

PEW NEWS

JULY 2020

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Pastor's Corner

"Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." Genesis 4:7

The current crisis in our nation underscores the deep nature of our struggle. Injustice and hatred towards another person or even a group of people is as old as Cain and Abel. Both Cain and Abel brought sacrifices to the Lord. Genesis 4:4-5 says, "And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard." Cain gets upset. This isn't fair. It's unjust. So he rises up in his anger and murders his brother. Oh, that Cain had listened to God. Here's what God says to him in Genesis 4:7. "Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." These profound words are so important for you and I in the midst of this crisis.

Allow me to illustrate. I have a friend who was attacked by a dog as a child. It was very traumatic. But after a trip to the ER and a few stitches he was all fixed up. Today you can't tell where he got bit. Except that he doesn't like to be around dogs. If he hears a dog bark he's immediately on edge. When he comes into the presence of a loose dog he breaks out in a sweat. His fear of dogs is imbedded deep within him. I believe much of it is subconscious.

Our sin problem is imbedded deep within us as well. The original sin we have inherited from Adam and Eve. It's a part of our DNA. It's such an integral part of who we are that most people just accept it as "normal." Without God's Word they will never understand that it is not normal much less will they ever be able to do something about it. Sin is crouching at their door. It's desire is for them.

I applaud and stand with all those men and women who are peacefully protesting perceived injustices that they see around them. God's Word compels us to stand up for the widow and the fatherless. To stand up for the vulnerable in our society. But much of what we see going on around us is simply people allowing the sin, which is crouching at their door, to take over. It's giving sin center stage. It's following in Cain's footsteps.

And yet God says that we must rule over our sin and our sinful flesh. Just as God gave Adam and Eve hope by pointing them to their offspring who would conquer Satan so God points their son, Cain, to Jesus. Only in Jesus will sin and sinful flesh finally be conquered. The answer for Cain was not to trust in his plan but to throw himself on the mercy of God. To confess his sin and look for forgiveness. To look to Jesus.

Another name for Jesus in the Bible is wisdom. Throughout the book of Proverbs wisdom is synonymous with Jesus. Consider these Bible passages as you seek strength to rule over the sin that is built into you.

Proverbs 1:33 But whoever listens to [Wisdom] will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster.

Proverbs 8:32 And now, O sons, listen to [Wisdom]: blessed are those who keep my ways.

Proverbs 8:34 Blessed is the one who listens to [Wisdom], watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.

Proverbs 12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

Proverbs 13:1 A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.

Proverbs 15:31 The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise.

Proverbs 15:32 Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence.

Proverbs 17:4 An evildoer listens to wicked lips, and a liar gives ear to a mischievous tongue.

Proverbs 23:22 Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old.

The answer for Cain and for you and I is the same. Listen. Listen, first and foremost to Jesus who has already defeated the sin that we struggle with. Listen to Wisdom and find the strength in him to rule over the sin that dwells in each of us. That's what we do when we confess our sins and rejoice in the forgiveness and life that is ours in Christ. We rule over it. Then, listen to your neighbor. Listen to the Able that God has put in your life. Your neighbor will show you the depth of your sinfulness so that you can once again rule over that sin through confession and forgiveness.

We can't afford to let the sin that lives in us rule over us. Instead, let's listen to Wisdom. The more we listen Wisdom the more we grow in the fear of the Lord and that fear response will be different! "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom." Proverbs 1:7

God's Peace,

Pastor Matt Sorenson

Applying Bible Principles

God uses money in a variety of ways in the lives of His children. One of the most important ways God uses money is to confirm direction. Simply stated, God uses the supply of money or the lack of it to confirm His direction for many of the decisions we must make in life.

If God gives us clear direction which is confirmed by His Word, then He will provide whatever is needed to carry out that direction. The only problem is that He expects us to step out in faith in obedience to His leading and His Word, usually without knowing in full the pathway that lies ahead. Living that kind of life requires faith in God's person and His promises. It requires taking God at His Word and basing how we live on His Word. It requires trusting Him, even when circumstances appear to be contrary. It requires seeking first His kingdom, and then being confident that He will provide what we need. It requires — as the writer of Hebrews observed — believing that God “. . . exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

Hudson Taylor, a missionary to China who lived in the 19th century, summed it up beautifully this way: “God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's supply.” This means that if we are not experiencing God's supply, either we are not doing God's work (that is, we are not seeking first His kingdom) or we are not doing God's work in His way.

Make no mistake about it: God is not a God of disorder. He will not provide specific direction which He confirms by his Word if He does not intend to provide what is necessary for us to obey Him fully. But He looks to us to be willing to trust Him by taking the first step, and then another, and yet another.

By the way, has God been speaking to you lately? Has He confirmed that direction through His Word? If so, remember this: You can be confident that as God works in your life, He will use money or the lack of it to confirm His direction.

What Is Going On with Worship in the Building and On the Internet?

The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to take our worship of the Lord on to the internet exclusively for several months. The leadership of our congregation decided to do that because we believed it was the best way to protect our members and our neighbors. Ultimately it was love for our neighbors (Matthew

19:19 and the fifth commandment) that formed our decision. Then the commonwealth of Virginia issued a stay at home order closing houses of worship and we followed that order and honored the authority (Romans 13:3 and the Fourth commandment) that God placed over us to be a blessing for us.

Our decisions throughout this pandemic have been based on several principles. First and foremost we seek to follow God's Word and trust in Him. Second, we seek to love our neighbors and those entrusted to our care. We seek to do what is best for our neighbors from both a spiritual and a physical standpoint. Third, we honor the authorities God has given to us to protect us and bless us. Therefore, we follow the laws and order from the mayor, governor and president.

During the pandemic we have had as many as 75 people worshipping in our virtual worship space at one time. We learned much, made many changes and ultimately that virtual worship space was a blessing to so many of us as God came to us to uphold and strengthen us during a difficult time. In the last month the commonwealth of Virginia has allowed places of worship to conduct in person services as long as they abide by specific limitations.

Our leaders opted to delay opening our building for two reasons. First, we were unprepared to meet the limitations imposed by the commonwealth. Second, we were unprepared to be able to continue the virtual worship service while conducting the service in the building. Once again we prioritized the safety of our neighbors.

In mid-June we opened for our first service which was held with 17 people in the building and about 50 people in the virtual worship space. These three weeks have been difficult. While we rejoice to be back in the building wearing masks while seated six feet apart with no singing is not what we want. It has been even harder for the people in the virtual worship space. Inadequate internet bandwidth choked the internet and sometimes stopped the service. Incompatible equipment has stalled our attempt to integrate audio and video signals which has resulted in difficulty hearing parts of the service.

This past week we were finally upgraded to fiber optic internet service which should resolve many of our issues in the virtual space. We have three different solutions we are exploring to resolve the incompatible equipment issues. We expect the experience in the virtual worship space to keep getting better each week! Praise the Lord!

We also wanted to explain the limitations with the service in the building. These limitations have been put in place either out of concern for your health or because it is mandated by the commonwealth or both. Social distancing, wearing a face covering, and disinfecting the facility between services are for your protection and are mandated by the commonwealth. The prohibition on singing and responsive reading is primarily based on expert opinion. The commonwealth will allow singing but mandates a distance of ten feet between people when inside. Our leaders choose not to sing or engage in responsive reading at all because research indicates that an infectious person is 30 times more likely to infect a large portion of the congregation while engaged in these activities. In Washington state one infected person attended a choir practice where they practiced social distancing and ultimately 53 of 61 members of that choir tested positive for COVID-19. (*Paging Dr. Hamblin: When Will It be Safe to Sing Together?*, The Atlantic, June 10, 2020)

So instead of singing we have been playing recordings of various people singing along with our organist, Becky Bound. Kim and Margaret Kenny have been working with pastor to fix issues related to the sound and video equipment. Pastor and Carolyn Dove have been creating new services and

presentations to use online. Much work has been done and every time something changes we create a new way to bring God's Word to you in as safe a way as possible.

We have limited worship to 10:30 am for several reasons. First, the entire sanctuary must be disinfected between services and we did not have the people to accomplish this. Second, each service requires more work by everyone involved in putting it together. Since our resources have been stretched thin serving a virtual community and the on-site services we have delayed adding other services. Finally, the number of people have not supported needing another service. Today we have 17 - 20 people attending in the building which is served well by one service.

We wanted you to understand what is going on and why we have made the decisions that have been made. It is possible that we will need to continue to worship this way for some time. As always we want to provide the best worship experience possible while keeping everyone safe. Please share with us your feedback and any ideas you have for improving our experience.

Opportunities to Use Your Gifts in the Kingdom of God

We are currently in need of volunteers to coordinate three ways in which we serve the Lord with our gifts. These coordinators would work with the Pastor, the Council, and members of our congregation to implement ideas for experiencing and sharing the love of Jesus Christ.

Stewardship Coordinator - Implements plans to help members use their time, financial resources and intellectual gifts to the glory of God. They would be responsible for coordinating the current program of newsletter articles and readers in the service as well as working with the Council on ideas to pay off our mortgage.

Evangelism Coordinator - Implements plans to help members share the love of Jesus Christ with their neighbor. There are many new resources available to us. This person would explore those resources to understand which would best equip our people to serve their neighbor.

InterVarsity Coordinator - Serves on the InterVarsity Council and coordinates the needs of the InterVarsity chapter at Longwood University with the church Council and members of our congregation. This is an opportunity for outreach at Longwood and to serve young people in our community.

Singers Needed

Since we cannot sing during the onsite services we have been blessed to have various people who have sung a solo or duet to go along with the music from the organ. Unfortunately we have been limited to the same three people. We would really enjoy hearing some different people sing! Because of the limited number of singers available and the effort required to record and coordinate all of this we are limiting the number of hymns we use today to two.

If you or your family are willing to sing for the congregation we will email you an mp3 file with the organ music on it. We want you to play that music while recording your singing along with it. Then email the mp3 recording back to us so we can play it during the service. We're looking for people

willing to sing and who have the ability to make an mp3 recording and send it back. If that's you contact pastor at pastor@stjohnsfarmville.org.

Treasurer's Report

Treasure's Report		May - 20	YTD	
Total Collections & Savings Used	\$ 17,701. 92		Total Collections & Savings Used	\$ 100,316. 93
Total Expenses	\$ 17,564. 50		Total Expenses	\$93,962.92
Difference	\$ 137. 42		Difference	\$6,353.71
May - 20			YTD	
Total Savings Used	None		Total Savings Used	\$14,500.00
MOM Mission Match			MOM Match	\$41.50
Add Mortgage Paid	\$1,535.00		Add Mortgage Paid	\$5,072.63