

From the desk of Pastor Jonathan



**105 E. Main
Street**

**Ionia, MI
48846**

Service

9:30 am

**www.ioniafirst.
com**

**January
2021**

Newsletter



“Asleep in the Back of the Boat”

January, 2021

Pastor Jonathan

...when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

Sisters and Brothers in Jesus Christ,

Well... here we are after another trip around the sun, and no better off as a species. Feels a lot like what we see in the scriptures. Things appear to be falling apart, and death looms large – like a lowering sky over a running sea – and God seems to be asleep. To be fair, I don’t think there’s any doubt like the one we feel when our own safety and security come into question. When our lives, or our ways of life, feel threatened, we shift into a very particular mode of fight and/or flight. We become agitated, aggressive, obtuse, abusive, and all from a narcissistic inclination toward self-preservation. But no one should be surprised by this: all of this has kept primates alive for millions of years, homo sapiens not the least! So when the disciples cry out in exasperation at a sleeping Jesus, we get it – especially this year.

I think 2020 will go down in memory as one of the worst years on record. Hundreds of thousands have lost their lives to the Coronavirus in our country alone, millions have suffered financial ruin, the institutions upon which society usually leans have imploded, and our sense of neighborliness has been tossed out with the bath water: 2020 did not seem very much like a “year of our Lord.” And worst of all, the calamities which we have faced in isolation have not – by and large – steered us toward a more intimate union with Jesus in the power of the Spirit, and through Them, the Creator. No. The doctrines of the church fall flat in times like these, and because (for most of us) our spiritual habits started out being so banal – or non-existent – we don’t have the depth to weather the storm. When 2020 got rough, we needed a robust inner vitality, which not many of us had, nor could many of us gain in the midst of the wind and waves because we don’t now and have never yet trusted the means of grace to actually work.

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This points us to the question of the spiritual practice of Christians when the doctrines stop making any sense. Ask yourself: what kind of faith does it take to fall asleep in the middle of a raging sea in an open sailboat? Well, Jesus has just come from a sermon series to which *hundreds* of people showed up. And even if the folks sitting beside the sea to hear him didn't understand every parable, they were spellbound by *him*... his quiet and assured confidence, his clarity of emotion, his theological imagination, and his obvious love. But the disciples... ah, these knuckleheads are not enamored with him *per se*, but the idea of him. They're too enamored with the idea that they are on a first name basis with the Messiah to grasp the implications of his parables for their own lives of faith. And all of Jesus' parables can be summed up by revisiting his prayer: look for the will of God to be done by everyone, starting with yourself; for all glory and power belong to God. In other words, whether we live or die in a storm, God is God, and will everlastingly continue to be God.

Do you have cancer? Be comforted.

God will always be God.

Have you lost everything? Be comforted.

God will always be God.

Has your beloved friend or relative died from COVID-19 or complications thereof? Be comforted.

God will always be God.

Has your faith slackened because you haven't had the luxury of being spoon-fed praise on a weekly basis? Be comforted.

God will always be God.

Has your Bible collected dust, because wrestling with the scriptures is too much work? Be comforted.

God will always be God.

Friends, whatever it is that is wrong with your life, or the way you see the world, or the things that you think are wrong that others are doing... *no matter what it is*... Jesus is asleep in the back of your boat. And when you shout at him in exasperation, he's just going to repeat what he's been saying all along: My peace I give to you; be still. And maybe you'll say to yourself – who the heck is this? I expect more from the Son of God? But maybe..... just maybe, you'll enter into wonder as your fears melt into calm... maybe, just maybe, you'll receive his question about your faith as the prompt of a loving Teacher, a just Master, and a truthful Friend.

Have you still no faith?

Whatever else you hope to accomplish in 2021 – I hope this is finally the year I lose 40 lbs – hope that you pony up the effort to see your spirituality take on new depth, so that you can rest... deeply and truly rest... while the teaming fray of humanity gnashes its teeth all around you.

Let us pray:

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time to make our common and private prayers to you; and you have promised, by your well-beloved Son, that when two or three gather in your Name, you will be in the midst of them: Fulfill now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of your servants as may be best for us, granting us in this world knowledge of your truth and in the world to come, life everlasting. Amen.

support to those with which you have worked.

CHRISTMAS AT IONIA CHURCHES IN 1891

The churches of this city always give the children reason for remembering the Christmas season and looking forward eagerly to its return. The following arrangements have been made for this year's celebration. Christmas Eve events are as follows:

The Church of Christ will give a free supper to the Sunday school in the church parlors at 6 o'clock.

The Methodist church has made extensive preparation for a Sunday school festival at 7 o'clock.

The Lutheran church will have a Christmas tree and festival at 7 o'clock.

The Baptist Sunday school will be entertained at 7 o'clock by the presentation of a cantata, "The Frost Queen."

The Presbyterian Sunday school will have a Christmas tree and a cantata at 7 o'clock.

The usual Christmas services will be at the church of SS. Peter and Paul on Christmas Day.

Christmas services will be held at St. Johns church at 10 a.m. Christmas Day and on Monday evening the Sunday school will have a festival, with "Jacob's Ladder" and a supper.

The German Evangelical Sunday school will enjoy its Christmas festival at 7 o'clock on the 25th.

The churches are being tastily decorated with evergreens, etc., for the festive occasions so soon to be enjoyed.

The celebration of Christmas in Ionia's churches has a long history and in this year of special challenges, it is well to remember that the birth of the baby Jesus and the story told in the Bible remains constant even in these difficult times. The relevancy of the Methodist church and its traditions have never been more essential. Going forward into the new year, there will be much work to do as we plan an inclusive and problem solving agenda for our congregation, the local community and indeed our missions around the world.

Linda Ciangi

News from Rebecca Brown

Happy Holidays to all the members of our congregation here at First Church. I sincerely hope that you and all your loved ones celebrated safely, and everyone washed their hands. Joe and I had a very nice Christmas, quiet, but very nice.

On a personal note, I would like to explain to all of you why our names have been on the prayer list. On November 15, about a quarter of the brick on the south side of our home here on North Jefferson fell completely off the home. Needless to say, we were shocked. After we recovered from the shock, we contacted our insurance company and after several weeks and several visits from them, it was decided by the insurance company that this is not covered by our policy. Joe is completely beside himself. We have contacted a contractor, and he assured us that in the spring the home can and will be repaired. Thanks be to God.

I would also like to remind all the ladies here at First Church that late tis fall we, the board of officers, took a vote and I was decided to, at this time, to disband the United Methodist Women group her at First Church. It was a very hard decision to have to make, however due to lack of attendance to published meetings and lack of participation at the various events, the board voted to disband.

I do have some good news. There is a core group of people, men and women, together who are interested in forming a group to take on various mission projects locally here in our town. These projects will include canned food drives, coat drives, small repairs done in peoples' homes, a fund raiser for the church where we will sell soup, bread and a dessert strictly take out only, and in the spring, a plant sale. Both of these activities will need many hands, men and women working together doing God's Work right here in Ionia.

We would also like to send our sincere condolences to our church administrator and a loyal member of the now disbanded United Methodist Women, on the loss of her mother. You are in our prayers as always Marie.

Lastly, we need a name for our new group. If you have any ideas of what to call our new mission type group, please call any one of the active members of this new group listed below.

I would like to remind everyone the U.M.W. group started working on a new library here at First Church. Pat Zander has graciously accepted our invitation to help with this project. If this is something you think you could help Pat with, please contact her.

We would like to wish everyone a Safe and Happy New Year, and also a healthier one.

Best Wishes to everyone. Hope to be able to see everyone in person really soon.

List of people interested in the new mission group.

Rebecca Brown

Roxie and Dave Stiles, Joe and Becky Brown, Don and Virginia Washburn, Ken and Ann Felice, Linda Ciangi, Jan Powell, Colleen Thompson, Gene Clark, Andrew Badder, Amy Buckingham, Marie Church just to name a few.

Trustees News

We have reduced the temperature in the Church for the time being. As soon as we go back to normal services, the temperature will be returned to normal. So if your travels take you to the Church, the heating system is working fine. We will also not be plowing the parking lot for the time being. The company we used to use is no longer in business. When we go back to inside services, we will go back to plowing on Saturday and Sunday. The City plows the lot during the week. We will be looking for volunteers to shovel the side walks and doorways.

We will be facing many challenges in the new year. This will probably be a year of change.

Trustees will be meeting on an as needed basis. The first meeting will be Tuesday, January 12, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. in Fellowship Hall. This meeting could be long, but all meetings will try to be no longer than an hour. Subjects that will be discussed will be, but not limited to, the Parsonage, Future Church Services, Money, etc.

A new group consisting of men and women will be starting up to do local mission related work. I am hoping to combine our resources to do small jobs which will need to be done around the Church and Parsonage.

Please stay safe. Limit your travel, wear your face masks, and social distance. If we all follow the rules, this pandemic will be over that much quicker.

God Bless

Stay Safe

Happy New Year

Joe Brown

January Mission

New Life Center

Ministering through projects such as PET handicap bike, educational classes and community health in Zambia, Africa.

**PLEASE PRAY IN THE NAME OF THE LORD
FOR:**

**(E-mail prayer requests to
sharron67@charter.net)**

Prayers for those in the military:

Adam Cook-Green Beret, Afghanistan

Nick Murray, Retired, Bremerton WA

Andy Hoort-Nurse, Ret. Royal Oak, MI

Ross Marshall, Navy, Submarine, Groton, CT

Daniel Zander-Major U.S. Army retired

Duane Baliff

Austin Campbell - Air Force

Prayers for:

Katherine Asher

Bill & Kathy Berry

Liz Bode

Justin Owings

Hunter Wagner

Elisha & Crystal Stock

Maybelle Drake

Low Slater

Lisa Dvork

Sharon & Bill Hartman

Janie Dollarhite

Marge Bowne

D.S. Margie Crawford

Joanie Carle

Loren Carle

Al & Marge Irby

Stuart Weisgerber

Jack & Millie Bartholomew

Lucille Leslie

Joe Felice

Penny Wineman

Ron Dankenbring

Enoch Dollarhite

Becky Brown

S.P.R.C.

Dear Friends,

It has been an interesting, and at times a bit rough road during my tenure as the team leader of the SP.R.C., but I have had excellent help from the committee. Like many offices in our church, it is time for new leadership. Ann Felice is an able and dedicated leader for this group. New ideas are needed and welcomed. Being responsible for a variety of positions at the church is not an easy task. Pray for Ann, the committee and church.

Finally, thank you for the support you have given us through the years.

God Bless, and have a Happy New Year
Jan Powell

****NOTICE****

The Church will not be providing offering envelopes this year. You can mail checks to the church at 105 E. Main St., Ionia, MI (please don't mail cash), or you may drop off your offering weekdays between 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., or you can contact Ronda Bestrom about the ACH debit program we have through Mercantile Bank which is a very secure way to give.

You will be receiving a letter soon asking for your pledge for 2021. This is important to plan the church budget for the year. With this letter you will also receive a chart to make it easy to keep track of your giving.

FINANCE REPORT ~ END OF YEAR 2020

Ronda Bestrom, Finance Chair & Secretary

Jonathan Bratt Carle, Pastor

GENERAL FUND CHECKING ACCOUNT:

This was a tough year financially for our church. With in-person worship interrupted, along with all our other ministries, giving fell away. We've kept up with our obligations, however, and feel blessed to have had the reserves in the General Checking to do so. But everyone deserves to know the real numbers, which are thus:

2020 Income:	\$116,843.17
2020 Expenses:	\$135,189.14
2020 Deficit:	-\$18,345.97

This leaves us beginning 2021 with approximately \$3,600 in the General Checking account, which will not cover one payroll for the staff. The Administrative Board will discuss measures to adjust this balance by making a withdrawal from the Endowment "Contingency Fund", which action is permitted by the By-Laws of the Endowment. So we will continue in ministry despite these difficulties.

If you have kept up your giving during this troubled year, please receive our thanks. If you have not, but would have given regularly if we had been worshipping in person, we ask that you consider sending a gift. And if any feel called to make a special one-time gift to help secure our financial footing for 2021, that would be deeply appreciated. Regardless, we wanted everyone to know clearly where we stand at the end of this year. We feel that transparency and accuracy in accounting inspires confidence that monies given to the glory of God are being used appropriately.

SPECIAL FUND CHECKING ACCOUNT: CURRENT BALANCES

Memorial Fund.....	\$5,243.22
Board of Trustees.....	\$671.03
Capital Campaign.....	\$15,215.55
Festival of Tables.....	\$1,428.07
Missions & Outreach.....	\$1,617.11
Monthly Missions.....	\$2,145.00
Vacation Bible School.....	\$419.94
Pastor's Discretionary Fund.....	\$416.89
Youth Group.....	\$0.00
Scholarships.....	\$4,763.07
Music on the Green.....	\$1,546.95
Soup Kitchen.....	\$2,858.18
Funerals & Weddings.....	\$209.78
Flowers.....	\$180.79
Nursery Payroll.....	\$500.00

NOTE: There are several monthly missions which have not been dispersed. This accounts for the accumulated balance in that ledger. This will be corrected and the funds sent to the ministry for which they are intended. Be assured, this problem will be fixed, and pastor Jonathan accepts the responsibility for making sure that missions funding is sent at the end of each month.

January BIRTHDAYS

- 1 Mark Hotchkin
- 2 Marge Irby
- 8 Miller Hotchkin
- 10 Michelle Castle
- 10 Abby Frost
- 14 Jack Manciu
- 23 Lacy Fulcher
- 24 Forrest Schumacher
- 27 Al Irby



January Anniversaries

- 4 *Allen & Joan MacDonald*
- 9 *Eric & Renee Asher*

January

Greeters

- Dec. 6 Would you like to be a greeter? If so contact
- Dec. 13 Marie in the church office, and we will sign
- Dec. 20 you up.
- Dec. 24
- Dec. 27

Note: If you have agreed to serve as a greeter on a Sunday morning, but find that you cannot do so, please call the church office (527-1860).

January

Liturgists

- Jan. 3 Deanna Hotchkin
- Jan. 10 Ann Felice
- Jan. 17 Eric Asher
- Jan. 24 Jan Powell
- Jan. 31 Linda Ciangi

If you are unable to serve on the day for which you are scheduled, it is up to you to switch with another liturgist, and notify the church office.

January 2021

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
Mission:					1	2
3	4 7:00 pm Ad Board	5	6	7	8	9
10 Noisy Offering	11	12 6:30 pm Trustees	13	14	15	16
17 Mission Sunday	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	Newsletter Dead- line					



105 E. Main Street

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Service 9:30am

Check it out!

www.ioniafirst.com



