



The Messenger
St. John Lutheran Church

155 Fairview Street
 West Branch, Michigan 48661
 Church Phone: 989-345-0120

Rev. Howard Travis, Pastor
 Pastor's Home Phone: 989-312-4637

Web site: www.stjohnwb.org



CHURCH COUNCIL

President

Vice President

Matt Mosley

Secretary

Jane Tennant

Treasurer

Rich Sholtis

Financial Secretary

Jolene Woughter

Properties Chairman

John Curnow

Elders

John Rohman
 Kirk Bielby
 Dennis La Tulip
 Art Mozak

Christian Education

Adele Travis

Evangelism

Carolyn Smith

Social Ministry

Beverly Pourcho

January 2019

In This Issue

A Word from our Pastor	Page 2
Social Ministries	Page 3
Prayer Ministries	Page 4
Ladies Aid	Page 4
Christian Education	Page 5
Evangelism/Outreach	Page 6
Don't Feel God	Page 6
Sin No More	Page 8
Church Announcements	Page 9
Birthdays and Anniversaries	Page 10
Calendar	Page 11

PASTOR'S OFFICE HOURS

Monday and Thursday: 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Tuesday and Wednesday: 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

No appointment is necessary – just stop by! Please call the office and make an appointment if these times are not convenient (345-0120).

CHURCH OFFICE HOURS

Monday through Thursday, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Dear members and friends of St. John,

It's no secret that the American Christian church is in decline. Almost every denomination has seen losses in attendance since the year 2000. The few denominations that manage to remain flat, or have even seen slight increases are church bodies that actively promote the idea that people should **feel God's presence** as they worship. And they should **feel God's presence** as He speaks to them through visions, dreams, or a still-small voice - on a daily basis. Everything centers on the **heart**, through feelings and emotions, as if the Christian must *experience* God's presence, or else.

The problem with this 'chasing after' God through feelings, emotions, signs, and wonders is that **the Bible clearly opposes it**. Let's examine this. First and foremost, **all Christians sin**. And God has given us a conscience that warns us of the danger of sin. We read from 1st John 3: "*By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything*" (v. 19-20, ESV). "Our heart condemns us" means that our conscience is bearing witness to our sin. **Far from feeling God's presence, we feel alienation from God**. St. John is reminding us of Scripture's promise of God's forgiveness, even when we "feel" condemned! God has died with that very sin on the cross. He's removed that sin from us, as far as the East is from the West (Ps. 103:12). When your heart is condemning you, the focus is on the **objective Truth found only in God's Word**: "You are forgiven, through Christ's shed blood!"

Next, we have Scripture's condemnation of our use of feelings and emotions to elevate (or lower) ourselves before God. From Romans chapter 10: "*But the righteousness based on faith says, 'Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) or "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart'" (v. 6-8). The true righteousness of God comes from **faith alone**. **Not** from feelings that false Christians pursue to draw closer to Him. **Notice where faith is found? "The word is near you..."** Indeed, child-like faith in Christ is to be prized more than anything in this world (see Matthew 18:1-4). And, little children don't chase after God with emotions and feelings – **they simply believe!** They don't look inside themselves to see if their heart is stirred-up.*

Finally, the false Christian's pursuit of signs and wonders, that are titillating to the senses, is condemned by Jesus. From Matthew 12: "*Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, 'Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.' But [Jesus] answered them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah'" (v. 38-39). The pursuit of God-driven visions, miracles, or dreams – stems from an **evil heart that doesn't want to simply trust God's word**. Jesus tells them that the "sign of the prophet Jonah," the resurrection of Jesus after three days in the belly of this earth, is the *only* sign we need.*

The problem with these false churches is that **they promote the lie** that *you* must find God through feelings and emotions, signs and wonders – if you're a *real* Christian. Wrong! From John 20: "*Jesus said to [Thomas], 'Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed'" (v. 29). And from Hebrews 11: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (v. 1). Indeed! Child-like faith simply believes!*

Now, we must state that God has given us our emotions, and even some of the gifts of the Holy Spirit are centered on feelings. For instance, the peace that passes all human understanding can

sweep over us, as a gift from above. And love that is unselfish, and sacrificial in nature, can come to us as we serve others in Christ's name. We can sense that love – as a feeling! And of course, joy. Joy can come from above, no matter what the circumstance. We may be struggling with a difficult problem, and joy will come to us when we least expect it. So, if feelings and emotions come from above, what is the problem with the false church's approach to "knowing" God? Dr. Martin Luther has the answer:

Why do you insist on finding [God] **within yourselves**, insist on **feeling holy** and without sin? You will never succeed. All your effort will be worthless.

Do you not know that Christ will be nowhere, nor permit Himself to be found anywhere, except about His Father's business — not in anything that is man-made? This is not the fault of Christ or His mercy. He can never be "lost." He can always be found. Rather, it is your fault because you are **not** seeking Him where you ought—namely, in the place where He should be sought. **You are being guided by your feelings and think you can grasp Him with your thoughts.** Come to the place that is driven neither by your own nor by any human being's business, but by God's business and rule. **So come to His Word.** There you will find Him and hear and see that there is no wrath and disfavor against you in Him, as you fear in your despair. Christ has nothing but grace and warm love in store for you. He acts as your kind and loving Mediator with the Father, speaking the kindest and best words possible on your behalf. Nor does He send you trials with the intention of casting you off, but so that **you may learn to know Him better and cling more firmly to His Word** and in order to rebuke your unreasonableness. ⁽¹⁾

As Dr. Luther states, people seek God *within* themselves. This is the root of their mistake. "All your effort will be worthless." **We must always seek our Lord in His word, and His word alone.** Feelings and emotions may sweep over us as we worship and live-out our lives in Christ Jesus. But these are the **result** of childlike faith that has come as a gift from above, **not** the result of our seeking them out. God's word and His Sacraments are all that we need! It's where we go when we seek to be closer to Him. For this is the only means that we are given to know Him.

Pastor Travis

⁽¹⁾ Martin Luther, the Writings of; St. Louis Ed. 11:453-455).

SOCIAL MINISTRIES

FOOD TRUCK – Our next free food give-away will be January 26th. There is a sign-up sheet in the fellowship hall for help needed to set-up and clean-up and distribute the food on that date. We are collecting donations of personal hygiene items and cleaning products to distribute at the Food Truck give-a-ways. Individuals in need cannot purchase items such as shampoo, soap, deodorant, toothpaste, or household cleaners with their Bridge cards even though they are needed. A collection basket will be in the fellowship hall for donations. We very much appreciate the support we get from all of you! Very blessed to be a part of this church family! Questions can be made to Lisa or Bev.

PRAYER MINISTRIES

Prayer Warriors are always needed!

Prayer Angels... You should have received, in the mail or in your church mailbox, the names of the children and students that you will be praying for this year. Please keep them in your prayers and drop them a note to let them know you're praying for them. *Any questions or concerns? Contact Adele Travis, at 343-9088.*

Praying for you... Have you received a postcard in the mail recently that said, "The Congregation has prayed for you"? As part of the ongoing prayer ministry here at St. John, we pray for the spiritual, emotional, and physical wellbeing of our members. We also lift up the ministries and outreach of this congregation on a daily basis. If you are interested in praying for these concerns, January Prayer Sheets are available in the Narthex on the cart next to the Portals of Prayer.

LADIES AID

MEETING – The January meeting will begin with lunch at Big Boy at 11:30 A.M. on January 8th with the meeting to follow at the church at 1:00 P.M. We would welcome any and all ladies of the church to come join us!!!

ELECTION- November election results are as follows: President – Mary Lowery, Secretary – Jane Tennant, Co-Treasurer – Yvonne Musselman and Marge Mozak, Altar Guild – Jane Tennant, Coffee Hour Coordinator – Lois Hernandez.

FUNERAL COMMITTEES – To ease some of the responsibilities for the Ladies Aid President at the time of a funeral, several committees have been developed to be responsible for calling for food, setting up for the funeral and helping the day of the funeral. Each committee will have three members and the committees will alternate funerals. We would still welcome assistance from others for set up and the day of the funeral. Committee A: Mary Lowery, Lois Hernandez and Jan Doerr. Committee B: Jane Tennant, Marge Mozak and Colleen Sholtis. We would welcome any volunteers for a third committee in the future.

BLANKET PROJECT – The ladies are working on making fleece blankets similar to fleece blankets with tied edges. We have a newer method of securing the edges and could really use some help! We invite any ladies or men that would like to help, to please join us on Mondays at approximately 12:00 Noon. The project requires no standing or bending over. It is totally a sit-down project!

FAMILY FARE "Direct Your Dollars" - As of December 19th, we have collected 38,164 dollars in receipts. Remember, you must use your "Yes Rewards" card or give them your phone number for the purchase to count as a "Direct Your Dollars" receipt. We have had some receipts recently that didn't count due to not using the "Yes Rewards" card!

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son, from the Father, full of grace and truth. *And, from His fullness we have received grace upon grace.*
John 1: 15 & 16

Have you made Bible Study your place to be this year?

Check out the opportunities below and come join us...

Sunday Mornings

8:30 a.m. - A Longer Look at the Lessons – Prepare for worship by taking a closer look at the Bible readings for that Sunday's service.

Monday Mornings

10:00 a.m. - We are taking an in-depth look at the book of **2 Samuel**.

Tuesday Evenings

7:00 p.m. - Women's Bible Study at Jane Tennant's home. A deeper look at Vocation through the Lutheran Difference Bible Study series.

7:00 p.m. - Men's Bible Study on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday. They continue to dig into God's Word, and have started the "Great Heroes of the Bible - New Testament" series.

Wednesday Mornings

9:00 a.m. – Men's Breakfast and Devotional - 3rd Wednesday at the church.

Sunday School Happening

But when the fullness of time came,
God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,
to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.
Galatians 4:4-5

What Good News! At just the right God sent His own dear Son to be our Savior. We will continue to celebrate the good news of our dear Savior's birth throughout the month of January. They'll be looking at how the angels announced our Savior's birth to the shepherds. How Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple to fulfill the Law, and Simeon and Anna's joyous response to seeing the Christ Child who would bring redemption for all people. Throughout the month they will be hearing how God fulfilled His promise of a Savior from Genesis 1:15, through His Son Jesus. And, as always the law and gospel message of God's Word will be presented to lead us to repentance and the forgiveness we have through Jesus' death and resurrection on the cross. **It's not just good news, it's the best news we could ever hear!**

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ.
Romans 10:17

A special thank you to all those that contributed glass jars and cookies for the Family Christmas Program. Both were greatly appreciated!

EVANGELISM / OUTREACH

Prayer cards are being sent letting you know that we are praying for your well being. I would like to challenge each of us to invite our family and friends to visit us for a Saturday evening or Sunday morning worship service and invite them to enjoy some fellowship with us after service Sunday morning. Who knows one invitation could potentially lead to another member joining our church family. Wouldn't that be wonderful!!

There are plenty of car window decals still available. Check with Dennis if you are interested and would like one or two.

There has been a Thrivent Grant applied for and approved to help purchase advent devotions for our Sunday school children.

Giving Thanks! Through a Thrivent Grant, we were able to purchase and distribute children's Seek and Find Advent devotion books to the day cares in the area. And, share the "Good News" with this community.

When You Don't Feel GOD IS WITH YOU

On December 11, 1979, one of the most famous nuns of the Roman Catholic Church, Mother Teresa, traveled to Oslo, Norway, to receive one of the highest human honors on earth: the Nobel Peace Prize.

After working many years among the poor in India and as a result of decades of publicity, Mother Teresa became a leading symbol of the Christian faith. Millions idolized and sought to emulate her. Billy Graham said she was the only person he knew who could probably get to heaven on the basis of her righteous life!

MILLIONS SHOCKED!

Twenty-eight years after Mother Teresa traveled to Oslo to receive the Nobel prize, millions were dumbstruck to learn that, for almost fifty years, Mother Teresa had written many friends saying that her spiritual life was like living in hell. Why? Because she ***felt*** no presence of God.

But what about all her speeches, her television promotions, and especially her smile? Her smile, she said, was a "mask."

Why, in her private letters, did Mother Teresa say she was wearing a mask? Because underneath her highly publicized deeds of Christian charity, she believed and confessed in writing that she was convinced she was without faith because she could not ***feel*** God.

MANY TODAY SYMPATHIZE WITH MOTHER TERESA

Millions were greatly disillusioned by Mother Teresa's stunning confession. Millions of others are sympathetic to Mother Teresa. Why? They say they, too, do not *feel* God. They are also searching for a confirmation of God through their physical senses, their emotions, and through spiritual visions.

The way the devil deceived Mother Teresa, and millions of others who follow in her footsteps, is not new. Five hundred years ago, Martin Luther wrote:

"In temptation we must not on any account decide this matter on the basis of our feeling ... If we want to follow our feeling ... we shall decide that we are bereft of all help from the Holy Spirit and that we have been utterly banished from the presence of God" (*Luther's Works*, vol. 26, p. 384).

If you also are tempted to confirm your faith by how emotional you feel about your spirituality, be careful! Don't be tricked by Satan as he tries to confuse God's unchanging truth with your ever-changing emotions.

Consider the following: If a highly-trained doctor examines you and writes out a diagnosis of your condition, but you feel just the opposite emotionally, whom do you trust: the trained doctor's written statement or your feelings? Or, if you are in jail and a messenger brings a written certificate from the governor saying you are fully pardoned-even though you don't feel free-whom do you believe: the governor's written, authoritative statement or your opposite feelings?

LOOK ONLY TO CHRIST, NOT TO YOUR FEELINGS!

Luther writes:

"Therefore faith is a constant gaze that looks at nothing except Christ, the Victor over sin and death and the Dispenser of righteousness, salvation, and eternal life. In his epistles, therefore, Paul sets forth and urges Jesus Christ in almost every verse. He sets Him forth through the Word, since Christ cannot be set forth any other way than through the Word and cannot be grasped any other way than through faith" (*Luther's Works*, vol. 26, p. 356).

Again Luther says:

"Therefore we must simply maintain that when we hear God saying something [in His Word], we are to believe it and not to debate about it but rather take our intellect captive in the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5)" (*Luther's Works*, vol. 1, p. 157).

As you struggle over whether to believe God's Word or your doubting and conflicting emotions, pray that the Holy Spirit will always bring to your mind the words Jesus spoke through Abraham. If people do not believe God's Word, they will not believe even if someone rises from the dead (Luke 16:31). Why are Jesus' words so critical to you? God promises to create faith in your heart not as a result of seeing sensational events, but as a result of hearing, of receiving His living, faith-creating Word into yourself through your eyes and ears (Romans 10:17). Witnessing a resurrection from the dead may be sensational, but it is not faith-creating. Only Jesus' Word can create in you faith, hope, and the lasting assurance of God's presence.

Don't seek God through your feelings as Mother Teresa did, and as millions of others still do. You will never find God in your emotions because your emotions are easily deceived and fluctuating. Rather,

focus on God's reliable message to you in His Word: "These have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).

Dear Lord Jesus, focus my faith on your unchanging and life-giving Word, so that I do not focus on my changing feelings. May the Holy Spirit also, through this living Word, create a strong realization of your presence in my heart and soul. In Your name. Amen.

Reprinted from *Good News Magazine*, Issue No. 30, published by the Concordia Mission Society, St. Louis, Mo., c. 2007.

“From Now On ... **SIN NO MORE**” JOHN 8:11

The apostle Peter acknowledges that some verses in the Bible are “hard to understand” (2 Peter 3:16). When we cannot immediately understand some of God's Word, the devil often tempts us to become discouraged. Satan then tempts us further to throw up our hands and say, “The Bible is too difficult to understand! I give up!”

DO JESUS' POINTED WORDS CONFUSE OR DISCOURAGE YOU?

When you read Jesus' words to the adulterous woman, who is shown on this page, “From now on sin no more,” or when you read St. John's words, “I am writing these things to you that you may not sin” (1 John 2:1), these words from God are indeed difficult to understand. You may say, “I try hard to be a Christian,” though with St. Paul you confess, “the good I wish to do each day, I do not do” (Romans 7:18-19).

Of St. John's words above, Luther said, “He who can make this text intelligible to us should be called a theologian” (*Luther's Works*, vol. 30, p. 235). Luther openly confessed that these Bible passages are not immediately nor easily understood.

THE KEY WORD FOR YOU IS “DESIRE”

Luther then asks the key question: “Why does the apostle say ‘[I am writing this ...] so that [we] may not sin?’” Luther then explains this difficult passage:

“The apostle wants us to be careful and to walk in the fear of the Lord. We should not say: ‘If this is the way the matter stands, I will sin.’ For John says: The **DESIRE** to sin should not reign in you. No, you should be watchful. But even if you fortify yourself to the utmost, yet sin remains, and you sin from day to day.’ Hence it is necessary to exercise foresight. For we must always be nourished by the Spirit, and we must also read the Psalms and Holy Scripture. This is our armor.”

In other words, Luther advises that just because God says, “Sin no more,” and Paul confesses the impossibility of claiming total victory over sin, we should not therefore give in to the power of Sin.

Rather, just as a soldier keeps himself fit through good food and exercise, we, as Christ's soldiers, also need to be nourished daily on God's food (Matthew 4:4); and, by daily combat with sin, God

exercises us in the faith and keeps us strong. "But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life" (Romans 6:22).

DAILY COMBAT WITH SIN STRENGTHENS YOUR FAITH!

Basing his teaching on God's Word, Luther notes repeatedly that God permits our daily struggle with sin for a good reason: to strengthen our faith. Paul agrees: "We also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:3-5). In other words, what the devil intends for evil, God uses for our good (Hebrews 12:11). By permitting a residual power of Sin to remain in you, God has provided a way to strengthen your faith. Luther explains:

"... lazy Christians ... unconsciously become sluggish and secure as if they needed neither God nor His Word. They amble along as if they were neither in danger nor in need and, in the process, they lose their faith and become incapable of doing good works. But God has permitted such enemies to remain for us so that we would have to fight and should not become lazy and secure" (*Luther's Works*, vol. 38, p. 131).

Thus, God's command to "Sin no more," actually means, "Do not willfully sin." These are Gospel words from Jesus because, even when you fail, God forgives you. In addition, through your daily battles, He greatly strengthens you.

A Prayer for our battle against sin: Dear Lord Jesus, through Your Word and sacraments, strengthen me to fight against sin, even though I fail miserably. Thank You for forgiving me when I fail. Help me to not sin willfully. Thank You also for these vigorous daily spiritual exercises which force me to pray, read my Bible, take Communion, and hear Your Word preached, for these are the means which You use to strengthen my faith. Amen.

Reprinted from Good News Magazine, Issue 29, Fall 2007, published by the Concordia Mission Society, P.O. Box 8555, St. Louis, MO 63126.

CHURCH ANNOUNCEMENTS

2019 FLOWER CHART — A new flower chart for 2019 is posted. There are many opportunities to sponsor flowers for the altar. Please take a few moments to sign up for a special date. Remember, flowers are \$15.00 and the Ladies Aid would like them paid for when you sign up.

DECALS — Been noticing St. John window decals in the cars in the parking lot or around town? Want one for your vehicle/vehicles? There is no charge . . . just ask Patty Rohman or stop by the church office to get one.

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT — St. John Lutheran has entered into an agreement with AuSable Valley Community Mental Health that allows them to use our facility for certain activities during the week. Part of this agreement is that our congregational members will keep confidential the names of people that are using our facility. Please observe this agreement by never mentioning

the names of people that you may have seen. Also, remind others of this agreement if you hear of a visitor's name being mentioned. Thank you for your cooperation. Executive Council.

Reminder: There is a box in the Narthex for giving to the **Ogemaw County Clergy Association**. This money is collected hygiene items, for the purchase of food, personal home heating fuels, and funeral expenses for people in Ogemaw Country that are unable to afford these necessities. Make checks payable to Ogemaw County Clergy Assoc. Thank you!

EMERGENCY PRAYER REQUESTS – St. John has developed a system that allows us to rapidly contact all members when a life threatening situation develops, requiring immediate prayers. We are requesting cell phone numbers (for text messaging) or e-mail addresses for all members. For those who don't use e-mails or text messaging, phone calls will be made. Please request a salmon-colored form from the office and return it when completed. Thank you.

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

1/04 – Eleanor Hanft
1/05 – John Curnow
1/05 – Shawn Darling
1/10 – Bill Pourcho
1/11 – Linda La Tulip
1/15 – Corey Bertossi
1/15 – Brei Anna Bertossi
1/15 – Anthony Bertossi
1/15 – Bret Bertossi
1/29 – Ervin Schilke



JANUARY ANNIVERSARIES

1/02 – Justin and Mary Bickel
1/10 – John and Betty Voss
1/27 – James and Nancy Woughter