



2019

Lord of Life Lutheran Church

Lenten Devotional

Wednesday March 6

Ash Wednesday

“Remember you are dust and to dust you will return.”

Dust, that's the film on all surfaces in the house that drove mom crazy! Now years later, ashes and dust take on a new meaning. Getting older and realizing one's mortality, this beginning to Lent seems like a real downer! That is until you remember the rest of the story! For just as in creation humans were formed from dust (see Gen. 2), so will we be reformed when Christ returns. Yes, this earthly time will come to an end and our bodies will become dust, but the story doesn't end there! Just as Lent ends at Easter, so we will enjoy a true Easter! Hold fast to the promises of God and share the good news. Death has lost its sting.

Bill Nybeck

Thursday March 7

Personal Responsibility and Civil Authority

Romans 13:1-6; Acts 5:29; Romans 14:12-13, 19

The first six verses of Romans 13 state clearly that we must submit to the civil governing authorities for there is no authority except that which God has established. One who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted Contrarily, in Acts 5:29, Peter and other apostles say, we must obey God rather than men! While trying to understand these conflicting gems of biblical guidance, I continued reading in Romans (specifically, 14:12-13 and 19): “¹²So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. ¹³Therefore, let us stop passing judgement on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way. ¹⁹Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification.”

Tim Shade

Friday March 8

Isaiah 56:7

these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house shall be called a house of prayer
for all peoples.

For a variety of reasons I have not been attending worship. But on Reformation Sunday, I did. And to explain why requires a bit of back story.

Some 20 years ago I helped a man from Albania to get a green card. Having left his wife and two daughters behind in order to provide for them, he was unable to see them for over ten years due to immigration laws.

Fast forward to the present. His youngest daughter is now nearly 30 years old and now lives in Dubuque. Susan and I have kind of adopted her. She was raised Muslim, and is a very spiritual, modern woman who studied law in Vienna specializing in human rights and women's issues.

For some reason I had the idea to invite her to attend worship with me. She gladly accepted. As we sat awaiting the service, I learned she had never experienced Christian worship, so I showed her the hymnal and its teaching about the structure of the worship.

When we got to the sharing of the peace, I took her hand and drew her toward me. I said into her ear, "Salaam alekhoun," and she giggled like a girl and answered, "Alekhoun ala salaam." Being at peace feels the same irrespective of language.

As the service came to a close we talked about the experience. You may recall that Sunday was one day after 11 Jewish worshipers were

killed in Pittsburgh. And it occurred to me that an old, disaffected Lutheran man had been led to worship by connection to a young Muslim woman, and that together we had prayed for that Jewish congregation in Pittsburgh.

Maybe Isaiah really was (and still is) a prophet...

Pastor Kurt Hansen

Saturday March 9

I probably spend way too much time wondering about things that I should just accept—events in history, the actions and motives of people, natural phenomena. But I like doing this, and I figure that since God gave me the mind that I have, I might as well use it.

One of the things I wonder about is the concept of Christ's humanity. What did it mean for God to assume human form and spend 33 years among us as Jesus Christ? Was he aware of his divinity throughout his life? As a little kid, how different was his mental capacity from that of other children? Did he really know or understand who he was? When did he know that he was God? Luke 2:40 states that "the child grew . . . he was filled with wisdom." At age 12, his parents' frantic search for him ended when they found him in the temple, amazing the adults with his knowledge. He explained that "Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?" At what point in his adolescence or adulthood did he recognize how his earthly life would end several years down the line? Was his fear of this, which he must have had up until his death, lessened by his knowledge of how things would turn out three days afterward?

Am I to have the same kind of confidence that my own death will be followed by eternal security and joy with God? I'm not nearly as confident and at peace with this promised eternal future. Despite the scriptural assurances, I have a fear of the unknown.

I don't think that "faith" is synonymous with "knowing for sure". I think that faith means believing without really "knowing", without having obvious proof in front of me. It's something I decide on, sort of like deciding to spend my life in a relationship with my spouse. I just commit to it and don't seriously entertain thoughts of the alternative.

I like the sense of human uncertainty expressed in Joan Osborne's 1995 recording of the song "What if God Was One of Us?" whether the lyrics strike us as irreverent, or an honest reflection on the question.

Steve Heer

Monday March 11

We Will Soar on Wings of Eagles

In the bleak, cold, dark days of Lent we often lose sight of what will ultimately be revealed at the end. But getting there is so hard. For 40 days and nights we are reminded of Christ's pain-filled sacrifice for all of humanity on the cross. For 40 days and nights we are reminded of the derision, mockery and ridicule Christ faced at the hands of the Romans. For 40 days and nights we reflect upon our own shortcomings and seek penance.

As Christians, this is a road we have walked many times. Though we know the final outcome, we must none the less prepare. We cannot take the ultimate power of the Resurrection for granted and sluff it off as just a yearly event in the Church. As Christ did in his final days and hours, we must prayerfully consider our lives and our brokenness.

Yet, as tired, as weak, as lost, as broken as we may sometimes feel, Lent prepares us to once again realize the unending capacity of our Creator. If God comes to earth fully human to recognize and share in our pain on the cross, we need only open our eyes to all God gives us. In Isaiah 40: 28-30 we know God is everlasting, untiring, all-knowing and we need only have hope and faith; hope and faith in the Resurrection that banishes the darkness.

When we grow tired, when we are weakened by our daily struggles, when we feel there's nowhere to turn, we need only place our hope in the Lord. He will renew our strength and we will "soar on wings like eagles . . . run and not grow weary. . . walk and not be faint."

Ken Resch

Tuesday March 12

1 John 4:7-12

Since our decision to move to the Dubuque community, made some 40 years ago, one of the most important decisions we made, was to become members at Lord of Life Lutheran. In 1979, our first son was born and because we were still churchless in Dubuque, we took our son back to Joan's home church in Illinois to be baptized. Shortly after that was when a John Deere friend, Kempy Stark and Pastor Ron Voss came knocking at our home in Asbury to invite us to a new church that was starting and meeting at Heritage Manor in Asbury. We knew it was time and we needed a church in Dubuque. After meeting many new young families, we fit right in and joined Lord of Life. Over the years this church has become a very important part of our lives. The relationships we have made and the love we have felt helped us through our life journey. We have grown our Family with 3 wonderful children, 2 weddings (so far) and 4 amazing grandchildren. We have truly been blessed and during this journey we have tried to reciprocate the love shown us by our Church community.

So, as we all continue on this journey together called life, let us show and share each other this love and concern to magnify our blessings and be what God calls us to be.

Dan Decker

Wednesday March 13

Psalm 23

Am I Singing this Psalm because I am so Blessed, Or Am I Singing this Psalm because God is so Great?

The twenty-third psalm is one of the best-known passages in the Bible. Though often read at funerals, it is about life rather than death. And it is especially about in whom we trust for safety and happiness.

It answers the question right off the bat, in the very first words: The Lord is my shepherd. In these words, we have a small and complete theology. God, people, and the relationship between the two. It is a capsule summary of the story of the Bible. Let me explain.

The Lord. This is an unfortunate translation. The word "lord" in English comes from nobility. A lord is a male member of the ruling class. A lord is privileged and powerful. The word has little or nothing to do with God.

The word God does not appear here in the twenty-third psalm. What does appear here is the name of God. God has a name. God's name appears a lot in the Bible (about 6,800 times), but out of respect for God and for the commandment not to use God's name in vain, most Jews and many others including Christians do not mention God's name out loud. And if you look at the twenty-third psalm, you'll see that it says is my shepherd.

Let's pretend that God's name is Fred. Then the twenty-third psalm would start, "Fred is my shepherd." I don't mean to be flippant here. But I want you to see how different it might be to refer to God your shepherd by name rather than by God's title or position. This is not just some god you are talking about, but this particular God whom you call by name. It is a different thing.

The Lord is my shepherd. The relationship between me and God is ambiguous here. The ambiguity is perhaps in all our dealings with God. Is this psalm mostly about me or is it mostly about God? That is, am I

singing this psalm because I am so blessed, or am I singing it because God is so great? Is this me-centered or God-centered? Are we saying, let me tell you about me, I have a shepherd: it is God? Or are we saying, let me tell you about God: I am in God's flock.

Who is doing the hiring here? Who takes the lead in our relationship with God? Are we the suitor, the caller, the agent, the petitioner? Or are we the pursued, the called, the patient, and the obedient ones?

Theologically the question is: are we blessed because of something about us or because of something about God?

Sherry Ellerbach

Thursday March 14

Many of us remember the dreaded elementary torture of choosing up sides; whether it be for the spelling contest, the playground activity, or whatever. I was fortunate to be chosen early—well maybe not for spelling—but always feeling sorry for those chosen last. To be chosen communicates a warm fuzzy feeling—being wanted, preferred, or special. Who doesn't like that?

Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ....just as he chose us in Christ....as his children through Jesus Christ." If this doesn't provide a warm fuzzy feeling, I don't know what will. This team, this side that we are on is truly a blessing. Chosen in Baptism, our winning is guaranteed, we all know some ups and down will be a part of life, but the end result is never in doubt. This is most certainly not a fantasy league nor a pipedream, but real and genuine.

Many use Lent as a time of preparation for Baptism, perhaps Lent can be a time to celebrate and remember our Baptism, why not be like Luther and every morning upon rising, make the sign of the cross in

remembrance of your baptism and be dressed with a crystal-clear smile as you approach the day as a chosen one!!

Prayer: Choosing God, you bless us in Christ. As we journey through these forty days, may your selecting continually be on our minds, knowing that our end is in His gracious hands.

Pastor John Sorenson

Friday March 15

Devotion to Devotions

So why do we write these devotions? Is it because we want to? Is it because Larry "requests" that we submit one? Or is it maybe because I'll have Larry's undying devotion?

Well why do we do anything? In my life experiences, it often comes down to a couple of reasons: 1) to gain a reward or 2) to avoid a punishment. Or maybe it's a little from column "A" and a little from column "B."

Perhaps I can add a third possibility as to why we do anything: because it is the right thing to do. Yielding to Christ will always be the right thing to do. I believe Proverbs 3:5-6 puts it best, "trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight."

Also, putting my thoughts on paper helps me to explore and deepen my faith. By sharing this with others, hopefully they can also gain some insight and strength.

Jesus has given us the example of how to live and conduct our life. He did not live by his own will. He was obedient to his earthly parents and heavenly Father. I can apply this lesson to my own life—willingly submit to God and follow Jesus. In doing this I gain the reward of eternity with Him and avoid the consequences of the action of putting myself first.

Today as I write this, it is a cold, snowy day in Iowa. As we read these Lenten devotions beginning Ash Wednesday in early March and concluding Easter Sunday in late April, we will be enjoying a warmer and milder season. But no matter the weather or the circumstances, my life has been better with Christ as my Savior. He is the one worthy of my devotion and gratitude. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

On a side note, Iowa Hawkeye fans might especially enjoy reading the March 16th devotion in the latest issue of *Our Daily Bread*. It ties in with what I am trying to say in my devotion.

Barry Pickart

Saturday March 16

Retreating into the Wilderness with Jesus

Matthew 4:1-11 Jesus Is Tested in the Wilderness

Lent is a forty-day period before Easter. It begins on Ash Wednesday. We skip Sundays when we count the forty days, because Sundays commemorate the Resurrection.

Lent is a season of soul-searching and repentance. It is a season for reflection and taking stock. Lent originated in the very earliest days of the Church as a preparatory time for Easter, when the faithful rededicated themselves and when converts were instructed in the faith and prepared for baptism. By observing the forty days of Lent, the individual Christian imitates Jesus' withdrawal into the wilderness for forty days.

It has been historically customary for Christians to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays. In fact, John Wesley refused to ordain anyone who did not fast on those two days. He felt that anyone who could not rule his own belly could not be expected to rule the church of God. (Source: St. Andrew Lutheran Church, 2018)

With the short history lesson out of the way, I'd like to ask a question: How do you prepare for a trip?

We pack carefully, we take time to think of the things we'll need, sometimes even try to anticipate things like the weather, or our activities and we gather all these things together so that when we arrive, we're are prepared for any occasion.

My wife, Penny, went to New York with two of her friends a few years ago. It's interesting to watch that process with her, because it lasts for days and I hear her mutter every so often things like, "I wonder if it's going to be cold?", or "I wonder if I should take more jeans or nice clothes?"...and to her credit; she left home for her trip with just one bag!

Much of the substance of life can be compared to the individual journeys we take. They are literally milestones for us that include events like marriage, the birth of a child, school, or pursuing an occupation.

But perhaps even more important than the journey itself is how we prepare for those journeys.

We can ask three questions of our journeys: 1) Are we prepared?; 2) Do we have the things we need?; 3) What might happen that we also need to prepare for?

We need to ask these three questions during our season of Lent. They may sound familiar, but life has changed since we asked these questions last year or maybe from our last journey.

Jesus gave us the example we are to follow when preparing for our individual journeys in life. This is one of the reasons we prepare for Lent during a forty-day period. The temptation of Christ occurred during His forty days in the wilderness to prepare for His ministry (He didn't pack any bags as far as we know...). Before He started His

ministry on earth, He prepared His heart, mind, and spirit for the journey He was about to embark upon.

And while life can be viewed as a series of journeys, the real substance of faith isn't the journey itself, but how we prepare for it. Lent is a time for us to prepare. Lent is a time for us to re-evaluate our lives and prepare again for our spiritual journey; to "pack" the things we need. It is also a time for us to prepare for those things that may occur during our journey that are unexpected. Heaven forbid we should have the opportunity to go swimming and NOT have a swimsuit on hand!

I don't know what you will pack in your bag for your journey through Lent. I know I will need to pack some fasting, and to decide on giving up something significant that will remind me to pray each time I miss it. I also need to pack some preparation for my heart just as Christ did during His forty days in the wilderness, seeking God's guidance for my journeys during the next year as I grow in faith.

If I gave you a suitcase to "pack and prepare" for your journey of Lent, what would you put in it? We can take the lead from Christ. We have forty days to pack and prepare for our journey. We renew a journey with Christ at the end of that time. And now during our preparation of Lent, we share with Christians around the world the forty days of preparation that will lead us to the power of a risen Christ on Easter.

Pack your bags, your spiritual bags, carefully, thoughtfully, and prayerfully. I promise that life will be giving us an exam on how well prepared we really are.

Dave Minnihan

Monday March 18

1 Thess. 5:16-18

A few years ago, I posted about this on Facebook. I said "just wanted to share a life lesson I was reminded of yesterday. Recently I moved a

particular item while cleaning prior to the kids' visit. Yesterday I realized I could use this particular item for a project I wanted to do. I went to where I thought I put it: not there. Throughout the day I made three trips around the house searching for it until I finally stood in front of the closet... I said, "Well, Lord..." (yes, I said this aloud—I'm strange like that! 😊) "I'm befuddled. Where did I put that?!" And immediately—like within 5 seconds—I remembered what I had done with it. While some may consider this fickle, I believe it to be a reminder that God wants to be involved in our lives in all situations—ALWAYS—no matter how good or bad, big or small, important or mundane."

I spend quite a bit of alone time, but I rarely feel lonely. Why, you ask? Because I do as the passage says: 'pray without ceasing'. Basically, I have a pretty constant conversation with God going on in my head. And yes, sometimes it's aloud.

Recently we went on a road trip to Pennsylvania for Hans' ordination and Marissa's church council vote. Doing this in February, especially THIS winter, was a challenge to think about. But I spent **a lot** of time in the week or two before, talking to God about my weather fears for family and friends traveling, travel logistics, expense, etc., etc. (and of course asked for prayers on the prayer chain also) and then decided God was in control and we would be fine. We welcomed two new ELCA pastors, met some of Marissa's call committee and council members, got a lot accomplished, had a great time, safe travels—and no worries!

This isn't 'simplistic' or 'magical' thinking—it's faith—a close personal relationship with my very best friend, who I rely on entirely. I pray this is the case for everyone reading this as well!

Rita Dienst

Tuesday March 19

A Special Sunrise

As I think back to past Easters, a vivid memory comes to me. During my teaching career, two other faculty and I led a science course that traveled by bus to do studies in northern New Mexico. Among the cacti, pine trees, desert shrubs, and high mesas, we studied the plants, animals, and rock formations (some of the same ones that are exposed in the Grand Canyon) of the area. It was an awesome way to experience the wonders of God's creation.

We taught this field course a total of 28 times between 1974 and 2003. Photos taken on the various trips remind me of my slow transition from a long-haired young prof to a somewhat weather-beaten mature duffer. And climbing the trails did not get easier, either.

Interactions with students were mostly in small groups as we scattered at the field sites. Many of our students were midwesterners who had never before been in America's West, and most were inspired by the vastness and beauty of the landscape. In such surroundings, students shared freely their personal thoughts and concerns. I sometimes felt as if I were serving as a therapist. However, the broadening of viewpoints and attitudes was impressive to see.

Many memorable experiences took place in the bunkhouses, dining hall, and meeting rooms at Ghost Ranch, a Presbyterian conference center north of Santa Fe that served as our field headquarters. It was an action-packed week, and the learning that was accomplished was great to see.

On the last morning on the Ranch, after packing the bus for our return trip to Iowa, we gathered in a natural amphitheater for a "sunrise service" led by students. On most trips, this fell on Easter Sunday. After Scripture readings, the singing of Easter hymns, brief prayers, and thoughts by anyone moved to share, all eyes turned to the east to witness the sun rising over the mountain range and mesas making up

the skyline. "He is risen" was a powerful feeling. That experience is one that is always mentioned when I encounter former students now, years later.

I am convinced that this was a faith-building time for almost everyone, and I am thankful for the part I was able to play.

Please join me in a word of prayer:

Dear Lord, help us to appreciate all that you have provided for us. We thank you for all the blessings of the Easter season, and for the fellowship that we share in our community. Be with us now and in the future. We ask this in Your Name. Amen.

Robert M. Miller

Wednesday March 20

Word of God

The Word of God is just that, His words to direct us step by step and guide our lives. These words come to us through the Bible and His teachings. These can be direct as the Ten Commandments that lay out how to best obey and exemplify Christ and how to live life in Christ's light day by day. The drawbacks remain—are we prepared and are we listening? There is hope when you find the Word in your time and in your talks with God—just listen.

Malachi 3:1-4 tells us the Lord announces a covenant with Israel. A messenger like Malachi (name means 'my messenger) shall prepare the way for the coming of the Lord by purifying and refining God's people...

¹See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. ²But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?" This to me says, "Are

we ready to hear, accept and obey the Word of God?" Have we cleansed our hearts and minds and have ourselves ready to listen to have His Spirit with us? Day by day we often say His name, sometimes curse Him and when the time is right, Thank Him, but are we ready to do more and be more than that as Christians?

I have spent time drinking and laughing only to end up ill, worn out and weak to say please Jesus help me and many a weekend forgetting what I did the week or night before only to fall into the same pattern expecting different results. Have we prepared our way to be one with God without question and without fail? To put away the addictions, substances and excuses—to prepare our way for the Lord? The Ten Commandments provide the guideline for the formation of Faith and obedience, but how close to perfect are we in following all of them with purity and fidelity?

Looking over the Ten Commandments, I am 5 for 10 and not proud of myself for that record, God gave His Son for our sins and yet I persist; we persist with bad habits and proudly say "I am a Christian!" It was my pride and arrogance that caused my marriage to fail. My children only see me every other week; only a phone call or quick trip across town if needed, but the day to day interactions, the joy of being their father and being there for them are compromised by my not listening to God and ignoring His teachings. My time with them is now drawn out and mapped on a calendar and decreed by the court. I wasn't using my head or my heart, I was utilizing my arrogance to step outside the given Commandments in so many ways. I am not prepared to receive the Word of God as I am not worthy to follow the doctrine given. My spirit is willing, yet my flesh is weak.

Are we prepared?? Once given the Word of God, a small seed, do we let it be trampled in the stampede of the fear of being saved? Do we leave it in the rocks to wither—tested but deserting once we don't feel the time for God? Drop it among the weeds to begin to bear fruit but then to decay as the secular world takes over and the cares and

pleasures of life push God aside (that being my downfall)? Or do we nurture God's Word, listening and learning to persevere as Christians to help others?

The last question asked of us by God; Are you gonna go my way? He tells us in contemporary terms:

I was born... long ago
I am the chosen, I'm the one
I have come... to save the day

These are His words for us to join in His Life and Love to celebrate His Word by sharing it, living it and knowing it is written for all of us.

We must be prepared, ready and without fail, willing to listen; trust and obey His Word and know our Salvation comes from not only living but magnifying the Word of God.

David King

Thursday March 21 It's Time to Come Clean

During Lent this year, take the time to ask God to help you examine your innermost self. Is there some dark spot you need to bring into the light of Christ? To seek forgiveness and to move in? I write this because I am finding discrimination and bigotry very much alive here in North Carolina. It's so unfortunate that the bible belt hasn't embraced the grace of God and shared it with the world.

While at Wartburg Theological Seminary, I realized I had some prejudice which I needed to confess. I pray I am a better person now! Part of Lent is being pruned of weak limbs so that we can be more like Christ. Pruning is never easy, but the result is good—hopefully great. May God strengthen your resolve to be more willing to be a light to the world around you. Peace.

Bill Nybeck

Friday March 22

Matthew 7: 1-5

A young man with long hair and beard wearing a T shirt, old blue jeans, no socks and worn out shoes walked into a church on a Sunday morning and was met at the door by an usher. The usher looked at the young man and inquired what he wanted as he certainly was not dressed properly to come in. Not wanting to cause any trouble the young man left and went to a local bar. He entered and was greeted by others in the bar with a great greeting and even offered a seat. The barkeep came by and as the young man had no money, offered a free drink as he was thirsty. We all who claim to be good Christians need from time to time to be reminded we should be more like the bar: welcoming no matter how someone is dressed, reach out to, offer comfort... Our Savior had long hair, wore sandals and led the way for us to follow. Remove the plank.

Al Stuart

Saturday March 23

Being Thankful

1 Thessalonians 5:18. Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

The Bible teaches that we should be thankful under all circumstances, including good and not-so-good. We never know what hand life will deal us, but Christ's promises and faith have together allowed me to continue life's faith journey.

I was born on a small dairy farm northeast of Rochester, MN in 1956. My parents had survived the Great Depression, albeit with some major challenges in life. They married in 1944 during WWII. Dad got a farm deferment that allowed him to avoid the war. Life seemed good until 1950. Then their challenges began...

Dad contracted Typhoid Fever in 1953 and almost died, losing all his teeth. He had also survived Scarlett Fever as a child. Vaccinations were not yet invented.

My sister Marcia was born in 1950, to live for only an hour due to Hydrocephalus. The following years brought two more miscarriages for mother. I was born in 1956. Another miscarriage followed in 1960. Our family became my parents and me.

The early 60's were financially optimistic, only to be saddened by a farm accident in 1965 that tore Dad's right foot off his leg. His foot was reattached and he survived thanks to the Mayo Clinic's phenomenal medical care and an absolute miracle from God. My father's recovery lasted more than two years after six major surgeries. I spent countless hours waiting in Mayo hospitals, and let's just say I know my way around Mayo to this day! To say he was depressed is an understatement. Our faith in Christ was at times the only hope we had. Mom always told me "we'll get by..." Later in life Dad told me the only reason he survived was because "Christ stood at the foot of my bed and told me to go back (to earth)..." I became a "man" at age 9, doing work that Dad would have done.

We continued to farm with help from friends, relatives, and neighbors. In 1971 we watched as a tornado demolished our large machine shed. At least we all survived. Then in 1972 we had just filled the barn with a fantastic crop of alfalfa hay, only to have it struck by a bolt of lightning. We stood and watched it burn to the ground. My mother proclaimed, "We'll get by..." Our faith prevailed. We rebuilt the barn a year later and continued dairying.

1972 brought personal trauma to me when my prize quarter horse was attacked by bees, sending me to the hospital with a significant head injury and comatose for 1-1/2 days. I recovered, bought another horse, and continued showing horses for another two years until college.

1982's farm recession brought more financial challenge to the family. At Christmas, my parents greeted us stating they had no money, little food in the house, a car that would not run, and on top of that, the LP stove upstairs blew up during the night. Deb and I bought them food, a car, and replaced the stove. I know what poor, cold, hungry people feel like. Faith prevailed. My parents were our personal mission for the next 28 years.

Finally, in 1989, the banker threatened to foreclose on the family farm. Fortunately, Deb and I were able to purchase the family farm I should have ultimately inherited. The good news is life calmed down to a normal pace after 1989.

It has often been difficult to give thanks to God under these circumstances. These situations caused my parents and me to question religion and our faith many times. I am amazed that my parents were able to survive the traumatic events in their lives. Both of them had a strong faith in their own unique way, but they seldom discussed it. I was once asked, "Did you have a stressful childhood?"

I am thankful for my continued faith in Christ, initially learned in the Church, and largely gained and grown through experiencing life events. I thank God for my faith.

Galen Thomas

Monday March 25

How do I balance irritation with forgiveness?

I'm generally a pretty non-adversarial guy. Things that really stick in someone else's craw often just get a shrug from me. At times, I've been grateful for—perhaps a little proud of—this degree of self-control. But sometimes I feel like I'm putting up with something that I shouldn't tolerate or failing to stand up for a principle.

In some relationships, letting go of a (minor?) resentment rather than hanging on to a grudge is a good decision, and maintains, or perhaps even strengthens, the relationship. I can argue that this is a good thing in a marriage, but also in workplace, social, and even faith community settings. I can even see this being a good choice in brief interactions on the street, in traffic, or in political conversations.

On the other hand, accepting disrespect or insult can become part of an exploitive or abusive pattern that is unhealthy. I believe that asserting one's own right to respect and dignity is both virtue and strength.

So, I am regularly frustrated with seemingly contradictory directives from Christ. In Matthew 10:14, Jesus tells his disciples to shake the dust off your feet and leave if you are not welcomed or listened to. But then in 18:22, Peter is told to forgive not just seven, but seventy-seven, times when sinned against. During his long rant (excuse the term) in Matthew 23, Jesus rails at "You snakes! You brood of vipers!" And driving the moneylenders out of the temple with a whip made of cords doesn't appear to be a good example of self-control.

But then at the end, during the passion, Jesus meekly accepts the insults, mistreatment and abuse from not just the authorities, but from the crowd that had previously been his biggest fans.

So, my confusion persists. I want to believe that God has a preferred, loving response for us to use in every situation. Maybe that's my problem. I want the Bible to be a manual that prescribes what tool or repair to use in the event of any of the possible malfunctions or breakdowns that occur in the lifespan of the machine, or appliance, that is my life.

I have to rely on prayer, worship, the fellowship in my faith community, and scripture to serve as consolation and guides as I navigate each of the days of my life.

Steve Heer

Tuesday March 26

A few years ago, I became aware of how our social life revolves around eating and drinking. For a two-month period I could not drink water or any liquid, in addition, no food. If a person does not participate in either of these options they are more or less ostracized. Life, socialization revolves around eating and drinking. It is like being a leper, you have nothing to create a sense of belonging. Life rotates around water, physical life obviously and more importantly spiritual.

The first letter of Peter speaks to water, the water of baptism.

“Baptism...now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Deprived of the water of Baptism is far worse than being ostracized. More than socialization, more than the removal of dirt, the water of Baptism gives a sense of belonging that can be found in no other source. Our good and gracious God with good conscience makes the water of baptism a fountain of life-giving sustenance through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This ultimate event will be celebrated at the end of our Lenten journey and it removes more than just dirt.

The two-month period that I endured, seemed like an eternity, with the presence of baptismal water we have a source for eternity. With this water also comes more eating and drinking, the bread and the wine, the meal of socialization with our fellow water-soaked family.

Prayer: Your good conscience is reason for a life-giving celebration and our foundation for belonging. For this daily gift we give thanks. Amen

Pastor John Sorenson

Wednesday March 27

1 Peter 4:10-11

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks

oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies – in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen

I tend to get the question often at my bank, why do you have so many teller windows in your lobby but usually only have two of them occupied by tellers? I have to admit, I’ve been here for 25 years and I can’t recall a time when all of the windows were being used. That being said, in those empty windows, you’ll find signs that say, “Next Window Please”. I also know that it can be frustrating when walking up to a building entrance, only to find a sign directing you to the other side of the building!

Wouldn’t common sense say, it’s an entrance, why shouldn’t it always be open? Yes, it probably should follow but inevitably there are always good reasons for the redirection...but not everyone has the same appreciation for those reasons.

It’s interesting, people can be the same. We have gifts and abilities which should be offered up in service to God and others. There is no shortage of special opportunities to step up and put these gifts to work but for some reason, either consciously or unconsciously, we put out our “next window please”, “too busy”, “not a good time”, “try someone else” signs...we have a plentiful supply of these, don’t we?

Then we look to the Lord, who has no waiting line when we call on him for help...actually, well before we ask we have received an abundance of grace...no asking, no signs! His help is free and yes, sometimes we must wait for his answers but then again, these are answers that are well worth waiting for.

Sometimes the best gift we can give each other is us...just simply being present and available for them. Sound familiar? Yup, just like God has provided for us! So take down your signs and be available to each other...#bestgiftever

Mike Donohue

Thursday March 28

Light and Dark, Sound and Silence:
4 Contrasting Stanzas 4
Lent, The Three Days, and Easter
Roy W. Carroll

I

Watch for the light,
cold, piercing, revealing light,
a burning beacon in the night.
Darkness abides. Our fears bind us tight.
Listen for the sound of silence, then
speak with love when you must speak.

II

Pray Silently
⋈
Feast and Fast
⋈
Praise and Lament
⋈
Pray Loudly

III

Question the procession.
Eat the bread, drink the wine.
“God’s silence never breaks,
but is that really a problem?”*
On noise-filled wilderness hills
the green blade rises still.

IV

Welcome the light,
warm, loving, radiant light,
a brilliant glorious sight!
Darkness abates. We’re set free by the light.
Sing out! Shout out! Sound and Silence unite.
Embraced by the light, we live in the light.
Share the light, the one true beautiful light:
“Jesus, the light of the world.”**

Acknowledgements

*Mary Oliver, *Whistling Swans* from *Felicity* 2015. **George Elderkin,
“Jesus, the Light of the World” 1890. John Crum, “Now the Green Blade Rises” 1928.
Paul Westermeyer, *Hymnal Companion to Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 2010.
Erling Hagge, *Silence in the Age of Noise* 2018.
Pastor Paul Amlin. Nancy Carroll. Susan Palo Cherwin.
Larry Croghan. Rita Dienst. Rev. Thomas Mundahl.
Philipp Nicolai. Mary Schmich. Paul Simon.
Lord of Life Lutheran Church Qlder Wiser Lutherans (O.W.L.s).
Students and professors in Loras College Jterm music classes, January 2019.

Friday March 29**2 Corinthians 5:7**

For all the trials and tribulations that we all experience, thru faith we can rely on one thing—the love that is shared with us by our Father in heaven. Even when our own lives are going pretty smoothly, it only takes turning on the TV news and the weight of the world’s problems can bring you down. Without the love, prayers and faith we have in our Lord, it would be easy to give up.

Thru his love, he sent his only Son to live among us and sacrifice himself to atone for all our sins. Because of his love for us, we can be assured again thru faith of everlasting life in heaven after our earthly journey has ended. Live the rest of your earthly life caring for his creation and sharing the love he has given us to each other as he has requested of us.

Dan Decker

Saturday March 30

John 10:9 I am the gate, whoever enters by me will be saved.

I grew up in a home without any structured religion or faith being practiced. My father was a scientist, a professor of entomology and economic Zoology at the University of Minnesota Agricultural Campus. Having been born in Ukraine, he practiced his Christian beliefs as a member of St. Michaels Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Minneapolis. For some unknown reason our family never attended church with my father. Mother had a degree in education and was a devoted wife and a fantastic mother. She professed to being a Christian Scientist. However, I never recall her going to a “Reading Room” or seeing any literature in the home regarding her “beliefs.”

Growing up, I felt something was missing in my life. Several of my friends were either Methodist or Congregationalist and one was Lutheran. During conversations with my boyhood friends, something

stirred inside me. Unbeknownst to my parents, I finally got up the nerve to discuss these stirrings with the local Methodist Minister, Rev. Wilber D. Gross. Thankfully, he peaked my interest in organized religion. I further discussed these new-found feelings with my older sister and brother, and finally with my parents. Long story short, at the age of 13, I along with my two older siblings decided to be baptized in the Methodist Church on March 28, 1948. Thus started my path into being a confirmed Christian.

I remained a Methodist until 1959 when my first wife requested I attend classes at a Lutheran Church prior to our marriage. I feel blessed that this change had profound effects on me, instilling a great sense of being, worshiping the Holy Trinity. I enjoy the liturgical church and am at peace with myself and my Lord.

Thus, I am a Lutheran by choice since 1959. Thanks be to God.

Phil Granovsky

Monday April 1**Season of Lent**

Many pastors have been asked which holiday is their favorite: Christmas or Easter? This is kind of like the chicken/egg question. The two are so very related that in fact for Christians they really can't be separated. We have Christmas because of Easter, and Easter is possible because of Christ taking on humanity at Christmas. What we can celebrate in Lent for sure is "GOD FOR US." God is with us, Emanuel. "Not my will, but yours (I'll go to the cross Father, if that's what you wish, for your beloved children.) I think the beauty of Lent is the quiet time to be still and feel the embrace of God and hear the call to draw close. To know the love of Christ in new deep, real ways. May it be so for you this Lent! Greetings from NC

Brother Bill (Nybeck)

Tuesday April 2

Mentoring

Several years ago I was asked to mentor one of our confirmation students. I was really reluctant to take on that responsibility. It was hard for me to see how I might be able to relate to someone so much younger than I was. What might we have in common? Would there be things that we could do together? What could I teach him about faith?

It did not take long for me to find out that this was going to be an important experience in my life. After a couple of meetings it was obvious that both of us were going to get a lot out of our experiences together. There were a lot of things that we had in common. Soon we were sharing those common interests and we both were learning a lot about each other. There were things he was teaching me and things I was teaching him.

I watched him go through junior high, high school, and go off to college. It was interesting to see him become an independent and confident young man. Every step he took I tried to make sure he knew that I was there if he needed help or wanted advice.

We do not see each other as often as we used to and we do not visit as much as we did before. If I know that there is an important event in his life that he might be facing I always try to make contact with him. Even if it is only a text to let him know that I am thinking about him I think it is important that he knows I care.

As we go through this Lenten season, think about the mentors you have had. A lot of those mentors were people that taught you about life and faith. They were there to give you support and answer your questions when you needed them.

God is like that. He is there to give you support and answer your questions when you need him. Have faith during this Lenten Season and know God is always by your side. Let him be your mentor.

Larry Croghan

Wednesday April 3

Thankfulness Challenge

1 Thessalonians 5:18 Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

What if God made a decree that everything you have been thankful for in your life you get to keep? And on the other hand, everything that you have not been thankful for you will lose. What would that mean to each of us? Think of Lent as the time God has given us to make up for our past “unthankfulness.” Take the challenge and start counting your blessings.

This is a made-up premise, but it should get you thinking about what is meaningful in your life. Knowing what is important and what you have been thankful for may not always be the same. You know that your family is important to you, but have you given thanks for everyone in your family? You know that your health, your ability to talk, to walk, to think, and to communicate are important. As a Christian you know the most important gift in our lives is the assurance of eternal life. We need to remember to be thankful for those things that stand out as being important and meaningful.

Some things we are thankful for stand out, but we also need to think about those things that may be just routine. Think of your everyday life and all that makes it worthwhile—your job or school, your time at home with family, your extra activities that might include sports, volunteer work, church commitments, and evenings out. All the things that make your life productive, fun, healthy, and loving.

The premise can go to extremes such as will you still have socks, shoe strings, toothpaste, clean water, a pillow, a road to get to work, your car, your pet, your phone, your hair dryer, paper, windows? As you can see this list could go on and on and Lent may not be enough time to specifically be thankful for all that is a part of our lives.

Belongings are not the most important part of our lives. We need to consider faith, forgiveness, love, empathy, thankfulness, happiness, fun, knowledge, charity... All are important to us and I'm sure when we take time to think about them, we're thankful for these in our lives.

We have a loving God who has given us more than we could ever be thankful for. Even though He has not given us a thankfulness challenge it is still worth us giving daily thoughts about what is meaningful and important, and for us to be thankful for the many blessings in our lives. Lent helps us focus on the most important gift of eternal life earned by the suffering and death of Jesus. Let's make Lent a time of thankfulness for the many gifts given to us by a loving God.

Dear God, we know you have given us many blessings. Guide us to realize the scope of these blessings and to thank you for giving us a life filled with your love.

Steve Geisert

Thursday April 4 Light One Candle

My cat consistently wakes me up between 4:00-5:00 A.M. by kneading the covers at my side. If it's too soon, I scratch his ears, he settles down; within the hour he's at it again. Over the Christmas holidays, I carefully found my way through the dark and into the kitchen to feed him when my eyes fell on a light in the front window. In each of our windows we have battery-driven candlesticks that come on for a specific number of hours—but never until 5:00 in the morning. I fed the cat, thought nothing of turning off the errant candlestick and shuffled back to bed.

Yet, that one light amidst all the darkness haunted me. On and off for several days the image returned and I could not fail to remember

Peter, Paul and Mary singing *Light One Candle* by Peter Yarrow. Though the song, one of certain protest, speaks of a time from the Maccabees and was written in response to the upheaval in Lebanon in 1983, it has a place with us as well.

The opening of the song begins:

*Don't let the light go out!
It's lasted for so many years!
Don't let the light go out!
Let it shine through our hope and our tears.*

Without demeaning the original intent of the lyrics, the opening penetrates the darkness of our Lenten walk and gives us hope. Parallel to the song is John 1:5: "The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." Yes, we may pass through the darkness of fear, pain, misunderstanding, mistrust, desperation, loss, or failure but we need only remember: If one small candle can defy the darkness how can we not have hope in the promises of God? Among those promises are these two from Romans: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. . ." (1:16) and "we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. . ." (8:28) Do not fear the darkness; wonder awaits us at the end of our walk.

Ken Resch

Friday April 5

James 4:11-12 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbor?

We've all heard the saying, "Don't judge a book by its cover". For many years, I would have lunch frequently at the same restaurant. And often, there was this same man there having lunch. He sat in the same spot at the bar, reading the newspaper and working the crossword. He never spoke. He looked rather serious and kept to himself. After I retired, my wife and I would go to lunch together. It didn't take long for her to strike up a conversation with this gentleman as she's a crossword worker too. After that, we talked each time we were there together, and never about the crossword. He would tell us about his family and things he'd done in his life. One night we were at the restaurant having dinner. As we were leaving, we saw him in his spot at the bar. He motioned for us to come over. He then told us he had been to the Dr. and was diagnosed with cancer. He said there was nothing that could be done, the cancer was too far advanced. We'd only known him a short time but he wanted us to know. We never saw him again. The cancer spread fast and he passed. We're so glad that we remember him as a friend instead of the lonely man that used to sit quietly at the bar.

Jim Gilbertson

Saturday April 6

John 15:16 You didn't choose me, but I chose you.

"Choose this day whom you will serve?" It came as a shock and surprise when I read this scripture. I was a first-year student at Concordia College, Moorhead, MN, in one of my first classes and was asked to take a test to help me decide what profession for which I might be best fitted. To my shock and surprise, it would be a pastor or a mortician.

I am sure the Lord was helping me make a quick decision. Was I to serve the living or the dead? I was brought up in a Christian home, born on Easter Sunday, attended Sunday school and later became a

Sunday school teacher, attended bible camps, and Luther league national conventions and Christian colleges so there was no question as to whom I would choose.

My first call was to a dual parish, one rural and the other in town, Derinda Center and Hanover, IL. I was told by the bishop that I should serve there at least three years. It turned out that we served there our entire ministry which was 43 years. With my beloved wife, Rosebud, who had obtained a registered nurse degree, being awarded the best nurse of all departments and continued on to get a Masters Degree in Nursing.

She had planned to be a medical doctor but now she felt called to work with me in ministry. After a time, there was an opportunity to become a lay minister. The bishop replied that he was sure I had already ordained her. She could write and preach a fine sermon. And was much needed when I began to have migraine headaches which sometimes came the night before Sunday. I know we could not have remained serving the parish without her help. God leads our lives in mysterious ways.

In all professions we are called to where we can best serve. In all walks of life, we can see where we can serve God. That is so evident in our parish here at Lord of Life where we are as a family and have chosen to serve our Lord. But abide in him as did Joseph and Job. Yes, we will have our ups and downs but remain faithful and he will fulfill our destiny so that we will fulfill our life of love and hope.

Pastor Henry Grishkowsky

Monday April 8

I know that I lead a fortunate life. While I have complaints and irritations, they are rather petty. Despite some of the annoyances of aging, my health is good. Our home is nice, my marriage is wonderful,

we're financially comfortable, our grown sons are independent and actually like spending time with us. I know that I have nothing to be unhappy about.

I still get mad regularly. It seems that there's always something going on in the news, in the neighborhood, with some driver on the road, something at church, or in my extended family, that irks me, even if only momentarily.

This reminds me of the climax to one of Gilda Radner's Roseanne Roseannadanna bits, when she builds up to "It just goes to show, it's always something . . . if it's not one thing, it's another . . . if it's not this, it's that . . ."

Then she tells about the song her daddy used to sing at Thanksgiving: the old Dutch hymn "We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing . . ." Of course, she quickly substitutes her own version of the lyrics, which leads up to a crazy, but hilarious, conclusion.

It often seems like "there's always something." And when those "somethings" happen, I need to figure out how to get beyond the frustration, the disappointment, the hurt, the sadness, the anger. If I'm lucky, I find a way to see the humor in it. But more often, I need to turn to God to ask for patience, for understanding, for self-control, for compassion and a sense of respect for that other person in the situation, given the love that I know God has for that person. I know God expects that of me. And I have to remember "to ask the Lord's blessing". Because it's always there when I want it.

Steve Heer

Tuesday April 9

Sermons

A sermon that I remember clearly was given by an interim pastor. He shared a notable event that happened when he was working as an

intern in a hospital chaplaincy program. It was a Monday morning, his first day on the job, and he came in a few minutes early, to be certain that he didn't miss anything. It turned out that he was the first one in the chaplain's office. A nurse rushed in to tell him that he was needed on the floor immediately, to minister to a dying patient. He tried to explain that he wasn't ready, that he had not been trained yet, but the nurse just said that he would do fine. In the elevator, on the way to the patient's room, the intern was fervently praying for help, feeling very inadequate.

When he entered the room, the family looked at him expectedly, but to his great relief, the patient, an elderly woman, looked quite normal, calm and relaxed. A family member informed him that their mother had only one request – that he sing "Amazing Grace" for her. He thought to himself, "this is great, I can do that" (he loves to sing), and he delivered three verses with gusto. The elderly woman gave him a warm smile and the family expressed their thanks, then he left. He found out later that the woman died soon after, very much at peace.

At their staff meeting the next day, the head chaplain thanked Pastor Scot for doing such a good job, and then asked the other interns how they would have handled the request. To his surprise, none of the other interns, and not the chaplain himself, would have been able to get through even the first verse from memory. This impressed me as a moving example of the Lord being in charge.

The story does not stop there, however. The chaplain later reported to the group, events surrounding another patient who happened to be just down the hall from the elderly woman. That patient was in the hospital with serious health problems, for which she was being treated. Although there seemed to be no medical reason preventing recovery, the patient had convinced herself that she was dying, and her condition was steadily worsening, to the dismay of medical staff. She seemed to have given up. Then one day, things turned around, and the patient's attitude and condition started to improve. When

asked about it, the patient said that she was lying in her bed one morning, feeling sorry for herself, when she heard, at a distance, someone singing “Amazing Grace” with great feeling. She was moved to brighten her mood and focus on recovery.

The result was that the Lord placed just the right person in a position to provide what was needed by two people that morning. What an example of Faith in action!!

The Lord does work in mysterious ways sometimes.

Bob Miller

Wednesday April 10

Friendship...

Proverbs 27:9, “A sweet friendship refreshes the soul”

Proverbs 18:24, “A man of many companions may come to ruin, but a friend sticks closer than a brother.”

The Bible says a lot about true friendship. The book of Proverbs talks about the importance of friendships. The Bible states that it is not good for man to be alone. We were created for companionship, for love, and relationships. Friendship is a true gift and an essential blessing of life. Research has shown that people with no true friends are much lonelier, have a much higher degree of unhappiness, and have a higher chance of depression.

When you have good friends, you laugh when they laugh, cry when they cry, and hurt when they hurt. Over the years Barb and I have observed all of these feelings with our close friends. One can feel lonely at times when faced with not having friends close to you. A year has passed since our dear friend Janet passed away and we still feel many of these emotions. There are many people like Janet, who are true friends and show their love and concern for so many.

Proverbs 17:17, “A friend loves at all times”

There is a phrase: A friend in need is a friend indeed. Proverbs also states that there will always be fair weather friends, but a true friend is there through thick or thin. True friends will always be with you and will never let you down. During and after my emergency surgery in December, Barb and I have witnessed many good friends at Lord of Life and our community which expressed true friendship. It warmed my heart and lifted my spirits. I believe God was watching over me during that stressful time. Good friends require walking with one another down the rough roads as well as the good roads. They are with you when unpleasant things happen as well as the good. Who is in your circle of friends? Do you consider Jesus to be one of your friends? He can be counted on no matter what. Take the time to talk to Him and rely on His friendship.

Times change, and so do we, but not in the way of friendships. Friendship is understanding, mutual confidence, sharing and forgiving. It settles for less than perfection and makes allowances for human weaknesses. (Anonymous)

Dave Morreim

Thursday April 11

Psalm 23, Jeremiah 23:1-6, Mark 6:30-34

The Story of Human Longing

The Lord is my shepherd. A shepherd was and still is a lowly occupation. Not one that required great power or management skills. In fact, this verse is almost an oxymoron. Lords are great. Shepherds are humble. What are they doing in the same sentence?

A shepherd is not an owner. A shepherd is not a boss. A shepherd is not a president: no shepherd is elected by the sheep. The shepherd is not one of the sheep with an advanced degree. The shepherd is not an attorney or admiral or spokesperson. Yet the shepherd is the Biblical

metaphor for king. And that is because the proper role of kings, like the role of shepherds, is to ensure the life and safety of the sheep. A king's job is to serve the people, just as a shepherd's job is to serve the sheep. When God speaks so angrily in Jeremiah, it is because the kings have not attended to the people, it says, and the people have suffered. They are dismayed, and fearful, and lost.

In the 23rd Psalm, God the shepherd provides all that is necessary for life. Pastures full of food for the hungry, clear water for the thirsty. Rest for the weary. The right paths on which the shepherd guides us keep us safe.

This psalm is intensely comforting because it is a picture of complete dependence on God and complete trust in God. The 23rd Psalm seems to be happy and safe. We who are so often anxious and fearful in spite of everything we are in Envy. We who are so full of sometimes desperate longing really long for being free of want. The Lord is my shepherd, the psalm says. I lack nothing.

In the end, God pursues us: surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. Are we being pursued by God, the words say? The action starts with the shepherd. It is God who gathers the sheep, it says in Jeremiah. It is not the sheep who call on God. It is God who calls them into God's house, as a good parent calls his or her children home. It is God who sees the sheep need help and comes to help them. It is Jesus who sees that the people are without a shepherd and has compassion for them.

The story of this psalm is the story of human longing. We long for a good shepherd to attend to us. To love us, really. We long for peace and happiness and safety. In spite of all our riches and skills and knowledge, we know from experience that we will not find this on our own. We long for a guide we can trust. One who is trustworthy in our search for that faithful guide. And of our hope that God is that good shepherd.

Sherry Ellerbach

Friday, April 12, 2019

Leviticus 23: 1-8

In the reading from Leviticus, God speaks to Moses and tells him the days that you must recognize and keep holy. From verse 3, "Six days shall work be done; but the seventh day is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no work: it is a sabbath to the LORD throughout your settlements."

In today's world it seems that we have lost sight of taking a day off and thinking of God. I know that I'm guilty of working all of the time. I have a hard time of separating work from relaxing with family. Case in point, I may travel with the family somewhere and then take a call from a contractor asking questions. I might check email or look something up to find a better way to do something at work. I really have a hard time at times of separating myself from the pressures of life to always go, go, go.

God knows that we need to relax. To take time to reflect. There is great benefit in taking some time to relax and contemplate. When we aren't always working all of the time, it is freeing to just be. Sit and think about the sunshine, nature, life. There is more to life than constant work. For all of the wonder and life around us, don't you think God deserves some place and space in your life? Peace to you all.

Jon Dienst

Saturday April 13

We are all blessed. Everyone has heard the phrase, count your blessings. There are certainly times when we lose sight of our blessings and just cannot see them.

There are many people in our lives that have helped us or have been a blessing to us. Most of those people we may not remember or even

know. We were born into a world already established in a comfortable and safe life. The people who have come before us, generations ago, have built our homes, schools, communities and created a wonderful place for us to exist and thrive. Most of these people did not know us and we may not have even been born yet but they have been a blessing to us.

There are many people who have been a blessing to us in our lives that we take for granted; family, friends, health professionals, emergency workers, educators, volunteers, donors, congregation members and prayerful people who are just doing their jobs or doing good work and do not realize they are helping you specifically. These things are going on all around us. Think about our community leaders that create a safer, more livable environment for us and our families and neighbors. Think about those in the public safety roles and the effort they make invisible to us. God is working the same way, invisible to us until we open our eyes and see the blessings all around us.

It is also true that each of us helps people and we become a blessing to others without knowing it sometimes. Some we do so in a very intended way, maybe as a teacher or a blood donor or just being kind and lending a hand. Other times we do not realize that we are someone that others are so thankful for. Every kind act is a blessing to someone. Every extra effort can inspire others. Those kind acts that warm us with the Holy Spirit, when we do them, help others that we may not realize. There have probably been hundreds of people who have inspired or influenced us in our lives.

When we see the blessings around us, we are inspired to be a blessing to others, to share the Holy Spirit within us. Make the world a better place for everyone you touch.

Kevin Eipperle

Monday April 15

Mark 6:30-32

³⁰The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³²And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.

It was some years back now, but I remember the experience of taking about 16 young people to a weekend retreat in Wisconsin. We met at 5pm on a Friday and caravanned to the retreat center about an hour away. After we got there and all had unloaded their gear and found their beds, they came rushing back to the gathering room and began asking, urgently, “What are we gonna do now?”

I responded, “Nothing.” The shocked silence didn’t last long before the anxiety blurted out, even more urgently, “Okay, but what are we gonna do? What are we gonna do?” I said again, “Nothing. There are trails that you can go explore, and you can’t get lost because the trails all lead back here. There is a game room. But you don’t have to do anything.”

So what did they do? They sat down and began to talk with each other. For three hours! These kids from several different schools and age levels all sat and talked. It was as though a pressure valve had been released. We eventually made pizza and played some fun group games, but the time was unstructured. And it was extremely non-productive. Which was the point.

I learned from those kids the importance of taking a break. They were used to being jostled here and there, from one test to another, from one requirement to the next. Every day, day after day came the pressure to produce. And the toll it was taking on them was palpable.

I realized we were onto something when every one of those kids signed up for the next retreat, and many brought friends. We called it the Seinfeld retreat: the retreat about nothing.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, with all our focus on doing and accomplishing, on achieving and surpassing, on competing and winning, help us to remember to take time to be with one another and with you. May we find our ultimate meaning in life in its true source, you, our Savior and Redeemer, and the community that is your body in the world. Amen.

Pastor Kurt Hansen

Tuesday April 16 Your Will Be Done

I think the most important part of the Lord's Prayer is the part that says, "God let your will be done."

If you are like me, I fight every day with letting God's will and not my will be done. I never get up in the morning and pray God let your will be done today. Every morning I run through my daily schedule and think about what needs to be done and then how I can achieve those things that are ahead of me that day. It seems like I forget to ask God how he can help me get through the day and follow his will not mine.

As the day goes along, I often struggle with getting my will done but even then, I fail to ask God for help. I never ask if I am doing his will. It seems like I always think I can make it on my own. Even when I get to the point of failing, I still do not ask for help and say to God your will be done. I still want my will to be done.

Jesus's words on the cross should always be there to remind us to ask God that his will be done. As Jesus faced death and was in the toughest times in those last days he turned to God. He asked God for

help and he asked that God's will be done even though that would mean his own death. As we go forward in our lives, let's all try to make sure that we ask God to help us do his will. It will be hard to do that because we always want our will to be done. By asking God for help we will get God's power to do his will.

Larry Croghan

Wednesday April 17

. . .and Jesus wept

Oh Mary, don't you weep, don't you mourn

Oh Mary, don't you weep, don't you mourn

Pharoah's army got drowned

Oh Mary don't you weep

Mary of Bethany was distraught. Lazarus, her brother, was dead and her grieving was heart-felt. If only Jesus had been here, she thought. Then, through the commotion outside the house her sister Martha came in and told Mary the Lord wanted to see her. John 11 records this moment as one which shows each of us the full humanity of Jesus. When Jesus saw Mary, saw her grief-stricken face, heard her lament "Lord, if only you had been here. . ." he wept. In the fulness of His humanity Christ shared with Mary the anguish of loss.

When we attempt to reconcile the humanity and the divinity of Jesus we fail because our expectations lie in the rational world and not a world borne by faith alone. In the end, we mouth the words of our Creeds and gloss over the disturbing part: wholly human; wholly divine. But it is so and the mystery may escape us if we do not remember: Jesus wept.

In Christ's humanity he understood how Mary felt in her loss and He understands us as well today. It's in that humanity that Christ knows our failings, losses and sinfulness. Then, the divinity of Christ melds with His humanity and he dies for our redemption on the cross. A fully human man died an agonizing death to open the road to forgiveness for all who accept on faith that Jesus was God and walked among us.

So, Mary ceases her weeping knowing God stands with her in the darkest of times.

Ken Resch

Thursday April 18 Cruel, Cruel Death

Humans have advanced in inflicting pain on one another. Perhaps it is the original "keeping up with the jones" (I can do better than that). The Romans figured out a way to make public punishment—the ultimate one being death—extremely painful. This was meant to keep everyone in line: no civil disobedience. And going to watch one being slowly killed was sport to some, perhaps many.

I'm struck by one who watched Jesus' death. A centurion, whom I expect watched many die in this way. He said, "surely this was the son of God." When we stand at the foot of the cross, touch the wood, feel the sharpness of a nail, can we say the same? I pray so! For it is on the cross that our sins are removed and carried away forever. Luther calls it the "happy exchange" at the foot of the cross. Give your sins up for eternity.

Bill Nybeck

Good Friday April 19

Hebrews 4:14d-16

One of my earliest memories of church involved standing in line with my parents outside the pastor's office, waiting to "announce" for communion. Why do that, I thought? Is that how the ladies knew how many little glasses to fill for communion? Little did I know that my parents were to use this time to confess their sins, the Lutheran version of the Catholic confessional. At least the Catholic's had a wall; this was face to face—you didn't even get to sit down!

When I read the Hebrews passage for devotions I had flashbacks. "Let us holdfast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Hebrews 4:14d-16

Lent is a time to hold fast to the tradition of confession; not because it is a tradition, but as a path to mercy and grace. Mercy and grace, good Lutheran theology, soooo necessary in the midst of our weaknesses. A savior, who is completely able to sympathize with our weaknesses. With an ample supply of sin, we are tested. Fortunately we are reminded during Lent that movement toward the throne of grace can be done with the same boldness and audaciousness that our savior went to the cross—the result being that we can emerge every day from the darkness of sin with His mercy and grace.

Prayer: Gracious and merciful God, as confessional people, complete with sin, we come before you tested and weak, in need of your open-ended and consistent forgiveness, with no lines. Amen

Pastor John Sorenson

Saturday April 20

Luke 24:1-12 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Resurrection of Jesus

¹But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. ⁶Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." ⁸Then they remembered his words, ⁹and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹²But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Have you ever thought about the role of women in faith? Here we have a reading from Luke's Gospel that makes it very clear that the women who entered the tomb that first Easter morning had been chosen to share the most amazing story ever told. What comes from this story is the message of forgiveness, of new life in Christ! Why these women? Simply put, their faithfulness. Scripture is filled with stories of humble women who do amazing things, who model their faith by their actions. These are some of these women, the ones who do not shy away from the cross, the ones who stand up for their families and who stand up for the faith.

These women at the tomb are told that Jesus has risen (are you thinking, "he is risen indeed, alleluia!"? right now). They carry this

most important news back to those whom Jesus called to be his apostles. I get that Peter had to go and see for himself. He's Peter, after all. But what about the others in the room when the women burst in to share their awe and joy at the risen Christ? What would you think? How would you respond? So many things that Jesus has said and taught must be flashing in the minds of the women and those they tell!

This Easter, as you prepare to hear this amazing story in worship, I hope your heart will race with excitement, that the things you've heard and read about this Jesus who is risen will fill your imagination as if you are hearing them for the first time, just like those gathered in the house listening to the story of the faithful women. I hope, also, that you will pause to say a prayer of thanks for all the women who've made a difference in your faith life and for those women who entered the tomb that first Easter morning.

He is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Pastor Paul



Give
THANKS
to the Lord
for He is good; His love endures forever.
-1 Chronicles 16:34



Lord of Life
Lutheran Church

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