

The Sidney United Methodist Church

News-n-Views

Volume 2017 Issue 8

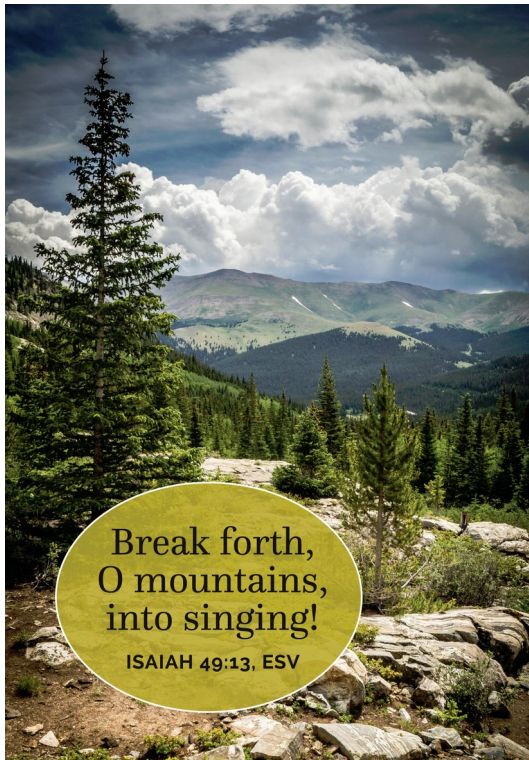
August 2017

August

Church Office Hours:
Monday-Friday
9:00am-12:00pm

Pastor's Office Hours:
Tuesday and Thursday
10:00a.m.-12:00 p.m.
or by appointment

Sunday morning
Worship time:
10:15 a.m.

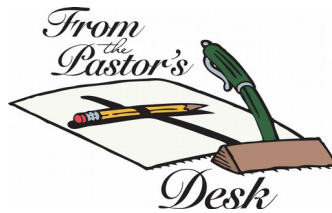


Break forth,
O mountains,
into singing!

ISAIAH 49:13, ESV



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In a sermon a few weeks ago I mentioned the recent death of one of the great thinkers of the twentieth century, Peter Berger. In seminary at Boston University, I had the good fortune to take a class with Professor Berger in 2002-2003. It was a year long class called "Practical Theology" and in it our assignment was to write a long project on some topic on the practical application of religion to everyday life. My project was titled: "Out of the Depths We Cry: How United Methodist Prayers Respond to Pain, Suffering and Evil." After seminary I expanded the project to include all Christian denominations. I turned the book-length piece of writing into a webpage, which I maintained for almost 10 years. I also integrated my findings into my teaching about Western Civilization, my sermons and, you might recall, several essays in these very pages.

Professor Berger was a world-renowned lecturer and an accomplished author. He traveled to universities throughout the United States, Europe, India, China and Latin America to deliver speeches and participate in panel discussions. He wrote over two dozen books and hundreds of articles, most recently a weekly series of provocative columns in *The National Interest*. Needless to say, I was thrilled when Professor Berger agreed to help me and several other students whose work he took an interest in. It was like Nolan Ryan agreeing to help a high school pitcher work on his fast ball.

What Berger liked most about my work was the fact that I gave serious consideration to traditional religious ideas like evil, theodicy and the efficacy of prayer. He liked the way I combined academic rigor with genuine spirituality and the way that I integrated personal experience with broader issues of religion and society.

Two of Berger's own books that had great influence on me were *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* and *Questions of Faith: A Skeptical Affirmation of Christianity*. The first was one of his early books, published in 1970. The second was the book he was working on when I took his class and met with him to discuss my writing.

In *A Rumor of Angels* Berger identifies four important signs that point to the existence of God. The first is the basic condition of being, the fact that we exist. We understand our existence because that understanding comes from something "above" and "beyond" us. The second is our ability to see and experience goodness in the midst of evil. How is it possible that the people of London were able to enjoy music in the midst of being bombed by the Germans, Berger asks? How is it that we can look forward to Easter Sunday amidst the bleakness of Jesus' death on Friday? The third sign is an almost universal revulsion to certain acts of violence, the murder of a child, for example. Where does this revulsion come from if not from some greater being that orders our sense of right and wrong? Finally, the fourth sign is humor. Professor Berger loved jokes. He especially loved religious jokes, the

kind that began with "A priest, a rabbi and a pastor walk into a bar..." He saw in humor the God-given ability to laugh at our imperfections and inconsistencies, to identify the absurdities of life with the understanding that we're always striving to overcome them and become better in how we live and at what we do. In other words, to become more n God's image.

Unlike most people, especially academics, Berger was never afraid to change his mind. His most dramatic shift in thinking was from the idea that societies become more secular as they become more modern to the idea that societies become more pluralistic as they become more modern. Religion, Berger discovered, can still play a hugely important role in a pluralistic society, whereas it cannot in a secular society. This led Berger into a deep investigation into what religion means. He traveled to mosques in Baghdad, to Hindu temples in Calcutta, to small country churches in Texas and to huge Orthodox cathedrals in Russia. He talked to ordinary people and asked them why religion was important in their lives. He took what ordinary people said seriously and allowed his ideas to be shaped around what he heard rather than trying to convince other people to beliefs based on his preconceived ideas.

In *Questions of Faith*, Berger summarized what he learned about Christianity from others and what he himself believes. He organized the book on passages from the Apostle's Creed, and uses these passages as a themes to explore the meaning of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As the subtitle suggests, he comes from the perspective of a skeptical Christian, not one who disbelieves but as one who always asks questions and always seeks to understand more deeply. Berger was always wary of people who believe without asking questions. He also appreciated that our questions did not have to be profound in order to help us understand more deeply profound ideas. For example, the farmer questions his faith when his child dies in a farming accident. His simple question, "Why?", and his simple answer, "Because God wills it," are both just as profound as the complex questions and answers of a theology professor. Berger insisted that both types questions and answers should lead us to a deeper faith.

As I mentioned, Berger was writing *Questions of Faith* when I took his class. One of the major questions we both explored at that time was the theodicy question: "How can a good God allow pain, suffering and evil to happen?" Berger helped me realize that the question was more than philosophical. That farmer in the field who loses a child in an accident--and the mother who loses her son to opioid addiction, and the husband who loses his wife to cancer--feels the immediacy of the question. Berger appreciated my shifting of the philosophical question to a pastoral one--"Who am I, who is God, and where do we intersect when pain, suffering and evil come into my life?"

Berger insisted that the Gospels offer the best response to both the philosophical and the pastoral questions. Jesus transformed everything. Jesus' life, death and resurrection shifted the entire cosmos. In Jesus, God created a new mode of existence. Death, Berger said, is the enemy, and in God's new order of things death simply cannot be accepted in any form it presents itself. And Jesus is with us now, offering us a new life alternative to the culture of death.

Talking about these and other ideas with Peter Berger was one of the most exciting and fulfilling experiences of my life.

In Peace, Pastor Tom

God of Tomorrows

This is the blessed life — not anxious to see far in front, nor eager to choose the path, but quietly following behind the Shepherd, one step at a time. The Shepherd was always out in front of the sheep. He was down in front. Any attack upon them had to take him into account.

Now God is down in front. He is in the tomorrows. It is tomorrow that fills [people] with dread. God is there already. All the tomorrows of our life have to pass him before they can get to us.

—F.B. Meyer

The Log in Your Eye

This humorous illustration of how not to get along at college also demonstrates Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:3-5.

A young man from Scotland went to study at an English university. A month into the school year, his mother visited and asked how he liked living in the dorm. "It's awful!" he exclaimed. "The fellow in the room next door bangs his head on the wall constantly, and the one on the other side screams all day."

"How do you stand it?" his mother asked in amazement.

"Oh, I ignore them," her son replied. "I just sit here quietly, playing my bagpipes."



Praise God! We had a spirit-filled VBS from July 17 - 20. We saw 30 children during these 4 days Experience and Discover God Everywhere (E.D.G.E.) Check out our Facebook page for photos.

VBS would not have happened without the support of so many people. Thank you to everyone who was present during the 4 days to help lead the children in song, story, crafts, recreation, science, registration, food, and acted as trail leaders. A thank you also to those who supported us with food donations or cash. We have planted many seeds and only God knows how they will be used.

As we strive to build more relationships with our community, the youth ministry team will continue to be present at the Share the Bounty meals. On August 31 the Bounty meal will be a cookout hosted by the Youth Ministry Team. We already have our grillers, Pastor Tom and Jeff Doyle. We are in need of people to provide some side dishes such as potato or macaroni salad, baked beans, green salad, desserts, and fruit punch. Funds are available to purchase all ingredients that are needed. In addition, if you can help with setup, serving, or clean up please call the church office at 563-1921.

Plans for future children's events continue as we discern where God is leading Sidney UMC. Our mission is to share the love of God and make disciples for Christ in our neighborhood and community. We believe God makes a difference in people's lives and especially in the lives of children and youth.

Thank you for your continued prayers and support for our children and youth ministry at Sidney UMC.

God Bless
Sharon L Bassett
Youth Coordinator





FREE School Supplies & Backpacks Available

From Catholic Charities of Delaware, Otsego & Schoharie
21 Liberty Street, Sidney NY
607-604-4071

Could your child benefit from a FREE backpack filled with essential school supplies?

If your child is enrolled in the Sidney Central School District and your household meets our income requirements, then you may qualify for FREE school supplies this year.

Preregister at the Catholic Charities Sidney Office (21 Liberty Street, Sidney NY, 607-604-4071) by August 4, 2017. When you register, you will be given a pickup date.

Please bring photo ID.

**Preregistration for this event is required. Please call 607-604-4071 or stop by at 21 Liberty Street, Civic Center Room 108, to fill out an application*



The United Methodist Women will meet on August 10th at 12:00 Noon at the church in Fellowship Hall. Please bring a bag lunch. This is our Prayer and Self-denial meeting. Our program is entitled "Maternal and Child Health". We will also discuss plans for the bazaar to be held in November.

Looking Ahead:

On Thursday, September 14, 2017 at 5:00 PM we will have our meeting and a covered dish supper.

Lydia Craft Circle will resume our weekly meetings on Tuesday, September 12th at 12:30 PM



This summer, put your best foot forward by brightening up a pair of flip-flops.

What you need

Flip-flops in your size, Metallic permanent markers, Foam stickers, Craft gemstones, Plastic flowers, Ribbon, Hot glue gun (with adult help)



What to do

Use these ideas to decorate clean, dry flip-flops:

Draw with markers on the soles, decorate the sides and soles with stickers, glue gemstones along the strap, glue plastic flowers on the strap between your toes, wrap ribbon around the strap and glue in place.



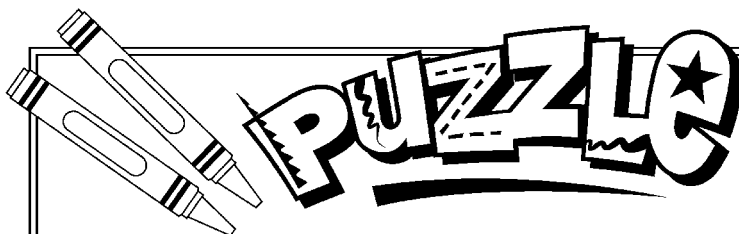
Know Your Target

Businesses must know their target market. Writers must know their target audience. And we all make better decisions when we consider the target of our actions.

A college religion teacher set up a cardboard target in his classroom. “Draw someone who has upset you,” he instructed. Students sketched ex-boyfriends or -girlfriends, coworkers who’d mistreated them, childhood bullies. Each, in turn, then placed their drawing over the bull’s-eye and took aim with a bow and arrow. Afterward, the bull’s-eye was riddled with holes. The students congratulated one another ... until the teacher pulled back the target, revealing Jesus’ scarred, torn face.

Silence fell as he read: “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these ... you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40, NRSV).

In choosing actions — no matter the human target — remember who else will be struck by your arrows. Let’s take aim with love, not hurt.



BE HAPPY IN THE LORD

Happiness and joy are frequent themes in the Old Testament book of Psalms.

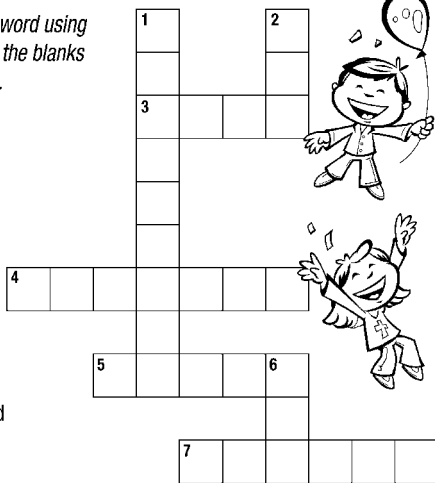
Directions: Solve the crossword using the clues below. Then fill in the blanks to complete the Bible verse.

ACROSS

- 3. A word for happy (rhymes with had)
- 4. What you do when you're very happy
- 5. A song written by David
- 7. Full of joy

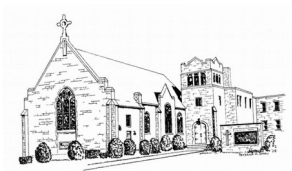
DOWN

- 1. People who obey God
- 2. Our Creator
- 6. The month after April



“But may the 1. _____ be 3. _____ and
 4. _____ before 2. _____; 6. _____ they
 be happy and 7. _____.” 5. _____ 68:3, NIV

Answers: (across) 3. glad, 4. rejoice, 5. psalm, 7. joyful; (down) 1. righteous, 2. God, 6. may and joyful.” Psalm 68:3, NIV



Sidney United Methodist Church
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