

Pastoral Reflections

St. Paul's Lutheran Church and Preschool

22915 Greater Mack Avenue, St. Clair Shores, Michigan



January, 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Jesus came to us and continues to come to us — God with us — we are never alone, never without His help, in whatever form help is needed. The question may arise, “*Why? Why did He and does He come to us?*” Very simply, He came to us and continues to come to us because of His great love for us.

At Christmas, we celebrate the miracle of His birth, that the Son of God came to earth to save poor, helpless sinners — He came here for *us*. During Epiphany, we confess that the One Who has come in the form of a Baby in Bethlehem's manger is actually God, and that He has come to rescue not only “us,” but *all* people — a Savior for all.

During Epiphany we proclaim “light” --- the Light of the world has come to us all. Likewise during Epiphany we proclaim “miracles” — the appointed readings profess the miracles of

Jesus. Both light and miracles affirm His Divine nature.

May we rejoice throughout Epiphany as we reflect upon God's many miracles — not the least of which is His presence in our lives — a reality that will endure forever.

Sincerely in Christ,
Pastor Rutter✝

Conflict

What does one do when one has conflict with another? The Bible declares to meet with the offending



person, one on one, and resolve the conflict with forgiveness — *Matthew 18:15-17*. If the conflict continues, then meet with the offending person in the company of two or three witnesses and resolve the conflict in their presence, also with forgiveness. In other

words, speak with one another words of peace. The Bible also declares, “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath,” and “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you,” *Ephesians 4:26, 32*. That is to say, do not let the conflict “stew” — resolve it immediately.

As Christians, we will occasionally find ourselves in conflict with others — even with some Christians. While we may consider such conflict to be unfortunate, in reality, conflict is not a terrible thing, for it allows the Christian or Christians to practice forgiveness and extend grace, as Christ does daily with us. Conflict is inevitable because the flesh is sinful — and we all live in the flesh. Add to that mixture the devil, and one has the perfect recipe for conflict.

The antidote: Jesus. He has made peace between mankind and God, and He brings that peace to our conflicted relationships. Since He has promised to be with us always, be encouraged to receive His peace and extend it, in the forms of kind conversation and forgiveness, to others. Indeed, with each Christian bearing the Source of Love, we are able to

bring restoration to our conflicted relationships. May we pray for such a practice among us all.

“To follow the crucified Messiah means one must take up his own cross daily, die to self-interest, and serve the One Who bought him. One cannot properly promote the Gospel any other way. To promote it this way — by dying to self-interest, giving up all insistence upon the sacredness of one's rights, and striving to win as many as possible --- is to follow Christ crucified, Who died, literally, to His self-interest, gave up all insistence upon the sacredness of His very real rights, and set Himself to win men and women from every people and tongue and tribe and nation. There is no other way of following Christ; there is no other way of sharing in the Gospel's blessings.” D. A. Carson, “*The Cross and Christian Ministry*”

Redemption doesn't come like Creation — God just couldn't say, “forgive” — He had to pay.

The Loud Amen

It was recently taught at our monthly Circuit Pastors' Meeting that the "Amen" immediately before the Agnus Dei, should be the "high point" in the Divine Service. The "Amen" comes immediately after the Pastor's words, "*The peace of the Lord be with you always.*" Perhaps the question should be asked, 'Why would such a time in the Divine Service be the "high point?" Indeed, the Pastor has just finished consecrating the bread and wine, a gift for the congregation in which the Body and Blood of Christ are now present, affirming to the members of the congregation that here is the physical assurance that your sins are forgiven, and that God is truly at peace with you, and that He is on your side, and that you are His children, and that He loves you, and that your seat in Heaven is secure, and that He is with you always — to name a few of many blessings. Yes, the declaration of the reality that God is at peace with you and me and has all of these blessings for us, should bring every Christian to his or her feet to respond, "Amen!" — *thus it is true that God is at peace with me and with you, and I will let everyone*

know about it, lest there be any doubts!" Wonderful! So from now on, the organist will be asked to play the "Amen" just prior to the Agnus Dei in a very loud and stirring manner, so that the congregation will respond in like manner. Affirm and bless your faith and the faith of others, with your loud, "Amen."

...and all the
people said
Amen

Boldly and Edifyingly

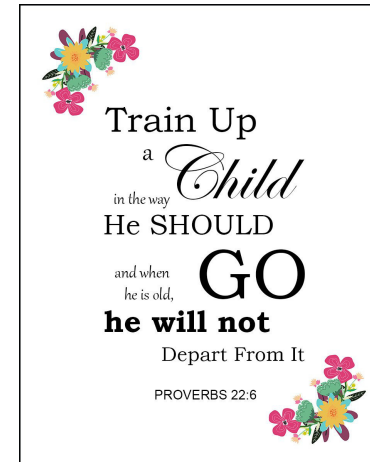
Why does the Pastor say "*Confess joyfully and edifyingly*" when announcing the Creeds? By confessing the creeds with one's mouth, one edifies the other worshippers — who will undoubtedly think, "*Wonderful! Someone else believes as I believe and is not afraid to show it!*" Certainly a powerful and thundering confession of the Christian faith is needed in this world of increasing darkness. Let the passersby hear the congregation's confession! May each member and visitor be encouraged to voice the faith with one's whole heart, and in so doing, bless the others. It may be that someone in the congregation on any particular day is having doubts about the faith or is unsure that the Holy

Spirit is alive and well. Well, proclaim them back into the faith with a hearty confession of it. It should also be noted that the devil hates whenever Christ is being confessed — he has to flee. Well, all the more reason to confess the Creeds boldly.

Raising Children

The best way parents can raise their children is to take them to the Divine Services on a weekly basis. Admittedly, such a statement sounds ill-reasoned and impractical, but the Bible does speak of assembling together weekly, and even cites infants as those who raise their voices in praise of God (Psalm 8:2.) And why not? Infants have been baptized into Christ and are part of the family of God --- they desire to be with the family; they desire to be in the presence of Christ and to hear His Name and His Word; they desire to give Him thanks; they desire to praise Him.

Each member of the Body of Christ — the Christian congregation, is important, as each member welcomes and encourages the child — even the infant, just as each member welcomes and encourages the adolescent and the young adult and the middle adult and the older adult — no one is excluded from being welcomed and encouraged. Parents of very young children often need an extra measure of encouragement, and even assistance, during the Divine Service. Truthfully, the earliest years are critical in establishing a lifelong pattern of being present in the House of God, receiving His eternal gifts. And please know that God has His unique way of blessing perseverance. Parents, bring your children to receive His blessings, and be blessed in so doing — your children will be blessed. The Bible declares, "*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it*" — Proverbs 22:6. Certainly "train-up" means a rigorous



training, not a “hit-and-miss” approach, but a consistent, faithful approach. Under a consistent, faithful approach, the child will grow into an adult Christian and likewise take his children to God’s House on a weekly basis.

Fathers are critical in their participation in raising their children to honor the Lord and His Word. Studies repeatedly show that with respect to the level of commitment to Christ’s Church and the weekly participation in His Divine Services, “*As goes the father, so goes his children,*” and especially “*so goes his sons.*” Mothers are important, to be sure, in raising their children to be committed to Christ, but fathers carry an extra measure of influence, and often quite an extra measure, dramatically so, according to the published studies [enter into an internet search engine, “the importance of fathers attending church”] — amazing. Certainly the Bible’s insistence upon fathers teaching the Word of God to their children is no accident. [cf. Deuteronomy 6] In other words, with respect to the parents, their attitudes and actions will affect their children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren — generations following.

Thus parents, especially fathers, raise your children in the best way, by bringing them to Christ and to His gifts, where He will do His work in their hearts. Truthfully, the heart in which Christ lives is the ultimate goal of parenting — identical to the desire of the Father in Heaven. Parents, please do not neglect your most important role — bring your children to the Divine Services on a weekly basis. God wants them present.

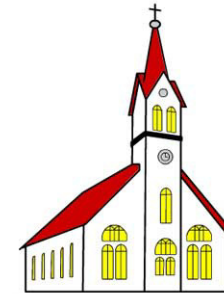
Much more can be written, as the worldly pressures of participating in sports and earning extra money by forsaking God’s House haven’t been addressed. But this will suffice for now.

Vacationing

During a recent family vacation, which caused me to miss two consecutive Sundays — the first time this has happened in 25+ years of pastoral service, we attended two Baptist Church Services, due to geographical considerations and time constraints. We had actually traveled 90 miles to attend a Lutheran Church, only to find it had closed. Its website seemed current, but it was clearly empty and the lawn sign had been

removed. Rather sad. So we traveled a few blocks and found a Baptist Church (First Baptist, Tifton, Georgia.) The other church — one week later, (Westside Baptist) was located in Berea, Kentucky.

While our experiences were both positive in that we met many other brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ and heard some good sermons — one (Baptist) preacher even anonymously quoted Martin Luther, one common experience in both congregations was that the members intentionally greeted us — and they were sincere. So many came to us; they said, “*We’re so happy to see you here today,*” and some carried on a bit longer. Simple enough, but very impactful. One lady, Faye, 83, even ran up the aisle toward us; yes, ran — have you ever seen an 83 year old run in church? — this occurred after the Service had ended. After greeting us she told us her story — she was the only girl of seven, the youngest, and when she was two weeks old her father told his six sons, “take care of your sister as she grows.” He unexpectedly died



later that afternoon. She had quite a story — a remarkable life — a strong faith.

My point is, when vacationing, go to church — in whatever town you happen to be, and meet God’s people. They won’t care that you are dressed in your “vacation clothes,” and they *will be* a blessing to you, as will the Word of God which you will hear in that place.

And perhaps another point, may we at St. Paul’s imitate the hospitality of the Baptists in the south. If you are 83, run to the visitors after church. If you are in high school, say “*good morning, I’m happy you’re here*” to the visitors, as did one young man in Berea. And of course, for everyone else who doesn’t fit into the afore-mentioned categories, just greet the visitors with a warm smile and handshake, and tell them you are glad to meet them, and ask them about their hometown. It’s okay if forty members greet a visitor — it happened to us, and it was rather nice. Memorable.

Sincerely in Christ,
Pastor Rutter✘