

Pastor Stahl's Weekly Message of Faith



Hello Everyone!
I'm getting tired of this winter weather! I think everyone is just about ready for Spring! The important thing is to check on your neighbors during this time and make sure they are safe and warm. Each day that passes is closer to Spring! Go Cardinals!

Congratulations to the Indiana Hoosiers, National Champions! 16-0 is a huge accomplishment! 50 years ago, the Hoosiers' Basketball team were National Champions at 32-0. Congratulations to Indiana!

Jesus Began His earthly ministry with the Sermon on the Mount. He Announced His Arrival on the scene when He went to the synagogue in Nazareth. This was His hometown church, where He had grown up. He goes to the scroll, Opens it and begins to read:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has Anointed Me to Preach Good News to the poor, to Heal the brokenhearted, to Preach deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to Preach the acceptable year of the Lord." Then He Announced, "This day this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:18-21)

Jesus Came to set the captives free from their sins. Jesus Came to Fulfill the Law and the Prophets. He Spoke in a Gentle but Firm Voice. God is with us in the flesh. He came to His own people to set them free. Many accepted Him as Lord and Savior. He Gave them a fresh start. Others were expecting something or someone different, and they rejected Him. But to

those who accepted Him, He Gave them Power to become children of God.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus Preached the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5,6, 7) It was the set of principles laid down by Jesus for the Kingdom of God. He Began with the Beatitudes, the series of sayings that say that we're Blessed when we do the right thing, even if the world doesn't like it.

"God Blesses those who are poor and realize their need for Him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

God Blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

God Blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth.

God Blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied.

God Blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

God Blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God.

God Blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called children of God.

God Blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of God is theirs." (Matthew 5:3-10)

Jesus Said that when people mock us and make fun of us for doing the right thing, to rejoice and be glad, for the prophets were persecuted the same way.

God Wants us to let our light from God Shine in the world. God Wants us to love one another. Let us love like Jesus Loves us! God Bless you!

Pastor Jeff Stahl
Countryside and Ogden United Methodist Churches

Ramblings from The Village Idiot

Thoughts from our Secretary of Health and Human Services, with your humble servant's comments. First, about our president's health. The HHS Secretary said in an interview, "The interesting thing about the president is that he eats really bad food, which is McDonald's, and, you know, candy and Diet Coke. He drinks Diet Coke at all times. He has the constitution of a deity. I don't know how he's alive, but he is."

Mr. Secretary: Before invoking the supernatural to explain the fact that our president is alive, perhaps you should read your own opinions about processed foods causing chronic illness. The term "chronic illness" means an illness lasting over a long period of time. The president being obese, having persistent bruising on his left hand and swollen ankles, and being able to descend stairs only with great difficulty are symptoms of chronic conditions.

I am quite confident, based on observing people around me, that there are plenty of Americans with worse diets but better health than the president's. I see no need to claim they "have the constitutions of a deity" to explain this. Maybe they just chose their parents well.

Our HHS Secretary also ignores the fact that the president is routinely up at all hours, posting his incessant temper tantrums on social media, and often nods off during the day. Perhaps his intake of Diet Coke is a factor. A 12-ounce can has 46 milligrams of caffeine. If he drinks a couple of cans or more later in the day, it's no wonder he's awake at all hours, and is short on sleep the next morning.

The Secretary also made a comment which raised a red

flag about our president's mental fitness: "He calls me three or four times a week and says, 'Where are you? Why aren't people healthier yet?'" It's bad enough to be expecting a noticeable change in Americans' health over such a short time period, but asking the same question "three or four times a week" raises the question of whether the president is asking so often simply because he keeps forgetting about the last time he asked. But it might be interesting to learn how the Secretary has been answering the same inane question three or four times a week.

The slogan "Make America Healthy Again" begs the questions, "Again? Like when?" And, "Healthier how? Perhaps many adult Americans in previous times were not suffering "chronic illnesses" because they had already dropped dead from strokes or heart attacks. The idea of "life expectancy" may also give a clue. The usual measure is "life expectancy at birth." In the US, it has risen from about 63 years in 1940, to 75.8 years for men and 81.1 years for women now. But life expectancy at age ten hasn't changed nearly that much. The implication is obvious: in 1940, a far higher proportion of Americans were dying at a young age than now. I guess that's one way to prevent chronic illness.

Meanwhile, I have again been blessed with the opportunity to improve my own health by keeping flaccid muscles and winter flab at bay by clearing snow in frigid temperatures. Of course, I have to be careful to pace myself and not stay out in the cold for too long. So it looks like long walks outdoors are off my agenda for the time being.



Psalm 62
New International Version
Psalm 62
For the director of music. For Jeduthun. A psalm of David.
1 Truly my soul finds rest in God;
my salvation comes from him.
2 Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.
3 How long will you assault me?
Would all of you throw me down—
this leaning wall, this tottering fence?

4 Surely they intend to topple me
from my lofty place;
they take delight in lies.
With their mouths they bless,
but in their hearts they curse.
5 Yes, my soul, find rest in God;
my hope comes from him.
6 Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.
7 My salvation and my honor depend on God;
he is my mighty rock, my refuge.
8 Trust in him at all times,
you people;

Hook, Line and Sinker

With Tony Hooker

Always in focus
You can't feel my stare
I zoom into you
But you don't know I'm there

I take a pride in probing
all your secret moves

My tearless retina takes
pictures that can prove---
Judas Priest

Who knew, in that heady summer after I strolled the hallowed halls of VGHS for the last time as a student, that Rob Halford, KK Downing and Glen Tipton would write a song about artificial intelligence and surveillance that would ring so true, 4 decades later. I sure didn't. I just thought 'Priest,' with their twin lead guitars, shrieking lead singer and leather & studs, were the coolest thing ever. Oddly enough, I went to see them last summer in Evansville, and I pretty much still think they're the coolest thing ever, but I digress.

As AI weaves itself ever tighter into the fabric of enterprise, becoming the efficient, data-crunching "backbone" of operations, it's easy to feel a tremor of existential anxiety. Every day, new headlines trumpet AI's latest triumph – composing code, diagnosing diseases, even generating art. The question isn't whether AI will change our jobs, but how deeply it will redefine human value in the professional landscape. Yet, for all its sophisticated algorithms and vast datasets, there remains a distinctly human element that stubbornly resists automation: the art of contextual empathy and nuance.

AI can process sentiment; it can even generate responses that sound empathetic. It can analyze countless interactions to identify patterns and predict outcomes. But what it cannot do—not genuinely, not yet—is understand the unspoken, the deeply personal history that informs a raised eyebrow, a hesitant pause, or a seemingly irrational decision. It struggles with the subtext of human interaction, the kind of understanding that isn't found in data points but in shared experience, intuition, and the

messy, beautiful complexity of being alive.

A machine, however advanced, could process words such as "husband passed" or "my newborn" as data points, perhaps even adjust its tone to pre-programmed "sympathetic" or "joyous" outputs. But it would struggle to grasp the weight of what was being conveyed. The way it silently redefined the entire interaction. It wouldn't instinctively know that the most effective response wasn't a logical explanation of the issue, but a simple, "I am so sorry for your loss. Let's take a moment and I'll walk you through this slowly, step by step, or "Congratulations! That will certainly bring some changes!" It wouldn't recognize that solving the immediate issue would be secondary to acknowledging the pain or joy of what was being expressed.

This is the specific skill I believe remains beyond automation: the capacity for true contextual empathy, born from a shared understanding of the human condition and the nuanced ability to prioritize connection over pure data efficiency. It's about reading between the lines, intuiting the emotional undercurrents, and understanding that sometimes, the "problem" isn't the problem at all. It's the ability to offer a hand, not just a solution, guided by an understanding of what it means to be vulnerable, confused, or heartbroken.

AI excels at logic and optimization. It can streamline processes, analyze vast amounts of information, and even predict human behavior with remarkable accuracy. But the messy, illogical, deeply personal reasons why humans behave the way they do – and the profound impact of truly being seen and understood in those moments – remains our exclusive domain. Empathy and emotions aren't weaknesses in the age of AI, but are two of our enduring, irreplaceable strengths.

pour out your hearts to him,
for God is our refuge.
9 Surely the lowborn are but a breath,
the highborn are but a lie.
If weighed on a balance, they are nothing;
together they are only a breath.
10 Do not trust in extortion
or put vain hope in stolen

goods;
though your riches increase,
do not set your heart on them.
11 One thing God has spoken,
two things I have heard:
"Power belongs to you, God,
12 and with you, Lord, is
unfailing love";
and, "You reward everyone
according to what they have
done."

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