

# Pew News

## May 2020

### St. John's Lutheran Church

#### **A New Normal**

"We were buried therefore with [Jesus] by baptism into death, in order that, just as Jesus was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." Romans 6:4

I think we can all agree upon this. We're ready for life to get back to normal. I'm sure that your normal is different from my normal but we probably have a few things in common. We can't wait to see family and friends and give them a hug. We're ready to ditch the face mask. We long to sit in the church sanctuary with our family. We'd love to go to our favorite restaurant and be surrounded by people laughing and having a great time. I'm sure that all of us are looking forward to life returning to normal.

But experts are warning us that we need to prepare ourselves for a new normal. That it's unlikely that life as we know it is going to return to what we were used too. For example, while we should be able to return to our favorite restaurants it's likely that we'll be expected to continue social distancing. In other words, the restaurant won't be bustling with life and laughter like we're used too. And those face masks might be expected for some time to come. Perhaps that's a small price to pay to be able to get out into public!

The apostle Paul says that Jesus rose from the dead so that we could have a new normal. Not just have a new normal but actually walk in that new normal! In Romans 4:25 Paul writes "[Jesus] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification." The wages of sin is death and so Jesus dies on the cross to pay for the sins of the world. To pay for your sins. Then on that Easter morning the Father raised him from the dead so that we could know that death had been defeated. So that we can know that our sins have been paid for. So that Paul can proclaim, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:54-56) Jesus was raised from the dead for our living. So that we can be set free from the tyranny of sin, death and the devil. So that we can live a new normal.

That new normal is given to us in Holy Baptism. God puts His Holy Spirit in us to give and sustain faith in each of us. That faith believes that Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead for our living. So that we can have a new normal. So that we can really live. In many places those being baptized are submerged in the water to symbolize that they have died with Christ and they burst up from the water gasping for air symbolizing their new life in Christ. Many people dress those being baptized in white garments representing their new normal. They have now been washed in the blood of Christ and are covered in Christ's righteousness! The white garments represent the righteousness of Christ.

Our new life in Christ is different than our old life. Paul says, "[God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son." (Colossians 1:3) Jesus says, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." (John 10:10) So what does this new normal look like for the child of God?

1. We live under the blood of Christ. The apostle Paul tells us over and over to put on Christ. There is no life for us apart from the blood of Jesus Christ. We live under his blood because it is his blood alone that covers our sins. Isaiah proclaims "He has covered me with a robe of righteousness." (Isaiah 61:10) The blood of Christ is our refuge. Christ covers us with his blood ". . . so that he might present the church to himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." (Ephesians 5:27)

2. We cherish the Word of God, our baptism and the Lord's Supper because it's there that we are covered with the blood of Christ. It's there that faith is given and strengthened. It's there that sins are forgiven. It's there that we come to understand what life really is. It's there that we "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." (Hebrews 10:22)

3. We worship all the time. We are constantly receiving forgiveness for our sins among so many other gifts and thanking the Lord for His faithfulness. That's what worship is. We receive from the hand of a faithful God and we give thanks. So the apostle Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice." (Philippians 4:4)

4. We're people of prayer. Paul says, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) Prayer is simply a conversation with God. We thank the Lord for His gifts. We plead with Him for wisdom. We share with Him our concerns. We give to Him our struggles and because He listens and intercedes we have peace.

4. Fellowship is important to us. Fellowship with God and fellowship with each other. In Paul's letter to the Corinthians he compares the church to a human body. Some people are like the eyes and other people are the hands. We're different but we cherish one another and need each other just like a body cherishes it's eyes and hands and feet.

Just like the human body often tries to reject a transplant so our sinful human nature tries to reject this new normal for our lives. We find it hard to believe that God could love us. We don't have time for Bible study, worship and prayer. We don't feel like being with other people. But just like the anti-rejection drugs the Word of God equips us to find joy in a new normal as the children of God. He is risen! He is risen, indeed. Alleluia! Living our new normal in Christ prepares us for anything including the new normals the world is going to throw at us.

God's Peace,  
Pastor

## **Applying Bible Principles**

One of the most striking accusations the Lord Jesus made when He was on earth was to label someone a hypocrite. Time and time again, He criticized the Pharisees and others for their hypocrisy. They said one thing but did something entirely different. They fit a description by Zig Ziglar who said, "A hypocrite is one who is not himself on Sunday."

That's perhaps what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote to Timothy: "But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." In other words, to give credence to Christianity, to give lip service to following Christ and to trusting in Him as Savior and Lord, and then to fail to provide for our own family, is hypocrisy. To do so, in reality, is to deny our faith and to be considered as someone who has no faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and no interest in spiritual matters.

It seems like such a small thing – relatively speaking (pun intended) – that Paul is exhorting Timothy to do. Provide for your own household, your own relatives. Take care of those under your care. Minister to those closest to you as a demonstration of your Christian faith.

Yes, we are to give to His ministry here at St. John's Lutheran Church. Yes, we are to be involved in ministering to others "on our own" and as part of the outreach of this church. But we are also to provide for our own families. We are also to minister to them and to care for them, for by doing so, we demonstrate the practical reality of our Christian faith. We thereby avoid the label of "hypocrite" since what we say is what we do.

How's the balance in your life? Are you providing for the needs of this ministry and those of your household? As a result, do others (especially your family) see Jesus in you?

## **Sharing the Love of Christ with Others During a Pandemic**

Our mission is "Experiencing and sharing the love of Jesus Christ." We've spend quite a bit of time exploring how we can share God's love with our neighbors but then everything seemed to change when we were told to stay at home. So how can we share God's love with others when we're not supposed to go near them? Here are a few thoughts that I've had and that I've gathered from others. Please share your thoughts with me as well ([pastor@stjohnsfarmville.org](mailto:pastor@stjohnsfarmville.org)).

1. Offer to pick up groceries or other items from the store for your neighbors who don't want to go out. Chuck Ironmonger and Blake Phillips have offered to do this.
2. Call your neighbors or other members of the church to check on them. Many people are very lonely because they can't get out or see their normal friends. Hearing your voice and knowing that you care makes a difference and shows that you care.
3. Pray for your neighbors. Make a list of them and take time to pray for them each day. You could even ask them how you can pray for them. You could walk through your neighborhood and pray over each home. People thank me all the time for asking and for praying for them.

Here are some ideas that have been shared with me.

## ENCOURAGE PEOPLE

1. Chalk messages on the sidewalk at night so it surprises people in the morning.
2. Set up a chalkboard in front of your house and write messages for passersby.
3. Talk to your neighbors as you walk (keeping your required distance, of course).
4. Join or launch a front window bear hunt for the local kids.
5. Leave a note for your local postman.

## GIVE TO OTHERS

6. Launch a street Facebook or WhatsApp page to share needs, ideas, and encouragement.
7. Deliver gifts (hampers, toilet paper bouquets, cookies) to your neighbors' doorsteps.
8. Rally people at your local supermarket to buy extra groceries for hampers for those in need.
9. Ask people to donate laptops and tablets for families who are homeschooling and don't have access to technology.
10. Try to form a coalition of pastors, business leaders, community leaders, and others to help meet the needs of families and those in financial difficulty
11. Set up a little pantry outside your home and fill it with toilet paper and non-perishables
12. Set up a community street pantry that everyone can donate to.

## SERVE OTHERS

13. Drop notes in your neighbors' letterboxes offering practical help.
14. Intentionally support small local businesses.
15. Volunteer at a local non-profit or charity.
16. Clean up trash from the streets and parks.
17. Write letters to politicians to release asylum seekers who are now at higher risk of getting sick.

## SOCIALIZE

18. Make a list of all the people you've wanted to catch up with and haven't, and then call or message them to check in on how they're doing.
19. If you're musical, hold a balcony concert, or a sidewalk or driveway concert.
20. Hold a "Dinner on the Driveway" night for everyone in your street.
21. Host a virtual dinner party using Zoom.
22. Project a film onto the side of a building for your neighbors to watch from their front yards.
23. Host an online trivia quiz.
24. Most of all, wash your hands regularly and thoroughly, practice social distancing, and if you have symptoms of fever or infection stay home and seek medical advice.

## **Almost Anyone Can Join in Worship and Bible Study**

We are trying to make it possible for anyone to participate in worship and Bible study. We are using an online space that allows us to have 100 different devices connected at one time. We praise the Lord that on Easter we had over 60 people in our worship space! But at the same time we miss those who haven't been able to join us yet.

If you have not joined us yet please consider giving it a try. It allows for you to see the bulletin on your screen while hearing the music and those participating in worship or Bible study. It enables you to ask questions and hear the answers. It makes it possible for you to see and hear your friends. Most importantly, it allows God to feed and sustain you with His life giving Word.

Pastor would be happy to help you if you are having difficulty getting in. It is possible, for example, to connect to the space at a different time to work out the bugs and get comfortable with the technology. Please let us know how we can help you get comfortable.

### **Join St. John's Lutheran Church for WORSHIP**

On any device connected to the internet enter or click on this link.

[https://zoom.us/j/263206206?](https://zoom.us/j/263206206?pwd=SOZlWWVQbnoxSG1telg4VXU0OWVpQT09)

[pwd=SOZlWWVQbnoxSG1telg4VXU0OWVpQT09](https://zoom.us/j/263206206?pwd=SOZlWWVQbnoxSG1telg4VXU0OWVpQT09)

You can use a telephone (long distance charges will apply).

Call (301) 715-8592 and enter Meeting ID 263 206 206.

### **Join St. John's Lutheran Church for BIBLE STUDY**

On any device connected to the internet enter or click on this link.

[https://zoom.us/j/825499176?](https://zoom.us/j/825499176?pwd=dXM2RmlBY1BTZU1PNXluMlJvUUFvQT09)

[pwd=dXM2RmlBY1BTZU1PNXluMlJvUUFvQT09](https://zoom.us/j/825499176?pwd=dXM2RmlBY1BTZU1PNXluMlJvUUFvQT09)

You can use a telephone (long distance charges will apply).

Call (301) 715-8592 and enter Meeting ID 825 499 176.