

MVLP Gather Round E-News - Issue #17

May 13, 2020

This is the seventeenth issue of our E-newsletter, “Gather ‘Round,” to call us together through the internet to share news and needs and stories with each other. If you have a tale to tell or a perspective to share, please send it on for the next issue!

The Buildings Are Closed; The Church Is Open!

Back issues of “Gather ‘Round” E-news are available on the Moosup Valley Church website, thanks to our webmaster, Pat Safstrom. Go to moosupvalley.church and click on the tab at the top of the page.

Rev. Betsy Reflects on Truth and Trust

Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord, “You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you. I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage. I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved (Ps. 16:1-2, 5-8).

Scripture tells us that Pilate asks of Jesus, What is truth? These days we wonder the same thing; it’s hard to tell with all the conflicting voices in the news. Reading the psalms at our Bible Study Zoom sessions, some of us lament that it’s hard to know whom to trust. Psalm 16, above, is known as a psalm of trust or confidence. We can trust the broad sweep of scripture to tell us what God cares about, truth that is made manifest in the life of Jesus of Nazareth: the poor and the hungry, the lame and the blind, widows and orphans, the outsiders and uppity women. It was his advocacy for those who were cheated and taken advantage of in the temple that threatened the religious and political leaders and their economic system, their privileged “way of life,” that finally got him arrested and killed.

So if Pilate cared about “truth” rather than just carrying out his job to keep the peace for Caesar during the Passover, he would have known that Jesus meant only goodness for the multitude. So what do I trust as your pastor? I trust and believe in the ministry of Jesus who taught us how life should be lived and cared for. As the WWJD bracelet that some of you have worn asks, “What Would Jesus Do?” So our first question when we are confronted with voices in the news, is to ask ourselves if a given action is in line with the Good News of the Gospel. Poet Adrienne Rich asks: “With whom do you cast your lot?” I cast mine with the One whom John claimed was “the Way, the Truth, and the

Life” (John 14:6). In other words, does this or that program or policy benefit the common good or only a few?

But, the world is more complicated these days than in Jesus’ day. How do we sort out what is true and what is “fake” news? Two summers ago, the University of Rhode Island published an article in their alumni magazine entitled, “The Age of Disinformation,” which highlighted the problem. They noted that identifying credible sources of information – what’s factual versus what’s fabricated – is now one of the core competencies students are required to develop in order to graduate. The author identified six types of fake news: disinformation, propaganda, hoaxes, satire/parody, partisanship, and inaccuracies in journalism. Honest mistakes always occur, of course, and newspapers are duty bound to correct them as soon as possible.

But this age of *dis*information goes further – and it’s not new! Examples of fake news go back as far as the 6th century. And during the American revolution, Benjamin Franklin swayed British opinion by printing fake newspaper stories in London papers. And even the Spanish-American War in 1890 was started by two New York newspapers competing with each other.

As a current example, the URI article begins with a story that circulated on the internet during the 2016 Presidential campaign that Hillary Clinton was running a child sex ring out of a D.C. pizza parlor. Where do these stories come from? This one was conjured out of a WikiLeaks dump on a social media message board, and the idea floated through the internet on sites like InfoWars, picking up details that involved occult practices, and was intensified on Facebook and Twitter. An unhinged story, put together like a puzzle out of whole cloth by a lot of players.

But this made-up story, through repetition, acquired the gloss of truth for some. So much so, that a 28 year-old man from North Carolina showed up at the Comet Ping Pong Pizza parlor with an assault rifle and a handgun to save the imaginary child sex slaves.

Where do these stories come from? The URI article cited young tech savvy webmasters in Eastern Europe, where jobs are scarce, who have discovered they can make a good living by creating websites, and they don’t care about their sources. People read these stories, think they are real or funny, and circulate them to their network of family and friends. And a man who cares about kids gets his rifle and gets in his truck.

People have always looked for easy answers that confirm what they already believe. And now we are so polarized as a country that we tend to stick with the news that tells us only what we want to hear – and we never listen to those that offer a different opinion and from whom we might learn. It doesn’t help that television outlets – like Fox News and MSNBC, opposite ends of the political spectrum – often mix straight news reporting with their opinion. And with the capacity of the internet to spread words across the globe with the click of a mouse, disinformation has become a big problem.

So what's factual and what's fake? What word can we trust? What word can we believe? John's Gospel says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." "And the Word became flesh and lived among us,.." making his case that *Jesus* is the Word. This Jesus, who speaks the words of the Torah: You shall love God and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. This Jesus, who speaks the word of the prophet Isaiah: I have come to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captive, recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed.

This Jesus, says John, is God with us. This Jesus is God's Word for our lives. And *this* Word is not fake news. This Word is true and trustworthy. This Word is the Light that overcomes the darkness. This Word is the Word by which we are to judge all other words.

Jesus, making God's Word known to us, giving us power to become children of God, bringing to life God's Word *in us*. What's in a word? Nothing less than our life. Our truth. Our future.

Springtime Beauty

Beverly Griffith sent me a beautiful picture of her cherry tree with a cardinal perched on the top of a branch. To share it with you, I am sending it as an attachment.

And Kim and I are enjoying all the bright tulips in bloom all over the Cape right now! How are they in Rhode Island?

Morning Poem (Submitted by Laurie Murphy)

by Mary Oliver

Every morning
the world
is created.

Under the orange

sticks of the sun
the heaped
ashes of the night
turn into leaves again

and fasten themselves to the high branches-
and the ponds appear
like black cloth
on which are painted islands

of summer lilies.
If it is your nature

to be happy
you will swim away along the soft trails

for hours, your imagination
alighting everywhere.
And if your spirit
carries within it

the thorn
that is heavier than lead-
if it's all you can do
to keep on trudging-

there is still
somewhere deep within you
a beast shouting that the earth
is exactly what it wanted-

each pond with its blazing lilies
is a prayer heard and answered
lavishly,
every morning,

whether or not
you have dared to be happy,
whether or not
you have ever dared to pray.

The Work of Our Hands

Tracey was thinking about Carol's horse stories and how beautiful they are. It reminded her of something she engraved on a piece of wood for someone a couple of years ago, included below as an attachment.

Did anyone (besides me) make Barbara's Cream Tea Scones? They are delicious! I warmed one up a couple of days later with butter and strawberry preserves. The recipe was in Issue #11. I'm going to make another batch soon.

Special Prayers: Please hold in your heart and prayers...

The Sroka family is still under quarantine due to still having symptoms and their doctor says this is still "uncharted territory." They are grateful that Randy is well and gaining strength – and keeping him this way and not relapsing is their goal. Ronnie is still busy taking care of everyone, though tired. They will see what next week brings.

Rose's relatives, the Pierre family, who have lost four members to COVID-19, including her cousin's wife, a nurse practitioner and mother of three little ones.

Joanne is home and continues to improve, but still waiting for the swelling to go down. She awaits the day when we can be back in church together again, and we await the day to hear her lovely voice!

Claire's son, Jim, is much improved, with a normal temperature for two days now. He expects to move to the group home by the end of May. However, Claire's nephew in California is treating COVID-19 patients and so many have died, all ages!

Gather 'Round for Bible Study

Both Rev. Betsy and Pastor Bob are leading Bible Study. Here's how to participate:

Psalms: Tuesday & Friday mornings at 10:00 a.m. with Betsy, reading and discussing selected psalms and the Easter scriptures by Zoom. Contact BetsyAldrichGarland@gmail.com.

Gospel of John: Wednesday evenings at 6:30 p.m. with Bob by telephone. (Send Bob your phone number, and he will call you.) Next week he continues in the Gospel of John 20-21.

Mt. Vernon Streams Sunday Service

Worship Sunday, May 10, will be on the MVLP Facebook Live page, streaming from the Moosup Valley Church at 12:30 p.m. with the theme: "Being in the right place at the right time." <https://www.facebook.com/MVLPspirit/?ref=bookmrks>).

The Day Will Surely Come...

In anticipating our being able to return to our churches (with fewer than 20 people and modifications), hopefully soon, we will need gloves, masks, sanitizer, and wipes. Pastor Bob has bought masks to supplement the ones you have made. If you have leads on other supplies, please let me or Pastor Bob know. We may never be back to "normal," but the day will surely come when we will be back in our pews.

Benediction

To hear this sung, google The UK Blessing. (Suggested by Cheryl Hawes after she and her sister Kathy received the Video from a friend. Note: This was the benediction at their Dad's memorial service in 2015. But it is especially moving when sung.)

May God bless you and keep you.

May God's face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

May God look upon you with kindness and give you peace.

Weekly Offerings may be mailed for:

Mt. Vernon to Ron Allen (116 Barbs Hill Road, Greene, RI 02827),

Moosup Valley to Pat Safstrom (76 Moosup Valley Road, Foster, RI 02825),

Rice City to Phyllis Dexter (53 Moosup Valley Road, Foster, RI 02825).

Reverend Betsy can be reached at BetsyAldrichGarland@gmail.com or 401-463-8697.

Pastor Bob can be reached at revbobh@gmail.com or 401-440-7831.

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