



Christ • Communion • Community

CASCADIAN WEEKLY

December 31, 2021

Week 94

A MESSAGE FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Cascade Christian Church,

It is that week between Christmas and New Year's Day - a time to catch our breath, to remember all that was good over the holy days and holidays, a time to look back over the last year, a time to anticipate and plan for the year ahead.

As I look back on 2021, I am amazed. It was such a difficult year with the church closed part of the time, then reopening and using all kinds of COVID protocols. It was a difficult year with so many funerals, with so many of you grieving a deep loss. And yet, even in the hardships of the last 12 months, it has been a very good year by the grace of God

I hardly know where to begin in counting all of these blessings, but thank God for these joys and mercies:

- We have gained members and new friends
- We have seen the church remain financially stable
- We have reached out in new and meaningful ways to those hurting through Weeks of Compassion, the Refugee Resettlement Project, ACCESS-6, Operation Santa Claus, Rippling Hope, the Caribbean Children's Foundation, Esther's Hope, and the mission ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).
- We have seen a wonderful increased participation in our children and youth ministries.
- We had some of the biggest sessions of church camp at Crystal Conference Center in decades.
- Our worship team, under the leadership of Jacob Relph, includes a full tech team and multiple musicians, making it possible to live stream our services near and far.
- We have resumed soup lunches, had another wonderful Thanksgiving take-out dinner, and have well attended support groups including Overeaters Anonymous, AA, Al-Anon, and Grief Share.
- Events like potlucks, game nights, Trunk or Treat, the Christmas Workshop, and a marriage seminar all took place.
- Our adult classes and women's ministries are strong
- We have an involved Board, headed by Jeff VanStrien, and the committees are empowered to do God's work in this time and place.
- And we have a wonderful staff - I am so grateful for the gifts, talents, and dedication of Mel Behm, Jacob Relph, Caitlin Oke, Michael Dirksen, Adam Carlson, Mark Langenbach, Nancy Gaskell, Carol Rienstra, Jane Klein, Katrina Rootes, Lindsey Lathrop, and Reba Cole.

While most of the blessings begin with the word "We" - the blessing is from God, and clearly God is not done with us. God still has work for us to do in such a time as this. By binding together in the unity of the love of God, together, as sisters and brothers in Christ, we can confidently go into the next year as we pick up our cross and walk at Jesus' side. I do not know what is ahead, but I know God is already there, and that gives me joy and confidence as we take the leap of faith and jump forward with Jesus. Thank you and thank God for a great year, and together let's see what the Good Lord has in store for us to do in 2022.

Keep the faith, and God's blessings to you in the New Year - Jill

WEEKLY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

<u>Sunday</u> _(1/2).	Sunday School - 9:30 AM Crib Room - 9:30 AM Worship Service - 9:30, 11:00 AM
<u>Monday</u> _(1/3).	Alcoholics Anonymous - 8:00 PM (Coffee House)
<u>Tuesday</u> _(1/4).	Men's Group - 6:30 AM (Coffee House) Women's Bible Study - 9:00 AM (Coffee House) Young Adult Group - 7:00 PM
<u>Wednesday</u> _(1/5).	Overeaters Anonymous - 3:30 PM (Coffee House) Wednesday Night Classes - 6:30 PM Alcoholics Anonymous - 8:00 PM (Coffee House)
<u>Thursday</u> _(1/6).	Alcoholics Anonymous - 8:00 PM (Coffee House)
<u>Friday</u> _(1/7).	Church Office Closed Open Talk Group - 7:30 AM (Coffee House)
<u>Saturday</u> _(1/8).	

**Financial giving for
the week ending in
12/26/2021:
Budgeted: \$10,652
Given: \$9,053**

IN MEMORIAL

This year in lieu of donating poinsettias in honor of a loved one, we asked for donations to help Afghan refugees as a thoughtful way to remember loved ones while supporting those in need. All of the donations are greatly appreciated. We would like to acknowledge those who gave in memory of a loved one;

- Mark and Denise Pray donated children's hat, mittens, and scarf in memory of Grace Hoekstra and Patricia Crame
- A monetary donation of \$50 in memory of Harold Koetje
- Numerous gifts were given - in fact, more than we had requested. Thank you to all who gave in memory or honor of others, who did not list their names.

Thank you everyone who donated to help to bring the light and comfort of Jesus to our new neighbors!

GENERAL NEWS

DOOR UNLOCK REQUESTS

As we are still in the first year with our new locking system, please remember that requests for doors to be unlocked need to be scheduled. If you need to schedule an event or a meeting please contact Caitlin Oke at the Church office at (616) 949-1360 or office@cascadechristian.com. If you would like your event or meeting in the Cascadian as well please let Caitlin know by Tuesday of the week that you want it published.

JANUARY 2: A NEW YEAR, A NEW PARTNERSHIP

On January 2 we will be celebrating our new partnership as the Michigan Region of the Christian Church partners with our neighboring Regions of Illinois and Wisconsin. Regional Minister Eugene James retired on December 31, and our new Regional Minister, Teresa Dulyea Parker, will be preaching on January 2. Services will be at 9:30 in the sanctuary and at 11:00 in the chapel.

BOY SCOUT TROOP 334 CHRISTMAS TREE RECYCLING

Our Scout Troop 334 will be providing Christmas tree and wreath recycling this year. Leave your tree or wreath at the curb and they will pick it up and recycle it for you at only \$10 per item. This is a great fund raiser for the Troop, and a way to protect our environment. The pick-up days will be Sunday, January 2 and 9. Please contact the Troop at www.bsa334.com to set up your pickup time.

NEW BIBLE STUDY, WEDNESDAY NIGHT CLASS AT 6:30PM

The Wednesday night adult Bible study will resume on January 5.

The class will be meeting on the second floor of the Education Building, and will be moving across the hall to the 3rd-5th grade classroom.

We will be studying "A Handbook for Today's Disciples" by Duane Cummins, looking at who we are as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Join us for one or all of the sessions that interest you:

- January 5: The Disciples - A Historical Sketch
- January 12: The Disciples and Christian Thought on the Trinity and Scripture
- January 19: The Disciples and Worship, and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper
- January 26: The Disciples and Missions, Unity, and Moral-Ethical Issues

GRIEF SHARE

The Grief Share support group will resume on Thursday, January 6 from 10:00-11:30AM. The support group will meet in person in the Coffee House, covering all aspects of grieving, using the excellent materials provided by Grief Share. For more information contact Jill at jforton@cascadechristian.com or call the church office.

CHILDRENS MINISTRIES

WEDNESDAY NIGHTS

Our Wednesday Night Youth Group for elementary kids is up and running again. We are doing our own unique lesson, playing some fun games, doing crafts, and having a great snack each week. Come learn more about God, and hang out with some of your friends from Elementary Camp!

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Starting in the new year we will be going through the 10 Commandments. Come right up to the elementary room at 9:30AM (we will not be dismissing from Church). We hope to see you there!

THANK YOU

Our Sunday School class has been collecting an offering since October, and we were able this month to buy stuffed animals, sensory toys, and a book for children at Helen DeVos Children's hospital! Please continue talking with your child about generosity and what it means to offer what we have to God and to others.

MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH GROUP

EVENT SIGN UP -- IMPORTANT!!

We are so excited to get youth group underway. We will be going to Spring Hill for a winter retreat, Mackinac Island, on a mission trip, and doing some fundraisers to help pay for these events as well. If you'd like to help out or you know that your child would like to participate, please fill out the form. Let Michael know if you have any questions.



SUNDAY SCHOOL

This year we are working our way through the whole Bible. Come right up to the youth room at 9:30AM (we will not be dismissing from Church). We hope to see you there!

MEMBERSHIP CLASS - MAKING DISCIPLES

6th-12th graders are invited to take part in a life changing class here at Cascade Christian Church. We will host a class called "Making Disciples" and in this class you learn what it really means to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ. Classes will be held Thursdays in January (replacing Be Bold) 4:15-5:45 PM. If you are interested in this class please email Adam at acarlson@cascadechristian.com or Jill at jforton@cascadechristian.com

CABERFAE SKI TRIP - POSTPONED

The Caberfae ski trip was postponed and will now take place Saturday, February 12. We will meet at the church at 10 AM, the cost is \$40 per person. If you would like to go please contact Michael Dirksen. His email is mdirksen@cascadechristian.com

12.26.2021 SERMON: ENDING THE CYCLE

Hello everyone! Peace of Christ be with you! For those of you that don't know me, my name is Michael Dirksen and I am the high school youth leader here at Cascade Christian Church. I don't normally preach, but I have before, and they tend to be pretty to the point, so for those of you who were hoping for a long lecture, I am sorry to disappoint. The last time I stood up here I talked about endings and beginnings, and how God is the God of both. Well, today we're all facing an ending. It's one we face every year which gives it a certain familiarity, but it gives us the opportunity to think back on this past year and reflect... and as I reflect on this past year, I think about how it has been one absolutely wild year. For the Church, there has been many signs of new life. Speaking as the youth leader, we had many kids participate in both our school year and summer programming. But that's not all. We had many of our old ministries, soup and sandwich, all the bible studies, and much more come back to life after adapting to the virus for so long. So in that regard - this year has been full of signs of Hope! However, more personally, many people online have referred to 2021 as "2020 Season 2" and are bidding it farewell accordingly. My guess is, if you're anything like me, the year has certainly had it's ups and downs, but 2021, like 2020, was not the year I expected. It's been a year where many of us had expectations that were certainly not met - perhaps even more so than normal new year expectations. It's been a year where a pandemic, we all hoped would end long ago, continues to devastate communities across this country. It's forced many of us to be isolated for far too long, and that has lead, in many ways to a divisiveness and anger at our neighbors that would not be at the alarmingly high levels we see today. So that's what I am here to talk about today: I'm here to talk about that divisiveness and anger.

If you feel as if the level of vitriol between people right now is more than usual you're not alone. Conflict is happening between people that were formerly best of friends, seemingly out of nowhere, and the idea of forgiveness has become so foreign in some spaces, we almost don't know where to begin. Almost all adults in the US in one survey indicated this trend that we are becoming a more divided and less forgiving society. First, thinking about this from a macro perspective -- in some ways, it's a product of the internet for two reasons. First, the internet, by connecting a bunch of likeminded individuals, ends up convincing all of those likeminded individuals of an idea much more radical than any of them came into the conversation believing. This is called group polarization, and it happens to everyone. Second, everyone's wrongs are now recorded online and can be pulled up with a simple google search, and because the internet is a new phenomenon - never before in human history have, we had these "global communities" of people who we will never meet in person. All of these trends have illustrated something to me for a long time: we don't have any sort of consensus around HOW to publicly forgive someone. You see this all the time: some variation of "the apology wasn't good enough" often lends itself not to a better apology, but increased indignation from both sides. Thus, the conflict continues. And while conflict is an inevitable part of the human experience - and is not always bad - it is how we respond to conflict that can make it either constructive or destructive. And the type of divisiveness and anger people are referring to is precisely this destructive conflict. While the intensity of this conflict is certainly new, this type of conflict is not. People have written about this type of destructive conflict for centuries. Romeo and Juliet and Hatfields and McCoys are both stories about how this exact type endless destructive conflict can escalate in such a way that the conflict becomes so divorced from the original injury that no one even remembers why we are fighting in the first place. And either way - living in a peaceful society - requires that we learn how to forgive without getting into these endless cycles of retaliation. The author Liz Bruenig puts it this way: "Forgiveness is the single most morally challenging task of the Christian life. It is also the key to a peaceful human life, which can only be attained through the ending of a cycle of retribution."

12.26.2021 SERMON: ENDING THE CYCLE

While finding a public ethic for forgiveness is too large of a task for me to accomplish today – talking about forgiveness in a personal manner seems much more reasonable – and a good first step towards finding that public ethic for forgiveness. Whether you're online or not, you personally can probably think of a time when someone offended you, wronged you, or an otherwise broken relationship. 2021 was a big year for that. Everyone has these types of wounds. And some are small, kind of petty, you know, this is especially true for some of the feuds that broke out in 2021. But for a lot of people, these wounds are big and serious and deep wounds. Forgiveness might not even seem like an option.

Yet, the answer in the bible is very clear – if someone slaps you – turn the other cheek. In essence, Jesus here is describing exactly how to end that endless cycle of violence and retribution... But that is much easier said than done. If it were that easy – this would be where I would end this sermon. Sometimes you thought you were over the injury and had forgiven the person but now you're more focused on it than ever and the wound is reopened, and it hurts more than ever, and then it becomes a day or a week or 10 years later and now it's become a part of you. Sometimes it's big things, sometimes it's small things, sometimes it's something that you don't even know why you still think about it. Sometimes it's people you haven't seen in forever and sometimes it's your closest friends or family. You try not to think about it, but sometimes that makes you think about the situation more.

Sometimes – it's all you can think about from the moment it happens. However the injury impacts your life – it becomes immediately clear that however big or small the wound is, the injury, and how to respond to it, now controls you. We can speculate and try to figure out why all this happens, but what we really want is to be free of this. To be alive, whole. We don't want what other people did to us to define our lives.

From here, our minds usually move towards one place: revenge. Revenge becomes our only hope, and we aren't free. Now revenge has gained some cultural meaning that insinuates it might be this big, grandiose action that you take, but revenge takes on many, many forms. Again, the bible has a quick answer in Romans 12:19, which is the bible verse for today's message, where it says "My dear friends, don't try to get even, but instead leave room for God." But again, if it were that easy, I could end my sermon here. Unfortunately, revenge is embedded within our culture. You can see it in the way we talk when we say things like "They'll learn." "I'll teach them." But what is revenge really saying? It's saying, I don't trust God to deal with this situation. I can't turn this person, situation, whatever you're dealing with over to God, so I am going to take matters into my own hands because I can do God's job better than God can."

When we start to think about our own history with revenge, it's easy to isolate the times we've sought out revenge to just a few times, but whether you've slipped into this mindset once, or thousands of times, looking back on it, you begin to realize how absolutely insane it makes us behave. Probably my favorite example is the cold shoulder. It's so trivial we don't even think of it as revenge. You wronged me so I am not going to speak to you. How many times have you done this only to realize the other person didn't even realize they did something wrong? Or the other person didn't even notice you weren't speaking to them? I mean, has that ever really evened the score? Revenge, in this situation, only hurt you, and in the end it neither satisfied nor "taught them the lesson" you were hoping. This points us to the bigger truth here that revenge doesn't work, does it?

12.26.2021 SERMON: ENDING THE CYCLE

So if revenge doesn't work, what does? I hope forgiveness is the obvious answer, but I'm still going to try to convince you. So let's look back on our initial goal: what we really want is to be free of this. To be alive, whole. We don't want what other people did to us to define our lives. This then explains why freedom is so essential in all of Jesus' teachings. Right at the heart of his message is the idea that God has forgiven us of our sins. Again, Jesus gives us the answer to how to end this cycle of violence when he confronts the crowd who want to stone the woman when he says "you who are without sin, cast the first stone." Jesus stops the cycle of violence right then and there. Furthermore, he illustrates how he doesn't hold any of our past against us, because none of us have clean hands. With Jesus, there is no condemnation, no list of wrongs, no judgement. The cross, in one light, is God saying "I don't hold your past against you." Some people, probably because of our own way WE deal with problems when someone wrongs us, believe God will act in the same manner. They believe that God is just waiting to punish us for any wrong thing we do. Even that way of thinking transforms the way we view a relationship with God because where love once was, is replaced by paranoia that if we step out of line at all, BAM - judgement. This is why you get people attributing things like personal injury, failure, or even global issues like a pandemic, people assume is God punishing us. But this is not the kind of picture that Jesus paints of God at all. Jesus talks to us about a God who wants to be in relation with us. A god who is full of love, grace, and mercy. He talks about the kingdom of heaven being like a mustard seed, a dragnet in the ocean, and a treasure, but nothing about this paranoid person waiting to condemn us. That seems to me to be human inclination, not divine.

So when I forgive someone, I am giving them what God has given me. Have you ever heard someone say "what they did to me was so wrong, I can never forgive them." My question for you is this: what if God said that?

Forgiveness does not diminish the wrong that was done to you. God is not asking you to diminish that, nor am I. You can forgive and still be hurt. You can forgive and still have boundaries. You can forgive and not be able to be around someone. Those are healthy boundaries. But what you cannot do is forgive and seek to continue the cycle of violence. Forgiveness means you are able to move on, to wish them well - even if you maintain those boundaries.

There's a popular TV show on Netflix (which will remain unnamed...) right now that I just sat down to watch now that I'm on Christmas break. In the opening episode, the main character meets two other characters, both of whom try to enlist his help to seek revenge on the other. The first one wants this simply because the other has been trying to kill him for some time. The second one tells him a story about how the first character killed her whole family, how she was a princess, and framed the story in such a way by suggesting that he stole her whole life away, and how she needs to kill him because it is the only way to achieve justice. The main character then points out that he did not steal her life, but she's doing that herself every day she chooses to make revenge her life. This puts a pin in the point that you've probably heard before - forgiveness is ultimately not about the other person at all - but about you, it's about setting you free.

As the band comes up, I just have one final point. I don't know what you're carrying around. How long you've been carrying it around. I don't know if it's a small grievance, a big grievance, or a grievance that you have thought "I will never forgive them." But I'm here to tell you that God did not create us to carry these burdens around. God created us to be free of those burdens! So I am here to ask you: Are there people you need to forgive? What do you need to do to forgive those people? Maybe it's a phone call, an email, a text, a conversation, or maybe it's just here, right now, between you and God, letting it go. The year 2021 is about to end, and in this ending, is God calling you to a new beginning of a relationship that is broken? Is God calling you to end a cycle of violence that has been going on so long you don't even remember what the initial injury was? I think the answer is probably yes.

So may you forgive, as you have been forgiven, and in the process free yourself too.