



## *From the Pastor's Perspective*

## Monthly Church Events

*"The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."* - Exodus 34:6, Numbers 14:4, Nehemiah 9:31, Psalm 86:5, Psalm 103:8, 145:8, etc.

Is COVID-19 a sign of the end times?

This question was posed to me since I've been collecting questions for my summer message series, "FAQs: Your Questions Answered with Biblical Facts." We've been taking up some of the questions on Sunday mornings, but I've also been addressing questions in my Monday devotionals. This question made me start to answer, and then stop (yes, I do stop talking once in a while!).

I was ready to answer quickly that our current pandemic is not a particular marker in the biblical prophesies of the end times. Although it is natural for people throughout history to wonder if the particular struggle they are facing might be a sign of God's punishment, I don't see our struggle to be particularly exceptional. Waves of disease have passed through humanity many times, such as Ebola (2014-2016) and Swine Flu (2009-2010) in recent memory, but larger killers such as HIV/AIDS (1980s-present), Spanish Flu (1918-1919), Smallpox (1520), and the Bubonic Plague of the Middle Ages have had far greater death tolls. (My father recalled hearing preachers give sermons on "Is Hitler the Antichrist?" during WWII.)

Humor helps us to cope with our struggles, and recently I've seen lots of memes about the "Apocalypse Bingo" of 2020, ticking off calamities such as "plague," "rioting," "floods," "earthquakes," "swarms," "economic crash," "wars and rumors of wars," "global warming," and so forth. So, I hesitated to respond as I thought a bit more: are there biblical examples of pandemics? Could this be punishment from God? There are always people quick to identify current calamities as God's punishment for whatever those people think God

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|---------------|---|
| <b>Aug 1</b>  | 9:00am - UM Men   |
| <b>Aug 2</b>  | 10:00am - Indoor Worship<br>2:00pm - Online Worship                                       |
| <b>Aug 3</b>  | 8:00am - Morning Men, Prayer<br>Knitters, Comfort Quilters                                |
| <b>Aug 5</b>  | 9:00 am - Kids Bash<br>6:30pm - Sanctify Rehearsal  |
| <b>Aug 6</b>  | 10:30am - Book club<br>12:00pm - Sarah Circle   |
| <b>Aug 7</b>  | 7:00am - Grow Group<br>4:00pm - Kae Bollinger Visitation                                  |
| <b>Aug 8</b>  | 11:00am - Kae Bollinger<br>Celebration of life  |
| <b>Aug 9</b>  | 10:00am - Indoor Worship<br>2:00pm - Online Worship                                       |
| <b>Aug 10</b> | 8:00am - Morning Men, Prayer<br>Knitters, Comfort Quilters<br>7:00pm - Mission Trip Start |
| <b>Aug 12</b> | 9:00am - Kids Bash<br>6:30pm - Sanctify Rehearsal   |
| <b>Aug 13</b> | 9:00am - Scandia Quilters<br>1:00pm - UMW Meeting<br>6:30pm - AMT                         |
| <b>Aug 14</b> | 7:00am - Grow Group<br>2:00pm - Unload Food Truck   |
| <b>Aug 15</b> | 7:00am - Set Up for CC<br>8:00am - Community Care<br>12:00pm - Mission Trip Close         |
| <b>Aug 16</b> | 10:00am - Indoor Worship<br>2:00pm - Online Worship                                       |
| <b>Aug 17</b> | 8:00am - Morning Men, Prayer<br>Knitters, Comfort Quilters<br>6:30pm - CMMT               |
| <b>Aug 18</b> | 10:00am - Rebecca Circle  |

## Pastor's Perspective Cont'd

must be angry about. Lord knows (pun intended) that there's a lot that God must be angry about these days.

Yes, the Bible does share how God sent calamities among people to punish us and set us straight. God sent a flood during Noah's time. He sent the 10 plagues (speaking of plagues!) against Egypt during the Exodus. There are many verses like Isaiah 13:11 where God threatens, "I will punish the world for its evil!" Even Kourtney Kardashian recently tweeted "Pay Attention!" and then quoted 2 Chronicles 7:13-17, "Whenever I hold back the rain or send locusts to eat up the crops or **send an epidemic on my people**, if they pray to me and repent and turn away from the evil they have been doing, then I will hear them in heaven, forgive their sins and make their land prosperous again."

God does punish wickedness using natural disasters. And Jesus does warn His followers to watch, to "read the times" and to be ready (read Matthew 24!). Even so, this is only a part of how God's followers view the world. Those folks who focus dominantly on the world's sins tend to also focus dominantly on God's punishments.

Yet the Bible's clear message is that God does NOT focus on people's sins! God focuses on His Son, who died to bring forgiveness. God is love. God is grace. God is mercy. God does treat sin as sin, and God does punish evil. Yet God's primary mode of operating is not punishing evil but seeking ways of redemption. Over a dozen times the Bible says, "The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."

Natural disasters, biblically, are most often just that: natural. They are most often the ongoing result of the fallen state of creation. When God uses natural disasters to punish His people, His ultimate goal is repentance. Therefore, God sends a clear and direct calling of warning (think Jonah sent to Nineveh, or the prophets like Isaiah to Israel).

I do not discern a divine calling for specific repentance during this time of pandemic. Now, I always discern a divine calling for ongoing repentance, pandemic or not. God's people must continually be watching for signs of the end times (and, according to Acts 2:17, we have been in the "end times" since the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost!), but the reason we watch is to help make ourselves ready by living lives of earnest devotion and renewed love for others.

So, what is our response to COVID-19? It is a calling for us to **Love.Grow.Serve.** all the more! Our fundamental calling as disciples of Jesus remains. We continue to walk with Jesus, but now with our eyes just a bit wider open!

How we react to the stress of our time is a major part of our witness to others for Jesus right now. Are you anxious? Angry? Negative? Complaining? Terse?

How is your loving?

Make a point to align your words, your actions, your facial expresses (even behind a mask!), to the mercy and forgiveness of our God. Offer hope in a climate of hardship. Offer grace in a culture of cancellation. Offer Jesus to a world wandering off track.

Yes, COVID-19 is a sign of the end times. It calls us to repent of our selfishness and to love better!

Keep calm and carry God!

Pastor David

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>Aug 19</b> | 9:00 am - Kids Bash<br>6:30pm - Sanctify Rehearsal        |
| <b>Aug 21</b> | 7:00am - Grow Group                                       |
| <b>Aug 23</b> | 10:00am - Indoor Worship<br>2:00pm- Online Worship        |
| <b>Aug 24</b> | 8:00am -Morning Men, Prayer<br>Knitters, Comfort Quilters |
| <b>Aug 26</b> | 5:30pm - END OF SUMMER<br>BASH                            |
| <b>Aug 27</b> | 9:00am - Scandia Quilters                                 |
| <b>Aug 28</b> | 7:00am - Grow Group                                       |
| <b>Aug 30</b> | 10:00am - Indoor Worship<br>2:00pm- Online Worship        |
| <b>Aug 31</b> | 8:00am -Morning Men, Prayer<br>Knitters, Comfort Quilters |

## ***KID's SUMMER BASH***

Summer is usually a time for a more care-free take on life. People go on vacations over the summer and there is a little more time for rest and relaxation. Summer can be a great blessing. But, this summer feels a bit different.

We are a little more anxious, we are more guarded. This summer is more nerve racking than ever before. It's hard to relax when everyone is cooped-up. It's hard to make plans when everything is being cancelled.

At Forest Hills we know we need to continue to function as the church. Ministry needs do not go away simply because everything gets shut down. We must go about doing ministry in a different way. During this time, we mask up, space out and take precautions, but we also know that many families are feeling extra stress and strain within their homes. As such, we want to provide an outlet for families with kids who need to burn off some energy, take a break from the TV, put down the video games and get out of mom and dad's hair for a little while. Our solution: the Kids Summer Bash!

Every Wednesday morning from 9-noon we will invite families to drop their kids off for some outdoor fun in the sun. We will play water games, eat snacks, sing some Scripture songs and learn a story from the Bible! It is a wonderful opportunity to encourage kids to have a great time and allow their parents a chance to catch their breath! We want people in our community to know that Forest Hills is a safe and engaging place for them!

Please keep this event in your prayers. We want God to use it to bless those families who attend. We want to be useful to God's work despite the extra challenges we may face right now.

If you know any families who might be interested, direct them to our website: [foresthillsunc.net](http://foresthillsunc.net) and they can register under "Upcoming Events".

For the King!  
-Andrew







## Summer Mission Trip

The summer mission trip planning is in full swing! We have a great week started. Let me give you a run through of what we have so far. First we will meet Monday night at church after dinner and settle in with sleeping arrangements and some fellowship time. Tuesday morning we will hit the ground running. Our current plan is to work at Community Helping Hands in Forest Lake at least once during the week. There we will be working with the staff to organize and stock their food pantry and other donations. We also have two afternoons of helping families in our congregation with yard work.

Relational work is the foundation of Christian service, and we want to build those relations with all ages, so we will be helping out at the Kids Bash Wednesday morning. We are also planning to go to the parks in Forest Lake and do some grounds clean up.

Thursday afternoon we will take a break and head to Wild Mountain Waterpark for fun and relaxation.

We will finish out the week helping with Community Care. Friday we will help with unloading and boxing the food, then Saturday we will help with distribution. After Community Care is over we will be finishing up with a debrief and head home.

This gives you just a taste of what the week is going to be like. We also have some key volunteers in place, like Ann Klinner who is planning and preparing all of our meals for the week. These types of activities would not be possible without the adults who are willing to give their time to the youth and the community.

If this sounds like fun there is still time to sign-up! Let Cassi know if you would like to be a part of this amazing week.

Cassi Betker

Director of Youth Ministry



## August Birthdays

May your special day be blessed and filled with joy! If your birthday isn't listed, please call the office and let us know so we can add you to the list!

Judy McKee 8/2  
Bob Rosenbaum 8/3  
Eden Bonsell 8/5  
Donald Richardson 8/17  
Florence Padrnos 8/20  
Teresa Berg 8/20  
Paulette Johnson 8/21  
Arlene Fredrickson 8/30

