

## Weekly Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of April 1 & 2, 2017

### Dear Members of St. John

Well I finished my ninth and final infusion this past Monday. I have to wait until April 7<sup>th</sup> for my lab tests and the results from my specialist at the Cleveland Clinic on April 11<sup>th</sup>. I have two more infusions scheduled for April, but now they will come every other week. While I enjoy the week off and plan to go and visit with my grandkids, I must confess this has been a long winter. I am just sick and tired of being sick and tired.

Overwhelmed, I think is a good explanation. We feel it for all sorts of reasons, and I don't know about you, but when I feel overwhelmed I want to run away! I want to run from what feels too big and unfixable! It is all just too much.

Thankfully, God wants us to run when we're feeling overwhelmed. But instead of running away from what overwhelms us, He wants us to run to Him. To run to His Word which settles us, shelters us and calms us down.

Most times we can't change all the stuff in our lives that feels bigger than we can handle. But, whatever feels bigger than you, is still puny compared to the Rock that is higher than you! *"From the ends of the earth, I cry to you for help when my heart is overwhelmed. Lead me to the towering rock of safety."* Psalm 61:2

When I feel flat-out overwhelmed and under-qualified and out-of-sorts, I'm learning not to run away from my stress. Instead, I'm learning to run to God — to His Word — in the overwhelming middle of my stress!

When I run to God's Word, even just one verse, I find that God is my *"refuge and strength, an ever-present help in of trouble"* (Psalm 46:1). When I run to Him, I find that my refuge isn't an escape from my stress. God is my refuge. I'm reminded once again that my strength doesn't come from me and my stamina or drive. My strength comes from the Lord.

He is the rock that is higher than I am. When I run to His Word, it protects me and keeps me from totally freaking out or giving up or falling apart. He really is **THE** "Rock" that is stronger and higher than anything you and I face.

If you feel the need to run away, lace up your cutest running shoes, and go for it! Run into the strong arms of Jesus. He is your strength. He is your Rock. He is your refuge.

And, when you find yourself sheltered in the truth of His Word and in the sanctuary of His presence, all the stresses that overwhelmed you and felt bigger than you, suddenly shrink down to the pebble size it really is!

God's Word gives you the perspective you need. God's presence gives you the peace you need, so run away brother and sister ... run to the Rock who's waiting to shelter and settle you.

God's richest blessing to each of you, as you run to our God.

Pastor Jim

## Weekly Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of April 8 & 9, 2017

### Dear Members of St. John:

Have a great day in the Lord! We took two days, but we were able to go to Virginia and enjoyed being with the Grandkids. They have so much more energy than what we do. This Friday, April 7<sup>th</sup>, I had several tests to measure what the chemo is doing. Hopefully, it will say that my numbers are still going down, and that I am moving toward transplant becoming a reality. Right now, it has been a "distant dream," but still a hope and a prayer. But the waiting has been the worst.

Jeremiah, who wrote the Book of Lamentations, records this lament, "The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD." Lamentations 3:25-26 (NIV)

When you and I wait on the Lord, there is this hope-for answer that is not yet realized, with the result that we become more overwhelmed. I started crying out to the Lord, asking the unanswerable question of why: Why were things so hard? Why was there such loss? Why did I feel so stuck? God answered me, but not in response to my whys.

As I sat and prayed, God reminded me that all the things I was so desperately trying to secure — life, health and provision — come from Him. I can't heal myself. I can't will my numbers to go down. God alone gives us what we need. All I can do? Pray. And wait.

Waiting is a recurrent theme in my life, but it has never gotten easier. It's always painful, because it forces me to remember — again — that I'm not in control. I can't give myself what I need; I can only ask God to heal, renew and provide.

So, I sit and pray that God would change my circumstances, and then I turned to the Word and read verses that declare that I already have all that I need in Christ (Ephesians 1:3) "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." And Philippians 4:19 "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." I may have to wait for everything else, but I never have to wait for God.

But why is waiting still so hard? If I have all that I need in Christ, why do I try to fix things instead of waiting for God's timing? I think it's because waiting reveals our hearts and how much we want to have control. And in order to wait well, we have to give up that control and stop striving to fix things — and seek Him instead.

The key verse in Lamentations declares that "The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him." It's not easy, but "it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD" — to have to wait for God to move on our behalf.

Our difficult circumstances may not change easily or quickly, but as we wait on God and put our hope in Him, rather than hoping in a change of situation, we'll find that He Himself is more than enough for us. In Christ, we have all that we need.

God's richest blessings to each of you. I love you lots and miss you even more.

Pastor Jim

## **Weekly Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of April 15 & 16, 2017**

Dear Members of St. John,

My week with my grandkids was special in very way. I saw all their chickens. They now have about 35, and many of them are laying now, which they love. They even have some to sell. While the kids were still in school, I played around with my son, Chris, in his garage. Did I tell you that Chris now has 12 vintage 1943 9N Ford tractors? He has fallen in love with Henry Ford and what he did for the farmer. Chris has his whole garden planted and it is bigger than last year, and I thought last year's was huge. On April 7<sup>th</sup>, I had all my labs tests to see if my number are still going down. On April 10<sup>th</sup>, I started in the next infusion. I asked if they had received the update on my labs. One of the main indicators showed a slight uptick. Not good. I will meet with my specialist to see what we do now. Keeping praying for me and I thank you dearly for all of them.

Are you excited about Easter this year? This Easter will be incredibly different and hard for me. It may be the first Easter Sunday in so many years where your family wouldn't attend church together. So, instead of looking forward to the celebration for all the right reasons, we might be secretly dreading it, knowing it would be difficult to get through the day. Holidays often look different through the lens of a broken heart or a broken family. So rather than focusing on the meaning of the resurrection, our thoughts may center around our earthly problems.

That's exactly why in Colossians 3:2, Paul encourages us to set our minds on the things above — not the problems of this world. Because whatever we set our minds on determines our thoughts, drives our emotions, fuels our words and actions, and ultimately steers the direction of our faith. When our thoughts are sinking, our hearts will too.

However, if we intentionally fix our attention on "things that are above," — what makes us joyful, hopeful and positive — like the resurrection of Jesus Christ, eternal life, hope found in our Savior and blessings of all kinds that make us smile, then our attitudes can stay uplifted, despite our circumstances.

The choice is ours when it comes to what we fix our eyes on, and that important choice will determine the direction of our faith and our ability to enjoy God's joy and peace, even when our hearts are heavy. Unsinkable optimism, hope and faith hinge on where we choose to focus our thoughts, ONLY on Jesus!

Yes, life may be hard in the moment. Things certainly hadn't turned out the way I'd hoped. But hard things in life don't have to harden my heart. We all experience hardships in life, but regardless of what we face, Jesus died on the cross for our sins, rose on the third day and ascended to sit at the right hand of our Father. He

assures us a beautiful future in heaven with Him, even when life gets ugly. Those divine truths are reason enough to celebrate Easter with an overflowing heart of gratitude and praise. Blessed Easter to All!

Pastor Jim

## Weekly Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of April 22 & 23, 2017

### Dear Members of St. John

I met with my cancer specialist and he said that the little uptick in my numbers was nothing to be concerned about. I will continue on an every other week schedule to receive my chemo treatments, which means I can feel a little more normal, at least for a little while. I had always known the chemo treatments are hard on a person, but until I actually went through them myself, I never knew just how hard it really is.

Cancer has helped me understand that whether I'm suffering the consequences of my own crabby disposition or reeling from situations out of my control, I understand the ache when life unravels. Whether one is waiting for the next test results and wondering if the numbers are up or down, enduring the effects of the chemo treatments or just having a crappy day, one does not have to look very far for something to bring you down. In fact, you don't have to have cancer and be going through chemo treatments to find something to bring you down. Just turn on the TV and watch the world news. The big question is what do you do when life brings you down? Where do you turn?

I know what it's like to stumble through the hours of my day, empty and irritated, cynical and even sour, where I sabotage my own joy or fret over my unexpected misfortune. "Down thinking" leads us "down living." Have you noticed that connection? And on the days I'm at my worst, I yearn for the One who knows me best. That's when I'm most *lonely* for my Heavenly Father and His tender loving care.

King David certainly understood this feeling. While this acclaimed man of God enjoyed times of ease and celebration, he also came face to face with his fair share often terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days. However, when life unraveled, David acknowledged his longing for the One who holds all things together. (**Colossians 1:17** "[Jesus Christ] is before all things, and in him all things hold together.") King David's worst days drove him to call upon His best hope: **Psalms 61:2** "From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I."

Perhaps this is also how we excavate the unexpected gift tucked into the folds of a *terrible, horrible, no good, very bad* day. If we pay attention to the childlike cry of our own hearts, our most frayed and frazzled moments can serve as a launching pad to propel us toward our faithful, unfaltering and most loving Father. Our Heavenly Father wants only the best for His children, and all the events of our life, even those terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days, will work in God's grand plan to accomplish His good purposes for our lives. Even that terrible Friday, when our Lord Jesus died, brought about the redemption of the world with His Resurrection from the dead on Easter. Our God is faithful, trustworthy and loving. You can count on HIM! Amen?

Pastor Jim

## Weekly Update from Pastor Jim-Weekend of April 29 & 30, 2017

I had my last chemo treatment this week, and all went well. In fact, I heard from the transplant staff and they set up appointments for this coming week. I go through a battery of tests, body scans, blood tests, X-rays, and another bone marrow biopsy, all to make sure I don't have any other issues going on that might deny me transplant. What a kick in the pants that would be to go through all this, only to find out it won't work for me. The best word to describe that is "*betrayed*". So, keep praying that I move forward toward transplant.

I wonder if that is how the disciples felt the day Jesus was crucified? They'd put all their hope and faith in Him, only to have Jesus submit to arrest, an unfair trial and death like a common criminal. Did the disciples doubt everything Jesus had said in their three years together as they hid behind closed doors? They must have been filled with questions that all started with "Why." Why did He leave us? Why did He allow this?

Maybe you've felt that way too, as you're left standing alone in a dark place. The other side of betrayal is bleak, loneliness and hopelessness. You can feel things will never be good again. Certainly, the disciples felt some of those emotions.

However, what the disciples didn't know on that devastating Friday was Jesus hadn't betrayed them at all. In fact, the opposite was occurring as they sat in despair. Jesus was honoring the hardest promise ever: Follow His Father's path to the cross. Jesus wasn't selfishly leaving them alone, He was selflessly leading them to the Father for all eternity. In the moments that looked most hopeless, Jesus was working out our greatest hope. In the moments that looked darkest, Jesus was forging a path to the light. And Jesus still does that for you and me today.

A friend once told me, *"Don't doubt in the dark what you know to be true in the light."* Believing is a choice. We can choose to doubt, or we can choose to believe. I've come to discover faith isn't fragile when it's placed in the right person. Faith in Jesus is rugged, strong and sustaining when we make the brave choice to trust Him.

Easter Sunday is proof. The Bible records that on Sunday, three days after Jesus' crucifixion, Jesus fulfilled His promise as He rose from the dead! But there was one disciple missing that Sunday evening: Thomas. Thomas didn't get to see the resurrected Lord, and He doubted the reports of Jesus being alive. So, one week later, Jesus came to the disciples again, this time to show Himself to Thomas, in flesh and blood.

Thomas finally believed. And I'm pretty sure Jesus was thinking of us when He said these words to Thomas, "[Is it] because you have seen me, [that] you have believed? *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*" (John 20:29). Jesus will hold your faith secure and show He is worthy of it now and forever. Jesus will keep every promise He's ever made. He proved it then, and He proves it today. Can I hear a loud Amen? Love you all! Pastor Jim



**Pentecost is Sunday, June 4<sup>th</sup>. Geraniums orders are being taken to decorate the altar for Pentecost. Cost is \$3.50 per plant. Last date to order is May, 28<sup>th</sup>. Please place your order form and payment in the box in the back of church or mail it to the church office. Please take your plant(s) with you after the service on June 4<sup>th</sup>. Make checks payable to St. John Lutheran Church Altar Guild.**



**Your name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your phone** \_\_\_\_\_ **# of plants** \_\_\_\_\_

**Given in memory of** \_\_\_\_\_

**Given in honor of** \_\_\_\_\_