

THE EMMANUEL EPISTLE

“Praising, Proclaiming and Practicing Emmanuel—God with us—in daily life!”

Pastor’s Keyboard: “Discipleship—The Narrow Gate & Hard Way”

I’ve been thinking about ditches a lot lately. Jesus cautions us about the gates we enter and the ways we travel. He ends his Sermon on the Mount with these words: “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and those who find it are few.”—Mt. 7:13-14

Are you staying out of the ditches? Years ago, I served a congregation where we spent considerable time in the ditches cleaning up garbage on our Adopt-A-Highway roadside cleanup. You never know what you’re going to run into when you get in the ditches. Environmentally, it’s good to get into the ditches and do one’s part to beautify the good creation God has given us. But beware lest the ditch consume you or cause you irreparable harm.

Theologically, it can be dangerous leaving the beaten path & exploring the ditches filled with broken glass, carcasses,



trash and debris. While some maintain that all roads lead to the same destination, Jesus boldly proclaims Himself to be the exclusive Gate and only Way to the Father (John 10 & 14).

In his book, The Cost of Discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes about two equally dangerous ditches. He writes, “only those who believe obey, and only those who obey believe.” To believe and not obey is CHEAP GRACE, which is another word for damnation. To obey and not believe is Salvation by Works, which is another word for damnation.

“When Christ calls a man he bids him come and die. Costly Grace for you & me!”

Stay out of the ditches! The road to hell (a camouflaged ditch) is paved with good intentions. Sin boldly, but believe more

boldly still. C. S. Lewis talks about the ditches of pride (I’m too good to need a Savior) and despair (I’m unworthy of forgiveness). St. Paul, writing to the Christians in Corinth, proclaims the Gospel to ditch-dwellers: Libertines who believe that they are free to do as please (*autonomians*), & Legalists who have a man-made rule for everything under the sun.

Martin Luther commenting on Matthew 7:13-14 writes, “The true disciples remain on the hard path, or enter through the narrow gate, namely, the Word of God, saying, ‘I am helpless. May God help me. It all rests in His hands. He promised & said: “Just cling to the Word, and I will uphold you. When you find yourself in any extremity or distress, you will learn to continue in God’s Word. This will liberate you and make you a true disciple”’” (AE 23:401).

—Pastor Dave Steffenson

**December 2014
Newsletter
Volume 2
Issue 12**

Food For Thought:

“Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship, & Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.”

Bonhoeffer, Cost of Discipleship

INSIDE AND BACK PAGE NEWS

SATURDAY SCHOOL 2
Lord’s Supper

Benefit Concert 2

Emmanuel Huddle 2

*12 Days of Christmas
Open House* 2

WORSHIP CANDLES 3

*South East MN
Area Christians* 3

*Salvation Army
Bell Ringing* 4

*Council Highlights &
Back Page Stories* 4

SATURDAY SCHOOL: The Lord's Supper

PLEASE NOTE: We will not meet for Saturday School on Nov. 29th—Thanksgiving Weekend.

First Communion Instruction: Join us for Saturday School on 3 consecutive Saturdays in December as we learn about God's gracious gift of Holy Communion. Youth wishing to begin receiving the Lord's Supper, or those wishing to grow in their understanding of this Sacrament are invited to participate in Saturday School on December 6, 13, and 20 at 5:10pm. Contact Pastor Dave or Julie Steffenson if you have any questions.

Emmanuel Huddle

Join us on Saturday, December 6 as we celebrate the Feast of St. Nicholas in Worship and then enjoy an Emmanuel Huddle during our fellowship time. During our Huddle we will discuss questions related to the Emmanuel Constitution and Bylaws. We will also take a preliminary look at a rough draft of the Mission Plan Budget for 2015, compliments of Arne Nelson (Treasurer). Bring your dreams, questions and ideas to the Huddle!

Twelve Days of Christmas—Bell Ringing Service: January 3, 2015

"The Bells of Christmas chime once more, the heavenly guest is at the door." - LBW #62. Bring your bells to church and help us ring in the New Year while sounding the good news that "Christ is born to save". Emmanuel Lutheran will have a special worship liturgy on Saturday night, January 3 in celebration of the Season of Christmas. Did you know that Christmas is a Season and not just a day? Did you know that the Keeping of the Twelve Days is a Tradition that began in 567 AD, the purpose of which was to allow God's people more time to reflect upon the gift of the Incarnation and to celebrate God's presence among us as Emmanuel? Some start counting the days on December 25, while others begin on December 26 and run through Epiphany (January 6).

So we have a dozen or perhaps a baker's dozen of DAYS to celebrate the Incarnation.
"Come, Jesus, glorious heavenly guest, & keep your Christmas in our breast." - LBW #62.

FEAST OF EPIPHANY—Open House at Pastor Dave & Julie's place

The Feast of Epiphany is observed on January 6. It celebrates the meeting of the 3 Magi (Kings) with the baby Jesus. In the New Orleans area Epiphany is known as King's Day, the beginning of Mardi Gras. King Cakes have become part of the celebration symbolizing the finding of the baby Jesus. King cakes are oval-shaped celebrating the unity of all Christians and decorated with the carnival colors of green, yellow and purple; some bakers add red to symbolize the life of Jesus. King Cake Season ends on Fat (Shrove) Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday (February 18, 2015).

Pastor Dave and Julie are hosting a **Christmas Open House** on Sunday, January 4 from 1-4 p.m. Beverages, desserts, snacks and Christmas goodies will be served. In preparation for Epiphany, we'll read the story of the Magi (Matthew 2) and sing some favorite Epiphany Songs (We Three Kings of Orient Are; As With Gladness Men of Old; Bright and Glorious Is the Sky; The First Noel; and It Came Upon A Midnight Clear). We hope you can join us as we celebrate the Twelve Days and the Feast of Epiphany. We'll even have King Cake!

Benefit Concert: Friday, December 5 at 7pm at Oasis Church. Free Tickets. Reservations are required. Jill Herringshaw will perform her own presentation of "Mary, Mother of All Joys" along with her daughter Emily! Monetary gifts and non-perishable food items are encouraged to benefit Oasis' Supermarket Saturday food shelf with Channel One. Call Oasis Church Office (507-289-8596) for tickets.

Food For Thought:

"The Son of God did not want to be seen and found in heaven. Therefore He descended into this humility and came to us in our flesh, laid Himself into the womb of His mother and into the manger and went to the cross. This is the ladder that He placed on earth so that we might ascend to God on it. This is the way you must take."

Martin Luther—1543, Lecture on Isaiah 9:6

“Worship Candles”

Last month we reflected on the presence of the Pascal Candle in our Worship Space. The Pascal Candle symbolizes our Lord’s glorious Easter triumph over the darkness of sin and death. It is reminiscent of the pillar of cloud and fire that led God’s people through the Wilderness into the Promised Land.

Pascal Candles have been used in worship since at least the fifth century. Small baptismal candles are lighted from the Pascal Candle and presented to the baptized: *“Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works & glorify your Father in heaven.”* We are participants in the paschal mystery through our baptism into the death & resurrection of Jesus.

Lighted candles are among the oldest ornaments in worship. In ancient times they provided light for reading. In their most basic sense, lighted candles symbolize Christ as the Light of the World (John 8:12 & 12:46). Two white candles are usually placed on the altar or on floor stands by the altar. They are known as Eucharistic Lights, although they may be lit even when Holy Communion is not celebrated. Some have seen the two candles as representative of the humanity & divinity of Christ.

Some churches have a Sanctuary Lamp in which a candle burns continually. It is either suspended from the ceiling or mounted on the chancel wall. Sanctuary lamps

follow the ancient Jewish custom of having a light burning near the altar symbolizing God’s living presence among us. In the Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches the sanctuary lamp signifies the Reserved Sacrament (consecrated body of Christ).

With the Season of Advent upon us, it befits us to speak briefly also about the Advent Wreath, which originated after the Reformation. Four candles are placed on the wreath representing the four weeks of waiting during Advent. The word Advent means COMING. We wait expectantly, filled with hope and repentant hearts, for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He comes in the bread and wine of Communion. He comes in the flesh of our neighbor. He comes in the humble attire of a Bethlehem Manger. His End Time Coming will be like a thief in the night; un-announced and always imminent. *Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!*

The Advent wreath is a circular garland of evergreen branches representing eternity; a timepiece of sorts clocking the days until Christmas and the return of Jesus. The candles on the Advent Wreath may be blue (hope) or purple (repentance) or even white (holiness). Thanks to LeRoy Quam for making our Advent Wreath!

Pastor Dave is taking Mondays as his weekly day off. Please call for emergencies only. Thanks!

SOUTH EAST MN AREA CHRISTIANS

VOLUNTEERS OFFERING A HELPING HAND

In 1997 a flood devastated Breckenridge, MN. A year later, Larry Vomhof organized a group of Christian men to help rebuild the community. Since 1998, Larry and his group of 25 volunteers have been using their God-given gifts & faith to bring hope & healing to communities hit by various forms of natural disaster (floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes). Each winter, for the past 15+ years, these Servants of Christ have been donating their time, talents and treasures doing mission in the name of Jesus!

Larry and his fellow servants have worked with Habitat for Humanity, Lutheran Disaster Response, Catholic Charities, Methodist Recovery, etc. They have worked on building projects in Breckinridge and St. Peter, MN; Biloxi and Gulf Port, MS; Houston & San Antonio, TX; Little Rock, AR; Oklahoma City, OK; Tuscaloosa, AL; etc. Besides their winter mission trips, they also have served in the greater Rochester area, building ramps and decks, installing windows, roofing, and various jobs for people in need.

In Jan. 2015, Larry and his crew are traveling to Brook-port-Unionville, IL to help rebuild after last year’s tornadoes. If you would like to partner with this servant group, offering your time, money, or prayers, give LARRY a SHOUT! Disciples of Jesus are always looking for ways to praise the Father and serve the neighbor in need...**IN JESUS NAME!**

Emmanuel Lutheran of Rochester, Minnesota

1815—38th Street NW
Rochester, MN 55901
Attn. Pastor Dave Steffenson

Contact Information:

253-302-9845 (Mobile)

507-206-3048 (Home)

pastor@emmanuelofrochester.org



SAVE THE DATE!

*Saturday, April 18, 2015 (6pm)
Emmanuel Lutheran Choir,
Grafton, IA will perform an Easter
Cantata at Emmanuel Lutheran of
Rochester, MN*

Bell Ringing—Salvation Army

One of Emmanuel's Ministry Partnerships is the Salvation Army. For a second year in a row, we are ringing bells and sharing the good news of Christmas (EMMANUEL) with our neighbors. Lee Pearce is coordinating this activity. This year's dates, locations & participants are as follows:

- Saturday, November 29 at Shopko North (**FILLED**)
1-2pm: Rich & Janet Sunde
2-3pm: Larry & Deb Vomhof & grandchildren
- Saturday, December 6 at Hy-Vee North (37th Street) (**FILLED**)
11am - 1pm: Arne and Samia Nelson
- Thursday, December 11 at Hobby Lobby (**FILLED**)
1-3pm: Don & Peg Holtan and LeRoy & Margaret Quam
- Monday, December 22 at Shopko North (**FILLED**)
11am - 1pm: Bob/Marcia Harms and Dick/Nancy Stanley

Merry Christmas!

We are thanking God for the Good News and Great Joy of sharing Jesus with our beloved friends at Emmanuel Lutheran. May God grant each of you a blessed Advent and a joy-filled Christmas.

Back Page Stories

Men's Bible Study Breakfast:

Weekly fellowship around God's Word at 8 am Tuesdays at Charlie's (1408 2nd. St. SW). Join us in being Evangelical. Invite a friend. Share the Good News!

Super Market Saturday: The next Channel One opportunity is Dec. 20 (9 am—Noon). Let's share the heart of Emmanuel by caring for the needs of our neighbors.

Women's Bible Study: Our study on Paul's letter to the Church at Corinth continues twice each month on Wednesday afternoons at 1pm. Remaining dates: December 3 & 17. Looking ahead: Our Winter Study will be "The Witness of Women".

Council Highlights (Nov. 6):

\$8,917.42 has been used from Emmanuel's Reserves thus far in 2014.

We had projected to use \$20,000.00 of our Reserves by this time. We have received \$3,822.00 in Thrivent Choice Dollars in 2014. Members and friends are commended for their generosity. Members of Emmanuel are encouraged to read the proposed Constitutional and Bylaw revisions prior to our Annual Meeting in Jan. & to bring questions to Pastor Dave, Pastor Feed or Lee Pearce. Discipleship Covenants for 2015 Membership at Emmanuel are ready for distribution and signing. Our next Emmanuel Huddle is December 6 following Worship. Karen Salz will be playing for our Christmas Eve Worship. South Zumbro Lutheran Church has invited Emmanuel to join them for a Leadership Retreat on Feb. 6-7 (topic: Discipleship). Marek Konop will be baptized into the Family of God on January 10, 2015. Pastor Dave is preaching at First Lutheran

Church—St. Ansgar's Consecration Sunday (Nov. 23). Worship-related items were discussed as we live into 2015. Our next Council Meeting is December 9 at 10:00 a.m.

Special Offerings: Our designated offering for Thanksgiving is the Pastor's Discretionary Fund. The designated offering for Christmas is the NALC Seminary. Thanks for Giving!

Liturgies: During December and January we will use LBW Setting II.

THANKSGIVING: We are thanking God for our supporters and prayer partners. Thanks for investing in God's Church in Rochester, MN.

Please keep Jim & Diane Wagner (International Church of Vilnius in Lithuania) and St. Paul Lutheran Fellowship (Twin Cities Church Plant), in your prayers.