

NEWSLETTER

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Wisdom for Everyday	2
LT Highlights	2
ELC News	3



This newsletter belongs to all of us. Your input is greatly appreciated. Please feel free to submit articles to the editor.

Editor: Judy Nguyen

Mission Statement

As we encounter God's heart of love, our hearts are made new by God's Spirit. We invite people to experience Christ's love, welcoming each one into a caring fellowship, serving Christ with our gifts and resources.



**New Holland
Mennonite Church**

18 Western Avenue
New Holland, PA
17557
717-354-0602
nhmc@frontiernet.net

A WELL-STOCKED FRIDGE

PASTOR DAWN RANCK HOWER

Last evening a group of us sat together for just under 2 hours to read the Gospel of Mark out loud. Afterwards we reflected that none of us had ever done that before. We've read the Gospel of Mark — just not in one sitting. We reflected on how different it was to get the whole picture at one time, rather than just pieces of the story. We noticed how often words like “immediately” and “as soon as” were used — Mark certainly keeps the story moving. We commented on some of the little details that Mark includes, which seem to serve no purpose other than interesting tidbits. For instance, when Jesus was being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane in Chapter 14, the disciples all deserted him and fled. And then Mark tells us, beginning in verse 51, “A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, and he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.” And thus ends that story!

In the book, *Sacred Pauses: Spiritual Practice for Personal Renewal*, author and pastor April Yamasaki, writes “I am convinced that Scripture is inherently interesting, that it has the power to engage and energize us today just as it did the people of Israel long ago” (See Nehemiah 8:1-18 where people stood, listening attentively as Scripture was read for hours — all morning long!) April writes, “If we are bored or find our minds wandering, perhaps that has less to do with Scripture and more to do with the entertainment-seeking and over-stimulated age in which we live. As philosopher professor Mark Kingwell writes, ‘The bored are rather like the teenager who, standing before a well-stocked fridge, complains that there is never anything to eat.’ When it comes to Scripture, the fridge is well-stocked, and we can partake in any number of ways.”

Scripture is full of intrigue! And, according to Paul, is “useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). How much time are you spending in this intriguing word of God? What has been your experience with Scripture? Do you have an established practice of reading the Bible? Why or why not?

Sometimes, if you are like me, I get in a rut with the Bible. Reading it in the same way over and over. And frankly, sometimes I get, well, less than intrigued. I find that switching up how I read the Bible can greatly help me to regain my interest and to once again want to ingest these living words.

Below are five different ways to read Scripture that I have found helpful. Consider trying each one in your personal devotions this month.

- 1) **Read it in short sections.** This is the typical method for our Sunday morning worship services. To read a passage, or passages, and then for the preacher to speak about that portion of Scripture. Many daily devotion books, like *Rejoice*, feature a short passage of Scripture each day along with a few paragraphs of explanation.
- 2) **Read a book from start to finish.** The Bible is a collection of 66 different books, each with it's own unique genre and voice. Much can be gained by reading each book from start to finish, like we did with the Gospel of Mark on Monday evening. I would like to encourage you to take the time (less than 2 hours) to, in one setting, read the Gospel of Mark out loud — perhaps alone, or with a family member or friend. Choose a different translation than you normally use, perhaps *The Message* or the *Common English Bible*.
- 3) **Focus on a particular subject and then to find all of the Scriptures that talk about that topic.** This would be the way we used the Bible this fall when we focused on the topic of peace. Suggestions would be to choose a focus that intrigues you, perhaps faith, heart, music, thanksgiving, or compare and contrast the different birth stories. Write down what you notice about that topic.

4) **Dialogue with Scripture.** When we begin to “talk back” to Scripture by responding, questioning, debating, and celebrating it, it becomes alive and interactive. Choose a portion of Scripture that is a story with characters (the Hebrew midwives, the call of Samuel, Jesus calming the storm, the Good Samaritan, Jesus and Zacchaeus, etc.) Read the story slowly several times. Which character are you drawn to? Hold an imaginary conversation — on paper — with the character in the story. Let your

(Continued on Page 4)

WISDOM FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

BY PAUL MARTIN

PSALM 119

VV 153–160

A PLEA FOR LIFE

See how I love your precepts:

preserve my life, O Lord,

according to your love. (v159)

In the verse prior to the above the psalmist speaks about loathing those persons who are faithless; then he almost boastfully proclaims how he loves the precepts of the Lord. If the psalmist had the right to make

such derogatory statements, do we?

I think we too often have a tendency to be impatient with those who do not have a similar faith in the God who has been faithful to us day after day, but loathing seems to be a bit extreme. Certainly a person's faithlessness does not permit us the right to abuse, mistreat, or gossip about them but should challenge us to renewed faithfulness. I quote here, Eugene Peterson. "The greatest temptation of our time is impatience."

Our challenge is to show by our lives of faithfulness to the Lord's precepts that the Lord God we follow is worthy of our faith and

trust; and that we can only be who we are by walking according to His precepts. And as we do this we earn the right to plea for Him to preserve our life as well.

PRAYER

Lord, your word is true, it is eternal. Our meditating on it and our faith in it is rewarded by a sense of your presence in our lives and the blessing and comfort that presence can bring. Thank you, Lord, we believe...help us to overcome any feelings of unbelief and to not become faithless like those the psalmist refers to in this portion of his psalm.

LT HIGHLIGHTS

BY JENN ESBENSHADE

Website – A new website is being developed.

Financial Update – The budget currently stands at a deficit of \$10,094. A letter was sent to update the congregation.

Lay Visitation – There was a suggestion to pair people from church with someone who doesn't come to church because of living in a retirement community. There is a sign up sheet for these visitations. There will also be a renewed emphasis on forming a committee to continue a more set lay visitation program.

House Fellowship Update – A form was created that describes the purpose of house fellowships and then surveys the congregation for their involvement. A plan will be put together based on the forms.

Mediation Update – With the passing of Marcus Smucker, our church mediator, Dale Stoltzfus has agreed to work to further strengthen our church, district, and conference relationships.

Communion – The LT decided to increase the amount of communion celebrations throughout the church year.

Hospitality – The LT discussed the summary notes from the Sunday School session on hospitality, focusing on various ways we can show more hospitality. Our current focus is on the ELC Christmas program. Dawn has created a brochure that can be handed out that gives information about our church.

Thanksgiving Service – The LT shared how meaningful the service was and how easy it was to find volunteers. There was discussion on how well the service flowed and the need for the space to both lament and praise.

Church Structure – There was discussion on reorganizing our church structure in light of our current attendance and needs. Some positions were eliminated and others were moved to be in other commissions. The congregation is being surveyed on their interest in staying in current positions and/or volunteering for others. Once these papers are returned, the LT will finalize any proposed changes.

Annual Reports – The purpose and format of annual reports will be discussed with the congregation to decide how to proceed with giving important information to the church on events.

Guidelines for Caring for Others – The LT met with Chuck Hold from The Factory Ministries to discuss how we relate with people in need. Based on his suggestions, new guidelines will be created for the distribution of the Caring Fund.

CHRISTMAS AT THE EARLY LEARNING CENTER

BY JEN MORALES

December? Is it really December? Ready or not... yes it is! And the Early Learning Center is busy with all the preparations! The tree is up, classrooms are in the Christmas project mode, parties are being planned and we are practicing for another great Christmas program. Each class is busy singing and the Pre-K class and Pre-K/Kindergarten class are busy practicing for the annual Christmas play.

Are you ready for Christmas? Do you remember the childhood joy of the Christmas season? Join us on Sunday December 14 at 10:30 am celebrating the birth of Christ through the eyes of young children. So much excitement! This is also our chance to interact with the Early Learning Center patrons after the service as we fellowship over a meal.

Please take a walk through the hallways over the next few weeks and enjoy the children's artwork displayed. As you near the office you will see baskets. Take some time to participate in our silent auction. There are also various gift cards to bid on. These funds will benefit our playground fund. We are also actively seeking donations for this project.

December. Are you ready for December? I am. This is one of my favorite months, a month of giving, giving of ourselves to others. It is also about receiving! Receiving the gift of a tiny baby, sent for us. It is our aim, at the early learning center, to offer the gift of Christ during this season and to help those in our care receive that gift. Please be in prayer for the center as we continue this mission.



BOOK EXCERPT

BY BERYL FORRESTER

A book, written by Beryl Forrester, is scheduled to be published in this next year. Each month, until the book is printed, we will be excerpting a section of the book *Animist to Anabaptist: Pioneering the Mennonite Mission in Gambia, Guinea Bissau and Senegal* in our newsletter.

From Chapter 1: Throughout my years in elementary school, I had a friend named Ronald. Every day he came to school in ruffled, oversized wool trousers held up by suspenders, the waist band in the region of his diaphragm. He wore a brown plaid shirt and had a speech impediment that made him difficult to understand. Moreover, he smelled bad and he was always by himself. All these negative aspects drew me to him just to be his friend and get to know him. I never found out much about his family except that they were very poor and suffered from much illness. But he and I had a good friendship.

In my school there were many like Ronald, children from broken, impoverished homes, living on the edge and without friends. The economy of our area of northern New York depended primarily on farming and forestry, with few industries or job opportunities. Although we didn't talk much about it, I suspect that poverty rates in our community were fairly high compared to other areas of the state that had well-developed business and industry. My guess is that at least 20% of my school mates lived in poverty or were in some way marginalized and disadvantaged. In my heart, even before I reached my teen years, I was drawn to these people. Not that there was much I could do for them. I just sensed that they were suffering from some sort of brokenness. In their eyes I saw mostly sadness and little hope or joy.

Extending hospitality and care for the disadvantaged was very much part of the home I was born into. During my childhood, there were few times my mother was not caring for homeless children through the county welfare office. In her busy schedule, she even found time to be about the neighborhood tending to her disabled elderly friends. My dad's hired farm hands were guys who drifted from farm to farm, unable to hold more responsible jobs. In my growing up years I had plenty of exposure to disadvantaged people, and somehow there was something right in reaching out to them. During the 1960s the U.S. government and social service agencies, including the church, sensitized us much to the presence of the poor and disadvantaged. While many well-to-do folks scoffed at this awareness and tended to blame the victims, I was happy to see a growing sense of social responsibility towards the marginalized. And while it is true that some programs to aid the poor were failures and in some cases even abetted poverty, still, there were countless cases of people being helped to a better life and well-being even by the much maligned "War on Poverty."

During this same period, several of our Bible scholars and theologians began making us aware that much of the ministry of Jesus was to bring good news to the poor, the downtrodden, and the marginalized. If you want to get close to the heart of Jesus, get close to the poor. We began to wake up to the social, economic, and political message of a holistic gospel. Getting people's souls saved, preparing them to go to heaven when they die (the message being preached in most evangelical churches), clearly was not the gospel preached by Christ and His apostles. Biblical salvation offers transformation and shalom to all aspects of human need and brokenness. Healing, wholeness, and justice belong to the redemption we have in Christ, even today.

That was the message of salvation I embraced during the preparatory years before returning to Africa. With that broadened understanding of salvation, I began to understand why God had filled my heart with compassion for the downtrodden. It was far more than humanistic pity; it belonged to the heart of Jesus' mission and why He came to be among us. From day one, on my arrival in Africa in January 2000, I was intent on preaching this holistic gospel

(Continued from Page 1)

imagination roll free and see what happens. When you are finished, read the dialogue aloud. What do you notice? Why did you choose the character you did? Did anything in the conversation move you? Did you feel the presence and guidance of God? Did you learn anything about yourself?

5) **Lectio Divina.** Lectio Divina is Latin for "sacred reading." Psalm 119:130 says "The unfolding of your words gives light." *Lectio Divina* is a prayerful approach to Scripture, which invites us to listen for a word, phrase, sound, or image that holds, for us, a word from God—an unfolding of God's word. This could be a word of comfort, instruction, challenge, or assurance. One writer likens *lectio divina* "to a person choosing a tasty morsel of food from a banquet table and savoring that one bit for all its flavor and nutrition." Throughout our day, we might return to the taste of that morsel, remembering the goodness and meaning found in such a small bite. The intention is to experience a word from God in God's word.

Choose a short portion of Scripture—a Psalm, a story, a paragraph of a letter. Become still and quiet (*silencio*), silently turning your thoughts and desires over to God. Let go of concerns, worries, or agendas. Just be for a few minutes. Slowly read the text out loud (*lectio*), prayerfully allowing each word to have its full weight. Reread the text paying attention to a word, phrase, or image that seems to have energy for you—a word that invites you, a phrase that puzzles you, an image that intrigues you. Read the passage as many times as you like. Ask God to show you (*meditatio*) how this particular word or phrase might connect with your life in a specific way. Rest before God (*contemplatio*), allowing God to transform you through the word or phrase or image as it sinks in more deeply. Be open and honest with God. Consider how this word, phrase, or image connects with your life today (*incarnatio*). How is God present to you? Let this word continue with you throughout your day and as you live it out.

Five different suggestions of ways to read Scripture – there are many more. The Psalmist says to God "Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). May your way be brightly lit as you explore different ways of reading Scripture.

I'd love to hear your reflections.

Blessings to each of you.

Pastor Dawn