

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH – MISSOURI SYNOD

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August & September 2020

“Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” (John 4:29 ESV)

Dear Friends in Christ:

I wrote the article printed on the following page in early March for publication in our April–May newsletter. How the world has changed since the middle of March when the first COVID-19 restrictions were put in place! When that happened, I felt I had no choice but to set my planned article aside and write a new one to address the crisis. However, I still hoped to share that first article with you, and so I decided to do so now with these additional introductory comments.

In the article below, I write about my newfound love for the game of bridge. My love for bridge hasn't changed during these past four months, but I play it entirely online now. The Racine duplicate bridge club is closed indefinitely, together with nearly all bridge clubs across the country. Many are wondering when (or even if) they will reopen. It may be a long time before people are comfortable again playing and sharing cards for several hours around card tables in a small, enclosed space.

Playing bridge has continued, however; only now, it's played online. Bridge players and clubs have moved their games to online platforms. Although most players miss the social aspect of playing bridge in person, they are grateful to still be able to play the game they love.

We, at Grace, have had to make similar changes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We upgraded our computer and video equipment so that we could broadcast our worship services and Bible studies online. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we worked through some of the early glitches! Although I am very happy that we can meet and worship in person again, we will also continue to use and improve our new online platform.

I believe this technology will prove to be a great blessing for us. Not only does it enable us to stay in touch with our own members, but it also allows us to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with people all over the world. What's more, it gives those who live locally the opportunity to see who we are and what we are about from the privacy of their home. As I write about in my article on the next page, it's not easy to visit a new church. We know from our own experience that it can be scary to go somewhere for the first time or to try something new. (I felt the same when I first started playing at the bridge club.) But with this online technology, people can visit our website or Facebook page, and they can get a good glimpse of our church through them. Of course, my hope is that they will come and visit Grace in person. As they hear God's Word through our online worship services and Bible studies, I believe some of them will do so.

I intended this to be a rather brief introduction to my first article, but it turned out to be article in and of itself! Thank you for reading all this! And thank you again your continued prayers, support, and encouragement. Yes, much has changed these past four months, but God's love for us in Jesus Christ hasn't changed. Despite the present difficulties, we have been given a wonderful opportunity to share the love of God with others, both online and in person, so that they, too, may rest in the forgiveness, peace, and salvation that Jesus won for them, for you, and for the world on His cross.

And now, without further ado, below is my promised article from March 2020:

Dear Friends in Christ:

Last summer, I decided to learn how to play bridge. (I will tell you the reason why later in my letter.) Since then, I have purchased and read several books on bridge. I downloaded an app that allows me to play bridge on my smartphone. I have also started to play a few times a month at the Racine duplicate bridge club of the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL). Some may say that I have become obsessed with bridge. I don't think I have reached that point, but Tabitha may disagree with me about that! 😊

You may be wondering why I am telling you about my new adventures in bridge. Well, it might sound strange, but I am finding similarities and connections between life in the bridge world and life in the church. For example, one of major concerns of the ACBL is that its membership is getting smaller and older. In the February 2020 issue of *Bridge Bulletin*, the ACBL monthly magazine, the ACBL president, Georgia Heth, wrote the following:

Of concern to me is that when I started playing bridge at age 23, I was a young bridge player, and now at age 63, I am still a young bridge player. One of the things greatly affecting the League is how the increase in the average age of our members has resulted in a corresponding decrease in the attendance at our tournaments. There has been much discussion about this and the decreasing number of members of the ACBL, all centering on how to increase both sets of numbers.

Does this sound familiar? We are facing the same kinds of challenges at Grace. Over the past few decades, our membership at Grace has decreased, while the average age of our members has increased. Ways to attract and bring in new members, especially younger families, is a concern we share not only with other churches, but also with bridge clubs, bowling leagues, and other organizations in our community. Generally speaking, people are not as involved in social and civic groups as they once were.

This leads me to tell you how I got involved with bridge in the first place. Quite simply, my father kept encouraging me to do so. He loves to play bridge. For a variety of reasons, he didn't play when I was growing up. (Hence the reason why I didn't learn then.) But when he retired 15 years ago, he picked it up again, and he now plays several times a week. Since his retirement, he has encouraged me to learn and play bridge, too. For many years, I kept telling him no, that I was either too busy or wasn't interested. However, after visiting my parents last summer, I decided I would give bridge a try. My dad and I used to play golf together. However, because his health no longer permits him to do so, I thought by learning this new game, I could play bridge with him instead. And I'm very glad that I did. My dad and I played bridge three times when I visited my parents in February, and now I'm hooked.

My friends, one of the best methods for trying to increase the membership of an organization—whether it's the bridge club or the church—is by personal invitation and encouragement. And as was the case for me with learning bridge, it may take several years of encouragement before your family member or friend decides to accept your invitation and come with you to church. But don't give up. Keep encouraging and praying. In John, chapter 4, the woman at the well in Samaria invited her neighbors to meet Jesus. She said to them, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" And, after meeting Jesus, they said to her, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world" (John 4:29, 42 ESV).

Yes, playing bridge is fun. (At least, I think so!) But the blessings of being in church and knowing Jesus as our Savior far surpass the joy of bridge or anything else in this world. As God's people, we have the privilege of sharing the saving message of Jesus with others. Jesus died for our sins and rose again Easter morning to win our salvation and eternal life with Him in heaven. May God grant us strength, patience, and encouragement as we seek to bear witness to Him and to His great love for us in Jesus.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Brian Crane

P.S. If you play bridge or would like to learn, please let me know! 😊

UPDATED COVID-19 WORSHIP GUIDELINES (as of July 20, 2020):

- We can hold in-person worship services at 50 percent of our seating capacity.
 - Conservatively, our nave can hold about 300 people, so 50 percent of that is 150. I do not anticipate that we will exceed the 150-person limit at any one service.
- Social distancing (six-foot distance between people, except for members of the same family) will be followed as much as possible.
 - Please keep your distance as best you can from other people.
 - Some rows of pews are blocked off.
- Masks may be worn in church, but they are not required.
- A linen dipped in alcohol will be used to wipe the rim of the common cup (chalice) between communicants.
- The individual cups will be spaced throughout the trays to reduce the risk of touching another cup besides your own.
- Please keep some distance from others while at the Communion rail (families can remain together). Also, please remain standing so as not to touch the rail and possibly contaminate it.
- Hand sanitizer will be available on stands near the trays for the used Communion cups for those who wish to use it.
- The children will not come forward for Catechism Time.
- The offering plates will be located at the back of the nave.
- The Fellowship Pads will not be completed at this time.
- Please try to follow social distancing as much as possible when leaving by not congregating at the exits.
- **Please contact me if you or your family would like to receive Communion from me privately, either at church or at your home. I will wear a mask if desired.**

Thank you for your understanding and cooperation. If you have any questions, please let me know. May God bring an end to this pandemic soon. – Pastor Crane

FROM THE BOARD OF ELDERS

I never enjoyed taking philosophy courses in college, but there was one book that stuck with me.

Candide by Voltaire is a wild farce of a satire, aiming to poke holes in the schools of thought, world leaders, and religions of the 18th century. At the center of the satire is Professor Pangloss, who constantly reiterates that “all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds” while suffering great loss and seeing great tragedy all around him.

The disconnect from his beliefs to the actual events of the world is meant to be humorous and ridiculous. Yet, I find myself relating to the reality of that statement more and more.

The life of a Christian is meant to be, reasonably, optimistic. We live in a world created for us, are absolved of our sins by a Savior who was punished for us, and will inherit an eternal paradise that was promised to us. We are privileged. We are blest. We should be thankful.

Thankful for even 2020? This has been a year defined by limits and loss, division, depression, and separation. To be thankful for this year can seem to be as misguided as Pangloss’ unwavering positivity.

Yet we have much to be thankful for. We know this world is not perfect. We know this world is forever stained by sin. And if this world is all we have, then we should be very worried.

But God's love for us extends past our earthly life. It extends far past COVID-19 and societal division. It leads us to His side, in heaven. "Heaven is my home," we sing, and we need to trust that.

We will do what we can to enjoy the blessings God has given us in this world and in these times. But He truly has prepared the best for us. And there is nothing that could be better.

God's blessings,
Matthew Olson

FROM THE BOARD OF STEWARDSHIP

"Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" asked the rich young ruler. Jesus said, "You know the commandments." And the ruler replied, "All these I have kept from my youth." And Jesus said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." (Luke 18:18–22)

As we listen to this, one question is raised in our minds: Is Jesus speaking to us also or only to the rich young ruler? In other words, is Jesus telling us to sell all that we have and give it to the poor? As good Lutherans, we answer: No! But why? Why should we not sell all that we have and distribute it to the poor?

The simplest explanation is this: If a man sold everything he had, his wife and children would be neglected. In other words, to sell everything we have and give it to the poor would ignore, even abandon, those whom God has placed in our care. Our money, everything we have, is not to be used solely for the church. But that doesn't mean it isn't to be used for the purpose God intends.

Everyone has three stations in life, three spheres in which we live and are to be of service to our neighbors. These stations are the church, the family, and society. We are members of all three of these by birth.

- We are born into the church by water and the Word of God, and our duties to others in the church arise from either our birth into the church or the birth of others by Baptism into it.
- We are born into a family, and our duties to others stem from either our birth into that family or the birth of others into our family.
- Finally, we are born into society, which is simply a further extension of our birth into our family. The duties we have toward other members of society come from either our birth or the birth of others into the same society.

All that we have and all that we are is to be pressed into service for the church, the family, and society. If we were to sell all we have and give only to one, the other two would be neglected, and our duties toward them would falter.

So consider your life and all that you have in light of these three stations. You pay taxes to support and help those in society. You provide food, clothing, and shelter for the members of your family. You save for college for your children.

But the one station that is usually thought of last is the church. Since the needs of the family and society are more immediate, the church is often given what is left over. This is not how it should be. Rather, we are to give of our first fruits – the best from off the top – even as Abel gave the best of his flock.

This requires forethought and intent. It means that you sit down and make a plan for what you will give from the beginning. It means sticking to it even when it seems there are other more immediate and pressing things.

This is all the more necessary now as we enter into periods of time while giving is low due to high unemployment or restrictions on meeting in church to give. If we love God, His gifts of forgiveness given through the means of grace we receive at church and only at church, then we will support the church just as we love our country and our family.

For all that we have and all that we are is given to us by our gracious and giving God. He spared no expense for us and our salvation. He gave up His Son into death so that our sins are forgiven, and we will live. What is more, He provides for all that we need for this body and life. And our lives in this world, among these three spheres of the church, the family, and society, are to mirror the generosity of the one who gave us life in all three by birth.

Don't let the church, your divine family, be ignored or even an afterthought. The church is nurturing you, bringing you up in salvation by Word and Sacrament for eternal life.

FROM THE BOARD OF EDUCATION AND THE BOARD OF YOUTH

KIDS...PLUNGE IN TO VBS 2020! At Splash Canyon VBS, children learn that God keeps His promises on life's wild ride! They'll look into the Bible, God's Holy Word, and explore five Bible accounts where our faithful God keeps His promises to be with us and gives us life and hope through Jesus, our Savior. Registration is open for all children three years old through sixth grade. The dates for VBS are August 3rd – 7th, 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM. Come along with us as we sing fun songs, do creative crafts, eat yummy snacks, play awesome games, and more. Most important, we will learn that all God's promises are Yes in Jesus! We can't wait to see you there! To register, fill out the registration form included with this newsletter or sign up online at vbsmate.com/GraceLutheranRacine.

SUNDAY SCHOOL: On Sunday, September 13th, at 10:30 AM, Sunday School classes will resume in the downstairs Sunday School chapel. We are excited for another year of learning about our amazing God and growing in our faith! Sunday School will have a different format this year. We will bring all the children together for devotion with Pastor Crane and learning the Bible lesson. We will then break into smaller groups for fun activities to reinforce and expand on what we are learning. It is our prayer that you will make Sunday School and Bible Study a part of your family's Sunday morning. "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

YOUTH BIBLE STUDY: Youth in grades 7th – 12th are invited to Youth Bible Study! We will begin meeting again on Sunday, September 13th, at 10:30 AM. We will start in the downstairs Sunday School chapel. Following devotion with Pastor Crane, we will go up to the youth room for class. Youth Bible Study is a place for in-depth conversation and exploration of the Bible and its themes in a relaxed environment. Come join us while we look into the Bible and grow in our faith and apply what we learn to our lives. We look forward to seeing you there!

COVID-19 VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL AND SUNDAY SCHOOL GUIDELINES: The safety and health of all our members is of top priority for us here at Grace Lutheran Church. In an effort to keep the teachers and children at Vacation Bible School and Sunday School safe and healthy, the following guidelines have been put in place by the Grace Board of Education:

- Pickup and Dropoff
 - By limiting the areas we have people coming to and going from, we are limiting the exposure of children and adults. For VBS, we will have the children dropped off and picked up in the elevator lobby, by the parking lot entrance of church. For Sunday School, we will have the children dropped off and picked up in the chapel downstairs.
 - When children are checked in, we ask that the “Health Screening Questions” listed below are reviewed. When a child is signed in, the parent is confirming they have reviewed them, and their child is healthy and not showing any symptoms of illness.
 - “Health Screening Questions”
 - Did you have a fever over 100.4°F in the last 24 hours?
 - Did anyone in your household have a fever over 100.4°F in the last 24 hours?
 - Do you have a cough?
 - Are you experiencing shortness of breath or difficulty breathing?
 - Do you have any of these symptoms (including fever)?
 - Chills
 - Muscle pain
 - Headache
 - Sore throat
 - New loss of taste or smell
- Small group sizes
 - By keeping the groups of children to a smaller number and then dividing them into smaller groups it will help to minimize exposure.
- Frequent Handwashing
 - After the children are dropped off for VBS, they will wash their hands on the way to the church sanctuary. Prior to the children being dropped off for Sunday School, we ask that they wash their hands.
 - Before and after snack time. (VBS & Sunday School)
 - After closing devotion in the church and before coming to the lobby to be picked up. (VBS)
 - Frequently throughout the morning. (VBS & Sunday School)
- Masks
 - We are not requiring them; however, children are more than welcome to wear a mask if they would like to while at VBS or Sunday School.
 - Staff is encouraged to wear a mask if they would like to.
 - Staff who oversee getting the snack ready will wear a mask and gloves as a precaution. (VBS)
- Social Distancing
 - When possible, we will keep the children and the staff with space between them. If a staff member needs to be closer to the children, we will ask that they wear a mask. (VBS & Sunday School)
- Sanitize
 - Areas, surfaces, and objects that the children will be using will be sanitized and disinfected frequently and thoroughly at the end of each day. (VBS & Sunday School)
- Snack
 - Each day the children will receive a snack and a beverage. The snack will be store-bought individual portions. The beverage will be an individual bottle of water or juice box. (VBS & Sunday School)

YOUTH TRIP TO THE ARK ENCOUNTER AND CREATION MUSEUM: From June 14th – 17th, four youth, Pastor Crane, and Matthew and Laura Olson traveled to the Northern Kentucky/Southern Ohio area to visit the Ark Encounter and Creation Museum.

This was a trip that we were not sure would be possible until a few weeks before it was scheduled to take place. The Ark and Creation Museum were closed until the beginning of June. When both locations and area hotels announced they would be open and detailed their efforts for making guests as safe as possible, we asked who would still be interested in going and went forward with those who felt comfortable making this trip and were available to go.

The Lord blessed us with safe travels and with a wonderful experience!

The Ark Encounter is a full-size replica of Noah's Ark that recreates the structure and functions of the Ark. Our group was interested in the replicas of animals, information about how life on the Ark worked, and displays about how the Flood's impact on the world is still tangible today.

The Creation Museum informs about the validity of the Bible and the Creation account from the Book of Genesis. Animatronics, beautiful interpretations of what the Garden of Eden looked like, stark reminders of how sin caused God's perfect creation to be twisted, and how we can trust in the teachings of the Bible as truth were some of the highlights of that visit.

We also ate at local places of interest (e.g., Skyline Chili and Graeter's Ice Cream), played miniature golf, and spent time in fellowship in our hotel room doing devotions with Pastor Crane, making food, and playing games.

It was a wonderful opportunity to immerse ourselves in learning about God's love for His people. None of this would have been possible without the extremely generous support that this congregation has given our youth through our fundraisers and other donations. We thank you very much for your support and look forward to sharing more of our experiences with you. **THANK YOU!**

THANK YOU for your generous financial support of Grace during this difficult time. God has richly blessed our congregation!

ELEVATOR FUND: As of Sunday, July 19th, we have raised **\$72,144** for the Elevator Fund. Thanks be to God!

A SPECIAL VOTERS' MEETING will be held on **Sunday, August 23rd**, at **10:30 AM** to discuss and possibly make changes to our worship schedule.

WORSHIP SERVICES: Our worship services can be viewed on Grace's Facebook page and on our YouTube channel, "Grace Lutheran Church, Racine, WI – LCMS."

FOOD PANTRY: If you would like to donate food pantry items, you can drop them off at Grace between **9:00 AM and 2:00 PM** Monday – Thursday. Many thanks for your donations!

HARVEST OUTREACH: If you are available and would like to help out at Harvest Outreach, please let Connie Abrahamson know at 262-909-8924. Volunteers are needed for **Friday, August 7th; Friday, August 14th; and Monday, August 31st**. Thank you!

SEWING SUPPLIES NEEDED: Cotton material or a \$250 Thrivent card would be appreciated to continue our sewing projects. We have made 28 lap robes, 6 bibs, 28 quilts, 15 baby quilts, and 552 masks. Please see Ruth Anger for additional information.

FREE MASKS are in the back of the church. Please help yourself! Thank you to those who have lovingly made and donated these for us!

NO CHURCH PICNIC THIS YEAR: Due to the current pandemic, there will be no church picnic this year. We look forward to next year's picnic!

Daily Lectionary Readings August – September 2020
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Saturday, August 1: 1 Samuel 17:1-19
Acts 26:1-23

Sunday, August 2: 1 Samuel 17:20-47
Acts 26:24-27:8

Monday, August 3: 1 Samuel 17:48-18:9
Acts 27:9-26

Tuesday, August 4: 1 Samuel 18:10-30
Acts 27:27-44

Wednesday, August 5: 1 Samuel 19:1-24
Acts 28:1-15

Thursday, August 6: 1 Samuel 10:1-23
Acts 28:16-31

Friday, August 7: 1 Samuel 20:24-42
1 Corinthians 1:1-25

Saturday, August 8: 1 Samuel 24:1-22
1 Corinthians 1:26-2:16

Sunday, August 9: 1 Samuel 25:1-22
1 Corinthians 3:1-23

Monday, August 10: 1 Samuel 25:23-44
1 Corinthians 4:1-21

Tuesday, August 11: 1 Samuel 26:1-25
1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Wednesday, August 12: 1 Samuel 28:3-25
1 Corinthians 6:1-20

Thursday, August 13: 1 Samuel 31:1-13
1 Corinthians 7:1-24

Friday, August 14: 2 Samuel 1:1-27
1 Corinthians 7:25-40

Saturday, August 15: 2 Samuel 5:1-25
1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Sunday, August 16: 2 Samuel 6:1-19
1 Corinthians 9:1-23

Monday, August 17: 2 Samuel 7:1-17
1 Corinthians 9:24-10:22

Tuesday, August 18: 2 Samuel 7:18-29
1 Corinthians 10:23-11:16

Wednesday, August 19: 2 Samuel 11:1-27
1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Thursday, August 20: 2 Samuel 12:1-25
1 Corinthians 12:1-13

Friday, August 21: 1 Kings 1:1-4, 15-35
1 Corinthians 12:14-31

Saturday, August 22: 1 Kings 2:1-27
1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Sunday, August 23: 1 Kings 3:1-15
2 Corinthians 1:1-22

Monday, August 24: 1 Kings 5:1-18
2 Corinthians 1:23-2:17

Tuesday, August 25: 1 Kings 7:51-8:21
2 Corinthians 3:1-18

Wednesday, August 26: 1 Kings 8:22-30, 46-63
2 Corinthians 4:1-18

Thursday, August 27: 1 Kings 9:1-9, 10:1-13
2 Corinthians 5:1-21

Friday, August 28: 1 Kings 11:1-26
2 Corinthians 6:1-18

Saturday, August 29: 1 Kings 11:42-12:19
2 Corinthians 7:1-16

Sunday, August 30: 1 Kings 12:20-13:5, 33-34
2 Corinthians 8:1-24

Monday, August 31: 1 Kings 16:29-17:24
2 Corinthians 9:1-15

Tuesday, September 1: 1 Kings 18:1-19
Ephesians 1:1-23

Wednesday, September 2: 1 Kings 18:20-40
Ephesians 2:1-22

Thursday, September 3: 1 Kings 19:1-21
Ephesians 3:1-21

Friday, September 4: 2 Kings 2:1-18
Ephesians 4:1-24

Saturday, September 5: 2 Kings 2:19-25, 4:1-7
Ephesians 4:25-5:14

Sunday, September 6: 2 Kings 4:8-22, 32-37
Ephesians 5:15-33

Monday, September 7: 2 Kings 4:38-5:8
Ephesians 6:1-24

Tuesday, September 8: 2 Kings 5:9-27
Philippians 1:1-20

Wednesday, September 9: 2 Kings 6:1-23
Philippians 1:21-2:11

Thursday, September 10: 2 Kings 9:1-13, 10:18-29
Philippians 2:12-30

Friday, September 11: 2 Chronicles 29:1-24
Philippians 3:1-21

Saturday, September 12: 2 Chronicles 31:1-21
Philippians 4:1-23

Sunday, September 13: 2 Chronicles 32:1-22
Colossians 1:1-23

Monday, September 14: 2 Chronicles 33:1-25
Colossians 1:24-2:7

Tuesday, September 15: 2 Chronicles 34:1-4, 8-11, 14-33
Colossians 2:8-23

Wed., September 16: 2 Chronicles 35:1-7, 16-25
Colossians 3:1-25

Thursday, September 17: 2 Chronicles 36:1-23
Colossians 4:1-18

Friday, September 18: Nehemiah 1:1-2:10
1 Timothy 1:1-20

Saturday, September 19: Nehemiah 2:11-20, 4:1-6
1 Timothy 2:1-15

Sunday, September 20: Nehemiah 4:7-23
1 Timothy 3:1-16

Monday, September 21: Nehemiah 5:1-16, 6:1-9, 15-16
1 Timothy 4:1-16

Tuesday, September 22: Nehemiah 7:1-4, 8:1-18
1 Timothy 5:1-16

Wed., September 23: Nehemiah 9:1-21
1 Timothy 5:17-6:2

Thursday, September 24: Nehemiah 9:22-38
1 Timothy 6:3-21

Friday, September 25: Malachi 1:1-14
Matthew 3:1-17

Saturday, September 26: Malachi 2:1-3:5
Matthew 4:1-11

Sunday, September 27: Malachi 3:6-4:6
Matthew 4:12-25

Monday, September 28: Deuteronomy 1:1-18
Matthew 5:1-20

Tuesday, September 29: Deuteronomy 1:19-36
Matthew 5:21-48

Wed., September 30: Deuteronomy 1:37-2:15
Matthew 6:1-15