



The Torch

May-June

2019

"To receive and share Christ's embrace"

Who Are the Pharisees?

Pastor Bill Cate

What do you picture when you hear the word, "Pharisee"? Maybe it's something like the image to the right. If you're like most contemporary Christians, your minds travel 21 centuries back in time, conjuring up an image of one the guys who gave Jesus so much trouble during his ministry. Actually, that's not an accurate statement. I don't believe Jesus was at all bothered by these *"experts in the law."* It was the other way around. Jesus bugged the living daylights out of these guys.



Why? Because he challenged the *status quo*. Jesus dared to suggest that there might be a different way to do things. From little, seemingly inconsequential things, like ceremonial hand washing; on up through more serious stuff, like working and healing on the Sabbath and more, Jesus challenged everything in their neatly packaged little world. Theirs was an existence within the confines of the Law. Theirs was a religion of dos and don'ts that would spin wildly out of control if the least little atom was out of place. Theirs was a way of life tightly bound to the way things have always been. *"Change"* was a dirty word that you dared not speak in their presence. *"Different"* was the ultimate form of blasphemy that could get you banned from fellowship.

That was over 2,000 years ago. What about today? What does a Pharisee look like today? Think you can spot one? The long beards and the tassels of their prayer shawls are gone. The flowing robes are things of the past. They don't stand on street corners

and pontificate about the right way to do things or the wrong way to approach God. Indeed, the very temple they so proudly claimed as the only place to worship God was reduced to rubble in the year 70 A.D., never to be replaced. So, who are they? Where are they? Do they even still exist?

Let's look at these questions in reverse order. First, yes, they do still exist. While not a political party or a religious faction or even an organized group by any definition, they are alive and well. You can feel their insidious influence whenever and wherever the remotest possibility of change is suggested. They identify themselves with statements such as, *"We've never done it that way before,"* or *"We've always done it this way,"* or *"In my last church..."* They cling to *"pages five and fifteen"* of a hymnal that has twice been replaced.

Second, *"where are they?"* In a word, everywhere. No longer confined to the temple or Jerusalem or even to Judaism, they are anywhere the Church on earth exists. They are in our national or synodical offices where they attempt to dictate and control worship practices in the local congregation, telling us who can and who cannot participate in the Sacraments or what songs we can and cannot sing. They are in our Christian colleges and seminaries demanding lockstep compliance with manmade practices and traditions. They are in our congregations, bristling, complaining, moaning, and carping about insignificant challenges to the existing state of affairs. Rocking the boat is the worst crime they can imagine.



That leaves us with the final question of *"who are they?"* In 1813, upon defeating the British Navy on Lake Erie, US Navy Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry sent the message, *"we have met the enemy and he is ours,"* to General William Henry Harrison. In 1971, cartoonist Walt Kelly rephrased this quote

to capture the answer to our question. He penned his cartoon character Pogo saying: *"We have met the enemy and he is us."* In other words, we are the Pharisees. We are the ones who don't want change. We are the ones who don't want to upset the *status quo*. We are the ones who can't stand the thought of something being different.

The Pharisees among us have recently made themselves known in the ongoing discussions and deliberations about the future of First Lutheran Church in the wake of my impending departure. The question before you now concerns the *possibility*—and that is all it is at this point—of joining with your brothers and sisters in Christ from Faith Lutheran Church in Buena Vista to form a dual parish. (*Note: a dual parish exists when two congregations share one pastor.*)

The resistance to this possibility of change is palpable. I have heard statements to the effect of, *"If they change the service time, I'll leave."* If that is your reaction, I am sorry that your faith is so shallow that it depends on the clock.

Another sentiment boils down to, *"We want our own pastor."* No matter what happens, whether or not a dual parish agreement is reached, the next pastor of First Lutheran Church will be your own pastor. The possibility that he also serves another congregation is not an issue. Congregations all over the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, especially in rural areas, are part of multi-parish arrangements. I know of many dual parishes (I was offered such an arrangement for my first call), several triple-parishes, and even one four-parish situation. Yet, they all have their *"own pastor"*—one pastor who serves them and proclaims the Gospel to them on a regular basis. The only question should be: *"Is the ministry of Word and Sacrament being offered in this place?"*

Sadly, the Pharisees among us seem to have had their way, at least for the time being. The planned pulpit exchange between me and Pastor Becker of Faith Lutheran Church in Buena Vista has been cancelled. The Pharisees among us have said that they don't want this—the dual parish—to happen because they don't want to change. The Pharisees among us would rather cling to tradition than share their faith. And that's just sad.

Meanwhile, as the combined congregations decide what to do, I urge you all to remember that Christ died and rose again for each and every one of us, no matter our congregational, synodical, or church affiliation. Jesus lives and your faith rests on him. I also add my thanks to the members of the working group from both congregations who have endeavored to follow God's leading in discerning a workable solution to a challenging problem.

Saved to Share,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pastor Bill". The script is cursive and fluid, with the word "Pastor" written in a smaller, more compact style than the name "Bill", which is larger and more prominent.



**OPERATION SPIRIT FROM THE
HEART OF THE
ROCKIES**

**Thank you very much for your
generous donations.
No more magazines until further
notice.**

Any cards and letters you would like
to send would be GREATLY
appreciated!!

Monetary Donations are also needed
to cover the costs of shipping and
purchasing other supplies and items
for the troops. Please make checks
payable to First Lutheran Church and
write "Operation Spirit" on the memo
line.

PLEASE PRAY FOR: Mark
Cunningham, CH(CPT) James Brown,
Anah Kotila, Tim Wilson, Kenneth
Wilson, Thomas Sweet, Jake
Engleman, and Garrett Taylor.

**PACK TROOP BOXES 9 A.M. TUESDAY
MAY 28TH & TUESDAY JUNE 25TH**

Elder's Meetings

May 5th & June 2nd

11:30 am



MAY BIRTHDAYS

5/1 Gerrie Johnson

5/3 Jim McConaghy

5/7 Lois Hansen

5/8 Katie Belmar

5/9 Luke Stinnett

5/10 Sarah Dreher

5/11 Phil Homann

5/15 Jane Shuey

5/22 Vivian Osborne & Lester Longbrake

5/26 Gary Martin

5/31 Jonnie McConaghy

MAY ANNIVERSARIES

5/29 Rev. Eric & Johanna Stinnett

JUNE BIRTHDAYS

6/10 Chuck Johnson

6/13 Brandi Stevens

6/17 Willis Shuey

6/19 Jane Carstens

6/26 Pastor Bill Cate

6/28 Larry Soukup

JUNE ANNIVERSARIES

6/3 Robert & Judy Kratky

6/10 Gene & Joan Hapl



Kids First Literacy Club

First Lutheran Church

May 24th is the last day of KFLC for this school year. We are having a celebration with the kids and parents and tutors that Friday. Donations for food are welcomed and would be much appreciated. This school year has been so fun, and we are so proud of everything the students have accomplished. Thank you to everyone who donated throughout the year and for all your prayers and continuous support. During the summer break, consider joining KFLC! We are always accepting more tutors, volunteers, and students. A very special thank you to Gerrie Johnson for all you do and bring to KFLC! See you next school year!



MAY 2019

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3 9a KFLC	4
5 9:15 Worship & Communion 10:15 Fellowship 10:30 Bible Class & Sun School 11:30am Elders Meeting	6 7:00p – 8:00p AA Meeting	7	8 7:00p – 8:00p AA Meeting	9 8:00a Men's Breakfast HRRMC Cafeteria	10 9a KFLC	11
12 9:15 Worship & Communion 10:15 Fellowship 10:30 Bible Class & Sun School Mother's Day!	13 7:00p – 8:00p AA Meeting	14	15 7:00p – 8:00p AA Meeting	16 8:00a Men's Breakfast HRRMC Cafeteria	17 9a KFLC	18
19 9:15 Worship & Communion 10:15 Fellowship 10:30 Bible Class & Sun School	20 7:00p – 8:00p AA Meeting	21	22 7:00p – 8:00p AA Meeting	23 8:00a Men's Breakfast HRRMC Cafeteria	24 9:00a KFLC	25
26 9:15 Worship & Communion 10:15 Fellowship 10:30 Bible Class & Sun School	27 7:00p – 8:00p AA Meeting	28 9am Packing Troop Boxes	29 7:00p – 8:00p AA Meeting	30 8:00a Men's Breakfast HRRMC Cafeteria	31	

JUNE 2019

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1
2 9:15 Worship & Communion 10:15 Fellowship 10:30 Bible Class & Sun School 11:30am Elders Meeting	3 7:00p – 8:00p AA Meeting	4	5 7:00p – 8:00p AA Meeting	6 8:00a Men's Breakfast HRRMC Cafeteria	7	8
9 9:15 Worship & Communion 10:15 Fellowship 10:30 Bible Class & Sun School	10 7:00p – 8:00p AA Meeting	11	12 7:00p – 8:00p AA Meeting	13 8:00a Men's Breakfast HRRMC Cafeteria	14	15
16 9:15 Worship & Communion 10:15 Fellowship 10:30 Bible Class & Sun School Father's Day!	17 7:00p – 8:00p AA Meeting	18	19 7:00p – 8:00p AA Meeting	20 8:00a Men's Breakfast HRRMC Cafeteria	21	22
23 9:15 Worship & Communion 10:15 Fellowship 10:30 Bible Class & Sun School	24 7:00p – 8:00p AA Meeting	25 9am Packing Troop Boxes	26	27	28	29 30

First Lutheran Church



Sunday

9:15	Worship
10:15	Fellowship
10:30	Bible Class

Pastor Bill Cate

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