

# Pastor's Newsletter

December 8 2020

## 2020 – 2021 Sermon Series

On Sunday November 29, 2020 we started a journey that will take us all the way through to Christ the King Sunday, November 21, 2021. We are going to make our way through the Gospel according to Luke. Our plan going forward is as follows :-

Dec 13	Luke 1:57-80
Dec 20	Luke 2:1-21
Dec 27	Luke 2:22-52
Jan 3	Luke 3:1-38
Jan 10	Luke 4:1-13



## Sacrament of Communion

We will be partaking in the Sacrament of Communion on **Sunday January 3**, so please ensure you have prepared bread and wine.

Catch up on any of our Sunday Worship services you missed on our YouTube channel, which you can access by clicking on the YouTube icon on our church homepage, [www.sasspc.bc.ca](http://www.sasspc.bc.ca), or by simple searching for "SASS Presbyterian" on YouTube.



**APOLOGIES** – the recording of our service on December 6, 2020 did not work and so we do **NOT** have it on our YouTube channel. If you would like a transcript of the Sermon and the Prayers of the People, from the service, please contact the office, or email me directly, [pastorbaxter@gmail.com](mailto:pastorbaxter@gmail.com)



## Advent / Christmas 2020 Worship Services @ SASS

Given the extension to the province-wide restrictions announced on December 7, 2020, there will be NO in-person worship services held at SASS until further notice. However we will endeavour to hold services via **ZOOM** as follows :-

In addition to our regular Sunday services, at 10:30am we will be holding the following

December 20<sup>th</sup> – 7pm – A Blue Christmas Service\*

December 24<sup>th</sup> – 7pm – Christmas Eve worship

December 25<sup>th</sup> – 10am – Christmas Day informal worship

### \* A Blue Christmas Service

For some people Christmas forces them into a paradox – they are supposed to burst in celebration filled with hope, love, peace and joy, just like everyone else, and yet, at the same time, they are so full of depression, sadness and grief.

December 21<sup>st</sup> is the shortest day of the year, in other words it is also the longest night, the day with the most darkness.

For some December 21<sup>st</sup> symbolises the dark night of the soul that they struggle with throughout this season.

On December 20<sup>th</sup>, at 7pm, via ZOOM, we are going to gather to acknowledge these emotions of sadness, emptiness, despair, longing, to give space for people to reflect upon memories, and to acknowledge their pain and loneliness before the Reason for this Season, to encounter his presence in the midst of the darkness. The service will include readings, suitable music, and we will be lighting candles in order to help us focus on the various emotions we are facing right now. I would suggest having your advent wreath in your worship spaces.

**SASS 2020 Advent daily devotionals.**

Henry Nouwen “And the Word was God”  
& Stephanie Hovland “Jesus’ Family Tree” – family devotions.

I am hoping everyone is making use of the resource(s) we mailed out before the first Sunday in Advent. I am working through both of them, one with the girls and one on my own. Despite these strange days both of them in their own way are reminding me that, to put it bluntly, God’s Got This. God is in control so despite not being able to celebrate this season incorporating all of the usual traditions no matter the situation we can all focus on the Real Reason for the Season and give Him all the praise and thanks, because He is the Gift of all gifts – Hallelujah.



**SASS ZOOM Worship Service information**

We continue to hold our Sunday worship services online, via ZOOM. The link to all SASS meetings and worship services is easily accessible. Just go to our homepage – [sasspc.bc.ca](http://sasspc.bc.ca) and scroll down and click on the following graphic. The password to access our ZOOM meetings will be “sass” – lowercase, no quotes.



The ZOOM Meeting ID for our SASS worship services is – **795 930 7120**

If you DO NOT have access to a computer / internet then you can **phone in** and listen to any SASS meeting / service using the above meeting ID.

1. Dial 778 907 2071
2. When prompted enter the Meeting ID: 795 930 7120, followed by #.
3. You will be asked for a participant ID - just hit the # key.
4. When prompted enter the password: 676824

**PLEASE REMEMBER on Sundays to check that your MIC is muted and that your camera is disabled / turned off, to limit bandwidth usage and potential on-screen distractions. If you dial in using your phone please MUTE your phone, if that option is available. (\*6 should enable you to do this)**

## SASS Church Finances

### FINAL UPDATE before the end of the financial year

For everyone's information, by November 30<sup>th</sup> 2020 we are roughly 25% short on our approved 2020 budget. Compared to 2019 we have received \$42,000 less this year than last year. Our expenses are being well monitored and managed by the Board.

There are a number of ways to continue supporting SASS during this pandemic.



Send a **cheque** to the church office, or you can **drop your offering in to the secure letterbox attached to the Chesterfield Ave entrance door**. This letterbox is checked and emptied every week day.



If you have a **PAYPAL** account - Go to our church homepage and scroll down and click on "DONATE NOW".

Using a **credit card, or paypal** you can donate to SASS through CanadaHelps. Click on the following link to our [donation form](#).



Sandi Romain can setup up for **PAR (Pre-Authorised Remittance)**. This is a monthly **direct debit** from your bank account. Go to [sasspc.bc.ca](http://sasspc.bc.ca) for more details. You need to download & complete the PAR authorisation and mail it directly to Sandi with a VOID CHEQUE. Sandi's contact details are as follows :-  
**SANDI ROMAIN, 2208 Sorrento Drive, Coquitlam, BC V3K 6H5**  
**604-931-6695, [romainsandi@hotmail.com](mailto:romainsandi@hotmail.com)**

**Thank you for continuing to support the life and ministry at SASS.**

**SASS 2021 offering envelopes will be available for pick up from the parking lot entrance on the following dates.**

**December 8, 9 and 10 - 9AM-12PM**

**December 15, 16 & 17 - 9AM-12PM**

**Girl Guide mint cookies will also be available for purchase to support the girls in our congregation who are continuing to meet in their Guide units during these strange days. \$5/box**



## Prayer

St. Andrew's & St. Stephen's is a "community of faith", a fellowship of brothers and sisters in Christ. Let's continue to uphold each other, and share our burdens during these days.

During these strange times we want to pray for you, and we have been blessed by so many participating in our Sunday services, leading us in prayer.

Please send your prayer request to [prayer@sasspc.bc.ca](mailto:prayer@sasspc.bc.ca)

The following is a transcript of the prayers of/for the people, from Sunday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, led by **Jen Stokes**. Let's continue to give thanks and pray together ...

Dear Lord,

We come to you as broken people in a broken world. Our world is more divided today than it has ever been and we need you so much Father. To guide us, to love us, to heal us.

In this time of COVID we pray:

In times when we aren't sure, God, Help to keep us to be calm;  
when information comes from all sides, whether it is correct and not, help us to discern;  
when fear makes it hard for us to breathe, and anxiety seems to be the order of the day,  
slow us down, God;

**help us to reach out with our hearts, when we can't touch with our hands;**  
help us to be socially connected, when we have to be socially distant; help us to love as perfectly as we can, knowing that "**perfect love casts out all fear.**"

For the doctors, we pray, for the nurses, we pray, for the technicians and the janitors, the Teachers, police officers, and the isolated and the caregivers, for the pastors we pray, for the researchers and theorists, the epidemiologists, the scientists and investigators, for those who are sick, and those who are grieving, we pray, for all who are affected, all around the world...

we pray... for safety, for health, for wholeness. May we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty,  
clothe the naked and house those without homes; may we walk with those who feel they are alone, and may we do all that we can to heal the sick— in spite of the epidemic,

Be with our **teenagers and University Students** now Lord as this time is particularly challenging for them as they struggle with online learning while feeling isolated from companionship, friendship and are struggling with anxiety and worry for the present and

the future. **This generation Lord is being hit the hardest** and they need you Lord. Bless them Lord Jesus.

We pray for those in power making the difficult decisions Lord. Be with their choices Father. Help them to hear you through all that they do and say every day.

This week please remember in your prayers as we say them **by name**:

Vall Hall

Don Campbell

Margaret Williams

Kel Kejser

Penny MacDonald

Continue to uphold in prayer

Sheila Hall

Jessie McCready

On the recent deaths of Jim Hall and Hugh McCready - Lord be with them.

Remember also those with Ongoing Health Challenges:

David Forrest

David Ballantine

Liz Lilley

Lorne Dennis

Please Lord be with those Seniors in Facilities who need you now more than ever because of isolation

Alan Bone

Joanne Graham

And Dean Scott

Protect all those mentioned by name and those in our hearts, from harm and be their comfort in this time of uncertainty.

in spite of the fear and worries - Help us, O God, that we might help each other.

In the love of the Creator,

in the name of the Healer,

in the life of the Holy Spirit that is in all and with all,

we pray.

May it be so.

Amen.



## Medically Speaking An Update from Dr. Nicola

### Using Hope to combat fear and regain health!

I sometimes allow myself philosophical musings, issues for which there are no answers but the thought process itself is the exercise. My recent musing has been twofold: If I had known that a pandemic was about to hit, would I have done anything differently; and, would I now be mentally better off, or worse? I have a photo from last Christmas during my parents visit with us. They have never experienced a large amount of snow (being missionaries in Asia sort of limited that opportunity), so we bundled them up and took them up to Mt. Seymour. They are standing with Joshua, grinning from ear to ear in a winter wonderland. When I look at the photo I am left with a strange unsettling, that we shared that moment, pre CoVid, and yet, I had already heard rumblings of a new pneumonia being seen in China. If we had known then what was coming, would we have acted differently? I am grateful that I don't know what is around the corner in my life. Living with the knowledge of an impending 'disaster' may make me feel that I could prepare, but in reality, is more likely to make me fearful and anxious.

Here we are, nine months into it. Our community sits in "Phase 3" of a four-phase reopening plan. Knowing that Phase 4 will not occur until we have a vaccination, we may be here for some time. How are we all managing? Humans are adaptable and I suspect that we have adapted to the whole; mask, hand sanitizer, follow the "stand here" signs and talk-through-plexiglass routine. Yes, we have developed a certain rhythm to life.

But many of my conversations with patients end up discussing fear. People that do not usually feel fearful find themselves with physical manifestations of fear such as shaky hands or a sudden knot in the stomach. Mentally, they find their thoughts trending towards the negative, but when we sit and try to tease out what the fear is, we discover that most often fear is an amorphous black blob that actually has no structure. If we are aware of this black shadow in our peripheral vision, we run from it, allowing it to grow bigger; and yet, if we face it, we find it is just a mist that swirls around us, never becoming tangible. Fear is a liar. It pretends to be hard and concrete and hurtful – in fact, it is so often nothing but a mirage.

Here we are, living in a fearful state fed into by headlines showing daily case numbers, restrictions that emphasize danger, rumours of medical systems at capacity. We are left fearful that CoVid may get us, or those we love – what then? However, recently in one of my many medical webinars I heard something that gave me some hope. A Vancouver doctor, Dr Bal Pawa, was speaking about how our thoughts and fears directly affect our physical state and health. This topic is not new. We know that people living with high stress are more likely to have heart attacks or gastric ulcers, that before an exam some people will be sweating whilst others will be running to the bathroom. Our emotional stress causes an increase in our stress hormones, which in turn have a direct effect on our nervous system and response. However, twice during her talk I found myself leaning in to hear more.



Firstly, she uses the word REFRAME as her mnemonic. This is the same word used by Regent College for their program aimed at connecting our faith to our everyday lives. “Good word,” I thought.

Dr Pawa’s REFRAME stands for Re-set, Exercise, Food, Rest, Asses, Mindset, Examine.

Secondly, when she got to Mindset, I was expecting to hear about mindfulness, meditation or yoga; but she caught me off guard by, in fact, saying, “Believe that you have resiliency and base your thoughts on trust and what is true.” She further qualified that by encouraging us to have self-compassion, patience and to find something or someone to be grateful for.

What is true?

We are living in a pandemic, but in a country with an excellent health care system that, due to good management, has ongoing capacity to cope with illness. We have testing centres, assessment centres, and a fully functioning, publicly available health care system. We have excellent leadership, arguably the envy of many places in the world. Our provincial public health officer, Dr Bonnie Henry, and her team are working to contact trace and work out how and where the disease is spreading. We have science-based guidance that is simple and effective: stay home if you are ill, wash your hands, keep your social gatherings small, wear a mask if you can’t maintain social distancing. We have an amazing team of scientists and microbiologists that have sequenced the virus and developed accurate testing systems. We are in the process of developing a vaccine. We know what the Novel Coronavirus is and understand how it is transmitted and who is at greatest risk.

In whom do I trust? I know I have a God of love, who is all knowing, sustaining, and has my best, eternal, interest at the centre of his mind. Also, I trust the science, the data, and the work done by credited experts. I check out my information from trusted sources, like BC CDC, VCH and Dr. Bonnie’s own daily reports; and I am thankful.

I know when I focus on what is true, I feel better. I relax, I calm, I remain in control. As is so often the case, Scripture has been there before us.

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Dr Pawa’s book has arrived on my doorstep. Maybe, if I get it read by Christmas, I can write an addendum on the topic!

[The Mind-Body Cure: Heal Your Pain, Anxiety, and Fatigue by Controlling Chronic Stress,](#)

I also ordered Dr Bonnie Henry’s book:

[Soap and Water & Common Sense: The Definitive Guide to Viruses, Bacteria, Parasites, and Disease.](#)



Maybe good ideas for your Christmas list! And here are the website links to those trusted sources:

<http://covid-19.bccdc.ca/>  
<http://www.vch.ca/covid-19>

Christmas will look different this year, but, we have hope and we stand on truth.

**Dr. Nicola**



**Pastor Martin's Musings**  
*"In effect until January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021"*

What can I say? Today's announcement (December 7, 2020) from Dr. Bonnie Henry, was expected, it was not a surprise, yet it felt like a gut-punch.

A month or so ago, when we started to have a few people come and sit in the sanctuary on Sundays, I got excited, prematurely so. I started to hope, I started to plan. Could we possibly be able to have some services around Christmas and have 40 people in the sanctuary, and as long as everyone was suitably spaced and wearing masks we might actually be able to sing. I longed to be able to advertise that with you, and moreover to actually sing with you, during the most wonderful time of the year, in my humble opinion.

But deep down I kind of knew what was going to happen. I just did not want to admit it to myself.

Today my Plan A was officially scrapped, and Plan B is now the plan for SASS as we approach Christmas.

It's not what I would have hoped for any of us, but it is the best we can do and so I will give it my all, and I know Daniel, Owen and others will help, so we can worship together as best we can.

But it's not just about worshipping together, is it? It's about all the things we normally do, hope to do, in and around our homes, that we will not be able to do.

How many families usually have their extended families over at some point over Christmas? How many folks usually have friends and neighbours over for dinner, and board games, on the same night every single year? How many folks have traditions that they will not be able to do this year?

I'm guessing all of us.

All of us are not going to have the Christmases we usually have, or hope to have. I'm bummed by that. I think my two girls are bummed by that. They are going to have to eat my cooking for a few more weeks before we get something different.

But as I sat with my two tonight, and gazed at our Christmas Tree, listening to one of them read our daily devotional, I realised in that moment at least we have each other. So many folks live alone and have literally been locked down from everyone for months upon months. I am sure they had glimmers of hope that over Christmas they would finally get to see their loved ones, and hug someone real, rather than the cushion, on the chair they spend most of their lives sitting in nowadays. My heart breaks for my brothers and sisters who are suffering in a way I am not right now. My heart breaks because we were made from and for community, and isolation, in God's eyes, was a problem that required resolution in Genesis 2. I wish you did not have to go through these days. I wish this was not the Christmas season all of us will be facing.

But Dr. Henry keeps reminding all of us, it is not forever, it is only for a short time. Her "short" is longer than my "short". But sometime, hopefully soon, we'll get back to some resemblance of normal. I'm already smelling the sweet mince pies being heated up in the kitchen next Advent season. We are going to have so much fellowship next Advent. I promise.

Over the past few weeks I have been listening to a lot of Christmas music on Praise 106.5. This morning there was an advert that was talking about all of the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season and it rightly asserted that all of it is not **the real reason for this season**. The advert went further and actually mentioned that the real reason for the season is all about Jesus born in a manger in Bethlehem. Amen! I thought. Then another voice came over the wavelengths and wished us listeners "Happy Holidays." What? You got me to the pinnacle of being able to see Jesus and you wish me a "Happy Holiday"? Where is Christ in that? And seriously do you understand how hard it is going to be to just be "happy" given all the circumstances of this year?

It got me thinking ...

I have also been watching ... confession time ... a few of those Hallmark movies, during their countdown to Christmas. For the most part the movies are atrocious. I think they resemble the "Mills & Boons" books I used to see my mum read, because their countdown to Christmas involves the boy and girl finally realising their love for each other, and once they kiss, the credits roll – queue next movie. Is that what waiting for Christmas is all about?

I have also watched a couple of new movies on Netflix – "Christmas Chronicles: Part Two", and "Jingle Jangle". If you have not watched the two Christmas Chronicle movies then watch them. They are fun family movies. As for Jingle Jangle – it is a musical – and it involves Christmas – need I say more?

The funny thing is both movies have got me thinking ...

Christmas Chronicles: Part Two involves Santa Claus harnessing the power of the Star of Bethlehem, because it is the only thing that keeps Christmas going. In fact, according to Santa, without the Star "Christmas is doomed." Now there is some serious theology in there!

And Jingle Jangle involves an inventor who can only create the impossible if he believes. Again, something to think about.

Maybe our current situation is giving all of us some precious time to “think.”

It is so easy for us to live our lives believing in Jesus, but at the same time trusting in ourselves. When it boils down to it we are the ones in control of the majority of our lives.

And then one day we get out of bed and Dr. Henry tells us we have to stay home, we can't socialise, and we have to wear masks all the time, everywhere we go. It gets us thinking, or perhaps it should get us thinking.

Do we really believe in Jesus? Do we trust that following Him is actually the most important thing we should do?

Do our Christmases resemble more the idea of happy holidays because Jesus plays such a small part in what we do? This year, let's keep Jesus the center of our Christmases.

In the Nouwen devotional on December 7<sup>th</sup>, the author said this about babies ...

***“While babies demand attention ... babies also blessedly evoke immediate, strong feelings in us: happiness, love, a desire to protect, a hope for the future.”***

Babies demand attention. Brilliant theology! The baby born in the manger demands our attention. Are we going to give it to him?

But babies also evoke feelings in us – love, and hope for the future.

Jesus came to pour out his love for us, upon us, in us. And He is the Hope for all futures. Take time this season to think about those things. Take time to meditate on the Word who became flesh for us.

Light a candle every night at the dinner table to remind you He is with you. He is!

No matter what darkness suffocates you right now believe and trust that when the Light shines into that darkness, the darkness can not and never will be able to withstand the Light.

I long to be with you all again soon. When that will be, no one really knows. Perhaps when that day comes we'll sing a Christmas Carol together, to mark a new beginning, to remind us of the New Beginning ...

**“Behold!” said the angels, I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. <sup>11</sup>Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah,**

the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” <sup>1</sup>

Until that day stay safe. Be responsible. Know that God has got you in the palm of his hand and He will not let you go.

*The Lord bless you and keep you  
The Lord make his face shine upon you  
and be gracious to you  
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you  
and give you his shalom.*

Blessings

**Merry Christmas**

**Pastor Martin**

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<sup>1</sup> [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Lk 2:10–12.