

THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE



Shepherd of the Valley Evangelical Lutheran Church

1455 East Yosemite Avenue, Merced CA 95340 209-383-0632

Our Mission Statement: To be loving Christians, centered in God's Word and serving one's neighbor.

Our Vision Statement: Accepting people where they are and loving them as God does.

STAFF

Pastor John Russell-Curry
jrussellcurry@comcast.net

Administrative Assistant:
Carolyn Daberkow
shepherdofthevalleyelca@gmail.com
209-383-0632

Office Hours

8:00 – 11:00 AM Monday-Friday

web page: www.thesovlutheran.net
Also on Facebook

Council President:
Marc Medefind
Cell: 209-777-9302
mrmedefind@aol.com

Sunday worship is live on Zoom at 10:00 AM and in-person in sanctuary. (See updates on calendar & SOV Weekly News emails.)

Please have your articles for the newsletter sent each month by the 15th to:
shepherdofthevalleyelca@gmail.com
Thank you.

THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE newsletter is available as a paper copy for pickup, mailed, or sent as an email attachment, or viewed on the website.

ELCA Statements and information are available on the web sites: Sierra Pacific Synod, spselca.org, and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, elca.org.

MESSAGE FROM OUR PASTOR

My father had a serious speech impairment when very young.

My brother made sure I was in attendance if he was to be called on to speak in public due to his serious speech impairment (I was to "interpret" his utterances).

Entering elementary school, I was sent to the speech therapist due to an inability to appropriately make the "th-" sound. That was kindergarten.

I made some progress. I "graduated" from that series of weekly sessions. I was assigned additional therapy due to a struggle with the "s" sound.

At the end of my 13th year of therapy, my specialist lamented, "John, when you first came to me, I thought you would make improvements. Now, whenever you speak, I know people will make fun of you".

Attending college, I learned to keep quiet – not speaking in class... not asking a girl for a date.

Entering teacher training at Stanislaus State, prospective teachers were reviewed a month before graduation. One reviewer pulled me aside, "John, we cannot allow a teacher who speaks like you to be in a classroom of impressionable young children". I was expected to quit the program.

At seminary, the preaching professor singled me out to meet with a specialist. After a couple of sessions, he announced, "There's nothing we can do for you. You're too impaired".

Here I am speaking in public on a regular basis to you impressionable people.

I sincerely appreciate that none of you have made fun of me. You are kind and accepting of someone with a "difference".

Thanks.

Pastor John



PRAYER REQUESTS

Prayers for healing:

Tom Stephens; Gleneda Muralt; Dorothy Woody; Rosie Sullivan; Eric Smith; Gleneda Muralt's niece, Shereida; Nan Dailey; Kimberly Castillo's daughter Jillian and mother-in-law Lupe; Pam Andersen; Pastor John Russell-Curry and his family; Warren Westerberg; Sylvia Poupard; Jeane & David Hetland; Annie Sofranek; David Cherf; and people who are ill around the world.

We lift prayers for our Benevolence of the Month, **Love, Inc.** and for our Sierra Pacific Synod Bishop, **Jeff Johnson.**

The names on the Prayer List may be removed at the end of each month unless the office is notified that you would like them left on for another month. Please leave a message at the office, 209-383-0632. Thank you.



PRAYER CHAIN

If you have any prayer requests, please contact Pam Andersen at 209-631-4594 to start the Prayer Chain.

Church Council Highlights

By Barb Ward, Vice President

*Donald Gumm shared his experience with the Fresh Expressions Lay Ministry training. He will move forward with ways we can make connections in the community and possibly host a monthly lunch or dinner at the church.

*We discussed having some safety protocols in place.

*We finalized the Ash Wednesday service.

*We are very excited that Lora Burnett has joined the choir.

*The hymns have been chosen for March.

*Pastor is replacing two clocks - one in the narthex and one in the conference room. Despite changing batteries, they still do not work.

*We discussed moving the key to the paper towel dispensers from the office to the supply closet in the main men's restroom (where the paper towels are kept)

*We will have a Palm Sunday potluck. Barb will put a sign-up sheet in the narthex.

*We finalized plans for Easter week: We will have a combined Maundy Thursday and Good Friday service at 10am on Friday, April 3rd and Easter Sunday service on Sunday, April 5. There will not be a coffee hour after church on Easter Sunday.

*We chose Friday, March 20 and Saturday, March 21 for our deep spring cleaning. Chris Love is looking into hiring a firm to bring in a cherry picker and clean the chandeliers and remove the cobwebs in the sanctuary. We really need all able-bodied people to help get the church looking its best inside and out and would love treats donated for the workers break on those days. We plan to work from 8:30-noon each day.

MARCH BIRTHDAYS

Alan Arnold	03/06
Dorothy Woody	03/07
Carolyn Stephens	03/10
Dan Woods	03/10
Christine Boyenga	03/11
Phil Rahn	03/14
Dylan Cherf	03/20
Ken Sullivan	03/26
Carolyn Daberkow	03/26
David Pressly	03/27
Patti LiWang	03/28
Brent Sales	03/29

APRIL BIRTHDAYS

David Cherf	04/03
Rita McDonald	04/19
Karen Arnold	04/20
Lilliana Gallaway	04/25
Dakotah Timpson	04/28



MONTHLY BIRTHDAY LUNCHEON

Birthday Luncheon will meet on Thursday, March 19, at 11:30 AM. Please watch for more information as to where we will be meeting.



Daylight Saving Time begins Sunday, March 8 at 2:00 a.m. Don't forget to "spring forward." Set your clocks ahead one hour before going to bed on Saturday night.

BIBLE TEXT READINGS

Second Sunday in Lent **March 1**

Genesis 12:1-4a
Psalm 121
Romans 4:1-5, 13-17
John 3:1-17 Purple

Third Sunday in Lent **March 8**

Exodus 17:1-7
Psalm 95
Romans 5:1-11
John 4:5-42 Purple

Fourth Sunday in Lent **March 15**

1 Samuel 16:1-13
Psalm 23
Ephesians 5:8-14
John 9:1-41 Purple

Fifth Sunday in Lent **March 22**

Ezekiel 37:1-14
Psalm 130
Romans 8:6-11
John 11:1-45 Purple

Passion/Palm Sunday **March 29**

Isaiah 50:4-9a
Psalm 31:9-16
Philemon 2:5-11
Matthew 27:11-54 or Matthew 27:11-54 Scarlet or Purple

PALM SUNDAY LUNCHEON

Sunday, March 29 After Worship

Bring your favorite dish to share. There will be sign-up sheet in the Narthex.

HOLY WEEK

Combined Maundy Thursday and Good Friday service will be held Friday, April 3 at 10 AM.

Easter Sunday service will be held on Sunday, April 5 at 10 AM. There will not be a coffee hour on Easter Sunday.

EASTER LILIES

Help beautify our sanctuary this Easter and honor special people in your life. You can order 6" Easter Lilies for \$20 each. They will grace the sanctuary on Sunday, April 5 and you can take them home after the service on the 5th. You can place your check/cash in a special envelope in the offering plate along with the order form or give it to Karen Arnold or the church office. Checks may be written to SOV and mark Easter Lilies on the memo line. **Deadline for orders is Sunday, March 22**

REMINDER

All SOV members who enter the church during the week are reminded to double and triple-check that doors are locked when leaving.
Thanks so much.

SUNDAY LENTEN BIBLE STUDY

Pastor John is leading a Lenten Bible Study entitled "Holy Week" that will conclude on Sunday, March 29. The study meets in the conference room after the worship service.
Please plan now to attend.

SOV WORSHIP SERVICES ARE ON FACEBOOK

Our worship services can be seen any day, at any time, on Facebook. Just type in the search box "Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Merced" and you will see the church listed. Click on our church and our Facebook page appears, with all the services.

We encourage you to send the service to your family and friends by clicking on the "SHARE" icon below the picture and then use "Share to your friends" or "Send in Messenger" service.

Shepherd of the Valley Website

The website is active and being monitored by Carolyn Daberkow, Administrative Assistant. Take a little time to review the website.

You will find the links to the Zoom gatherings by clicking on ABOUT US, click on WORSHIP SERVICE OUTLINES and click on the long link. You will need the Zoom app downloaded to your phone, tablet, or computer first.

Thanks go to Carolyn Daberkow for the continuing updates.

**BENEVOLENCE OF THE MONTH
March Benevolence**

Love INC

P.O. Box 2141
Merced, CA 95344
Office Line: 209-383-7034
Help Line: 209-383-1265
info@loveincmerced.com

Office Hours: 9 AM – 2 PM
Monday-Friday

Love INC of Greater Merced serves the communities of Merced, Atwater, Planada, Winton & Le Grand.

Within these communities we have 32 church partners that provide resources to people in need and volunteer assistance. We work as a liaison among individuals, agencies, organizations, and churches who desire to reach out and serve those in need. Together, we come alongside those individuals and families who have multiple needs, but desire to break free from the cycle of poverty.

Donations may be given to Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church with Love, INC on the memo line to be forwarded.

Spring Cleaning

Many hands make light work so come on out! We will be doing a deep cleaning on Friday, March 20 and Saturday, March 21 from 8:30-noon and need lots of help. If you are unable to come either day, think about providing treats for the workers.

CONGREGATION COUNCIL MEMBERS

Term ends May 2026

Karen Arnold
David John Cherf II
Marc Medefind
Barbara Ward

Term ends May 2027

Mary Jo Knudsen
Mona Kowalczyk
Christine Love
Christopher Tomford

Mona Kowalczyk – Treasurer & Bookkeeper
Christine Boyenga – Financial Secretary

2025-2026 Council Officers

President: Marc Medefind Vice-President: Barb Ward
Secretary: David John Cherf II

Next Meeting Date: Third Monday of the month
March 16, 2026 10 AM

MARCH SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP ASSISTANTS

To help serve the glory of God in worship - please contact Chris Boyenga, 209-769-8544 to participate as Greeter, Usher, or Reader/Assisting Minister for our 10 A.M. Sunday Worship Service.

	Sunday March 1	Sunday March 8	Sunday March 15	Sunday March 22	Sunday March 29
Greeters/ Attendance	<i>Chris Love</i>	<i>Chris Boyenga</i>	<i>Mona Kowalczyk</i>	<i>Chris Boyenga</i>	<i>Mary Jo Knudsen</i>
Ushers	<i>David Bettis</i>	<i>Alan Arnold</i>	<i>David Bettis</i>	<i>Donald Gumm</i>	<i>Alan Arnold</i>
Reader/Assisting Ministers	<i>Tim Shaw</i>	<i>Mona Kowalczyk</i>	<i>Mary Jo Knudsen</i>	<i>Susan Gumm</i>	<i>Bronwen Maxson</i>

Forsaken??
Reflection by Nan Dailey

“My God, my god, why has thou forsaken me?” These words, which Jesus shouts from the cross, are found in Matthew (27:46), Mark (15:34) and in Psalm 22 (v 1-8) When Jesus says them from the cross, they are understood to mean that he is quoting the psalm so that the people can know the prophecy has been fulfilled by and through him.

But the phrase has always haunted me way beyond understanding it as a prophecy. It's rife with human suffering, despair, and betrayal. Just the night before, Jesus in all his humanness, had accepted his fate, accepted that the cross was his destiny, accepted God's path for him (Matthew: 26:39). He had drained that bitter cup to the dregs.

Except there were more bitter dregs to come. And maybe that's what is happening here, as he hangs on the cross so close to death. He does not, in fact, cannot soften this human horror and devastation. Is it any wonder he cries out his rage, his human confusion in the compelling words: “My God, my god, why has thou forsaken me?”

I read somewhere that when Jesus died, the separation between divine and human became permanent. There were earthquakes, tombs opening, and rocks splitting. Everything we thought we knew about death, divinity, holiness, and resurrection was cracked wide open.

And though **we** know the end to this story is a joyful reunion with Jesus, the people of Jerusalem, the disciples, Mary Magdalene and all the others, did not know it. What they knew on that Friday night, was they needed to get his horrifically tortured body down off that heavy cross and bury it before the sabbath.

The painting by Rubens “Descent from the Cross,” shows us the scene vividly. Rubens painted at least four versions of it, but if you pull up an image of any of them, you'll see much the same thing: the labor it took to first pry the body off the nails embedded in his flesh and then lower it gently to the ground. One man has somehow climbed to the top of the cross and is holding precariously onto the material that presumably will be used to wrap the body in.

Try looking at the scene both through the eyes of the participants and your own. Look at the whiteness of Jesus' body, at the flaccidity of his limbs, his closed eyes. It probably won't take much to convince you that Jesus has really died. For the next few days, we have to live that grief, that abandonment, that emptiness.

It's not quite time to shout our Easter “Hallelujah! Christ has risen”. But hang in there, my friends, because we are not in fact forsaken. We don't have to feel empty and cold and alone. He **is** coming, his holy wind is even now whispering the good news on the tiniest little breeze. Listen, listen, put aside your grief for a minute and listen. You'll hear it. I know you will.

**SHEPHERD OF THE VALLEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
MARCH CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Worship 10 AM Sanctuary & Zoom Lenten Bible Study After Service					Knitting Club 2 PM SOV Weekly Email News	Church Clean-up 9 AM
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Worship 10 AM Sanctuary & Zoom Lenten Bible Study After Service					Knitting Club 2 PM SOV Weekly Email News	
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Worship 10 AM Sanctuary & Zoom Lenten Bible Study After Service	Council Meeting 10 AM			Birthday Luncheon 11:30 AM	Friday & Saturday Deep Spring Cleaning 8:30 to 12 PM Knitting Club 2 PM SOV Weekly Email News	
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
Worship 10 AM Sanctuary & Zoom Lenten Bible Study After Service					Knitting Club 2 PM SOV Weekly Email News	
29	30	31				3
Worship 10 AM Sanctuary & Zoom Lenten Bible Study After Service						



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED