

The Petra Press

Newsletter of the Williamstown Lutheran Church

Stephen Sweyko

www.wlcvermont.org

February 2026

620-644-9158

Pastor@wlcvermont.org

Pastor's Corner

Blessings in the name of our risen Lord.

As I'm writing this, tomorrow is Friday the 13th. Some people are very superstitious about Friday the 13th. It's considered a day of ill omens, of bad luck. Friday the 13th ranks right up there with crossing the path of a black cat and breaking a mirror. There's even a technical term for people who have an obsessive fear of Friday the 13th. It's called "Paraskevidekatriaphobia." It's a good thing that I could look that up because I'd never be able to spell it. Some people won't fly, won't drive, some won't even leave the house on Friday the 13th. Modern culture, piggybacking on the fear of the day, named a slasher horror movie "Friday the 13th." It became a series of movies, an entire franchise. The title just added to the fear induced by the big guy in the hockey mask.

There's no agreement on when Friday the 13th became associated with bad luck. The first known instance of it being used in literature appeared in the 1800s. But it's thought that the idea has Christian roots. The number 13 is considered "unlucky" because on the night in which Jesus was betrayed, at the Last Supper, there were 13 people at the table (counting Judas). And Friday is the day on which Jesus was crucified. So, putting the two together makes Friday the 13th sort of a "double whammy."

And it's ironic that either incident would be thought to be "bad luck." St. Matthew tells us that at the Passover Meal the night in which Jesus was betrayed, "Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.'" (27) And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, (28) for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." At that table, at that meal, Jesus gave us a Sacrament where we regularly receive the very forgiveness which He would earn on the cross the next day. And we call the day in which we remember Jesus' crucifixion "Good Friday." It is good us and for the whole world,

because on the cross Jesus paid the price for our sin. And His victorious resurrection three days later declared that we have new life because of Jesus.

And in between now and that celebration of our Lord's resurrection is Lent, beginning on Ash

Wednesday. During Lent, we remember just how much we need the forgiveness that Jesus won for us, and that we receive through the declaration of the Gospel and through the Sacraments. On Ash Wednesday, February 18, we receive ashes on our forehead which reminds us that we are mortal, but we also know that through Christ, we have been given eternal life.

There's nothing unlucky about Holy Week just as there's nothing unlucky about Lent. And that means that there's certainly nothing unlucky about Friday the 13th. Luck has nothing to do with it. What it has to do with is the will and promise of our heavenly Father. What it all has to do with is Jesus, His beloved Son through whom we have life now, and life forever.

See you in church.

In Christ,

Pastor Stephen Sweyko



“We love because He first loved us.” *1 John 4:19*

“Let all that you do be done in love.” *1 Corinthians 16:14*

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” *1 Peter 4:8*

“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” *John 15:12*

“Love is patient, love is kind... Love never fails.” *1 Corinthians 13:4–8*

A Devotional Reflection on the Heart of Valentine's Day

Every February, the world pauses to celebrate love. Cards are exchanged, flowers are given, and families gather around small acts of kindness. But beneath the modern traditions lies a deeper story—one that speaks to the kind of love Christians are called to embody every day.

A Witness of Faithful Love

The day we now call Valentine's Day traces its name to St. Valentine, a Christian who lived during the Roman Empire. Though details of his life are partly lost to history, early Christian tradition remembers him as someone who showed courageous, self-giving love. He cared for persecuted believers, encouraged the faithful, and—according to some accounts—helped Christian couples marry at a time when doing so was dangerous.

His life reminds us that love is not merely a feeling. It is a choice to honor God and serve others, even when it costs us something.

Love Rooted in Christ

As centuries passed, the feast day honoring Valentine gradually became associated with expressions of affection and devotion. Yet the heart of the day still echoes a truth that Scripture teaches clearly: **real love begins with God.**

- “We love because He first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)
- “Let all that you do be done in love.” (1 Corinthians 16:14)

Christian love is patient, steadfast, and sacrificial. It reflects the love Christ showed on the cross—a love that seeks the good of others before our own.

A Day to Remember What Love Truly Is

Valentine's Day can be more than a cultural celebration. It can be a gentle reminder to:

- cherish the people God has placed in our lives
- practice kindness in small, unnoticed ways
- forgive freely
- encourage those who feel forgotten
- reflect Christ's love in our homes, workplaces, and communities

When we do these things, we honor not only the memory of a faithful believer from long ago, but the One whose love transforms us today.



Ash Wednesday

February 18

Imposition of Ashes with Communion

@ 6:00 p.m.

Mid Week Services

w/o Communion

Wednesday February 25

March 4

March 11

March 18

March 25

All @ 6:00 p.m.

The **Lenten season** is a significant period in the Christian liturgical calendar, lasting **40 days** (not including Sundays) leading up to Easter. It begins on **Ash Wednesday** and is a time of **prayer, fasting, and almsgiving**, aimed at spiritual preparation for the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ at Easter. This season emphasizes reflection, penance, and the need for conversion, allowing Christians to deepen their faith and relationship with God.

 **The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod** ·
Follow
3d · 

We invite you to memorize **Leviticus 19:18** with us this week.

Memorizing Scripture is a valuable practice for Christians, even in a digital age. Join us each week as we hide God's Word in our hearts.

Learn more at lcms.org/memoryverse.

MEMORY VERSE

YOU SHALL NOT take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but YOU SHALL love your neighbor as yourself: I AM THE LORD.

LEVITICUS 19:18



The deadline for the March 2026 Newsletter is Friday March 6, 2026. I would appreciate stories, articles, pictures, cartoons, etc.

A special THANK YOU Pastor Sweyko, Barb Currier and Gail Andrews for your contributions to this newsletter. Kathy L