
St. Paul's Epistle - *March 2023*



Church Council Minutes—February 2, 2023

Those present: Tim Anderson, Leanna Hasbargen, Tony Lucek, Steve Rutkowski, George Aitchison, Leonard Morrison and RaNae Whitbeck

Chairman Tim Anderson called the meeting to order. In Pastor Quast's absence, Steve Rutkowski gave the opening devotion. The Minutes and Treasurer's reports were reviewed and approved.

Briefs: 1) The Joint Church Council met on January 29th, shared salary amounts were discussed and agreed upon. 2) The Roof project was discussed. 3) Arrow Lift has repaired the chairlift. 4) Ash Wednesday service is taking place February 22nd and remaining Lenten services will alternate with Fort Frances. 5) Hygiene items will be collected during Lent for Lutheran World Relief. 6) The Haiti storage room has been cleaned out and will be used by the Altar Guild.

There were no membership changes.

The meeting adjourned with the Lord's Prayer.

Submitted by ~ RaNae Whitbeck, Acting Secretary

Lenten Worship Schedule

March 1, 15th and 29th: Lenten services at Church of the Lutheran Hour, Fort Frances

March 8 and 22nd: Lenten services at St. Paul Lutheran

All services taking place at 7 p.m.



REMEMBER:

Set your clocks ahead one hour before you go to bed on Saturday, March 11th.

Also, make sure to check the batteries in your smoke detectors!

Collection for Lutheran World Relief Hygiene Kits continues through Lent.

We need: Bars of soap, toothbrushes, nail clippers, sturdy combs, and lightweight, dark colored bath towels.

The kits will be put together the week before Easter. These kits will be sent to people in need throughout the world. There is an informational poster on the bulletin board to show where these kits were distributed in 2022.



Church Roof Update

As of February 20th, 2023, we have raised a total of \$37,444.46 toward our roof project!

Thank you to everyone for your generous donations so far! Every donation, big or small, goes a long way toward the project being completed.



Sunday School

Thank you to all parents, grandparents and guardians for bringing your children to Sunday School! We are continuing the study of major stories of the Bible. This second half of the year our lessons are focused on the New Testament. If you are interested in helping out with co-teaching a lesson, crafts, science experiments or even music, please talk to one of our Sunday School teachers or Pastor Quast.



March Birthdays

A very happy birthday is wished to these members of our church family!

3rd: Ralph & Richard Christie

4th: Cheryl Toth

7th: William Bacon

8th: Nissa Wright

9th: Robbie Leerssen and Chad Bacon

19th: Tristan Toth

23rd: Gary Buffington

24th: Lori Boquist

27th: Dave Swenson



From the Pastor's Desk...

Greetings, People Loved by God, in the name of our Saviour, Jesus!

Dear friends, as we continue our look at the commandments, this time we examine the gift of marriage and human sexuality. The Sixth Commandment serves to protect and preserve marriage as the foundation stone of all human society. Marriage, as defined by God, is the lifelong union between one man and one woman. This commandment is stated simply and succinctly in Exodus 20:14, "You shall not commit adultery." Luther explains that this means, "We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other." As is usually the case, this is easier said than done, especially in our present society and context where the clear definition of marriage has been eroded, and all forms of sexual expression are deemed not only acceptable, but are to be celebrated by all.

Let's begin by examining what the Scriptures teach us in terms of leading a sexually pure and decent life—something that is not readily apparent in our fallen human natures, nor emulated at large in our society. Firstly, Christians recognize that sexuality is a good gift of God. I know that there have been periods in history where some Christian groups have deemed sexuality more of a "necessary evil" for the purpose of reproduction of children. However, this is not how God sees it. We see in the beginning of Genesis that God created man in His own image—male and female He created them. God created us as sexual beings. He created us with sexuality in mind. And this was part of God's good creation. For after He finished His work of creation (Genesis 1:31), "God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good." So, Adam and Eve, created as sexual beings prior to the Fall, were declared to be "very good."

Another way in which Christians lead sexually pure and decent lives is by honoring marriage as God's institution, the lifelong union of one man and one woman. Of course, this has been denounced widely in our society and by our current culture, which has sought to redefine in law what marriage is (allowing for homosexual "marriages" and moving toward "throuples" or other arrangements), with an end in view that allows for any union between two consenting adults (or more), regardless of the consequences to family and children, and completely in opposition to natural law. Once again, in Genesis we see God promote marriage as this union between one man and one woman when He gave Adam and Eve to each other. Jesus echoes this in Mark 10:6-9, "From the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

So marriage was intended by God to be between one man and one woman for life, becoming one flesh in the sexual union, with the intention of creating another one flesh in a child. Some may point out the instances of various Old Testament saints having more than one wife (ie Abraham, Jacob, David, etc.), thinking that God then advocates for polygamy. This would be incorrect, however, as God never instructs His people to have more than one wife, and that there is no instance of any good ever coming from a man married to more than one wife. Therefore, we ought as Christians to promote in our homes, congregations, and communities the great joy and blessings that come to all through a marital union between one man and one woman.

Finally, we may also try to lead sexually God-pleasing lives by controlling our sexual urges and, therefore, reserving sexual intercourse for the marriage partner alone. For as Hebrews 13:4 states, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous." So beloved, sex, though a good gift of God, is not to be enjoyed outside of the marital relationship between a man and a woman—meaning all unmarried people are called to be celibate. We can clearly see how the sexual revolution of the 1960s, which has had a great and continued impact on our society, has had a detrimental effect. People often engage in sexual activity outside of marriage (having multiple partners), which has drastic consequences, especially for the children that inevitably result from these sexual unions. Children, sadly, bear the brunt of these things, having to grow up in less than ideal situations, often separated for periods of time from one or more of their biological parents, and are robbed of the sure foundation that a loving, stable marriage provides for the raising of children. This is particularly true for those children being raised in same-sex couple households, which necessitates a distance of at least one, maybe both, biological parents, leading to poor psychological outcomes.

So, beloved, it is clear from Holy Scripture that God would teach us through this commandment that sexual intercourse between unmarried persons (ANY unmarried persons—even a man and a woman) is strictly forbidden. Furthermore, that all acts of a sexual nature that take place outside of man/woman marriage are also sin: rape, homosexual activity, incest, sexual child abuse, obscenity (even talk), and pornographic materials (one of the greatest plagues of the internet). Alongside these, even our sexually impure thoughts and desires are forbidden. This is why God commands (1 Corinthians 6:18) us to "Flee from sexual immorality." These commands are serious. For they are sins against our bodies—bodies created by God in His image. Jesus places these sins on a par with other serious sins like murder when He says (Matthew 15:19), "Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander."

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God desires His people to live in obedience to the way in which He has created and designed us—and He has designed us for heterosexual marriage. Indeed, one of the great images of the Bible that describes the relationship between God and His church is one of marriage. Christ is likened to being the bridegroom and His bride, the church, in Ephesians 5. Therefore, we Christians ought to uphold and honor marriage in all that we think, say, and do. This is also one reason why divorce is greatly discouraged by God in the Scriptures. Only in extreme cases of adultery, desertion (including abuse), should people ever consider divorce (and even in these instances it is not required by God, but allowed). And even then it is not a "good" thing, but a tragic end from what God instituted for our blessing.

One of the ways in which this commandment is being ignored and rejected today is by the wholesale acceptance of transgender ideology, which states that there are no real differences between men and women and that they are interchangeable and men can be women and vice versa. This is a rejection of our Creator God's act in making us distinctly male/female sexual beings. We must reach out to people who suffer from genuine gender dysphoria with real compassion and love. However, it is not loving to allow someone to continue in their rejection of God's natural order and cause harm to their own or another's body through hormone treatments (which quickly render a person permanently sterile) or surgery (which removes perfectly healthy body parts).

This then also connects with the previous commandment concerning our physical bodies as good gifts of God that are to be kept healthy and whole as much as possible. When people suffer from feelings that their minds and bodies don't match, rather than seeing that as somehow a "mistake" by God, we should conclude that sin has damaged a person's mind in some way so that there is now a disconnect. Rather than treating the symptom by giving in to hormone therapy or radical surgery to alter a person's outward appearance (which doesn't really change their gender as evidenced by their DNA and chromosomes) we should encourage psychological counseling to help them come to grips with the body that God has given them. In this way, they may still honor God as Creator, even while struggling with this issue.

This is a huge issue, one which deserves in-depth treatment, which cannot be adequately provided here. However, should you have questions about how best to love our neighbor who is wrestling with these things, please contact me.

So, dear friends, it is clear that we can be a good example to those around us by simply adhering to God's Word in this matter, and that we can promote marriage between men and women as a good, right, and salutary thing that people should aspire to (though we do recognize from the Scriptures that some people are given the gift of lifelong celibacy—never marrying—so that they may be of service to their church and neighbor in different ways).

People who do marry, however, are called by God to love, honor, and respect each other above all else. The wife is the husband's God-given helper, and the husband is the wife's God-given head. They are given to each other by God to submit to and sacrificially serve one another.

We can clearly see how we have all fallen short of these ideals of being sexually pure in all that we think, say, and do (see Matthew 5:28). Therefore, it is with joy that we recognize our bride-groom Jesus who offered Himself up as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. As St. Paul writes (Ephesians 5:22-27), "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, His body, and is Himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."

What joy it is to know, beloved, that we have a God who loves us so completely and fully in every way. May we learn from Him to love our spouses in such ways, and to promote true marriage in our community, that all may receive God's blessings in marriage.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me (cell – 218.324.1948). I pray for you all, daily. May God's grace be upon you, now and always.

Yours In Christ,

Rev. J. Quast

Pastor, St. Paul Lutheran Church, International Falls, Minnesota

Pastor, The Church of the Lutheran Hour, Fort Frances, Ontario