

## GREETINGS FROM THE PASTOR:

It didn't take long for the world and the church to respond to the Supreme Court ruling on gay rights and marriage. Newspaper editorial pages and television commentators were in first response mode the very next day. Within church circles, Bishop Allende emailed the Synod on Saturday. He encouraged us to discuss the matter with one another, listening respectfully to those whose opinions may differ from our own. He reminded us that as a church we are not of the same mind on this issue. ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton waited until Tuesday to share her remarks. She wrote, "This decision affects each of us, some of us profoundly, and we are not of one mind. Let us continue to accompany one another with prayer, love, and mutual respect as we reflect on this new reality...."

I'll admit that it is hard not to comment on the Supreme Court's ruling establishing the civil right to gay marriage. The move from upholding state laws allowing gay marriage to striking down laws that prohibit it has been swift and surprising. My own response for the past several years has been to marvel at the radically different strategies two now historic Civil Rights movements have taken. In 1954 it was *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, when, without prior warning or precedent, the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional discrimination based on the premise known as *separate-but-equal*. That movement started at the top, and led to a decades-long struggle to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Civil Rights Act of 1968, and still more decades filled with the ongoing struggle to eliminate race-based discrimination at every level.

On the issue of sexual identity and preference, by the time the Supreme Court got involved in *Obergefell vs. Hodges* (2015), there had been a mountain of precedents in administrative and employment rules and regulations. It has been decades and more since these anti-discrimination regulations have included references to sexuality in addition to race, ethnicity, and religion. By the time this present case came along, it was no longer a question of *whether* but *when*. That *when* has come. This is what the ELCA has been trying to prepare us for. It may seem to some that the ELCA has been moving too fast, but we have not been trailblazers on this issue. I don't want to burst any bubbles, but Lutherans are not trailblazers when it comes to many social issues, perhaps any social issues. What I can say with significant conviction is that Lutherans will not be on the side of those who deny equal dignity and civil rights ever again. It happened to us in Germany; and once the issue is one of respecting civil rights, we will not allow Luther quotes or Bible verses to justify those who would disparage human dignity or deny civil rights.

I'll admit that I have been more of an analyst than an advocate on this issue. I've tried to be compassionate but cautious. My suspicion is that sooner rather than later more Lutherans will learn that the issue is no longer one of whether sexual identity is something we're born with or a lifestyle we choose. The world is changing. The world has changed. The younger generation has embraced this change by percentages that would astound us. If we're talking about civil rights, and the Supreme Court makes it clear that we are, we learned too much from World II to ever go back to an understanding of Christian love that doesn't find a way to see that God's gift of human dignity is what the legal construct of civil rights is trying to acknowledge and protect. It's time to listen with respect and let love take the lead as we find our way to what comes next.

**CHURCH COUNCIL NEWS**

Our meeting in June continued the good financial news that has kept us in the black with small surpluses all year long. These surpluses have been small; but the result is that we continue to maintain a healthy sense of giving and a healthy bottom line. Mark Votaw called us to order at 7:02 p.m. Our devotions were led by Carol Rossbach. Also in attendance were Dave Palumbo, Jayne Schrader, Jim Fidler, Heather Hoffman, and Pastor Sherwindt. We adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Operating revenues exceeded expenses by \$199.98 in May, leaving us with a year-to-date surplus of \$510.14. The primary item before us focused on preparations for our Congregational Meeting on June 24<sup>th</sup>. We needed to have an election slate ready to go. Plus we were working on two resolutions that will go before the congregation: one having to do with facts confirmed by our recent title search; the other asking the congregation to authorize expenditures for the parsonage, which could exceed \$5,000 as we prepare the parsonage for its next chapter. We need to move with deliberate speed as we collect information that will help us prepare for the right decision.

**ZION'S FINANCIAL FACTS FOR MAY**

May Income	19,799.33
May Expenses	<u>19,599.35</u>
<b>May Surplus</b>	<b>199.98</b>
Income through May	100,578.71
Expenses through May	<u>100,068.57</u>
<b>2015 YTD Surplus</b>	<b>510.14</b>
Our Food Pantry Fund	\$7,555.26
Zion's Youth Fund	\$6,465.25
2015 Advanced Giving	\$7,500.00

*We thank you for your generous support!*

**MORE COUNCIL NEWS**

**Caring Ministry:** Jayne has run the Food Pantry, served as the Church Office Secretary, and now moves from serving as the Caring Ministry Elder to assuming the role of Council Secretary. Ron Tvorik has said Aye-Aye to Council's request that he fill out the remainder of Jayne's term as Caring Ministry Elder. By way of background, Ron moved north from Columbus a couple of years ago, finding and then joining Zion along with his wife Linda, their grandchildren Chrissy and LJ, and then Chrissy and LJ's parents, Laura and Lester. Jayne moved over to Council Secretary so that Carol Rossbach could run as Vice President.

**Learning Ministry:** Renee Keith is still as helpful as she has always been, teaching Confirmation during Sunday School, and helping with Vacation Bible School as she is able, but she has served two consecutive two-year terms as the Learning Ministry Elder, which is Zion's constitutional limit. Taking her place on Council will be Janet Slease. In the meantime, Debbie Fox has been moving Vacation Bible School along. The theme is G-FORCE, and the dates are Monday through Friday, July 13—17.

**Property Ministry:** Todd Elsass finished his first two-year term, and now begins his second. As the Property Ministry Elder, Todd meets with the Trustees on a monthly basis, where decisions about property maintenance and oversight are discussed. In addition to working with the Trustees, Todd has also been grateful for the help we have received from the Thursday morning Retirees Club, which, in addition to Carl Geib, Richard Biggerstaff, Verle Elsass, and Bob Lancashire, now includes Clarence Givler as their newest member.

## **MORE PROPERTY NEWS**

Has anyone seen the kitchen since some of Zion's women spent time throwing out the old, organizing what was left, and did some significant cleaning along the way? Mabel Kolarik and Darlene Milavickas deserve a lot of credit for the initiative they displayed in sticking with this cleaning project for a couple of weeks. Once everything was just about complete, Darlene surprised everyone with the wax job she did on the kitchen floor! No one thought the floor had it in it. The kitchen floor radiated a sheen that made even casual walkers by take notice. Again, we offer our thanks for a job well done.

One of the side effects of Darlene's work on the kitchen floor was the surprise offer from several Council members to join a painting party at the parsonage if Darlene would come! It's true. We had concluded, after more than a few attempts to entice a group of volunteers to form a parsonage painting crew, that it would be easier to solicit some bids, examine proposals, select one, and get the job done. We're still getting some bids; but we are also actively looking for willing volunteers to join in the "fun" of painting the parsonage upstairs and down. Well, we can't promise that it will be fun, but we can guarantee that Darlene will be on the team, not on the bench as a possible substitute, but on the starting team and helping us paint!

The dates we have in mind are the last week of July and the first week of August. (These are the dates Darlene told us she would be available!) Without doing any additional recruiting, we have Darlene and four others. We would like to have six to ten of us on board. Would you be willing to join us for a painting party at the parsonage? If you think you'd be interested in finding out more, just let the Church Office know (330-499-3909).

## **MORE COUNCIL NEWS**

**Witness Ministry:** Howard Dansizen, our webmaster, has agreed to serve as the Witness Ministry Elder. Our primary focus will be on improving our website. If you think that this is something you would like to be a part of, let the Pastor, or Howard, or Mark Votaw know. We've got a good start, with Gregg Evanoff, Miriam and Marissa Keating, and Chuck Danner willing to get on board. Our first priority is to make sure that we have more of the history we celebrated with our Bicentennial Anniversary available on the website. Again, if you are interested in helping, let us know.

**Worship Ministry:** Dale Jacobs continues as our Worship Ministry Elder. As we reflect on the past program year, we can count our blessings with Jon Elsass serving as our interim choir director for the entire choral season, Ed Hauck serving as the organist at our 8:00 a.m. service, and Suzanne Walters maintaining a continuity of leadership for our Praise Team at the 10:30 a.m. service. We continue to adjust as Brian & Suzanne's children, first Kelly, and now Kevin, make the transition from Praise Team regulars to full-time college and graduate school students. Kevin heads to the University of Akron; Kelly is in Providence, RI, pursuing her Masters at Johnson & Wales University.

**Social Ministry:** Randy Cizek serves as our Social Ministry Elder. This means that he gets to think about our *End-of-the-Summer Party*, which takes place on the Sunday of Labor Day Weekend, and features a great grill-off. Every now and then, this new tradition overlaps with Rally Day, which is the case this year. So, expect big things as we celebrate the end of the summer and the beginning of a new Sunday School year.

## *OUR CONGREGATIONAL MEETING ON JUNE 24, 2015*

Sixty of us came together – plus a dog! – on the Wednesday evening of June 24<sup>th</sup> to enjoy some ice cream and to join in common affirmation of five simple facts. 1) Our title search has been completed. 2) There are no liens or mortgages. 3) There are no covenants or agreements restricting what we can do with our property. 4) The Constitution and bylaws contain no restrictions on what we can do with our property. 5) As a corporation in good standing in the State of Ohio, we can buy and sell real property. Sure, we're two hundred (and one) years old! A lot has happened that we may have forgotten. Rumors and vague recollections often make it hard to know the facts, affirm the facts, and agree with the facts of the matter. But this is what we did at our Congregational Meeting on June 24<sup>th</sup>.

First things first, we elected a full slate of members willing to serve on Church Council, as Deacons, and with the Trustees. It was a great night for an election. One among us, Renee Keith, was term-limited off the Council. Renee has done a great job as our Learning Ministry Elder. We have really enjoyed her support and the leadership skills she displays so naturally as someone who loves Christian education, and Zion, too. Thank you, Renee, for your willingness to serve. Those serving on Council are Mark Votaw (President), Carol Rossbach (Vice President), Janet Slease (Learning Ministry), Heather Hoffman (Parish Life Ministry), Todd Elsass (Property Ministry), Jim Fidler (Resource Ministry), Randy Cizek (Social Ministry), Howard Dansizen (Witness Ministry), and Dale Jacobs (Worship Ministry). Jayne Schrader will move from Caring Ministry to serve as our Council Secretary. Ron Tvorik has agreed to serve as our Caring Ministry Elder.

We have been experimenting with different ways to organize our Deacons, doubling the number, and reducing Sunday morning duties to a single service. This year, we were happy to affirm Nick Cignetti, John Long, Donna Roan, Doug Roman, and Dean Yoder for their willingness to join six others in serving as Deacons at all the worship services we schedule and celebrate at Zion. Everyone seems happy with the schedule that John Long organizes. We can always use more help. Let John Long or the Pastor know if you are interested in joining in the rotation. As far as Trustees go, John Rhodes and Bob Lancashire were willing to continue with the work they share with Betty Boettler, Todd Elsass, Adam Schrader, and Beth Shaheen. We could not be more grateful for our many members who are willing to serve in these elected capacities, as well as for our many members and friends who support them with their help. When it comes to the care of our property, many men and women alike offer crucial assistance. We could not be the church we are without your support.

In listing members elected to serve on Council, I omitted the name of Dave Palumbo, not as an oversight but to make a special point of highlighting the good news that Dave has served as our Treasurer for the past ten years, five consecutive two-year terms; and he was willing to take on another two-year term, his sixth. We've been well served, and are deeply grateful. Dave wants to pass along his Treasurer's duties to another member who feels up to the task. Even though Dave is a CPA, which means he has professional expertise in the field of accounting, professional expertise is not required. Just your willingness will do. Dave will be happy to spend whatever time he must to help you feel comfortable with the job, and equipped to do it. Please let Dave or Pastor Sherwindt know of your willingness to serve.

GREAT NEWS FROM ZION'S SUNDAY SCHOOL

**Happy Birthday to:**

UPCOMING EVENTS – MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

**Monday, July 13:** *G—Force, God's Love in Action (MOVING)*: Registration at 8:45 a.m.

**Tuesday, July 14:** *G—Force, God's Love in Action (ACTING)*: Bring a T-Shirt Today

**Wednesday, July 15:** *G—Force, God's Love in Action (CARING)*: It's T-Shirt Day

**Thursday, July 16:** *G—Force, God's Love in Action (FOLLOWING)*: Enjoy this evening, too!

**Friday, July 17:** *G—Force, God's Love in Action (SHARING)*: Water Day & Pizza for Lunch!

**Sunday, September 6:** *Rally Day* and our *End-of-the-Summer Party* Join Forces at Zion!

SUNDAY SCHOOL FOR PRE-K THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL

We are on our summer break from Sunday School! This, of course, doesn't mean that we will not have an active Christian Education program for our kids this summer. Just take a look at what's coming with Vacation Bible School. Read about it on pages 7 and 8. We're going to have lots of fun, with plenty of opportunities for service, as we spend a week in *G—Force Park*. Make it a point to join in the fun and the service; and bring a friend!

SUNDAY SCHOOL AND OUR END-OF-THE-SUMMER PARTY

How it happened, it's hard to say; but six years ago we decided to have an *End-of-the-Summer Party* on the Sunday of Labor Day Weekend. We have come to call it the "Great Grill Off" because many of our men enjoyed letting all of us see what they could do with a little bit of imagination and a whole lot of grill. I soon found out that we weren't talking about your grandfather's grill. One year we added a dunk tank. Other years we added music. It wasn't long before we realized that we had created a great event, which turned into an extraordinary fundraiser. This year we are using our *End-of-the-Summer Party* to focus on mission, our mission. Since Rally Day and the Sunday of Labor Day Weekend fall on the same day this year, September 6, we look forward to a great party as we begin of another Sunday School year. This year's celebration should be extra special. Mark your calendar, and plan to join us.

THE DATE IS SET FOR OUR YOUTH MISSIONS CRAFT SHOW

Our *Twelfth Annual Craft Show* will take place on Saturday, October 17<sup>th</sup>, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. This is a great event at Zion, which helps our youth program; and we need lots of help to make it a success. We hope to have around 65 craft tables rented, with 8-foot tables costing only \$35. If you are interested in a registration form, or know someone who might be, let the Church Office know, or speak directly to Connie Frank, our Craft Show Coordinator. While our youth benefit, all of us can get involved. There's the Bake Sale, Raffle Baskets, vendors and shopping, along with our Concessions, which feature our world-famous German dinners! We've been at it a dozen years. Let's make this one of the best! That's *Saturday, October 17<sup>th</sup>*.

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL 2015  
G—FORCE (GOD’S LOVE IN ACTION)  
MONDAY THRU FRIDAY, JULY 13—17



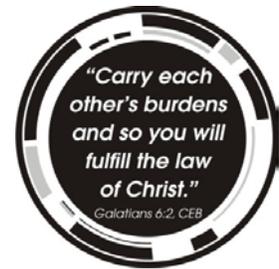
Mark your calendars now, and plan on joining us Monday through Friday, July 13th–17th, for Vacation Bible School this year. The format will be very similar to last year. On Monday through Thursday, we will meet from 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. On Friday, since Friday is traditionally Water Day, we will meet from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Registration and sign-in will begin each day at 8:45 a.m., which is a little earlier than normal; but the good news is that we will be able to get our mornings started right at 9:00 a.m. That’s the plan; and don’t forget that we will still have our Family Night and Ice Cream Social on Thursday evening at 7:00 pm.



We will have an action-packed week of fun, learning, and service at what we are calling Zion’s G—FORCE PARK! The kids will learn many ways to show God’s love by MOVING, ACTING, CARING, FOLLOWING, and SHARING. There will be great lessons, great music, fun games, delicious snacks, lots of crafts, and service projects, too, lots of them.

Our Vacation Bible School program is designed for children age 4 through those who have completed the 5th grade. Youth who have completed 6th grade and higher are invited to help during the week. We have many volunteer & service opportunities planned for these youth! Registration packets are now available in the Church Office. Please turn in your completed forms by Friday, July 10th, in order to help us order sufficient supplies. We will still accept registrations during the week of Vacation Bible School if space is available.



We have a busy week planned! We’ll get started on Monday with lots of fun and activities! Wednesday will be T-Shirt day, so each child will need a white T-shirt with their name on the label by pick up time on Tuesday. Thursday evening is our traditional Family Night and Ice Cream Social, which begins at 7:00 p.m. Everyone is invited to join us that evening for our VBS Program, and then for ice cream and fellowship afterwards. We will also have our Quilt Raffle that evening.



Then, on Friday, we’re back for our Big G—Force Park Celebration! This will include water activities and fun games as we celebrate our week of learning and service. The children will need their swim suits, towels and sunscreen on Friday. Of course, we will have lessons, crafts, music, games, service projects and snacks each day as well. The time is near! It’s almost here! We are all looking forward to a great week for our kids, staff and parents, as we all learn about God’s love!

## G—FORCE SERVICE PROJECTS DURING VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

We will focus on service this year, which is always a great tradition at Zion's Vacation Bible School. We've planned many service projects, some familiar, some new. The children will experience how important it is to serve others and God in their lives! We hope they will see that no matter how old we are, we can truly make a difference! Here's a summary of this year's projects:



**THE DAILY OFFERING** – There will be a contest each day between the **SHARE** boys and girls to collect change as our offering. Each team will have a jar and the most money collected wins! This money will then be donated to a charity chosen by our VBS participants during the week.

**ZION'S FOOD PANTRY** – We ask that each child bring in a food item each day, if possible. **CARE** This food will help stock Zion's Food Pantry, which has been about the ministry of helping many families in the community for over fourteen years.

**QUILT SQUARES** – The children will once again create quilt squares for Zion's Comfort Givers to sew quilts for Lutheran World Relief. We will raffle one quilt, chosen by the winner, on Thursday evening at the Ice Cream Social. Tickets will be available during the week. As usual, it's one ticket for a dollar, or six tickets for five dollars. Join us for all the fun!



**SCHOOL KITS** – We will be collecting various items for school kits to help children in our community. Items needed are backpacks, paper, notebooks, folders, binders, glue, pencils, erasers, crayons, scissors, rulers and markers. Please bring in any donations by the morning of Thursday, July 16<sup>th</sup>. If anyone in the congregation is interested in donating items, please leave the items in the Church Office.



**DAILY PROJECTS** – The children will work on several service projects throughout the week **MOVE** at Zion and at home. We really like to make the connection between what we learn at church and what we do at home.

We're looking forward to a great week and hope you will join us! We are still in need of volunteers for the week! Please consider joining us one, two or all five days. It truly is a rewarding and enjoyable experience with a great group of kids! We have also put out sign-up sheets in Luther Hall for lots of food and supplies needed for the week, along with donation cans for those who are interested in helping. If you have any questions, or would like to volunteer, please call Debbie Fox at 330-966-2433, or, if you'd like, just email her at [dfox521@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dfox521@sbcglobal.net). As always, thank you, thank you, thank you for your great support! Your interest and support makes a difference.



## THE WOMEN OF ZION

June began a new study for the *Women of Zion, Give in Secret*. This new focus kicked off the summer by reading from the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:2-4, to be precise. Verse 1 began with a warning, “Beware of practicing your piety before others to be seen by them.” While our Lord speaks of prayer, giving alms, and fasting, all of us must ask how it is that we can allow our light to shine, without drawing attention to ourselves for the wrong reasons. As it turned out, none of our women were able to attend the June *monthly Bible study*, which means that no one is behind. We’re all starting fresh when we meet for *July Bible Study*, which is Tuesday, **July 21<sup>st</sup>, 9:30 a.m.** in the Resource Room.

July continues our summer focus. Emma Crossen is our guide, and the next Session invites us to *Be Like the Widow*. Luke 21:1-4 turns our attention to the widow’s mite. A traditional rendering of this text might lead us to focus on the virtue of sacrificial giving; but we might be well-served to focus instead on societal shortcomings, which, in Jesus’ day, left too many widows in poverty, often abandoned and usually forgotten. Are there things that we can do differently as a country that doesn’t leave as many persons vulnerable and in need ... like the poor widow, whose needs in life far exceeded what little money she had. You might find July’s study much to your liking. Give it a try. It’s July 21<sup>st</sup>.

*Zion’s Comfort Givers* will join forces with Vacation Bible School during the week of July 13 through 17 to have a great time with our kids, and a busy time of sewing. We will meet Monday through Thursday from 9:00 a.m. to Noon in Luther Hall. It’s always nice to have a few additional sewers during VBS. So please join us. You’ll be glad you did; and so will we. It’s very rewarding and lots of fun.

## MORE FROM OUR BISHOPS

When Bishops Elizabeth Eaton and Abraham Allende addressed fellow Lutherans in responding to the Supreme Court’s recent decision on gay rights and marriage, they encouraged us to read the ELCA’s social statement adopted at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly entitled *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*. In this regard Bishop Allende advised, “If you have never read it, I would urge you to do so.” It is a statement in which our church “calls for mutual respect and for guidance that seeks the good of all.” The statement acknowledges that as a church we are not of one mind as we think through and live with dramatic changes in the world around us and among us. Bishop Allende simply asks that “as we live together with disagreement, we continue to accompany one another in study, prayer, discernment, pastoral care, and mutual respect.”

If you have not yet read this social statement, I assure you that, while there are no pictures, the statement is not long and is very readable. Zion’s Adult Sunday School Class discussed the statement back when it was released, and we found it fairly easy to understand, with just the right amount of technical expertise to inspire confidence that those who wrote it had done their homework, and wanted to educate rather than pontificate. Fortunately, we had Jim Fidler to help break down some of the more technical sections; and, by and large, we enjoyed the discussions. Copies are available through the Church Office.

We have work to do as we figure out what the Supreme Court’s decision means for us as a church. The challenge is ours. Bishop Eaton assures us that “all decisions about recognizing, supporting and holding publicly accountable same-gender relationships are entrusted to [local] congregations.” The call is ours.

## DATES TO REMEMBER

America turns 239 on July 4<sup>th</sup>. That surely is a day to remember and celebrate! Abraham Lincoln, in his *Gettysburg Address*, spoke reverently about a nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to propositions of fundamental equality. Martin Luther King, Jr. offered his *I Have a Dream* speech almost one hundred years later, building on this vision in looking forward to an America that would rise up to the challenge of living out the true meaning of its creed, grounded in the self-evident truth of God-given equality. Unrelated to America, but deeply rooted in our faith when it comes to celebrating freedom, Martin Luther penned what might be the most famous quote about freedom in reminding us that Christians are perfectly free, subject to none, but bound to a Lord who makes us servants of all.

## AROUND THE CHURCH

**Marcus Rhodes** and **Ben Mohler** are having a great summer playing baseball for the North Canton Little League All Stars, the 12-year old team with aspirations for making it all the way to National Little League Finals in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. It's still early in the summer season; but we wish them the best of luck. Way to go!

Speaking about North Canton Little League All Stars, it's been some time since **Nathan Fox** played with that 12-year old team, but he is still playing summer baseball. He's been on the road since before summer began playing 16U travel ball with the Triple Crown Royals out of Columbus, Ohio. Their goal is to make it all the way to the Perfect Game 25 National Championship in Emerson, Georgia.

Speaking about all star excellence, we are very proud to announce that **Kevin Walters** recently received word from Joan Cogan that he had been selected to be the 2015 recipient of the Flad-Grandjean-Elliot Scholarship, a \$2,000.00 scholarship given to a Lutheran graduating high school senior heading off to college. The award honors excellence in academic discipline, religious faithfulness, and moral character. Recipients should display a constructive mix of church and community involvement; Joan has been a first-hand witness to the extraordinarily generous way in which Kevin has shared his time and talents at Zion, singing with our Children's Choir (way back when), with the Senior Choir and Zion's Praise Team, offering special music as a soloist, with ensembles, with voice and instruments, volunteering with VBS, coming out for work days, serving as an acolyte, a lector, and so much more. We congratulate Kevin and wish him well as he pursues his interests in music educations at the University of Akron.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF JESSICA STAYER HEATH

(April 28, 1987 – June 27, 2015)

It's not supposed to be this way. The natural order of things is that children do not pass away before their parents. There are no words to express the empty hole left when their child is gone. You can contain the whole of their life in the palm of those hands that held them close as babies. It is not supposed to be this way. But these were the circumstances that surrounded John and Becky as they surrounded Jessie with their love on the Saturday morning that God called Jessie home. Jessie had battled leukemia for ten years, often with some degree of success, succumbing finally while under hospice care at the Compassionate Care Center. The next day was Sunday, and the Gospel chosen for that day was Mark 5:21-43, where Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, finds Jesus and pleads with him to save his daughter. She appeared to have died while Jesus was on his way. Jesus entered her room, and assured everyone that she was just sleeping. He reached for her hand, and said, "*Talitha cum*", which we are told means, "Little girl, get up!" And the little girl got up!

I wish that when I walked into Jessica's room the day before that I could have boldly said, "Little girl, get up!" That didn't happen the day I visited Jessie. Instead, all I could do when I heard her labored breathing and saw her Mom holding her close was share the Good News that God's love is sure, and God's presence is with us always: present in the hearts of those there gathered, present in the prayers so many had offered, present in the ties that bind us together in love, now and forever. This, too, is a miracle, the Good News of God's grace, and God's love, and God's life with us always and faithful forever. Over the course of thirty years of pastoral ministry, I have come to understand that this Good News is the best of news. It's not just a consolation prize. It is the truth about God. It is the truth about God's promise. It is the truth about our present blessing and our ultimate future. The suffering we endure does not separate us from God's love, or sound an alarm indicating that God has withdrawn His favor from our lives. The Gospel tells us that God will not allow anything ever to come between us and His unwavering love. What better news could there be? This Good News gives us strength now and life forever.

Interestingly enough, In Mark 5:21-43 cited above, both the little girl and a woman in the crowd received temporary reprieves. The woman in the crowd had battled an incurable disease for a dozen years, and the little girl was at the brink of death. Their reprieves elicited great joy, and rightly so; but they were temporary. Death would come knocking again. Sooner or later, death has its way with every one of us. The gift of faith does not change the terms of our existence. We are mortal, and vulnerable. There is nothing that we can do that will change these facts of life. We can wonder why so few are given temporary reprieves from suffering and death. We can wonder why Jesus didn't cure more diseases, heal more persons, and save more little girls from being tragically and untimely taken. The texts are silent on these heartfelt questions. The solution we seek requires much more than we might have imagined. The solution requires One who can change these facts of life. The Gospel tells us that there is One who has turned the tables on mortality and conquered death for us. There is One who has died that we might live, One whose resurrection proclaims the Good News that love and life will have the last word. The Book of Revelation (3:20) tells us that at the end, and right here and now, our precious Savior stands at the door and knocks. Even when it seems like death is here, faith invites us to trust that ultimately the One knocking at that door is none other than the Lord of life, who enters into our hearts as we enter into His life so that together we can share in a communion that promises new life now and true life forever ... in Jesus' name. Amen