

Weekly Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of February 4-5, 2017

Dear Members of St. John,

Today I had an appointment with a Multiple Myeloma specialist at the Cleveland Clinic. It's not that I have doubts about what my cancer doctor at the Moll Center is doing, but just felt that "two heads are better than one." The specialist suggested I take the same drug I reacted to, because he believes I had an immune reaction rather than an allergic reaction. But to be on the safe side, he suggested I get that drug at the Cleveland Clinic, downtown. So, Monday morning, in all that snow, it took almost 2 hours to get downtown. Also, heard from my cardiologist and he says "there is no narrowing of any of my veins to the heart." Praise the Lord! After getting the drug, I started to have the same reaction, so they immediately gave me the anti-drugs. My breathing difficulties lasted only about 15 minutes, and then they started up the chemo drug again, and I did not have any problems the rest of the day, even though they increased the drug by 50 milligrams each hour, from beginning at 50 moving all the way to 200. The long day came to an end and we finally got home, tired, but still giving thanks to God.

As I am going through all this, I read: "*Be still, and know that I am God.*" (Psalm 46:10a). But, did you see that comma? It seemed to jump off the page for me today. A pause. *Be still...* When I'm still, **then**, I will *know God*. I will know the peace that God embodies. He will show me His will. I will know that He is God and that God is good all the time. And all the time, God is good.

That peace from God will not come when I'm busy, thinking "what if this, or what if that?" It is not a peace that comes when I'm doing what I like to do, like preaching or visiting some member, as good as those activities are. It is a peace that comes when I'm **still**, and quiet, and doing nothing. It is a peace that comes when we just lean on God.

The word "still" in Hebrew (the original language of the Old Testament) means: *to hang limp, sink down, be feeble, to be lazy, to leave alone, abandon, withdraw*. It is not that God wants us to be lazy, but rather to realize that our power is limited. God wants me to be still. He wants me to be patient, and quiet. God wants me to trust Him and not to stew or worry over what might happen. For sure, that can drive a person crazy. God did not make us to carry those concerns. But when you and I are still, God is calling us to "Pause" and find Him, and there to find true peace.

I am well aware of how often I hoped or wished things would happen faster than they do (i.e. waiting for test results or reports from the doctor's office). I am sure you do as well. But when we pause and are still, we are in essence saying, "God, Your time-table of events in my life is the best it could ever be." What a wonderful God we have, that we can sit back and let Him work out His grand plan in our lives.

Loving each and every one of you very, very much. God bless you!

Pastor Jim

Weekly Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of February 11-12, 2017

Dear Members of St. John,

Well, on Monday morning I had my next chemo infusion at the Moll Center, very close to my house. That's good news, because driving downtown is for the birds, and I don't think they like it either. They call it an infusion, because they start me with only 50 milliliters the first hour, and increase it by 50 each hour thereafter, until they reach 200, where I stay until the bag is finished. I must finish the entire bag which has 1,046 milliliters in it. I had no reaction to the chemo drug this time around. Praise the Lord! I have noticed that I am more tired throughout the week after the infusion, but I am hoping that is a sign that it is working to kill the cancer.

This week, I studied Psalm 23 and I really like it, as I am sure you do too. It starts out so clear and forceful "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want..." (Psalm 23:1) The Hebrew word for "want" is "**hasar**" and it really means "to lack anything." God does not promise everything we want, I am sorry to tell you. He does promise that we will lack nothing. But oh, how Satan wants to make them one and the same, like he did with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (If you want to read that again it's in Genesis 3).

When the difference between these words "wants" and "needs" starts getting skewed, we start compromising. We start justifying. And it sets us up to start getting our needs met outside the will of God. The abyss of discontentment invites us in and threatens to darken and distort everything in our world.

Listen, Satan is a liar. The more we fill ourselves with his distorted desires, the emptier we'll feel. The more we overspend, overwork or overeat or even abess over being healed — the emptier we feel. Remember, Satan wants to separate you from God's best plans. He wants to separate you from God's proper provision. He wants to separate you from God's peace. Remember these three truths:

- 1) **God's provision always sustains life.** Satan's temptation always drains life.
- 2) **God's provision in the short term will reap blessings in the long term.** Satan's temptation in the short term will reap heartache in the long term.

3) **God's provision fully satisfies the soul.** Satan's temptation gratifies the flesh.

We are either holding fast to God's promise or are lured by a compromise. And isn't it interesting that the word *promise* is right there in the middle of that word *com(promise)*? God promises, "*I will meet all your needs according to the riches of My Glory in Christ Jesus,*" (paraphrase, Philippians 4:19). He is everything we need and so perfectly capable of filling in the gaps of our wants as well. I want to be healed, as anyone would, but not knowing the exact plans of God, we must always add, "Not my will, O God, but Yours be done!" God has our best interests at heart!

Pastor Jim

Weekly Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of February 17-18, 2017

Dear Members of St. John,

Again this week, I had my 8 hour long infusion at the Moll Center, very close to my house. This was my 3rd treatment of a total of 8. I am hoping that about half way through, they do lots of labs to determine whether this treatment is working or not. My Myeloma Specialist ordered labs last week, so maybe we will see if this is working.

In my devotions this week, I happen to read **Habakkuk 3:17-18** "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls,¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior."

For much of my life, I thought to question God was to doubt Him. I had learned to trust in His complete control, and desired God's will for my life over my own. But somewhere along the path of obedience, my questioning ceased, and so did my laments.

Lament is a passionate expression of grief where God meets us in our time of sorrow. Lamenting prayers are prayers where we express our honest emotions before God. God wants to hear us, even on our bad days, and He is always open to our honest prayers.

One example of a lament found in Scripture is when the Psalmist cries out to God, asking: *How long? "How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart?"* (Psalm 13:1-2 NIV)

Have you ever lamented *how long* to God? How long must you suffer? How long before you see your children come to the Lord? How long must you stay in a job that doesn't satisfy you? How many more chemo treatments must I go through?

Both Habakkuk and David's lament show we may sometimes feel forgotten, and even forsaken by God. Notice that this lament isn't silenced by a happy-go-lucky song in church, or but the often used but rarely meant, "I'm fine." David's lament is taken directly to God in the form of prayer. In Scripture, God permits us to lament, and as we cry out to Him in lament, He answers.

God gives us permission to present our honest questions before Him. He knows we will have anxious thoughts and troubling circumstances. It is what we do in these lamenting times that matter. There is no "fake it 'til you make it" in Scripture. Lamenting gives our honest cries to God and gives Him the opportunity to comfort us when everything is not fine. Being "fine" is never to be our goal with God, however, intimacy and transparency *are*. Habakkuk understood that, and that's why after his lament, he said, "*yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.*" We can rejoice in God, because God is on our side, best expressed in His offering up His only Son in our place. God loves you. God loves me. ***Eternally!***

Pastor Jim

Weekly Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of February 25 & 26, 2017

Dear Members of St. John

I continue with my infusion each Monday. Now they put the same amount of medicine but in less fluid. Instead of 1,000 mls, they now put it in only 750 mls. That means the infusion time goes far quicker. Instead of being done at 5:30 or 6 PM, I am now finished about 3:30 or 4 PM. That's good news, thank you God. Also, lab tests reveal that my "Kappa/Lamb Serum ratio" has gone down from 831 in December to 607 in February. Also, my "Kappa Free Serum" has gone down from 914 in December to 485 in February. I am not ready to break out in the Hallelujah Chorus just yet, because each time I started on a new chemo drug my numbers initially went down and then began to creep up again. So, please join me in prayer that God would make my numbers continue to go down and we will praise God together.

But no matter what happens in life, the real question Jesus continually poses to us is "Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" Matthew 6:27 (NIV)

When it comes to worrying, I could win an Olympic prize. Not surprising, since I come from a long line of expert worriers, my grandmother and especially my father.

During my college days, when I would come home for some family gathering and Grandma would be worried that I would have a safe trip. Before I was to return to college, she was already worrying about the trip back. I would have to call home, remember, reverses the charges, to say I returned safe and sound.

Now, some forty years later, it's easy for me to laugh at my grandparent's apprehensions, but maybe my worries look equally foolish to God. When I consider my fears in the light of our all-powerful, heavenly Father, they look small and unnecessary.

Jesus knew all about our inclination to worry when He asked, "Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" (Matthew 6:27).

Maybe worrying is in my genes, but I nurture it every time I allow it to take root in my thoughts. I've wasted time and energy letting my mind get worked up over situations my heavenly Father had fully under His control.

Scripture reminds me I have a loving Father who cares even for birds: "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (Matthew 6:26, NIV). When I call to mind that God feeds even sparrows, I'm reassured. I remember my heavenly Father sees me, loves me and cares for my needs.

What about you? You might have some pressing uncertainties in your life. Trouble at work, concern for your kids, and a simple visit to the doctor can turn your life upside down. Regardless what you are facing, we can flex our faith muscles today and use worry to build our faith in our Great God.

Pastor Jim



After a few of the usual Sunday morning hymns, the Church's Pastor slowly stood up, walked over to the pulpit and, before he gave his sermon for the day, he briefly introduced a guest minister who was in the service that day.

In the introduction, the Pastor told the congregation that the guest minister was one of his dearest childhood friends and that he wanted him to have a few moments to greet the congregation and share whatever he felt would be appropriate for the service. With that, the elderly man stepped up to the pulpit and began to speak.

"A father, his son and a friend of his son were sailing off the Pacific coast," he began, "when a fast approaching storm blocked any attempt to get back to the shore. The waves were so high, and even though the father was an experienced sailor, he could not keep the boat upright and the three were swept into the ocean as the boat capsized."

The elderly gentleman hesitated for a moment, making eye contact with two teenagers who were, for the first time since the service began, looking somewhat interested in his story. The older minister continued with his story, "grabbing a rescue line, the father had to make the most excruciating decision of his life: to which boy would he throw the other end of the life line? He only had seconds to make the decision." The man said, "the father knew his son was a Christian, and he also knew that his son's friend was not. The agony of his decision could not be matched by the torrent of the waves. As the father yelled out, 'I love you, son!' he threw the life line to his son's friend. By the time the father had pulled the friend back to the capsized boat, he son had disappeared beneath the raging swells into the black of night. His body was never recovered. By this time, the two teenagers were sitting up straight in the pew, anxiously waiting for the next words to come out of the old minister's mouth.

"The father," he continued, "knew his son would step into eternity with Jesus and he could not bear the thought of his son's friend stepping into an eternity without Jesus. Therefore, he sacrificed his son to save the son's friend."

"How great is the love of God that He should do the same for us. Our heavenly Father sacrificed His only begotten Son that we could be saved. I urge you to receive His offer to rescue you and take a hold of the life line He is throwing out to you today." With that the older minister turned and sat back down in his pew as silence filled the room.

The Pastor of the Church walked slowly to the pulpit and delivered his sermon. Following the service, the two teenagers were at the old man's side. "That was really a great story," one of them politely stated. "But I don't think it was very realistic for a father to give up his only son's life in hopes that the other boy would become a Christian."

"Well, you've got a point there," the old man replied, glancing down at his worn Bible. Then a big smile came over his narrow face and he again looked up at the boys and said, "it sure isn't very realistic, but I am standing here to tell you I'm that son's friend. And what a glimpse it gives me to understand what it must have been like for God to give up His Son for me."

Blessings, Pastor Jim