

Well, well, well, here we are again after several weeks of missing. I am having a difficult time getting things done lately. I do apologize for missing so many weeks.

Here is the preview of the week before Christmas Eve. I have not even hounded anyone about going to First English on New Year's Eve. So, this is the last message before Christmas and the New Year. (Maybe I will get my act together before the first of the year.)

There will be poinsettias on the altar for Christmas Eve. If anyone would like to take one or two home, you can put \$10.00 in an envelope for Tim. They will be all red, as in years past.

This week we will be lighting the 3rd candle of the Advent wreath. This is the Sunday of Hope, I think. I hope that everyone will come.

We will have two services on the 24th. The morning service will be the last Sunday in Advent, and the Evening will be the first Sunday of Christmas.

Then comes January. We will have the first Sunday on the 7th of January. It will be the first Sunday after Epiphany. We often use the word epiphany to describe a great idea. It is represented by a light coming on. Our great idea is to love Jesus, put him first in our lives, and look forward to Lent.

Ash Wednesday is on the 14th of February. Does that sound familiar? We have service at 7 p.m. and then you can go out for appetizers and a drink to toast your love. See, I have your whole evening planned. It will be the last party until Easter. At least that is how the early church did things. Birthdays were okay because they were annual events. The theme for Ash Wednesday is "*Eternal Lord of Love, behold your Church.*" So, get ready to show your love for our *Lord*.

Okay, I have had some fun trying to find stories or sayings that will make us think about stuff. This week is stuff you probably didn't know. I had never heard of Cecilia Payne before. She was a remarkable woman who overcame adversity and made some amazing discoveries. I hope that you enjoy her story.

"Since her death in 1979, the woman who discovered what the universe is made of has not so much as received a memorial plaque. Her newspaper obituaries do not mention her greatest discovery. Every high school student knows that Isaac Newton discovered

gravity, that Charles Darwin discovered evolution, and that Albert Einstein discovered the relativity of time. But when it comes to the composition of our universe, the textbooks simply say that the most abundant atom in the universe is hydrogen. And no one ever wonders how we know.”

Jeremy Knowles, discussing the complete lack of recognition Cecilia Payne gets, even today, for her revolutionary discovery. (via alliterate)

OH, WAIT LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT CECILIA PAYNE.

Cecilia Payne’s mother refused to spend money on her college education, so she won a scholarship to Cambridge.

Cecilia Payne completed her studies, but Cambridge wouldn’t give her a degree because she was a woman, so she said to heck with that and moved to the United States to work at Harvard.

Cecilia Payne was the first person ever to earn a Ph.D. in astronomy from Radcliffe College, with what Otto Strauve called “the most brilliant Ph.D. thesis ever written in astronomy.”

Not only did Cecilia Payne discover what the universe is made of, she also discovered what the sun is made of (Henry Norris Russell, a fellow astronomer, is usually given credit for discovering that the sun’s composition is different from the Earth’s, but he came to his conclusions four years later than Payne—after telling her not to publish).

Cecilia Payne is the reason we know basically anything about variable stars (stars whose brightness as seen from earth fluctuates). Literally, every other study on variable stars is based on her work.

Cecilia Payne was the first woman to be promoted to full professor from within Harvard, and is often credited with breaking the glass ceiling for women in the Harvard science department and in astronomy, as well as inspiring entire generations of women to take up science.

Cecilia Payne is awesome and everyone should know her.

Merry Christmas,

Shalom my friends.

Sunday Preview

December 17, 2023

“Rejoice always,” begins the reading from 1st Thessalonians. Isaiah and the psalmist make clear that God is turning our mourning into laughter and shouts of joy. “All God’s children got a robe,” go the words of a spiritual. It is not so much a stately, formal, pressed outfit as it is a set of party clothes, clothes we are happy to wear. We receive that robe in baptism, and in worship we gather for a foretaste of God’s party.

THE LESSONS

FIRST READING: Isaiah 61: 1-11

Please be seated.

¹The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;
²to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;
³to provide for those who mourn in Zion — to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.
⁴They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.
⁵Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines;
⁶but you shall be called priests of the LORD, you shall be named ministers of our God; you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory.
⁷Because their shame was double, and dishonor was proclaimed as their lot, therefore they shall possess a double portion; everlasting joy shall be theirs.
⁸For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
⁹Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.
¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
¹¹For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

PSALM: Psalm 126

Read responsively

¹When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, then were we like those who dream.

²**Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy.**

³Then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

⁴**The LORD has done great things for us, and we are glad indeed.**

⁵Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses of the Negev.

⁶**Those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy.**

⁷Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.

SECOND READING: 1st Thessalonians 5: 16-24

¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise the words of prophets, ²¹but test everything; hold fast to what is good; ²²abstain from every form of evil.

²³May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

GOSPEL: John 1: 6-8, 19-28

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ¹⁹This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"

²⁰He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." ²¹And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." ²²Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,

"Make straight the way of the Lord," as the prophet Isaiah said.

²⁴Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" ²⁶John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal."

²⁸This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

A With hope and expectation, we offer our prayers for the Church, the World, and all who await God's day of restoration.

A brief silence.

A Fill our mouths with laughter and our tongues with shouts of joy as we bear witness to the great things you have done. Give your Church a spirit of gladness as we gather and as we are sent. Merciful God,

C **receive our prayer.**

A Let the trees of the field sing your praise. Protect forests, orchards, rainforests, and all wooded areas from disease and deforestation. Keep us grateful for their gifts of oxygen, food, shade, and shelter. Merciful God,

C receive our prayer.

A You love justice and promise your favor to those who are oppressed, brokenhearted, and incarcerated. Grant wisdom and compassion to those who work for public safety and all who work within prisons, jails, and courts, that mercy may increase and violence wither away. Merciful God,

C receive our prayer.

A Give us strength to pray for our World without ceasing and provoke us toward love and good deeds for all who are in need especially Michael, Niki, Aurora, and those who are in our hearts. Provide for all without adequate housing, food, employment, or access to health care. Empower us as helpers and advocates. Merciful God,

C receive our prayer.

A Open our hearts to those who serve as truth-tellers in our church and in our society. Bless leaders in church and society in their task of proclamation. Amplify voices of peacemakers, advocates, and especially those whose voices are ignored or marginalized. Merciful God,

C receive our prayer.

A With gratitude we rejoice in the saints *especially* Katharina von Bora Luther, who witnessed to your life in all circumstances, in whom your Spirit was not quenched, even in death. Through them, teach us always to hold fast to what is good. Merciful God,

C receive our prayer.

Here other petitions may be offered.

Suggestions

**World Hunger, World Health, World Peace
Child Welfare in Underdeveloped Countries
Mass shootings and killings in U. S. cities and schools
Preservation of Environment
U. S. Economy
Deaths of law officers
Ukraine Conflict
Acceptance of differences**

P We offer our spoken prayers and those held in our hearts trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

C Amen.



CONTACT THE PASTOR

Communications requesting pastoral care should be made directly to Pastor Larry Baker, (614) 257-8560.

COMING EVENTS AT ZION

SUNDAY DISCUSSIONS BEFORE CHURCH We



have Sunday morning Bible discussions every Sunday before Church. We meet at 9:45 each week. We are going to be reading a book by C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* and discussing it. I am looking forward to the new format. Please come and bring your Bible and your favorite morning beverage with you.

DECIEMBER 24th will be the 4th Sunday of Advent. That evening we will have our traditional Candlelight Service. We hope that you will all attend both services.

DECEMBER 31ST as we all know is New Year's Eve. It is also the 5th Sunday of the month. We will be celebrating the final Sunday of the calendar year with First English. If you are one who purchases donations, you might want to start picking them up soon. Jon should have the sign-up sheet ready this week or next. We will say Happy New Year to many who will not be joining us at First English on Christmas Eve.

VILLAGE EVENTS

Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays 9:00-10:00 AM Here at the Community Center they are instructor –led Workouts. Want some exercise this is where to find it.

FINDING US ON THE INTERNET Some of you may know that the church has a wonderful website that was designed by Susie Taylor. She does a wonderful job updating it every week. Susie also has her own page on Facebook that I have referred to on several occasions. There are many items on her site that are great for thoughts of the day. It is [Stix-N-Stonez](#). Check it out. However a new blogger on the scene is Alex Meister. Find him at "[christianameister.wixsite.com/blog](#)". Alex has posted many of his essays on different topics relating to Christianity. Some we have discussed in our Sunday Bible Studies. I invite you to check out all of these sites. Then come to Bible Study and discuss your feelings.

PRAYERS



Aurora is finished with her chemo treatments. Please continue to keep her and her parents and Grandma in your prayers. (Possibly the best way to reach Aurora and her family is through Margret, 8461 Silverbell Ave., Galloway, 43119.)

We are also praying for Nicole Biler Robinette, (Tim's daughter). She is on the transplant list for a new heart. We pray that this will happen soon. She is currently at home but will be called back to the hospital soon until an organ becomes available. Tim says that she is in good spirits. Keep her; her husband, Stephen; and her parents and family in your prayers.

Please keep these people in your prayers as well: Michael Koch; Wesley and JoAnn Porter; Mike and Donna Toy, and all of those who are suffering from diseases or other health issues and their families. Please remember all of our shut-ins and sick, especially Arlene Castor.

The address for Michael and the Koch family is 224 West Romany Loop, Beverly Hills, FL 34465. Michael has moved to *The Grove*, a facility that is much closer to his home. You can get updates from Linda at

www.caringbridge.org/visit/michaelkoch2?fbclid Keep all of the Koch's in your prayers.

If you hear or know of anyone who should be on our Prayer List, please let me know, my number is 614-398-6302

Letter from the Bishop

Leaders Embody Christian Character

If I were to say the word “Dust” to 5 different people, I might get 5 different perceptions of the word.

The attentive housecleaner would think about the film of dust that accumulates on table and furniture tops.

The rose grower would think about dusting the roses to protect them from blight.

The detective show enthusiast would think about what the crime scene specialist does in looking for fingerprints.

The farmer in the Midwest would think about the plane flying over the field treating the crops.

The theologian would think of the Ash Wednesday imperative that “we are dust and to dust we shall return.”

All perfectly good definitions of dust. To have a conversation about dust, we would need a common definition to use to keep us on the same page.

Any time a word is used, it should be defined in a way that makes clear how the word is being used. This is called an Operational Definition.

When we speak about character, there is also the need to have an operational definition of the word.

Character, for this blog, is the nature of a person that shapes what they do and say.

We are going to be even more specific. I am writing about Christian character.

Operationally defined, Christian character is what people do and say when who they are has been shaped by the Word of God through an encounter with Jesus Christ.

Leaders in faith communities embody Christian character. In doing so, they create an environment where mission can thrive.

The Cultures of Character and Personality

There was a shift in America from the Culture of Character to the Culture of Personality at the turn of the century (1800 to 1900’s). Susan Cain, in her book *Quiet*, refers to an observation made by cultural historian Warren Susman. This shift from the Culture of Character to a Culture of Personality represents a change in the way leaders are asked to lead.¹

In the Culture of Character, the leader was someone who was, “serious, disciplined, and honorable.” The public impression of the person was not nearly as important as what the person did in private.

With the advent of the Culture of Personality, leaders started paying attention to how other people saw them. It was a shift from doing what is right to looking good in front of others. Being “bold and entertaining” were seen as an important part of a person’s identity and required the person to be a performer.²

Comparing written guides for character of the time with “personality-driven advice manuals³,” Susman noted the attributes outlined for each. For the character guides, a person was “described by words like citizenship, duty, work, golden deeds, honor, reputation, morals, manners, integrity.” In the personality advice manuals, the qualities of “magnetic, fascinating, stunning, attractive, glowing, dominant, forceful, and energetic” were lifted up.⁴

I think it is important to consider the differences between a Culture of Character and a Culture of Personality. In recent years, leadership in the church has been based heavily upon the Culture of Personality. Larger than life

personalities have dominated the podcasts, book deals, and the pool of keynote speakers considered for clergy and lay leader training.

When I think about leadership, I think about the Culture of Character—but a particular kind of character. When I think of the character in leaders of churches, I think specifically about Christian Character. This type of character is distinct from any other definition of character.

What Makes Christian Character Different?

It is commonly assumed that good deeds make for a good person. Most certainly – at times – we can trace one’s good deeds to a motivation to do what is right and good. We are also aware that a person can do good things out of less than honorable intentions. Martin Luther understood this. Luther would tell us that good deeds don’t make a good person, but a good person does good deeds. In modern parlance, “Sitting in a church building doesn’t make me any more of a Christian than sitting in a garage makes me a car.”

Instead of assuming that a person’s deeds will shape who they are, we assert that something has happened to the person first; the person is changed from that encounter; and as a result, the actions of that person are shaped by who they have become.

For Christians, the *death of Jesus on the cross* for the forgiveness of sin and the promise of eternal life is the life-changing moment. It washes over us in Holy Baptism. It satisfies our hunger and thirst in Holy Communion. It permeates our minds, hearts, and souls as it comes to us in the proclamation of the Word of God. “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,” we are changed.⁵

Jesus shouted to the dead Lazarus to come forth from the grave. Lazarus came forth and was unbound from the tyranny of death. The Word of God is God’s bold announcement that death has no power over us, that God loves us unconditionally, that God calls us to share the gifts of life with others, and that God will sustain us in all our endeavors.

No moral system or methodology for making meaning in the world can have that impact on us. That is why Christian Character is different from other kinds of character.

Christian Character

Having a Christian character is to be human once again, living in the power, grace, and gift of life that comes from God through Jesus Christ.

Pastor John Strommen writes that for Christians, any conversation about being human starts “with our relationship to God.”⁶

This relationship with God tells us three things about our lives, according to Pastor Strommen:

1. God’s breath filled dust and brought us to life;
2. God’s breath sustains us; and,
3. God’s breath gives us a hopeful future.⁷

Christian character is marked by New Life; God Sustaining Us; and God Giving Us Hope.

Leadership with Christian character embodies those marks of God’s new life, sustenance, and hope.

The End of Christian Leadership

Too often, when we hear the word END, we think “being concluded”.

I invite you to consider another definition of the word END, that is, what is the *purpose* of what one is doing? When we talk about the END of Christian leadership, we are speaking about the purpose of Christian leadership.

Too often, Christian leadership is described as having a toolkit with the right tools at our disposal. In this scenario, the END of Christian leadership is seen as using that toolkit wisely to meet a proscribed set of measurable objectives. The END of that type of leadership is success and accomplishment. It starts with gathering the skill set necessary to meet those objectives and knowing how to best use the tools.

While it is important to develop one’s leadership skills, Christian leadership does not start with gaining a skill set, but starts with Christian Character.

Christian leadership comes from the core of who we are. Who we are is shaped by our encounter with Jesus. As we encounter the grace and mercy of God, we are changed. Just as when someone we adore says “I love you to us” and we are different, hearing God’s promise of love through Jesus changes us.

C. Kavin Rowe writes, “Leading an institution as a Christian is an adventure. It is anything but boring, and it is anything but easy.”⁸ To further stress the challenging nature of Christian leadership, Rowe states, leading an institution “requires from us all that we have to give, really, in the sense that it demands that we think about the Lord and that we behave in ways that show that we think about the Lord.”⁹ He describes this kind of leadership as that which both gives to us and demands from us. We can find joy in leading as a Christian. Giving thanks for that joy, we also realize that Christian leadership “calls forth a kind of seriousness about repentance and forgiveness and sin and the texture of Christian life.”¹⁰

This type of leadership described by Professor Rowe is only possible if we have received the gift of new life, sustenance, and hope from God.

As Christian leaders, we see ourselves and the people we lead through the prism of Jesus and his death on the cross. The work of Jesus changes everything. The prism through which we then see each circumstance in which we find ourselves as Christian leaders is that of seeing “all those things in the light of Christ.”¹¹

In a relationship with God, Christian leaders bring to their context the capacity to focus on what is life-giving, what is life-sustaining, and what gives hope to life. That is the END of Christian leadership.

The Fundamental Background of Christian Leadership

At the forefront of every Christian leader is their Christian character given them by God. Christian leaders are shaped by God’s gift of new life sustenance, and hope.

Christian character is also what shapes the background through which all things are viewed. All the challenges, demands, and tasks of leadership are received through the background lens of new life, sustenance, and hope. Being a Christian “leader is about cultivating the right kind of background.”¹²

Stand in the busy food court of a local mall. You will be overwhelmed by more stimuli than you could ever process. Not surprising, you will find yourself focusing on that which is familiar. For my son, that would be

Auntie Anne's Pretzels. He can recognize the colors and patterns for the vendor, the smell of the pretzels, and the memory of his last time eating at Auntie Anne's. His background with this vendor gives him a framework that allows him to focus amidst the plethora of stimuli.

As C. Kavin Rowe states, the background we use to recognize patterns helps to “reduce the appearance of complexity by screening out certain things and highlighting others, and they make the world appear to us in specific and manageable ways.”¹³

In the book, “Practical Wisdom: The Right Way to Do the Right Thing,” authors Barry Schwartz and Kenneth Sharpe use the example of a stop sign. When seeing a stop sign, we don't go through a series of conscious questions and answers that lead to a logical conclusion. We don't say, it's red, octagonal, and has the word Stop on it. We simply see the sign and say, “It's a stop sign.”¹⁴ Our background allows us to draw an almost immediate conclusion.

Rowe uses the example of the stop sign to speak about the importance of a person's background. When a person's background is shaped by the presence of God's new life, sustenance, and hope, they gain the capacity to see, hear, and recognize the presence of God and the activity of God in their lives. The church's mission is built upon that reality.

Professor Rowe uses the concept of background to speak about Christian leadership, “Christ shaped leadership is about developing a fundamentally Christian background in our institution or organization.”¹⁵ Leaders operate from that fundamental background and strive to shape a community of faith that functions based on a Christian background. The qualities of that Christian community are God's new life, sustenance, and hope.

13 Features of a Christian Leadership

A community that is shaped by God's new life, sustenance, and hope will allow room for leadership that makes mission thrive. What might that leadership look like? I conclude with 13 Features of Christian Leadership whose background is in God's new life, sustenance, and hope.

Professor Rowe outlines these 13 features of Christian leadership. Christian leadership is made manifest in:

1. Humor: Laughter is a sign that we refuse to give in to brokenness.
2. Scriptural Imagination: Learning to read the Bible well and developing a scriptural way of living requires slow reading, sustained attention, and community.
3. Resilience: It is not necessarily toughness, but a lived hope, a way to keep getting up again that has its roots in God's permanent faithfulness.
4. Failure: Christians need leaders—and institutions—to train us in how to fail.
5. Connections: Christian leaders cannot compartmentalize their lives because Christ is the Lord of all—so all things must be seen in relation to Christ.
6. Silence: In this speedy world of words, leaders must learn how—and when—to use them.
7. Success: Recognizing and not denying the reality of failure and death.
8. Listening: Knowing how to listen well, which demands the ability to pay active attention while avoiding distraction and to relate what is being said to its context.
9. Hierarchy: Wisdom in shaping a hierarchy toward a community's public witness and the importance of Christian character for leaders.
10. Institutions: institutions are where Christians become Christians. And leaders, those in power, are the ones who shape institutional life.

11. Power: Found in hope, living out our lives of hope, we participate in God's remaking of creation in Christ.
12. Power of Images: leaders think about the place of images in their life and work, noticing that images are powerful, can be idols, and can create the space for growth in discipleship.
13. Neighborliness: Strengthen the role the church plays as the place where our families and distant connections come together.¹⁶

This is relative long, but I found it interesting and thought you might also. I thought about splitting it into two Sundays, but next Sunday will be kind of busy. Take two or three settings and read it. She made some good points. It is nice to have a Bishop in our District who is getting out there and we actually know who she is instead of going to synod meetings and when the Bishop stands, everyone says WHO IS THAT?

*Hope to see you soon.
God bless you all this week.*



Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers

***1 Rejoice, rejoice, believers,
and let your lights appear;
the evening is advancing,
and darker night is near.
The bridegroom is arising
and soon is drawing nigh.
Up, pray and watch and wrestle;
at midnight comes the cry.***

***4 Our hope and expectation,
O Jesus, now appear;
arise, O Sun so longed for,
o'er this benighted sphere.***

*With hearts and hands uplifted,
we plead, O Lord, to see
the day of earth's redemption
that sets your people free!*

Text: Laurentius Laurenti, 1660-1722; tr. Sarah B. Findlater, 1823-1907