

PASTOR'S PENNINGS

A Father's Love

Jesus said, *"The son got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him"* (Luke 15:20).

He was homeless, smelly, and almost starving to death. But the worst thing was that he knew it was all his fault. He thought his father was cruel and overbearing; there were too many rules. He wanted freedom. He wanted to have fun, but his father was all about responsibility and hard work. So, he asked for his share of the inheritance. He didn't care about the farm; he just wanted the money. As soon as he got it, he left. He could finally do what he wanted to do. But it didn't take long and all that money was gone--partying is expensive. Those he thought were his friends left as soon as he ran out of money. He was all alone and miserable. He had two choices, and neither seemed pleasant. He could continue as he was and hope he could scrape enough together each day so that he wouldn't starve to death, or he could go back home.

He headed for home. He was prepared to grovel, to ask to be just a hired hand on his father's farm. But he didn't get the opportunity to do much groveling. As soon as his father saw him coming, he ran out to meet him. He hugged and kissed him, and gave orders for a huge celebration in his honor. The rebellious son had expected a cool reception. He had expected an "I told you so." Instead he got what he knew he didn't deserve: a joyous welcome home.

You and I are that young man who rebelled against his father. We have all rebelled against our heavenly Father. We have considered Him to be cruel and over-bearing and having too many rules--someone who doesn't want us to have any fun. We have all separated ourselves from Him and broken His commandments. Our consciences tell us that He is angry, that we deserve whatever pain or suffering comes our way. Could our heavenly Father still love us? Could He still welcome us to His eternal home in heaven?

Jesus' story about the disobedient son in Luke 15:11-24 is a short story that speaks volumes for our lives. It assures us of God's love and our heavenly home. Our heavenly Father loves us so much that He punished His obedient Son, Jesus, in our place so that He can welcome us as His dear children and heirs of eternal life. Instead of giving us what we deserve for our rebelliousness, He gives us what we don't deserve: complete forgiveness in Jesus.

PRAYER LIST

You heard my plea: *"Do not close your ears to my cry for relief."* You came near when I called you, and you said, *"Do not fear."*

-- Once again we need to pray for Bob Wagner, brother of Dorothy Deards, who has lymphoma and is taking chemotherapy. Pray that this experience will lead him to find refuge in God. Pray that he will be glad that God does not delight in the strength of man but the heart of those who fear and love Him.

-- Please pray that the Lord would move more Pioneer and youth leaders to rise up and be a part of this program of our church. Pray that the program would bless our children.

-- Janet Wisdom is a friend of Fred and Gena Potter. The Potters have requested that our congregation pray for her to find a suitable job that will sustain her. Include her when you pray.

-- We rejoice with you Scott and Carole Peters on 17 years of marriage. It is our prayer that God will bless you in wonderful ways in the future and that your love will grow for each other day by day.

-- Ben Piña is struggling with his lymphoma cancer. Pray that God showers His love on Ben every

day and prepares him through His Word for the joys of heaven that come only to those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Ben loves Jesus and reflects it with heartwarming smiles. Pray that Ben's love for Jesus grows day by day.

-- Jean Luebking is living at Grace Living Center. Her husband, Russell, continues to live at his home and comes by to visit her. Please pray that God would bless Jean and Russell even though difficult times have come upon them. Ask God to lift their hearts with His grace and mercy all the days of their lives.

-- Thank the Lord that He moved the hearts of Holy Cross members to not only reach our church Mission Offering goal of \$25,000 but to return to the Lord \$29,000 not counting Jubilee and other mission offerings. When a congregation has a love for mission and an unwavering commitment to give generously so that unbelievers the world over have the opportunity to hear about Christ and be saved, that congregation's spirit and love will filter down into every aspect of congregational life in many positive ways. Praise the Lord for God's grace in leading you to membership with the group of believers who call Holy Cross home.

STEWARDSHIP

One of the neatest things about a congregation the size of Holy Cross is that everyone's gifts and abilities are vitally needed. To be sure they are just as needed in a larger congregation, but it seems to be more obvious in a congregation like ours. Thankfully, God's Word tells us that along with the gift of faith the Holy Spirit also gives us spiritual gifts. These are special gifts God gives to each Christian. God is the one who decides who gets what gift and promises that each person has at least one! He gives these gifts to be used in service to Him and to one another.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12:27, *"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."* What God is telling us is that He has provided all the "parts" necessary so the "body" can function as He wants it to function. For us as a congregation, that means God will provide people in our church with certain gifts and the willingness to use them so that what He wants done, gets done.

Think about what blessings and gifts God has given you. Count it a privilege to use these gifts to the glory of God and the benefit of His people here at Holy Cross and throughout the world!

EVANGELISM

Did you ever wonder why God put you at your job or at the particular place you are at in life (hospital, retirement home, neighborhood)? You are there for a reason: to serve as a Christian witness. Maybe you never thought of it that way before. Whether you work in an office, spend time working outside in the fresh air, stay at home with the kids, or are retired, God deliberately puts you in contact with other people. The Bible says He does that so that as Christians, we can be salt and light. As salt, we have the responsibility of influencing our society with the love of Jesus. And as light, we have the privilege of showing other people the way of the Bible. Now, obviously, God never commands us to "push" our religion on anyone else. But, some of us at work talk passionately about the Sooners, a new diet, or even politics. The fact is, that as Christians our New Man is passionate about Christ. In fact it is more passionate about Christ than anything else.

So what can we say to the people we come in contact with? One way is to ask the people you meet whether they are satisfied and happy with their lives. Another question could be, what Jesus means to them. Listen well and then share why you are excited with Jesus. Confess your sinfulness and let them know where it should have led you. (To hell.) But then, share how Jesus

forgave you, promised you eternal life and led you to believe it with all your heart. Friends, let the Gospel fire you up with God's love. People will see the difference between you and them and will want to know why you are the way you are. What a joy it is when God presents the opportunity to tell them.

LENTEN SERVICES

February 25th is Ash Wednesday. Once again, we will have special Lenten worship services on Wednesday nights at 7:00PM. There will be some type of rotation of pastors for these services. Our Oklahoma Circuit is discussing how that will work and how many will be in the rotation.

Lent is the church's 40 day journey of repentance and renewal in preparation for Holy Week and Easter. Ash Wednesday's special call to repentance and renewal is not repeated during the Sundays in Lent because they are not properly part of the season. Rather, these Sundays, although subdued, still serve as "islands of refreshment" during the course of the season, in keeping with the emphasis that all Sundays are "little Easters."

The theme that will be used during our Wednesday night services will be, "Father Forgive Them." The six sub-themes will be (and not necessarily in this order):

1. Forgive Our Fearful Lack of Trust - Mark 14:48-52 - (The Disciples In the Garden);
2. Forgive Our Desire to Defy Your Divine Authority - Mark 14:60-65 - (The Sanhedrin);
3. Forgive Us When We Despise Your Great Salvation - Matthew 27:15-26 - (The Mob In Pilate's Courtyard);
4. Forgive Us When We Abandon Your Truths! - John 18:33-38 - (Pontius Pilate);
5. Forgive Us For Despising Our Savior's Claim! - Mark 15:16-20 - (The Roman Soldiers); and
6. Forgive Our Misplaced Sorrow! - Luke 23:26-31 - (The Woman of Jerusalem).

On Maundy Thursday, Michigan Lutheran Seminary (Preparatory School) choir will replace the liturgy and sermon with a sacred concert. The service will end with Holy Communion. Michigan Lutheran Seminary is one of the two preparatory WELS high schools funded with our offerings that are designed to lead young men and women to consider serving in the public teaching or preaching ministry. A large percent of Martin Luther College students come from our two preparatory schools. The offering that evening will be given to support this school. Members will be asked to host the choir and provide them with supper before the service. Stay tuned for more information and organizational efforts by our Elders in February.

NEW MEMBERS WELCOME

We would like to welcome **Latischa** and **Mike Huller** who have transferred their membership from a WELS congregation in the east to Holy Cross. Mike works at Tinker. Latischa has joined the choir. Latischa is the daughter of Anice Glass. Latischa and Mike have a baby boy named Keith. May our congregation fill you with God's love as you hear His Word and receive His Sacrament in the services Holy Cross offers every Sunday. We pray that you will be a blessing to Holy Cross as you continue to serve your Lord.

VOTERS' MEETING

The annual 2008 Voters' Meeting was held January 25th, 2009 following a pot-luck dinner. On the meeting agenda were reports from all Boards along with membership business and the reports of 2008 offerings, and expenditures. The agenda also contained a proposal for adoption of a "Board of Education Proposal for Confirmation." Since the February newsletter is produced

and distributed prior to the meeting, the results of the Voters' Meeting will not be available in the newsletter until March. In the meantime the Minutes of the meeting are available on the church bulletin board for review.

A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES

Last month it was mentioned that we would have a congregational movie night. The night selected by the Stewardship Board is Friday, February 13th from 7-9PM. The Stewardship Board will provide salted, unsalted along with buttered and unbuttered popcorn along with drinks. Those attending are invited to bring cookies and other munchies if they want them.

The movie was in Oklahoma theaters last month and is called, "Fireproof." It is funny, full of heroism and also a beautiful love story. The name Fireproof comes from the need many have to fireproof their marriages. (Keep the lack of love from burning their marriages down.) The movie shows why a marriage partner cannot truly love without knowing and having Christ's love. It is a family movie and will be enjoyed not only by married couples but also by singles old and young. I suspect you will find it one of the best movies you have seen in a long time. Make plans to attend now.

Pastor

MARY-MARTHA FOOD PANTRY

The Mary-Martha Guild is starting a year-round food pantry to help members of Holy Cross congregation as well as others who are experiencing difficult times due to the sagging economy. Anyone who wishes to donate to the food pantry may bring non-perishable food items and leave them in the kitchen area.

WOMEN'S RETREAT

"Get Active ... in the Word, in your prayer life, in serving others, and with your body" is the theme of the first annual Camp Shiloh Women's Retreat. Mrs. Heidi Goelzer will be leading this retreat from Friday, February 20th at 6:30PM till Saturday, February 21st at 3:30PM. If you register by February 4th, the cost is only \$95 for housing, food and materials. The cost is \$110 if you register after February 4th. Call the Camp Shiloh office at 905-855-1800 to register. Soon information and registration information will be found on our website www.campshilohretreat.org.

PIONEERS

The Pioneers are looking for volunteers and project leaders for the Pioneers during the month of February for all children from 1st to 8th grade. If anyone has any ideas or projects they would like to help with, please contact Byron or Dina Shoumaker at 392-2286.

ASH WEDNESDAY SOUP SUPPER

The ladies of the Mary-Martha Guild are sponsoring a soup supper on Ash Wednesday, February 25th. The supper will be held from 5:30-6:30PM at Holy Cross Lutheran Church. Everyone is invited to attend.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

The Education Committee, the Relocation/Renovation Committee and the Norman Mission Committee are still in investigation phase of their various projects. The investigation phase will be completed shortly and then they will begin work on developing proposals to be presented to the congregation. The Board of Steward-ship plans on presenting these proposals to Holy Cross congregation for review and comments sometime in early May. A new bulletin board has been installed on the south wall of the fellowship room. Information about the Committees and their ideas are posted on this bulletin board for everyone to read.

MARY-MARTHA GUILD

The Mary-Martha Guild had their monthly meeting on January 10th. The Bible study was 1 Samuel 15, the Lord rejects Saul as king. God is interested in our doing things with the "right heart." Whenever one rebels against God, one is creating a sin of idolatry. Next month's Bible study will dwell on David and Goliath.

Al Cardwell, Chairman of the Board of Elders, presented a proposal to the ladies about helping Holy Cross congregation host a Pastor/Teacher/Delegate conference at Holy Cross in 2010 or 2011. The ladies were all in agreement to help host such a conference. The ladies then received information and exchanged ideas about the first Lutheran ladies retreat at Camp Shiloh on February 21st; the LWMS Spring Rally to be held in Arlington, TX; and the National LWMS Rally in Denver, CO on June 25th - June 28th. Other topics and items discussed were symbolism, quilts for members of Holy Cross, a "ladies night out," food pantry, soup supper, and personal invitations. To take part in these discussions and helping with these many topics and items, attend the next meeting of the Mary-Martha Guild on Saturday, February 14th at 10:00AM.

ROOMBA THE ROBOT

Have you met or seen Roomba the Robot? Roomba the Robot is a robotic (automatic) vacuum cleaner. It has been purchased by the Board of Property Management to vacuum the carpet in the sacristy aisles and under the pews. So now when members of Holy Cross clean the church they will not have to vacuum the carpet under the pews or in aisles, as Roomba will have done it. The altar area in the sacristy will still have to be vacuumed manually because Roomba cannot climb steps. If you want to meet or see Roomba the Robot it resides in the northwest corner of the sacristy.

WORDS FROM THE ELDERS

The first Sunday in February, Holy Cross will start using the new church Worship Supplement. There will be three copies in each pew, so you will have to share with your neighbor until next year's budget. This gives you a chance to get to know who's sitting next to you and a chance to visit. If you would like to purchase a copy of the supplement, please see Pastor and he will order it and you can pay him, or you can for yourself from the Northwestern Publishing House by telephone or Internet. The cost is \$13.50 per copy for the hard back and \$15.50 for the spiral bound. The new Elders for the 2009 church year are: *Al Cardwell* Chairman, *Butch Barnett*, *Dean Thomas* Secretary, *Terry Eischen*, and *Eric Hanson*. Please read 1st Timothy 3:1-12, where it clearly explains the duties and the responsibilities of these men. Please greet them with open arms, and pray for them to have the strength to serve in this capacity, because it is by far the hardest responsibility for them and takes a great toll on them and their families. Along with the guidance from Pastor Strackbein, our Elder visits will start soon and our goal is to get everyone visited in the 2009 year. If you need help or someone goes into the hospital, please call Al Cardwell at 405-815-7546 or 793-9514, and he will contact your assigned Elder. Each Elder is assigned to at least 20 or so members. The list will be posted in the visiting area along with the church roster. The Lutheran Men's Retreat at Camp Shiloh will be the 20th and the 21st of March - that's a Friday and Saturday. For reservations and transportation, contact Scott Peters at 672-2627 or Al Cardwell at 793-9514.

THE SUNDAY WORSHIP BULLETIN

Last month we discussed the part the bulletin cover has in our worship service. This month let us look at what is contained in the inside of our worship bulletin. First there is the **Psalm**

heading, followed by the **Sunday of the church year**, and the **date**. These items set the tone and direction for the service. God doesn't want us to worship Him because it is His law. He doesn't want us to come to the house of God because it would look bad and sooner or later we would have the Pastor and Elders knocking on our doors. God wants us to worship with a heart full of joy. We were created for it and miss out hugely if we don't come and worship. It is awesome to come before the presence of God in His house to have His Word and Sacrament showered over our hearts and souls. It is awesome because God is awesome and it is awesome because we get His loving presence as an act of Grace. Think of it, instead of the hell we deserve, we get to be His sons and participate in a litany of praise, from Him to us and then from us to Him.

After setting the tone of joy and gladness we find the broad direction of our worship in the season of the church year. There are two main parts of the church year, the Festival part which concentrates on the life of Jesus, and the non-festival which concentrates on major doctrinal themes of the Bible. In the Festival part of the church year we start with Advent, preparing for the celebration of Jesus birth and His coming again in glory. The Christmas portion of the calendar celebrates the birth of Jesus, His name, His circumcision, and His presentation in the temple. Epiphany celebrates His coming as a light to all the world including the world of Gentiles. There the Baptism of Jesus comes into play as does the theme of missions. After three to six Sundays comes Lent which highlights the passion and death of Jesus. Easter concentrates on the theme of justification, resurrection and defeat of Satan. Finally there is Ascension, Pentecost and Trinity Sundays. The non-festival season is called the season of Pentecost because the emphasis is on how we respond to the Festival portion of the year in our lives of faith.

Next in the bulletin follows the worship theme, a welcome to the visitors, and the prayer of the day. The **worship theme** is taken from one of the three readings and ties everything together. If the theme is, "The Power of Baptism," everything from the bulletin covers to the organ preludes and postludes, the choir number or numbers, the hymn of the day before the sermon, and the readings all are tied into the worship theme. Actually, so is the Synod's *Meditation* lesson you may be in the habit of reading during the week.

The **welcome to our visitors** is always important. We are a missionary church. We want the world to hear our message and are very happy when the Lord leads non-members to hear the Gospel at Holy Cross. Of course, the words don't mean much if we don't make our visitors feel welcome. It's always a good idea to say hello or to ask about where they are from, and invite them to come back.

The **prayer of the day** is the prayer said in your behalf right after the confession of sins, Lord have mercy, the absolution and the song of praise. In some of our liturgies it follows the phrase by the pastor, "The Lord be with you," and the congregation's response, "and also with you." It symbolizes the eagerness of the congregation to have its pastor bear this prayer before the presence of the Lord and on the pastor's part for this prayer to be answered.

Next are the **worship readings**. Some pastors simply take time to explain the readings at the lectern. For the sake of time, I have chosen to put these explanations in the bulletin. To get the full benefit of these readings and to understand what is going on, it would be good if the worshipers took time to read these and contemplate on the theme and pray for God's blessings on the pastor and the worshipers before the service starts.

Christian fellowship is wonderful and many congregations never take time to do it. Their

members come and then go without saying anything to anybody. What a blessing it is that so many at Holy Cross take time to visit with each other. However, without pouring cold water on people who like to visit, why not participate in Bible study and then take time to make your worship more meaningful by studying the bulletin, reading the Scripture explanations and the text for the day. When the service is over, please stay, have some coffee, and visit to your heart's content.

SOUP CAN LABELS/CEREAL BOX TOPS

Please bring your Campbell soup labels and cereal box top coupons and give them to Dina Shoumaker. Gethsemane Lutheran School can redeem the labels and box tops for school supplies.

FLOWERS FOR THE ALTAR

Don't forget the flower sign-up sheet on the bulletin board in the fellowship room.

HOLY BAPTISM

*Oh, Lord, we bring to You this child
On his baptismal day;
Take him in Your protecting care
And keep him, Lord, we pray.
With water and Your Holy Word
You wash away his sin;
You give Your Holy Spirit
And create new life within.
This heavenly birth through Your dear Son
Is hard to comprehend;
But You have asked us kindly
That we follow Your command.
To bring to You the small ones, dear,
And to forbid them not;
For these are also precious souls
Our Savior's blood has bought.
We thank You that for such as these
Your kingdom now has come;
Direct and guide his footsteps
Ever toward his heavenly home.
Oh, Lord, for us we also pray
And ask that You would give
The wisdom and the strength we need
To teach him how to live.
Oh grant us all a childlike faith
That we at last may stand
Around Your throne with those we love
In Your dear heavenly land!*

FEBRUARY GREETERS

Feb. 1 - Byron and Dina Shoumaker

Feb. 8 - Dean and Lynn Thomas
Feb. 15 - Tom and Georgia Bigaouette
Feb. 22 - Al and Carol Cardwell

FEBRUARY CLEANING LIST

Jan. 31 - Scott & Carole Peters/Byron & Dina Shoumaker
Feb. 7 - Charlie & Bev Quam/Gerry & Mary Cartwright
Feb. 14 - Eric & Diane Hanson/Chris & Mindy Chaddock
Feb. 21 - Joe & Kim Glass/Jeff & Anice Glass
Feb. 28 - Bill & Fran Shoumaker/Cheryl Littlejohn

FEBRUARY NURSERY SCHEDULE

Feb. 4 - Joyce Hendrickson
Feb. 8 - Mindy Chaddock
Feb. 15 - Andrea Smith
Feb. 22 - Aimee Barnett