

Made in God's image

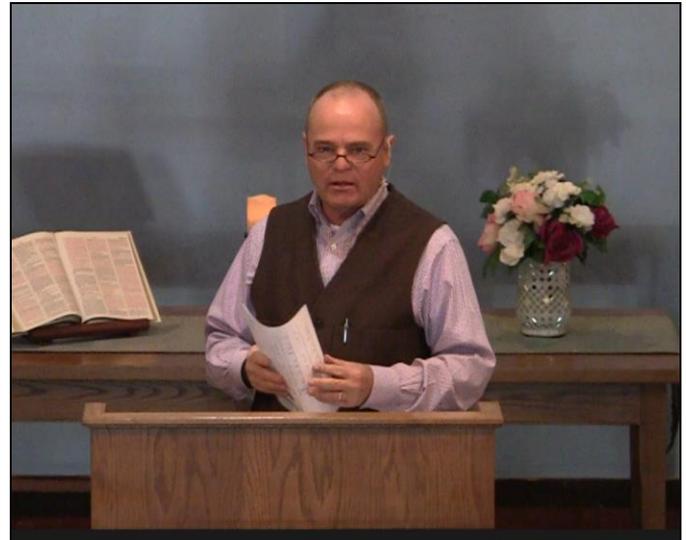
By Jean LaRosa

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27 ESV)

I have a dear long-time friend of another race. She has been my prayer partner for many years. We had never talked about racial issues much until last summer, during the Black Lives Matter protests. That first time was an awkward conversation for both of us, but it was an important conversation, and it paved the way for a closer friendship. I feel honored that my friend has been willing to share her thoughts on this topic with me, and I have been blessed by her transparency and her perspective.

A few days ago, in the raw aftermath of the attack on our nation's Capital building, we met for prayer. Our conversation again turned to racism and the part it has played in this sad and tragic chapter in our nation's history. We prayed for our country. We prayed for her children, that their hearts would not be hardened by the hatred on display right now. She asked what on earth could she say to them when they had just seen images of rioters parading the Confederate flag through the Capitol. We prayed that they might have hope that things would not always be as bad as they are right now. We grieved that Christian symbols had been co-opted and displayed by some extremist groups on this awful day, and we prayed for the witness of the Church. When we were done, she thanked me for listening to her with an open mind and told me many people would have said that racism wasn't their problem. I told her I felt like what I had done was an inadequate response, and that Jesus would have done so much more, that racism was everybody's problem.

Live Stream Budget Meeting



Tom Taylor led the annual budget meeting on January 17, attended both in-person and online. Congregants were able to ask questions about the budget in person and virtually during the meeting.

After our phone call, I asked myself, "What would Jesus have done?"

I can't presume to speak for Him, of course. But I can look at the Bible and find many examples of Jesus including in His ministry those who were marginalized in their culture. Consider some of the people He ministered to:

- He healed a leper and chose to touch him in order to do so. (Luke 5:12-15)
- He invited Matthew the tax collector to be one of his disciples and socialized with tax collectors and sinners. (Luke 5:27-32)
- He allowed Himself to be touched by a bleeding woman in the crowd and healed her. (Luke 8:43-48)
- He revealed Himself as Messiah to the woman he met at the well—a Samaritan woman, no less. (John 4:4-26)
- He showed mercy to the woman caught in the act of adultery. (John 8:3-11)

Continued on page 2...

“Made in God’s image,” continued...

One of the things I have always loved about Jesus is His radical inclusivity. He held up the Good Samaritan, a member of a despised ethnic group, as an example of what it looks like to truly love your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:25-37). No one was excluded from His ministry on the basis of their ethnic group, gender, religion, or profession. He welcomed all who would come to Him. He saw the image of God in all people. As His followers, can we do any less?

I want to encourage those who have perhaps been considering opening the door to a conversation like the one I had with my friend. It might be with someone of a different race, from a different culture, from a different faith. Open that door. It may be awkward, and you might hear some things that make you uncomfortable. But open that door and come alongside. You might feel, as I did, that all you can do is listen and pray, and that doesn't seem like enough. But God is giving us the opportunity right now to be the Church to a world that desperately needs to see examples of Christian love.

Early in the morning of January 7, when National Guardsmen were cleaning up some of the mess left by the rioters in the Capitol, New Jersey Congressman Andy Kim asked for a trash bag and joined them. During an interview he said, “When you see something you love that’s broken you want to fix it.... It really broke my heart, and I just felt compelled to do something.... What else could I do?”

I pray that this will be our response as Jesus’ followers when we share God’s love with a broken and hurting world:

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8)

Elders’ Corner

By Pastor Andy Straubel

The elders welcomed in the new year with thanksgiving. The year 2020 has been a challenge but, thankfully, we made it this far. We have learned to worship virtually, hold a budget meeting virtually, and conduct our annual meeting virtually. I long for the time and count the days until we can all meet together.

“Stand firm, let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58 NIV). These words were given to the Corinthian church in difficult times. They are a good reminder to us as well.

Similarly, in Ephesians 5:8-21 Paul charges the faithful: 1) Walk in wisdom (Ephesians 5:15). 2) Make the most of every opportunity, (v.16) “redeeming the time.” 3) Understand the will of God (v.17). 4) Be filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 18), and to 5) make melody in your hearts by singing.

Thank you all for your love and support. As we enter a new year let us stand firm and give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord.



Blessings to all who celebrate a birthday this month. May you feel the love, joy and presence of the Lord as we all celebrate your special day with prayers and warmest wishes.

Helen Cull	February 3
Scott Bruno	February 9
Amy Kasternakis	February 12
Tom Taylor	February 16
Sandy Ober	February 17
Ella Bernheisel	February 21
Shirley Erbe	February 24
George Hill	February 24
Elizabeth Simicevic	February 26

Worship Team News

By Don Ober



1+1=3

I wanted to share this month my recent experience with COVID-19 and what lessons I have, learned from this illness.

Around the Christmas holidays, my wife and I were both diagnosed with COVID-19, and we both were forced to self-Quarantine for a few weeks which meant I could no longer play or participate with the praise team during that time.

For me this was a great sacrifice, especially since it was the Advent season, and it really made me take stock in many things in my life. I really love working with my fellow Christians in this music ministry. No professional gig, I've ever played, even comes close in comparison to working for the King with my brothers and sisters-in-Christ.

I have often told the members of our team that, although none of us are great musicians by the world's standards, they continually impress me. As a professional musician outside the church, I have played with some very outstanding players, much better than myself, and yet, how can I make such an assertion?

The answer to this question is rather easy. The sum is greater than the whole! God's Word proclaims in Mathew 18:20, "*when two or more are gathered in my name, I am there with them.*" Do we truly believe that? If so, it only stands to reason, that of course, because our sum is truly greater than the whole! We have assistance the world simply does not have! All of us on the team have seen this first hand. Although it may not be obvious to the congregation, there have been many times where the leader for any given Sunday, not knowing beforehand what the sermon is on, has

chosen songs that completely harmonize "perfectly" with the message Pastor Andy is preaching that Sunday. I'll admit, sometimes it can be quite strange how this happens, and yet it should not surprise us at all!

God's Word also proclaims in Philippians 4:13, "*I can do all things in him who gives me strength.*" I truly believe this illness gave me new insight in how these two verses connect with one another. If we truly believe these two scripture verses, we must believe that working together, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we are capable of much more than anything we are capable of without the assistance of "The Helper," and dare I say it, "working on our own."

I have actually become thankful for our recent illness, although I would never have asked for it, because it gave me a bit of a new perspective. I think the question all of us need to ask ourselves is this: "Am I putting myself in a position within the family of God, where truly, one plus one can equal three?"

In Corinthians 12:20, Gods' Word proclaims that there are many parts but one body. His Word goes further in saying, "*the eye cannot say to the hand I do not need you.*" Not all of us can be preachers. I certainly cannot, but we all have a role to play in our church family. There are needs within our church that can only be met by each of us, with the help of the Holy Spirit. It may be as simple as passing out scriptures to the homeless, but whatever it is, there is a role that God has prepared us for. Are we doing it? Are we truly making the sum greater than the whole?

The answer to that question can only be summed up in this final passage from Matthew 5:14-16, "*You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*"

My prayer for our church in 2021 is that we all can find out where our mission field is and truly become the sum that is greater than the whole. God Bless.

Further Up and Further In

*Inviting dialogue to encourage growth in
and among us*



By Cindy Bills

Love Without Romance

It is said that in polite society, we do not discuss politics or religion. Today, I am going to do both, at the same time. As residents of the United States, we find ourselves in a veritable morass of political, racial, and economic divisions that reach across all religious beliefs and practices. I am not interested in mounting a soapbox and making my case about *what* convictions we hold. I am much more concerned about *how* we come to our convictions and *how* we express and exercise them. Even though the news has been calling our current times as unprecedented, the writers of the Bible do not seem to be strangers to conflict and controversy, even among believers. We would do well to consider their words.

It matters what we believe. Both Matthew and Luke record words of Jesus that are as relevant in our no-absolute-truth culture as they were in the first century:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall. Matthew 7:24-27.

No one can avoid all the storms of living as a fallen creature in a fallen world; but building our lives on the foundation of Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life can enable us to avoid at least many of the pitfalls of these storms. Yet Scripture does not give us a blueprint for what that looks like. The

Christian life is not about religious performance; nor does Scripture provide a flow chart for us. The Christian life is about cultivating a growing and intimate faith relationship with the Lord of the universe and then expressing that relationship in what we do and how we treat others.

Romans 14 has become one of my favorite passages in the New Testament. I would encourage you to spend some time reading it and processing the words of the Apostle Paul. In this epistle, Paul is addressing a dilemma that is causing controversy among believers living in the very secular city of Rome. At issue is the eating of meat sacrificed to idols and/or eating meat of unknown origin, that might have originated from pagan worship practices. Some believers are so horrified at the thought any association with idol worship that they are choosing to avoid meat altogether and eat only vegetables. Others see nothing wrong with eating meat sacrificed to idols in whom they do not believe and who, according to their faith, are not real. Some of us may be surprised to see Paul take the position of freedom: he sees nothing wrong with eating meat sacrificed to idols who do not represent anything that is spiritually material.

But Paul is not pronouncing his position in order to prescribe appropriate Christian behavior. He does not denounce those who are abstaining from meat; nor does he exhort those who hold his “freedom” position to straighten their brethren out. Instead, he uses the division of opinion to teach two important principles. The first is that each believer is responsible for living before Christ, with the help of the indwelling Holy Spirit. We are to develop and practice our convictions in the context of our dynamic relationship with the Lord. Our convictions are the outworking of our faith and walk in Christ and often reflect our personal history, experiences, and maturity of faith. The conviction held by one believer may not be appropriate for a brother or sister to hold! So while there is the absolute truth of Christ, there is not necessarily one right way to translate that truth into our lives. The second principle is that we are not to regard our convictions as a standard to be used to judge one another or to

Continued on page 5...

“Love Without Romance,” continued...

feel superior to someone who holds a different—and sometimes contradictory—position. We are to be sensitive in our interactions with and behavior toward one another so that none of us is caused to stumble or is the cause of stumbling. Paul warns us that as important as convictions of faith are, using them to achieve self-righteousness is utterly un-Christian.

In his letter to the Philippians (the well-known Chapter 13), Paul reinforces these thoughts by reminding the believers in Philippi that doing great things in Christ has no eternal value if they are not done out of love. If we speak in tongues, if we prophesy with power, if we move mountains in faith, if we give all we have in ministry, and even if we die a martyr's death, such activity will fail to advance the work of Christ and His kingdom if it is not generated by our faith relationship with Christ, manifested in love, and expressed as the outworking of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Paul calls the body of Christ to unity: *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* (Galatians 3:28). In these days of division, in the *United States* I would love to add that there is neither Republican nor Democrat; neither black nor white; neither Hispanic, Latino, Asian, nor White. Paul underscores his point with this admonishment a bit later in his letter: *For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.* (Galatians 5:13-15)

Jesus told His disciples that the world would associate His disciples with Him not by their strident convictions, not by their self-righteous behavior, but by their love: *By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.* (John 13:35)

Our God is a God of restoration, reconciliation, and redemption. This is illustrated no more powerfully than in Jesus' death to cover our sins and restore

our relationship with our loving Creator. While the conflict, controversy, and division of these times could be used as tools by Satan to rip us apart, they also represent opportunities for the members of Christ's body to prosper the work of the Holy Spirit in us and among us, to deepen our love for one another so that as a body, we may manifest God's goodness and glory to a world desperate for genuine Good News.

Please feel free to contact Cindy (609-275-8557 or cynthialbills@gmail.com) to continue the dialogue...

Perisseia:

Our women's growth group has begun its winter series. All women are welcome to join us as we consider how to more deeply incorporate prayer into our everyday lives of faith. Virtual meetings via Zoom are Thursday evenings, 7:00-8:30. For more information or to request a Zoom invitation, please contact Cindy Bills at cynthialbills@gmail.com.

New Sunday School Classes

Our Adult Sunday School classes will begin on February 14, and will meet virtually. Please join us as we seek to grow in our knowledge and love of the Lord with one another:

I Samuel – Women will continue their study of 1 Samuel at 11:30 am. You will receive a Zoom invitation if you participated in our class in the past. We are taking an in-depth look at I Samuel to understand this crucial segment of Hebrew history and how it applies to our lives of faith now. If you do not want to receive an invitation, or if you would like to join the class for the first time, please contact Cindy Bills at cynthialbills@gmail.com. The teachers are Janet Berrill and Cindy Bills.

Ephesians - Men will be studying Ephesians at 12:30 pm via Google Meet, a wonderful letter of encouragement to strengthen believers. In it, Paul masterfully explains the nature and purpose of the church, the body of Christ. If you have joined Pastor Andy's class in the past, you will receive an email invitation. If you would like to join his class for the first time, please email Pastor Andy at andrew.straubel@gmail.com. Pastor Andy Straubel will be the teacher.

Disciplined for Our Good

By Janet Berrill

It was the end of my day at work, and I hopped in my car to head home. Driving through the parking lot my mind was elsewhere, and I turned out of the lane I was in without looking. Due to COVID-19 there were few cars in the parking lot, and rarely are there any other cars driving in or out when I arrive or leave. Except for this time. As I turned left, I heard a loud car horn and hit the brakes. There was a car coming down the lane that I hadn't seen because I hadn't even looked. Fortunately, we both stopped in time so there was no collision. I backed up and let the other car continue on its way. The driver of the car gave me a dirty look as they drove past, and I acknowledged to myself that I deserved it.

As I drove out of the parking lot, I mulled over what just happened. An idea ran through my head that it wasn't my fault, that it was the other driver's fault (pride trying to rear its ugly head! See December 2020 article). I immediately dismissed that thought and took full responsibility. I admitted to myself that I was distracted and hadn't looked before making the turn. Then I thought about how the other driver must have felt. I'm sure the driver was annoyed at me and probably planned to tell the family that night about the crazy driver in the parking lot that afternoon. I thought about going back and apologizing to the driver but talked myself out of it saying the person had probably already parked and gone into the building.

Hebrews 12:6,10,11 says, "*The Lord disciplines the one He loves. God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in His holiness. Discipline produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*" Why are we disciplined? We are disciplined when we do something that God doesn't want us to do. God knows what is best for us, so if we are doing something He doesn't want us to do, then it is not for our good. Out of His love for us, He disciplines us so that we can receive the good He has for us rather than what we want for ourselves which is bad.

I view the incident in the parking lot as a discipline from God, and I am thankful to Him for it. I was not paying attention as I should have been, and God allowed a situation to occur to show me what I was doing was wrong. His discipline was for my good. On one level, God wants me to be an attentive and safe driver. But on a higher level, God wants me to be obedient in all things. His discipline has a purpose, and when we respond to God's discipline, it leads to sharing in His holiness and a harvest of righteousness and peace.

I believe the severity of God's discipline parallels our response. If we don't listen the first time, then the next time the discipline will be more severe. I listened. As I drove home, I thanked God that I had not hit the other car, and I apologized for not having my mind on my driving. I told God that I wouldn't let it happen again; I would pay better attention and not let my thoughts distract me. I am thankful God loves me enough to discipline me. Now as I drive and obey the traffic laws, I am a safer driver and I please God by obeying Him.

Could God be disciplining you? Has He allowed a situation to occur in your life to get your attention?

Financial Update

(through December 31, 2020)

"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want..."

	Actual	Budget
Income	\$257,508	\$290,000
Expense	\$266,329	\$289,935

The income includes \$32,392 from our PPP loan which has been forgiven. Windsor Chapel has sent \$39,286 to our missionary partners this year. That is 18% of your giving!

If you have any items or information you would like to share in the newsletter, please e-mail:

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