

Shepherd of the Mountains Lutheran Church

(Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod)

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Pastor: R. Wayne Morton

Ministers: Each and Every Member

The Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 11, 2018

Welcome

In the name of Jesus Christ, we warmly welcome you to God's house this morning. Especially if you are visiting, we pray that you will feel at home with us and discover the blessing of God's grace and forgiveness in this service.

Please help us to celebrate the gift of your presence today by filling out a Friendship Form (in the burgundy cover near the end of each pew) and passing it along to the others in your row at the time our gifts to the Lord are offered.

The Distribution of the Lord's Supper

Following Holy Scripture, which speaks of the blessing of forgiveness (and therefore life and salvation) for those who discern the reality of Christ's bodily presence in the Supper (Mt. 26:28, e.g.), but warns of harm and judgment for those who don't (1 Cor. 11:27-30, e.g.), we urge all those baptized and catechized individuals (youth and adults) who would come to the Lord's Table today to celebrate Holy Communion to examine your hearts to see that you:

repent of your sin;

believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord;

affirm the real presence of Christ's true body and blood in/with/under the bread & wine;

and desire to live your life in accordance with the will of God.

If you have not previously communed here at Shepherd of the Mountains, please first introduce yourself to our Pastor, in order that all those who will commune together today - who will share the one bread and the one cup - may be assured that we share as well the same confession and understanding.

(Young) children who are not yet capable of such self-examination are nevertheless invited to come forward - not to receive the body and blood of our Savior, but rather, the blessing of our gracious God.

As We Gather

Honestly, it's just hard to compete with *some* Bible verses. And while Lent is not typically a time for celebration, this morning we might not be able to help ourselves because we've got not one but two of many people's all-time favorites. What could compete with what St. Paul penned to the Ephesian Christians in our Epistle lesson: "*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast*" (Eph. 2:8-9)? Well, maybe only this morning's beloved Gospel: "*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life*" (John 3:16).

But let's just be honest; that Old Testament lesson is certainly no slouch. Fiery serpents? Snake bites? Death from poisonous venom? A bronze serpent atop a pole? It's the stuff from Friday Night at the Movies, from *National Treasure*. It's more like a scene out of Hollywood than out of the Bible! It all might make for a confusing script, except for the fact that Jesus opens the door to its hidden meaning - the elements of sin, punishment, repentance, and rescue. It all might make for a confusing script, if not for the fact that Jesus reveals what it all means: "*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life*" (John 3:14-15).

(10:25 a.m.) The Ringing of the Bell

(10:25 a.m.) Make a Joyful Noise

(This celebratory element of our liturgy is omitted during the penitential season of Lent.)

Prayer for blessing on the Word

Lord God, bless Your Word wherever it is proclaimed. Make it a word of power and peace to convert those not yet your own and to confirm those who have come to saving faith. May your Word pass from the ear to the heart, from the heart to the lip, and from the lip to the life that, as You have promised, it may achieve the purpose for which You send it. Amen.

The Welcome

(The Pastor may invite the people to God's house by using the following greeting:

"The Lord be with you." **"And also with you."**)

* (stand) The Invocation and Opening Versicles

Pastor: In the name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit.

People: Amen.

Pastor: Following the course of this world,

People: we were dead in the trespasses and sins in which we once walked.

Pastor: But God, being rich in mercy, made us alive together with Christ—

People: by grace we have been saved. (based on Ephesians 2:1, 4–5)

* (stand) The Confession and Absolution of Our Sin

Pastor: Beloved in the Lord. Let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins unto God our Father, beseeching Him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness. (Heb. 10:22)

Pastor: Our help is in the name of the Lord.

People: Who made heaven and earth. (Psalm 124:8)

Pastor: I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.

People: And you forgave the iniquity of my sin. (Psalm 32:5)

Pastor: O almighty God, merciful Father,

People: I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess to you all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended you and justly deserved your punishment now and forever. But I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them, and I pray you of your boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor sinful being.

Pastor: Upon this your confession, I, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God to all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I publicly forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit.

People: Amen

Pastor: “By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Eph. 2:8-10)

The Entrance Hymn: #744 “Amazing Grace”

* (stand) The Kyrie for Lent

Pastor: In peace let us pray to the Lord.

People: Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

Pastor: For the gift of divine peace and of pardon, with all our heart and with all our mind, let us pray to the Lord.

People: Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

Pastor: For the holy Christian Church, here and scattered throughout the world, and for the proclamation of the Gospel and the calling of all to faith, let us pray to the Lord.

People: Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

Pastor: For this nation, for our cities and communities, and for the common welfare of us all, let us pray to the Lord.

People: Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

Pastor: For these and for all our needs of body and soul, let us pray to the Lord.

People: Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

Pastor: Help, save, comfort, and defend us gracious Lord.

People: Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

* (stand) The Hymn of Praise

(Traditionally omitted during the penitential season of Lent.)

* (stand) The Greeting and Prayer of the Day

Pastor: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Pastor: Let us pray. Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning; and though we deserve only punishment, You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

People: Amen

The Old Testament Lesson: Numbers 21:4-9

(The unbelief of God's people resulted in His judgment but He gave them healing and hope.)

4 From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. 5 And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." 6 Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. 7 And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. 8 And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." 9 So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

Reader: This is the word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

The Epistle Lesson: Ephesians 2:1-10

(Once dead in sin, we've been redeemed us by the gift of God's grace in Christ, our Lord.)

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved - 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Reader: This is the word of the Lord. **People: Thanks be to God.**

* (stand) **The Gospel Acclamation** (LSB, p. 157, "Return to the Lord, Your God")

Pastor: The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the third chapter.

People: Glory to you, O Lord.

The Holy Gospel: John 3:14-21

(As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up that all who believe in Him may have eternal life.)

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

Pastor: This is the Gospel of the Lord. **People: Praise to you, O Christ.**

The Hymn of the Day: #571 "God Loved the Word So That He Gave"

(vs. 1-4, *6) (* In honor of our Triune God, we stand to sing the final, Trinitarian verse.)

The Sermon

We Believe, Teach and Confess: The Sacrament of Holy Baptism

(The Small Catechism, Lutheran Service Book. p. 325)

The Offering

(If you have not already done so, please register your attendance with the Friendship Form at this time and pass it down and back your pew, taking note of the names of those sitting with you and rejoicing in their presence here today.)

* (stand) The Offertory

(LSB #805, "Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow")

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;

Praise Him, all creatures here below;

Praise Him above, ye heav'nly host:

Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.

* (stand) The Prayer of the Church/Litany

Pastor: For [names of synodical and district presidents], for all pastors in Christ, for all servants of the Church, and for all the people, let us pray to the Lord:

People: Lord, have mercy.

Pastor: For [name of president or monarch], for all public servants, for the government and those who protect us, that they may be upheld and strengthened in every good deed, let us pray to the Lord:

People: Lord, have mercy.

Pastor: For those who are ailing [names] and those who grieve [names], that they may be strengthened in body and spirit, confident of the love of Christ, let us pray to the Lord:

People: Lord, have mercy.

Pastor: For those who work to bring peace, justice, health, and protection in this and every place, let us pray to the Lord:

People: Lord, have mercy.

Pastor: For those who bring offerings, those who do good works in this congregation, those who toil, those who ring, and all the people here present who await from the Lord great and abundant mercy, let us pray to the Lord:

People: Lord, have mercy.

Pastor: For favorable weather, for an abundance of the fruits of the earth, and for peaceful times, let us pray to the Lord:

People: Lord, have mercy.

Pastor: For our deliverance from all affliction, wrath, danger, and need, let us pray to the Lord:

People: Lord, have mercy.

Pastor: For . . . [additional bids for prayer may be inserted here] . . . let us pray to the Lord:

People: Lord, have mercy.

(Here special intercessions may be made. Each petition concludes:
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.)

Pastor: We pray this through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

People: Amen.

* (stand) The Service of the Sacrament (from LSB, p. 160)

The Preface (LSB, p. 160)

The Proper Preface (LSB, p. 161)

The Sanctus (LSB, p. 161)

The Prayer of Thanksgiving (LSB, p. 161)

The Words of Our Lord (LSB, p. 162)

The Proclamation of Christ (LSB, p. 162)

The Lord's Prayer

**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 trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us;

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

The Pax Domini (LSB, p. 163)
The Agnus Dei (LSB, p. 163)

A Prayer before Communion

Dear Savior, upon Thy gracious invitation, I come to Your table to eat and drink Your holy body and blood. Let me find favor in Your eyes to receive this holy Sacrament in faith for the salvation of my soul and to the glory of Your holy name; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Distribution

(The white wine in each tray is “non-alcoholic” wine.

(Children coming forward for a blessing are asked to keep their hands below the communion rail in order to eliminate any confusion for those who are distributing.

(We encourage all those communicants who intend to come to the Sacrament today to prepare for receiving the Lord's gracious gifts with the Christian Questions found on page 329 of our war-ship and hymn book, *Lutheran Service Book*.

(Following Holy Scripture, we urge all those communicants who would come to the Lord's Table today to celebrate Holy Communion to examine your hearts to see that you:

repent of your sins;

believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord;

affirm the real presence of Christ's true body and blood in/with/under the bread and wine; and, desire to live your life in accordance with the will of God.)

A Prayer after Communion

Almighty and everlasting God, I thank and praise You for feeding me the life-giving body and blood of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Send Your Holy Spirit that, having with my mouth received the holy Sacrament, I may with my heart obtain and eternally enjoy Your divine grace, the forgiveness of sins, unity with Christ, and life eternal; through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.

* (stand) **The Common Dismissal**

Pastor: *The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you in body and soul to life everlasting. Depart in (+) peace.*

People: **Amen.**

* (stand) **The Post-Communion Prayer**

Pastor: *Let us pray. We give thanks to You, heavenly Father and King eternal,*

for You have once again fed and nourished us at Your Table through the body and blood of Your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord. Strengthen us through this gracious Meal that we may live without fear and confidently show forth Your love through acts of mercy. Support us in this life and bring us at last to the unending feast in Your eternal kingdom, where You live and reign with the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

People: **Amen.**

* (stand) **The Blessing of our God**

Pastor: *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."*
(John 3:14).

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look upon you with favor and give you (+) peace (Num. 6:24-26).

People: **Amen.**

The Closing Hymn: #702 “My Faith Looks Up to Thee”

Parish Announcements

Organ Postludes

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MISSION MINUTE: “Look!” And instinctively, nine of out of ten people *will!* They’ll look in the direction you’re looking. They’ll look in the direction you’re pointing. They’ll look to see what you see. When death was swallowing up so many of the sinful and rebellious Israelites, “*The LORD said to Moses, ‘Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.’*” When death was continuing to take its toll of sinful Jews and Gentiles, the Lord had St. John reaffirm, “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him [looks to him!] should not perish but have eternal life.*” “Look!” That’s what we’re still to say today, as death continues to swallow up our

friends, our neighborly love, and our common faith. "Look! And live, in Jesus!"

AND SPEAKING OF MISSION, please take a few minutes to welcome those **VISITING WITH US AT SHEPHERD THE LAST FEW WEEKS** If you know them, be sure to let them know how glad you were to see them at worship. And if you don't, make it a point to meet them, to invite them to worship again or to Sunday Bible Class or Ladies' Bible Study or *LifeLight* Bible Study.

Margaret Quay - Whiteriver, AZ. Canyon Day Lutheran church
Lesta Cromwell, and S'Layna Bradley - Pinetop, AZ
Norm & Donna Schaefer - Show Low, AZ

SERVING IN GOD'S HOUSE THIS WEEK:

Organist: Maja C Elder in Charge: Kevin D
Project Keep-In-Touch Mailing: Martee E

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

Sun 3/11 8:15 a.m. - Handbell Choir Practice
9:15 a.m. - Sunday School/Bible Class
10:30 a.m. - Divine Service - Holy Communion (2nd Sunday)
11:55 a.m. - Dorcas Society "Mites for Missions" Coffee Fellowship
Tues 3/13 5:00 p.m. - NO Confirmation Class (BRUSD Spring Break)
Wed 3/14 9:30 a.m. - Ladies' Bible Study
6:00 p.m. - Lenten Midweek Supper
7:00 p.m. - Lenten Midweek Worship
Sun 3/18 8:15 a.m. - Handbell Choir Practice
9:15 a.m. - Sunday School/Bible Class
10:30 a.m. - Divine Service
11:45 a.m. - "First Sunday of the Month" Potluck Luncheon

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS THIS WEEK: Next Sunday - 3/18 - Susan Dale, Linda Nadel.

WE INCLUDE IN OUR PRAYERS TODAY:

All those who are suffering
All those who are grieving
All those who are lonely
Bob D - 1
The Salvation Army - Pastor Dave Sherman
The English Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Redeemer - St. Albans, NY
Pastor Steven Hicks
Martin Luther Chapel Lutheran Church - Pennsauken, NJ Pr. Robert Bruggeman
March SS/BC Mission Project - Four Corners Christian Camp for at-risk youth

LIFE QUOTE OF THE DAY (from Lutherans For Life) "My heart goes out to those struggling with guilt from the secret sin of abortion - a burden carried by millions. These women and men should not be deprived of the forgiveness Jesus earned for them when they have a repentant heart. We need to speak up and let them know they can have the forgiveness Jesus bought for them through His life, death, and resurrection" (Virginia Flo, Lutherans For Life Regional Director of Minnesota).

OUR OFFERINGS TO THE LORD:

02/28/18	Undesignated Offers	- General Fund	\$ 216.00
03/04/18	Undesignated Offers	- General Fund	\$ 1,692.00
	Designated	- Building Fund Pledges	\$ 20.00
	SS/Bible Class	- Four Corners Christian	\$ 13.00
	"Building Beans"	- Building Fund	\$ 10.00
	"First Friday" Movie	- Building Fund	\$ 35.00
	"Cans for Christ" recy	- Building Fund	\$ 4.00

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse . . . Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not even have room enough for it!" (Malachi 3:10).

(In faith, we depend on average weekly gifts of **\$ 2,889** from God's people - in addition to the \$ 80 pledged to cover the repayment of the financing of a building project - to enable us to carry out our total annual congregational ministry of \$ 157,975.)

WHERE ARE OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL OFFERINGS OFF TO THIS

MONTH? Glad you asked. We only just decided last Sunday morning, as we often do the first Sunday of every new month. We're supporting a Christian camp that tries to give at-risk kids the tools they need to lobby for themselves and to make good decisions rather than bad. It's up in Colorado. JB has been there hunting for buried treasure. Larry, too. They take the "detectors" money and use it to defray the cost of their youth camp. Four Corners Christian Camp - between Cortez and Durango. Keep them in your prayers, please, as they'll be in ours.

LIFE THOUGHTS IN THE CHURCH YEAR (from Lutherans for Life): "[Y]ou were dead in trespasses and sins...like the rest of mankind" (Ephesians 2:1, 3b). One's own capacities or activities don't give human life its value (Ephesians 2:9). The love of God in Christ does that, and it does so universally and infinitely (John 3:16). The very heart of the Gospel holds human life precious, even when impaired by infection or immaturity (Numbers 21:8). We rest refreshed in this grace!" (Prayer: Gracious God, cause fountains of Your grace to flow through us. Amen.)

WHAT WE'RE NOT GIVING UP GIVING UP FOR LENT THIS YEAR IS WORSHIP. And, because Sundays are not a part of Lent, we'll be gathering together for Lenten worship every Wednesday night. Our Lenten midweek series this year is all about the Lord's many invitations to return to Him. Each week features one of those Old Testament invitations. Last week, we turned to the prophet Hosea: with "Return to the Lord, Who Will Raise You Up." This week, our invitation comes from God's mouthpiece Malachi, whose invitation is, "Return to the Lord, Who Does Not Change." Each Lenten service begins at seven o'clock.

AND TO ENCOURAGE YOU TO WORSHIP, WE'RE SERVING UP SUPPER, TOO! Each week, our Lenten midweek service will be preceded by a Soup, Salad, or Surprise dinner right here at church, hosted by one (or more) of our "families" - singles, couples, or the kids, too. We meet right here at church, so you don't have to get the house ready for company along with dinner. Sign-up is easy; just see Pastor with the Wednesday of your choice. What to serve is just as easy; you may serve anything you choose! The two remaining Wednesdays in Lent?

Wednesday, March 14th _____ ??????
Wednesday, March 21st _____ Sylvia & Bob _____

WE DIDN'T NOMINATE HIM, BUT SOME OTHER CONGREGATION DID! OUR PASTOR! FOR DISTRICT PRESIDENT AND BISHOP! AND ALSO FOR DISTRICT REGIONAL VICE-PRESIDENT. Deja vu, right? We went over all this three years ago, when Pastor sat down with us and had an honest conversation. The good news was, he didn't feel called to the DP chair. The bad news was, he was going to retire at a "normal retirement age." So here we are three years later. He's declined both nominations again. Still, he knows it's an honor that folks out there continue to think he might be the man - even though he thinks its time for him to hang up his boots. As daughter #2, Allison, offered, she'd rather have Poppa (grandpa) than President. And that's pretty hard to argue with.

LET'S PLAY, "HOW MUCH DO WE OWE?" The game is easy. We built a grand addition on the front of our church. Then we doubled the size of the kitchen, moved the doors into sanctuary, turned the old rest rooms into storage, finished up the offices, and completed everything in the Fireside Room except the flooring, which is even now acclimating to its future space. We had saved up our money. We used it all, but then more continued to come in. Before that happened, in order to make certain we wouldn't run short, we conservatively borrowed some from LCEF, "God's bank," the Lutheran Church Extension Fund. Sixty thousand, to be exact. We've been paying that (20-year loan) off month by month. But then money began to come in specifically for debt retirement, specifically for loan principal reduction. And so, our game: "How much do we owe?" Where is that \$60,000 debt today? Where does it stand? (If you've seen Treasurer Bob's colorful red and blue graph in the fellowship hall, you can't play our game; you already know!) What's your guess? We had some early support, and some year-end gifts, and some first-of-this-year designations, too. Are we at \$50,000? Forty thousand? Could we be as low as \$30,000 - only *half* of what we started with only a year and a half ago? Already? Our history does say this congregation pays its debts! So, take a guess, and then take a peek at Bob's graphs. And give God thanks for all our generous supporters out there, as we work to take that number back down to a nice, round 0.

BACK IN JANUARY, OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL OFFERINGS WENT OFF TO LUTHERANS FOR LIFE FOR “OWEN’S MISSION.” We weren’t alone, apparently. LFL had set a goal of \$175,000 - an amount that would allow them to be able to supply a set of Touch of Life fetal models - free! - to every one of the remaining 900 Lutheran day schools across the country that had not yet received one. They just announced the good news. They met their goal. The Touch of Life sets typically are presented during a 15-20-minute program put on by an LFL staff member (or trained volunteer). Most are done as part of a school chapel service or special assembly. The hope and prayer is that seeing the lifelike models, the students will come to appreciate the God-given value of each human life from the very moment of conception. As John Hawkins of LFL says, “May all our youth be motivated by what God has done as our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier that gives value to life!”

LAST WEEK, PASTOR SAID THEY’RE LIKE ANOTHER MEMBER - ANOTHER FAMILY. THRIVENT FINANCIAL FOR LUTHERANS. Yes, maybe they don’t get to church that often - maybe only once or twice a year - but they’re very regular about sending in their offerings. In fact, they use direct deposit; they pop them right into our checking account at the Lutheran Federal Credit Union. A couple of weeks ago, they deposited another \$127.00. And now this last week, they plopped in another \$12. Oh, and another \$4,000 on top of that! That’s right, a total of \$4,012! Thank you, TFFL, and thank you, Thrivent members, for continuing to make the Choice™ for Shepherd of the Mountains. We all know how this one works by now, right? Thrivent Financial for Lutherans offers insurance and financial services products at rates and returns competitive with the for-profit insurers and financial services companies. But TFFL is a fraternal organization - not a for-profit corporation - so, as long as it continues to distribute amounts equal to what it would have to pay as corporate income tax if it *were* a tax-paying corporation either directly to its members (its policyholders and investors) or its members’ causes (their churches, schools, mercy ministries, etc), it escapes income taxes. (Viva the fraternal, right!) Thrivent Choice™ is one way the company does that. TFFL sets the amounts that each investment or insurance product will “earn” under the Thrivent Choice™ program. It doesn’t affect the interest rate earned or the cost of the insurance; that’s completely separate. In this week’s list of members

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WHAT WAS THE ATTENDANCE LAST SUNDAY? Christian Ed. - 11; Worship - 39 (Members 32, Friends 3, Guests 4) How many were here because you invited them? How many will return because you welcomed them?

IF YOU WEREN’T HERE TO HEAR THE LETTERS LAST SUNDAY, YOU HAVE TO GO READ THEM FOR YOURSELF. The letters from some of the kids out at Concho Elementary School. They’re on the bulletin board in the old hallway. And they are dear. Heartbreaking, in some case, but dear. They are reminders that even in our own communities, even when we never want for *our* next meal, others do. Even other *children*. They are the encouragement we need to remain faithful and generous as we continue to provide meals every Friday for those kids who just miss the federal government cutoff for weekend food. (Both sets of students count on the government for breakfast (State Breakfast Program) (SBP) and lunch (National School Lunch Program) (NSLP). The school kids themselves load up the backpacks for the ones who receive our gifts. They fill them with two meals for Saturday and two more for Sunday. Single-serving is the watchword. And healthy is the rule. And while there’s an extensive list of suggested items at the wicker collection basket in the narthex, some of the more common ones include: fruit cups, breakfast bars, Pop-tarts®, canned meats, canned or pouch tuna, crackers/cheese, crackers/peanut butter, veggie straws, snack bars, nut packs, jerky sticks, water, and Gatorade. (And if you can’t get out to shop, cash gifts work, too. There are always foods and drinks they need to fill in with.)

P. S. We’re committed until the end of the school year in May. Thank you for your continuing support. And don’t worry that you might never see anything in the basket; the need is great enough that your gifts get whisked away to the food pantry at CES just as soon as they come in. (Thanks, Linda, and Kevin and Patti, for all the delivering!)

WERE GIVING THE CONFIRMANTS TWO WEEKS TO THINK ABOUT
IT. THE COURT SAID THAT THE CONFIRMANTS HAD TO BE
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(It's the way we do our "examination." We know; you had it much worse!)

WHO JESUS IS . . . IN EVERY BOOK OF THE BIBLE In 1st and 2nd Timothy, He is the Mediator between God & man. In Philemon, He is the Friend that sticks closer than a brother. In Titus, He is Truth. In Hebrews, He is the Blood of the everlasting covenant. In James, He is the Great Physician. In I & II Peter, He is the Chief Shepherd. In I, II, and II John, He is the Manifested Love of God. In Jude, He is the Foundation of your faith. In Revelation, He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, your Coming King.

WHAT ARE THE COUNTRIES WHERE IT MOST DANGEROUS TO FOLLOW JESUS? According to OpenDoorsUSA, China, Kenya, Indonesia, Mexico, Nepal, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Vietnam make the top fifty. But the top ten are - in decreasing order: Iran, Yemen, Iraq, Libya, Eritrea, Pakistan, Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan, and everybody's # 1 - North Korea.

AND JUST IN CASE YOU HADN'T HEARD:

CALL IT A REMATCH. ATHEISTS MAY GET A SECOND CRACK

Three years ago, a federal judge in Wisconsin ruled that the long-standing clergy housing allowance violates the First Amendment. Judge Barbara Crabb declared that the \$800-million-a-year tax break is an unwarranted benefit for religion. But then the Department of Justice appealed, the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals overturned it on something of a technicality - ruling that the plaintiff - leaders of the atheist Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) had no legal standing in the case because they hadn't been damaged and could claim the "minister of the gospel" benefit for themselves. So they did, and when they were turned down by the IRS, they re-filed their suit. Last fall, Judge Crabb once again ruled in their

favor. Now the case is being appealed again to the Seventh Circuit.

The clergy housing allowance allows "ministers of the gospel" -within certain limitations - to exclude from wages the amount they spend maintaining a household - mortgage, utilities, maintenance, property taxes, etc. Part of the defense of the allowance has been that "ministers" are considered self-employed by the IRS, which means that they don't have the benefit of an employer to split the required Social Security tax withholding (currently 15.3%) with them. As a result, they wind up paying 7.65% more of their income than other "employees."

"WE'LL TRADE YOU YOURS FOR OURS," Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan offered. A one-for-one swap: American pastor Andrew Brunson for Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen. Gulen has been living in exile in the U.S. since 1999. Nevertheless, he is accused of masterminding last year's failed Turkish coup through his international network of followers. Brunson was jailed last October - following more than 20 years of living and ministering in Turkey - "suspected" - along with 50,000 other judges, lawyers, soldiers and journalists - of involvement in the coup. The offer was the first acknowledgment from the Turkish government that Brunson was in fact being held as a political prisoner.

WILL THE TAX BREAK FOR COUPLES AND FAMILIES COST THE CHURCH? Experts say it will. Researchers speculate that taxpayers won't donate what they can't itemize. They estimate that the recent doubling of the standard deduction for joint filers from \$12,000 to \$24,000 will reduce the number of those who itemize those charitable deductions from the current 30% of filers to a mere 5%. And that, they conjecture, could cause a drop of anywhere between \$5 and \$15 billion in charitable giving. What do *members* say?

CLEAN UP GOD'S HOUSE DAY: You do *your* spring cleaning each year, but who does *God's*? Wouldn't it be great to spruce up His place here after the grime and dirt of winter and construction? Have you had a project you've had your eyes on - a touch-up here, a clean-up there, a tossing out of some accumulation there (think refrigerator and freezer and storage), a small improvement here? Well now's your chance. When can we get this all done? Before Easter - before Palm Sunday -

... like

“wall” in the fellowship hall. Your name next to a job gives you first crack at completing it - when it’s convenient for you, or when it might be most fun (when others will be at church doing their favorite chores, too). And for those jobs not on our list but on yours, try the Trustees’ Suggestion Box.

IT’S TIME TO MAKE A CHOICE® AGAIN. Thrivent Financial for Lutherans members only have this month and next to direct all the Thrivent Choice® dollars they have accrued - from 2017 and from 2018 already. This is the time of year when almost all TFFL members will find dollars just waiting to be designated. So, go online at www.Thrivent.com/thriventchoice or call 1-800-847-4836, and say “Thrivent Choice” at the prompt (any time between before 6:00 p.m. CST, M-F). Any dollars not designated by March 31st will go into a hole in the bottom of the ocean or to the IRS or North Korea or someplace where you’ll never see them again - rather than to your favorite ministry. (Remember if you do go online, a little clue when you’re looking for SOTMLC. Just put in Pinetop, AZ at first - nothing else. SOTMLC will pop right up for you.) This has been a great program for Shepherd of the Mountains. Thank you all for your support. And make it a regular habit to be checking, for you never know when your investments and insurance products will generate you Thrivent Choice® dollars to be designated.

IT’S NOT THAT THERE’S MORE OF IT. IT’S NOT THAT THERE’S MORE OF THEM. IT’S THAT, FRANKLY, THEY’RE DIFFERENT THAN THEY USED TO BE - WEALTHIER THAN THEY WERE THIRTY YEARS AGO. The persecution conservative Christians are experiencing. From people who don’t like them - according to researcher George Yancey at the University of North Texas, typically the politically liberal, highly-educated, and less-religious. Yes, “Christian activists . . . pay a stiffer price for that animosity,” he reported in the *Review of Religion Research*, but that’s not because more people are opposed to

them. Rather, it’s that those people are wealthier now than they were thirty years ago. Oh, and the election of conservative Christians doesn’t help, he notes. That only adds fuel to the opposition fire.