

Immanuel Messenger

Immanuel Lutheran Church

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----- May/June 2010 -----

A Word from the Pastor

Some Upcoming Liturgies

Happy springtime, everyone!

We have three important and moving liturgies coming up soon: Ascension, Pentecost, and Trinity. Here are a few notes on those services:

Ascension, May 16, 2010

Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." (Mark 9:35, NRSV)

There might be something of Peter's longing in your heart too: you would be glad for Jesus to dwell here on earth, close at hand.

For years, in some measure I regretted the festival before us, The Ascension of Our Lord. I imagined that if Jesus were still here on earth, I would be glad to go on a pilgrimage to see him. That would be great! People travel to all manner of holy sites on earth. Better still would it be to travel to the holy One, our Lord Jesus! I would be content to wait patiently in line for my chance to talk with him.

Well, that day is coming. One day, each of us will have an earnest pastoral conversation with Jesus. Every knee shall bow before him and every tongue confess that he is the Lord. (Philippians 2:10-11)

Meanwhile, Jesus *must* ascend to his Father, for he has important work to do on our behalf. He has his ministry of intercession for us, and we should not wish to delay him from that ministry.

(Continued)

This year, we will join the Church's ancient celebration of the Ascension of Our Lord via transfer of the celebration from Ascension Thursday to the closest Sunday, May 16th.

Pentecost Sunday, May 23

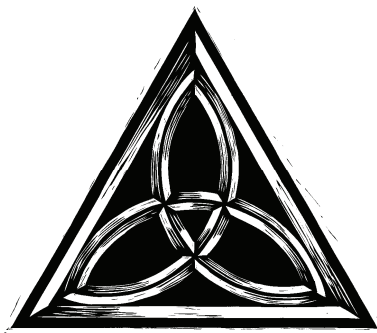


A beloved Easter hymn speaks of a great wonder on earth: the wonder of change and improvement. We sang that good hymn just recently here at Immanuel:

*Come down, O Love divine;
seek thou this soul of mine
and visit it with thine own ardor glowing;
O Comforter, draw near;
within my heart appear
and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.
("Come Down, O Love Divine" LBW 508, verse 1)*

This is the special ministry of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit. The Spirit brings new possibilities to us. The Spirit desires to sanctify us, to make us more Christ-like, to free us from the momentum of our old ways, and to make us new and better. So, on Pentecost Sunday we rejoice over the Spirit. No stony hearts for us! Even if we have been lukewarm heretofore, Pentecost means igniting the heart, "thy holy flame bestowing."

Trinity Sunday, May 30th



We believe in one God in three persons -- the work of human salvation is so complex! It is an old rule of Trinitarian theology that “the works of God *ad extra* are the joint work of the three divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” You are that precious! Your life matters so much that it is the continual concern of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Their individual labors for you vary, but the work of each is necessary and lovingly offered for you. It is not just the Son who loves you, but also the Father and the Holy Spirit. Oh! You loved ones -- loved by a threefold Love! That is why we celebrate Holy Trinity Sunday.

So, we have three good festivals before us: Ascension, Pentecost, and Trinity. God be with you for these liturgies, for this springtime, and always.

In Christ,

Gregory Fryer

Pastor Gregory P. Fryer

Midtown Concerts

Midtown Concerts continues with two more concerts in May at Immanuel Lutheran Church, 1:15 p.m. on Wednesday. Each concert lasts approximately 30-40 minutes. Best of all, the concerts are FREE! The final two concerts are:

May 19 -- ARTEK (*More Monteverdi Madrigals from Book 5*)

May 26 -- Trefoil (*Flower of Flowers: A Medieval Bouquet*)

The concerts will resume in September.

Thank You for the Spring Bazaar!

Our recent spring bazaar was a joy and big lift for our church roof campaign. Folks contributed lots of things to the bazaar and transported them to the church. Workers spent many an hour sorting, pricing, preparing, and setting out things for Saturday's bazaar, May 8th. Volunteers sat at the tables, sold the items, served the food, and cleaned up afterwards -- all with good grace and patience. Special thanks go to Maria Van Der Merwe and Kathy Jolowicz, leaders of the bazaar, and to Sexton Chris Schulze who was everywhere and helpful always.

We made \$2,100 profit on this bazaar, which is great! The estimated cost of our new roof for our church and steeple is a million dollars. My theory is that that is a *thousand* thousands, and we now have two of 'em! Plus, we have the roof campaign, to which we turn next.

Pastor Fryer

Our Roof Fund Campaign

An update from Pastor Fryer

Thank you, everyone, for your gifts and pledges to our church roof campaign. It has done this pastor's heart much good to open the campaign envelopes and to see the pledges and gifts entrusted to our church. In an earlier essay, I compared the combined strength of individual contributions to the strength of kindling: any one piece of kindling might be frail, but combined into a bunch, they can be mighty. This time, my image is musical. Our pledges to our roof campaign are like a symphony: not everyone plays the same instrument, not everyone gives the same gift or pledge, but each contribution is wonderful and important to the total lovely harmony of the music. Both the little piccolo and the great kettle drums are noble and needful to the overall tune.

Our campaign goal is \$350,000. Combining that with the Dr. Dorian Doptoglon bequest should do the job. Here are our campaign results so far:

Number of pledges or contributions, through 5/11/2010	85
Total of pledges or contributions, through 5/11	\$239,895
Initial leadership gift	\$50,000
Profit for May 8 bazaar	\$2,100
TOTAL SO FAR	\$291,995

Let me lift up that first figure: So far we have received eighty-five pledges or contributions. We are still a small congregation. In recent years, we have been growing, and this year we are doing especially well. Still, for now, we are a fairly small congregation. One measure of that is the number of offering envelopes we give out each year. This year there are eighty-eight families or individuals with offering envelopes. That means that we have had a large percentage of support for our roof campaign from our church members. Some of the eighty-five gifts or pledges have come from former members, and I hope we get more as time goes by, but most of our eighty-five gifts or pledges are from our current members. They are precious, each one, both from current members, former members, and friends of Immanuel Lutheran Church.

I believe that our "With Joy and Thanksgiving" fund campaign for the roof went well. We made our case in a simple and sometimes moving way. Especially I enjoyed the personal testimonies supporting the campaign. Who was not moved, for example, by eleven-year-old Kathryn Wick's testimony that if she is going to grow up to be a long-time member of Immanuel Lutheran Church like Miss Ann Siemer, then our church is going to need a good roof!

Toward the end of this newsletter, I have included my own testimony concerning the tithe and what that is like in our family. Also, we have enclosed a roof fund campaign envelope. Thank you, everyone, for your help.

Pastor Fryer

Children's Choir Singing on Sunday, May 16

Our Children's Choir will be singing "This Is My Father's World," during the 11:00 a.m. Liturgy on Ascension Sunday, May 16. There will be a rehearsal at 10:30 a.m. that morning. Lauren Alfano will accompany the children on the violin.

Prior to the Voters' Assembly in the undercroft, the children will also sing a fun song for us called "Father Abraham."

Voters' Assembly, May 16

VOTERS' ASSEMBLY AFTER LITURGY ON MAY 16TH! At this meeting we will hear the Treasurer's Report, and reports from the Board of Deacons, the Board of Trustees, the Endowment Fund Committee and the Pastor. If you would like to become an official member of the Voters' Assembly, please mention your desire to Pastor Fryer, who will present your name to the Assembly. Our Constitution gives this rule: *The Voters' Assembly shall consist only of such members who have reached the age of eighteen, who are diligent in worship, regularly partake of the Lord's Supper and live a life in conformity with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Pastor's Class on "Story and Promise"

Sundays after the liturgy, beginning Sunday June 6

I am looking forward to this class as a way to begin sharing my gratitude for Lutheran theologian Robert W. Jenson and for his ministry in service of Christ and his Church. Dr. Jenson is teacher and mentor for Carol and me and a friend of this parish. He has preached here before, including the sermon for my installation as pastor back in 1991, and he is scheduled to preach for the 25th anniversary of Carol's and my ordination this coming fall, November 14.

Generations to come, even centuries to come, will point to Robert W. Jenson as one of America's greatest theologians. I am fully persuaded of this. Indeed, I believe that one of the most important things I bring to this dear church is my contact with leading ecumenical theologians, chief of which for me will always be Robert W. Jenson.

To set the stage for his autumn visit here, let's discuss one of Dr. Jenson's early works, *Story and Promise* (1973). It is a kind of catechism. It is an overview of fundamental matters of the Christian faith.

I figure that we will grab some food from Coffee Hour and meet in the Martin Luther Room to discuss the book. There are eleven chapters. Maybe we can do one per Sunday. This will teach us a lot and increase the joy of Dr. Jenson's visit in November.

Pastor Fryer

My Stewardship Testimony

Pastor Gregory P. Fryer
Immanuel Lutheran Church
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Fund Campaign for Our Roof and Steeple
“Commitment Sunday”
The Fourth Sunday of Easter, April 25, 2010

This is the bucket into which the raindrops fell. They fell through our honorable, old slate roof above, landing near the pulpit, a couple years ago now. In God’s grace, those falling raindrops inspired an anonymous \$50,000 leadership gift which started the path which has led to this good morning, Commitment Sunday, when we turn in our gifts or pledges toward a new roof for our church and steeple. I’m going to place this bucket on a stool there in our center aisle and you can drop your pledge form into it.

In my testimony now I mean to talk personally with you about Christian stewardship. I consider the management of our money to be an important part of our life in Christ. I mean to talk about my own personal example. I hope it might help you for me to talk a little bit about my paycheck, my tithe, and my pledge to this campaign. I am not going to talk about the concrete numbers here, but I am available to share those numbers with any of you in pastoral conversation. Still, I do mean to talk about the tithe and about what that means for our family.

But before I turn to such things, there is something on my heart to say: I have always tithed, but I have never before talked much about it. That’s because circumstances vary from person to person. I know how very blessed I am to be pastor of this congregation. I am deeply aware of the many kindnesses I have received simply because I am the pastor. And so, my tithe seems pretty humble compared to the blessings I have received.

But most of all, I hesitate to talk about my own giving to the church because I am aware of how modest my stewardship is compared to many of my brothers and sisters in the Lord. I have little to boast of compared to many quiet Christians I have known over the years.

I will never forget a poor, elderly woman in my first parish, down in York County, PA. She lived in a little, dimly-lit, smoky trailer. She cobbled together a humble living collecting things and selling them at her roadside stand. She tithed! Gently I tried to suggest that she did not need to tithe, she had so very little money to give. But this dear old woman was wiser than me, wiser than this young pastor trying to minister to her. She said to me, “Pastor, I know you mean well, but please do not try to deprive me of my Christian life.” This was what mattered to her: she loved Jesus and wanted to support our congregation. She wanted to support the Church in the traditional way of the tithe.

I remember back to when I was a boy, to my childhood congregation. There was an earnest discussion back then concerning the tithe. A “tithe” means 10%. But even for Christians who wanted to tithe, there was an uncertainty about whether it should be 10%

on income *before* taxes or *after* taxes. As I remember it, we concluded that either one was fine.

At first glance, it appears that I give a tithe on my income *before* taxes. My monthly paycheck is a certain figure. Again, I can tell you that in private conversation. My wife, Pastor Carol Fryer, gets her own paycheck and gives her own tithe to the congregation she serves, United Lutheran Church up in Mt. Vernon,

So, my paycheck is a certain figure and my tithe to Immanuel is 10% of that figure. (Actually, it is a wee bit more than 10%.) In one sense, that tithe is *before* taxes, because of a peculiarity of clergy taxes: we are considered “self-employed” for tax purposes, and so there is no tax withholding for me. I must then pay my taxes out of my paycheck. So, first off, I give my tithe to the church. I have set up my bank account to automatically send my tithe to the church first thing. Then I set aside another bunch of money for taxes. (Sometimes it seems like a BIG bunch of money.) Then our family lives off what’s left.

So, at first glance it appears that I tithe on my gross salary. But the reality is that my tithe falls short of that standard. It is closer to a tithe *after* taxes. Partly, that’s because when I set up this year’s automatic payment plan with my bank, I forgot that my paycheck is reduced some via a medical flex spending plan, and I should include that amount too. But the chief thing is the parsonage: I should give a tithe on the value of the parsonage too. The Board of Pensions considers the value of a parsonage to be worth 30% of my base salary. I pay Social Security tax on that amount. So, I made a rough estimate: I figure that my present tithe is approximately a tithe of my net income.

The thing about this campaign is that it has led me to do some soul-searching and some more careful calculations about the tithe. Carol and I have studied and discussed things and have decided that I can make a pledge of an additional \$100/month -- not just for the sake of this campaign, but also simply because I want to draw closer to the higher standard for the tithe. I wish it were more. Maybe I will give more as time goes by. Meanwhile, this additional amount places me somewhere in the middle of a tithe *after* taxes and a tithe *before* taxes.

In terms of day-to-day life over the years, this has meant that our family has inclined toward some simplicity in life. It has felt like Carol and I have lived from paycheck to paycheck all our lives. Especially it was hard to save up money for a college fund. I worked very hard at that over the years, and wish I could have done more. Things are getting better now that both Carol and I have fulltime salaries.

Why did I strive for the tithe all these years? Our Lutheran doctrine of the priesthood of all believers teaches that a pastor has no greater duty to tithe than does any other Christian. So, why did I tithe? Four quick answers: First, the Bible says so:

Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house; and thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing. (Malachi 3:10, RSV)

Many Christians have understood the call to Israel to practice the tithe to be a call meant also for the Church.

Second, I have wanted to somehow be in the company of that elderly woman in the smoky trailer back in Pennsylvania. Likewise, I have wanted to be part of that band of people who include my mother and father before me and who also includes people in this congregation. The person to your left or right, for example, might be a tither. We have them in this congregation. They are quiet and humble about it, but they help make us strong.

Third, I calculate that the simplicity of life which comes along with tithing has done me no harm. Though I like pipes and the smell of pipe tobacco, for example, I do not smoke. I never felt I could afford it. But not smoking has done me no harm. I do not drink expensive wines or whiskey because I never thought I could afford them, but again, I think it has done me no harm. Simplicity is not a bad thing.

And fourth, the Church is important to me. This is what I care about a lot. And so I try to support the Church in the traditional way.

In general, I do believe that tithing has been crafting my soul, teaching me some contentment in life. As St. Paul said to young Timothy:

There is great gain in godliness with contentment (1 Timothy 6:6, RSV)

So, that's that. I am trying to use this roof campaign as an occasion for striving toward the tithe. And I commend the idea to you too. Circumstances vary. I bet many of you are already doing the best you can and you should do no more. But if you can, then I commend that you try to make some progress toward the tithe.

Thank you.