

WEST CENTER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

The Pastor's Portion *Spiritual Nourishment for the Soul*

March 1, 2020

As we journey together in this Lenten Season, God has laid it on my spirit to be in intentional and fervent prayer for each member of the West Center church family. We are living in interesting times. Times when fear is at an all time high, between the election season, the corona virus, economic highs and lows: You name it, we can get scared about it. But Jesus persistently tells us "Do NOT BE AFRAID." We must learn to trust God and to lean not unto our own understanding. Let's just follow Jesus.

May the God of Love and Light send an army of angels to encamp around all of you in this season.

Ephesians 3: 14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,¹⁴ from whom every family¹⁵ in heaven and on earth takes its name. ¹⁶I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit,¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

If you have a particular prayer request, please let me know by sending me an e mail or calling me.



Rev. Kris E Watson can be reached by e mail at revkewatson3@gmail.com

Lenten Season is upon us. Take the ALMIGHTY JOURNEY OF FAITH: 40 DAYS OF PRAYER, MEDITATION AND HEALTHY EATING.

During this Lenten Season starting with the first Sunday of March we will be engaged in the public READING of THE BIBLE in the Sanctuary from 10:45-11: 00 AM. We will begin with the Gospel of Mark.

1:00 pm COFFEE & CONVERSATION WITH PASTOR KRIS

An informal Study of the Lord's prayer. A time to share and ask questions.



Image above created for West Center Church by Jeremy Tressler. Please thank him for the gift of his talent to help West Center reach out to the community.

West Center Church seeks to worship the Living God, being Led by the Holy Spirit to carry on the work of Jesus in justice, peace simplicity and unity.

Weekly Inspiration: Henri Nouwen

"The beginning and the end of all Christian leadership is to give your life for others."

– **Henri J.M. Nouwen, The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society**

"Prayer is the center of the Christian life. It is the only necessary thing. It is living with God in the here and now."

– **Henri J.M. Nouwen, The Only Necessary Thing: Living a Prayerful Life**

"Compassion- which means, literally, "to suffer with"- is the way to the truth that we are most ourselves, not when we differ from others, but when we are the same. Indeed, the main spiritual question is not, "What difference do you make?" but "What do you have in common?" It is not "excelling" but "serving" that makes us most human. It is not proving ourselves to be better than others but confessing to be just like others that is the way to healing and reconciliation."

– **Henri Nouwen**

Matthew 4: 1-11

4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴ But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" ⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" ⁷ Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹ and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

In this time that we have to share together, I wanted to talk to you from the topic:

Resist the Temptation

Let me set the scene of the passage that was read in your hearing: Imagine the scene. Jesus' cousin John: you know, the one who was preaching a gospel of repentance...standing in the wilderness wearing nothing more than camel skin, and eating nothing more than wild honey and locusts...he is out there at the Jordan River was baptizing religious leaders who were repenting of their sin.

One of the interesting things about the gospels is that there is this whole expanse of time in the life of Jesus that we know nothing about. After his parents bring him back from Egypt, where they had fled from Herod who was killing all new-born male infants, the next thing you hear is that Jesus is being baptized by his cousin John in the Jordan river. The story picks up with Jesus at the age of 31.

Now you have to believe that Jesus knew his identity of the Son of God. He knew his power, and he knew his Divine identity. And as a young man between his childhood and age 31, you can almost imagine how he was! I mean, you know young men, cocky, cock sure, arrogant, selfish, self-absorbed and full of self...I mean it is almost a cliché at this point, right?

But Jesus also knew the scripture, he knew that he was called. and he knew that he had a mission to fulfill. , at the age of 31, he finally surrendered. He went to that Jordan River so that the scriptures could be fulfilled, and righteousness could finally begin to dawn in the horizon of humanity. And the text says that as he was coming out of the water, a dove landed on him, and he heard the voice of God saying this is my Beloved, in him I am well pleased. God had to have been pleased with the fact that he accepted and finally surrendered to his assignment. Especially given that fact that it was not going to be an easy assignment, and that is an understatement! I mean, we know that this assignment is going to end in betrayal, conflict, and then a brutal bloody death a cross...all after pouring out so much love on those he ministered to

and prayed for.....no good deed shall go unpunished! One would think that after such a pronouncement of blessing and approval by God, that the rest of his journey would be filled with hearts and flowers and ease and comfort, but NO>>>>>

What happens next is remarkable, because the Bible says that the SPIRIT drove him into the wilderness to be tempted by the enemy...for 40,days with no food, no people, no water, nothing but him and God...oh and I imagine that the tempter was there lurking in the shadows.

And we know that what the tempter is tempting with are metaphorical examples of all that God wants to strip him of during this season of purification...

Turn these stones into bread...you must be hungry...YOU can eat all you want while the people you are called to take care of are going hungry...go ahead, you have the power...You can fly! Look, throw yourself off of this temple, and nothing will happen, your angels will catch you! Show off your power! Oh, and finally look around, you can see all of the world from here, you can own all of this if you just worship me....

Now, we know these are not real things, but rather a metaphor for those forces within ourselves that Jesus wants us to be rid of in order to serve him and minister to his people! He wants us to be rid of the love and reverence for the things that go POOF!

The big book of Alcoholics Anonymous a book and teaching steeped in the Judeo-Christian tradition, has a passage that I really love: It says: Selfishness, self-centeredness, that we think is the root of our problem. "Driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking and self-pity, we step on the toes of our fellows and they retaliate." Selfishness, self-seeking, self-absorption, greed, delusion and self-pity are at the root of our human condition and our problems. God sent Jesus into the wilderness to deal with it...to conquer these things, so that his ministry would be effective and pure.

Sure, Jesus could have turned the stones into bread, while the people to whom he was called to minister starved...he could have eaten his fill ALONE IN THE DESERT, he could have used his Divine power to do that, but that would be SELFISH!

Sure, he could have elevated himself about the crowds, flown around in all his self-satisfying glory, congratulating himself and reveling in his God given power, but that would be self-absorbed and selfish and would have helped no one and nothing but his own ego.

Sure, he could have opted for ruling the world, gaining all the material possessions he would ever want, living a life of flowery ease, but that would be greedy, selfish, and self-absorbed. These are the things that Jesus had to conquer before he could effectively minister. He had to be rid of the notion that the fleeting things of life, the things that cater to the ego and control...things that go poof are of any lasting value.

If we are honest, we have to conquer these things too. Think about it. We care more about our comfort, and getting our way than we do about God, and what God wants. We want things to be done exactly the way we want them done, and rarely stop to pray to discern what God may want.

We wrestle for control over even the smallest things so that we feel important and valued, and we ignore the reality that God is in control of all of everything! We ignore the fact that human beings control nothing more than our reaction to God's actions. And we don't do that very well, do we? Control is an illusion. We control nothing, yet we wrestle for control and power and to have our names called and on important documents and we try to pretend that this means something to the God that we largely ignore.

We get seduced by the things that go POOF..the things of earthly value ...but of no eternal weight. Things that moth and rust will soon destroy or that can be snatched without notice! Jesus has to tell the tempter: Man cannot live by bread alone but must survive on the word of God. Jesus had to rebuke the tempter by telling him that he would not put God to the test and would NEVER worship anyone but God.

But look at us, what do we worship:

Money: POOF

Fame: POOF:

Our own accomplishments: POOF

Our own talent: POOF

Our titles: POOF

Our brilliant minds POOF!

How quickly and easily we forget GOD and buy into the illusion of self-sufficiency and self-control. How easily we give glory to the things that go POOF. We forget that God has a plan for our lives, has a plan for our church, has a plan for this world, God has a plan.....And we are so busy trying to be comfortable and in control that forget that we are here to worship the living God, and we are here to worship ONLY the God, and not ourselves, our past, our way of doing things, or the building, the windows, or any other thing of human construction.

On Wednesday I told those who came for ashes this poem by Benjamin Mays:
I have only just a minute,
Only sixty seconds in it.
Forced upon me, can't refuse it.
Didn't seek it, didn't choose it.
But it's up to me
to use it.
I must suffer if I lose it.
Give account if I abuse it.
Just a tiny little minute,
but eternity is in it.

Beloved, we have only just a minute. A moment in time, in the scheme of eternity. And we are called in this moment to appreciate what we have, to thank God for it, to resist the temptation to focus on things that go poof, and to beat back our egoic need to grab control over minutia.

I agree with the authors of the Big Book of AA: Selfishness, self-centeredness, and self-absorption are at the root of our problems. But this next line that says: WE ARE DRIVEN BY A HUNDRED FORMS OF FEAR.SELF DELUSION AND SELF SEEKING, and it is killing us.

In truth, the granddaddy of all of these things... the real root of our problem is fear. Fear is why we hoard, fear is why we hold ourselves back from others, and from God, fear is why we grasp and grab and struggle so mightily to get a piece of the pie. It is fear that causes church fights, malcontent, gossip and triangulation. Fear causes wars, and stirs tribalism, nationalism, racism, sexism, homophobia and injustice.

Looking to the past is useless. Lamenting over what you think you have lost is useless. We have only just a minute, only 60 seconds in it...and it's up to us to use it. Let us resist the temptation to focus on the things that go poof! Let us use our minute to love one another, pray for one another, serve God and God's people, and make the most of our minute. Let us never forget that in this very minute, eternity is in it.

No matter how much you have, no matter how gifted you are, you cannot take anything that you get, any argument you win, any way that you get...you can't take it with you. We have only just a minute. Eternity is in it. Only what we do for God will matter in the eternal reality of this or any other moment. So, give generously, love passionately, serve faithfully and rejoice in the Lord always...because God is!

One day the things of this earth will grow strangely dim
In a moment: In a twinkling of an eye: Poof, those things will vanish.
And then we will experience the light of the glory of God. Let us pray.

West Center Congregational Monthly Church Calendar

March	WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH
1	COMMUNION SUNDAY
8	Daylight Savings Begins
13-14	Rev. Kris to train a church in Rochester in Racial Reconciliation
15	Deacons Meeting
19:	Town Hall with Mike Khader 6:30-7:45PM