

May 2020 Newsletter
New Paris First Brethren Church
Swimming in a Bathrobe
From the Desk of Pastor Jeff Estep

John 21 tells a fun, and powerful story about Jesus appearing to His disciples after His resurrection. Seven of the disciples go fishing, and after a long night of labor have exactly zero fish as a reward for their work. As the sun begins to rise Jesus calls to them from the shore, though they did not recognize them.

“Friends, haven’t you any fish?” You have to love Jesus’ sense of humor!

“No,” they said. I’ve always wondered whether this was all they said, or whether in their tiredness and frustration they said a few more things John thought it best not to include in his account.

Then Jesus toys with them some more. “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” The right side? Of course, why hadn’t they thought of that! But they do, and they catch so many the nets nearly tear.

Now the disciples recognize Jesus, and the story gets really fun. John tell us that Peter, who had apparently stripped down to his shorts to fish, PUTS ON his outer garment and jumps into the water. I’ve always thought if I were making a movie about Jesus’ life and included this scene, I would take some creative license and have Peter’s brother Andrew lose his balance and fall into the water when Peter rocks the boat to jump in. I don’t know, it just seems like something that would happen to the lesser-known brother, and it would add to the “fun” of this story.

But the manner of Peter’s rash plunge into the Sea of Galilee raises an interesting question. WHO PUTS ON MORE CLOTHES TO GO SWIMMING? Normally, we wear less clothing in the water than we do out of water. But Peter puts on his loose-fitting, body length outer garment to swim to shore. It would be like swimming in your bathrobe. Who does that?

But some commentators actually see a very good reason why Peter puts on more clothes before jumping in. He wasn’t thinking of his swim to shore; he was thinking of what came after. When Peter recognized Jesus, he wanted to be ready to follow Him

He wanted to be ready to go with Jesus, and the only way to be fully ready for the journey was to be fully dressed.

I don't know about you, but I feel kind of like we've been "lounging" a bit these last few weeks. Maybe we haven't just been sitting around the house in our shorts, but our activity level hasn't been what it normally is, and we may feel a bit like we've spent the last month and a half stuck on a 12 foot fishing skiff, and accomplishing nothing! Who else is ready to get off of this boat?

My hope is that we are able to get back to a somewhat normal life pretty soon. But my prayer is that when we do, we approach it with the same gusto that Peter did. Christ has a journey for us, and for our ministry, when this thing is lifted. When we hear Him call our voice, let's make sure we are ready for the journey! Let's dive back into the ministry He has for us, for others need to know the hope that has carried us through these last few weeks! We may find that people are more open to the truth we profess. Let's follow our Savior into the mission He has for us. This is the time to put on our cloak and be ready.

When exactly this happens, and what ministry looks like for the short term, still is yet to be decided. The Board and I will use our state and federal governments' guidance to help chart the path forward. Please be in prayer for us as we make these decisions. In the meantime, continue to listen or watch our services online. Continue to download the digital bulletins so you know what is happening, to take part in our Bible studies as you are able. Continue to call each other, write to each other, and pray for each other. It has been a long night, but daybreak is near. But while we're in the boat, let's make the most of our time. And let's get ready to jump in, fully clothed, to follow our Master, when the sun rises!

Pastor Jeff Estep

Upcoming Sermons

5/3- The Case of the Blind Optometrist

5/10- Persistence

5/17- The Sad Truth, the Joyous Hope!

5/24- Fruit Basket

5/31- Storm Stories

New Sermon Series Coming in June!

One of the most influential Christian bands of the last fifty years is the British band “Delirious?”. The first track on their “Glo” album is called “God You Are My God”. It is a guitar driven song of worship that begins with a Gregorian chant and finishes with a joyful choir accompanying lead singer Martin Smith in joyful praise. Right toward the end of that song are lyrics that make me tear up every time I hear them, as the choir jubilantly exclaims, “We’re going to the house of God, we’re going to the house of God, are ya comin?” The invitation to join in praise is the epitome of what gathering for worship is all about.

We’ve certainly been missing that corporate praise, haven’t we? As I began to think about what to preach on after we finish our Life 101 series in May, my heart was drawn to the “Songs of Ascent” in Psalm 120-134. These psalms were traditionally sang by ancient Jews as they made their pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the sacred feasts. These were meant to prepare the hearts of pilgrims for worship at the Lord’s house. I think we can identify with these ancient pilgrims right now, with their anticipation and joy. And as we prepare to come back together as a church, I think it is good to reflect on what it means to “prepare” for worship.

With that in mind, on June 7th we will start a new sermon series called “The Journey: We’re Going to the House of God!” As we dig into the words of these psalms, I pray God will draw us deeper in love and praise of His majesty. I also hope our worship will be especially joyful as we gather and celebrate His goodness to us. I look forward to being together again soon, and sharing this sermon series

with you!

Children's Ministry Article for May

Children's ministry has not stopped these past several weeks under quarantine! Our lessons have gone online, just like everyone else's around the world! We have continued to study "Gross" stories in the Bible. I am simply "adapting" our Group Publishing lessons to be as meaningful as possible while we are all learning from home.

With our new way of learning, kids get to read scripture, answer questions about what they have read, play a game or do a craft to reinforce the lesson, watch a video interpretation of the scripture, and sing and dance along to upbeat worship music. No, we are not creating original video content. Thankfully, YouTube has a wealth of wonderful stories and songs that are easy to access and share with families. Lessons are kept short. We know kids are tiring of eLearning formats that have taken over so much of their lives.

If you have not yet done so, check out a lesson online. They are easy to find on our church's website. Share them with little people in your life! In addition, I am including directions on how to access the Bible Lessons provided to Fairfield Community Schools elementary school students. Kids can watch their teacher, Mrs. Catherine, via Facebook! It is amazing to watch people rally around kids to support them through a season of life that is challenging.

One of the lessons we are studying this quarter addresses the Israelites grumbling in the desert and our need to listen to and rely on God. To close, I'd like to share the prayer we are using with that lesson to remind us all to stay strong and positive during these difficult days, when we don't always understand why God has led us to where we are individually, or as a nation: Dear Jesus, help us to remember to listen to you and do things your way. You know what is best for us. We hear from you when we pray and read our Bible. Help us to remember to do those things this week. Help us not to grumble and complain the way the Israelites did. Keep our attitudes positive and strong, even when we are struggling with all of the things we can't do. Help us to focus on the things that we can do and the many ways you are taking care of us. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Pastor Jeff and Jamie Estep

BUTTERFLY MORNINGS

At the writing of this article, I have already notified the Tuesday morning ladies that Bible Study is officially cancelled until at least early fall. We will make the decision to meet again when fellowship in close proximity to each other is considered safe. As of today, April 23 rd , there are 1,750,686 active cases of COVID-19 in the world—72,377 recovered cases—185,494 deaths. The US has 729,278 active cases—78,530 recovered—48,061 deaths. Indiana has 706 people testing positive, there is no data on recovered cases and 4 people have died in Elkhart county. I can say with confidence that these numbers will be higher by the time you read this newsletter. The economic fallout from this world-wide pandemic are of epic proportion.

The US unemployment numbers are higher than the Great Depression. Much of the population around the world is experiencing a life disruption that would have been impossible to imagine just a few months ago. There are people who have not left their dwellings in weeks and those that do leave are wondering if this could be the trip that brings the virus home. Having shared the bad news, you can see why I am having difficulty responding to Jeff's request to write something uplifting.

As I consider encouragement, gratitude and hope, I do have some thoughts that may help you in pondering your own reflections. I am encouraged to know that God has given the gift of healing to scientists around the world who are working day and night to discover therapeutic applications and vaccines to fight this virus. I am encouraged by never-ending acts of kindness on display from the young and old that are happening every day around the world. I am encouraged by never-ending acts of kindness on display from the young and old that are happening every day around the world. I am encouraged that more people are using technology to listen and watch religious services than people who attended church before the Covid-19 outbreak. I am encouraged by the declarations of faith that have been shared by people from all walks of life who have suffered unimaginable family death and economic loss. They remain steadfast that God will carry them through.

I am grateful to all the heroic first responders who have worked tirelessly to save every critically ill patient. I am grateful to all the volunteers who have put themselves in harms way to get food to delivered to the most vulnerable in our communities. I am grateful to the workers in essential businesses who have clocked in everyday in order to provide the services we need.

I am grateful that we have discovered innovative ways of dealing with the communication challenges during isolation so that we can get together with our families and our brothers and sisters in Christ. I have hope because I know that God is still in charge; He has demonstrated the power of his healing love over and over again since this all began just two months ago. I have hope because His Word provides the history of His assurance and deliverance. I have hope because the spirit of Jesus Christ lives inside all believers. They will continue to do His work. I have hope because if I should succumb to the virus and die, I know Jesus sacrificed his life on the cross for my sins so that I can have life everlasting. It does not get any better that. Paul's words to the church in Rome have always been my favorite of his writings: And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us (5:2-5). I think that is enough said.

PEGGY

TRUSTEE'S THOUGHTS

We survived the Winter and Spring is here the outside of the building is looking pretty good. The front flower area and landscape areas have been cleaned and the leaf's cleaned up. The grass has been cut once, but we still have weeds. Our friendly ground mole is back but I plan to get him. With the mild winter and the new high efficiency furnaces our heating cost should have been lower this past winter. We are ready to install the air conditioner soon and hope we can have Church and use them. The last time I checked we were still needing about \$2,000 for the air conditioners. I have not been in the Church much but with no activities going on in should be in good shape. The Trustees have not had a meeting for some time, but if you know of something we should be doing let me know.

Gregg Miller, Chairman of the Trustees

Bonnie Reagan Bible Study

As we stay at home in order to decrease the spread of COVID 19, we could readily make a list of what would make us happy. It would include worshiping together on Sunday morning, visiting my grandchildren, attending a little league game or graduation, picking out my own produce, and the list could go on. Happiness generally depends on our circumstances. As Christians we can find joy in all our circumstances, even through the social distancing of COVID 19. Joy does not come from outward circumstances but by inward strength. Knowing Jesus' care for us and our ultimate victory in Him, we can experience joy even in our hardships.

Pastor Jeff is leading the Coronavirus Online Bible Study through the book of Philippians. The Apostle Paul speaks about joy and about the Christian's duty to rejoice over and over again. Paul writes this letter to the Philippians from his prison cell. (Paul is "stuck" in jail and we are "stuck" at home). Paul's message is as relevant to COVID 19 Christians as it was to the Christians in Philippi.

Please join us on Thursday evening at 6 pm. It's easy – come as you are, sit in a comfortable chair, you can participate or just listen, no driving, just a couple of "clicks" and you are here. Don't miss out on the blessing you'll receive through our Bible Study.

We all want to thank Pastor Jeff for our online Bible Study. It is a wonderful time of studying and sharing in God's word. We appreciate being able to reach out to each other in a positive, unique way.

Bonnie Reagan

Want to join the Thursday evening Zoom Bible Study? Download the app, and sign in using this information: Zoom Meeting ID- 432-608-5416, Password 190763. The weekly study guide is available at newparisfirst.com, on the previous Sunday's sermon page.

Pastor Jeff