

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, August 3, 2021
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“As Was His Habit”

READING: Luke 2:41-42 – Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom.

Luke 4:14-16 – Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read.

The Greek word translated in both of these texts as “custom” is *ethos*. It is a word that can just as readily be translated as “habit”. I like it that way. It was Mary and Joseph’s “habit” to go each year to the Holy City to celebrate the Passover Festival with family and friends. It was also their son’s “habit” to attend worship and instruction in the town’s synagogue wherever he happened to find himself when the Sabbath day rolled around. It was their “habit” to attend to their spiritual needs just as assuredly it was their habit to feed themselves, clothe themselves, or bathe themselves.

Since the Pandemic hit us, some new habits have become quite noticeable in our society. I see people who are still wearing masks in public, even if they have already been inoculated against the virus. It has become a habit for them. It gives them a sense of safety. I have a feeling that for some people, the mask will become a regular feature for the rest of their lives.

Since the Pandemic, hugs and handshakes have become a little problematic. For some, those physical connections have become uncomfortable and they have made a habit of avoiding such close contact. For a year it was considered unsafe and unsanitary to do such things, and now it’s become a habit that’s hard to break.

Since the Pandemic, many people began to order their groceries online and then pick them up without contact at the store. For many, this has become a habit for them. They like the convenience of it. They like the time-savings they get from it. And, they can avoid any kind of crowd and the lines at the check-outs. It has become a habit.

Unfortunately, there is another habit that has become the norm for some members of our congregation. It’s a habit that had an entire year to develop and I’m afraid it’s going to be one that’s hard to break but broken it must be. I’m talking about being absent from the Lord’s house. There are a fair number of people we have yet to see in attendance on Saturday or Sunday since the “Lock-down” started last March. We thank God that we were able to have online services that will continue indefinitely, and we thank God that we have been able to safely gather once more in worship. But I fear that for some, staying away from the Sanctuary has become a bad habit. Here’s why I say that:

#1 – Communion. Those who either watch the services online or have gotten “out of the habit” of worship cannot and will not receive the Lord’s Supper. This is the very meal that Jesus gave us so that our souls may be fed on the very “Bread of Life”. It is a life-giving, life-saving meal that forgives our sins, strengthens our faith, connects us to Jesus, and ties us together as the family of God in this place and around the globe. You’ve got to have it!

#2 – Fellowship. We are meant to be together. The “Lock-down” was a misery because it kept all of us apart. It was not normal. God ordained congregations because he knew in his wisdom that his people are stronger, more faithful, more productive, and comforted by the love and help we give each other. Fellowship -talking, caring, loving, laughing, worshipping together- is an indispensable part of the Christian walk. You cannot get that online. You cannot get that sitting on your deck or riding on your boat or hitting a bucket of balls at the range. Christians are people who need people – and who need to give of themselves to people who need them! It is God’s way.

Now there certainly are people who benefit from online services because they are shut-ins or temporarily side-lined with an injury or an illness. Thank God for that technology. And I know there are some who are still frightened by COVID even though they have already been vaccinated. But for most of us, there is no good reason for us to be away for week after week from the Lord’s house. It was Jesus’s “habit”, his custom, to be in the place of worship like clockwork every Saturday Sabbath no matter what village he found himself in. It was his habit because he, according to his humanity, needed to be connected to his Father in worship and needed to be comforted, strengthened, and “fed” by his Father’s word as it is found in the Scriptures. Let us make it our habit as well. And let us encourage family and friends we know who have gotten “out of the habit.” Invite them to “come on home,” for after all, it is our Father’s house. Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENT(S):

- 1) Our celebration of Pastor Woods’ 25th Anniversary of his Ordination is planned for August 22 in late service and in the dinner to follow the service. Watch for details that should have come to you on a postcard. Be sure to respond to it. What a blessing he has been to us!**
- 2) Pastor Woods and Trish will make a trip to Alaska the last week of this month and the first week of August. Keep them in your prayers.**