

HOPE-FULL LIVING

•*Daily Devotions for Living Life to the Fullest*•

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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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Saturday, October 1, 2016

October Gold

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich.

Revelation 3:18

Many times in October, I marvel at the last rose blooming with frost on its petals, green tomatoes to be picked, and golden leaves on the trees. The sunlight hits everything at a slant, adding to the golden hues, and I wonder who coined the phrase “golden years.”

I’ve heard some ask in bitterness, “What’s so golden?” When I shut out Jesus, I also ask that question. Then the Holy Spirit prompts me to let Jesus back in. Scripture reminds me of the gifts of family, perspective and peace in God’s promises. In mercy I am reminded that God is God and I am his child (1 John 3:1).

Heavenly Father, forgive us when we push you away, and grant us the gift of seeing the gold in our years and the peace that comes from knowing we are your children. Amen.

Sing: Read or sing the words to “When Peace, Like a River” (“It Is Well with My Soul”).

Read: Psalm 42; Romans 8:14-17

*Judy Scherr
Lemay, MO*

Sunday, October 2, 2016

Your Holy Huddle

*For where two or three are gathered in my name,
there am I among them.*

Matthew 18:20

Whether we are football fans or not, we all know what a huddle is: when these gigantic guys get together for a few seconds and call the next play. What would happen if they stayed in the huddle for 30 minutes, or even an hour? We would no doubt say, "That's silly." A huddle is the place you decide on a play and then go to your places and play the game.

That is exactly what worshiping in your Holy Huddle, the Church, is all about. We gather in order to be reassured of God's love and grace and then we "break the huddle" to go back home to where the Lord has put us, on our playing field.

Continue to celebrate your Holy Huddle. It might be worship on Sunday, small group discussions, praying for and with others, or wherever two or three of us are gathered ... and remember, there he is in the midst of our Holy Huddle.

Lord, help us to gather together in order to scatter to tell others about your love and forgiveness. Amen.

Talk: Whether you like football or not, talk to others about your "Holy Huddle" in the Lord.

Read: Matthew 18:15-20; Hebrews 10:19-25

*Rich Bimler
Bloomington, IL*

Monday, October 3, 2016

Saving and Saved

In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

John 14:2

As I grew up, I saved many different things. Perhaps you had saved some leaves from trees, pressed flowers or had some dolls. You probably can't even remember the initial reason for collecting them. If you are fortunate, these may have retained some value in later years. The fortunate ones indeed are those who still have a very rare baseball card.

We need not collect or do anything to be children of God. He has done the collecting and we are the fortunate ones indeed. Through Baptism you became a child of God and that can never be taken away from you. It was nothing you had to earn or to find or to collect. The value is beyond all earthly measure and endures forever. The reward is eternal life with your Maker in heaven.

Lord Jesus, help us to ever remember that through your sacrifice we are children of God. Amen.

Consider: What might you be collecting now?

Read: Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 1:4-8; Galatians 3:27

*Jim Wiedman
Lombard, IL*

Tuesday, October 4, 2016

Thistledown

He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up."

Matthew 15:13

The word *thistledown* has a much more romantic sound than what most people actually feel about the white fluff that spreads thistle seeds. They float everywhere and replant themselves anywhere they land, thus insuring there will be plenty of new thistle plants next spring.

Even though most farmers don't like thistles and do their best to eradicate them, we could learn a lesson from these encroaching plants. Nothing deters them from spreading; they will survive and will try their best to grow anywhere they land.

God has instructed us to spread the good news of the Gospel, even though it may be difficult at times. He will bless our efforts and multiply them, no matter where they end up or the condition of the hearts on which they land.

Heavenly Father, help us to spread your mercy and your Word like thistledown. Amen.

Plant: Think about how you will spread God's Word.

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:7; Genesis 3:18

*Gloria Doty
Ft. Wayne, IN*

Wednesday, October 5, 2016

Boast and Rejoice

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.

Romans 5:3-4

St. Paul was a boastful hoper. He was also a joyful sufferer. That's an odd pairing, but Paul didn't write this to set forth a theological principle. He was describing what he was actually experiencing in his relationship with Jesus. He was a hope-full boaster because the content of his hope was nothing less than the glory of God. He was a joyful sufferer because to him it was the exercise plan that ended up producing hope, "and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit." No wonder he could boast so confidently. Sufferings and reversals will come as you age. But since you stand at peace with God in the grace of Jesus, they can only affirm the hope that is in you.

Father, let me experience the peace that only your Son Jesus can give. Amen.

Remember: Bring to mind sufferings and difficulties you have experienced that have produced endurance, character and hope in you.

Read: Romans 5:1-11

*Mike May
Kansas City, KS*

Thursday, October 6, 2016

A Spontaneous Meal

And day by day ... breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.

Acts 2:46

A few weeks ago some couples started gathering spontaneously at a deli for a meal before our Bible class. The meal group grew and delighted in the fellowship. We were drawn closer also in our study. We even got to interact with some of the deli workers about our faith. In a hectic world of digital schedules, such meal moments often don't happen.

Apparently the early Christian community after Pentecost desired each other's company on a frequent basis. Yes, they studied God's Word and the apostles' teaching, worshiped in the temple and gathered for prayer and the Lord's Supper. But they also broke bread together in their homes and received their food with glad and generous hearts. No wonder the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved!

Lord Jesus, be our guest at spontaneous meals together. Amen.

Invite: Consider inviting friends for a spontaneous meal of fellowship and witness.

Read: Acts 2:42-47

*Stephen J. Carter
Oakville, MO*

Friday, October 7, 2016

Second Wind

Let us not grow weary of doing good ... we will reap, if we do not give up.

Galatians 6:9

John Marin's seascape paintings evoke vitality. They place us amidst wild winds blowing, waves crashing against rocks, or on a lobster boat cutting through the choppy sea. They celebrate movement.

What about your faith? Is it alive with movement? "Faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:26). Years ago, you had youthful energy and hope. These kept you dashing about each day, within your family, town and church. Now, your steps may be slower, but you can still be active in many ways. With God's help you can get your second wind and get moving again.

God, give me the energy and hope to keep doing your work. Amen.

Get moving: Find God in lively places. Enjoy a windy day in a bustling city or take a ferry ride. Then bring your energized faith to others.

Read: Colossians 3:17

*Catherine A. Welch
Southbury, CT*

Saturday, October 8, 2016

Seasons of Life

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Autumn is such a beautiful time of year. The variety of changing colors on the trees creates a picturesque scene. As we age, we all venture through numerous seasons of life. Sometimes our season resembles fall or winter, while other times it resembles spring or summer. It's the transitions between these seasons that can be challenging. As brothers and sisters in Christ, it is important for us to encourage one another and uplift each other in prayer. The fellowship of other believers uplifts the spirit.

We are reminded in the Book of Ecclesiastes that there is a season and a time for everything under heaven. There is One who is with us throughout all of our seasons in life though. With God, we never walk alone.

Heavenly Father, remind me that you are always beside me throughout every season in my life. Amen.

Reflect: What have you learned about yourself and faith as you have journeyed through the various seasons in your life?

Read: Ecclesiastes 3:1-17

*Betsy Becker Niedringhaus
Ballwin, MO*

Sunday, October 9, 2016

Not Done Yet!

We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.

Ephesians 2:10

Bob, a care center resident, said, “I don’t know how much longer I’m going to be around, but while I’m here I feel like God wants me to encourage these people. And Betty, a retired teacher, helps fellow residents adjust to assisted living by leading a small “AAA” group: “Accept, Appreciate and Adapt.”

Our physical abilities may limit us, yet we can bloom where God has planted us. If we are still here, then we are not done yet. “Be kind to one another,” Paul writes (Ephesians 4:32). And Jesus tells us, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40).

Thank you, Father, for sending your Son in love. Help us to love others in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Act: Speak to someone or do an act of kindness for them today, reflecting God’s love.

Read: Matthew 25:34-40; Ephesians 4:25-32

*Steve Hess
Ft. Myers, FL*

Monday, October 10, 2016

True Contentment

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Hebrews 13:5

My first apartment was quite humble. I had little furniture and it was all hand-me-downs from various family members. I was making \$4 an hour as a registered nurse. Yet I was grateful every day for the Lord's provision. I framed the above passage to hang in my living room as a reminder that God would provide for all of my needs. Over the years the salary increased, the hand-me-downs gave way to new furniture and now my husband and I struggle to down-size and weed out the clutter and unneeded items.

Whether I am rich or whether I am poor, God has remained true to his promise. He has never left me nor forsaken me. That is better than any worldly possession.

Loving Father, I rest content in your presence and provision. Amen.

Give: Share your unneeded items and wealth with those less fortunate and share God's ever-present love with them too.

Read: Deuteronomy 31:1-8

Terry Weber
Williamsburg, VA

Tuesday, October 11, 2016

Side Effects

The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.

Isaiah 32:17

Often where seniors are gathered, medications and the various prescriptions each may be taking become a topic of conversation. Every medication has a large number of negative side effects, some very alarming, and taking them becomes a fearful thing. Trusting in the prescribing doctor is a must, having confidence the doctor knows what we need.

God's prescription, just one, was written for each of us many, many years ago, and it has zero negative side effects. It is written in the Bible. There is just one instruction—believe in God's Son, who went to the cross for all our sins and rose from the grave to tell us we will have eternal life with him.

Father in heaven, you know us better than we do, and you give us eternal life. Keep us from doubts. Amen.

Be confident: Pray and have confidence God will guide you.

Read: Psalm 116:1-2

*Don Hollmann
Ballwin, MO*

Wednesday, October 12, 2016

Harvesting

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Galatians 5:22-23

In spring I plant with hope. In summer I water faithfully. In fall I expect a harvest. Sometimes at harvest time I wish I had planted something different, but I can reap only the fruit of what I planted, and then only if I carefully nurtured it through the hot summer.

In Galatians 5 are two lists of “fruits” in our lives. In either case, we reap what we sow and tend. I want to bear the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience—and all the others. That means I had better be tending to the Spirit’s work in my life and the seeds of Word and Sacrament that he has planted in me. What a wonderful harvest that will be!

Holy Spirit, help me to nurture faithfully the Word of Life you have planted in my heart that I may bear the fruit of righteousness. Amen.

Do: Pick a fruit of the Spirit to tend today—joy, kindness, gentleness and the others—and do it again tomorrow.

Read: Galatians 5:19-25; 2 Corinthians 9:10

*Diane Bahn
Cypress, TX*

Thursday, October 13, 2016

Have a Childlike Faith

Let the little children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

Mark 10:14

Remember when we were children and we played Leap Frog and we jumped over each other on our hands and knees? The second version was ever more fun. We raced across the yard on our hands and knees like frogs.

Now that we are no longer agile enough to physically pretend we're frogs, we can still play Leap Frog in a third version. This way is the best version of all, especially when we need God's help solving our problems. How? By leaping onto our knees and pretending our arms are "front feet" as we reach heavenward. Not only are we pretending we're frogs, we are Fully Relying On God (F.R.O.G.) as we pray for guidance with a childlike faith.

Dear God, as your child, help me remember to forever pray without ceasing, even if I can't kneel like a frog. Amen.

Do: Share version 3 of Leap Frog with your friends.

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18

*Edna Jakobksy
Ft. Myers, FL*

Friday, October 14, 2016

Sunrise

Today you will be with me in paradise.

Luke 23:43

We recently moved to senior apartments across the street from our church, appropriately named Steeple View. Our apartment faces east and the sun wakes me almost every morning for prayer time. Sometimes it's behind clouds and then reappears. Other times, like this morning, it's beautiful, but then later we have storms. Each March in Florida we see sunsets almost every evening with the same experiences. Isn't that how life is, especially as seniors? On some days life is good, but then the clouds of frustrations, aches and pains come. As we pray, God's Son reappears and reassures us that all things work together for good to those who love God. When our lives have been going well for a while, occasionally the storms of life come suddenly, like serious illness and death. We pray for comfort and peace, knowing God's Son is always with us. We also believe he died and rose again, so we can do the same.

*Dear God, thank you for being with us always.
Amen.*

Watch: Get up early and watch a sunrise this week.

Read: Romans 8:28; Matthew 28:20; Luke 23:43

*Annette Schumacher
Muskego, WI*

Saturday, October 15, 2016

Do You Want Healing?

[Jesus] said to him, "Do you want to be made well?"

John 5:6

The man by the Bethesda pool had been waiting for 38 years to be healed, years of getting up in the morning, making his way somehow to the pool and lying there all day.

Jesus came and said, "Do you want to be healed?" What kind of question is that to ask a sick man, a man unable to move by himself?

A good question, I think. Sometimes even sickness or problems begin to feel normal. Jesus comes to us today in this story and says, "Do you want to be healed?" (Are you ready to move from what you know to something new?)

The man at the pool got up, took his mat and walked. What is your answer today to Jesus' question about your life? Do you want to be healed? Can you walk into new life, new possibility, new opportunity? Take the first step and see.

Jesus, open my heart to be strong and to take steps in healing, guided by you. Amen.

Think: What are the things in your life that need the life-giving, life-changing action of Jesus? Pray daily for strength and courage.

Read: John 5:1-9

*Linda Johnson Seyenkulo
Totota, Liberia*

Sunday, October 16, 2016

Bees

Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

Matthew 18:20

We know about “all creatures great and small” and we know “the Lord God made them all.” We also know there are fewer bees making our honey. However, a hive in our chimney and a visit in our living room? What were we to do? Yes, there was a bit of fire in the fireplace and now some fewer bees on our continent, but their response was amazing. Within minutes they plastered themselves together in a bush, hardly seen or heard, spent a quiet night and took off for parts unknown (we hope).

The moral? God gives us each other. Countless devotions from this publication have brought me closer to fellow Christians and to our Lord. Writers and readers are banded together by inspired words and God’s magnificent guidance. Together we live out the hope-full life and look forward to meeting each other in heaven.

Good Lord, thank you for all those people who write and speak your words of love to us. Amen.

Give thanks: Thank God for writers, readers and publishers.

Read: Revelation 21

*Lois Scheer
San Diego, CA*

Monday, October 17, 2016

Laughter

Our mouth was filled with laughter.

Psalm 126:2

My friend John giggles while telling humorous stories. I suggested he suppress his chuckle so we could understand him better. John replied with a snicker, “I can’t help it if I know what’s coming.” He may never win a joke-telling contest, but his constant giggle is infectious.

Laughter is a gift from God that can often help us better cope with life. King Solomon wisely wrote, “A joyful heart is good medicine” (Proverbs 17:22). The Psalmist urges us, “Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart” (Psalm 32:11). God’s loves us and forgives our sins because of the sacrifice of his Son Jesus Christ on our behalf. Such good news empowers us to rejoice at all times, and even laugh in tough times.

Thank you, Father, for the gift of laughter. Help us to see the lighter side of life. Amen.

Chuckle: Recall a comical situation, and laugh out loud.

Read: Psalm 126; Proverbs 15:13-15

*Steve Hess
Ft. Myers, FL*

Tuesday, October 18, 2016

A Bright Spot

Young men and maidens together, old men and children! Let them praise the name of the LORD.

Psalm 148:12-13

My late fall garden is mostly brown, dried up and dreary. But in one corner I see a bright spot with brilliantly colored flowers. That's where I planted the asters. Asters are late bloomers, doing their best in the fall—right up to a freezing frost.

Are you in the autumn of your life and things seem rather old and dreary? Just remember that God is with you through all the years. Jesus died for the sins of all people, no matter how old they are.

There are no age limitations on how long we can serve God. We are never too old to tell others the Good News of salvation or to pray for them. We can be late bloomers and still spread the beauty of God's love and forgiveness.

*Lord, help me to be a bright spot in someone's life.
Amen.*

Encourage: Whom do you know who needs some cheering up?

Read: Matthew 5:13-16

*Jeanette Dall
Batavia, IL*

Wednesday, October 19, 2016

Pray First!

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

Mark 1:35

You have probably heard the adage “Think before you speak.” That’s good advice. But Jesus, by his example, gives us an even better pattern—pray first! The disciples were searching for Jesus because the crowds wanted Jesus to share some words with them. Jesus had been preparing to do just that, but first, Jesus needed to pray. Time in prayer to his Father prepared him to speak.

What a difference it makes when we pray first and speak second. What if Peter had prayed first before he responded to the accusation on the night of Jesus’ arrest: “You also were with Jesus.”

Before you respond to someone, stop and pray first. It can help avoid later having to come back to apologize.

Lord, help me to remember to pause and pray first before I speak. Amen.

Pray today: Lord, give me the right words of hope, encouragement and peace.

Read: James 1:19

*Glen VanderKloot
Springfield, IL*

Thursday, October 20, 2016

Strategy for Living

There is nothing better ... than to be joyful and do good as long as we live.

Ecclesiastes 3:12

In recent years I have been intrigued by what I read in the Book of Ecclesiastes. King Solomon, the author, shares his observations of daily living with and without God. He challenges us to get rid of our desires, devices and doubts for living. He encourages us to let God come into our lives.

Of course, we know that he does. Jesus knocks at the door of our hearts. The Holy Spirit, through Word and Sacrament, seeks to enter our hearts. As his children, we can be joyful as we are aging. We can continue to do good wherever life takes us—in our home, among the family, in the neighborhood, among God's people and in the community where we live.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, help us overcome our approach to life and view life from your point of view. Amen.

Discover: Take time out and read portions of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Discover the good news of God's care and mercy.

Read: Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

Walter M. Schoedel
Webster Groves, MO

Friday, October 21, 2016

Members

If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

1 Corinthians 12:26

As we age, our bodies don't work quite as well as they once did. If both knees are stiff, or one hip is bothersome, it is difficult to get the whole body up and moving. Yet with recovery from illness, or as a particular pain subsides, the entire body enjoys health or pain-free movement.

The body of Christ, of which we are members by faith in his name, works in much the same way. When a member suffers through disaster, need or grief, the whole body grieves and offers support. As a member rejoices in an anniversary, the birth of a child or recovery from illness, members join in celebration and thanksgiving. In suffering and joy, Christ's body "builds itself up in love" (Ephesians 4:16). It works.

Lord Jesus, lead us to live in unity as members of your body. Amen.

Listen: As you hear of suffering or joy in the lives of members, look for ways in which you might support or rejoice with them.

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-26; Colossians 1:15-20

Carol Geisler
Manchester, MO

Saturday, October 22, 2016

Encourage the Young

I have been young, and now am old.

Psalm 37:25

We recognize them. Their hair is thicker than ours. They come as singles or married. There may be small children with them. They bring their electronic devices, and sometimes their tattoos. They may worship regularly or sporadically, or as prompted by a Thanksgiving or Christmas service. They are the young adults among us.

As we have opportunity, let us greet them, talk with them and get to know them better. Share with them how the Lord has brought us hitherto. Pray for them. Eat the Supper with them.

Let us encourage these our fellow worshipers. We have experienced their temptations, their stressors, their doubts. We have had jobs or activities that worked against worship. We too have been led wrongly by our peers. We too “have been young.” Let us let them know that we understand.

Dear Jesus, help me cross the generation bridge to encourage the faith of the young. Amen.

Walk: Walk toward the young, not around them, and certainly not from them.

Read: Proverbs 4:1-15; Colossians 3:1-11.

*Harry Edenfield
Brownstown, MI*

Sunday, October 23, 2016

Too Many Buttons

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.

Ecclesiastes 4:9

“I can do it!” My three-year-old granddaughter firmly declined my offer of help with the many buttons on her party dress. So I let her take control, and she proudly finished the process. The result was a button at the top without a button hole and a lonely button hole at the bottom. She easily explained with a shrug, “Too many buttons,” as she went off to join her friends.

Later, while struggling to make sure all dinner ingredients reached optimum temperature at the same time, I saw my own pride. How often have I been guilty of insisting “I can do it”? I was about to end up with too many buttons.

I asked for help. God put us in families and in community for a purpose.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the provision of family and friends and for reminding me I'm not meant to do it alone. Amen.

Invite: Plan a get-together, asking everyone to take part in the meal preparation.

Read: Romans 12:4-5; Psalm 133:1; Hebrews 10:24-25

*Lynne Waite Chapman
Ft. Wayne, IN*

Monday, October 24, 2016

Trusting the Impossible

Steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.

Psalm 32:10

On a recent flight, I thought about the amount of trust I have in a pilot when I board a plane.

It seems impossible that the heavy plane gets off the ground, let alone flies through the air. I don't understand the instruments the pilot reads to stay on course. I haven't a clue as to how he lands at the correct destination, on time and without running into other aircraft ... and yet, I blithely get on board. I trust the pilot and wouldn't think of telling him how to do his job.

Do I trust my heavenly Father that much? Do I believe he will safely lead me to my final destination? Or do I constantly tell him how my life should be or how I think I could run things better than he does? Trust is such an important part of our relationship with our heavenly Father. With him, nothing is impossible.

Lord, help me to trust you in all things. Amen.

Trust: Sing the hymn "I Am Trusting Thee, Lord Jesus."

Read: Jeremiah 17:7; Hebrews 13:5

*Gloria Doty
Ft. Wayne, IN*

Tuesday, October 25, 2016

Hands Alive

The LORD will ... bless all the work of your hands.

Deuteronomy 28:12

Knot a Problem is a group of people who enjoy unraveling snarled yarn. Knitters from around the world send their knotted messes to them. Imagine that! Yarn chaos is a blessing. Some actually find the untangling task relaxing and an escape from their worries.

Maybe it's time you rediscover the joy of using your hands. Even if you lack full use of your hands, God may be calling you to use them in some way. Simple tasks can be a diversion from pain and anxiety, and give you a purpose for each day. They can keep your spirits alive with attainable goals and connect you with others. Joyful hands can spread God's love.

Thank you, Lord, for hands and the many ways to use them. Amen.

Use your hands: Be a sign of God's presence. Wave to a neighbor, knit a prayer shawl or do a jigsaw puzzle with someone who is lonely.

Read: Ecclesiastes 9:10; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

*Catherine A. Welch
Southbury, CT*

Wednesday, October 26, 2016

Not in a Hurry

You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house.

1 Peter 2:5

The Sagrada Familia basilica in Barcelona is Antoni Gaudi's magnum opus. Gaudi became its chief architect in 1883. Asked later why progress was so slow, he replied, "My client (God) is not in a hurry!" It's a good thing. Gaudi died in 1926, the basilica was not dedicated until 2010, and the completion is scheduled to be in 2016 at the earliest. Nevertheless it is already a magnificent, inspiring, albeit totally unique temple.

The same can be said of our lives. We are all "works in progress." God patiently continues to shape our lives so that we grow in our ability to stand firm in his grace and show forth his glory.

Lord, help me to be patient with others, including myself, granting a time of grace for growth. Amen.

Consider: Is there someone recently with whom I was impatient? Do I have some "unfinished business" with them?

Read: 2 Peter 2:1-5; 2 Peter 3:8-11

Ted Zimmerman
Napa, CA

Thursday, October 27, 2016

No Audition Needed

But Rahab the prostitute and her father's household and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive. And she has lived in Israel to this day.

Joshua 6:25

Motion picture companies occasionally choose our surrounding area as a location for filming. Those interested in pursuing a part are told when and where to appear in order to try out. Invariably most hopefuls are turned away. There is, however, an epic exception—God's creation.

Thousands of years in production yet still not a wrap and new cast members are always needed. Equally remarkable, it seems that even the most unlikely are accepted. Just ask Rahab. Surely she never imagined being cast as anyone's Good Samaritan. The Master Director knew better. Hence her performance was flawless. Sound interesting?

Go ahead. Step up. God has a role for each of us. And we don't even have to audition.

Grant us the wisdom, Lord, to discern your will and the courage to heed your call. Amen.

Believe: You are uniquely made to fulfill God's purpose for your life.

Read: Joshua 2:1-7; Joshua 6:22-25

*Robert Stephens
Glen Allen, VA*

Friday, October 28, 2016

Trust

The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts,

Psalm 28:7

Much is said about lack of trust. Discouraged by hearing of computers being hacked, folks being scammed? Who can you trust? Can you even trust your own judgment?

Jesus challenged the disciples from the beginning. He called them and they responded with trust. Jesus promises to be with us—and he is. He promises to send a Comforter—and he does. Paul prayed that trust in the Lord would bring joy and peace, causing an overflowing of hope.

It's not "blind trust." We have the knowledge of the resurrection and the Comforter. Being honest in our dealings and avoiding "deals too good to be true" prevents disappointment. As we age, we may need to rely on those God has put around us. We can be trusting and overflowing with peace and hope.

Dear Jesus, help me to treasure my friends and family, gifts from you, gifts from your hand. Amen.

Look around: See the trustworthy people you know. Counter each "scam" story with one of grace and love shown.

Read: John 14:1; Romans 15:13

*Gail Lutze
Valparaiso, IN*

Saturday, October 29, 2016

Downsizing

One's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

Luke 12:15

The “abundance of one’s possessions” becomes very real in these latter days of life. We talk casually about “downsizing,” and yet when the time comes to let go, the process of giving up can be very difficult. Old photographs, documents, pieces of furniture, even items of clothing come laden with precious memories, and before we know it, we are encompassed by clutter, the “abundance of one’s possessions.”

Jesus would have us evaluate the meaning of our abundance. “Downsizing” gives us an opportunity to thank God as we let go. As we set aside each item so long held, we pray a prayer of thanksgiving—for what it has meant to us and for those who are connected with it. The “abundance of one’s possessions” then can become an opportunity for grateful praise.

God of all that is good, as we downsize, let us lift up your blessings to us in all of our days. Amen.

Try it: Prayerfully downsize. As you set aside old possessions, speak a prayer of thanks.

Read: Luke 12:13-21; 1 Timothy 6:6-10

*Don Hinchey
Englewood, CO*

Sunday, October 30, 2016

The Autumn Years

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Hebrews 13:8

It was a book of devotions for “the autumn years.” I thought my dad would appreciate it at age 68. But when I saw the pained and quizzical look on his face, I realized I had given him the book at least a decade too early. He wasn’t ready to face the change of seasons in his life.

Now that I am a few years beyond 68, I can feel his pain. I’m still trying to live in “Indian summer.” I’m not ready yet to face the chill of late October.

The Good News that brings us comfort and strength in every season of our life is that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” He is our guardian and guide through all of the seasons of the year—and all the seasons of our life.

Loving Savior, abide with me through all of the changes and challenges of life. Amen.

Do: Reach out with care and sensitivity to someone who is in the autumn of life.

Read: Hebrews 13:1-8

*Gil Duchow
Hilliard, OH*

Monday, October 31, 2016

Birthdays

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Romans 15:13

How do we celebrate our birthdays? Do we say things like, “Been there, done that, don’t make a fuss!” “Who wants to celebrate being old!” “No gifts. I have everything I need.” (And then we feel sad when no one gives us a gift!) Or can we rejoice in the prospect of a new year of grace?

Could we make our next birthday a celebration of God’s abundant love for us? How about a brief note to each family member and friend, thanking them for their caring love and friendship? Maybe we could speak of our joyous expectancy of the years the good Lord still has in mind for us followed by our future home in heaven. What an example we can be of hope-full living!

So teach me to number my days, dear Lord, that I might indeed get a heart of wisdom. Amen.

Plan ahead: Let someone know how you would like to celebrate your next birthday.

Read: Psalm 91

*Lois Scheer
San Diego, CA*

Tuesday, November 1, 2016

Face-to-Face

The LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.

Exodus 33:11

A man I taught in first grade found me on Facebook after 45 years! Randy told me that when we went to God's house as a class, he thought he would see God face-to-face. In our school's community—pastors, teachers, classmates, parents—Randy learned that Jesus loved him so much he gave his life for him. Yet Randy hasn't seen God face-to-face!

Moses is the only prophet who spoke with God face-to-face. But he didn't see God in his full glory. Jesus tells us if we have seen him, we have seen the Father (John 14:9). But we haven't see him in his full glory. One day, because Jesus reached out through the Christian communities that nurtured Randy and you and me, we will at last see God face-to-face in all his glory.

Father, I long to see you face-to-face. Jesus, I long to hear you call my name. Spirit, I long to breathe your grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Do: Ask God to place you in a community that nurtures people in Jesus and brings them to salvation.

Read: Psalm 31; 1 Corinthians 13

*Ruth Geisler
Aliso Viejo, CA*

Wednesday, November 2, 2016

Prepared

I will come again and will take you to myself.

John 14:3

An ended trip, for pleasure or business, brings us home. I've heard that a horse's pace increases as he approaches home. No urging is needed to get to warmth and food. Life's end is often described as "going home." The journey ended, we will be with our heavenly family.

As I entered the room, my sister-in-law scowled, "I'm so mad at Mother and my sisters," she said. "They're all in heaven enjoying Jesus, and I'm just sitting here." Tempted to chuckle, but seeing her distress, I hugged my sister and said I understood, but I loved being with her, and hoped that she could wait until Jesus called her home.

Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you." What a promise! It's hard to imagine this place, but our Lord is good with his promises. We must be patient and wait for the fulfillment.

Dear Lord, help me live each day in preparation to be with you. I know that you are with me now and will be with me there—when I arrive home. Amen.

Tell: Share your feelings about "going home" with a friend or loved one.

Read: John 14:1-4

*Gail Lutze
Valparaiso, IN*

Thursday, November 3, 2016

How Wealthy Are You?

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Psalm 136:1

Most people who know me would consider me to be of modest means. I live in a mobile home, drive a 2003 Chevrolet, live on my monthly Social Security check and acquire most of my wardrobe from garage sales. Yet, according to an article I read some time ago, I rank in the top 8% of the world's wealthy. I'm sure most, or all, of those who read these devotions do also. If you have money in the bank, money in your wallet and some spare change on your dresser, you qualify.

But do we really live in a state of thankfulness for our material blessings or do we tend to take them for granted? When we have food on the table, a roof over our heads, and clothes in our closets, do we think of those who don't? We should drop to our knees daily in thankfulness to our precious and providing Father and Lord.

Dear Father, help me to thank you for your abundant blessings every day. Amen.

Give: Gather some cans and boxes of food and take them to your local food bank today.

Read: Isaiah 58:11; Philippians 4:19

*Harriet Stennfeld
Ft. Wayne, IN*

Friday, November 4, 2016

A Different View

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.

Hebrews 10:24

Flying over Sydney, Australia, I am awestruck by the beauty below. The Harbour Bridge stretches majestically over the sparkling aqua ocean and the pearly white sails of the Opera House shine like jewels. Yet for the businessman in his stuffy office in the streets below, the only view is of a computer screen and the pile of papers on his desk. For the homeless man in the alleyway, the view is of trash and the gutter.

Each of us has a different view of the world. Much depends on our circumstances, our past and our beliefs. We can each view God differently too. Listening to others share their personal journey with God can open our eyes to new dimensions of his beauty and power. Looking at God from another perspective can help us to embrace more fully his infinite love.

Lord Jesus, open my eyes and ears today to learn more about you through the perspectives of my friends. Amen.

Listen: Ask others about their faith in Christ.

Read: Hebrews 10:24-25

*Kerry Osborne
Sydney, Australia*

Saturday, November 5, 2016

Staying in Touch

If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.

John 8:31

I stay in contact with members of my graduating class, or their widows, as the “central hub of information.” If I receive an email from a class member or spouse, I hit “Forward” and send the email to everyone on my list. What a blessing!

What a blessing to be able to stay in touch with our blessed Lord Jesus. We have his words in the Scriptures. We hear his words in the Sunday services we attend. We can set aside time each day to read and meditate on Jesus’ words. We can read devotions like this one. We receive the body and blood of the Lord Jesus in Holy Communion.

It is easy, even in retirement, to become so busy that we forget to stay in touch with Jesus and let him stay in touch with us. Thankfully the Lord forgives our “busy-ness” and constantly welcomes us back.

Lord Jesus, you have promised to be with us always. Empower us by your Spirit to stay in touch with you through Word and Sacrament and prayer. Amen.

Reflect: How can you improve your Scripture reading and prayer life?

Read: Matthew 28:18-20; Matthew 1:22-23

*Paul Eggold
Greendale, WI*

Sunday, November 6, 2016

Everyone Has a Story

Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.

James 1:19

We all know folks who complain regularly, people who are negative about life. Sometimes their self-centered story is difficult to accept. It can be boring or annoying. It's hard to be Christ-like at such a time.

The faithful are called to listen to God. We seek to follow Jesus. It is difficult to endure some unkind person, who for whatever reason finds no joy in life. James encourages us to be caring, as Jesus is caring. Listening is a gift to a hurting person. Paying attention to the misery in someone's life brings healing, even if we speak barely a word. We cannot change people. That's the Spirit's job. Nevertheless, with God's help, we can listen with love and patience.

Lord, help me to listen to those who disagree with me, those who are unpleasant and those who need a friend. Amen.

Do: Say a special prayer for someone who is hard to love.

Read: James 1:19-26

*Lael Hoerger
Niles, MI*

Monday, November 7, 2016

Ruler of Kings

Seek the welfare of the city.

Jeremiah 29:7

During elections and the months of campaigning that precede them, we wonder and worry about the outcome. How will our leaders govern? Will they bring prosperity or failure? We may forget who truly governs all things—our crucified and risen Lord, to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given (Matthew 28:18).

God told the exiled Israelites, “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jeremiah 29:7). We are citizens of this earth and at the same time citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20). With trust in our Lord, “the ruler of kings on earth” (Revelation 1:5), we seek through our daily work and through our prayers the welfare of the cities, the states and the nation in which we live.

Lord, grant wisdom to the leaders of all nations, that they might govern their lands in justice and peace. Amen.

Seek: In your daily work and in prayer, seek the welfare of the city.

Read: Jeremiah 29:4-7; Psalm 146

*Carol Geisler
Manchester, MO*

Tuesday, November 8, 2016

Election Day Meditation

To those who are elect ... according to the fore-knowledge of God the Father.

1 Peter 1:1

Today we as a nation elect our future leaders and representatives. It is one of the great privileges and responsibilities we have as citizens. At the end of the day, who will the “winners” be? God only knows—although we will be fed constant projections throughout the day. We pray that the “winners” will be those who will serve us best.

Peter addresses Christians as “the elect.” We have been chosen by God in accordance to his eternal purpose. He sanctified us by the Holy Spirit, sprinkled us with the blood of Jesus, and called us to the obedience of faith. In electing us, God has made us “winners.” However, he elected us in order that we might serve others’ well-being. That too is our privilege and responsibility.

Father God, help us to be good citizens of this nation, and in the cause of the Kingdom of God. Amen.

Choose: Will you exercise your privilege and Christian duty to vote?

Read: 1 Peter 1 and 2

*Ted Zimmerman
Napa, CA*

Wednesday, November 9, 2016

Fruitful

He cuts off every branch that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, so it will be even more fruitful.

John 15:2

I am a bonsai enthusiast. I create bonsai trees and encourage them to become what I call “living art.” Growing plants are ever changing, striving to reach their genetic potential. The goal is to keep the little trees healthy in small pots and make them look mature and artistic by showing their branching shapes. I must prune growth in places and encourage growth in other places to create a living art form.

You are one of God’s living art forms. He has a plan for your life. Have you noticed his pruning in your life, his encouragement to grow in a different direction? It can be painful but remember that God loves perfectly. He wants you to reach your full potential. He prunes to make you his living work of art so you become what he created you to be!

Lord, help me to reach my full potential as your living creation. Amen.

Consider: Meditate about times when you felt God’s pruning.

Read: Psalm 92:14; John 15:5-17; Ephesians 2:8-10

*Lynn Menz
Jefferson, IA*

Thursday, November 10, 2016

Pay Attention

Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

1 Corinthians 10:12

Falling is a fear for many not-so-agile seniors. Even though the fall referred to in today's verse is spiritual rather than physical, the caution to "take heed" applies to both. Just as we need to pay more attention now when we walk, we need to pay even closer attention to our spiritual walk and faith life. A fall on the sidewalk may cause pain or even long-term problems, but a spiritual fall is much more serious.

"Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it" (Hebrews 2:1). God doesn't want us to drift away, so he sprinkles Scripture with calls to pay attention. He's not nagging but loving, like a parent with a child. If we do fall, we can reach out and be lifted up by his grace. And he reminds us to hold on tightly. Then we can stand firm in the faith for as long as we live.

Father, thank you for reminding me to pay attention to my faith. Help me stand firm. Amen.

Pay attention: Steer clear of things that may cause you to stumble or fall—physically or spiritually.

Read: 1 Corinthians 16:13; Jude 24-25

Marj Maynard
Billings, MO

Friday, November 11, 2016

Express Yourself

Shout for joy to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise!

Psalm 66:1-2

The word *shout* struck me as I read over this psalm. Shouting is a bold action, and very loud! Even though I praise God frequently, I do not shout my praises. I usually whisper them. I am more inclined to share my joy expressively only with those I know well. There have been few times in my life where I was so happy I felt as if I could praise God out loud. As I reflect on this psalm, I willingly consider that from time to time, my praises should be spoken out loud to others. Share the joy of knowing God.

Loving God, help me to boldly share my joy in knowing you with others. Amen.

Share: Think up a new way to share your joy, and praise God!

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Philippians 4:4

*Annette L. Sherwood
St. Louis, MO*

Saturday, November 12, 2016

Making No Progress

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge.

2 Peter 1:5

I recently flew from my home in Indiana to Houston, Texas. The flight takes several hours and I spent a good deal of time gazing out the window. Although the plane was moving forward at a speed of over 500 mph, it seemed to be standing still when I looked at the banks of endless clouds.

Often my life and my faith appear like that, too ... standing still. Time is moving forward, but I seem to be stuck in the same life pattern and not making any discernible progress or growing in any area. Once the plane descended a bit and I could see the ground, it was apparent we were indeed moving. Perhaps I need to “descend,” look at my surroundings and realize I am making progress and growing in all areas, as long as I have God as my pilot.

Father, remind me you are my Pilot in life and if I grow in your Word, I will always make progress. Amen.

Grow: List areas in which you need to grow or move forward.

Read: Psalm 20:4; Isaiah 30:21

*Gloria Doty
Ft. Wayne, IN*

Sunday, November 13, 2016

At the Family Table

Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!

Luke 14:15

My older cousin still lives in the house previously owned by her parents and prior to that, owned by Nanny and Papa, our mutual maternal grandparents. The dining room table that was in place at my birth still dominates the small but welcoming room in a humble home in Queens, New York.

If that table could talk, what bountiful stories it might tell! Many gatherings took place around that table—festive Thanksgivings, new-baby celebrations, the round of annual birthdays, Sunday dinners and, sadly, some funeral luncheons.

As at the Lord's Table in our churches, gathering at the family table sustained us for the journey. Family tables are sometimes moved or lost, but we all have access to our Lord's Table where Holy Communion offers togetherness, forgiveness and nurture to the household of faith.

Thank you for the blessings of family tables and the Lord's Table in my life. Amen.

Partake: Take Holy Communion as you are able.

Read: I Corinthians 10:15-16; Psalm 23

*Paul A. Metzler
Shrewsbury, MO*

Monday, November 14, 2016

The Father Knows Best

This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Psalm 118:24

Long ago in the womb, our world was small and dark, safe and secure. We slowly developed, according to God's plan, until the time was right for entry into the bright new world we've known ever since.

Now we've lived on earth for many years. God has loved, forgiven, and taught us to live according to his purpose. Our future is secured by Calvary's love and grace. His robe of righteousness awaits us in our eternal home, when the time is right.

So rejoice and be glad in this special day! Relax and enjoy each blessing he provides. Trust in God's wisdom. Be patient. Thank him often. The Father knows what is best for you.

Lord, we trust your wisdom, mercy and grace every day. Amen.

Count: List each blessing you notice today.

Read: Psalm 139

*Sharolyn Sander
Lincoln, NE*

Tuesday, November 15, 2016

Looking for Evidence

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5:22-23

Perhaps the listing of the fruit of the Spirit is a very familiar Scripture passage to you. It is one I never tire of hearing. In fact, I typed this verse up, printed it out and put it in my kitchen on display as a daily reminder of my actions. Am I loving in this moment? Is this gesture kind? Could I be a little more patient? I use this list because it keeps my intentions on track. I want to follow the Spirit of God as closely as possible.

The fruit of the Spirit is evidence that God is at work. When we let God work through us, it is very likely that we will draw others toward God too.

Holy Spirit, remind me how to act with kindness and gentleness. Amen.

Reflect: At the end of the day, take time to reflect on your actions.

Read: Colossians 3:12-17

*Annette L. Sherwood
St. Louis, MO*

Wednesday, November 16, 2016

An Old Bible

He who does these things shall never be moved.

Psalm 15:5

I was paging through, looking for the psalm for the day, and my tattered Bible fell open at Psalm 15. It was marked profusely—underlines, arrows and numbers circled. When or why did I do all that? Some of the margin notes had faded, and some I couldn't decipher, but they were evidence that I did study.

The old markings were cause for thanksgiving and wonder, for God had seen fit to hold me close to his Word for so long, even during the times when I neither understood nor sought his teaching. As our minds and activities turn toward Pilgrims, turkey and dressing and family gatherings, I thank God for setting me firmly in his Word.

Dear Lord, your Word is truth. Thank you for giving us your Word that we may know your will and find sustenance. Amen.

Do: Look for your first Bible, Small Catechism, old hymnal or something that reminds you of how God has always been there.

Read: Psalm 15; Romans 15:4; Colossians 3:16-17

*Judy Scherr
Lemay, MO*

Thursday, November 17, 2016

Let's Do Lunch

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together.

Hebrews 10:24-25

Get-togethers don't just happen. They have to be planned and prepared for—which is why sometimes they don't happen. This is not a new or original insight. The writer to the Hebrews knew that and encouraged fellow Christians to plan regular gatherings, knowing that “love and good works” don't come naturally to us. Similarly, gatherings of family or friends don't happen by saying, “Let's get together sometime.” And those gatherings, just like specifically “church” gatherings, really keep us focused and joyful in doing good works with and for those closest to us, “and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” The time we have to gather for encouragement with those we love is a precious and finite commodity!

Jesus, help me to make and take time to gather together with others to stir up love and good works. Amen.

Schedule: Pick a day, time, and place and start calling people to “save the date.”

Read: Hebrews 10:23-25; Acts 2:43-47

*Mike May
Kansas City, KS*

Friday, November 18, 2016

We Gather Together

Assemble the people ... that they may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 31:12

This verse is the text for the hymn entitled, “We Gather Together to Ask the Lord’s Blessing.” This hymn was written in 1597 by Adrianus Valerius. Under Spanish rule, the Dutch Protestants were forbidden to gather for worship. This hymn celebrates the Dutch victory over Spain and the religious freedom it offered.

As you gather with your family, friends and loved ones this holiday season, be mindful of those who overcame religious persecution so that we now may enjoy our religious freedom and the ability to gather together freely.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the religious freedom that we have to meet together and worship you. Enable each of us to spend time in worship praising you and gathering together with loved ones. Amen.

Assemble: Gather together as a family or with your close friends.

Read: Deuteronomy 31:12-13; Hebrews 10:19-25

*Celeste Cummins
Storm Lake, IA*

Saturday, November 19, 2016

Beyond Understanding

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

Researchers who study the behavior of wild animals often become attached to them over time. They name the animals, recognize them and know their personalities. They study these animals because they are enthralled and captivated by them, and yet the animals can't understand how much they mean to the researcher.

In the same way, humans are incapable of understanding God's divine, pure and heavenly love. Sometimes we are tempted to think of God's love in human terms, and wonder if God may stop loving us because of something we have done. However, God loves us with a deep richness that is beyond human comprehension, and it is full and unconditional.

*Lord, thank you for loving me more than I can imagine, and for all the gifts you've sent to me.
Amen.*

Do: Tell someone how much they mean to you.

Read: Romans 8:38-39; 1 John 4:9-11

*Brenda Schmidt
Minneapolis, MN*

Sunday, November 20, 2016

The Lord Is King

The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad.

Psalm 97:1

My family teases me about the saying they see displayed in my kitchen. “I’m in Charge Here!” brings a knowing smile to their lips. Mom may be in charge in the kitchen, but the more important question is: Who’s in charge in a world seemingly gone mad?

Amid threats to life and limb, natural disasters, governmental instability and moral decline, even people of faith may question who’s in charge. God’s Word assures us that the Lord is king forever and ever. We need only scan the Psalms for reassurance that our mighty, faithful, loving God is the One in charge. Over and over the psalm writers remind us that God is our rock, fortress, stronghold, deliverer and shield ... indeed.

Lord, teach me to abandon useless anxiety and embrace instead your mighty promises. Amen.

Share: When conversations dwell on fears for the future, share why you can leave worry behind and rejoice instead.

Read: Psalm 97; Matthew 6:25-34

*Donna J. Streufert
South Bend, IN*

Monday, November 21, 2016

In Gratitude

Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly ... with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Colossians 3:16

Someone I heard speak a few years ago had been burned over 90% of his body when he was only nine years old. Today he has a wife and four children and shares messages of inspiration.

I recently came across a quote he shared: “When it comes to life, the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them in gratitude” (the quote is attributed to Gilbert K. Chesterton).

What a fitting message for Thanksgiving. Every blessing comes to us from God, our Father, yet so often we forget and act as if they come from our own merit. The greatest blessing of all—forgiveness and life eternal through the sacrifice of our Christ our Savior—is also ours through no merit of our own. Let’s accept them all in gratitude without taking them for granted.

Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good and his mercy endures forever. Amen.

Reflect: What have you taken for granted rather than taking them in gratitude?

Read: Psalm 107; Philippians 4:4-9; Romans 8:28-39

*Jane P. Wilke
Woodbury, MN*

Tuesday, November 22, 2016

The Empty Chair

*For where two or three are gathered in my name,
there am I among them.*

Matthew 18:20

Gatherings for Thanksgiving are steeped in family traditions; the house, those attending, the turkey and the side dishes connect us to our families. I've heard it is tradition to set a place for Elijah at Passover Seder meals, complete with a glass of wine.

This may be a meaningful tradition: setting a place to remind us that when we gather in the name of Jesus, he is with us. The empty chair reminds us that as traditions change, and we miss people who are no longer there, we can rejoice knowing that they are with Jesus, seeing him face-to-face.

With this in mind, as we create new traditions, may we follow the advice of Paul to his Colossians friends as they gathered together. "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful" (Colossians 3: 15).

Dear God and Father of our families, please fill our lives and gatherings with your joy and peace. Amen.

Create: Begin a new tradition of the empty chair, sharing the good news of Christ's presence.

Read: Revelations 21:3; Colossians 3:12-17

*Nancy Rapp
St. Louis, MO*

Wednesday, November 23, 2016

Thankfulness

In everything give thanks.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

This Bible verse seems impossible to accomplish. Give thanks all the time? You've got to be kidding! But one day I heard someone explaining that the verse does not say to give thanks *for* everything, but *in* everything. After that, it made more sense.

It would be difficult to give thanks *for* your house burning down, or *for* your spouse dying of cancer, or *for* arthritis. Yet you can still be thankful *in* those situations because our loved ones were not injured in the fire, or because medical advances made the cancer easier on your spouse, or because you have pain medication. We can also be thankful that God sent his Son to die *in* our place so that we can be with him forever.

Heavenly Father, thank you for using the difficulties I face to make me stronger and prepare me for something better. Amen.

Recall: Think of a time when you survived a challenge and came out stronger.

Read: Philippians 4:10-13; Romans 8:28; Psalm 136

*Celeste Cummins
Storm Lake, IA*

Thursday, November 24, 2016

Thank We All Our God

Give thanks in all circumstances.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Martin Rinkart experienced bloodshed, food shortages, devastation and suffering during the Thirty Years' War. As the only surviving pastor in Eilenburg, Germany, he conducted over 4,000 funerals in 1637, including that of his wife. Yet during this year, he also penned the beloved words of "Now Thank We All Our God," as a short prayer before meals.

He remembers God's wondrous deeds and countless gifts of love. He praises our bounteous God, who blesses us with joy and peace, grace and guidance, and freedom in this world and the next. He ends with a doxology of praise for our eternal Triune God.

May we also be led to greater humility and perspective as we thank God for his abundance and blessing ... in all circumstances.

Lord, enable us to truly thank you with hearts and hands and voices. Amen.

Pray: Sing the words of this hymn as your table prayer today.

Read: Psalm 37:39-40; Psalm 95:2-3

*Sharolyn Sander
Lincoln, NE*

Friday, November 25, 2016

Thanks for Everything?

In everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Philippians 4:6

Everything? What about testings, temptations, troubles, fears, loss? Are those included? Perhaps in our thanksgiving thoughts we should start with nothing—no family, no children, no employment and not enough food. Ought we to remember that there are many in this world who do not have these gifts? Could we, like Job, still be thankful that “my Redeemer lives”? (Job 19:35). Paul reminds us again, “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us” (Ephesians 1:7-8). Those riches are ours, and God, the big spender, lavishes them upon us unconditionally. If we forget to give thanks, it is not because we have so little, but because we remember so little what God has done. All his gifts, though undeserved, are ours, given out of his fatherly love and mercy.

Lord, make me thankfully aware of my daily gifts, even every little one. Amen.

Do: Thank, praise and obey.

Read: Philippians 4

*Connie Bretscher
Valparaiso, IN*

Saturday, November 26, 2016

Thanks for Children

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

Matthew 19:14

As we give thanks to the Lord through this Thanksgiving season, let us make sure to give special thanks for the children the Lord puts around us. Yes, those children who sometimes spill things, are a little too loud at worship, forget to do their homework, bother us during *Jeopardy*, and do not visit us enough. Rejoice that the Lord continues to put children among us. What a boring world it would be without them!

Be like Jesus today by hugging a child or two, by smiling at those 4-year-olds, by saying affirming words like, "You have nice eyes!" and by speaking words of hope and joy. And remind your young friends that Jesus loves them too!

Lord, enable us to love children, near and far, because you first have loved us as your children. Amen.

Enjoy: Have fun smiling and talking with those little ones in your life, and give thanks.

Read: Matthew 19:13-15; Matthew 18:10-14

*Rich Bimler
Bloomington, IL*

Sunday, November 27, 2016

Beyond Words

Make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.

Isaiah 40:3

Today's Scripture is not just for Advent. In ancient Hebrew, the word *wilderness* could literally mean "somewhere beyond words." Have you ever felt like you were "somewhere beyond words"? Has it ever been difficult to find the words to describe what you were experiencing? Do you feel like that today? Perhaps that's one reason the Holy Spirit intercedes for us in "groanings too deep for words" (Romans 8:26).

God built a highway straight through the middle of those "beyond words" experiences. His Word Incarnate, Jesus, travels that highway right to your heart. God's Word, the Scriptures, brings Jesus to us. We may find ourselves in a place beyond words, but you can bet we find God there too—Immanuel, God with us, the Word made flesh. He is with you today, tomorrow and forever.

Lord Jesus, Word of God, speak comfortably to me today. Amen.

Be quiet: Spend 5 minutes in silence after reading Scripture today, letting God's Word speak to you.

Read: Isaiah 40:1-5

*Don Schatz
Kenmore, WA*

Monday, November 28, 2016

Anticipation

To all ... who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

John 1:12

Last year we planned to purchase an Advent calendar for our great-grandson and his expected baby sister. We wanted to begin a tradition and worship opportunity for this young family, and also share a special treat each day with our great-grandson as he adjusted to his new sister.

We purchased a sturdy wooden manger with boxes to place small gifts and Bible verses for each day of Advent. Advent began the day after his new sister arrived. What excitement!

Each day when he came home from school, he ran to the calendar and requested help opening the right box. First, a Christmas storybook, then ornaments for the tree and so on. We know this year he is eagerly awaiting his sister's first birthday and the start of his preparation for Christ's birth.

Lord, help us anticipate your birth like a small child. Amen.

Share: Read the Christmas story or share an Advent remembrance with a young child.

Read: John 1, Luke 1

*Ann Eissfeldt
Ballwin, MO*

Tuesday, November 29, 2016

God in Our Mess!

And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

Luke 2:12

“Our Lord comes to us even in our mess!” That’s how a friend signed her Christmas card. The thought fit her, whose house was wall-to-wall clutter. The thought fits us all with our mistakes, missed opportunities and troubles.

The Christmas message is that Christ, the Son of God, born of a virgin and cradled in a feeding trough, comes right into our mess. He comes in spite of our mess. He comes to clean up the mess we’re in. And he’ll be there when we can only offer our selfish hearts and broken promises. He’ll be there when we have reached our last thread of hope to forgive, renew, redirect, restore, accept and strengthen us by his grace and mercy. That’s why he came, and still does, to all who see the mess they’re in and beg for release.

Lord Jesus, grant us your cleansing presence in the middle of a messy world. Amen.

Share: Share with someone who is down on themselves because of sin the great news that Jesus cleaned up our mess, redeeming our world from sin and shame.

Read: Luke 2:1-12

*David P. Schmidt
St. Louis, MO*

Wednesday, November 30, 2016

Green Leaves

For its leaves remain green ... it does not cease to bear fruit.

Jeremiah 17:8

Our home overlooks the Powhatan Tidal Creek; we are separated from it by about 100 feet of protected forest. During spring and summer the forest is stunning and thick with various shades of green. We can only see the water during the winter after the blustery winds have ripped the leaves from the trees. Yet even in autumn and winter there remain a few green trees. The holly trees continue to have green leaves all year long and continue to bear vibrant red berries. I think of those berries as part of God's provision for the various birds through the winter.

Like the holly, we Christians continue to remain green year round, alive with God's message of love. And we continue to produce vibrant fruit, acts of love and kindness, God's provision for those around us.

Trustworthy God, help me to remain alive in you and always bear fruit to your glory. Amen.

Grow: Bear fruit year round to the glory of God in whom you trust.

Read: Jeremiah 17:7-8

*Terry Weber
Williamsburg, VA*

Thursday, December 1, 2016

Christmas Goodness

Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

Luke 2:10

As I lay, a noodle in bed, recovering from an illness, the words to this old children's song ran through my mind: "God is so good. God is so good. God is so good. He's so good to me." It was all my brain could handle. And it was enough.

God's goodness was never more apparent than during the first Christmas. Over the centuries Satan tried to put mistrust in the hearts of God's people. But they remained steadfast, waiting for God's promises to come true. Rejoice as angels fly into formation, shouting, "This is it! God's goodness and victory prevail in his Son!" God's goodness surrounds you as you welcome your Savior. That goodness will see you through illness, loneliness, pain and every trouble as you celebrate the great joy your newborn Savior brings.

*God, you are so good to me, now and always.
Help me witness your goodness to those around me.
In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Do: List the signs of God's goodness in your life today.

Read: Psalm 52; Luke 2:8-14

*Ruth Geisler
Aliso Viejo, CA*

Friday, December 2, 2016

God's People Celebrate

Know that the LORD, he is God!

Psalm 100:3

Even a commercialized Christmas season brings out some of humanity's best. People think about exiting the "rat race" and re-entering the human race. The "working hard for the money" seems more purposeful as gifts are exchanged. Charity is practiced. There is even a "hint" in the air that there is a legitimate reason for celebration.

God's people celebrate. Celebration is not dependent upon finances, energy, mobility, or on being pain-free. It is rather an opportunity to meditate on the gracious heart of our God and his Messiah. We reflect on gifts that last eternally. We anticipate the heavenly reunion with fellow believers who once gathered around beloved manger scenes. It is a time to hear church choirs and to "hear" heaven's choir.

We join humanity's celebration, and so much more, for we "know that the Lord, he is God!"

Dear Holy Spirit, thank you for giving wisdom to our celebrations. Amen.

Share: Tell others what God has taught you about celebration.

Read: Exodus 12:21-27; Luke 10:17-20

*Harry Edenfield
Brownstown, MI*

Saturday, December 3, 2016

Waiting People

Wait for the LORD ... let your heart take courage.

Psalm 27:14

From my post at the pharmacy window where I volunteer at a free medical clinic, I have a good view of the waiting room. The people waiting are quiet and hopeful, knowing at the end of their wait they will see someone who cares and who offers relief for their struggles. They come with very little, hands empty, and they leave, smiling with gratitude. The exceptions to that quiet waiting are the kids who sometimes accompany their parents. They jump from chair to chair—noisy, singing, oblivious to the patient adults.

The waiting room offers a picture to us, God's waiting Advent people. We are hopeful, too, knowing that our emptiness and our hurts will be met by Someone who gives us care and relief and much more. The Savior we await offers us eternal life! And those bouncy kids? Advent's ending gets even better with a little singing and dancing.

Lord, as I wait for you, give me compassion for those who wait with empty hands. Amen.

Wait: Next time you are standing in a long line, ask God what he wants you to learn today.

Read: Psalm 27; 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

*Sally Beck
Williamsburg, VA*

Sunday, December 4, 2016

Cousins

Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.

Luke 1:39

Ah, cousins! I loved spending time with my East Coast cousins every couple of years growing up.

Mary arrives at cousin Elizabeth's home. Imagine some of their conversation ... telling one another how the news came to each of them, about the reactions of folks around them and about the hopes and dreams for their boys! They had much joy, and some challenges, to share.

The conversations with my cousins weren't much different. We shared joys, challenges, hopes and dreams as we prayed, ate, shopped and played various games together. Bottom line, we celebrated being together, just as I imagine Mary and Elizabeth did.

Thanks for family, Good Father. Continue to shower your blessings on them, especially on cousins. Amen.

Celebrate: Remember family today and celebrate the blessings they are/were in your life.

Read: Luke 1:41-46; Luke 1:46-55; Luke 1:67-79

*Louise Schini Weber
Ft. Myers, FL*

Monday, December 5, 2016

Heirs with Christ

Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Ephesians 3:6

Do you know someone who is adopted? Those who are adopted have all the full rights of biological offspring, including the ability to claim an inheritance. As far as legal entitlement goes, there is no difference between a biological child and an adopted child.

Through Christ we have been adopted into God's family, and we are even able to call upon him as "Father." This adoption imagery in the Bible shows that God seeks a close, intimate relationship with us like that of a parent to a child. We can rejoice at our adoption, since now we have full assurance of our inheritance as children—eternal life with God in heaven.

Father God, thank you for adopting me into your family and calling me your own. Amen.

Remember: Reflect on your assurance of salvation as part of Christ's family.

Read: Galatians 3:26-29; Ephesians 1:11-14

*Brenda Schmidt
Minneapolis, MN*

Tuesday, December 6, 2016

Jesus Matters Most

But one thing is needful.

Luke 10:42

The staff at our congregation has a saying: “Jesus Matters Most.” We can get worried about many things. All sorts of things can distract us. When we feel bothered, pestered or otherwise taken away from what we think we should be focused on, we say: “Jesus Matters Most.” We say it aloud, so we really hear it. “Jesus Matters Most.”

That is a lesson our ancient sister Martha needed to learn. “But one thing is needful.” Jesus is the one thing needful.

So many things capture our attention: Worries, fears, other people, good and bad feelings, aches and pains, even having fun. Remembering that “Jesus Matters Most” puts them in perspective; it puts all things in their proper place. These other things won’t go away. But they will not control us.

We matter to Jesus. He comes for us. We matter most to the One who matters most.

Lord Jesus, you matter most. Help me live that today. Amen.

Speak: Say aloud today, “Jesus Matters Most,” and mean it!

Read: Luke 10:38-42

*Don Schatz
Kenmore, WA*

Wednesday, December 7, 2016

Pretty Boxes

For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:11

One Christmas our extended family gathered at Aunt Mil's for a festive meal. She had a flair for decorating. A gorgeous centerpiece decked the dining table. But what really thrilled me, my brother and my cousins were the gaily wrapped gift boxes tied to long red ribbons, stretching from the centerpiece to each place setting. What wonderful gift would the boxes hold? When could we open them and receive the surprise? Imagine our disappointment when our aunt explained they were empty—just decorations for the table! Alas, they had looked so promising.

In contrast, our God doesn't fool us with empty gifts. He kept his promise to send a Savior. Jesus is the gift for you and for me that never disappoints.

Father, thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus, our Savior. What a precious gift you gave us all. Amen.

Reassure: Who in your family or community may be unsure of God's love? When you gather for a meal or celebration, how will you reassure them?

Read: Isaiah 6:1-2; Luke 4:14-21

*Donna J. Streufert
South Bend, IN*

Thursday, December 8, 2016

Tender Heart

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

1 Peter 3:8

Wouldn't it be nice if when we gathered together with family and friends, everyone was accepted and loved? Unfortunately, we usually struggle for peace with those people with whom we are closest.

We all have bad days, when the world seems so harsh. Often we take out our frustrations on those close at hand. Let's make a plan to turn it around.

During the next gathering, find one person and share some small kindness. Bring compassion to someone else, and act with a tender heart. You can be someone who is gentle toward others. You can be a vessel of God's love to those who are hurting.

Lord, keep me mindful that I can be tenderhearted toward each person I meet today. Amen.

Encourage: Share a smile, listen and support someone nearby.

Read: 2 Corinthians 13:11; Psalm 133:1

*Annette L. Sherwood
St. Louis, MO*

Friday, December 9, 2016

Signposts to Christmas

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.

Isaiah 7:14

All the beautiful cards—a sparkling tree through a window, snow-covered woods with sleighs and reindeer, church steeples, a star over Bethlehem, the manger and shepherds—we send cards, bake and decorate to reproduce the magic in the pictures, and search for that perfect gift. And how about the Advent wreath and church services? So much to do! So many decisions!

If we regard these as must-do tasks, we've given these props undue importance, but if we think of them as signposts, they become parts of a purpose, celebrating the coming of Christ. Just as the wise men followed the star, each of our activities becomes a direction, leading us like signposts to the destination, Jesus. Rejoice and be glad for the perfect gift has been given.

Thank you, God, for sending the Christ Child, and help us to keep Jesus at the center of our lives all year through. Amen.

Rejoice: The beauty surrounding the season serves to show us God's incomparable gift.

Read: Luke 2:8-21; Isaiah 9:1-7

*Judy Scherr
Lemay, MO*

Saturday, December 10, 2016

The Morning Star

Until ... the morning star rises in your hearts.

2 Peter 1:19

Around Christmas the stars come out. We see stars atop Christmas trees, hanging from grocery store ceilings and on Christmas cards. Most likely the star as a symbol of Christmas began with the star of the East the wise men saw.

“Stars” in our world are people who are the very best in their field, and when we “reach for the stars,” we try to do our very best. In astronomy, the planet Venus is the morning star. It announces that the dawn is here, light has come and it is a new day. Jesus is the Morning Star of Scripture. He says, “I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star” (Revelation 22:16). When the Son of God became human, a new day dawned. Light came to all the world.

When you see some of the many stars of Christmas, think of them as announcements of a bright new day like the morning star announces the dawn.

O Lord God, let each star we see remind us to go to the manger and rejoice and sing alleluia. Amen.

See: At sunrise and all through the day, remember Jesus, the bright Morning Star.

Read: John 3:12-16

*Eldor Kaiser
Lenexa, KS*

Sunday, December 11, 2016

Joy Power

The joy of the LORD is your strength.

Nehemiah 8:10

Joy is different from happiness. Happiness can happen between you and a piece of chocolate. Joy comes when you're aware that someone is glad to be with you. It's the sparkle in someone's eye to see you. It takes two for joy to happen. Remember a time a baby caught sight of your face and smiled back? Or the time you surprised a dear person with your presence? Maybe you recall a little fellow who grinned when you held up a ball for a game of catch. Joy is relational.

What is this "joy of the Lord" then, and how can it make you strong? God delights in you. Why? Because he made you. And when the devil tells you that you are alone, God says otherwise. Notice the name given to Jesus—Emmanuel. God is not only with you, but in you because of your Baptism. How far away can you really get from him? Not far!

Dear Emmanuel, I am not ever alone. Because of your love, I will never be alone in this life or the next. Hallelujah! Amen.

Find: Look for Bible verses that express your joy in the Lord. Share those verses with others.

Read: Matthew 1:23; John 14:16-17

*Julaine Kammrath
Aurora, IL*

Monday, December 12, 2016

Are You Prepared?

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

2 Corinthians 9:15

Are you prepared? It is a common question that we often hear these days. We prepare for many events throughout our lifetime. Our formal education equips us to live independently as adults. Later in life, we eventually prepare financially for retirement. However, during the season of Advent, how well do we prepare our hearts for the birth of our Savior, Jesus?

Many of us decorate our homes and get caught up in the hustle and bustle of preparations without stopping to reflect on the meaning of Jesus' birth. Christmas trees, lights, wreaths and Christmas stockings may adorn our homes. But what is truly in our hearts? Let us now rejoice in God's indescribable gift that we have been given!

Heavenly Father, help me to prepare my heart for the greatest gift you have given mankind. Equip me to share the gift of your Son Jesus with others. Amen.

Action: Reach out to someone who needs to hear the good news of the gift we have been given.

Read: James 1:17

*Betsy Becker Niedringhaus
Ballwin, MO*

Tuesday, December 13, 2016

What Really Matters?

The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.

Romans 10:8

“If Jesus is not real, nothing matters. If Jesus is real, nothing else matters.” Those are the words a friend found carved into a classroom desk in college. From all appearances, those words were not casually scratched into the wood but etched in with some degree of determination as if in hopes they would stay on that desktop a good long time.

The words carved into that desk are reminiscent of the words of St. Paul: “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). In Paul’s mind Jesus is real, and as far as life goes, nothing else matters. I’m certain that we’ve all at times questioned the meaning of life, but by God’s grace the answer comes not in words carved in wood or splashed on back alley walls. The answer comes in God’s Word, Jesus, who lives in our hearts.

Let your Word live forever in my heart. Amen.

Bless: Let every word you speak today come with the blessing of God.

Read: Romans 10:5-13

*Edward Arle
St. Charles, MO*

Wednesday, December 14, 2016

Recollections

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Philippians 4:8

Ah, the good ol' days—when life was simpler, right and wrong were clearly defined, hard work paid off, you were smarter than your phone and operating your television was easier than rocket science.

Truthfully, the good ol' days were probably not as “good” as we recall. Our recollections, however, often turn our attention to times of familiarity and security in the face of frightening changes in our world, our lives and our bodies today. Yet, in all times, God’s grace abounds. Therefore, the Bible challenges us to a re-collection of our thoughts. With our focus on Jesus, we can occupy our minds with signs of his goodness and blessing in these days.

Lord Jesus, cast out my anxiety. Make me aware of your good and gracious gifts today. Amen.

Think: Rejoice in Jesus’ presence with you and ponder all things praiseworthy.

Read: Philippians 4:4-7; Psalm 118:24

*Sandi Geis
St. Louis, MO*

Thursday, December 15, 2016

Faith or Works?

For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

James 2:26

My monthly Bible study group is currently reading Joanna Weaver's *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World* as its focus for discussion. The study of what Jesus says to Martha concerning her sister Mary always leads the participants into a stronger, faith-based relationship with Jesus Christ.

All too often, we Christians profess our love for Jesus but get sidetracked into other activities in our lives—commitments to our communities, employers, spouses and children—and we forget Jesus' simple instruction. Faith, not works, is all that is needed to have a fulfilling and everlasting relationship with God's only Son.

Put down the frying pan or hammer, find a place of solitude, and open your heart, ears and soul to his message to you.

Jesus, thank you for the time we spend with you and help us to continue to build a stronger and deeper relationship with you. Amen.

Do: Spend "quality" time today and truly listen to Jesus' message of love to you.

Read: Luke 10:40-42

*Gloria Elder
Crystal Lake, IL*

Friday, December 16, 2016

Our Christmas Cards

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God.

Luke 2:20

During these days, Christmas cards are arriving in the mail and on my computer. Once again artists have created some remarkable designs.

There are those featuring the shepherds and wise men worshiping the Christ Child. Some include Bible passages like, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Still others focus their attention on the names of Jesus, like Emmanuel, Savior, Messiah or Son of God. Other cards contain lines from Christmas carols and hymns to remind us of the message of Christmas.

As I open my cards, I ponder the message. I praise the Lord for his wonderful gift. I pray for the people who sent me their Christmas greetings.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your Son. Help me sing songs of gratitude and open my heart to his presence. In his name I pray. Amen.

Keep: Keep your cards and in July reread them. Ponder the message, praise the Lord and pray for the folks who sent them.

Read: Isaiah 9:2-7

*Walter M. Schoedel
Webster Groves, MO*

Saturday, December 17, 2016

Trust in the Lord

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

Proverbs 3:5

Are you ever convinced you know the right thing to do? I have been there. So was Joseph. He planned to quietly divorce Mary because she was pregnant. It seemed to him to be the right thing to do. However, God thought otherwise. It is easy to place our confidence in our own understandings and thoughts, but that is a sure way to stumble along in life.

Solomon warns us against leaning on our own understanding. Solomon is speaking from experience. He had failed to trust God completely. We do not have to make Solomon's mistakes all over again.

It is always the right time to trust in the Lord. There is no room for worry, fear or indecision. Simply trust and follow God.

Lord, help me every day to trust in you alone, to acknowledge you and walk in your pathways. Amen.

Recall: Remember a time when you leaned on your own understanding and were wrong. Repent of it.

Read: Matthew 1:18-25

*Glen VanderKloot
Springfield, IL*

Sunday, December 18, 2016

God Containers?

Who is like the LORD our God?

Psalm 113:5

Almost everything comes inside containers—plastic bags, bottles, cans, boxes. Huge storage containers get stacked high on cargo ships. So much stuff fits nicely inside.

Could any container hold God? No! You can't contain Spirit. Two thousand years ago, God erupted from his infinity home (heaven). Jesus was confined on two occasions, as the creed states, “born of the virgin” and “died and buried.”

Jesus was inside Mary's womb. Later, he was entombed for three days. Confined, contained, before his birth; again, at his death. Neither container could hold him. He was human and also God. Christmas and Easter tell this fantastic story of our totally uncontainable God.

Why would we ever even want to contain him? He is bigger, stronger, more loving than all we could imagine. Let God be God for you. Never box him in.

Lord, help our hearts and minds to be satisfied with who you are. You are our God. Amen.

Think: At times when you feel so out of control, tell yourself, “God isn't!”

Read: Psalm 113; Ephesians 3:14-21

*Ron Biel
The Villages, FL*

Monday, December 19, 2016

Never Alone

I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:20

Have you ever felt alone? Let me count the ways, you may say. Yes, we all have felt alone, even when we were with a group of people. Remember the classic movie *Home Alone*? It is scary, uncomfortable and even unbearable at times to be alone like little Kevin was.

A current TV insurance commercial reminds us that no one is ever alone because of the influence and love of people from the past—our grandparents, our teachers, our friendly neighbor—because their love and support through the years enabled us to grow and mature.

The next time you feel alone, thank the Lord for his presence through all the people who through the years have loved and supported you. He is still with us now through Word and Sacrament and the people that he has put into our lives in the past and continues to give to us right now today.

Lord, when we are alone, assure us that we are not, because of you. Amen.

Today: Look at all the lonely people around you and bring them God's presence, through you!

Read: Psalm 139:7-12; Hebrews 13:5-6

*Rich Bimler
Bloomington, IL*

Tuesday, December 20, 2016

Family Gatherings

God sets the lonely in families.

Psalm 68:6

It was the first year that none of our family was coming home for Christmas. We understood that our daughters had their own families and in-law obligations. We couldn't travel to them, because of ministry obligations.

We volunteered to serve meals on Christmas at the local mission, but they had enough help. We invited for dinner some people we thought might be alone on Christmas, but they all had plans.

We were feeling rather lonely Christmas morning—until we gathered with our church family for worship. The visitors were gone. Our “family” was there. The numbers were small, so we actually sat up front together (most of us). We worshiped together with glad and grateful hearts, rejoicing that God sent his Son to gather us together in his family of faith—here on earth and hereafter in heaven. And we weren't lonely anymore!

Loving Savior, thank you for gathering us into your family of faith. Amen.

Do: Invite someone who might be lonely to join you for dinner on Christmas or Epiphany.

Read: Ruth 4:13-17

*Gil Duchow
Hilliard, OH*

Wednesday, December 21, 2016

The Winter Solstice

My times are in your hands.

Psalm 31:15

The days are getting shorter. December 21 is the shortest of the year. Short days remind us that our time on this earth is short. That can make you blue or bitter or anxious or determined.

But we, like the psalmist, declare, “Lord, my times are in your hands.” We can say that because God sent Jesus to redeem our time. Our short lives would have ended in death and doom. But Jesus gave us a life-extension by his death and resurrection. Now, we will live forever. So we trust in God. We serve him. We look forward to heaven.

Dear God, this life is short. But life with you will be forever. Thank you for this time and for time to come. Amen.

Take time: Now that you have the time, take the time to do something for someone that you always thought you might do, if you had the time.

Read: Psalm 90; 2 Kings 4:1-7

*Lonie Eatherton
Fenton, MO*

Thursday, December 22, 2016

Glow-in-the-Dark Faith

*For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,”
has shone in our hearts.*

2 Corinthians 4:6

Walking at dusk can be dangerous. We are told to put on reflective gear so drivers can see us. Wear bright clothing—something on your arms and legs with blinking lights. Drivers need to see glowing lights in motion.

What about dark days in life? During troubled times what alerts family, friends or your community of your presence? Maybe you are the only one with the experience and faith to help others move forward. You will always have a role to play. You might offer comforting words or solutions to problems. God still calls you to shine among others—not just with gray hair, but with your faith in action.

*Lord, help me bring faith and hope to others.
Amen.*

***Brighten up:** Let others see how God blesses you with the strength and joy to move forward. Wear bright clothing—literally and figuratively!*

***Read:** Matthew 5:15; Ephesians 5:8-11*

*Catherine A. Welch
Southbury, CT*

Friday, December 23, 2016

Stille Nacht

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

A favorite Christmas memory is that of our annual candlelight service when the choirs would surround the congregation to sing “Stille Nacht.” My mom didn’t sing in the choir, but every year I could find her, sitting right there in the middle. Oh, how she loved that hymn.

I still see her every Christmas Eve when with candles lit we begin to sing “Silent Night.” I have yet to get through the lyrics without tears as I remember my mom’s love for us and her love for Jesus.

There is a timeless element to Christmas hymns. Even though we’ve changed over the years, Christ’s love has not. For while we were yet sinners, he was born for us, died on the cross for us and rose again. Remember that this year as you sing your favorite hymns.

Lord Jesus Christ, draw us closer to you through every word in every Christmas hymn. Amen.

Remember: Think of a favorite Christmas memory. How might it tie to God’s undying love for us in Christ?

Read: John 1:1-18; John 3:16-21

*Jane P. Wilke
Woodbury, MN*

Saturday, December 24, 2016

Arrived!

I bring you good news of great joy. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:10-11

Jostling folks, often with handmade signs or flower bouquets, gather behind the yellow lines, anxiously awaiting the arrival of family or friends at Kai Tak airport. As the automatic doors slide open and the first passengers come down the ramp, cries of welcome erupt. On both sides of the line, emotions are overwhelming. There are tears, hugs and pats on the back. The wait is over; reunions begin.

On the night of Jesus' birth, the only waiting folks were Mary and Joseph. Upon his arrival, the sky burst into light as an angel told of his birth. Stunned yet curious, the shepherds quickly headed for a Bethlehem cow barn. They brought no welcome signs or flower bouquets, only themselves.

As you come to the Christ Child's manger this Christmas, be assured that the wait is over and your heavenly reunion awaits.

*My heart is full of thanks and praise, Emmanuel.
Amen.*

Recall: Remember a joyful homecoming.

Read: Genesis 42 to 47:12; Luke 15:11-32

*Louise Schini Weber
Ft. Myers, FL*

Sunday, December 25, 2016

Three M's of Christmas

Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

Luke 2:19

Mary was overwhelmed with the visit of the angel, the birth of her Son, the visit of the shepherds. She couldn't do otherwise but ponder what she had been experiencing and wonder what it all meant.

What about us as we celebrate Christmas? It is a Miracle—the birth of God's Son. It is a Mystery—how can this be? Finally there is a Message for us. He came to be our Savior and Lord. Like the shepherds, we travel to Bethlehem to worship him, and then go out and tell others the Good News. He came to redeem us from the curse of sin, the sting of death, the clutches of hell and the power of the devil. We indeed become his sons and daughters, heirs of eternal life. We hold these truths dear to our hearts.

Lord Jesus, help us this Christmas to focus our attention on the miracle, the mystery and the message of your coming. Amen.

Time out: Share your Christmas faith with your children, grandchildren and the community where you live.

Read: Luke 2:1-20; Galatians 4:4-7

*Walter M. Schoedel
Webster Groves, MO*

Monday, December 26, 2016

The Days After

He will give you another Helper to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth.

John 14:16-17

I remember leave-taking after a holiday visit to Grandma's. She would patter after us as Mom shoed five kids into our 1957 Ford. Grandma would press a five-dollar bill into Dad's hand and quickly retreat so she could see everyone a final time. My last look back framed this old woman waving her white handkerchief and dabbing at tears.

Sometimes the quiet after holiday bustle provides a welcome rest, but sometimes also pulls on the heart. Jesus understands separation, and God does something about it. He sent his Spirit to be with believers forever. This is a fact you can lean into on "the days after." There really is Someone right there to befriend you. Talk to him and see what happens.

*Lord, thank you for the pleasure people in my life bring. Thank you for the pleasure you bring too.
Amen.*

Write: On one side of a folded index card, print: ASK. On the other side, print: RECEIVE. Use it as a reminder to ask for help when you feel lonesome and see how God responds.

Read: John 17:20-21; Isaiah 43:2

*Julaine Kammrath
Aurora, IL*

Tuesday, December 27, 2016

Find Joy in Jesus' Word

Your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

John 16:22

The seek-and-find “Where’s Waldo?” books were very popular a few years ago. It was fun to search, whether you found Waldo or not. It was not so with another search. Mary and Joseph had lost track of Jesus after leaving the festival in Jerusalem one year.

Not finding Jesus in the pilgrim crowd, Mary and Joseph returned to Jerusalem and found him in the temple exploring God’s Word with the teachers there. Years later Jesus said, “You search the Scriptures ... and they are the writings that testify of me” (John 5:39). Searching the Scriptures! That’s the key for finding Jesus—or rather, being found by him. Jesus Christ meets us in our daily attention to his written and spoken Word.

How glad Mary and Joseph must have been to find Jesus. Find joy in Jesus today.

Holy Spirit, open our eyes of faith to find Christ wherever we may be. Amen.

Ponder: Think of one saying of Jesus that gives you special joy. As the opportunity arises, tell someone about it.

Read: Luke 2:41-46

*Fred Boettcher
Menomonee Falls, WI*

Wednesday, December 28, 2016

Expectations

The people were in expectation.

Luke 3:15

Why do we always have expectations as we come to the end of a year and the beginning of a new one? Sometimes they are defined as New Year's resolutions. Most of us have made them and, as most people admit, most of us never keep them.

Expectations are like a double-edged sword. They spring from a hope deep within us for something better, something different. When they are not fulfilled, we have a sense of being let down. We tell ourselves that we really knew that nothing would change.

As followers of Jesus, our expectations for the future are not like some wishful believing in Santa Claus. Our expectations are grounded in God's fulfilled promises in Christ. At the end of the year we can have expectations of God because the Savior has come. God is now with us in Christ.

Dear Father, I look to my future with expectation because you are in my future and I can trust you, because of Jesus. Amen.

Write: Find and write down each day a promise of God for your future.

Read: 2 Corinthians 5

*Lionel Otto
Adelaide Australia*

Thursday, December 29, 2016

The Rest of the Story

But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days.

Daniel 12:13

Radio personality Paul Harvey specialized in storytelling. His broadcasts colorfully described events or people, leaving out certain details. At the very end he would reveal some surprising fact or twist. For decades his signature tagline was, “And now you know (dramatic pause) the rest of the story.”

As we look back on this year and all the years before, we want to know the rest of the story. Jesus’ disciples did too. “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming?” (Matthew 24:3). Another time Jesus told them, “It is not for you to know” (Acts 1:7). Some things we just don’t know. But God knows everything and gives us all the details we need: Jesus is coming back to take all who believe in his redeeming life, death and resurrection to their heavenly home. That’s the rest of the story!

God of the ages, walk with us through the end of this year and into the next. Bless our days. Amen.

Prepare: Be ready to share the rest of the story.

Read: 1 Peter 1:3-5; Revelation 1:1-3

*Marj Maynard
Billings, MO*

Friday, December 30, 2016

Get a Face Lift!

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.

Numbers 6:25

Imagine a surprise visit from a favorite friend or family member. Can you feel your face light up and your heart fill with joy? You would be quick to offer a smile, a hug and hospitality.

Did you know that God thinks of you that way? His blessing to his people from the days of Aaron is to “make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.” That’s like saying God’s face lights up when he sees you and he responds in gracious care and kindness. What a beautiful truth, most deeply fulfilled in Jesus!

God blesses us so we can share his blessing with others. Let’s let our faces reflect the joy and delight God has with us as his redeemed children and our words and actions convey gracious kindness to others.

Father, help me to reflect to others the delight and grace you have toward me because of Jesus. Amen.

Do: Let your face light up as you greet others today and tell them why!

Read: Numbers 6:24-26; Psalm 4:6-8

*Diane Bahn
Cypress, TX*

Saturday, December 31, 2016

Auld Lang Syne

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Romans 8:32

Since *Auld Lang Syne* was first published in 1788, it has been the farewell song to the old year in many places around the world. It means “For the sake of days gone by.” On the last day of the year it is customary to “raise a cup of kindness yet” as we think back with a nostalgic tear on some fond memories and some not.

But the old year was more than merely “days gone by.” In every trouble, in every joy, God was our Refuge and Strength, our very present help in every trouble. We raise our praise to God. He who has saved us in the past from sin and every evil will abide with us with his abundant blessings in the new year also.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day. O thou who changest not, abide with me. Amen.

Pray: Sing (or pray) “Abide With Me” or another hymn of faith on this last day of the year.

Read: Romans 8:18-39; Psalm 91

*Lonie Eatherton
Fenton, MO*

HOLY HABITS for **HOPE-FULL HEALTH**

Gather Together

We are all part of a “Holy Huddle,” the Church, and we need each other to support and encourage us. Consider these gathering activities as part of your Holy Habits during these weeks:

H: House warmings are great ways to meet new people. Invite people over to your place, or ask someone to host a “new neighbor” event, or welcome people to meet your new pet. Look for ways to invite and be invited to get better acquainted with people, young and old.

U: Unique. Consider new ways to gather with others. Meet a friend at a coffee shop, go to a movie with a new neighbor, invite a friend for a walk, go shopping with a child, or bring some warm cookies to your local school.

D: Determine to get out of your home regularly, decide who to call on the phone, develop a regular schedule of talking and visiting with people.

D: Do not put off spending time with other people. Even if you are unable to leave your home, you can pray and phone people, just to keep in touch.

L: Link yourself with someone new, someone now, someone whom you can befriend—and be friends.

E: Enjoy! “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I,” Jesus said. So be glad!

Hope-Full Praying

Safe Travels

Lord, during these holidays, please make highways havens of hospitality. Protect families and friends who are in the air, on the roads and even on the seas. May miles become miracles of healthy conversations among all who travel. Keep all of us on your highway to heaven. Amen.

Holiday Memories

Special days “re-member” us, Lord. They bring us together as your Holy Huddle. Many will gather with family and friends. Some will mourn the absence of relatives and loved ones. Some will be caught in tension as sin gets in the way of forgiveness. Thanks for the past memories, Lord, and help us to rebuild old memories into new memories of hope and love. Amen.

Staying Connected

This world, Lord, is so connected through social media, smart phones and iPads at one level, yet so disconnected to you. Thanks for staying connected with us through Word and Sacrament and through our family and friends. Help me to be a connector of your love and hope to others as I not only text people but also point them to the texts of Scripture. Amen.

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