

# Shepherd's Voice



August 2020

## "Kindness"

By Pastor Scott Searl

Listening to the news, reading about increased violence in the city of Minneapolis (and around the country), seeing the numbers of Covid-19 cases continue to rise, noting the political divide and prayerfully wondering about school openings, I've craved one thing more than any other... and it's not more chocolate or better internet access, it's not more money or loser fitting clothes (although I'm sure I will need them!) What I've been craving is kindness.

In a recent article in the New York Times, the author noted that at this time last year one in twelve adults in America reported feelings of anxiety and depression. The most recent polls indicate that today one in three adults in America report feelings of anxiety and depression. I'm certain that our kids reflect this same significant increase in these feelings. If you are feeling these emotions you are not alone. I know when I feel anxiety and depression I am often less kind, less gentle, less joyful and can even feel less faithful. I know that my mind can close to hearing the suffering of others when I am anxious or depressed. I know that I can become closed off to different points of view and different life experiences. And what I need in these moments is sometimes the very thing that I cannot find within myself.

What I have come to recognize is that we are not our feelings. There is some deeper part of us that is the observer of our emotions. Our true self, that which is at our very core, is a beloved child of God. What this means is that you are not anxiety, you are not depression, you are in fact beautiful, created in love for love. This is in part what Paul means in the book of Philippians when he reminds us all to have the same mind in us that was in Christ Jesus. That same mind is the recognition that suffering, and pain may inflict us, but they are not the definition of us. I find that kindness in particular has an impact on my anxiety and depression. Kindness and gentleness are like a baptismal warm bath that come from outside myself to remind me of what I truly am, and what others truly are. Kindness is a balm for our weary soul.

What I also know for sure is that God's face is the face of kindness toward you. Imagine for a moment God beholding you and smiling. Imagine for a moment that the creator of all things is looking upon you with tenderness, gentleness and warmth. Paul reminds his church at Galatia that "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control." (Galatians 5:22). This is the spirit that is deep within you, because it is the spirit that made you and defines you. As we all move into the fall, back to school, back to confirmation, back to WAM, back to whatever it is, let the words of God's kindness fall upon you every day. Let words of kindness fall gently on your heart. Let acts of kindness come gently from your hands and let God's spirit of kindness define who you are. Beloved, beautiful child of God.

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Deacon	Brian Henning
Faith Community Nurse	Kaye Wothe
Administrative Assistant	Shawn Wacholz
Building Manager	Blair Prax

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Vice President	Julie Luers
Treasurer	Steve Hanneman
Financial Secretary	Ryan Erickson
Secretary	Adam Driscoll
Serve	Nate Lichy
Worship & Music	Julia Buteyn
Building & Facilities	Peter Barott
Learn	Open
Communications	Jill Miller
Care	Dave Cousins
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Evaluation	Chris Polston

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Directions	2
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Pastor Scott Searl	12
Pastor Sherri Otto	13
Brian Henning	14
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## Update from Pastor Scott

Friends at SOTH,

Thank you for your patience and kindness as we continue to work out what is best for our kids and our family of faith in general for this coming fall. I am grateful that schools are taking the time to assess the situation and announce plans when appropriate. In many ways we are hoping to mirror what our schools decide. We also will need a little extra time to get things in order for our kids as we wait for schools to announce their plans. Please contact any of our program staff - myself, Pastor Sherri or Deacon Brian if you have thoughts, concerns or ideas. We are open to listening to all ideas, working with our return team, and implementing the best plan possible. As we decide our first concern is the safety and health of everyone. While we all yearn to be in person, we must respect the fact that Covid is a serious illness. Our priorities of faith will be to continue to be connected to God, to each other and our community. So please keep all our kids, parents, grandparents, staff and leaders both at church and in our community in your prayers as we seek to continue to be faithful in this unusual time.

I also want to highlight our speaker series for this fall. This is an amazing line up of speakers, teachers, authors and mental health care providers. Please keep each and every first Wednesday of the month on your calendar for what will be a fantastic series. While Covid may keep us all on zoom, it has provided a rich opportunity to host speakers from across the country without having to fly them in! Please check out our annual program guide for all the details. Don't miss any of these great speakers this year.

Peace, many thanks, and God's love to you all.  
Pastor Scott

### **President's Post continued**

wonder if they think us older family members haven't done enough. One thing that has come through loud-and-clear is that we all want our country to live up to the ideals it was founded upon — life, liberty, and equal treatment for all its citizens.

So the conversation will continue in my family. Last week my dad wrote this about the passing of Congressman John Lewis, whose death came fifty-five years after Bloody Sunday: "Is it possible we are ready for real systemic change, or will you, our grandchildren, in fifty-five years, be remembering George Floyd as the catalyst for more incremental change? Stay the course people. I don't have fifty-five more years to help".

Peace, Todd



## PRESIDENT'S POST: Three generations and 200 emails: talking about racism in America

By Todd Biewen, Church Council President

I'm not worried about my dad. He knows what he's doing, and he is strong and sharp. At 86 years of age, he has been protesting the killing of George Floyd by standing on a bridge in Mankato that spans the Minnesota River. He

waves at passersby with one hand and holds his Black Lives Matter sign with the other, and he has done so nearly every night since Mr. Floyd was killed by a Minneapolis police officer. In the first couple weeks, among the 50 to 100 demonstrators, my dad was an average of sixty years older than everyone else. When I talked to him the other night, he said he has been the only one there on most nights; the number of protestors dwindle as the days pass. My dad, however, remains energized and restless because he thought our country had come further on racial equity than it actually has.

My father has long carried a torch for racial justice. As a boy, his hero was Jackie Robinson, the first black player allowed to play in major league baseball. His entire adult life my dad has had great regard for Atticus Finch, the lawyer and main character in Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird." My dad believed Atticus to be a fair and just character, and a really good father — the kind of father he wanted to be. As a long-time high school English teacher, he taught this classic novel in an unorthodox way, taking the time to read the entire story to his students, word for word, cover to cover, because he thought the book was that good, and the lessons about fairness, decency, and racial justice, that important. I hope you can imagine that he didn't just read the book, he taught the book.

In retirement, my dad owned a home in Mississippi, and in 2012 at the age of 78, he went to Alabama to board a bus with a lot of people he didn't know, all but one of them black, to travel from Montgomery to Selma to walk with them across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. He did this in remembrance of the Sunday in 1965, when John Lewis and 600 other citizens were confronted and beaten by Alabama state police for peacefully demonstrating against racial injustices. This became known as Bloody Sunday, and took its place among many other significant events of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Because of progress made at that time, many people, my dad included, had a notion that our country was further along on racial equity. I've heard many people, including some members of Shepherd say the same; that they thought our country was in a better place.

My oldest son provoked something in my family when he sent an e-mail on June 1, less than a week after the killing of George Floyd. By "my family", I mean my mom and dad, me and my four siblings and our spouses, and our 15 kids. The 15 kids (we refer to them as "the cousins") are aged 18 to 33 and many have significant others. In total, the family is about 40 people spanning three generations. My son lives in Seattle and in the email he wrote:

### *President's Post continued*

"With George Floyd's tragic killing in Minneapolis, I've been thinking about all of you ... how are you doing, feeling, responding? Personally, I've found it easy to feel powerless when systemic racism has such deep roots, but there's much we can do to at least try to effect positive change. It's easy for us to move on from the protests; we have the privilege of being able to let these challenging times fade away, retreating into our comfortable lives. Our black brothers and sisters, on the other hand, do not. They live with the reality and pain of racism every day. Let's not retreat. Let's keep the dialogue going."

With that invitation to my family, the emails, opinions, and ideas started to fly. Since June 1, in the roughly two hundred e-mails shared back and forth, some things have become clear. We don't have the answers, we're searching for them, and we're willing to listen and learn. The conversation in my family is not unlike what we're talking about to some degree at Shepherd. And, it has included the exchange of an awesome collection of articles, videos, and podcasts on the topic of systemic racism.

My parents always told their five kids we can do whatever we want to do and be whatever we want to be. They have also told my generation and their grandchildren that they can and do make the world a better place. On this issue of racial injustice, I'm not sure any of us believe them. Like so many, we have been complacent and comfortable. In these two hundred e-mails a lot of perspectives have been shared. Some in our family's youngest generation have shown so much passion and commitment. Although they would never say it, I can't help but

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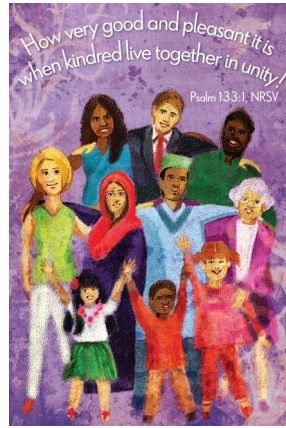
# Staff Reflection

## *It's all us continued*

our hearts, and at the same time do it with the humility that recognizes that we are all in this together. We are all one humanity, and we must learn to trust one another.

Finally, and most importantly, those of us who are comfortable must give special attention to those who are suffering. In the person of Jesus, we see someone who gave up his power or selfish use of his power and instead used his power for those in need. In Jesus God limits God's self and focuses not on God's needs, but the needs of those who are most vulnerable, most in pain, most suffering and most in need. We must follow suit. God's call to us is to limit our freedom for the sake of our brothers and sisters. Not in a charitable way where we comfort ourselves with our goodness, but in the Jesus way where we experience, empathize and participate in redemptive suffering in solidarity with all those who are in need. Our sisters and brothers of color are crying out in pain, "Black Lives Matter" and we must suffer and listen. We must hear their ideas and points of view and work with them to fill in the flawed model of the world that we all carry around in our heads. This is growth! When we can see with the eyes of the other, not fully, but in part. When we can feel someone else's pain, not fully, but in part. This is both an act of humility and an act of trust. God calls us to leverage our own freedoms not for personal gain, but for the gain and benefit of our neighbor.

As we move forward imperfectly God calls us to see in each other beauty and love. For there is no such thing as a them, there is however a beautiful, diverse and amazing us.



## **It's all us... there is no them**

By Pastor Scott Searl

I watched with disappointment as our MN legislature left without making any changes. My personal sense was that now was the time to begin to rebuild a new way of being in the world for our police departments and for each of us. I was sad when we couldn't come to an agreement. Many people need us to act now, the delay has been too long. People are dying, and we must find new ways of being in the world. I also need to recognize that as a collective, outside the

legislature, we can't find common ground or reach agreements either. Far too often each of us (myself included) claims our opposition to be either stupid or evil. And there is no way forward when we see each other as either stupid or evil. What I want to make clear is that the legislature is us, we are them. The legislature is not the problem, we are. We all are. The legislature is a mirror of our own behavior and the behavior of the larger population. That's what representative government is. The legislature represents and reflects us. Not perfectly of course, but I have to admit, I often struggle to find agreement or compromise when I disagree with others. So then why should I expect my representatives to achieve what I myself cannot? In order to do better, we all must do better.

One of the ways forward is to begin to admit that each of us holds a limited and biased point of view. The model of the world that we all carry around in our head that helps us navigate the world is not perfect. We do not see clearly. I am certain that my life experience has created a world view that is not the same as the world view of someone who grew up in poverty. We see the world differently. We need each other to help us find a more accurate model of the world. In fancy church language this is in part what we mean when we say we are in bondage to sin. We think our world view is correct, perfect and clear. We then call anyone who has a different world view either stupid or evil. We must begin to recognize that we are limited, finite and our world views are biased and incomplete. If we hope our legislators will learn to find common ground, and find new creative solutions to our pressing problems, we must learn humility for ourselves and trust in each other.

Relatedly, we must be careful not to make our police officers the scapegoat here either. It is true that there is bias in police departments. It is also likely true that the culture of some police departments needs significant reform. But let's also acknowledge that if we are focused only on changing the police departments we fail again to recognize that the police departments are also a reflection of the larger culture. While I have no data to support this claim I suspect that most police departments reflect the same bias of the community that they serve. In other words, the police are again a mirror of each of us and our larger cultural bias and prejudice. So, we cannot simply look to police reform as the entire solution to our issues. The police are us; we are the police. So, we must courageously strive for justice with all



## Why Lutheran?

By Pastor Sherri Otto

Last night I had a conversation with several parents about Confirmation. When I asked them the question, “What is one thing that you want your kids to take away from Confirmation?”, one person replied, “This might sound weird, but I want them to learn about other religions.” Another person added, “I agree. I want them to know why they believe what they do and what it means to be a Lutheran.” And all the other parents nodded their heads in agreement.

So, why are we Lutheran? It is an important question to ask ourselves and from time to time, have a conversation on what we believe. And it is essential for us to be able to talk to our kids, not only about the Bible, the Commandments, the Creeds, etc., but also about who we are as a people of faith and what our identity is.

This identity, however, does not mean we are better than another person, that we are right, and another religion is wrong, or that we have this circle of friends that no one else can be a part of. Absolutely not! Knowing and understanding that your Lutheran identity is grounded in the love of Jesus Christ, opens our hearts and our minds to see things in a new and different way. In this identity, we believe that by grace we are saved and that we are moved by God’s grace, love and mercy, to love and do what we can for our neighbors in need.

When we learn about other religions, we find that we have more in common with someone from a different faith or background than we ever imagined and the fear that we can sometimes feel, is taken away. When this happens, we can learn from, respect and have conversations about our commonalities and our differences and work together for the good of all.

It is my hope this year, that our Confirmation students learn about what it means to be Lutheran and about other Christian faiths. We will also have conversations about the different religions in our community such as Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, and if possible, by next Spring, be able to visit a Synagogue, Mosque, or Temple and perhaps even do a service project together.

Please pray for our Confirmation students as they begin to discover and grow in their own faith and learn about the faith traditions of others in our community.

Peace,  
Pastor Sherri

## Return Team Update

The “Return to Church” team has been meeting regularly discussing a number of COVID19 issues and impacts to SOTH. Our bias has and will continue to be the health and safety of our members, staff and community. With that in mind and out of an abundance of caution, we will continue to worship from home through the rest of the year.

Blessings to all,  
The Return Team  
Jodi Rogness, Don Wothe, Scott Edmundson, Blair Prax and Terry Jensen

## First Fall Speaker Racial Justice, Voting and Politics

**Wed, September 9 - 6:30pm**  
**Speaker: Dr. Anthony Bateza,**  
**Assistant Professor of Religion at St. Olaf College.**

Dr. Bateza is a specialist in Martin Luther, moral theology and Christian ethics. His research examines Luther’s understanding of human agency and his relationship with the virtue tradition. His other scholarly interests include the broader Augustinian tradition, the impact of Luther’s thought on 19th century philosophy, and questions of race, identity, and social justice.

## WoSOTH Book Club Preview

Wed., August 19, 7:00 pm, on ZOOM  
“Dear Church” by Lenny Duncan (all congregation)

Wed., September 16, 6:30 pm,  
“A Woman is No Man” by Etaf Rum

Wed., October 14, 6:30 pm,  
“American Dirt” by Jeanine Cummings

## WAM continued

So, with all this being said, I hope you will continue to pray for all who will be making decisions about these things in the future. Please note that we are trying our best to ensure that our kids can experience quality community and learning in a safe and practical way.

I do plan on hosting another parent input session on Tuesday, August 25 at 6pm to begin talking more about the specifics of what WAM will look like once more decisions can be made. I will need as much input as possible, so please be on the lookout for more information sent via email.

In the meantime, enjoy these remaining summer days, stay safe, and please wear your masks!

## Gardening Help

Even though our church building is currently closed, our gardens continue to grow—and so do the weeds! If you would like to help a little or a lot, please contact Gretchen Marble, Cindy Koelsch or Naomi Peterson. Thank you!

## Apart for a Time, WAM Like Never Before



By Deacon Brian Henning

On July 8, I had the opportunity to sit down via Zoom with several parents of our WAM kids to discuss what WAM might look like this coming fall. One thing continued to ring true: keeping our kids connected is of utmost importance. While this may seem like an obvious revelation, I think it is important to note that I could not agree more with this sentiment. The community of our kids at Shepherd is so incredible and I am so grateful for each of our kids and the personality and energy they bring to our family of faith.

Of course, the question of what to do with the kids is a national debate right now and one that must be taken seriously. At Shepherd, we are also taking this question very seriously. Information about how kids transmit COVID-19 is murky at best. At the same time, we know that kids learn and grow the best through hands on, in person learning. Our question becomes quite complicated quite quickly because while we want to give our kids the opportunities to be together, to learn about how God is active their lives, and to experience a community where they can truly be themselves no strings attached, we must also keep in mind the importance of keeping them and everyone around them safe.

I wish I could write in this paragraph that I have all of the answers ready for you to digest. However, I, along with many other people, are still working this out. Our return team has decided to postpone the beginning of WAM to September 23. This has been done to give families time to adjust to a new school year and to the many changes to daily life which are about to come. It does continue to remain unclear what WAM will specifically look like this year. One thing is for sure: it will be a WAM like never before.

There are a variety of things I am contemplating at this moment. The first is a WAM which gathers online. This will be our weekly interpretation of our WAM community. Online we will connect, do some large group Bible study type things, and then be sent back into the family unit for further activity and discussion. I imagine this being a cross between the ancient practice of house church with the modern technology of the internet. Another thing I am considering is what outdoor, physically distant, masked, event style things we can do. The (anti) COVID Carnival was a resounding success and Pastor Sherri and I are both looking forward to our other upcoming events (pesky rain stay away!). What other events like this can we do, especially when we get into those glorious Minnesota winter months? Finally, I have been contemplating what an in person WAM could look like, provided the data and our return team allows for such a gathering. I could imagine WAM being a deeply intergenerational event where families gather together, physically distant of course, to learn together about faith. However, we would have to be in family units for a variety of reasons. We also would not be able to sing, play games, or do many other things that make WAM special.



## Fugitive and the Rabbi

By Kaye Wothe, Faith Community Nurse

*One day a young fugitive, trying to hide himself from the enemy, entered a small village. The people were kind to him and offered him a place to stay. But when the soldiers who sought the fugitive asked where he was hiding, everyone became very fearful. The soldiers threatened to burn the village and kill every person in it, unless the young man was handed over to them before dawn. The people went to the Rabbi and asked him what to do. Torn*

*between handing over the boy to the enemy and having his people killed, the Rabbi withdrew to his room and read his Bible, hoping to find and answer before dawn. In the early morning his eyes fell on these words: "It is better that one man dies than that the whole people be lost."*

*Then the Rabbi closed the Bible, called the soldiers, and told them where the boy was hidden. And after the soldiers led the fugitive away to be killed, there was a feast in the village because the Rabbi had saved the lives of the people. But the Rabbi did not celebrate. Overcome with a deep sadness, he remained in his room. That night an angel came to him and asked, "What have you done?" He said: "I have handed over the fugitive to the enemy." Then the angel said: "But don't you know that you have handed over the Messiah?" "How could I know?" the Rabbi replied anxiously. Then the angel said: "If, instead of reading your Bible, you had visited this young man just once and looked into his eyes, you would have known."*

*Are we not challenged in daily life to look deeper into the eyes of the people we encounter - even those who are running away from something - and to see in them the face of God? Perhaps just knowing that they, too, are beloved children of God will be enough to prevent us from handing them over to the enemy. Are we not also challenged and encouraged to look more deeply at the way God sees us - beloved, accepted, affirmed, and worthy of salvation? Are we, like the fugitive, reflections of the Messiah?*

This parable-like story titled, "The Fugitive and the Rabbi" is taken from my all-time favorite book, "Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith" by Henri Nouwen.

When I read this story, if the label "fugitive" had not been used, but instead another identity title, I wonder how I would have viewed the person? I have had to ask myself, who do I consider the fugitives in my life? When I read the story what picture came to mind when I read "fugitive?" For example, I know I immediately picture a man. What gender, race, etc. is the person you picture? Your race or another? Why? What pre-conceived judgments have you made based on the title "fugitive?" Who are the fugitives in your life? What assumptions do we make about others we encounter, interact with or are in extended families with? Have we stepped back and asked them more about the thing we jump to conclusions about? Have we looked in their eyes (from at

## Fugitive continued

least six feet away and with a mask on) and opened our heart to consider their life experiences? I confess that sometimes I am exhausted and need to find a way to not engage, to rest and then I am able to be more empathetic, but I cannot stay unengaged forever, even if it is simply to ask for forgiveness and listen.

In what seems like a time of great division on life-and-death matters the reminder to see the "other" as a child of God and to remind ourselves we too are "loved, accepted, affirmed..." by God feels important. Every day we need to ground ourselves in that truth, share it with others and soak it in ourselves as we move into our day.

Wishing you rest as we enter the last part of summer, wishing you eyes to see the hope in each new day and to see the face of God, especially in the fugitives in your life.

Kaye Wothe  
Faith Community Nurse

## WoSOTH Breakfast Dates

Save the dates for the 2020-21 WoSOTH Breakfast dates. Topics will be announced.

Sat., September 26, 2020

Sat., November 7, 2020

Sat., January 9, 2021

Sat., April 17, 2021

*Continued above*

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