

--- *River's Edge Echo* ---

Published by **FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF SARATOGA, WYO.**

March 2021

Is Pandemic God's Judgment?

Greetings everyone

The month of March marks the one-year anniversary of a nationwide shutdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I remember when Governor Gordon announced a three-week shutdown. I did a quick look at the calendar and thought, "Well, we won't be worshipping in person for Palm Sunday and probably not Maundy Thursday; but at least the order expires in time to worship in person for Easter." We know that did not happen as three weeks turned into seven for the state. While we might lament missing Easter services last year, we are fortunate that Governor Gordon eventually eased the restrictions enough to allow religious services to resume on May 10, 2020. Other states and many European countries are still being banned from worshipping in person or limited to only outdoor services.

Early in the pandemic, I remember one elder suggesting that perhaps this is God's judgment against our nation (and world) for turning its back on God's law. I am always hesitant to declare something to be God's judgment against a group of people or an entire nation. After all, that statement has been abused by self-righteous groups such as the Westboro Baptist "church." (*Small "c" intentional. I do not consider them a true church.*) Plus, there are numerous events that have been declared to be God's judgment against us. Examples include 9-11, as well as many of the hurricanes, fires and other disasters that have taken place over the last couple of decades.

Another reason I do not like calling disastrous events God's judgment, is that it makes it sound like those who died from these events were the sinful ones. That is not accurate. The book of Job is exhibit A against such thinking. Another example is John 9:1-3 where the disciples, seeing a man who was blind from birth, ask Jesus who sinned, the parents or the blind man? Jesus' answer was that neither of them sinned. While hesitant to say that the pandemic is God's wrath against us, there may be an element of truth to that statement.

I am confident that this pandemic will serve to further God's good purpose. How God will use it, I do not know. The Almighty has not revealed it to me. (And I am pretty confident he has not revealed it to anyone else either.) I also know that God is calling us to pray fervently. The first thing we should do in our prayers is to confess our own sins. Next, we should pray that God will heal our land. Finally, we need to act consistent with our claim to be followers of the Messiah. God wants all of us to, "become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world." (Philippians 2:15) We need to be shining brightly in the hopes that our light will bring others to a saving faith in Christ.



With thoughts of Spring, which seldom comes to Saratoga, Carlene Sjoden submitted this picture of daisies at the Church last summer.

For the first two weeks of March, the Scripture passages for the sermons will continue on the theme of God's judgment and restoration. Then the last two weeks will have us looking at Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem. As we continue in the season of Lent, may we find ourselves drawing nearer to Christ in both faith and action. —*Blessings, Pastor Steve*

Scripture Passages for March

March 7—Luke 13:1-9 March 14—Psalm 107:17-22
March 21—John 12:1-12 March 28—Mark 11:1-11

Session Highlights

On February 18, the Session held its monthly meeting. Most of the meeting was routine with the Session approving the minutes of the January Session meeting and the minutes of the Annual meeting, as was approved by a vote of the congregation. The board also made a change in the committee assignments. In keeping with the tradition established by the Session, Ken Collamer and Vickie Stolns were assigned to the Nominating Committee and John Wickstrom's request to not be on the committee was approved.

The Session also discussed issuing a credit card to the treasurer and the pastor. Over the past decade, fewer of the vendors who serve the church are willing to bill the church. Some of the companies that do allow us to be billed, offer discounts for using credit cards. The Session approved obtaining a credit card and has assigned Pastor Steve Niccolls and Treasurer Sonja Collamer to create a policy regarding the use of the card.

The Session also discussed the possibility of having fellowship after worship. The consensus is that it is still a little too early to do so for March, but will take up the issue again at the March meeting.

The next Session meeting is scheduled for March 18, at 4:30 p.m. —**Session Highlights. . . continued on back page**

Thank God for Old People:

>Old People are easy to spot at sporting events: during the playing of the National Anthem because they remove their caps and stand at attention and sing without embarrassment, and they know the words and believe in them.

>Old People remember World War I & II, Pearl Harbor, Guadalcanal, Normandy and Hitler.

>They remember the Atomic Age, the Korean Conflict, the Cold War, the Jet Age and the Moon Landing, plus the 50+ peace-keeping missions from 1945 to 2005, not to mention Vietnam.

>If you bump into an Old Person on the sidewalk they will apologize. If you pass an Old Person on the street, they will nod or tip his hat to a lady. Old People trust strangers and are civil to each other.

>Old People hold the door for the next person and, when walking, make certain the lady is on the inside for protection.

>Old People get embarrassed if someone curses in front of women and children and they don't like any filth or dirty

language on TV or in movies.

>Old People have moral courage and personal integrity. They seldom brag unless it's about their children or grandchildren.

>It's Old People who remove their hats while eating in a restaurant in respect for the ladies and guests.

>It's the Old People who know our great country is protected, not by politicians, but by the young men and women in the military serving their country.

>This country needs Old People with their work ethic, sense of responsibility, pride in their country and decent values.

We need them now more than ever!

Thank God for Old People!

—Submitted by Gloria Rakness, with editing by Dick Perue



And Forgive Us Our Trespases...

...as we forgive those who trespass against us... Why "trespases" instead of the more modern word "debts"? "Debts" and "debtors" have monetary significance, whereas "trespass" implies any offence against another person, any intrusion into their rights.

If asked to name some of the biggest problems of life, you might answer: health, finances, or worry about the future.

But what about guilt? Whether or not we are aware of it, a guilty conscience can be a subtle but serious problem. A sense of guilt, even subconscious guilt, is a powerful and destructive force in one's personality. The human heart cannot live comfortably with feelings of guilt.

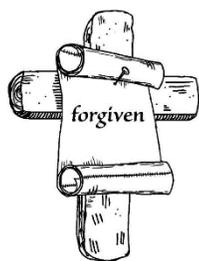
Isn't guilt the emotion that prompts us to ask God to forgive our trespases or sins? We believe that Jesus took on His perfect self the burden of our sin and the punishment for it; therefore, we needn't feel guilt for sin any longer. And if we have truly and fully accepted God's forgiveness, the result is a wonderful sense of peace in our souls. But we still need to pray for forgiveness...

"All have sinned..." (Romans 3:23) "All" means everyone. Beginning with Adam and Eve, every human being who has ever lived (except Jesus, of course) has sinned, and that sin offends a perfect, holy God. Since we have all sinned, we are all guilty, and therefore we are all in need of forgiveness from the One we have sinned against. And God *does* forgive us initially when we come to recognize Jesus as our Saviour, when we become Christians. The promise of God is forgiveness for everyone who asks it of Him. The only way we can NOT be forgiven is simply to *not ask!* At the Cross of Calvary, we can find true forgiveness of sins, freedom from guilt, and reconciliation with our heavenly Father.

From then on, however, in our daily Christian walk, two things need to happen: first, we need to confess our sins. First John 1:9 says: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive [us]..." And so we pray: "forgive us our trespases [sins]". But that is not the end of the matter. There is a condition, a 'catch'. When we ask God for His forgiveness, *we must be willing to forgive those who have trespased against us*, offended us, sinned against us.

When we pray: "forgive us our trespases [in the same way] as we forgive those who trespass against us", the words trip off our tongues because most of us have prayed this prayer countless times. It is easy to pray that God will forgive us, but how about "as we forgive [others]"? Easier said than done? Absolutely! But if we want God to forgive us, it is very important! Next time, we'll think more about some ways we 'interpret' that phrase and how we actually can forgive others in the way that God wants us to.

—Virginia Senne



Schedule of Events:

Sunday:

Adult Bible Study—8:15 a.m.

Worship Service—9:30 a.m.

Wednesday:

Prayer Shawl Ministry—9:30 a.m.

**Second Thursday of Month
Presbyterian Women—1:30 p.m.**

Session meeting 2nd Thurs. 4:30

First Presbyterian Church of Saratoga, Wyoming

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Officers & Committees

Session—Ken Collamer, Vickie Stolns, John Wickstrom, Herman Strickland, Van Skilling & Teense Willford.

Treasurer—Sonja Collamer

Financial Sect.—Anne Wickstrom

Clerk of Session—John Wickstrom

Deacons—Carlene Sjoden, Sandy Willford, Laurie Johnston, Susan Collamer, Anne Wickstrom, Becky Strickland.

Session Committees:

Building /Grounds—Herm Strickland
Christian Education—Van Skilling & Teense Willford

Congregational Care—all Session members & Deacons

Endowment—Ken Collamer

Evangelism/Membership—Ken Collamer

Memorial—Vickie Stolns

Mission—Vickie Stolns

Nominating—Ken Collamer & Vickie Stolns

Worship—John Wickstrom

Leaders:

Adult Bible Study—Sonja Collamer

Choir Director—Laurie Johnston

Music—Laurie Johnston, Carol Clemetson, Peggy Hiser, Cindy Kessler, Teense Willford

Memorial Committee—Carol Jo Jones, Frances Kirby, Vickie Stolns

Prayer Shawl Ministry—Barb Johnson, founder; Christine Wickstrom

Presbyterian Women—Emily Nicolls

Prayer Chain—**Sherry Parlow: 326-3369**

Corporate Officers—Dick Perue, Ken Collamer, Sonja Collamer, John Wickstrom

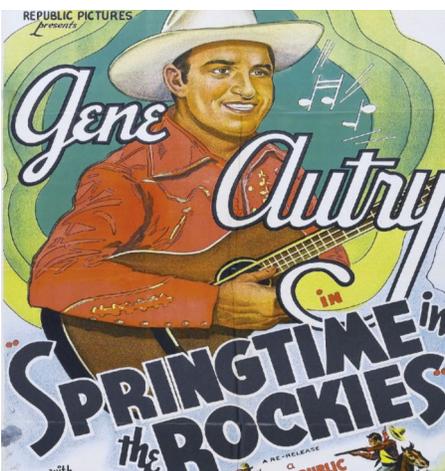
"River's Edge Echo"—Dick Perue



The Doxology (winter version)

Praise God from whom all blizzards flow
Praise him at 35 below
Praise him in snow drifts 10 feet deep
Praise him though snow makes us weep

This version is courtesy of Spirit 92.9, a radio station in St. Cloud MN. A video clip of this version being sung is posted on the church's Facebook page.



'When it's Springtime in the Rockies'

Lyrics by Gene Autry

When it's springtime in the Rockies
I'm coming back to you
Little sweetheart of the mountains
With your bonnie eyes of blue

Once again I'll say I love you
While the birds sing all the day
When it's springtime in the Rockies
In the Rockies far away

The twilight shadows deepen into night dear
The city lights are gleaming o'er the snow
I sit alone beside the cheery fire
I'm dreaming dreams from out the long ago

I fancy, it is springtime in the Rockies
The flowers with their colors are aflame
And though I long to be back in the Rockies
I'll wait until the springtime comes again

When it's springtime in the Rockies
I'm coming back to you
Little sweetheart of the mountains
With your Bonnie eyes of blue

Once again I'll say I love you
While the birds sing all the day
When it's springtime in the Rockies
In the Rockies far away

—Submitted by Carlene Sjoden

Prayer Shawl Ministry Still Busy Knitting

(Editor's note: The Prayer Shawl Ministry, whose volunteers gather at the Saratoga Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall each Wednesday, submitted the following letter to the congregation last month):

Dear Pastor Steve and members,

We are so blessed to have you all as partners for our prayer shawl ministry. This year (2020) has been challenging to say the least.

We did not meet from March 13 to May 27, 2020 because of the health orders during the pandemic of Covid-19. We met 37 times this year. We averaged 8-10 members at each meeting. We have 18 members with 5 retired. We had no new members this year.

We gave out 152 shawls, using 432 skeins of yarn. Each shawl takes 3.5 skeins. We spend an average of \$5.50 per skein. This year, 2020, we spent about \$1,376.00 on yarn, \$147.00 on prayer cards (200) and \$142.00 on postage. We have \$1,450.00 in savings. We received \$200.00 which is the minimum the bank requires for us to keep in our free savings account. We have set aside \$150.00 for postage and cards for 2021.

Our treasurer Debbie D'Amico resigned in April of 2020 to take care of her parents in Colorado. Cheryl Ervin became our treasurer in September 2020. Debbie still has some of our records so most of the balances for the savings account are from June 2020 since the statements were going to Debbie until then. Our secretary is Micki Hall, and I am the leader for 2020-2021.

I hope I haven't forgotten anything important. We surely appreciate the donations you have made to our group. We are still praying and still giving out shawls, about 4 a week. We are so thankful to have a safe place to meet. We are bless to have you helping us in our ministry.

*With kind regards,
Christine Wickstrom*

DEACONS' DOINGS

The Deacons and ex-officio Pastor Steve Niccolls met informally, via text messages February 18, 2021.

Deacons are working on an updated birthday and anniversary list of congregation members for the card ministry. It was completed and given out to Deacons, in attendance, and Cindy Kessler before church Sunday February 21, 2021.

The Deacon Board is putting together an April "surprise" for the congregation. The Board will meet after worship, Sunday March 21, 2021.

If you know of a congregation member that is under "quarantine" for covid-19, please let Pastor Steve or one of the Deacons know. There are "Blessings Bags" available.

Wishing you a blessed March 2021!

—Submitted by Carlene Sjoden, Co-Moderator

Adult Bible Study

The Sunday morning Bible Study group will wrap up our study of the exciting and prophetic book of Daniel on Sunday, February 28th. We will then begin our Lenten study with the aid of a book by Kenneth H. Carter Jr., *Near the Cross, a Lenten Journey of Prayer*.

Mr. Carter writes in his introduction "My prayer for you, in the season of Lent, is that you will find help and hope in the Letter to the Philippians. . . . Paul's words can assist us in reframing many of the questions we have in the spiritual journey. I find his encouragement to be an amazing gift from God in a season of despair and discouragement. And I find his challenge to be a prophetic admonition from God in a culture of cynicism and complacency."

The study books are in the Narthex and cost \$4.00. We would welcome you to join us Sunday mornings at 8:15 in the Fellowship Hall.—Submitted by Sonja Collamer



Session Highlights . . . continued from front page

Committee assignments for Session members are:

Clerk of Session—John Wickstrom

Building & Grounds—Herman Strickland

Christian Education—Van Skilling and Teense Willford

Congregation Care—All Session members and Deacons

Endowments—Ken Collamer

Evangelism & Membership—Ken Collamer

Memorial Committee—Vickie Stolns

Mission Committee—Vickie Stolns

Nominating Committee—Ken Collamer and Vickie Stolns

Worship Committee—John Wickstrom

—Submitted by Pastor Steve Niccolls

Prayer Chain No. is 326-3369

Ways to contact Pastor Steve

Normal drop-in office hours at Church are

Monday-Thursday 8:00 - 12:00

Meetings and Appointments at Any Time

Office phone is 326-5337, Home phone 326-3163,

Cell phone (510) 825-3721

srniccolls@att.net* or *1pcsaratoga@union-tel.com

Or leave note on white board on office door or on desk



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