

## LOOKING AHEAD TO OUR BICENTENNIAL

Zion turns 200 on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014. What an incredibly blessed life! It takes a lot of good fortune to have been planted two hundred years ago in a place that hasn't become too urban, or too rural, with neither too much controversy, nor too little life. Zion Lutheran Church has been so blessed; and we are the ones who get to plan the celebration of the long life of love and service we've enjoyed. We, of course, are not the only ones to make Zion the church she has become, and we will want to be intentionally inclusive when it comes to thanking God – and God's people – for what all of us together have been blessed to enjoy. This sense of inclusiveness begins with the "other Zion" with which we've shared our two hundred year history. I'm speaking of Zion United Church of Christ on South Main in North Canton. Both Zions share this history, and we will find some important ways to celebrate this shared history of blessing together.

The weekend of June 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of this year will be such an occasion. The Men of Zion have come to celebrate a delicious Father's Day Weekend Prime Rib dinner on the Saturday night before Father's Day. This year we will invite our friends from Zion United Church of Christ to join us. Saturday will feature the exceptional food we've come to expect when the Men of Zion prepare a feast. With the presence of Zion United Church of Christ, we will have more people, and a better program, actually, the first program to accompany this delicious evening, if we forget the time we tried to show *Amazing Grace* on the big screen in the Sanctuary, but never actually got to see it. This time will be better; and then on Sunday, we will host a joint choir, made up of the other Zion's Chancel Choir and our Zion's Senior Choir singing an ode to Old Zion Church, first at our place at 8:00 a.m., and then at their place at 10:15 a.m. It will be a great beginning to a wonderful bicentennial year.

So, that's then. What's happening now? Great things, miraculous things, are unfolding right before our very eyes. We have a working group within our Bicentennial Task Force that is exploring the replacement of the colored glass windows on the east wall of the Sanctuary with faceted stained glass windows to complement the center Chancel Window that graces the north wall of the Sanctuary. After months of looking, giving up the search, and engaging local artists with the task of complementing that center window, dumb luck (and God's amazing grace) struck. I got to talking with Jim Hauser of *Willet Hauser Architectural Glass Studio*, who upon hearing that I was calling from Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in North Canton, Ohio, googled us in his own studio files, and told me that we were in there, that the *Willet* side of Willet Hauser designed, constructed, and installed the beautiful faceted stained glass Chancel Window that is the one-of-a-kind, spectacular gem we enjoy every Sunday.

I cannot describe how miraculously serendipitous it was to stumble blindly into the answer we had given up on finding; but now we know the studio (Willet Hauser), the designer (the late Odell "Billy" Prather), the date (1959), and the cost (\$1,500.00) of the Chancel Window we want to complement with five faceted glass windows, which we will give to ourselves as a bicentennial gift. We will have more to say about the specifics once we have decided on a recommendation, which the congregation will get to approve at a congregational meeting. But one thing we know is that God is listening to our prayers and paying attention to our needs as we look to praise His holy name for the long history with which He has blessed us, so that we might be a blessing to others with the love we share, the service we extend, and the worship we offer ... in Jesus' name. Amen

## **FOOD PANTRY SUPPORT**

Zion's Food Pantry received \$10,100.<sup>00</sup> in financial support in 2012. That is surely an incredible amount of generosity, and we have many persons, many groups, many churches, and a few additional organizations, as well, to thank for this generosity. Our congregational family is the mainstay of what keeps our Food Pantry going, but we receive help, substantial help, from many individuals and groups in addition to the members of Zion.

Our Food Pantry is affiliated with the Stark County Hunger Task Force. We are known as its North Canton satellite. The Stark County Hunger Task Force has more than twenty such satellites in Stark County. Its umbrella-like oversight of these satellites results in receiving funds through grants and donations, some of which it shares with us. In 2012, the Stark County Hunger Task Force shared \$3,064.80 to help with our expenses.

In addition to the Stark County Hunger Task Force, fellow congregations in the North Canton Ministerial Association also support our Food Pantry with gifts of food and monetary donations, too. Our most faithful partner is Christian Community Church, whose *Koinonia Class* contributed \$600 to our Food Pantry in 2012. Northminster Presbyterian also faithfully contributes food, as does Trinity Baptist Church.

Community groups like the Parkview Dinner Club, and the company that wound up with what was left of the Hoover Company, TTI, have supported the ministry of Zion's Food Pantry. Of the \$10,100 we received to run this ministry, Zion's members, friends, youth, and neighbors gave over \$6,750. That's what we give year in and year out; but as you can see, lots of others join in the success that this ministry has become. For that, we thank God, and our partners, too.

## **MORE FOOD PANTRY NEWS**

2013 is here, and that means more changes are in store for our Food Pantry & Clothing Closet! We had so much stability for so long that changes in leadership seem a bit unusual; but change is normal, and we have handled these changes without missing a beat. First, Jayne Schrader stepped forward, and then to the side. Now, it's Beth Willis, our Social Ministry Elder, who after stepping forward, has had to step back, since as you read this newsletter, she and AJ are on their way back to North Carolina!

Beth has roots in northeast Ohio that run long and deep. She leaves lots of family behind, and friends, too, as she returns to North Carolina, where she and her son AJ will live outside of Raleigh in a town called Fuquay-Varina. Beth has enjoyed the last few years that she spent in North Canton, and both AJ and Beth have really enjoyed the support and friendship that have been theirs here at Zion. We, too, have been blessed by their presence, their friendship, and by their active involvement in the life of our congregation.

Whether it was Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, our church dinners, outdoor work days, kitchen clean-up detail, serving with Church Council, or ministries like the Food Pantry & Clothing Closet, Beth and AJ have really made a huge difference in the worship we offer and the service we extend here at Zion. We will surely miss them, even as we wish them well as they look forward to the adventures God has in store for them as they seek His way and His will for their lives.

In the meantime, Cathy Harvey, as our Caring Ministry Elder, will gather together a new set of willing helpers as we look to keep the Food Pantry & Clothing Closet running smoothly, efficiently, and faithfully into the future.

**CHURCH COUNCIL NEWS**

In Lorin Beaber’s absence, Brian Milek called January’s Council meeting to order at 7 p.m., Juanita Cignetti offered our devotions. Also present were Dave Palumbo, Beth Willis, Cathy Harvey, Todd Elsass, Beth Shaheen, Dale Jacobs, Vicki Givler, Pastor Sherwindt.

The Treasurer’s Report documented the good news of 2012: Operating Budget Income in December was \$25,718.91. Income exceeded expenses in December by \$1,483.53, which allowed us to complete the perfect record of 12 consecutive monthly surpluses in 2012. We ended yet another year with our budget in balance, as we did in 2011, in 2010, in 2009, in 2008, in 2007, and in 2006. Over the course of these past seven years, we have accumulated a positive surplus of \$10,970.04.

While balancing our budget yet again, we were also able to exceed our targets for benevolence, which totaled \$33,475.00. Support was given to the Northeastern Ohio Synod, the Lutheran Malaria Initiative, our Food Pantry, the Women of the ELCA, the Solid Rock Riding Center, the Internship Outreach Fund, and lots of additional local assistance. It was another very good year.

<b><u>ZION'S DECEMBER FINANCIAL FACTS</u></b>	
December Income	\$ 25,718.91
December Expenses	\$ 24,235.38
<b><i>December Surplus</i></b>	<b><i>\$ 1,483.53</i></b>
Income thru December	\$250,574.22
Expenses " December	\$242,485.25
<b><i>Surplus thru December</i></b>	<b><i>\$ 8,088.97</i></b>
<b><i>Our 2012 YTD Surplus</i></b>	<b><i>\$ 8,088.97</i></b>
<b><i>Our Accumulated Surplus</i></b>	<b><i>\$ 10,970.04</i></b>

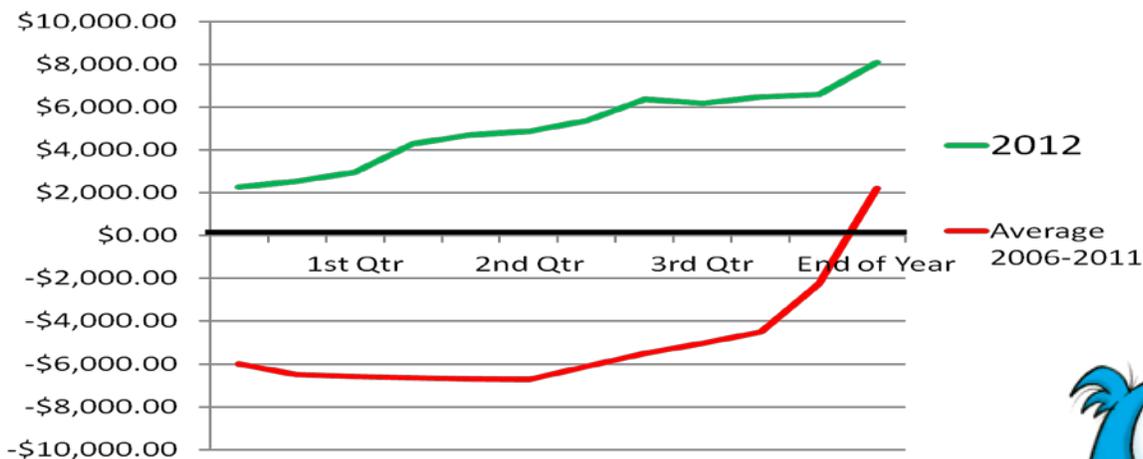
***We thank you for your generous support!***

**MORE COUNCIL NEWS**

***Resource Ministry, Early Bird Giving Is Back!***  
 The chart on the next page (see page 5 → ) is very clear in showing the difference that Early Bird Giving made last year. The bold black line indicates a budget in balance. We have balanced every budget since 2006. The bold red line is a composite average of those six years between 2006 and 2011. Since our biggest expenses occur in the first quarter, with heating bills and snow-plowing costs, we usually begin the year in the red. By the end of March our average deficit for these six years was \$6,593.19. Since our biggest giving occurs in the fourth quarter with the holidays of Thanksgiving and Christmas, we always found a way to bring the budget into balance before the end of the year. By the time the ball fell on Times Square, we were usually in the black, with an average surplus of over \$2,000.00. The ending was great; but the story was getting old and a little tiresome.

So, last year we tried something new. We called it Early Bird Giving. The idea was not to get you to give more, but to get you to give earlier. Members of Church Council issued the challenge: they would give \$2,500.00 in the first quarter if the congregation would match that with \$2,500.00 in Early Bird Giving of their own. The plan worked to perfection. The bold green line shows that we started the year in the black, and we stayed north of balance all year long, with twelve consecutive monthly surpluses, and a yearly surplus of \$8,088.97! This year the plan is the same; the challenge is the same; and we hope that your response will be the same. Members of Church Council have already pledged a Challenge Bucket of \$2,500.00. Now, we need you to respond with the support you showed last year. We hope you’ll choose to make the difference we all made last year.

## EARLY BIRD GIVING IS BACK, AND IT WORKS!

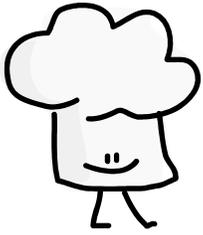


In his temple talk at both services on Sunday, February 27, Brian Milek expressed both his astonishment at the great success Early Bird Giving was last year, and his gratitude for the great support our members showed for this program. While it's true that past performance is no guarantee of future results, it is also true that your generosity has never let us down. Let's have another fun year living north of balance as we look forward to more unexpected surprises in getting ready to celebrate two hundred years of growing in love and service by grace.

**Internship Update:** The 15-page application has been signed, sealed, and delivered. All the appropriate committees have been consulted. The Northeastern Synod Office has offered their blessing. Trinity Lutheran Seminary read the application with interest and approved Zion as a sponsoring congregation that will be in the mix of sites that are recommended to interns for this upcoming 2013-2014 academic year. Jane Jenkins, the Director of Contextual Education at Trinity, in a recent letter approving Zion for this role, wrote,

“We very much appreciate having received your application for an intern in 2013-2014. Thank you for your offer to provide an internship site for one of our Trinity students. The number of students in need of an internship assignment varies from year to year. Classes are of differing sizes, which affects the number of internship assignments. While there is a larger class this year, numbers are somewhat behind what has been the traditional class size. While we wish it was otherwise, being received as a sponsoring congregation does not guarantee an assignment. Matches are made with consideration of the students' particular needs and the congregations' opportunities for providing a learning environment.”

As our name is recommended to seminarians, I will be contacted, and the two of us will talk about Zion as a prospective site. All I can say is that it is very encouraging to be in the mix. By applying and being approved for this role, we have already strengthened the program that Trinity can offer. This is an exciting time for Zion, for the seminary, and for seminarians who will become tomorrow's pastors. We remain hopeful and confident as we look ahead to a great year.



## LENT MEANS DELICIOUS DINNERS AND GREAT SERVICES

It seems like we just finished with Advent – and we did! – but that doesn't stop the calendar from announcing that Lent is right around the corner, as in February 13<sup>th</sup>, which is when we gather for Ash Wednesday Worship, announcing that our Sunday Evening Lenten Dinners begin with the First Sunday in Lent on February 17<sup>th</sup>.

We are making a concerted effort this year to invite the families we serve with the Food Pantry, hoping that when they know that our Sunday evenings begin with delicious dinners, where their presence is invited and welcomed, more of the families we are blessed to serve will join us. We hope that our own families will join us in good number, and, to this end, Council (on February 17<sup>th</sup>) and the Senior Choir & Praise Team (on February 24<sup>th</sup>) will be prepared for the possibility that we will have healthy gatherings for good food and great fellowship, delicious dinners and inspiring devotions, which the Senior Choir & Praise Team will help lead on these Sundays.

By the way, we are adding a little twist to this year's Lenten season. The Adult Sunday School Class is going to follow the book, *40-Day Journey with Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, for the forty days of Lent. The next page says more about the resource this devotional book offers, while inviting all members to join in this spiritually uplifting discipline of prayer and meditation during Lent.

## A LOOK AHEAD TO OUR LENTEN SCHEDULE AT ZION

<b>February 13, Wednesday</b>	7:30 p.m.	<b>Ash Wednesday Worship Service</b> <i>"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."</i>
		Our worship includes an extended Rite of Confession, the Imposition of Ashes, special music from the Senior Choir, and the Celebration of Holy Communion.
<b>February 17, Sunday</b>	8:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.	<b>Lent 1</b> , Luke 4:1, Led by the Spirit
<b>February 17, Sunday</b>	5:30 p.m.	Dinner hosted by the Church Council
<b>February 17, Sunday</b>	6:15 p.m.	Zion's Senior Choir Leads Worship
<b>February 24, Sunday</b>	8:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.	<b>Lent 2</b> , Luke 13:34, Gathered by God
<b>February 24, Sunday</b>	5:30 p.m.	Dinner hosted by our Senior Choir
<b>February 24, Sunday</b>	6:15 p.m.	Zion's Senior Choir Leads Worship
<b>March 3, Sunday</b>	8:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.	<b>Lent 3</b> , Luke 13:8, Grace Extended
<b>March 3, Sunday</b>	5:30 p.m.	Dinner hosted by the Chancel Guild
<b>March 3, Sunday</b>	6:15 p.m.	Zion's Praise Team Leads Worship
<b>March 10, Sunday</b>	8:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.	<b>Lent 4</b> , Luke 15:20, A Father's Love
<b>March 10, Sunday</b>	5:30 p.m.	Dinner hosted by the Men of Zion
<b>March 10, Sunday</b>	6:15 p.m.	Classic Readings with Special Music
<b>March 17, Sunday</b>	8:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.	<b>Lent 5</b> , John 12:3, A Woman's Tears
<b>March 17, Sunday</b>	5:30 p.m.	Dinner hosted by the Youth of Zion
<b>March 17, Sunday</b>	6:15 p.m.	The Passion Narrative of Saint Luke

## 40-DAY JOURNEY WITH DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

“Imagine that you are on the banks of the Colorado River. You are here to go white-water rafting for the first time and your guide has just described the experience, telling you with graphic detail what to expect. It sounds both exciting and frightening. You long for the experience, but are somewhat disturbed, anxious, uncertain in the face of the danger that promises to accompany you on the journey down the river. The guide gets into the raft. She will accompany you on the journey, *but she won’t take the journey for you*. If you want to experience the wildness of the river, the raw beauty of the canyon, the camaraderie of the adventurers, and the mystery of a certain oneness with nature (and nature’s creator), then you’ve got to get into the boat.” (*40-Day Journey with Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Rod Klug, editor)

The above-mentioned book extends an invitation to join us for our Lenten journey. “It describes the journey, provides a raft, and invites you to get in. Along with readings from your spiritual guide, you will find scripture to meditate on, questions to ponder, suggestions for personal journaling, guidance in prayer, and a prayer for the day. If done faithfully each day, you will find the wisdom and encouragement you need to integrate meaningful spiritual practices into your daily life. And when the 40-day journey is over, it no longer will be the guide’s description of the journey that stirs your longing for God, but *your own experience* of the journey that grounds your faith and life and keeps you on the path.” (*40-Day Journey*, Rod Klug, page 8)

### **LENTEN LECTIONARY SCHEDULE FOR OUR 40-DAY JOURNEY WITH DIETRICH BONHOEFFER**

<u><b>Forty Days of Lent</b></u>	<u><b>Scripture Verse</b></u>	<u><b>Psalm Fragment</b></u>
Day #1      February 13	Matthew 11:28-30	Psalm 25:4-5
Day #2      February 14	Philippians 4:6-7	Psalm 119:103-5
Day #3      February 15	Mark 1:35	Psalm 5:1-3
Day #4      February 16	Colossians 3:23	Psalm 90:17
LENT 1      February 17	(Sundays are not included in the forty days of Lent.)	
Day #5      February 18	Isaiah 12:1-4	Psalm 103:1-5
Day #6      February 19	Matthew 6:31-32	Psalm 145:18
Day #7      February 20	Matthew 6:33-34	Psalm 36:7-9
Day #8      February 21	Matthew 5:3	Psalm 40:17
Day #9      February 22	Matthew 5:4	Psalm 30:11-12
Day #10     February 23	Matthew 5:5	Psalm 10:17-18
LENT 2      February 24	(Sundays remember and celebrate the Resurrection.)	
Day #11     February 25	Matthew 5:6	Psalm 33:4-5
Day #12     February 26	Matthew 5:7	Psalm 112:4-5
Day #13     February 27	Matthew 5:8	Psalm 24:3-5
Day #14     February 28	Matthew 5:9	Psalm 34:12-14

(If you would like to join us on our *40-Day Journey with Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, and would like a copy of the book to follow, call the Church Office at 330-499-3909, and let us know. Library copies are available upon request; and these books are for sale at a discounted rate of \$10.00.)

## GOOD NEWS FROM ZION'S SUNDAY SCHOOL



### **HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:**

Marissa Hilson – Friday, February 1<sup>st</sup>  
Austin Todich – Sunday, February 3<sup>rd</sup>

### **UPCOMING EVENTS – MARK YOUR CALENDARS!**

**Sunday, February 10<sup>th</sup>:** Our *Farewell to Alleluia* signals that Lent begins on Ash Wednesday

**Wednesday, February 13<sup>th</sup>:** Lent begins with the Imposition of Ashes on Ash Wednesday

**Sunday, March 17<sup>th</sup>:** Our Youth and Youth Leaders host our Sunday Evening Lenten Dinner

**Saturday, March 23:** Dress Rehearsal for Children's Easter Program, and a Pizza Party, too!

**Sunday, March 24<sup>th</sup>:** The Children's Easter Program is set for Palm Sunday at the 10:30 service

**Sunday, March 31<sup>st</sup>:** Our Annual Children's Easter Egg Hunt for all ages during Sunday School

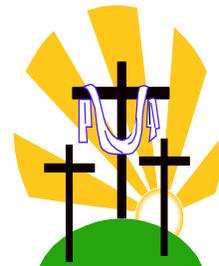
**Sunday, May 19<sup>th</sup>:** It's a ways off; but this is the Festival of Pentecost and Confirmation Sunday!

### **SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES: PRE-K THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL**

Sunday School will continue on its normal schedule this month. As a reminder, Sunday School begins at 9:15 a.m. each Sunday, and ends at 10:15 a.m. Our classes will continue to learn important lessons from the Bible along with much fun and learning for all. We make good use of great crafts, puzzles, games and snacks. Please join us!

### **LOOKING AHEAD TO LENTEN DINNERS & EASTER PLAYS**

We are looking ahead to the Lenten and Easter Season because, believe it or not, it will be here soon! We are planning our traditional activities for the children: the Children's Easter Program on Palm Sunday (March 24<sup>th</sup>), and the Easter Egg Hunt on Easter Sunday (March 31<sup>st</sup>). We will pass out parts and start practicing for our program at the end of February, and we will be collecting Easter candy and small prizes in February and March for the Easter Egg Hunt. We need to fill lots of eggs – over 500 in the past years, so any donations are greatly appreciated. The older youth in our Catechism and High School classes will be filling the eggs for our hunt.



With Sunday Evening Lenten Programs starting up with the First Sunday in Lent, our youth and youth leaders will be hosting the fifth Lenten Dinner on Sunday, March 17<sup>th</sup>. We will be contacting families in March to make arrangements for this dinner, and for the service, too.

### **A FINAL CALL TO ALL FOR ACME RECEIPTS**

Thank you for turning in your ACME receipts. Please continue to bring in your ACME receipts. Our collection jar is located outside the office in the Narthex. We will get credit for all receipts dated between September 22, 2012 and February 9, 2013 that show a "community cash back" amount at the bottom of the receipt. Please bring in all of your ACME receipts to church by Sunday, February 24, 2013.

## THE WOMEN OF ZION

**Women's Monthly Bible Study:** We continue our study of *Gathered by God*. Last month we focused on getting away for rest. This month our focus is on being called together for community. The Greek word is *koinonia*, and the theme verse is 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1.9: "*God is faithful; and by him we were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*" The Christian community, begun in obscurity, with twelve followers huddled in fear in an upper room, changed the world. In some places, Paul refers to the Christian community as the body of Christ; in other places, it is the fellowship of believers, the household of faith, the family God; but by all accounts, whatever the terms used, we are talking about the gift of the gospel, the living, breathing, and real life invitation to join in the mystery of salvation. February will be a great month to say Yes to Bible study. You are invited to join the Women of Zion in the Resource Center on the third Tuesday, which is **February 19<sup>th</sup>**, when the coffee is served and the conversation begins at 9:30 a.m.

**Zion's Comfort Givers** meet on the second and fourth Thursdays, February 14 and 28, in Luther Hall, at 9:30 a.m. Along with an active dose of sewing, Zion's quilters enjoy coffee, conversation, and being filled with the feeling of knowing that we are helping persons around the world through the good that we do and the fun that we have on these Thursdays.

**Zion's Chancel Guild** will meet in the Sanctuary on the evening of Monday, February 11<sup>th</sup>, at 6:00 p.m. for our annual Chancel Cleaning. We are scheduled to host dinner on the Second Sunday in Lent, which is March 3<sup>rd</sup>. Dinner is served at 5:30 p.m.; the service follows at 6:15 p.m. We look forward to a great night. Plan to attend.

## THANK YOUS AND MORE

*Dear Members of our Zion Family,*

Thank you so much for the basket of great stuff that greeted us when our family got home after Ben's birth! From blankets to rattles to baby wash, Ben got so much! In addition to all the baby gifts, Josh and I appreciated the salad, lasagna, and pie very much. Thanks for the gifts for the special thought, and for your way of being so nice.

*Thanks again,  
Renee, Josh, and Ben*

**An Anniversary to Remember:** This first *Valentine's Card* ever written was on the day that St. Valentine died, February 14, 269 CE.

**Another Anniversary to Remember:** As we make plans for the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Zion's founding, the Bicentennial Task Force asks that you help us remember the ties that bind us together by pulling out a photograph of your Confirmation Class. Darlene Milavickas is hoping to celebrate these Confirmation connections; and she would like to see as many of these photographs as we have. We don't want to take them from you. We just want to copy your photo so that we can contact Confirmation classmates with news about our Bicentennial celebrations. Thanks so much for your interest and help.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF RUTH "MICKEY" MCMILLAN

(February 22, 1923 – December 26, 2012)

“Mickey” is the name by which her friends knew her, and that’s the name she liked. But Ruth is a name that carries with it powerful biblical memories, with a narrative that will always tell us about God’s love and its effect on us and our love. Ruth and Naomi, unrelated by blood but drawn together inseparably by friendship and need and family, are linked in ways that couldn’t be more powerful in showing us the power of affection, and couldn’t be more revelatory in revealing the nature of God’s faithfulness. “*Whithersoever thou goest, there I will go; and whithersoever thou lodgest, there I will lodge. Your people will be my people, and your God my God.*” (Ruth 1:16) What a powerful line, and what a powerful love! That’s the storyline behind the name *Ruth*, revealing the narrative of God’s love and the nature of God’s faithfulness.

Wherever we are, that’s where God is, whether it’s on Church Street in North Canton, or at the other end of the state in Miamisburg. If you look closely at the narrative, you’ll sense some seasonal hints of the Christmas story, with the promise that wherever we live, God will find us. In the Christmas story, it’s the miracle of Incarnation. The Word became flesh and dwelled among us. The original Greek picks up on the Old Testament image of God taking up residence in the tabernacle, and tabernacl-ing among us, literally, pitching his tent right alongside of us. Back in the 1970s, when gas was cheap, I heard a Pastor talk about God with his RV, and a bumper sticker that read: *have love, will travel*. Wherever you are, there I will be also; and remember, “I am with you always, to the end of the age, and beyond.” (Matthew 28:20)

There’s a sense of this theme in our Gospel in John 14: “In my Father’s place, there are many dwelling places, lots of places to pitch your tent, more rooms than any can count. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am there you may be also.” The directionality is reversed. We’re not talking about God following us to the green planet, but opening the gates of the kingdom to all believers. We’re talking about the story of salvation, the promise of eternal life, the truth of a place called heaven, and the way to get there. That’s exactly where our Gospel is heading when Jesus lets the Twelve know where he’s going and how to get there. Thomas expresses his doubts, with more than a hint of exasperation, “Lord, we have no absolutely idea where you’re going! How could we possibly know the way?” Then comes that unforgettable response, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”

That’s why we’re here, with hope for the future, faith in God’s promises, and confidence that the life that triumphed over the grave with the miracle of the resurrection will greet us at the pearly gates with the miracle of a love that will never let us go. “For I am persuaded,” Paul writes, 100% certain, fully convinced, “that neither death nor life, nor principalities, nor powers, nothing in this life, nor anything in the next, nothing we’ve done or ever could do, absolutely nothing in the entirety of all of creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God, which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39) What defines the hopes with which we gather today are the promises God makes for a future that opens up into eternity. Our memories dim, and our lives fade. But God has promised that we will never be forgotten, and more, we shall share in the life God is and celebrate the life God gives forever.