

THE BALSAM BRANCH

April 2021

Balsam Lutheran Church

1115 Mains Crossing
Amery, Wisconsin 54001

Laurie Kenyon Woods, Pastor



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Pastor's Pen

In this month between winter and spring, I am keenly aware of longer days, the warming of the earth, of budding trees and greening grass. The promise of new life is everywhere.

With the start of April, comes the end of Lent, and the beginning of Easter. The colors of Easter are white and gold, reminding us of the joy of resurrection and the brightness of the sun. After the cold and darkness of winter mixed with the cloudy and shadowed journey to the cross, Lent's colors of purple and gray give way to bright white and clarifying yellow. Lent's reminders of pain and mourning give way to light and warmth, to presence and peace. This transition

in the church calendar is sort of like the first spring morning when you can actually feel the sun's warmth on your skin.

On my recent walks outside with my husband and dog, I have begun to see the faintest of green shoots starting to peek out of the cold earth - promises of new flowers, leaves, and life. It makes me wonder how these delicate plants of spring push through the dark, cold, hard earth. Then I realized: they don't push their way through at all! The sun coaxes them. The warmth and bright light of the approaching spring mixes with the mysterious pull of the life-giving sunlight to bring beauty out of the dark earth.

What an important reminder!
Sometimes, I think we approach Holy Week (and if we are being honest, our

whole Christian lives) by focusing on what it means for us, where we are in the story of Christ's final days of his ministry, his death, and then resurrection. But the truth of not only Holy Week but also the Christian story, is that the real center is not ourselves, but Christ. We are those small shoots of new life coming up out of the soil - not on our own action or effort - but through the sun-filled grace of God's love.

On Easter Sunday, we celebrate the resurrection of Christ from the grave. This event that forms the foundation of our faith invites us to deepen our belief in the mysterious paradox that life follows death.

The ability to celebrate anything in life is its own kind of mystery—a miracle that we are only able to welcome and receive by grace. May we use this season of Eastertide, every one of its fifty days, to believe in and practice the resurrection--both that of Jesus but also that of him that is at work in and through us through the Holy Spirit. In each of our lives, in the promise of springtime, and in the presence of Christ, may we see reminders of God's faithfulness and goodness.

Blessings,

Pastor Laurie

Collection items for back-packs:

April: deodorant

Financially Speaking

Thank you to all of you who have continued to support Balsam Lutheran financially despite not being able to worship together due to the pandemic. Your continued support is so appreciated.

Our general fund balance as of March 31 is \$70,329.29. All expenses have been paid for March, but this balance does not include the March 28th offering and any offering given through the online giving program (Tithely).

There are two areas where your extra offering (in addition to your offering to the general fund) can make a significant impact.

1. We have made great strides in reducing our mortgage balance which is now under \$150,000. Any extra offering designated for "Debt Reduction" will go to reduce the principle on our loan.
2. We have pledged \$1000 to support our missionaries—the Friberg's. Any extra offering designated for "Mission Support" will go to fulfill that pledge. Parents of campers--there are funds to cover the cost of sending your child/children to Luther Point Bible Camp. Please contact me regarding reimbursement.

In Christ,
Gail Peterson

THANK YOU!

THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

I would like to thank my Balsam family for the help and support you've provided me in the last few years. It's been a challenging time for me and I couldn't have gotten through it without you! From housing to gifts for my new home to a word of encouragement, (even a free elliptical machine), everything helped me through.

Thank you, come and visit, I'm pretty much settled.

Gods Blessings,
Michelle

On behalf of the **Amery Area Food Pantry**, I wish once again to thank you for your generous donation of \$200.00 and 44 pounds of groceries this month. Because of the continued generosity of church groups like yours, we are able to provide food assistance for over 150 households each month. It is with the deepest appreciation that we acknowledge your donation. We are blessed to have your support. Please know that we are very appreciative of your kindness and generosity.

Directory

Usually, the directory is completed in March, but this year it won't be done until May so that it can have the new Council included in it. Please get to Bonnie any changes of address, changes or additions of phone numbers and e-mails. Also, each committee needs to get to Bonnie their members and chairman.

April "Birth" days

01 Gayle Knutson	16 Amie Costello
01 Marlys Kromrey	21 Logan Sigsworth
02 Caressa Fougner	24 Bonnie Corcoran
03 Ashton Duden	24 Tammy Olson
08 Lisa Markee	25 Sue Albright
11 Janet Cran	27 Eileen Markee
15 Arlen Peterson	28 Nancy Bottolfson
15 Michelle Stone	

Prayer Ministry

- **Prayer Shawl Ministry** – Please let Pastor Laurie, Bonnie Corcoran at 268-9881 or Nancy Bottolfson at 268-8244 know if there is someone in need of personal prayer, a visit and a prayer shawl.
- **Prayer Requests** – Prayer Chain, please contact: Nancy Bottolfson at 268-8244 or email her at botolson@amerytel.net or call Esther Nelson at 268-8223.

2021 Easter Message from Bishop Laurie

Crosses We Don't Choose

Then Jesus told them, "... take up their cross and follow me." Matthew 16:24b
Dear Members and Friends of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin,
My friend Julie's mom had dementia. Julie picked up that cross and carried it as her beloved mother faded away. Paul was in second grade when he was diagnosed with diabetes. It was a cross

he would carry for the rest of his life. Erica's drug addiction was a cross she and her family carried for years until she found sobriety. They were all crosses they didn't choose.

Jesus carried his cross on the road to his crucifixion. Along the way he falls, and a man named Simon of Cyrene is forced to pick up Jesus' cross and carry it the rest of the way to Calvary. Simon was most likely a reluctant cross bearer. Most of us are reluctant cross bearers. We don't choose the pain or suffering we've been dealt, and yet we carry the load. We don't choose to carry another person's cross when they are too weak to carry it themselves, but we are at times compelled by love to do so.

This month marks the one-year anniversary of the pandemic. It is a cross that we've all carried to one degree or another. For some it has been an inconvenience and for others a heavy burden of suffering and profound grief. Theologically there is no way to put a positive spin on the coronavirus or 2020. It has been a cross we didn't choose. The strain of carrying this cross is evident in our country and congregations. We are all weary of it.

On Palm/Passion Sunday and Good Friday we are drawn into the story of Jesus' arrest, trial, and death. We walk alongside him in the crowd as he carries his cross, our cross, compelled by love. We walk with a suffering Jesus straining under the weight of this cross, stumbling, falling, getting back up and finally letting go, letting another carry it. Jesus knew pain in his human body, and so Jesus knows our every weakness. Jesus himself was beaten, knew suffering and was unable to carry the weight this cross. He

falls to the ground under the weight of his love for us.

As a church we invite others to walk in the way of Jesus knowing that they are carrying crosses they didn't choose for themselves. We invite others to walk in the way of Jesus because as a community of faith we shoulder the burden and carry it all together. We help another carry their cross out of love. We are Simon of Cyrene.

Maybe that is what this past year has taught us; that we need each other; we aren't alone. We've been isolated, quarantined, but not alone. We can't take our congregations for granted. We need our faith communities and the relationships with other believers because we can't carry our own crosses. We follow the way of Jesus together bearing our neighbor's crosses out of love.

It is in the cross that Jesus carried and on which he was crucified that we can know the love of God and salvation. This is Luther's Theology of the Cross. It is in the crosses that we as a community of faith carry together as we follow in the way of Jesus that we too see and know the love of God.

Dear friends of the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, I am grateful for you, that during the pandemic, we were able to walk in the way of Jesus together. May you each know the joy of Easter! Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed.

Bishop Laurie Skow-Anderson

1 Inspired by an article titled Crosses we don't choose in March 10, 2021 Christian Century by Debie Thomas

2 Simon of Cyrene Matthew 27:32