



JAMESTOWN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
411 Liberty Street, Jamestown, PA 16134  
(724)932-2101  
[www.jamestownpres.org](http://www.jamestownpres.org)  
E-mail: [jpc411@windstream.net](mailto:jpc411@windstream.net)

Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not his benefits – who forgives  
all your sins and heals your diseases. (Psalm 103:2-3)

April 30, 2020

Dear JPC family and friends,

Attached you will find highlights from the Session meeting that took place Wednesday evening of this week. The majority of our time was spent carefully considering how to best serve the needs of this congregation and our community, given the likelihood that some COVID-19 restrictions may soon be lifted.

At this time, all state residents are under stay-at-home orders until May 8. Tomorrow (May 1), Governor Wolf is expected to announce which areas of Pennsylvania can move from “red” to “yellow” phase in his three-phase plan. Although “yellow” lifts the stay-at-home order and allows many businesses to reopen, people are still urged to wear masks in public and gatherings of more than 25 people will be banned. Session is in strong agreement that we will abide by government guidelines. We also believe it is best for the congregation if we do not return to worship in the sanctuary for at least another month (and possibly longer).

- We will continue to send out weekly worship resources and post online worship services on our website <https://jamestownpres.org/> (under the worship service tab) and on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/jamestownECOpresby/> Hillside Presbyterian Church in Greenville also offers an online Bible study <https://www.facebook.com/hillsidepresby/>
- Session is very thankful that even in these uncertain times, the congregation has continued to give faithfully. Your generous gifts have enabled us to retain church staff and complete some long-needed building maintenance.

- Free Saturday Community Suppers will be provided on a take-out basis on May 2nd and May 16th with reservations in advance by calling the church office (see attached for menu and other information).
- As a reminder, we have an active Email prayer chain. It would be a privilege to pray for you and others in the community; prayer requests can be submitted by phone or Email to the church office.
- Finally, we know that many in our community have been economically impacted by this crisis – some in a significant way. If you are in need of assistance, please let Pastor Sue or the Deacons know.

May the powerful love of the Risen Lord fill you with peace and hope,

Pastor Sue

**Jamestown ECO Presbyterian Church**  
**Highlights for Session Meeting, April 29, 2020**  
**Moderator, Pastor Sue Nageotte**

*This meeting was held via Zoom conference call.*

The primary focus of this meeting was discussion of worship and other aspects of congregational life for the next few months, in view of anticipated reduction of COVID-19 restrictions.

Susan Anderson, moderator of the board of deacons, was our guest at the beginning of the meeting. She reported that the deacons have been staying in touch with home-bound people, including delivering meals from the “take out” Saturday Suppers. As a person working in the health field, Susan recommended we move cautiously in planning for worship or other organized activities in the near future.

Session is very thankful that even in this time of worshiping apart that people have been so generous in giving. The general fund balance was \$9095.05 as of March 31<sup>st</sup> and \$12,322.00 as of April 29<sup>th</sup>. God has blessed this congregation and we feel it is important to share our blessings with the community.

It was the consensus of session that we would abide by any rules recommended by the state as it begins its re-opening plan. We are currently in “red” meaning residents are asked to stay at home and gatherings of 10 or more people are banned. When our area moves to “yellow” phase, we would be permitted to gather in groups of fewer than 25 people. Since we were averaging about 40 in worship prior to the virus, session is in full agreement that we cannot resume worship in the sanctuary at this point. We feel caution is necessary to keep people safe. We will continue to record services for the internet and monitor when it will be safe to worship together again.

Saturday community dinners will be provided on a take-out basis on May 2<sup>nd</sup> and May 16<sup>th</sup> free of charge with any donations going to the Jamestown Food Pantry and Backpack Program. The May 2<sup>nd</sup> meal includes rigatoni, salad, and dessert (serving a maximum of 120 people). The May 16<sup>th</sup> meal is chicken BBQ, potatoes, baked beans, coleslaw, and

dessert for a maximum 200 people. If Jamestown area restaurants remain closed under state guidelines, we would provide a take-out meal on June 6, otherwise we will return to once-monthly suppers beginning the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday in June, the 16<sup>th</sup>.

Session members felt that the weekly update letter & worship resources were much appreciated by the congregation. Viewership of the online weekly worship service has significantly surpassed our average in-church attendance.

We feel it is difficult to get feedback and prayer requests during this time of social distancing. We are encouraging anyone who may have prayer requests to contact the church office so Pastor Sue, the Session and Deacons can be aware and respond to any needs of the people.

As a quarter-time pastor, Pastor Sue ordinarily preaches 3 times each month but has provided worship leadership continuously through March and April due to the COVID-19 situation. Session approved Pastor Sue's request that she continue with her pastoral duties (including pre-recorded worship services) through Sunday May 24<sup>th</sup> followed by two weeks off starting May 25<sup>th</sup> and returning on June 8<sup>th</sup>. Rev. Rick Cepris has agreed to preach for the online worship service on Pentecost Sunday, May 31<sup>st</sup>.

Thanks to both the congregation and the community to the overwhelming response to the purchase of the flower vouchers for the Preschool. With the reimbursements of part of the tuition, this support really came at a critical time.

The properties committee has been working extremely hard during the past month. They ground all of the old paint off the fellowship floor in preparation for new epoxy hard-coat paint, replaced and primed all of the wainscoting in fellowship hall, painted the downstairs bathrooms, replaced the kitchen lights, and painted the trim and all the heat covers in fellowship hall. Also, the much needed porch replacement on the manse was completed.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Thank you to all who helped with our Community Dinner last evening.

A special thanks to Pastor Sue, Cindy Loveridge, Janeen Mihoci, Susan and Dale Anderson and Jarron Mihoci for their time and dedication to our on-line worship services!

We are still asking for a photo of you and your family to include in a collage on our website and included at the beginning of each Sunday morning worship video. Please forward a photo of you and/or your family to Janeen Mihoci by text or by email: 724-456-9368 or jnj900@windstream.net (No names will be used on the website). Any questions, please feel free to contact Janeen.



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# Happy Birthday!

05/03 Samantha Stevenson  
05/03 Sara Stevenson  
05/04 Sue Courtney  
05/06 Alicia Robbins  
05/10 Dave Volosin  
05/12 John Mihoci  
05/18 Mike Henegan  
05/20 Ed Fry  
Pastor Sue Nageotte  
05/28 Mary Helen Valesky  
05/31 Scott College  
Carol Henegan

*“Worshipping Together ... Even While Apart”*

*T*  
*moments in silent prayer.*

**Call to Worship:** *(based on Psalm 33:1-5)*

**Shout with joy and sing to the Lord; it is right for God’s people to praise Him. Praise God with all kinds of music! Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully and shout for joy. For the word of the Lord is right and true. The Lord loves righteousness and justice; He is faithful in all He does. Praise the Lord!**

\*HYMN: # 337 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty



## **“Life Beyond Normal”**

*John 21: 1-17, 19b*

Two weeks ago, we explored the story of how the Risen Lord appeared to his disciples when they were hiding in a locked room in Jerusalem. All were there except Thomas. HE had to wait a full week before he himself could see Jesus ... SEE him, and believe.

That's the launching point for today's Gospel reading. The disciples are no longer hiding. They are also no longer in Jerusalem. Now they are 70 miles north, in Galilee, near the beautiful freshwater lake known as Lake Kinnereth. In Jesus' time, it was also called the Sea of Galilee, and sometimes the Sea of Tiberias.

It wasn't surprising to find the disciples back in that area. That was, after all, where most of them had grown up; where most of them first met Jesus. Simon Peter and his brother Andrew lived in Capernaum on the northern shore of the lake. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, probably lived there too. Nathanael was from nearby Cana, where Jesus performed the miracle of turning water into wine.

We could think that after everything that had happened in Jerusalem, they came home for the simple reason that this had been their “home base.” In Galilee, they had family and friends ... connections ... resources. But there was a much more important reason for them to be there. In Mark's gospel we read that when the women came to the empty tomb, an angel told them to remind Peter and the others that Jesus had said he was going ahead of them into Galilee and would meet them there.

So now the disciples were back in their old stomping-grounds, waiting. Waiting for their teacher and leader to appear; waiting for life to return to normal. Well, normal for them anyway. These men had been Jesus' closest companions for the past three years. The Gospels tell us that Jesus traveled about through all the town and villages in Judea, preaching and teaching and healing every kind of illness ... showing God's love. So these men were used to being on the move.

Staying in one place for so long ... well, we know a little what that's like, don't we? Suddenly having to stay close to home; being unable to participate in our customary activities ... in our hearts, every one of us wants this virus to just be OVER so we can get back to normal. The disciples weren't dealing with a pandemic; they weren't ordered to

stay at home. They were waiting for Jesus to meet them, like the angel said he would. They didn't mind the waiting ... well, not TOO much ... but they certainly weren't used to staying in one place doing *nothing*. So one afternoon when Simon Peter announced, "I'm going fishing," the others were quick to agree.

Some of the commentaries I've read say that going fishing was a sign of impatience – *sinful* impatience, but there's no hint of that in the text. Peter *might* have been tired of sitting around, but maybe he also wanted to be a good steward of his time and talents – doing something productive to put food on the table.

Whatever Peter was thinking, the others were on board with his plan in a heartbeat: "We'll come too!" So off they all went, climbing into the boat, their bodies falling into the comfortable rhythm of rowing oars and casting nets. It must have felt SO good to be back in the boat again, doing something *familiar*.

When our lives have been disrupted – and especially when we don't know how long the disruption is going to last -- it is completely understandable for us to want to return to familiar activities. But we need to remember that as humans, we don't see God's big picture. Returning to what we think of as "normal" might NOT be the best thing in God's plan for us.

Remember during the Exodus, how the children of Israel were hungry in the desert and complained that it would have been better to have stayed in Egypt where at least they would have been well-fed? I very much doubt that as slaves, they really could have eaten all they wanted ... but that's how they remembered things. Nevertheless, God wasn't about to let them go back. He had bigger plans for his people than slavery.

No; being comfortable doesn't mean we are on God's path. I've gotten pretty far off track though – so let's go back to the Sea of Galilee. Maybe that little group of disciples went fishing because they needed the food. But maybe – just maybe -- some among them figured it was time they returned to their old occupation.

What happened that night, however, shows clearly that God did not intend to let them slip back into their "pre-Jesus" way of life. Far from it! First there was the frustrating lack of success. The men rowed back and forth, again and again casting the net where experience told them fish ought to be. Matthew Henry writes that this mysterious absence of fish – or rather, the failure to CATCH any fish – is a reminder that while God has given us *dominion* over the creatures of the earth, he does not *require* those creatures to come at our command. That's a truth that everyone who fishes, everyone who hunts, knows full well! Henry also

writes that sometimes God permits even diligent workers to be disappointed in their labors, so that we will rejoice the more fully when he graciously provides for our needs.

That night, Peter and the other disciples were most certainly disappointed in their labors! Even though they worked hard and they worked smart, they didn't catch even one minnow. Not, that is, until they heard a voice calling them from shore: "Friends, haven't you caught any fish? Throw your net on the right side of the boat!"

From a human perspective that made no sense. If there weren't any fish on the LEFT side of the boat, why would there be fish on the RIGHT? But when they threw the net – WHAM! The net was overflowing with fish, BIG ones! The catch was enormous. Suddenly one of the disciples called out, "It's the Lord!" Peter wasted no time jumping into the water to get to the shore, while the others pulled in the net.

And there was Jesus, waiting for them on the beach, with a fire that had burned down to coals, and fish already cooking on it. "Come and have breakfast!" he said, and told the others to bring some of the fish they'd just caught. When everything was ready, Jesus took the bread and fish and served them to the disciples.

John ends his Gospel with what is called the "reinstatement" of Peter. Three times on the night of Jesus' arrest, Peter denied being one of Christ's followers. In fact, he even denied knowing the Lord! The burden of that memory must have weighed heavily on Peter's heart. But after they ate, Jesus went to Peter and invited him to make a new start. He did this by asking Peter a series of three questions.

"Do you love me, Peter?" asked Jesus. "Lord, you know that I love you."

"Then feed my lambs."

"Do you love me?" "Yes, Lord; you KNOW that I love you."

"Tend my sheep."

And once again – a third time – Jesus asked, "Do you love me?"

"Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you!" "Feed my sheep."

I've often thought about how Peter must have felt, being asked three times "Do you love me?" But until this week, I never stopped to wonder how Peter ... who had been a *fisherman* ... might have felt about being charged with feeding the SHEEP. Of course, that's a metaphor. Peter is being asked to care for Christ's people, to provide for them, to *lead* the flock.

If you've been around church for a while ... if you're familiar with a little church history ... you probably already know that Peter became the first leader of the church. In the Roman

Catholic tradition, Peter was the first pope. So you might be thinking, “Pastor Sue, what’s the point here?”

But here’s the thing. Peter was a fisherman. And way back when Jesus first called Peter to be his disciple – Peter and his brother Andrew -- Jesus told them, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” For three years, Peter had followed Jesus, but for the majority of his life he had seen himself, in one way or another, as a fisherman. Now, Jesus was giving Peter an entirely new role, a new identity even.

Maybe I’m making too much of this. But it seems to me that the primary point of this passage is that even though Jesus had met them in Galilee as he promised ... life was not going to go back to the way it had been.

As we look upon the other disciples, dragging in the miraculous catch of fish ... as we look upon Peter, not only accepted by Jesus but given the new responsibility of leading and feeding Christ’s sheep ... we see Jesus calling them to a life *beyond* their previous experience ... beyond what was well-known and well-understood.

Do you hear that same call, today? I do. In just a matter of weeks, life in America – life in most of the world – has been disrupted in ways we would never have imagined to be possible. Who would have imagined churches and schools and restaurants being closed? Who would have imagined being under orders to stay at home, except when it is absolutely necessary to go out? Who would have imagined “going to church” in front of a computer screen, with coffee cup in hand and wearing our Sunday-best slippers? Life is very different right now than it was even 6 weeks ago. Not only social and economic life ... but spiritual life. All across America, all across the world, people are turning to God with open and hungry hearts. *[examples: national news showing hospital staff singing Amazing Grace, gov’t leaders asking for prayer; share info on number of households watching the worship service each week on our website]*

It is likely that in the next few weeks *some* of the COVID-19 restrictions will be lifted. But that doesn’t mean we can – or should – go back to doing all the same things in all the old ways. Much as we find comfort in familiar activities, we can be sure that God has a better future in mind for us and our world than simply returning to normal. So let us seek that better future, trusting in God to lead us. Amen? Amen.