

First Baptist Regina Weekly News

For the Week of May 31th, 2020

The Miracle of Spring!



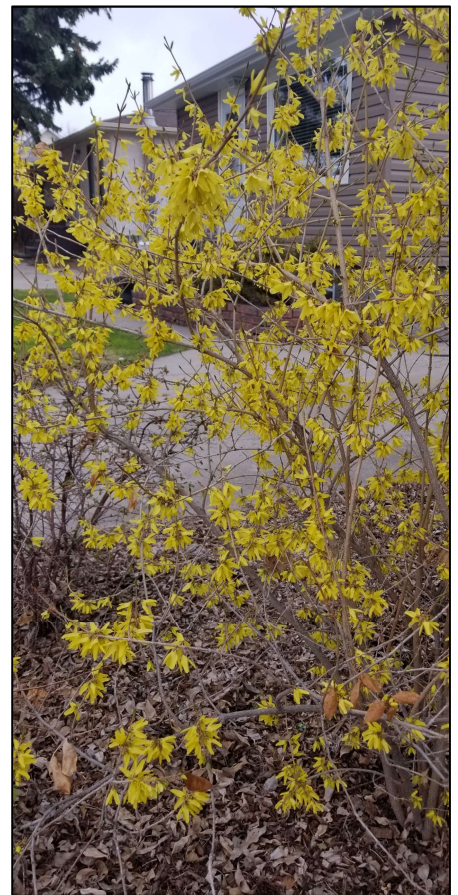
Miracles are sometimes described as God's interruption or alteration of the natural order: the sun rises and sets, rain falls, and plants grow all without God's activity. And only sometimes, God intervenes and surprises us with a dramatic rescue or an unexpected healing.

At the same time, we uncritically recognize that life often strikes us as miraculous, even when it is natural and expected. Plenty of folks cannot help but exclaim, "What a miracle," when a child is born. Spring certainly feels like a miracle when it finally arrives in Regina. But neither of these outcomes were unexpected, both a result of cause and effect. Are we being silly if we feel surprise?

It could be argued that every sign of new life reminds us of the origin of life in the Holy Spirit. Or perhaps our hearts know something our minds cannot yet grasp: it is all miraculous. God's grace and goodness are all around us, sustaining all life until the great renewal that drawing ever closer.

May God have mercy on us all, opening our eyes to the constancy of his miracles, and thereby renewing us in our own work and prayer.

With love, Pastor Joel



AGM 2020 – Online



Our spring Annual General Meeting has been delayed due to COVID-19 but is now scheduled for Sunday, June 14th, 2020. It will be held online via Zoom meeting following the morning service.

Be sure to attend: we have much to celebrate and much to discuss!

The 2019 Annual Report and other related information may be found on our website: www.firstbaptistregina.ca

If you need a printed copy of the agenda and annual report delivered to you, please call the church at (306) 359-1450.

What have YOU got growing?

Do you like to grow things? If so, this is certainly the time of the year to do it! We invite you to take a photo (or two) of you and/or your family with whatever you have growing in your yard, balcony, deck, or wherever and send it to fbc_main@sasktel.net. We will share them with your church family so that we can rejoice in the miracle of spring together!



Deacon's Report

As our Covid-19 challenges continue, I wish to say a number of thank yous, on behalf of the Deacons' Board.

- Thank you to Pastor Joel for his hard work and strong leadership, leading us so well through uncharted waters. He has felt the weight of leadership, and put in long hours. And he has been faithful and successful in serving us and serving Jesus.
- Thank you to Pastor Richard and Pastor John, as they have taken on new duties - new job descriptions really - without complaint, and have served us so well.
- Thank you to Youth Leader Chris, for finding ways to stay in touch with our young people, and holding them together as a group. They have needed support and Chris has been there for them.
- Thank you to Julie Hovey, who has helped Joel meet with and have fun with our children each week.
- Thank you to those who have made phone calls, delivered groceries, and helped get the weekly newsletter out. Those without internet have really appreciated the printed newsletter.
- Thank you to Kevin and to the Finance committee. They have monitored our finances and looked after the changes in our loan. They are wise and careful people.
- Thank you to Kevin and Bryan, for all the technical work they have done in making our worship services accessible, and making our pastors' lives easier.
- And thank you too to the entire congregation of First Baptist Church. You have tuned in faithfully on Sunday mornings, and you have continued to give faithfully to the work and mission of the church. You continue to be the church.

We are now awaiting guidance from the government on how and when we might begin to re-open our building. We expect that this will be a slow process, and that we will be offering a 'hybrid' approach for some time yet - a combination of online and 'in the building' activities. We will let you know as soon as we know more.

In the meantime, we keep the Faith!

Blessings to you all,

Ron Phillips, Deacons' Chair

Live from Lebanon!

Our fundraiser on Sunday, May 24th was a moving experience with powerful stories from our SENT team, the Botros family in Beirut, and a Palestinian seminary student. We have raised nearly \$5000 toward our goal of \$8500. This is being matched from our Mission budget and going toward providing for the Botros family, Syrian refugees, and the Middle East Conference.

Ways to give:

1. Online with a credit card: <https://www.givetogo.org/team/FBCRegina>
2. Mail, or drop off, your donation to First Baptist Church, 2241 Victoria Ave, Regina SK S4P 0S4. (Please do not leave cash in the mailbox.) If you require an in-person pick up, call the church at (306) 359-1450.
 - Make cheques out to “CBM”
 - Note “SENT Lebanon” in the memo line or on the envelope

SENT team Reflections from the Luncheon

Deirdre Sentis: When we visited Lebanon last year, we stayed beside the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary and it was an honour to meet President Elie Hadad and other faculty and staff. They are brave heroes committed to staying in Lebanon, instead of fleeing, demonstrating the love of Jesus in the midst of hardship.

Recognizing that there are changes in the needs in their communities, the realities of church life, theological education, and leadership formation, they are exploring ways to re-envision their ministry.

Dr Martin Accad is speaking at the Middle East Conversation on “A Dynamic Pause: Reflections on Simplicity, Purpose, and Transformation in this time of Pandemic” on June 18. I am looking forward to attending from home.

What a privilege to know that when we give to CBM in Lebanon, we are getting funds directly into the hands of trustworthy local leaders who, through local churches, are helping those who are suffering.

Ben Sentis: While we were in Lebanon, Xavier and I often went with Timothy, Emad’s oldest son, to a small grocery store to buy snacks. They cost the same as we would pay Canada. In the last four months however, all food prices have sky rocketed by sixty percent, and hunger is now as big of an issue as the Corona virus.

Driving around in Lebanon was very different, there were many checkpoints, sniper towers, a few tanks, and soldiers were everywhere. When we were there, the military seemed present but not active. Now however, the military is on high alert and is very active. Beirut is no longer safe, there are riots, gangs of protesters, and fights.

One of the pastors we met in Lebanon said that it would take ten years for the Syrians to move back because all they had has been destroyed, their water, homes, schools, hospitals, everything. On top of that, Syria is conscripting everybody old enough to serve in the army, and some of them may be arrested if they return. Many refugees don't want to go back. So not only are the Lebanese struggling with political unrest, COVID-19, and their own economic crisis, they have the burden of 1 million refugees.

What's been happening at First?

Morning Prayer

Join us each morning, Monday to Friday at 7:15 am to begin your day with scripture and prayer, via Zoom. Visit our website at firstbaptistregina.ca for the link.

Children Up to Age 7

Pastor Joel: Each week, the children share some of the work they've been doing, or a favourite stuffy or toy. We sing, tell a bible story using our wood figures, pray, and eat together. Our children are bright and full of life and joy which they share freely with each other.

Children Ages 8 and up

Julie H: This group is called Breakout, and we meet weekly on Thursday at 3:30 pm. Each week we reflect on a scripture passage by reading it and responding with a craft or activity. We have taken over the kitchen twice to make playdough and cake in a cup. We have also made several creative crafts such as catapult airplanes, origami bookmarks, and stamping with potatoes. I have especially loved getting to know the kids who have been attending. They are all so talented and are exceptionally creative.

All FBC Kids: A private invitation is sent to the parents who have signed up. Contact Pastor Joel at joel@firstbaptistregina.ca or (306) 359-1450 if you wish to receive an invite.

Youth

Pastor Chris: One of the first meetings that I had on Zoom when we began to go into lockdown, someone said that this was an incredible opportunity; an opportunity to deepen relationships, talk with our youth about different topics, and to be pastoral and

loving in a way that I had not been before. I wasn't so sure that this was true. I love being with the youth face to face; bugging them, seeing them interact, and carrying our communal journey of discipleship together. I wasn't sure how this would happen online. But I would argue, that in many ways our interactions have been deeper on some levels. Different for sure, but God has continued to be present in what we do.

We meet once a week and take time to play different online games over Zoom, or have a reflection together, and pray with one another. I have been very blessed every time we get to meet. Whether it is preparing for the devotional lessons, or the Zoom activities, I have truly enjoyed having something to look forward to each week, and being able to see the faces of our youth. This past week was a highlight for me as we played a game where we had to "meow" a popular song that others might know. Each person chooses a song and sings it replacing the words with "meows" instead. I laughed so much, and had real joy seeing the youth interact and do something that will be so good to show at future weddings (since it was recorded J).

Another highlight has been dropping off small care packages to the youth. Being able to see people face to face, visit, and say hello, has been very uplifting. We know that we have wonderful youth and people in this Church, but there is a different sense and appreciation of that reality in a time like this.

In short, we continue to meet, love one another, and have meaningful connection. While I cannot wait for when we can again meet face to face, I recognize that there has been good that has come of this different form of interaction. And for that I am so grateful.



2020 is a unique Leap Year. It has 29 days in February, 180 days in March, 9 months in April, and so far we're 6 years into May.

A priest, a minister and a rabbi are playing poker when the police raid the game.

"Father," the officer asks the priest, "were you gambling?"

"Of course not," the priest replies, after saying a silent prayer for forgiveness.

"Pastor, what about you?" the officer asks. After an appeal to heaven, the minister answers, "no, sir."

Turning to the rabbi, the officer asks, "Rabbi, were you gambling?"

Shrugging his shoulders, the rabbi replies, "With whom?"

“New Life in the Spirit”

Pastor Joel Russell-MacLean’s sermon from May 31, 2020
Galatians 2 and 3

Why did Jesus die?

How might you answer that question?

We heard Paul’s answer read for us from his letter to the Galatians:

Paul said it was, “so that we might receive the Holy Spirit.” (Gal 3.13)

Receiving the Holy Spirit in our lives is not optional: to be a Christian is to receive the Holy Spirit.

This week is the celebration of Pentecost: the anniversary of the day in history when the God the Holy Spirit entered the lives of people in a way that was new in history.

For the next few weeks we are going to read Galatians through the lens of Pentecost. We will look and listen for what Paul is saying about life under the control of the Holy Spirit.

In order to help us understand Galatians and to reflect on life with the Holy Spirit, let us consider two things:

First, Christianity is at its heart relational and not systematic or rule based. Each Christian is invited to receive another being into their life: the Holy Spirit. Our morality, our life, comes from our connection to that being.

Secondly, Christianity arises out of a series of events in history. People had to work out what the coming of the Holy Spirit meant and sometimes this involved disputes and frustration.

To begin then, Christianity is at its heart relational and not systematic or rule based. Religions often appear as a way to live life, as “how to live right with God and right with other people.” Religion can be treated very much like a “how to”, a DIY for a better society, a happier life, a fulfilled life.

Some religions feel like, and many are, written by a person or a group sitting and reflecting on life and offering their teaching. They are sometimes even called by the name of the original teacher: Confucianism, Buddhism, or Epicureanism.

Christianity is more complex than that. When you open the gospels, you find much more than Jesus’ teaching. You find four stories of his life, death and resurrection. In fact, there is more story and singing than teaching “how to” in all of the bible.

Christianity did not arise from someone's teaching.

Christianity began from people gathered in a room and standing in front of them was Jesus. They had watched him die, they had buried him but there he was, eating with them, letting them touch him.

Christianity began from people together in a room when a violent wind shook the home, tongues of fire appeared over the heads of every person and they began to speak in languages they had not previously known.

I think that makes for something authentic, real, human, and I would argue, humane.

Some Christians respond by discounting all the stories and events and only preserving the teaching. However, around the world and back through the centuries, for most of the Church Pentecost has been and remains a celebration of an event, a story: the coming of the Holy Spirit.

As well, I have been convinced by others that teaching alone does not create a faith that is strong and resilient enough in the face of serious pressure.

A number of German church leaders, such as Karl Barth or Dietrich Bonhoeffer, observed that the liberal church in German was unable to resist the call to war in 1914 and later the rise of the Nazi party in the 1930s. Part of the cure for the church at that time was a renewed conviction that God had entered the world and the hearts and lives of believers.

In the face of the challenges of Covid 19, in the face of the riots across the US, Pentecost is a celebration of the fact that we don't only have a list of instructions to live by: God is actually present within us. The Holy Spirit not only guide believers, Holy Spirit also comforts, strengthens, and transforms us.

Christianity begins and arises out of these stories and many more. People had to try make to sense of what was happening right in the thick of things. There was little to no time to stop and to make sense of it before decisions had to be made.

And so things were messy.

There were many people involved and therefore, different perspectives, different experiences of the events and yet they had to agree on what this meant. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul records that over 500 people were believing witnesses to Jesus' resurrection.

Now, my wife and I have struggled to agree on the colour of a piece of furniture. How messy to hope 500 people, single people and couples, young and old, would agree about what just happened in all the details and in what it meant.

Amazingly and compellingly, however, their basic story does not change. Indeed, Paul, all but one of twelve, and many more were tortured and executed and yet they refused to change the basic story: "God is intervening in history, only it is nothing like what we expected!"

Of course, if God had just handed out a textbook, that would have been much clearer. There would be no fighting, no mistakes, and no wrong answers: "You will experience this and this and this; it will mean this and this but not this..."

The difference people and perspectives is part of the messiness of the early church. As well, they had to sort out what the coming of Jesus and the Holy Spirit meant for the Mosaic law.

In the first few years, of course all believers were Jewish. Therefore, two of the prominent features of Judaism at that time are important to know.

First, there was only one God. Now, if God was in heaven, how could it be that the Holy Spirit was living within us? We'll talk about that messiness and how the church sorted it out - it only took 500 hundred years to largely settle things.

Secondly, the right response to God's grace for a Jewish person included and focused on visible outward practices of "the law": what they ate, how they washed, sabbath, sexuality, circumcision. These were highly visible differences in how they lived from Gentiles, that is all non-jewish people.

But then what happens when Gentiles start believing in Jesus? What happens when they are baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit?

Here is the mess: should Gentiles also respond to God's grace by following those same laws? By observing the Sabbath? Special holidays? Dietary laws? Circumcision?

That is what is behind the debate we are reading in Galatians. Now they did sort it out and appear to have gone back to friendly relationships but this letter shows us how painful the struggle was.

Paul argued that since the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit before observing any of the laws, it was a dangerous mistake for them to start living as if they must follow all the laws s believers.

Gentiles and Jews were being invited into something far more joyful and free, far more personal, and also far more demanding.

This is what Paul wrote: life as a Christian starts with the Holy Spirit (3.2). That is the origin of our life in Jesus. Paul goes on to say in fact that “Christ redeemed us... so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit,” (3.13-14).

If receiving the Holy Spirit is the beginning of life in Christ, and it is the goal, the purpose of our salvation, then it follows that our whole life ought to be about being filled with the Holy Spirit and living in step and in obedience to the Holy Spirit.

This relationship is the source of our ethics even our daily guidance. We live in obedience not to a system but to a being, the Holy Spirit.

As an aside, the nature of our salvation ought to give us pause, a bit of discomfort, when we find ourselves relying on policy, on laws, on governance that dictates all behaviour, and especially on ideology. There is a place for these things on this side of being fully transformed, on this side of paradise.

However, when we rely on them, it can lead to something inhumane. Over the past two hundred years, we have seen that when the vision of creating a perfect system of rules or governance is combined with a secular society, a society without the humbling acknowledgement that our nations, our governments, our organizations are not ultimate because only God and God’s kingdom are ultimate, that society tends towards totalitarianism and the crushing the human spirit.

Instead, what God proposes in the church is that authority ought to reside in a being and in relationship. There we asked to take responsibility for our actions and our words.

If imperfect people, in an imperfect world are to live not by rules, not by laws, but by individual choices, what sort of resources would be needed for that group? What would we need to have in place? Because, mistakes will be made.

Wouldn’t we need grace? Wouldn’t we need a powerful foundation to forgive one another, to assume the best of one another? Wouldn’t we need a strong connect to our God, to receive constant guidance? To have God changing our hearts and minds so that our character is being transformed and that slowly, we inch toward being a new kind of person?

This is the very thing that Paul says God is doing in us and is providing us through the Holy Spirit. This is the very thing Paul said God had done in his own life.

This is what drove Paul, not a philosophy, an ideology, or a new religious idea. He had met a being, a person: he had met Jesus and it changed his life. He had been filled with the Holy Spirit.

If we have spent most of our time reading Paul's complex theological arguments, or his controversial (and frankly, obscure) verses, it is easy to miss what motivated him and drove him. It is the one thing that appeared over and over again whenever Paul spoke and whenever Paul picked up a pen.

"It was Jesus himself who appeared to me and taught me." 1.12

We hear the story of Jesus meeting Paul not once, but three times in Acts, Paul tells it here in Galatians and elsewhere.

I was travelling to Damascus to destroy the church, and instead, Jesus appeared to me.

What he experienced when he met Jesus was that Jesus loved him. In response to this love, Paul wrote, "the life I now live, I live for Jesus, who loved me and gave himself for me" (2.20).

To be a Christian therefore is to be in relationship, in the real connection between two beings: between human and God: between you and the Father, you and Jesus, you and the Holy Spirit, between you and the one and only God who is one in three persons.

Perhaps there are some who would say, this kind of relationship is not really who I am. It is more for touchy feeling people, or people who are drawn to "spirituality". But this is the vision of the new world that is coming, the new heaven and the new earth, when we will live in close and intimate relationship with God. If that isn't something you are looking forward to, use this time to get ready for that world.

Use these days to open up your life and your hearts to God's presence. Use these days to receive the Holy Spirit in your heart and to live within you.

This is the deep source of joy that believers need to face the chaos that can come into our lives, like Covid and or the rioting occurring the US.

This is the deep source of love and grace we need in order to become the kind of people who in our day to day choices are able to love people and to love God.

Tithing during the pandemic

With the COVID-19 crisis limiting contact with others and restricting meetings of groups, please do not neglect the financial needs of our church.

We have several ways to provide your regular tithes and donations to the church:

1. Mail your gifts to the church or call and leave a message at (306) 359-1450 to arrange for an in-person pick-up. Please place your cheque in your regular offering envelope (or any envelope marked "Offering"), and seal that inside another envelope addressed to the church:

First Baptist Church
2241 Victoria Ave, Regina, SK S4P 0S4.

2. Establish a **Pre-authorized Remittance (PAR) Plan**. This will automatically transfer funds from your account into the FBC Regina account on a regular basis. Please email the church or contact the Treasurer if you would like to set up PAR, or change your commitment.
3. Make an online donation:
 - Use **Interac e-Transfer** to donate from your phone or computer to FBCRegina@gmail.com *(no fee or cost to the church)*
 - Use a credit card with a PayPal account via the **PayPal Giving Fund** *(no fee or cost to the church... 100% of your donation reaches us and contributes to our mission)*
 - Use a credit card or PayPal via **CanadaHelps** *(a fee of 4% is deducted from the donation)*
 - Use a credit or debit card via **FBC ChurchTrac** *(the church is charged a fee of approximately 3% for each donation)*

PLEASE refer to our website at firstbaptistregina.ca for more specific information on these contribution methods. You may also contact the treasurer at (306) 775-1497 or email the church at main_fbcregina@sasktel.net for further details.

Daily Bread Devotionals

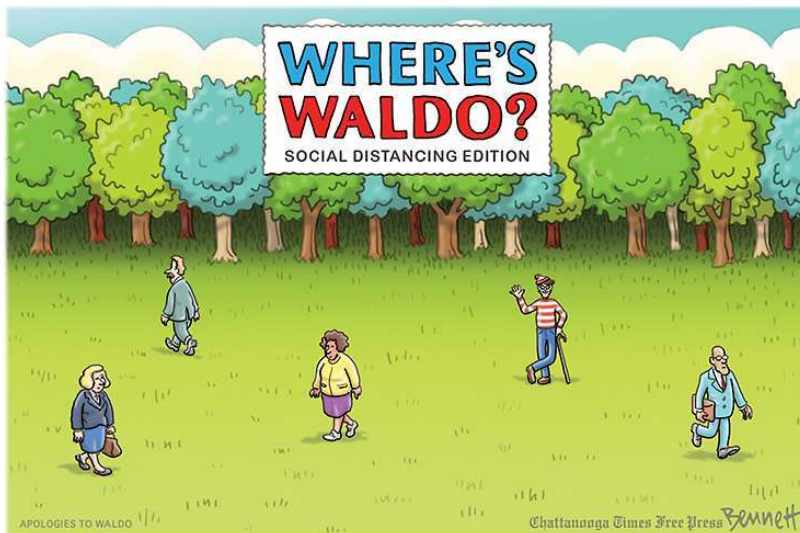
The Daily Bread devotionals for June, July, and August, have been dropped off at the church. If anyone would like one, please contact the church. We can leave them in the mailbox or mail them to you.

Website

The COVID-19 crisis has impacted our church events and schedules in every way. The church website (firstbaptistregina.ca) is a valuable source of information that can be used to keep you connected and up to date with how our church leadership and pastors are responding.

We are currently holding Sunday worship and Learning for Life (L4L) via Zoom meeting. The links to these meetings can be found on the home/sermon page of our website. As well, there are bi-weekly small group meetings, and daily prayers that are utilizing Zoom.

You will also find links to our Facebook page and YouTube channel, where we are presenting video reflections and devotions by a number of our members and pastors.



"Did you hear about the bee that flew in the cow's ear?" asked the farmer.

"No," his friend replied. "What happened to him?"

"He wound up in a pail of milk."

"How'd he do that?"

"He went in one ear and out the udder."