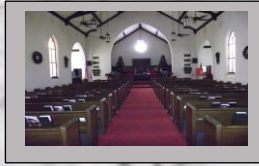


FIRST FRUITS

WE GIVE OUR FIRST FRUITS

BECAUSE HE GAVE US HIS ONLY SON

March 2021



Volume 24 No. 3

First Things First...

If It Happens...

"Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego answered... 'If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace...but if not...we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.'

From: Daniel 3:16-18

[This article is an adaptation of the "Pastoral Report – 2020" first published in First Lutheran's 2020 Annual Report.]
2020. Quite a year to remember – or forget! Surely, none of us has ever experienced such turmoil and uncertainty. The protests for civil rights in the 1950's and 1960's brought about positive changes in our nation, despite the violence against some of the protestors. The peace protests against the Vietnam War also encountered violence at times. Both of these movements witnessed some destruction of property, some disruption of daily "normalcy," and a level of disobedience to law and order fostering condemnation by authorities and the general populace. The passion and commitment by the core participants of those protest movements were unquestionable. But in this past year, the upheaval caused by the combination of the "woke" movement and the COVID-19 pandemic initiated a level of fear and anxiety never before felt first-hand by most contemporary citizens of the United States. The result is either an indelible memory or an experience everyone wants to forget.

The effects of a time of such discord and mistrust spilled over into much of life. Riots, looting and destruction, often falsely cloaked as protest marches, caused economic chaos in many communities and created fear in countless citizens of our nation. The mounting death toll and attendant controversies in defining deaths as COVID or not, the decimation of the American economy, while a mounting cry for socialism threatened the substance of capitalism each contributed to a general foreboding concern. The presidential campaign devolved into acrid and vicious personal attacks. The animosity between the major political parties created a static agenda which prevented the government from accomplishing much good for the people or the infrastructure of the nation. The focus of both the executive and legislative branches brought attack-after-attack-after-attack. It prompted many to proclaim with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

And in despair I bowed my head,
"There is no peace on earth," I said,
"For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, goodwill to men."

For those who trust the Lord, much can be learned through studying Daniel 3 in the account of the Three Young Men and the Fiery Furnace. The story is well known. Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful man in the world at that time, deemed himself worthy of worship. He set up a huge sculpture of himself and commanded that everyone bow in worship before the statue. Failure to comply with his edict was punishable by death in a "burning fiery furnace." But three young Jewish men refused to bow before the golden idol cast in the likeness of the king. They were brought before the despot who gave them a chance to avoid death by fire. If they would worship his image, they would be set free. But their answer revealed the depth and intensity of their devotion to the God of Israel. "God is able to deliver us from the fire, but if he chooses not to do that, we will still worship Him only" (my paraphrase). Despite the threat of capital punishment, the three would do what millions of martyrs would do in the generations of the Church: they would obey God rather than man. Thousands upon thousands have chosen to die rather than renounce Christ. It is time for those identifying themselves as Christian to imitate Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

How is that to be done? Last year the advice of some medical "experts" and the mandates by governmental officials required churches to suspend worship services. As a result, too many Christians abandoned their congregations. Many pointed to the Scriptural admonition to "obey the governing authorities¹." The result?.

Churches stood shuttered like secular businesses. It was clothed, like the proverbial wolf-in-sheep's clothing, in a commendable purpose, i.e., to prevent the spread of the dreaded disease. As a result, many congregations will suffer irreparable harm from compliance to the mandates. Some will never again open their doors. Some will never regain many of those who have fallen from the habit of gathering for worship. Some have endured financial hardship from the reduced or abandoned attendance. However, some congregations have continued to receive God's blessings even with reduced attendance at worship. First Lutheran is one of these blessed assemblies. Because of the faithful support of some, First enjoys a healthy and (for now) a stable financial condition. But a challenge looms in the near future which could lead to a need to emulate those three young Jewish men.

If the current governmental authorities issue a new shelter-in-place order (mandate/law) or establish and require a so-called "green passport"², then I will be compelled to civil and peaceful disobedience. My personal and daily living will comply and maintain a "contact-free" existence, insofar as is possible. However, when the matter involves the assembling of the faithful for worship I will not comply. The enemy of the True Church may be using the pandemic to cripple the witness and ministry of the Bride of Christ. Commendably, many churches have provided virtual worship services for their members. But can the churches survive without the fellowship, that is, the gathering, of their members? Will those who have grown accustomed to a virtual or televised worship ever return to a "brick and mortar" gathering of the faithful? Will they lose interest in the virtual worship and ultimately ignore worship altogether? The Greek word translated most frequently as "church" literally means "gathering" or "assembly." However, the practice of church members choosing to not attend worship is a continual and growing concern in many churches. Nearly every Annual Report which I have composed quotes Hebrews 10:24-25 which extols "(a)nd let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." One of my favorite Gospel Quartet songs declares:

"Excuses, excuses, you hear them every day,
The devil will provide them if from church you stay away.
When people come to know the Lord, the devil always loses,
So, to keep those folks away from church he offers them excuses."

And, now, there is the distinct possibility that the devil may receive assistance from governmental authority.

Appropriately, you may be asking, "How does any of this relate to Daniel 3? If there does come a day when another mandate forbids public worship services, I will refuse to comply with that mandate. Worship services will be conducted regularly and as normally as is possible. I will encourage a voluntary wearing of face masks and social distancing. It is the prerogative of every member of First Lutheran to decide whether or not to attend. Every worshiper may choose whether or not a mask is worn. Worship will continue regularly, even if it means that I would be fined or incarcerated. While Scripture does teach that we are to obey the governing authorities¹, it also provides that we answer as Peter and John did when brought before an examining committee of the high priest's family: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you or God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard³." Called to assemble by Hebrews 11:24-25, I choose to continue to worship. Further, that assembly is guaranteed by the Constitution (specifically in the Bill of Rights) under the First Amendment, stating: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the peoples peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances" (emphasis mine) Rest assured, we will continue distributing audio recordings of sermons via email, text and the church website. By this, anyone who chooses or is prohibited from attending worship may still hear the message of the Gospel regularly.

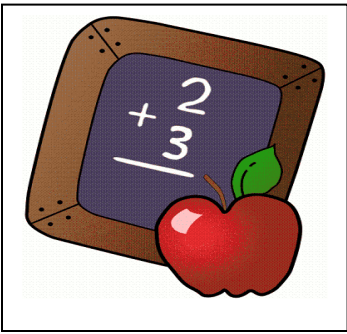
Thank you for the privilege of serving in First Lutheran's pastoral office. If anyone has need of prayer, please call, text or email me. If anyone desires Holy Communion but cannot attend a Communion Service because of health concerns or mobility restrictions, please contact me that we may find a way to share the Sacrament together. Finally, please pray for me that "words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel...that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak." (Ephesians 6:20)

In Christ, Pastor Grier

¹ Romans 13:1

²Proposed as evidence of receiving COVID-19 vaccination and required for attendance at "large gatherings."

³Acts 4:20



First School And Day Care

First School has 97 children enrolled at this time. Recently we had a winter storm and it was quite challenging to deal with. Our school suffered minimal damage. Also, with the help of our dedicated parents we were able to have enough milk during the milk shortage.

Some grant opportunities are coming up to help cover some short term bills. God is such a great provider and we are pressing forward in faith that he will always help sustain us.

Many Blessings,

Bree Joines

First School Director

**First School Board Meeting –
Tuesday, March 9th, at 5:00 p.m.**

MARCH READINGS

03/07 Psalm 31:9-13; Genesis 31:1-16, Acts 21:1-14, Matthew 19:1-12

03/14 Psalm 31:14-18; Genesis 31:17-21, Acts 21:15-25, Matthew 19:13-22

03/21 Psalm 31:19-24; Genesis 31:22-32, Acts 21:26-36, Matthew 19:23-30

03/28 Psalm 32:1-5; Zechariah 9:9-10, Isaiah 53:10-12, Philipians 2:5-11, John 12:20-33



- 03/07 Ryan Woodson
- 03/08 Thomas Hernandez
- 03/10 Misty Ledwig
- 03/16 James Herrington
- 03/29 Abigail Hernandez



- 03/06 Jaqueline Lundy
- 03/06 Cathy Schoenfield
- 03/10 Rachel Hernandez
- 03/13 Brantley Doege
- 03/13 Alvin Yackel
- 03/23 Sheila Miller
- 03/25 Emma Jo Barosh
- 03/26 Nora Hollingsworth



- 03/18 Kirk & Nerissa House
- 03/19 Saby & Lynette Hernandez
- 03/30 Doug & Cindy Mathews



COUNCIL MEETING
 Thursday, March 18th
 6:00 p.m.



Our FLC Family

- Dorothy Atchetee
- Harlo & Rhonda Atchetee
- Charles Bard
- Ron Chambles
- Lynda Christenberry
- James & Sheila Herrington
- Nora Hollingsworth
- Harry & Marilyn Kight
- Kim & Larry Ledwig
- John Nelson
- Odis Newton
- Sharon Nielsen
- Ruth Speckels
- Charlotte Watson
- Larry & Cheryl Young

Friends of FLC

- Tracy Morton
- Kim Walker

List will be cleared on the 1st in January, April, July and October. Please help us stay current; call the office with changes or additions.



**PRAY FOR OUR
 LOVED ONES
 IN THE MILITARY**

Jake Barosh

WE'RE HERE WHEN YOU NEED US



OR



Office hours: Tues & Thurs: 8:00am - 4:30pm
 Wed: 8:00am – 12:00pm

Phone: 979-543-5847

Email: office@firstlutheranec.com

Pastor Clyde Grier:
 Phone: 979-541-6173

Thank You

I want to thank the congregation for the beautiful gift I received in acknowledgement of my 67 years of playing the organ. I have been blessed to be able to continue as long as I have. I love to play and pray that I will have a few more years to serve.

Helen Kight

+ + + + + + + +

FLCEC Manna Meals Team

Our FLCEC Manna Meals Team will be serving on Thursday, March 4th. Please let Cathy Schoenfield know if you will be able to help. Help is always needed with serving and cleaning up!

Where all are family and all are fed

Newly elected Church Council Members:

Sheila Herrington, Cindy Mathews,
Cathy Schoenfield

Continuing Church Council Members:

Milton Johnson, David Kight
Kirk Marek, Jimmy Nielsen

Elected to First School Board:

Helen Kight, Cori Koudela

Continuing on First School Board:

Billie Jean Bram, Kim Ledwig, Diane Stewart

Elected to Cemetery Board:

Calvin Borak

Continuing on Cemetery Board:

Nora Borak, David Kight

Auditors – 2021

Loretta Johnson, Karen Kight, Pat Marek

Nominating Committee – 2021

Helen Kight, Pat Marek

WOMEN OF THE WORD MEETING

Monday, March 1st
6:00 p.m.

WOW Food Drive
Sunday, March 7th

A = Always

S = Say

A = A

P = Prayer



Lenten Schedule

Ash Wednesday Service

February 17th – The Lenten Fast

Lenten Services – Wednesdays

February 24th – Matthew 4:1-11

March 3rd – Mark 9:17-29

March 10th – Luke 4:31-37

March 17th – John 6:52-65

March 24th – Luke 1:46-55

A Lenten Thought

*Return to the LORD, your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast
love...*

Joel 2:13

NRSV



March 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 WOW Meeting 5PM	2	3 Lenten Service 12:15PM	4 Manna Meals 5-6:30 PM FLCEC Team serves	5	6
7 Sunday School 9:30 AM Worship Service 10:45 AM w/Communion WOW Food Drive	8	9 FS Board Meeting 5:00PM Newsletter Items Due	10 Lenten Service 12:15PM	11	12	13
14 Sunday School 9:30 AM Worship Service 10:45 AM	15	16	17 Lenten Service 12:15PM	18 Church Council Meeting 6:00PM	19	20
21 Sunday School 9:30 AM Worship Service 10:45 AM w/Communion	22	23	24 Lenten Service 12:15PM	25	26	27
28 Sunday School 9:30 AM Worship Service 10:45 AM	29	30	31			

March Responsibilities

ASSISTING MINISTER: Jimmy Nielsen
SEXTON: Doug Mathews
USHERS: Doug Mathews, James Stewart
ALTAR GUILD: Cindy Mathews, Helen Johnson

ACOLYTES

7th
14th
21st
28th

READER

Kirk Marek
Ted Schoenfield
Cathy Schoenfield
Diane Stewart

If you are unable to serve on your date,
please find someone to take your place.



MARCH FLOWER CALENDAR

7th Open
 14th Open
 21st Open
 28th Doug & Cindy Mathews

FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH

304 Oscar
El Campo, TX 77437
979-543-5847

Email: office@firstlutheranec.com

ESTABLISHED FEB 1893

*Worshipping Christ and Sharing
the Word for over a century.*

*Clyde Grier, Pastor
Helen Marie Kight, Organist
Christine Richter, Office Manager
Bree Joines, Director of First School*



Join us on **FACEBOOK** or check us out at
www.FIRSTLUTHERANEC.COM

*CHURCH COUNCIL MEMBERS: Sheila Herrington, Milton Johnson, David Kight, Kirk Marek, Cindy Mathews,
Jimmy Nielsen, Cathy Schoenfield*

FOR
GOD
SO
LOVED THE WORLD
HE
GAVE
HIS
ONLY
SON

OUR NEWSLETTER
CAN BE FOUND ON
OUR WEBSITE AT
WWW.FIRSTLUTHERANEC.COM



Sunday School – 9:30 a.m
Worship Service – 10:45 a.m.