



St. Mark's Lutheran Church

Publisher
Church mouse

Volume Number
2015

Issue Number
48

Date
May 2015

New website

Our new webpage is up and running. Check it out. It is awesome! Thank you Angela. The address is www.stmarkslutheranmiddleburgh.com



Ongoing bottle and can drive. Please leave **clean** bottles and cans by the garage door. Proceeds will be used for the mortgage.

Prayer Ministry

You are invited to participate in a new prayer ministry. We meet on Thursdays at 5:30 p.m. in St. Mark's sanctuary. If you are unable to attend and have a prayer request you would like lifted, please contact the church office or feel free to place your written request in the prayer box located in the narthex.

Prayers Concerns

Please lift the following people up in prayer:

Scotty Becker's family
Tommy Claypoole's family
Richard
Ed
Lori
Cody

Upcoming Events

May 12 - Council meeting 6:00

May 16 - Youth Group 6:30-8:30

May 17 - Hand bell concert 3:00

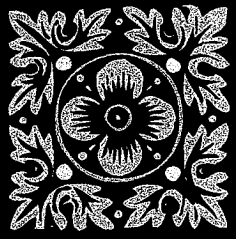
May 27 - NET dinner at St. Mark's

Every Thursday 5:30 - Prayer meeting in sanctuary.

Speakers for our upcoming services:

May 3 - Friar Peter Chepaitis
May 10 - Carolyn Wyckoff
May 17 - TBD
May 24 - Charles Davidson
May 31 - Mike Saccocio

Special thanks to all our speakers for sharing their time with us.



St. Mark's Lutheran Church

Servers for May

May 3:

Acolyte - Morgan
Ushers - Bill/Bonnie
Reader - Michelle Nespica
Greeter - Debbie
Prayer - Georgia
Counter - Debbie

May 10:

Acolyte - Dylan
Ushers - Maurice/Ginny
Reader - Marie
Greeter - Harry
Prayer - Beth
Counter - Diane

May 17:

Acolyte - Logan
Ushers - Sharon/Harry A.
Reader - Jim
Greeter - Maurice
Prayer - Jim
Counter - Carrie

May 24:

Acolyte - Dylan
Ushers - Denise/Kaleb
Reader - John C.
Greeter - Pat
Prayer - Gene
Counter - Debbie

May 31:

Acolyte - Morgan
Ushers - Debbie/Marie
Reader - Ted
Greeter - Janet
Prayer - Ted
Counter - Diane

I think that I will never see
A church that's all it ought to be
A church whose Members never stray
Beyond the straight and narrow way.

A church that has no empty pews,
Whose pastor never has the blues.
A church whose Members always tithe
And none is proud, all look alive.

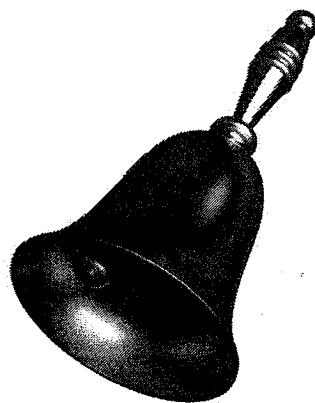
Whose gossips never peddle lies,
Or make complaint or criticize.
Where all are always sweet and kind
And to all others' faults are blind.

Such perfect churches there may be
But none of them is known to me.
But still we'll work and pray and plan
To make Our Church the best we can.

The Middleburgh
Ecumenical Bell Choir
Concert

Sunday - May 17 - 3:00 p.m.

St. Mark's Lutheran Church Fellowship Hall





St. Mark's Lutheran Church

Happy Days !!!!!

Birthdays: May

May 5 - Gloria Falcone
May 8 - Mary Schaffer and Claude Brown
May 11 - Dennis France
May 13 - Debbie Brigadier
May 14 - Augie Kauffman
May 16 - Michael Cinquino
May 22 - Sharon Nesbitt
May 26 - Stephanie Nichol
May 28 - Kobe Gordon
May 30 - Brianna Gordon

Anniversaries: May

May 21 - Jill and Kenneth Hanley
May 26 - Jane and Aaron Wilsey

Did you know St. Mark's offers the following opportunities for you and your family to participate?

Phoebes - every Monday from 9-2 PM

Youth Sunday School - Sundays from 9:15 - 10 AM

Adult Sunday School - Sundays from 9:15 - 10 AM

Prayer Ministry - every Thursday night beginning at 5:30 PM

After School Program - every day from 3 - 5:30 PM

For those of you that were unable to stay for the annual meeting (you missed some delicious food!) copies of the committee reports will be in the next few newsletters for your information.

Zumba Classes will be Wednesdays and Fridays from 1-2 in the fellowship hall. Check the calendar in the hallway for more details.

SOCIAL MINISTRIES – 2014

“Our God is an **AWESOME** God. He reigns from Heaven above.” Thank you Lord for allowing us to serve your people.

The following is a report highlighting most of our 2014 ministries.

Food Pantry

We received donations from school and community clubs, local churches, Boy Scouts, U.S. Post Office and other community friends. Our congregation has also been generous with non-perishable and monetary donations.

We continued to purchase food from NE Regional Food Bank and received a \$800 grant from the Hunger Prevention Nutrition Assistance Program. A big thank you to Dennis France and Dennis Foland for picking up the food each month. The assistance from these sources, and many more, made it possible to offer more nutritious foods and maintain our pantry's supplies.

2014 referrals to our pantry and clothing closet came from local schools, Head Start, DSS, Berkshire Farms., SCCAP, Catholic Charities, and WIC.

Number of visits to food pantry – 205
Number of children fed – 207
Number of adults fed – 372
Total number of individuals fed – 579

In addition, 3 Thanksgiving and 3 Christmas baskets were given out.

Thrivent Food Pantry Challenge – Thrivent offered a challenge to churches who serve their community through outreach programs. For every dollar donated to our pantry between Dec. 1, 2013 and March 31, 2014, they granted 50 cents per \$1.00 raised. We accepted the challenge and raised \$2,642. **AMAZING!!**

Clothing Closet – Our community and congregation were generous with donations. We answered needs for clothing, shoes, boots, bedding, and household items. A relationship with “The Everything Shoppe” and Department of Social Services made it possible to help with specific needs.

Number of children served – 40
Number of adults served – 26

Summer Band Concert – In July we again hosted an ice cream social. Delicious desserts were served by many (pies the favorite). The fellowship was wonderful and money raised benefited the food pantry.

“Coats for Kids” and Adults – In cooperation with SCCAP, St. Mark’s hosted a coat, hat, mitten, and scarf give-away. Items were both new and slightly used. Twenty-seven coats are keeping recipients warm. Local banks displayed boxes for donations.

Christmas Appeal – 15 Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes were packed and sent to Samaritan’s Purse. Walmart gift cards helped to provide gifts for children through Wings as Eagles Ministry in South Dakota. Three local foster children received gifts through the generosity of church members.

Coffee Hour – Families prepared delicious refreshments served after our worship services. Yummy food and great fellowship were enjoyed.

“Bread” Ministry – Our local Stewart’s Shop donated bread, rolls, pastries, and snacks to our food pantry.

NET Dinners – The fourth Wednesday of each month we prepared dinner for our neighbors. What a great time we had in the kitchen! Join us!!

Our prayer – “... love your neighbor as yourself.” Matthew 22:39
‘Let us love one another because God first loved us.’

Christian Education Report – 2014

Three very young, energetic boys (ages 4-7) attended Children’s Sunday School. Each week we opened with a “share and prayer” time. Our focus was learning about Jesus’ love and how we can love others. They enjoyed singing, crafts, stories, and playing together. The Youth Christmas message was presented for the Congregation on December 21st. The boys portrayed barn animals and one of the Kings. They loved trying on all the costumes!

While our energetic boys are having fun learning about Jesus, our adults are also learning in a Bible study being taught by Beth Cash. This year their focus has been reading and studying the book of Romans. Please feel free to join their inspirational time of learning.

Sunday school / adult Bible classes begin at 9:15 a.m. each Sunday.

In His Service,

Pat McCoy

NALC News

North American Lutheran Church

April 2015

The Great Exchange

An Easter Message from Bishop John Bradosky

Dear Disciples of Jesus throughout the North American Lutheran Church:

Throughout this Season of Lent I have prayed for our Deans and the congregations of each of our Mission Districts. I am well aware of the many struggles and difficulties some have faced, but I am equally aware of the many joys and celebrations as well as the transformed lives as individuals have come to faith in Jesus Christ or continued to grow and mature in Christ. All those following Jesus and leading others realize that both the joys and sorrows are so interrelated that it is impossible to separate them. Life in Christ includes a constant flow of both. I share these reflections on the Easter Gospel as a way to encourage you during this Easter Triduum.

The Great Exchange

I realize this sounds like a strange way to begin an Easter Message, but have you ever thought of what it would be like to be on "death row" on the last day of your life, waiting for the guards to lead you to the gallows, the electric chair or the room to receive a lethal injection? What would the emotional trauma be like waiting for someone to end your existence, your influence, your identity?

Have you ever known anyone on death row? In preparation for Holy Week and Easter, I have been preoccupied with the Passion narrative and the man on death row, awaiting execution, "Barabbas." The Gospel writers tell us that Barabbas was a robber, a murderer, a revolutionary, an insurrectionist.



Head of Christ, attributed to Albrecht Durer (1471-1528) or Hans Sebald Beham (1500-1550).

Perhaps he was a part of the Zealots trying to rid Jerusalem of the Roman occupation.

Barabbas was a notorious prisoner and we certainly share nothing in common with him, right?

Continued on Page 2

Continued from Page 1

We may have a few parking tickets and perhaps have an occasional arrest for speeding, but we are not violent criminals. We may have committed an occasional misdemeanor but not robbery or insurrection. Comparatively speaking we are good people aren't we, not like Barabbas? Perhaps we could have been guilty of a felony but never intentionally, certainly not murder, nothing deserving death row. We don't consider ourselves to be like Barabbas at all!

Most people don't know anyone on death row. I can't say that. Few people know this about my family, but my first cousin, Johnny Foster, was a gang member in Pittsburgh, Pa. He had broken the law and been incarcerated for brief periods of time on several occasions. While recovering at his parents' home following a motorcycle accident that nearly ended his life, some friends from the gang brought him a fresh supply of drugs to assist him in his healing. When he called them for more drugs, they told him he would have to pay. Without funds, he took a long screwdriver and broke into the back door of a neighbor's home to rob her. The owner was a single mom, with one young daughter. They were both in the living room watching TV. He broke in, went upstairs and, as he was searching for her purse and wallet, the young mother heard his movements and went upstairs to confront him. Still high on the last of his drugs, startled by her presence, in a rage he stabbed her to death with the screwdriver. Moments after he left, her little daughter found the lifeless body of her mother. His trial was brief, and the verdict swift. His life would end in a prison cell.

Several decades later, I invited the brother of Scott Mink from Dayton, Ohio, to share their family's devastating struggle and grief. On Sept. 19, 2000, Scott, then 36, was living with his parents and using alcohol and crack cocaine when, as he told police, he "snapped." He killed his parents after they hid his car keys. The news of their parents' gruesome death reached their children and they gathered at the home of Scott's sister to make funeral plans for their parents when Scott called them. He admitted to his family that he had murdered his parents and then he turned himself in to the police, offering the same confession. His trial was brief and the judgment swift. He was convicted of first-degree

murder and sentenced to death by lethal injection. His case moved quickly through the review process because Scott asked to be executed for his crime. He told his family, "I have done something awful and I deserve to die. Only my death will bring my family's grief to an end and give them the chance to move forward with their lives."

We may not have committed the same crime but Barabbas reminds us that we have all sinned and broken God's commands, avoiding His will for our lives, rebelling against God's sovereignty, asserting our own selfish will, destroying our relationship with God and with our neighbor. The sum total of our sinful rebellion makes us just like Barabbas. We can try to justify ourselves or ask God to accept our relative righteousness by comparing our life to others, but no matter how we attempt to deny the truth, it does not change it. We are sinners deserving death. Only from that perspective will the full weight of the cross and the resurrection unleash its life-transforming power in our lives.

Perhaps Pilate was trying to gage Jesus' lack of popularity or perhaps he was trying to lessen his own responsibility for Jesus' death. As a sign of goodwill Pilate was willing to release a prisoner condemned to die. The people would decide. Would they choose Barabbas, the man whose name means "son of the Father?" (Some ancient texts of Matthew's Gospel even refer to him as Jesus Barabbas.) He tried to free God's people with political insurrection and taking the lives of others.

Or would they choose Jesus, the true Son of the Father, who was reconciling the world to the Father by giving his own life? The people shouted for the freedom of Barabbas and the death of Jesus! This was the first manifestation of the "Great Exchange" that was about to unfold. The one who deserved to die was set free and the righteous one was condemned to die in his place. Jesus was to die for the sins of Barabbas.

Both physically and spiritually we are all on death row. From the moment we are born we are headed toward death. No matter how "good" we attempt to be, our life is filled with sin and rebellion. It is an inescapable reality for every person. Death is the huge equalizer — rich or poor, powerful or

Continued on Page 3

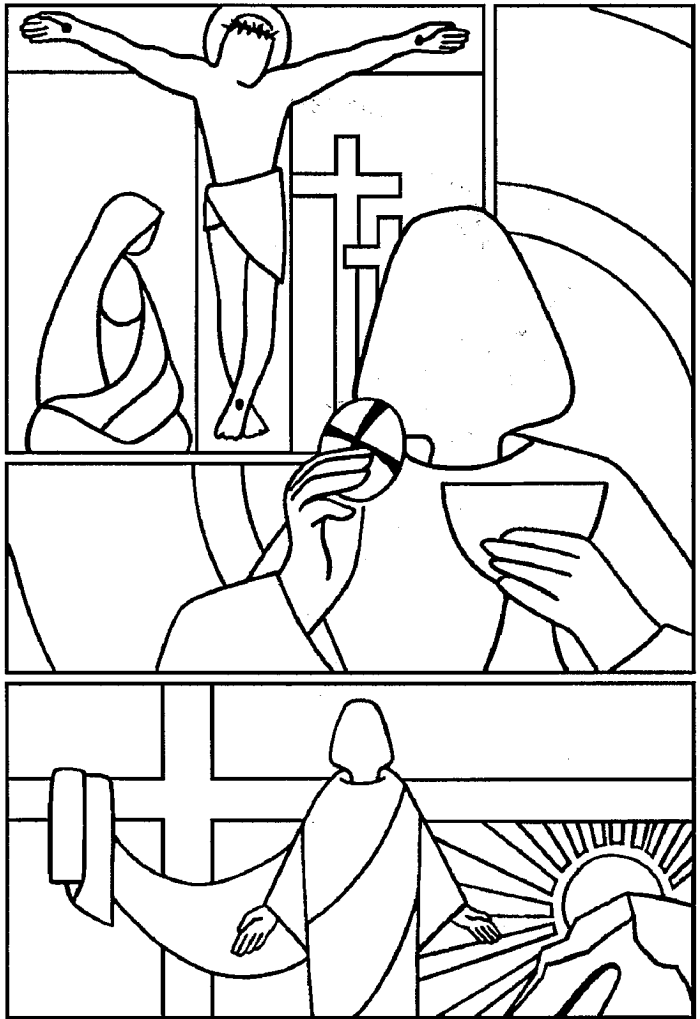
powerless, popular or unknown, intelligent or incompetent, skilled or unskilled — the same end awaits everyone. Denial, anger, avoidance or even declaring that life is pointless and without meaning doesn't change reality. It does not alter the truth.

What is imprisoning you today? What is it in your life that is causing you to live in fear? Is it your past sin? Do you live in fear that someone may discover the truth about your past? Is it a present struggle in your relationship with family, your marriage, your finances, your health, your career? Is it your future that is causing you to feel imprisoned? Perhaps you are trying to figure out the next chapter in your life and fear making a decision. How do you know if it is the right decision about school, career, retirement? If any of that pertains to you then you are in good company because that is where the disciples were on that first Easter morning.

After Jesus' agonizing death on the cross and His burial, the disciples were imprisoned by their fear, their grief and their overwhelming sense of loss. They were hiding in fear that they would share the same fate as the one they had spent the last three years following. They felt powerless and hopeless. That's why they went in the cover of darkness to the tomb, to finish the job of giving Jesus a proper burial. They were afraid of their past involvement with Jesus, concerned about their security in the present and feeling hopeless about their future.

The Easter story begins with Jesus in the tomb, imprisoned by death. Mary arrives at the tomb, imprisoned by her grief. Most of the disciples stay away from the tomb, imprisoned by their fear. This is the context for the Easter proclamation: "Jesus is alive! He lives!" The Resurrection unleashes the life-transforming power of His redemptive love.

The stone is rolled away and the body is gone. Jesus is alive and on the move. Mary is so imprisoned by her grief that she can't celebrate the Resurrection. She is mourning the fact that some grave robbers have carried away the body of Jesus. She doesn't even recognize Jesus when he asks, "Why are you crying?" Then He speaks her name, "Mary." The door of the prison flies open and her grief is transformed to joy. She goes to the disciples and gives them the news that frees them from the



prison of their fears, Jesus is alive and appeared to her and would soon appear to them!

The Great Exchange began with the cross. Jesus died the death we deserved to die. It was our sin that was nailed to the cross. Jesus took our place.

Paul writes, "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Peter writes, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24). A few verses later we read, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit." (1 Peter 3:18).

Continued on Page 4

Continued from Page 3

During Holy Week we remember the prophetic words of Isaiah regarding the crucifixion: "He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

The Cross of Christ assures us that the price for our sin has been paid in full. We are freed from the prison of sin and its devastating power over us. Our forgiveness is complete; our redemption and salvation is secure. This grace through faith in Jesus Christ justifies us. He is the key that unlocks the door to all imprisoned by past sin.

The Cross brings us forgiveness and Easter brings us new life! That is the second part of the "Great Exchange." Through faith in Jesus He brings us into the kingdom of heaven, a world without fear. Jesus taught his disciples not to fear death. He didn't! "Have no fear of those who can kill the body. They cannot destroy the soul" (*Matthew 10:28*). "Jesus abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel" (*2 Timothy 1:10*).

Dallas Willard writes, "All who enter into His life through faith in Him have entered into a life that is eternal. He proclaimed that we were so loved by God that He would not allow us to cease to exist. God treasures us and delights in us." Jesus told His disciples that He had gone to prepare a place for them. In fact, Jesus told His disciples that they would never see or taste death (*John 8:51-52*). On another occasion, Jesus simply said, "Everyone living and believing in me will never die" (*John 11:26*).

Jesus came to show us how to begin now to live that eternal life. The process of discipleship is learning from Jesus how to live a life that is eternal, to learn to live the kind of life He lived. Our future in that kingdom is one of being more at home there than we are here. It is one of ruling and reigning with Jesus, being in His presence, experiencing the fullness of His love, truth and His intended order for life that brings peace.

Even the hymn, "Amazing Grace," reminds us of eternal life, "when we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun."

We are going to be around a long time! Learning to live that eternal life now means not having to rush through this life as though we have to cram in as much as possible for fear we will miss the best that life can offer. The best that life can offer is Jesus, and Easter proclaims that life in Jesus is eternal. Life in Christ helps us to experience life without overwhelming fear, a life that is abundant in meaning, purpose and direction.

Take time to value your relationship with Jesus and the people he has given you to love and care for. The good news of Easter is the best news we can ever hear. It is the greatest news we could ever proclaim. We are forgiven, freed from our past and alive in Christ. Paul writes in Galatians 2:20, *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God who loves me and gave His life for me."*

I have often wondered what happened to Barabbas. The Scriptures don't give us the rest of the story. But I do know what happened to my cousin, Johnny Foster, and the family of Scott Mink.

Johnny Foster came to faith in Jesus Christ through a prison ministry. He wrote letters of apology to every family member. He began his own ministry of leading others to Jesus and discipling them. He did not file an appeal or ever seek to have his conviction overturned. He had forgiveness in Christ, new life in Christ, and peace in Christ. His ministry was in the prison. He even created several videos to help convince youth of the dangers of using drugs and the results that destroyed his life. Johnny Foster died in a federal penitentiary. The chaplain told the family that in the last moments of his life he reached out with his arms to embrace Jesus and his last words were, "I am free at last." Then the chaplain added, "Truth is, he has been free since he came to Jesus years ago, and his ministry in the prison has set many others free as he led them to Jesus."

Because of this Great Exchange that is ours in Christ Jesus, Scott Mink's family was able to forgive him and spend time with him in prison during those final years leading up to his execution. All the other family members were reconciled except his brother

Continued on Page 5

Continued from Page 4

Bill. He refused to forgive him for killing their parents and depriving Bill's children of their grandparents. Scott was in prison, but Bill was imprisoned by his own anger, frustration and hurt.

On the Sunday before Scott's execution the family gathered to decide if they were going to be present to witness his death. Bill was still unsure if he ever wanted to see his brother again. He had been reading the Bible and praying for direction when the words to a song cut through his emotions and the Lord spoke a word he needed to hear. That song was *Untitled Hymn* by Chris Rice:

*Weak and wounded sinner,
Lost and left to die,
O, raise your head for love is passing by;
Come to Jesus! Come to Jesus!
Come to Jesus and live!*

*Now your burden's lifted
And carried far away;
And precious blood has washed away the stain;
So sing to Jesus! Sing to Jesus!
Sing to Jesus and live!*

*And like a new born baby,
Don't be afraid to crawl;
And remember when you walk sometimes we fall;
So fall on Jesus! Fall on Jesus!
Fall on Jesus and live!*

*Sometimes the way is lonely
And steep and filled with pain,
So if your sky is dark and pours the rain;
Then cry to Jesus! Cry to Jesus!
Cry to Jesus and live!*

*Oh, and when the love spills over
And music fills the night,
And when you can't contain your joy inside;
Then dance for Jesus! Dance for Jesus!
Dance for Jesus and live!*

*And with your final heartbeat
Kiss the world goodbye,
Then go in peace, and laugh on glory's side
And fly to Jesus! Fly to Jesus!
Fly to Jesus and live!*

*Fly to Jesus! Fly to Jesus!
Fly to Jesus and live!*

In the midst of this song, Bill realized that the grace of Jesus Christ was bigger than Scott's sin — even the sin of murder. He realized that the sin of his lack of forgiveness was just as great as his brother's sin and that in God's economy they were both on death row in need of the Great Exchange, forgiveness and new life in Jesus. Bill knew what he had to do.

On the eve of his brother's death he was reconciled with his brother and shared Communion with him as a family of faith. They talked openly about his baptism and Christ's promise of His grace, His forgiveness and the assurance of His constant presence. Scott assured his family of his repentance and the peace that was his in Christ now and for eternity. He told his family that they would walk down the hallway and that on the other side of the room where they would give him the lethal injection, Christ was waiting and so were his parents. Bill decided to stay and witness his brother's final breath. He said that Scott walked in and was very calm. "He was assisted up on the table, and he looked out at us, gave us a thumbs up and mouthed the words, 'I love you, Bro.' I looked back and said out loud, 'I love you too. Go with Jesus.' He laid his head back, went to sleep and after a few more breaths his breathing stopped."

The power of the Great Exchange changes everything — the cross of Jesus Christ, the empty tomb and the assurance of Easter, forgiveness and new life in Christ.

The Scriptures do not give us any word about Barabbas' response. The question we are invited to answer is what difference are we willing to let this Easter reality make in our lives?

Easter is not just a word of hope at the end of your life. It is a word of direction for how to live your eternal life in Jesus right now. It is a word that sets you free to begin that journey today! He greets us today with the same message through Word and Sacrament. He is just as present today in this place as He was on that first Easter morning.

Christ is Risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!
Amen.