



2508 Washington Ave SW
Bemidji, MN 56601

The Relentless Pursuit

A Four-Part Devotional Series on Luke 18 and the hymn "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing"

Part 4: The Relentless Pursuit

*Oh, to grace how great a debtor I know daily you're constrained to be;
Let my grace now like a fetter bind your wandering heart to me.
Prone to wander, I know you feel it; prone to leave the God you love.
Here's your heart, I'll take and seal it; seal it for my courts above.*

It is such a powerful and personal gift! Your grace. You keep us all together in your arms of grace, and sweet Jesus we need that. Because, wow, how prone we are to wander at times God. How prone we are to leave you. I mean, so much happens in life. So much is out of our control. So much to fear. So much that makes us want to run and hide. So much that makes us pretend like we don't need you.

But you, God, never give up on us. You never stop pursuing us. Even into the depths of death itself you will never let us go!

It is no wonder why Samuel tells us to raise our Ebenezar, that rock that claims our help as coming from you. It is no wonder why the Psalmist in psalm 121 invites us to turn our eyes to the hills and know that our help is in you, our Lord. It is no wonder why Robert Robinson calls us to sing out loud 'hither by thy help we've come'. You keep us steadfast in your love. You pursue us no matter where we go. You connect us, bond us, and unite us in your ever flowing streams of love and mercy! It is a gift we can never repay; a gift that blesses us every day.

Father God, we know there are not always answers to the big questions, and you know that sometimes we get angry, lost, and lonely. But you promise to walk with us through all the highs and lows of life, so that we will never be alone. This promise we received in baptism, that nothing will ever separate us from your love. That you will truly keep our going outs and coming ins today and all days, and for that, we thank you God. We thank you for never giving up on us even when we wander from, ignore, or unjustly judge you and others. We thank you for relentlessly pursuing us no matter where we go. We thank you for taking our hearts, saving them, and washing them clean with your son's precious blood. We thank you for sealing us for your courts above.

Help us to pray without ceasing. Help us call on you for help and trust that you will answer us by faith. Help us know that even when life makes little sense, when tragedies strike that have no good reason, we can lean on your strength and hope in a better tomorrow. For you weave your love without ceasing, and will relentlessly pursue justice in us and through us. May we walk together in you and shine together your ever embracing light of love. In Jesus' name we pray... AMEN.

Peace,
Pastor Chris

What is Ash Wednesday?

The imposition of ashes began to develop in the eleventh century where it had become customary to receive ashes at the beginning of Lent. The Christian use of ashes relates to a fourth century Jewish practice where public penitents were dressed in sackcloth and sprinkled with ashes on the head as a sign of repentance. As it is practiced now by many churches and denominations, being marked with ashes is a public acknowledgement that one is a sinner, as we all are. Receiving the ashes in the sign of the cross is a symbol of repentance and forgiveness. The ashes themselves are the burnt palms used on Palm Sunday of the previous year. While receiving the ashes, it is customary to hear these words, "Remember you are dust and to the dust you shall return". They are a reminder of our mortality, that from the dust of the earth we were formed and when we die, we will return to being dust again. Though we are in bondage to this reality, we belong to God. In the repentance of sin and the forgiveness that comes through Jesus' death and resurrection, though we die, we shall live forever. Ash Wednesday begins the spiritual journey of Lent; a time of renewal in the love of God. (Information on Ash Wednesday was compiled from www.elca.org and www.aboutcatholics.com)

What is Lent?

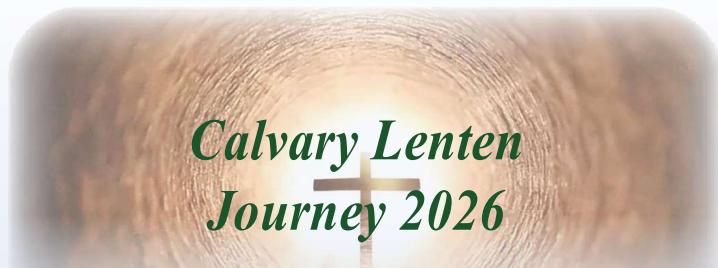
The word Lent derives from the Middle English word Lenten, meaning springtime – the time of lengthening days. In its earliest form, it consisted of three weeks and was an intense period of spiritual and liturgical preparation for catechumens before they were baptized at Easter. By the time Christianity was legalized in the fourth century, Lent had developed into its current length of forty days. This length connects scripturally to the time Jesus fasted and was tempted in the desert. (Luke 4:1-13). Some now also believe that it relates to the early church's forty-day fasting practices especially engaged by monks. This fast, beginning right after Epiphany stressed prayer and penance. Once most people were Christian and baptized as infants, Lent lost the connection to the preparation of catechumens for baptism and the themes of repentance and fasting became dominant. (Information on Lent was compiled from www.elca.org and www.aboutcatholics.com)

An Invitation to our Lenten Journey 2026

For quite some time now my heart has been spinning on the call of Jesus to love thy neighbor. That to love God is to love each other. You can't say you love God but hate your neighbor. The two are deeply interwoven in a kind of dance meant to be a living expression of following Christ. Admittedly, as I look out across our state, our country, and our world, this feels like a bit of a tall order. Questions of how do we respond as those who confess Christ as the center of our lives? How do we shine our faith when so much of what we experience seems to be heading in a direction that cares less and less about those whom Jesus paid the closest attention to? Who is the neighbor that God calls us to love? I mean these questions are serious and significant, and they draw us to a way of life that doesn't put ourselves first. Loving thy neighbor is fundamental to life with God. When Jesus says love God and love people, he doesn't say 'some people' or 'those who look like us' but simply, people. Jesus sought all people, especially the lost, the lonely, the broken hearted, the sick, those who society, has deemed the 'least of these' in order to build a community where all are equally loved and cared for. This message is radical, especially right now, but it is the call we walk together with God: The call of all Christians.

This year, as we journey through the Lenten season, you will be invited to reflect on the stuff that clutters our hearts and lives; the stuff that turns us from our walk with God and our love for our neighbors. Worship will see a few changes for the season. Our liturgy on Sunday mornings will find a more traditional flow and the colors of the season will change to purple. We will also be removing the language of "Hallelujah" from our vocabulary not to be returned until Easter. Our kiddos will help with this on Ash Wednesday and in worship on Sunday. In addition, our Wednesday ministry will change to include a noon Ash Wednesday and Lenten service. We will gather for music, scripture, and a reader's theater presentation of our evening drama. Calvary Alive will still begin with a meal at 5:30pm which flows into Lenten Worship at 6:15pm. In Worship we will sing the beautiful Holden Evening Prayer and experience a five-part drama series, Lent in the Attic, that explores themes around how the 'stuff' of our lives affects our faith and walk with God. We are excited to begin this journey again and it all starts on February 18th, with Ash Wednesday worship. Join us for dinner at 5:30pm and worship at 6:15pm. We are also excited to share a new daily devotional resource will be available to walk with you throughout Lent. These devotions are written by Calvary members to bless you on your journey. May Lent be a time of renewal in your personal life and may it be a time of renewal and connection for our life together. And all throughout the journey, may you know that you are held in my thoughts and prayers as we walk together in Christ's love. God's peace friends!

Pr. Chris



February 18

Ash Wednesday Worship with the Imposition of Ashes

February 25 - "Movin on Up"

The Stuff We Carry with Us (Psalm 121)

March 4 - "House Hunting"

The Stuff that Gets in the Way (Psalm 84)

March 11 - "Toga Toga"

The Stuff We Do and Don't Do (Psalm 139:1-18)

March 18 - "Caught in the Act-tic"

The Stuff that Weighs Us Down (Psalm 51:1-13)

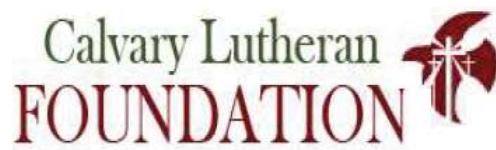
March 25 - "Cobwebs"

The Stuff that We Let Go (Psalm 30)

See Calvary's February Birthdays Here

[View this newsletter on the web and follow this link to see who to wish a happy birthday in February!](#)

February Ministry Partners: Calvary Foundation



Calvary's Monthly Ministry Partner for February is the Calvary Foundation! The purpose of the Foundation is to secure and receive gifts and bequests so that we may support the mission and ministry of the Calvary community for future generations. The ways the Foundation carries out its mission are many and varied, including contributing to college and Bible camp scholarships, as well as providing assistance to fund our youth trips.

Gifts received this month will help build up the Calvary Foundation so that we may continue to distribute the fruits! Gifts are welcome in any amount and in many forms (real estate, wills, trusts, stock, life insurance, monetary contributions, etc). You may wish to honor or memorialize a loved one or friend by giving a gift to the Calvary Foundation. May God be glorified in all that we do!

Hangin' with Matthew

A LENTEN JOURNEY THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Where: Calvary Lutheran Church - Led by Pr. Chris

When: Wednesday evenings at 7:15pm (after Lent Mentoring)
February 18-March 25

Who: Everyone is welcome

Cost: Free, but bringing treats is welcome

What: Join us for six weeks as we journey through the Gospel According to Matthew. Experience God's story of love and Matthew's connections to the deep traditions of the faith. All you need to bring is you and your favorite Bible, whatever translation you like and preferably one you are comfortable writing in. Come to learn, share, and listen as we grow together as Christ's church. Formed in love – growing in love – sent in love.

Preschool Open House

On February 19, the preschool will be having its Open House for new families from 5:30-6:30pm! If you or someone you know is interested in registering for Preschool for the 2026-2027 school year, it is a wonderful opportunity to take a tour, meet the teachers, and learn more about our thriving program! We serve families in our community with children ages 33 months to 5 years. If you have any questions, you can reach me at aholmgren@calvarybemidji.org, or check out our website calvarybemidji.org/pre-k.

Thank you!

Ashley Holmgren - Director of Preschool Ministry

Summer Programming

Did you know our preschool also offers summer programming, AND we serve school age as well? We provide care for ages 3 years to 5th grade. Feel free to come to our Open House on February 19 to learn more about our summer program as well.

Register for Summer Camp

We had Camp Sunday and the brochures are out, so now is the time to register for camp this summer. Head to pathwaysbiblecamps.org to find your day, weekend, or week for an amazing outdoor, faith-filled experience. The early bird registration deadline is March 30 to receive a discount. Calvary also provides camperships to help with the costs of camp. Don't miss a great chance to experience God's presence in a wonderful place with great people leading the way. Register now.

First Communion

We celebrated First Communion for 25 kids during our recent class and in worship. Each year we gather our 5th graders (and some others) to teach about this important sacrament and to celebrate the milestone together with families.



CLUB meets at Unified Basketball Game

We're all gathering together for the Unified Basketball game at the high school on Wednesday, February 4. Really, all the congregation is invited to this amazing community event. The game starts at 6:30pm, and we'll all meet there at 6:00pm. Look for the colorful signs made by our confirmation groups. We'll try to sit together and join the noisy fun as a group. It's a great way to support our community.

Summer Trips Meeting February 12

We have two great trips planned this summer. The Middle School Adventure will be to Duluth June 14-16 and the Senior Youth board the houseboat on Rainy Lake July 12-17. Our next summer trip meeting for both Middle School and High School parents and kids will be Thursday, February 12 at 7:00pm in the Fellowship Hall. This will be the final registration deadline. We'll hand out silent auction information and a plan for the rest of the winter/spring. Let Brett know you'll be there.

FINANCIAL REPORT

12 MONTH FISCAL YEAR – JULY-JUNE

General Fund – December

<u>Income</u>	<u>Budgeted</u>	<u>YTD Income</u>
\$137,574	\$106,469	\$616,554
<u>Expenses</u>	<u>Budgeted</u>	<u>YTD Expenses</u>
\$90,534.90	\$106,515	\$596,397

Cash, Receivables, & Savings: \$100,875

Dec. Ministry Partner: Village of Hope & Evergreen \$2,389

Calvary Foundation Balance: \$60,433

We want to thank everyone for their continued support as we grow in our ministry together!

A Message from Calvary Council ~ Sue Supalla



Calvary Family,

My name is Sue Supalla and I am writing to you this month as I have begun my second term on your church council. As a member of Calvary for 25 years, I am thankful and grateful for the opportunity to serve the congregation.

2025 was a transformative year in the life of our church. Evidence of a complete turnaround from the days of Covid are behind us and we can be thankful for the blessing of God's work through you in this place. November and December brought members forward to share their experiences of just how God has touched their lives through the mission of Calvary. What a gift it was to hear their stories... Thank You! December also brought the light of Advent season, culminating with a beautiful Christmas eve worship where over 1000 of our family worshiped together in celebration of Christ's birth. What an incredible night to be together as a church.

As we look forward to 2026 the council is encouraged by the response of the congregation for your faithful stewardship, improving our financials from a year ago. What a testament to the devotion of God's people. We are all aware there is much more to accomplish in the coming years... reducing our mortgage debt, (currently at \$718,000, or \$7,988 per month). Working towards a full-time worship and music position, and fulfilling our commitment to our seniors. Join your council in supporting the decisions we are faced with as we continue this positive and uplifting ministry at Calvary. We know our future is bright in God's hands and with his help anything is possible. May the peace of Jesus Christ and his light be with you all.

Sue Supalla - Church Council Member at Large

Stewardship Nuggets

Greetings, church family. We are overwhelmed with gratitude for the gracious response Calvary has seen in its financial support for our shared mission in faith. We were graced in November and December with different voices sharing why they give and what Calvary has meant to them. We asked you to grow together our financial gifts and you did! We ended 2025 strongly and we are so thankful for you! Our Challenge now is to continue this momentum in 2026. If you haven't had the opportunity to talk as a family about your mission support (your financial giving to Calvary) please take that time now. January is the perfect time to grow your gifts and make a weekly or monthly commitment to our shared faith. We all rely on each other and what a joy it is to share this road of faith. RebelGive is easy, accessible, and consistent. You can sign up today or continue sending in your offering envelopes for they all help bring our ministries to life. They help us care for and love both each other and the world. Thank you for your commitment and support of our life together. You are a blessing!

Pr. Chris and the Stewardship Ministry Team.

Preschool Garage Sale

Calvary preschool will be having its 2nd Annual Garage Sale Fundraiser this April 24 and 25. Please keep us in mind as you start your Spring cleaning! We will start accepting donations Sunday, April 19 through Wednesday, April 22. Come shop, and find some great deals while supporting our preschool!

A flyer for the February menu at Calvary Alive. It features a background of various food items like a mug of hot chocolate, cinnamon sticks, and ornaments. The text is as follows:

CALVARY ALIVE
FEBRUARY MENU:

FEB. 4 - NO CALVARY ALIVE
FEB. 11 - CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP & HOT HOAGIES
FEB. 18 - CHICKEN ENCHILADAS
FEB. 25 - SPAGHETTI & MEAT SAUCE

***Vegetarian & Gluten Free Options Available**

VBS Kickoff! Meeting February 15

It's time to start planning another amazing VBS experience, this time in the rainforest. So let's meet on Sunday, February 15 at 11:45am to talk about decorating, schedule, and how much fun it will be. Our VBS week is August 3-6, and 9. The theme of exploring the nature of God in "Rainforest Falls" should provide some awesome opportunities for decorating. Join us for our kickoff conversation. Talk to Brett for more information.

Did You Know?

Unless asked, hospitals don't alert pastors when their congregation members are admitted. If you would like Pr. Chris or Pr. Jeremiah to visit you while you're hospitalized, please don't hesitate to reach out to us at church! We would love to come and pray with you. For those who worship online at home, hymnals and bibles are available for use. Please let us know if you'd like one of the Caring Friends Ministry Team members to make a delivery and a visit!

Opportunities TO CONNECT

Men's Breakfast & Bible Study - Wednesdays 8:00am at Perkins
Martha Circle - 3rd Tuesday of every month 1:00-3:00pm
Hope Circle - 3rd Tuesday of every month 9:30-11:00am
Marigold Circle - 1st or 2nd Monday of every month 10:00-12:00pm
Senior Group - 3rd Friday of every month 12:00-1:30pm at Giovanni's
Quilters - Every Thursday 9:00-11:00am
Choir - Every Thursday 5:30-6:30pm in the Sanctuary

GRIEF SUPPORT GROUPS

The Refuge - 2nd & 4th Tuesday of every month, 4:00-5:30pm in Room 1 at Calvary (Erin Kossivi 813-417-7678)
Refuge Kids - Weekly, Fridays at Bemidji Covenant Church Family Life Center from 4:30-5:30pm (Erin Kossivi 813-417-7678)

Stewardship of Land Survey

Name: _____

Greetings, friends. We want to thank you for participating in this process of exploring the stewardship of our land resources. The conversations have been rich and faithful, and we appreciate the gift it is to walk together as church. It was clear from the feedback with the Stewardship of Land Forums back in the fall that we should explore multiple options including exploring the feasibility of building on our property, the practicality of leasing the land, as well as what selling part of the property could look like. This feedback led us to have a follow-up conversation in December with our neighbors to the east who are exploring a potential expansion of their company. From that conversation it became clear that they are seeking to purchase 17.5 acres on the east side of our almost 40 acre property with an offer of just over \$1,000,000. With this clarity, we wanted to ask a couple of additional questions for feedback from you:

- 1) Knowing this information, is selling a portion of our property a direction that we should continue to explore as a viable option?**

 - 2) If you encourage us to continue exploring this option, what priorities should we hold while doing so? Examples: Should we focus on debt reduction, invest the funds, start new ministries, enhance current ministries, or are there other priorities you see?**

 - 3) If you prefer that we do not continue exploring this option, where do you believe we should focus our efforts and why?**

Thank you for your feedback and continued engagement in this process. Please return this completed survey to the church office by February 15, 2026. You are a blessing and it is a joy to walk together!

**Would you prefer to fill this survey out digitally?
Scan or click the QR Code and answer the questions online.**

