

## February Newsletter 2024

### St. James: WE GROW. WE GO. WE GATHER.

#### From the Pastor

We are Jesus' friends (John 15:12-17). Ponder that reality for a moment. Jesus prayed for us too ... in that garden ... on the night of his betrayal. *"My prayer is not for them [the apostles] alone. I pray also for those who believe in me through their message, that all of them might be one. ... May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."* (John 17:20, 23)

Jesus' love for us never wavers! Despite knowing our faults, Jesus says, *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last."* (16)



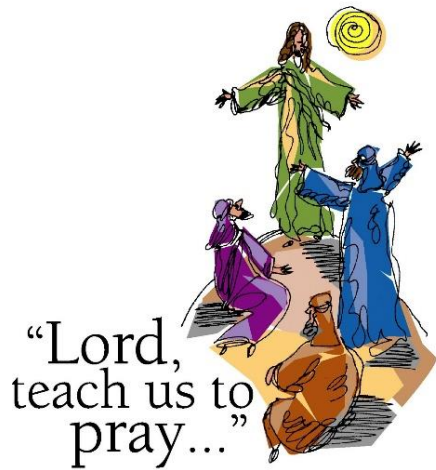
In *The Christian Leader*, Don Ratzlaff retells a story Vernon Grounds came across in Ernest Gordon's *Miracle on the River Kwai*. The Scottish soldiers, forced by their Japanese captors to labor on a jungle railroad, had degenerated to barbarous behavior, but one afternoon something happened: *"A shovel was missing. The officer in charge became enraged. He demanded that the missing shovel be produced, or else. When nobody in the squadron budged, the officer got his gun and threatened to kill them all on the spot.... It was obvious the officer meant what he had said. Then, finally, one man stepped forward. The officer put away his gun, picked up a shovel, and beat the man to death. When it was over, the survivors picked up the bloody corpse and carried it with them to the second tool check. This time, no shovel was missing. Indeed, there had been a miscount at the first check point. The word spread like wildfire through the whole camp. An innocent man had been willing to die to save the others! ... The incident had a profound effect. ... The men began to treat each other like brothers. When the victorious Allies swept in, the survivors, human skeletons, lined up in front of their captors ... (and instead of attacking their captors) insisted: 'No more hatred. No more killing. Now what we need is forgiveness.'"*

Sacrificial love has transforming power. St. John puts it this way: *"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."* (1 John 3:16) And here, in John's words, is the secret for loving each other. We love because our Friend ... the one who died and rose from the dead ... first loves us. We forgive because our Friend first forgives us. We serve because our Friend serves us first. We speak his healing Word because our Friend speaks that healing Word to us. God's grace and peace is yours in Christ Jesus, your Friend!

Pastor Glenn E. Schaeffer

1 Timothy 6:12

## *“Lord, Teach Us to Pray” – A Study of the Lord’s Prayer*



Pastor Schaeffer is leading us through a study of the Lord’s Prayer. The study is on Sunday mornings following the worship service. Using the Scriptures and Martin Luther’s Small and Large Catechisms, he is helping us to understand and appreciate each petition in this “perfect” prayer.

This study is being recorded on Zoom and a link is provided to people who are interested in the study but unable to attend the class on Sunday mornings. Let Pastor know you would like to receive the link and he will email it to you.

## **You’re Invited to Participate in St. James’ Leadership Retreat**



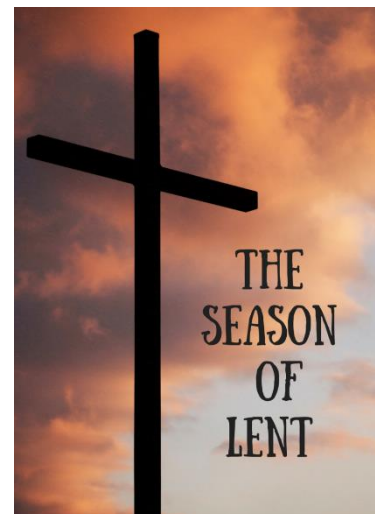
On the weekend of April 12-13<sup>th</sup> you are invited to participate in St. James’ leadership retreat. The retreat will begin on Friday evening (7 p.m.-9 p.m.) and will continue on Saturday (9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.). The retreat will be held at the Warner Building (downtown Grand Rapids).

We will spend the time in prayer and studying God’s Word. We will identify the opportunities and challenges we are facing as a congregation and begin to develop a plan to address these opportunities and challenges.

*If you plan to attend the retreat, please let Pastor Schaeffer know by April 2.*

**Lent: Lent Begins on Ash Wednesday (February 14) and ends with midday prayer on Holy Saturday.**

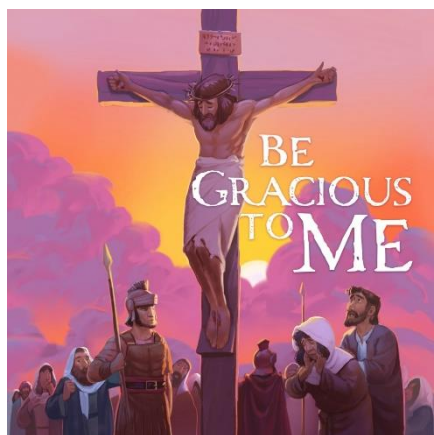
The resurrection of Jesus is our great salvation. To prepare to celebrate the Feast of the Resurrection (Easter), the Church sets aside a period of preparation. In AD 325, the Council of Nicaea recorded the first reference to the specific number of days for Lent: forty. This forty-day preparation was first prescribed for baptismal candidates and became known as Lent (from the Old English word for “spring.”) During this period, the candidates were examined in



preparation for Baptism and the Easter (or Paschal) Vigil. Later, these forty days were associated with Jesus' forty days in the desert prior to His temptation (Matthew 4:1-11) and with the forty years the children of Israel spent in the wilderness (Numbers 14:34) and became a period of preparation for every Christian.

Ash Wednesday begins the observance of Lent. The placing of ashes on the forehead is a sign of penitence and a reminder of human mortality. The Sundays during this season are not "of Lent" but "in Lent." Thus, the Sundays retain an Easter tone and may be less solemn than the midweek services that congregations typically offer. The observances of Lent are concrete reminders of the greater solemnity of this season, yet Lutherans emphasize the Gospel of Christ as central even to this penitential season.

## BE GRACIOUS TO ME: PSALM 41



No Old Testament saint attests to God's grace quite like King David. Raised from the sheepfold to the throne of the house of Israel; raised again (and again, and again) from sin: pride, murder, adultery, and despising of God; lifted clear of the snare of the wicked (Psalm 119:110), of the pit (Psalm 30:3), of the very gates of death (Psalm 9:13); with no merit or worthiness in himself, David was continually raised up by God's grace and favor.

God's grace wells up in Psalm 41, where David exults in divine mercy amid his own weakness, powerful enemies, and treacherous friends. David tracks the flow of divine grace back to its source at the cross and, with prophetic vision, finds it springing forth in the lives of all baptized believers – including you.

How has God's grace raised you? If you haven't been set on a royal throne or made ruler over a great people, maybe you've seen improvements in your finances or employment. Or perhaps family strife has been quieted. Or maybe a compassionate helper or valuable ally has entered the picture at just the right moment. Have you shaken off a bad illness, a bad habit, or a bad influence? If so, rejoice and thank God for His grace and favor!

But if you feel like you're sinking instead of rising, what then? Is there any comfort for the saint of God who looks around to find that "*the waters have come up to my neck*" (Psalm 69:1)? David knows that saint's fortunes because they are his as well:

*"In the day of trouble the LORD delivers him; the LORD protects him and keeps him alive; he is called blessed in the land; You do not give him up to the will of his enemies."* (Psalm 41:1-2)

You have a sure hope! Therefore, do not look for hope in your experiences or your emotions, which will portray for you the same bleak scene that David captures in Psalm 41:

- My enemies say of me in malice, *“When will he die, and his name perish?”* (v. 5)
- When one comes to see me, he utters empty words, while His heart gathers iniquity. (v. 6)
- Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me. (v. 9)

Faith offers a better vision: despite all that binds and bruises and bleeds you, God *will* raise you up. He has raised you already! In Holy Baptism, God has *“raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”* (Ephesians 2:6). If you are *in Christ*, how can you sink? How can you fall?



Lent is the ideal time to meditate on David’s ordeals and your secure position in Christ.

Psalm 41 provides the ideal guide to your meditation. If the laments of Psalm 41 call to mind your numerous difficulties and need for deliverance, they depict even more clearly the work by which your deliverance has been won.

David *“prophesied about the grace that was to be yours”* and *“searched and inquired carefully”* concerning your salvation (1 Peter 1:10). And that salvation is this: the Son of David, by grace, *“might taste death for everyone”* (Hebrews 2:9).

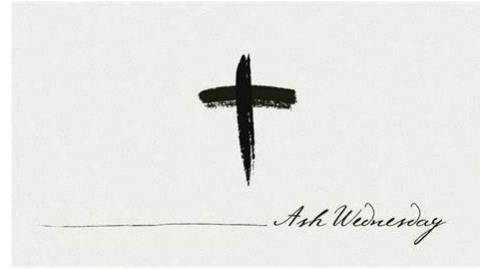
Are the scheming enemies of Psalm 41:5 not the foes of Christ, who is sustained on His sickbed (v. 3) but the one by whose wounds you are healed (Isaiah 53:5)? Even the close friend of our Lord has lifted his heel against Him (Psalm 41:9). God be praised, all these sufferings are yours too! Or *“do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death”* (Romans 6:3)?

Because you are in Christ, you share in all things with Him, even the prophetic Word. David’s vision in Psalm 41 has become your reality in Christ. In the day of trouble, the Lord delivers you; the Lord protects you and keeps you alive; you are called blessed in the land (see Psalm 41:1-2). Press on to know the Lord’s suffering, death, and Word. As surely as the Lenten journey ascends to the victory of Easter, you shall be raised up.

*“Be Gracious to Me!”* is the theme for Ash Wednesday, our Sunday morning Lenten services, Holy Week services, and Easter Sunday!

## Midweek Lenten Services

Midweek Lenten services will be held on Wednesday evenings at 6:30 p.m. Each service will be a time for additional reflection on our Savior and for spiritual renewal as the Holy Spirit ministers to us in His Word.



Ash Wednesday (Feb. 14) will be the first midweek service with other services being held on February 21 and 28 and March 6, 13, 20.

A pancake supper will be held on Ash Wednesday prior to the service beginning at 5:30 p.m. We are hopeful that midweek soup suppers will be served prior to each service, but this is not yet confirmed. Watch the Sunday bulletin for updates.

Monday Services will NOT be held  
from February 12 through April 1.  
Monday services will resume April 8<sup>th</sup>.

## Lutherans for Life Provide Several Informative and Helpful Resources



**LUTHERANS**  
**FOR LIFE**

**Abortion and Race** - Highlighting the racial disparities of abortion, this infographic fold-out brochure discusses how abortion affects minority populations in America. (\$1.00 each)

**Word of Hope** - This fold-out brochure is a great way to highlight Word of Hope, the post-abortion ministry of Lutherans for Life. (Free)

**I Praise You** ... This beautiful 14" x 36" fold-out brochure highlights the fetal development of Jesus in the womb. (\$1.00 each)

**Abortion Fast Facts** - This infographic fold-out brochure gives a quick look at statistics surrounding abortion. (\$2.00 each)

**Grandparents and Abortion** – The message of God’s unconditional and forever faithful love is given by grandparents who welcome their grandchildren – no matter what the circumstances of conception – as precious gifts from the Lord of Life. (\$0.50 each)

You can order these resources and other L4L resources at [cph.org](http://cph.org) or 800-325-3040.

### **ISJ Academy Open House February 8<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 p.m.**



Do you know someone who has a child or children? Encourage them to attend the ISJ Academy open house. They will be able to meet the staff, take a tour, and learn more about our school.

ISJ Academy provides affordable Christian education for preschool through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. ISJ Academy is committed to

providing an atmosphere and curriculum which allows students to learn about Jesus and grow in their Christian faith.

More information about the school is available on the ISJ Academy Facebook page and the website: <https://www.mychristianschool/>.

### **Did You Know ...**

If you are feeling stressed, reading a good book can lower your cortisol levels and other unhealthy stress hormones by 68%. Researchers from the University of Sussex found that stress reduction can be achieved within six minutes of reading.

They also found that reading reduces stress better than other methods such as listening to music (61% reduction), drinking tea or coffee (54% reduction), or going for a walk (42% reduction).



Researchers believe the concentration of reading a good book helps distract the brain away from anxious and stressful thoughts caused by stress.

**Ed. Note:** Of course, we know that reading THE Good Book [the Bible], not only calms our hearts but also soothes our souls!

(From *Better Health*, Winter 2023, Vol. 39, No. 4. Source: [anxietycentre.com](http://anxietycentre.com))

## Money Management

A saying you don't hear too often is "cash is king." That can still be true today – even in our mostly cashless society. Cash can help you be a better ruler of your budget. Research shows that people spend more money when using credit cards than paying with cash. That's because the average cash transaction is \$22, whereas the average non-cash transaction is \$112. The tap of a credit card may make it easier to pay for a \$100 item, but if you have to pull \$100 of cash out of your wallet, that may be enough of a jolt to prevent an impulse buy. (From: *Better Health*, Winter 2023, Vol. 39, No. 4.)



## St. James' Governing Board Update



Greetings from the Governing Board,

As we have shared and discussed many policies that have been created and approved, we wanted to make an opportunity for you to ask questions or gather greater understanding. Following the Lenten Service on Feb. 28th and March 13th from 7:30-8:30 pm the governing board will hold policy meetings. The following breaks down the policies

and dates we will discuss them.

**Feb. 28<sup>th</sup>** – Policies to be reviewed:

1. Statement of Belief
2. Statement on Marriage, Gender and Sexuality
3. Marriage Policy
4. Burial Garden Procedure
5. Church Facility Use Policy

**March 13<sup>th</sup>** – Policies to be reviewed:

1. Code of Conduct Policy
2. St. James Tuition Assistance Fund
3. ISJ School Board Members Policy
4. Canceling Service Policy

*Copies of the discussed policies will be available on the night of the meetings or by email on request.*

## Share the Love of Christ with a Cookie!



*"May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else ..."* 1 Thess. 3:12

You are invited to let your love overflow! For Valentine's Day St. James' LWML will be assembling trays of cookies to show St. James love to first responders, care staff at congregate settings, neighborhood school staffs, and other care givers in our community. Everyone can help share the love of our Lord by getting involved!



**You can use your hands to embrace our neighbors by doing one of the following ...**

- **Bake** some cookies with love!
- **Assemble** trays of delicious cookies at the February 11<sup>th</sup> LWML meeting!
- **Carry** the love into the community by delivering a tray!

Wrap individual baked goods with plastic wrap or small snack bags. Deliver your goodies to church on or before Sunday, February 11<sup>th</sup>. If you would like to write cards of encouragement for the organizations that receive the treats, or if you would like to help deliver trays, speak to Sandra before February 11.

**NOTE: THE LWML MEETING IS FEBRUARY 11<sup>th</sup>; not February 4<sup>th</sup>!**

### **Men's Breakfast & Bible Study**

Saturday, February 10.

Breakfast is served at 8:30 a.m. and the Bible study follows.

RSVP to Pastor Schaeffer by noon on February 9<sup>th</sup>.