



Spreading Branches

The Newsletter of Lansdale Presbyterian Church

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"I am the Vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me bears much fruit..." John 15:5

October 2021

Know Jesus, Know God

– Rev. Chris Kennedy

I told some of you the story of a guy I know called Pete at our recent "Back to Church Sunday" Adult Sunday School. Once he was invited to participate in a debate on Christianity at one of the London universities. On the night of the debate, in a packed auditorium, a student became increasingly incensed after Pete cited John 14:6, where Jesus says "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." The student was mad. He asked a question from the floor, "Are you telling me that Jesus is the only way to God?" "Yes," Pete replied. The student got even madder. He pointed directly at Pete and shouted, "That is so arrogant! SO arrogant!" To which Pete answered, "You're right, it is completely arrogant. Unless of course it's true. In which case it makes complete sense for Jesus to say it." The student's boiling anger cooled off almost immediately.

Later Pete described how, in that moment, he felt like it was him against the entire auditorium. But that's the issue for many isn't it? We know that what the Bible says about Jesus is true. We believe it. But there are times when believing in Jesus can feel like we are in a minority of one. Maybe in the place we work, or in school, among our family, or in our neighborhood - for many we spend time with, the notion of us believing in Jesus, seems distant, or even arrogant.

Which is why we need to listen to what Jesus says about himself. In his eyewitness account of Jesus' life, John records a moment which at first glance seems to end in failure. We're told in John 8:30 that many people, having heard his teaching, believed in Jesus. It all seems to be going so well.

But in the "follow-up" discussions, Jesus begins to press home the truth of what his listeners are really like. An argument escalates over the following verses. "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free," says Jesus. The implication being that his hearers, even though they say they believe in Jesus, do not. In fact, they are slaves.

Jesus' listeners disagree. They invoke their Jewish heritage. "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone." Now historically, this is inaccurate. They've forgotten the story of Moses, and the Exodus and how God miraculously rescued them out of slavery in Egypt.

But Jesus doesn't correct them on their historical omission. Instead, he raises the temperature further as he explains how each of them is a "slave to sin." He acknowledges that they may well be Abraham's physical descendants, "yet you seek to kill me."

And then he pushes it even further still by questioning the truth of their spiritual parentage. "I speak of what I have seen with my Father." By contrast "you do what you have heard from your father."

So just who is their real father? Jesus doesn't take long to explain. Their spiritual "father" is the "father of lies." They are children of the devil. This is electric. Imagine going to a church membership meeting where the leader says you are living a lie!

But the argument gets even more heated. The annoyance rises as the people who said they believed in Jesus a few verses previously, question his ethnicity and say he's demon-possessed! (verse 48). They scathingly ask if Jesus thinks he is greater than Abraham, and older than Abraham? "Who do you make yourself out to be?" (verse 53).

The argument reaches its climax when Jesus asserts, "Before Abraham, I am." (verse 58). This is huge. Into what is an already highly charged atmosphere, Jesus hits the nuclear button. He's deliberately answering his critics in terms of the covenant name that God gave to Moses in Exodus 3:14. "I AM WHO I AM." The name derived from this (what is translated as The LORD in our English Bibles) was so special within the Jewish tradition, so precious, so holy, that people didn't even say it out loud. Anytime it appeared in the Scriptures (such as Exodus 3:15) people spoke another name for God instead (that's how we arrive with the term "Jehovah" incidentally). So, for Jesus to deliberately invoke this specific name and attribute it to himself is sacrilege. It is arrogant blasphemy. Which is why the crowd picked up stones to throw at him. Yet their reaction proves what Jesus has been saying all along. In their hearts, they really want Jesus killed.

Arrogant blasphemy? It would be, unless of course it's true. And the wonderful news of Christianity is that Jesus shows he is true. We can know God, because of what Jesus will do. We read in John's gospel how Jesus willingly allows himself to be killed, on account of the Jews', and our unbelieving rebellion against God. He willingly suffers God's wrath, so that we could be freed from slavery to sin, and all its consequences, when we trust in him. Jesus Christ shows how much we are loved by God.

John's point in recording this moment in his gospel account is that Jesus clearly shows that people need to believe in him on Jesus' terms. Know Jesus, know God. It's completely arrogant, unless of course it's true. In which case it would make sense to say it.

And it cuts both ways — without Jesus, we cannot know God. No Jesus, no God.

The point is clear. The invitation is to believe in Jesus on his terms, not ours.

Throughout John's gospel, Jesus says some extraordinary things about himself. Starting on October 3rd we'll be starting a new series in our Sunday morning Adult Sunday School classes entitled, "Jesus in His Own Words." Any time Jesus says "I am" he's echoing that special name of God. We are going to look at these "I am" sayings in John's gospel — where they are spoken; how they connect to themes from the Old Testament Scriptures; how they are fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus; and why we need to believe them today.

There will be plenty of opportunity to ask questions as well.

Have you ever had one of those experiences where you meet somebody and don't realize who they are? Not long after we moved into our home here in Ireland a neighbor and her husband showed up at our doorstep with a home-baked cake to welcome us on to the street. I asked, "And what do you do?" "Oh, I'm a writer" was her humble reply. Once she had left (and after I'd done a quick piece of research) I discovered that she's written over 20 books. Her novels have sold over 35 million copies and been translated into 33 languages! Thankfully our friendship with both her and her husband has grown over the years.

In the gospel accounts we read the truth about God's Son. He is greater and older than Abraham. He tells us God's words. He obeys God's will — to the point of death, even on a cross. For you and me. My prayer is that each of us would meet with him as we listen again to his words. That we'd realize who he is and what he has done for us; that our faith in him would continue to grow, and that our lives would change as understanding of his love for us deepens. Know Jesus, know God.



PRESENTING
*"The Emperor's
New Groove"*

**Friday, Oct. 15
7PM**

**Outdoor Showing!
Popcorn & Snacks!**

How can I serve?



Help save a life. Give blood.

Blood Drive on Wed., Oct. 6 | 2-7PM

You make a difference.



Signup at www.lansdalepres.org

Deacons' Harvest Home Ministry

Once again this year, our deacons will be collecting donations for their Thanksgiving Harvest Home Ministry during the month of November.

There will be opportunities to donate non-perishable food items as well as turkeys and pies. Food baskets will be distributed to designated families the week before Thanksgiving.

Special offering:

There will be a special offering on Sunday, November 14th to purchase additional items for food baskets.

Watch for the display table in the lobby October 31st and for details in the bulletin and the November issue of Spreading Branches about how you can be a part of blessing others through this outreach ministry.

Seniors Living in Christ (SLIC)

Seven seniors met at the church on a warm September afternoon to carpool to Pennsbury Manor, located in Morrisville, along the Delaware River. They were able to tour the manor house, which was a replica of what William Penn's house may have looked like based on that period in history. Pennsbury Manor was built in 1938 while Penn's original house was the late 1600's. An informative short movie was shown on William Penn's life, how he came to acquire the land in Pennsylvania and his beliefs as a Quaker. He strongly believed in religious freedom and freedom for all, even though he was a slave owner. The group was also able to tour the small museum inside the visitor's center and the beautiful gardens outside. The visit ended with a picnic lunch in their pavilion and a nice time of fellowship and fun discussions!

In October, SLIC will welcome back historian Mike Jersberger who will share about the Civil War: Lincoln Visits Philadelphia. Following the presentation, there will be a hoagie lunch (\$4.00). Meet in the Church Library at 10:30 am on Wednesday, October 20th. Please sign up in the church lobby to attend.

EASTERN PA WOMEN'S PRESBYTERY ONE DAY CONFERENCE

SAVE THE
DATE!

"Walk in Wisdom"

Saturday | March 26, 2022

Providence Presbyterian Church
Quakertown, PA

Thanksgiving Service

Sunday evening
November 21st

Watch for more
information to
come





NEW Adult Class

BEGINS SUNDAY, OCT. 3



Jesus in His Own Words

Teacher: Rev. Chris Kennedy

Location: Worship Center

Newcomer's Class continues in the Library

Throughout John's gospel, Jesus says some extraordinary things about himself. Any time Jesus says, "I am", he's echoing that special name of God (e.g., Ex. 3:14-15). In this class we are going to look at these "I am" sayings in John's gospel — where they are spoken; how they connect to themes from the Old Testament Scriptures; how they are fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus; and why we need to believe them today. There will be plenty of opportunity to ask questions as well.

Men's Bible Study

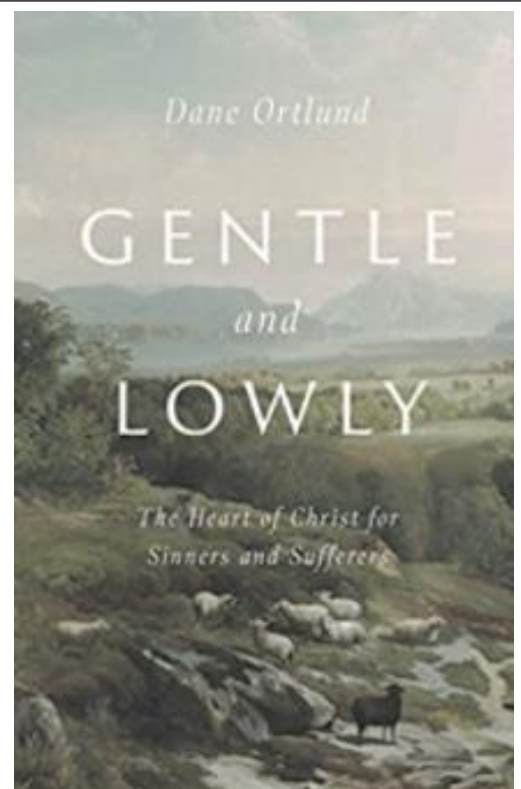
Wednesday
Mornings
6 - 7:30 AM

Conference Room
In-Person & Zoom

Women's Bible Studies

Wednesday
Mornings
Begins 10/6
9:30am • LPC Cafe

Thursday
Evenings
7pm • Via Zoom



Book groups will begin this month!

Pick up a copy of the book in the church lobby or office.

Watch for more information on dates and times in your weekly bulletin.



This month's events:

- 1 10:30 am Small Group online and in-person *
- 3 8:00 am Band Rehearsal *
- 9:15 am Christian Ed. for children, youth and adults *
- 10:30 am Worship Service in-person/live-streamed *
 - Communion
 - Dr. Tim Witmer preaching
- 5:00 pm Small Group in-person (Halvorsen) *
- 5:30 pm Youth Group in-person *
- 5:30 pm Small Group in-person (McBride) *
- 5:30 pm Small Group in-person (North Wales) *
- 6 6:00 am Men's Bible study group in-person *
- 9:30 am Women's Bible study begins in-person *
- 2-7 pm Red Cross Blood Drive (gym)
- 6:30 Choir Rehearsal *
- 7:30 pm Mission Committee meeting in-person
- 7 7:00 pm Session Meeting in-person
- 7:00 pm Ladies' Bible Study online *
- 8-9 Wedding Rehearsal/wedding Negley/Beck
- 10 10:30 am Worship Service: Dr. Tim Witmer preaching
- 11 7:00 pm Moms Together (gym)
- 15 7:00 pm Family Movie Night (outdoors at LPC)
- 17 10:30 am Worship Service: Dr. Tim Witmer preaching
- 18 7:00 pm Deacons' Mercy Ministry meeting in-person
- 19 12 pm Prayer meeting online
- 7:00 pm Prayer meeting online and in-person
- 20 10:30 am Seniors Living in Christ (SLIC) Historian talk
and hoagie lunch at LPC
- 21 7:00 pm Session meeting in-person
- 24 10:30 am Worship Service: Dr. Tim Witmer preaching
- 26 7:00 pm Finance Committee meeting in-person
- 29 6 – 9:00 pm Moms Together Fall Event at LPC
- 30 8:00 am – 2:00 pm Session planning meeting in-person
- 31 Reformation Sunday
 - 10:30 am Worship Service: Dr. Jonny Gibson preaching *