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[Bethlehem Lutheran Church - Davey](https://www.facebook.com/BethlehemLutheranChurchDavey)

Our Little Free Pantry—Take what you need, leave what you can. If pantry is full, take food to Judy H’s house and put in tub. Dry goods only for winter. Grocery gift cards can also be purchased—since space is limited, this is a great option. Thank you Larry for building it! And thank you Mike and Jeff for the install!



Bethlehem Lutheran Church
PO Box 96
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A Contemplative Advent

To be Christian is to be transformed from the inside out. Many Christians instead view discipleship as a sort of transactional relationship – if I’m good, or if I believe strongly enough – I’ll be saved. What exactly that means to people is too often flattened to “I’ll go to heaven when I die.”

That’s where our heads go, because human nature, at least in Western culture, is to be transactional – tit for tat. That isn’t legitimate Christian discipleship. To be Christian means to fall so in love with the God we meet in Jesus that it changes our whole worldview. It is work done by the Holy Spirit within us. Contemplative practices are basically postures we take that allow that work to happen. It’s what happens when we move out of our heads and stop thinking so much and just let God’s love for us change us.

I do not believe this is an optional way to discipleship. When we are guided by transformative love, we can truly carry Christ’s love to the world. When we are guided instead by this transactional God – especially if that God is one who keeps measuring us and finding us wanting – we treat the rest of the world the same way. We begin to judge whom God loves and whom God doesn’t. We make rules and rigid boundaries and create our own image of God – to put it in Lutheran terms, we see even God’s grace as law instead of gospel.

That way of doing discipleship is killing the church. It’s also contributing to some of the massive polarization and downright evil in this so-called Christian nation.

As much as I love to learn and think, and as important as I believe it is, if how we approach faith doesn’t make us feel more loved by God, if it doesn’t lead us to love God more and love our neighbor more, then at best it’s kind of a waste, and at worst it makes us mean.

For that more loved based faith, we need an uncluttered time and space to connect with that spirit of love. Create a little sacred space – a particular chair, your patio, a special room. Set aside a time – this can be the hardest part. But try to find even 5 minutes a day in which you will be uninterrupted. If you’ve got kids and this seems impossible, invite them to join you. Kids often do better at contemplative practices than we give them credit for.

There are some formal contemplative practices that we’ve learned a bit about over the years, and we will continue that. This can’t just be a solo venture – spending a little time when we’re gathered for worship to reflect silently can bring a healthy vibrancy to the congregation as we more and more experience God’s presence. This year for Advent, we’re using *visio divina* – meditation on a piece of art.

You could do that at home. Find a sacred image online, or in a book, or even in your Bible if you’ve got one with pictures. But remember, sacred doesn’t have to be religious. Part of contemplation is recognizing that the sacred lies often in the ordinary.

(continued)

Or just open your Bible and read a short passage – in a time of silence afterward, ask what catches your attention? Read it again – is there some connection with your life? Read it again...afterwards, just meditate in silence on the passage. As you finish, use a worded prayer to ask God for whatever has emerged.

Those are probably the best beginner practices. There are also prayer walks, and other prayers with movement. There's Centering Prayer, and various forms of meditation on a word or phrase. Worship and the sacraments can be contemplative. I continue to hope we can grow together in our spiritual connection to God, each other, and all creation.

Christ's peace,

Pastor Kris

Christmas Eve

As much as any of us would have hoped otherwise, we do not feel it's safe to do in person worship on Christmas Eve. I realize that there are churches who will, but for most of them it will be nothing like what people are used to and the logistics are probably beyond what makes sense for our small congregations. After worship on December 6 we had a great conversation about how to celebrate Christ's birth in a meaningful yet safe way.

There will be one service at 8:00 pm on Christmas Eve. It will be on Zoom as we've been doing. I'm looking into ways to possibly livestream it to another platform, such as YouTube or Facebook Live. That way we can have "visitors" who might not be comfortable joining on Zoom. We're also working to have a virtual background of both churches to use at intervals during the service.

We have a group of tech savvy volunteers working on ways to get recordings of the congregation singing the carols from past Christmas Eve services. That should create more of that feel of singing with the congregation.

Christmas Program

The Zion Sunday school is working on a little recorded telling of the Christmas story to play during worship on Sunday December 20.

Serving in the World

The Otto Challenge—The Otto family from Zion is collecting money and food donations for the Ashland food pantry! They plan to donate \$250 in food and will match up to \$500 in monetary donations. Please make checks payable to Ashland Food Panty and mail to Jerry Otto, 1406 County Road A Ceresco, Ne 68017. Food donations can be left at the church and they will collect on December 20th.

Calendar

December 13 10:00 am—Worship on Zoom

December 20 10:00 am—Zoom Worship - Zion Sunday school "program" recording during worship
Virtual communion—have bread and wine or juice available

December 24 8:00 pm—Christmas Eve worship on Zoom

December 27 10:00 am—Zoom worship

Advent Midweek—This month I am focusing on Advent themes during my **Midweek Moment** every Wednesday evening at 6:30 on Facebook Live. Join me! I also send the link out in my weekly Thursday email. You can access that even if you're not on Facebook.

Church offerings can continue to be mailed to:

Mike Unverferth
2800 W. Branched Oak Rd.
Raymond, NE 68428

Both churches also have an online giving option through tithe.ly. The easiest option is to download the tithe.ly app on a mobile device. Then just search for either church. You can also give from a laptop or PC – go to this link and instead of downloading app, click on "give online."

<https://get.tithe.ly/download-tithely-app>

Here is the **log in information** for worship at **10:00 am**

Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81665346843?pwd=dKhXWG4REh4QnA3Um5mQ05GOUJJQT09>

Phone—1 312 626 6799

Meeting ID: 816 6534 6843

Passcode: 787545



When will we get back to in person worship?

This is tied to the Lancaster County risk dial which as of this writing is still in the red, or high risk level. After Christmas, if the dial at least goes back to the orange level and stays for a couple weeks, I think we can resume short indoor communion services.

Return to in person worship will happen when we've been in the yellow for at least two weeks. Most likely, return to in person worship with singing and everything won't happen until a vaccine is widely available, or by some unexpected mechanism the virus abates on its own.