From the Pastor

True confessions: I am not always a tidy person. I can tolerate a fair bit of clutter and half-finished projects. I was raised to throw things away cautiously because I never know when I might need it or what this piece of refuse could become. Many things get lost in small piles, but I often find a tiny bit of joy in searching out that bill or button because within the piles are also cards from friends, prayer cards from funerals, and newspaper clippings. Little gifts from the mess.

In my experience, life’s messes often leave little gifts. The stories swapped at the bedside of a dying matriarch. The small recovery celebrations of an ill child. The relationships formed among those who protest injustice. The relief from feeling alone when someone consoles you.

Once, Jesus told a series of stories about the kin-dom of heaven. He compared it weeds sown among wheat, to a tiny seed that grows into a large bush, to a tiny bit of yeast that leavens a huge amount of flour, to a treasure or a pearl worth risking everything for, and, finally, to a net thrown into the sea. The net brings in all kinds of fish - good and bad. The parable continues on to talk about separating the two and throwing out the bad. But, today, I am finding a place of rest in the idea that the net takes in the good and the bad. That’s the mess - the good and the bad.

There is a time for sorting, sure. But sometimes there is great value in just taking in the whole of the thing. There is value in acknowledging that our lives are a great mix of good and bad. Sometimes the greatest gifts we receive are tiny things that come at the crucial moment. Sometimes we only see the good in the rearview mirror. Sometimes we travel from joy to endless joy.

We run into trouble when we spend too much time either trying to find the cause of the bad or the good. We are often taught a lie which staunchly maintains that we get what we deserve: if we are faithful and righteous we will get good things; and if we are unfaithful and sinful we will get bad things. This view works its way into our faith in many devious ways, but if we get hung up on why this terrible thing has happened to us or, conversely, on why we were are so deserving of our good fortune, we actually miss whatever gifts the mess might offer to us.
This is important. As people of faith, we often correct “lucky” or “fortunate” as blessed, which contorts into some expectation that we experience the good in life because of our faithfulness and that the only thing of value is the good we experience. This leaves no room for the cross. The cross isn’t about our deserving. It is a gift of God’s compassion and love for the mess of life. This is what we’re asking for when we pray that God will bless this mess. It is something that this final stanza from the classic Good Friday hymn, “Ah, Holy Jesus.” It reads, “Therefore, kind Jesus, since I cannot pay thee, / I do adore thee, and will ever pray thee; / think on thy pity and thy love unswerving, / not my deserving.”

God bless you,
Pr. Adrianne

Virtual Narthex
Bring your own coffee to the next virtual narthex, Sunday, March 7 at 10:10am. Last month we learned about Zoom bookcases sold to enhance the image of your Zoom background. The topic this month is “What is your favorite Bible story or character?” The link to join is:

New Members
Have you been worshipping with us through the pandemic and want to relate more closely with our congregation? Have you recently moved to the area and are looking for a congregation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to worship with? We are eager for you to join us. Pr. Adrianne will be hosting new member classes in March (Sundays, March 14, 21, 28 at 10:10am on Zoom). If you are interested in participating or in meeting with Pr. Adrianne, please email her (pastoradrianne@gmail.com) or contact the church office.

Youth and Christian Nurture
Faith grows in community. While individual faith practices are important, we know that they are worked out and learned together. During this time of worshiping at home, it has been harder to be present with our congregational community. This has really brought forth the idea of our homes being little churches. Even outside of pandemic times, we know that most faith formation takes place in the home. In The Godbearing Life, authors Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster write about how “teenagers only spend one-fifth of their waking hours with their families...[yet] the unguarded state common to family life makes these hours extraordinarily potent ones.”
During Lent, we were able to provide resources for faith formation at home, as a way both to support families growing in faith together and to unite the separate households of our congregation in a single practice. We provided kits to 26 households which included books for 41 children and youth. Thank you to everyone who helped bring this idea to fruition, especially Sacha Arterberry, Sharon Fawbush, Leah Iversen, Gretchen Moehlmann, Debbie Nixon, Allison Ward and Pr. Adrianne. We are also grateful for the funds in memory of Jane Warner for providing the books for each of our children and youth. Please share any pictures or stories of how you are using your Lent-at-Home kit with Pastor Lecia (pastorleciabeck@gmail.com).

If you received a Lent at Home Kit, be sure to catch the Virtual Children’s Chats on Tuesdays on Facebook (or any time on YouTube) to see the week’s story told by one of our Godly Play teachers.

Confirmation Class will meet on March 7 and 21 at 12:15 pm.

High School Youth will meet on March 14 at 5:30 pm. High school students are invited to monthly meetings on Zoom. We will have time to get to know each other, check in on life and maybe even play some games. We will meet on the second Sunday of each month.

Information will be sent to families a week prior to the gatherings. For more information, please contact Pastor Lecia.
**The season of Lent**
We continue to pray that God will **Bless this Mess** throughout the season of Lent. Please join us on **Wednesdays at 7:00pm** for these remaining themes:

- March 3, Bless the Mess We Made of Ourselves
- March 10, Bless the Mess We Make of our Neighbor’s Life
- March 17, Bless This Mess When We Cannot Save Ourselves
- March 24, Bless...Us

On Wednesdays, we also have **Prayer at Noon on Zoom**. The link to join is: [http://bit.ly/2020lentnoonprayer](http://bit.ly/2020lentnoonprayer). If you cannot join us, but have a prayer request, please contact Pr. Adrianne.

**Holy Week**
Please join us for worship on YouTube throughout Holy Week and Easter:

- **On Palm Sunday**, we will have special dramatic offerings from Pr. Amanda Ghaffarian and Rose House. This service will premiere at 11:00am on YouTube.
- **On Maundy Thursday**, April 1, we will worship and practice the reconciling love of Jesus at 7:00pm on YouTube.
- **On Good Friday**, join us live to adore the cross on YouTube at 7:00pm.
- **On Easter Sunday**, our joyous Festival Service including our virtual choir and guest musicians will premiere on YouTube at 11:00am.

We will also have a **live, in person Easter Sunrise Service** at 8:00am. We are currently compiling a list of Frequently Asked Questions about this service [here](#). Please help us prepare for Easter Worship by answering this [two question survey](#).

**Mission & Ministry at St. Thomas**

**Thank You for Helping Homeless Families**
On Saturday, February 13, and Wednesday, February 17, the Mission Committee sponsored a donation drive on behalf of the New Hope for Families. We asked you to donate supplies for families moving into the shelter and families moving out into permanent housing. You donated so much that we filled up a van on Saturday and left another load in the narthex; then you donated even more on Wednesday! Thank you so much. These supplies will go out during the next weeks to parents who are working for a safe and stable life for their families.
Homelessness and Housing Instability in Bloomington in 2020

On February 3, Beacon Director Rev. Forrest Gilmore and New Hope for Families Director Emily Pike joined us for a forum on how their organizations are fighting the crisis of homelessness and housing instability in Monroe County.

Here are some of the numbers:

- In 2020, Beacon provided 14,000 nights of shelter, served 79,000 meals, and helped 717 people experiencing homelessness and housing instability.

- As of the first week of February 2021, Beacon was hosting 50 people per night at their new low-barrier winter shelter, 60 people per night at their emergency shelter Friends’ Place, and 40 people at their shelter for COVID-19-positive clients. The number of people served has increased 3 times from one year ago.

- In 2020, New Hope for Families hosted 39 families at the Roof (their homes on the west side of Bloomington) and 34 families in motels—600 people. The Nest, their accredited child daycare center, served almost 150 children.

- Forty percent of people experiencing homelessness in the U.S. are families with children. Children are most likely to experience homelessness before the age of five, and especially before the age of one.

Most immediate needs include: twin sheet sets, liquid soap, shampoo and conditioner, laundry detergent and dryer sheets, unscented hypoallergenic baby wipes, disinfecting wipes, new bed pillows, diapers (size 3 and up) and any size Pull-Ups.

You can also drop off or mail a check to the church office. Please make it out to St. Thomas Lutheran Church with New Hope for Families in the memo line. We remain so very grateful for the generous support shown by this congregation.

MISSION ENDOWMENT FUND (MEF)

The MEF committee had its quarterly meeting on February 7. They elected to provide funds to Beacon, Inc., Bethlehem Lutheran Church New Orleans Louisiana, New Hope for Families, and St. Vincent DePaul.

The St. Thomas Mission Endowment Committee encourages and accepts proposals for programs or projects not otherwise funded by the congregation’s budget or general fund. The primary purpose of the MEF is to provide funding for special needs at St. Thomas Lutheran Church, local outreach, and worldly missions.

Proposals for the next quarter should be submitted by April 30. Contact the church office for an application.
Thank you for supporting our Guatemalan Sister Parish this spring by shopping fair trade at SERRV International!
Shop this custom shopping link, and we'll earn 20% for our organization.
PLUS: Use promocode SESPRING21 for FREE SHIPPING on orders $50+ when you place your order March 3-17. Be sure to check out SERRV's popular Easter collection—this is the perfect time to send an Easter gift to a loved one.

Check that you see St. Thomas in an orange banner at the top of the page to ensure your order is being applied to this fundraiser. If you would like help making an order, please contact Kaye Hill.

Mission Book Group, Tuesday, March 16, 7:00 p.m.

Please join us on March 16 at 7 p.m. for a virtual discussion of *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, by Matthew Desmond. This Pulitzer-Prize winning book speaks, through the story of eight Milwaukee families facing the loss of their homes, to one of the ongoing crises in our nation. The evening is sponsored by the Mission Committee for the entire congregation, as part of our yearlong emphasis on homelessness and housing insecurity.

We'll read the first section of the book to begin our discussion (107 pages). If you'd like to join us but prefer not to purchase a copy, copies of the book are available at the church; please call the office to come in and pick one up. The Zoom link for the meeting is below, as is a link for an online reading guide.

Join Zoom Meeting
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89285731149?pwd=WnInSERWSXEwL01XZUJDVF3WHpHZz09
Meeting ID: 892 8573 1149
Passcode: 515913
Access the online reading guide at:

INTERESTED IN TAKING A JOURNEY WITH ME?
I am passionate about understanding the history and roots of racism in our country. I have lots of tools to start this exploration and would like a few like-minded folk to travel this path with me. There is no agenda other than to begin learning and see what happens. If interested, please email me at hingerso@indiana.edu....thanks, Helen Ingersoll
The St. Thomas Community Garden

Only six open plots left in the garden for the upcoming 2021 season. If you’ve been thinking you would like to grow a few veggies this summer now is the time to sign-up. These plots will not last long. New gardeners are welcome to sign-up for information and to apply for these open garden plots. Contact Kaye Hill at kayehill48@gmail.com and she will send you the STLC Community Garden Contract and a 2021 Registration form.

Prayer Chain

Want to join our St Thomas email prayer chain? Do you have prayer requests? Contact Susan Colston skcolston@aol.com for further information.

Lutheran Campus Ministry at IU

Spring is almost here. From birds returning to flowers blooming, there are signs all around us of renewal, resurrection, hope and new beginnings. It is no wonder then that Spring is the time of year when we tend to fling the doors open wide and inhale deep breaths of fresh air. We sweep out the dust inside our homes that has accumulated during the colder months. We relish the feeling of accomplishment when we donate our unwanted possessions to those who may need them more and we smile when we finally organize that space that had been previously cluttered.

Spring though is not just a time for us to think about cleaning our homes, but about cleaning up our lives as well. We can start by throwing the rubbish from our lives- things such as hate or insecurity that cause us and the others around us harm. We can dust off our Bibles and journals and use them as tools in strengthening our relationship with God. We can recycle our joy through a phone call or letter to a friend telling them of good things happening in the world. We can donate our time and from our abundance to help out where needed. We can organize and declutter our schedules so that those things/people that are important in our lives- our family, our faith, and our friends- are given the time and attention that they each deserve.

Spring cleaning takes effort and energy- both in our homes and in our lives. We don’t have to do everything all in one day and we don’t have to do everything alone either. If you need help, please don’t hesitate to reach out. May God guide you and give you strength.

Peace,
Pastor Amanda Ghaffarian †
The Indiana Citizens Redistricting Commission (ICRC) is hosting virtual meetings to receive public testimony from Hoosiers on how to redraw electoral maps for state and U.S. Congressional districts.

Help the ICRC identify important communities of interest in our region to make sure the new districts allow everyone an equal voice at the State House and in the U.S. Congress.

Be a part of this important conversation and let your voice be heard! We invite you to register to attend this important meeting for U.S. Congressional District 9.

**Action Requested**—Click the link below to register for the **U.S. Congressional District 9 ICRC Meeting** on March 10, 2021 from 7:00-9:00 p.m. EST. (A Zoom link will be sent after you register.) [https://tinyurl.com/ypq2kam2](https://tinyurl.com/ypq2kam2)