



"Bits from Bob" for Week of January 28, 2024

St. John United Church of Christ
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Bob Koch, Pastor and Bit Scribe

Here's part of Sunday's sermon, "The Flavor of Faith" based on 1 Corinthians 8: 1-13.

Paul warned Christians in the Corinthian church to "take care that this liberty of yours doesn't somehow become a stumbling block to the weak." Disciples who love, in other words, never purposely go out of their way to make another Christian stumble and fall. How can we keep that from happening today?

Loving behavior starts with not being selfish or rude. It isn't as easy as it sounds. Society has tossed civility and thoughtfulness out the window. So much of what we see and hear is about getting ahead, controlling the conversation, and winning no matter what the cost.

That's not how things work here, in the body of Christ. The church isn't about you or me. It's about God and neighbor. Do something to prove it, even if it's something small.

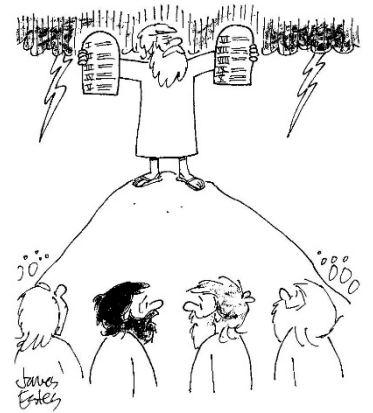
Pray, read your Bible, worship, and volunteer. Recycle your trash. Hold your tongue. Wait your turn. Don't interrupt. Give until it hurts, and then give a little more. Visit a neighbor or someone homebound or ill. Put others' feelings ahead of your own.

Do something, anything, to remind yourself that it isn't all about you.

(Want to watch Sunday's contemporary service? [You'll find a video of worship here.](#))

Bad Dad Jokes

- At my annual exam the doctor explained that being middle-aged now means I will experience slow muscle loss over time. I said, "Well, that stinks!" "Oh," my doctor said, "you get an award for it." "I do?" I asked. "That's right," my doctor said, "a-trophy."
- What did one toilet say to another? *You look flushed!*
- What do you call two spiders that just got married? *Newly-webs.*
- My uncle is a lion tamer. When he went bankrupt, they took nearly everything. At least he's still got his pride.
- This one is for the Trekkies out there: Spock had three ears: a left ear, a right ear, and a final front ear.
- I started writing numbers using noodles. I call them ramen numerals.
- When I was younger, I played the drums, but quit. I considered taking it up again many years later but decided not to. I was afraid there'd be repercussions.
- A police officer stopped my wife as she left a music shop carrying trumpet polish. He arrested her for possession of a band substance.
- What did Yoda say when he saw himself in 4K? *"HDMI."*
- What is the difference between a hippo and a Zippo? *One is really heavy; the other is a little lighter.*
- What did the one nut say while chasing the other nut? *I will cashew*
- If you add milk to your coffee directly from a cow, and the cow asks you to pay her, are you paying a cow fee?



"Something tells me the party's over."



- A building has been proposed by developers in Oklahoma City that, if completed, [would be the tallest in America](#).
- A six-legged cocker spaniel that was abandoned at a supermarket [successfully underwent surgery to remove the extra limbs](#) and is "quietly" recovering in her foster home.
- The research company Potentia Insight quizzed thousands of city-dwellers to rank [the fifty best cities in the world in 2024](#).
- If you're going to travel, you may as well enjoy a good meal. [Here are Yelp's 100 top US restaurants for 2024](#). You won't have to go far to visit one of them. Number two on the list is in St. Louis!

- As long as we're travelling, let's admire the work of [2023's travel photographers of the year](#).
- The New York-based company Siggì's Dairy is offering \$10,000 to people who can [stay away from their smartphones for an entire month](#).
- [The pastor accused of a three-million-dollar crypto scam](#) says he may have 'misheard God'.
- If you order a box of frozen Kobe beef croquettes from Asahiya, a family-run butcher shop in Takasago City in western Japan's Hyogo Prefecture, [it'll take another 43 years before you receive your order](#).
- [Why do people have different tastes in music?](#) A music education expert explains why some songs are universally liked, while others aren't.
- [Meet Aaron Yoder, one of the world's fastest backward runners](#) who can complete a reverse mile in five and a half minutes.
- Definitely something fishy about this...A teen whose Instagram username is @fish_bandit84 has been arrested in Provo, Utah, [for taping fish to ATMs and other objects](#). And, yes, of course, there are pictures!
- Police responding to a retail theft call in a California city discovered what is likely the most 2024 thing ever: A Sacramento woman [allegedly stole about five dozen Stanley cups valued at a whopping \\$2,500](#).
- Read about the daughter [who saved her mother's life with organ donations – twice](#).
- An 11-year-old boy is hearing for the first time in his life [after receiving a breakthrough gene therapy](#).
- Betty Brussel, a 99-year-old Canadian swimmer, [recently broke three world records](#). "I just count the laps," she said.
- The National Hole-in-One Registry says the odds of making two aces in one round are 67 million-to-1. [Seventy-seven year old golfer Cliff Romme just defied those odds](#).
- Here's Tuba Skinny with ["Jones Law Blues."](#)

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- The Hard Hat Crew will meet this Saturday. On the agenda are: Finish up painting the dining hall, removing old kick plate in dining hall and installing new grey kick plate, putting the altar back and clean up the dining hall floor, working with the Women's Guild on the location of the brick sidewalk, and tackling whatever miscellaneous projects may pop up. The fun starts around 8:30 AM. Volunteers are welcome!
 - **Thanks to everyone** who supported New Beginnings' Donate and Dine event at the Bullpen last Wednesday!
 - **The Nurture Committee is sponsoring a Game Day** Sunday, February 4, at 2 PM. We'll gather in the dining hall for a bit of fun to break up the winter blahs. Bring your favorite board game, snack, and beverage.



- **Bible study will meet this Wednesday, January 31.** Sessions are held in the library, start at 7 PM, and are also carried on Zoom. Log in at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84450472119>
- **The church office in the process of updating the church records.** Written forms are available at church, but [you can also use this link to update your information online.](#)
- **The sale of memorial bricks** has been extended due to a rash of last-minute orders. Proceeds benefit the Building Maintenance Fund.
- **End-of-year contribution statements** are sent out on an individual basis; contact the church office to request yours.
- **Shrove Tuesday** is February 13. Our annual sausage and pancake supper will run from 5-6:30 PM.
- **Ash Wednesday is February 14**, which also happens to be Valentine’s Day. Taking that coincidence to heart, our worship theme this year will be “In the Name of Love.” A full outline is included in this issue of the “Bits.”
- **Lenten worship will follow last year's pattern**, with services rotating among Holy Ghost UCC, Darmstadt, Trinity UCC, Biddleborn, (Pastor Tarrah Vaupel), Friedens UCC, Marissa (Pastor Brett Palmer) and, of course, our own New Athens family of faith.
- **A spring Women’s Retreat will be held April 13 and 14 at DuBois Center.** If you didn't receive registration information by mail, you can pick it up in the church office or sign up in the foyer on Sunday morning.

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- Pray for *the people of Ukraine, Israel, and Gaza*, and for an end to the wars there. Please also pray for *all who mourn*.



- **Margaret Barlow** had knee replacement surgery Friday and is back home recovering. Julianna Main had knee replacement surgery this morning.
- **Jeff Faucett** is hospitalized at St. Elizabeth’s where he’s having a variety of tests run.
- **Verla Mae Hoffman** is still a patient at Memorial but is doing much better.
- **Ruth Ann Hanft** had a pacemaker implanted last week.
- Chris Biermann asks that we pray for *her brother Russ*, who is having cataract surgery on Tuesday.
- Greg Ray’s cousin, **Jeff Ray**, is out of his coma, awake and aware, but still faces a long recovery.
- Janet Jones asks that we pray for her sister **Ardie Dillier**, who’s experiencing heart issues.
- **Steve Ritter** continues to deal with health issues and would appreciate our prayers.
- Donna Reuss’ cousin, **Angie Van Buren**, remains bed-ridden in her home.
- Teresa Whelehan’s brother **Jon** continues to cope with a brain lesion and heart issues.
- Please pray for **DJ Miles**, who is living with ALS.
- Please pray for **Lucas Klingman, Jace Shoulders, and Ava Kern**, all of whom are battling leukemia.
- Please pray for those struggling with cancer: **Sharon Askew, Gena Beck, Dennis Breithaupt, Rhonda Dyer, Kent Goepfert, Bill Gregory, Gerri Griffin, Lee Hurst, Kim Kinzinger, Sharon Koenigstein, Stan Lewis, Stu Loesche, Maddie Mann, Joyce Mosimann, Bill Murray, Cathy Raney, “Red” Ruff, Brittany Schaltenbrand, Dean Schatte, James Scherle, Scott Todd, Connie Whitehead, Ron Wolf, and Phyllis Zimmerman.**
- Keep praying for **Matt Liefer**, still waiting for a heart transplant, and for **Greg Boschert**, now on the liver transplant list. Please also pray for **Ruth Juenger and Ben Hall**, both of whom are at home but struggle with mobility issues.
- Please pray for *the staff, students, teachers, and administrators at New Athens District 60 and for our own New Beginnings Daycare.*

Lent 2024
“In the Name of Love”

Ash Wednesday and Valentine’s Day both falling on February 14 is a stark reminder of just how complicated all our talk of “love” and “loving” really is. This year’s Lenten theme, “In the Name of Love,” takes a deep dive into the knotty nature of love in scripture. We’ll see times when love was a freeing gift, and other times when people used love as an excuse for oppression, abuse, violence, and even murder. Through it all, we’ll look to Christ’s death on the cross as the full and final example of what self-giving love is all about.

Four area congregations will observe Lent together: Holy Ghost UCC, Darmstadt and Trinity UCC, Biddleborn, (Pastor Tarrah Vaupel), Friedens UCC, Marissa (Pastor Brett Palmer) and, of course, our family of faith here at St. John’s. ***Ash Wednesday and Good Friday will be at “home,”*** but the other services will rotate, with all three pastors present and the host pastor preaching. Worship services will be at 7 PM, with each congregation hosting a soup and sandwich supper beginning at 5:30 PM.



Offering envelopes from all participating churches will be collected during worship and then distributed to the appropriate congregations. Loose offering will go to relief efforts of the International Red Cross to aid those on both sides of the conflict between Israel and Hamas affected by homelessness, hunger, and violence.

February 14, Ash Wednesday

Revelation 2: 1-7, “Abandoning Love”

Ephesus was the official center of Asia, so the church there was correspondingly important, too. Paul spent three years there. When he left, he warned of troubled times ahead. Those times had come and, according to Revelation, Ephesus weathered them well.

“I...know that you are enduring and bearing up for the sake of my name and that you haven’t grown weary,” Jesus tells the Ephesians. “But,” Jesus adds, “I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.” The well-intentioned Ephesians had become so zealous to find the right way and so quick to weed out what they thought was the wrong way that they’d left the one true way, the way of love. They were in danger of becoming nothing more than pious hypocrites. How often can the same be said of us?

February 21 (New Athens)

Genesis 34, “Dinah and Shechem”

Genesis 34 tells the story of Dinah, the daughter of Leah and Jacob, whom Shechem rapes and who is then used as a voiceless bargaining chip in a scheme for her family to get their revenge. Jacob’s sons trick the Hivite men into circumcising themselves to supposedly seal an economic and military alliance. Three days after this mass circumcision, Jacob’s sons attack the Hivites. The men, who are in no condition to fight back, are all slaughtered. Jacob’s sons then plunder the city and make all the Hivite women and children slaves.

All this is done in the name of “love.” The rapist Shechem feels “his soul drawn” to Dinah, while Dinah’s brothers say they carried out their bloody war to avenge their sister’s honor. Jacob’s main concern is the military repercussions of his family’s raid. And as for Dinah...we never hear her voice. For that matter, we don’t hear from God, either. Whatever else this story is about, it isn’t about love.

February 28 (Darmstadt)

Genesis 25-33, “Jacob and Esau”

The story of Jacob and Esau is a trip to dysfunction junction filled with sibling rivalry, warring spouses, and a battle of parental favorites. As Tina Turner famously asked, “What’s love got to do with it?” In this case, the answer is, “Not much.”

March 6 (Marissa)

1 Corinthians 13

This service is a pivot point, one where we turn from examples of what love is *not* to what love *is*. And what better place to make that turn than in the thirteenth chapter of Paul's first letter to Corinth? Paul doesn't deny the reality of impatience, unkindness, envy, boasting, arrogance, rudeness, or any of the other less than loving actions and attitudes he lists. These things exist and their power is real, Paul said. They will harass and trouble us – but they won't defeat us, because God's love in Jesus Christ is stronger than any of them.

March 13 (New Athens)

Luke 19: 1-10, "Zacchaeus"

The story of that "wee little man" is about more than tree-climbing. Zacchaeus, the Roman-collaborating, neighbor-cheating tax collector who used his position to enrich himself, responds to Jesus' presence in his house by giving away half of his possessions and promising to pay back anyone whom he'd cheated fourfold. Love, especially Jesus' love, opens hearts and changes lives. Maybe that's why, sometimes, we're afraid of it and even run from it...

March 20 (Biddleborn)

Luke 15: 11-32, "The Parable of the Prodigal Son"

...all of which brings us to this parable. After breaking his father's heart (as well as his bank account), a selfish son squanders his new-found wealth, finds himself sharing a trough with some hogs, and at last comes to his senses. He resolves to throw himself upon the mercy and love he once abused, returning home. Expecting to be treated, at best, as a servant, he finds himself graciously welcomed by a father who rejoices that one once lost is now found.

Maudy Thursday, March 28 (Marissa)

As we gather around Christ's table, we see, smell, and taste love's power in broken bread and outpoured wine. We also mourn our participation in the betrayal of Christ's love that is also part of this sad yet holy night and meal.

Good Friday, March 29 (New Athens)

John 18 and 19, "Failing to Love When It Matters Most"

On Good Friday, we'll relive the story of Jesus' suffering and death as lights dim and candles go out in a Tenebrae service of darkness. We'll focus on Pilate in particular the one who, especially in John's account of Jesus' death, had several chances to release Jesus but never did.



Easter Sunday, March 31

Mark 16: 1-8, "Afraid"

Each gospel account of Christ's resurrection has its own power and perspective. Mark speaks plainly to the stark terror of discovering one thought dead is alive, and the fear of sharing such fantastic, hard-to-believe news.

We'll have three Easter day services. The first will be at the old city cemetery at 6:30 AM, the second (traditional) worship service will be at 8 AM, and the third (contemporary) service will be at 10 AM. Our youth and Board of Christian Education will sponsor their annual Easter breakfast Easter day, too. Serving will run from 6:30 am through 9:30 am.

Please remember those living in nursing homes and assisted living facilities with your prayers, cards, and visits. PB

Cedar Trails, 490 Urbana Drive, Freeburg, IL 62243

Wilda Utz

Cedarhurst, 518 Legacy Drive, Waterloo, IL 62298

Vickie Wildy

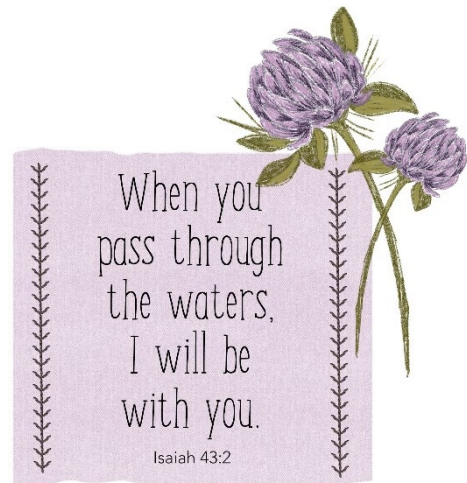
Freeburg Care Center, 746 Urbana Drive, Freeburg, IL 62243
Charles and Janet Knewitz, Sue Kosarek, Martha Wirth, and Don Milligan

Bria of Columbia, 253 Bradington, Columbia, IL 62236
Darlene Connor

Integrity Health Care, 727 N. 17th Street, Belleville, IL 62226
Bill Darner

Mar-Ka Nursing Home, 201 S. 10th Street, Mascoutah, IL 62258
Jean Claunch

St. Paul Home, 1021 W. E Street, Belleville, IL 62220
Ralph Wildy



***Here's the Nurture Committee schedule of events for 2024.
Mark your calendars now!***



Sunday, February 4 *Game Day, 2 PM*
We'll gather in the dining hall for a bit of fun to break up the winter blahs. Bring your favorite board game, snack, and beverage.

Sunday, May 19 *Worship and Church Picnic at Hanft Park*
Worship will be at 10 AM, followed by a potluck lunch starting around 11 AM. Grilled burgers, brats, and hot dogs will be furnished. This is a bring your own lawn chair and your own beverage event.

Sunday, June 30 *Fifth Sunday Potluck*
We'll have one worship service at 10 AM, followed by a potluck at 11 AM (ish).

Sunday, August 11 *Ice Cream Social*
We'll gather in the dining hall after 9:15 AM worship. Ice cream for breakfast? You betcha!!

Sunday, October 20 *Breakfast Potluck*
We'll have a breakfast potluck after the 8 AM service, with the contemporary service bumped a bit later, to 9:45 AM.

Sunday, November 3 *Potluck and Music at Nuernberger Farm*
Everyone is invited to Nuernberger farm for a potluck lunch, chili dump, and live music beginning around 11 AM. This is a bring your own lawn chair and your own beverage event.

While we're at it... our Chicken Dinner will be May 5 and the Wurstmarkt September 29. We'll decorate the sanctuary for the Advent and Christmas seasons after 9:15 AM worship on December 1, and go caroling on December 18.