

First Baptist Regina Weekly News

For the Week of August 2nd, 2020

God describes his affection for his people in passionate terms.

God chose very tender and intimate words to describe how he felt about his people.

The youth pastor of my teenage years convinced his wife to spend their honeymoon on a two week canoe trek through northern Ontario. Just to reassure you, sensitive reader, they remain happily married to this day. This “honeymoon”, however, was definitely a test.

The rain started as they searched for a campsite on the first night. It continued to rain through the next day. And the days that followed. Interestingly, the rain did not discourage the main citizens of the region, the blackflies and mosquitoes. The couple decided to leave early when the bride announced, “I’m leaving.” The rain only stopped as they loaded their gear back into the car. My youth pastor said it was a very quiet ride to their new home.

Now the husband is able to say, “It wasn’t that bad. I liked that it was just the two of us, out there together.” Apparently for his wife, time has not worked its customary magic. She answers with some warmth, “No John. It was that bad.”

In Jeremiah, God sounds as wistful and idealistic as my youth pastors as he speaks of Israel’s years in the wilderness.

“Remember the years of being young and in love and newly married? How we walked together in the wilderness?” (Jeremiah 20)

It would seem to us to take a bold husband to exhort his wife to look back fondly on years—years—of living in a tent, in a desert, with limited food and water.



I think the irony adds impact. These were not years of newlywed bliss and joy for either the people or for God. And yet, the creator of all things, the eternal being, the Lord of the universe described his relationship with one group of humans with exactly these tender and vulnerable words.

Many of us are having a difficult year. There is Covid-19 of course, but also other grave illnesses, chronic pain, unemployment, and the grief of losing loved ones. In other words, hardly a year of lighthearted bliss for many.

In light of Jeremiah’s words, perhaps it would be good for you to ask God in prayer, “How would you describe our year together?”

With love,
Pastor Joel



Crisis in Lebanon

CBC recently published the following article:

“Amid unprecedented economic crisis, many Lebanese despair: With shortages of food, electricity, money, and a lack of political will, there is little hope of recovery.”

<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 Learning for Life Series: A Study of the First Epistle of Peter

Beginning Sunday, August 2, Bryan O. will facilitate a new online series in Learning for Life. The class will explore what this epistle has to say to us today about our identity as believers and as a church, and how we should live in a society in which following Jesus increasingly puts one at odds with the surrounding society. For more information, please contact Bryan at L4L-1Peter@orthner.ca or leave a message at the church at (306) 359-1450.

Spiritual Disciplines Series: Fasting

Richard Foster notes: “Fasting is the voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity. The focus of biblical fasting is always on spiritual purposes. The heart of one who is fasting is to seek God, most often privately and with no motive to gain approval from people. Fasting provides the opportunity to reveal those things that control us. It reminds us that we are sustained by every word of God and it restores balance in a believer’s life regarding priorities and nonessentials.”

Some initial insights on fasting, picking up from what Foster has stated, is that fasting must forever center on God. It must be God-initiated and God-ordained. If our fasting is not unto God, we have failed. Physical benefits, success in prayer, or gaining spiritual insights must never replace God as the center of our fasting. Secondly, perhaps more than other spiritual disciplines, fasting reveals the things that control us. This is a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We cover up what is inside us with food and other good things, but in fasting, these things surface. Lastly, fasting helps us keep our balance in life. How easily we begin to allow nonessentials to take precedence in our lives. How quickly we crave things we do not need—until we are enslaved by them. Fasting can help break this cycle. Cornelius Plantinga Jr notes: “Self-indulgence is the enemy of gratitude, and self-discipline usually its friend and generator. That is why gluttony is a deadly sin. The early desert fathers believed that a person’s appetites are linked: full stomachs and jaded palates take the edge from our hunger and thirst for righteousness. They spoil the appetite for God.”

Some biblical reasons for fasting include:

- to strengthen prayer (Ezra 8:21-23)
- to express grief (2 Samuel 1:11-12)
- to express repentance or a return to God (Joel 2:12-13a)
- to humble oneself before God (1 Kings 21:27-29)
- to express concern for the work of God (Nehemiah 1:3-4)
- to minister to the needs of others (Isaiah 58)

When it comes to practicing fasting, we might also recall that Jesus started his public ministry with 40 days of fasting (Matthew 4:2) but also be quickly reminded that he did not give any firm instructions to his disciples on a regimen of fasting (Mark 2:18-19). Yet we also see that the early church did incorporate fasting into their worship practice (Acts 13:2-3). Fasting would have been a common practice of Jews and seemed to be assumed by Jesus that it would continue as a common practice among Jesus disciples (Matthew 6:16).

Some tips for fasting:

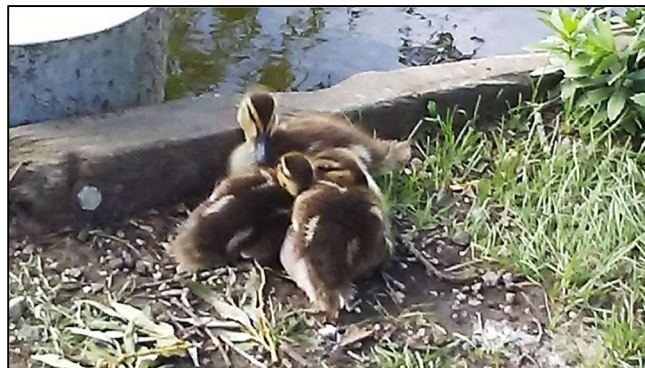
- Start with fasting from one meal per week.
- Whenever you fast, be sure to drink lots.
- Keep your Bible and journal nearby; fasting can lead to insights as it creates space for contemplation.
- Work up to longer fasts (perhaps a day to start). Do not do fasts of several days without guidance (especially if you have any medical concerns).
- Don't break your fast (if longer than just one meal) with a big meal but rather small portions of food; the longer the fast, the more you need to break the fast gently.

Neighbourhood Photos

Photos from Marilyn P's neighbourhood—just in case you missed them a couple weeks ago.



Sunday morning bike ride



Evening walk by Wascana Lake

New Small Group: Reading Through the Old Testament

Beginning in September, Pastor Richard will be 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.fbcregina@sasktel.net) and he will get you connected.



Little Johnny's new baby brother is screaming up a storm. He asks his mom, "Where'd we get him?" His mother replies, "He came from Heaven, Johnny." Johnny says, "Wow! I can sure see why they threw him out!"

Coach: "Why are you late for the game?"

Caterpillar: "I had to put my shoes on."

Teacher: "Answer this math problem: If your father earns \$500 in a week and gives half to your mother, what will she have?"

Student: "A heart attack."

God's Words

Ron P's sermon from August 2, 2020

Exodus 24:1 - 18

Introduction

J.I. Packer died on Friday, July 17, 5 days short of his 94th birthday. He had gone blind, his ministry had come to an end. I'm so happy for him that he is at home with his Lord Jesus.

Now you may be thinking, 'Who is J.I. Packer?'

Though I never met him, he was a man who touched my life deeply. He was a theologian who loved Jesus, loved the Bible and had the highest confidence in it, and who wrote and spoke with precision and conciseness to communicate the Christian faith.

As a young pastor, I was nourished by his books. And I wanted to be like him, in that love for Jesus, that love of Scripture and deep confidence in Scripture, and that ability to be both precise and concise in my communication of the Christian faith.

I've been thanking God for him, as I learned of his passing. And I've been thinking about and re-reading one of his books, in connection with the Scripture passages that lie at the heart of our worship this morning.

The book is called God's Words. It's a study of words that are key Bible words. And Packer's thesis is that we need to hear God in his words. In his vocabulary. If we are to know Him, and understand what He is up to, we need to become familiar with God's words.

Now you might disagree with that. Some of these words we might call 'Christianese'; that is, only Christians know what they mean, and they don't communicate with our world, with those we want to communicate with, that they might know Jesus. We need modern words, or we end up just talking to ourselves.

Maybe. But maybe we lose something along the way, when we stop using God's words?

I thought of this book as I was studying our texts. Because, like it or not, our texts this morning contain words – God's words, God's vocabulary we might call them – which either we don't use much anymore, or, we just don't like. At least, not the way they're used here, in these texts.

The words are: Covenant, blood, glory (with its related words fear, wrath, and holiness), and worship (with its related word, sacrifice). We will look at each one because they are

'God's words', coming to us at the heart of these Bible passages. They convey what God wishes to communicate to us.

I. The Words in Context – Finding our place in the story

The Bible is a story in four acts: Creation, fall, rescue, and victory.

God created a beautiful world, with humans bearing a special responsibility to care for it on God's behalf.

It all came apart, with human rebellion – humans wanting to be like God, rather than serve God.

God began a rescue operation, to get creation back on track. He called a man, Abraham. Made out of him a great nation, Israel, to be a peculiar people, his people, for the sake of the world. To Israel came God's son, Jesus, to die for the sins of the world, and to rise from the dead, a victor over death, sin, and evil. And Jesus' church, in the power of the Spirit, proclaims and lives the life of God's Kingdom, a sign and invitation to the world.

And finally, Jesus will return, victorious. And God will have a redeemed people, living in a redeemed creation, with their redeemer. Evil, and death, and sin, banished forever. And all will be well, and completely well.

That's the true story of our world – creation, fall, rescue, victory.

Now when we open our Bibles in Exodus 24, we find the rescue well under way. Israel has been rescued out of slavery in Egypt. They've crossed the Red Sea, miraculously. They've arrived at Mt. Sinai. They're on their way to the promised land.

And here, at Mt. Sinai, God calls them to enter into a covenant with Him. Back in Exodus 19:4 - 5, God said, **"You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."**

Then comes teaching about the terms of the covenant in Exodus 20-23. Now, in chapter 24, the covenant is entered into –

...With fear and trembling.

...With danger of death for coming too close to the mountain.

...With the glory of the Lord in a cloud settling on the mountain.

...With bloody sacrifices, and blood thrown on the altar and thrown on the people.

...With sin atoned for.

...With promises made – **"All that the LORD has spoken we will do."**

...A meal is celebrated, with God!

And Moses returns to the mountain to be with God.

The scene in Matthew 26 takes place well over a thousand years after Sinai – Jesus in the upper room with his disciples. This is still part of the rescue phase of the big story. A lot has gone wrong in the intervening years. The rescue phase is a long one, and not a smooth one.

But here in the upper room we see a new covenant being entered into. Again there is fear and trembling, though the 12 disciples are scarcely aware of the holy moments they are privileged to be a part of. But they know there is great danger.

Jesus talks of covenant, and blood, though the blood this time is not that of an animal, but the blood of Jesus. **“Poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”**, Jesus says.

There is a meal, sealing, celebrating the covenant. There are oaths of loyalty, on the part of the 12, soon to be broken.

And yet, for all the failure, the decisive step in God’s rescue plan, takes place on the morrow, on the cross.

And here we are, soon to gather, symbolically, from our own homes, around the table of the Lord. To remember. To promise. To be included in the great story. Which goes on until Jesus returns.

II. God’s Words

We’re ready now to look at God’s words. Uncomfortable words. The four are deeply entwined but I’m going to talk about them separately, in hopes of some clarity.

1. Covenant

I noticed that Chris used this word twice in last week’s sermon. Do you know what a covenant is?

It’s a relationship. Sometimes between equals, like in marriage. Or in a deep friendship, like David and Jonathan entered into.

In this case, though, it is a relationship between unequals: Almighty, holy, immortal God entering into a relationship with mortal, sinful people, like us. A relationship that is all of grace, on God’s part. A relationship that is life-giving to us. A relationship that is holy. An awesome privilege. And an awesome responsibility. For in this covenant, we become the people of God. For the sake of the world.

Do you tremble as you think about this covenant? You, now in relationship with the Creator of the cosmos! You, invited to come close! You, bearing His name!

Have you any idea of the cost? Of this covenant? For covenants come at a cost.

Has the responsibility settled on you? You and I bear Jesus' name!

At the table we'll remember the new covenant.

2. Blood

At Sinai, oxen were sacrificed. Lots of them. Burnt offerings for sin; peace offerings for gratitude. Blood everywhere. Collected. Thrown on the altar – thrown on the people.

Can you picture it?

In the upper room – a cup, and the words, **“this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”** And the next day, the cross.

What's with the blood?!

The Bible says the life is in the blood. And the Bible says, **“without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”** (Hebrews 9:22)

These are God's words, not mine. And God continually requires the shedding of blood – sacrifices – to deal with sin, and to bring humans back into relationship with him. And supremely, finally, decisively, Christ sheds his blood on the cross.

Blood is everywhere, including throughout the New Testament.

1 Peter 1:18 - 19 – “you were ransomed...with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”

Revelation 5:9 (speaking of Christ) – **“you were slain and by your blood you ransomed people for God.”**

Revelation 7:14 – “they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb.”

Have we any idea of the seriousness of human sin?

Have we any idea of the cost of our forgiveness? The cost of the covenant?

3. Glory

At Sinai, **“the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel.”** (Exodus 24:17)

And the people were warned not to come too close. And they trembled.

Looking back on his time living with Jesus, John would write, **“We have seen his glory...”** (John 1:14)

In Scripture, the glory of God is associated with the **fear** of God, the **wrath** of God, and the **holiness** of God, as well as with the beauty and the goodness and the power of God.

C.S. Lewis put it well in the Narnia Chronicles, in the mouth of Mrs. Beaver to Lucy. “He is good, but he is not safe.”

Our faith keeps in tension the truth: **No one can see God and live** (Exodus 33:20), though God in his mercy allows glimpses. And the truth: **God dwells with those of a contrite and lowly spirit...** (Isaiah 57:15)

And in Jesus, we see God incarnate touching the leper and the prostitute and calling us “friend”.

And yet, Hebrews reminds us, **“The Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”** (Hebrews 10:30 - 31)

At the table, renewing the covenant, remembering his blood, we see the glory of God. With trembling gratitude.

4. Worship

Israel worshiped God at Sinai. They made multiple sacrifices. Perfectly good oxen, given to God. They made promises, recognizing who God is and who they were, and what God had done for them.

At the table of the Lord, we worship. We remember who God is. Who we are. And what God has done for us. With gratitude we remember who we are, as God’s people.

And sacrifices? There is no longer need for sacrifices, for Jesus is the final and sufficient sacrifice. **Hebrews 10:12 – “when Christ has offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God...”**

And yet, the New Testament calls us to **offer our bodies as living sacrifices...our spiritual act of worship. This is holy and pleasing to God.** (Romans 12:1)

When we come to worship, we don’t come empty handed. Worship is demeaned, God is demeaned, if we come casually, thoughtlessly, arrogantly. We bring ourselves, in humility, in brokenness. It’s all we have. It’s all He wants.

Worship is serious business.

III. Pulling it all together

These are God's words. God's vocabulary. Words that are meant to shape us. Covenant. Blood. Glory. Worship.

We are a people of a holy covenant. Bought with the precious blood of Jesus. Having drawn near to the glory of God, with boldness, but not forgetting who God is. At worship. Anticipating the messianic banquet in Glory. Offering our all.

May God be pleased with our worship. And with our lives. Amen.

Covid 19 Update

The provincial guidelines for places of worship were changed several 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.

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.

I'm so excited to
take the garbage
out. I wonder what
should I wear?

Interestingly, according to modern astronomers, space is finite. This is a very comforting thought—particularly for people who can never remember where they have left things. (Woody Allen)

Have you heard the story of the magic sandwich? Never mind, it's just a bunch of bologna.