



2023

Lord of Life Lutheran Church

Lenten Devotional

## **Ash Wednesday February 22**

**Second Corinthians 5:20b** is the beginning of the second reading for Ash Wednesday, “We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” Welcome to Lent, being reconciled to God. This was the mission of Christ, on behalf of sinners: that’s us. God did not count our trespasses against us—this message has been passed on to us to be shared. This season that is observed by so many, offers witness opportunities to the gospel of reconciliation, gifted to us.

In the preceding verses there is the reminder that we are “a new creation, the old has passed away, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.” At Christmas time we are told to “go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born.” People need to be reminded what is to be celebrated. Now our undertaking is to remind them of the story of reconciliation, which is the meaning of this season. Welcome to Lent!!

*God of reconciliation, thank you for providing the path of return to you, through your Son. Amen*

***The Rev. John Sorenson***

## **Thursday February 23**

**Joel 2:12-13 (NRSV)** *Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.*

As I began to reflect for this year’s Lenten devotion, I was reminded of times growing up when I would go to a one-on-one confession with a priest. I would kneel in the darkened “booth” with a black cloth hiding the priest in the adjoining booth. I would begin, “Bless me father for I have sinned.....” After listening, he would give a take-away assignment for penance and then would say, “and now make a GOOD Act of Contrition.”

I still remember:

*Oh my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of Heaven and the pains of Hell, but most of all because I have offended Thee, my God, who art all good and*

*deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, do penance and amend my life. Amen.*

I checked the Internet and found what seemingly is a more modern version:

*My, God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In His name, my God, have mercy.*

During Lent, we examine our relationship with God and reflect on a loving God who has died for us and how we choose to do wrong and fail to do good. To aid us, some choose to give up something—candy, chocolate, wine, etc., **as a sign of sacrifice and to test one's self-discipline** and helps relate to the suffering of Jesus. Some believe that this is to represent Jesus Christ's sacrifice when he went into the desert to pray and fast for the 40 days before later dying on the cross. Some may choose to take a different approach and “give up” anger, rudeness, unkindness, gossip. Another approach is to examine our sin of “failing to do good.” What can we do to strengthen our relationship with God and follow the command to “Love thy neighbor” during this Lenten season. Can we visit a shut-in, take a meal to a neighbor in need, volunteer, clothe the poor, donate blood. Ah, yes, I think so!

*Loving God, send your Spirit to guide us through this Lenten Season and keep us be mindful of your Son's great sacrifice and death on the cross for us. Create a clean heart in me, O God: a humble heart, a meek heart, a peaceful heart, a benevolent heart, a devout heart. Amen*

**Mona Sorenson**

## **Friday February 24**

The story of the temptation of Christ in the wilderness is one that at first reading might not sound very relatable for us. We've probably never been stranded alone in the desert for forty days and nights, never been held off the edge of a cliff and told to call upon the angels for help, never been commanded to turn a rock into a loaf of bread. This story feels unique to Jesus, and as a result we tend to hear this story as something that happens to Jesus because of his divinity. We believe that the devil, the force of all evil in the world, meets with Jesus and

struggles with him for an entire season in the wilderness because this is what the devil does, right? He struggles with God. He fights against the source of all love and hope.

But this story of temptation is not one that happens to Jesus because of his divinity, but because he is human--because he is a person who lives in this earthly, tangible world of ours.

Each of us knows what this struggle with evil is like. We know what it is to be tempted in the wilderness of our lives. We've each contended with the forces of pride, anger, insecurity, and fear. Think about those dry places and moments in your lives, when you have found yourselves tired, worn out, fearful, anguished. Temptation comes to us in moments when we look at others and feel insecure about not having enough. Temptation comes in judgments we make about strangers or friends who make choices we do not understand. Temptation rules us, making us able to look away from those in need and to live our lives unaffected by poverty, hunger, and disease. Temptation rages in moments when we allow our temper to define our lives or when addiction to wealth, power, influence over others, vanity, or an inordinate need for control defines who we are. Temptation wins when we engage in the justification of little lies, small sins: a racist joke, a questionable business practice for the greater good, a criticism of a spouse or partner when they are not around. Temptation wins when we get so caught up in the trappings of life that we lose sight of life itself. These are the faceless moments of evil that, while mundane, lurk in the recesses of our lives and our souls. These are the moments that pry us apart from our neighbors, from God. That turn us in on ourselves and make it impossible to see who and whose we really are. That make us forget that we belong to God.

Christ's moment of complete vulnerability to the power of evil takes place right after his baptism. This story reminds us that our baptism doesn't shield us from the power of temptation and sin. Yes, our baptism gives us new birth in the Holy Spirit, new life in God--yes, it washes us in Christ's death and resurrection and means that resurrection is our future, too. In baptism we are saved from the ultimate price of sin--death. We will die, but death will not win. It will not have the last word.

This is all true, but as baptized people our need for renewal continues. Baptism connects us like a lifeline to God, but we will still make mistakes and fall into temptation daily.

And that is when our baptism will come to save us again. This healing and loving power has entered your life, but you will keep needing to lean on it every day in order to find a way forward. You will keep needing God's help over and over again to be made new, to be able to trust the promises of God's love, to be able to believe that you are made beautiful and whole by the power of Christ. Martin Luther used to say that as baptized people we die in sorrow for sin and repentance every day, and that every day God raises us back to new life and wraps us in possibility and wholeness. In our baptism, every single day carries with it new love, new life, new hope.

As baptized people we have a connection to the heart of God--a lifeline in the face of evil, in the wilderness of our lives, in the midst of temptation. Thank goodness we are not without God's help. In the temptation story we learn that in Jesus we have a companion, a friend, a savior, who knows our pain, who knows what it is to be tempted, who can empathize with us, but who also can overpower evil, can say no to temptation, and can hold fast to God's love. On our own, we will fall prey to temptation every time. But with the help of Jesus Christ in our baptism, we lean on the power of the one whose love is stronger than any evil this world can muster.

***The Rev. Marissa Becklin***

**Saturday February 25**

### **Lenten Confessions**

I remember every glass of milk I have spilled  
like white waves over my head  
and shards of broken glass on the floor  
making every step dangerous.  
I remember faces of friends who I had forgotten  
and promised rashly spoken but not kept.  
I remember mistakes that echo in my head  
loud as Moses carving rules in stone.  
I remember ancient words that call for admission  
in somber tones from black gowned preachers.

I remember nights dark enough to snuff  
out light for the next forty days.

But I also remember being told that Lent was necessary  
for laughter to begin again.

I remember being told that when truth is told  
the absent God returns.

Then what was told comes true  
and the sun shines warm on the winter ground  
while dandelions sprout by the south wall  
and winter is pushed away inch by bloom.

Then at the risk of sacrilege  
laughter rolls down my cheeks  
and the comic overwhelms the tragic;  
light overcome the dark,  
and the story told once upon a time  
is now, always truly now.

***This poem was written by Pastor David Kaiser,***

***Kayleen Backhaus's father.***

***Pastor Kaiser is a retired pastor for the  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.***

## **Sunday February 26**

**Philippians 4:6-7** *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

I write this devotion while I wait to close on our new house in Missouri. It was supposed to have happened a week earlier, yet here we sit waiting. My anxiety has been raised, my fears compounded, and my sense of being alone in this process deepened. All of our possessions are in the house; yet we cannot be there. We are at the mercy of the builder and the title company—people with whom we are unfamiliar. So, what can we/you do in a situation seemingly out of our/your control? Breathe deeply as you sit quietly, and enter into meditative prayer.

This is what Paul tells the small Christian community of Philippi. Whatever their anxiety, whatever their needs, Paul unequivocally tells them to enter into prayer and present their concerns to God. It is the peace of God, far beyond our mortal comprehension, that will bring them into relationship with Jesus Christ. I do not read these verses in the simplistic fashion of some Christians. I do not believe Paul is telling the Philippians to bring their wishes and desires to God in prayer and God will give what they seek in prayer.

When I enter into prayer and ask God to help me with the burdens I bear, I'm not expecting God to make the bumps in the road to closing on our house to magically disappear. NO! What I have received in the past, and am confident I will receive in the present, is a peace that goes beyond my understanding. Jesus Christ, God's appointed and anointed son will enter into my prayer and guide me to what I need to face my anxieties and concerns.

Close your eyes. Breathe deeply in and out several times. Allow your cares, concerns, pains, and needs to surface. Pause. Now begin to talk to God.

***Ken Resch***

## **Monday February 27**

**1 Corinthians 12:4-5** *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord."*

As we move into and through the season of Lent, we often find ourselves drawn to its themes. We consider abstinence of some type, enriching our prayer/devotional life, or various types of giving. It's this third theme, acts of charity and service, that form the basis of this meditation.

We returned in late January from Holden Village, a remote community and retreat center in the Cascade mountains of Washington state. We went with a group of Nate's students as part of a Wartburg Seminary J-term experience. There were 18 of us in all. Part of both the beauty and the challenge of a trip to Holden is the intentionality it takes just to get there. Think planes, trains, and automobiles, then add shuttle, boat, and school bus.

On Sunday, January 15<sup>th</sup>, our group was holed up in a motel in Chelan, WA, hoping to get on the boat and up the lake to Holden. Our arrival at Holden had already been delayed two days by avalanche risk on the mountain. Since our itinerary had changed, and it was Sunday, we had the added challenge of finding a way to get 18 people and all their luggage the mile and a half from the motel to the boat dock. Through a local Lutheran pastor, Nate had connected with Mike, a kind parishioner who owned a pickup truck and was willing to haul our luggage. Nate was desperately trying to schedule a Lyft to haul people and was not having much luck.

While Nate was trying to piece the transportation together, I had grabbed my phone and had just begun watching the livestream of Sunday worship from St. Philip the Deacon Lutheran Church in Plymouth, MN, where we used to live. The thought of catching a little church on a stressful morning was appealing. The opening hymn at St. Philip on that 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Epiphany was “O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright”, a beautiful tune with equally beautiful text. At the very moment the assembly was singing the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse...

**“In your one body let us be  
as living branches of a tree,  
your life our lives supplying...”**

Nate’s phone rang. It was Mike, saying, “don’t worry about a Lyft. My wife is coming in our other car. We’ll make as many trips as we need to get all of you there.”

A short time later, there they were, Mike and his wife Wendy. “Living branches”, willing to help a group of complete strangers, asking nothing in return. How many living branches do we encounter as we move through our seemingly ordinary days? Do we recognize them when we see them?

In this season of Lent, how might WE be living branches? How might we be Christ’s hands and feet in the world? Acts of love and service need not be grand, flashy, or widely known. Can we quietly brighten someone’s day, sharing the gifts God has given us, bringing a light that is uniquely our own?

***The Rev. Dr. Nate and Diane Frambach***



## **Tuesday February 28**

**Luke 13:6-9** *Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"*

I am an occasional gardener. I say occasional because I have limited patience for the care of plants. I plant and if growth happens, great. If not, away with it!... I'll try a different plant. This parable reminds me that patience in all things is important. We teach our children that patience is a virtue; it is an important life skill that will be called upon countless times in our lives. Yet, practicing patience tries our, well, patience!

As Christians patience plays a critical role in our lives. Loving our neighbors may not bring immediate results. We may never see the outcome of sharing our resources. Awaiting God's answer to our prayers may be frustrating and seemingly hopeless. To me this parable reminds us that we may not know how our actions will affect others, but we should continue to serve even if we don't see the result. The care and love the gardener has for this tree is what is important. The parable warns that we will be 'cut down' if we don't follow Christ, but God is patient with us (and ultimately, we know the result of His patience - eternal life.) We should, therefore, strive to be patient.

Hmmmm... maybe I should give plants a second (or third or fourth....) chance this spring!

***Susan Hansen***

## **Wednesday March 1**

**Psalm 34:3** *O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together.*

COVID has been responsible for many changes in our lives. One of those changes seems to be the decision to worship online instead of in person. During the COVID shutdown, being able to worship via Zoom was great, but we missed the community we share in person. There are so many things we learned attending church services. When we were

young, we learned to sit still and be quiet. We learned that the prelude is a time to clear our minds and prepare for worship. We learned the words to many hymns, the words to the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed. We learned that the candles lit on the altar signifies that the Light of the World, Jesus, is among us. We learned that when the acolyte carries the flame out after service, it signifies Christ going out into the world with us. We learned that the presence of flowers represents the beauty of God's creation. We learned that each season of the church year is represented by a different color. We learned how to pray with and for others. We learned that the offering placed on the altar is a reflection of what God has first given us. We learned that our offering is not only monetary, but also the willingness to share our time and talents. We learned that the building is not the church, but the church is the people within. Therefore, we learned that without the people within, there would be no church.

Oh yes, and one more thing: we learned you should always check the hair on the back of your head before going to church. 😊

***Jim & Bernita Gilbertson***

## **Thursday March 2**

### **Don't Worry, Be Happy**

(Thank you, Bobby McFerrin for the title)

Each year I make a resolution to worry more. Some say most of what we worry about never happens. It would then figure that the more things I worry about the chances of them happening decreases. It is an interesting premise, but I know that worry is God's reminder of what we need to include in our prayers. Prayer is a positive way of dealing with the negatives in our lives. God's love is present when we pray and that is something that gives us peace.

We read in Paul's letter to the Christians in the city of Philippi, **Philippians chapter 4, verses 6 and 7**, from the New Living Translation:

*"Don't worry about anything; instead pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus"*

When our worries guide our prayers, we are letting God guide our lives. When I make the resolution to worry more it is my reminder to pray more. The result is personal peace knowing I have God's loving support.

*Dear God, may we find peace in our prayers. Your love and guidance are ever-present. Give us the courage to face obstacles in our lives knowing your love supports us. Thank you for the many blessings that continue to give us hope and strength each day. Amen*

**Steve Geisert**

### **Friday March 3**

**Jeremiah 29:11** *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the lord. "Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

Lent is a time of contemplation, reflection and transition. We transition from Christmas with the celebration of a birth, to Epiphany with the manifestation of Christ to the peoples of the earth, to Lent, a time of reflection, fasting and repentance before reaching Easter, the resurrection of Jesus. I know a lot of people have experienced transition. Lord of Life has been through a transition. Transitions can be hard and sad. But this time of transition can also be transformational. There is an opportunity to go in a different direction, make different but important connections. What can you do to make positive the transition?

I hope with all of the transitions in your life whether good or bad, that you look to the reading from Jeremiah above. Even though we all have experienced change, understand that Jesus is always with you. With God's peace,

**Jon Dienst**

### **Saturday March 4**

**Need God's Help? Ask for it.**

Too often we underestimate the power of God. We forget that with God's help we can often make things happen that we think are impossible. Through prayer and God's love we can turn around our

lives. If you are like me, too often I tackle a job without asking God first about the job that needs to get done.

Jesus taught us to pray “Thy kingdom come thy will be done.” That means we should ask God for his will be to be done in the situation we are facing. God listens to all of our prayers. Too many times we get anxious and don’t wait for his answer and his help.

God gives us his unconditional love and he shows us that love when he answers the prayers we ask. Too many times we fail to listen to God’s answer to us. His answers may not be the answers we want to hear but need to hear.

Make sure that when you pray that you ask God and then really listen to his answer. It is in your best interest.

**Larry Croghan**

**Monday March 6**

**It's the Mission, stupid!**

**John 3:26-30** *And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.” John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.”*

I once knew a man who got lost. He was lost not in the geographical sense, but in the spiritual sense. This man had been quite successful in his life, working hard and inspiring others to do the same. But when his business began to fail, he came to me in quite a despondent state. He wanted to know what he was doing wrong. He wanted to know why people seemed not to be listening to him anymore. He wanted to know if God was still on his side.

As we talked, it became clear that the man's business had changed dramatically, but his knowledge base and approach to life had remained much the same as it had always been. His wife had suggested that he consult with others, which he had done. But he didn't agree with the

changes they wanted him to make. They didn't know the business like he did, he said. So, instead, he doubled down on his efforts, pushing himself and his employees to keep trying, determined to return the business to its successful past. It didn't work.

What happened, as it turned out, was that the man (his name was Joe) had gotten lost. His business involved making a specific kind of medical equipment for children with heart disease. His family had suffered the loss of a nephew to heart disease, and Joe got into this work to help other children. But over the years, he forgot his original motivation. The day-to-day work and problems piled up until he became more and more concretized in his role as the CEO and problem solver. Finally, the problems simply overwhelmed him, and now he could no longer see the business apart from his own need to make it work. He had lost his vision.

John the Baptist had no such difficulty. John knew who he was and what his limits were. He kept his mind's eye on his mission to Baptize followers for Jesus. And when they tried to get him to focus on himself instead of his mission, he would have none of it. "He must increase, and I must decrease," he said.

It is so tempting to get caught up in the struggles of life. "If it's to be, it's up to me," we say. But Jesus shows us how to keep the mission first. To focus more on the outcome and less on our own need to be the one controlling the outcome.

It is rewarding, and very humbling, to truly follow Jesus' example.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, be our guide in the missions to which you call us. Help us to be as willing to listen as we are to speak, and as willing to follow as we are to lead. Amen.

***The Rev. Kurt Hansen***

**Tuesday March 7**

**2022 A Year I'd Rather Forget Except-----**

The year started with continued PT for a knee replacement In October 2021. It was moving along, but I had a few complications, not quite as smooth as the first knee 4 years earlier.

So I'd rather forget, **except**, I have to remember prayers answered for skills of the surgeon and physical therapy. Things turned out ok.

In March I came down with a virus I thought, but I just couldn't stop coughing. This went on into April. While I was helping my son load a truck when he was moving, I sustained a concussion. When seeking medical attention, they discovered I really had pneumonia which was why I kept coughing.

So I'd rather forget, **except**, I have to remember there was no brain bleed, the headaches did go away eventually, and the coughing stopped. Prayers answered it wasn't as bad as it could have been.

The summer and fall moved forward and I developed overall body pain which by October had become debilitating, to the point of hospitalization and the possibility I'd have to go to skilled nursing. I continued to try to get answers and still am.

So I'd rather forget, **except**, people were and are praying for me. My church family brought food, assisted me with tasks, got groceries and helped me put them where I could reach them easily. Many sent notes, cards, texts and emails to sustain me.

In the midst of life's challenges, especially as we age, it is easy to get discouraged. We who were brought up as Christians and were taught about prayer do have an advantage. That doesn't mean we don't forget to pray, or always get a yes or positive answers to our prayers. Or are we happy with a yes, no, maybe, or not now.

The difference I think is no matter what the outcome, we may want to forget except there is a silver lining and an answer to prayer if we look for it.

***Pat Friedman***

### **Wednesday March 8**

**Mark 8:34-35** *"He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, '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, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.'"*

The annual practice of Lent is one I look forward to each year. While challenging, thought provoking and not light in terms of self examen, Lent offers great possibility for renewal and spiritual growth. Just as mother nature rests deeply, awaiting bursts of new life come spring, so too the soul longs for the fresh winds of God's Holy Spirit to revive one's being after the long winter.

Jesus is clear in the reading today about the cost of new life. Just as the food that we find on our plates that gives us life, so too God intends for the faithful to be filled with grace, mercy and energy for living that brings life that is life, and not just existence. That particular life came with great cost as Jesus gave his life so that we might live. Life such as this is freely given, and received only by faith the same Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior!

Just as life is transformed from the frozen earth into vibrancy and vitality in springtime, so too God intends that the new life that comes through Christ is renewing, reforming, and reviving as new life unfolds. It is a transformation that moves us from where we presently are located to where God would have us be. This transformation asks us to leave behind our self-chosen ways to the ways of Christ. Just as we sing in the hymn "Christ Be Our Light" so it is that Jesus will light our path and show us the way. Jesus does this so that we would save our lives and not lose them as we travel life on earth.

And in this way, as we are made new, life becomes a joyful journey where purpose, meaning and fulfillment bloom within and around us. Jesus invites us to deny ourselves and to become his companions. Will you dare, can you hear the words, will you accept the invitation of Jesus to take up your cross and follow?

***The Rev. Mark Oehlert***

**Thursday March 9**

**Walls**

**Galatians 5:1**

i want stone walls not brick  
walls where corners are not necessary  
where small pieces are picked to fit  
where square pegs go into round holes

and not be psychologically or otherwise  
considered out of place and sync  
like a poem that doesn't rhyme

give me walls that take time to build  
where masons search through rubble  
roll and tumble stones  
some to toss like salt over their shoulders  
some to keep with whispered wish words  
and wonder dreams

i don't want brick on brick  
squared in orthodox codes  
every one precise and proper  
aligned and level (headed)  
so they look straight and true  
plus perfect from the street  
but giving everyone stiff necks

no i will build my house  
of field stones two feet thick  
paint it puce but add one red brick  
so passers by will ask "why?"  
then i will leave some secret nooks  
where field mice can make nests  
and have their babies

***This poem was written by Pastor David Kaiser,  
Kayleen Backhaus's father.***

***Pastor Kaiser is a retired pastor for the  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.***

**Friday March 10**

**Light Shines Through the Darkness**

**Isaiah 9:1-2** *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.*

Before we sold our house, each Christmas season strings of lights would shimmer along the roof line. We intentionally chose icicle lights that had blue lights above the dangling white icicles because the blue reminded us both of Mary and the Epiphany on the twelfth day of Christmas. After Christmas Day, we shut off all the other outdoor lights (we had many)



and only lit the lights we called our Epiphany lights. They were lit every night through January sixth.

We know what follows Epiphany, and each week as we hear the scriptures reveal Jesus as the Son of God, we move closer to the darkness. Now, we find ourselves amid Lent and the depth of the darkest moments faced by Jesus Christ as he walked, talked, and healed among the people. Many of us may feel darkness overwhelming us. We've felt stresses, losses, and burdens these past few years that we never thought existed. But there will be light.

Jesus did not go to the cross in vain. Though all hope seemed gone as Jesus stood before Pilate, we must recognize Jesus stood firm; he recants nothing. Can we not take our pain and feelings of hopelessness to that same cross? It may seem too simple but try prayer. No matter how dark our lives feel, Jesus Christ, the son of God, gave His all for our humanity. Turn to the cross, and lay all your concerns there as you pray. Know that the darkness will become light,

***Ken Resch***

## **Saturday March 11**

### **Honor the Sabbath!**

**Exodus 20:8** *Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.*

I grew up in a small town in PA where everybody went to church on Sunday mornings. I knew that when my mom and dad took me to Emmanuel Lutheran, I would also see my grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Some of my friends attended other Christian churches, so we frequently visited each other's houses of worship together. It was common practice and fun.

Fifty years ago, I lived in Moscow in the USSR for two years. My first husband was an Assistant Air Force Air Attaché, so our family lived in an apartment at the U.S. Embassy with Marine guards inside the walls and Russians guards outside. During this time many of the beautiful Russian Orthodox churches were being used as museums or warehouses. Going to church was definitely not encouraged and church attendees were often persecuted. We learned that some of the people were gathering secretly in their homes to worship, but there were others who openly visited the operating churches even though they knew that it could affect their chances of employment or their children getting a better

education. One of the things you had to learn to accept in Moscow at the time was the feeling of always being watched. When we visited a Russian Baptist church one Sunday, the secret police were obviously writing down names of the people they saw walking into the church. Many of the churchgoers were elderly women. I wondered when I saw them trying to write down bible readings. I was later told that they did this because they could not own or purchase Bibles. There were none available.

Inside the wall life was so different. We had an American Methodist chaplain, who held services for us every Sunday at either the Ambassador's residence or the British Embassy when a Church of England priest visited. Knowing how much the Russian people had to struggle and sacrifice to be able to worship, I never wanted our family to miss a service, because I knew how blessed we were to have the freedom to worship. I have never lost that appreciation for the ability to worship on Sunday or any other day of the week. We must keep working to support those freedoms for the next generations.

Worship Matters! Community Matters! Caring for Others Matters!  
Prayer Matters! Faith Matters!

Let's follow our hearts along the pathway that Christ has laid out for us for as long as possible.

***Peggy Granovsky***

**Monday March 13**

**Why Lutherans Don't Sit in the Front Row**

Loosely inspired by **Luke 14:7-14**

More than once in ELCA and predecessor congregations, I have heard, somewhat in jest, comments about no one sitting in the front row (or front four rows). In the above referenced Gospel lesson from August 27, 2022, Jesus spoke of a person attending a wedding banquet and sitting at the head table. If this were to happen, one would be told to leave the head table and find an appropriate seat. That would be embarrassing and a sign to all present that we thought highly of ourselves. It is better and more humble to hear something like, "Hey you guys in the Peanut Gallery. Come on down and sit with everyone else." Why: Those of us that sit toward the back are just being humble.

***Tim Shade***

## Tuesday March 14

I've always liked the Beatitudes. I prefer Matthew's version, listing eight of them in 5:3-11. Luke's in 6:20-23 is a shorter version, listing four.

I've seen film portrayals of Jesus speaking these words to a large crowd, but my reading of each of the versions refers to two separate audiences – a large crowd that came to be near Jesus to be healed of assorted afflictions, and a smaller group of disciples to whom he separately taught the Beatitudes. In Matthew's version, Jesus uses "those/they" in the third person. In Luke's, Jesus uses the second person "you who are", followed by a "woe to you..." sequence in v. 24-26. Maybe the distinction between the audiences and the pronouns is irrelevant.

I'm not familiar enough with the biblical scholarship to know if the Beatitudes are meant to console and comfort those who are suffering from a range of things, with Jesus promising what relief or reward will happen; or if they are a prescription, a directive, to the disciples who will be ministering to those who are mourning, meek, hungering for righteousness, or are themselves merciful, pure of heart, peacemakers, and persecuted because of righteousness. Perhaps the intent is both of these.

I also don't know if there is a reason for the two separate audiences and interactions – the large group which received immediate healing; and the other, smaller, group of disciples who received the Beatitudes lesson. Presumably the smaller group of disciples were not themselves ill or suffering, demon-possessed, experiencing seizures or paralysis, as were the larger group. It seems analogous to an organization in which the numerous customers immediately get the product/service that they came for, while the smaller "staff" group are offered employment and being given job training for the ongoing service they will be providing to the consumers. I wonder which group I'd prefer to be in. But I suppose they're not necessarily mutually exclusive groups.

I turn 70 this year. I've already begun to experience some of the physical, cognitive, and emotional afflictions that come with age. The Beatitudes lead me to hope that I will be comforted, shown mercy and tolerance, maybe be seen as a peacemaker (although that may be a stretch). While I would rather not be persecuted, I certainly hope to attain the kingdom of heaven if I am poor in spirit at times. I also hope

that I recognize others who experience these things, and that I am compassionate and can offer comfort, mercy, and extend my own form of “healing” to those persons.

*Steve Heer*

**Wednesday March 15**

### **God’s Sign**

One evening, within a few weeks of losing my best friend, and giving up my will to God, I stood out in my garden hoeing weeds. A sudden rainstorm came up, and the warm drops gently rolled down my face. I just decided to stay out in it and let myself get wet. The sun still shone, the balmy air blew softly through my hair, and it just felt good to stand in the drizzle and be cleansed by the light shower. The sun became even brighter, and suddenly, as I looked to the east, a huge double rainbow appeared. I’d seen rainbows before, but nothing as incredibly picturesque as this and certainly never two at the same time.

The lower rainbow cast shades of rose, ginger, saffron, emerald, azure, indigo, and lavender and immediately drew my attention. The softer-hued rainbow above mirrored the lower one, but in reverse order, the highest arc was the lightest shade of purple and the other colors were more muted and blended right down to the red at the bottom, the most vivid of the arcs on the lower rainbow.

Witnessing from our home on a hillside west of Dubuque, the rainbows stretched from one end of the city to the other – a perfect double arc of exquisite colors painted by the Master. It was though God had His arms outstretched to hug the city with His love. I clearly knew that He had created this vision, but I didn’t grasp its significance at the moment. It should have been obvious, since I strolled “in the garden” (my favorite hymn) at the instant this rainbow appeared. I obviously did not have my brain engaged.

Being an immature and uneducated Christian, I had never read the Bible, nor the verses in **Genesis 9:8-17** saying that the sign of God’s covenant with Noah would be a bow in the clouds. At the moment my eyes looked upon this inconceivable and extraordinary sight, God’s sign of promise and hope, I didn’t recognize it. He’d given me the sign for which I had gotten on my knees and begged. Not being well versed in

the bible, I was too uninformed to comprehend the gift He offered me. But bless His heart; He gave me another chance.

The following Sunday I walked into the church secretary's office. There on the wall hung a handmade decoupage clock containing a nature scene with a rainbow in the background and the words "God keeps His promises one day at a time" printed on the face of the clock below the multihued arc. I instinctively grabbed a Bible and started looking in the concordance for the word "rainbow." I found the verses in Genesis and read them voraciously.

I hit my forehead with the heel of my hand like in the "I should have had a V-8!" commercial. I knew God had given me my sign. I began to weep and thanked God for answering my prayer with His rainbow. I could physically feel the burden of the loss of my friend being removed from my shoulders as if God were there, in person, lifting it off. Immediately I straightened up and knew that Maureen was being cared for in heaven. I knew she was okay, alive, and well in another plane of existence. I shed my last tears, tears of joy, for I knew I would see her again.

To know God has answered your prayer in such a glorious manner is a pretty humbling experience. At once I felt the need to repay His kindness. All the old Sunday school lessons of being a disciple for Jesus returned to my memory. What should I do? How could I do it? Where do I begin – all these questions began running through my mind. As I prayed for God's guidance, He prepared my way for me. Even though I had no idea what to do, He did, and He made it really simple so that I could follow His lead.

Years before, in 1982, I had begun attending Lord of Life Lutheran Church in our community. The people of this church were very welcoming. My family and I attended services every week, but we had never joined, never made a commitment - another obvious sign of an uneducated, undeveloped Christian.

From 1986, when I lost my friend and saw the double rainbow, till 1989 I would share this story verbally to friends or write about it in a sympathy card for people who had lost loved ones, but beyond these lame attempts, I did nothing to further my discipleship to Christ or commitment to my church. Still floundering as an amateurish Christian, and not making much headway, I knew more would be required of me – but where to begin?

I joined LOL in 1989. In 1989, Pastor Ron started a new Intensive Bethel Bible study. I decided to participate. The first night of class really touched me at my core. Pastor started talking about how we had come to take the class. He talked about each of us having to think it over, pray about it, etc. Then he said some words that really shook me. He said, "I know each of you *think* you decided to take this class, but what you need to know is: God chose you to be here tonight." I remember feeling flushed. "God wants **you** to be part of His team. He knows you inside and out, and He has specifically chosen each of you to be His disciple." If I had any reservations about being a part of the class, they immediately dissipated with Pastor's words. God chose me! I felt honored and humbled beyond explanation. Why me?

What about you? Has God chosen you for something special? Reflect on that during Lent and see what He has in store for you!

***Nancy Davis***

#### **Thursday March 16**

When I think of God's love, I think of Pastor Paul and how much he has done for my family during difficult times. Also, I think of all the wonderful people on our prayer chain. So many answered prayers through their continued support. I ask God's blessings for all.

***Sue Deaver***

#### **Friday March 17**

Confession and forgiveness are so necessary in our daily and worship life. It is indispensable for us, specifically during this season, or any season for that matter. In **1 John** we read, *"If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves...but if we confess our sins God who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us."*

When asked if I'm behaving, I jokingly respond, "No, I need to have something to confess." I don't know about you, but I have no trouble finding things to confess. The verses continue, *"My little children, if anyone does sin, we have an advocate, Jesus Christ; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins."* He compensates, he makes up for, he makes amends for our transgressions. He is our campaigner, our promoter, our supporter, our activist, and that is no joke. What a sacrifice for us and for the sins of the whole world.

*Forgiving God, you are so patient with us and our sins, thank you for the advocate we have in your Son who atones for us and the whole world.  
Amen*

***The Rev. John Sorenson***

**Saturday March 18**

### **Walking the Walk**

Every day we do a lot of physical walking. We are told that walking is a great way to exercise our bodies. Exercise is good for maintaining good health. Good health is something we all strive for.

Physical walking is just one way we walk daily. A second way we walk is in the way we live our lives. Jesus talks about walking as God wants us to walk. Through his life Jesus taught us how to walk in our lives. He taught us to love one another. He taught us that unless we had not committed a sin, we should not criticize others for sinning. He taught us to take care of others' needs when he said that we should care for one another by feeding and clothing them. When we do this, we are practicing better spiritual health.

I find it much easier to walk to better my physical health than to follow the walk for better spiritual health. Walking the way Jesus taught is much harder because it requires much more from me. Every day I fail to walk as Jesus taught us. I do not always respect others. I do not respect who they are or fail to listen to what they say. I see people that need to hear a positive word and I fail to even notice them. There are lots of people all around me that have not been blessed with clothes to keep them warm or food to eat and I do not make sure that I contribute to help them meet their needs.

During Lent we think about Jesus's walk to the cross and his death for our sins. Too often we forget the walks he made through his life talking about what we need to do on a daily basis. We listen every Sunday about how we should walk in Jesus' footsteps but then we do not put his actions into practice. We fail to see or do what Jesus would want.

Our congregation puts a lot of emphasis on Blessed to be a Blessing. That is because God has blessed us all in many ways. We are encouraged to use our blessings to bless others. God blessed us with Jesus and Jesus taught us how to bless others in our daily lives. As we go through this Lenten Season let us continue to remember that we have

been blessed to be a blessing. If we remember we have been blessed, we can then walk the walk of sharing God's love just as Jesus shared his love for us by walking to the cross to give his life for our sins.

***Larry Croghan***

## **Monday March 20**

### **"Just Do It"**

Lent is the season we take time to prepare for the death and triumphant resurrection of our Savior at Easter.

I will confess I struggle to get inspiration and motivation to write a devotion. It is a task outside of my comfort zone. But it has become a part of my Lenten preparation.

To help "prime the pump," I looked up the word devotion in my Websters New World Dictionary. There were five definitions listed, two of which stood out to me; religious worship and faithfulness. In worship and in our faithfulness to God, I am reminded we are called to serve.

But like writing a devotion, I sometimes struggle in my service to others. It reminds me of a tee-shirt I have of Homer Simpson lying on a Nike Swoosh eating a donut saying, "Can't somebody else just do it." Or sometimes I want to repeat the words of Moses in Exodus 4:13, "Oh Lord, please send someone else to do it." Along with Moses and Homer, I can attest it is easier to let someone else do it! (Did you ever think you would hear those two names mentioned in the same sentence?)

But then I remember Acts 20:35b "it is more blessed to give than to receive" and I recall the times when contributing to worship I have been doubly blessed; first by being able to share my talents and then by experiencing a joyful worship.

Much like writing a devotion, helping out in service to others is a wonderful way for us to prepare for Lent and the year ahead.

***Barry Pickart***

## **Tuesday March 21**

One of my favorite sayings is: "What you are is God's gift to you. What you make of yourself is your gift to God."



I thank God every day for the gifts He has given me to make me what I am. What am I? a daughter, a sister, a wife, a mother, a friend, a teacher, a volunteer.

I know that in all of these roles of what am I, I've made some mistakes. But I pray every day that what I attempt to make of myself is pleasing in His sight, and with His guidance, my gift to Him will continue to grow.

*Dear God, Thank you for the gifts you have given me. Forgive my mistakes and guide me in what I make of myself. In Christ's name, Amen*

**Bernita Gilbertson**

## **Wednesday March 22**

### **The Serious Business of Heaven**

Lent is a bit of a conundrum, isn't it? On the one hand, Lent has a strong emphasis on repentance. It is very personal as we reflect on who we are and what we have thought, said or done which places a strong focus on our sinfulness. All those errors that have put a distance between us and God and one another come to the fore. In that way Lent can seem to be a hard time. For in Lent that old saying "The truth hurts" fits. Confession and denial may be good for the soul, but can be painful as well.

On the other hand, Lent carries with it a sense of spring and the coming spring season. That is what the word Lent actually means. It comes from the old English *Lencten*. After this past winter we are ready for spring and some good news. We are hopeful and ready for some joy. C.S. Lewis once wrote that joy is the serious business of heaven. So part of our Lenten journey is also to know and experience again that joy that God intends for us. Lent is a truth time, and part of the truth is that we are loved people blessed with God's grace.

There is a Lenten hymn that summarizes the two truths of Lent. The hymn is "Ah, Holy Jesus" no. 349 in the ELW. It appears in the collection of hymns for "Good Friday." But it clearly sings the truth about the season of Lent. It was written by Johann Heermann who lived between 1585 and 1647. Heermann was the sole surviving child of his mother. During the Thirty Years War; his father and siblings were lost. Heermann promised his mother that if he survived, he'd become a pastor, and he did. But then a throat infection brought his ministry to an end because he could no longer preach. Instead, he wrote poems many of which were set to music and became hymns.

Heerman's poem first speaks of Lent as a time for confession, for truth-telling, for repentance. The first two stanzas hit home hard. They ask questions about who caused Jesus' death. The first two stanzas of the hymn say it all.

"Ah, holy Jesus, how hast thou offended  
that we to judge thee have in hate pretended?  
By foes derided, by thy own rejected, O most afflicted."  
"Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee?  
Alas my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee.  
T'was I Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee; I crucified thee."

The words are clear and true. Lent is a time for repentance.

If the hymn was not enough, there were other words spoken in the liturgy, the prayers, and the readings. Words that agreed that we are sinners in need of confession and repentance. Like for the ancient David, our sins, errors, even little mistakes and *faux pas* came to the fore. We knew and God knew that we had sinned in thought, word and deed. There was no opportunity for excuses or blame.

But Joy, Lewis said, is the serious business of heaven. Where is the joy in the hymn?

The last three stanzas of Heerman's hymn tell where the joy is.

- 3 Lo, the Good Shepherd for the sheep is offered;  
the slave hath sinned, and the Son hath suffered.  
For our atonement, while we nothing heeded,  
God interceded.
- 4 For me, kind Jesus, was thy incarnation,  
thy mortal sorrow, and thy life's oblation;  
thy death of anguish and thy bitter passion,  
for my salvation.
- 5 Therefore, kind Jesus, since I cannot pay thee,  
I do adore thee, and will ever pray thee,  
think on thy pity and thy love unswerving,  
Not my deserving.

Heerman tells us that God's love is all gift. It is not deserved. It is not earned. Given by God's love unswerving.

Now Lent is also a time to dance and shout "Alleluia!" It is a time to look forward to the wonder of life destroying death, of hope replacing

despair, and of peace coming to earth. It is a time for joy, a time for spring and a time to anticipate Easter.

Lent is a movement or a journey going from the sadness and truth of our sinfulness to the joy of knowing God's love. It is a movement from death to life. This is where joy becomes the serious business of heaven.

***This meditation was written by Pastor David Kaiser,  
Kayleen Backhaus's father.  
Pastor Kaiser is a retired pastor for the  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.***

**Thursday March 23**

**I Love You, Jesus**

The Pastor had just finished distributing the Lord's Supper. He spoke the words of dismissal, "Depart in peace", when Fred, one of the communicants, with eyes focused on the cross whispered, "Thank You, Jesus. Thank You, Jesus! I love You, Jesus!" The Pastor shared that beautiful experience with his wife. They talked about it for some time, especially the phrase, "I love You, Jesus." We say to each other, "I love you." We say to our children, "We love you." Our children tell us that they love us. But what about, "I love You, Jesus?" Could He be waiting to hear us say that? Would He be pleased to hear those words from our hearts?

Or hymns are full of love. We sing of tender love, fervent, ineffable love. We sing of boundless, perfect, redeeming, wondrous love. We sing of amazing, holy, gracious love. We sing of creating, pardoning, patient, everlasting love. Furthermore, we sing that the Lord would teach us love; that He would crown our lives with love and keep us in His love. In our songs we ask that we would bring forth fruits of love; that we would be moved by His love; that we may give Him love.

Love is not a mere emotion, an idle feeling or sentiment. Rather, love is an active, working principle, a motive power. Love is an action word. Ask a little child, how much do you love me? The child will immediately go into action. The bigger the hug, the harder the squeeze, the more the child is trying to express its love.

So it was and is with the Lord our God. Note the words of action in the following: *John 3:16*, "God so loved the world that He GAVE His one and

only Son." Jesus did not love us and then stay in heaven. Because He loved us He CAME to planet earth and GAVE Himself a ransom for us all. He MADE the supreme sacrifice. He PAID our debts.

- "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." *Isaiah 53:5*
- "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down His life for His friends." *John 15:13*
- "Above all things, have fervent love among yourselves." *1 Peter 4:8*
- "By this shall all know that you are My disciples if you love one another." *John 8:35*

No question about it, love is the badge of our faith.

**"Thank You, Jesus! Thank You Jesus! I love You, Jesus!"**

This meditation was adapted from *Letters, Volume 1* by Cecil H. Skibbe. Copyright © 1991. Two complete volumes of thirty letters each are available from Cecil H. Skibbe, 908 Sowder Square, Bloomington, IN 47401. Used with permission of the author. Submitted by Pat Friedman.

## **Friday March 24**

### **Patience**

**James 5:7** *Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.*

I love a good barbecue beef brisket. I bought a pellet smoker last year, and in studying how to smoke a brisket, I learned how to prepare and season the brisket. I learned the target internal temp for brisket is 201°, but the optimum cooking temp is only 225-250°. These facts have resulted in the mantra of all barbecuers: "low and slow". Smoking a brisket can take anywhere from 12-18 hours!

On my inaugural attempt, I put a trimmed and seasoned, 15 lb. brisket on the smoker at 10am, impaled it with a probe, set the temp for 230° and waited. And waited.

And waited...

By 9pm I was getting tired of waiting, so I began to increase the cooking temperature. Just a few degrees can't hurt. No change. A few more

degrees. Nothing. Eventually I cranked that thing up to 375°! Finally, I pulled the brisket out, put it in the oven on a timer, and went to bed. And in the morning when I unwrapped it, my beautiful brisket had turned to mush.

Why do we have such a tendency toward impatience? I certainly have no answer. But Scripture is replete with God's encouragement for us to be patient. Do a Biblical word search on patience. You'll be amazed how impatient God's people have been.

Learn from the brisket! Low and slow! Turn down the external temperature! Resist being pressured by all the urgent things. Bask in the warmth of God's word and allow it to slowly warm you until you become a pleasure to Him.

*We pray: Lord God, thank you for being patient with us. Teach us to settle in to the warmth of your patient love. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

***Pastor Kurt Hansen***

**Saturday March 25**

**Living Generously**

**Matthew 6: 21** *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Whether our yearly income is \$20,000 or \$120,000, we seem to spend most all of it. When we can, we save for the future, a special purchase, an event, or trip. Mostly, we have the funds when there is a real need. We know that there are so many people in need, even in our own community. We witness it in the programs we support as a congregation: the little food pantry, Open Closet, Almost Home, and others.

Sometimes I struggle with being more generous than I already am. Why is that? Because there are things I want; I would like to retire someday; I am fearful of being taken advantage of; fearful of beggars on the street; fearful that the causes will continue to ask for more, and if you have lived through tough times it makes you more conservative. There is also that fear of another recession on the horizon.

Matthew 6: 19-21 reads:

*“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves dig through and steal. But lay up for*

yourselves treasures in heaven, where no moth or rust destroys and where thieves do not dig through and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Anyone who has a retirement nest egg, or an investment, saw it fall significantly in value during 2022. If at the beginning of 2022, we had been generous with those dollars by making gifts, then their value would have grown instead of diminishing. Yeah, makes you think about those moths and rust.

Earlier in the same chapter, Matthew tells us not to perform our good works publicly to be noticed by the people. But rather, do them in secret.

Giving gifts that can change people’s lives for the better brings us and the recipient great reward. Look for opportunities to give those kinds of gifts. If you can do it in secret, all the better.

***Kevin Eipperle***

## **Monday March 27**

“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” These words are familiar as one of two admonitions that may be spoken at the imposition of ashes on the foreheads of those attending Ash Wednesday liturgy. Over the years, while serving as a lay minister distributing ashes, I have always chosen instead to use the second form, “Repent, and believe in the Gospel.” This year, however, I find myself drawn to this alternate reminder of our mortality and impermanence in this life.

Perhaps this is partly a function of age, as the past year has brought with it the passing of several close friends and family members, an increasing awareness of physical decline in my own health, mobility, memory, and energy level, and similar diminishments in other dear friends and family members. Reminders of my own human mortality and frailty seem to be a natural and more frequent, personal part of life as years pass. So too, are reminders that some of those dreams and plans for my life that were held in earlier years will need to go unrealized for any number of reasons, some good and some not so good.

Yet, for all that, this call to remember that we are but temporary travelers passing through this life, is wrapped up in the assurance that

our very being has come from God, and will return to God. Each of us is God's own creation, and our existence here and now, along with our ultimate destiny, is always in God's loving and merciful hands. That divine love and mercy comes to a focal point in this season of Lent, as we reflect upon our own need for repentance and forgiveness, for healing of all the brokenness and unfulfillment in our lives, and as we prepare to embrace the gift of eternal life that has been given to us on the Cross and in the Empty Tomb.

As we are marked with ashes and reminded by the words of this Lenten season, we are also sent forth to practice the Christian disciplines of prayer, fasting and almsgiving to those who are in need. When I grow ever closer to my Lord Jesus by intimate prayer with Him, and when practicing conscious acts of self-denial that help me avoid the distractions that cloud a focus on my relationship with Him, I am also given the grace to reach out and minister to others. Despite the limitations and transitory nature of this earthly life, in this season of Lent I have been given a special time to fix my gaze more fully upon Jesus and upon my brothers and sisters, and have been empowered to offer the ashes of my life as witness to His presence in me and in this world.

***David Tschiggfrie***

**Tuesday March 28**

**Holocaust Remembrance**

**James 2:8** *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"*

I am writing this at the end of Holocaust Remembrance week. What a horrific time that was and to think that the vast majority of people under the age of 40 know nothing about this dark time in the history of the world.

In 1997 my wife and I took a trip to Germany to visit her son, who was stationed at Joint Command in Stuttgart, Germany. So nice to travel in a foreign country where we had a personal tour guide. Steve always outdid himself. On a cold, drizzly overcast day we were on our way to Salzburg, Austria and stopped at the Dachau Concentration/Elimination Camp.

As per Wikipedia:

*“Dachau was the concentration camp that was in operation the longest, from March 1933 to April 1945, nearly all twelve years of the Nazi regime. Dachau #39’s close proximity to Munich, where Hitler came to power and where the Nazi Party had its official headquarters, made Dachau a convenient location. Demographic statistics vary but they are in the same general range. History will likely never know how many people were interned or murdered there, due to periods of disruption. One source gives a general estimate of over 200,000 prisoners from more than 30 countries during Nazi rule, of whom two-thirds were political prisoners, including many Catholic priests, and nearly one-third were Jews.” Overall, over 6 million, YES 6,000,000 people were exterminated by the Nazi Regime.*

Touring the replicas of the barracks and gas chambers was truly chilling and will remain with me forever.

My simple request is: **Let us never forget.** Too much has been swept under the rug. I see a revival of this with the invasion of Ukraine, a sovereign, democratic freedom seeking country by the brutal forces of Russia also committing genocide by attempting to wipe out an entire nation of peace-loving people.

I do profess to being a Christian and abhor all violence to any race, creed, color or minority. You cannot do a kindness too soon, for you never know how soon it will be too late

May all Christians follow the Lord’s teachings. During Lent and always let us try to walk in the footsteps of our Lord and Savior, treating all with kindness no matter their station in life.

Blessings and peace to all of you.

**Luke 6:31** *“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”*

***Phil Granovsky***

**Wednesday March 29**

**Romans 5:8** *But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*

*Redeemer, Lamb of God, he is worthy. Thank you for the Cross, Lord.*



## Thursday March 30

We often talk about the Community of Believers. That is no truer for us than it is this year. I know it has been a tough year for all with Covid and the illnesses that have plagued many of us. That is also so true for our Family. As many of you already know I lost my 88-year-old sister in the last year. My oldest brother age 87, and his wife have been dealing with many illnesses and persistent pain. My brother aged 72 and 1 ½ years older than me has been dealing with many problems and has spent much time in the last month or so at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, trying to get to the bottom of his illnesses. Recently I myself have been dealing with an unexpected illness and my first ambulance ride and spent almost a week in the hospital recovering.

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 there 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. Thank you for your continuing prayers and I look forward to being able to once again participate fully in our Church Community here at Lord of Life.

***Dan Decker***

## Friday March 31

**Mark 15:3** *Then the chief priests accused him of many things.*

*Jesus, you were scorned, beaten, mocked, and crucified for our sake. We cannot thank you enough for enduring such cruelty for the sake of our salvation. You are God's one and only Son, the greatest sacrifice, our Savior and Redeemer. We praise you and thank you with all we are.*

## Saturday April 1

Sandy and I were recently asked to share our “faith journey” with the youth faith formation class on a Sunday between services. It was probably more interesting for us than for the class, since it was

essentially reminiscing, only with an audience. (My usual reminiscences take place in my own head without having to make them engaging for others.)

It was sort of fun recalling my education in Catholic schools – St. Anthony’s Grade School and Wahlert High School in Dubuque. Our teachers at St. Anthony’s were a mix of lay women and nuns (BVM’s – from the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary), who still wore full length black “habits” with a stiff, narrow white arch-shaped visor-kind-of-thing that surrounded their faces. I can’t recall if their “belts” were a large rosary, or a thick rope. I think there were both variations. As kids, we used to refer to the BVMs as “black-veiled-monsters” amongst ourselves. The Sisters were probably aware of this. In reality they were kind, caring, but firm women who belonged to a religious Order dedicated to education.

As a boy, I was allowed to become a mass server, or “altar boy”. This was a privileged responsibility. I wore an ankle-length cassock, and over it a white pleated surplice that draped to our hips. Our responsibilities were to light the candles on the altar, deliver the cruets (small pitchers of wine for the priest for communion – the congregation did not get wine) and water, a tray and a small towel for the priest to wash his fingertips prior to handling the host (a large flat wafer) for consecration prior to communion. We then held the paten (a round, gold metal plate with a wooden handle – sort of a very elegant ping-pong paddle) under each individual’s chin as that person received communion from the priest, who placed the small communion wafer (host) on his/her tongue. Only the priest was to actually touch the host.

This all sounds rather elaborate to non-Catholics, but it was perfectly routine to those of who grew up Catholic. And Dad and Mom were always proud to attend midnight Mass at Christmas and Easter with the whole family; Mom, Dad and all 7 growing (eventually grown) kids together in a pew. I felt sorry for anyone who sat behind the Heers; we were all tall and blocked the view of those unlucky folks. As the brothers married, our normal-sized spouses provided a “window” for those few directly behind.

In the years following high school and college, I gradually dropped away from frequent worship, but never lost the belief that one’s faith is important. I was a non-practicing Christian during graduate school. Upon returning to Dubuque in 1978, and looking for a job, I learned of the

new Catholic Worker House on 21<sup>st</sup> Street. While it wasn't "employment", they welcomed me as the first male live-in "staff" member in this temporary shelter for a range of persons, mostly female. Roughly corresponding to the Dubuque Rescue Mission (for men), it was supported by a group of faith-based Christians – including some Franciscan nuns – and hosted weekly worship and faith-based discussion of social justice issues from a Christian perspective. (Do some research on Dorothy Day, who began the Catholic Worker movement in the 1930s, and was consecrated as a saint in the Catholic Church 10 years ago).

Fast forward to our marriage in 1981 and the birth of Nick, our oldest, in 1983. We wanted a faith home that would offer something to Nick, and later Luke. Visiting the relatively new Lord of Life Lutheran Church at the recommendation of friends, we experienced the persistence of founding Pastor Ron Voss (whom we jokingly recall as a pastoral "stalker"). It proved to be a good decision to join this active, socially conscious, engaging congregation as our family matured through the years. It remains our faith home.

***Steve Heer***

## **Monday April 3**

### **Trust**

As we prepare for Easter, I am reminded how often I forget to trust God. Each day I pray and ask God for help with something. I seem to forget to realize that God already knows what my needs or others needs are.

The result is that I do not put trust in God to help me with the issue I am facing. That means that I also do not allow God to do his will in that situation. I am failing to both trust God to help me and I am also attempting to do my own will.

Failing to trust God to help us through those tough days ends up with us worrying and being frustrated with what is happening in our lives. For me that often means sleepless nights that are fruitless.

God will help us through those fruitless nights if we just put our trust in him. He will guide us through those tough days and tough times. He will help give us the peace that we all need and want.

***Larry Croghan***

## Tuesday April 4

### In Darkness We are Found

**Isaiah 49:15-16** *"Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;*

Our Lenten journey takes us through Jesus' darkest moments that end with him hanging on a cross between two common thieves. Roman law was harsh, and to suggest there was something greater than the emperor meant certain death. Yet, the words Jesus spoke were not words of upheaval and overthrow; sadly, too many failed to understand the message and he was crucified. Those who clamored for his death are all forgotten, but Jesus Christ, son of God remains.

Now, in 2023, many of us find ourselves filled with uncertainty, doubt, missteps, questions, and even moments of fear. We wonder if we are alone in our thoughts, unable to articulate them to others. We question if our decisions are good ones, or if we are groping blindly in the dark seeking direction. It has been this way for me for nearly a year, and though I continue to move forward, concerns linger.

We do not know if choices we've made are the best and sometimes, we must go with our experiences, hunches, and hopes. Yet, as tenuous as all this may be, there is an absolute certainty that has never left me from childhood. Yes, like many others caught up in the throes of anguish or doubt, I've often failed to remember. When I take a deep breath and pause amid the turmoil my certainty returns. I am never forgotten by God our Lord and Savior; who chose to dwell among humanity as Jesus of Nazareth; who chose to share a story of love, compassion, and salvation; who chose to make the ultimate human sacrifice for us all. No, we are never forgotten, engraved as we are on the hand of God.

***Ken Resch***

## Wednesday April 5

**Psalms 22:1a** *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

Good Friday is not for the faint of heart.

The day centers on the cross of Christ. It focuses on his excruciating death. It features an imperial act of torture and capital punishment upon an innocent man who came bearing God's unconditional love to the world.

But in the cross, we see who God really is.

Early in his time as a university professor, Martin Luther had an awakening experience in studying Psalm 22. Identifying its words with those Christ spoke from the cross, Luther was awestruck at the way our Savior experienced the fullest extent of desperation and alienation from God on the cross. Here Christ suffered completely, identifying fully with us. Here the Almighty becomes the All-merciful. Here the Judge becomes the Judged. Here the God of Justice becomes the All-loving. In Christ the One who knew no sin became sin for our sake so that in Christ we may be saved.

*O God, in Christ you willingly took on our worst so that we might have and know your best. We gratefully embrace and receive all that you have done for us for Christ's sake. Amen.*

***The Rev. Troy Troftgruben***

**Thursday April 6**

**Seven Words for Good Friday**

Seven old words are spoken to ever need.  
For cotton mouths, drought and expanding deserts,  
he thirsts and shares the salt and vinegar.  
For cross words, anger, bricks and war  
he forgives those who know not what they do.  
To the lonely living in cardboard who eat crusts  
he gives family, mother, child.  
To the hopeless living death row single moments  
he promises paradise and tomorrows.  
For those who have given up on every god  
he shouts the emptiness of forsakenness.  
To those who have nothing else to trust  
he offers the hands of God.  
For those who wish for conclusions,  
he shouts the final ***tetelestai!***

***This poem was written by Pastor David Kaiser,  
Kayleen Backhaus's father.  
Pastor Kaiser is a retired pastor for the  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.***

### **Friday April 7**

In a previous devotion I wrote of reconciliation with God. We are like sheep who have gone astray. Just prior to writing this we returned from an amazing and emotional trip to the Holy Land. Seeing shepherds with their herds of sheep and goats, one can go astray so easily, especially in a large flock. My thoughts turn to the words of **Isaiah 53**, *"But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, upon him was the punishment for our iniquities; and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turn to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."*

On the trip we were observers of possible sites of his being crushed, his punishment, his bruises, all for those of us who have a tendency to wonder and turn to our own lost way. But there is hope, possible sites of the resurrection, even entering a tomb, seeing a stone that covered the entrance. Yes, possible sites but concrete illustrations of God's power over sin and death.

*Reconciling God, crushed, punished, and bruised, laying our iniquity on your Son, your grace is beyond our imagination. Amen*

***The Rev. John Sorenson***

### **Saturday April 8**

**Romans 15:13** *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

While I've shared this experience with a few people I've decided to now share it more widely. During a yearly physical in 2008 my calcium was found to be high. I underwent testing and was told it was my parathyroid. Of course, thanks to Google I learned about this tiny little gland (4 small things the size of a rice grain, situated behind the thyroid). Google also informed me that in 99% of the cases it would be a

benign growth easily taken care of with surgery. In the other 1% which is cancerous, the prognosis is 3-5 years. After completing the testing, I was told to expect cancer.

Surgery was scheduled; blood pressure soared, and I was put on meds to be able to even *have* surgery. Obviously, I was terrified - as I had kids in 5th & 9th grade. Finally, surgery day came and there were issues finding veins for the two spots necessary. The surgeon after seeing me in tears from the pain told the anesthesiologist to wait until under the bright lights of the OR.

Heading into the OR was a very life-changing experience for me: as I was just outside the OR doors I saw Jesus, who gently told me not to worry because it would all be ok. When I awoke in the hospital room, my surgeon came in and told me it wasn't cancer. I said, "I know." Then came the endocrinologist who told me tissue was being sent in for biopsy. When I told her the surgeon said it wasn't cancer, she said he shouldn't have said that until the results were back. I of course had it on even higher authority that all was well!

In the aftermath I was told that the pre surgery test results were so high that they had never seen results like that not be cancer. Because of this experience, I have developed a very close personal relationship with God and have a pretty much ongoing conversation with God. I trust in God's plan for me and my family and know that whatever this world holds for us, the next one is glorious and eternal. And of course, I've since had cancer twice and survived. God is great!

***Rita Dienst***

## **Easter Sunday April 9**

### **Jesus Is Alive**

**Matthew 28:1-10** (Contemporary English Version) <sup>1</sup>*The Sabbath was over, and it was almost daybreak on Sunday when Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. <sup>2</sup>Suddenly a strong earthquake struck, and the Lord's angel came down from heaven. He rolled away the stone and sat on it. <sup>3</sup>The angel looked as bright as lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. <sup>4</sup>The guards shook from fear and fell down, as though they were dead.*

<sup>5</sup>*The angel said to the women, "Don't be afraid! I know you are looking for Jesus, who was nailed to a cross. <sup>6</sup>He isn't here! God has raised him*

*to life, just as Jesus said he would. Come, see the place where his body was lying. <sup>7</sup>Now hurry! Tell his disciples he has been raised to life and is on his way to Galilee. Go there, and you will see him. This is what I came to tell you."*

*<sup>8</sup>The women were frightened and yet very happy, as they hurried from the tomb and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup>Suddenly Jesus met them and greeted them. They went near him, held on to his feet, and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup>Then Jesus said, "Don't be afraid! Tell my followers to go to Galilee. They will see me there."*

He is risen! You've navigated the 40 days plus Sundays of Lent and you've landed on this devotional offering for Easter. The reading from Matthew is one of the appointed texts for our Easter celebration. It contains some familiar lines that, I believe, we overlook out of that same familiarity. Earthquakes and an empty tomb and an angel rolling a stone away? Women running from the tomb to tell the others when suddenly Jesus appears? We don't get this detail in Mark's Gospel! I wonder why?

The words I want to focus on, however, are three simple ones. Don't. Be. Afraid.

These words, or ones with the same meaning, appear in scripture around 365 times, as I recall. This makes them among the top in all of scripture. Do not be afraid. How does God know that we need to hear these words? We do need to hear them. I need to hear them. It's far too easy to fall into fear. But the message of Easter truly is about addressing our fear. Fear of sin and death. Fear of what is next. Fear that we won't, don't measure up.

Friends, hear the good news. Jesus loves you! Jesus has interceded for us and has freed us from the fear of sin and death. Jesus' message of love says you are enough because through the cross you are saved. These are the messages of hope we all need to hear, to be reminded of. It's why we gather in worship each week and break bread and drink from the cup at Christ's table of welcome. It's why we sing and praise God with our voices and in our prayers.

Don't be afraid. No matter what else happens, you are God's beloved ones and that is worth celebrating. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

***The Rev. Paul Amlin***





# **Lord of Life**

## Lutheran Church

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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***