

Countryside Trinity Church Connections

April 10, 2020 Edition

From Pastor Brant...

So [the chief priest and the Pharisees] went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

--Matthew 27:66

These are the final words about the death of Jesus. Remembering Jesus' words, "***After three day I will rise again,***" the chief priests and the Pharisees go before Pilate and plead their case for him to secure the tomb until the third day in case the disciples try to pull a fast one and steal his body and then declare the truth behind Jesus' words. Pilate and acknowledges their authority to make it happen, "***You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.***" It is the final nail in the coffin, so to speak. Not only is the tomb sealed with a stone, the stone itself is secured in place by a 24 hour guard. Unless a miracle occurs, the prediction of Jesus about the third day will just become one more way for the people to ridicule and dismiss the ministry of Jesus.

If there is a concern about this stone, and its finality, there is certainly no mention of it in what follows in Matthew on Easter morning. In Mark the women bring spices so that they can anoint the body and they share their concerns around who will roll away the stone at the entrance of the tomb. None of that is in Matthew. What we have is a bit ambiguous. ***After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.*** What do they anticipate seeing? How hopeful do you think they are concerning Jesus' words about rising again? I don't think they went to see the stone sealing the tomb. I don't think they went to see the posted guards. I don't think they went to see Jesus' dead body. They went there to see something different. And they did.

What they do see and experience is a powerful in-breaking of God into the world. ***And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.*** Wow. I don't think they expected to see that! Feeling the earth shake, seeing the angel descend, his appearance like lightning, his clothing white as snow, and the stone is rolled away.

How does our understanding of the first Easter event impact our sense of anticipation concerning the Easter event in the here and now? As people who may feel as if we have been entombed with a huge stone blocking our way out, how do we want to see God's power displayed? A sudden disappearance of the virus? A miracle cure? A vaccine? No more deaths? A flattening of the curve? A lifting of the "stay at home" order? The beginning of the baseball season? Our pick up order for bread and toilet paper filled? Any of these would be welcomed. What have you already seen that speaks to you of God's power? As a people who consistently gather around the Easter event, where have you been looking and what have you been looking for as you anticipate God at work? Where has the stone been miraculously rolled away?

What I have seen is an outpouring of effort and generosity in the midst of the sadness and anxiety. We have seen celebrities open up their wallets and give generously to different causes, caring for people in a vast array of needs. These tend to get the headlines. We are also aware that there are many people who have stepped up to provide care. There is the teacher who walks five miles most days to make sure his students and their families have food. There is the first grader, inspired by the need to care for his grandmother, who used all of his savings to buy groceries and hot meals for elderly members of his neighborhood. Healthcare workers have volunteered to go into places where the virus is overwhelming the resources of a community to not only give aid to those infected, but also to give other healthcare workers time away to heal and find restoration.

Where do you find yourself called by God's Spirit to share in this Easter miracle? Where are you going to accept your invitation from God to offer your support and compassion to those in need? You may think that your way is blocked, and you are probably right, as the normal way of responding seems cut off, but new ways are out there. How can we release others from their tombs?

Once the stone is rolled away from the tomb, the angel sits on it and gives the women this message, "Don't be afraid." A few verses later, when the women come upon Jesus, he offers them the same message. I would invite you to remember the miracle of Easter by finding for yourself a stone of your own, a "worry stone," one you carry with you to rub when you are feeling anxious or worried. Paint it or decorate it any way you see fit, and perhaps you can share a picture of it on our Facebook page or bring it to church when we can gather again. Let it remind you of the assurances of Jesus, ***"Do not be afraid,"*** and repeat it to yourself that it might help you to see God at work.

Combined Sunday Morning Worship on YouTube Continues

Our combined worship service with First and Second Presbyterian Churches continues this Sunday at 10:30 am. **Go to YouTube and search for First Presbyterian Church Saginaw.** This week Brant will be leading some of the liturgy, while Rev. Ted McCullough will be offering the sermon. Our organist, Andrew Glynn will again be contributing music to the service.

As part of this service, I would invite you to participate in the offering time by making your regular offering to the church. Presently Mari is working to add an online donation opportunity to our website, but until it happens, please take this time to either write your check to the church or mail it in, or use the Bill Pay option at your bank. Mari and Kathy will insure that the mail is picked up and that your checks are processed. Please keep in mind any ministries to which you provide regular financial support that they might be sustained in this time where their might be reduced giving.

Weekly Zoom Beatitudes Bible Studies, Wednesdays at 7 pm

Our weekly studies on the Beatitudes continue via our Zoom account on Wednesday evenings at 7 pm. This week, on April 15th, we will be exploring the beatitude, *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God."*

All members who have given their email addresses to the office are sent an invitation to participate on your laptop, tablet, smart phone or even your land line phone. You can download the Zoom app, and then use the information provided in the email to join the online meeting, or you can call the number given in the email. Though video is not needed to participate, we do love to see your smiling face as well as hear your voice. If you are having issues joining the meeting, please let the church office know so that we might be able to guide you through the necessary steps.

Prayer Concerns

We lift up prayers for Lila Neumeyer, who is undergoing rehabilitation at Wellspring in Frankenmuth, Glenna VanHautte whose long-time companion, Jim Dexter, recently passed away, and Norma Meacham's granddaughter, Sara Babcock who has been diagnosed with preeclampsia following a Caesarian Section birth. Let us also continue to lift up the members of our community and world who risk their health and the health of their families to ensure that we are safe and cared for, that they might be strengthened and protected.



STAY HOME. SAVE LIVES.

Help stop coronavirus

- 1 **STAY** home as much as you can
- 2 **KEEP** a safe distance
- 3 **WASH** hands often
- 4 **COVER** your cough
- 5 **SICK?** Call ahead

Let's all do our part – we are all in this together and the better we follow the safe guidelines – the sooner we will be able to worship together again and resume our normal activities.

