

First Baptist Regina Weekly News

For the Week of July 19th, 2020

Time together, time apart

I must head out in search of His Presence
Leaving you behind at least for a time
I simply need to know His True Essence
I will return when His Presence I've learned
And I'll share it then with you, my dear friend.

Miles I've wandered without a trace of Grace
And I dare to think how you're faring there
I fear returning; I've not seen His Face
But return I must, in your grace to trust
We meet again and in you – I find Him.



During this ongoing season of social distancing and isolation, we must not forget the importance of community and our need for one another. It is in each other, at least in part (large part), that we find the presence of God. So, take time to connect and see what God has for you in his people, through his people. Paul gives us the wonderful encouragement that we are the temple of God and that the Holy Spirit dwells in us (1 Corinthians 3:16). While we are not physically meeting together for corporate worship service, still let us not forsake joining together by other means – whether it be a phone call, a social distancing visit, a letter, or email. We need each other; it's the way God has made us and one way he meets us.

Yet let us not lose the opportunity we have in time apart as well. God will speak in the quiet, in the aloneness, in the separation. Wendell Berry, one of my favourite writers, has brought out well the balance of spending time apart (because there is something to be said for silence and solitude and God's work in our lives during those times) and time together.



In his poem *The Cold*, Berry writes:

How exactly good it is
to know myself
in the solitude of winter,

my body containing its own
warmth, divided from all
by the cold; and to go

separate and sure
among the trees cleanly
divided, thinking of you

perfect too in your solitude,
your life withdrawn into
your own keeping

--to be clear, poised
in perfect self-suspension
toward you, as though frozen.

And having known fully the
goodness of that, it will be
good also to melt.

I am looking forward to the melting of the measures which keep us distanced, but let us take this time to learn what we can in this space. Yet let us never forget the importance of finding fellowship.

Pastor Richard



Neighbourhood Photos

Photos from Dean G's neighbourhood



Can you figure out where these photos were taken?



New Small Group: Reading Through the Old Testament

Beginning in September, Pastor Richard will be setting up and facilitating a new small group: "Reading Through the Old Testament." This group will meet online, using Zoom. A schedule will be provided with weekly readings. We will plan to connect once a week to discuss what we have read, share anything that has stood out to us, and ask any questions we may have. Please contact Pastor Richard at richard.fbcregina@sasktel.net, or leave a message at (306) 359-1450, Ext. 222, if you are interested in joining. Watch for updates!

Spiritual Disciplines Series: Journaling

When it comes to journaling there is not a right way to do it; what you are wanting to capture is how God is at work in your life. Are there ongoing struggles? Are there places of joy? What is God saying to you through these experiences? How is God shaping your soul – spiritually forming you? As you journal, the answer to this last question may not be immediately evident, but as journaling becomes a regular practice you most likely will be able to look back and see patterns and answers to the above questions.

As some may know, poetry is something I enjoy. I find when I journal it will often take on a poetic form, whether it be resonating with a poem someone else has written and copying it out or writing one myself which puts my thoughts on paper. You may choose to journal by way of a scrapbook approach or picking up a journaling Bible (with wide margins) in which to record your thoughts alongside God's Word.

Kenneth Boa notes: "Many people have found that keeping a spiritual diary (journal) heightens their understanding of the unique process of spiritual formation through which God has been taking them. By recording our insights, feelings, and the streams of our experiences, we clarify the progress of our spiritual journey." Adele Calhoun suggests: "Journaling is a way of paying attention to our lives – a way of knitting the vast ball of our experiences into something with shape that attests to the state of our soul. . . . On the pages of a journal, in the privacy of a moment, we can take tentative steps into truth The ongoing nature of a journal catalogs the journey of a soul into God. It reveals how we hammer out our identity as a Christ-follower through the ups and downs of daily routines as well as in times of crisis."

Following are some very simple ways of practicing journaling:

- Write down your experiences, perhaps focusing on where God was active or present in your day (Examen).
- Write out what you are praying for (keeping a prayer journal).
- Write out what stood out to you in your scripture reading today.
- Feel free to be artistic, including art or clippings; your journal could even take on a scrapbook format.
- Pick up a journaling Bible to help with writing down your thoughts as you read.

Again, this practice of journaling is something to be done over the long haul, providing you something to look back over and see your spiritual journey as it has been unfolding.

What's 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

The children are having a short break from meeting at this time. Watch for updates.

Youth

We will have fewer gatherings over the summer, but still plan to get together in smaller groups, or over Zoom, semi-regularly, so that we can stay connected and continue to build relationships.

Gospel of Mark Small Group

In May we had a new small group get underway via Zoom with two different meeting times: The 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month at 7pm and the 2nd and 4th Friday of each month at 10am. We are reading through the Gospel of Mark at about a chapter a week and meeting to discuss what we've read twice a month. This is not an in-depth study of Mark, but more a slow reading of Mark with informal discussion. Our conversation, along with highlights from Mark's Gospel, includes visiting to get to know each other better and we also take some time to pray together. We invite you to join us! Contact Pastor Richard (richard.fbcregina@sasktel.net) and he will get you connected.



When I was kidnapped, my parents snapped into action. They rented out my room. (Woody Allen)

Wife: "In my dream, I saw you in a jewelry store and you bought me a diamond ring."

Husband: "I had the same dream and I saw your dad paying the bill."

A boy asks his father, "Dad, are bugs good to eat?" "That's disgusting. Don't talk about things like that over dinner," the dad replies. After dinner the father asks, "Now, son, what did you want to ask me?" "Oh, nothing," the boy says. "There was a bug in your soup, but now it's gone."

Finances

To the end of June, our revenue has fallen to 12% below our Year-to-Date budget. Our expenses are 8% below YTD budget. This results in a current deficit of \$9,100 (spending more than our income).

Approved Operating Budget for 2020:	\$ 427.6K
Operating Budget to the end of June 2020:	\$ 213.8K
Operating Revenue to end of June 2020:	\$ 188.6K
Operating Expenses to end of June 2020:	\$ 197.7K
Restricted Reserve Balance:	\$ 98.5K
(Benevolent, Building, Organ, and Legacy Funds)	
CBWC Loan Balance:	\$ 0K
Organ Fund Loan	\$ 205K
CEBA (CRA) Loan	\$ 40K

The board had approved a plan to provide ourselves a loan from the Organ Fund to repay our outstanding debt to the CBWC (Canadian Baptists of Western Canada). This proposal allows the church to finance our debt internally, while still maintaining the Organ Fund for the purposes for which it was established.

We have also taken advantage of the CEBA (Canada Emergency Business Account) no-interest loan from the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). This will be paid back by the end of 2022. Of the original \$40K amount, \$10K will be forgiven.

Covid 19 Update

The provincial guidelines for places of worship were changed about three weeks ago. However, the consensus among the board and pastors remains that we wait on re-opening our Sunday morning in-person worship services. For the time being, we will continue to meet online on Sundays. *Learning for Life* will continue all summer at 9:30 a.m. and the service start time will remain at 11 a.m.

A committee has been created to plan the restart of in-person Sunday worship services. They are considering possibly September or earlier. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak with one of the board members or pastors. Our phone team will be in touch as well. We wish to hear how everyone is doing and how many of us are ready to take part in in-person gatherings (following all the health guidelines).

A valuable source of information about First Baptist is our website: firstbaptistregina.ca. If you don't have a computer and/or internet access, the Regina Public Library has now re-opened, and you may access the website on one of their public computers.

This could also be an opportunity for us to grow in friendship and in prayer. Contact Pastor Richard if you would like to be part of a small group or take part in one of the studies that are underway.

“Is God Here With Us or Not”

Eric Warren’s sermon from July 19, 2020

Exodus 17:1-7

Hi everyone. I’m grateful to be invited by Pastor Joel, to share a message with you. My wife Amy and I began regularly attending First Baptist a year ago and have been impressed with the spiritual depth and maturity of those we have spent time with. We also appreciate the children being included in the main service. Just in case you haven’t met us I’ll give you a little background. In 2018, we retired from 36 years of Pastoral ministry serving congregations of Grace Communion International in five provinces. After retiring from Toronto, we moved to Regina...to the Cathedral area to be near our three children and two grandchildren. We have a prior history in Regina having pastored a congregation here from 1997-2011. I go back there once in a while to preach. I am originally from the Rouleau area and Amy is from a rural community South of Spokane Washington.

Having lived in both Moncton and Toronto, we can relate to the homelands of Pastors Richard and Joel. While in Toronto we lived in Mimico, which was also the home of Pastor John’s brother Gary and CBM director Terry Smith.

Amy and I believe that being connected with a congregation of Christians is a key component to our spiritual health, accountability and transformation.

Some of that transformation has come through bouts with suffering and turmoil.

Torment tests our trust in God and his provision, tempting us sometimes to ask: *“Is God here with us or not...Is He here with me or not?”*...Yes or no...

Biblically speaking, the answer according to Jesus and Paul is an emphatic YES!

Regarding his followers, Jesus said: *“Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them...”* John 14:23 (NRSV)

For all other people groups, Paul quoted truth from a pagan author of his day: *“(God) is not far from each one of us. For In him we live and move and have our being...”* Acts 17:27-28 (NRSV)

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are invisibly present...and close at hand.

We are most vulnerable to going off the rails spiritually when we suffer the lack of basic human needs like food, water, housing, and relationships.

The chosen people of Israel asked: “*Is God here with us or not?*” within a month of leaving slavery behind in Egypt. It was a month full of miracles...a month accompanied by the awesome presence of God in a pillar of fire at night and a cloudy pillar in the day.

But now they were facing a full blown water crisis that was getting worse every hour. Why had the cloudy pillar or Moses led them away from an Oasis at Elim with 12 springs and seventy palm trees, ever deeper into the Sinai peninsula where there is nothing but rock and sand? Today, as then, it is one of the harshest environments on earth. I know...I was there 40 years ago this month.

I and 30 other Bible college students were travelling in the Sinai Peninsula. It was a three day and three night overland trip to Mount Sinai and back from Eilat Israel. Since there were no roads, we found ourselves bounding across vast expanses of sand, sheltered by overhead canopies, in the backs of two diesel powered six-wheel-drive ex-NATO army trucks in 45-degree daytime heat! At night we slept without covers on top of sleeping bags on the sand under a star studded sky as the temperature dropped to a still warm 37 degrees.

So...I can relate a bit to the challenges the Israelites faced during their 40 years in the Sinai wilderness and more specifically to the events recorded in Exodus 17. I remember looking at the large drinking water tanks attached to the frame of each vehicle and marvelling how those tanks were all that stood between us and death by dehydration. We were mandated to drink 4 litres of water a day. Because it is so hot, dry and windy, you rarely have the sensation of sweating. The wind wicks the moisture off your skin before it has a chance to bead.

Using the language of a formal legal complaint...the Israelites requested water for their crying children, nursing babies, their sheep, goats, cattle, camels, and donkeys.

At the risk of oversimplifying what is happening in today’s story, we might see two different responses to this water crisis. The community of Israel was tormented by thirst. Would they trust God...or would they test God?

The people blamed Moses. A riot was building and they were threatening to stone him.

“Why bring us out of Egypt...are you trying to kill us?” they taunted. One thing they were not short of in Egypt was good food and water. Having taken a train from Cairo to Alexandria and back, I have personally seen how the Nile delta is still a fertile place for food production even today. Israel mistrusted Moses motives and doubted God’s presence. God was not giving them what they needed when they wanted it. For the people of Israel, as Walter Brueggemann states, *“the water question morphed quickly into the God question...Israel was developing the art of fine whine!”*

Why didn't God just provide the water ahead of time, before Israel arrived in Rephadim? Wouldn't it have avoided all this drama? Or was God, in his grace, delaying the water miracle so the people might see their testy, hardhearted mistrust. Moses named the location Massa Mirabah... "testing" and "arguing".

The Psalmist highlights God's perspective: *"Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,⁹ when your ancestors tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work."* Psalm 95:8-9 (NRSV)

More than a thousand years later, Jesus would experience this testy argumentative reality again from Israel's descendants. Despite many miracles and profound teaching, hardened hearts appeared again and again and again as reactions to him.

Paul pointed out to the Corinth Christians that this story and others should serve as a warning to them. They had been complaining about Paul and his leadership. Paul...the one who was instrumental in bringing them out of spiritual slavery into the freedom of Christ.

Paul writes: *"These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come."* 1 Corinthians 10:11 (NRSV)

Do we take this as a sobering warning to us as well? Have any of us asked a similar question as we struggle with the impact of Covid-19? "Where is God in this?"

I thought of contrasting Israel's mistrusting response with Moses trusting response...then Hagar came to mind.

Over 1000 years before the Exodus, Abraham's wife Sarai had an Egyptian servant named Hagar. As was common in ancient cultures, Sara appointed Hagar as a surrogate to produce an heir for Abraham. During her pregnancy, Hagar began to treat barren Sara with contempt. Sara lashed back harshly and Hagar ran away into the wilderness. The Hebrew expression for harsh treatment used here is the same as what is used to describe Egypt's oppressive treatment of Israel.

Seeing her in crisis sitting by a spring, God spoke to Hagar. When he asks her why she is there, she doesn't make excuses in the way Adam and Cain did when God asked them a similar question. She tells him the truth. He noted her oppression and spoke encouragingly regarding her baby's future and directed her to reconcile with Sarai. Hagar gratefully gave him the name "The God who sees me."

Many years later, Hagar and Ishmael were caught pestering Sarah's miracle son Isaac. As a result, they were banished from Abraham's household into the wilderness where they eventually ran out of drinking water. But this time there was no spring or well in sight.

Rather than complain to God, Hagar seems to have resigned herself to wait until death, perhaps with some trust that *“the God who sees me”* might talk to her again. God did, and once again encouraged her by providing water, and promising a nation would come from Ishmael. She was finally free from Sarah.

Both untrusting Israel and trusting Hagar experienced the testing torment of extreme thirst...

How might we cope better with trust-testing times? I suggest some questions for us to consider.

How do we picture God’s presence in our everyday lives...especially in times of turmoil?

Do we see him as nearby or far away?

What are our expectations of God...especially in times of turmoil?

Do we find ourselves in prayer defining, sometimes demanding, what the answer should be and specifying the timing of it?

When we are asked to explain why God allows suffering and turmoil, what do we say?

I find the late Elizabeth Elliot’s thoughts helpful. In a YouTube video entitled: The Terrible Truth: Suffering is Not For Nothing, she states, *“I have found peace, not in an explanation, but in a person, Jesus Christ.”* In 1956, she suddenly found herself a young widow in Ecuador with a baby to raise. Her husband Jim was speared to death along with four other missionaries by some members of a remote indigenous tribe in the jungle. They thought her husband was a cannibal. She returned to the tribe two years later and, along with others, was instrumental in the conversion of almost the entire tribe over the next several years. It’s a deeply disturbing and inspiring story with a number of paradoxes.

For Elliot, suffering and turmoil seem to have some mysterious place in the Christian life. She believes that *“suffering is not for nothing...I am convinced that there are a good many things in this life that we can do nothing about...but that God wants us to do something with.”*

In some mysterious and partly understood way, God saw a purpose in allowing Jesus to suffer the turmoil of persecution and crucifixion.

The author of the New Testament book of Hebrews writes: *“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.⁸ Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered;⁹ and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him,”* Hebrews 5:7-9 (NRSV)

God is more than big enough to handle complaints from a trusting heart. It is emotionally and spiritually healthy to describe to him exactly how you feel and what you think. He

can help you deal with those feelings, right or wrong, and give you direction that leads to praise sooner or later. The Psalms are a great study of this.

God came through for Israel, creating water from a rock. God determined which rock Moses would strike with his stick. Tribal elders were there to witness and confirm what was to happen.

We might imagine that there was no giant “Jumbotron” screen for the people (estimated to be at least a few hundred thousand or more) to witness the water burst from the rock...some perhaps a kilometer or more away from the action. The animals might have been the first to react...the thirst-driven bawling and bleating stopped. With their noses lifted, flexing and wiggling in the air, as if to say: “What is that smell?” Water?! Eagerly, the animals might have instinctively pressed forward, mooing and bleating in excitement. The riotous Israelites complaining turned to cries of joy as word passed from the front of the crowd that the water had finally come. Parents lifted their children up and pointed toward Moses and the elders gathered on the rock in the distance and perhaps excitedly exclaimed: “Water!” Soon, in their turn, they were filling their containers to the full, drinking their fill with water trickling down their chests.

Jesus hinted on several occasions...to a Samaritan woman (John 4), and later to a Temple audience (John 7), that He was the ultimate Rock from which living water flowed, to end both material and spiritual thirst forever.

God gives us a picture of the future and where trusting in him leads. Is it possible there are some intentional parallels to Israel’s experience at Rephidim?

In John’s vision of the world to come...descendants of Israel and representation of all cultures and ethnicities gather from every direction as equals in Jerusalem to see God face to face and worship him.

Never again will anyone be tempted to ask: *“Is God here with us or not?”*

¹ *Then the Angel showed me Water-of-Life River, crystal bright. It flowed from the Throne of God and the Lamb,*

² *right down the middle of the street. The Tree of Life was planted on each side of the River, producing twelve kinds of fruit, a ripe fruit each month. The leaves of the Tree are for healing the nations.*

³ *Never again will anything be cursed. The Throne of God and of the Lamb is at the center. His servants will offer God service—worshiping,*

⁴ *they'll look on his face, their foreheads mirroring God.*

⁵ *Never again will there be any night. No one will need lamplight or sunlight. The shining of God, the Master, is all the light anyone needs. And they will rule with him age after age after age.*
Revelation 22:1-5

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.

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SIRI ... SAY GRACE

Dad: "Can I see your report card, son?"

Son: "I don't have it."

Dad: "Why?"

Son: "I gave it to my friend. He wanted to scare his parents."

I didn't know my wife was a construction site thief, but when I got home, all the signs were there. (Woody Allen)

I used to be addicted to soap. I'm clean now.