



2024

Lord of Life Lutheran Church
Lenten Devotional

The Promise of Renewal

Spring is a season of cleansing, renewal, and newness for the created world; and the season of Lent, which at least in part mirrors spring, is an opportunity for cleansing and renewal for God's people and the whole human family. One of the appointed Scripture readings on Ash Wednesday each year is a portion of Psalm 51, which reads in part (v. 10), "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." We begin the season of Lent, and look toward the coming of spring, with the hope and promise of renewal.

In his poem, "A Purification," Wendell Berry, our former national poet laureate and so-called farmer poet writes:

At start of spring I open a trench
in the ground. I put into it
the winter's accumulation of paper,
pages I do not want to read
again, useless words, fragments,
errors. And I put into it
the contents of the outhouse:
light of the sun, growth of the ground,
finished with one of their journeys.
To the sky, to the wind, then,
and to the faithful tress, I confess
my sins: that I have not been happy
enough, considering my good luck;
have listened to too much noise;
have been inattentive to wonders;
have lusted after praise.
And then upon the gathered refuse
of mind and body, I close the trench,
folding shut again the dark,
the deathless earth. Beneath that seal
the old escapes into the new.

Among many things, the poet speaks about renewal; about being renewed.

You likely know very well the common Lenten refrain that is highlighted specifically on Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the season of Lent: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." To that we add, "remember that you are loved, and to Love you shall return.

The season of Lent provides another occasion to slow down, to pay attention to the world—the world around us, between us, and within us—and to be renewed, to be surprised, even astonished at our capacity to love and serve in Jesus' name.

Rev. Dr. Nathan Frambach

Ash Thursday Reflection

Today is Ash Thursday,
a day that is really just the day after Ash Wednesday,
a day that holds the echoes of the poignant evening before

This day, after Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday,
After the richness and pomp and ritual and liturgy of the past two days
Feels quiet, feels haunted

On Tuesday we filled our bodies with good things as we prepared for the
Lenten fast

On Wednesday we remembered that those same bodies are fleeting
And that nonetheless they belong to God

Today I sit in the silence as the sunshine peeks out from the clouds
And I pick the leftover ashes from underneath my fingernails

The vulnerability of last night, the humility before God, the honesty about
our frailty

Will not let go of me with one washing of my hands

These ashes that cling to me are the ones that I traced on foreheads just
yesterday

In the shape of the instrument of death
that our God transforms into a throne of resurrection

These ashes are the ones I traced on the forehead of a woman dying of
cancer,

The reminder of her mortality one she already recites daily

These ashes are the ones I traced on the forehead of a man who just
survived a stroke,

Who not two weeks before looked death in the face

These ashes are the ones I traced on a woman and her mother,
both grieving the death of their father and husband

These ashes are the ones I traced on the head of a stranger,
Whose story I do not know but whose eyes were filled with depth

These ashes are the ones I traced on my own forehead in the mirror,
Praying for God's strength as I lead this community of imperfect disciples

Even when I pick these ashes away in the light of the morning,
their shadow remains on my pale skin,
Reminding me of the intensity of this holy project of belonging to God

The promise of our death clings to our skin,
The truth of our sinfulness hangs on our bodies,
But the hope of the empty tomb overshadows it all

As these ashes slowly disappear from my nailbed in the days to come,
The water that carries them away will remind me of my baptism

Of the promise of that water that washes us into freedom
That frees us from the grime of sinfulness that is stuck under our fingernails
And that washes away the dirt of our graves

In this way, this holy Ash Thursday reminds me
That Easter Sunday's promise is near to us always

Pastor Marissa Becklin

Imposition of ashes and truth

Romans 3:23

The Seniors' Residence where I sometimes lead worship or Bible study schedules an Ash Wednesday worship. The first time I led the service I was surprised at the number of residents who came. The small chapel was full as was the hallway outside. Most chose to have the sign on the cross marked on their foreheads. Most came forward and I went to those who could not venture forward. I spoke to each one the simple words, "From dust you came. To dust you shall return." A simple eight-word phrase that is for me the most profound word of honest appraisal on oneself. The words tell the truth.

There is a sense of levelling. As Paul says, "ALL have sinned and fallen short of God's glory." All means there is no longer any distinction, separation or judgement. There is no comparison that has merit. The ALL disallows our often quick judgments based on race, culture, gender, position, reputation or age. If we all are made from dust and one day will return to dust there is simply no room for our constructed divisions.

The practice of the Tanzanian Lutheran Church, apparently practiced in many African Christian communities is to call others "brothers and sisters". Another way to emphasize that in Christ we are all one.

So people of God, pray for open eyes, minds and hearts so as to see in yourself and in others the oneness that is God's creative plan. We may only be dust, but we are God's dust. Amen.

Rev. David Kaiser, (Kayleen Backhaus's dad)

Sam and I are sitting here on a cold -25 degree day (with the wind chill) in our warm home and we are so thankful for the heat that is rolling out. We talked about how we take these things for granted, yet there are people right here in our community that are cold.

We also take Our Lord for granted, but the Lenten season helps get our thoughts back to him. We are reminded how he must have suffered not only at his crucifixion but the 40 days and nights in the desert. Lent is a time for reflection and penance. When I reflect on what happened with my family in the past 5 years, with the deaths of my brothers, sister and sister-in-law, it helps me to realize how blessed I am to have a church family that really cares and takes care of one another.

Sue Deaver

A Lenten Journey: Yes, again.

Lent is a forty day spiritual journey (not counting Sundays) that begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Maundy Thursday during Holy Week. Along the way, scripture readings invite us to engage with a diverse collection of people, places, and circumstances. Buckle up — it can be a wild ride; but the use of helmets and protective gear is optional. Observe and **listen** up — open eyes, open ears, open hearts and minds are *required*. Receive and respond. Easter is our destination, our promised land, and our home.

The following three versets were formed in part by borrowing - with respectful appreciation (and yes, apologies!) from selected works by Willie Nelson (yes, *that* Willie Nelson), Joy Harjo (yes, *that* United States Poet Laureate from 2019 to 2022), and yes, *that/those* unknown author/s of a sixteenth century (CE) German carol. An unexpected trio? Peace and deep joy as you journey toward home, again.

- I. On the road again,
takin' a journey through Lent again.
Back and forth, up and down and around again,
makin' music with our biblical friends again.
- II. Time to sing the songs of Lent again.
Old and new, sing 'em all night and through the daytime, too.
Take care of the songs; the songs will take care of you again.
- III. So, . . . bury all that's dead,
until the day when time will end,
and death will die and Christ will come again.
Lord, to us folks glad Easter send. Again.
Amen. Amen. Amen.

Acknowledgments:

- I. "On the road again, . . ." Willie Nelson, 1980. alt.
- II. Poet Warrior: a memoir. Joy Harjo, 2021. alt.
- III. "So trieben wir den Winter aus, . ." 16th century German carol, anon. alt.

Roy W. Carroll, Lent 2024

Acts 3:19-20,26 *"Repent therefore and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus. When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you, to bless each of you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."*

"Wicked ways" seems harsh doesn't it; "who me, wicked? No way, maybe sinful, but wicked?" As I write this, I'm serving jury duty, I will listen to the facts with no preconceived ideas about someone accused of some "wicked ways." I will sit in judgement. We are told that God sits in judgment, fortunately this same God offers the alternative of repenting — a refreshing for us so that our sins may be washed, wiped away by the presence of the Lord, the Messiah, that is Jesus. This defendant, God raised up as a servant on our behalf, laid down his life. May this season of Lent jog our memory as to how blessed we are to have grace on our side, refreshed from our wicked ways.

Refreshing God, help us to see our need to turn from wicked ways to be in the presence of our Lord and Savior, our defendant. Amen

Pastor John Sorenson

Mark 9:2-8 (NRSV) *Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and His clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, “It is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved;” “Listen to Him.” Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, only Jesus.*

Last year John and I had the opportunity to visit the Holy Land with Wartburg Seminary students on their January term. It was an amazing trip. Having visited the areas where Jesus was born, grew up, ministered and finally was crucified made the Scriptures come alive and prompted one to dig a little deeper into some of the passages. One of the places we visited was Mt. Tabor in Jerusalem and the Church of the Transfiguration. The church (interior pictured here) was built in 1924 on top of church ruins from earlier periods. We, of course, know Jesus took the disciples to the mountain and not to this beautiful church. But we assume Jesus was in this area. This is just one instance where seeing the church made me delve a little more closely into the Transfiguration of Jesus’ story. As Jesus



is about to start his journey to the cross, he talks with Moses and Elijah. What is the significance of Moses and Elijah’s appearances with Jesus just before God’s cloud of acknowledging Jesus? I understand the appearance of Moses and Elijah represented the Law and the Prophets. – “Listen to Him!” – seems to have shown that the Law and the Prophets must give way to Jesus. The One who is the new and living way is replacing the old – He is the fulfillment of the Law and the countless prophecies in the Old Testament.

For this Lenten Devotion, I will focus on two things. Peter wanted to make a dwelling for Jesus and the Old Testament guys, so the focus might be how do we intentionally make space for Jesus in our lives this Lenten Season. The second would be the voice of God in a cloud, “This is my Son, the

Beloved;” **“Listen to Him”**. Those are important words for us as we reflect and journey through this Lenten Season.

Dear Jesus, help us to listen to what you say, come down from the mountain and follow your example of being a servant and make room for you in our hearts and lives. Amen

Mona Sorenson

Change

There is an old adage that states two things in life are certain; death and taxes. On the topic of death, when I stand before the judgement seat, I’ll proclaim I put my faith in Jesus. On the issue of taxes, Jesus gives us guidance as stated in Mark 12:17a. “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.” (However, I do suggest having a competent tax preparer or accountant.)

I’d like to offer another certainty—and that is change. Change can and will occur at any time. Change is a powerful force. Some people embrace and welcome it, while others tend to resist and avoid it as much as possible. Although our perceptions and situations will change, it is comforting to know that Jesus does not. Hebrews 13:8 says, “Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.” He is our solid rock on which we can build our faith foundation.

We may waiver, due to change and fear of the unknown, but it is comforting to know that as change occurs, we have Jesus Christ to draw on for strength and comfort. Thank you, Lord for being our anchor and safe harbor in life’s uncertainty. With Jesus, we need not fear.

Barry Pickart

“How I got here (to Lord of Life)”

I’ve been part of a series of communities over the course of my life. They’ve not all been “Christian” and have differed in many ways.

Baptized Catholic, I attended St. Anthony’s Elementary School, Wahlert High School, and Loras College, all in Dubuque. Taught by Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVMs), Catholic priests, as well as many lay Catholic teachers, I was immersed in the Catholic strain of Christianity for my formative years. Communion, confession, and confirmation (each a distinct

sacrament in the Catholic Church) were at St. Anthony's. At Wahlert, classes were taught by both lay teachers and Catholic nuns and priests, including daily religion class. At Loras, a Catholic institution, many of my instructors were priests and Catholic nuns – even for non-religious courses like Psychology, Aesthetics, Classical Archeology, Mathematics, and Computer Science.

My participation in Catholic worship during those years was steady, but my later teens were not particularly devout. My parallel path of employment had a significant impact on my life and my faith. During my later years in college, I worked at Hills and Dales with seriously disabled children, then as a nursing assistant on the psychiatric unit of Mercy Hospital. After graduation, I was a live-in staff member in a group home for adolescents. These experiences involved being in close daily contact with a range of kids and adults with serious physical and mental health difficulties, making their lives and relationships difficult in assorted ways. It also led to steering my college major in Sociology toward a social work career path.

Looking at graduate school options, I crossed paths with someone who suggested Tulane University in New Orleans, where he'd earned his Social Work degree. Being 22, and more adventurous (or full of faith and optimism?) than cautious, I applied to Tulane sight unseen, and was accepted. I hitchhiked to New Orleans after Dad dropped me off at the Casey's at Key West at the south edge of town. I guess God was with me, although I don't recall if I thought much about it on that 1976 August morning. I'm sure Dad and Mom prayed constantly until they got my phone call that I'd made it safely to New Orleans. (No cell phones in 1976). Finding a place to live, I made another round-trip hitchhike to Dubuque to ship my belongings to New Orleans. This was well before Forrest Gump declared "I've always relied on the kindness of strangers."

In New Orleans, I think I only worshipped a few times at the Catholic Church next door to Tulane. I got a job near campus as live-in staff in a halfway house for men who were transitioning out of the State Mental Hospital on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain. My field placement while at Tulane was in the psychiatric unit of the VA Hospital. Back in Dubuque with my degree, I spent a year as a therapist at the mental health center in town, a job that expired after a year. I was getting accustomed to interacting with people who had significant struggles. Sandy and I met about this time.

I learned of the relatively new Catholic Worker House opened by a group of lay women and Catholic nuns from the Franciscan Order. Thinking that this

was a job option, I soon learned that this was not a potential employer, but a “House of Hospitality” for homeless individuals, in the tradition of Dorothy Day’s and Peter Maurin’s Catholic Worker movement in New York City dating to the 1930’s. The Catholic Worker was a faith community, of sorts. I was the first male live-in staff at Dubuque’s Catholic Worker House. I eventually moved out of the Catholic Worker. Another academic year was spent as an on-campus support person/RA at Clarke College (which had just started admitting men as full-time/on-campus students) for 24 young men from Saudi Arabia who were here for a crash course in English before moving on to Houston for training as highway patrolmen for their country’s new highway system. This was another immersion into a situation with people who don’t fit neatly into their social setting – Muslim men on a Catholic women’s college campus in a not-very-diverse city . . . in 1979 during the Iranian Revolution when 52 Americans were held hostage for 444 days. Saudis are not Iranians, but they were all Arabs as far as most Americans were concerned.

Sandy and I married in 1981 at St. Anthony’s, with the priest we wanted (Father Bob Beck, another Catholic Worker participant) presiding, due to a convenient convergence of factors. We continued involvement in the Worker for weekly liturgy and “clarification of thought” discussions in place of the traditional sermons. In 1983, with the approaching birth of Nick, we were looking for a more traditional church home. We needed something with services and sermons more amenable to the presence of kids, not involving 30-minute faith-based discussions of social issues, as was the open-ended group format at the Worker.

After visiting the new Lord of Life congregation in Asbury, with the initial pastor Ron Voss, we became members. In 1983 Nick, and 2 years later Luke, were baptized at Lord of Life. Our involvement in LOL continued and deepened. My own long-cultivated views about social, political, faith, and relationship issues fit in well with Lord of Life.

We became “woven into” this congregation. Nick and Luke received communion, were confirmed, and were part of pastor Tom Mundahl’s in-house band of young members. Adult education (now “Faith Formation”) has been a particular area of interest of mine over the years.

My 70 years are what one “faith lifespan” looks like. What a long, strange trip it’s been. (Congratulations to the reader(s) who know where that song lyric comes from).

Steve Heer

Observation

"Everyone has a lot on their plates, the menu is just a little different for each of us!"

Despite our best intentions, we can tend to think our menu is the worst and everyone else is loving the meal life is serving up for them. Could this be because we've forgotten how to make room for Jesus every day? Forgotten how to release our anxieties to prayer and find the freedom, clarity and joy promised by Christ?

Matthew 6:34, NRSV *So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.*

Philippians 4:6 *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*

And consider this additional prayer: *Dear God, please forgive me for worrying while knowing you'll always make a way.*

Pat Friedman

It's Not What You Get It's What You Give

In the end Christmas and Easter are different for Christians. Christmas is centered around getting a gift from God with the birth of Jesus. Easter is about giving when Jesus gave his life for our sins. Both of these acts are central to our faith as Christians.

As we move through our lives, we get things and we give things. Too often we center on what we get and how much we get rather than what we give back to others. After Christmas or when we have a birthday, everyone wants to know what you received as gifts. When others celebrate a birthday or a special event, we are asked what did you give them.

Too often what we give or we get is measured. God does not measure the value or amount of the gifts we give or get. God does not care what we give. God wants us to remember the intent of the gifts that we give.

God sent Jesus to earth to teach us how to give. Jesus gave his life to save our life. We should use his example of giving in our lives. Everyone has been blessed with gifts and we have the ability to give those gifts. As we go through this Lenten season may we all practice giving our gifts to help

others in honor of Jesus who gave his life to save us. The gift Jesus gave all of us is the possibility of everlasting life.

Larry Croghan

Psalm 119: 26 & 27 *I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes. Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wonderful works.*

Psalm 119:66 *Teach me good judgement and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments.*

When I was a young man, it was very common for me to pray for wisdom to help me deal with challenging situations, relationships, raising my children, leading other children in youth group and Scouting and other interactions. In my 30s and 40s I just added “give me wisdom” whenever I prayed. In my 50s and now 60s, I still seek wisdom in prayer. We have all heard the saying, be careful what you wish for. Most of us learn better from personal experience than observing other’s experiences. That could translate to...you want wisdom? then let me throw some terrible experiences your way that you can learn from. Life is better when we learn from other people’s experiences too. Wisdom does come with age and experience but even more, I have found, it comes with building a solid foundation of character and thoughtfulness based upon God’s law and Jesus’ teaching. I would encourage anyone to seek out the Lord’s help in dealing with difficult situations.

Kevin Eipperle

When my first husband passed away unexpectedly in 1981, I was totally lost. Devastated. I struggled. We had a young daughter and I just couldn’t seem to cope with anything. That’s when a neighbor stepped in. I knew her but not well. She took me under her care and let me grieve while also helping me with my daughter. She has been in my life ever since. We have seen each other through both good and bad times. We had so many fun times together. There has also been loss of family, her divorce and illnesses. I don’t know where I would be today if not for her. She is now dealing with Alzheimer’s. It’s so hard to see her like this but I’ll always be there for her as she was for me. That’s what true friends do.

Barb Croghan

As Christians we are to:

put God first, but we don't.
not use the Lord's name in vain, but we do.
love our neighbors as ourselves, but we don't.
not judge others, but we do.
tithe, but we don't.
not tell lies, but we do.
keep the Sabbath, but we don't.
not sin, but we do.
forgive, but we don't.

Dear Lord, We are human and we mess up. Help us get our do's and don'ts in order. In Christ's name we pray, Amen

Bernita Gilbertson

Psalm 34:4 *I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.*

Recently I've been thinking of people who are expressing fear and angst because of the state of our country and world. And then during the week of the snowstorms in January when we decided to record the service, Jon was in the tech booth getting set up and asked me to go to the podium to do a sound check. To have something to say, I opened up the bible to read...right to Psalm 34:4. Once again God is speaking to me and my thoughts!

And then I saw this quote from a promotion for *The Chosen*: "In this world, bones will still break, hearts will still break. But in the end, light will overcome darkness." What a wonderful reminder!

As Christians, we need to remember that in the face of our fears, the place to turn is to the Holy Trinity. When we have a close relationship with God, the One who knows our thoughts and hearts will comfort and guide us through whatever we are facing.

Lord Jesus, help us to remember to come to you with our fears and concerns. We ask that you guide us and give us comfort and peace. Amen.

Rita Dienst

Mark 2:2 *"So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door, and Jesus was speaking the word to them."*

This verse comes right after Jesus was baptized and his "public" ministry begins with the healing of the man who was paralyzed. The healing aside, let's focus on this verse. "So many gathered... Jesus was speaking the word to them." Our theme for our mid-week Lent services is "Created for Community". From the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, the importance of gathering and hearing God's Word is vital for the community. It is one thing to spend time in quiet, personal devotion, but it is just as important to be with others... to hear God's Word and share what it means to each of us.

I have a dear friend, John. He is a retired pastor and when we first got to know each other years ago, he would say to me and others we were with: "Let's go break bread together." AKA "let's go out to dinner." That was the first time I had heard that phrase, "let's go break bread together." It quickly reminded me that we humans are meant to be "together"... to not only share meals together whether it be at Panera Bread or at the altar for communion bread.... from those tables we walk away a wee bit stronger. Which made me think of this quote: "if you want to walk fast then walk alone, and if you want to walk far then walk together".

"So many gathered around... and Jesus was speaking the word to them." Our time in community, our time together is so important... at the Table and in the Word. During this Lenten season, yes, spend time in quiet, personal devotion.... but let us also break bread together.

Interim Pastor Karla Wildberger

The Steadfast Love of the Lord Never Ceases...

More than a decade ago, I trained at Lord of Life to become a Stephen Minister. At that time, I'd been through an unhappy period in my life. I had been questioning some of the life decisions I had...and had not, made. Some days I truly felt I had just squandered fifty plus years of life.

As I was struggling through this time, the opportunity arose to take the above-mentioned training course. I've always thought of myself as a willing listener; I was given to understand that an important feature of this ministry involved listening. I was inspired to hope this was my chance to help others, and to be honest, I prayed this would also allow me to feel better about myself.

As a part of the training, each student was asked to choose a Bible verse that he or she found meaningful, as well as helpful in our own understanding of the Ministry we hoped to provide. My choice of Lamentations 3:22 probably reflected, at least in part, the feelings I had been recently struggling with...and it was my thinking that others in any type of crisis, large or small, might share the sense of reassurance this verse gave to me. If you choose to read more of chapter three in Lamentations, you'll find the writer was very seriously lamenting! And yet, in the midst of his tale of woe, the writer reminds himself of this:

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
His mercies never come to an end;
They are new every morning;
Great is your faithfulness.
"The Lord is my portion," says my soul,
"Therefore, I will hope in him."

Can it be so simple? It hardly seems possible...but for me, each day I wake up to remind myself that a new morning is another opportunity to be the child of God, the servant of God, that I would like to be. And if I fail to meet my own expectation, what then? I have hope because, as we're told in **John 3:16**: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*

As you contemplate "turning toward God" in this season of Lent, remember that you are steadfastly loved...always have been, always will be, for the Lord's mercies are new every morning. Jesus' loving sacrifice is the final proof of that love. Thanks be to God!

Debbie Thomas

"If you want others to be happy, practice compassion.
If you want to be happy, practice compassion."

His Holiness, the Dalai Lama

I always enjoy finding a store with a variety of good greeting cards. I can literally spend hours browsing through the selection of cards. On one of our more recent visits to Madison, I found a card with the above quotation. For certain, it was a card I wanted to purchase. I'm often not sure who will be the recipient of my card purchases, but I always know if they have potential for a future greeting. I have yet to send the card to anyone, but having read the quote on numerous occasions when looking through my card file, it has given me opportunity to pause and to think about the concepts of happiness and compassion.

As a young child, I may not have been familiar with the word “compassion”, but I do feel that it was my parents who certainly helped me to internalize what the term was all about. I grew up in a small town in northern Iowa, and several of our neighbors were elderly, single or widowed, and not “well to do”. My mom was an amazing cook! I do believe that she would have been able to make just about anything, and not only would it taste good, but it would also look great. She was also quite a gardener. Mom would often send my brother and me to one of the neighbor’s homes bearing baked bread, cinnamon rolls, an assortment of Christmas candies, fresh vegetables, etc.

One of our neighbors, Helen, lived in what we called “a crooked house”. The house was small with peeling paint, and it actually looked crooked. When Helen welcomed us into her home, her floor was actually sloped, like if you set down a ball, it would probably roll to a corner. Another neighbor, Wilbur, would usually take a while to get to his door, but when he did, he would welcome us into his tiny, dark little kitchen. I remember that he had a spittoon in the corner, and he would often turn from us a few times to spit into it. Now, Hazel lived in a small upstairs apartment. We knew Hazel from the drug store where she worked part-time. She would always hold the little brown paper bag for us when Mom or Dad let us pick out some candy from the penny candy counter.

I guess that it was these encounters with our “old” neighbors when I began to learn about compassion. We not only brought goodies into their lives, but we also brought friendship and caring into their worlds. I’m sure that a visit from young children also brought a little light and some happiness into their lives. I may not have been familiar with the word compassion, but I do know that it made me happy to see them smile as they welcomed us into their homes. I am thankful that I had the parents I did, and I am thankful for those early experiences.

Colossians 3: 12, 14 ...*clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ... Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*

Sandy Heer

Seems like the same old problem. We often talk about the Community of Believers. That again is the theme for this year. I know it has been a tough year for all with illnesses that have plagued many of us. That is true for our family. As many of you already know I lost my 88-year-old sister in the last

2 years. My oldest brother, age 89, and his wife have been dealing with many illnesses and persistent pain. My brother aged 74 and 1 ½ years older than me has been dealing with many problems and has spent much time at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota trying to get to the bottom of his illnesses. Recently I myself have been dealing with unexpected illnesses. During this time, we rely on our church family and specifically the Prayer Chain and Lord of Life Prayer Chain Facebook page for support and prayers for health. We can feel the love from our Lord of Life Community and friends during this time of illness. We know that Lord of Life and our many true friends here are an important part of our lives and we would feel lost without them. It stresses the importance of participating in this Community to be a part of this loving support. We rely on our church community support. We pray that the new year brings hope, health and love to our very important community of believers at LOL. Thank you for your continuing prayerful support!

Dan Decker

Ephesians 4:1-4 *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—*

So here we are in 2024 during Lent, considering what our stories are. When Larry asked us to think about talking about our story for this year's devotional, I was thinking about call stories.

We are all called on this earth to do something with the gifts God has given us. Lent is a time of contemplation and reflection of what we have done or should be doing with our lives. My story is a story of service and of public service in helping others. My last name is Dienst which is literally "service" in German. I have helped people in many ways, in Church, in my professional life at the City and in other opportunities. I get a lot of joy in helping people. The appreciation I've received from people has kept me going and feeling fulfilled. I hope others can enjoy that feeling and that calling to help others. Now, I'll admit it hasn't always been rainbows and unicorns in the process of helping, but the majority of the time, it has been a blessing.

I encourage everyone to find their call, to find their purpose in life and to do what gives them joy. My call is service to others, what is your call? What should you have done and what can you still do? In my early working life, I bagged groceries, helped people out to their cars and load groceries into their cars. Later in college, I was working nights to clean office buildings and clean up messes and do what I could to help pay for school and be able to buy my Ramen noodles and beer. Hey, I went to Wisconsin! After I graduated, I worked for a while in Minneapolis and eventually moved to Dubuque and worked in civil engineering software development. I worked on developing solutions to help people solve problems that ultimately protected health and life for people in their communities. And most recently, you know that I currently work as an engineer for the city of Dubuque. As I continue in my life journey, I always reflect on what I can do or what I should have done to help people.

Pastor Mark recently talked about how God can very subtly nudge you in a direction. Listen to that nudge. You are being called. I've learned to recognize that nudge. I've asked many times, "Why Me, God?" I know why. Because God has given me the blessings and gifts to do what I do. What is God asking of you? I can guarantee you already have the gifts to do what God is asking of you. God's work, Our Hands. Peace,

Jon Dienst

I'm Comfortable

I lead a comfortable life and I know it. I'm writing this on one of those below-zero days in January this year. After I had been outside for a while when I came inside I was thankful that my home was warm and comfortable. I sat in a cozy chair to enjoy TV and after a while I got a snack. That evening I had a ham steak for dinner. Later that night I got into bed—my comfortable, clean, cozy bed. It is obvious to me that my life is pretty comfortable.

My thoughts go out to those around the world, thinking specifically about Ukraine, Gaza, immigrants to the United States, and also those in need in our area. They may not have a home anymore: they may be suffering from being too hot or too cold, food may be unpredictable, sleeping may be random and probably not in a proper bed. In comparison I am blessed and I know it.

My fears do not include that I may die from gunfire or explosives, from exposure, from hunger, or from sickness related to no available care.

Dubuque is a safe place to live with good medical care, plenty of available food, and caring people. It provides those who live here plenty to make our lives content.

A recent sermon by Pastor Karla talks about the Holy Spirit being a wind that guides us. Sometimes to the edge of our comfort zone. Being comfortable should give us a safe launching pad to go to the edge and look for ways to actively give support to those who are not comfortable.

There are many people who need our support. Lord of Life gives us the opportunity to provide food and clothing to those in the Dubuque area. I pray that we can go to the edge and each look for our own ways to reach out to make the lives of others more comfortable locally and beyond. The love that the Holy Spirit brings to us is a gift we want to share.

Steve Geisert

Acts 17:30-31 *"While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."*

If you know me, you know that God has overlooked many ignorances on my behalf. He is relentless with the command, repent. Grace abounds for us, turn from that which is separating us from the Lord our God, Christ Jesus our Lord. How mind-blowing is this reassurance; the fix that our gracious God bestows. I don't know what day this devotion will be assigned, but we know what is coming, a day of celebration, the assurance of God raising this son of his from the dead. What a confidence, what a guarantee, God has fixed for us.

Gracious overlooking God, may we heed your command to repent, basking in the assurance of your Son's resurrection. Amen

Pastor John Sorenson

Isaiah 41:10 *Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

I have very fond memories of attending church as a young girl. Attending Sunday School with my friends added to my enjoyment, as it provided not

just a spiritual education but also a social environment where I could connect with peers who shared similar beliefs and values. Having my dad preach the sermon was a unique and special experience. It provided a personal touch to my church attendance every Sunday morning. My biggest joy came from sharing my voice with others during worship as I sang out each verse of the hymns as loudly as I could. My enthusiasm and passion for singing during worship not only enriched me, but I also brought it upon myself to uplift and inspire all those around me each Sunday. I could not imagine anyone not having the same enthusiasm and joy I had for my church and church family. One day as I was walking home from elementary school, I was approached by an upper classmate who asked me if it was my dad who worked at the church building down the street. I proudly told him, yes, and without any hesitation the boy angrily told me he was going to hurt my dad and my family because of our affiliation with the church. I remember running home with tears streaming down my face, and feeling extremely frightened and anxious for the safety of my family. I realized at that moment not everyone shared my dad's beliefs, and not everyone was accepting of our faith and belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This brief encounter of rejection made me question who I was as a Christian, and as an individual for many years to come.

I am thankful that even when we experience rejection, God is there for us. Our God knows the pain and loneliness of rejection. His Son, Jesus was rejected by his people, friends and followers leading to his death on the cross. But it is through the cross and Christ's resurrection that we find comfort in knowing we are never alone, and that through faith in Jesus, we can find comfort, peace and spiritual healing.

Over the years I have realized that being a follower of Jesus comes with its challenges, and adversities, just as Jesus experienced. But my belief in Jesus' rejection and resurrection gives me the power to overcome any obstacles I may face. It is through God's unwavering love that gives me a sense of hope, renewal, and the power to triumph over rejection and suffering.

Lord, we know that rejection can be a deeply hurtful and discouraging experience. We pray that you would heal the wounds caused by rejection and restore our sense of self-worth and value. Your Word assures us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made and that we are accepted and loved by you.

Kayleen Backhaus

Daily Foundation

Matthew 7:24 *Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.*

I can't recall when this habit started but it was early in my first career while living in Des Moines, so likely sometime in late 1990 or early 1991. I also wish I could recall now what caused the habit to begin, but I can't. But almost without fail every day since, nearly 33 years and 12,000 mornings, I've begun my commute to work in the same manner with the same routine that has become quite personal.

First, a quick personal prayer that begins with "thank you Lord for the gift of today, the gift of yesterday and the gift of tomorrow", then individualized prayers for people in my life that need it most, the world around us or anything small or large in between, much like each of you reading this do as well.

Second, the Lord's Prayer.

Third, a line from a prayer song (sung in my head as I'm a lousy singer I'm guessing) that I picked up early in adulthood and has stuck with me ever since.

Now I'll admit I have some pretty significant compulsive tendencies when it comes to how I live my life so there's something very comforting about starting my workday the same way, every day. And I'll also admit I'm not perfect at it at all and there are countless days where my thoughts leave in the middle of my personal prayer to the many other things on my mind as we go through life, but I always end the same way. Sometimes it's parked in the parking lot outside my office, and that's ok too.

But it's more than just the routine of it all. As I contemplated this devotion, it reminded me of the story in Matthew regarding the wise man who built his house on the rock and the parallels to us having faith in God as our personal foundation. My quirky routine I described has very much become the foundation of my day, my personal daily rock. Who knows what each day will bring but there's comfort and peace in having each day's 'foundation' being built on faith.

I pray that each of you have a similar daily foundation. This also serves as example of something I believe strongly in - not overthinking personal faith. It doesn't always need to be complicated. It can be as easy as a few minutes on the way to work, saying a prayer and singing a simple song verse.

Jeff Mentzer

Two verses from “Just As I Am, Without One Plea” (ELW 592)

Just as I am, without one plea,
but that Thy blood was shed for me
and that Though bidd’st me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about
with many a conflict, many a doubt
fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

And a Scripture reading from Jeremiah 17:7-8 *“But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and does not cease to bear fruit.”*

These two readings came together to me in one day—the hymn as part of a devotion and the scripture as a result of my search for an appropriate quote for a project I was working on. The quote that came to mind for my project was “Bloom where you are planted.” As I researched the origin of the quote, I found it was found several places in the Bible. Oh, not word for word, but the Jeremiah reading above describes a believer’s fruitful flourishing by trusting in God. This writing encourages us to be all God has made us to be wherever we are planted.

Hymn 592 and two more verses that follow, remind us we only come to God just as we are, with our imperfections, our successes, our struggles and the rejoicings, all just as we are planted. We are invited into God’s presence and God welcomes and accepts us.

Perhaps we struggle to trust enough to be all that we can be, and at times we fail along the way, but we know that through Jesus, the Lamb of God, we are invited and welcomed by God.

Gracious God, thank you for welcoming us just as we are, even with our imperfections. Help us to trust in you enough to be all that we can be as we live our lives in our relationship with you and with others. Amen.

Mona Sorenson

To Ponder: “For Christians, to share in the Eucharist, the Holy Communion, means to live as people who know that they are always *guests*—that they have been welcomed and that they are wanted.” (Rowan Williams)

Reflection: Being a Guest

Throughout our married life, my wife and I have lived at a distance from family. So, at holidays and other times, we visit them. Although they have visited us, we are most often visitors. We know what it's like to be guests.

Guests don't set the schedule or the guest list. They don't pick the menu or nitpick the selections. They share spaces with others. They adapt to new rhythms. They receive graciously. And although sometimes challenging, being a guest is a lifegiving break from the mundane routines we control.

We church people can learn to be better guests. We tend to control things. We tend to nitpick what is given, criticize others in our spaces, and refuse to change. In doing so, we ensure new guests stay away.

This was a problem at Corinth, judging from 1 Corinthians 11. Although there are many issues at work, Paul highlights the reluctance of some "haves" to honor the "have-nots" in the community as true equals. People were not waiting for one another (11:33). People were not putting others first. People had forgotten: at Christ's Table, we are all guests.

Are you a good guest in Christ's house? It involves not just dropping by. He invites you to sit awhile, receive, give up control, join new people, and be changed. Work at being a guest—and keeping Christ as the host. When we reverse that formula, things go very poorly.

Lord Jesus Christ, help us to receive your gifts with gladness. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Troy Troftgruben

Growing up, I attended the brick church on the corner of our little town. It was not always brick. In March of 1945 tragedy struck and the original church building burnt to the ground. I was not alive when that happened, but I remember the stories my dad told me about the day of the fire. He told me they were let out of school to go help with getting things out of the church before it was completely engulfed in flames. I vividly remember one story he told about one of the locals running into the church building, grabbing a church pew in each arm and hauling them to safety. With a determined will and unshaken faith, rebuilding of the church began and in July, 1946 the newly built structure was dedicated. The history of the brick church on the corner runs deep in my family, and it holds many cherished memories for me. As I sat in the pews every Sunday morning, I felt a sense of pride knowing my grandfather and father contributed to the rebuilding

efforts of not only the physical structure, but also the rebuilding of the faith community.

As creatures of habit, we find comfort and stability in daily routines. I had attended the same little brick church all of my life. I was familiar with almost all aspects of the church life and I had sat in the pews with the same people every Sunday for almost 60 years. When my wife and I moved to the Dubuque area we knew we wanted to find a new church family to share worship and community with. Moving to a new area and seeking out a new church family was both exciting and daunting. On one hand, we knew it would present opportunities to explore different traditions, meet new people, and experience diverse forms of worship. On the other hand, it meant leaving behind the comfort and familiarity of the old church and embarking on a journey of integration into a new community.

Just when we were starting to feel comfortable in our new surroundings and faces were starting to become familiar, the world was shut down because of the Covid 19 pandemic. We did not attend church face to face for over a year. When we returned to sit in the pews once again, we felt like we were starting all over again with meeting people and becoming familiar with new routines and traditions.

We are thankful we have found a church that provides us with opportunities for service and fellowship. We are thankful we have found a church that aligns with our values and beliefs. We have truly felt a sense of belonging and purpose at Lord of Life. It has become a cherished part of our Christian journey, offering us new connections and opportunities for spiritual growth. Thanks be to God!

Donald Backhaus

Our Church Community

I grew up in the small rural community of Griswold, Iowa. Everyone knew everyone else in Griswold and when there were people in need, the community came together and met that need. I was a member of the Methodist Church that was a part of that community. I knew everyone in that church and they knew me. I was part of the Griswold community and the Griswold Methodist Church community.

Every Sunday when you went to church you were greeted by people that you knew and trusted. They called you by name. When you had accomplished something special or if a member of your family had a special

event, everyone in that church community celebrated with you. If you got injured, they wanted to make sure that you were being taken care of and healing. The church members mourned with you if a family member died.

That community and my church community were still interested in me after I left to go to college. When I came home for visits or when I came home for the summer, they welcomed me. When I started my new career as a teacher and a coach, they wanted to know how I was doing. They welcomed me and accepted me as I started a family. They were still there to mourn with me when my grandparents died. No matter how many moves I made or where I went, that community was a place I could always count on for support.

When I arrived in Dubuque, I was in a much different situation than I had ever been in. My previous teaching and coaching situations had all been in small communities that had been like Griswold. I and my family had been accepted in them just like I had been accepted in my hometown community. Dubuque though was going to be different because it was much larger and not everyone in Dubuque knows you like those small-town communities knew us.

Soon after we arrived, we found a community that would be like those small-town communities that we had relied on before for support. That community was the St. Peter Lutheran Church community. Our family was encouraged to become a part of the St. Peter community. We were encouraged to be a part of the activities that were happening in the church and became a part of small groups that helped us and gave us opportunities to reach others. We were learning that it is not just what you get it is what you give that is important.

The experience at St. Peter taught and enforced things that I had learned about the importance of a church community. The things I had learned were really important when we became a part of starting a new congregation. Developing a congregation that welcomed and cared about the people that wanted to become a part of a new congregation was really important. Those early charter members were all like my family and me. They needed the support of others that cared. When they found that support for their families, they wanted to be a part of supporting others. That was the kind of congregation that Lord of Life became and still is.

That kind of a community can only be developed when it is a community that is centered around the Love of God. A community that is centered on God's love accepts and loves all people. That community is led by the Holy

Spirit and provides for the needs of others. The members of that community are always there for each other.

Larry Croghan

Psalm 1:39:1-18

paper folder

mostly i'm like poet's paper for the poems are seldom finish....
the sentences end in mid....

the paper white and experimental often discarded
piece after piece is discarded thrown away away away
crumbled ripped and gone

sometimes i bounde the paper wads against the wall
shed them into tiny fragments
blown about by winds of failure
all of the above with appropriate
exasperation expletives et ceteras

then he comes
paints a design on my basic monochrome
folds me on proper lines
gives me wings and lets me fly

Mold me and Make me Lord, after Thy will, while I am waiting yielded and still.

Submission provided by Rev. David Kaiser, (Kayleen Backhaus's dad)

Isaiah 35:3-4 *"Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you.'"*

Most reading this will understand the concept of feeble hands, and maybe even weak knees. One of the frustrations of aging, the hands are not as strong as they once were, the solution is to look for alternative ways to accomplish the task. What an alternative God offers us weaklings, "Here is your God, He will come and save you." And not only does he come, but with vengeance, desiring to settle the score on our behalf. With recompense, making payment for us. During this season, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God." An awesome alternative for our weakness.

*As we stand feeble and weak, be strong and do not fear, our God is near.
Amen*

Pastor John Sorenson

Matthew 19: 14 *Jesus said "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."*

I am fully aware that my devotions are not the typical type penned by so many others in our congregation, but there are some things I am passionate about; one of which follows.

Social Justice is important

Are we aware of the injustice and suffering we inflicted on the indigenous children 1819 thru 1969? The Lutheran Church along with other denominations professing to be Christian inflicted great harm on children, separating them from their families and their native land and culture. They were put into boarding schools, stripped of their culture, forbidding them to speak their native tongue or practice any of their heritage.

There is no doubt that our church, along with other Christians in the U.S., are complicit in this egregious perpetuation of Indian boarding schools and the genocidal effects they had on the indigenous people/tribal nations.

Fortunately, the ELCA now recognizes the errors of the past as they make an effort toward reconciliation with Native Americans and all indigenous peoples.

Let us hope and pray, as we enter the season of Lent, that we all work for justice and healing for all of the people who have been wronged. If you have never had the opportunity to visit one of these former boarding schools, please consider doing so to learn more about the deplorable conditions and treatment during that time.

Lent has a strong emphasis on repentance. It is very important that we reflect on what we have done by thought, word and deed as we confess our sins publicly in our liturgy. So too, the church as a whole must repent its sins against the indigenous people of the U.S., including Alaska.

Unfortunately, the same thing is currently happening in Ukraine with Russia forcibly deporting Ukrainian children to Russia, causing Vladimir Putin to be charged with war crimes. I for one hope he will eventually be arrested and tried accordingly. Slava Ukraini. There are similar types of war crimes being perpetuated currently in Gaza and Israel.

Dear Lord, we ask of Thee to forgive us our sins and transgressions against all people. Help us cleanse our hearts and minds. Amen

Phil Granovsky

God's Gift of Forgiveness

Romans 5:1-2,5-8 *Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith to this grace in which we stand. The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. For Christ, while we were still helpless, died at the appointed time for the ungodly. Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person, though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.*

At first glance, these words of St. Paul seem almost too-good-to-be-possible, but upon reflection they can echo an amazing truth for someone who has reached deep down inside to extend forgiveness to someone who has wronged them. Of course, Paul is speaking here of that divine example of love and the forgiveness won for us on Calvary by our Lord and Savior. But for us sinners who are called to “forgive those who trespass against us,” we can be stopped short as we consider how we are called to forgive. At its core, our ability to forgive is only made possible by the grace of the Holy Spirit which has been poured into our hearts. For left to ourselves, our old sinful human nature will always be at odds with forgiveness.

Those words from Romans beg several questions for me as I learn to forgive. Do I need to receive an apology or hear the words “I’m sorry” before I can forgive? Am I able to forgive even if the other person continues to sin against me? Is it truly possible for me to forgive and then forget that sin? Or if I cannot forget, have I actually failed to forgive?

A couple of examples also come to mind when reflecting on the forgiveness which I have received from those I have sinned against. Once, after committing a very serious offense against someone I love, they were eventually able to forgive me and then commented, “If you love me, you will never do that again.” Those words are not an unreasonable expectation, and I have often thought “If I truly loved this person, I should not have committed that sin against them in the first place.” Although that act of being forgiven reminds me to avoid the temptation to that particular sin, yet my need for forgiveness still remains for all the other times and

offenses I know I will commit in my relationships. I do have a deep love, but I will also need to receive forgiveness over and over at the same time.

The other unsettling example concerns the ill will and human dislike I have for a particular individual in the public arena. To repent of this feeling about the person continues to be very difficult, for in my mind it is very hard to “hate the sin, yet love the sinner.” Although I cannot imagine ever being in agreement with what the person does and who they appear to be, a very wise friend offered this advice: “Although I do not like this person, I will pray for them, since you cannot hate someone for whom you are praying.” In this case, I need forgiveness for failing to open my heart to praying for this person, for not allowing God’s Spirit to convert the unforgiveness I feel.

This season of Lent prepares us for the miracle of New Life granted us in forgiveness and reconciliation on the Cross, a new life that changes our hearts and minds and actions by the working of the Holy Spirit. My Lenten prayer is that I will allow God to help me grow in the grace of forgiving, so I may pray with humility and in hopeful expectation that I will forgive those who trespass against me, as God has loved and forgiven me.

David Tschiggfrie

Matthew 16:24-26a *“Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?”*

As our Lenten journeys continue, we gather each week to “refill our vessels” as my dear spouse Nancy says. What is it about church that draws us to be there? When the bell rings and the lively conversation quiets, as everyone turns toward the cross, there is an air of expectation and a bit of excitement as worship begins.

Worship in God’s house is an ancient and yet ever new practice, centuries in the making, yet fresh as the morning dew each week on the Lord’s day. There is something about gathering together; people young and people old, female and male, people who live nearby and people who travel some miles to become a congregation, some filled with joy and others filled with heavy hearts. This is the only time during the week that we particular people in this particular place become one as the worshiping body of Christ.

At this occasion on the Lord's day, we set aside ongoing duties and responsibilities, schedules and activities to come together to sing songs we did not choose to sing, to listen to scripture and a message that we did not choose to hear, to pray for matters that we did not select. We gather in a building filled with symbols, paintings and other elements that turn our insights toward the holy. All of which brings an expectation of experiencing the immeasurable gift of God touching our souls.

We come on Sunday at times with hearts heavily laden by earthly concerns for family or friends or our own personal challenges. We come at times bewildered by current events in our world and we seek consolation from what overwhelms us. We come at times with light hearts and remarkable joy and gratitude that life has brought blessings beyond measure. We come at other times still, putting one foot in front of the other, tending to our little corners of the world and the paths that we each must walk.

Throughout life, we find the church to be a rock-solid foundation that we return to again and again, for refreshment, renewal, encouragement and hope. We hear the ancient and ever new words that feed our hungry souls through liturgy, prayers, bible readings and songs. We come because we need to connect with our Creator and we need to support our neighbor. We come and we are not disappointed because God is God and we are God's people responding to God's invitation to "refill our vessels"! May this Lenten time be one of renewal as we travel to the great three days and the resurrection of our Lord!

Thanks be to God for this immeasurable gift of faith and life! I'll see you in church! Grace and peace,

Pastor Mark Oehlert

Our pastor daughter shared a story with us about an unchurched adult who attended her church a few weeks ago. He was new to the town, and had only been to church a few times when he was a young child. He arrived right as the service began, and after worship talked to her about the adversity that he's faced in life and how he knew nothing about being involved in a religious community, but had the desire to make a change and feel close to God. He had recently started reading the Bible on his own, and thought it would be a good idea to get involved in a worshiping community. Not knowing anything about the place, on Sunday morning he heard the church bells ringing and decided to follow the sound. He ended up at her church. Our daughter joked that "that's the first time those bells did their

job!” He had never seen Holy Communion distributed before, but told her after worship that he could “tell that something really important and holy was happening” as he witnessed it that day.

The following Sunday he again came to church, this time with his ten-year-old son. As our daughter explained what they would see, hear, and experience during worship, he shared that coming to church together that day was his son’s idea. After the service, they spoke with our daughter and the son asked if he could be baptized. She told him she loved that idea and was curious what excited him about baptism, and he told her that “when you’re baptized Jesus comes down and goes into you—I want to be baptized for God.” She told him that he has good theology! The son then asked his dad if he’d like to be baptized too (the father was already baptized as a child). They decided together to do an affirmation of baptism for the father when the time comes for the son’s baptism after Lent.

We never know what the seeds of faith that we plant in our community will grow to produce—all we can continue to do as people of faith is to trust in God’s timing, pray fervently for the church and the world, and be brave and courageous in sharing our faith with others. The world needs it.

Rita Dienst

Happy Easter and God bless.



Lord of Life

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Thank you to everyone for contributing your devotions. What a wonderful way to share the love of Christ! Also, a note of gratitude to Rita Dienst for editing and preparing this booklet.

Larry Croghan