

Amaz^{ing}!News

FEBRUARY // 2022



A MONTHLY PUBLICATION FROM ZOAR LUTHERAN CHURCH | WWW.ZOARLUTHERAN.COM

INSIDE

From Beyond Our Walls	Pg. 2
Letter from Pastor Paul	Pg. 3
February Youth Update	Pg. 4
Worship in February	Pg. 5
Feb. Events Calendar	Pg. 6
Thank You Sponsors	Pg. 7

A LOVE LETTER FROM GOD

BY KIMBERLY KNOWLE-ZELLER

"And you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Corinthians 3:3).

Turning the calendar to a new year brings to mind a flurry of new ideas, new resolutions and new spiritual practices to try. Culture bombards us with all the ways to do x, y and z, and suggests new resources to make the year go well. Could we shift our focus from all the things we can and should be doing to all the things that God is already doing?

Let this be the year to see how God is transforming our lives right now. We don't need to add more things to do or be this year. The truth that God bestows on us is already ours—we are loved children of God.

In our family with young children, we don't ring in the new year together.

Most likely, we'll all be sleeping when the clock strikes midnight. While I'm not the most disciplined person in following through with resolutions or maintaining structure as a family, I long to do something to set the new year apart. I desire to take intentional time to thank God for the gift of our lives, health, family and friends. With our children, we can mark the new year together by saying a special prayer and asking God to help us nurture our faith, reach out to neighbors, and grow in love and compassion.

This year I'm not writing a list of goals or hopes. Instead, I'll be sharing with my children all the things that God is already doing in our lives and writing them in a list. We'll think of it as a love letter written by God to us.

Consider this your invitation to take time to remember your identity in Christ and give thanks to God. Remind your children, and yourself, that you don't have to do anything different this year. God loves you dearly just as you are.

FROM BEYOND OUR WALLS

You may not know the name Susan Palo Cherwien, but Zoar has sung many of her beautiful texts over the years. Even though she died on December 28, the formative influence of her poems—along with their evocative power—will continue to shape this congregation, along with generations of Christians across the English-speaking world. I share portions of this eulogy because I believe you will enjoy knowing a bit about the most celebrated Lutheran hymn-writer of our time. The Reverend Samuel Torvend accurately captured what it felt to be around Susan. Next time we sing one of her hymns, I hope you feel more connected to the words by knowing more about the unique human being that she was.

To be in conversation with Susan was to enter a world larger than many could imagine: the trace of distant stars in the human body, the dogmatism that deadens faith, the effect of singing on the brain, Jung's interpretation of the Mass, the elements needed for a hearty broth, the plight of migrant farm workers in Minnesota, the nightmare of political cronyism, how to write a beautiful sentence, Hildegard's egg of the universe, and so much more. Here was a friend, mother, spouse, poet, cook, gardener, and musician whose knowledge of life, of the world was simply breathtaking. But, then, she was curious and she loved to read and read widely and was possessed of the patience and determination to wrestle with a question or follow a footnote until it yielded gold, much fine gold.

To watch Susan serve as a faithful sacristan at her beloved Mount Olive was to become mindful of the medieval description of "this honorable and priestly office dedicated to the care of the Blessed Eucharist, the baptismal font, the holy oils, the decoration of the church, the preparation of ceremonies, and the preservation of good order." No monkey business with Susan; no sloppiness served up to the holy people of God; no pious novelties intended to "entertain" the "folks" in a world she knew to be marked by untold suffering and anxiety. Ever the researcher of church practice, she recognized that the ancient liturgy with its

water, olive oil, bread, wine, incense, torches, colors, music, vesture, gestures, postures, and ceremony, evangelizes all the senses of the body; she knew that its blessed formality heals and restores and challenges. The great crafter of lyrics held that the Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot be limited to words spoken or sung, knew that God became flesh in a body and that all the senses of the body are to be welcomed and honored in the worship of God, that worship itself is a practice for bodily life in the world.

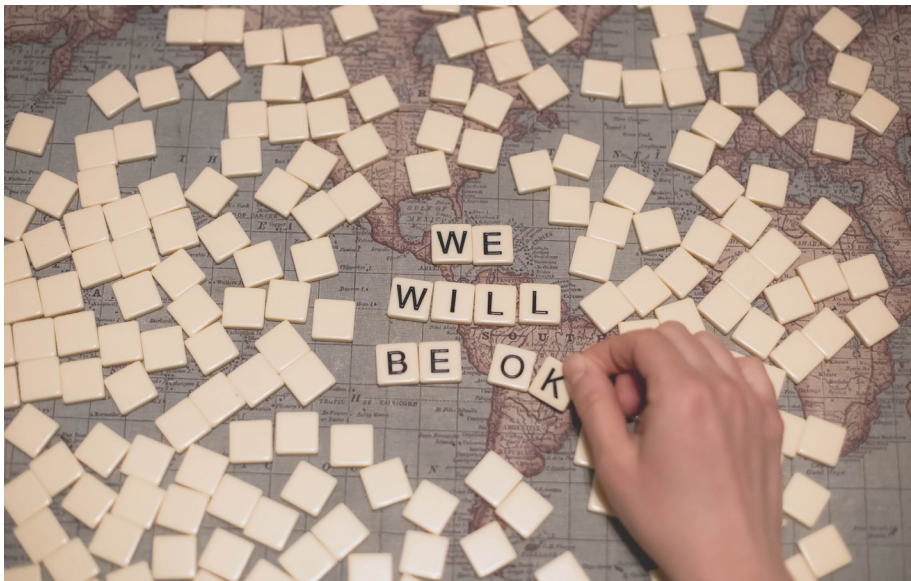
And, yes, at last: the words. To read, sing, pray, contemplate, memorize, and ask that her hymn texts be sung in the seasons and feasts of the year, at the baptism of one's child or the funeral of a parent, at one's wedding or the falling apart of a relationship, at the beginning of a journey or upon one's homecoming is to do this first: give thanks to God for the art and skill bestowed upon blessed Susan who from her own mystical experience, study, and contemplation there flowed the poetry now sung around the globe, now treasured in communions not her own. In the words of Alice Parker, Susan's hymnody is for the "thinking, questioning Christian and an honored source for those engaged in fashioning songs that can match its consummate skill and prophetic vision."

It was said of the medieval mystic and hymn writer, Hildegard of Bingen, the Sibyl of the Rhine, "The Lord granted her a prophetic spirit, an evident love of creation, and consummate skill in poetry and music."

Most Radiant One, we commend to you our winsome prophet and lover of your good earth. Give rest, O Christ, to your servant, Susan, where sorrow and pain are no more, but only life everlasting in the company of your saints in light.

Yes, let the church rise up and say, AMEN.

Samuel Torvend



from
Pastor Paul
Senior Pastor
pastorpaul@zoarlutheran.com

Is anyone else getting a bit tired of this? As I looked back over last year's calendar, I was struck by how much life has returned in some ways to normal. Kids have been back in school; stores are open; and most of the mandates have ended. Looking at those changes, it would be easy to think that things are where we hoped they would be soon. As we look back to last February as the Alpha variant of covid was beginning to wane and vaccines were available. We thought, "Finally, by this summer things will be back to normal!" And, for a while, it was that way. As hard as it may be to remember, back in June, we had even shifted to masks recommended rather than required with plans for all kinds of fellowship activities coming back.

Then came August and the Delta variant and the following six months of the pandemic which has killed so many, debilitated so many more, and continued to impact the ways we interact in commerce, business, education, worship, and fellowship. We hoped that six months ago we were nearly back to, if not the way things had been, then back to something that looked and felt more like normal. But realizing that we are as dealing with infection and death nearly as much as the worse times of last winter, and looking around at many parts of life looking so much more like pre-pandemic. It becomes clear that things aren't really so much better for everyone; we are just tired of dealing with it. Covid fatigue, zoom fatigue, and just fatigue at having to keep up with the changes that sometimes during these nearly two years have come daily. People are weary and wondering where is God in all these struggles? The Psalmist echoes those same feelings, "How long will it be?" In all these things, it can feel like God isn't paying attention in our suffering.

But as we continue the season of Epiphany this month, we remember that in God's profound love for us, Jesus Christ entered not just into our world and lives but into our struggles, suffering and death to redeem us from sin, and Christ rose again on Easter morning to show us that nothing, not life or death, not problems or pandemics, not

frustrations or failures, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. As we journey with Jesus during this Epiphany season, we also remember that the work of Jesus saving us was not a moment but took a long time to be revealed.

It is only natural after so many months of struggles and so many losses and griefs that we would cry out in our sadness and weariness, "How Long O Lord!" But the Lord isn't far off ignoring our pain; no, Jesus Christ promised that He was with us always – not just in the happy faith-filled times, but always. Though we know that there are still times of frustration and difficult adjustments still to come, as we journey with Jesus through these days of Epiphany, we remember that Christ is journeying with us too.

Peace,
Pastor Paul

**"Relent, Lord!
How long will it be?
Have compassion on
your servants."
Psalm 90:13**

FEBRUARY YOUTH UPDATE

February 6 – 5th/6th Grade Valentine's Day Service Project 4-6 PM

February 13 – No Youth Group - Amanda is at the Extravaganza!

February 20 – 5th/6th Grade Nerf Wars 4-6 PM

February 27 – 7th - 12th Grade Tie Blankets 4-6 PM

Changes to Youth Group in 2022

Youth group will be changing slightly starting in January of 2022! 5th/6th grade youth group will take place on the first and third Sundays of each month and 7th-12th on the second and fourth Sundays. On months with five Sundays a 5-12th Grade event will be held for all youth in those grades. Youth are asked to RSVP before these dates by using the sign ups provided. FRIENDS are always welcome! Bring a friend along with you! Just make sure to sign them up so Amanda can plan accordingly. We can't wait to start a new year of fun!

Valentine's Day Service Project

5th/6th Grade Youth are invited to join us in making Valentines for our homebound members Sunday, February 6th from 4-5 PM. Come for some craft time and devotion as we serve our friends with love.

Nerf Wars

5th/6th Grade Youth and their friends are invited to join us for an evening of nerf wars and devotion. Bring your own gear or borrow from the church. You won't want to miss the fun. Join us from 4-6 PM on Sunday, February 20th. Sign up is required. You can find the link in your weekly youth update.

Tie Blanket Making

7th-12th Grade Youth and their friends are invited to join us for an evening of tie blanket making to benefit people in need in our community. Join us Sunday, February 27th from 4-6 PM in making tie blankets and in devotion. Sign up is required. Please check your weekly youth update for the appropriate sign up link.

Mandatory Youth Gathering Prep Meeting Session 3 & 4

All youth attending the 2022 ELCA Youth Gathering with Zoar are REQUIRED to attend Youth Gathering Preparation Sessions. Session #3 & 4 will be Saturday, March 5th from 9-3 PM. We can't wait to continue working towards our journey to Minneapolis!

First Communion 2022

First Communion classes will begin for all 4th grade youth and older who wish to partake in Holy Communion for the first-time beginning Sunday, March 6th during the Sunday School Hour. More information on the celebration of these amazing youth and their First Holy Communion will be coming soon! Stayed tuned to your Weekly Children's Ministry Update for more information.



from
Amanda
Director of Youth Ministries
ahoyles@zoarlutheran.com

Greetings Friends,

Happy February! From making Valentines to Nerf Wars lots of fun is in store for our youth this month!

In addition, this month I will be headed to Minneapolis, Minnesota for the 2022 ELCA Youth Ministry Extravaganza! I am blessed to be supported in journeying to this conference each year in which I get to network with other youth ministry leaders in the ELCA from around the country, learn about the latest youth ministry curriculum, techniques for ministry and more! At this year's conference I will have the opportunity to take a tour of Minneapolis in preparation for this year's ELCA Youth Gathering in July! This will help to provide me with the tools I need to continue to plan our July youth trip to Minneapolis. It is going to be a great month! I can't wait to get started.

Peace,
Amanda Hoyles

WORSHIP IN FEBRUARY

This month we continue exploring the theophanies of Jesus as the Messiah and God's own self-revelation. In miracles and teachings, we continue to learn about the gift and blessing for all the nations that is Christ. The following reflections are adaptations from material previously published in Sundays and Seasons.

FEBRUARY 6, SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY GOD'S IMPERFECT PEOPLE

Week after week, Christians gather, hear the word proclaimed, share a meal, and are sent out to bear the good news of God in Christ Jesus to a hungry, needy world. Inside though, we wonder why God has entrusted such an important mission to people like us.

In a world where we constantly hear that we are insufficient—that we do not have enough, know enough, or sufficiently matter—God's trust in our capacities seems imprudent, even irrational. But notice, Jesus precedes a call to discipleship with a miracle pointing to God's abundant provision, signaling that we will receive all we need. Still today, Jesus meets us at the shorelines of our own lives, going about our daily work, and calls us to lifelong discipleship. Caught up in God's abundant grace and fed out of that bounty, we are commissioned to go catch others.

FEBRUARY 13, SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY BEATITUDES

A fundamental decision is placed before us this day: Will we choose the way of blessing or woe? The death and resurrection of Jesus is the pivot on which the decision turns. To be in Christ means that we get planted by streams of water and are among those who thirst for God's reign. The mystery of our faith points to the path to life: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

FEBRUARY 20, EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY LOVE YOUR ENEMY, AND DO NOT JUDGE

The promise and its fulfillment may not look alike, even though they are intimately connected. Paul speaks about seeds and plants as he tries to picture resurrection life. Joseph's brothers never thought they would see him alive again, so how shocking he must have appeared to them as an Egyptian leader! Jesus invites us to sow seeds of new life by loving enemies.

FEBRUARY 27, TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD LIFTING THE VEIL

The transfiguration is frustrating for disciples—past and present—who long for an unmediated experience of God. First, Jesus' glory is revealed, and then, just as suddenly, a cloud descends, and the vision fades. Even with unveiled faces, we don't see directly or even clearly. Even when God reveals God's self in shining glory, much remains veiled and hidden.

As he witnesses Jesus' transfiguration, Peter's understanding remains veiled; ours does too. The glimpses we get of God's glory—through the veil or reflected in the mirror—are expectation-shattering, alarming, overwhelming, and astonishing. The veils we contend with daily are the barriers that prevent us from truly loving those neighbors, caring for creation, and seeing the shining face of Jesus in the faces of people who are different, hungry, difficult, enemy, invisible, or poor. God appears in ways that surprise and confuse us, whether shining on the mountaintop or dying on the cross.



from
Omaldo

Cantor

operez@zoarlutheran.com

I am writing these words after watching the online funeral of Susan Palo Cherwien. She has been called the poet laureate of the Lutheran church and was known to her friends simply as "Luigi." Zoar is very familiar with many of her texts, one of which we sang not long ago, "As the Dark Awaits the Dawn" (ELW 261).

As I watched, I was struck by the powerful sense of Christian witness the hymn offered. The lines, "As the dark awaits the dawn, so we await your light. O Star of promise, scatter night, loving bright, till shades of fear are gone," spoke with a force that I never imagined before once I heard them as a death bed prayer. The hymn not only gave me a shot of unshakable trust in the face of death but of hope in God's unimaginable beyond: "As the moon reflects the sun until the night's decrease, may we your healing light release, living peace, unto your holy dawn." Furthermore, notes of gratitude and blessing emerged for the gift of life: "Shine your future on this place, enlighten every guest that through us stream your holiness, bright and blest; come dawn, O Sun of grace."

Even in her "final" witness, Luigi gave me an inspiring testimony of the race well run. In her funeral service, I felt the message of another hymn she penned: "Rise, transformed, and choose to follow after Christ, though wounded, whole; broken, shared, our lives are hallowed to release and to console. Alleluia! Christ our present, past, and goal!"

Peace,
Omaldo

ZOAR CALENDAR OF EVENTS HIGHLIGHTS

FEBRUARY // 2022

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1 9AM Quilters 3:14PM Prayer w/ Staff 7PM LLL Comm.	2 8AM Bible Study 3:30PM A.L. II 6:30PM Confirmation 8PM Uncorked Faith	3	4 1PM Zoar Book Club	5 6PM Worship
6 8:30, 11AM Worship 9:45AM Sunday School 4PM 5th/6th Youth Group	7 6PM Property Comm. 7PM Social Min	8 9AM Quilters 3:14PM Prayer w/ Staff 7PM Stewardship	9 8AM Bible Study 1PM Rachel Circle 6:30PM Confirmation 7:30PM YAYA	10	11 8AM Men's Bfast 1PM Solo Again	12 10AM Yarns of Love 6PM Worship
13 8:30, 11AM Worship 9:45AM Sunday School No Youth Group	14	15 9AM Quilters 3:14PM Prayer w/ Staff 7PM Council Mtg	16 8AM Bible Study 6:30PM Confirmation	17 9:15AM Naomi Circle	18	19 10AM Prayer Partners 6PM Worship
20 8:30, 11AM Worship 9:45AM Sunday School 4PM 5th/6th Youth Group	21 7PM Worship & Music Comm.	22 9AM Quilters 3:14PM Prayer w/ Staff	23 8AM Bible Study 1:30PM A.L. I 6:30PM Confirmation	24	25	26 6PM Worship
27 8:30, 11AM Worship 9:45AM Sunday School 4PM 7th-12th Youth Group	28 6PM Popcorn Gang 7PM Personnel					

for a complete list of events, please check the Z-Blast for weekly announcements

OUR 85+ MEMBER FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS:

February 1	Bob Palmer
February 2	LaDonna Kossow
February 2	Lee Odegaard
February 17	Dee Lowrie
February 26	Jed Hazel
February 26	Carol Henschen
February 28	Bill King

ZOAR STAFF

Senior Pastor: Paul Reichert
 Cantor: Omaldo Perez
 Director of Youth Ministry: Amanda Hoyles

Administrative Manager: Jen Milligan
 Secretary: Suzanne Delaney
 Custodian: Paul Cannon

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Deadline is the 2nd of the preceding month!

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Pr. Paul Reichert
Senior Pastor

Worship Times:
Saturday: 6 PM
Sunday: 8:30 & 11 AM

Sunday School: 9:45 AM

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**O give thanks to the God of gods, for
his steadfast love endures forever.**

— Psalm 136:2

