

Pastor Anne's Message, March 2024

Grace to you and peace from God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Hope, faith, and love from our God "buoys us up" every day of our lives. This month, I want to highlight the benefits of hope to encourage you, to lift you up with positivity, and support you in this Season of Lent; as well as in the day to day fabric of these times. The benefits of our Christian Hope are gifts for you to embrace.

1. **Hope moves us forward.** Christian hope is a realistic expectation of and a joyful longing for a future of good and glory based upon the reliable word of God. The more we long for the future, the less we will yearn for the past. Hope deletes regrets and builds expectation. It diminishes drag and increases momentum.
2. **Hope energizes the present.** It is worth living today because the eternal tomorrow is so much brighter. What's "doomsday" for most is "coronation" day for us. What most dread, we anticipate as a positive part of our journey in Christ.
3. **Hope lightens our darkness.** Hope does not deny nor remove the reality of dark and painful fortune. However, it does shine a bright light into these alleys and points to the sunrise at the end of them.
4. **Hope increases faith.** Faith fuels hope but hope also fuels faith. As Hebrews 11 makes very clear, hope and faith are very closely tied together, the one enlivening the other. Without faith we cannot soar in hope; but without hope, faith will limp home. The greatest believers are those with greatest hope...and vice versa.
5. **Hope is infectious.** Just as we can drag others down by our moping, so we can inspire and motivate through our inspiring hope. It not only encourages other discouraged believers, but it also impacts depressed nonbelievers who cannot but ask to learn the reason for the hope they see in us.
6. **Hope is healing.** Have you ever known someone who is depressed, maybe just a little down, maybe even clinically depressed? By definition, depression is a sense of hopelessness. Things often will not get better without professional intervention and help. That is why counselors will want to give an individual the hope that in the vast majority of cases, they WILL get better, there IS a way out, and there are strategies that they can learn to help themselves in their feeling of hopelessness. That hope in itself is a huge step toward healing.
7. **Hope is practical.** Hope does not mean we just sit and wait for Utopia to appear. Not at all! Hope motivates action. When we hope for better days for the church, we serve the church. When we hope for the healthy development of our children, we are motivated to share the Gospel with them. When we hope for God's blessing on His Word, we listen to it much more avidly. Hope produces action.



8. **Hope purifies.** Whatever persecution we experience in the world, the day is coming when we will not be just called sons of God, but we will be more like the Son of God. This is what inspires and motivates the apostle to persevere to the end of holiness. "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself just as He is pure." (1 John 3:3).
9. **Hope stabilizes in the storm.** There are sixty-six drawings of anchors in the Catacombs in Rome. There are also drawings of anchors in the caves and tunnels which persecuted Christians hid in, during the Roman persecutions. Hope was their anchor during those dark and stormy days. Like the anchor, hope grabs what is out of sight. As one theologian put it: "The cable of faith casts out the anchor of hope and lays hold of the steadfast rock of God's promises."
10. **Hope defends.** Paul also depicts hope as a defensive helmet. (Ephesians 6:17.) The helmet also points us to the area of greatest vulnerability and danger – (our mind or our thoughts.) That's where evil usually works to present reasons to doubt and despair. And that is why we need our minds renewed daily by the power of hope.

Hope in God helps us base our expectations on all the characteristics of God, instead of our circumstances or feelings. Ask the Lord to help you increase the quality and quantity of your hope as you praise Him for His wonderful attributes. The better you know God, the more you can praise him. Thank God that when the light of hope comes in, the darkness of doubt is driven away. Sing songs of thanksgiving throughout the day to remind you of the overcoming power of Christ's light and hope. Embrace living hope!

May you be blessed with hope in this season of Lent and beyond!

In His name,
Pastor Anne

Moderator Report

As this year's moderator, some thoughts concerning the continued well-being of our Church have come to mind.

The COVID-19 pandemic seems to have changed our lifestyles and traditions to a certain extent. The tradition of bringing your family to Church, coming together on a Sunday morning to both worship and visit with one another, seems to have stalled. Our Vacation Bible School is now more important than ever. Let's focus on having another super successful VBS this summer!

Respectfully,

Bev Loftus, Moderator

Maundy Thursday Seder Meal

Maundy Thursday is the Thursday before Easter, believed to be the day Jesus celebrated his final Passover meal with His disciples. The main significance of Maundy Thursday is the institution of the Eucharist or Holy Sacrament of Communion. The Passover meal was when Jesus washed the feet of His disciples in an extraordinary display of humility. He then commanded them to do the same for each other.



It was at this meal he gave this commandment to His disciples. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. John 13:34

Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the lamb sacrificed for the first Passover. As Christians we now partake in the communion of His body and blood. We use bread and grape juice, or in some churches, wine, as symbols of the first communion at the Last Supper.

You can read of the first Passover in the Old Testament: Exodus 12. There are many other references including Number 9:1-4, Numbers 28:16-25 Deuteronomy 16:1-6, Leviticus 23:4-8.

It can be a challenge for a Christian participating in a Passover/Seder Meal to see the rituals and symbols through Jewish eyes. The Collbran Congregational UCC observes and experiences the Seder meal on Maundy Thursday. That will be March 28, 2024, beginning at 5:30pm. There is much symbolism during the meal. Traditionally roast lamb and roast chicken are served.

This is a quiet respectful dinner including symbols and readings from the Bible.

The Stewards and Women's Fellowship prepare and serve the meal.

Please plan on attending and sharing this meal with the congregation. There is always a good time to learn new things and traditions.



Trustees Report

Trustees for the church for 2024 are Mike Loftus, Julia Cox, Sue Bellotti, and Tilda Evans. We want to thank Cindy Price Melendy for the years of service she has provided to the Trustees and the Church Council. Her dedication provided all of us with the attitude that things can get done. Thank you, Cindy.

The start of 2024 has been a doozy. We have replaced the water heater as the old one finally gave up. We want to thank Collbran Supply for making it possible for us to shop locally. They are always helpful. We chose to go with a 40 gallon rather than always keep 80 gallons of water hot. There is always concern that the gas bill just keeps climbing for this big building.

We have begun to look at replacing windows in the overflow room. There is a lot of heat loss through and around them. That is not a job that will be taken on before the weather warms up.

We are considering some fence work for the street side of Mothers Park.

A short meeting was held following church on February 18th to share information and ideas for 2024. Thanks to all the Trustees for being available and interested in keeping the building in good repairs.

We realize, with Collbran Auditorium under repair for the next several months, there may be more use of the church dining room, kitchen, and upstairs meeting room. The Trustees are asking that anyone interested in renting space please contact one of the Trustees as you are planning an event. We will be glad to work with you.

Report submitted by Sue Bellotti

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL has been scheduled for June 19, 20, and 21 for 2024. The curriculum is Hometown Nazareth-Where Jesus was a Kid.

There are classes for Pre-K (ages 3-4yrs), Kindergarten, (ages 5-6 having just completed Kindergarten), 1st & 2nd Grade (students finishing first and second grades), 3rd and 4th Grades(students finishing third and 4th grades), and 5th & 6th Grades (students finishing fifth and sixth grades).

We are looking forward to another exciting year of VBS. Watch for more information!!

Easter Celebration

March 31, 2024

10:00 am

MUSICIANS REPORT

Shannon Currier, Organist, and Sue Bellotti, Pianist, are preparing special music for the Easter season. This is the time of year for classic greats such as "The Palms," "Jerusalem", "Open the Gates to the Temple", and "Were you There". We look forward to sharing this special music during March.

Submitted by Sue Bellotti.



HEART

From: Easter Readings to Touch Your Heart, 40 Days 40 Words by Ken and Randy Petersen

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. Matthew 22:37-38

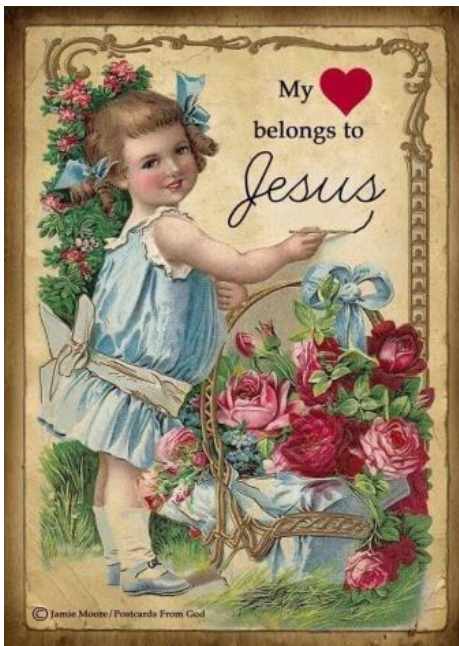
A ruthless politician was rushed to the hospital with a heart attack. "That's a shocker," said a late-night comedian. "Who knew that he even had a heart?"

The joke works because the English word heart refers to both the physical organ in our chests and our emotional center. The same is true in the biblical languages. The Hebrew leb and the Greek kardia are understood physically and emotionally and encompass the whole of who we are- the moral and spiritual core of what it means to be human.

These words are used about one thousand times in the Bible. Most occurrences describe human motives, desire, decisions, or character. The all of us. Your heart is who you really are.

The heart is notorious for bearing mixed motives, public pretense, and personal pride.

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure," the prophet Jeremiah complained. "Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). The Lord led Samuel to reject David's brawnier brothers for the kingship because of their hearts: "People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).



The prophet Joel challenged those who were making a show of their repentance, "Rend your heart and not your garments" (Joel 2:13). Through Isaiah, the Lord chastised some other phony worshipers: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Isaiah 29:13).

At various points in their history, the Israelites hardened their hearts toward God. One prophet called those hearts "hard as flint" (Zechariah 7:12). Daniel described the downfall of a Babylonian king: "But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory" (Daniel 5:20).

The heart is also the home of love. Surely this is why the Great Commandment in the Jewish law is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5 and see Matthew 22:34-40).

As we walk with Jesus through the Easter season, we would do well to remember that God desires heart intimacy with us. Coming to a place of clarifying and purifying our heart is not dictated by the law but is an opportunity provided by grace. It's not a "have to" but a "want to". God loves us and wants to walk with us in close, loving communion. Why would we not want to have that?

As we journey to the cross, this is a good time to review our heart health. Maybe we have wandered from God. The Bible advises: "Let us examine our ways and test them and let us return to the Lord" (Lamentations 3:40). Perhaps we harbor spiritual pride: "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought" (Romans 12:3). We might consider the words of Jesus as a model for what our heart health should be like. "Blessed are the pure in heart" (Matthew 5:8), He said, suggesting perhaps those who are honest in the intentions, not hiding mixed motives. "I the Lord, search all hearts and examine secret motives" (Jeremiah 17:10). God knows our heart. The question is, do we?

PREPARING YOUR HEART FOR EASTER

What is the condition of your heart today? This is a good time to consider the heart love of God and respond to it. This is a good time to pray for God to "give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you" (Ezekiel 36:26). This Easter season is a good time for you to come to God with more than just a mental agreement but a complete trust in the risen Jesus at the core of who you are.

Senior Tea Time!

Lita Hill attended her Senior Tea in 1964 with her mother, Florence Freeman. Lita also remembers Lou Hill, Allen's grandmother, reminiscing about attending the Senior Tea with her son, Clifford Hill in the spring of 1942. Naomi (Benson) Morse said her Senior Tea was on May, 1964. It was so special, and it was for seniors and their mothers, only. They were wearing their best dress clothes. The ladies all wore hats, and many wore white gloves. Many of the boys wore suits



Ethel (Hawkins) Click often spoke of her Senior Tea the year she graduated. 1941 was early in WWII and some of the senior boys had already enlisted and left soon after graduation.

Nancy Karlson introduced the group to tableside magician, Dave Wallin. He has entertained at the Senior Tea for over 35 years. The women of the church and community provide special cookies, sweets, and sandwiches for the Tea.

We are looking forward to serving the graduates for another amazing Senior Tea, April 30, 2024, at 4:15 in the Congregational Church Dining Room. All seniors or students who are graduating this spring are invited to attend. Please contact Sue Bellotti if you have a graduating student who did not get an invitation.

Sue Bellotti

Women's Fellowship President

THE MUSTARD SEED
THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
COLLBRAN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
PO BOX 160
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To contact Pastor Anne Djokic:
Church: 970.487.3349
Email: annef.djokic@gmail.com
www.collbrancongregationalchurch.org

Editor: Tilda Evans, lewtildaevas@gmail.com



Collbran Congregational Church is having a
Lasagna Dinner Fundraiser
for Vacation Bible School

March 15, 2024

4:30 to 6:00 pm

\$15.00 per meal

Take Out Only

Serving fresh homemade lasagna, tossed salad, garlic bread, dessert. Gluten free lasagna, gluten free bread, and dessert (purchased from the grocery store) are available.

Contact Sue Bellotti, (970) 487-3474 or Julia Cox, (970) 487-3750
to place an order.

Pick up at Collbran Congregational Church Dining Room.