

ST. PAUL'S DECEMBER 2023 NEWSLETTER



Have you ever seen the movie *Oceans 11*. If you haven't you should. It stands as one of Hollywood's better renditions of a heist movie. In it the characters set out to do the impossible. To rob the shared vault of 3 casinos on a fight night, when security would be at its highest level but when the payday would also be the greatest. As you watch the heist unfold you begin to think that things have gone wrong. Alarms have been tripped and the SWAT team is on its way. It is only after the heist is completed and you are allowed a behind the scenes look at how the plan was carried out that you begin to appreciate the brilliance of their plan and the flawlessness of their execution of it.

In some ways the story of Jesus is a heist story as well. Ephesians 4:8 says, "when he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive (NRSV)", meaning that the things that keep us captive are carried off by Jesus. At Christmas time we hear proclamations of peace on earth, goodwill toward men. We might be tempted to think that Jesus came to take captive the Scrooges and the Grinches of this world or even within our own heart. That the peace on earth and the goodwill toward men is something that man is to create or multiply. This is not wrong it is however woefully incomplete. In heist movie terms it's like making a movie about the challenges of robbing a casino of a single \$5 chip. Not particularly gripping cinema. *Oceans 11* gives the audience a behind the scenes look at the strength and complexity of the casino vaults security. The Bible allows us the same insight into our own captivity. Ephesians 2:1 describes all of humanity as "dead in your trespasses and sins." Our ultimate problem is not with Scrooge but with sin, death, and the Devil. We rightfully belong to the Devil because we oppose God in thought word and deed. And because we stand apart from God the life giver, we are locked in spiritual death, facing an eternal death to come.

But Jesus stole us back. The Devil's vault had us, by our own sin, locked away from God. How could our prison be broken when we had made it ourselves and our prison was intrinsic to our nature. You can understand why the Devil believed his bondage of mankind was secure. At Christmas we celebrate God becoming man. Upon this one action of God everything turned. In a move so brilliant that no one could see it coming and no one could have stopped it, God became man and ultimately became sin so that we could receive the righteousness of God. Johan Gerhard expressed the beauty of Christmas this way:

"Let us admire the marvelous wisdom of our God, who could devise a scheme for our redemption, which neither angels nor men could have devised. Infinite good was offended; an infinite satisfaction was required. Man had offended God, from man the satisfaction for sin must be required. But finite man could not possibly render an infinite satisfaction, nor could divine justice be satisfied but on the payment of an infinite ransom. For this reason God became man that, for man who had sinned, He might render a perfect satisfaction for sin, and as God who was infinite He might pay an infinite price for our redemption. Well may we wonder at this stupendous reconciliation of divine justice and mercy, which no one, before God was manifest in the flesh, could have devised, nor after He was so manifested, could fully comprehend."

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This Christmas as you read the familiar story of Bethlehem, shepherds, a virgin with child, and a babe in swaddling clothes; I invite you to wonder at the beauty of God's plan to rescue you from the ownership of the Devil. When your heart is filled with the wonder of the gift of the Christ child, you will find peace with God and Christ's good will towards men to be the foundation of Christmas joy.

Merry Christmas, Pastor David Handsaker





Childrens Christmas Program & Worship Service
Sunday, December 17, 10:30 am
*** Note Time Changes***
Sunday School & Confirmation 9:00 am



Services for Sunday, December 24th

Sunday Morning Worship Service9:00 am
Coffee Fellowship 10:15 am (No Sunday School or Confirmation)



Sunday Christmas Eve Candle light Worship Service4:00 pm



The Salvation Army is in need of Cereal, Peanut Butter & Jelly Donations

There will be a collection box In the narthex for your donations until Sunday Dec 17th



See You on Sunday

A recent Gallup poll revealed that only 30 percent of Americans attend church on Sunday. One does not have to be particularly observant to know this is true – just drive by local fields on a Sunday morning where dozens of children surrounded by their spectating parents are playing soccer.

This should be concerning to every Christian since “faith comes by hearing, hearing by the word of God.” Roman 10:17.

Of course, not everyone can make it to church on Sunday. Some may have to work a shift at a local mill, others may have physical limitations prohibiting attendance. Nowadays these folks can still view or listen to a service via radio, tv, or computer, for which we should be thankful. For the most of us, however, Sunday morning should be spent in church, and that is not just my opinion because the Bible has plenty to say about gathering together. Consider these verses:

“Whether, then, you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” 1Cor. 10:31. We are meant to glorify God. What better way to do this than singing praises and worshipping the Savior together?

“Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.” 2 Tim. 2:7 Exercise is important, not for just our physical well-being, but also for our mental acuity. Good mental exercise is provided every Sunday morning in Pastor’s sermon when he challenges and encourages us. We have Sunday school for all ages and further study is offered on Wednesday night. I think church attendance actually makes us smarter since we are considering the inspired word, the truth of God!

“If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing...” 1 Tim. 6:3-4a. Receiving Biblical teaching protects us from wrong thinking. Our present society has placed its stamp of approval on abortion, the gay life style, drag queens, gambling, etc. etc. We are bombarded with messages which are contrary to Biblical truth. We need to be reinforced regularly with sound teaching.

“And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.” Heb. 10:24-25 These verses are a call for action. We are to go to church to encourage others and be encouraged by our fellow believers. This is an antidote for discouragement, loneliness, and despair. A kind word, a listening ear, and empathetic concern all can have a huge impact.

“And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” Acts 2:42 This description of the early church is certainly applicable to today. Sound Biblical teaching is crucial; incorrect teaching is detrimental and dangerous. Fellowship is crucial to Christian growth. We need each other. Whether this verse describes communion or just a regular meal, breaking of bread together binds our church. Finally, individual prayer is important, but so is corporate prayer.

“Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.” Matt 18:19-20. Here we see again a promise about corporate prayer. We also find out that we don’t have to have a packed church to experience Christ’s presence.

Hopefully these verses have been a challenge and blessing. Other verses to consider: Rom 12:12, 1 Tim 6:18, Heb. 13:17, Phil. 2:1-2, Col. 3:16.

See you Sunday morning! C. Phil Johnson

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St. Paul's Lutheran Church (AFLC)

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Pastor David Handsaker / Church office 218-879-5956

Worship Services—Sundays at 9:00 am

Sunday School classes for all ages 10:30 am

See time changes for Sunday, Dec 17

Wednesday Evenings –Family Night 6:30 pm

Kids Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study

