



JANUARY 2021



From The Pastor's Pen
~ Pastor Sarah Flack

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:23-25)

The month of January is experienced in different ways by different people: some are excited for the start of the new year, some are just glad to have survived the previous year, some miss the joy of Christmas and are already counting down for December 25th. J.D. and I are a little bit of all three--we're glad to have survived 24 days of moving the "Elf on a Shelf," excited to see what this year will bring (we're optimists!), and haven't started counting down yet...but we might when we finally put away the Christmas decorations!

January can also be an in-between space, a time to rest and reflect, to consider the lessons from the past and to remember why we have hope for the future.

Long before we were born, a man named Daniel in a far-off land learned that he could trust God, and he praised God with these words:

...May the name of God be praised forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him. He changes the times and seasons; He removes kings and establishes kings. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. (Daniel 2:20-21)

These ancient words of praise remain true today; the God of Daniel who proved Himself trustworthy so many years ago is just as trustworthy today, just as interested in the daily lives of His people today, and just as wise and powerful today. I am thankful we serve a God who will always be good and faithful and that I can praise Him in Spirit and in truth with the words of those who came before me.

As a church, Christmas brought some new experiences--masks and Christmas Eve reservations, of course, but also two Christmas Eve services, a Blue Christmas service, and a wonderful group of online friends who faithfully worship with us each week. We have much to be thankful for as a church.

In looking ahead, my hope is that we can continue to find creative ways to be the church and love our communities--yes, communities, because we have people worshipping with us from near and far--in the next few months. If you have an outreach idea, service project idea, or just an idea of some way to show love that we can do together as a church, let me know--I consider it a privilege and joy to help people bring their ideas to life. We have all that we need in Christ Jesus; may we show toward one another the mercy and grace and love that He has so richly given to us.



Grief Ministry
~ *Laura Schafer*

Is It Wrong For Christians To Grieve?

Often when we are grieving people share the following verses with us:

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” Philippians 4:4

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds” James 1:2

The answer is NO, it is not wrong for a Christian to cry, weep or mourn.

In Isaiah we read the following description of Jesus,

“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” Isaiah 53:3

Before we heal we need to accept that the pain is real, feel the pain and work through it. God understands this and promises to comfort us.

There are many examples of grieving throughout the bible; take a look at Abraham, Jacob, Job and the Psalms. Even Jesus grieved when he heard about Lazarus. (John 11:1-44)

Jesus wept. (John 11:33) Jesus grieved and was without sin. Sadness, sorrow and tears do not mean we have lost hope and our faith in Jesus.

These examples and more in scripture show us it is okay to be sad and weep. In these examples we see how everyone expressed their grief differently. Jesus went to a desolate place; Job had his friends around him, Jacob said he would grieve his son until he died, while David got up, changed his clothes and went to the house of the Lord. It is okay to grieve your own way.

We need to be mindful that while it is okay to grieve, it is important not to sin in our grief. Feelings themselves are neither good nor bad, they are part of being human, however we must set our mind on things above to avoid our feelings turning into wrong attitudes and actions. (Colossians 3:1-3)

How do we go from grieving to joy again? Healing takes time and work. Time spent in His Word, time spent in prayer and worship, time spent doing the next right thing, AND time spent grieving. (Isaiah 53:4-5 and Isaiah 61:1-3)

If you are grieving today, pray, pour your heart out to Our Heavenly Father who loves you. He cares for you and wants to help you find peace and joy. His peace, comfort and joy are available to all who seek him.

Elder Ministry

~ *Dean Wilkie*

Happy New Year saints of the Lord:

We've weathered through some snowstorms and we've made it through our holidays, the tail end of 2020 wasn't much different than 3/4 of the year had been. But God is in control! We may not always understand the reasons why things are, and that challenges our faith, but whether we possess good faith or little faith, it's not about how much we have but to whom we place our faith in. Let's reflect back on what has been and acknowledge what He's carried us through. Now continue to move forward with our eyes on the prize, moving forward in God's purpose and calling on our lives. Looking forward, trusting in His leading, for He is the good shepherd and He leads His flock with gentleness, as He leads the young. A quick look at David's Psalm 23 reaffirms how the shepherd tends his sheep. The Lord of the ages, the God of creation is OUR shepherd (of those who believe), how could we have need (our want list is always long). We lay in His provision, he leads me beside rivers of rest in peace and gives us rest. He directs us in the way of righteousness. Though we walk thru difficult times, distressing times - fear not - for He is there with rod (to rescue/protect) and staff (to guide), this is our hope and comfort. His goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our life. The Hebrew verb for that word "follow", the meaning is much stronger - as to pursue, to hunt after by the loving nurture of our shepherd.

This is our promise; this is what we have to cling to. By placing our faith in the Rock of the ages, we know where we stand in these uncertain times. When everything else looks like the tempest is about to overtake our boat, look up and cry out to the Lord! But Saints, here is the catch; if we think we'll perish like Peter, inquire of Lord Jesus. When He bids us "come, care, do" - our part is obedience. For Peter to have that 'walk on water' moment, it was necessary to respond to Jesus command "come". Peter walked on water as long as he kept his focus on Jesus and not the circumstances around him.

We are in a new calendar year, the old one is gone, this is like having a new day to start over with no mistakes in it yet! So now is the time to nurture your faith until you have your get out of the boat moment; it may be this year. Walk in a way worthy of your calling, and when your faith is challenged have the courage to rise up from the situation and walk above it. But, to do this successfully we need to keep our focus on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

Be in God's word, know the God you serve and the promises that are ours. Walk in fellowship with Him, and be blessed this month and in the new year.

Breaking The Chains

~ *Ken and Michelle Kavanagh*

12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

(Philippians 4:12-13)

As we move into the new year, thoughts of change always come to mind. Every year at this time, people make New Year's resolutions because they feel the need to change something in their life. They want to change their appearance, frame of mind, eating habits, social life, family life, the organization of their home, etc. They become tired of the "old" and desire for things to be different. Sometimes change is needed for our health, our homes, our finances, our relationships, our work and our spiritual life and that's a good thing! But we must ask ourselves a question. Why do we always feel that desire to change every new year? Though the new year can represent fresh and new, I think if we dig a little deeper, it may sometimes have to do more with our lack of contentment with who we are and what we have, and our commitment to stick with what we begin.

Contentment is simply being satisfied with what you have, where you are and most importantly...who you are. Although changes may have to come depending on your situation, your current situation will not bring you down because your eyes are fixed on Christ.

Commitment is an agreement or a pledge to do something in the future and to complete it. We often make New Year's resolutions but fail to stay committed to them. This is where we have to ask ourselves "why"?

So in this new year, take some time and ask yourself if you are truly content with what God has given to you and who you are in Him. Then ask yourself why it may be hard for you to follow through with commitment. If you notice in the first paragraph, I had listed "spiritual life" last as things that we seek to change. Many times it is one of the last things on our list to change when it should be the first thing we review and make changes in. Seek God for answers and ask Him to examine your heart, to help you to be content and to be committed to change and in finishing whatever we begin.

*7 I have fought the good fight,
I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.
(2 Timothy 4:7)*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Men's Ministry**

The Men's Ministry meets the first Saturday of the month at the church. The next fellowship will be held Saturday, February 6th at 9:00am. This is a great time for the men to get together, have a bite to eat and share the Word. For more information, see JD Flack.

- **Semi Annual Meeting**

The Semi Annual Meeting will be held on Sunday, January 24th after service. As the meeting will be right after the service, you are welcome to bring a snack for yourself to eat in your seat.

- **Tuesday Bible Study**

We will be starting a new six-week (no homework) bible study called, "Breaking Free From Fear", beginning Tuesday, February 2nd at 12:30pm.

Contact the church office for more information and to reserve your seat.

Winter Weather Cancellations

It is the policy of River Community Church if the Thousand Islands School District closes school or cancels after school activities due to weather conditions, ALL activities at River Community Church will be canceled.

River Community Church will also notify you of this decision in the following ways:

- Mass email to all members who have a current email address on file.
- Facebook and webpage postings
- Newzjunky & WWNY TV
- Mars Hill Radio

Notifications will be done the same way, if at any time we need to go virtual due to Covid.

Happy Birthday!!!

If you see the following, be sure to wish them a very Happy Birthday!

Jehoshphat Collins	01/02
Michelle Kavanagh	01/03
David Collins	01/24
Barbara Dier	01/28

