



Congregational Communication
September 13, 2023
Rev. Joel Petruschke

Our Mission: We respond to Christ's love by feeding those who hunger in body, mind, and spirit.

Sunday, September 17

9:30am – Sunday School

11:00am – Worship (hybrid)

Pastor's Perch:

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

There is a turn of phrase that haunts me. It is this: "The gods you make are the gods that will destroy you." That phrase haunts me because first, I struggle to discern whether that statement is true or not. And second, if it is true, and it may be, how do we ever get around it? How do we ever come to an image of God that is not some projection of the human psyche? How do we ever come to THE pure, unadulterated image of God?

Now, in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament the people of God developed an image of God, such that God was seen as wrathful, jealous, and downright frightening at times. God was seen as one who destroyed his people when they were sinful. And the destruction of God's people happens over and over again in the Old Testament. So, it seems that the statement is true—the God that the Israelites come to worship is a God who will destroy them.

Certainly, there is some truth as well to the notion that the false gods we worship have the power to destroy us. Think of the various addictions people have, the things people make into gods, whether those gods are work, or sex, or money, or power. When we have an unhealthy drive for these things, these so-called "gods" become healthy for us and they take their toll, such that they can destroy us.

In our society, I worry about the gods we have established, namely the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press. These are our "societal" gods. To be sure, many persons are deeply passionate about their media outlets. We greatly value the news and information we hear on television, on the radio, or online. But the gods associated with the media can be detrimental as well; they too can destroy us.

My fear has always been that the media plays on the passions of people. The media knows how to keep us tuned in, knows how to keep us listening. And it is not always healthy. Too much of it is toxic. And I am not denigrating one political ideology or another here; I am only just highlighting the means by which we get our news and information. And so, what we value most—the freedom of speech, the freedom of the press (these gods)—could also be our undoing as our society becomes more and more polarized through the power of the media, because we believe so passionately in the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press. The gods we make are the gods that will destroy us.

So, the question then begs to be asked in all of this, how do we counteract these gods that want to destroy us? My opinion is that we need to be critical thinkers. With respect to the media, for instance, we need to ask ourselves certain questions. Why do I listen to that particular news outlet? How do I feel when I hear their reporting? Why do I feel that way? What is the other perspective?

With respect to the addictions, it is also helpful to ask ourselves questions, so as to think critically. Why do I give in to this addiction? What prompts me or triggers my behavior such that I seek out a certain unhealthy habit? Why do I give up control to this addiction?

Yes, critical thinking is paramount to coping with the gods that want to destroy us. And, our ancestors of the faith did the same thing. They thought critically, and they asked questions about their God. Can God change God's mind and decide NOT bring about destruction when a group of people have sinned? To which, the answer is "yes." See the Old Testament book of Jonah, for instance. The book of Jonah is an example of our ancestors of the faith thinking critically.

So, critical thinking is so important. It makes us slow down and makes us be more self-aware. It makes us question why it is we do what we do. It makes us take inventory of our behaviors and it seeks to understand them. In essence, critical thinking makes us ponder the gods we make and makes us consider how those gods could be destroying us. Hopefully then, we jettison those unhealthy gods, peeling them away, as we draw closer and closer to the one true God.

In Christ, Pastor Joel Petruschke

President's Perch:

The church Council met on Monday and acted on several items. It voted to renew the contract with Our Saviour Lutheran Church for Pastor Joel's services for another six months. Our Saviour will be considering this renewal at their Congregation meeting this coming Sunday (Sept. 17th). We have been blessed by Pastor Joel's presence with us and have greatly benefited from his ministry to us. The last six months have been focused on calming, healing, and reconnecting. Going forward we will be spending time and energy in looking long-range to discovering what St. Stephen can be.

Our present position is comfortable in many ways. Everyone's effort has made this possible. However, we are not in a sustainable position financially. Many have stepped up their giving which has given us some space to plan for the future. We are still in the black for the year-to-date (see included Financial Status). The forecast is still to have a deficit before the end of the year but that greatly depends on the ongoing support that we receive. Next year will be more challenging due to increased costs. Please help by praying for your leadership that it makes the best decisions possible with your guiding input and participation.

We are pleased to announce that an agreement has been signed with St. Paul Lutheran Church in Carlisle for our Youth and Family Minister, Jennifer Batcheler, to provide youth services for both of our churches. We hope that this arrangement strengthens the youth programs of both churches. She will be splitting her time between the two churches and will be leading joint programs. The costs will be shared likewise. I'm sure you will hear more from Jenny as this program progresses.

As part of looking forward, the Council is trying to find ways to use our facilities more completely. Not just for the benefit of St. Stephen but for the New Kingstown community in general. We are seeking your input and participation in helping with this effort. It could be in bringing forth ideas to Council Members, being willing to participate in a team that works to develop an idea, and/or providing your time for a task that needs personal attention.

Please keep all of your leadership in your prayers as we pray and work for the benefit of all.

Tom Burson

St. Stephen Lutheran Church				
Financial Status				
8/31/2023				
General Fund				
	August Actual	Totals		
	Revenue / Receipts	\$9,360		
	Expenses / Disbursements	\$12,579		
	Over / (Short)	-\$3,219		
	Year to Date	Actual	Budget	Notes
	Revenue / Receipts	\$82,145	\$73,654	\$8,491 Revenues over budget for the year
	Expenses / Disbursements	\$80,273	\$81,481	\$1,208 Expenses under budget for the year
	Over / (Short)	\$1,872	-\$7,827	\$9,700 Overage for the Year
Mission Support (Synod Benevolence)				
	Year to Date Details	Revenue / Receipts	Budget Year to Date	Notes
	August Year To Date	\$6,297	\$3,333	\$2,964 Revenue over budget.
				Figures do not include World Hunger "Pass-through"

Youth Corner

It is with pleasure, that I announce that St Stephen and St Paul, of Carlisle, have formally agreed to combine their Youth and Family groups into one, large, group partnership. This will allow us to offer kiddos and families from both congregations, more opportunities, peers, support, and experiences, than operating separately would have afforded. As I extend my role to include both church families, I will be dividing my time between the churches and worship services. I couldn't be more grateful and excited about what this growth will mean to our ministry and hope that your support, dedication, and love for these families, will grow right along with us! Blessings to you all! - Mrs. B

Upcoming Events:

September 16- Annual Congregational Day at Cherry Crest Farm- 12:30PM

September 22-24- ELCA ALIVE annual event at Nawakwa- grades 6-8

October 22- Nawakwa Fall Days- 1:00PM- 6:00PM

October (TBD)- Halloween Party- All youth families

December 1- Secret Santa Begins!

January 5-7- Winterfest- grades 9-12

January 17-21- ELCA Youth Worker Extravaganza

July 13-20- (2024)- ELCA Youth Gathering- grades 9-12

(Re)new Sunday School Class! - Beginning October 1, 2023, during the Sunday School hour, a class examining the Book of Psalms will be offered; it will be led by Lloyd Sheaffer. In the class participants will not only study individual psalms but also will delve into the history of these poems, learn about techniques used by the various psalmists, and discover how The Psalms can become an active part of a person's prayer life.

This 12-week study is open to all adults, young and not-so-young, in the community. Participants are encouraged to invite others to this class.

Come to this class and discover why Martin Luther said "[The Psalms] could well be entitled a 'Little Bible' since everything contained in the entire Bible is beautifully and briefly comprehended, and compacted into...a Manual."

How should St. Stephen use our Memorial Funds? St. Stephen has been blessed with several Memorial donations in remembrance of loved ones. Council desires to use some of the proceeds from these donations in and around the church and is seeking congregation input. Please put your thoughts to paper and place the paper in the "suggestion box," located on the table near the sanctuary entrance.

Sunday worship begins at 11am. This is hybrid worship, meaning that we worship both in person and online at the same time. If you worship online, please introduce yourself to others online and greet other folks that you aren't familiar with. We also invite those worshipping online to provide their own elements of bread and wine/grape juice in order to participate in communion.

Accessing worship online - You can attend online worship by clicking this link -

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/410597064?pwd=b3lEa2hnbmtxU2kvYVhxUGN6ZWdoUT09>

You can also call 1-929-205-6099. Once connected, just enter the Meeting ID - 410 597 064 and the password - 779080. You can also find the direct link for this on our church webpage - www.ststephenlc.org. Scroll halfway down to the link that says, "Join us online." Click the link and you'll be connected to the Zoom session.

Worship Assistants

Date	Usher Greeter	Cantor	Lector	Assisting Minister	Altar Guild	AV Support
9/17/23		Kathy Burson	Pat Seiple	Kathy Burson	Maxine/Carol	Tom Burson Cheryl Neidig
9/24/23			Carol Clelland		Maxine/Carol	Tom Burson Cheryl Neidig
10/1/23		Lynne Immell	Jadam Smith	Lynne Immell	Sue Rodgers	Tom Burson Cheryl Neidig
10/8/23		Lynne Immell	Roger Immell	Kathy Burson	Maxine/Carol	Tom Burson Cheryl Neidig