

May 2021 Newsletter

First Church Brethren of New Paris

Pastor Jeff Estep

Perhaps you've figured out by looking at me, that I've never been a stellar athlete. It's ok, I know it and I own it. I played decent softball as an adult, and I have a pretty good jump shot in basketball (just don't ask me to play defense). But any athleticism I used to have came AFTER I got out of high school. My freshman year I was 5'2" and weighed about 110lbs. And I was skinny as a rail throughout my high school career. (My kids remind me often that is no longer the case!) But needless to say, I wasn't on any athletic teams when I was in high school.

One of the joys I have as a father is having five children who are all much more coordinated than I was at their age, which means Jamie and I keep busy attending their athletic and dance events. Right now it's spring, which means track season for Nate and Johnathan, who are both on their schools' track teams.

I'm still sort of new to track. Johnathan ran track two years ago, and for obvious reasons track didn't happen last year. So as we've begun attending several track meets a week, I've noticed that track meets are different to watch than other sports. In most sports, you root for the TEAM, and only YOUR TEAM. Your ability to encourage individual athletes is limited by the group dynamics of the sport. But in track, you aren't just rooting for a team, but for individuals. The athletes have different levels of skill and experience. Some kids consistently finish at the front, and others further back. But regardless of where they place, the audience cheers for each one- they encourage them all the way to the finish line. You do this for each athlete, whether they're on your team or not, because you want all of them to do their best and FINISH STRONG!

As I reflect on this, I'm reminded of what the writer of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 12:1-2. To set the scene, Hebrews 11 has just described "The Hall of Faith", where the actions of heroes past are described: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Rahab. The writer says that each of these heroes persevered in faith because they were looking forward to the Heavenly Kingdom into which we all have become a part. Then, in Hebrews 12, the writer begins, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

The writer presents our life of faith as a race. We are the athletes, running toward a heavenly finish line. Like many athletes, we are tempted at times to give up. We grow tired, we ache, and we wonder if all of this difficulty is worth it. But then we hear the voices from the stands. The examples of those who have gone before are cheering us on.

I know I've said this before, but I don't believe that "The Hall of Faith" in Hebrews 11 was meant to be exhaustive. In fact, I think anyone who has lived by faith becomes a part of that great assembly. The "great cloud of witnesses" includes those who are listed in Scripture, but it also includes saints throughout the centuries of the church, known and unknown, who have finished their race, and whose example gives us courage. This would also include loved ones we've known, who have gone before.

We each have a "great cloud of witnesses" who are in the stands, encouraging us to keep going when the race gets tough. Can I ask who is in your "great cloud"? Who are the believers who have impacted your life, who are now with the Lord, and are now waiting for you at the finish line? When I'm struggling, or discouraged, I often think of the people I've known who I know are cheering me on from heaven. And like that kid toward the back of the pack at the track meet, struggling to finish that last 100 yards, I find the strength to keep going.

What about you? Who are the people who cheer you on? If you are struggling, think about those people who make up your "great cloud of witnesses". Write down their names if it helps. Be reminded of the obstacles they overcame, their acts of faith, their testimony, the way they encouraged you while they were alive. And think of what they'd say to you now, which might very well include the words, "You can do it! Keep running!"

Focusing on what is ahead!

Pastor Jeff

Sermon Titles- May

May 2- Trekking Together

May 9- God's Will in 3 Easy Steps!

May 16- Kept Blameless

May 23- Worthy of the Kingdom

May 30- Every Good Purpose

Children's Ministry

GET YOUR KIDS TO CAMP! I am so happy to be able to say that we are in good shape for sending kids to camp this year! The Men's Ministry's annual Pancake & Sausage Fundraiser raised \$2008, a record! I want to thank the men of our church for sponsoring this, and everyone who came and supported the breakfast. As of the writing of this article, we have enough money to provide at least 12 scholarships to students to attend camp.

Cassandra Peters is collecting our camp forms this year, and helping to recruit kids for camp. If you need a form, you can talk to her, or you can download one at brethrenretreat.org, and turn the filled-out form into Cassandra.

Here are the dates for this year's camps.

Ignite Camp- (Bible Camp for 11-14 year olds)- June 13-19 (we provide partial scholarship)

Fuel Camp- (Bible Camp for 8-11 year olds)- June 20-26 (we provide partial scholarship)

Blaze Camp- (Bible Camp for 14-18 year olds)- June 27-July 1. (Students may also attend an extended version of this camp from July 1-3).

Mini Bible Camp- (6-8 year olds)- July 18-20

Archery Camp- (9-13 year olds)- June 27-July 1

Nature Discovery Camp- (9-13 year olds)- June 27-July 1

Cooking Camp- (9-13 year olds)- July 4-8

Sports Camp (9-13 year olds)- July 4-8

Canoe Camp (13-16 year olds)- July 4-10

Pioneer Camp (10-12 year olds)- July 11-17

In Christ, Pastor Jeff

Youth Newsletter

By the time you get this newsletter, our weekly Youth Group meetings for the school year will have officially ended ☹️ We usually take the summers off because of vacations, fair, camps, Conference, and other things that would prevent kids from attending on a regular basis. But that doesn't mean that Youth Ministry stops at the end of April!

Over the coming weeks, we will begin registering youth for this year's Engage Conference in Akron, Ohio. This year's Conference will be held at a convention center from July 19-22. We will be staying in a hotel, which means no boiling hot dorm rooms (yay!), and less packing because we don't have to pack bedding and fans for the boiling hot dorm rooms (yay!). Please talk to Jamie or I if you have questions about this year's Conference, which is open to those who have finished 6th grade and older. If your student would rather not go to Conference, but might be interested in going to one of Camp Shipshewana's Jr. or Sr. High camps, talk to Cassandra Peters. We would be happy to help get your student to camp!

Though we've not filled the calendar yet, we will be doing a few youth group events over the summer. Parents, please make sure that we have your contact information so we can send you texts, mailers, etc., about what's going on. We'd hate for your teen to miss out!

Finally, we are kicking around the idea of moving our weekly Youth meetings to Sunday nights when we start back up in the fall. There are a few reasons for this. First, in the event we don't yet have a new Youth Director, having Youth on Sunday and Kids Club on Wednesdays would give Jamie and I greater ability to help with both programs. But another important reason we are considering the change is that because of school sports, after school activities, and parents getting off of work, it can be difficult for our youth to get here by 6pm on Wednesday evenings. By moving meetings to Sunday, we would have greater flexibility in when we start and finish, it would be easier for students involved in school activities to attend, and we would be able to use more of the building if we needed to, as the building is rarely in use on Sunday evenings. Having said that, we don't want to make this decision without parental input. Parents, please let us know what thoughts you have about moving our meetings to Sundays, and whether it would be beneficial for your families.

Serving Christ,

Pastor Jeff & Jamie

Helping Hands

We will have a regular meeting on May 13th @ 1:15 pm to 3pm
Edna will have something for you all to do. Thanks HELPING HANDS LADIES



**HAPPY
BIRTHDAY**

3- Mark Miller 9- Jerica Johnson 11- Tammi Williams

14- Diana Stump

18- Mabel Miller 21- Bob Fowler 22- Art Baer

24- Diana Hammonds and Zoe Zimmerman 25- Bev Deter

28- Brenda Weaver 29- Jon Long



**HAPPY
ANNIVERSARY**

5- Jeff & Jamie Estep 29- Charlie & Ruby Thompson

Did we miss you? It's possible we don't have all your info! Pick up a Church Directory Update form so we don't miss your birthday next time!

Butterfly Mornings

There's a fairly common catchphrase ("I guess it is my cross to bear") that I have heard used to describe something that has gone wrong in life that brings unpleasantness. I have been guilty of using this phrase a few times without even giving it much thought. Henry Blackaby author of *Experiencing God* has clarified what it really means to take up your cross. He begins by quoting from Matthew 16:11:

Then Jesus said to his disciples, If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."

Your "cross" is God's will for you, regardless of the cost. Taking up your cross is a choice; it is not beyond your control. You may have health problems or a rebellious child or financial pressures, but do not mistake these as your "cross to bear." Neither circumstances you face nor consequences of your actions are your cross. Your cross will be to voluntarily participate in Christ's sufferings as He carries out His redemptive purposes (Phil. 3:10). Paul said he rejoiced in his sufferings because he knew that by them, he was able to participate in the suffering required to bring others into Christian maturity (Col.1:24).

We tend to want to go immediately from "denying ourselves" to "following Jesus." But you can never follow Jesus unless you have first taken up your cross. There are aspects of God's redemptive work that can be accomplished only through suffering. Just as Christ had to suffer in order to bring salvation, there will be hardships you may have to endure in order for God to bring salvation to those around you. Jesus did not talk with His disciples about the cross until they had come to know He was the Christ (Matt.16:21). You will never be able to endure the suffering of the cross unless you have first been convinced that Jesus is the Christ. Once you have settled your relationship with Christ, He will introduce you to your cross.

There is no Christianity without the cross. If you are waiting for a relationship with God that never requires suffering or inconvenience, then you cannot use Christ as your model. God's will for you involves a cross. First, take up your cross, then you can follow Him.

I marked this particular devotion so that I could go back and read it often, especially when I am feeling sorry for myself. It is difficult to surrender our will to God; however, we cannot follow Christ if we do not deny thyself and take up His cross. May this message be a reminder that when we pick up the cross every day, our faith is stretched beyond what we every thought possible. It is in rare moments of spiritual clarity; we can begin to understand what Paul meant when he said: "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). **Peggy**

Trustees Notes

Spring is here and the grass is green. The front lighted sign has not been working for some time and the trustees did not know that the light was not working. Doug has been working with Scott Signs and they have got it repaired, THANKS DOUG. If you see a problem or something is not working or that needs repaired please let a Trustee know.

The Trustees will be having a meeting Saturday morning MAY 8th this will be after the men's breakfast. We have a quote to have the parking lot resealed and stripped. We have talked about having the outside stairway painted, we have talked about a vinyl fence to hide the air conditioners and possibly a concrete boarder in place of the plastic ones we have now. If you have any thoughts on these or any other projects we should be looking into let me know.

Chairman: Gregg Miller