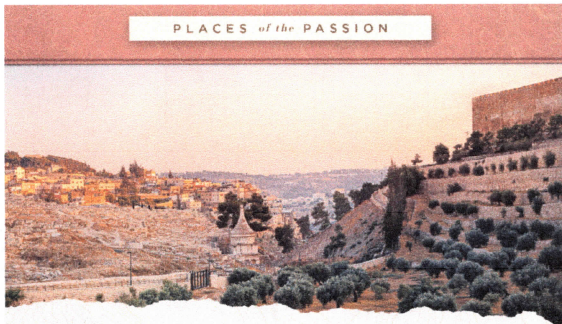


## Pastor Mark Witte



With great hope of good and better days to come I wish to introduce you to our Lenten Series for

2021. Pastor Bob and I look forward to sharing with you the *"Places of the Passion"*.

While we've been quarantined in homes and limited in travel these past 12 months it seems a welcome hint of joy to travel in word and spirit to the various places that were significant to the Passion of our Lord. Use your mind's eye to take yourself to these momentous locations and find a richer understanding of the steps our Lord Jesus took to bring us salvation at the cross.

The Lent services this year will take place in person at Grace at 11am and 7pm on the Wednesdays of Lent. We will also be live-streaming and recording the 7pm service with the hopes everyone else can follow from home. Below you'll see the themes of each special service:

- Feb. 17 (Ash Wednesday)**      *The City of Jerusalem*
- Feb. 24 (Midweek)**              *Bethany*
- Mar. 3 (Midweek)**                *The Mount of Olives*
- Mar. 10 (Midweek)**            *The Garden of Gethsemane*
- Mar. 17 (Midweek)**           *The High Priest's Courtyard*
- Mar. 24 (Midweek)**           *Pilate's Judgment Hall*
- Mar. 28 (Palm Sunday)** *Bethphage*
- Apr. 1 (Maundy Thursday)**    *The Upper Room*
- Apr. 2 (Good Friday)**         *Golgotha*
- Apr. 4 (Easter)**                 *The Empty Tomb*

### EASTER SCHEDULE

We would love everyone's help in spreading the word that we have changed up our Easter service times for 2021. To accommodate a 3rd Service this year and preserve adequate time for each service we have new times to announce. Here is the worship schedule for Easter morning: **7:00 a.m.**      **9:00 a.m.**      **11:00 a.m.**

## Sarah Witte, Youth Leader

In this time of turmoil one thing remains the same – our salvation in Christ. If we hold on to that one facet - everything else, all the bad things in this world, fall away. Peace reigns!

During this time it is imperative that we hold on to some sort of fellowship – some semblance of relationship, however that looks. It might be in the form of phone calls, cards, in-person bubbles or prayer. Mental health is just as important as physical health. Spiritual health, however, is the most important. Stay connected in your faith, in church and with each other.

IMPACT youth has been persevering through the trials. Over this past summer we met outside in my backyard or in parks. This fall we had to bring it inside. However, we do our best to maintain our social distancing while indoors. We had a small Epiphany party in January to exchange Christmas gifts and play games. While the youth don't want to wear masks, they are desperate for fellowship.

One aspect of youth that we have maintained to the best of our abilities is our commitment to service. In September we hosted the Easter Egg at the church picnic. In October we helped with the Trunk or Treat, both set-up and hosting a Super Mario Brothers themed trunk. In November, with the help of Holy Ghost and Thrivent Action Team cards, we were able to feed 43 families for Thanksgiving, including turkeys. Our service projects in December included feeding 23 more families with a Christmas meal. We also shopped for our annual ISD family as well as three other families with the help of One Sheep. In January we spent a day at Heartbeat to sort, clean, organize and drop off items to Goodwill.

Our future plans, as of right now, do include the garage sale for June. We are hoping things are looking much better by then. Organized trips for this summer are undecided. The district is deciding on the Junior High District Gathering in Frankenmuth usually taking place in June. This is the year that there are no organized trips for high school youth so we'll see where that leads us. In a way, that allows us some flexibility on our plans. I hope to continue with Monday nights, Sunday School, and other events. I'd like to start up Super Youth events in the next couple of months.

Prayer just might be the most important thing we have right now, along with our relationship with our loving, heavenly Father. Keep our youth and their families in your prayers. Keep our nation, state, and cities in your thoughts. Remember who is in control and who's will is all-powerful. Peace be with you!



## Pastor Bob Auxter, SMP

### “Uniquely made...therein, uniquely loved.”

*“O LORD, you have searched me and known me! <sup>2</sup> You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. <sup>3</sup> You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. <sup>4</sup> Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. <sup>5</sup> You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. <sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.”* Psalm 139: 1-6

I had a discussion with someone recently who was sure that God did not love all of us equally. The evidence for her was that she saw blessed and not blessed people every day. According to her vision, some deserved to be blessed, and were not, and most did not deserve to be blessed, but were blessed anyways. Hence, God cannot love equally.

I gave her my pastoral insight that according to God’s Word, He loves the whole world equally, enough so, to come and save us all, each and every one of us from our self-destructiveness, lest we be lost and condemned eternally and *equally*. Also, I quoted her Matthew 4:45b-*“For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”*

And that is where we left it, but I could sense that she was reluctant to leave go of her original premise. Then I began to think on the matter further, mulling her words over and over again in my mind, as I wrestled with it knowing sooner or later the Holy Spirit would give me some guidance on the matter. That’s how He has always worked these things out for me all along.

Sure enough, in the middle of the night, I awoke wide-eyed from a deep sleep with this thought in my mind- “God loves each of us *uniquely!* And Psalm 139 immediately came to mind- *“<sup>13</sup> For You formed my inward parts; You knitted me together in my mother’s womb. <sup>14</sup> I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows it very well.”*

In the Hebrew text of Psalm 139, “wonderfully made’ is *palah (pah-lah)*, and defined as *“separated, put a difference, set apart”*. In another word, *uniquely*. It is a known scientific fact that each of us is uniquely created. No two of us have the same fingerprints, nor identical voice patterns, nor DNA- God’s blueprint for creation, to name just a few of a myriad of parts and parcels of

humankind that are uniquely personal and one-of-a-kind. Even identical twin siblings have often minute differences, as well as some that are quite noticeable, in plain sight.

I also researched the definition of that word, *uniquely*, according to Webster’s Dictionary, and found this- *existing as the only one or as the sole example; single; solitary in type or characteristics: having no like or equal; unparalleled; incomparable.*

Bottom line is that God does not play favorites or games with us. None of us are irreplaceable, but each of us is uniquely created to be a unique blessing to neighbor according to the design and Will of our Creator God. And who of us can fully understand the mind of God- *“Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows Him his counsel?”* Isaiah 40:13, and, *“Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?”* Job 11:7 You and I are equally unique in that you and I are the only one who represents that Image of, by the Mind and Design of God, in which we have been uniquely created.

The value of a diamond or a gem is according to how many facets or cuts it has to reflect and fracture light going through it or reflected by it. It is the very same with His creation of us. Stop and think how many individuals have been conceived AND created since Adam and Eve, and how many remain yet to be conceived and created until the end of time, and see them each as unique reflections, as facets of, the incomprehensible beauty and complexity of God, and then go further with understanding His equally and uniquely different way of loving each and every one of us. Our finite brains cannot take it all in.....that’s what eternity is for.

So, I encourage and pray for you, that by the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling, to cherish your uniqueness in reflecting the unique love of God, by lavishing your neighbor with love and compassion, mercy and forgiveness, defense and protection, just as God has done to you. Amen?

