

APRIL 2025



IMMANUEL LUTHERAN CHURCH, ELCA
631 Grand Street, Allegan Michigan



Jeff Hopkins - April 3
Carter Vance - April 17
Dick Jones - April 17
Harold Steffey - April 21
Dawn Doornhaag - April 25
Ken Kinsey - April 26
Jim Combs - April 28
Jessie Cronkhite - April 29
Jeremy Combs - April 30



WORSHIP VOLUNTEERS FOR APRIL

April 6

Reader - Linda Havens
Assistant - Jim Horwath
Counters - Laura Compton & Linda Scott
Greeters - Jim & Marie Combs

April 13

Reader - Linda Scott
Assistant - Donna Preisler
Counters - Joyce Davis & Mike Aksamit
Greeters - Jim & Marie Combs

April 20

Reader - Michele Radke
Assistant - Mike Fusillo
Counters - Laura Compton & Linda Scott
Greeters - Jim & Marie Combs

April 27

Reader - Sharon Aksamit
Assistant - Mike Aksamit
Counters - Joyce Davis & Jim Combs
Greeters - Jim & Marie Combs



WORSHIP PARTICIPANTS: We really appreciate everyone that serves during our worship service and *would love to have more people involved*. If you would like to serve as a reader, worship assistant, counter, or greeter, please talk to Pastor Chris or Ken Kingsbury. We can be reached in the office Monday through Thursday from 9 am to 1pm.



April 2025 Pastor's Page: "The Gospel"

For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith...

- Paul, Romans 1:16

One should thus realize that there is only one gospel, but that it is described by many apostles. ... For at its briefest, the gospel is a discourse about Christ, that he is the Son of God and became a human being for us, that he died and was raised, that he has been established as a Lord over all things.

- Martin Luther, "A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels," from *The Annotated Luther*, Volume 2: Word and Faith, p28-29

Yes, I think I've written and spoken about this in the past. If you remember what I said and wrote, you are welcome to skip this pastor's page. Be warned: I'll probably cover this topic again... and again... and again. It's one of my favorite hobby horses; it's also critically important.

Originally, the word "gospel" (εὐαγγέλιον, euaggelion, "true message" or "good news," from which we get the word "evangelical") meant the news that our army had been victorious on the field of battle. The earliest Christians repurposed the word to mean the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Bishop Satterlee teaches that it's important for every Christian to be able to define the word "Gospel" in fifty words or less. So, here's my (very Lutheran) definition:

The Gospel is the Good News of Jesus Christ: that God became fully human, knew human frailties, was born and lived and died for us and for our salvation, not because we earned it or did anything to deserve it, but out of pure, unearned love and favor (grace).

(49 words 😊)

Does that answer all questions about Jesus? No. Is there a lot of foundational Scripture and theology ungirding my definition? Yes. I could probably spend an hour unpacking it, but I'll spare you.

There is only one Gospel (Galatians 1:6-12). You might use different words (I hope you do – your own words), but those words should amount to basically the same thing. If you add what we or I need to do, that's the Law, not the Gospel. The Law is not bad – in fact, it is holy, good, and necessary – and it's not the Gospel.

People use the phrase “the gospel truth,” but that's an expression, not a definition. We could talk about “the Gospel according to John,” but that's just John's 22-chapter explanation of his understanding of the Gospel (they didn't limit anything to fifty words back then 😊).

There is only one Gospel.

So, if that's the Gospel, then let's cover what is **not** the Gospel:

All other “gospels” are false.

The so-called “prosperity gospel” is a perversion, both false and dangerous. I've covered this before and I'll cover it again, but being rich is not necessarily a sign of God's blessing (Luke 16:19-31), and being poor or ill or having something happen to a person is not necessarily a sign of God's wrath (Luke 13:2, part of the reading for 3 Lent, and John 9:1-3). GOD IS NOT A VENDING MACHINE. Enough on that.

A bit more controversially: there is also no “social gospel.” While God is clearly concerned about how wealthy people and the folks in charge treat folks who are less well off (Leviticus, Amos, and Luke, just to name three of hundreds of places in Scripture to which I could point), that's not the Gospel. “Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, etc.” is what we're supposed **to do**, so it's the Law. Again, that's not bad – it's holy and good and necessary.

I encourage you to have your own 50-word (or less) definition. Remember that the Gospel is God's action, not ours. And if you hear someone else using the word “gospel,” but it doesn't sound like what you would call “good news,” then it's **not** *the* Gospel.

SDG,

Pr. Chris

A note on decision-making:

While I am capable of making unilateral decisions (it takes **a lot** for me to experience “decision fatigue”), I always prefer to be collaborative in my decision-making. I find that when we make decisions together, the more people buy into the solution, answer the question, or change the practice, the more likely it is to succeed (and the more likely we are to get more people will work together to make it happen).

Obviously, the disadvantage of collaborative decision-making is that it's slow. Gathering a group to make a decision or answer a question or change a practice – or, more practically, waiting until the next planned gathering (meeting), means that I need (or another leader needs) to receive the question or idea before the appropriate all committee or congregational council meeting.

Also, I pretty much always make better decisions when I have more time to think, and I can help guide others to think more thoroughly, and they can point out flaws in my thinking. All of us is smarter than one of us.

At least three times since I wrote my last pastor's page, I've had to make a unilateral decision. This is almost always a matter of timing – when the question arises just after an all-committee meeting or council meeting – and I feel as though I have to make a decision **NOW**. (Nota bene: this is often how scammers work – they pressure you to make a fast decision so that you won't have time to think.)

This is what happened with the question of Easter flowers. Should one of us on the worship committee have thought of it before the February meeting? Yes. Did we? No. Which meant that, when it came up at the end of the next council meeting, I just made a unilateral decision to go with lilies. Again, I don't like it. But it was necessary because I had to talk to Rhonda at Village Market, who had to get back to me with prices and a timeline... you get the idea. So fewer people had input. I rushed a decision with fewer people.

Does it really matter? In these instances, probably not. But it might in the future.

So, please give me time to think and discuss. Give me time to gather other interested parties so that we can get buy in from more people. We'll make better decision together over time.

Holy Week Schedule:

Maundy Thursday, 17 April, Hope Lutheran Church in Plainwell, 5pm

Good Friday, 18 April, Immanuel, 3pm or Allegan United Methodist, 7pm

Other notes from Pastor Chris:

We continue our collection of personal care (toiletry) items for Grand Ravine residents through Lent:

Shampoo, conditioner, bodywash, deodorant, hand lotion, dental items, toilet paper, facial tissues

We have two lift chairs in our basement! If you need one, or know someone who does, please let me or Sandie or Jim know so that we can coordinate transportation! I will be in touch with Grand Ravine if no one from Immanuel contacts me. 😊

An invitation from Grand Ravine:

A free Tai Chi and Better Sleep class for 13 weeks. It is being offered by MSU Extension and taught by Laura Anderson. It is every Wednesday from 10:30am-12:00pm in our community room at Grand Ravine. People can stand or sit, and she teaches at a slow pace. This is a great opportunity for everyone who would like to attend.

We'll have our annual Easter egg hunt for the children after worship on Easter Sunday. For this, we ask for donations of Easter candy. Please bring all candy that would fit inside a plastic Easter egg to Immanuel by Sunday, 13 April.

Our next confirmation fundraiser will be Sunday, 13 April, after worship. Please stay for a few minutes after Palm Sunday worship to support our confirmands and enjoy lunch and fellowship. Menu will include lasagna, garlic bread, and salad.

There will be no adult Sunday school on Sunday, 13 April (because of the youth fundraiser) or Sunday, 20 April (because of the Easter Egg hunt) or Sunday, 27 April (because pastor is gone).

There will be no confirmation class on Sunday, 6 April or Sunday, 27 April.

Looking ahead a bit:

The baccalaureate committee again asks Immanuel to provide cookies for their service at the high school on Sunday, 18 May. If you are willing / able to make cookies for the seniors and their friends and families, please let Pastor Chris know.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Quilting Group meets every Tuesday in the Quilting Room at 9am.

Bible Study Group meets every Wednesday at 10am in the Study Room. We discuss the Bible Readings for the upcoming Sunday Worship Service.

Praise Team Practice meets every Wednesday at 4pm. Watch the Bulletin and the church web page for changes during the holidays.

Coffee for Vets meets on the second Tuesday of every month in the Fellowship Hall for coffee and fellowship. If you know of a Vet who might like to participate, please invite them.

BIBLE AND BREW will meet Monday April 14th at the Trestle Stop in Hamilton. We meet at **5:30pm** for a meal, fellowship, and a lively discussion on random questions on a wide variety of subjects. It is a lot of fun and we hope to see you there. *Please note the time!*

THE MANDALA GROUP will meet at the church on Monday April 14th at 1pm. If you have an interest in this group or would like to know more about it please see Maryann Fusillo. This can be a very rewarding spiritual journey and we invite you to come.

THE CHURCH COUNCIL will meet Monday evening on April 21st. If you are interested in the activities of the congregation or have an issue you would like to have the council consider, you are welcome to attend this meeting.

BOOK GROUP meets on Monday April 28th at 1pm to discuss *James by Perceval Everett*. Members of the group suggest and decide on which book they will read for the following month at each meeting. Watch the Sunday Bulletin for the announcement of the monthly selection.

Zumba meets in the Fellowship Hall every Wednesday at 6pm and every Saturday at 10am.

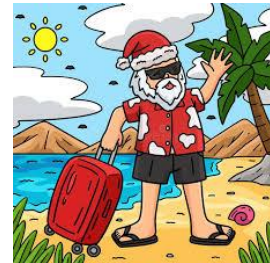
Dinner Nite Out will take place Saturday April 19th at 5:30pm. The place and hosts are TBD. *Please see the sign-up sheet* on the Round Table if you would like to host and choose the restaurant.

LENTEN SOUP SUPPER AND WORSHIP will continue on Thursdays until Holy Week. We begin with a light meal in the fellowship hall at 6pm. There will be signup sheets on the Round Table for this event. The Lenten worship service will follow at 6:45pm. This is a special season where we prayerfully reflect on the sacrifice Christ made for us. Make a point to attend if you are able.



PASTOR CHRIS will be attending the Army Reserve Battle Focused Training in Fort McCoy, Wisconsin from Monday April 7th through Friday April 11th. Please contact Pastor Julia Humenik at United Methodist Church for any Pastoral emergencies.

VACATION TIME: Pastor Chris will be on vacation beginning Monday April 21st and ending Saturday May 3rd. Pastor Jim Foster will lead us in worship for the First Sunday after Easter (March 27th). During this two week period please contact Pastor Julia Humenik at United Methodist Church if there is a pastoral emergency.



NEED A POWER LIFT CHAIR? We have two of them available in our basement. Please let Pastor, Jim Horwath, or Sandi Horwath know so we can arrange transport.



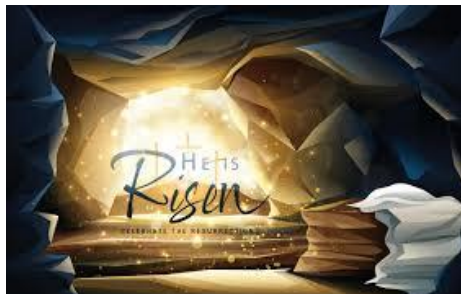
HOLY WEEK: we begin our special worship this week with Palm/Passion Sunday worship at the normal time on April 13th. In ancient times, palm branches symbolized goodness and victory. They were often depicted on coins and important buildings. Solomon had palm branches carved into the walls and doors of the temple.

Palm Sunday commemorates the entrance of Christ into Jerusalem, during which palm branches were placed in his path, before his arrest on Holy Thursday and his crucifixion on Good Friday. It thus marks the beginning of Holy Week, the final week of Lent (Matthew 21:1-11).



Maundy Thursday worship service will be at Hope Lutheran Church on the 17th at 5pm. This is the celebration of when Jesus gathered His disciples together in celebration of the Passover. It is a time to remember when the Israelites in Egypt were instructed to place the blood of a lamb on their doorposts to protect them from the angel of death taking their firstborn children. Today we celebrate Holy Communion as the time when death was finally defeated through the blood of Jesus (Matthew 26:17-30).

Good Friday services will be held here at Immanuel at 3pm on Friday the 18th and at 7pm at the United Methodist Church in Allegan. This is a very somber time for us to reflect on the great love of our God. A God that was willing to sacrifice His only Son for our forgiveness (Matthew 27).



Easter Sunday will be at the normal hour (10am) here at Immanuel and this is the joyous time when we celebrate the resurrection of Christ. ***The tomb is empty,*** and death is totally defeated. The Kingdom of God touches each and every one of us with this blessed message of hope (Matthew 28).

YOUTH FUNDRAISING LASAGNA LUNCHEON

will be Sunday April 13th shortly after the worship service. We plan to use the funds by helping our Confirmants attend a Confirmation Camp at Stoney Lake in July and possibly also send youth to the National ELCA Youth Conference.



THANK YOU: Last month our Grand Ravine Brunch was a big success. They provided the food, and Pastor treated everyone to his famous pancakes. After brunch, we had a great time playing games; Special thanks to Shelley Busfield for donating the bingo set and to Russ Davis for doing a repair to the bingo cage! A big thank you to Joyce Davis and Michele Radke for their wonderful help and support.

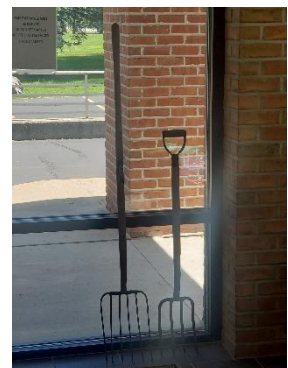
WHITE CAPS BASEBALL: By August the snow will be gone and time for Baseball. The signup sheet for the August 23rd game is on the Round Table. Be sure to get your name down for the limited number of reserved tickets.



CHURCH ANNUAL RUMMAGE SALE: It's time to start setting aside household and clothing items for our annual rummage sale on May 16th and 17th. When donating items please ensure that they are clean and in good condition. Drop-offs will begin on May 1st by placing the items in the Fellowship Hall near the piano. We appreciate your support of our Backpack Ministry. Watch the bulletin for the times to help setup on Thursday May 15th and the take-down Saturday afternoon May 17th.



GOD'S GARDEN will start back up in May so mark your calendars now for May 6th and May 20th. Please join us this season as many hands make the work light. We will have a signup sheet on the Round Table soon.



SS BOOK BOX PROJECT

