

Rejoice & Renew. 28 January 2024. Kick-off sermon for Sanctuary Renewal Process and Campaign.

Well friends, it's been a while since I've started a sermon with some quality puns. (Actually, I not sure I've ever shared QUALITY puns). But for each one of these, please feel free to groan out loud.

Stealing someone's coffee is called . . . a mugging

Today I held the door open for a clown. It was a nice . . . jesture.

Pasteurize: too far to see.

No matter how much you push the envelope, it will still be stationary.

Whoever invented "knock-knock" jokes should get a no-bell prize.

Energizer bunny arrested: charged with battery.

And. . . I put my grandma on speed dial. I call that insta-gram.

Instagram. Grandmothers. And grandmothers mean mothers in law. Now, I'm glad to say I've got a terrific mother-in-law. LuAnne's mother is dynamite. Flexible, supportive, courageous after losing her husband. Bakes delicious cookies and blooms a gorgeous garden. But apparently out in society, some feel relations with in-laws can be a little interesting. A Catholic Moms group sees it as an act of faith to offer tips for dealing with mothers in law. Whole books have been written about how they can be the "other woman" in one's marriage. It's probably good to know there's actually a "Mothers in Law Day" in October!

What was disciple Simon Peter's mother-in-law like? Asking the question reminds us that some of Jesus' disciples were actually married already when called to follow. Simon, who would have his name changed to Peter later by Jesus, was one of them. My GIFT Group has been moving through the Chosen series and maybe some of you have seen the episodes that share the marriage tension that might have existed between Simon Peter and his wife. Not only because of Simon Peter traveling with Jesus. But also with the extra energy and concern we all face concerning sick relatives.

Did Peter's mother-in-law permanently live with them in his house? Or was she just there because of her sickness? We don't know. But either way, the fact that she is sick matters to Jesus. She's a child of God; so she matters, plain and simple. But Jesus also probably cares because she is

family with one of his team. And who knows—if Simon Peter has children—she’s also important as grandma.

So that’s why when Jesus leaves the synagogue in Capernaum, he walks a bit south in the village and pays a visit to Simon Peter’s mother in law. She’s down with a very concerning fever. But verse 30 indicates that Jesus takes her by the hand, lifts her up, and the fever breaks. And she feels so re-energized, Scripture says that “she starts serving them.”

Now I have to pause and smile, wondering if those troubled by the patriarchy of Scripture—which indeed it exudes simply because of the era and culture which it captures—will say, “You’ve got to be kidding me. The lady is sick in bed for who knows how long. And Jesus heals her—and she’s got to start serving them? Come on.” You could have some fun debating that, I know. But I like to see this not as a sexist statement but a spiritual statement.

Really, for me, these two verses are a fantastic summary of Christian theology. We are sick and not functioning as we’d like or should. Jesus finds us and heals us. We get to serve Jesus and his friends in grateful response. (Repeat)

It’s not surprising, therefore, that this very house still stands today. For 2,000 years, it’s been important for Christians to maintain this holy site where Christians and remember the good news that all of us, like Peter’s mother-in-law were sick and not functioning as we’d like or should. Jesus finds us and heals us. We get to serve Jesus and his friends in grateful response.

Let me show you the location of the house. On the left a map of Israel. You can see in the bottom left corner of the map the Gaza Strip and the area outside it would be the site of the kibbutzim, both areas of indescribable horror as we know. But if we move our eyes up north, following the Jordan River vertically, we find the fishing and trading village of Capernaum, on the north side of the sea of Galilee. And like it or not, you have to endure me sharing once more that our COS group was so moved when we got to visit this site on our Holy Land trip this June.

Do we know 100% that it was THE house? No, we don’t. But archeology tells us it certainly was a Galilean home of the first century. I’ll spare you the details for another time, but in excavations, they found an octagon-

shaped Byzantine church built over the home. And now, a church built in 1990 allows visitors to not only peer down an open space into the site, but provides a dynamic worship space where millions of faith pilgrims have been able to gather for worship, prayer, and reflection. It's a holy place where Jesus, still today, shows up to lift his people up in neat ways.

Indeed, I'm grateful that people of faith in the past built that church and gave our COS group a chance to have our faith deepened there this June as we prayed and reflected. Likewise, I'm so appreciative that brothers and sisters in Christ before me built wonderful worship spaces at St. Luke's Lutheran in Oak Ridge, Oregon; St. John the Divine and Good Samaritan Lutheran on the south side of Chicago; Gethsemane Lutheran in Columbus, Ohio; the National Cathedral in D.C.; Bethesda and Tabor Lutheran in Connecticut; Living Word Lutheran and Epiphany Lutheran in Ohio; and here in Georgia, Christ Our Shepherd Lutheran Church. I praise God for all the faithful before me who provided my family and me holy places where Jesus finds me in special ways and lifts me up, in the midst of God's people gathered.

And now we find ourselves in 2024, on the cusp of our 50th anniversary at COS, with the opportunity to refresh the worship space the Lord has used dynamically for so much joy and life over these 5 decades.

Some of you know all about this project, some of you are hearing this for the first time. Some of you were at the big presentation on October 17; some of you will come to the presentation at noon on February 4. Some of you are thrilled we completed a refresh of our contemporary worship space a few years ago, even though we've got a few more ideas to finish). And some of you are so glad that, in your mind, that we are FINALLY responding to congregational surveys of the past prioritizing investment in dynamic worship—including the lighting, technology, seating, and surroundings in our traditional sanctuary--that foster beauty and “wow factor.”

Most have heard how David Beecher in 2022 brought together a Team of 20 interested leaders who then contracted with liturgical architect and designer Alberto Portela to suggest a plan, which was then tailored further to our preferences and hopes. Once Larry Peterson settled in last summer, he was able to join Leslie Klein and Don Livingston, to finish the proposal that

was endorsed by the congregation and council, and is now ready to be implemented Monday, April 15. You can almost feel the excitement in our first lesson about Solomon's plans for the temple design from 1 Kings first lesson. And likewise, there is strong excitement about the details of the COS plan as well. So many cool features: classy, sturdy worship chairs that will include extra cushion as a result of the feedback many of you gave. 😊 LED displays allowing us to display banner like motifs, or stained-glass images from cathedrals around the word, or moving images of flowing water or wind-swept grain fields to support the sacramental moments of baptism and communion. A new chancel configuration, the front of the steps which will be adorned with beautiful blue and green stones, also peppered artistically with stones we are having sent from the Sea of Galilee and maybe even Bethlehem and Jerusalem. I've just reached out to a friend in Wittenberg Germany and we'll see if we can include a stone or two from the birthplace of our Reformational heritage. More details to come. But we thank all of you who gave input on a plan that might not be perfect in the eyes of everybody, but represents the best of our community.

And now we've got an opportunity to support this project together. To rebuild Notre Dame after it burned cost 760 million dollars. To refurbish the National Cathedral in the last few years is 32 million. Good news—we are not dealing with those budgets. To complete this phase and provide a little for the one to come, our team is shooting for \$300,000. More good news is that we already have \$110,000 in hand thanks to some dedicated funds and special gifts already received! So, \$190,000 is our remaining goal.

And our Rejoice & Renew resource raising team has constructed a pyramid of potential. A plan for how all of us, with each family unit determining the gift that's right for them, can cross the finish line together. LuAnne and I have decided that we'd like to be one of the 5 gifts required at the \$10,000 level. And if you don't mind, I'd like to share some principles guiding our decision, which we consider an act of faith and discipleship, just as we decide how to worship, treat other people, pray, forgive, etc. And who knows, maybe these will be helpful to some of you folks as you pray about your gift, which all of us will be invited to offer March 3.

1. Gratitude. When I first got to Camp Luther, it was so much fun to have a pool in the middle of camp. But as the bluff eroded, a new

- pool had to be built. And we were so grateful for all the good times we enjoyed in the old pool, LuAnne and I, even though our gift wasn't very large as college counselors, decided, hey, we want to be in on the new pool in a spirit of gratitude. In all things, grateful to God
2. Expectation. I know the joy of seeing my kids baptized, singing and acting in worship, confirming their faith, hearing and growing in the word the Word of the Lord. So, it's fun to dream about what God will do in the future. I expect God will do amazing, life-giving works with a freshened, re-energized sanctuary that speaks of a God of hospitality and creativity for my own family but also in the lives of people I don't even know yet.
 3. Urge to splurge. I remember when I bought LuAnne's engagement ring. Although I can be "frugal" when it comes to eating out or buying new clothes, I knew that was a time to splurge a bit. Not every day does a guy get to buy a wedding ring that his bride will look at for decades. And not every year, does a congregation get to put its stamp on a worship space that our Triune God will use for kingdom purposes. There are certain times in life that you want to do it right! And LuAnne and I think this is one of them for our COS.
 4. Related to that a bit, is Sacrifice. A key story in King David's life is when a citizen is willing to just give him the land, the cattle, and fire wood that David needs to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. And King David is appreciative, but almost a little insulted. "I will not offer a gift to the Lord that costs me nothing." LuAnne and I try to use the same approach. We try to stretch in our giving to the Lord, to the point where we are saying NO to some important things so we can say YES to something even more important. And we think this sanctuary renewal is one of those holy occasions. Giving at a "sacrificial" level for the Lord's work.
 5. Another principle is "supplement, not substitute." LuAnne and I know we don't help the church at all if we simply take some of what we had already committed to the Annual Ministry Plan for COS core ministries and just divert it to the sanctuary renewal project. No, we understand this is a special gift, an above and beyond gift on top of what we've discerned should be our regular stewardship of what the Lord provides us each week.
 6. Beauty of the Baton. Now maybe some of you are like LuAnne who worships primarily in the Fellowship Hall. Why should contemporary worshipers help fund a project in the traditional sanctuary? Well, LuAnne

knows she didn't give one dime to the Fellowship Hall renewal; in fact, it was completely financed by a generous gift from someone who worshiped exclusively in the sanctuary, who wanted her gift to be used equally in both our beautiful worship spaces. When you've got a chance to take the baton from faithful generations of the past and run your leg of the race so that the race can continue strong in the future, you do it. We're all in this together!

7. Joy. We rejoice that God is entrusting us. Scripture tells us that God didn't allow King David to build the temple in Jerusalem. But Solomon received that honor. What joy it is to know that 2024 is holy time. God is allowing us to do something really neat in God's kingdom, that will endure for decades to come and bless the lives of thousands. So, let's do it.

Well, from mothers-in-law to "taking care of mother," the phrase Interim Pastor Dave shared 15 years ago, challenging COS to make sure its facility reflects the vibrancy of its people, we've covered a lot of ground today.

But whether it's this past Wednesdays Word from Wiese, today's gospel, or Sanctuary Renewal, we're talking about Jesus entering into holy spaces to lift people up. Let's rejoice that Jesus does so. And ask how we, in grateful response, can get up and serve him, like Peter's mother-in-law, and help him along the way. Let's Rejoice and Renew! In Jesus' name, Amen.

Mark 1:29-39

²⁹As soon as [Jesus and the disciples] left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

³²That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

³⁵In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." ³⁸He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." ³⁹And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.