

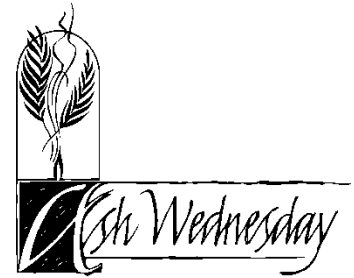


**The Messenger**  
**St. John Lutheran Church**

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](http://www.stjohnwb.org)



**CHURCH COUNCIL**

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**Social Ministry**

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# March 2019

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**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 Lutheran,

One of the most common complaints that non-Christians direct at the Church is that, **"It's all about the money."** Satan loves to push the notion that the Christian church is really just a man made enterprise that seeks to extract money from the poor and the naïve, for its own selfish purposes. And that plays into our selfish notions about giving to others. However, Jesus' own words in Luke 6 give us the truth about giving to others: <sup>30</sup>*Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back.* <sup>31</sup>*And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them...* <sup>35</sup>*love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.* <sup>36</sup>*Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*" (ESV)

**God loves all people equally.** We, as Christians, are charged with a **special calling: to share God's love with all, even those that we think are undeserving of our love.** The Church is **God's House**, created and sustained by Him to reach-out in love to the community and the world – even to the enemies of God. And we must not think that giving sacrificially to the church and to our neighbor is only for the "rich" (that's a convenient "escape clause" that we frequently use to let us "off the hook"). **All of us have been given an abundance and are "rich" in God's eyes.** John the Baptist reminds us, *"Whoever has two tunics [or coats] is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise"* (Luke 3:11). Do you have two coats in your closet? Do you food in your cupboards? You are "rich" by God's standard.

**Our human nature**, however, demands that **we be selective with our love** and our gift giving. Before loving someone, they need to prove to us that they're worthy of our love, and will not squander it. We count and measure every dime we have, imagining that one day we may need it, if God decides to withhold His gracious giving to us. That's Satan's trick as well: "Did God really say... are you sure you can trust God?"

Jesus tells us to love and give to the undeserving, even to our enemies. I know that this is hard. If you find it difficult to give to someone or something that *passes* your "worthiness test", how much harder is it to give to someone who you judge to be *totally unworthy*? This person has mistreated you in the past. He or she has never said to you, "I'm sorry." That leads us to this important truth: **We can love and give to all because we have been loved and given good things in Christ Jesus.**

**Today, you're in a position to give love** (yes, even to love sacrificially), **for you were first loved by your Father in heaven, who has shown steadfast mercy to you.** We're reminded in James chapter 1 that *God* is the giver of all good gifts (v. 17). Do you think you have received all those good things because you were worthy to receive them? Think again. You are unworthy, yet, while you were still a sinner, Christ died for you. You were a blistering enemy of God, never once telling Him, "I'm sorry," and yet, He has brought you into His kingdom. **How did this happen?** First, someone had to pay down your debt of sin. **Your spiritual bank statement** was covered in **red ink** – your debt to God, unimaginably high. If God used *your* "worthiness test" on *you*, before He gave you good gifts, what would your life be like today?

Instead, Jesus, the Father's only Son, goes to the cross with your red ink all over Himself. His miserable suffering and death is given to you as the best gift you will ever receive, since **your red**

**ink of sin was covered by His shed blood.** You were fully reconciled to your Father - by Jesus' atoning work for you.

**The truth is nothing is won or lost by having more stuff.** We have everything necessary when we abide in Christ Jesus, and He in us (see John 15). What remains in this life is **not** a burden or something that must be done by you to qualify for heaven. Instead, what's left is a **golden opportunity to love the Lord your God**, with all your **heart**, and with all your **soul**, and with all your **mind** (Matt. 22:37). How do you love the Lord, for all His goodness and kindness that He has showered upon you? Jesus tells us how, in Matthew 25. He said, *"Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'"* (v. 37-40). If your grand plan for loving the Lord is to come to worship and to say, "Lord, I love you," and then leave His house and turn your back on your neighbor in need – you of all people are most to be pitied.

**The true measure of the worth of a Christian is not found in their bank account or their possessions.** What you have or do not have does not change who you are or what you are worth. It doesn't matter if you live or die with nothing more to your name than the change in your pocket, or if you have a million dollars. Your salvation is accomplished, you have eternal life as your guarantee (1 Corinthians 15:42). Your complete worth is clearly shown in your Creator God's willingness to die for you. So everything else that God gives you – is merely "icing on the cake."

We learn from today's text that **God wants our motivation for giving to others - to be love for Him and love for our neighbor.** As we have received mercy, we are to extend mercy to others. We are to give out of a sense of **freedom we have in Christ** – a freedom that opens the doorway to real, substantial love. We love, because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). And so, we recognize our money and possessions as nothing more than **a tool** that we have at our disposal to use for the benefit of our neighbor. **And what is the greatest good that your neighbor receives when He receives your love? He sees Christ Jesus in you!** God is glorified when others receive your undeserved love, even as you are loved undeservedly by God. So share from your abundance, for you are most certainly loved and have been given good things by God.

Pastor Travis

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## SOCIAL MINISTRIES

**FOOD TRUCK** – Our next food give-a-way is on Saturday April 27<sup>th</sup>. A sign-up sheet will be available for volunteers. We wish to thank all the people who help make the food give-a-ways a great success. 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.

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# PRAYER MINISTRIES

**Prayer Warriors are always needed!**

**Prayer Warriors** – Please keep your students in your prayers and drop them a note to let them know you're praying for them.

**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, March Prayer Sheets are available in the Narthex on the cart next to the Portals of Prayer.

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## LADIES AID

**MEETING** – The March meeting will begin with lunch at KFC at 11:30 A.M. on March 12<sup>th</sup> 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!!!

**GREETING CARDS** – The Ladies Aid has added Easter Cards to the cards available for sale on the counter outside the kitchen. Check them out. What a great time to proclaim the true meaning of Easter – Our Risen Lord!!

**FAMILY FARE** "Direct Your Dollars" - As of February 18th, we have collected 45,440 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.

**GARAGE SALE**- Think ahead to Spring as you clean out closets and drawers this winter and save all those treasures you no longer need for the Ladies Aid Garage Sale in the Spring. We will accept almost anything.

**POSSIBLE SPRING BAKE SALE** – We are thinking of possibly having a Bake Sale in the spring. If we do, we will need many persons in the congregation to donate baked goods. What do you think? Will you help? Let us know!!!

**SPECIAL THANKS** – We wish to extend special thanks for material occasionally found in the quilters room donated for us to use in our quilts. It doesn't go unnoticed and is greatly appreciated!!! Don't forget, we always have a need for gently used bed sheets to use on the backs of quilts. So, if you are cleaning out your linen closet this spring and have sheets that you don't need, think of us!

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## 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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday.** They continue to dig into God's Word, and are using the "Great Miracles of the Bible - New Testament" series.

### **Wednesday Mornings**

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

## **Sunday School Happenings**

*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life.*

*No one comes to the Father except through Me.*

John 14:6

**It's March! And, we have all heard the saying that "*When March roars in like a lion it goes out like a lamb.*"** Our Sunday School lessons for March begin the same way with John the Baptist preaching his fiery message of repentance and baptizing people in the Jordan River, preparing hearts and minds for the true Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The harshness of the law preparing our hearts and minds for the grace we've been given through God's Gospel of forgiveness found in Christ Jesus.

**We continue the month with the baptism of Jesus.** In His baptism, Jesus began taking on our sins, it was the beginning of His road to the cross. And, through our baptism we are united with Christ in His death and resurrection, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, and given new life in Christ. He has made us His child and brought us into His kingdom. *For that we give thanks and praise!*

**Our next lesson begins right after Jesus' baptism,** where He was led by the Spirit into the desert and fasted for 40 days. When Jesus was at His lowest point, Satan came and tempted Him to sin. We all know that Jesus resisted the temptations using God's Word, and the devil left him. Jesus was tempted just as we are, but never sinned. And, He has provided us with the powerful weapons of His Word, the sword of the Spirit, and His protective armor to use to defend ourselves against the devil and His schemes. But even more importantly, He has kept God's Law on our behalf by becoming the sinless sacrifice for our sins so that we might have forgiveness and new life in Him.

**We end the month with Jesus' calling of Philip and Nathanael** to believe in Him and confess Him as their Lord and Savior. Just as Jesus called them, He calls us too to believe in Him to and to confess Him as our Lord and Savior too. It's only through Jesus that we are given forgiveness for our sins and eternal life in heaven.

**Each of our lessons this month** will start with the fiery message of the law, that leads us to repentance, and ends with God's grace given through the precious Lamb of God, Jesus.

*For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

Galatians 3:26-27

## **Sunday School Brunch**

A special thank you to our Sunday School teachers and Social Ministries team for providing food for the brunch. And, thank you to all who donated supplies for our local schools. The Brunch offering was used by Social Ministries for the local Food Truck. ***Thank you to all who gave!***

## **March is Missions Month!**

**Our featured mission this year are...**

### **Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch...**

"We help the most troubled, complicated and amazing kids by providing best-in-class psychiatric therapy and trauma-informed care, where we look kids in the eye, walk with them, and help them become their best selves. In addition to Residential Treatment Facilities in Fargo, Bismarck, and Minot, the Ranch provides Outpatient Psychiatric and Psychological Services, and Spiritual Life Programs. Our on-campus school, Dakota Memorial School (DMS), provides a personalized education for kids who have psychiatric, behavioral and trauma issues."

### **Lutheran Heritage Foundation**

Publishing and distributing Lutheran educational materials (e.g. Luther's Small Catechism, Book of Concord, children's books) into worldwide languages; training-up Lutheran pastors and missionaries in foreign countries.

**Don't forget the ongoing needs we continue to support in this community and in the world...**

- **The Ogemaw County Clergy Association**– Through your financial contributions, food and help with electricity, heating and funeral bills are provided.
- **Caring Pregnancy of West Branch** – Through your donations, physical needs and emotional support are provided for families and their infants.
- **Orphan Grain Train** - Christian volunteer network that shares personal and material (e.g. quilts, blankets) resources with needy people in America and around the world. Grain Train volunteers gather donations of clothing, medical supplies, food, Christian literature, and other aid to meet real needs.
- **LWML** – Through the mites collected by this organization, the needs of many are met in this county and abroad. For more information about projects that are being funded check our newsletter and their website at [www.lwml.org](http://www.lwml.org).
- **Our local Food Give-A-ways** – Next truck: April 27<sup>th</sup>

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## EVANGELISM / OUTREACH

Facebook is up to date. As soon as I have the Lenten schedule I will post it on Facebook. Prayer cards are being sent. We have requested and received a Thrivent Grant to purchase Lent Devotions for the children. There is sign-up sheets on the bulletin board if you would be willing to change the sign outside or be Lector. Please don't forget to encourage others to worship with us. Have a wonderful month and remember warm weather will soon spring upon us. God bless.

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

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## THOSE WHO DO NOT ABIDE IN ME... "ARE BURNED" John 15:6

There are many medieval paintings that show people being cast into hell on Judgment Day. In Mark 9:43, Jesus speaks about this coming frightful event to awaken you and all people to listen carefully to His Words when He says: "If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned" (John 15:6, ESV).

### WHY DOES JESUS PAINT SUCH A FRIGHTENING PICTURE OF THINGS TO COME?

Why does Jesus use such alarming language when He speaks about **abiding** in Him? Because many people today do not know that **abiding** in Jesus is a requirement for staying out of the eternal fires of hell. Others simply don't care what Jesus is saying to them.

Millions *know* Jesus as an historical person. Some even have extensive knowledge of Jesus. Others have only a vague understanding of Jesus. Although neither group has an active day-to-day **abiding** relationship with their Lord, they nevertheless believe that, if there is a Day of Judgment, Jesus will save them, and give them entry into Paradise. They live with this false security simply because they are merely aware of historical and Biblical facts about Jesus.

### THE DEVIL'S DEADLY DECEPTION

Relying for salvation on no more than an awareness of historical fact is a deadly deception of the devil. Why? Herod and the Pharisees knew more about Jesus than the most brilliant theological scholars today, yet their knowledge of Jesus will not save them from the fires of hell. During His public ministry, people followed Jesus by the thousands. They saw His miracles. They heard His teachings. These people had more firsthand knowledge of Jesus than the most brilliant Bible student today. Yet many of the same people will end up in the fires of hell (Matthew 15:7-9; John 5:39-40).

Jesus says that in order to be saved from the fires of hell, you need to have more than a mere awareness of Him. You need to be "united" to Him. God says this "uniting" takes place in Baptism (Romans 6:3-5; John 3:5). Through Baptism, God causes you "to be born again to *a living hope* through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3).

### JESUS SAYS YOUR CONNECTION TO HIM IS THE KEY

This *connection* is what causes and enables you to **abide** in Jesus, a connection that gives you new life on earth, and guarantees you life forever in heaven.

Remember Jesus' clear words to Nicodemus: "Unless one is born again [from above, by God], he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Through His miracle of Baptism, God gives you a new birth and, from that miracle on, you begin **abiding** in Jesus. This is why Jesus' words about being born again through Baptism are so very, very important to you. "If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned" (John 15:6, ESV). If you desire true spiritual life on earth and also to be rescued by Him from the fires of hell (2 Timothy 4:18), then take seriously Jesus' teaching and insistence that you must **abide** in Him.

Reprinted from *Good News Magazine*, Issue 25, Concordia Mission Society, St. Louis, c. 2006.

**Note from Pastor Travis:** Please do not be confused by this article into thinking that "abiding" is some kind of work that you must do to be saved. "Abiding" is nothing more than allowing God to work in your heart and mind. Too many say, "Why – that's easy! I do that every day!" **True abiding** is making sure that you truly are connected to Christ through **His means of grace:** Worship (every week), the Lord's Supper (when it's offered) and Bible studies or devotions (daily). Frequent prayer, although not a means of grace, is a mark of someone who is abiding in Christ. Note that there is **a commitment that must be made** to 'stay connected' to the very source of eternal life: Jesus Christ. While worship, Bible study, and the Lord's Supper are not 'work', they are critical to your spiritual health. How many people take comfort in their 'head knowledge' about Jesus, thinking that knowing the stories of Christmas and Easter means they're going to heaven when they die? Abiding in Christ is **true discipleship** – God working in you, breathing new life in you each day, guiding you through repentance (daily), and growing you in wisdom and knowledge of Him. Anything less is a dangerous game that can have devastating, eternal consequences.

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## **"Be Gracious to Me According to Your Word."**

PSALM 119:58

As you think about the failures, hardships, and other difficulties you have experienced in your life, it is probably not difficult for you to admit, as many people readily do, "Yes, I am a sinner. Not only have I suffered many wrongs, but I have also committed many wrongs."

Your negative experiences might make it easy to conclude that you are a sinner in need of help. However, your persistent feelings of guilt or regret will continually attempt to prevent you from saying with confidence: "I believe that Jesus Christ has completely forgiven me all my sins-including the sins of which I feel ashamed." If this lack of confidence is true for you, you are not alone! Many people, including many lifelong Christians, suffer with similar doubts concerning the forgiveness Christ earned for them in His death and resurrection. When these Christians are asked, "Do you believe God has forgiven you all your sins for the sake of His Son, Jesus?" they cannot bring themselves to answer confidently: "I do believe." The best these Christians can say is: "I hope so."

**THIS WOMAN HELD JESUS TO HIS WORDS!**



When you begin to feel doubtful and wonder whether God could ever truly forgive ALL of your sins, turn to Matthew 15:21-28. As you read what God says about the woman, you will see that she insisted that Jesus deal with her according to His Word. This woman begged Jesus to heal her daughter, but He seemed to ignore her. When He finally responded to her, His words felt like a slap on the cheek: *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.... It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs"* (Matthew 15:24, 26).

However, this woman believed that Jesus is the promised "Son of David" (Matthew 15:22). She had heard and believed that Jesus is not only the God of Israel (Matthew 15:24), but He is also the Savior of the whole world (1 John 2:2). Having heard these promises, this woman now insisted that Jesus, her God, deal with her according to His Word. "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table" (Matthew 15:27). With these words, this woman held her God to His promises! She knew that Jesus is the gracious God who had been promised to her according to His Word (Genesis 3:15; 22:18; Psalm 67:1-2; Luke 1:38). Now she insisted that Jesus be gracious to her according to His Word.

### **WHEN YOU SUFFER DOUBTS, BECOME INSISTENT LIKE THIS WOMAN**

Your Lord Jesus Christ not only wants you to recognize your sins, but He also announces to you that all your sins have been forgiven by His death and resurrection (Acts 5:30-32; Ephesians 1:7-8). Whenever your feelings of guilt and regret make you think that Jesus might be angry with you, think of this woman. Whenever you are tempted to think that God might not want to help you, insist that your Lord Jesus *"be gracious to me according to Thy Word"* (Psalm 119:58). Hold Jesus to His Words, just as this woman did. For example:

- When you doubt that Jesus will always stay with you, say to Him: *"Lord, deal with me according to Your Word. You have promised never to leave me or forsake me* (Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5). *Be with me now, according to Your Word. Comfort me, protect me, and preserve the gift of faith You have given to me."*
- When you doubt whether you can resist temptation, say to Him: *"Lord, You have declared Yourself to be my Shepherd and Keeper* (Psalm 23:1). *According to Your Word, strengthen me now against these persistent temptations. Continue to be my Refuge and Strength, my ever-present help in trouble* (Psalm 46:1)."

*Dear Jesus, I confess that I frequently doubt Your forgiveness and love. Give me the courage and confidence of faith so that, like this woman, I may insist that You deal with me according to Your Word whenever I feel doubt starting to rise. Amen ✝*

Reprinted from *Good News Magazine, Issue 33*, Concordia Mission Society, c. 2008.

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## **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.

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### FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

3/05 – Linda Voll  
3/07 – Floyd Weiss  
3/08 – Karen Randall  
3/09 – Ronald Darling  
3/10 – Art Mozak  
3/18 – Sandra Hanft  
3/24 – Mary Lowery  
3/27 – Clara Pourcho



### FEBRUARY ANNIVERSARIES

3/03 – David and Janice Doerr  
3/24 – Ed and Karen Schmitt