

08.01.21 WORSHIP SERVICE

SABBATICAL SHARING – PASTOR CALEB

It is good to be back with you all today. 3 months go by quickly, and yet it feels like a long time since I've seen your faces. I have Austin with me here, but Beth and Josiah are at the Western District Assembly worship service at Faith Mennonite this morning.

This is my first Sunday after returning from my sabbatical leave. You are probably curious about how we are doing and what I've been up to. I'll take the next few minutes for a short report about my sabbatical.

One of my initial goals for sabbatical was time for study, reflection, reading, or writing, apart from the purpose of writing a sermon or preparing for a Bible study or meeting.

I had some initial expectations that I had to lower or let go of, in order to simply spend time with my family and to give Beth a break. We had a few weeks without regular childcare which meant I had plenty of time with our boys, now 4 and almost 2.

I did some reading or audiobooks on topics of prayer, racism, pastor wellbeing, and broader-church currents.

These include: Thomas Merton, *No Man is an Island*; David Gushee, *After Evangelicalism*, Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, much of Drew Hart, *Who will be a Witness?* and portions of Matt Bloom, *Flourishing in Ministry*.

I enrolled in a six-week webinar series called, "*Pastors for Normal people.*" These were on themes of teaching the Bible in congregational settings, especially for pastors who have their own questions about the Bible or are coming to new understandings of how to approach the Bible.

This has partly inspired me to plan a study called "How the Bible came to be (and what that means for how we read it)" that I'd like to offer sometime in the fall.

MINISTRY INTEGRITY CIRCLES

I also had a little bit of travel during sabbatical. Over the past year, I participated in a program called Ministry Integrity Circles through the seminary in a cohort of other pastors from a variety of locations.

I always met virtually with them until the final retreat in June which took me to Indiana, and allowed me to also visit some old friends.

FAMILY TIME AND REST

We also traveled as a family to South Dakota, where Beth's folks are from, and Iowa, where I am from.

A highlight of the Iowa trip was the demolition of the house right next to my parent's. Dad's cousin Daniel Keith operated the excavator and became a hero in Austin's eyes.

We also took a short vacation to Colorado as a family, where we attempted to do modest hiking with the kids on our backs. Kind of like back-packing, except the pack talks back and asks to get out or back in every five minutes.

RUNNING AND BIKING

Running, as well as biking, has been important to me to stay physically and mentally healthy. I try to run or bike prayerfully, and find connection to God, especially when it feels as if I have to tap into a strength beyond myself.

I had more time for this on sabbatical, culminating in a half-marathon I ran by myself last Friday, faster than my goal time.

QUITO MENNONITE CHURCH

I did not do any international travel, both because of the logistics of planning it between other trips and in a way that Beth could have support with the boys. Additionally, I'm sensitive to the fact that the pandemic still rages in Latin America, so travel isn't without risk. I've saved one week of sabbatical time that I hope to use in the future to visit one of the communities I know.

At the same time, it worked out that I was able to connect with the Quito Mennonite church virtually.

I meet with their leadership group over Zoom. They are in a time of transition and loss, and I could at least learn how they are doing and listen.

I also preached two times in their Zoom services – very fun to experience – and joined a morning discipleship study. They now consist of more unfamiliar faces to me than familiar.

WORDS OF GRATITUDE

I am deeply grateful and indebted to this congregation for providing for this time away in which I could rest, and find renewal that I hope will provide the fruit of new energy, and that together we will experience growth with the challenges we will surely have in the next year.

If you'd like to hear more, feel free to contact me.

MORNING PRAYER – PASTOR CALEB

ADORATION

God of the cosmos,

We see glimpses of your awesomeness and creativity in the sunsets, the nighttime stars poking through the balmy summer air, and the fireflies dancing in the breeze.

We see your tenderness and joy in the faces of young children.

We can only try to comprehend your mystery, vaster than the billions of galaxies, who also has counted the hairs of our heads.

It is even harder to comprehend the mystery of You who took flesh in Jesus, and to let the radical way of Jesus inspire our daily walk and biggest hopes.

We feebly sing your praises and bless your holy name.

CONFESSION

We confess that we are still under the power of sin and the various powers of our broken world, unable to free ourselves.

Our imaginations are small, our faith is fragile, our focus self-centered and trivial, our hopes are shallow.

We use our words to judge or wound others, and we ourselves are wounded and insecure.

Forgive us.

You who are rich in mercy have made us alive in Christ.

You have loved us the same even we are at our most hostile to you and to one another.

THANKSGIVING

We offer our thanksgiving and our petitions. I name some of those we share as a community, and each of us has unspoken concerns also on our hearts.

We thank you for the ministry of Camp Mennoscah this past summer and for all the children, youth, and young adults from our community and beyond who were able to experience camp this year, especially after missing a normal camp experience last year.

We give thanks for summer and summer activities.

For summer sports, swimming, vacations and family outings, changes to enjoy the outdoors.

We give thanks for a season closer to normalcy, being able to gather with less Covid concerns.

SUPPLICATION

We offer our concerns about increasing case numbers and concerns about the Delta variant, not knowing what, exactly, that will mean for our community.

We are pandemic-weary. We ask for patience and compassion for individuals and family who are affected or hospitalized.

We lift up people in our midst with illness, ongoing treatment, or recovery. Each of us is close to someone in one of those categories.

Send healing and comfort by your Spirit.

We continue remember Brent Rauh in his recovery after his stroke.

We rejoice with Delton and Janice that his injury was not worse, and pray for his continued recovery.

We pray for the family and friends of Mary Ann Funk, whose memorial service took place yesterday.

We pray for those who are working hard to make preparations for Threshing Days next weekend. Grant them energy and creativity as they head into the events.

We pray for people in our country and globally who are living in (or being displaced from) areas with wildfires, heat waves and other changing climate conditions are impacting daily life.

We pray for wisdom to know how to respond to the crises of our time with compassion, and for the faith to remain anchored in hope even when the news can make us feel deep angst and uncertainty about the future.

Help us to practice an awareness of your presence, and to let that awareness transform our thoughts and all that we do.

Rooted in the love of Christ, we have the faith that the pattern of death and resurrection in Jesus' life is the same pattern we can live by.

The same power that rose Jesus from the grave lives in us.

Help us to take that conviction forward in this coming week.

In the name of Jesus, Amen