

N E W S L E T T E R

Canceled Debts

One day Jesus was invited to dinner at the home of a religious leader named Simon. He was a member of the group called the Pharisees that believed their good works made them worthy before God; they believed that they went above and beyond what God required in his law; they didn't believe that they needed to be saved from their sins. On the one hand, it is surprising that Jesus received this dinner invitation from Simon; on the other hand, remember that the Pharisees were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus. On this particular day, there was an unexpected guest at the gathering—a sinful woman, most likely a prostitute. She had come to honor Jesus by pouring expensive perfume and even her own tears on his feet. Simon was upset that Jesus was welcoming the praise of this sinful woman. He thought that if Jesus really knew who she was, he would not even let her touch him. The truth is Jesus knew that she had lived a sinful life. He knew exactly what kind of sinner she was. He also knew that her joyful tears were born of his forgiving love for her.

So Jesus told a story to teach Simon and us a lesson about forgiveness. There were two men who were in debt. One of them owed a moneylender about three years' worth of wages. The other owed the same moneylender about 50 days of wages. Neither was able to repay, so the moneylender graciously canceled both debts. Jesus posed a question: "Now which one of them will love him more?" Simon answered correctly that the one who had the larger debt canceled would have loved the moneylender more.

Jesus' short story speaks volumes for our lives. We all have a huge debt that we cannot pay. We cannot make up for all the sinful things we do, not by doing more good things or by doing less bad things. We can't cancel the debt of sin by anything we think, do, or say.

But God saw our desperate need and loves us so much that he canceled our debt of sin. He did that by having his Son, Jesus, pay it completely for everyone. The price he paid was his death. As the sinless Son of God, he was able to take all of our sins on himself and suffer their punishment for us. By his death, he canceled the debt of our sin. Three days after he died, he rose from the dead to prove that his sacrifice counted for all of us.

Jesus' closing words to Simon clearly reveal to us what the connection between forgiveness and good works is. He said, "Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; that is why she loved much. But the one who is forgiven little loves little." First, this woman received forgiveness from Jesus; then she showed her love for him. The same is true for you. As you read this, take five minutes and begin to contemplate what a great debt you had accumulated by your sins. Now consider how Jesus, in his life, suffering, death and resurrection has removed your mountain of sin-debt. You've been freed from this mountain of debt and now you are free to follow him and serve your neighbor.

It's springtime, and Christians are celebrating the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. What a great time of the year to be reminded that Jesus has canceled our debt of sin and given us new life with him!

Jesus said, "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

--Luke 7:41,42

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UPCOMING DATES

April 7
Elders Meeting

April 14
Confirmation Sunday
Council Meeting

April 27
LWMS Spring Rally

April Worship

St. Paul writes, “Christ has *indeed* been raised from the dead.” Big word: *Indeed!* Paul is stressing that we must not think of Jesus’ resurrection like a happy ending to another epic fable. The resurrection is not legend. It really happened. Easter is not just a holiday. Easter is history. On time’s infinite line, Jesus’ resurrection is the punctiliar moment that defines reality for us all. If Christ remained dead, he is a fraud and failure. But Jesus is exactly what he claimed to be—the Son of God, our Lord and Savior.

The greatest theologian of the early church, Augustine, called the season of Easter “a joyful week of weeks”—seven wonderful weeks, each seven glorious days long. In this glorious season, let us meditate upon the breathtaking implications of the resurrection reality.

- April 7th – Second Sunday of Easter – The Living Lord Gives Proof And Peace
- April 14th – Third Sunday of Easter – We Have A Meaningful Message To Share
- April 21st – Fourth Sunday of Easter – The Risen Savior Provides Shepherds
- April 28th – Fifth Sunday of Easter – The Living Lord Produces Active Faith

Easter Greeting

During the season of Easter, we will use the Church’s traditional greeting at the beginning and close of our services. The pastor will say, “Christ is risen!” The congregation responds, “He is risen indeed! Alleluia!” These words are sometimes called the Paschal Greeting. In following this ancient custom of the church we share in the certainty and joy of the resurrection.

Easter Season Worship Notes

While the timing of Christmas is determined by the movement of the sun, the date of Easter is determined by the phases of the moon. In the Western church, Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox. The day of Easter is the start of the season of Easter. The six solemn weeks of Lent are eclipsed by seven weeks of unbridled joy. These seven weeks correspond to the period of 50 days on the Jewish calendar between the Passover and the Feast of Weeks (known in Greek as Pentecost, which means “fifty”). The church reserves its highest praise for the Easter season. As the season reaches its close, the church remembers Jesus’ ascension into heaven and the keeping of his promise to send the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

- ✠ Easter Sunday has the place of prominence in all of the Sundays of the Christian Church year.

- ✠ Scripture records that Christians continued to gather for worship on Sundays in remembrance of the Resurrection.
- ✠ The fifty days of the Easter season make up the oldest season of the Christian Church year.
- ✠ The Sundays of Easter and the Festival of Ascension all highlight the victory of Christ’s resurrection and the temporal and eternal blessings the resurrection imparts. Our worship in the Easter season strives to rejoice in this.
- ✠ During the Easter season, the 1st Lesson read in the Service is from the New Testament book of Acts. These lessons highlight and proclaim the power of the Risen Christ.
- ✠ The Paschal Candle has been used in the Christian Church since the 5th or 6th Century.
- ✠ During the Easter season, the Paschal Candle will be lit for all of our services before worshippers enter the Sanctuary. The Paschal Candle will remain lit until those worshipping leave the Sanctuary each Sunday.
- ✠ On Ascension Day, the Paschal Candle will be extinguished after the Gospel. This symbolizes and emphasizes the visible removal of Christ’s physical presence from his disciples after his ascension into heaven.
- ✠ During the rest of the year, the Paschal Candle will be lit at baptisms and funerals. It serves as a visual reminder of the close connection between Easter and baptism; Christ’s resurrection and our resurrection to life everlasting.

Confirmation Day

Gabe Johnson and Madelyn Kannas will be confirmed on April 14th. There will be an informal reception in the fellowship hall following the service.

Sunday School Children Sing

The children will be singing parts of the psalm on Sunday, April 21st.

LWMS Spring Rally

The spring meeting will be held at Trinity-Mt. Olive in Graceville on April 27th. Registration will begin at 10:30 a.m. Rev. Ben Tomczak of the Asia One Team will be presenting with a focus on work in Australia.

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.

A Letter from Nathaniel Stein

We received the following letter from our former member and current vicar.

Dear Members of Immanuel,

Words alone cannot describe how honored I am to be your “adopted student.” I truly consider it a privilege to be on your minds and in your prayers, as you are in mine.

It’s been over two decades since my family lived in Spicer. I can imagine a lot has changed! But I know one thing has remained steadfast: your love for your Savior and each other.

Years ago, I got to experience that very love in-person. Whether it was welcoming a 4-year-old to help with ushering, going on a hayride, or simply having a quiet conversation on some steps, your love has been evident and distance has not changed that.

Thank you for your continued support in my life. Perhaps you have heard of my mother’s recent health issues. It has been a struggle this year, but God is using our struggle for his glory. Even as my mother goes through this difficult time, she is renewed each day by her Savior’s love, as are her children. Please continue to keep her in your prayers.

In all things, continue serving the Lord in any and every capacity. Let your love continue to be evident to others, as you fall more into your Savior’s embrace.

God be with you all.

“God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.” Hebrews 6:10

A Servant of Christ,
Nathaniel Stein

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!

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.

Volunteers

We are in need of some volunteers for the following: giving rides to church on Sunday, folding bulletins and newsletters and preparing the elements for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Please consider helping out in this way. The sign-up sheets are on the shelf in the Narthex.

Church Council Meeting Minutes

February 11, 2024

Members Present: Rollie Nissen, Jim Buffington, Justin Kannas, Scott Clausen, Ross Malkuch, Kent Larson, Aaron Bутtenhoff, Pastor Engel, Jay Remmele

MMSP = Motion Made, Seconded, Passed

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Nissen at 11:35 a.m.

Opened the Lord’s Prayer.

Agenda: MMSP to accept the agenda with the addition of “Transfer In” under Elders.

Secretary’s Report: MMSP to accept the minutes from January 14, 2024 council meeting as presented.

Reports of Officers and Standing Committees

Chairman’s Report: No report

Elders Report: MMSP to transfer in Kyle, Lindsay, Weston and Valen Marks from Ascension Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jacksonville, NC.

Trustees Report:

- Solar lights will be used for the outdoor sign so we don’t have to run wiring.
- The LED lighting upgrade is done.
- The electrical to the shed still needs to be completed.
- MMSP to purchase a new heavy duty vacuum as the old one is beyond repair.

Financial Secretary’s Report: MMSP to accept the Financial Secretary’s report as presented.

Treasurer’s Report: No report.

Planned Giving: No report.

Pastor’s Report: A total of \$79,535 was given to synod missions on behalf of our congregation in 2023. This is a total of **all** gifts by the congregation and individual members to various different missions in the synod.

Old Business and Action Committees

AV Committee: Have found a hardware solution to make it easier to display media on the TVs.

New Business

Church Council will serve meal before Lenten Vesper on March 6th.

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

- March 10, 2024 at 11:30 am council meeting
- April 14, 2024 at 11:30 am council meeting

Meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Closed with the blessing.

Respectfully,

Jay Remmele, Recording Secretary

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

John 20:29-31 - Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

What a perfect conclusion to the incident of Jesus' appearance to the disciples and his restoration of the faith of Thomas! "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." The sentence is packed with significance for us. For we have not seen, nor will we see until Jesus takes us to himself in heaven. But we are blessed! Jesus says so! We are blessed, that is, we have the enjoyment of the peace that Jesus gave to his disciples in his Word in his Easter appearances. For look! We do believe the witness of the disciples. We believe it not because we are better than they were or more deserving. We believe the Easter message because the risen Jesus is in that Word. We believe it because he has overcome our native and inborn unbelief with his gracious words: "Peace be with you!" We believe it and confess with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" And so Jesus—himself the content of our faith, its author, its giver, its preserver by means of Word and sacraments—pronounces us "blessed"! What an amazing thing that is: that Jesus so praises faith, which is ours by his gift alone.

Yes, and we don't want to miss it: In his blessing he is once again and as always urging us to listen to his Word. For it is by that Word alone that the miracle of faith in his saving work for our salvation is accomplished and preserved in us. Worthy of praise and adoration is he alone; his incarnation was a miracle; the love that moved him to it is beyond reason; his work on the cross is positive proof of an ardor beyond compare for our rescue from all that sin deserves; his resurrection confirms it once and for all; and the miracle of faith places the last seal on it. He alone is Lord and God; he alone is Savior.

Still there is another point we don't dare miss in all of this. It is the other side of the coin: If those are blessed who have not seen and yet have believed, then what of those who have not seen and have refused to believe? St. John answers the question: All that is written in the gospel and the events following Jesus' bodily resurrection have that glorious goal in mind; it is the goal that Jesus had in all he said and did, namely, that we should believe him. It is the goal that we should trust that he is Savior, as we have said and noted so often. But those who refuse him as Savior refuse also this blessedness so dearly won also for them. For while faith is always and alone a gift of God given in

the powerful gospel, it is not a gift that God forces on anyone. Those who refuse Jesus refuse the gift of blessedness; they do so through their own fault, not the fault of the gospel. We notice it already with Thomas. How miserable he was apart from the Word. How blessed he became when by means of that one appearance, the Word again became dominant, as we see from his confession of faith in Jesus as both Savior and God.

Is it not clear? It is God's good and gracious will that we believe the gospel. And he has given that gospel the power to overcome doubt and unbelief. God's intent and the gospel's power is evident as it overcomes the doubt of the disciples and even the unbelief of Thomas. They had only God to thank both for their redemption and for their faith in Jesus as their Savior and God. Judas, on the other hand, and all who reject the witness of the disciples in that powerful Word have only themselves to blame for their loss of blessedness and their eternal doom.

That serves as both an encouragement to us and also as a warning. We are encouraged by the obvious fact that the disciples were unworthy of so great a grace and blessing. So too are we. But the promise of God's favor and his intent that we be rescued by Jesus' redeeming work and saving Word extends to us no less than to them. How deep and how often have we fallen? Here is Jesus, Savior and God! How often have we doubted or even perversely rejected our dear Jesus? Here he is still, our Savior and our God. But the warning remains: Do not perversely cling to doubt and wallow in a rejection of Jesus, our only Savior and God. When doubt assails and unbelief threatens, fly to the Word, listen to it. For there is the power of God to restore trust in Jesus again. When self-righteousness pushes away the confession of unworthiness and the embrace of Jesus—Jesus alone as Savior—then it's back to the Word. For there God will still crush our foolish pride and bring us again to the foot of the cross and to the empty tomb of our dear Redeemer. There we again will cry for pardon and for peace.

And Jesus will not cast us aside, but still will speak peace to us as he did to the disciples in the upper room. When despair comes from the shrill cry of the devil reminding us of our unworthiness, then too, listen; then too, it is back to the Word. See how he loved those disciples. See how he loved Thomas. See how he even extended to Judas a call to repentance in the Garden of Gethsemane. To you he comes no less with the same burning zeal for your redemption, a redemption already fully accomplished on Good Friday and confirmed on Easter Sunday. His embrace of his disciples and, not least, of Thomas is his embrace of you too. For as St. John tells us by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, all these things happened and have been written just so that you too would believe that Jesus is your Savior, and that by believing you should have life—life eternal through his name, his work, his Word.

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