

Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church

N E W S L E T T E R

A Father's Love

He was homeless, smelly, disgraceful and almost starving to death. But the worst thing was that he knew it was all his fault. It was his own fault; his own grievous fault. He had nothing and no one to blame but himself. 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.

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 headed for home. He was prepared to grovel, to ask to be just a hired hand on his father's farm. He had everything rehearsed. He knew what he was going to say by heart. "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am not worthy to be called your child." 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." He figured he had an hours-long lecture from his father. 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 overbearing 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.

This parable of the rebellious son was used as the basis for a portion of Oswald Allen's hymn: "Today Your Mercy Calls Us," most specifically stanzas two and three. As the lost son was welcomed by his father beyond all expectation, so the

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UPCOMING DATES

February 4
MISSION FESTIVAL

February 11
Council Meeting

February 14
Ash Wednesday

sinner is freely welcomed by our heavenly Father. God's gate is not blocked, but remains open for all people to enter. In Christ, God no longer remembers our sins and what is more, among the sins that are forgotten is even the sin of wandering away. Yes, even the sin of turning from God is forgotten as the Spirit works faith and brings God's people home. At this the angels rejoice. Ponder Allen's hymn and use it this Lent to remind you of God's prodigal love for the world and you:

Today your mercy calls us to wash away our sin. However great our trespass, whatever we have been, however long from mercy our hearts have turned away, your precious blood can wash us and make us clean today.

Today your gate is open, and all who enter in shall find a Father's welcome and pardon for their sin. The past shall be forgotten, a present joy be giv'n, a future grace be promised, a glorious crown in heav'n.

Today our Father calls us, his Holy Spirit waits; his blessed angels gather around the heav'nly gates. No question will be asked us how often we have come; although we oft have wandered, it is our Father's home.

O all-embracing Mercy, O ever-open Door, what should we do without you when heart and eye run o'er? When all things seem against us, to drive us to despair, we know one gate is open, one ear will hear our prayer.

Epiphany Worship

The Greek word epiphany means "appearance." If it were not for the revelations God made about himself in the Bible, we would know very little about him. From creation and conscience, we could learn that he is wise and powerful, holy and just. But we could never know him as the one, true and only God. We could never find out that he is the God who saves us. During Epiphany, we have the opportunity to see God reveal who he is through Jesus. Week after week, revelation after revelation, we learn more about Jesus – who he is and what he come to do – and in that revelation, we see the true God. The focus for the Sundays in Epiphany is: Jesus Is Revealed and the themes for the first two Sundays in February are:

- ✠ February 4th – The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany – Revealed As The One Who Heals And Helps
- ✠ February 11th – The Transfiguration of Our Lord – Revealed As The Son of God In His Glory

Annual Meeting Notes

At the voters' assembly meeting last Sunday, the voters elected Justin Kannas (treasurer), Jim Buffington (trustee) and Kent Larson (elder). They approved a budget for 2024 and set our congregational mission offering subscription at \$32,000. They also approved 2024 distribution percentages from the Bailey Family Trust. A recommendation from the Planned Giving Committee to distribute \$2500 from the Trust Fund for the Evangelism Committee was also approved.

Mission Festival

Mr. Sean Young, Senior Director of Mission Operations and former Home Mission Administrator, will be at Immanuel for our mission festival to make a presentation

about our synod's efforts in opening 100 missions in 10 years. Our mission festival will be held on February 4, 2024 and Mr. Young's presentation will be in the fellowship hall from 10:30-11:30 a.m. A meal will be served at 11:30. There is no cost for the meal.

Bailey Family Trust

In 2021, we learned that Immanuel would receive an annual gift from the Bailey Family Estate. In January 2023, the voters of the congregation approved a proposal where we would disburse each annual gift in four equal parts to: 1) WELS Home Missions; 2) WELS World Missions; 3) WELS Ministerial Education; and, 4) Work to be done at Immanuel. For 2024, the voters voted to disburse the funds to: 1) 100 Missions in 10 years; 2) Grace-Hmong Outreach in Vietnam; 3) Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary for tuition for Seminarian Nathaniel Stein. Nathaniel is a son of Immanuel and will be entering his final year at WLS in August 2024; 4) Immanuel to save in order to replace the Bibles we use for the Service and Bible classes.



MLC Music Student

We have received word that we were assigned an MLC student to lead our Bible and Music Academy this summer. Emma Berg, from DeForest, WI will spend the summer at Immanuel and teach piano, beginning organ and voice lessons. Plans are being made and we look forward to having Emma join us. If you would be willing to house Emma for the summer, please speak with pastor for more details.

The Season of Lent

The season of Lent originated as a period of fasting in preparation for Christ's resurrection. It was also a period of intensified instruction for those preparing to be baptized. This period has long been associated with forty days, though it was not until around 600 A.D. that the beginning of those forty days was set to the seventh Wednesday before Easter (Ash Wednesday). Sundays have never been counted as part of the forty days of Lent. Thus, they are labeled *Sundays in Lent* rather than *Sundays of Lent*. One of the church fathers referred to the Sundays in Lent as "inns and havens, for those to rest in who have taken upon them the course of fasting in this holy time of Lent, that they may refresh their bodies a little from the labors of fasting." While worship during Lent is solemn and muted, the gospel remains the central focus as we prepare our hearts for Easter.

The seasonal theme for our worship this Lent is: Rethinking Religion. Everyone has assumptions about God. Likewise, everyone has assumptions about religion. Increasingly, those assumptions are negative. Americans are walking away from Christianity in breathtaking numbers. It raises the question. How do those people know if their assumptions about religion are correct? Do they really understand Christianity at all? Do we? Do we truly understand this religion? In the season of Lent, as much as any other, Jesus teaches things that turns the world's assumptions about religion completely upside down. We call it "Christianity." So, in this holy season, let us go straight to Christ and let him replace assumptions with truth. The themes for the Sundays in Lent in February are:

- February 18th – 1st Sunday in Lent – Rethinking Trials, Tests and Temptations
- February 25th – 2nd Sunday in Lent – Rethinking Suffering Under the Cross

Ash Wednesday

Lent begins on February 14th. Divine Service will start at 7:00 p.m..

Midweek Services

The theme of our Midweek Lenten Services this year is: *God on Trial*. Each service begins at 7:00 p.m. The weekly sub-themes are as follows:

- ✠ February 21st – Midweek 2 – Testimony
- ✠ February 28th – Midweek 3 – Restraint
- ✠ March 6th – Midweek 4 – Truth
- ✠ March 13th – Midweek 5 – Misconceptions
- ✠ March 20th – Midweek 6 – Sympathy

Chili and Soup Suppers

There will be a chili supper starting at 5:30 p.m. on Ash Wednesday. Soup suppers will precede the remaining Wednesday Lenten services and will start at 6:00 p.m. Please consider volunteer to provide for one of the meals. There is a sign-up sheet in the Narthex.

Bible Readings for 2024

One year of a three year plan to read through the Bible is available in the Narthex. The schedule is worked so that you don't have to start with year one. The Spirit will bless your time in the Word!

Ladies' Serving Groups

Please check the serving group list in the narthex. Make corrections as needed to your phone number. If you would like to switch serving groups, either make the adjustment on the sheet or speak to your serving group leader.

Facebook

If you use Facebook, please like and share Immanuel's posts when you see them so that they will be seen by more people.

Winter Weather and Worship

Please be reminded that we will hold our regularly scheduled services for those who are able to make it to church. If conditions are poor enough, we may cancel Sunday School, Bible classes and other activities but we will always hold our services. Check Operation Snowdesk for cancellations. Please use your sound judgment to determine whether or not you should travel to and from church in hazardous conditions.

Some Thoughts on the Beginning of Lent

Just pause to look, wonder and marvel how it all begins. Only One is eager for it to start. Only One has his heart on all that will happen during this holy time. Only One wills it. Only One leads it.

Of course, Jesus is the One. Jesus is the center of Lent, just like Jesus is the center of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Easter and everything in between. Who doesn't know this and recognize this? Yet we are not absent from nor excluded from it. In fact, wonder of wonders, quite the opposite is clearly the case. As far as we are concerned, Lent is all about Jesus. But for Jesus and as far as he is concerned, Lent is all about us.

Even as it begins, Jesus knows full-well how it will all proceed and how it will all end. On his way up to Jerusalem, Jesus spelled it all out for his disciples. So now, dear child God, see how it begins. Jesus is determined. Jesus leads the procession. It is as if Jesus can hardly hold himself back he is so intent and ready to bring it to its blessed conclusion. Why? Because for him, all this is about us. He has no need to suffer. He has no need to be betrayed, condemned, mocked, spit on, flogged and executed. He has no need to suffer for crimes for he has committed none. Yet it is precisely for this he has come and exactly for this he willingly goes up to Jerusalem.

It is not at the request of desperate sinners he comes. There are no hordes of lost people urging him on, insisting that he go the way of the cross. There is no one pleading with him, "Hurry up, Jesus. Get to Jerusalem so you can die for me!" In fact, the band of sinners with Jesus when he announced his trip to Jerusalem to die are astonished. They are bewildered. They are afraid.

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And this is exactly how we begin. As we relieve these epic, salvific events, we too are astonished. How can it be that God is so eager for our salvation? How can it be that the Father does not spare his own Son in whom is ever and always well pleased? How can it be that the Son does not cower and crawl away when he considers the cost in the agony and torment of both body and soul? How can it be that the Holy Spirit is in full agreement with the love and justice of the Father and the eagerness of the Son for our salvation? How can it be that in the person of Jesus Christ, God dies for his creation?

So as Lent begins – those dread and blessed 40 days – we can only fix our eyes on the One Lent proclaims and centers and only gaze in astonishment at what happens. Yet even as we do, we can't help but come to grips with the fact that our hearts are divided; our souls ripped in two like the curtain the Temple. At one moment, a glance at the cross pierces, tears and burns. Yet at the very same time, the very same glance leads us to cry, "Go on, go on Jesus. Go on to Jerusalem in lowly pomp to die." (Think of the Palm Sunday hymn we humbly yet enthusiastically sing.)

As you view again and anew Jesus' work in Jerusalem this Lent, do so with an unwavering focus on an unwavering Savior. This Lamb of God go uncomplaining forth to secure and win salvation. See how deep his suffering is in his sacred body and in his sinless soul. See how horrible its cause in the sins of your body and in the sins of your soul. See how perfect his love for your body and for your soul.

Church Council Meeting Minutes

December 10, 2023

Members Present: Rollie Nissen, Jim Buffington, Tom Jurgenson, Aaron Battenhoff, Justin Kannas, Scott Clausen, Todd Marxhausen, Pastor Engel, Jay Remmele

MMSP = Motion Made, Seconded, Passed

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Nissen at 11:42 a.m. Opened with the Lord's Prayer.

Agenda: MMSP to accept the agenda as presented

Secretary's Report:

- MMSP to accept the minutes from November 12, 2023 council meeting as amended
- MMSP to accept the minutes from December 3, 2023 lighting/electrical meeting as presented

Reports of Officers and Standing Committees

Chairman: No report.

Elders:

- Approved using EHV for the new bible and will be purchasing new bibles for the church soon.
- There was discussion on online giving. Some members have this as their only platform for giving. We will continue to provide this for our members.

Trustees: The vacuum is still waiting to be repaired. With the age of the vacuum would it be more cost effective to get a new one? Further recommendations will be sought from more church members

Financial Secretary's Report:

- MMSP to accept the Financial Secretary's report as amended

- There was an \$80 negative correction to the total monthly gifts. The corrected total is \$21,729 from \$21,809.

Treasurer's Report: MMSP to accept the Treasurer's report as presented.

Planned Giving Committee Report:

- The separate accounts for each fund has been created.
- There has been a request received from the evangelism committee.

Pastor's Report: No report.

Old Business and Action Committees

AV committee: No report.

Lighting: Project has been approved and contractor is scheduled.

Called Worker Compensation: MMSP to adopt the proposal from the CWCC with updated copy from Todd below. (*Separate attachment*)

Budget Committee:

- Change line 5110 Pastor Salary from \$65,000 to \$64,402
- Change line 5040 Health Insurance from \$26,268 to \$24,780
- MMSP to accept the 2024 budget proposal as amended

Paid Sick Leave Act: To be compliant we need to show actual sick time available on the pay stubs. Pastor does not receive an actual pay stub. Jo and Pastor will be provided appropriate documentation to show sick time.

Nominating Committee:

The Nominating Committee provides the following list of nominees:

- Elder – Martin Fabrizio
- Treasurer – Justin Kannas
- Trustee – Jim Buffington

New Business

Appoint Planned Giving Committee Member:

- MMSP to appoint Scott Claussen to his second three year term.
- Justin will contact Kelly Kohls and Steve Okins to see if one of them is willing to serve

Parsonage allowance: MMSP to adopt the following: Parsonage allowance for 2024 (Under the provision of Sec. 107 of the Internal Revenue code of 1986 as amended, the minister of the Gospel listed below may have a portion of their compensation designated as parsonage allowance. The amount indicated shall be the designated parsonage allowance for the year 2024. Should any worker listed be provided with a house, he shall have rent-free use of the house for the year 2024. Pastor Craig A. Engel - \$15,500. Fair market value of the parsonage will be set at \$1,000/month.)

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

- January 14, 2024 at 11:30 a.m. council meeting
- January 21, 2024 following the meal, voters' meeting
- February 11, 2024 at 11:30 am council meeting

Meeting adjourned at 12:40 p.m.

Closed with the blessing.

Respectfully, Jay Remmele, Recording Secretary

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