

BETHEL NEWSLETTER

February 2008

Reaching Out – Praying, Caring, Sharing

Holdrege, Nebraska

See You at the Cross

February 6, Ash Wednesday, begins the Lenten season this year. This is close to the earliest possible date for Lent to begin. So if it seems early, it is. There will be additional information about various aspects of our Lenten journey in this newsletter, so please read it carefully. Again, you are challenged to make this a meaningful 40 days by doing something different from the usual course of life's activities. That could be spending some devotional time that doesn't happen regularly, or attending the Wednesday evening Lenten services, or giving your time to others in a special way to serve them. The list could go on. The point is to how best to reflect on the cross of Christ and what it means for me today. I would like to add some thoughts to consider in this regard.

Some may ask, "Why dwell on the horror of the crucifixion of Christ?" There are more pleasant stories about His life and resurrection. There are some answers to that question that I find helpful for me in my life journey. Maybe they will be so for you as well.

First, I believe it is critical that we see a God who suffers – for us. As we all know, it is easy for us to see a great chasm between God and ourselves. When we do this, then God can't be there for us. For example, when we experience suffering in our lives, then it is hard to understand how God could possibly connect with us. It is like Bill Gates trying to relate to a street person. But when we realize God suffered horrendously on the cross, then that all changes. We realize God has been there, done that. He knows what we are going through. His heart breaks when our heart breaks. Then to know that the suffering of God's Son was in our stead, brings Him even closer.

Second, suffering is not God's will. No one wants to suffer and die, not even Jesus. He prayed to the Father that the cup of suffering could be taken

from Him. Suffering was brought into the world through sin. In the midst of our suffering we know it can't be avoided but it also doesn't have to defeat us. Part of our calling as Christians is not only to speak that message but to live it in relationship to others. How can I alleviate the suffering of someone else? That is, make the cross of Christ real for the one who suffers. To know that there is hope in the midst of suffering is the Christian message.

Third, we stay near the cross of Christ because He leads us to where we are going. We all are going to die. But we don't have to live in fear of it, for to do so is not to live at all. This truth was underscored in the song *The Rose* with the words. . . "a soul. . . afraid of dying, never learns to live." So we come to the cross to live in hope. Our hope is that as Christ was raised from the dead, we too shall be raised.

So let us gather at our Savior's cross again this Lenten season and do what we need to do to keep our focus on Him. Because without the cross there would be no salvation, no hope for us. To come to the cross, as we do to the Lord's Table, is to express our thanksgiving for what Jesus the Christ has done for us. See you at the cross.

Blessing in your Lenten journey,
Pastor David Sites

"Am I Still Loveable?"

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. **John 3:16**

"Am I still loveable?" That's a question I've heard a lot lately. Not in so many words, but behind many of the comments and questions. Questions about what I think the Bethel's strengths and weakness are. Comment about how things are going, especially since the announcement of the survey result. "Am I still loveable? Are we still loveable?" seem to be the questions behind most of them. I'm trying to think of a nice story to make a point about God's love.



Diamonds in the Rough

I have many to choose from. A very dear friend of the family's from Wisconsin doesn't e-mail us often, but he does relay forwards that seem like they've been around the world twice. A story about a cute little boy who gets blackmailed by his sister until he comes forward to his mother and she welcomes him with open arms would be a nice story to generate a warm-fuzzy feeling.

There's the one about the gang member who heard about Christ, put his trust in him, and ran the gauntlet to get out of the gang so he wouldn't have to commit crime for the gang anymore. A nice story if you're looking for little bit of shock value.

There's also the ones from my own life. There's a six year period in my life when I've wondered if God loves me and if he would take me back. It's a nice story if you're looking for the comfort of knowing someone who's supposed to be forever confident in God goes through times of struggle and doubt, too.

There are many stories I could choose, many stories I could draw from to talk about how God loves us. But I really don't think I need to draw on any of those this month. I don't need to draw on them for one very important reason:

The Gospel and the stories of this congregation are all I need to show you God's love!

This month we begin the season of Lent. Lent is meant to be a time of reflection and examination. We reflect on our actions, and we examine our hearts. On Ash Wednesday we will remember that we are mortal creatures. Our Catholic brothers and sisters will refrain from meat on Fridays, remembering that Christ gave his body (his meat) for all of our salvation. (An act Lutherans are not forbidden to do, by the way.) Just as many of us bristled at the survey results, many of us will bristle at what we see in ourselves during the coming forty days, and we may even wonder if we are still loveable.

Let us remember through all of this that the answer is a resounding "YES!" For it is for ones such as us that Christ came for. Ones such as us that he died for. Ones such as us that he rose again for. And for that we can give thanks.

Intern Nathan Metzger

Though our feelings come and go, God's love for us does not.

– C.S. Lewis

The new trend among the people who have too much money is to wear rough diamonds. They are not faceted diamonds. No flashes of color, no sparkles, no clarity, no quality in the cut. But right now, lots of people think they are cool. You can buy a gem that has a certain natural earthy, organic appeal, sometimes they are a bargain since they are stones which are not suitable for cutting. Example; De Beers offers a stainless steel ring with a stone that is not suitable for cutting, \$600. Or you can drop a cool \$750,000 at Tiffany's for "one-of-a-kind" necklace of uncut diamonds and pearls.

Uncut diamonds can be found in the human race also. I remember a story of such a person. Pastor found several boxes of new bibles that had never been opened. So the following Sunday, the pastor asked for volunteers to sell the bibles. Jack and Paul raised their hands and volunteered. They both made their livelihood selling, so the pastor was pleased. Louie also raised his hand, and the pastor had doubts about Louie. Louie was a farmer, who kept to himself and he had a speech impediment. The pastor filled their cars with bibles and asked them to report back next Sunday.

The following Sunday the first person the pastor asked to report was Jack. Jack replied, "Using my sales prowess, I sold \$200 of the bibles." "Fine job, Jack" replied the pastor. Turning to Paul, he asked how he had done. Paul stated, "Being a professional salesman, I sold \$280 of the bibles. The pastor replied," Splendid Paul." Somewhat apprehensively, the minister asked Louie, how he had done. Louie replied, "I sold \$3,200 of the bibles!" The pastor was shocked and could hardly ask, "How did you accomplish this Louie?" Louie shrugged. "I-I-I re-re-really do-do-don't kn-kn-know f-f-f-f-for sh-sh-sh-sure. The pastor finally said, "Louie just tell us what you said, when a person opened the door." "A-a-a-all I-I-I s-s-s-said wa-wa-was," Louie replied, "W-w-w-w-would y-y-y-you l-l-l-like t-t-t-to b-b-b-buy th-th-th-this b-b-b-bible f-f-f-for t-t-t-ten b-b-b-bucks o-o-o-or wo-wo-would



yo-yo-yo-you j-j-j-just l-like m-m-me t-t-t-to st-st-stand h-h-h-here and r-r-r-r-read it t-t-to y-y- you??"

In the book of Ephesians, Paul also speaks of uncut diamonds. The Ephesians were uncut in more ways than one. For one thing, they were uncut in terms of a condition that had nothing to do with diamonds. They were uncut in terms of circumcision, and were considered to be far from God by the circumcised Jews of that day. They were "the uncircumcision," says Paul (2:11) aliens from Israel, strangers to the covenant. No hope, without God. "But now," he points out, "in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us" (2:13-14). This is what God is saying to each of us, become transparent to the light of God. When we focus on what is good and right and true, we turn from "diamonds in the rough" into beautiful, brilliant gems. Our compassion and patience and love create a channel for the light of the Lord to shine through us. Believe It!

God Bless.

Darrel Wissmann PMA



GOLD STAR AWARD

For twenty-three years Marlene Johnson has faithfully served Bethel as Financial Secretary. This involved counting the offering from worship services, making the deposits, recording what individuals have given, giving the Treasurer an itemized listing of the deposits, and sending out quarterly statements to contributors. Sound like a lot? It was and Marlene did a wonderful job along with the other responsibilities she has with work and home as well as at church. Thank you Marlene for a job well done.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!!!

Palm Sunday, March 16 – Dinner will be served following the 11:00 a.m. service by the Scholarship and Grant Committee. A free will offering will be accepted.

February Ushers

8:30 a.m.

James Johnson
Randy Aldrich
Dennis Hingst
John Skallberg

11:00 a.m.

Craig Sandell
Craig Oltmans
Bruce Swanson
Richard Ohrt

6:30 p.m. Saturday Night Ushers

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| Feb. 2 | Phil Hinrichs |
| Feb. 9 | Eric Titus |
| Feb. 16 | Dan Lippstreu |
| Feb. 24 | Todd Veal |

AS A PLACE OF GRACE WE **PRAY** for each other as members and friends of this congregation:

Feb. 3, 2008

Weston & Riley Svoboda
Dale & Diana Sall
Gust & Phyllis Sall
Mildred Sall

Feb. 10, 2008

Ivan & Sandy Samuelson
Todd & Nancy Garrelts
Paige, Blake
Tim & Janet Gabriel
Haley, Jill
Ann Fuerst

Feb. 17, 2008

Dave & Debbi Watt
Brian
Cedric & Paige Fuerst
Garret, Allison
Art & Carolyn Reddish
Dennis & Trudy Rath

Feb. 24, 2008

Kent & Diane Samuelson
Andrew Samuelson
Jessica Samuelson
Addison
Sean & Amy Rademaker

Worship & Music News

THE CONCERT!!!

Have you marked February 10, 2008 on your calendar and reserved an afternoon of music and celebration? At 3:00 p.m. Dan Vaughan will present his organ builders concert on our newly restored organ. It promises to be a very enjoyable afternoon. Dan will play various selections to show the capabilities and sounds of the organ.

The handbell choir will perform two organ-handbell numbers. Also participating will be Nancy Ecklun and Jane Matejka as each will play an organ/duet with Dan and Mary Anna Anderson will play a short Bach piece.

Dan and the Praise choir will present ways the organ can be used to enrich that style of worship.

Following the concert a reception will be held in the Fellowship Hall. You will have a chance to visit With Dan and his helper, Dennis Remington, both former members of Bethel.

The organ is a wonderful instrument and we are thankful that we now have anew console and all systems replaced with state-of-the-art parts and components. Our thanks to Dan and Dennis for making all this happen.

See you Sunday, February 10, at 3:00 p.m.

LUTHERAN TOURS OF NEBRASKA

Martin Luther's GERMANY and SWITZERLAND
Tour June 6-19, 2008

An exciting 14-day journey featuring an in-depth look at Luther's reformation from his birth to death, from his Wittenberg life as an Augustinian monk to his married life with Katharina, from where he studied to where he preached.

The tour goes further to explore the grandeur of the Bavarian and Swiss Alps, then a sobering visit to Dachau, and ends in the cosmopolitan city of Munich.

For more information contact the church office (995-5361).

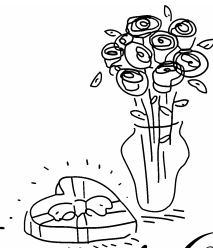
Christ's Love Compels Us

"For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, therefore all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him Who died for them and was raised again" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

Some sons disobey their fathers. Others obey unwillingly with arguing and complaining, resentful of their fathers' authority. Still others are compliant, but are there any who would be as submissive as Jesus was to His Father's will? ". . . yet not My will, but Yours be done," Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:42). Carrying out His Father's will was no easy task, but, because His love for us is as great as the Father's, He was willing to win our salvation for us by carrying out the plan the Triune God had established before the foundations of the world were laid. It was His love for us that caused Christ to give His very life so that we, who were dead in sin, might be alive forevermore in Him.

There is nothing we can do to earn this love; there is nothing we can do to "pay Him back." The Christian life of stewardship is a response to His love. His love compels us to respond by loving Him first and best and loving others as ourselves. His love compels us to provide for our pastors, teachers, and missionaries who work to bring the Gospel to the world for which He died (I Corinthians 9:9-12). His love compels us to look after the widow and the orphan (James 1:27). His love compels us to feed the hungry, extend hospitality to the homeless, clothe the destitute, and visit the prisoner (Matthew 25:37-40).

Stewardship is the use of life and all of life's resources in response to the grace of God in our lives, poured out in service to others, even as Christ poured out His lifeblood for us. The prophet Micah clarifies to us what God requires of us: "*To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God*" (Micah 6:8b). These are not attitudes we can work up of our own accord. Only as we are renewed daily through Word and Sacrament can we respond to this great love of Christ and respond in joyful service and generous giving that please God.



Valentine's Day

