

St. Paul United Church of Christ 119 North Franklin Street New Bremen, Ohio 45869 Phone (419-629-2502), Fax (419-629-3207) Email <u>stpaulnb@nktelco.net</u> or <u>stpaulnb@gmail.com</u> Visit our website at <u>https://stpaulnb.org</u> Rev. Becky Senior Pastor Pastor Dee Associate Pastor Jeff Quellhorst-Council President

April 26, 2020 Third Sunday of Easter

LIGHTING OF THE CANDLES (please light a candle(s) at home in preparation of worship)

WELCOME

This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

WELCOME SONG

No Matter



CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: Bearer of love beyond imagining, spreading the feast of life before the world:

People: Christ of the people, Christ who never lets us go.

Leader: Wonder of grace that spreads across the earth, embracing the rejected, holding close the lonely:

People: Christ of the people, Christ who never lets us go.

Leader: Love eternal, love that never fails, costly love reaching out to all who wait:

People: Christ of the people, Christ who never lets us go, we worship you in spirit and in truth.





INVOCATION (in unison)

God, teach us how to love as you have loved us. Teach us to love the unloved. Teach us to love our enemies. Teach us to see others as you see them; teach us to see ourselves in the light of your forbearing, forgiving love. Come, enter our hearts with your love and grace. Amen.



CHILDREN'S MOMENT

We are still in Easter Season—St. Paul continues to celebrate that Jesus rose from the dead three days after he died. I'll let you in on a secret: because Jesus rose from the dead, EVERY DAY is Easter! We can celebrate new life in Jesus not only this season but all year long.

I've been thinking a lot about symbols of Easter. One Easter symbol is a seed. All by itself, it is hard. It is dry. It doesn't seem alive at all. Yet, when you plant a seed in good soil, give it enough water, the hard dry seed breaks open and a plant begins to grow. This week in your worship packets you received small, colorful hearts that are filled with seeds. Your project this week is to get a paper cup, fill it with good dirt, plant a seed heart into your cup and give it some water. Check your soil every day: soon you will have a flowering plant to enjoy.

Jesus' resurrection is like a flowering plant from a dry seed. What seems to be dead (like an unplanted seed) is actually very much alive.

Let us pray. God, we thank you for Jesus who gives us new ways to live, new ways to grow, new ways to love. Help us this week to share his joy with others. Amen.



PASTORAL PRAYER, SILENT PRAYER, AND THE LORD'S PRAYER. (Today's prayer was adapted from a prayer written by theologian and author Sarah Bessey)

O God, bless the merciful. Bless them with your love. Bless the hospital chaplains who are crying and praying in trauma rooms with the scared and the hurting. Bless the doctors and nurses, the janitors and the lunch ladies, the front-line workers and behind-the-scenes faithful ones during this terrible time. Bless the ones in nursing homes with lonely seniors, putting themselves at risk to keep caring for the vulnerable. Bless the families on the other side of the window glass with phones, smiling and waving and holding up signs of love to their elders. Bless the vulnerable and at-risk and those who open their doors to them even in the midst of a pandemic. Bless the scared kids and the adults who notice them.

Bless the ones who cry too much and feel too much. Bless the wounded healers.

Bless the kind ones, who speak words of life and gentleness. Bless the benefit-of-the-doubt givers, the one-more-chance lavishers. Bless the comforters and the Kleenex-passers. Bless the walkers-in-another'sshoes. Bless the wheelchair pushers. Bless the ones there waiting after the chips fall, and the edifice crumbles, and the truth comes out. Bless the ones baking bread and leaving it on doorsteps for parents they can't risk seeing. Bless the ones who love vulnerable children, day after day after day. Bless the ones who are lonely and alone, who are isolated and vulnerable, who are struggling to breathe.

Bless the ones who lavish grace and bandage wounds and figure out how to make ventilators in factories. Bless the ones who intubate and the ones who are crying in the stairwell, overwhelmed by caring. Bless them for they give dignity to the rest of us. Bless them because they see us and they love us anyway.

Bless the ones who, in their patience and their uncanny ability to keep going, are able to be present with the hurting, the dying, the ones who are alone. Bless them for long days on their feet, sweaty and exhausted and filled with mercy for us anyway. Bless them for their determination in the face of suffering and for their faith in our story.

Bless the ones who care for the aging and the dying, for those making the way smoother for the families left behind. Bless the ones who hold the hands of the poor and broken and you and me. Bless the ones running right towards the hurting with their hands outstretched. At the end of all this may we bless them with rest and gratitude, with compassionate and generous policies and pay, with just systems and actions. At the end of all this, may they know they were our heroes. At the end of this, may we value love and mercy.

All of this we pray in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

ANTHEM Take Your Mat Up and Walk by Deadman (YouTube.com; search take your mat up and walk by Deadman) The hours are passing slowly Like the clouds in the late summer sky The days, they keep on dragging on and on With no comfort and no reason why And you feel the time as it passes Just like Lazarus when he's waiting at the gate For a little kindness That some stranger might demonstrate Take your mat up Take your mat Take your mat and walk Take your mat up Take your mat Take your mat and walk Like a leper at the pool of healing When he's waiting for his turn to bathe Like a blind man, a lame man, a sick man

Waiting for a miracle to take shape And in this life of suffering Situations are out of our control It's just when you think that you're beaten down It takes faith just to make you whole (chorus)

Last night I thought I heard a voice Asking me do you want to be well? "How can I with so much pain?" I said out loud and surprised myself

And then I had an answer To the grief that I had endured It was sitting right there beside me All the while was the means to be cured (chorus)

NEW TESTAMENT LESSON: Acts 3:1-11

(from Eugene Peterson's <u>The Message</u>)

One day at three o'clock in the afternoon, Peter and John were on their way into the Temple for prayer meeting. At the same time there was a man crippled from birth being carried up. Every day he was set down at the Temple gate, the one named Beautiful, to beg from those going into the Temple. When he saw Peter and John about to enter the Temple, he asked for a handout. Peter, with John at his side, looked him straight in the eye and said, "Look here." He looked up, expecting to get something from them.

⁶⁻⁸ Peter said, "I don't have a nickel to my name, but what I do have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!" He grabbed him by the right hand and pulled him up. In an instant his feet and ankles became firm. He jumped to his feet and walked.

⁸⁻¹¹ The man went into the Temple with them, walking back and forth, dancing and praising God. Everybody there saw him walking around and praising God. They recognized him as the one who sat begging at the Temple's Gate Beautiful and rubbed their eyes, astonished, scarcely believing what they were seeing. The man threw his arms around Peter

and John, ecstatic. All the people ran up to where they were at Solomon's Porch to see it for themselves.

RESPONSE:

Leader: The word of God for the people of God. **People: God is still speaking. Thanks be to God!**

QUESTIONS FOR THE NEW TESTAMENT LESSON:

- 1. What words or phrases caught your attention in this text?
- 2. What might God be saying to you in this passage?
- 3. What might God be saying to our community in this passage?
- 4. What is the good news of this story?

SERMON

Rev. Becky Erb Strang

In this season of Covid19, isolation, illness, death and uncertainty, even our scripture lessons this Easter season seem all out of whack. On Easter Day, our scripture was the Easter story from the Gospel of Mark it ended abruptly when the women who'd been told by a young man in white (or possibly an angel) that Jesus is alive, they ran away in fear and told no one. Then last week we skipped completely over all the Easter stories in Matthew, Luke and John and jumped all the way to the beginning of Acts of the Apostles and Jesus' ascension into heaven.

Today's scripture lesson is equally out of rhythm. This time, we skipped Acts 2 (which in my humble opinion is the most important chapter in all of Acts—the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the believers, Peter's impassioned sermon that day and the way these believers began to gather and care for one another in a new kind of community.) Yes: every bit of Acts 2 has been skipped and our narrative lectionary reading picks up at Acts 3:1-10—the story of Peter and John going to the Temple to pray when a man disabled from birth hollers out to them, asking for monetary assistance. Peter went up to the man, saying, "I don't have a nickel to my name, but what I do have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!" He grabbed him by the right hand and pulled him up. In an instant his feet and ankles became firm. He jumped to his feet and walked.

But here's the cool part of the story: not only did this man get up and walk, he went into the Temple, walking back and forth, praising God and DANCING! Yes: this man, lame from birth, not only praises God with his words, he praises him with his whole body. Today's scripture ends with this man, dancing and praising, flings himself upon Peter and John, embracing them bear hugs of joy.

(Bear hugs! Until this pandemic, I doubt that many of us gave much thought to the gift of a simple hug from a friend or family member. NOW, in this time and place, we place ourselves inside this healed man so that we can experience his joy, his laughter, his dancing, his praising AND his hugs).

Perhaps that is the good news of this story—that we are ALL in need of healing, we are all in need of being lifted up in the name of Jesus. We are all in need of laughter and dancing and the gift of human touch.

Our scripture reading ends here, but the story does not. If our lectionary hadn't skipped Acts 2, we would have read that after the Holy Spirit came upon the believers, allowing them to speak in all the languages of the world, Peter spoke to the gathered crowd and began to preach—assuring the people that the miracle they were witnessing came from God through the risen Christ. He ended that Pentecost sermon with these words: Change your life. Turn to God and be baptized, each of you in the name of Jesus Christ so your sins are forgiven. When Peter preached on Pentecost, the scriptures tell us that 3000 people believed and were baptized.

We also learn something else important from Acts 2. Those 3000 believers pooled their resources together, selling what they owned so that no one in this ever-growing band of believers went without. Hear me well: from the very beginning of Christianity (which wasn't even called that at the time), the believers lived in a community in which everyone—rich, poor, woman or man—was welcomed and received as an equal.

After today's miracle at the gate called Beautiful, Peter again began to preach to the crowd. And remember: by the time Peter got to his sermon, he, John and the healed man were inside the Temple. Peter's sermon began by calling out the Jews who had taken part in Jesus' death, acknowledging that these people, while complicit, clearly did not have any idea the scope of sin in sentencing Jesus to death. And just like his Pentecost sermon, Peter ended by saying, "Now it's time to change your ways! Turn to face God so he can wipe away your sins, pour out showers of blessing to refresh you, and send you the Messiah he prepared for you, namely Jesus." And in today's sermon by saying, "But you are the first in line: God, having raised up his Son, sent him to bless you as you turn, one by one, from your evil ways."

But before Peter had even given the final wrap-up in today's sermon, the priests, the chief of the Temple police, and some Sadducees seized Peter and John, arresting them and throwing them into jail for the night. And let me be clear: The Book of Acts is chock-full of stories of these Jesus people preaching to crowds who became believers only to have the preachers tossed in jail.

The next morning Peter and John were brought before the Temple leaders to face their charges—the charge of preaching the resurrection of the dead, the charge of healing someone in the name of Jesus. And yet again, Peter would have none of this. Filled with the Holy Spirit, he preached: reminding the Temple leaders that they had failed to recognize Jesus for who he was and is.

A reading of Acts 4 tells us that the Temple leaders were clearly in a bind. The people—the ordinary people—were enthralled by Peter and John's message of new life in Jesus. What could these leaders do in response? This is what they did: they released Peter and John, telling them that their days of preaching about Jesus had ended. You can almost hear the laughter in the text as Peter and John, laughing back said, "We can't keep quiet about what we have seen and heard."

And again: we hear that after Peter and John left the Temple and returned to the believers, we are giving another glimpse into community life. This time in Acts 4:32-35: *The whole congregation of believers was united as one—one heart, one mind! They didn't even claim ownership of their own possessions. No one said, "That's mine; you can't have it." They shared everything. The apostles gave powerful witness to the resurrection of the Master Jesus, and grace was on all of them. And so it turned out that not one person among them was needy. Those who owned fields or houses sold them and brought the price of the sale to the apostles and made an offering of it. The apostles then distributed it according to each person's need.* I find this broader story particularly compelling during these weeks of quarantines, sheltering in place and low (or high) levels of anxiety about our health, the health of our loved ones, and what might the future hold not only for us as individuals, but us as a community, a nation and even our sisters and brothers throughout the world. If Acts 3 had been our scripture during ordinary times, we might have heard it differently: another miracle performed in the name of Jesus.

But these are not ordinary times. And this is not an ordinary story. In many ways, in these weeks of anxiety, fear, and uncertainty, we have become MORE like the community of those earliest of believers. Even in our seclusions and quarantines, we have become more communityminded. People (mostly women) in our area have pooled their collective resources to make literally thousands of facemasks. Are you out of elastic? Put out a message on Facebook and elastic will miraculously appear on your door step. Need masks for your aging parents? Put out a plea and it will be covered.

Likewise, our Blessing Pantry. Since this crisis began, donations are pouring in—donations of items to the barrel outside the office door and donations of dollars to keep the Pantry running. And you need to hear this: many of the donors of stuff and dollars are not St. Paul folk. They are people in our community who, like those earliest of believers, are pooling resources together so that no one in our area will be without.

Even in our isolation, we have become more community-focused. We have become more generous. We are not only praying for our neighbors who might be lonely: we are picking up our phones, calling them or sending them cards. Even in our quarantines, we are looking past our own front doors to address the needs of those around us.

This is my prayer for our community, our nation, our world: that when this crisis is over and we can leave our homes, and hug our neighbors once again we will not forget what we've learned in these weeks. That we will continue to reach out to our neighbors. That we will continue to pool our resources to help those in need. For here is the truth: most of us have far too much stuff cluttering our lives. What might our lives look like, moving forward beyond the coronavirus, if we jettisoned the stuff/junk of our lives in order to live more simply so that ALL can live? So back to the man born lame waiting for handouts at the Beautiful Gate. When his friends carried him to his position near the entrance to the Temple, he probably had not expectations beyond getting enough coins from worshippers to have something to eat that evening. On that particular afternoon, the unnamed man got much more than he bargained for: he got a second chance at life.

That second chance at life is offered to us each and every day with each and every breath we take. And that is the good news when we are living with a pandemic and when we are living in healthy days. God is a God of second chances.

The man born lame was given a second chance at life—and he embraced that life with joyful abandon: sprinting to the Temple, dancing and praising God and hugging Peter and John.

And we are called to do the same: In days of fear and uncertainty and days of joy. We are called to dance and sing and hug and love.

So this is what I propose: when the quarantines are lifted, let's dance in the streets, sing in our sanctuary and hug each other tightly. But this is what I also propose: when the quarantines are lifted, let's keep doing what we have been doing in these weeks of confinement and illness—reaching out to our neighbors, pooling our resources, simplifying our lives and caring for each other with greater depth.

Poet Mary Oliver once wrote in her Poem of the One World:

This morning the beautiful white heron was floating above the water and then into the sky of this the one world we all belong to where everything sooner or later is a part of everything else which thought made me feel for a little while quite beautiful myself. Friends, Mary Oliver is right: we belong to each other. We are part of each other. So, take up your mat and walk into this new life that is now yours. Amen.

WE RESPOND WITH OUR GIFTS

OFFERING INVITATION: When we worship (whether gathered or scattered), we offer God three things: our time (this hour or so we have to praise him), our talents (our abilities to pray, praise, sing, and serve God in the world), and our monetary gifts. God accepts these because God wants not our gifts, but us as Givers. God wants us. We are the living sacrifice. In your worship packet this week, you received an envelope for you to send your offering, your tithe, to God by way of the mission and ministries of St. Paul Church. Let us give generously and joyfully.

DOXOLOGY

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; praise him, all creatures here below; praise him above, ye heavenly host: praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (unison)

Gracious God, we thank you for the love that stands under the whole creation, the love that is our guide and calling for every moment of our lives, the love that makes possible dreams and works of peace and justice. Receive these offerings, and may they be expended in works of love in this community and out into all creation. Amen.

HYMN OF SENDING Here I Am, Lord

WITNESS & MISSION



Here I Am, Lord









WORDS: Daniel L. Schutte (1947-); para. Isaiah 6:8 MUSIC: Daniel L. Schutte (1947-); arr. Michael Pope (20th c.), Daniel L. Schutte (1947-), John Weissrock (20th c.) Words and Music © 1981 Daniel L. Schutte and New Dawn Music



BENEDICTION

The grace of God, deeper than our imagination; the strength of Christ, stronger than our need; and the communion of the Holy Spirit, richer than our togetherness; guide and sustain us today and in all our tomorrows. Amen.



PASSING THE PEACE OF CHRIST Leader: In Christ, we are a new creation. Let us pass the peace of Christ with each other.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

May 3rd Communion-Pick up is Saturday, May 2nd, 11:00am-Noon, Herman St. We will also be handing out goodies for the May 3rd Children's Moment. If you are unable to get out, but would still like communion, please contact the church office (419-629-2502) and we'll do our best to arrange delivery to your home.

Blessing Pantry-is open 10am-noon and 1pm-3pm Monday-Friday and 5:30pm-7:30pm Tuesday's. All Donations Welcome-Thank you! We have placed a metal can outside the East Educational Building door for donations.

Building Entrance-St. Paul is accessible by the East Educational Building door, Monday-Friday 10:00am-Noon and 1:00pm-3:00pm. Please ring the doorbell, wait outside the doors so staff may assist you. We are currently taking everyone's temperature asking you to sanitize hands and remove shoes. Thank you!

Mailbox-We have installed a mailbox outside of the East Educational Building door for any correspondence you may have for the church and would like to drop off. Please lift the flap and drop through the slot on the top. The box is locked and will be checked often. Thank you!

Daily Devotions-Please join Rev Becky or Pastor Dee Monday-Friday at 11:30am, online via Facebook Live. These will be airing on our Facebook page St. Paul United Church of Christ-New Bremen, OH.

May/June Upper Rooms-have arrived! Please call the church office if you would like one and we will gladly mail one to you.

E-Giving @ St. Paul <u>3 Different Ways to Give</u>

Online – Make a donation on our website: stpaulnb.org

Give+ App – Search "Give Plus Church" in your App store and find St. Paul to Get Started!

Text – Make a donation to our Number: 833-308-0048 St. Paul New "Text to Give" #(# changed as of 10/9/19)
How To Give by Text (Example - my amount for the example is \$25 (minimum amount is \$5.00))
For general fund giving: Send 25 space gl (hit send)
For building & property fund giving: Send 25 space bp (hit send)
For project of the year giving: Send 25 space poy (hit send)
Once a text amount is sent:
Registration Link- Sent via text the first time a donation is made.
Thank you! Please visit (link) to register.

Donation Confirm- Sent via text each time a donation is made.

Thank you for donating \$ (amount)! Text repeat to make this recurring or refund to cancel this donation. Isaiah 26:20 Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut your doors behind you. Hide yourselves a little while until the wrath has passed.

Brad Law