



First Mennonite Church of Champaign Urbana

THE VINE

February/March 2020

Lent in Real Time

by Pastor Michael

Most years our Lent worship traces a theme through the Revised Common Lectionary readings. We leap into Lent with the story of Jesus' 40-day fast in the wilderness (Lent is 40 days long) and touch down with the "Palm Sunday → Maundy Thursday → Good Friday → Easter Sunday" blitz. But here's the problem: the time covered by that one week in the church's calendar encompasses one-third or more of the Gospel stories (in Mark it's nearly half of sixteen chapters). If you're unable to make the services on Thursday or Friday of Holy Week, you might not hear any of the stories of the last week of Jesus' life.

As Anabaptists, we nurture a clear commitment to the whole of Jesus' life, to the full depth and breadth of his teaching, healing, sojourning, prophetic ministry. Yet absent the final week – the prophetic challenge to the powers of Jerusalem and Rome, the rejection and execution, the struggles of the disciples to remain faithful, and the in-breaking of God's New-Life-Power – we risk missing the cost of Jesus' commitment to God's liberating work.

Lent this year stretches from February 26 (Ash Wednesday service at 6:30pm) through April 9 (Maundy Thursday service at 6:15pm). Sunday worship services will follow extended narrative sections from Matthew 26-27, concluding with Matthew 28 on Easter Sunday. We'll trace the stories of Jesus and the disciples beginning with their last meal together, then the arrest, trial, execution, and resurrection, observing how God empowers Jesus to remain steadfast before the powers of his day. FMC writers and actors will help dramatize some of the stories. Consider reading these chapters in the last week of February as preparation for the journey

Lent is traditionally a time to check our own spiritual journeys. Where has the path taken you? Where have you missed the trail markers and wandered from God's love? Listen closely for Jesus calling out the Way.



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Lent and Easter Calendar

Focus: Jesus' last week

Scripture: Matthew 26-27; Matthew 28



February 26: Ash Wednesday Service (6:30 pm)

March 1: Lent 1 worship & communion (9:15 am)

March 8: Lent 2 worship (9:15 am)

March 15: Lent 3 worship (9:15 am)

March 22: Lent 4 worship (9:15 am)

March 29: Lent 5 worship (5th Sunday schedule; worship at 10:45 am)

April 5: Palm Sunday, worship (9:15 am)

April 9: Maundy Thursday meal & service (6:15 pm)

April 10: Good Friday service (12:15 pm)

April 12: Easter and communion; brunch at 9 am and worship at 10 am (no Sunday school)

Note: As we move closer to Easter, there will be opportunities to participate in an orchestra and pick-up "Hallelujah chorus" choir. The orchestra will likely play on Palm Sunday or Easter. The choir will rehearse after Easter brunch and sing during Easter worship. Look for details in the coming weeks.



The FMC Council developed an emergency plan this year, outlining various types of emergencies and responses. A link to the plan was emailed to the congregation when the annual meeting document links were sent out. Hard copies of the plan are available in the brochure rack near the office.

In response to the plan, the office updated our first aid items (well past expired, some dry and unusable). We have two new labeled first aid kits for minor injuries; the kits are stored in visible locations:

- Upstairs on top of the coat rack
- In the fellowship hall, on the counter under the coffee mug cabinet

Other items to locate quickly:

- Automated External Defibrillator (AED) is next to the first floor water fountain. Instructions are in the unit.
- Fire Extinguishers
 - 1) At the top of the basement stairs that are closest to Springfield Ave.
 - 2) In the sanctuary, behind the partition close the pulpit.
 - 3) Downstairs in the kitchen, above the waste basket.
 - 4) Downstairs in the furnace room (at the foot of the stairs closest to the parking lot).
 - 5) In the office, on the left side of the long work counter.

Current worship series



We've begun a five-week worship series entitled "Body and Soul: Healthy Sexuality and the People of God". The series is a celebration of God's gifts of our bodies, as well as the gifts of intimacy, sexuality and holy desire. Part of our celebration includes a different food to eat each week.

February 2: Our bodies, God's image

February 9: Honoring the gift of sex

February 16: Holy desire

February 23: Queer theology; guest preacher, Annabeth Roeschley

Note: Annabeth Roeschley attended Bluffton [Mennonite] University and is currently at Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS), earning a master of divinity degree with a concentration in LGBTQ religious studies. She won the 2019 G. Campbell Morgan preaching Award, given annually to a CTS student who excels at preaching.

Lament

God, we are lonely.

We are surrounded by people, surrounded by activity, surrounded by noise – yet we are lonely.

We lament estranged relationships with family and friends.

We ache for the children we had hoped for but never bore.

We miss those dear to us who live far away.

We mourn loved ones who have passed on.

Our busyness does not fill the void.

Our hyper-connectedness through technology does not complete the picture.

We long for intimacy in our lives.

We desire to know and be known.

Teach us, gracious God, the love that satisfies.

Open us to receive one another

and learn the way of intimate friendship,

The way of love. Amen.

This lament was used during the January 26 worship focus, "Created for intimacy".



New Google Group for Illinois Mennonite Churches that are Openly Welcoming

- by Randy Nelson

Including FMC, there are now six churches within Illinois Mennonite Conference that are openly welcoming LGBTQ+ members. These are Chicago Community Mennonite Church, Evanston Mennonite Church, North Suburban Mennonite Church in Libertyville, Reba Place Church in Evanston, and Mennonite Church of Normal. Last fall, we organized a conference call with representatives of all of these churches. To help maintain this contact, this winter in cooperation with Andy Hedberg of Mennonite Church of Normal, we created a Google group that includes interested people from all six churches.



Any member of the Google group can send an email to all members. Currently there are not major restrictions in the group but we ask that you use this service only to communicate within the group concerning LGBTQ issues within IMC and how we engage them, or information from MCUSA or Brethren Mennonite Council related to LGBTQ policies within IMC.

If you would like to be included in this group, please send your email address to Pastor Michael.

Study War No More: Three Movies

- by P. Gregory Springer

Perhaps the most ironic flaw in human thinking is that we can stop one war by waging more war, that we can prevent violence through more violence. At this stage in civilization, we should have learned the illogic of this.



But, still, we watch war, even if we don't participate. We pay to see violence on the screen or on the sports field. Sometimes, we may turn our heads or refuse to watch. But the wars continue.

Are anti-war movies even possible? Don't all war movies end up glorifying battle, heroes, and sacrifice in some respect or another?

There are a couple of new twists on that idea. The first is Sam Mendes' movie 1917 (which by the time you read this may have won the Best Picture Oscar).

In some ways, 1917 tells a familiar narrative of daring and bravery in battle. Two young British soldiers, Blake and Schofield, are given just a few hours to carry out a suicidal assignment. They must cross the battlefield alone on foot to warn fellow troops – some 1,600 of them, including Blake's brother – that they are about to be ambushed. Based on true events, the WWI tale includes all the horrors and trials of battle, with barbed wire, the filth and crowding of trenches, the barren landscapes, the guns and bayonets, the rush against time.

But there is a big difference between 1917 and other war movies. Director Sam Mendes has told this story – handed down from his grandfather -- without employing traditional film editing. The movie appears to be done within a single shot, a single gasp of time, two hours of holding your breath.

The eye of the camera observes dispassionately as these two soldiers race against time. The viewer is placed in a similar situation as the soldiers: there is no escape, no relief from editing to another place or another time. What is happening now continues happening and the viewer is present at every moment, whether the soldiers are being attacked, planes are crashing near them, they are falling into rivers and surrounded by corpses and burial grounds, harboring a young woman and her baby, doing hand-to-hand combat, or zigzagging through a sniper zone. You are present in every moment. It is all the unblinking now.

Some have criticized the movie for being a special effect that draws attention to its technical choreographic wizardry. In some ways, it is like seeing a play on stage where the curtain never comes down. But at the very least, 1917 is a different way of observing war in the movies.

Study War No More: Three Movies (*continued*)

Another example is *Jojo Rabbit*, also nominated for best picture. Making a comedy about Nazi Germany can be risky business, but this deeply rewarding, warm, and funny story follows the 10-year-old boy infatuated with Hitler Youth and his hero, Adolph Hitler (who appears to Jojo like an imaginary friend and is portrayed winningly, mustache and all, by the film's director Taika Waitiki). This may be the only movie ever made where you enjoy watching Hitler on the screen.

The most sublime and beautiful of these new movies is Terrence Malick's new film, *A Hidden Life*. It tells the story of Franz Jägerstätter, an Austrian farmer and family man, who could not bring himself to pledge loyalty to Hitler. He continues to farm and work for his family, despite growing pressures to conform. All he has to do is proclaim loyalty, nothing else, but in his quiet protest, he cannot bring himself to do so.

The visual aspects of *A Hidden Life* portray a different kind of glory than the one's usually seen in movies about wartime. It is not the glory of battle that we see, but the glory of landscape of God's creation, of nature, of food and work and the meaning of community, even as Franz and his family become pariahs. It is the glory of conscience and truth.

"Sign the paper and you will be free," the authorities plead with Franz after he has been imprisoned.

"But I am free," he replies.

Today, in an era people have referred to as "post-truth," very few would be willing to pay with their lives for refusing to sign their name to a lie. In 2007, Jägerstätter was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI.



This is a marvelous movie, perhaps the best movie about non-participation in war, and it is in keeping with other movies by director Terrence Malick. If you aren't able to see *A Hidden Life* anytime soon – it is only being distributed in a few larger cities at the moment -- you can get an idea of Malick's sensibility and visual style from his earlier movies, such as *Days of Heaven*, his philosophical meditation *The Tree of Life*, or his other actual war movie, also poetic in nature, *The Thin Red Line*. *A Hidden Life* is a movie about dealing with war, but without depicting the voyeurism of battle itself.



- by Rebecca Bare

I recently read the book *Fifty Shades of Grace*, which contains fifty short stories about how people have found grace in their lives. The introduction of the book advises the reader to read not more than 2-3 stories at a time. I followed this advice as I read, and I was able to remember and digest what I read.

The stories are short, taking no more than five minutes each. The authors are from a variety of backgrounds, such as a member of the Kennedy family, civil rights leaders, missionaries, pastors, etc. The stories are also arranged in a wide array of topics. I remember one about giving yourself grace when you do something embarrassing. There were several stories about finding grace after a loved one has died. Other stories centered around finding grace with people who disagree with your religious or political views.

I highly recommend this book to everyone. It's available in our FMC library.



New Books in the FMC LIBRARY

Who is my Neighbor? by Levine and Sasso. A children's book that encourages new ways of seeing our neighbors and ourselves.

Collateral Damage – Changing the Conversation about Firearms and Faith by James Atwood. Pastor, activist, and avid hunter for many years, the author issues an urgent call to action to Christians to work together to stop gun violence.

Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion, & Truth in the Immigration Debate by Matthew Sorens. New, expanded edition.

East Central Illinois - Exploring the Beginnings by Elizabeth Hanson. This book was donated by Janet Elaine Guthrie in connection with studying the Doctrine of Discovery.

Collection of Hibakusha Experience. Hibakusha is a Japanese word meaning "person affected by a bomb" and generally refers to those affected by the 1945 bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This book was donated and translated by Barb Shenk and brought from Japan by Randy and Marcia Nelson.

After Life by Greg Springer. Travels without Lee, and glimpses into Greg's volunteer journeys in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Colombia, and Peru from 2016-2019.

Intercultural Church: A Biblical View for an Age of Migration by Safwat Marzouk.

DVD: Bakhita – From Slave to Saint. The story of the life of a woman born in a village in Sudan, kidnapped by slavers, and sold to a Venetian merchant and who was eventually considered a saint in the Catholic Church.

Numbers

- by Pete Shungu

Numbers have always made more sense to me than words
And statistics have always made more sense to me through sports
1 plus 1 is always 2
3 hits in 10 at bats is always a .300 batting average
6 baskets made in 12 attempts is always a 50 percent shooting percentage
When I was little, I used to buy packs of baseball cards
1988, '89, '90, '91 Topps from Toys R Us
I always liked Topps cuz they had the most stats on the back
At first I was too young to understand what the statistics meant
So I would memorize all the players' heights and weights
Later I would learn the meaning behind the stats— I learned how to calculate batting average and slugging percentage and earned run average
My brother and I would play this game I created to see which player had more of each statistic than another player- based on the stats on the back of the cards
We even had a name for it- one-nothing-two-nothing
Cuz we would compare the two players stat by stat like oh-one, one-one, two-one, two-two
And the winner would move on to face the next challenger
I was probably more interested in the statistics than the game of baseball itself
I was a nerd— and I still am

Numbers make sense to me—

Sometimes I can remember birthdates better than names

Give me a street and street number and I'm golden

Give me a couple of landmarks nearby and I'm lost

I'm that person who knows the Champaign-Urbana bus routes by their number, not their color.



(continued on next page)

Numbers (*continued*)

When I worked at the U of I, I used to hop on the 9B to work, the 9A back home— sometimes I would take the 1 or the 5 or the 22

But if someone was like ‘take the blue’ then I’d be like ‘huh?’ That’s a foreign language to me.

Numbers teach me that the way we do things is not the only way

Why do we measure in inches, feet and miles instead of centimeters, meters and kilometers?

Why do we weigh in ounces and pounds instead of grams and kilograms?

Why do we take temperature in Fahrenheit instead of Celsius/centigrade?

It doesn’t make sense

It only seems to makes sense because we have constructed things that way

Numbers help me understand the world

But they can’t explain everything

They can’t always capture emotions

They can’t always capture nuance, subtlety, beauty, tragedy

So that’s I write

But then again, words can’t always capture those things either

Maybe some things aren’t meant to be captured

analyzed

logic-afied

Maybe some things are meant to just

be

