

# PURE RELIGION

Wednesday, March 8, 2015  
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*Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*  
*James 1:27 (ESV)*

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*Enter to Worship  
Depart to Serve  
Together*

The Lord uses the season of Lent to work repentance in our hearts and minds, drawing us closer to Jesus and making more real the beauty of the Good News in Him. As we go through this season (and really every other season), I do quite a bit of reading. This morning, I ran across a devotional I would like to share with you. It is by Chad Bird, a Lutheran pastor, professor, and writer. I pray you are as blessed by it as I was:

"When I (Chad Bird) was a kid, I roamed the alleys and nearby fields with a pocket full of pebbles and a slingshot in hand. My grandfather had carved me the slingshot from the fork of a mesquite tree, native to our New Mexico soil. I'd even burned my name into the wood using the sun and a magnifying glass. As you might expect, my favorite Sunday School story was David and Goliath. In my make-believe world, I was that boy from Bethlehem, and sparrows the Philistine giants. It felt good to be the hero who takes down the foe. I was but a boy. I was new to the world. I loved Bible stories about saints who conquered.

When I became a man, I roamed the highways and byways of this world with a pocketful of dreams and a degree in my hand. There were ladders to climb, and I climbed them. I carved out a place for myself in this world. I had a bright, secure future. My favorite Bible story remained David and Goliath, for I saw myself in him, conquering this, and overcoming that. I was the boy from Bethlehem, only now a man, and giants were my prey. It felt good to be on top, making my place in the world. I still loved Bible stories about saints who conquered.

You know where this story is going, don't you? You can feel it in your gut. Who knows, maybe I'm in the middle of telling your story. Let's make it our story, why don't we. And let's tell it like it is.

When I became a man, I became a man like David. Like the David who, instead of going out to war, stayed home and fell prey to lust, to fear, to lies, to murder, to cover-up, and finally to repentance and forgiveness. When I became a man, I became a man like Noah, who planted a vineyard, got wasted, and fell asleep naked as a jaybird. When I became a man, I became a man like Abraham, who lied about his wife and put her life and chastity in danger just to save his own neck. When I became a man, I became a man like Judah the prostitute-user, Aaron the idol-maker, Gideon the doubter, and the list goes on and on. "Show me a hero," F. Scott Fitzgerald said, "and I'll write you a tragedy." Show me a prideful man, I would add, and I'll write about his downfall.

Over the last ten years or so, I've looked very little at the story of David and Goliath. And I've often wished that during my Sunday School days, I'd have learned the other stories about David, the embarrassing stories, the narratives of moral failure; the sordid details of lives that come unraveled when men and women show their true colors. When their lust and selfishness and greed and hunger for power knock them off their self-made thrones into deep and dank piles of dung. I wish I'd drunk in those stories in my youth, for when I needed them, they were not yet *my* stories. I lived them, then, I read them. And as I read them, I saw my own narrative bleeding between the lines of these OT saints who were sinful to the core, just like me.

When I became a man, I realized that I was not God. I was not even a hero. I was just one more lost soul, a walking corpse wrapped in transgressions and sins, wallowing in graveyard dirt.

When I was that man, God made me a child again—and not just any child, but His child. He rolled up His sleeves to dig through the deep and dank pile of dung into which I had fallen and pulled me out. You'd have thought I smelled like a rose, so close did He hold me. And He washed me (God, did He wash me!) behind the ears, inside the soul, between my toes, until every speck of dirt and every hint of dung, was bathed away. And He took me by the shoulders, looked me in the eye, and said, "Chad, I have taken your sin away; you shall not die."

And I became like God's child David, whom the Lord pardoned of his adultery and murder. I became like Noah, Abraham, Judah, Aaron, Gideon, and so many more wayward children, whom the Lord did not treat like trash but treasure. He called them to repentance, He called them to Himself, and most importantly He called them His own.

All our stories, all our tragedies, all our downfalls are retold in the story of the cross. The blood, which spilled from the veins of our Lord, is the ink that rewrites our personal narratives. The account which our Father reads of our lives is the story of Jesus washing us, holding us, dying for us, rising for us, and living His life through us even now. It is the story of grace. It is the story of second and third and fourth and thousandth chances to begin anew in the Savior who makes all things new.

We need less Goliath, and more Bathsheba, in the stories we tell ourselves, our children, our friends and neighbors. Show me a sinner, and I'll write you a story of a God who saves them. Show me a man with a scarlet letter, and I'll show you divine blood that dyes that letter white as snow so that it stands now for "Absolved," "Atoned," "Alive." Show me broken hearts and broken lives and I'll show you the God who's never met a heart or life He won't mend.

I now love Bible stories about sinners—about drunks and liars and cheats. Because in them all I find the greater story of a God who so loved a world of drunks and liars and cheats that He bled and died and rose again to redeem it. That is really *The Story*, the best story. The story that's not about saints who conquer but the Christ who overcomes all that He might have us as His own."

Blessings,

Pastor Jeff

# Part Time Music Ministry Position

St. James Church ([www.stjameslou.net](http://www.stjameslou.net)), a congregation rooted in the Evangelical and Reformed tradition, is seeking a worship leader/minister to guide and facilitate its music and worship ministry. The ideal candidate will possess the following skills and abilities:

- Proven ability to organize and direct the congregation and various choirs in worship through music
- Proficient in both organ and piano
- Ability to direct and develop vocal choirs and ensembles of various ages, voices and skill levels
- Ability to direct and develop handbell choirs and ensembles of various ages and skill levels
- Ability to develop and encourage members to use their musical gifts in worship

Every person desiring to be considered for a ministry position with St. James Church must declare him or her self in agreement with the congregation's statement of beliefs and affirm these beliefs in his or her ministry.

While the above skills and abilities represent the ideal candidate the congregation recognizes that all the skills and abilities listed may not be present in a single candidate. In such cases where certain skills or abilities are not present the congregation may consider filling that requirement with either additional ministry staff or volunteers from the congregation.

Please contact Pastor Jeff McCarty at [rev.mccarty@stjameslou.net](mailto:rev.mccarty@stjameslou.net) for a complete job description and further information.

## March Birthdays

- |    |                 |
|----|-----------------|
| 4  | Joseph Graves   |
| 8  | Wanda Reynolds  |
| 12 | Norman Hampton  |
| 14 | Christian Scott |
| 19 | Rose Gonterman  |
| 20 | Laura Belt      |
| 24 | Richard Prather |

## Prayer and Praises

### **CHURCH FAMILY MEMBERS**

- Tom Powers
- Katie Buchanan & family
- Sheila Badger
- Wanda Reynolds

### **EXTENDED CHURCH FAMILY**

- Chenoah Clark, Doug Klein's daughter-in-law
- Mr. John
- Mr. Lawrence Rogers and family
- Gail, friend of Sheila Badger
- Phyllis Jones, Jeff McCarty's grandmother
- Miley Hodge
- Lee Stone
- Dennis Klein's grandson

### **THE MILITARY**

- The Badger Family
- Our Military

### **MISSION & COMMUNITY**

- Weekly Pancake Breakfast
- Vincent & Lauren Kuo
- The LORD sends workers for His harvest
- Those apart from Christ, the poor, and hurting in our neighborhood

### **OUR LEADERS**

- Our Pastor, Church Staff and council members
- The President, National and Local Political Leaders

## Church Council

From Mark Hampton, Council President

I hope this finds each of you safe and warm as we dig out from our second real dose of winter. While it is cold outside I am thankful that God has continued to warm our fellowship and congregation with His Holy Spirit.

I hope that each of you are finding the annual calendar helpful and are also encouraged by the timely updates that are provided via email and of course the newsletter itself. It has been said before but it needs repeating, thank you Jess for keeping us informed and up to date.

At this time I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the Saturday Morning Pancake Breakfast that has begun. To all who are coming on Saturday morning to help cook, clean, and more importantly share in the ministry know that God is blessing you, the neighborhood and our entire congregation as a result of your efforts. To ensure that this ministry has funding the Council approved the use of nearly \$1,000 from an old account that was no longer being used for its intended purposes. Please continue to pray for this ministry and those it will reach with the Gospel.

As of the last Council meeting all previously noted "to do items" are making progress and we continue to meet our financial obligations.

Be sure to check your monthly and annual calendars for upcoming significant events in the life of St. James.

## Bible Study for Lent: Re~Confirmation

Wednesdays through Lent

Soup & Bread at 6pm, followed by our study

*see Pastor Jeff for course materials*

## Ladies Guild Yard Sale

### Saturday, March 14

Start saving your items now! Setup will be Friday, March 13. If you have any items you wish to donate, you may bring them to the Fellowship Hall on that day.



## Bring-a-Friend Sunday

### Palm Sunday, March 29

Join us following worship for a meal and special music. Bring yourself, a friend, and a dessert!

## Holy Week

April 2, 7:00 PM ~ Maundy Thursday ~ Living Last Supper

April 3, 7:00 PM ~ Good Friday Service

April 5 ~ Easter Sunday

## Community Pancake Brunch

Every Saturday at 11:00 am

Our FREE pancake breakfast for the community continues each Saturday. They are being fed not only physically, but spiritually. Please join us as we have the opportunity to meet some of our neighbors!



## Amazing Grace

*For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. - Ephesians 2:8*

Every day is a new challenge. Every day is a time to turn over a new leaf. Everyday we can start to live and love. Do all the things we can with the help of God. Days are the opportunities that God gives us to reopen our lives to the possibilities of what we may become. No one has learned anything right until he learns that every day is the most important day of his life. What great works of wisdom and how wise we would be to follow them. Do we have to wait for a special day - Mother's Day, Father's Day - to be nice and remember or honor them. Or wait for a holiday to invite some family members over for a dinner or cook out? These expressions of love or also a gift would be a great honor to them just to feel loved. Today is your day to reach out and show you love. What is a day in a person's life? I think it's the most precious treasure that can be given to any of us. Let's all try and make everyone's day a great one. Also one that can help be your greatest day ever because you care and showed it. Love can make a big difference!

The gifts that God gives are priceless treasures, and you are such gift. Your life has a special importance that was made to be unlike any other and is deeply valued. Thanking God that He has not only brought you into this world, but that also brought you into my life.

Due to the weather over the past several weeks, there was a delay in the publication of this month's newsletter. I apologize for any inconvenience! The next deadline will be Friday, March 27. Thank you!

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