



BETHLEHEM STAR

Go and...be present



To be present has more than one meaning as a faith practice. It might just mean to show up. Be present in worship. Show up to visit someone who is sick or in a care facility. Show up at community or faith events that pique your interest. Learn about what is being done about issues you care about and show up to help. Show up at funerals of friends' loved ones, even if you didn't really know the person. Show up to learning opportunities.

It also means to be in the moment...to be present to what is around you in the here and now. We all too often wallow in the disappointments and regrets of the past, or worry about the future, and then we miss the impact of the present moment. Whether the present moment is beautiful or joyful or painful, it is where we are called to live. It's where we meet God.

People of faith have long known about the power of meditation to help us connect to God. More recently there is a growing body of literature in psychology and the neurosciences that tout the benefits of mindfulness meditation. Meditation asks us to be in the moment. It also acknowledges that our minds will inevitably wander to either the past or future – even if the future is just 10 minutes from now when you get back to work. Bringing your mind back to a particular word or phrase or image, or even just your breath helps to retrain your brain to live more in the present...and to be present. I know from experience that even though my meditation time nearly always seems like a mess, that repetitive turning back seems to have an impact on the rest of my life.

Christ's peace,

Pastor Kris

An Election Year

Jesus followers and voting

As a new year begins, another election year begins, as well. I wish someone could assure us that this one promises to be less ugly than the last couple, but so far I think that's a pipe dream. We don't have a huge amount of control over how political candidates conduct their campaigns. We can, however, exercise our right to vote. Many candidates who say they are for Christian family values don't even come close to what Jesus actually taught. On the other hand, many candidates who never mention their own religious beliefs, or even those who have none, stand for the things that Jesus did actually teach.

The best and simplest way to know what Jesus actually taught is to read and reread what Jesus taught. And that comes from reading the four gospels. Not the ten commandments. Not Paul's writings. Those are important – they are all God inspired scripture. And there is an overarching story of God's work that is told in all of scripture. But Jesus' teachings are found in the four gospels. My challenge this year to everyone is to read all of the gospel of Mark and pay attention to what Jesus is doing and saying. Write it down and let it guide you as you think about the candidates' stands on various issues.

And if you really want to have an impact, pay attention to local issues. Get involved if that's your thing. Write letters to your own representatives.

And pray. We are called to prayer and to trust that God hears those prayers and that God does act.

Jesus followers and social media

I think by now most of us have learned how manipulative social media can be. It offers content that is designed to make you feel outraged, even if it wasn't something you even thought about before. It offers content that is plain false. And it makes us distrust one another. Many of us have had to concede that it is not the place for intelligent civil debate on issues we might once have thought it could be. I know that I've largely given up on it for that. I will very rarely post something about a particular issue when I feel so strongly I just can't not do it. But it is getting increasingly rare.

So here are my more general suggestions – they apply no matter what your political views are.

If you want to make some sort of political statement on social media, make it your own words. Make sure you've done at least a little research from at least a few different sources. Sounds too hard? It is hard. And more time consuming than what most people want to do. And nine times out of ten, you'll end up deciding you didn't have the whole picture and your view isn't quite the same as when you started. That's always a good thing because it will get you closer to the truth.

Don't share photos or memes with pithy one liners meant to evoke outrage. That's all they do, and they just make us more angry and even mean. If you are outraged by something you see, it's almost certainly either not the whole story or it's completely false.

If you are going to use your Christian beliefs as a basis for a post, make sure it is solidly rooted in the ministry and teaching of Jesus, and not just one Bible verse that is often taken out of context to back up a view.

Be careful about engaging in debate online. If it's not someone you know well, it's probably better to just not. And if it's someone you know and you feel a strong urge to respond, have the courage to have a face to face conversation. And focus mostly on asking questions—how did you get to that view? Have you thought about _____? And so on.

Jesus challenged people in power both in the religious world and the political world. He presented a whole different worldview he called the kingdom of God...a worldview based in love of God and love of neighbor. And he sends his disciples out to do the same.

A View From the Pew (12/28/2023)

By The Preacher Woman's Husband

One of the decorations that hangs in our house this time of year is a sign that reads, "You're the reason that Santa even has a naughty list." Preacher woman (PW) and I have come to an agreement: I can put this sign up every year but only in the mud room where few will ever see it. However, I see it everyday and perhaps that is the point. I like the sign because I confess to liking being naughty every now and then. Mostly this



is the harmless kind of naughty, like when we had a digital answering machine that would announce who was calling depending what label I gave that particular number. For example, I changed my cell number label from my name to 'pool boy', which was met with an eye roll whenever I called home and the machine announced, "Pool boy is calling". However, sometimes I stray a bit too far which happened when I changed the label to 'a lesser god'. That got met with the ultimatum of "If you want me to answer your calls that better change." Needless to say, I promptly got myself off the naughty list and returned to neutral ground, at least for a while, and Santa relented and I didn't get a lump of coal in my stocking. All this to say, who really keeps the list of whose naughty or nice? I'd say mostly Santa's helpers – you and me.

But as we continue to celebrate the season of Christmas and the birth of Jesus, there is a group that has no us-them list. On a recent episode of National Public Radio's "Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me", a caller was a retired Lutheran pastor who was asked by the show's host, Peter Sagal, if he was free to start sinning now that he was retired. The retired pastor immediately replied with, "Oh no, I've had that going long before!" I immediately identified with the pastor and take great comfort in doing so. If we accept being an all-in-one saint and sinner in the tradition of Martin Luther, then we also accept that the birth of Jesus was the beginning of a transformative period in our world and ultimately resulted in Him dying on the cross for our sins so that we may live. What it doesn't mean is that we are free to sin, but rather called to follow Him in our daily living, striving to be more Christ-like each day, with others and with ourselves. I like to think Jesus had a sense of humor and enjoyed laughter as much as anyone. So I don't think we have to stop being a little naughty now and then, just don't be mean and belittle others in doing so, but have fun and most often at our own expense. And as PW calls on us at the end of worship, remember to go forth in peace and spread the good news!

Worship is at 10:30 am Sundays, in person or online—or you can join us later on YouTube. Links to the bulletin and YouTube channel can be found on our website:

<https://www.bethlehemdavey.org/worship-in-person-and-online>

Calendar

- December 31** 10:30 am—Worship as usual
January 7 10:30 am—Combined Epiphany worship at Grace
January 14 10:30 am—Worship
January 20 6:30—8:00 pm—Community sip and paint event
January 21 **10:45 am**—Worship with communion
(Note later start time to accommodate Zion’s annual meeting)
January 28 10:30—Worship; annual meeting following worship

Annual meeting

One of the agenda items for this year’s annual meeting will be a proposal for grant applications to be granted from our investment account. A copy of the proposed grant policy and application will be made available at least two weeks in advance.

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[Bethlehem Lutheran Church - Davey](#)



Council president—Jeff Atkinson—402-432-6212
Council members—Charlie Brown, Linda Sestak ,
Jerri Daugherty, Curtis Olson

January helpers

Cleaning— Jeff and Laurie
Lector - Jerri D.
Coffee - open
Usher - Jeff
Communion Assistant – Janna
Altar setup—open
Little Free Pantry—open