



**Be completely
humble and gentle;
be patient,
bearing with
one another
in love.**

Ephesians 4:2

Dear Friends,

There are parts of the Bible that are hard to understand, or to stomach, and there are other parts that are boring. For me, the most boring bits are presented like proverbs or morality tales. Last Sunday's reading was about the sacrifice of Isaac. We had read it at worship in the park on Wednesday too, and it made people uncomfortable. The idea that God could test Abraham in such a barbaric way is inexplicable. But explaining this encounter, or other encounters with God, is not our job. The chances that we will get it right are remote. Barbara Brown Taylor provides the best insight I have come across. She does it by quoting from C. S. Lewis' classic children's book *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York, Macmillan, 1950).

"A large lion named Aslan pads around the edges of the story, appearing at strategic moments to save four lost children from danger and guide them home. Hearing about him for the first time from a couple of friendly beavers, the children have doubts about whether they are looking forward to meeting him.

'Is he-quite safe?' asks one of the girls. 'I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.'

'That you will, dearie, and no mistake,' said Mrs. Beaver, 'if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly.'

'Then he isn't safe?' said Lucy.

'Safe?' said Mr. Beaver. 'Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you.'

(Barbara Brown Taylor. The Preaching Life, Cowley, 1993)



We are not God's apologists. We are people looking to do our best to hang on to the lion's mane for dear life. I'll take the lion over a fortune cookie any day.

Your friend in Christ,
Michael

How will we Worship?

What we know.

It is our first duty to keep each other safe, especially the most vulnerable amongst us.

We miss being with each other, worshipping with each other, and the strength it gives us.

But our sanctuary is a small enclosure, with little or no ventilation.

What we are learning.

We believe that with masks and distancing, small, short services outdoors are a reasonable first step, and will help us to conduct short services indoors when the time comes.

And something new — at least 100 people have been worshipping together with us, sometimes as many as 200, online, every Sunday, without fail, since before Easter.

What we don't know.

How the virus will impact us in the next days or weeks.

When we will feel safe enough, collectively, to have services of any size indoors. (Nevertheless, we are rehearsing and planning for that time.)

So here is our evolving plan

Wednesday evening outdoor Eucharist, 20-25 minutes
(Reading, teaching, prayers, but no sermon)

Usually, on Thursday or Friday, a video meditation to tie things together

At some point, very small indoor Eucharist(s) on the same patterns (Maybe even multiple services to keep numbers small and enough distance and to shorten time of exposure.)

On Sundays, online worship is the summing up/culmination of all our other work, and includes the sermon for the week.



Senior Warden's Vestry Report

I had barely taken on the role as Senior Warden when we were all told to stay home. After holding Zoom meetings in March and April, we were finally able to meet in person, masked and outdoors, in May. In June we met indoors, following ECMN protocols, and wearing masks. Here is a summary of what we have been talking about these past few months.

Rummage Sale

Hold on to your gently used treasures! We have not given up on our annual rummage sale. We hope to be able to hold our sale in August. Stay tuned for more information.

Painting the Church

In May, our faithful Jr Warden, Diane, obtained a quote for painting the north and east sides of the church as had been discussed at the annual meeting. The quote was very reasonable, but given the uncertain times, the vestry has decided to wait on painting.

Seeking New Treasurer

Jody will be resigning as our treasurer pro tempe on August 15. If you have an aptitude for numbers and (preferably) some experience with bookkeeping and are interested in taking on this important role, please let a vestry member know.

Wednesdays in Brown Park

Until we are permitted to hold services again indoors, we are meeting at 6:00pm in the pavilion at Brown Park for a short service of the Eucharist. The sermon, reading and "usual" prayers will still occur in video format on Sunday morning on our Facebook page. Please join us for communion and the chance to see some friendly faces. Masks required.

Second Sunday

Second Sunday offering for June and July is for the Free Clinic of Steele County. In particular we are collecting for PPE for the dentists, which clinic director Lee Vela says is in especially short supply. You can mail your contributions to the church or drop them in the church's mailbox.

August Second Sunday has typically been for the San Jose Obrero ministry. We are still waiting to hear from ECMN about how this year's services and meals will happen. Stay tuned.



Church Finances and a PPP Loan

In May, the vestry decided to pursue a small business loan from the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). ECMN also applied for and received the loan, and encouraged its churches to apply. Initially hesitant about possibly taking money from local small businesses, and the ethics of taking money from the Government, we waited. Then it became clear there would be money left, and most churches had applied. At that point our income compared with last year was \$5,000-\$10,000 less, despite a \$5,000 PIF withdrawal at the beginning of Q2 2020, and the incredible extra generosity of our members. At the end of June we were notified we received the amount requested, \$21,300. We have 24 weeks to use it before the grant becomes a loan. Nevertheless, we are still anticipating a shortfall this year that may be as high as \$20,000. We'll see. We know too that our normal fundraising is likely to be less than usual. Later this summer we'll begin a drive to cover the shortfall; if we do well it might include the unbudgeted projects discussed at the Annual Meeting, the sound system and painting the church. Please keep saying your prayers, and thank you for all you do!

***Many, many
thanks to Jody
Boisen for her
diligence and
hard work on the
PPP application.***

How Are You Connecting?

Over 100 people are watching our services on FB each Sunday. Most people are from our local congregation, but some are our friends or family members who have moved and who are enjoying their renewed connection with us through Facebook. Many thanks to Leanne Alt who has copied many of these services to DVD and delivered them to those we knew of who did not use Facebook.

We know that we have missed people, that not everyone is online or a Facebook user. Please let us know if you are one of the people we have missed.

You can call the church office and leave a message or call a vestry member. All numbers are on the back of this newsletter. Whether it be getting you a DVD copy of the Sunday service, scheduling a regular check-in phone call, or a (masked) visit, we want to know how to connect with you.



St. Paul's to Host a "Better Together" Owatonna Book Circle

We will be hosting a reading group as part of Better Together Owatonna's book circle event. If you have been looking for a way to help build a more inclusive Owatonna, reading and discussing a book about race is a good way to start.

Better Together book circles choose one of the books below to read and discuss this summer and are then invited to a community discussion this fall. Recommended group size is 5-10 people, so if we have enough interest, we could host more than one circle.

Book choices are:

How to Be an Anti-Racist by Ibram X. Kendi

So You Want to Talk About Race
by Ijeoma Oluo

White Fragility by Robin DiAngelo

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness by Michelle Alexander

Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? by Beverly Daniel Tatum

Book circles will begin in late July. Specific times have not been set and will depend on participants' schedules. Let Kris Warehime know if you are interested in participating.

For more information visit the Better Together Owatonna Facebook Page at <https://www.facebook.com/BetterTogetherOwatonna>.

Prayers

It's been a tough season. Many of us have found ourselves praying like this:



Here is perhaps a more effective prayer, a favorite of some St. Paulites, and also, apparently, of our new bioshop:



Leaven is published monthly to keep the people of St. Paul's informed and united in thought.

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