

From the Pastor's Desk, Custer UMC (Winter 2019)

Weather is almost always the first item from the Pastor's Desk, maybe because it most illustrates the happenings in our community. We are in the midst of winter, and this one has already affected much of our state and nation. We pray that we do not experience the winters described by our departed friend, Bud, who related to me snowdrifts that piled up to the height of the posts that carry our power and telephone lines. Bless would really enjoy that very much (lol).

This issue of the Pastor's Desk is being written between cold snaps. I pray that those who do not have the appropriate shelter be assisted by our relief agencies. This need highlights our Sunday announcements about our assistance to the community through our missions and ministries. We have our own concerns but we do need to ensure that others in our community who are in dire straits be afforded the same care.

In the past weeks many of our members have become ill, and some have had friends and family experiencing illness or tragedies. This would serve as a reminder for all of us to be mindful of our prayer covenant, a covenant that allows us access to the grace of God not only for ourselves and our community of faith, but for the community around us, as well. Let us be faithful to find a quiet place around 9 pm and pray for our church, our members, our cares and concerns, and even ourselves.

We are in the Season of the Epiphany. Epiphany is defined by the International Webster's Dictionary this way: 1) manifestation of a divine being (Paul's enlightening experience); and/or, 2) an experience or event, anything that would enlighten or make knowledgeable a person who may or may not seek it. The Season of the Epiphany starts in January and ends with Transfiguration Sunday in our Christian calendar. It coincides with the time of 'winter solstice' which is the shortest day of the year, when the earth's revolution around the sun takes a particular turn and heralds the change of season from Fall to Winter.

For God's creation, in particular the human beings, it is the dawning of a new year, a season of Light. This light comes particularly to those who sit in darkness: the darkness of exile, the darkness of division, the darkness of suffering, or the darkness of ignorance to the true word of God.

The Sundays after Christmas/Epiphany also turn into the Sundays of Lent. Transfiguration Sunday will turn our thoughts to the season of repentance. The season of Lent is a reminder that we have all distanced ourselves from God, one way or another at one time or another. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. The term *Lent* comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *lencten*, which means "spring." The season is a preparation for celebrating Easter, the day of Christ's Resurrection. Historically, Lent began as a period of fasting and preparation for the baptism of converts. It became a time for penance and repentance by/for all Christians. The First Sunday describes Jesus' temptation by Satan; and the Sixth Sunday (Passion/Palm Sunday), Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his passion and death. Through his death, burial and resurrection, Jesus paid the penalty for sin, thus purchasing for all who believe in him, salvation and eternal life.

Let us hearken back to prayer. We have a covenant in our congregation – to pray for our church, our members, our ministries and growth. Let us cap our prayer time with the prayer that Jesus Christ himself taught us: the Shepherd's Prayer. In that prayer are the words, "...and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." Let us take those words to heart. It is the key by which we can be changed for the good on a daily basis, anchoring our relationship with the Son, who is one with our Father in heaven.

Matthew's words in chapter 18:20 says, "*For when two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*" When we pray in covenant, we are gathered together through the Holy Spirit in unity with Jesus Christ through which God's presence animates all our lives, shields us from all harm, and also propels us to accomplish the work of our Savior for which he sacrificed his flesh and blood.

Once again we all together ask that God, our Father in heaven, fill us with the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our fellowship with one another; through Jesus Christ who was born, lived, suffered for us, and died on the cross so that we may have life eternal with him. Amen!