

Weekly Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of January 7-8, 2017

Dear Members of St. John,

I am hoping that your New Year is off to a good start. I know it is for me. I was able to spend Christmas with my grandkids and absolutely loved it. One of the best Christmases that I can remember. Also, it seems that January will be my last round of chemo and I have several appointments down town at the Cleveland Clinic. I will be spending January 16th and 18th, most of each of those two days, going through many different tests, blood work, full body x-ray, and another bone marrow biopsy, a test I am not looking forward to, because of how painful the first one was. So, I am asking you to join me in praying this verse from Philippians.

“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus” Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT).

It is amazing to me how our imagination works. Why do we always seem to jump to the worst conclusion? When something is going to happen, we right away think, “Oh no, this is not going to be good.” We have such a persistence toward negativity! But why?

God continually reminds me, as He does in Philippians, the worries that rattle my brain, the doubts and fears that flutter in and through my head, that God is God, and I am not. Which means I have a decision to make: Keep worrying, or let go and let God work.

In Philippians 4:6-7, God promises that when we release our worries and turn instead to prayer, He will give us His peace — a peace that’s beyond everything and anything we can understand. His peace will guard our hearts and minds from the anxieties that can be very persistent, to say the least. We try so hard to make sense of what’s happening around and to us, but God tells us these things are beyond our understanding. So, I must tell myself, “Just give up trying to figure these things out.” That, in itself, is a humbling experience, and simply reminds us that God is God and only He knows how all the parts of my life will fit together for my good.

So, when the worries of your life plague you, give them over to God and leave them with Him. I know we are tempted to pick them up again. When that happens simply remind yourself, “I have given them to God,” and He is very good at taking care of them, particularly since I am **NOT!** This gentle reminder is “God’s peace” that will continually to guard your hearts and minds throughout your day, your week, your month and New Year. There is no better way to enter a New Year than to commit all our care and needs to our gracious and loving Savior. Jesus gave us His all, so that we will lack nothing.

Loving you all and praying God’s blessings for a great New Year.

Pastor Jim

Weekly Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of January 14-15, 2017

Dear Members of St. John,

What I thought would be my last round of chemo, my cancer doctor said, “my numbers are **NOT** going down, in fact they are going **UP**.” He said we will try this round of the double chemo and see what happens, but if they continue to go up, we will have to change our course of action. So, that means all the testing that was to happen at the Cleveland Clinic, January 16th and 18th, will be postponed, to when, I don’t know. “**Rats! And Double Rats.**”

Since this is the second time I’ve received “bad news,” I am not quite as disappointed, but it did get me thinking, “wouldn’t it be great to be able to look into the future and see what will happen next?” But then I wonder, would I really like to know what will happen next? Maybe it’s best I don’t know.

One thing that not knowing the future does, it sets us up to trust God to bring His best for our good to the future. In fact, He promises, “When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.” Isaiah 43:2 (NLT) God talks to His people, the Israelites, as they begin a journey. After years in captivity, they rejoiced at the freedom to return to their homeland. But to get there, they must travel a long distance. Their travel would look quite different from ours — no plane to catch and no trailer to haul their stuff. So, you can imagine the challenge this nation would face when they found themselves

standing in front of deep waters or difficult rivers. Men, women, children, livestock and all their belongings would have to find a way through these physical obstacles.

Though we may not come upon an actual river, we will likely encounter something this year that mimics a rushing current or suffocating smoke. Notice how Isaiah says, “*When you go through deep waters ... When you go through rivers of difficulty ... When you walk through the fire of oppression.*” Did you happen to notice, it is **When**, not **If**.

When I realized the uncertainty of my life’s future, I purposed to get rid of all the extra stuff, those unnecessary things that just weighed me down. It is amazing how a life altering diagnosis identifies all those things I could live without and would ultimately free me up to follow God wherever He chooses to lead me. I can say “Thank You, Lord Jesus, for Cancer” because I know when I go through the deep waters, when I cross difficult rivers, when I endure fires of oppression, God will make a way through them all.

Do I see “How” God will do all that? No, I don’t. But again, I am in a position to trust God. 2 Corinthians 5:7 says, “We live by faith and not by sight.” It is more important to God that my faith be strengthened than my body to be healed. That sounds harsh, but God wants you and me to be with Him for an eternity. So, Faith is the answer.

Pastor Jim

Weekly Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of January 21-22, 2017

Dear Members of St. John,

Wow, what a week! I met with my cancer doctor who said I am no farther ahead after eight months of chemo than when I started. In June, my numbers were 852, and at the end of December, I was at 831. My doctor suggested I start on a new regiment of two chemo drugs, one given by IV and the other in pill form. So, on Monday, January 16th, I was planning on spending the whole day receiving chemo IV. I was about one hour in the process, when I began experiencing breathing problems. I called the nurse and she right away turned off the chemo, and injected me with anti-allergic drugs to counter act the chemo. We waited 10 minutes, and I was no better so they called 911 to take me to the hospital. At the hospital, they had to put me through a heart attack protocol, which all proved negative, thank you, Jesus. I was then discharged on Tuesday about 5 PM.

Do you like detours? It seems that in my life, detours are all over the place. God has a purpose and a plan for you and me. In Ephesians 2:10, Paul wrote, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, **which God prepared in advance for us to do.**” God has something that maximizes your skills, personality, experiences, passions and compassions in a way like no one else ever could. Sure, it may not happen tomorrow. Nor will you get there by going in a straight line. This is because God sets twists and turns in all our lives, that provide opportunities for us to grow, mature, be humbled, learn, develop, surrender, gain confidence and more. I call these twists and turns “detours.”

Detours are unanticipated routes that take us another way to our intended destination. It’s either a sign you come upon (i.e. my test numbers), a person who steers you elsewhere (i.e. my cancer doctor) or a police car with lights flashing (i.e. my ride in an ambulance), letting you know the road is closed.

Few of us like to be inconvenienced, for any reason. But detours are designed for our own good on the roads of life, regardless of how we view them. Detours are a good thing, but I still don’t like them.

God can do many things in detours. We learn patience, compassion, kindness, gratitude and all those wonderful things that empower us to fully live out our dreams. You may feel that your life right now is on one ongoing detour from fulfilling your dreams. But, just like Joseph whom God positioned from “the pit to the palace” (read Genesis chapters 37-50), God has a plan for every moment in your life as well. Yes, even the most mundane and monotonous ones can lead to wonderful growth opportunities.

God is taking you straight to our destiny, in His ever God-like-zig-zagging-sort-of-way. Thank Him for it and ask that His peace would be given, that is unexplainable.

Love you all,

Pastor Jim

Weekly Update from Pastor Jim – Weekend of January 28-29, 2017

Dear Members of St. John,

Last week after getting out of the hospital, I had a stress test. I was able to do the treadmill with little or no problems. After the test, the doctor came in and looked at the print out and said, “I see a couple of abnormal readings.” He said I will need to go through a nuclear stress test, where they insert dye in your veins and can take pictures of my heart. Because that was still coming this week, my cancer doctor said they would cancel the chemo I was to receive on Monday. I am still waiting for the results.

Life sometimes keeps us from details that are better left alone. It keeps some of the blanks, blank on the outline of our lives. Does it ever drive you crazy when a speaker gives you an outline with blanks but then skips some of the points? Me too. We like completed outlines. All the blanks filled in. All the gaps closed. All the details disclosed. And all the “why” questions answered to our satisfaction. But that’s not the way life is.

I believe that’s the way God wants it. Our all-knowing God not only allows this but actually designed our life to be this way. Without blanks, we would have no room for Him to enter in and write in His answers. For Him to become the Way, when there seems no way. For Him to be the Truth, when only lies consume our thoughts. For Him to be the Life, not just living but an *ABUNDANT* life, He’s designed for us (John 14:6). Our God is not fickle, forgetful or unloving in any way. He does not make mistakes. He purposes the gaps. He allows sacred spaces and blank places. He leaves room.

If we had all the blanks filled in, we would explain away God’s part in our story. God doesn’t want to be explained away. He wants to be invited in. He wants us to make room for His additions or changes in the directions of our story.

One time God was told, “There is no room,” and He turned an ordinary stable into an unforgettable sanctuary. “No room” became a space through which Jesus Christ stepped through glory to the grit and grime of this sin-soaked world. What He came to bring was Redemption. “To redeem” means to “buy back.” Jesus came to buy back the world that was already His. But sin interrupted His ownership. So, Jesus came to deal with sin, death and the grave. Jesus came to fill in all this world’s blanks, hardships and holes.

So, what do all these blanks and unanswered questions of your life provide space for? For Jesus to come in and fill them. It provides Jesus the opportunity for Redemption. It gives Jesus the chance to become our Way, our Truth and our Life. And only then, Jesus says, “we will get to the Father.”

Some author once asked: “Are you, as Christians, standing on the promises, or merely sitting on the premises?” Jesus wants us standing on His promises. And one of those promises is that all that happens in my life will help me continue to stand on those promises. Love you all very much. Keep up the prayers. They are being answered!

Pastor Jim

**The only difference between
a good day and a bad day is your
ATTITUDE!!**

**Give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.
1 Thessalonians 5:18**