

I can't believe that it is already the Fourth of July weekend. In so many ways it feels like we just wrapped up the Easter season. But now we are already into July. We've been so busy with different projects like the windows and RAGBRAI, that it can be easy to overlook some of the other things happening around the church and our lives.

This weekend is the General Synod for the UCC. For those of you who do not know what that means, it is essentially a conference for everyone in the UCC. Generally, only delegates from the different conferences and associations attend because they are the only ones that have voting rights.

This weekend, there are a number of resolutions for the delegates to vote on. Many of which will have no effect on us here at St. Paul's. There are a couple that could influence different paths that we might take. But, I do not plan on discussing them until after the Synod is over. And remember, in the UCC everything happens at the congregational level, so even if they decide something at the Synod that we do not feel reflects our best interest, we do not have to implement it.

We also had a number of birthdays last week. There were five from last Sunday to now that I know about. We got to celebrate our graduating senior and retiring coach at the baseball game on Monday night. And the Food for Kids program started distributing the sack lunches on Wednesday.

I know I talk about this program a lot. But, I truly feel that there is a need to make certain that kids in the community are not going hungry. And I do want to thank everyone that has donated their time and food to the program. It is no small task and it was very well received.

We handed out 44 individual sacks and 4 family boxes. We estimated with those numbers we feed approximately 50 kids. And each sack and box contained 4 meals worth of food. That means that we distributed roughly 200 meals for children in our community.

I talk about this with anyone that will listen. I realize that some people are tired of hearing me talk about it. I'm sure some of you are tired of hearing me talk about it. But, the more I talk about it, the more I'm hearing something that I heard the previous week, "You really believe what you're saying." And that makes me feel good.

I don't know how many of you know, but yesterday was the one year anniversary of me quitting my job and committing one hundred percent to my family and ministry. I quit being a part time minister, part time father and husband, and a part time student. And I started working on what I can do to spread God's Love.

At the beginning I heard a lot of negative comments. People asked me if I was serious? And it got worse when they found out that I was in my home church. They asked me what I was thinking. Why would I want to put myself through that? And how dare I compare myself to Jesus and do what he couldn't. Unfortunately, I still get the last one.

But now I am hearing, "You really believe what you are saying." And if people are saying that to me, then they are hearing me. They know that they are always welcome through these doors. They know that we will do whatever we can to make certain that no child goes hungry in this community. And they know that St. Paul's isn't just punching the clock on Sunday, we are in the community and we are proud of what we do.

This week was also the finals for one of my classes. The class was on the New Testament. While we were going through the class, I realized that we rarely read from 2 Peter. So, I was telling another minister that I wanted to spend some time talking about 2 Peter. He

asked me why since every three years we end up reading the entire bible, so there really isn't any point in spending extra time working on different scripture.

Obviously I didn't agree with him since we are reading from 2 Peter today. But I decided to check on whether we actually spend any time reading 2 Peter in the lectionary. I have spoken about the lectionary series in the past. The idea behind the Revised Common Lectionary series is that in a three year rotation you end up reading most of the bible and in theory from every book. And most people follow this pattern. In fact the series is in the back of the red hymnal, so that anyone would be able to find what scriptures we should be reading each week.

But, I don't follow that series. I follow the narrative lectionary series and it focuses primarily on the gospels. It does cover the old testament as well. But, the main focus is that each year covers a different gospel. Last year we focused on Matthew. Next year we will talk about Mark. So, what do you do in between?

In looking at the RCL 2 Peter is only read one time. And I didn't see it really at all in the NL. So, why not take a little time to talk about 2 Peter? Peter was one of Jesus' first disciples. He became the first bishop of the church. But we only have 2 letters from him in the bible.

This letter was written after Peter was arrested in Rome and was awaiting his trial. He knows that he is nearing the end of his life. And he writes this letter.

Unlike most of the other letters in the Bible, Peter doesn't address this letter to anyone specific. I think that since he identified himself as Simon Peter, he was intending this letter to go to everyone. He is bringing Jews and Gentiles together in his introduction by using both of his names. He is showing that he might be addressed as two separate people, but together they are one in him. Much like all of us are one in Christ.

Peter continues to tell us that even though Jesus died for our sins and has guaranteed our place in heaven, it is only certain if we live a righteous lifestyle. Jesus led by example, so we have seen what is right and what is wrong.

We know that to lead a righteous life we must follow our faith. We share goodness, knowledge, godliness, affection, and love. We do what is right for right's sake, not because it makes us look good or we get into heaven because we did something nice to gain entrance instead of just doing the right thing.

We will gain entrance into heaven because of the work we do and the life we lead, not because of the front we show or the things we get other people to do in our name. This is the opportunity that so many people have. They do not see Jesus the way that we see Jesus.

We believe that no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here. We believe that anyone who believes in God and the Lord Jesus Christ has a right to take communion with us. We believe that we are all God's children.

So, yes, we really believe what we say. We believe what Peter says. We show our knowledge in God and Jesus, by leading the life that he led. We share our goodness and affection throughout the community by volunteering for different organizations, helping others, teaching, and finding ways to make not just ourselves, but our community better. We share our love and hope by doing what is right for right's sake. And the more we do it, the more people will see it and the more they will talk about it.

Father,

I thank you for your grace and peace as I strive to know the fullness of Jesus Christ. I do not want to be nearsighted and blind, but I desire to live a life of excellence! I desire to live a life that is fruitful, effective, and productive. Not wasting away even a day that you have blessed me with. I will strive to learn and obtain the knowledge you have provided within your word, so I will know your great and precious promises. I will make every effort to add to my faith goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, affection, and love. I will work to live out these commands daily. Taking small steps forward everyday, until I can look back and see the leaps and bounds I've made in becoming more like Christ and less like everyone else. Father, I pray that you would help me everyday, and when I fail, you would provide me with the strength to keep pressing forward and living a righteous life. I pray that as I make every effort to nurture the Holy Spirit within me, you would use me to pour love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and hope into others around me. Father, when they see me, I pray they see you.

In Jesus Name,

Amen