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## PASTOR'S DEVOTIONAL

*"By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ..."* – 1 Peter 1:3.



One of my fondest memories of my seminary years was singing in the Choir of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia under the direction of Dr. Robert Bornemann. Dr. Bornemann (who everyone referred to as "Bob") was professor of Old Testament and Hebrew as well as director of the choir. He was also an accomplished composer, and during my time in the choir we sang two of his pieces: "The Tower and the Spirit," in which the confusion of languages at the Tower of Babel in Genesis is contrasted with the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost through which all the people in Jerusalem were amazed that *"in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."* (Acts 2:11). The second composition of Bob Bornemann that we sang was "Letter from Babylon," based on the words of the First Letter of Peter. Over thirty years after I last sang in the Seminary Choir, I can still hear the beautiful melodies of "Without Having Seen Him, You Love Him" (1 Peter 1:8) and "You Have Been Born Anew to a Living Hope." (1:3).

Throughout the Sundays of Easter (Easter is a fifty-day season that leads us through the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Day of Pentecost) we will be hearing the words of this first letter that is attributed to Peter, the lead apostle in the early days of the Church's witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The letter is written to the churches of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) *"who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood."* (1:2). The apostle refers to the letter's recipients as "exiles" (later as "resident aliens"), sharing in Peter's exile in Rome (which he refers to as "Babylon" in 5:13, using a term from

the book of Revelation that refers to Rome as an enemy of God's people). Their "exile" is a consequence of their faith in Jesus Christ; because they have boldly confessed that Jesus Christ is Lord, they have suffered tremendous losses. Even though they may be living in the same location, these Christians are "exiles" and "resident aliens" because many of them have lost their families, their homes, their occupations, and their freedom – everything that has given them an identity. They are *"a slandered minority, exiled as Israel was in Babylon, strangers in a strange land (all the more strange because it used to be home)."* (David Bartlett). The question on their minds as they begin hearing Peter's words may well have been: *"Who are we now?"*

Peter's words to these exiles struggling to understand their identity are rooted in the good news of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and what it means to God's people in this time and place. The apostle opens the letter with words of praise to the *"God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,"* who has given God's people *"a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"* (1:3). This "living hope" includes *"an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you"* (1:4). An inheritance is only bestowed on one who is a rightful heir, and this is the new identity that these exiles have received. In their rejection by others, they have shared the rejection of Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant who was *"despised and rejected by others, a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity"* (Isaiah 53:3). But though Christ was rejected by others, God has made him *"a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight"* (1 Peter 2:4). This *"stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner"* (2:7), the cornerstone of the house of "living stones" into which all God's people – despised and rejected for confessing their faith in the one who was also an alien and exile – so that we who were once *"not a people [are now] God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."* (2:10). Those who very identity had been stripped from them are now given a most exalted identity and mission: *"you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."* (2:9).

While we may not share in the fate of those who suffered tremendous losses and were living as exiles and "resident aliens" in the land they once called home, we are called in this Easter season to consider what is at the heart of our identity as Christians. Because we have been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, we too have been born anew into

the living hope that is ours in our Risen Lord, the assurance that “*because he lives, we shall live also*” (ELW Funeral Service). As God’s children, we have the assurance that our true inheritance is being “*kept in heaven for you*,” the eternal home that our Saviour has prepared for us (John 14:2-3). We are the people of God who are “*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people*”; and our identity comes with a purpose: “*in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*”

As we continue to rejoice in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are also called to consider what it means for us here at Zion to be God’s holy people, and how we are fulfilling our purpose to share the good news of our Crucified and Risen Lord with others. Our identity defines our mission; it will be the challenge that will be before us in these coming months as we discern who we are as the people of God, what our purpose is in fulfilling God’s mission for us in this place, and what is holding us back from being the people who God has built into this “house of living stones.”

- “Christ builds a house of living stones: we are his own habitation; he fills our hearts, his humble thrones, granting us life and salvation ...hither we come to praise his name, faith in our Savior confessing.” – ELW Hymn 652.

May this “house of living stones” here at Zion be the place where God’s presence is known to all, and may it be the place from which the good news of Jesus Christ continues to be sent out to all the world as God’s people here continue to share the good news of Jesus Christ “*who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*”

Yours in Christ,  
Pastor Jeff Laustsen

## COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS

 At the beginning of each Council meeting for the past several months, we have been using the book *Living Lutheran: Renewing Your Congregation* as a study guide to prepare for crafting a purpose statement and guiding principles to bring forward to Zion Congregation. The members of Congregational Council together with members whose term ended in February gathered

for a one-day retreat at St. Paul’s Anglican Church on Saturday, March 25, 2017. Following lots of discussion and prayer, we were able to craft a “Purpose Statement” and “Guiding Principles” for Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church. The first draft of these documents will be reviewed and tweaked at our upcoming Council meeting and eventually presented to the Congregation for approval and adoption. The exercise has been very inspiring and rewarding to all of us and we look forward to sharing our results with the Congregation.

Now that the warmer weather is returning we will be reviewing quotes regarding the water issues and arranging for the completion of the most pressing issues.

## PIG ROAST



**Mark Your Calendars!** Congregational Life is hosting the postponed **PIG ROAST** lunch. On Sunday, May 28<sup>th</sup>, after the 10 AM service, we will be marking the end of our Sunday School year program, and welcome our new Vicar, Jason Ashby. Hope to see you on the 28<sup>th</sup>! Spread the word! All are welcome.

## ZION CHOIR

Thank you, each member of the Zion Choir, for your generosity and dedication throughout the season of Lent, and for all your work leading up to Easter. Together, you contribute richly to Zion’s ministry, both within our beautiful sanctuary and beyond it. Your leadership and service are true gifts. Thank you, too, to our wonderful organists, Marco Burak and Franklin Famme, for the countless extras you contribute to the choir program at Zion.



The Choir often sings at seniors’ residences; we sang at Spruce Lodge in February, and Greenwood Court in March. On May 7, at 2:30 PM, we sing a program at Hillside Manor. We invite anyone to come and enjoy the music and spend time with the residents. It is always lovely to see members of Zion in the audience! Please also spread the word, especially if you know anyone living there, or with family living there, who might enjoy it.

Lynne Hopcraft  
Choir Director

## ZION WOMEN OF FAITH

May 1: Executive Board meeting at 7 PM

May 24: 7:30 PM WOF meeting



**Coming Up:** On Wednesday, June 28 we will be going to Grand Bend Theatre to see "All Shook Up" at 7:30 PM. Cost is \$40 per person. Dinner at Wayne and Joanne Young's cottage from 5:30-6 PM. For tickets call Joanne Young 519-271-3225 or Ellen Wolfe 519-749-5341.

## FRIENDSHIP MEAL



Our Friendship Meal continues to serve people in need in our community. Our May gathering is Friday, May 26 at 5 PM. The people who come to our meal are a blessing and so are the people who volunteer. We need our volunteers to share their blessing of time and service. Please call Sister Jean Widmeyer (519-273-6810).



## ZION TABLE FOR SENIORS

Our next gathering of Zion Table For Seniors, is Tuesday, May 23rd. Our after dinner guests are Clara and Brian Hannenburg of Mitchell. Clara fights against the stigma of Alzheimer's Disease and cognitive impairment. Come and hear her share her story. Please let Doris Bartlett (519-271-9622) or Rita Mueller (519-271-6539) know by noon, Tuesday, May 18 if you can attend. Lunch cost is only \$12.



Florence Kapas, April 11  
Ida Vanderberk, April 14



## THANK YOUS ARE IN ORDER

A heartfelt thank you to all who donated to the Easter Flower Fund, which decorated our sanctuary for the Easter celebrations. We also thank the WOF who organized it, and Linda Springer and Joyce Dietz, who did the beautiful decorating. Those who donated are:

Doris Chown, Vi Cook, Elsie Dahm, Ken & Mary Helen Dale, Bill & Irene Egoetz, Wayne & Linda Faulhafer, Richard & Anne Graul, Doreen Graul, Brian & Barb Gropp, Tim & Darlene Gropp, Judith Hammond, Bea Huras, Robert & Beverley Keutsch, Wayne & Lynnette McLeod, Garnet & Mary Mueller, Rita Mueller, Brian & Pauline Schade, Edith Schneider, Don & Eva Wagner, Bob & Heather Wickenheiser, Noreen Wilker, Jean Weir, Bruce Mitchell & Ellen Wolfe, Wayne & Joanne Young, and Elfrieda Zimmermann.



On behalf of the Worship and Music committee, I would like to extend a big 'Thank You' to all the volunteers who stepped forward to help clean the Chancel area. Your help made the job much easier. Again, Thank you!

The Maundy Thursday potluck was very well attended. Lots of real tasty food. (I heard some recipes were also shared). This truly was a great social event.

I do hope everyone had a wonderful and Blessed Easter.

Worship and Music next scheduled meeting is Wednesday, April 26 at 7 PM.

Submitted by  
Elsie Dahm, Chairperson

## MAY 2017 VOLUNTEERS

Listed below are those who serve as a reminder and as a thank you for serving.

Date	Communion Assistants	Greeters	Readers	Usher Captains	Counting Captains
May 7	Stephen Fischer & Judith Hammond	Paul & Janet Jeffery	Bruce Sippel	Ed Illman	Lois Lemon
May 14	N/A	Robert & Beverley Keutsch	Linda Springer	Wayne Yundt	Ron Deichert
May 21	Liz Bomasuit & Darlene Illman	Lynnette & Karen McLeod	Fritz Steigmeier	Wayne Yundt	Ron Deichert
May 28	N/A	Peter & Dianne Hiller	Bill Sylvester	Jerry Terhaerdt	Stephanie Sousa

## STEWARSHIP THOUGHT

### **Stewardship is.....**

It is difficult to practise stewardship, unless we have a clear understanding of exactly what stewardship is. If we wish to embrace stewardship, we must gradually learn to embrace every definition or aspect of stewardship.

**Scripture Based:** All of the teachings of stewardship come directly from the Gospels, the Old Testament and New Testament. Stewardship is the way God has expected His people to live since the beginning of time.

**Dependence on God:** Stewardship is recognizing that everything we have is a gift from God. We can take credit for nothing. Everything we have and everything we do is a result of some gift that God has placed into our hands.

**Gratitude:** Stewardship is living a life of gratitude – taking the time every day to recognize the gifts that God has given and to be grateful for them.

**Giving Back:** Stewardship is returning a portion of our gifts to God. The gifts we return are our time, our talent and our treasure. We return these gifts because we feel an overwhelming need to show our love and gratitude to God.

**Transformative:** Stewardship is transformative. Once we embrace the stewardship message, it changes the way we look at every decision we make. Stewardship becomes a total way of life.

**A Love Response:** Once we allow God to truly take up residence in our hearts, we become so overwhelmed by His abundant love for us that we just naturally feel the need to join our lives with Him and dedicate our time, talent and treasure to carrying out God's work here on earth.

**Prayer – Spending Time With God:** Stewardship involves spending time with God. Recognizing that every day is a gift from God, we strive to spend some of each day with God, through prayer and scripture reading. During this time we ask God how He wants us to use the gifts He has given us.

**Participation – Sharing Talent:** Stewardship involves sharing talent. Recognizing that God has given each individual unique skills and talents so that together we can do the work of Our Lord, we strive to share our own talents and to encourage and welcome others to also use their talents to participate in the mission of the church.

**Generosity – Giving Treasure:** Stewardship involves giving treasure. Giving time and talent does not excuse us from giving treasure. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus challenged us to give as it has been given to us. Aware of our tremendous financial blessings, we strive to give generously to support the building up of God's kingdom.

**Trust In God:** Stewardship is trusting God. We believe that our generous God will always provide for us. None of us will ever have all that we want, but we will always have all that we need.

**Thankfulness:** Stewardship calls us to be ever grateful for the gifts that God has given.

**Discipleship:** Stewardship is discipleship. We strive to put God first in all things and to follow where Our Lord might lead.