

First Baptist Regina Weekly News

For the Week of July 26th, 2020

Moses was granted an audience before God. He used his chance to ask for one thing. “Lord, accompany us on our journey.”

Perhaps Moses could have asked for anything for the Israelites when he appeared before God: victory, wealth, or security. Moses instead asked for God’s presence within and alongside the community of Israel as they travelled. God had offered to send a representative instead or to promise to bless them but Moses pleaded with God: please be with us.



Why did this matter? Isn’t God everywhere anyway? And don’t plenty of people who pay no attention to God get through life just fine?

I’m challenged by this: Moses knew God better than most people and like others who have known God well, he was convinced that God’s presence was worth more than anything else.

Moses gave up everything else he could have asked for, even for himself, to instead have God live with Moses and his people.

May God accompany us through these days and through our lives. There is nothing on earth or in heaven of equal worth.

With love,

Pastor Joel

Crisis in Lebanon

CBC recently published the following article:

“Amid unprecedented economic crisis, many Lebanese despair”

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/lebanon-unprecedented-economic-crisis-1.5661851>

The situation is dire. Please pray for the Lebanese people, especially our mission partners: The Botros family, all ABTS (Arab Baptist Theological Seminary) staff and students, Syrian refugees, all LSESD (Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development) ministries.



Now for the good news! Donations to our Lebanon fundraiser are still coming in! New total: \$9,483! There is no time limit on donations. Donate online at <https://www.givetogo.org/team/FBCRegina>, or contact the church by email at main_fbcregina@sasktel.net or by phone at (306) 359-1450.

CBM (Canadian Baptist Ministries) also has a Covid-19 Relief Fund. Donations can be made at cbmin.org.

Note from Terry Smith, CBM Executive Director:

“Greetings from the team at CBM on whose behalf I am writing to express our deepest thanks for your ongoing support for global mission. Our staff are working full on to assist our global partners as they respond to the global pandemic. Thank you for your solidarity. We also truly appreciate Kayely's leadership at CBM.” (Kayely Rich is on the board.)

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, if you are interested in joining. Watch for updates!

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.fbc Regina@sasktel.net) and he will get you connected.

Covid 19 Update

The provincial guidelines for places of worship were changed about four 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. If you need assistance, one of the library staff members can help you.

Spiritual Disciplines Series: Prayer

When I think of prayer my thoughts go to a book I read years ago by Rosalind Rinker, *Prayer: Conversing with God*. This book challenged and encouraged me with the simple thought that prayer is a conversation with God. Sometimes we can make prayer more complicated than it needs to be. I started praying – at least intentionally – when I was around 10 years old. I had never been to church, was never taught how to pray or what words to say; I simply started talking to God.

I want to encourage you to pray, meaning simply to talk with God on a regular basis. It can be a good idea to set aside a time each day for prayer, creating the space and habit to talk to God regularly. We also need to recognize, however, that we can and ought to pray with God at many moments throughout our day. When we pray there are different things we can bring to God, including prayers of confession, intercession, petition, thanksgiving, lament and many more. So, our prayers may take on different content, but in each of these we are presenting ourselves before God with what is on our heart.

When in prayer, we should also be listening for God and what he may have to share with us. Thinking of the concept again that prayer is a conversation, as we share what is on our heart with God let us create some space for silence in order to wait on what the Lord may have for us in response to our words. Prayer, in this way, can be a transformative process where we are not only talking but engaging with God around what is going on in our own lives and our communities.

Pastor Richard



Little Susie, a six-year-old, complained, "Mother, I've got a stomach ache." "That's because your stomach is empty," the mother replied. "You'd feel better if you had something in it." That afternoon, her father came home complaining that he had had a severe headache all day. Susie piped up, "That's because it's empty," she said. "You'd feel better if you had something in it."

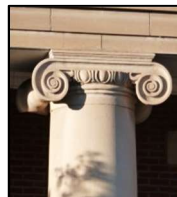
Q: What type of sandals do frogs wear?
A: Open-toad!

Neighbourhood Photos

Photos from Dean G's neighbourhood—just in case you missed them last week.



Can you figure out where these photos were taken?



The Golden Calf

Pastor Chris' sermon from July 26, 2020

Exodus 32

Covid and the Desert

Like many of you, our household has seen a significant uptick in both our desire and motivation to get projects done around the house in the last few months, especially in decluttering our home. Some of you who know me well also know that I am not always the best at organizing things. As my wife can attest, I often believe that if I have removed clutter from a shelf, and placed it in a drawer, then my cleaning is done.

Unfortunately, I have also carried on this habit with my children. When we clean together, often it is not about placing things in their proper place, but about removing those items from the space we want "cleaned" so that things look better. I confess, this is a negative habit that I give in to, and is something I need to continually work at.

Covid-19 has provided me with some time to reflect on many of my character flaws, and to have some discomfort over poor habits that have developed over the years. Many of my daily routines have been stripped away in a forceful manner by the necessity to be as physically distant as possible. Sports, movies, restaurants, libraries, museums. Things and activities I did with either friends or family, were all very quickly gone.

But this hasn't all been negative. Not to make Covid-19 sound trite, or be overly optimistic and naive, but there are parallels that we can draw upon with what is happening today, and stories that are described in Holy Scripture and in the history of the church.

Deserts are often used by God as places of spiritual formation and transformation. For some reason, I have always been very drawn to the story of the Israelites wandering in the desert, and also the stories and accounts of monks and nuns who seek isolation in monasteries, or a purposeful community of believers who are committed to working out their salvation together.

Fourteen years ago, I visited a monastery in Abbotsford B.C. I would spend my days working and assisting where possible, walking in the forests around the community, and in prayer. Each evening, after our communal meal, one of the monks would invite me into his study, pour me a small amount of wine port, place almonds into a bowl, and then patiently let me ask questions. There was a freedom to ask any question I had ever had about scripture, Christianity, and how our faith intersected with society.

There are many things that have stuck with me from that time, but one of the most important, was understanding that Christ is present in the Old Testament, not just the New, and that the Old Testament transcends its context and time to also be about us. Christ was and is continually seeking humanity out, and calling us to orient our souls towards God. Reading about the Golden Calf in Exodus 32, like most scripture, prompts us to ask an important question: *How can this story speak to me today, and challenge me to become more like Christ?*

History of Idols in The Ancient Near East

Let us briefly look at the historical context of idols in this passage. In the ancient Near east, people were very familiar with the practice and worship of gods, or idols that had been created by humans.

When I was researching about idols, I came across a paper written by a Torah scholar who asked if “idol worshipers really believe that something created by their own hands could really be a god? Or did the idol just represent a god”. What he is really asking is, “How could their faith in a created ‘thing’ be real, and therefore shape them as a people?” He argues that when we look at some ancient ritual texts, we can see ceremonies and practices that are meant to transform the physical into the spiritual. Even though an idol has been created by human hands, it was believed to become indwelt by the god that it had been created to represent.

Clay tablets from Nineveh describe a long ritual process where the idol was washed, cleansed, and prayed over to invoke the god’s presence. In turn, the creator of the idol participated in several ceremonies. In one of these ceremonies, a ram was sacrificed, the maker’s tools were sown inside the flesh of the animal’s thigh, and then it was tossed into a river where the god Ea was believed to have dwelled. In another ceremony, the creator’s hands were symbolically cut off as he confessed that it was not him, but the god Ea working through him, who had created the idol.

At the end of the rituals, a feast was declared and the people would eat, drink, and celebrate their god coming into the crafted idol. These rituals, among others, helped the people to believe that a created thing could become holy and carry the presence of a god.

We can see much of the historical idol practices in the Israelites who crafted a golden calf. Perhaps they really were fearful that something had happened to Moses, and that without him, the Lord would abandon them. So, they went to Aaron and convinced him to be the one to fashion the idol for them. Is this about the people searching to have a stamp of approval placed upon their sin?

In Aaron, we see someone who is either too fearful to speak up against the host before him, or someone that is too willing to please others. Again, scripture speaks to us, and we should be able to see ourselves in Aaron. When we remain silent about injustice, and refuse to love either God or our neighbor, we are complicit in work that is not worthy of the kingdom of God.

The Torah scholar who described idol ceremonies concluded that the difference between idol worship, and worship that is to be ascribed to Jehovah, is that He was to be worshiped *aniconically*. This means we are to *not* ascribe to Him earthly features, characteristics, or the physical appearances of created things, like other ancient Near east gods. The danger for all of us, then, is when we allow created things to gain our attention in such a way that they affect our spiritual health. The material, if given our time, attention, or worship, can draw us away from our relationship with God.

Three Lessons

Father Demetrios Antokas, when writing about this story, says that there are three clear ways that we too create idols in our lives, and replace God with things of this world:

1. The giving in to our passions or senses (the people were impatient and wanted immediacy).
2. The giving in to our own ego, or placing ourselves at the center of our decision making.
3. A Lack of Trust in God that leads to destructive anxiousness and fear.

First, let's discuss the idea of our passions. The word passion means for us to give in to our emotions, or those inner thoughts, or feelings, that drive us to certain actions. Passions—our senses—are doors through which we can either experience the Holy and good, or turn ourselves away from God.

Our reading in the gospel of Matthew 6, verses 22-23 speaks of our eyes being the lamp of the body. The eye represents our senses, or, our passions. During lent, we talk about fasting, or attempting to control what we consume so that we can develop tools and habits that mature the fruit of the spirit in us. Self-control, or being able to master our bodies physically, has an impact on that which is eternal, our spiritual being.

Reading scripture backwards through the lens of Christ, we can see that human passions are often imposed on God, and He is made more human-like, since it is humans that are attempting to understand and explain both the mysterious and infinitely unknowable Creator. But it is through our passions and senses that we see a glimpse of Him, and

through which humans also met the incarnate God in the person of Christ. What we experience on earth matters. What we consume on earth matters.

Exodus reminds us that we need to guard ourselves from giving in to our passions. Eric spoke of this last week when describing how suffering can change us, and that we can use experiences of suffering to transform us in either positive or negative ways. I appreciated the quote “I am convinced that there are a good many things in this life that we can do nothing about, but are things that we can do SOMETHING with.” (Elizabeth Elliot, Ed.) Suffering is not for nothing, but it does not seem like the people of Israel were willing to suffer long. Rather, it was their passions, their fear, that drove them, and that had massive immediate and long term consequences for the entire nation.

Secondly, let’s look at our ego related attitudes towards God. Our Gospel passage in Matthew reminds us that we cannot serve two masters. The word mammon meant money or monetary wealth, but eventually came to be understood as covetousness. This Golden Calf represents the things that we create and ascribe importance to in our lives. Wealth and the accumulation of *STUFF* is an easy target to unpack in relation to this passage.

We live in an extremely consumeristic society, and one that, in Canada at least, is largely built upon a mountain of credit and debt. When Covid-19 first struck, and I was at home, I tried to tune in to the livestream of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s address to the nation each day. Something I almost immediately noticed, interspersed between the news commentary segments, was how many commercials now seemed strange and out of touch with our *new reality*. I wondered how long it would take for us to start producing commercials that sought to monetize the emotions we might be feeling. I only had to wait a few days before I saw a commercial that promised to help us grapple with all the fear and anxiety of drastic and quick changes.

Some of you might have seen the commercial that I am about to describe. It starts with a slow melancholy song, with the lyrics on repeat saying “I know that we’ll see better days...” while the narrator describes how better days are going to take work. But, we are not alone, *YOU* are not alone. Ram Trucks are here to help. *How?* 0% financing for 84 months, and no payment for 90 days! The commercial says that they don’t believe “reverse” is an option, so they will help “drive people forward.”

Many commercials now use the same sort of pitch when trying to convince how important it is to keep our economy going, and therefore, to consume. We must ask ourselves, “What it is that we covet? What is it that we thirst for? To be people who manifest the kingdom in this world? Who love God, and therefore our neighbor with co-suffering and sacrificial love?” Or are we, am I, too caught up in thirsting for, finding

comfort in, and making an idol of material things in this world, and trusting that the created is more important than the Creator?

The Third point that we can take away from this story, is that we, as a people, often harm our relationship with God, with others, and ourselves, when we do not genuinely trust Him.

As Matthew 6:27 says, “Who among you, by worrying, can add a cubit to your length, or a single hour to your life?” Anxiety and fear are the fruits of a lack of trust in a creator who is truly for us, and not against us. When we seek to control others or the things around us, and hold on too tightly to the idea that we are the ones who set our own path, then we can develop habits and emotions that negatively affect us.

This has been something that has really come to the surface the last few months. Covid-19 has disrupted, stalled, or destroyed many of the plans that people had. Trips cancelled, jobs lost, and a much more uncertain immediate, and perhaps long term, future. For many, this has been a tough lesson to learn: I am not in control. We, are not in control.

How we react to this new reality is important. I do not believe that it is a coincidence that suicide rates, opioid overdoses, the consumption of alcohol, and other potentially negative habits, have increased dramatically in recent months. Let me paraphrase what Pastor Joel has said before. Covid-19 has brought to the surface and magnified many things that existed before. It’s just that some of them are not very pretty.

But even when we give in to darkness, turn away from our creator, and worship things of this world, there is *HOPE*. Christ, like Moses did for Israel, intercedes on our behalf, and calls us to a covenant relationship with our Father.

When we look at Moses we see the foreshadowing of Christ. Coming down from the mountain, and seeing the people in a debauched state, he is angry. But he is angry in a way where his wrath, or anger, comes from a place of love and concern. Moses intercedes on behalf of the people and pleads with God for their sake. He offers to have his own name blotted out in the book of life on their behalf. Moses, as a typology or comparison to Christ, begins to show us the patience that God has for us, and how Christ has redeemed us from our fallen state.

Conclusion

Our fear and anxiety does not affect God, or change His disposition towards us; it changes our ability to be open to the Spirit at work in our lives, and can hinder the orientation of our hearts towards loving both God and our neighbour. There is a danger to ourselves when we too deeply depend on our own wisdom and ability to take care of our lives.

When things slow down, and distractions are stripped away, what questions can we ask of ourselves to discover the work yet to be done in our hearts? What practices might we take up? What actions might we carry out?

When, in places that feel like the desert, we know that Christ and others have gone before us, and that we are ultimately never alone or abandoned. God calls us to places like the desert so that we can be transformed.

In suffering, we can have a hope in a God who casts out fear and anxiety, and who seeks to replace the idols in our lives for our benefit, so that we might have true life in HIM. May each of us seek to be worthy of that love, be true to our covenant, and be a people who seeks to remove whatever idols we might have that tarnish the image of Christ within each of us.

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.

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.

**SOMETIMES I
WONDER IF ALL OF
THIS IS HAPPENING
BECAUSE I DIDN'T
FORWARD THAT
MESSAGE TO 10
OTHER PEOPLE**

There is a senior citizen driving down the highway. His wife calls him on his cell phone and in a worried voice says, "Herman, be careful! I just heard on the radio that there is a madman driving the wrong way on Route 280!" Herman says, "I know, but there isn't just one, there are hundreds!"

How are you at the language of texting?

A mom texts, "Hi! Son, what does IDK, LY, & TTYL mean?" He texts back, "I Don't Know, Love You, & Talk To You Later." The mom texts him, "It's ok, don't worry about it. I'll ask your sister, love you