Thank You for Being the Church!

Over the past several weeks I have been repeatedly impressed with how you (the members of Zion and Trinity) have stepped up during this pandemic. Thank you for being the Church! You will see several stories in this newsletter detailing our congregations in action, but these only represent the tip of the iceberg.

Thank you to Pastor Johnson and Deaconess Tiffany for your tireless and creative work to share the Gospel of the Kingdom through online Bible studies, children's messages, worship services, and more. You both deserve an award!

Thank you to Zion's tech team (especially Bob Genzen and Judy Jacobsen) for volunteering hours and hours of your time to ensure we were able to stream our Lenten and Easter services (and even a Baptism!). You'll see in Pastor Vogel's article that they have been helping to stream his worship service for his Hispanic congregation. Zion's dedication to missions continues! And thank you to everyone who gave a special gift to update our equipment (which will be installed soon) to enhance and perpetuate our streaming capabilities.

Thank you to the Conner children (and their mother!) for playing vital roles in our Holy Week and Easter services (palm and flag waving, organ, trumpet, and trombone playing).

Thank you to Zion's elders for taking time to call so many of our home-restricted members and for being such a huge support to me! Zion is blessed with faithful elders! Thank you to Zion's council for your work behind the scenes! And a huge thank you to Shannon, Zion's secretary, for learning all kinds of new skills to ensure we could and can share God's Word online.

Thank you to Bridget and the preschool for making Easter baskets for each of the preschoolers (see pg. 19)! What a great surprise and treat for them! Thank you to Sunday school teachers who mailed Sunday school lessons to our younger children. What joy it brought them to get a package from you in the mail!

Thank you to Zion's newly formed Friendship Committee. You have wasted no time organizing and putting plans into action to share Christ's love on Zion's behalf with numerous people in our congregation and community (see pages 9 and 12). If you (the reader) have additional ideas for them, they'd love to hear from you. If you'd like to volunteer, call the church office!

Thank you to the many, many Zion and Trinity members who have made special efforts to call, write, get groceries and/or prescriptions, and so much more for our home-restricted members. You are incredible! Thank you to the many, many Zion and Trinity members who are so faithful in prayer! Thank you to all of you who continue to give in support of the mission and ministry of Zion and Trinity. You amaze me.

On page 2 you will see a small sampling of some of the words of encouragement and gratitude we have received over the past weeks. I share them with you because they are for you. Thank you, thank you, thank you for being the Church! – Pastor Conner

gratitude for Zion in the midst of a pandemic

Thank you for being structured and prompt. It's helping me to regain my own structure during this time of discombobulation.

We are so blessed to… belong to the Zion church family. Everyone is so caring!

Your ministry online has been a wonderful blessing in my life. You have been able to feed my faith in a way that I have been needing for a long time.

Thank you for your daily prayer time. I have been learning, enjoying and appreciating it from the other side of the state!

I have heard many positive comments from coworkers (some of whom are not even Zion members) that the FB Live prayers, Bible studies, and services are feeding them while they are not able to go to church in person.

The resources made available by Zion have been invaluable. I've made time to pray with you and the rest of the congregation weekday mornings at 7:30 (morning prayer was not something I practiced prior to the quarantine). And I've been reading along in Philippians on Thursday night.

It means a lot to us that we have such a caring congregation!

What a nice surprise at my age to get such a nice Easter basket!

Thank you so much for providing us ways to worship during this time! It means so much to us and our community!

[Upon receiving an Easter basket from the Friendship Committee]: Tears welled in my eyes and they flowed freely for a while, but not tears of sorrow, but tears of joy and thankfulness… I'm so thankful and so grateful that God placed me in Zion's family.

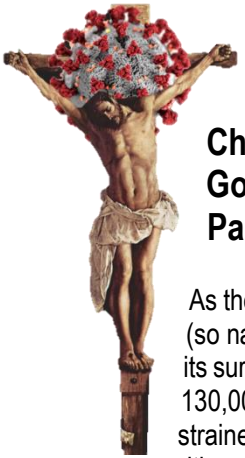
We are thankful for all the… loving, caring, thoughtful ways we hear that you continue to connect with members without internet by delivering mailings, sermon copies, DVDs, treats, or phone calls.

Thanks for your prayers and services streaming. It does make me feel like I am almost there.

Thank you for all the encouraging words during these very difficult times. I have enjoyed the streamed services, prayers, and Bible studies.

Thank you for your wonderful ministry you continue to feed my faith in all that you are doing.

Having the chance to pray with you each morning is really cool



Christ's Corona: Seeing God in the Midst of a Pandemic

As the global impact of the coronavirus (so named for the crown-like spikes on its surface) has started to set it in – over 130,000 deaths, deflated economies, strained health care systems, isolated citizens, emotionally scarred people, uncertain futures – the question of God has started to emerge. Where is God? Why, as philosopher John Lennox recently put it, does it feel like God is in lockdown?

It's not a new question to humanity. Job famously complained, "I cry to you for help and you do not answer me…" (30:20). Christ Himself echoed the question from the cross as He prayed Psalm 22: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?"

Such questions have moved many to formulate syllogisms of protest against God:

- If God is good, He would stop such viruses.
- If God is powerful, He could stop such viruses.
- But such viruses persist.
- Therefore, God either isn't good or isn't powerful or doesn't exist.

And the often unstated conclusion goes something like this: So, I reject Him.

For many, such syllogisms amount to nothing more than logical shields to hide a hurting, disappointed heart. And, while rejecting God may remove the problem of God's relation to suffering, it does not remove the problem of suffering. In fact, in the process of removing God, it also removes hope.

If this question of God and suffering were settled by syllogisms, we would simply offer the following:

- God is good and He will stop such viruses.
- God is powerful and He can stop such viruses.
- God is wise and can work through such viruses for His purposes.
- God is eternal and not limited to our time demands for ending human suffering.
- Therefore, He can be trusted.

While this answers the individuals' intellectual protest, it doesn't really do much to help their hurting hearts. Perhaps this is why God's response to human suffering isn't a syllogism, but a Person. *Where is God?* He's hanging on a cross, crowned with creation's curse – the cursed corona of sin!

WHERE IS GOD? HE'S HANGING ON A CROSS, CROWNED WITH CREATION'S CURSE – THE CURSED CORONA OF SIN!

God is not indifferent to our sorrow. He is not ignorant of our pain. He's not socially distant from our pandemic. In Christ, God has come near. He has made His dwelling *among* us! He has locked Himself down with us! And on His cross He is crowned with creation's curse, its cursed corona. He absorbs the virus of sin into Himself and takes it into death with Him.

This doesn't mean we won't suffer, that we won't wear creation's cursed corona, or that we won't catch this virus. In this fallen world, we will suffer, and we might contract this virus. But it does mean we aren't defined by creation's cursed corona and

that we are not abandoned to it. Our God has worn it. Even more, He has defeated it and He will, one day, banish it forever! As a dear and wise Christian friend recently shared with me, "As disheartened humanity sits in a stupor, God megaphones from the cross, "IT IS FINISHED!" And on Easter morning, God triumphantly trumpets, "HE IS RISEN!" She added, "The End became the Beginning. Hopelessness emerged as Hope. Darkness revealed Light. Death birthed Life."

And yet, as she wrote, we may in this life "walk with a limp," wounded by creation's curse. This present pandemic may not end soon. This coronavirus may not go away quickly. We may limp financially, emotionally, socially, and mentally. Our limp may, however, prove beneficial. It was C.S. Lewis who perceptively wrote, "Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

If this pandemic has shown us anything, it's how little we control, how quickly our pillars of surety and confidence can crumble, how desperately we need a Savior. And it is this Savior, Jesus, not the current pandemic, who calls for our attention. Yes, we should be aware and take precautions and practice the recommended hand washing and social distancing, but let us not give this pandemic greater notice than Jesus.

C.S. Lewis spoke in a parallel circumstance nearly 80 years ago. He was addressing life lived under the threat of the atomic bomb. In the following quote, I have simply replaced the references to the bomb with references to the coronavirus/pandemic. Consider carefully his words:

> In one way we think a great deal too much of the [coronavirus]. "How are we to live in an [pandemic] age?" I am tempted to reply: "Why, as you would have lived in the sixteenth century when the plague visited London almost every year, or as you would have lived in a Viking age when raiders from Scandinavia might land and cut your throat any night; or indeed, as you are already living in an age of cancer, an age of syphilis, an age of paralysis, an age of air raids, an age of railway accidents, an age of motor accidents."
>
> In other words, do not let us begin by exaggerating the novelty of our situation. Believe me… you and all whom you love were already sentenced to death before the [coronavirus] was invented: and quite a high percentage of us were going to die in unpleasant ways… It is perfectly ridiculous to go about whimpering and drawing long faces because the scientists have added one more chance of painful and premature death to a world which already bristled with such chances and in which death itself was not a chance at all, but a certainty.
>
> This is the first point to be made: and the first action to be taken is to pull ourselves together. If we are all going to be destroyed by [a pandemic], let that [pandemic] when it comes find us doing sensible and human things—praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts—not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about [viruses]. They may break our bodies (a microbe can do that) but they need not dominate our minds.
>
> — "On Living in an Atomic Age" (1948)

Pandemics need not dominate our minds; Jesus should. Our minds must be dominated and captivated by His words and His promises: "It is finished!" Death and its deed-doers are defeated!

Christ has triumphed! He is living! Martin Luther captured this confident confession in his famous hymn "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," written during a time of great trial for Luther (plague, death of a child, intense opposition to the gospel):

> And take they our life,
> Goods, fame, child, and wife,
> Though these all be gone,
> Our vict'ry has been won;
> The Kingdom ours remaineth.

This is our confidence in the face of pandemic! Where is God in the midst of this pandemic? He's not distant: He's on the cross wearing creation's cursed corona, dying for the very people whose sin cursed creation in the first place and made pandemics possible.

But, as we highlighted earlier, Scripture points us also to Christ's resurrection. The cursed Christ is the glorified Christ. He is crowned with the Creator's glory, a splendid corona that shines for us, a corona, astonishingly, that we will share! Scripture promises: "When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Colossians 3:4). And again,

> But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself (Philippians 3:20-21).

James writes,

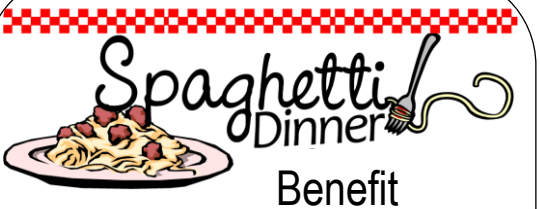
> Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him (James 1:12).

And Paul, writing to pastors, but offering hope to all who follow Christ, writes, "And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" (1 Peter 5:4).

Where is God? He's among us wearing creation's cursed corona for us. He's exalted for us wearing the Creator's glorious corona, a crown we will share. Perhaps my friend said it best:

> Good Friday and Easter are for me and for you. Christ's Resurrection is our new beginning, our hope, our light our life. It's enough for today and enough for an eternity of tomorrows. The free gift of faith is ours given at Baptism and nourished through the Word and His body and Blood. It's all we have; and it's all we need. It's our everything when in an instant all our earthly props can become nothing.

He loves us, friend. He is for us. May He and His promises captivate our hearts and minds in the midst of this pandemic and even into eternity. – Pastor Conner



Benefit

for Janet Smith!

Spaghetti to go (no dine-in)

Saturday - May 16
5-7pm @ Trinity in Manilla
Suggested donation $10

Delivery to Manilla or Manning available!
Call: 654-3031

A Palm Sunday like No Other

Despite not being able to gather in person for worship, the family and friends of Zion celebrated Palm Sunday with joy and hopeful anticipation via Facebook Live while Conner children represented the children of Zion with their cheerful palm waving. That afternoon, approximately 40 people came by the church to receive palms. Many of them then paraded their palms around town. Check out the pictures below (or the video on Facebook!).

Top left: The lone (festive) trumpeter plays for Palm Sunday service. Below: Conner children offer socially distanced hosannas to palm recipients. Second from top on right: Conner children represent Zion children during the streamed service. Below: Palms on parade!

This article isn't for everyone. It's not that it's not important, because it very much is! This article will address some of the unstated philosophical knots in the opening article and philosophical knots don't interest everyone. And, yet, they must be addressed, even when we can't fully untie them. Sometimes it's important to know what we don't know, so that we can trust who we need to trust. In other words, it's important to come to the end of our abilities so that we can see the need for faith in God.

Sometimes it's important to know what we don't know, so that we can trust who we need to trust.

So, we press forward. We need to wrestle with the problem of pain, what some have called *natural evil*. For our purposes, we're going to refer to this as *natural calamity* because the word *evil* can muddy the issue. When we hear the word *evil* we assume the involvement of a moral agent, i.e., a person who has committed some evil act (murder, theft, deceit, etc.). Natural calamities, like the present pandemic, along with things like tornadoes, earthquakes, tsunamis, and even cancer and other diseases, don't have an obvious moral agent to blame.

We might argue that natural calamity is not unconnected to moral evil because it was man's sin that fractured nature to begin with, making calamity possible. God even said, "Cursed is the ground because of you" (Genesis 3:17); (see also Romans 8:20-22). And, in the case of the present pandemic, this may indeed provide the explanation we need. A sin-cursed, mutated virus turned deadly to humans.

But that will only take us so far because it raises a whole host of unanswerable questions:

- Fire has the power to warm us *and* to burn us. Is its power to burn only a result of the fall?
- Earthquakes exchange and circulate critical materials with earth's atmosphere and bodies of water – making earthquakes, surprisingly, necessary for life. But they can also cause great damage and harm to humans. Were humans insulated from their potentially deadly power before the fall?
- In the book of Job, God extols and delights in behemoth and leviathan, two massive, majestic creatures who could prove dangerous and deadly to man. Were these massive creatures no cause for concern before the fall?

It certainly appears that God's world involves inherent risk, what we're calling *natural calamity*. The potential for calamity seems baked in. Why did God make the world this way? Man's rebellion and the subsequent curse on creation help us understand some of our present problems – a mutated virus now harms humans – but what of fire, earthquakes, and massive animals?

There are no easy answers. There's not even an easy answer for moral evil. If we are going to be raised empowered by God's Spirit, and therefore immune to sin and its lure, why didn't God start that way? Paul offers the following answer in 1 Corinthians 15: "It is not the spiritual that is first but

the natural, and then the spiritual" (15:46). In other words, "It is not the Spirit-empowered condition that comes first, but the human-spirit-empowered condition that comes first, a condition that is susceptible to sin." This appears to be Paul's way of saying, "Because this is the way God did it."

The same seems to be the answer for natural calamity. There is inherent risk in God's creation. How will God resolve this in the renewal of the earth? Will He resolve it? We don't know. Paul indicates that our resurrected bodies will be *changed*. Perhaps creation will be changed in a similar way. We know that death, mourning, crying, and pain (i.e., pain because of sin) will be no more (Revelation 21:4), but we don't know how God will remove the potential for natural calamity.

For those of us (like me!) desiring neat and tidy answers, this can prove exceedingly frustrating. You may even question the wisdom of asking questions we can't answer. But even here the Lord is working and teaching us. Remember our opening insight: sometimes it's important to know what we don't know, so that we can trust who we need to trust. It's important to come to the end of our abilities so that we can see the need for faith in God. Such is the case here.

Consider C.S. Lewis' insights:

> The intellectual life is not the only road to God, nor the safest… we may come to love knowledge – our knowing – more than the thing known: to delight not in the exercise of our talents but in the fact that they are ours, even in the reputation they bring us.

In other words, our reason reaches the end of its road and requires us to trust God the rest of the way. Ravi Zacharias has put it this way,

> God has put enough into the world to make faith in Him a most reasonable thing. But He has left enough out to make it impossible to live by sheer reason or observation alone.

We need this reminder. Our intellectual abilities are limited. We may bear the image of God, but we are not God. Our understanding may be great, but it is limited. Our knowledge may be expansive, but it is inadequate. And this makes the revealed knowledge of God's love for us in Christ all the more important and amazing, because this revelation is the greater revelation. To clarify: the revelation of God's love for us in Jesus (including His cross and empty tomb) is greater than our unresolved questions.

Paul wrote of this revelation in 1 Corinthians:

> What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
> nor the heart of man imagined,
> what God has prepared for those who love him—
> these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit (2:9-10).

What lay beyond the imagination of man – the promises of God in Christ – these things God has revealed to us through His Spirit! If He has revealed the greater – our salvation and the hope for all of creation – will He not, in the day of Christ's return, reveal the lesser – how He will deal with natural calamity? Most certainly yes! Until then our questions will remain unanswered, inaccessible to our reason. And this may, in fact, be good for us because it's good to know what we don't know, so we can trust who we need to trust: Jesus. – Pastor Conner

"A friend loves at all times..."
(Proverbs 17:17)

Zion's Friendship Committee Spreads Easter Joy

Despite being unable to hold its very first meeting due to pandemic gathering restrictions, Zion's new Friendship Committee has been looking for ways to connect with people, especially with those who may be particularly isolated during this time.

With funds from a Thrivent Action card, Friendship Committee members "met" via email to coordinate Easter baskets, with individuals volunteering to bake, color, write cards, and shop from local business (special thanks to the Marketplace on Main and Kristina's Flowers!). Individuals dropped off these items at Zion, where the baskets were assembled and sent out for delivery with various committee members. Nearly 30 baskets were delivered to Zion members' doorsteps along with phoned-in wishes for Easter joy.

The Friendship Committee has also been working to send out handwritten greetings to our members in care facilities, as well as sharing personal notes, including information on how to connect with Zion, with other members.

Do you have an idea for the Friendship Committee? Or are you interested in joining? We'd welcome your brainstorms and participation, both during this unusual time in our lives as well as when we're able to resume activities and gathering as usual!

Above: Young artists turned their kitchen table into an Easter art factory.

Above middle and bottom right: basket droppers!

Above: Lucy and Catherine help finish assembling the baskets.

Below: One of the delivery buses!

The Easter bunny!

The Pandemic's Endemic Questions

Besides disrupting our lives, the current pandemic has brought several difficult questions to the surface. We've addressed some of them in the previous two articles. In this one we will address two more:

- Is God causing the coronavirus?
- Is God judging us through the coronavirus?

These are not easy questions, and one article can't hope to do them justice, but we'll do our best with the space restraints we have.

Is God causing the coronavirus?

Our reflexive response is *No! God wouldn't cause a virus that harms and kills people.* We have a strong urge to get God off the hook for this. Surprisingly, it's an urge God doesn't share.

Scripture declares God's sovereignty and lordship over all creation. God says to Moses, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?" (Exodus 4:11). God speaks through Amos: "Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it? (Amos 3:6). Through Isaiah God declares, "I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the Lord, who does all these things" (Isaiah 45:7). Jeremiah writes, "Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?" (Lamentations 3:38). Micah announces, "Disaster has come down from the Lord to the gate of Jerusalem" (Micah 1:12). And upon losing his property and children, Job famously confessed, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21).

In many and various places, Scripture announces God's lordship over wind, seas, snow, lightning, kings, nations, fish, worms, flies, gnats, frogs, locusts, quail, and disease. Not even a sparrow falls to the ground apart from Him (Matthew 10:29).

Even Satan operates on a divine leash, being given only as much slack as God allows. God is, as the psalmist declares, "a great King over all the earth" (Psalm 47:2). And as Paul declares, God is "over all" (Ephesians 4:6). All. He is lord over *all*. Are we free to exempt the coronavirus?

Does this mean God has caused the coronavirus? Maybe. Perhaps it was Satan, but even then God is holding the leash (as we see with Job in Scripture). At the very least it means that it has not arisen outside of His lordship. And, despite what you might be tempted to think, this is good news. It means God isn't playing catch-up. He's not working from behind. This virus will yield to His will and God will work it for His good.

Might that involve human suffering? Yes. Might that involve great disruption to world economies? Yes. Might it upend our settled routines? Yes. Might it shatter some of our dreams? Yes. Might it take the lives of those we love or even our own life? Yes. Does any of this mean God's lordship isn't loving? No. If God could take the greatest evil (the execution of His Son) and use it to accomplish the greatest good (the redemption of the world), can He not exercise His loving lordship to accomplish His good purposes through the coronavirus? Yes. God is the Lord; there is no other. His lordship, though sometimes beyond our understanding, is loving. We need not fear. He, not the coronavirus, is reigning.

Is God judging us through the coronavirus?

This question moves beyond God's agency (i.e. whether God is causing the coronavirus) to God's purposes for the virus. There's no doubt God has judged (i.e. condemned) through plagues, sulfur and fire, water, confused languages, pagan nations, and many, many more means, but every last one of these instances involved a clear word from the Lord. Do we have a clear word from the Lord as to His purposes for the coronavirus? No.

Can God judge individuals through disease? Yes. Acts 12 records the following: "Immediately an angel of the Lord struck [Herod Agrippa] down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last" (12:23). Do we have any such word from the Lord concerning any individual suffering under the coronavirus today? No.

Can God discipline and humble through disease or natural calamity or hardship? Yes. Paul writes about "a thorn… in the flesh," "a messenger of Satan" sent by God to "harass" him (2 Corinthians 12:7). God took Zechariah's voice for nine months when he doubted God's promise to give Elizabeth and him their son John (Luke 1:20). And God struck Elisha's servant Gehazi with leprosy for his covert money grab from Naaman (2 Kings 5:19-27). Do we have any such word from the Lord concerning any individual suffering under the coronavirus? No.

We must be careful not to speak where God has not spoken. Does this mean Scripture is silent on the matter? No. The Gospel of Luke records the following instructive account:

> There were some… who told [Jesus] about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

Jesus' response is simultaneously brilliant and jarring. He is cautioning us against focusing on what God may or may not be doing in another's life, whether He's judging them or not. Instead, Jesus says, the focus in such scenarios (those senselessly murdered by Pilate, those victims of the falling tower, and those affected by the coronavirus today) is the same: ourselves. *Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish*.

Jesus refuses to let us move the question away from ourselves, which is why His response is jarring. In effect, He's saying, "What God is doing in other people's life isn't your concern; what He's doing in yours is. Repent." Scripture reminds us, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

What, then, is God's message to *you* through the coronavirus? Repent. You cannot put this off. Your life may be upended at any time, something this virus has made explicitly clear and real. Believe the gospel. Believe that God has come to this earth in Christ to redeem and save it, to redeem and save *you*. Leave your idols. Leave your sin. They're all death. Christ is life. Trust Him. Follow Him. No, it won't ensure you a life free from suffering or even from contracting the coronavirus, but it will ensure you freedom from condemnation and the assurance of a life finally and fully liberated from sin and its death grip. Now is the time to hear God's gracious call and to respond in faith. – Pastor Conner

"A friend loves at all times..." (Proverbs 17:17)

Zion's Friendship Committee Says "We Love You" with Flowers

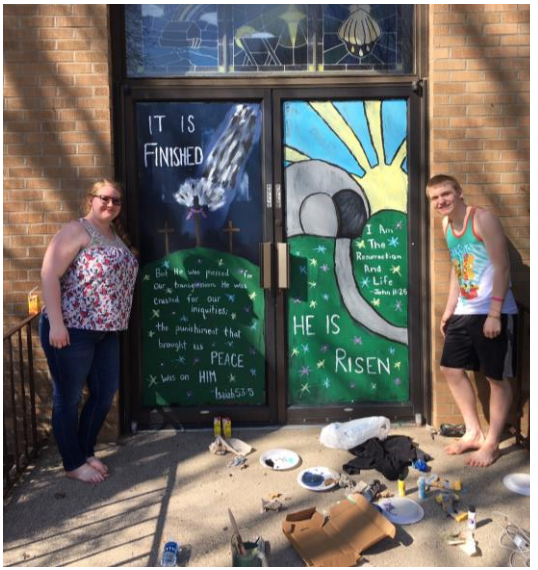
The pandemic-related isolation of our loved ones and community members in long-term care facilities is something that weighs heavily on all our hearts. After sending out handwritten notes to Zion members who reside in facilities, the Friendship Committee brainstormed other ways to brighten residents' days. Combining this project with support for another community organization whose activities are curtailed due to the pandemic, we purchased flowering plants from the IKM-Manning FFA program (planted before school was cancelled for the year, and tended by instructor Ben Booth in the meantime), and repotted them into cups, with a heart pick in each sharing a Bible verse and word of encouragement.

"Junior committee members" helped with cutting out the hearts, decorating the cups with cheerful artwork, and repotting the plants. Although we could not deliver the flowers in person, we dropped off one for each resident at both Accura and Manning Senior Living, where photos sent by staff showed that the gesture was met with smiles. Simultaneously delivered was a message for each staff member, including a thank-you, an encouraging Bible verse, and Zion's contact information, along with an invitation to share needs or prayer requests. Even as we on the Friendship Committee hope and pray that our efforts bless those we seek to serve, we find our own hearts encouraged in the process! It is truly a privilege to share Christ's love.

Interested in helping the Friendship Committee further the mission and ministry of Zion in creative and exciting ways? Consider joining the committee! Not available to make that commitment at this point? The committee would still love to hear your ideas for how we can connect with members, share Christ's love with the community, and encourage members to participate faithfully. Also, you can participate in exciting upcoming projects through donations earmarked for the Friendship Committee. The secure lockbox is always open! ☺ Questions? Contact the church office!

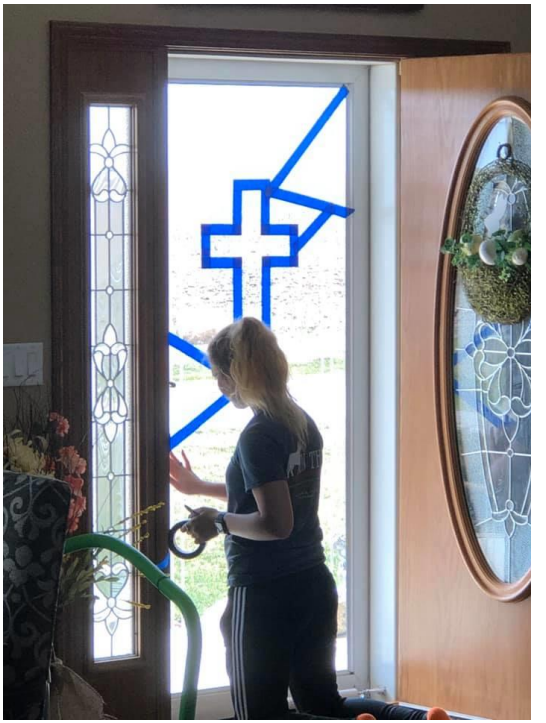
Celebrating Easter @ Home

In spite of social distancing restrictions, Trinity members celebrated Easter at their homes!



Deaconess Johnson & Brody Blom painted Trinity's doors. One door highlighted Good Friday and the other door celebrated Easter.

The Lahrs' Easter celebration door!



Sierra Ferry decorated her Aunt Diane's door.

Kristin, Nick, Jackson, Carson, and Easton Woebke made a special cross for Good Friday in Irwin.

Running Commentary… *2 John:1*

We don't know all that much when it comes to the origin of the letter, 2 John. And yet, there's an incredible richness to this thirteen verse letter.

*1 The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I **love** in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth,*

Who's the "elder?" History argues, John – Jesus' disciple. Who's the "elect lady and her children?" We're not sure.

What do we know? Something significant! The elder *loves* these his Christian recipients. But this love is "agape," that is unconditional and without strings attached. The GOD revealed in the Old & New Testament loves with this sort of love. Christ dies for people not expecting a pat on the back (on the contrary, Jesus received blows to his back). This unconditional love drips down from the Father in the Son to His transformed children, so that the Father's children demonstrate no-strings-attached-agape love.

We'll say more in coming newsletters about this idea of loving and knowing "truth," but suffice it to say that Christian love is more than a feeling; it's a love shaped by objective truth.

Morning Prayer

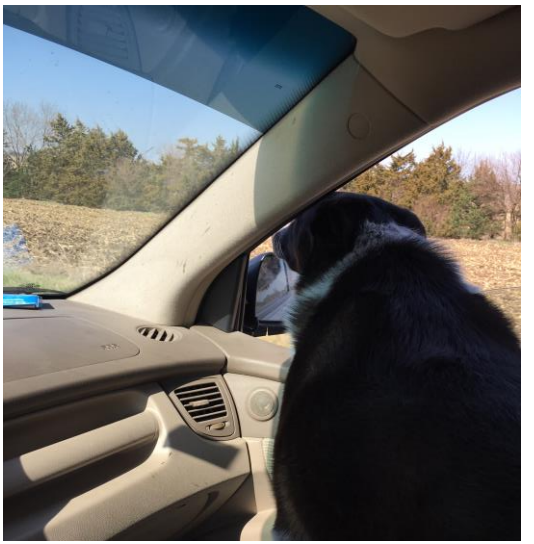
Liturgia Horarum

Wednesdays @ 7:15am

Beginning the morning with what is Holy…

Join us on Trinity's Facebook Live page Wednesday mornings for a special worship experience.

Charlie, Pastor Johnson's blueheeler, enjoyed delivering worship packets to Trinity members ☺



Among the Negative, Let's Keep Positive

You've seen the negative headlines: *pandemic, death toll, worldwide outbreak, unemployment, spreading.* Ominous words! With all the negative, it's important to find positive. Doing so can go a long way through this difficult time. Keeping positive doesn't have to be a 'do-it-yourself' project, though. We look to our community for support. Family, friends, and church, these are the people we see daily, the people we know and trust.

Here are four Ps to help in the midst to difficult times:

- *Perspective*. Keeping perspective means seeing things in proper relation to the bigger picture (i.e. God's great story of creation, redemption, and renewal!). Our reaction to news releases is very much in our control.
- *Purpose*. While there is no school and some people may be temporarily unemployed, each person needs a purpose, a reason to get up in the morning. And we have that in our vocations! You have neighbors that need your love. This may mean calling an elderly neighbor, drawing a picture and sending it to a care facility for a resident, praying for your neighbors, or caring for your children. Everyone needs a purpose and everyone has one in their vocations.
- *Positive Thinking*. Try to find something good every day. Grass is green, sun is shining, flowers are starting to bloom. These are all great gifts of God, all things He's going to renew when Jesus returns! Further, it has been shown that chronic worry will increase cortisol levels and lower a person's immune functioning, making people more vulnerable to disease. So, dwell on the positive gifts of God.
- *Productivity*. If you find yourself having more time on your hands than usual, consider learning a new skill or hobby. Take advantage of the time and become proficient in something meaningful to you.

It is also important to maintain routines. If you usually get up in the morning at a certain time, continue getting up at the same time. Keep a calendar handy and make sure you know what day of the week and day of the month it is. For people that take certain medications, you should focus on the routine to make sure that your medications continue to be effective for you. If you're able to join Zion or Trinity for live streamed worship, do it. If not, keep a regular time for worship. If you feel like you are struggling, make sure that you ask for help. No one is in this alone. There is help available.

Janet Brus, RN, Psychiatric Medical Care, Manning Regional Healthcare Center, Program Director
712-655-8262

2020 VBS Canceled

Out of an abundance of caution, especially concern for our volunteers who largely fall into the 60+ demographic, Zion leadership has made the hard decision to cancel VBS for 2020. We are exploring possibilities for a one day gathering in July.

PANAMÁ NEWS

NEWS FROM THE GAUTHIER FAMILY

brian.gauthier@lcms.org
https://www.lcms.org/gauthier

Treasure in the Midst of Quarantine: Life, for most of the world, has changed drastically, especially since my last newsletter. Words like "quarantine", "lockdown" and "pandemic" are now regulars in our vocabulary and seemingly are in control of our lives. The freedom to come and go as we please, to buy and sell as we desire, and to do whatever we want has been limited temporarily if not cut off completely. People are panicking. People are frantic. People are terrified.

But you, dear baptized brothers and sisters, need not be. While your place of employment may have a "work from home policy", your local government a "shelter in place" mandate and you may not be able to order your coffee from your local cafe like you used to, the Gospel of our Lord and the love of Christ is never quarantined. Nor are the promises of the Lord Jesus to be with you and comfort you bound to social distancing norms. Jesus has promised to be with you always, and He is. May the words of St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 2 bring you comfort and peace in these difficult days:

> But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show the unsurprising power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed; but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

The Lord bless you and may you have the peace that passes all understanding in the days to come remembering Jesus' words from the cross for you: "It is finished."

In our quarantine: each person is only allowed out of the house 3 hours a week (Ladies on Mon., Wed., Fri. and Guys on Tues., Thurs., and Sat.). The hour depends on the last digit of your ID number. This is only to buy food and medicine.

Balboa Property Update After finally obtaining permits, work began and continued for about a month, then came COVID-19. As of March 20th all construction work has ceased until further notice. The entire country is on complete lockdown with all air travel suspended. The only businesses open are the essentials such as grocery stores and pharmacies and each person is allotted one hour a day to shop. Your hour depends on the last number of your identification document. You are given 30 minutes on either side of that hour for travel. Anytime beyond that 2-hour window is punishable by fine or detainment.

Before cessation of the work, the old roof was completely dismantled and the metal fittings repaired and prepared for the new metal trusses and beams. Once those materials were finally delivered, two metal beams were installed. Please pray that winter (what we call the rainy season) takes its time arriving! Thank you again for your prayers and your ongoing support of the Lord's work in Panamá.

Amigos en Cristo

News from ***La Iglesia Evangelica Luterana Amigos en Cristo:*** *Friends in Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church:* **Vacancy Pastor Daniel Vogel**, Denison, Iowa

May 2020

First we lost our Sanctuary in Zion, Denison. It was deemed structurally unsafe for gatherings. So last November we began worship in Zion's school gym. Wow, what a change from the beautiful historic worship sanctuary at Zion!

If that wasn't enough of a challenge last month with all the other churches we then lost even the ability to gather in small groups to worship and study God's Word due to the Coronavirus. Our worship group is not large but we have a number of older folks and others with special health needs. So we could not meet. And all of this turmoil took place right in the midst of Cuaresma/Lent when we focus most intensely on our Lord's suffering. It's the season of sacrifice, of 'giving up' something. Who would have thought we had to give up our church and Easter scenes!

But these human challenges are not difficult for our Lord and Savior. We are NEVER without a church home as the baptized children of God. He is our Church, our Hope, our Salvation.

How can the Christian Church remain 'church' if it cannot hold public services, especially during Holy Week? Well, we certainly found out this year! God provided the means through the technology and social media that we have become accustomed to in this generation. When the government ordered that no groups could gather with more than 10 persons I started doing a devotional message for Lent from my home on my iPhone. But our signal was so weak where we live outside of Manning that I asked Zion, Manning if I could use the church to record my messages. Pastor Jonathan Conner said yes, and more, offered his tech team (Bob Genzen and Judy Jacobsen) to help. With their expertise we have sent out weekly videos on Facebook for Lent, Holy Week and Easter. Below Judy and Bob are gathered at Zion with my wife Paula who helped me sing for the services. What a blessing they have provided for our special ministry! For Marta, an elderly member but an active walker and very social. She is now alone in her tiny apartment and not sure how to handle her loneliness. For Samuel dealing with cancer and other health issues. For Maria with marriage concerns and for Jaime disabled and depressed. These and many others with all their special needs miss our time together. So until we can meet again we pray for each other, make calls, and stay connected as best as we can.

PLEASE PRAY: + For online blessings. + For the sick and troubled, for Samuel, Marta, Maria, Jaime, Marbella, the elderly and our families and friends. + For the future partnership of Zion, Denison and Amigos as we work together. + For our goals for 2020 in Denison and Storm Lake. + For our calling a bilingual pastor. ***In thanksgiving for the mission hearts of the many individuals and congregations of the Iowa District West who support the Lord's work among Hispanic immigrants in Denison & Storm Lake and also in our other 2 missions in Sioux City and Des Moines.***

Rev. Daniel Vogel
32678 Aspen Ave., Manning, Iowa, 51455
Home: 712-653-2354 / Cell: 712-309-1292
Email: daniel.vogel@ziondenison.org

中華信義神學院 China Lutheran Seminary

On Furlough in St. Louis!

Stephen, Maggie, Ginny, Gary, Isaac

Winter 2020 (Pre-COVID-19)

While in St. Louis for education and guest instructor service, we have been attending Light of Christ Lutheran Chinese Mission and have had invitations to share at a variety of Chinese fellowships. Light of Christ had to move into Immanuel, Olivette's gym for worship since the worship service has been growing with Chinese from all around (many different places of origin). St. Louis Chinese Christians are close to our hearts and are filled with God's love, commitment, warm-hearted serving, and joy!

The children were excitedly looking forward to playing in the snow (which they had never done), so a few snow activities have been fun! On the left, Ginny and Maggie build a snowman and on the right, Gary and Isaac have fun sledding.

I made this map (above) to show each of my student's country of origin and where they now serve in our churches in the U.S.A. The exploding Christianity of the Global South is coming to America (as well as we going out).

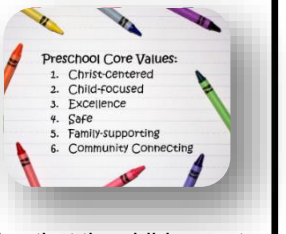
This is us (right), The Olivers, after Ash Wednesday Worship: Isaac, Maggie, Ginny, Stephen, and Gary.

Preschool Praises for April

The last month has been a roller coaster as we went from only being off from preschool for 4 weeks to not being able to go back at all! It was so sudden of a change that we were unable to prepare the preschoolers for the possibility and are saddened that they may not understand why they can't go to school anymore.

This month we tried to keep the connection with our students by delivering Easter baskets to their homes the Saturday before Easter. We weren't able to knock on the door or give hugs, but we know that the children got joy from the present they received from their teachers. Emails were sent to parents to try to keep the connection with them as well to give them different ideas of activities they can do with their children to continue their learning and growing at home.

We teachers will return to the school to gather up the children's remaining papers and belongings early next month as well as their end of the year gift. The Biggest Story books were purchased for each child using a Thrivent card. These books are beautiful and colorful and tell the story of Jesus throughout the Bible.



We miss the children so much and are sad that we can't finish out the year, but we are hoping that the children get to have lots of time with their families. Thank you for all of your support this school year!

Saved to Serve, Mrs. Gore & Mrs. Nemitz

UPCOMING EVENTS @ ZION & TRINITY

Please Note! All times and events are subject to change

	May 16	**Spaghetti Dinner To-go Benefit for Janet Smith (5:00 -7:00 p.m.) Trinity, Manilla / delivery available**
	May 21	**Thursday afternoon Communion Service at Zion (1:30 p.m.)**
Confirmation	**May 20**	**Confirmation Witness Night (*Pending gathering restrictions*) 6:30 p.m.**
Confirmation	**May 24**	**Confirmation Sunday (*Pending gathering restrictions*)**

May Birthdays and Anniversaries @ Zion & Trinity

Birthdays (T = Trinity)

1. Becky Bruch
   Jayden Bunker
   Lynn Nulle
   Stan Spies (T)
2. Rita Beck
   Evelyn Gore
3. Kendra Arp
   Naomi Blackford
4. Isaiah Conner
   Russell Hansen
6. Emily Albertsen
   Andrew Dreier
   Dustin Karsten
   Greg Sextro
7. Catherine Conner
   Lane Sams
8. Nate Blackford
   Ryan Sandage
9. Daniel Dawson
10. Randy Kurth
    Rachel Ramsey
11. Art Joens (T)
    Aubri Kucik
    Robert Merriman
    Riley Willison
12. Nathan Bauer
    Jaime England
13. Lucy Borkowski
    John Ehrichs Jr.
    Lillian Nolte
    Kari Ranniger
    Dick Saunders (T)
    Jarod Segebart (T)
14. Rodney Backhaus
    Irene Genzen
    Lincoln Hodne (T)
    Nathan Peters
    Todd Winter
15. Jan Henkelman
    Ella Langel
    JoAnn Thomas
16. Timothy Conner
    Nicholas Grimm
17. Emily Ceminsky
    Jessica Kucik
    Kay Otto
18. Brad Kusel
    Gina Vollstedt
19. Brennen Morris
20. Karlee Arp
21. Kamaya Jacobsen
    Harper Morris
    Kelli Morrow
    Garry Puck
    Dereck Trimpe
22. Ty Greving
    Todd Ketcham
    Alexis Lesle
    Mya Sandage
    Lisa Steffes
23. Taya Vonnahme
24. Bryndon Rosener
26. Alan Grimm
27. Dennis Grimm
    Gene Lohrmann
    Joan Noelck
28. Jessica Sellner
29. Heidi Crawford
30. Robbie Bandow (T)
31. Megan Alexander
    Stephanie Smith

If we missed or misspelled your name, please inform the church office.

Anniversaries

6. Michael & Bridget Gore
10. Steve & Barb Page
13. Dan & Jennifer Behrens
21. Nicholas & Dena Diersen
25. Russell & Cynthia Ranniger
27. Scott & Cheryl Lahr (T)
28. Ben & Mckensie Bess
    Isaac & Courtney Grabill
    Mark & Jessica Kucik

Official Acts

Baptism: Beckett Bruck, son of Tyler and Morgan Bruck, April 25, Pastor Conner

In Our Prayers

Patty Meeves (Laurene's daughter in law), Janice Monson, Ron Brus, Sherri Steffes, Jim Deevers, Rick Spack, Natalie Mason (Bruce and Mary Grimm's daughter), Gage Carlson (great grandson of Russ and Virginia Mohr), Maridee Bohlmann (David & Joene Bohlmann's daughter-in-law), Janet Smith, Joyce Schroeder, Nancy Grimm, Arlene Mohr, Dewayne Buhr, Rosemary Stamm (John Erich's sister), Nancy Walters, Ron Schilling