



Owl Creek Baptist Church

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OUR VISION: *To be a continuing light in the world's darkness, inspiring people to love God and to love others.*

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News and Announcements...

❖ **Happy fifth Sunday of Eastertide!** We continue to bask in the glow of the resurrection of Jesus, an event far more significant than any pandemic disease!

❖ **Have you experienced communion online?** While we have not been able to enjoy fellowship around the Lord's Table, Pastor Chapman has prepared a brief online communion service. Simply log on to the church web site (listed above) and view the communion video. All you need is your own bread and cup!

❖ **Your Executive Board** met this past Monday, May 11th, via ZOOM. This is a summary of our decisions and actions from the past couple meetings:

- Decision to discontinue worship at least until Governor DeWine determines it is safe for social gatherings.
- Action plan to keep in touch with and check on individual members' needs via phone contact from the Pastor and Board members.
- Decision to continue delivering food pantry items to Utica Food Pantry.
- Decision to purchase new chairs for the Chakilo classroom, following replacement of carpet and repainting the walls.
- Decision to purchase new curtains for balcony windows in the sanctuary.
- Action to update necessary annual music licenses.
- Action to update Owl Creek website and Facebook page; Pastor Chapman has produced an introductory video and a communion video.
- Decision and action to cull out and destroy financial records more than ten years old (which were taking up valuable office storage space).
- Treasurer Peg Carpenter reported that offerings have averaged over \$1000 per week; She is still receiving mailed contributions.
- Decision to honor recent graduates of Utica High School who attended the Owl Creek youth group.
- Deliberation on the possibility of a "drive-in" style of worship service in the church parking lot utilizing an FM transmitter, still in consideration.
- Custodian Bob Smith continues to regularly check on the church building, performing light cleaning.

Our next meeting will be on Monday, June 1st. If there are matters you wish to bring to the Board's attention, please contact our chairperson, **Bonnie Kohl**.

❖ **Tell us your news items!** Email Pastor Chapman or Bonnie Kohl with news or prayer requests that you would like to share.

Let us lift up in prayer...



The President and the Congress of the United States, obviously straining under the tremendous and unprecedented pressure of the now three-month long pandemic.

People who are not able to work from home during the pandemic, facing mounting financial burdens. (It is reported that the jobless rate is effectively 25% of all Americans!)

Martha Robey, who is continuing to recuperate at the home of her son.

Lorell Chapman, the pastor's mother, who is receiving excellent services from hospice care, in San Diego.

Jerry Skeen, awaiting the outcome of a doctor's appointment at the end of the month to deal with the back pain from which he has been suffering for over a year.

Rev. Bruce Hissong, former pastor of Northside Church of Christ, much beloved in the community, has been diagnosed with stage-4 lung cancer that is spreading, and wife Nancy. Cards, notes and donations to offset medical care may be sent to P.O. Box 966, Utica OH 43080.



SERMON: “The Resurrection of Jesus and the Renewal of All Creation” (5th Sunday of Easter)

TEXT: Revelation 21:1-5

We lived for thirteen years on Chicago’s south side. They were years for graduate school, starting our family, and entering my first pastorate. The parsonage of Morgan Park Baptist Church was conveniently located next to a small city park. Our kids enjoyed the swing sets and slides in the playground area, played in their first soccer leagues in the adjoining tree-encircled field, and I used the oval quarter-mile sidewalk as a convenient jogging path. We really did use and enjoy that green space!

When a good friend of mine visited us, he and I took a stroll around that park. Having just finished a soda, he attempted to toss the empty can into the nearby rubbish. When he missed the barrel, I gently reminded him that we ought to be good stewards of our planet and clean up. He brushed off that request as if it were meaningless. I was offended...not simply because it was *our* park located next to *our* house. What really offended me was his theology. “Taking care of the earth is not important,” he insisted. “God is just going to burn this world up when Jesus returns.” I had known that my friend was smitten by some of the popular “end-times” frenzy that heavily invaded the Christian church, back then. I just didn’t think that his sentiments went so far as to eliminate all concerns for garbage disposal!

I suppose that I should have anticipated such an attitude. After all, the horribly misguided system of beliefs that fixates on the “end times” and the second coming of Jesus is infamous for disparaging our planet. That doctrine gleefully anticipates God’s total destruction of the world. Such beliefs dovetail with older theology that has long proclaimed that “we go to heaven when we die”—meaning, of course, that we leave this world far behind. A few hymns celebrate the notion that “this world is not my home, I’m just passin’ through.” One notorious expression of this view came via the short-lived U.S. Secretary of the Interior, James Watt. Back in 1981, at his Senate confirmation hearings, he attempted to explain his less-than-urgent concern for the environment with a comment that “we don’t know how many generations there will be until the Lord’s return.” Many people understood him to mean that the world did not have long to survive, so we shouldn’t bother trying to preserve it. This was decidedly an odd philosophy for the man charged with protecting the environment. His rhetoric and subsequent policies of radical deregulation for industrial pollution seriously alarmed so many U.S. citizens that environmental groups reported an explosion in applications for membership and donations. Regardless of one’s personal politics, let it be noted that major swaths of the Christian body have held, and still cling to, a seriously negative attitude toward the future viability of planet earth.

The question I wish to address is, does such a negative attitude square with biblical teaching? I hasten to say that I don’t think the Bible contains any passages that directly instruct us about care for the environment, at least in the

modern sense. Such concerns would have been unrecognizable to the authors of the Bible, even under God’s inspiration. But the Bible is likewise silent about any of our modern social and ethical debates. Yet, that has not stopped Christians on all sides from twisting scriptures to support their views on everything from abortion to capital punishment to homosexuality to nuclear armaments.

But I am nonetheless confident that the Bible does address the broader issue, if not of environmentalism directly, of our real relationship with this planet that God has made our home. And the central point of that address goes back to our fuller understanding of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The argument begins with the fact that, when God raised his son, it was a statement about physical life, about the created order. His resurrection flowed from a chain of events in which God affirmed the physical universe. When God finished each poetically described “day” of creation, he pronounced the work “good,” and then “very good” at the conclusion. When God blessed the Israelites, he gave them a piece of terra firma, some land they could call their own. Jesus of course, was raised *bodily*, not as a spirit as some mistakenly believed. All these gifts were physical, affirming the goodness of God’s physical creation.

Yet something else, quite wonderful, attends the second coming of Jesus. In one of John the elder’s many visions that march through the Book of Revelation, he saw the “New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.” Here, the choreography is vitally important. John states that a “new heaven and a new earth shall appear.” It is not just the old (first) earth that passes away. That’s only half of the project. The old (first) heaven also passes away. To be clear, the language of the text in no way suggests that the old order needs to be utterly destroyed. Rather, the old order is “made new.” We would be justified in saying that God is in the *renewal* business, a term that fits rather well with modern conservation language. More important, however, is the marriage metaphor that John employs regarding the return of Christ. The New Jerusalem, he writes, comes down from heaven “as a bride.” In his vision, there is a marriage between heaven and earth, a celebration of renewal in this reunion, one that makes whole all of God’s creation. This picture is far removed from the tragically distorted view held by those who believe the earth is going to simply be destroyed in the end. They have failed to read to the end of the book! Jesus was resurrected, and he did not merely “die and go to heaven.” He is coming back for the explicit purpose of renewing—not destroying—this world. What’s more amazing is that, according to this vision, no one *leaves* the earth and *goes* to heaven. It’s the other way around. Heaven is coming to us, here on earth! But this should not be surprising. Jesus, after all, prayed for this when he said “Thy kingdom come...*on earth.*”

So, when I go hiking around the Great Lakes, or ride my bike on a sunny day, or even take a walk down Owl Creek Church Road, I stop and listen and attend to nature. I feel the wind on my face. I hear the cry of birds. I watch the sunshine carom off of leaves. I smell the soil rich with moisture. But I simultaneously play out biblical theology in my mind. I begin to wonder how much more beautiful all this could possibly be when God renews the earth. And I am reminded that, one day, this earth will be married to heaven. So it’s best that I honor it, now, in the same way that I would honor a bride or a groom, ready to pledge their eternal love.



TEXT: John 10:1-42 (Jesus as the “good shepherd”)

We continue our study of the fourth gospel by taking a look at the third “I am” saying. And once again the literary pattern about which I have previously written pertains. We noted that Jesus said he was the “bread of life” near the festival of “unleavened bread,” and then miraculously fed bread to a crowd of 5000 people. Jesus next proclaimed he was the “light of the world” in the middle of the Jewish “festival of lights,” and then miraculously gave sight to a blind man. As with these episodes in Jesus’ life, we find the same illustration surrounding Jesus’ next claim, that he was the “good shepherd.”

Scholars debate whether this saying better attaches to the previous Festival of Lights (aka, Festival of Booths; 7:2) or to the preceding Festival of Dedication (10:22). The latter festival was a commemoration of the successful Maccabean revolt of 160 BC, when the Jews threw off the last vestiges of Greek domination. They cleansed the temple from its abusive defilements under Greek kings, “rededicating” the altar and the temple gates to God’s purposes. This might explain why Jesus said that he was “the gate” (10:9) just prior to stating that he was the “good shepherd” (10:11, 14). I am persuaded, however, that Jesus’ “good shepherd” saying may fit better with the previous festival, the Festival of Booths. That festival was a celebration of the Jews’ pilgrimage through the wilderness following their exodus from Egypt. They came to Mt. Sinai where they received the covenant law and were formally constituted as God’s people, chosen for a divine purpose.

In John’s gospel, the Festival of Booths was concluding when Jesus was run out of Jerusalem by the religious authorities. He healed a blind man shortly thereafter, which only led to more controversy. The Pharisees had driven Jesus away from the festivities. But after they interrogated the healed blind man, they also drove him away (10:34). In all of this, the Pharisees were claiming to be the “gate-keepers.” They decided who belonged to the covenant people of God and who did not. They took on the mantle of “shepherding” the community. Jesus proclaimed that he, not they, had the authority to be the “gatekeeper” (indeed, the very “gate”) and the rightful “shepherd” for the people, for two very good reasons. First, the Pharisees did not own the sheep. Jesus did. Secondly, the Pharisees would not sacrifice their lives for the sheep. Jesus, in fact, would do so. His authority was not only determined by God the Father, but was also revealed in authentic action.

This world indulges in a lot of exclusive practices. We may find ourselves on the “outside” looking in at those who are wealthier, healthier, smarter, the right size, shape, color or gender. In other words, the world often tries to tell us that we just don’t belong. The gospel affirms, however, that the only “club” to which it is worth belonging is the family of God. We are God’s gentle, humble, meek flock. We are strong in some ways but as weak as everyone else in others. But we have a shepherd who tells us we *belong!*

International Ministries

May is ABC-USA International Ministries anniversary month. This year marks IM’s 206th year of global mission, made possible by the generosity and support of people like you. We invite you to participate in giving to IM’s general fund during the month of May.

The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to hit charitable and nonprofit organizations like IM especially hard. IM has seen a dramatic decline in gifts during this crisis and has taken steps to cancel events and cut expenditures. But these measures are not enough to make up for the giving shortfall. Without your help, IM could be facing a financial crisis that impairs our ability to pursue God’s mission.

IM needs to raise \$700,000 for its general fund by September in order to cover its operational costs this fiscal year. We will not be able to reach that amount without additional gifts. Would you consider sending a gift, in any amount, before May 30th during this anniversary month? You may donate online at “www.internationalministries.org” or mail a check payable to International Ministries to:

International Ministries
1003 W. 9th Ave, Suite A
King of Prussia, PA 19406

Your generosity will allow us to maintain our level of support for our missionaries! Thank you!



Racetrack Ministry

Rev. Vincent Harris, our area Race Track Ministries Chaplain, has retired but has not yet been replaced. He currently needs our help to sustain the ministry.

The emergency list of items he is requesting includes face masks and non-perishable foods, such as canned meats, soups, peanut butter, crackers, and anything that does not require refrigeration. Simple, non-prescription medications that are needed include things like Theraflu, Robitussin and aspirin. (He is willing to accept open packages since he trusts us not to have tampered with the contents.)

Ongoing needs include general household items, clothing and toys for various ages of children. Money, checks or gift cards to Walmart or grocery stores are also appreciated.

Alice Meadows, who has contact with Rev. Harris, will facilitate the delivery of all donated items in mid-June.

Let’s do what we can to lend a helping hand!