual salvation as much as God cares about a world shaped by justice and wholeness. God wants all people to know God and to thrive in every way. This means that my calling is not just to check boxes next to a list of the 10 Commandments, but to live those commandments so fully that they become a shared blessing for everyone. I'm not living faithfully by checking the "do not steal" commandment if I thrive in a system that advantages me because I'm a straight, white, cisgendered man and disadvantages my black transgendered neighbor.

This week, as a whole people (and one might even say a world), we took notice that it was just one year ago that George Floyd was callously murdered by police officer Derek Chauvin and a policing system that has a long history of showing little regard for black lives. We are also approaching the 100 year anniversary of the Tulsa massacre when white Oklahomans indiscriminately killed over three hundred black citizens, leveled an entire community to burning rubble, and systematically covered up the truth of the racially motivated crimes: the result being generations of stolen earning potential and wealth creation among the black American victims.

Our individual piety and "goodness" and adherence to the Ten Commandments might allow us to ignore such tragedies that expose the systems of sin embedded in the fabric of our nation (going back as far as the first moment European Christians set foot on this continent and claimed ownership over what was not theirs and intent to subdue both the people and the creation they encountered). However, reading the bible more closely and without solely focusing on our individual relationship with God alone we find we are called to repent of the sins of our parents that continue to shape us and plague us. We are called to collectively take actions that bring justice and wholeness to all God's children and all God's creation.

So, as a faithful community we talk about the violence that plagues our neighborhoods (near and far off) because it reduces all of us and because the words of the biblical prophets hold us all accountable for it. When generations of God's children have been ground and crushed by the structures of power and culture because they are seen as less than human due to the color of their skin we are all judged. Our individual piety does not save us. We are accountable and complicit with the evil perpetuated by our government because we are part of the system.

That's the hard news, but the good news is that God blesses, those who seek justice and mercy, to the thousandth generation!

May we continue to be a congregation seeking, together as one people, to do justice for all creation.



COMMUNITY GARDEN

The Lower Valley Community Garden dedicates a number of gardening beds to growing food for the Open Cupboard Food Pantry during the spring, summer and early fall. This is an important mission project for our church and we need your help. Each Tuesday morning throughout the summer, volunteers pick up the weekly harvest from the garden and deliver it to the food pantry. We are in need of additional volunteers to help with this. Everything will be packed up and ready to go; you simply need to load it into your car and take it to the food pantry in Clinton where pantry workers will help you unload, weigh and log the delivery.

If you are available on Tuesday mornings and willing to offer an hour of your time, we would greatly appreciate it! Even just committing to one or two weeks would help us out. Please contact Karen Newman at 908-763-9483 or email kjnewman115@gmail.com with questions or to offer your assistance. Thank you!

WORSHIP IN THE PARK

It's been a long year, but Worship in the Park is Back! Join us at Califon Park on June 6 at 10 a.m. Coffee and light snacks to follow but feel free to bring your own lunch if you are inclined to enjoy a spring picnic.

COUNTERS NEEDED

Now that we are back to worshipping in the sanctuary on Sunday mornings, the Finance Team would like to add to our pool of people willing to count the offerings. The addition of on-line giving and our new financial software has made the process easier, faster and more streamlined than it was in the past. If you are able to commit to one Sunday a month to help with the counting, please contact Karen Newman at 908-763-9483 or email kjnewman115@gmail.com.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Women's Bible study meets the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the month (June 2 and 16), 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. in the library. We share life and wrestle with scripture together. At the present we're spending time in the James. Contact Chad with any questions.

High School: Meetings are on Sundays from 7-8:30 in the parish hall.

Middle School: Meetings are on Wednesdays from 7-8:30 in the parish hall.

FROM THE HARRIS FAMILY

The Harris Family wishes to thank the Lower Valley Presbyterian Church for its support to our family after our house fire on March 8, 2021.

We are so grateful for the prayers, clothing, furniture, housing, phone calls, visits, gift cards, monetary donations and all the love that was shown to us in this difficult situation. The outreach of the community, family, friends and complete strangers will never be forgotten.

Please continue to lift us in prayers, as we navigate the road ahead of us.

Sincerely,

The Harris Family – Tod, Lora, Annalee, Lucas and Jackson



Upcoming Servers

Date	Liturgist	Ushers	Communion Servers
June 6 — Worship in the Park	Warren Newman	OPEN and OPEN	OPEN OPEN OPEN OPEN
June 13	OPEN	OPEN and OPEN	
June 20	Karen Newman	OPEN and OPEN	
June 27	OPEN	Karen and Warren Newman	
July 4	OPEN	El-Zahr family	OPEN OPEN OPEN OPEN
July 11	Warren Newman	Peggy Macaoay and OPEN	
July 18	OPEN	OPEN and OPEN	
July 25	Marilyn El-Zahr	OPEN and OPEN	

**If you are able to serve in one of the OPEN spots,
please let Claudia know. Thank you!**