

**St. Peter Lutheran Church
208 Newtown Ave.
Norwalk, CT 06851**

***PARISHSCOPE
MAY 2020***



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Pastor's

Welcome to another month of worshiping at home through YouTube videos and studying the Bible together on Zoom! I trust that this has helped to open our eyes to the blessings of modern technology, and our hearts with thanksgiving to God for those through whose efforts we have it.

I've certainly gained a greater appreciation for those who over the years have done the mostly behind the scenes, mundane tasks that I find myself now doing. Running off copies of the sermon and Divine Service for those who have no internet... stuffing them into envelopes... running off address labels... putting stamps on them... dropping them in the mail... preparing the Parishscope... filling the candles for worship (and remembering to light them for the video!)... arranging flowers around the altar (and remembering to water them during the week; oops!)... changing paraments and banners... cutting the grass... Boy, there are a lot of necessary things that are done, of which we are mostly unaware! And, done by people who happily do them without the need for recognition.

This is certainly one good thing that has come from this current self-isolation. How many times have you heard it said that we need to be thankful for doctors and nurses... and for those who clean their patients' rooms? We are also being urged to remember and give thanks for farmers... and truckers... and grocers (including those who stock the aisles; those who clean the stores; those who scan the items and check you out; etc.)... and restaurant staff... and delivery people... you get the point. Many are now getting the point. We have a very interconnected society! We are all dependent upon many other people!

We in the church have known this all along, haven't we? One of the things Martin Luther emphasized in his teaching was what he called the Priesthood of all believers. In his day, people had the idea (as this was what they had been taught) that, in order to truly please God, you had to do things that were specifically religious, such as: worship; and pray; and make a contribution to the church; etc. Especially praised as pleasing to God were the works of the members of the religious professions: priests, monks, nuns, etc. The end result of this was a belittling of the works

Ponderings

and jobs of the average person. When Luther began reading and studying the Scriptures, he saw not only the great error of such teaching but of how God in Christ raised up, and even exalted, the life and works of the average person. For instance, in 1 Pet. 2:3 it says: *"As you come to [Christ], a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."* And so, every Christian offers spiritual sacrifices! God receives them because of His Son, who by His sacrifice purifies them. Peter goes on to say: *"you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."* (1 Pet. 2:9) And so, Luther taught, every Christian – from the farmer to the milkmaid to the person who cleans out the stalls – is a royal priest, who by his works is every day offering to God works that please Him and serve others!

For this reason, Luther included in his Small Catechism a Table of Duties. Before the list of various positions that people occupy in life (today we call them "hats" that people wear) is written the following:

Certain passages of Scripture for various holy orders and positions, admonishing them about their duties and responsibilities

Then listed were positions such as Pastor, and also Hearers of preaching; Civil Government (yes, those serving in political offices are doing holy works!), and Citizens; Husbands and Wives; Parents and Children; Workers and Employers; Youth; Widows; and, finally, Everyone. After each were listed Bible passages that applied to them.

How God has exalted us, and exalted everyone in the world, in Christ! We all have works that He gives us to do. He even works through those who reject and deny Him. Their works are not eternally pleasing to Him – for it is only through faith in Christ that we and our works are made righteous – but they are a blessing to us in this life. For this we give thanks.

And so, let us join the many others who are now being encouraged to give thanks for the many and various mundane and ordinary jobs that we usually don't think about. Give special thanks to God that you and your works are pleasing to God in Christ and will be remembered by Him! As Scripture says: "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared beforehand for us to do." (Eph. 2:10)

In Christ Jesus, our Lord,
Pastor

WE'RE STILL SHUT DOWN

But, things are still happening at church! Be sure to check out our website for updates (thanks, Eric!). Every week a Service and sermon are recorded and posted on YouTube (thank you, Cindy, for playing and assisting Pastor!); every week there are two Bible classes on Zoom (Wednesday at 7:30 PM and Sunday at 9:00 AM); Holy Communion is given to those who desire it (by appointment only); and Pastor is in his office: praying for everyone, preparing sermons and Bible studies, etc.

If you do not have access to Pastor's sermons, give him a call and he will gladly send you a copy every week. Also, if you have a prayer need, let him know. Let us all pray for increasing health, and that things will change soon!

BOOK REVIEW – *The Fire and The Staff*



This book from our church library is displayed on the table behind the last pew in church. It is recommended by Ian MacKenzie, who says:

The Fire and the Staff is a book of theology, but don't let that scare you: it is a very engaging and accessible read.

Following is his review.

Lex orandi, lex credendi. Thus went an ancient saying of the Church, which means: "the law of prayer is the law of belief." The thought being expressed here is that *how one worships*

reflects and influences what one actually believes. This is the central theme of Rev. Klemet Preus's book *The Fire and the Staff: Lutheran Theology in Practice*. His aim is to show how practice and doctrine are related to each other, how they reinforce each other, and how if you change one, you will change the other. He defends historic Lutheran practices and liturgy and demonstrates that our practices are intricately linked to our doctrine and support it, and how abandoning these practices will result in us compromising our doctrine and the Gospel.

Preus sets the stage for his book by explaining the title in his introduction:

The Fire and the Staff captures the relationship between doctrine and practice. Doctrine is like a fire. It lights our way and warms us. ... Practice, by which I mean the regularly accepted actions of a church body, a congregation, or an individual, is a staff that points to our doctrine and reinforces it.

Doctrine and practice are more closely related, even interdependent, than is often realized. Doctrine affects practice and practice affects doctrine. The two are so intimately woven together that when you change one, you will inevitably change the other, sometimes without realizing what has happened. The analogy of a shepherd is apt. A shepherd warms himself and his flock by the fire. With his staff he gently nudges the sheep toward the source of warmth. So God gives us doctrine, and through churchly practices He nudges us toward the biblical doctrine of Christ. ... (p. 14)

Preus devotes the first few chapters to doctrine and the means of grace, explaining the central article of Lutheran doctrine – justification by faith – and demonstrating why doctrine is important. He cautions against measuring the success of the ministry by worldly standards such as numerical growth. He supports this claim by pointing to the Book of Acts, in which we find several examples of the church *not* growing, and yet this is not regarded as a failure on the part of the apostolic ministry. Rather, a successful church is

[O]ne where the Word is taught and the Sacraments administered. The results of these instruments of God are left to the Holy Spirit. Our success at ministry or in church is

measured only by whether we consistently and purely teach this Word and rightly administer Baptism and the Lord's Supper. (p. 37)

Many Christians today downplay the significance of doctrine, urging fellow Christians to focus on their *relationship* with Christ rather than on arid doctrine. But this would be like saying you should focus on your relationship with your wife rather than getting to know her. But of course to have a relationship with her, you *have to get to know her*. Imagine telling your wife that it doesn't matter that you don't know when her birthday is, or when your anniversary is, or what movies she likes, because what's important is not 'arid' facts like these, but rather your relationship with her (and let me know how that goes!). Likewise, doctrine is essentially God telling us things about Himself, precisely *so that we can* have a loving relationship with Him. Or as Preus puts it: "*Christ without doctrine is some vague, wordless, fleshless, and incomprehensible blur, unknowable and unworthy of knowing*" (p. 56).

After outlining basic Lutheran doctrine, Preus shifts his focus to practice. He develops a set of criteria for determining whether a particular practice is essential, whether it is beneficial, or whether it is harmful. Sometimes, the Gospel demands a particular practice. Such practices are essential. An example would be the Lutheran practice of infant baptism. Other practices may not be strictly necessary, but are important because of the particular context in which they are situated or because of the intimate connection between the practice and an article of faith. Practices also teach, sometimes even before we have understanding. Man is not a purely spiritual being like the angels, but is an embodied creature: consequently, we learn not by pure intellection, but with the aid of habits and practices, by rites and rituals. An example Preus gives is a child being taught to bow his head for prayer before he even understands why. In this way the child learns reverence toward God. Practices are also beneficial that promote the unity of the church: ancient and widespread practices connect us to Christ's mystical body across both time and space, to both first-century Christians and to Christians on the other side of the world.

In the Divine Service, the primary way in which practices manifest themselves is through the liturgy. The liturgy gradually developed over

the first five or six centuries of the Church's history as "certain scriptural passages were employed to teach the basics of the Gospel." The liturgy reflects and promotes our oneness in Christ. Preus explains: "*Uniformity in worship is desirable because it unites the saints on earth in a common Christian song. ... [We can] conclude that we are similar churches because our services are the same. ... [C]ommon doctrine is promoted by common practice*" (p. 174). The liturgical ordinaries (the parts that are repeated every Sunday) highlight the major events of Christ's life: the *Gloria* evokes the Incarnation, the *Sanctus* recalls Palm Sunday, and the Words of Institution and the *Agnus Dei* Maundy Thursday and the Passion. Thus, another benefit of a liturgical church is that one is guaranteed to hear the basics of the Gospel, even if the sermon is poor or the hymns are weak.

Practices can also be harmful. Preus's main target here is the practices of American Evangelical Christianity, which have had a significant influence on the Lutheran Church. Evangelicals look to a spiritual experience rather than to faith in something objective as a sign of salvation. A mark of authenticity of such an experience is *excitement*. One consequence is that things become subjective and unpredictable rather than external and objective. This sows uncertainty and divisions among Christians as it becomes increasingly difficult to agree on how to know when one has had an authentic spiritual experience since it is not grounded in something objective like God's Word. Preus traces the development of this novel approach to Christianity through various stages in American history: from the founding of Methodism to early 19th century American revivalism to the birth of Pentecostalism in the early 20th century to the Charismatic movement in the 1960s. Evangelicalism has also been strongly shaped by the American experience, in particular by America's founding ideological principles of individualism and freedom. Evangelicalism stresses the *decision* or free choice of the individual believer to come to Christ.

The different doctrinal content of American Evangelical Christianity is reflected in its practices. For example, the centrality of experience over faith finds expression in its worship services (e.g., praise bands, extemporaneous prayer) and in its emphasis on dynamic,

charismatic preachers. Its belief that we must decide for Jesus (rather than Jesus choosing us) is reflected in its rejection of infant baptism (babies cannot make a conscious decision, after all), thereby denying the fundamental doctrine of grace. Preus draws a vivid analogy in response to this rejection: *"I don't remember when I was born from my mom or how I felt. But it must have been an important event or I wouldn't be here. I think I was particularly close to my mom at that time, and I think I was also particularly close to God when I was born again in Baptism"* (p. 251-252).

While Preus devotes a lot of space to defending historic Lutheran practices against novel Evangelical practices that have been introduced into the Lutheran church in the modern day, he also acknowledges that change can at times be good and even necessary. However, he stresses that even when change is necessary, it should be done *gradually* and accompanied by teaching and gentleness, so as not to alarm or drive away those who had grown accustomed to the previous practice. Preus writes:

Love is patient. It does not expect others to understand change more quickly than is realistic. Even if mature Christians know the need for change, that does not justify the change. They have had the time to learn. Give others the same time. ... Even when change is necessary for the sake of the Gospel, it must be initiated slowly in deference to the weak. (p. 415)

A good pastor must exercise prudence in implementing change.

The Fire and the Staff is a book of theology, but don't let that scare you: it is a very engaging and accessible read. Preus skillfully weaves memorable anecdotes, stories, and even movie plotlines throughout the book to illustrate his points. I encourage anyone looking for a deeper understanding of the historic Lutheran liturgy and its importance and the relationship between doctrine and practice to read this book.

MAY 2019 BIRTHDAYS

May 1	Amy Eklund
May 2	Esther Boone
	Marco Quattrocchi
May 7	Joan Papsun
May 9	Joseph S. Wash (grandson)
May 10	Selina Sharma
May 22	Tom Collins
	Christel Lane
	Devin Palmisano
May 23	Jase Steiner
	Mary Sexton
May 24	Erik Eklund
May 25	Claire Evangeline Scoville
May 31	John Shane
	Xena Moy

ANNIVERSARIES

May 4, 1974	Frank & Hanne Billowitz
May 12, 2007	Michael & Kimberly Sala
May 18, 1996	George & Carol Fischer, Jr.
May 31, 1986	Pastor & Lorayne Beinke

(Any mistakes in the above: sorry! Pastor is on his own here!)

BIBLE READINGS FOR MAY 2019

May 1:	Judges 13:1-14:20 John 1:29-51 Psalm 102:1-28 Proverbs 14:15-16
May 2:	Judges 15:1-16:31 John 2:1-25 Psalm 103:1-22 Proverbs 14:17-19
May 3:	Judges 17:1-18:31 John 3:1-21 Psalm 104:1-23 Proverbs 14:20-21
May 4:	Judges 19:1-20:48 John 3:22-4:3 Psalm 104:24-35 Proverbs 14:22-24

May 5:	Judges 21:1-Ruth 1:22 John 4:4-42 Psalm 105:1-15 Proverbs 14:25	May 14:	1 Samuel 15:1-16:23 John 8:1-20 Psalm 110:1-7 Proverbs 15:8-10
May 6:	Ruth 2:1-4:22 John 4:43-54 Psalm 105:16-36 Proverbs 14:26-27	May 15:	1 Samuel 17:1-18:4 John 8:21-30 Psalm 111:1-10 Proverbs 15:11
May 7:	1 Samuel 1:1-2:21 John 5:1-23 Psalm 105:37-45 Proverbs 14:28-29	May 16:	1 Samuel 18:5-19:24 John 8:31-59 Psalm 112:1-10 Proverbs 15:12-14
May 8:	1 Samuel 2:22-4:22 John 5:24-47 Psalm 106:1-12 Proverbs 14:30-31	May 17:	1 Samuel 20:1-21:15 John 9:1-41 Psalm 113:1-114:8 Proverbs 15:15-17
May 9:	1 Samuel 5:1-7:17 John 6:1-21 Psalm 106:13-31 Proverbs 14:32-33	May 18:	1 Samuel 22:1-23:29 John 10:1-21 Psalm 115:1-18 Proverbs 15:18-19
May 10:	1 Samuel 8:1-9:27 John 6:22-42 Psalm 106:32-48 Proverbs 14:34-35	May 19:	1 Samuel 24:1-25:44 John 10:22-42 Psalm 116:1-19 Proverbs 15:20-21
May 11:	1 Samuel 10:1-11:15 John 6:43-71 Psalm 107:1-43 Proverbs 15:1-3	May 20:	1 Samuel 26:1-28:25 John 11:1-53 Psalm 117:1-2 Proverbs 15:22-23
May 12:	1 Samuel 12:1-13:22 John 7:1-29 Psalm 108:1-13 Proverbs 15:4	May 21:	1 Samuel 29:1-31:13 John 11:54-12:19 Psalm 118:1-18 Proverbs 15:24-26
May 13:	1 Samuel 13:23-14:52 John 7:30-53 Psalm 109:1-31 Proverbs 15:5-7	May 22:	2 Samuel 1:1-2:11 John 12:20-50 Psalm 118:19-29 Proverbs 15:27-28

May 23: 2 Samuel 2:12-3:39
John 13:1-30
Psalm 119:1-16
Proverbs 15:29-30

May 24: 2 Samuel 4:1-6:23
John 13:31-14:14
Psalm 119:17-32
Proverbs 15:31-32

May 25: 2 Samuel 7:1-8:18
John 14:15-31
Psalm 119:33-48
Proverbs 15:33

May 26: 2 Samuel 9:1-11:27
John 15:1-27
Psalm 119:49-64
Proverbs 16:1-3

May 27: 2 Samuel 12:1-31
John 16:1-33
Psalm 119:65-80
Proverbs 16:4-5

May 28: 2 Samuel 13:1-39
John 17:1-26
Psalm 119:81-96
Proverbs 16:6-7

May 29: 2 Samuel 14:1-15:22
John 18:1-24
Psalm 119:97-112
Proverbs 16:8-9

May 30: 2 Samuel 15:23-16:23
John 18:25-19:22
Psalm 119:113-128
Proverbs 16:10-11

May 31: 2 Samuel 17:1-29
John 19:23-42
Psalm 119:129-152
Proverbs 16:12-13