

APRIL 2020

**Newsletter from New Paris
First Church of Brethren**

From the Desk of Pastor Jeff Estep

My whole life I've heard stories about the Blizzard of '78. Growing up, I cherished the stories my parents told about that historic storm. A few of you have shared your stories of the Blizzard over the years I've known you. I've often wondered what it would be like to experience something like that, stuck in the house for a couple of weeks because of something really weird going on around us. After experiencing the events of the last few weeks, I think I no longer have to imagine what that would be like. Coronavirus is unlike anything we've experienced in the past century. Our fellow citizens, both in America and all over the world, are suffering. And unlike a storm that passes, and you then quickly recover from, this virus marches on, silently. We don't know who will get it next, if we have already been exposed, and if the precautions we are taking are protecting us and those we love. Let's be honest, we live in scary times.

As I was thinking about what I might write for this month's newsletter, my mind went to one of the most powerful stories in Scripture, in fact, one of my favorite stories. It takes place in 2 Kings 18-19, during the reign of one of Judah's greatest, and godliest kings- Hezekiah.

Hezekiah was one of the few kings of Judah that followed God with all of his heart. He destroyed pagan temples, idols, and altars that competed with that of God's temple in Jerusalem. He attempted to lead the nation into a spiritual revival. He defeated Judah's enemies in battle. Things were going well. Then, a threat from the East emerged. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, sent his army to the northern tribes of Israel, and laid siege to its capital city of Samaria. The northern tribes eventually fell to Assyria. A few years later, Sennacherib turned his sights on the fortified cities of Judah, and one by one they fell. Things were looking pretty bleak for Hezekiah's kingdom, and for God's people. Desperate, Hezekiah pleaded for peace, sending every ounce of gold and silver as tribute to the invading army.

But the Assyrian army didn't withdraw. Instead, their field commander came to the wall of Jerusalem to mock the Jews and threaten to destroy the city of God. He bragged about how the Assyrian army had destroyed the proudest of nations, and claimed that no god could stand up against their power. In fact, he claimed, it was the LORD Himself that sent the Assyrian army to destroy Jerusalem. Things looked pretty dire. Hezekiah tore his robes, went into mourning, and took refuge in the LORD's temple. It seemed all was lost. Then God spoke.

God sent the prophet Isaiah to King Hezekiah to assure him that despite the boasting of the Assyrians, their past victories over their enemies, and the destruction they had already caused in Judah, God would not allow their plans for Jerusalem to succeed.

Said the LORD, "I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant." (2 Kings 19:34) And just as God promised, Assyria's army left without firing an arrow, for God had caused the commander to hear that another army was marching against them. And in one of the greatest displays of God's power recorded in Scripture, that night an angel of God went through the Assyrian camp and put 185,000 of their soldiers to death. Sennacherib's army withdrew, and a short time later Sennacherib was murdered by his own sons.

What encouragement can we get from this story, especially at this time of great trial? A few things I would note, using quotes from Hezekiah's story:

"Do not be afraid of what you have heard..." (2 Kings 19:6) Certainly this could be a time of great fear. As we watch the numbers of the sick rise, and see it seem to crouch on our own doorstep, it is natural to be afraid. But we do not need to fear. God was in control in Jerusalem in Hezekiah's day, and He is in control now. He has a plan, and He is our defender. My friends, do not fear.

"This will be the sign for you, O Hezekiah: This year you will eat what grows by itself, and the second year what springs from that. But in the third year sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit." (2 Kings 19:29) Judah's economy had been destroyed by the time the invaders reached Jerusalem. The people were in great danger of starvation. But God promised that He would provide during the rebuilding, He would not save them from Sennacherib only to let them starve. He would supernaturally provide a harvest even though they hadn't been able to plant.

Not only will God get us through this period, He will provide for us as we rebuild. If you have lost your job, or if those you love have suffered economically, He will provide if we trust in Him. And He has provided us with Christian community to help us as we recover.

“Now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O LORD, are God.” (2 Kings 19:19)

God used the situation in Judah to rescue His people, but He also used it to show His power. And my sincere prayer is that God will ultimately be glorified, even in the midst of this trial. I have been so encouraged to hear how so many companies have done what they can to help, whether paying employees during a shut down, or retooling their factories to make respirators, or hiring thousands to make sure supplies get where they need to while other companies are having to lay people off. It warms my heart to learn how many people I know are sewing face masks for nurses, or donating food to students who are in need. I know not everyone making these sacrifices is a believer, but many are. People are witnessing for Jesus through their love and sacrifice, and the goodness of our nation’s character is shining through. I believe God will be glorified, and honored, through this season.

So be of good courage. Pray for the sick. Offer love and support to your neighbors. And offer the hope of Jesus to those who are controlled by fear and hopelessness. There may be no greater opportunity for us to be “salt” and “light” than right now. The world is watching for the children of God to be a witness to their Father’s love. We will get through this together, with God’s help. He is in control, and He has a plan!

Pastor Jeff Estep

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Wow, does Kids Ministry look different at the start of April than we imagined it would! Like everything else at the church, our on campus kids ministries (Jr. Church and Kids Club) are taking an unplanned break, but I wanted to highlight a few things that are happening right now regarding children and families:

With Sunday worship temporarily suspended, we are nonetheless trying to give parents a chance to provide a Jr. Church style lesson to their kids. Each week, parents will be able to download a .pdf of a simple lesson for parents to lead their children through, based on the lesson we would have done during Jr. Church. Our first week's lesson was about the story of Jesus ridding a man of demons by sending the demons into a herd of pigs. These lessons can be downloaded at newparisfirst.com by clicking on the link on the morning's sermon page.

Because of COVID-19, we had to postpone the Pancake and Sausage Breakfast Fundraiser planned for March 28th, which was going to raise money for Camp Scholarships. Though only God knows what will transpire over the coming months, Camp Shiphewana is still planning on holding camps this summer, and we are still planning on sending kids! Over the coming month we will begin getting registration info to parents, and we will need to raise money to send them. If you would like to contribute, you can write a check to the church with "Camp Fund" in the memo line, or you can give your online gift at newparisfirst.com. Parents, if you have any questions, please talk to Pastor Jeff by phone or text, 574-370-8171!

Pastor Jeff and Jamie Estep

THIS IS IN THE FELLOWSHIP HALL



God Sighting!!!

God is using our church to help families in the midst of the shut-down! As you know, Jamie organizes a “Blessings in a Backpack” program at Benton and Millersburg Elementary Schools. When Fairfield closed for the coronavirus, Jamie sent an email to some teachers asking for donations of food so that students could be sent home with four weekends’ worth of food. We anticipated a few donations, but thought we would probably have to purchase a few items to make up the difference. But the teachers who received Jamie’s email forwarded it on to others. Some people posted the need to Facebook, and those posts were eventually shared to the Fairfield Schools and Fairfield Food Pantry Facebook pages.

The next day, (Sunday, March 15th), we expected a few people to drop off some items over the course of the afternoon. But we were shocked as a steady stream of people began showing up, some bringing entire trunkfuls of food! We were at the church from the time worship let out until after 6pm, and we were busy the entire time. By the time we left, multiple tables in the fellowship hall were covered in mountains of Pop Tarts, Mac ‘n Cheese, Ramen, Cereal, and various other items. It was amazing how God brought this food in to help families, and from just a simple email!

Over the last couple of weeks we have begun delivering bags full of this food to several families in the area who need extra help. A big thanks to our youth group for helping us bag the food for these families. As time goes on, we know most if not all of this food will be needed by struggling families in our area. It is amazing how quickly things can change. A few weeks ago we had a paycheck to paycheck, or w/bustling economy, and few people were in genuine need. But as factories have shut down, even temporarily, families that may have been living ho weren’t able to shop ahead of the run on stores, suddenly find themselves needing some help. And that is why God provided this food. If you know of a family who is low on nonperishable food, please give Jamie or I a call.

The Fairfield Food Pantry is also open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:30-4:45pm for families living in the Fairfield school district.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us all in our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." What an incredible opportunity we believers have to offer comfort to our neighbors at this time! Let's pray that the comfort we lend will lead to eternal life for those who do not yet know Jesus!

Sermon Titles- All Subject to change

April 5th- Fasting

April 12th- Easter Message!

April 19th- Treasures in Heaven

April 26th- Seek First the Kingdom

April Birthdays- Zane VanDiepenbos- 4, Elmer Yoder- 5, Tim Mullins- 7, Riley Miller-8, Theresa Miles-14, Joyce Parcell - 23, Jim Morris- 25

April Anniversaries- Bob & June Fowler- 4, Larry & Joyce Parcell- 10, Doyle & Brenda Weaver- 15, John & Grace Cline- 19, Mark & Sonia Miller- 28

Butterfly Mornings

Tuesday morning Bible Study will remain on hold until further notice. It seems reasonable to believe that we will not meet until at least May 5th and possibly longer. We have four lessons remaining in our study of Acts. I would like to finish this study before we begin our summer break. If this is not possible, we will finish Acts in the fall.

In the final chapters of Acts, we will see the challenges Paul will face as he returns to Jerusalem. The Jerusalem church over the previous ten years has become narrower in its outlook. Peter, John, and Barnabas moved out to other areas and the Jewish Christians have slipped back into legalism. Paul finds himself torn between wanting to show that he is a zealous Jew who appreciates traditions and a man who was called by God to serve him in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a population of people (the Gentiles) who were not practicing Jewish tradition nor did Paul preach that they should. Paul's message to the Gentiles was about forgiveness and salvation through the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross for all the sins of humanity.

Luke's portrayal of Paul's ministry now bears close resemblance to that of Jesus. Paul's final journey to Jerusalem, even knowing he would face persecution, was an act of obedience to God's will. As it had been with Jesus, Paul's return to Jerusalem was not so much about the end of his life as it was about the purpose for his life.

Paul wrote in Philippians 1:21: "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." In this statement, the apostle Paul is saying that everything he has tried to be, everything he is, and everything he looked forward to being pointed to Christ. From the time of Paul's conversion until his martyrdom, every move he made was aimed at advancing the knowledge, gospel, and church of Christ. Paul's singular aim was to bring glory to Jesus.

This is a message that every Christian is called to live. It is a responsibility of great magnitude and great reward.

....Peggy

Deacon Board

Psychologist William Marston once asked three thousand people, “What have you to live for?” He was shocked to discover that 94% of the people he polled were simply enduring the present while they waited for the future. Some indicated they were waiting for something to happen—waiting for children to grow up and leave home, waiting for next year, waiting to take a trip, waiting for someone to die, or waiting for tomorrow. They had hope, but no on-going purpose for their lives.

Only 6 % of the people identified relationships and activities in the present tense of their lives as valuable reasons to for living!

The 94% would be wise to recall the words of this poem by an unknown author.

During all the years since time began,

Today has been the friend of man,

But in his blindness and his sorrow,

He looks to yesterday and tomorrow,

Forgot past trials and your sorrow,

There was, but is, no yesterday,

Instead of dwelling on your past mistakes, make a new start today by thanking God for all the good in your life.

Guilt is concerned with the past.

Worry is concerned about the future.

Contentment enjoys the present.

(Reprinted from a daily devotional book)

Joyce and I be away for about five weeks. Please know that we remember you in our prayers while we are away, and we love and miss you so much.

Jimmy Gill, chm.