

HOPE-FULL LIVING

• *Daily Devotions for Christian Seniors* •

January • February • March • 2012

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Hope-Full Living Mission Statement

To inspire God's seniors with the assurance that "This very day, I have a body, a mind, a spirit and a message—God's rejuvenating Gospel message to and through me—to share with my world, my friends and my Lord."

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Sunday, January 1, 2012

Ah-Hallelujah!

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life ... we proclaim also to you ...

1 Jn 1:1, 3

Welcome to the party—a *celebration* of memories with no regrets, of promises pending for a forever future, of today's present gift. Here you will find laughter, light, love. Here you will find your Lord, enlightening you with the "Ah-Hallelujahs" of hope-full living.

God's surprising presence has filled your life. You've sensed it—in the growth of family, the gift of friendship, the maturing of faith and your ever-deepening relationship with God's great "Ah-Ha," Jesus Christ.

In the midst of "senior moments," health hiccups and even very real griefs, God is ever present, quick to encourage. More than that, God is alive in YOU, calling you into his most blessed service.

Welcome to a celebration of Ah-Hallelujahs every blessed day of your God-given hope-full life!

Lord, open my eyes to your presence that I might invite those around me to join in praise: "Ah-Hallelujah! Help me celebrate our surprising Lord!" Amen.

Think: List moments you were keenly aware of God's presence.

Read: 1 Jn 1:1-10; Jn 17:1-26

Peter Mead

Monday, January 2, 2012

Carbonated Holiness!

May the God of hope fill you with all joy ... so that you may overflow with hope!

Rom 15:13

That is what laughter is: carbonated holiness, divine joy that bubbles up and overflows to others! I like the sign: “You don’t stop laughing because you grow old, you grow old because you stop laughing!” How true, how true! When was the last time you had a hearty laugh? What are you waiting for? Today is the day!

Our Scripture text reminds us again of where our joy comes from—the Lord! We can laugh, at ourselves especially, because Christ has had the last laugh. He has risen from the grave! Even in the midst of our pains and problems and pettiness, it still is the Lord who brings us joy and laughter.

Romans 15 affirms that people of all ages overflow with hope and joy ... even when we do not look, feel or act like it, because it is the power of the Spirit in us.

Keep that carbonated holiness coming to us, Lord, in Word and Sacrament and through the giggles and laughter that we sense around us and in us. Amen.

Be Aware: Look for opportunities to overflow with hope today ... by hugging a child, by e-mailing an old friend, by reading the comics or by just looking in the mirror and giggling!

Read: Rom 15:1-13; Ps 97

Rich Bimler

Tuesday, January 3, 2012

Channeling the Spirit

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout.

Lk 2:25

When we think of Simeon, we tend to think of him as an old fogey who twiddled his thumbs until the arrival of Jesus. But the Bible makes it clear that Simeon was far from washed up, decrepit or of no use to society. We read that he was moved by the Spirit, the Spirit was upon him, and that it was the Spirit who revealed to him that he would meet Jesus. Does that sound like a man who was out of the loop spiritually or otherwise? Simeon had a job to do and a purpose in life, and he did it when he held Jesus in his arms, blessed him and spoke to Mary about the future.

Remind yourself that the Holy Spirit is not finished with you yet. You still have much to contribute to the world around you, just as Simeon did. Listen to the Holy Spirit and let the Spirit move you to bless others, to celebrate God's plan of salvation, to hold young and old alike in your arms and to watch for the coming of Jesus. When you channel the Holy Spirit, as Simeon did, it's like recharging your batteries.

Lord, help me to power up through the Holy Spirit to accomplish the work you would have me do. Amen.

Do: Hold someone in your arms and bless them.

Read: Lk 2:25-35; Rom 8:13-17

Mark Zimmermann

Wednesday, January 4, 2012

Down With Groan-Ups!

I am feeble and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart. Ps 38:8

Psalm 38 sounds like it was written by someone my age! Listen to some of the descriptors—bowed down, no health in my body, wounds fester, searing pain, feeble. David has every reason to groan, right?

True, our pain and problems do get us down. But in spite of these woes, the Lord still promises us new life in him each day! We live on this side of the Resurrection, in the midst of our Good Fridays!

Do people see you and me as a grown-up or as a groan-up? A friend of mine tells me that he gets so cranky at times that his grandkids call him, “Grump-Pa”! We aging adults do have much to groan about. But we senior saints have so much more to celebrate as we continue to grow in the Lord and model what hope-full living is all about to those around us, both young and old.

“Lord, be not far from me. Come quickly to help me, my Lord and Savior” (Ps 38:21-22). Help me to change my groaning into growing, in you. Amen.

Encourage: Today, encourage yourself and one other person to grow in the Lord, even though our bodies ache and our minds are muddled, because we are called to be grown-ups instead of groan-ups.

Read: Phil 2:1-3

Rich Bimler

Thursday, January 5, 2012

The Way God Sees Things

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”

1 Sm 16:7

When Israel wanted a king, God let them have a king based upon the people’s criteria. The people’s choice was Saul. Saul was tall and handsome. At first he followed God, but then he started to ignore God and take all the credit for his accomplishments. Eventually God abandoned Saul and told the prophet Samuel that he would replace Saul with someone that met God’s criteria. God chose a young boy named David. David would become the greatest king in Israel’s history.

When you make choices, what is your criteria?

O Lord, help me to make wise choices this day that are according to your will for me and my life. Amen.

Think: Put on new eyeglasses today and see things the way God sees them. Look at people’s hearts.

Read: 1 Sm 16:1-13

John Kotovsky

Friday, January 6, 2012

Shooting Stars

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Mt 5:16

We're told that the universe is ever-expanding. Still, stars appear to be stationary. Oh, they seem to move, but it's an illusion. Only the earth is spinning around its axis and orbiting around the sun. Stars stand still.

This is not true for us. God's stars, enlightened with Christ's Light, are bodies in motion—shooting stars.

I don't mean to imply that we burn out. God's eternal promises assure us that we will never do that. Rather, we are on the move—stars sent to draw others into the orbit of our Sun of Righteousness.

You may not feel “on the move.” Old bones may ache. That matters little. Even the smallest movements can be gestures of God's clarion call that bids all people repent, renew and rejoice. Wherever you are, you are God's sent and shooting star! So shoot ... and SHINE!

Send me, Lord, in big ways and small, to share the light of your love. Amen.

Count: Count the number of people you come in contact with this week. Spread the light!

Read: Mt 5:13-16; Ps 8

Peter Mead

Saturday, January 7, 2012

“Bill Praying”

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.

Mt 25:40

The paying of the bills has generational differences. Our younger friends and family will extol the virtues of online bill paying—arranging with the bank to pay off your creditors with the click of a key. No problem.

But it's hard to relinquish the monthly ritual of setting out the checkbook, calculator, stamps and return address labels and handwriting the bills. Besides, such labor gives the opportunity for bill *praying*, not merely paying. As you pay the mortgage remember the homeless. “Lord, in your mercy ...” The phone and Internet bills call on us to recall the lonely, those who have few to call. “Lord, in your mercy ...” A credit card bill with restaurant charges reminds us of the hungry. “Lord, in your mercy ...”

You get the point. As we so easily write out the check, we train ourselves to be ever more mindful of those who long for what we take for granted. Writing out the bills becomes a holy habit, an opportunity to remember and respond to those who have so little.

Giver of all good gifts, empower me to share of my wealth with those who cry to you. Amen.

Write: Write your checks. Pray your bills.

Read: Phil 4:4-9; Jn 6:25-35

Donald Hinchey

Sunday, January 8, 2012

Productive Living

One thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.

Lk 10:42

In days before retirement, it was necessary to get into the office for meetings, making phone calls and checking off the “to do” list. Now since retirement, those tasks are no longer part of the daily routine. Some days may be full and “fulfilling,” but other days seem lonely and unproductive. Especially on those latter days it is important to know that our worth comes from God. We are his children and are blessed by him whether we are “producing” or not.

And how much of our “doing” is really necessary? In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus admonished Martha for running around, “producing” things instead of listening to him as was her sister Mary. In these less busy days, we may do well to spend time sitting at the feet of our Lord and just “be” rather than “do.”

God of all our days, help us to recognize the gifts and abilities which are part of today for me. Help me to know my value to you because I am your child—blessed, named and called. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

List: Rather than make a “to do” list today, at the end of your day make a list of “things accomplished.”

Read: Mt 11:28-30

Margaret Hinchey

Monday, January 9, 2012

Walk in Love

It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us ... As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.

2 Jn 4, 6

As we grow older, we learn that it is sometimes impossible to walk without assistance. We need the assistance of a walker or some other person. We certainly need help to walk in love each day of our lives. Help is available! Way back in Leviticus, God said to his people, “I will walk among you and you will be my people and I will be your God.” God walks with us every day—with his peace, with his protection, with forgiveness through Jesus’ life and work. God gives us the support we need to walk in love no matter how much pain we are in. No matter how often we stumble and fall, he is there to give us his love so we can walk in love.

Take my hand, precious Lord, as I walk along life’s way. Do not let me wander in darkness for then I would be lost. By your love, assist me in my walk so that I may love others as you have loved me. Amen.

Think: Think of someone who is hard for you to love and pray for that person.

Read: 2 Jn 1:4-6; Eph 5:2

Eldor Kaiser

Tuesday, January 10, 2012

But Jesus Can!

He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities ... and with his stripes we are healed.

Is 53:5

A grandmother was reading nursery rhymes to her three-year-old grandchild. She read:

Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall / Humpty Dumpty had a great fall / All the king's horses and all the king's men / Couldn't put Humpty together again.

When Grandma finished reading that verse, the little girl said, "But Jesus can!"

You and I sit on a wall / You and I as we age have had some pretty big falls / All earthly philosophies and man-made ideas / Have not, cannot, put us together again / But Jesus can!

Why? Because of who he is. He is God's Son, our Savior. Because of what he has done for us. He suffered and died to heal us. Then God's power raised him from the dead, the same power that works in us to make us whole again and lets us experience the wonderful blessings that God promises his people.

Lord Jesus, we turn to you for heath, healing and hope. Amen.

Pray: What pain and sorrow need healing today? Go to God in prayer.

Read: Eph 1:15-23; Is 53:4-6; 1 Pt 2:24

Walter M. Schoedel

Wednesday, January 11, 2012

The New Normal

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Gal 5:14

As life moves along, we keep establishing new levels of what is normal.

Once we could run a mile. Our new normal is a walk around the block.

Once dinner meant a hearty meat-and-potato meal. Now normal is more likely a cup of soup with a side salad.

As we get older, with every visit to our doctor we set “new normals” for our weight, blood pressure, cholesterol or something else.

How about the way we know and show love? Any new normals there?

But God’s love doesn’t change. The older I get, the more I love to sing, “Jesus loves me, this I know ...” And I do. Knowing his love releases me—even compels me—to pass it on to others.

Lord, help me to make showing your love to others my new normal. Amen.

Challenge: Do two intentional, loving things today—at least one for a family member.

Read: Rom 8:9-10; Lk 10:25-28

Charles S. Mueller, Sr.

Thursday, January 12, 2012

Abundant Life

I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Jn 10:10

We live in a present culture filled with the fear of not having enough. Our anxieties continue to rise with the national debt. We worry if our retirement funds will be enough. Will we still have Social Security and Medicare? Will we have enough to be able to spend more of our retirement time with our family and friends? Will we have enough to do the traveling and activities that we have dreamed about doing?

When these anxieties come, we need to remember Jesus tells us in John 10:10 that he came to give us an abundant life. The New Testament Greek word for abundant means overflowing. Jesus has come to give us a life that overflows with the same love and grace that flows from God no matter what our age, physical condition or economic situation might be. God gives us the faith, strength and love to overflow in our lives to others so that they, too, can see how much God loves them.

When my anxieties rise, Lord, widen my vision of your strength and presence. Amen.

Challenge: Write John 10:10 on a card and put it on your bathroom mirror to say aloud each day.

Read: Jn 14:5-7

Dick Hardel

Friday, January 13, 2012

He Will Get You There

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Rom 8:28

As a boy, I wanted to study for the ministry, but financially my family couldn't afford it. At a summer holiday job, the manager asked me what I wanted to do. I told him my predicament with a bit of embarrassment. I wasn't sure he would understand.

The manager looked at me and said, "Don't you think if God wants you there, he will get you there!" Today, I can look back on how true those words are. God holds your life, too, in that same trust. God has shown in Jesus that he will give everything to fulfill his purposes in your life. If God wants something for you, you can trust him to get you there.

Dear Lord, when I do not know how it will happen, help me to trust you to fulfill your will. Amen.

Action: Encourage others with this assurance.

Read: Lk 1:26-38; Mk 9:14-32

Lionel Otto

Saturday, January 14, 2012

Dying Well

... whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

Rom 14:8

There we were, my brother and I, standing next to Mom's casket at the visitation. A family friend came up to us and simply said, "Your mom died well!"

My first thought was "What is he talking about? There she is, dead!" But then it sunk in. Our friend was affirming the faith with which the Lord had gifted my mom. Her life had been a witness that she had lived well, aged well and died well ... in the Lord!

Have you ever thought what people will say about you at your visitation? Nice fella, good cook, Cubs fan? There is a story about a man who was asked what he would like someone to say about him in the casket ... and he replied, "I hope they will say, 'Look, he moved!'"

Romans 14:8 says it so well. And so you and I live well ... in the Lord; we age well ... in the Lord; and we will die well ... in the Lord! Because we are his and he is ours! Now that is really something to live about!

Lord, thanks for the life you give to us each day. Allow us to live this life daily for others and for you. Amen.

Respond: When people ask you, "How are you?" joyfully respond, "I am well ... in the Lord!"

Read: Rom 14:5-8

Rich Bimler

Sunday, January 15, 2012

Songs of the Heart

But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy.

Ps 5:11

There is a wall inscription in the Memory Unit at the Lutheran Hillside Village Retirement Home in Peoria, Illinois. It says something like: “Love is knowing the songs of their hearts, so that you can sing it for them when they no longer remember the words.”

Thanks for all you do to learn the songs of another’s heart. It may be that they will have sung the words so often that there is no chance you could ever forget them. It may be that they sang no words at all, but having observed their lives, you know exactly what songs express their heart.

Songs that express the heart of those we love can so powerfully express memory, faith and hope.

Bless us, Lord, so we may hear the songs of the hearts of those we love. Amen.

Think: Listen carefully to those you love with song-sensitive ears.

Read: Ps 91

Vernon D. Gundermann

Monday, January 16, 2012

Gray Hairs

Gray hair is a crown of splendor.

Prv 16:31

My hair is gray. I consider it one of God's most clever blessings. I make assumptions about every gray head I meet. Their parents have probably gone to glory. Their children leave brochures on the kitchen counter titled "A Home for Your Golden Years." They have uttered evil words trying to program their VCR. Their cell phones disappear without warning. They are concerned about living longer than their money. They like to talk. THEY ARE WONDERING ABOUT DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE. The opportunities to share redemption in Christ Jesus and our eager expectation of life with our loving Lord are endless.

Thank you, Lord, for letting me live long enough to appreciate my gray hair. Give me good words to speak to those who may have no hope. Amen.

Share: No matter the color of our hair, if we live with the promise of eternal life with Christ, we owe it to anyone we meet to share that joyful expectation.

Read: Is 46:3-4

Lois Scheer

Tuesday, January 17, 2012

Seeing Is Believing

[Jesus said to the blind men,] “According to your faith let it be done to you”; and their sight was restored.

Mt 9:29-30

What a gift it is to be able to see! Vision is precious, but even with vision it is not easy to truly see what we look at. I once had an art teacher who said, “If you can see it, you can draw it. If you can’t draw it, it’s because you don’t really see it.” There are no classes offered titled “How to REALLY see.” If there were, I would enroll, because really seeing is important. By that I mean, seeing with understanding. Of all the things I would like to see in that way, I most want to be able to see Jesus.

We really don’t need special glasses. Along with the blind men we can pray, “Lord, I want to see!” and the Spirit will open our eyes to see that his power, love and grace are active in this world and in our lives, in nature, history, circumstances and other people. Alleluia! Jesus lives; we, too, shall live!

Lord Jesus, we cannot see you with our eyes, but we see you through faith and believe. Open our eyes of faith, dear Lord, and let us see your grace. Amen.

Challenge: Look carefully at each person you see or meet today. How are they carrying out Jesus’ work?

Read: 1 Jn 2:9-11; Lk 24:13-16; Mt 6:22-24

Eldor Kaiser

Wednesday, January 18, 2012

Time Flies

[Jesus] said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."

Mk 16:15

"Carol, no! It can't be!" That was my first reaction. Carol told me that one grandchild was graduating from high school and another one from college.

Carol's daughter, son-in-law and children live in another state, so I had not seen them for many years. It cannot be. I remember the daughter's grade school years. I was at her wedding "just a few years ago." What a sudden wake-up call concerning the swift passage of time! Ever have a similar kind of reaction?

What am I doing with the time that I have left before the Lord calls me?

So many tasks. So many options. So many distractions. What is REALLY important? "And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). What will be my witness to others today?

Help me, O Lord, to use the time that you have given me to witness to others about my faith in you. Amen.

Share: Share what Jesus means to you with one person today.

Read: Ps 90:12

Paul Eggold

Thursday, January 19, 2012

You Are God's Rainbow

Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you ... Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life.

Gn 9:14-15

Sometimes the good and bad memories of the past float around like ghosts in our mind. Dwelling on the wrongs of our past cripples us and prevents us from being God's rainbow. God's forgiveness frees us to leave the past behind and focus on the ministry before us.

The rainbow was God's reminder of his promise to Noah. Baptism is God's rainbow of promise to us (1 Pt 3:20). We may think we are getting too old to be of much use in God's service. Noah was over 600 years old when God asked him to build the ark. You are not too old!

What a joy that the Lord calls us to continue to be his rainbow and to bring joy and hope to others. So celebrate in being God's rainbow!

Sun of Righteousness, shine through my life so that I can be a rainbow to those around me. Amen.

Look Up to the Clouds: Write, call or visit someone in need of a rainbow.

Read: Gn 9:8-17

Leo Symmank

Friday, January 20, 2012

Grandparent Crowns

Grandchildren are the crown of the aged ...

Prv 17:6

There are many crowns for the aged. The writer of the book of Proverbs would suggest that none is more significant than the crown of grandchildren.

You know that because sometimes they say that to you. On a birthday or a wedding anniversary, they express how important and significant you are. They may even say that they wish to be like you and are so grateful for your love and your example.

But it means even more when they wordlessly imitate you. Sometimes it is in small things, like the way they prepare a dish for dinner. Sometimes it is in huge things, like their values and priorities. None is greater than when they express the same hope, confidence and trust in the Christ that is so important to you.

Heavenly Father, do crown the aged with imitating grandchildren. Amen.

Think: Reflect on the pattern being portrayed by your grandparenting.

Read: Col 3:12-17

Vernon D. Gundermann

Saturday, January 21, 2012

Living a Generous Life

... they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us.

2 Cor 8:5

There are some important steps that we, as senior adults, can model and share with the younger generations:

1. First, give yourself to the Lord. Everything we are, possess and enjoy comes from the grace of God.

2. Give now from what you have now. The financial situations of our lives change constantly. Our giving is always in thanksgiving to God.

3. Even in poverty, we receive the blessings of our God and can serve God in many ways. Even in a nursing home, I can serve God generously by praying for my family and others in need. I can sing God's praises.

4. Because of God's action in Christ Jesus, we have the privilege, as children of God, to serve God.

5. Think of ways to surprise people with service in thanksgiving to God.

Gracious and generous God, pour out your Spirit so that thankfulness, praise and service in your name overflow daily in our lives as we pass on the faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Mentor: Reach out to a young person in need of guidance.

Read: Col 1:3-6

Dick Hardel

Sunday, January 22, 2012

Water Power

Nicodemus said to [Jesus], “How can anyone be born after having grown old?”

Jn 3:4

It was the Unlimited Air Races, and I was there. Engines originally built in the 1940s were producing unheard-of horsepower in the 1990s. These ancient aircraft were clawing through the air at speeds far beyond their original capacity. It was thrilling to see and hear!

Something called water injection was a big part of the increased power these old engines were generating. It goes against our common sense. We use water to put fires out, not make them bigger! Yet here, a shot of simple water delivered in the right way, at the right time was providing sizeable boosts of power.

We’re water-injected, too, through Holy Baptism. But this is not simple water. It is water harnessed to the fire of the Holy Spirit by God’s Word and promise. The water and the Spirit generate amazing power at any age!

Renewing Spirit, by water and the Word, carry me beyond my self-defined limitations to the life only you can accomplish. Amen.

Take a Look: Take another look at doing something you thought you would never get accomplished.

Read: Is 55:1-3

Mike May

Monday, January 23, 2012

How Could They Know?

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.

Jn 3:36

On January 12, 2007, a young man dressed in worn jeans got off the subway in downtown Washington, D.C., set out his violin case and played six difficult classical pieces in 43 minutes. None of the people knew that the violinist was Joshua Bell, a world-renowned violinist, nor that the violin was worth \$3.5 million. How could they know? Someone had to tell them.

When Jesus was born in a stable, he looked like just another baby. How could anyone know he was the Messiah, the Son of God? Someone had to tell them. The Spirit of God told an old man named Simeon, and he said, "Lord, you now dismiss your servant in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation." Simeon recognized Jesus as the Savior of ALL. But just knowing who he is isn't of any value unless we claim him as OUR Savior.

Thank you, Jesus, for Simeon and others who have told us who you are. Thank you for your Spirit, who has led us to believe and trust in Jesus as our Savior. Give us now a happy new year. Amen.

Tell: Tell someone today that you believe that Jesus is God's Son and your Savior.

Read: Lk 2:25-31; Rom 10:14-15

Eldor Kaiser

Tuesday, January 24, 2012

Imitating Anna

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher.

Lk 2:36

We learn a lot about Anna in the three verses dedicated to her. First, we find she was a prophetess. Not many women were in those days, so she must have been highly regarded. Then we read she was from the tribe of Asher. She came from good Jewish stock. Then we are told that she was 84 and a widow after only 7 years of marriage. You would think Anna would have just given up or shuffled off to a hovel somewhere to live out her days in seclusion. But she was active in the church, “worshiping, fasting and praying day and night.” And after she saw Jesus, she did not fade into the background either. She gave thanks and talked about Jesus to all who would listen. What we discover from Anna is that advancing years, tragic loss and decades of being alone are not automatic barriers to living with purpose, living with joy, living for others and living for the Lord, wherever he has placed you.

Dear Lord, help me to never let my past or present circumstances hold me back from living out my spiritual calling. Amen.

Visit: Go to visit someone who is going through a hard time.

Read: Eph 5:19-20; 1 Thes 5:16-18

Mark Zimmermann

Wednesday, January 25, 2012

A.G.—A Kid at Heart!

In him we live and move and have our being.

Acts 17:28

A sight to behold: riding to the church on a yellow moped, his tanned and lined face framed in white blond hair blowing in the wind ...

“Pastor,” he said, “all right if I borrow the church’s extension ladder? Got to get up on my roof.”

“Sure, A.G. Just don’t fall off.”

“You sound like Mildred!” Grinning, he strapped the ladder to his moped and moved east on Ocean Boulevard toward home.

A church trustee and an all-around handyman, he was capable, funny, willing and crabby at the same time. He gave his wife, Mildred, fits. No doubt, though, her love for him was stronger than the irritation he caused her.

Mildred would say: “He just doesn’t know his age!” (87 at the time!)

Hmmm.

Heavenly Father, free me to serve you wisely at every age of my life and so give glory to you and to your beautiful Son. And keep me from doing foolish things as well—at any age! Amen.

Take a Risk: Do something you’ve always wanted to do but never had the courage to.

Read: Jos 1:9

Tom Zehnder

Thursday, January 26, 2012

The Olympic Café

*As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers,
you did it to me.*

Mt 25:40

It was supposed to be a drop-in café for visitors to the Sydney Olympics. A group of young people had a dream to connect with visitors from overseas and to share with them a cup of coffee and some cake.

Not one single overseas visitor came. But then towards the end of the Olympics something happened. Some of the local street people began to come in. They were not offered much, just a cup of coffee, some cake and someone to talk to.

Today, over ten years later, they still come. It is their place. So much is given and received now, in the love, the friendship and the presence of Jesus that enfolds everyone who comes. And blessings never dreamed of are experienced by the young people who serve.

Lord, keep me open to the ways you would transform the place I share. Let my home be a place of blessing where lives are touched by your Spirit. Amen.

Prepare: Share what God is doing in your life over a cup of coffee. See whom God brings to you.

Read: Mt 25:31-46; 2 Cor 8:1-7

Lionel Otto

Friday, January 27, 2012

What Followers See

And he said to them, "Follow me" ... they left their nets and followed him.

Mt 4:19-20

Jesus called his disciples to follow him. Right? So, what does a follower see? The first and obvious answer is that they see his back. Right? His back before our eyes is very reassuring. I'll suggest some reasons this is true and then let you expand the list.

When his back is before our eyes, it means he's right there with us. It comforts us like the feeling a child gets holding a parent's hand.

If he's in front of me, it means that he will meet any of my problems first, just like Isaiah 65:24 says, "Before they call, I will answer." He actually knows my needs before I know they exist.

He is slogging through life's underbrush (maybe snowdrifts?), clearing a pathway as we, together, move right ahead.

Some Leader, he! Who wouldn't want to follow him?

Jesus, help me follow close enough to keep you in sight. When I can see you, all will be OK. I want to believe that. Help me do so. Amen.

List: List some challenges and opportunities which Christ has led you through.

Read: Mt 17:1-8; Rom 8:28

Charles S. Mueller, Sr.

Saturday, January 28, 2012

That Sinking Feeling

But when [Peter] noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him.

Mt 14:30-31

It was a beautiful spring day, and as I drove I watched a mother and her three young children walking down a steep incline on the sidewalk. The littlest boy had lagged behind, distracted by the sheer pleasantness of the day, enjoying the time, swinging around a lamppost. But then he looked up and saw that the others had gotten ahead of him. Oh no! Time to catch up! So he took off, short legs pumping furiously.

About the time he reached top speed, he stubbed the toe of a sneaker and it launched him. Kapow! Down he went. Mom heard the commotion and turned quickly, coming to the rescue. She scooped him up as he whimpered slightly. Then—a few kisses expertly applied—they were off again on their spring walk, reunited and happy. Just to be and to be with each other was a celebration.

Scoop me up, Lord, when I get too far ahead of myself or too far behind you. Then reawaken my eyes to the joy of your presence and embrace. Amen.

Help: Help someone who needs assistance today.

Read: Is 41:9-11

Mike May

Sunday, January 29, 2012

Consider Groaning

Give ear to my words, O LORD; consider my groaning.

Ps 5:1

Almost everyone knows about “groaning.” We all have reasons to groan. When we groan, it is generally because we just cannot find words that adequately express our feelings. Only a groan will do. For some, groaning increases with the years. We seem to observe more things for which there are no words!

The good news is that groaning is not the last word! There is one who takes our groans and puts them into words. It is the Holy Spirit. He takes our groans and puts them into prayer form that our Heavenly Father understands perfectly! He answers them in ways which are sometimes beyond our understanding. He answers them in ways that work good for those who love him, according to his purpose.

It is all right to groan.

Keep on hearing our groaning, Lord. Amen.

Think: Reflect on those situations when you groan.

Read: Rom 8:18-30

Vernon D. Gundermann

Monday, January 30, 2012

Our Substitute

Surely HE has borne OUR griefs and carried OUR sorrows ... HE was wounded for OUR transgressions; HE was crushed for OUR iniquities; upon HIM was the chastisement that brought US peace, and with HIS stripes WE are healed.

Is 53:4-5 (emphasis added)

Lots of pronouns. In school we learned that we must know the antecedents of pronouns to understand, because a pronoun is only a substitute for the name of someone or something. So for whom do the pronouns he, him and his substitute? There is no antecedent in the poetry of Isaiah, but we know it is Jesus. In the New Testament, we read the account of Jesus' suffering and death, and we're told: "God made HIM who knew no sin to be sin for US" (2 Cor 5:21), and "HE died for ALL, that THEY who live should not live unto themselves, but unto HIM who died for THEM and rose again" (2 Cor 5:14).

Wonderful pronouns! Beautiful substitutes! Christ—instead of ME. HE for US.

O Lord Jesus, for your silent suffering in our stead, for your love in giving your life so that we might live, we give you thanks. Amen.

Fill In: Be a substitute for someone today; fill in for a friend.

Read: Gal 2:20; Lv 16:10

Eldor Kaiser

Tuesday, January 31, 2012

Whatever You Say

And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears."

1 Sm 3:10

God often spoke to people in the past. He still does. Sometimes he talked with them directly, as he did with Elisha and Job. Sometimes he used a third party, as he did through Jonah and Daniel. Sometimes he sent a written message, as the one he sent through Jeremiah. Hebrews 1:1 summarized his communication methods, including his last and best one, with the words, "In many and various ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a son." The question is not whether he has spoken and still speaks. It's, "Who has heard?"

Many people today don't hear a thing God says. They apparently don't want to. But our concern in this moment is not with "many people." It's more personal than that. Do you hear? May I suggest that if you can hear him, a great response would be to read the title of this devotion out loud. Millions of people, past and present, say those words every day.

O God, speak to me, that I may hear you and delight in responding immediately and positively. Amen.

Tell: God speaks today. A question is, "Who is hearing what he is saying?" Any ideas? Tell someone what you heard God saying to you.

Read: Ex 4:10-13; Is 6:1-8

Charles S. Mueller, Sr.

Wednesday, February 1, 2012

EncourAGE

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

1 Thes 5:11

When we look to the night sky and see a star, we somehow are encouraged, aren't we? Stars remind us that God is in control. God used stars to encourage Abraham: "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them. So shall your offspring be" (Gn 15:5). Our role as stars in the constellation of God's bright kingdom, then, is to be a light of encouragement in this dark world. Regardless of age or ability, you will always have the light of encouragement. More so, it is our amassed experience that makes us bright and shining lights! We have experienced raising families, finding jobs, keeping the faith and rebounding from loss or failure. We are living proof that God is good. We are living examples that survival is possible with the help of God. That's why it's important that we act our age! We can encourAGE. It is our AGE itself that can be a powerful encourAGEMENT to all whose paths we brighten.

Help me to use my experience to encourage others to continue in their journey of faith with you. Amen.

Write: Write a note to a friend who needs a pick-me-up today.

Read: Mt 5:13-15

Mark Zimmermann

Thursday, February 2, 2012

Motivated by Grace

Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.

Lk 7:47

Simon and the sinful woman are so different. Simon relies on God's fairness. He does not believe that this sinful woman has any right to be among God's people. He lives his life doing what is right and expected.

The sinful woman can only hope that God will forgive. And when she receives such unconditional forgiveness and acceptance from Jesus, she is overwhelmed. In Jesus, God has shown her so much grace she can only respond with all she has.

God surrounds our lives with so much grace. His love for us is not conditional on our obedience. He holds us every day in forgiveness. He fills our hearts with gratitude that we, too, might respond in love.

Heavenly Father, I thank you for the forgiveness that sustains my life in you. Fill me with grace to share with those around me. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Encourage: Encourage grace-filled living in your family and circle of friends.

Read: Lk 7:36-50; Lk 6:37-42

Lionel Otto

Friday, February 3, 2012

What's Up?

Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?

Job 38:18

From the moment we're born we start to write our own rule book for the world we live in. At first, things appear pretty straightforward, like up and down. Then we discover there's another side of the planet. Are the people there upside down, or are we? What about gravity? Things fall, right? Then we take a physics course and find out all things are all pulling on each other. One of rules I used to count on was that round things roll and square things don't. Seemed pretty universal to me—until I visited a big salad bar. I got to the croutons. They're square. I put them on the salad. They rolled off. Defining what you can rely on really is not so simple.

Jesus once said, "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (Jn 12:25). Now that is what I call a rolling crouton.

Help me to see that in your kingdom the rules are different from those of the world. Amen.

Dare: Dare to question the up-ness of something you're passionately certain you are right about. Rejoice in renewing your mind. Pray your own transformed prayer.

Read: Jn 12:20-26; Rom 12:1-3

Mike May

Saturday, February 4, 2012

Honorable Mention

Honor your father and your mother.

Dt 5:16

One time when I was browsing in a party supply store, I noticed the only ribbons left on a shelf were the “Honorable Mention” ones. So I purchased all of them.

I put the boxes of white ribbons in the trunk of my car. As I traveled from town to town and congregation to congregation, when I heard people honorably mention their friends, grandparents, children, parents, grandchildren, or godchildren, I gave them a ribbon.

Whatever our age, wherever we may be living and whatever our situation might be, we can honorably mention those whom God has gifted us and who have mentored us in the faith, that it may be well with us and we may live long on the earth.

Lord God, King of the Universe and the God who has made us whole, we praise you for your grace and mercy. Strengthen our faith so that we always honorably mention those people you have used and continue to use to shape our faith and lives that it may be well with us and we may live long on the earth. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Honor: Honor the actions of someone today.

Read: Eph 6:2-3; Ex 20:12; Dt 5:16

Dick Hardel

Sunday, February 5, 2012

We Will Receive

The Lord's unfailing love and mercy still continue, fresh as the morning, as sure as the sunrise. The Lord is all I have, so in him I will put my hope.

Lam 3:22-24

It is the beginning of the football game. The two captains and the referee stand on the fifty-yard line. The coin is tossed. It's heads. The captain yells, "We will receive! We will receive!" Standing before God, that could be our chant.

We are first of all not achievers, but receivers. We did not find Jesus. He found us. It is the story of the lost sheep and the shepherd and of the lost son with a waiting father. We put aside our efforts to achieve. We open our hearts to receive in faith the gift of our Savior who died to bring us home. Until that day, we celebrate God's love and mercy, thanking him through our love, forgiveness and kindness to others.

Refresh my life, O Lord, through your unfailing love and mercy. Amen.

Share: Share your trust in God's unfailing mercy with family and friends.

Read: Jn 1:14-17

Leo Symmank

Monday, February 6, 2012

Earthen Vessels

We have this treasure in jars of clay ...

2 Cor 4:7

I saw this sign for retirees in a gift shop: “Here’s the door; go rock yourself to death.” That’s not God’s message!

As retirees, we may be wrestling with a feeble frame or a fearful heart. We may feel like a piece of old furniture. We may be grieving over the loss of work or identity. We may be torturing ourselves with regrets over what might have been or remorse over our failures. We may be mourning the death of a spouse.

But as earthen vessels, we can be shaped by God to be his people with his light shining in and through us. We belong to him to live according to his purpose in Jesus Christ. His all-surpassing power can help us deal with life’s changes and challenges and crises in our later years. With him shaping our lives by his grace, we live to his glory and prepare for the day when he calls us to our heavenly home.

Lord, remind us that you seek to shape us to live daily seeking your plan and purpose. Amen.

Think: Think of ways in which you want God to shape your life.

Read: 2 Cor 4:7-18; Is 46:3-4

Walter M. Schoedel

Tuesday, February 7, 2012

Remember to Remember

Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth ...

Ecc 12:1

Remember is one of the great Bible words. It's always about a yesterday event. God often urges his people to remember, to recall, to revisit the past. That's not easy. Remembering requires focused intentionality, the kind that people give up on and try to slide past with an "I forget." Children say that often. Those who are older do too.

But when you relax and deliberately filter out bad memories, what's left are the glowing moments of your life. God has a filter for his memory too. It's Christ. Viewing us through Christ makes Jeremiah 31:33-34 happen. It's worth looking for what he has to say through Jeremiah and then repeats in Hebrews 8. He says, "I will remember your sins no more." What a wonderful thing to remember!

Help me to get over dwelling on the things you refuse to remember, Lord. Help me remember always all you did to wipe my record clean. Amen.

Sit: Sit still for ten minutes and try remembering one great thing from every decade of your life. Write them down and put the list where you will see it.

Read: Heb 8:12; Lk 23:42

Charles S. Mueller, Sr.

Wednesday, February 8, 2012

Yoked

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me ...

Mt 11:29

In a lifetime, we become “yoked” to many things. Those yokes take many different forms. Some are symbolic. The symbolic ones are sometimes the most powerful.

One of our yokes is fairly invisible but very powerful. We were yoked to Christ in our baptism. Some have made that visible with a small stole. Some have observed that yokedness very quietly. But being yoked to Christ has undoubtedly been a source of great blessings to you. You are yoked to the Great God, the maker of heaven and earth! You are yoked by the Holy Spirit to Jesus.

That combination, you yoked to Jesus, has been, and remains, a very significant team!

O Jesus, we are so grateful that through baptism we are yoked to you. Amen.

Think: Reflect on what you know of your baptism and what it means to you.

Read: Is 55

Vernon D. Gundermann

Thursday, February 9, 2012

“Oh to be 25 again, or 75, or 33...”

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Heb 13:8

St. Augustine remarked that in heaven we will be 33 years old, like Jesus. May I be so bold as to disagree?

Our culture praises youth and vibrancy, and may sniff at honored members of the “geezer” generation. Oh, come on! We did it! We are here for heaven’s sake!

At age 25, my auto insurance rates dropped! Then, and this borders on the hilarious, when I turned 75 the other day, they went back up! My agent said, “Well, we follow the charts ...” whatever that means! (*I know what it means.*)

But *this* is off the charts! Wonder of wonders! Jesus is alive! Conquering death at 33, he lives! That makes him 2,033 earth years old—about.

And we? We are forever connected to his life, death and resurrection in baptism! (Rom 6). His life surges in us! In Jesus, we are ageless!

Lord Jesus, help me to count my age and my life in yours! Amen.

Flip through: Flip through an old scrapbook and remember God’s faithfulness through the years.

Read: Lam 3:22-24

Tom Zehnder

Friday, February 10, 2012

Eternity

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Mt 5:16

Arthur Stace grew up on the streets of Sydney. He became Sydney's most famous graffiti artist as he scrawled the word "Eternity" over 500,000 times on the streets there.

The idea came to him one night as he huddled in the back of a church during worship to get out of the cold. The preacher said that night how he wished he could shout the word "Eternity" down every street in Sydney. Arthur made it his life mission. He did it with chalk in every street he could. He wanted everyone to think about God's eternity. Arthur is remembered today with a replica of his famous "Eternity" in Sydney Square.

God is not limited by the smallness of our gift. He takes what we offer and uses it to bring blessing way beyond our dreams. He encourages us to be like Jesus—a bearer of blessing to all around us.

Lord, remind me each day that my life touches others. May it touch them with love and forgiveness and hope. Amen.

Share: Share with those around you what you wish for them in Jesus.

Read: Lk 9:10-17

Lionel Otto

Saturday, February 11, 2012

Let Them Hear

My sheep listen to my voice; and I know them, and they follow me.

Jn 10:27

I recently had an appointment with my audiologist, and we talked about the rapidly improving technology of hearing aids. He said that the next big thing on the horizon was to tune the hearing aids to the specific voice that I needed most to hear—my wife's.

Wouldn't it be great if we could have hearing aids tuned to the voice of Jesus! Then we would follow him and always hear his promises and listen to how Jesus wants us to behave. We don't need mechanical help to hear Jesus' voice. Jesus says, "My sheep listen to my voice." We who are followers can hear the voice of Jesus quoted so often in Scripture.

He tells us that we should help those in need—feed the hungry, visit the sick and those in prison. He sums all his instructions up in the words "Love your neighbor," even your enemies. He will be with us always. Those who listen to his voice will have life eternal and will never perish. Those who have ears, let them hear.

Dear Lord, through your Spirit give us ears to hear the words of our Savior. Amen.

Challenge: Listen carefully to everyone you meet today. Is someone in need of your love and help?

Read: Dt 30:19b, 20; Jas 1:19

Eldor Kaiser

Sunday, February 12, 2012

God Chose You

God chose you from the beginning to be saved by the Spirit ... and belief in the truth.

2 Thes 2:13

It takes over two months for the Hollywood committee to decide who will get an Oscar. It takes fifteen months for a Nobel Prize Committee to pick a Peace Prize recipient. It takes over three years for the U.S. Postal Service Stamp Advisory Commission (did you know there was such a thing?) to select a commemorative stamp. God was quicker. Eons ago, he said about you, "You are mine," and then made it happen.

An Oscar might be declined, a Nobel Prize refused, an honorary stamp spurned. But what about when God has made a choice? Little Samuel acted fast. Isaiah came through with "Here am I, send me." Mary, Elizabeth, Paul and many others since said, "Yes." Don't dawdle when by his Spirit he calls you. How about a hallelujah? An OK? A thank you? An amen?

Lord, even though I don't really understand why, by your Spirit help me know that St. Paul was right: You chose me, a long time ago. Amen.

Show: It's no secret. You did not choose him. He chose you. How might we show that we know and believe that? Hmmmm.

Read: 1 Sm 3:1-9; Is 6:1-9

Charles S. Mueller, Sr.

Monday, February 13, 2012

Wholly Holy

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Jn 3:17

Forgiveness by God's grace is a healing process of the Holy Spirit to make us whole and to call us for holy living—wholly holy.

This is about wellness. Wellness is not the lack of illness. Wellness, according to Holy Scripture, is to live with God centered in each dimension of our lives: intellectual, emotional, social/relational, spiritual, physical, financial, environmental, occupational/vocational.

So often people think that spiritual wellness is the part that connects to God. But God sent Jesus to make us whole. God connects to each whole human being and calls us to live wholly holy. That only happens by God's grace and love in Jesus Christ.

Almighty and gracious God, we rejoice in the gift of salvation that you have given us through Jesus Christ. Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us and strengthen us to live as forgiven and whole people. Continue to heal all the brokenness in our relationships and lives and strengthen us to live as your holy people—wholly holy through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Live wholly: Take care of your whole self today.

Read: Col 1:21-23

Dick Hardel

Tuesday, February 14, 2012

Embraceable You!

He will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them [close to his heart].

Is 40:11

“Embraceable you!” Remember Frank Sinatra crooning, “I love all the many charms about you; above all I want these arms about you, my sweet embraceable you”?

Romantic love can spark intimate embrace. But God’s love sparks an even more intimate embrace. You are a lamb in his arms; he holds you close to his heart. Your Shepherd-God has caressed you with his most tender loving care!

And what are the “many charms about you” prompting this embrace, this spiritual intimacy? Are you oozing loveliness, are you irresistibly charming?

In truth, this is the picture: wrinkles, skin blotches, restlessness, ill-tempered, drooping eyelids, distant stares, hard of hearing, hard to please—by nature sinful and unclean.

There is no charm. There is only the grace of your Lord Jesus! Because you are accepted and forgiven, the saving work of Jesus is all about EMBRACEABLE YOU!

Jesus, thanks for your embrace. Amen.

Think: Who needs your Jesus’ embrace?

Read: Lk 15:11-24 (especially v. 20)

Chaplain Randy Shields

Wednesday, February 15, 2012

A Person Giving Value

Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.

Mt 25:40

Julie Mills Shade was a midwife in Leesville, Louisiana. In her lifetime, she delivered 4,575 babies, and never lost a child or a mother—an enviable record even for a gynecologist. After 48 years, her daughter, a nurse, said to her, “Mother, it is enough.” Julie summed it all up with these words, “God gave me a gift and I used it.” Julie was not ordained, nor called by her congregation, but she was certainly in ministry.

Julie knew and counted the lives in which she had made a difference. You cannot know all the lives to which you have added value with your support and kindness. Those to whom you give value also add value to your life.

It is Christ who gives us our value. With his death on the cross, he paid the highest price for us. We cannot repay him. Our thanks to him is in the service we render to others, both young and old. When “it is enough,” God will call us home.

Thank you, Lord, for the privilege to add value to the lives of my family, friends, even strangers. Amen.

Just call: Tell someone how much you value what they did for you.

Read: Mt 10:29-31

Leo Symmank

Thursday, February 16, 2012

You Are My Child

“For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” And they began to celebrate.

Lk 15:24

We grow up in a world that is like a person with amnesia. It does not know who it is, where it came from, why it is here or where it is going in the midst of this vast universe. It has a sense of accountability, but does not know to whom it is accountable. So it gives its allegiance to anyone because it needs to belong to someone.

Then God comes to our world in Jesus and tells us we belong to him. He has come to bring us back to the Father, to give us a name and a family to belong to.

Just as the father said of his prodigal son, so God says of us, “You are my child. You were dead, but now you are alive again. You were lost, but now you are found.”

What a blessing to know whose we are.

Father, I thank you for accepting me as your child, for giving me a name and a family to belong to. Let me never forget that I belong to you. Amen.

Enjoy: Celebrate the gift of family with your wider family in Christ.

Read: Lk 15:1-32

Lionel Otto

Friday, February 17, 2012

You Are a Gift

Each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

1 Cor 7:7

No matter how old or how young you are, you have gifts to share. No, your gift is not too small. Jesus used a boy's lunch to feed thousands. What a difference that day must have made in his life. Maybe later, when he felt his gifts were too small to meet a task, he said, "If Jesus could use my small lunch, then surely he can expand my gifts today to help these people."

Think of the gifts that you have. What gifts do others say that you have? Write them down. Now think of ways to use those gifts. Maybe it is a skill to teach. Maybe it is to listen. Some people who ask for advice really just want someone to listen to them.

Or maybe, like Jesus with the boy at the feeding of thousands, you could invite a grandchild or another youth to join you in a service project like delivering meals or visiting a shut-in. Then remind the youth what a gift he or she is. In that way, you, too, become a gift to them. Certainly, YOU are a gift worth sharing.

Thank you, Jesus, for giving me ways to be a gift to others in your name. Amen.

Giftng: Choose a specific way this week to be a gift to someone. Then implement your plan.

Read: 2 Cor 9:12-15

Leo Symmank

Saturday, February 18, 2012

Dancing with the Stars

Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.

Phil 2:15-16

Paul is clear that we have something to offer that is worth celebrating. We have the Light of Christ shining in us. We may not think of ourselves as stars of the show, but in God's drama, we ARE his stars. The Light of Christ gives us the power to express with our hands and feet the narrative that God has scripted for us. Call it "the dance of the stars." The steps of the dance do not include complaining or arguing. Instead, we are glad and rejoice. Clapping our hands in praise of others is part of the dance. Synchronizing our movements with others to do God's kingdom-work is part of the choreography. Bringing Jesus' joy to one another by shaking hands, patting backs or sharing greetings is part of the dance as well.

What "moves" have you done on the dance floor of life today? Simply let God lead!

Thank you, dear God, for leading me in my dance with the stars to bring the Light of Christ to the dark world around me. Amen.

Shedding Some Light: Make an effort today to move your feet across a room to say hello and shake the hand of a new friend.

Read: Ps 150

Mark Zimmermann

Sunday, February 19, 2012

Live in the Light

You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.

Eph 5:8-10

Remember: no matter our age, we will always be children of Light. What does that mean? Paul is pretty specific here: We bear the fruit of light and search out God's will.

We are called, each day, to use our time to God's glory. Discovering what pleases God happens only when we are living in his Light. Sin's darkness cuts us off from God. But in the Light of forgiveness, we find ourselves "alight" with prayer, worship and devotion. We find that the path God wants us to tread is lit by the lamp of his Word. We trust that he will make our path straight to the very end. Step into the Light of the Lord today and never look back.

Keep me in the Light of your love that I may grow to know and understand you and your plan for me more and more each day. Amen.

Shedding Some Light: Turn on all the lights in the room when you read a devotion or say a prayer today to remind you to live in the Light of the Lord always.

Read: Gal 5:22-23

Mark Zimmermann

Monday, February 20, 2012

Pay Attention

We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

2 Pt 1:19

One thing we must strive to do as stars in God's kingdom-constellation is to pay attention to the Light of Christ around and in us. Just as we may not always pay attention to the stars each night, we may not always search Scripture to shed light on our darker days.

Look to God's Light, so clearly shining in Scripture. Open your Bibles ... open your eyes to the words of comfort, peace and joy found in the message of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection. Gaze at the faces of the people around you ... open your eyes to the Christ within each of them.

You are never too young to start fresh in your relationships with others, self and God. Remember that the sun rises each day, and the Son of God rises in our hearts, ready to help us brighten this world.

Draw us closer to you and closer to those around us, dear Jesus, through the Light of your love. Amen.

Look: Be sure to look people in the eye when you talk to them today.

Read: 1 Jn 2:7-10

Mark Zimmermann

Tuesday, February 21, 2012

Lone Stars

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.

Ps 139:11-12

Are you lonely? Do you feel like a lone star, shining alone in the vast darkness of endless space?

You aren't a lone star. When Elijah felt similar things, God whispered to him that a great family of secret believers existed. When Abraham, childless, needed reassurance of God's promises, the Lord offered him the whole bejewelled night sky.

Even when you cannot perceive the other stars around you, rest assured that you are still a part of God's grand kingdom-constellation. Others are shining with you, right now. Christ, too, is your ever-living Light!

Assure me that I am not alone, O Lord. When I feel that way, encourage me to invite others to shine. Amen.

Call: Call a friend from the past and share memories and words of encouragement.

Read: Lk 8:16-18

Peter Mead

Wednesday, February 22, 2012

Setting Out

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

Lk 9:51

The turn of phrase “He set his face” (meaning “to go determinedly toward a goal”) isn’t used much anymore. The Samaritans could see that look on Jesus’ face. He knew what lay in store for him in Jerusalem, and he was determined to set in motion the chain of events that led to our salvation.

Yet shortly after he began this journey, he turned and rebuked James and John for wanting to rain fire on those Samaritans who rejected them. Clearly, Jesus wanted to remind them that their mission was to witness, not judge or punish.

As we set out on our Lenten journey, let us always seek to reach out to others in the name of Christ, even when they reject us.

Walk with us, Lord, that we may be guided to walk in your ways. Amen.

Think: Who can you bear witness to who may have rejected you in the past?

Read: Lk 9:51-55

Chaplain Lane Knouse

Thursday, February 23, 2012

Cross Ways

... it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.

Jn 11:50

The reality of Jesus dying on a cross for the world's sins is hard to comprehend. It just does not make sense to me that God would sacrifice his own Son to die for you and for me, but that was the required price. Even Caiaphas in his arrogance got it right; it was truly better that Jesus should die than the entire nation. Little did he know that he was talking about God's will!

No matter what sins we accumulate in our days on earth, God has made the required atonement through Jesus. The Way of the Cross was the only way to accomplish this; therefore, it was completed, once and for all!

Heavenly Father, the abundance of your grace was shown as your Son remained on the cross and died so that we might have life. Thank you. Amen.

Share: Tell others about the meaning of the cross of Christ.

Read: Mt 27:32-54; 1 Cor 1:18-31

Chaplain Jeffery Scheer

Friday, February 24, 2012

The Silent Jesus

He was oppressed ... yet he did not open his mouth.

Is 53:7

What might angry protesters do if they are oppressed? Spew forth venomous words? Make a scene? Exploit the moment? Perhaps it would turn into a media event and become the lead story on the evening news. Isaiah's picture of Jesus, the Suffering Servant, is so different.

Jesus knew when to keep quiet. He was the Son of God who had come to do his Father's will for us (he kept the Law perfectly). His obedience made those final hours of suffering a quiet time, neither reviling nor resisting. Quietly and reverently, Jesus completed and fulfilled his Father's will.

The silent Jesus is so eloquent. He does not open his mouth in self-defense. His tight-lipped love bleeds for your sins. Such magnificent love—an action speaking louder than words! Unconditional love for you describes the silent Jesus.

*Jesus, hear me while I pray; take all my guilt away.
Amen.*

Think: Do you hear the silence?

Read: 1 Pt 2:23-25

Chaplain Randy Shields

Saturday, February 25, 2012

Squeaky Clean

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

Ps 51:2

Lent is a time of cleansing, the cleaning of our hearts. First, reach back in your memory to find things you shouldn't have done, things that now make you ashamed and unhappy. Bring them all out into the light, and ask God for forgiveness. He already knows all these things and has forgiven them, before you even found them in your memory closet. But he wants you to take this task seriously.

Then put good things into your heart—things like God's love, God's care for you throughout your life, God's provision for your needs and wants. Put in there everything that Jesus has done for you, and how active the Holy Spirit has been in your life. Do this every day and remember that you have already been forgiven by God.

Heavenly Father, forgive me all my sins, and wash me clean. Keep me from straying from you, and surround me with your loving arms of protection. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Think: Are there some sins in your heart that need repenting so that you can be cleansed through the forgiveness of Christ?

Read: Ps 51; Acts 3:19-21

Chaplain Wendy S. Popp

Sunday, February 26, 2012

The Devil Made Me Do It

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God ... tempts no one.

Jas 1:13

"The devil made me do it!" It's an excuse, but it does contain some truth. St. James makes clear that all temptation comes from Satan. At times, we yield to his temptation and sin.

Christ was tempted, too, but did not yield. In the desert with the devil, Christ resisted Satan's temptations for 40 days and nights. When the tempting was over, the devil left and angels came and ministered to Christ. So shall it be for us who put our faith in Christ, for he overcame temptation for us. When this life of temptation ends, we, too, shall know the company of angels in the eternal presence of Almighty God.

Lord, lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil. Amen.

Be Aware: Note the temptations you face today, and resist them by the Holy Spirit who dwells in you.

Read: Mt 4:1-11

Chaplain Keith Weise

Monday, February 27, 2012

Mercy Me

God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Lk 18:13

“Mercy me” is an expression that goes way back. Can’t you just picture a lovely, genteel lady fanning herself and saying this when she saw something that astonished her? And isn’t that exactly what the season of Lent is all about—the astonishment of God’s mercy to us?

I confess; I used to get grace and mercy confused. I probably even used them interchangeably more than once. That was until I heard this definition: grace is getting what we don’t deserve; mercy is not getting what we do deserve.

Wow! That brings it close to the heart, doesn’t it? We talk a lot about grace—how nothing we do can earn the forgiveness and eternal life that is ours because of the cross of Christ. But we avoid talking about mercy—because that’s where our own sin stares back at us in the mirror of God’s Word.

Thanks be to God that he is the giver of both grace and mercy.

Lord, astonish me today with your mercy, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Think: What can you do today to be a giver of mercy to someone else?

Read: Mt 5:1-12; Lk 18:9-14

Jane P. Wilke

Tuesday, February 28, 2012

A Certain Hope

*Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.*

Ps 32:1

You are a sinner; I am a sinner; we are surrounded by sinners. That's what's called original sin. However, we also know that through the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, we now have certain hope for forgiveness and a future in heaven.

The writer of Psalm 32, written so many centuries ago, did not have the Messiah as the redeemer but only had hope that one day, one future day, he would come. Try to imagine the fear and turmoil such uncertainty must have caused for people of faith. Now rejoice in the comfort of knowing “the rest of the story,” as Paul Harvey would say.

Loving God, we give thanks and praise that you sent Jesus, the promised Messiah, to save our sinful selves. Give us courage to proclaim the good news to those who have not heard and faith to give sincere thanks for this blessing. Amen.

Do: Take this Lenten time to reflect on the incredible gift God has given to us. Share this hope with someone in despair. Rejoice on Easter that we have a glorious future promised and prepared for us.

Read: Jn 1:29-34; 1 Pt 1:13-21

Chaplain Karen Pitkin

Wednesday, February 29, 2012

Collapsing Houses

Take with you words and return to the LORD; say to him, "Take away all iniquity ..."

Hos 14:2

A 70-second tornado ripped through my neighborhood, and in 70 seconds churches were destroyed, houses flattened and lives turned upside down. This is the feeling that I sometimes experience during the Lenten season; perhaps you feel the same.

We look back and think of certain choices and decisions that only took seconds to make, and the destruction is still seen or felt years or, perhaps, decades later. The guilt I sometimes feel is like some of these houses I see in my neighborhood—flattened and destroyed, but Hosea reminds us that we are able to go to the Lord seeking forgiveness and be made new again.

Gracious Jesus, give me the strength and courage to lay my guilt at your feet and be renewed again in your eyes. Amen.

Think: List moments when you have heard your pastor say, "Your sins are forgiven."

Read: Ps 51:12; Jn 8:11

Chaplain Patrick L. O'Neal

Thursday, March 1, 2012

Your Lenten “Dash”

Repent and believe in the gospel.

Mk 1:15

Recently I visited a cemetery. I walked up and down the rows reading what was engraved on the tombstones. What caught my attention that day were the dates on the tombstones. First came the date of birth, then a dash, then the date of death. The dash, I said to myself, represented the time these people lived on earth.

What about your dash? It's there waiting for your death. Are there things you'd like to change? You never know how much time is left for you. Lent is that time of year where you give special attention to correcting your lifestyle. That's repentance—turning away from sin and turning toward God, giving up selfishness in favor of following God's will, receiving God's Spirit as part of your Lenten walk with him.

Whatever needs changing, God will give you the courage and the will and the means to repent and reshape your dash.

Father, whatever needs changing in my life, change it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Challenge: Keep asking God to help you change things in your lifestyle that need changing.

Read: Acts 3:17-26; Eph 5:15-21

Walter M. Schoedel

Friday, March 2, 2012

“The Way” Out

... with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

1 Cor 10:13

Jesus was tempted up to the very time he would take his last breath on the cross. Let us be aware that we will not escape temptation as long as we live. An older adult shared, “I thought when I got older, life would get easier from when I was young with all those temptations and worries. But I’ve found that as I get older, the temptation is greater to give up the fight.”

As Paul reminds us, God himself will provide the way out. We call that “way” Jesus.

O God, when I am tempted, grant me strength to follow you, the way out. Amen.

Think: List temptations throughout your life, and name all the ways God brought you out.

Read: Gn 22:1-18; Mk 1:9-15

Chaplain Stephanie Meyer

Saturday, March 3, 2012

Never Too Old to Dream

For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain ... My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

Phil 1:21, 23

When you were young, you may have had hopes and dreams. They may have enlivened your spirit and motivated you to live with enthusiasm. But these are now in the past, memories of what you achieved or abandoned or exchanged along the way.

As you've grown older, your hopes and dreams have diminished in correlation to your abilities, will and time to achieve them. After all, you have to be realistic. Big hopes and dreams are for the young. Or are they? Maybe it is a matter of perspective. For those who are baptized and believe in Christ Jesus, it will only get better when life here ends. For starters, there will be no more sin, death or the devil. You will also be with the merciful and loving God, who chose you to be part of his heavenly family forever. And that's something you can hope for and dream about no matter how old you are.

Enliven my spirit, Lord, with the hopes and dreams of eternal life with you in your glory. Amen.

Dream: Dream of life free of sin, death and the devil. Tell others about this dream and its reality in Jesus.

Read: Rom 8:18-25; Jl 2:28

Chaplain Brad Thomas

Sunday, March 4, 2012

Pouring Our Hearts Out to God

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

Mk 1:35

Prayer is an essential part of a Christian's life, but finding the time to have an intimate conversation with God can sometimes be difficult. Searching out a quiet and calm location away from the busyness of life can be difficult.

Prayer is the way to know God's will in our lives. It is also the way to search out his plan for our lives.

Pouring out our heart to God can be the easy part of prayer. Listening and waiting for the response is the difficult part.

Lord, in your mercy, open my heart and soul to you and your love. Amen.

Reflect: When was the last time you poured your heart out to God? What was his response?

Read: Ps 23; Mt 6:9-13

Chaplain Judy Coiner

Monday, March 5, 2012

The Holy Gift of Change

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed ...

1 Cor 15:51

The climax to any mystery story is the solving of the case. The one who solves the mystery in the verse above is Jesus Christ. It is in Christ that we are all changed.

Maude is 102. She comes to worship every Sunday at Lutheran Hillside Village. When I greet her after worship, her response is always the same: "I like church!" Maude knows that her salvation is not a mystery.

During Lent, may we understand what the apostle Paul and Maude understand. May we know that in Christ we are changed; may we with Maude say, "I like church!"

Gracious God, continue to lead us as your changed children. Empower us to be your faithful servants as we seek to serve those around us. Amen.

Think: Reflect on the blessings of being a changed child of God.

Read: 1 Cor 15:51-58

Chaplain Paul Park

Tuesday, March 6, 2012

Unconditional Love

And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments.

Lk 23:34

We've all heard of unconditional love, but unconditional forgiveness? Unspeakable things were done to Jesus between his arrest and death. Yet, as he hung on the cross, Jesus asked his Father to forgive his killers. Such was his love that it encompassed forgiveness.

Have you been wronged by a family member, caregiver or someone else you have trusted? Maybe repeatedly? What's your response? It can be easy to hold on to anger, but Jesus tells us to forgive as we've been forgiven. As he has forgiven us for all the sins we've committed that sent him to the cross.

Too hard? Ask the one whose great love for you prompted his forgiveness to help you to find the strength to love enough to forgive. That's a prayer that will be answered.

O Lord, help me to forgive others as you've forgiven me. Amen.

Think: Think of those who have wronged you and pray for the ability to forgive them. If necessary, ask someone you've wronged to forgive you!

Read: Mt 6:9-15; Mt 18:21-22

Chaplain Gayle Truesdell

Wednesday, March 7, 2012

What's for Supper?

The Teacher says, "Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"

Mk 14:14

Many of us have heard the words "What's for supper?" as our children or spouse arrived home from a long day. Jesus tells the disciples to ask a similar question as they make their Passover preparations.

You have probably prepared some special meals for your loved ones and maybe they even had important events associated with them. Now, in older age, you might not have as many table partners as you once did. It is important to remember that God is always ready to share a meal with you. Invite him to your next meal, and do not forget his meal for you—Holy Communion. God's sacred meal is refreshing, abundant and satisfying, and you are invited to come and eat!

Gracious Savior, help us to remember the gift that we have of coming to your table and dining with you. Amen.

Feel: Sense our Lord's presence the next time you commune.

Read: Mk 14:12-25; Ex 16

Chaplain Jeffery Scheer

Thursday, March 8, 2012

The Banner Over Me

You have set up a banner for those who fear you, that they may flee to it from the bow.

Ps 60:4

Recently I observed WWII veterans at a funeral service as the honor guard presented the flag to the family. With tears in their eyes, they raised their hands in salute, as the “banner” of our country was being reverently folded and delivered.

With a similar conviction, the psalmist recalls the protection God had provided the Children of Israel throughout their history and the protection given to him in spite of his weakness and sins.

The psalmist reminds us of the “banner” that consoles, bolsters and defends us from death and Satan. That “banner” is Jesus Christ, whom God established before the beginning and revealed at the perfect time for our salvation.

*Thank you, Heavenly Father, for setting before me today your Son Jesus as my strength and salvation.
Amen.*

Recall: Think about a time when the knowledge of Jesus' love helped you through a difficult time or temptation.

Read: Ex 17:8-15; Sg 2:4; Jn 3:14-15

Chaplain James Mueller

Friday, March 9, 2012

Help! I Need Somebody

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? ... Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me!

Ps 27:1, 7

Lent can be a time where darkness is very real; yet the days gradually lengthen as we near Easter. In the darkness can hide all manner of evil, just lurking and seeking new ways to cause us harm or trouble. It could be as drastic as losing our job or as simple as losing our grocery list and coupons.

Yet through it all—big things and simply annoying things—people of faith go to God. We ask for help in changing our bad situations to better ones, or as the psalmist phrased it: be merciful and answer me. Often we interject a simple but sincere “Please help me.” What is your prayer today?

Loving and ever-present God, please walk with me and help me. Give me the courage and faith to ask you for help and the faithful knowledge of hearing your answer. Amen.

Reflect: Take a moment and think about your recent problems. Did you go to God for help? How did God answer? Did you allow yourself to hear God’s response?

Read: Ex 15:2; Mi 7:8

Chaplain Karen Pitkin

Saturday, March 10, 2012

Rejoice? In Suffering?

We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Rom 5:3-5

We have much over which to rejoice. And we have our fair share of suffering. Can these two be related?

St. Paul tells us that our suffering serves a purpose. Through suffering we grow in endurance, character and hope. Ultimately our suffering points us to Christ, who suffered upon the cross of Calvary. By his suffering and death, we have been granted freedom from suffering, sin and everlasting death. There indeed is cause for rejoicing!

Now we do suffer—physically, emotionally, spiritually—in our Christian life. Christ's promise, sealed by his suffering, is freedom from suffering and eternal life in the perfection of paradise.

Lord, relieve my suffering or strengthen me by your grace to bear it in faith. Amen.

Reflect: How have you grown through the suffering you've endured?

Read: 1 Pt 4:12-19

Chaplain Keith Weise

Sunday, March 11, 2012

This Cup

Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?

Jn 18:11

There is an old Finnish legend that says that at the time of creation, Satan asked to contribute only a cupful of his own making to what God had done. Because of this, we have the flying and biting insects of today.

Often in life, it's not the big things that get you down; it's the pesky little nagging things. The taunts thrown at Jesus led to his only plaintive cry on the cross. Jesus drank the bitter cup of our sins and was ridiculed for doing so.

It not only takes courage to do God's will, it also takes humility.

Heavenly Father, when others tease me for following you, give me strength to love them anyway. Amen.

Think: How can you turn a biting remark into a good-natured exchange?

Read: Jn 18:10-12; Mt 27:27-45

Chaplain Lane Knouse

Monday, March 12, 2012

What Can I Do?

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.

2 Cor 5:20

There is nothing more discouraging than when I hear an older adult say, “I’m old. What can I do?” I get discouraged because Paul reminds us that we are ambassadors, and, last time I checked, there is no age limit nor physical requirement for such a title. We live in a society where youth is celebrated. You and I are part of a community that lifts up Christ regardless of age, background or position in life.

Christ is still making an appeal through you, and perhaps this appeal is even stronger than before as you can blend your personal life experiences and faith as a witness for those you interact with.

Gracious Jesus, continue to provide opportunities for me to share in deed and word your love and grace to others. Amen.

Do: Ask how you can be helpful to a friend, neighbor or a family member today.

Read: Is 6:8; Gal 3:28

Chaplain Patrick L. O’Neal

Tuesday, March 13, 2012

The Joy of Clinging

No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

Lk 16:13

This reading is part of a long teaching section in Luke. The translation for “devoted to” is literally “cling to.” What do we cling to in this life? Luke’s answer is, of course, Christ.

We are well aware this Christ is found in many places—church, work, school, home, grocery store, etc. But where do we know for sure that we can find this Christ to cling to him? Where is this Jesus nailed down?

We cling to Christ as he is on the cross. Easter Sunday is always a glorious day of worship, but God’s glory begins already on the cross. It is at the cross that we are called to cling to Christ.

Holy God, we give thanks that you have called us to cling to you. Amen.

Think: Reflect on special clinging moments in your life.

Read: Lk 16:1-13

Chaplain Paul Park

Wednesday, March 14, 2012

Shining Forth

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

Is 60:1

It's difficult to remember during Lent that the Lord shines in glory, and that he shines in glory for us. We tend to focus so completely on faults, mistakes and problems that we forget that when God shines on us, he makes us shine as well. God wants us to radiate his glory to everyone around us.

Look at a flower blooming—it makes the world more beautiful simply because it exists. It doesn't pretend to be someone else or act ashamed that it blooms differently from another. It simply shines and raises its face to praise God.

We can also shine in God's love; we can declare God's glory to everyone around us by being the beautiful creature God intends us to be. Who wouldn't shine in that glory?

Heavenly Father, help me shine today as your own dear creature. Let me be the light you have given to the nations, to be your witness here in this place. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Do: Praise God for something today; compliment someone; smile at a stranger. Shine!

Read: Acts 13:47; Eph 5:11-14

Chaplain Wendy S. Popp

Thursday, March 15, 2012

Childhood Revisited

Remember not the sins of my youth ... according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!

Ps 25:7

Photo albums take us there. Long-term memory takes us there. Childhood revisited—a time when we found security in our home, life seemed less complicated and there were carefree moments. What pleasant flashbacks!

Childhood revisited—it may bring some backlash or whiplash. Were there some R-rated episodes, never to be mentioned at a recognition banquet? Did you sow some wild oats? Are there skeletons in the closet?

Revisit your childhood and pray: “Lord, remember not the sins of my youth.” What a bold prayer! Sin grieves the Lord, yet dare to ask him to have a bad memory—not to charge youthful sins against you.

This gentle, healing prayer asks simply: Lord, remember me—accept me, forgive me and grant me your peace. Recall the death and resurrection of Jesus and your acceptance is reaffirmed!

Thank you, Jesus, for childhood memories. Amen.

Think: Recall good childhood memories.

Read: I Jn 2:12-14

Chaplain Randy Shields

Friday, March 16, 2012

Under God's Hand

O Lord, you have searched me and known me ... and [you] lay your hand upon me.

Ps 139:1, 5

As you get older, you may be tempted to feel more distant from God. If you've become less active in your church or lost your ability to serve or see family and friends less often, then you may wonder if God even cares about what is going on in your life.

If you do, then read aloud the words of Psalm 139, and let them wash over you. Repent of doubting his love, and be refreshed by the grace of his Word. God made you. He knows exactly what is going on in your life. He knows, before you do, what you will do or think or say. He knows you better than you know yourself, even the bad stuff that you'd rather he not know. Even so, God laid your bad stuff on Christ, who willingly bore it, even to death, so that you would not. In your baptism, the bad stuff was washed away, you were given new life and God laid his hand upon you to keep you close to him and part of his family forever.

Father in heaven, forgive me for thinking that you do not care about me. Amen.

Feel: Feel God's hand upon you.

Read: Ps 139

Chaplain Brad Thomas

Saturday, March 17, 2012

Waiting with Excitement!

Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

Jude 21

Waiting can be a very difficult thing to do. We seem to have to wait for everything. As a kid during Lent, I had to wait for Easter. My desire was to go right to the glorious celebrations of Easter without going through the season of Lent.

Even now, I still have to wait for things in life. Luckily, the reality of what I am so excited about—Easter—has not changed. Jesus has still risen from the dead and the sins of the world are forgiven. That is certainly exciting news!

Lord Jesus, help me to be patient as I await the coming of Easter. Help me to remember that your sacrifice, not only for me, but also for the entire world, is exciting news. Amen.

Reflect: Make a list of times God made you excited about what was happening around you.

Read: Jude 1:17-25; Jn 20

Chaplain Jeffery Scheer

Sunday, March 18, 2012

Come to the Water of Life

As the deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

Ps 42:1-2

God is unique for all believers. Each believer comes to the waters of life in multiple ways. The spirituality within a soul longs for a close relationship with the one and only Yahweh. Exposing our souls to the holiness of God brings about an openness that enriches the link with him.

The search of the soul for God's complete enlightened person is a continuing and ongoing process for everyone. The search for God can come in the forms of worship, meditation and exposure to him in many places.

We look into the clear crystal aquamarine waters of God's heart and experience his peace and essence.

God, as we search for you in your creation, hold our hand and heart. Amen.

Think: Where do you go when you seek to be drawn closer to God?

Read: Rv 22:17

Chaplain Judy Coiner

Monday, March 19, 2012

Something New

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

Jer 31:31

“Something old; something new; something borrowed; something blue” is a bridal tradition. The “something old” represents the bond to the bride’s family and her old life. “Something new” represents the couple’s new life together and their future hope for happiness, prosperity and success.

I wore my mother’s wedding dress with only one modification. It symbolized that my new life flowed from my old life; however, my marriage is something else entirely from that of my parents.

God’s Savior would come from his chosen people Israel as promised. Yet that Savior inaugurated a new kingdom with its new covenant between God and people from all nations. The new in Jesus is for you and me.

God, thank you for making a new covenant with me through my baptism into Jesus Christ. Amen.

Think: Share or remind someone today how God is doing something new in Christ Jesus and how they can take part in it.

Read: Jer 31:31-34; Mk 14:12-26

Chaplain Stephanie Meyer

Tuesday, March 20, 2012

Sharing Our Blessings

Praise the LORD, O my soul! ... who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry.

Ps 146:1, 7

Most of us have more than enough food and shelter. Most of us are free to do as we wish in our daily lives. Hence, we have truly good reason to sing praise with our very innermost being. Giving praise, however, is to be an active expression. Hopefully, we pray and tell God how blessed we are and feel, but do we actually show how blessed we are?

We show how truly blessed we feel by helping those who need help. We put food in the donation box to help those in need. We voice our support and hopefully work to help those in trouble. In this time of Lenten reflection, examine yourself. What have you done to help others?

Loving God, give me eyes to see and ears to hear the needs of others. Help me to help others as my way of rejoicing and celebrating your love. Amen.

Think: Have you shown how blessed you feel out of love and done so quietly that only you and God know it?

Read: Mt 25:37-40; Acts 2:42-47

Chaplain Karen Pitkin

Wednesday, March 21, 2012

Begging for Mercy

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

Ps 51:1

We might think begging is beneath us; yet in going before our God with the most earnest requests, there is only one way to do it—beg! In requesting God’s mercy, compassion and forgiveness, our asking becomes strong. We make our request from the depth of our soul.

In Lent, we are reminded that it is our sin that sent Jesus to the cross. When we really acknowledge our sin, we see that we are unable to do anything for ourselves—we must turn to him.

In the midst of earnest “begging,” we are assured of God’s mercy; he wants to forgive. Living under his shadow of love, we find peace, joy and comfort. In our later years, we seem to long for greater comfort. God is there for us and wants us to come to him.

O Lord, my God, in your most tender mercy see me through Christ’s work of redemption and grant that I may always be in your shadow of love. Amen.

Think: Come to Jesus; “beg” for his forgiveness. He will grant it.

Read: Lam 3:22-24; Lk 18:9-14

Chaplain Darryl Anderson

Thursday, March 22, 2012

The Dirt You Can't See

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Ps 51:10

I can remember it as vividly as if it were yesterday: Grandma doing her spring cleaning. She didn't just scrub the kitchen floor, she took her paring knife and scraped deep into the corners, saying, "You have to get it all—even the dirt you can't see!"

Grandma was right. Just as there was dirt hidden in those corners, there is dirt hidden in my heart. Some sins I can see; some only God can see. The difference is that I can't take the paring knife and scrape away my sin. Only God can create in me a clean heart; only God can renew a right spirit within me. And that's just what he did through the death and resurrection of his Son, my Savior, Jesus Christ.

Lent is the perfect time for spring cleaning, don't you think?

Search me, O God, and know my heart! See if there is any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Amen.

Think: What sin is hiding in your heart? Accept the forgiveness that is yours in Christ.

Read: Ps 139; Rom 11:33-36

Jane P. Wilke

Friday, March 23, 2012

Cleansing Tears

Standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

Lk 7:38

The woman was said to have lived a sinful life, a life that could afford her the luxury of an alabaster jar of perfume. Her tears indicated that she was sorry for that life and wanted to change. As is often the case, once others have you labeled, they don't want you to change.

Lent is a good time to take stock of one's life and set out on a course to change it for the better. It's hard work, made harder by our past. One of the great things that Jesus did was to point people to the future. The woman was forgiven, her life undoubtedly got better; we're not so sure about the criticizing host.

Dear Jesus, please help me to accept the good intentions of others. Amen.

Think: Who do you know that deserves a second chance?

Read: Lk 7:36-50

Chaplain Lane Knouse

Saturday, March 24, 2012

A Venti Filled with ... Obedience?

Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets."

Lk 5:5

A favorite coffee house I frequent provides beverages in a tall-, grande- or venti-sized cups. A tall is 12 ounces and increases in size as it becomes grande or venti. When Simon declares his obedience to his Lord, he does not follow up with an amount or size of such obedience. He simply drops his net.

In the Garden, Jesus prays for obedience, "Thy will be done." So why do we think "giving up" something during Lent is some great sacrifice as if God is seeing our sacrifice as a tall, grande or venti? Why not "let down the nets" in obedience to his word and, like Simon, discover what fills our nets this season as his will is done?

Gracious Jesus, show me the proper way to "let down the nets" in obedience to you and your Word. Amen.

Do: Write down times you were obedient to the Lord.

Read: Rv 3:14-18; Lk 22:39-46

Chaplain Patrick L. O'Neal

Sunday, March 25, 2012

Worship the Lord

Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.

Ps 33:3

I've been listening to a church musician practicing for worship. If you aren't a church musician, you may have thought that all the music poured out in glory throughout worship is the production of perfect people who never make mistakes or need to work out the fingering. Not so. It takes preparation.

How do we prepare for worship? Dress up, arrive early, greet friends and wait to be enriched? Of course; but there's a deeper way to prepare: Find the lessons for the day and meditate on them; pray for the worship leaders, that they may help us learn more, see more and know more about God.

Part of taking God seriously is being ready to sing his praises in his sanctuary. It's a joy to look forward to worshipping together.

Lord God, strengthen our worship to you. Make us truly hear the Word that is preached, sung, read and prayed. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Do: Pray for those preparing for worship this week. Prepare for worship and participate joyfully.

Read: Ps 40:3; Ps 98:1; Is 42:10

Chaplain Wendy S. Popp

Monday, March 26, 2012

Pray Without Ceasing

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications ... and he was heard because of his reverence.

Heb 5:7

During his earthly ministry, Jesus prayed like no one before him. Often he would “withdraw to a desolate place and pray” (Lk 5). We hear Jesus pray the Our Father (Mt 6, Lk 11) and the High Priestly Prayer (Jn 17), and we see him pray fervently in the Garden of Gethsemane before his Passion (Lk 22).

Oh, that we could pray like Jesus, but there are so many distractions, so little time, so many other obligations. Even so, Christ still prays for us. He is our Great Intercessor, and he prays without ceasing to God the Father on our behalf. By his prayers we are preserved in faith and delivered into the holiness of God. In faith we pray, knowing that Christ always prays for us.

Lord, hear my prayers and supplications, and save me from everlasting death. Amen.

Do: Make and keep a list of people and concerns for which you will pray regularly.

Read: Lk 11:1-4; 1 Thes 5:16-28

Chaplain Keith Weise

Tuesday, March 27, 2012

Perfect Likeness

Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him ...

Heb 5:8-9

If given the choice, would you turn in your life for a different one? Would you erase from history and your personal memory all mistakes, shortcomings and sinning, along with all the consequences?

If you hesitated, you recognized that this exchange wouldn't have been your life. All that you have gained in wisdom, character and self-discovery would be lost as well. God chose to perfect his power in weakness (2 Cor 12:9). All that work God accomplished in you to make you into the likeness of his Son Jesus would be in vain.

Jesus did not disdain the temptation, suffering and rejection in his body during his life on earth. And God has made this Jesus both Lord and Christ.

God, help me to learn obedience to you through suffering that I may one day be found perfect in the likeness of Christ Jesus. Amen.

Think: Keep the events of today in the frame of God's work of perfecting you.

Read: Is 52:13—53:12; Heb 4:14-16, 5:7-9

Chaplain Stephanie Meyer

Wednesday, March 28, 2012

Our Days Are Numbered

[People's] days are determined, and the number of [their] months [are] with you, and you have appointed [their] limits that [they] cannot pass.

Job 14:5

As we count down the days to Holy Week and Easter, we might also begin thinking about counting our days. Thinking back, we appreciate God's blessings. We remember his arm of love around our shoulders. We give thanks for the times he has been at our right hand. We can also look forward. We look to the joy that God promises in eternal life.

This can be what Lent can mean to us—looking back, but looking ahead at the same time. While we have days that are numbered, in the sight of God there is no time line. His love is always and is always for us!

Lord Jesus, let us not be so busy counting days that we forget that with you there is no time limit. Because of your unending grace, we do not need to count. Amen.

Reflect: Look back at sin and repent; then look to Easter and live in the joy of the resurrection.

Read: Eccl 3:1-8; Mt 10:29-31

Chaplain Darryl Anderson

Thursday, March 29, 2012

Meant to be a Mentor?

Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Acts 4:36-37

We may think of Paul as one of the greatest evangelists of all time, but he was not always an evangelist. In fact, there was a time when he was a persecutor of Christians. But God changed his heart on the road to Damascus, and then it was Barnabas who encouraged and mentored Paul to become the greatest evangelist of all time.

Who are the people in your life that encouraged you in your faith journey? Was there someone in your life that took you under their wing to encourage and mentor you? Was it your parents, grandparents, pastor, teacher, friend or someone else? Whom have you encouraged?

O Lord, help me to encourage others today just as Barnabas encouraged Paul and other new believers. Amen.

Think: How can I encourage the people around me and build them up in the body of Christ?

Read: Acts 11:19-26

John Kotovsky

Friday, March 30, 2012

Greeting Our King

Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

Ps 24:7

For thousands of years, God had placed judges, kings and prophets to guard his people and to announce that the King of Glory was coming to the earth.

The King of Glory came as an infant born to Mary, announced by angels, defended by a carpenter and welcomed by shepherds and Magi. He brings forgiveness, healing and salvation to his people.

Jesus calls for the gates of our hearts to open today. Some gates are well-oiled by God's Word, while others are rusted tight. It is in such hearts that he desires to rule until the Last Day when the "New Jerusalem" is revealed, where the gates are never closed and Christ guards his church triumphant.

Holy Spirit, open my heart that Christ would find a place fit for the King of Glory during this holy season. Amen.

Remember: Greet your King each day in celebration of his birth and as we look for his return.

Read: 2 Cor 4:6; Eph 3:14-21; Rv 21:25

Chaplain James Mueller

Saturday, March 31, 2012

Hard Choices

Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour"? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.

Jn 12:27

After his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus knew his death was imminent. He'd come to earth for this purpose. It was his intention to fulfill that purpose. Over time, we may have come to take it for granted that he chose to suffer and die for us. For Jesus' human side, this must have been a difficult choice to make.

Do we face difficult choices today? You bet! Some are not as dramatic as Jesus' choice to die for humanity but still difficult. Choosing to give up driving. Choosing to move from independence to skilled care. Choosing to let God decide when it's time to die. Hard choices.

But, we don't face them alone. Jesus knows about hard choices, and he stands by and with us as we make them. He gives us both the strength and the comfort we need in troublesome times.

Guide me, Lord, in my hard choices. Amen.

Think: Look back over the times that Jesus helped you to make hard choices.

Read: Lk 22:41-43

Chaplain Gayle Truesdell

Easter is coming soon ! We encourage you to continue the Lenten journey to the cross and empty tomb with the next issue of "Hope-Full Living." Blessings as you hope in the Lord!

HOLY HABITS for **HOPE-FULL HEALTH**

Every day is a “healthy aging” day because the Lord continues to bless and guide us. We are well, even in the midst of our problems, pains and pettiness, because the Lord has died and risen for us. We live healthy lives because we live on this side of the Resurrection!

Hope-Full Health in the Lord means that we are able to celebrate and serve our Lord and the people around us in amazing ways. Here are a few Holy Habits to practice. Feel free to add your own:

1. Care for those around you. No need to cure them, just care for them.
2. Worship regularly, involve yourself in personal devotions, read and live the Scriptures each day.
3. Walk in the Lord daily, both spiritually and physically.
4. Use your six senses each day to honor and praise the Lord: sight, sound, touch, smell, taste and HUMOR!
5. Relentlessly pursue your passion to tell the story of Jesus and his love to people of all ages!

Holy Habits are all around us. Name them. Celebrate them. Model them for others. Continue to do them, again and again. And while you and I are living well in the Lord, let us practice these kinds of words daily: “I love you,” “Hooray,” “Ah-ha,” “You may be right,” “I may be wrong,” “I’m sorry,” “Please forgive me,” and even “Oops!”

Hope-Full Praying

For Those Who Are Sick/Injured

Lord, bring healing quickly to those who suffer this day. Send your Spirit into hospital rooms, ER centers, to sick beds, to those injured in mind, body and spirit. As you did as you walked this earth, give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, healing to the broken, hope to the sorrowful. And send caregivers, like me, to bring your healing to those around me, right now, today. Amen.

For Those Who Mourn

People are grieving, Lord, in homes, in cities, throughout the world. Death was no stranger to so many people this day. In a world that brings worries, woes and wars to all of us, today we pray for those friends around us who need a special touch of your hope, peace and comfort. Help me, Lord, to comfort people this day in your healing name. Amen.

For Safe Travel

Lord, the highways are overloaded with cars this day. The skies are streaked with jetliners. Bike lanes are squeezed with racing stripes. The seas are bobbing with cruise liners. For all who travel this day, Lord, including my loved ones, be with them please. Safeguard and protect them. Enable them to return home again safely, so they can be surrounded with the sounds of love and joy once again. Amen.

For Families

Lord, we know that a home is where people know each other so well and still love each other, in spite of it all! Thanks for bringing us together as a family, even in the times of struggle and conflict and turmoil. We know, Lord, that a home where you live is a place where things are not perfect but rather a place where people are forgiven. Thanks, Lord, for loving and forgiving us as your Family, the Church. Amen.

For Friends

I thank you, Lord, this day for all of my friends! Please bless and guide them as they continue to bring your love and joy to me and to so many others. Help me, Lord, to reach out to my friends as well. And as I do, keep reminding me that once we were your enemies, until you came to die and rise again, to make us your friends. What a friend, Lord, we have in you! Amen.

For Spiritual Growth

We pray this day, Lord, that you will continue to nourish us through your Word and Sacraments. Keep us from striving for righteousness because you have already made us “right” through your death and resurrection! Engage me in your Church, Lord, so that I can continue to be strengthened through you and your people around me. Keep me growing and going, Lord, in your name. Amen.

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