



THE SERVANT

The monthly newsletter of Servants of Christ Lutheran Church, a congregation of The North American Lutheran Church serving the Cedar Rapids area

Meeting at Robins City Hall Community Room, 265 South Second St., Robins, Iowa 52328
Worship: 9:00 am; Fellowship & Coffee: 10:00;
Bible Class and Sunday School: 10:15
Ron Voss, Pastor

*****October 2020*****

Dear Servants of Christ,

SOCIAL DISTANCING. Did I see a few of you shudder at those two words? Had we even heard that phrase a year ago? And yet, for the past six months (and into the future), it dictates our lives. We don't dispute it; we understand it is necessary. We make every effort to follow it. But social distancing exacts an awful price: on our personal lives, on our economy, on conducting business, on educating our children, even the health care. Social Distancing: necessary but nasty.

As I was thinking about "distancing" in the past weeks, my mind flicked to a book we have in our home library. Another Max Lucado gem. Published in 1987 (yeh, it's an oldie), the title of this book seemed so comforting in this era of social distancing. The title? **God Came Near**. Notice I put that title in bold letters, because in the pandemic I need to hear these words, need to be reminded of what they mean. While others around us need to "keep their distance," God comes near. God invades our lives. God sticks by our side. God embraces us . . . and He does so without a face mask or hand sanitizer.

I need to be reminded that God's presence, His nearness, is more than a title of a book. It is WHO HE IS. It is His very essence, His very being, His very nature. Remember one of those big words we learned to describe God: omnipresent? That means present **everywhere, anytime, any place, for anyone**. Let's review a few Biblical examples.

And the Word became a human being and lived among us. John 1:14

The opening verses of the Gospel of John are the gospel reading for Christmas Day. These verses trumpet the news that *God Came Near*; He became one of us; He would spend 33 years living among us: laughing, crying, sleeping, working, grieving, eating

grain from the fields or enjoying the food and beverage at a wedding banquet. No divine social distance but a babe in a manger.

"Ask, and I will give you living water." John 4:10

Recognize that sentence? It's from the story of Jesus speaking to the Samaritan woman as they met at the well. Remember Jewish laws and tradition: don't talk to women in public; hate the Samaritans; despise the sinner (remember her "profession?") This story has loud "gasps" sounding all around it. And yet, *God Came Near*. Jesus talked to her, listened to her, confronted her, and offered her forgiveness and eternal life. Jesus threw social distancing right out the window.

After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam." So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. John 9:6-7

Some read this Biblical narrative and wince. Do we really have to say that Jesus spit, made mud, and smeared it on a man's eyes? But for the religious leaders, the hygiene was not the main offense; it was Jesus *touching* a diseased man. Big NO NO! Fastidious Jews did not touch anything "unclean." Just another example of our compassionate God coming near, literally, getting in our face! Jesus not only casts social distancing to the wind, He defies common "personal space" to show His love.

And the list goes on: meeting Zacchaeus at his home; raising the widow's son in Nain as Jesus touches the coffin; inviting Thomas to put his finger in Jesus' wounds. *God Came Near*, God comes near . . . and He stays.

It's October, the month we remember and celebrate the Reformation. We think of Martin Luther. Luther did not know the phrase "social distancing" but he certainly felt it. Or perhaps what he experienced was "spiritual distancing." He felt so far from God. Luther tried everything: study, prayer, worship, even self-beating. How could he—Luther—bridge the gap? And then Luther stumbled on the book of Romans. He read, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his **grace** through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:23-24) Wow! We can't, but God can! It is God who comes near to us! No more distancing . . . Social, physical, spiritual. Good 24/7 and into eternity.

So, we continue to wear masks; we continue social distancing; hand sanitizer abounds. And at worship, we share the peace by waving or nodding. We receive the Sacrament one at a time. But as we stand alone (or a lone couple), remember the One who stands beside you, gives you His peace which passes all human understanding, who personally hands you His body and blood. *God Came Near* . . . and He still is.

In Christ's love and presence,
Ron

Bible study—*Pastor Epistles: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*— continues through October

These three letters by Paul are often called the Pastoral Epistles because they address issues concerning the Office of the Holy Ministry or the pastoral office. They are the final three letters of Paul, and in them we are given a crucial understanding of the nature, character, and work of the Gospel ministry.

Paul is aware that his ministry is coming to a close and is concerned about the future of the Church. He is led by the Holy Spirit to give divine counsel to those who will succeed him in order that the Gospel and its ministry will continue just as he received them from the Lord. And through these divinely inspired words, he prepares every generation that follows to maintain faithfulness to the Lord and keep the faith.



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Laypeople may be tempted to think that these letters do not concern them. Nothing could be further from the truth. Understanding just what the will of our Lord is regarding the work of ministers will help them to be not only humble and grateful recipients of their pastors' service but genuinely useful assistants and friends to them.



Post It and Pray It

Some use post-it notes. Some like refrigerator magnets. Others tape the "memo" to a visible spot. Whatever the method, the goal is the same. Place important information in a location where you will see it and respond to it.

Each Sunday we pray for individuals, prayer requests submitted by members. Names are posted in the bulletin and via email. If you have not already done so, may I suggest you take the list and post it in your home in a location where you will see it every day: refrigerator, outside door, bathroom mirror. See the list and pray it. Your prayer does not need to be long or "flowery." A simple "Lord, I bring these individuals and their needs before your throne of grace." Say the names aloud. Then, "Amen." That's it. Nothing fancy. But it keeps these individuals in our minds and hearts and before the throne of God.

October Mission Giving

**\$500 — North American Lutheran Church General Fund

**\$500 — Iowa Mission District



REFORMATION SUNDAY October 25

Times Square on New Year's Eve with a dropping ball. Corned beef and cabbage on St. Patrick's Day. Parades on Memorial Day; fireworks on the Fourth of July. Trick or Treat bags. Cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie. Every one of these items rings a bell, each of these representing a tradition. Tradition is defined as "the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation." Without specific traditions for specific events, "it just don't seem the same." You doubt that? The year 2020 has already seen the cancellation of some traditions and before the year ends, we will probably see more. Traditions matter.

One of the traditions of the Lutheran church is the liturgical year. The liturgical year includes Reformation Sunday, just a few weeks away. In this year of upheaval, let's quickly review a few of those Reformation traditions.



THE HYMN: "A Mighty Fortress." Most cannot imagine Christmas without "Joy to the World" or "Silent Night." And our voices long to belt out "Jesus Christ is Risen Today" on Easter Sunday. So Reformation Sunday has members scanning the bulletin to make sure Luther's best known hymn is on tap. This traditional hymn from 500 years ago reminds of our heritage, our faith, the power of the Spirit.

THE COLOR: Red. Green for Pentecost (50% of the church year); seven weeks of purple for Lent; weeks of white for the Christmas and Easter seasons. But red? Well, it's "single hits." But what powerful events. Red is for courage, for boldness, for the flame and inspiration of the Spirit. So we see red on Pentecost, the birth of the Christian Church. Red is used at ordinations as the Spirit anoints new spiritual leaders to "go and make disciples." And we see red on Reformation Sunday to remind us that the Spirit "zapped" Luther with power to renew, reform, rekindle the Church in Word Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone.

THE PSALM: Psalm 46. Always read on Reformation Sunday; never varies. Although Psalm 23 is considered the best known psalm, Psalm 46 is not far behind. Following 9/11, many churches held special worship services; the psalm most frequently used was 46. The opening verse tells us why this passage was chosen for 9/11, why it is used for Reformation: "God is our refuge and strength; a very present help in time of trouble."

THE "FAMILY CREST": Luther's Seal. Perhaps this tradition has slipped a bit from our vision. But if you travel back a few decades, Luther's Seal was everywhere. Men wore tie clips and cuff links displaying this emblem. Necklaces and charm bracelets adorned females. A black cross (our sins are erased through Jesus' death); a red heart (where Jesus should always be); the white rose (representing peace and joy); blue sky (blue, the color of eternal hope and life.)



The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Psalm 46:7