

Parish Happenings

December 2022

FROM PASTOR CHAD

150 Years of Expectation and Action



Photo by David-Olivier Gascon on Unsplash

This year our scripture reading for the first Sunday of Advent was from Isaiah, but there was also a reading from the end of Matthew's gospel (24:36-44). I always find it interesting that we begin the church year, and the season of preparing to celebrate Christ's birth, by reading a passage near the end of the Gospel story. Advent begins liturgically by looking forward to a second Advent when Christ will return and the world will be judged by God. It is a rather ominous beginning to a season that reaches a crescendo with the birth of a baby. Yet, there is wisdom in a tradition that challenges us to live expectantly.

This first gospel reading of the church year assures us that there is no knowing when Christ will return, but also that there is no knowing who are or are not true believers. Throughout Matthew's gospel there are passages that emphasize insiders and outsiders, but never is there a code for us to use to determine who is in and who is out: it is always God's job to do the judging.

Matthew is consistent in delivering the message that the element of surprise is an invitation to be prepared and suspend our worries about dividing people until a time when God will take care of everything. In the meantime we are to be about the work of God as demonstrated and taught by Jesus.

It is tempting to think that our gift buying binges, wrapping frenzies, and Christmas parties are a good metaphor for the season celebrated by the Church each December. Scripture does challenge us not simply to idly wait for the second Advent. However, I've come to the conclusion that the Christian life is nothing like our 21st century Christmas preparations.

Firstly, our waiting is extremely temporary, we know what day all of our frenzied gift related activities will come to an end (depending on how much of a procrastinator you are the end is either the 24th or in the wee morning hours of the 25th.) But, the end of the world as we know it, is not known to anyone in heaven or on earth. We aren't called to live in a frenzied rush, but with a

But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father... Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

(Matthew 24:36 and 44)

healthy rhythm of work and Sabbath, prayer and reflection, and concern and care for our neighbor. Something this congregation has been doing for 150 years now.

Second, our present sense of expectation is rooted in consumerism. Children learn early on that Christmas is about expecting to open gifts. When my kids were young it used to make me crazy that the most common question any stranger or well meaning family member always asked my children was “So, what do you want for Christmas?” Oh, sure, we can hope that we are teaching them a sense of expectation around giving and the joy it can bring, but let’s be honest, it is over run by the expectations around what one will receive. Instead our expectation during Advent is based on the hope of a world set right – a world shaped by God’s justice and peace.

Beginning Advent with Matthew 24 focuses our waiting and expectation properly on living in God’s kingdom now. It forces us to consider God’s call to active preparation: bringing water to the thirsty, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the prisoner, reconciling broken relationships, and loving at all cost.

What will this sort of Advent waiting and expectation mean for you and your family this year? What are some new ways you can be attentive to the concerns of God? What traditions can you add or ditch in order to be focused on God’s love, justice, and peace?

As our congregation moves through its 150th Advent I’m asking the same questions about the start of our next 150 years of ministry in this place. What new ways can we remain focused on our call to serve God in this community?

Cheryl

CHRISTMAS EVE

Christmas Eve worship schedule is:

Family worship with candle lighting – 4:30 p.m.

Lessons and Carols with candle lighting – 7:30 p.m.

CELEBRATING LVPC’S SESQUICENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY

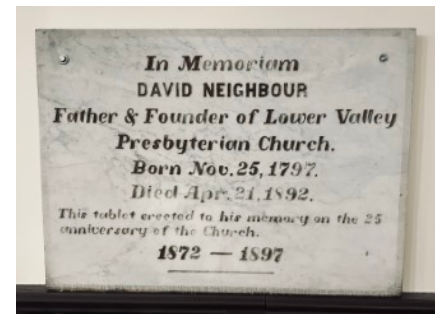
The last few years have certainly upended many plans, but we didn’t want to let 2022 slip away without acknowledging and celebrating the sesquicentennial anniversary of our congregation.

On May 7, 1872 our congregation was officially organized by the Presbytery of Morris and Orange. That’s 150 years ago last May and if you didn’t know the definition of sesquicentennial you’ve learned something new today. Our building was erected the year prior and I suspect the real work of *the church* was already begun, but the moment our mission was officially recognized by the larger Presbyterian church was 150 years ago.

We will celebrate and mark this 150th year on December 4. This has been our annual recognition of notable membership anniversaries Sunday and seemed like a good time to celebrate. There will be a reception and lunch following the worship service so mark your calendars for December 4th.

We’ll take a look back at some fun history: for instance did you know that the original organ cost \$1,200 and had to be pumped by hand or that from 1910 to 1915 the church played a major role in building a sidewalk from main street so people could get from town to church?

And we’ll celebrate God’s call to be the church of Christ in the years ahead of us.



CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PLAY

Our annual Children's Christmas Play is back. The children are excited to share it with our congregation during worship on Sunday, December 18.

CHRISTMAS TREE SALE

The trees for our annual sale were delivered the week of Thanksgiving. We need help selling trees Saturdays and Sundays during Advent. Participating in the tree sale is a fun way to interact with our community, share some Christmas spirit, and help the bottom line.

STEWARDSHIP

What is stewardship? Merriam-Webster defines it as "the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care". For 150 years, the stewards of Lower Valley Presbyterian Church have been people just like us attending worship, engaging together in prayer and fellowship, or just caring about the well-being of the church. Surely, our church couldn't have existed for this long without faithful stewards.

Stewardship is something which happens all year long. We see it in our Session members who dedicate their time as leaders of the church making sure the work which keeps this place running is being done. We see it in the Parish Hall each Sunday through those who have offered to help out with fellowship. Participating in mission projects, helping with Christmas tree sales, offering to usher or serve as liturgist, serving as a Sunday school teacher, making a financial contribution to the church ... these are all examples of stewardship which we see all year long.

We hear a lot about stewardship and pledging at this time of year because it is the time we start thinking about next year's annual budget. What is a pledge and why is it important? A pledge is simply an estimate of what you expect to financially contribute next year to the well-being of the church. We understand that circumstances sometimes arise which prevent people from giving the full amount of their pledge, and that is OK. Our pledged total is just one of the factors we use to arrive at our estimated income for the following year, but it is EXTREMELY HELPFUL to the Finance team when developing our annual budget.

Whether you drop an envelope in the plate during worship, mail a check, or participate in our online giving program, we are grateful for every gift we receive. If you have already returned your pledge card, thank you. If you have not, please do so before the end of the year. If you have misplaced your pledge card, you can pick one up in the church office or contact Claudia and she will mail one to you.

YOUTH GROUP

High school youth group has begun on Sundays from 7 - 8:30 p.m. We generally meet every Sunday at the church for some fun and games and a bit of bible study and fellowship. Our main communication comes from our Student Communications Coordinator's large text group. If your phone number is not part of that group and you'd like it to be, make sure to let pastor Chad know and we'll get you included.

ADULT SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Men's Fellowship: There's plenty of bible study, but that's not all. Join us virtually on Saturdays at 8 a.m. We share life and wrestle with scripture together. At the present we're spending time in Leviticus. Contact Chad with any questions to get the zoom link.

PRAYER CHAIN

Reminder! The church maintains a virtual prayer chain. If you would like to be informed about those in need of prayers, and are willing to commit to prayerfully participate, please contact Krista Jenkins at kjenkins1970@gmail.com. Prayer requests can also go to Krista.

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Lower Valley Presbyterian Church
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Califon, NJ 07830

The Vision of our Church

Lower Valley Presbyterian Church is a community of believers who worship God in word and deed, nurture each other through prayer, friendship, and education, and seek to serve others in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Our four areas of ministry are faith development, caring for each other, outreach ministry and supporting ministry.