

“THE CORNERSTONE”

OCTOBER – NOVEMBER 2020

First Presbyterian Church PC (U.S.A.)
206 E. 20th Street P. O. Box 444
Falls City, Nebraska 68355
402-245-2650 – <http://www.fallscitypres.org>

Worship Time: 10:45 am

Reflections from Pastor Rick—

Spirit of the Living God, disrupt our comfort and interrupt our schedules. Awaken our minds and shake up our hearts. By your Word of love and hope and wonder. In your many names we pray. Amen

Gospel Reading John 11: 32 *When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”*

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of our God endures forever.

Bless This Mess: What Can Make Us Whole?

O God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

The Mary our text is referring to is Mary from Bethany, a small village near Jerusalem, and she’s the Mary who has two siblings: Martha and Lazarus. (Mary was a very common name in those days, which is why there’s a few floating around the gospels. Mary and Martha send word to Jesus that his friend, Lazarus is ill and may be dying. Jesus seems to take his time. When Jesus finally gets to Bethany from Jerusalem, just a few miles away, Lazarus has been dead for four days. And here we are. Mary comes up to him and says, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

How do you think she said that? With pain? Anger? Lament? Blame? I imagine she said it, looking him right in the eye, knowing very well who he is, pointing a finger at his chest, and through clenched

First Presbyterian
Church
P O Box 444
Falls City, NE 68355

teeth said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Some of the anger and pain and lament has been on my heart this week.

Another week, another compilation of videos from cell phones, another list of names, of Black men shot and killed or paralyzed. I read these stories. I see the videos. I hear the testimonies of families, and I pray, not with my hands clasped, but with a finger pointed, saying, “Lord, if you had been here at this convenience store in Lafayette, Louisiana, Trayford Pellerin, would not have died.” “Lord, if you had been here, in this bedroom in Louisville, Kentucky, Breonna Taylor would not have died.” “Lord, if you had been here, on the concrete of this Minneapolis street, George Floyd would not have died.” “Lord, if you had been here, in this bedroom in Miami, Florida, Atatiana Jefferson would not have died.” “Lord, if you had been in Sacramento, California, Stephon Clark would not have been shot 20 times and killed for apparently holding a gun. God, you know it was only a cell phone. “Lord, if you had been in Falcon Heights, Minnesota, Philando Castille would not have died.” “Lord, if you had been here, Ahmaud Arbery, Trayvon Martin, Freddie Gray, Michael Brown...and so many others not caught on camera...would not have died.”

As Mary, the sister of Lazarus comes to Jesus, with anger and blame and sting in her words, I imagine Letetra Widman, the sister of Jacob Blake, sent chills and a charge to all who watch it. I imagine her coming to Jesus, saying, “Lord, if you had been here in Kenosha, Wisconsin, Jacob Blake wouldn’t have been shot multiple times in front of three of his sons and been paralyzed.”

Brothers and Sisters, these past few weeks and months have been tough ones, like so many other weeks, as the long overdue racial reckoning sweeps across the American consciousness. And for me, I shake my head. My faith in the systems I grew up believing were just and good. My faith in my fellow human beings and even my faith in a God of love brought me to my knees, asking how can we as a people come together to solve the problems we face. From my place of privilege, even I have a hole in my heart, and I can’t imagine how so many of our brothers and sisters of color, are feeling and have been feeling for generations. What can make us whole? What can lead to healing and wholeness?

Mary and Martha felt so helpless - all they could do was sit and wait and hope that Jesus would be loving and faithful and would care. Yet, he doesn’t show up until their brother, Lazarus, had already been dead for four days.

Thanksgiving Food Collection

The area Fellowship of Churches will not be holding the Community Thanksgiving Service this year. However, food baskets will be packed and delivered as they have in the past. Please bring your donations to the church on the first three Sundays of November (November 1, 8 and 15th). Bring items that will be helpful in preparing Thanksgiving dinners! All donations will be taken to the packing site. Thank you for taking part.

+++++++COMMUNITY NEWS+++++++

Red Cross Blood Drive

The Red Cross Blood Mobile will be in Falls City at Prichard Auditorium on Thursday, October 1 from 12 noon-6 pm and Friday, October 2, 9 am-3 pm. Please either call for appointments (402-245-3227) or go on-line to redcrossblood.org **Thank you for your support!**

HELP NEEDED!

The local SENCA office is reaching out asking for volunteers to assist with the Food Bank of Lincoln distribution in Falls City. The hours are usually 11 am to 1 pm. Distributions will be held on Monday, Oct 19th, Thursday, Nov 19th, and December 8th. Four to five volunteers are needed each time. If you can help out, please call - Sherry Huddleston, Family Development Specialist at the SENCA office (402) 245-5284.

FALL COMMUNITY BENEFIT SUPPER

St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, 20th & Towle Street, are having an Old-Fashioned Roast Beef Supper on October 4th from 5pm to 7pm. Meals will be carry-out or delivery only with a freewill offering. Funds from the supper will be supplemented by Thrivent Action Team and are used to support community service projects. To reserve a meal, please call the church office (402) 245-3828 or Elysia McGill (402) 801-0521 by October 1st.

So, what will your role be? Where will you be as God blesses this mess? And we know, God will bless it. We worship the God who heard Abel's blood crying out from the ground, who brought the Israelites out of enslavement, who provided manna in the desert, who breathed life into dry bones, who called Lazarus out of the tomb, who conquered death after state-sanctioned crucifixion, who even redeemed the worst terrorist the early church had ever known, Saul, and called him to be Paul, one of our tradition's greatest teachers. This is the Good News we need in these days. This is the message of hope we yearn for. This is redemption and a call to righteousness. This is the blessing in the mess. This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the name of the triune God of faith, hope, and love.
Amen, Amen, Hallelujah, Amen!

Recommended Reading

Finding God's Life for My Will by Mike Donehey

Talking with God by Adam Weber

Indelible by Kristen Heitzmann

Blessed, Broken, Given by Glenn Packiam

Forever Friday by Timothy Lewis

The White Devil's Daughter by Julia Flynn Siler

Climate Justice by Mary Robinson

The White Devil's Daughters by Julia Flynn Siler

Climate Justice by Mary Robinson

If you have any book(s) you have enjoyed and would recommend, please email to presbyterian@sentco.net

ATTENTION NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

All newsletter articles for the December-January newsletter will be due to the office by **November 16th**. If you have any information you would like printed for your group or activity to be published, please submit them in written form. Keep everyone informed by submitting an article! Thank you for marking this *important* date on your calendar!

The newsletter is printed with the information we have at the time of printing. Please check with the appropriate person(s) on changes to dates and times of events.

A LITTLE TITHING HUMOR!

In Vegas, people can tithe by dropping casino chips in the offertory. At the end of the weekend, there is a Brother that goes around to all the casinos to cash them out and make a deposit. He's known as the Chip Monk!

+++++++PARISH NEWS+++++++

Daylight Savings Ends

Daylight savings ends on November 1, 2020. Remember to fall back, get an extra hour of sleep, but come to church on time!

Diaper Closet & Prayer Shawl Ministry

The Diaper Closet is in operation and would like all to spread the word! Additional volunteers are always welcome! Please consider donating a couple of hours to this wonderful project!

Readers for Service

We are needing readers to read scripture during church services. You can choose your Sunday(s) and the readings will be provided to you early in the week. A volunteer list would be nice to develop and allow for more persons to be a part of the service. Please let us know if you are willing to help out. Thanks.

PILL BOTTLE COLLECTION UPDATE

We have delivered our first three kitchen bags of clean pill bottles. This delivery went through the Presbyterian Women but future deliveries will likely go directly from us to the Mathew 25 Ministries.

The requirements remain the same:

- Have an all plastic lid
- Labels must be removed leaving no glue or residue
- Be washed in very hot water and dish soap
- Be rinsed and dried thoroughly
- Have lids on clean, dried bottles
- Clean, recapped bottles be placed in large Ziplock bags marked "CLEAN BOTTLES"

Some suggestions are:

1. Take the labels off as soon as possible after the prescription has ended
2. Run them through the dish washer with bottles on top rack posts and the caps in silverware baskets
3. Use rubbing alcohol, fingernail polish remover or GOO GONE if needed to remove stubborn glue

Place bags of clean bottles in baskets at church or in the church office. We have collected over four kitchen sized bags of bottles. Let's keep it up!

Thank you,
The Session

Presbyterian Women

PW's 2021 Churchwide Gathering, August 5-8, 2021. The PW Churchwide Gathering is now less than a year away! WOOHOO! St. Louis, MO is the place to be inspired, energized, and challenged; to grow in one's faith and to learn from the many knowledgeable speakers. Events will be held at the Grand Marriott and St. Louis Convention Center. Registration books will be available in the next few weeks and registration begins in January 2021! Continue to dream and make plans to attend!

What could make Martha and Mary whole? What could heal their pain, their hearts, their faith? "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

We read a little further in John's gospel. Not far, just the next few verses. When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." And Jesus wept. It doesn't feel like much, sometimes. Yet, I'm glad John writes on. I'm glad John continues the story, and we see in the anger and the lament and the brokenness of Martha and Mary, Jesus is disturbed and moved and begins to weep. Maybe the first step of beginning to feel whole is recognizing that Jesus weeps with us, Jesus hurts when we hurt. God came near to us as Jesus Christ to know what it's like to be human, to feel these feelings, and even to suffer pain and rejection so, God can say to us, at our lowest moments, "I've been there. I know how much it hurts." Jesus knows what it's like for tears to fall down our cheeks because he too, has wept, over the pain of losing someone he loves. Brothers and Sisters, in case you're also carrying this pain and anger and sadness and doubt, please remember, what can begin to make us whole is knowing, Jesus weeps with us. Jesus cries alongside the families and friends and neighborhoods that have felt the pain of systemic racism and lived in fear of their lives for far, far too long.

As John's gospel continues, we see that Lazarus is brought back to life. And while the names I mentioned at the beginning will not have breath in their lungs again on this earth, I try to believe for the sake of healing and wholeness and faith and hope, God will bring new life out of such death and destruction and deception. However, here's the kicker, our wholeness, as individuals, as a community, and as a society, doesn't just depend on Jesus doing all the work. We are called to take action, my friends. Take what action you can. Learn, read, protest, speak up, speak out, challenge and push yourself and reach out to people you love to let them know they're not alone. Our God is in the business of bringing death back into the beauty of life, but that business will not work without us. Find ways to share love and beauty and grace and challenge toward yourself and one another in these difficult days, because God will bless this mess and make us whole, but we're called to have a role to play in it. Our God is a creative God. We are the children of God. Our DNA is God's. God expects us to be creative in our response, as well. We have been chosen by God. As such, we need to practice the loving kindness which is in our hearts given to us by God.