

“THE WITNESS”

NEWSLETTER OF MESSIAH (FISHERVILLE) & ST. PETER (FETTERHOFF’S) LUTHERAN CHURCHES OF HALIFAX, PA

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2023

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Dear Church Family and Friends,

At the moment, it seems nothing could be more pertinent/useful or meaningful than for me to share the following entitled: [A] Grace-Based versus Merit-Based Religious Life. As your pastor, I share God’s concern and hope for a religious life more oriented toward grace than merit.

Most of us grew up receiving one clear impression: we must earn approval and please authorities if we want acceptance. Remember when I asked before what motivates you? Now I’m asking you to recall your earliest memories of approval and disapproval.

Before kindergarten, approval seemed to come in the form of getting what I wanted, disapproval in the form of whoopings. In school and Sunday school, adults in verbal or written form communicated things done below or beyond expectations, both positive and negative. A good grade was considered an “A” and earned me twice what a “B” was worth: a dime versus a nickel.

In church, we were taught to feel bad about disappointing God/ parents/adults. At home and school, discipline often involved busy work, loss

of privileges, or separation. Law often works that way: creating guilt that seeks relief or making one feel similar negative emotions/consequences as those to which we contributed. The system aims to discourage less desirable behaviors and reward those deemed positive. No wonder we struggle with the idea of grace and suffer from merit-based religion.

Take a look at the subheadings below. Each describes a major arena of organized religion: Initiative, Emphasis, Rooted In, Focus, Goal, Tone, Power, Produces, Reward, Scripture, The Church, Outcome. Compare your beliefs to the two points of reference: grace or merit. Mark the ones that most strongly resemble your way of thinking. Highlight ones based on grace and display them in a place readily seen. Share your thoughts and/or pray about them.

What in your personal history/upbringing resists a grace-based religious life? What might happen if we let go of merit-based religion? What could the future hold or the outcome be if we trust God’s method of relinquishing control and coercive power?

In all of our relationships, might we ask God to help us be motivated by goodness rather than driven by fear, empowered by grace rather than manipulated by merit? After all, doesn't anger, dominance, and sin happen when we seek control rather than let God work in and through us based on grace? What do you think?

*Your Loving Pastor,
Pastor Nancy Brody*

Grace-Based versus Merit-Based Religious Life

Initiative or First Step

Grace based: God *initiates*; I respond. God's grace elicits a response of faith. Grace-faith.

Merit based: I *initiate*, taking the first step; God responds. If I will then God will. Earning-deserving, merit-reward thinking.

Emphasis

Grace based: The *emphasis* is upon relationship with God and growing through that relationship.

Merit based: The *emphasis* is upon measuring up to expectations and demands expressed in a code of ethics or beliefs. Law.

Rooted in

Grace based: Everything is *rooted in* and grows out of the personal relationship with God, empowered by the Spirit. Marked by glad dependency upon the Spirit.

Merit based: Everything is *rooted in* and depends upon self-effort and self-reliance.

Focus

Grace based: The *focus* is heart, the interior realm. This focus results in authenticity.

Merit based: The *focus* is behavior, the external realm. This focus results in appearances and pretense.

Goal

Grace based: The *goal* is the transformation of the heart and life—spiritual growth.

Merit based: The *goal* is conformity of belief, behavior, and ritual—outward appearance.

Tone

Grace based: The *tone* is unconditional. Acceptance and forgiveness are gifts freely given.

Merit based: The *tone* is conditional. Acceptance based on conformity. Forgiveness is based on repentance. We get what we deserve.

Power

Grace based: *Power* is used to serve, to empower others, to nurture and bless.

Merit based: *Power* is used to control and dominate others, to reward those who conform and to punish those who do not; to manipulate.

Produces

Grace based: Grace produces *love and gratitude* expressed in praise and thanksgiving.

Merit based: Merit-based relating produces and plays on *guilt and fear*.

Reward

Grace based: The *reward* is God's kind of life (eternal life) here and now as well as after death.

Merit based: Merit-based relating deals in *rewards and punishment*, including acceptance and rejection now and heaven and hell after death.

Scripture

Grace based: *Scripture* is viewed and used as the record of God's self-revelation in Jesus of Nazareth.

Merit based: *Scripture* is viewed as the authoritative word of God having absolute authority regarding proper belief, behavior, and ritual.

The Church

Grace based: The *church* is an inclusive, nurturing community in which all are valued and embraced as God's children. It expresses the radical hospitality of God.

Merit based: The *church* is an exclusive community functioning out of an *us-them* mentality. It is for those like us in belief, behavior and ritual. Uniformity is valued over diversity.

Outcome

Grace based: Kingdom of God.

Merit based: Religion.

Appendix D from the book, *Discovering Your True Self: A Guide for the Journey* by Steve Langford. WestBow Press, June, 2020. *Used with permission.*

SUNDAY, JANUARY 22 DEADLINE for FEBRUARY 2nd SOUP AND SUCH

In February, "Soup and Such" has a menu which includes Chicken Noodle Soup – \$7/quart, crescent rolls – 4/\$1.50, and Pumpkin Bars w/Cream Cheese Icing – \$1.50/slice. **Orders are due by Sunday, January 22** and **pick-up** is from 4 to 6 P.M. on Thursday, **February 2nd at Messiah**. For more information, contact Dianna Reed at 717-692-5317.

LET US PRAY

Please Note: The names of people who may have previously been in crisis, but are now stable have been removed. The names of those in recovery, in long term care, living with chronic/severe/terminal conditions or in acute crisis remain. Please contact Pastor Brody with corrections/amendments.

Please email concerns and/or requests including your name and theirs, contact information, and a few specifics to: elsiebrody@gmail.com or text 443-974-5558. Thank you.

CURRENT SEASON(S) of the CHURCH YEAR and WHAT THEY MEAN

The season of **Epiphany** is celebrated on January 6th, the day God revealed the Christ child to the nations via a special star, the same one which led three Wise Men to Jesus. The color of altar paraments (cloth hangings of various seasonal liturgical colors used to adorn the altar and pulpit or lectern) for the day is white. During the time after Epiphany we hear stories about Jesus' baptism and early ministry. The color for these Sundays is sometimes white, sometimes green. On the last Sunday we celebrate the Transfiguration, when Jesus shines brightly on the mountaintop, God's glory is seen and the witness of Moses and Elijah confirms the mystery of faith. The color for this day is also white.

Lent, from the Anglo-Saxon word "spring" is a season when we turn toward God and think about how our lives need to change. This is also a time to remember our baptism, and how that gift gives us a new start every day. The color for Lent is purple, symbolizing repentance. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and lasts for 40 days (not including Sundays) and ends on the Saturday before Easter Sunday, the Easter Vigil. The period of time is symbolic of Christ's 40 days in the wilderness.

Descriptions of church seasons and liturgical terms have been paraphrased from publications by Augsburg Press, including *The Lutheran Student Handbook* and *Lutheran Handbook II*.

UPCOMING SCRIPTURES

1/15 – 2nd Sunday after Epiphany

1st Reading – Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalmody – Psalm 40:1-11

2nd Reading – 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Gospel – John 1:29-42

1/22 – 3rd Sunday after Epiphany

1st Reading – Isaiah 9:1-4

Psalmody – Psalm 27:1,4-9

2nd Reading – 1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Gospel – Matthew 4:12-23

1/29 – 4th Sunday after Epiphany

1st Reading – Micah 6:1-8

Psalmody – Psalm 15

2nd Reading – 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Gospel – Matthew 5:1-12

2/05 – 5th Sunday after Epiphany

1st Reading – Isaiah 58:1-9a [9b-12]

Psalmody – Psalm 112:1-9

2nd Reading – 1 Corinthians 2:1-12 [13-16]

Gospel – Matthew 5:13-20

2/12 – 6th Sunday after Epiphany

1st Reading – Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Psalmody – Psalm 119:1-8

2nd Reading – 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Gospel – Matthew 5:21-37

2/19 – Transfiguration of Our Lord

1st Reading – Exodus 24:12-18

Psalmody – Psalm 2 or 99

2nd Reading – 2 Peter 1:16-21

Gospel – Matthew 17:1-9

2/22 – Ash Wednesday

1st Reading – Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Psalmody – Psalm 51:1-17

2nd Reading – 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Gospel – Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

2/26 – First Sunday in Lent

1st Reading – Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Psalmody – Psalm 32

2nd Reading – Romans 5:12-19

Gospel – Matthew 4:1-11

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THE SEVEN FAITH PRACTICES



PRAY . . . Prayer. . . Pray Frequently

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).



STUDY . . . Christian Education. . . Study

Scripture Diligently. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Psalm 119:105).



WORSHIP . . . Worship. . . Worship

Regularly I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together (Psalm 34:1-3).



INVITE . . . Evangelism. . . Invite Others

Often But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (Romans 10:14-15).



ENCOURAGE . . . Teaching/Mentoring. . .

Pass on the Faith Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action (1 John 3:18).



SERVE . . . Social and Justice Ministry. . .

Serve for the Sake of Others For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).



GIVE . . . Stewardship. . . Give Freely

...give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back (Luke 6:38).

These seven faith practices provide a helpful road map for disciples as they comprehend the basic moves or activities that comprise the life of discipleship. They are succinct and memorable enough to carry on a card in a wallet or a purse, yet comprehensive enough that volumes could be written to describe their full meaning. For more information on faith practices review the resources provided in the Call to Discipleship Congregation Planning Guide. A helpful, user-friendly description of each of the seven faith practices is found in “Faith Practices: assessing their place in your life,” pages B-39 through B-42 in the guide. The same resource can be found on the

Web page

www.elca.org/eteam/2001CEProgramPlanner.

WHAT ONE HOUR AWAY from YOUR PHONE CAN DO

More than 3.5 billion people worldwide spend an average of three hours a day glued to their smartphones—on social media, texting, checking emails. According to a German study, there's good reason to cut down. Researchers found that people who lowered their usage by one hour every day were happier, spent more time being physically active, were less depressed and reduced anxiety symptoms by more than 30%. Cutting back was more effective than total digital detox. People who had spent one hour less per day on smartphones during the one-week intervention were more likely to successfully change their habits over the long term than abstainers who had put their smartphones away entirely for a week.

Article from Reader's Digest, The Healthy, December 2022/January 2023 Provided by Messiah's Health Ministry

MARCH 2nd SOUP AND SUCH

In March, "Soup and Such" has a menu which includes Chili – \$7/quart, cornbread muffins – 4/\$1.50, and Shoofly Cake – \$1.50/slice. **Orders are due by Sunday, February 19 and pick-up is from 4 to 6 P.M. on Thursday, March 2nd** at Messiah. For more information, please contact Dianna Reed at 717-692-5317.

2023 COUNCIL MEMBERS



Messiah Council Officers

President: Kyle Hoffman
Vice President: Kyle Jury
Secretary: Tori Kaufman
Treasurer: Drew Hogan

Other Members

Madison Crum-Burger
Luis Gutierrez
Austin Kieffer

St. Peter's Council Officers

President: Diane Keister
Vice President: Ray Rummel
Secretary: Rhonda Hentz
Treasurer: Nicole Miller

Other Members

Audrey Rummel

Mary Bohn

Please pray for council members, other lay leaders, Pastor, and each other as we continue to minister under our shared call: God's mission to bring abundant life to the entire world through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

MESSIAH THANKS VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS

In recognition of the important work performed by volunteer organizations in our community, a donation has been given by the Ladies Aid to: Halifax Area Ambulance and Rescue Association, Inc.; Bethesda Mission; Medic 6; Halifax Fire Department; Fisherville Volunteer Fire Company; Upper Dauphin Human Services Center, Inc.; Food Ministry Program at the Halifax United Methodist Church; Carsonville Volunteer Fire Company, Dauphin County Library System and Halifax Area Historical Society. The church thanks these and all volunteers who enrich our lives, keep us safe from harm, and provide much needed services.

LOOKING FORWARD to JOINT SERVICES in 2023

January 29th @ Messiah

April 30th @ St Peter

July 30th @ Messiah

September 10th Joint Picnic

October 29th @ St Peter

December 31st @ Messiah

All joint service include fellowship afterward: beverages and snacks will be offered. Live streaming and recording are planned.

<h3><u>CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR JANUARY</u></h3>

15 2nd Sunday after Epiphany
8:30am Worship at St. Peter
10am Worship at Messiah

16 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

18 6:30pm Ladies Aid

19 7:00pm UD Conf. meeting by zoom

22 3rd Sunday after Epiphany
 8:30am Worship at St. Peter
 10am Worship at Messiah
Deadline to order Soup and Such for February

29 4th Sunday after Epiphany
 10am Joint service @ Messiah

<p align="center">CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR FEBRUARY</p>
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2 4-6pm Pick Up Soup and Such at Messiah

5 5th Sunday after Epiphany
 Worship of Holy Communion
 8:30am at St Peter
 10:00am at Messiah

12 6th Sunday after Epiphany
 8:30am Worship at St. Peter with
 Recognition of Service
 10am Worship a Messiah

DEADLINE FOR MARCH NEWSLETTER

14 Happy Valentine's Day

**16 Messiah Preschool Resumes
with Christmas Party!
6:30pm Ladies Aid**

19 Transfiguration of Our Lord
 8:30am Worship at St. Peter
 10am Worship a Messiah
Deadline to order Soup and Such for March

20 President's Day

22 7:00 pm Ash Wednesday @ St Peter

26 First Sunday in Lent
 8:30am Worship at St. Peter
 10am Worship a Messiah

YOU TUBE: Halifax Messiah

MESSIAH'S WEBSITE: Halifaxmessiah.church

FACEBOOK PAGES:

"Messiah Lutheran Church, Halifax, Pa, USA"
"St. Peter – Fetterhoff's Lutheran Church"



CHURCH WEBSITE RELOADED WITH NEW CONTENT

*Check out weekly updates and archived materials on **MESSIAH'S WEBSITE**: Halifaxmessiah.church You'll find bulletins with hymn lyrics and articles, descriptions of various programs and ministries, newsletters, recorded services, text versions of sermons, a monthly calendar, and way to give online. Our 10am (and joint church services) are available every week as a livestreamed event via Facebook and available later in the day on YouTube. We'd love to see you in person, but if that's not possible, please let us know if you watch online. Thanks, and blessings. Pastor Nancy Brody.*