

Parish News • Friday, January 14, 2022

Greetings from Pastor Craig!

Shortly before our Zoom Bible Study on Wednesday I walked from my den into the kitchen. Glancing out the window from where I was standing by the sink, I saw a small flock of birds dive toward the Mountain Ash tree on the north side of the house. Suddenly they made a left turn and then landed equally spaced out on the branches. Whereupon the tree became alive with movement as the birds energetically began to pluck the berries from the tree.

Several moments later a handful of birds departed from the Mountain Ash, flying up into the crown of a nearby Aspen tree. The remaining birds began to depart in groups of four or five until the tree was as empty as it had been filled with birds a few moments earlier.

I kept my eye on the birds up in the Aspen trees. They remained still for a short time, then began frolicking from one set of trees to another within the general vicinity, slowly working their way back in the direction of the Mountain Ash tree. And sure enough, before long they returned for another round of animated berry plucking.



By now some of you may have guessed that I was witnessing a bunch of Cedar Waxwings. What fascinating behavior and simply gorgeous birds! They have a crest that extends from the back of their head, a vertical yellow bar on each wing topped by a small red splotch, and a brilliant yellow stripe that fans out and expands horizontally when their tail spreads.

The birds appeared to swallow the berries whole and in a single gulp; it was so fast I wasn't able to determine for sure. One bird book says Cedar Waxwings will pass berries from one bird to another, but I didn't witness

this behavior.

This is the first time I recall noticing Cedar Waxwings in the Mountain Ash tree in my backyard, so once again I'm finding myself surprised, even during my fourth winter in Ely.

Speaking of winter. I was listening to a news program today on my smart speaker while at the sink when the announcer said that on Saturday, we will be half way through meteorological winter.

I was in disbelief when I heard this because it was only yesterday that I warmed up from the last cold snap. But it turns out that some meteorologist somewhere assigned December through March as "meteorological winter" and seeing Saturday will be January 15th, we are now halfway through. Imagine that!

But living here "Up North," you and I both know that regardless what the calendar says, winter will come to an end only when it good and well decides it's time to vacate the area for a few months.

My reason for mentioning this (in addition to the beauty of these birds) is I see a parallel between the apparent delay of spring, at least on the calendar, and how the evidence of God's hopeful promises isn't often on display out in the open for us to see. The promises that accompany Jesus at his birth are bold and breath-taking. In the depth of winter and the post-Christmas letdown, however, the gap between God's promises and what we see may press down heavily on us.

The church season of Epiphany, which continues between now and March 2nd (Ash Wednesday), focuses on the revelation of Jesus in all his love, compassion, humanity, and glory. We see who Jesus, born in a manger, is revealed to be for us and for the world. Just who is Jesus? What did he mean to his first followers? What does he mean for you and me? And for the entire human race?

The Gospel Reading for Sunday worship this week is the account of Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding of Cana in Galilee. This was his first public act as recorded by John in his gospel.

We are told this was "the first of his signs and revealed his glory." We'll see similar manifestations of Jesus' glory and significance in the Scripture readings on Sunday morning throughout Epiphany.

His glory is not always apparent, not always on display, for us to see in the upheavals our country and world are presently experiencing. However, our eyes of faith, nurtured by Scripture, Holy Communion, and Worship bolster us to believe where we have not yet seen in a way similar to how we know spring will come even though there isn't any evidence of it right now.

As I mentioned last week, Covid-19 is galloping once again through our school and community. Thankfully most of these infections have been mild. Let's keep praying for all infected and especially for those who are experiencing life-threatening illness.

Also join us online for worship if you choose not to venture out. Like all of us I'm trying to find the balance between being cautious/safe and not letting Covid-19 define my life.

Item #1: Offering envelopes are available on the shelf under the stained-glass window in the rear of the church. If you choose to take a pack, write your name on the list next to the envelope number. This is the easiest way for us to keep track of your contributions in order to provide you a year-end giving report for tax purposes. However, we still provide giving reports for all who make their contributions throughout the year by check.

Item #2: Our Prayer Wall for this week is attached.

One of our Scripture Readings nearly every Sunday is from the New Testament. The New Testament includes four accounts of Jesus' life, one historical portrait of the early church, a bunch of letters written to individual churches, and vision given to the Apostle John. Here are some inspiring words I came across this week about the New Testament.

The biblical drama is the heaven-and-earth story, the story of God and the world, of creation and covenant, of creation spoiled and covenant broken and then of covenant renewed and creation restored. The New Testament is the book where all this comes in to land, and lands in the form of an invitation: this can be and should be your story, my story, the story which makes sense of us, which restores us to sense after the nonsense of our lives, the story which breathes hope into a world of chaos and love into cold hearts and lives.

(N.T. Wright and Michael F. Bird. *An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians*; p. 38-39.)

God's peace be with you.

Pastor Craig

The Ely United Methodist Church

Prayer Wall

January 14, 2022

This is a guide for prayer this week. The *Prayer Wall* is a reminder of those needing prayers during devotional times. Thank you for dedicating some of your personal prayer time to lift up these requests.

Matthew 21: 22 (NIV)



(Jesus said), "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

We lift up the following in prayer...

- **Linda Fryer & Judy Hall** – Linda received emergency gastro-intestinal surgery & had a heart attack during surgery. She received 2 stents & is on a life support ventilator. Judy, Linda's housemate, is experiencing frequent falls. **Update:** Linda passed away peacefully Thursday evening with her family and Judy at her side.
- **Ina Hapala family & friends** – Irene Hatfield's sister, Ina, passed away. Please pray for comfort for family & friends.
- **Nancy Kasa family & friends** – She is the sister of Susan Germek and Rich Floyd who passed away recently from complications from a broken pelvis. Pray for comfort and peace for her family and friends.
- **John Barich** – Patti Rusco's dad is hospitalized with COVID and other complications.
- **Sandy (Barich) Thompson** – She is having breast cancer surgery January 21. Pray for a successful outcome.
- **Zeke Urbas** – Zeke will have his cancer check-up scans on January 25, please pray for clear scans.
- **Joan and Jim Nicholas** – **Update:** Joan is out of the hospital and in rehab within her senior village community for her fractured hip. Her complications with acute renal failure and paralytic ileus have cleared up. Thanks for all the prayers!
- **Brian Biebl** – Brian is having a tough time grieving for the recent loss of his father and his son one year ago.
- **Ann Levar family & friends** – **Update:** Ann passed away Peacefully. Pray for comfort her family and friends.
- **Glenn Biebl family & friends** – **Update:** Glenn passed away Peacefully. Pray for comfort his family and friends.
- **Emma Smrekar Update** – Carolyn Fendt's granddaughter & high school senior received her last chemo treatment for stomach cancer on June 11th & was believed to be cancer free. Her cancer has returned and is now life threatening.
- **Jim & Jennifer Elinquist** – **Update:** Jim & wife, Jennifer, tested positive for COVID. Both have mild symptoms.
- **Ray Marsnik, Bob Baier & Ryan Reid** – All received serious injuries in the same auto accidents that killed Pat Marsnik and are hospitalized. Pray for healing, comfort and peace.
- **Pat Marsnik family & friends** – Ray Marsnik's wife, Pat was killed in a car accident. Pray for comfort for him & his family.
- **Parker & Lucas** – Katie Korzenowski's friend's sons: baby Parker in neonatal unit with seizures and 13 year old Lucas suffered a stroke and is in the ICU. Pray for healing and full recoveries.
- **Devon Luthen's good friend** – Devon's good friend has learned her breast cancer has returned. Please pray for Devon's good friend. (No name needed.)
- **Mike and Gail Haney family** – Mike is facing end of life struggles.
- **All essential health care workers exposed to the COVID-19 virus and the Delta & Omicron variants**

We include all the United Methodist Churches and Pastors, both active and retired, in our MN UMC Annual Conference as we work in extraordinary ways to keep our congregations and communities free from infection by the COVID-19 virus.

Prayer requests are compiled from our church prayer chain, from our Sunday morning church congregation using the prayer request forms located in the pew welcome pads, and the North Star District Prayer List. . Prayer requests will remain on the Prayer Wall through four weeks unless removed earlier because the prayer is known to be no longer necessary.