

## The Vine & The Branches

February, 2012

Ink Blots from the Pastor's Pen

### Keep Swimming . . . It's What the Followers of Jesus Do!

This is a reprint of Pastor's remarks at the 2012 Annual Meeting of the Congregation.

The Devil came to church one day . . . scared most everybody half to death. The pastor and assisting minister were the first to run; then the organist and the choir. The parents of middle-school-aged kids held up pretty well – after all, they'd seen far more scary things at home! But finally, even they ran out, leaving only one little old lady from the Altar Guild. The Devil went right up to her and said, "Aren't you scared of me? I'm the Devil, you know." "Shoot, No," she said; "I'm not the least little bit scared of you! And why not? I've been married to your brother for fifty years!"

Yes, there are jokes and stories and books and movies galore about the Devil, but you and I know that, Devil or no Devil, sin and death are real. Those two things are *in* us . . . in our thoughts and our words and our actions. Devil or no Devil, you and I are plenty capable of sin . . . and shame . . . and fear. If we are at all alike – and I think we are – we know the things that we've done and that we do that shame us. We are well aware that we have a shadowy side.

Though it has not always been front and center, that truth has been present in nearly sixty percent of the Sunday morning Gospel readings since this church year began on the last Sunday of November, the First Sunday of Advent. Why do I say that? Because John the Baptizer has been mentioned or has been a central figure in five of those nine readings! What, I ask you, was the central verb of John's preparing the way for Jesus' coming? C'mon now; sure you know it. It's okay to say it, too. Yes, the central verb of his message was **Repent!**

While I can't answer for you, I like to think that if I had been in-or-around Jerusalem town in 30 AD, I'd have gone out to the wilderness to see John. I like to think that I'd have gone out and gathered with all those at the river being baptized for the forgiveness of sin. I like to think that I'd have known that I needed that repentance, that washing, and that forgiveness. So, what about you? Wouldn't you like to think that you'd be in that number . . . a part of the crowd gone out to see John in the desert . . . gone out to get the old washed off and the new put on? Do you . . . like me . . . sometimes worry . . . about your own . . . dark side?

Do you remember *transaction analysis*, the interpersonal relationship fad that swept the nation in the 1970s that grew out of Thomas Harris' book *I'm Ok, You're Ok*? Well, I don't believe it. We're not okay . . . at least not without God's grace shown to us in Jesus. That's why on most every Sunday we confess our sins as a group. We admit to how poorly we're doing as followers of Jesus as a trusting acknowledgement that God, for the sake of Jesus' offering, does forgive. The first step in that faithful following of Jesus is to acknowledge just how much we need Jesus, and

just how much we need – not just water for drinking and bathing, but that special holy water, Holy Spirit Water, baptismal water, to be made new and kept fully alive.

This year, from the very first word of the very first chapter of Mark, we've been hearing that the beginning of the good news of Jesus happens when we receive a baptism of repentance. In super literal translation, "baptism of repentance" in Greek means "immersion in life change." Yes, John the Baptizer was saying that the way to wholeness and membership in the family – the "kin-dom" of God, and to the salvation of body, mind and soul, now and forever, requires that immersion in life change; it requires a putting-off of sin. The beginning of the good news for you and for me comes when we dunk ourselves deeply in baptismal water, when we submerge our life into the life God has made available for us in Jesus. When we turn away from self-love toward God's love for us in Jesus: that is when we become disciples.

Now, I don't know about you, but I'm tired of business as usual in this life. I'm tired of "me-as-usual." I want to jump into the sea of God's grace and stay there! Now, for sure, way back in the early spring of 1952 I was baptized . . . I was marked as one of God's own when I was marked with the sign of the cross of Jesus, the Crucified One. On that day I was welcomed into the household of God and, by God's continuing grace in Jesus, I've still got a room. And yet, clearly – if we haven't learned this lesson over the last several years we may never learn it! – life has its ups and downs. The shadowy side follows me around . . . why, sometimes it even seems to have taken the lead! . . . and so I know that I can never, ever, get complacent or satisfied about myself or my discipleship. Yes, nearly sixty years ago I "put on the robes of Christ's righteousness," but even those robes get dirty from time to time in the midst of life in this garden of good and evil and a whole lot in between. So, what is the mission for Christian people? What is the mission for those who have "taken the plunge" into the already but not yet kingdom of God being worked out by God through Jesus? What is the mission for us who have not yet finished our work? What is our mission now? What is our mission when things all around are "shaky" at best?

Well, brothers and sisters, our mission is to keep swimming. We've jumped into the saving water of life with Jesus and now we've got to swim! The water that washes away our sins, also buoys us up. Yes, we've got to keep swimming. Some days, when the waters of life get really choppy, it seems more than we can handle to just keep our heads afloat, much less make much real headway. But friends, we simply have to keep swimming. We have to keep growing in discipleship. Our lives depend on it . . . but far, far more, the life of this broken world depends on it, too! The mission to which we have been called by God is not simply to claim to be "God's people" in the world. The mission to which we have been called is to be "the Body of Christ" . . . to be the nail-marked hands and calloused feet, and the smiling face and welcoming arms of Jesus – in our world. We are not simply to be about doing God's work in the world. We are to be about doing the redeeming and transforming work of God in Jesus in the world. The difference between those two is huge! That's the call to faithfulness that we, the followers of Jesus, have . . . and that's what we, the followers of Jesus who have come together and taken the name "Faith," will do.

~ Pastor Carr

## Preaching Matters

The readings appointed in the Lectionary for our hearing and as the basis for our proclamation during the month of February are:

**Sunday, 5 February: The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany/Sunday 5**  
Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147: 1-11, 20; 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 9:16-23; St. Mark 1:29-39

**Sunday, 12 February: The Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany/ Sunday 6**  
2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 5:1-14; Psalm 3; 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 9:24-27; St. Mark 1:4-45

**Sunday, 19 February: The Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany/Sunday 7**  
Isaiah 43:18-25; Psalm 41; 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 1:18-22; St. Mark 2:1-12

Or

**Sunday, 19 February: The Transfiguration of the Lord**  
2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 2:1-12; Psalm 50:1-6; 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4:3-6; St. Mark 9:2-9

**Wednesday, 22 February: Ash Wednesday**  
Joel 2:1-2, 12-17, or, Isaiah 58:1-12; Psalm 51:1-17; 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:20b-6:10; and  
St. Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

**Sunday, 26 February: 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent**  
Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-10; 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:18-22; St. Mark 1:9-15

**The Annual Congregation meeting** was held on Sunday, January 22. The 2012 Budget was passed. Julia Machnak was elected as president. Karen MacKenzie (secretary), Walt Smith (Worship Shepherd) & Cassie Haupt (Mission Shepherd) were reelected for 2 year terms. We would like to Tami Klopfer & a crew of good people who provided lunch.



### The Good Samaritan Fund

**CHANGE** may not change the world, but it could make a good start. The **CHANGE** that I am talking

about is not the kind that we do, but what we give. It is the **CHANGE** that is in your pocket or

purse. It is pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters. We are starting the Good Samaritan Fund.

As Jesus taught us about the Samaritan who helped the poor man who was hurt, we are trying

to help the poor who around us are hurting from lack of food or other things. We have a box

for you to drop in your extra **CHANGE** when ever possible. This box will be in the Narthex.



The **CHANGE** will go to help buy food and other necessities that our poor hurting brothers and sisters need. We have been collecting food and clothing for Good Hope Lutheran Church to give out, but there are other things that they need to buy that are not donated. We will start by giving the **CHANGE** collected to Good Hope but, as time goes by, we will select other places to give the **CHANGE**. Thank you so much to Jennifer Cleaver, who created the box!

**WELCA Spiritual Retreat “Women of the Well”, March 10, from 8:15am – 3:00pm. This year’s retreat will be held at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Ida, MI (ask Ruth Helzer for directions). The speaker is Deborah Lovett who will motivate us to “walk in the Lord by**



**following the example set for us by the Samaritan woman at the well.” Brake-out sessions include the following topics:**

- 1) Sitting with God at the Well of Living Water; 2) Strategic Shopping; 3) Card Making; 4) Healthy Healing Food Choices; 5) Re-Claim Your Space; 6) Power of Positive Thinking/A Morning Rev-Up.**

**Registration is \$35 (which includes continental breakfast and lunch) and is due to Julia Machnak by Feb. 20. Make checks payable to Prince of Peace Spiritual Retreat or to WELCA of Faith. Registration forms are posted on the WELCA board in the Parish Hall.**

### Education News

#### Faith’s 7th - 12th Graders

Two February activities are planned:

- 4 - 6 p.m. - on Tuesday, February 7 - meet @ Merri-Bowl for bowling, a tour behind the pin machines, pizza and pop.

Free for Faith Teens, \$6.95 for each friend. Please sign up ASAP.

- 7 - 9 p.m. - on Thursday, February 23 - baking cookies for charity at Faith.

Teens may attend both events or just come to the one that fits into their schedule. Bring a friend along, too!

#### Winter Schedules

Teens will find a survey in their family’s mailbox at church. They need to circle the days and times they are available to attend activities during the next few months, and return the form to Linda Bozgan by Sunday, February 12.

#### Confirmation Class

Students meet at Holy Cross for the rest of their class sessions this year.

#### Sunday School

Classes will not meet on February 19, due to the Livonia school vacation.

## **Planning for the Future**

Members of Faith are exploring issues related to aging -- in order to help their spouses, their parents, and other loved ones. If you want to discuss concerns, and decisions that are often made during that stage of life, then please join the meeting on Tuesday, February 28 at 1:30 p.m. Share your knowledge and learn from others. If you have questions, then please contact Linda Bozgan at (313) 278-8250 or [lbozgan@hotmail.com](mailto:lbozgan@hotmail.com)



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## **Ash Wednesday: February 22. Communion Service at 7:30pm**

### **Lent is coming.**

***We will be having our Wednesday gatherings on the following dates:***

***February 29, March 7, 14, 21, & 28.***

***Meals begin at 6:00pm followed by the services at 6:45pm.***

***Consider signing up as a group, family, or individual to prepare the food.***

***Menu is your choice!***

***Please sign up if you will be attending the meals so the cooks know how much to make.***

(\* the angels above are saying "I love you" in Swedish, Serbian, & Italian)