

“Arising Son”
2021 Lenten Devotional



Jesus said to her,
“I am the resurrection and the life. Those
who believe in me, even though they die,
will live...”
~ John 11:25

Ash Wednesday, February 17, 2021

Week One: Transfigurations



February 17-20

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 32:24, 28-30

Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved."

REFLECTION: I think of "Israel" as Jacob's "superhero" name. It comes with an origin story. It reveals something about both the hero's character and his journey. Maybe most important of all, it looks cool on the cover of a comic book. Watch out, world; here comes the God-Wrestler!

And keep in mind, that cool name (Superman, Wonder Woman, Spider-Man) is not the character's "secret identity," it's their *public* identity. Clark Kent, Diana Prince and Peter Parker are the secret, private names of these extraordinary individuals, the masks they wear when they pretend to be ordinary and try to "blend in." They might keep those masks on for extended periods, while they go to work, make dinner and brush their teeth, but the meat of the story happens when they shed their street clothes, wrapping themselves in colorful costumes to right wrongs, fight for justice and save the world.

Israel, the one who struggles through sleepless nights trying to get his arms around God, is the extraordinary public truth of some seemingly nondescript guy named Jacob Isaacson. To be sure, the hero's true identity is never far below the surface, even in their street clothes. Clark Kent exposes corruption as an investigative reporter. Peter Parker volunteers in soup kitchens.

Typically, the hero only becomes aware of this true identity through some unexpected drama or even trauma. Peter Parker didn't go looking to be bitten by a spider and have his DNA scrambled. Neither was Jacob looking for a wrestling match with God, and he certainly didn't plan to walk with a limp for the rest of his life. While their minds were on one thing -- Peter's high school tribulations, Jacob's conflict with his brother — something else entirely came out of the blue and revealed the course of their life. (They didn't even get to choose their own new names; "Spider-Man" got his from an amateur wrestling promoter and "Israel" received his instead of learning God's name, as he had demanded.)

So I wonder, when will we experience our own extraordinary origin stories and learn our own true, wrong-righting, justice-seeking, world-changing names? Who are we really?

PRAYER: *Abba and teacher, surprise us with the truth of ourselves, and commit our hearts to serving your world and your people with the courage of the name you have given us: Beloved Child made in your image. Amen.*



Thursday, February 18, 2021

SCRIPTURE: 1 Kings 19:11-12

He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.

REFLECTION: The dictionary describes transfiguration as "a complete change of form or appearance into a more beautiful or spiritual state." Non-believers make the statement that they cannot believe in something or someone that they cannot see. Yet as Lutherans we believe in Jesus Christ even though we can't physically see Him and look forward to seeing Christ when He returns.

Peter, James & John were to stay awake guarding Jesus, but they fell asleep. They awoke to see Christ's glory and Moses & Elijah standing with Him. Moses and Elijah represent the two principal components of the Old Testament: Moses was the giver of the law, and Elijah was considered the greatest of the prophets. God allowed the apostles to have a spiritual experience that was meant to strengthen their faith for the challenges they would later endure as Jesus has to suffer through the Passion.

In the same way, at certain times in this life, God may give certain members of the faithful, special experiences of His grace that strengthen their faith. Not everyone will have such an experience, but we should welcome these experiences, but not expect them, or be afraid of them.

They are meant to be momentary glimpses of the joy of heaven that should sustain us as we face various challenges of this life, and to help strengthen us on the road that will ultimately bring us into the endless joy of heaven. This is the future experience we pray for!

PRAYER: *Lord, we are weak and don't fully understand all that will happen before we meet you in our heavenly home. Please forgive our ignorance and lack of faith. Send your Holy Spirit to make us stronger and to build our faith so that we reach out and spread Your Word to our fellowman. Help us live our lives more like Christ, helping others, loving our neighbor and bringing them into the fold. Amen.*



Friday, February 19, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Luke 8:43-48

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years; and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. Then Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you." But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me." When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

REFLECTION: A person with hemorrhages or many other diseases were not to be seen in public. A woman who suffered for many years and received no relief was so desperate to find help since she spent all she had on physicians and they could find not cure her.

She ventured into the crowds who were surrounding Jesus. She made her way thru the crowd to be near Him. When she was close enough, she touched his clothing and her hemorrhage stopped. Because of His powers, Jesus knew someone touched him. Everyone denied touching him but when the woman knew she could not keep it a secret she stepped up and admitted what she did. I am sure she was very afraid to admit this and thought she would be reprimanded. But her faith gave her the strength she needed to admit what she did in order to be healed. Jesus saw her faith and made her well.

Having faith in Jesus is so very important. No matter what we are going through, Jesus is always there for us. He will help you get through the good and the bad and never judge us.

This bible verse makes me think of my Mom. She had consistent pain for over eight years and no doctor or test could find a cure. She would always ask me if Jesus was listening to her prayers for healing. I told her to keep believing and have faith. He might not answer your prayer today, tomorrow or next month but in his own time. I always encouraged her every day I talked with her. Unfortunately, she was never cured. I am sure because of her faith when she passed away and went to heaven, Jesus opened his arms and wrapped them around her and took the pain away.

Always have the faith no matter what because Jesus will always be there for you.

PRAYER: *Dear Jesus, During this difficult time for our world, please see the faith we have. Know that we believe in you and are thankful what you did for us on the cross. Amen.*



Saturday, February 20, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Luke 23:47

When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said "Certainly this man was innocent"

REFLECTION: Merriam Webster says "transfigure means to give a new and typically exalted or spiritual appearance; to transform outwardly and usually for the better."

The centurion was a man of duty. A man who was expected to follow directions without question. Yet, at the foot of the

cross, the realization that something terribly wrong had taken place occurred. Have you ever wondered what happened afterward? Did the centurion go back to “business as usual” the next day? The day after that? Somehow I doubt it.

The transformation we undergo when we develop a relationship with our Savior changes us. It begins deep inside, and creates in us a new being. The transformation is “usually for the better.”

Sometimes it doesn’t feel like it. Our human nature makes us want to go back to our selfish self. We become too wrapped up in the world around us, and sin becomes prominent... greed, envy, and quite often in these days, division and hate. It is easy to give in; easy to give up. But we have been shown the way by the One who overcame all that for us.

We know where to go when our earthly selves are being led into this hateful, hurtful trap. Back to the One who gave His all for us to be free of it. Back to the foot of the cross where we can say “Certainly this man was innocent” and then allow Him to lead us to total transformation.

PRAYER: *From the song by Keith Green “ Make my life a prayer to you, I want to do what you want me to... No empty words, and no white lies, no token prayers, no compromise”. Amen.*



Week Two: ALPHA



(Beginnings)

February 21-26

Monday, February 22, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Romans 6:4

Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

REFLECTION: Have you ever stepped in the deep mud at the edge of a pond, felt your foot sink into the mud and find that you are completely stuck? Twice I have lost good boat shoes to a few feet of freshwater muck. For me, being stuck like that it is an awful feeling, like I'm trapped.

At times I have felt like that is what has happened to my life. Walking in the old life of sin and shame felt like every step, every word, every action, was just putting me deeper and deeper into the muck. One bad step led to a worse one.

Paul says that we "might walk in newness of life." Yet most of us are very stuck trying to move through life. And all of us, because we are human are stuck in our way of thinking or in some other way. We are buried in the muck.

In Baptism, we are unstuck. In baptism the Holy Spirit frees our feet and gives us the freedom and the permission to walk a new way. The way of the Cross.

PRAYER: *God help us to see that we aren't stuck. Amen.*



Tuesday, February 23, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Ezekiel 11:18-19

When they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations. I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh.

REFLECTION: As we reflect on the Weekly Theme, ALPHA, Gods' message to Ezekiel is that he should convey to the people, that if they give up their sinful ways and idolatry, they will be made new and right with God. King David in Psalm 51:10: said "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." When we surrender and repent, it is God who does the work of cleansing our hearts and minds.

During the Civil War, American evangelist D.L. Moody said: "I believe firmly that the moment our hearts are emptied of pride, selfishness, ambition and everything contrary to Gods' law, the Holy Spirit will fill every corner of our hearts. But if we are full of pride, conceit, ambition and the world, there is no room for the Spirit of God. We must be emptied before we can be filled."

The verses, from Ezekiel can also give us insight into the "Alpha Beginning" that is to come many centuries after this writing. Jesus, the "Arising Son" will be born in Bethlehem, suffer and die on the cross and in three days rise from the dead. Through Christs' death and Resurrection, our sins are washed away and we are given new life through baptism and the Holy Spirit.

PRAYER: *Lord you are the Alpha and Omega. Create in us a clean heart and renew a right spirit within us, through your Son Jesus Christ who is the Arising Son. Amen*



Wednesday, February 24, 2021

SCRIPTURE: 1 Peter 1: 3

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

REFLECTION: God has given us, His children, so much: His grace, even though we don't always deserve it, His mercy when we don't live up to His expectations and the greatest gift of all, His Son Jesus Christ. For this we must show Him our thankfulness and praise. This we can do every day with our prayers and worship.

When I was very young, the resurrection seemed impossible to understand, even scary. As I grew older, I was excited when the angel declared to the women at the tomb, "He is not here for he has risen!" God gave us such hope on that day. Not only had we received the words of love and caring from Jesus during his ministry on earth, but His resurrection proved that we had that hope of a new birth. Because of His death on the cross for our sins and His resurrection, God fulfilled His promises. Now we have faith and hope for our eternal home.

This is a troubling world we live in today. The Pandemic has made us fearful of something we cannot completely control. We stay in our homes as much as possible, go to church

virtually and isolate ourselves from family and friends. Our country and its values are under attack. What can we do? How do we survive all this uncertainty? We look to God's unchangeable promises and His steadfast love. He does not waver in His constant love and caring. Our hope is based on God and His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER: *Dear God, We thank you for your endless grace and abundant mercy. Help us to look to the future, confident in the hope you have given us through your Son's death and resurrection. Amen.*



Thursday, February 25, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 21:4-5

God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away. And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new."

REFLECTION: During a speech in 1992, Queen Elizabeth II referred to the year as "Annus Horribilis" (horrible year). I think we are all in agreement that 2020 can go down in history as the newest "Annus Horribilis".

New Year's Day 2020 was filled with hope and enthusiasm for the beginning of a new decade. Then the Coronavirus came to America and the world as we knew it was turned upside down. The thought of being in quarantine for months on end seemed like something out of an apocalyptic horror movie, yet here we are, still being kept away from family and friends and our normal daily routines. So much has changed in such a short period of time that it is

incomprehensible. Simple things we took for granted, like going to a store, have been changed. The sense of loss has been overwhelming. When caught up in the throes of sadness and despair, it is easy to feel alone and forgotten. Yet as we mourn what has been and may never be again, there are glimmers of hope and renewal like the crocus emerging from the winter snow. The promise of vaccinating as many people as possible; the slow reopening of our favorite restaurants and most important, returning to worship, all lead us to the hope of a return to the familiar.

As we enter this season of reflection and repentance, we need to remember that God our Father is always with us, wiping away our tears, and helping us emerge from these trying times more firm in our faith with gladness and newness in our hearts.

PRAYER: *Lord, we thank you for renewing us with your unending love and knowing what we need even when we may not know it ourselves. Amen.*



Friday, February 26, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Lamentations 3:22-23

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

REFLECTION: Imagine what it must have been like for the lamenter who wrote these words. The beloved City on a Hill, Jerusalem, lay in ruins and the people carried off by Babylon. Where is God? Why has God abandoned us?

The chapter starts with crushing emotions at the hand of God, images of darkness, brokenness, bitterness, emptiness and despair. The author truly feels that God has taken aim with heart piercing arrows targeting God's own people. In many ways the passage parallels Jesus' own passion on his way to and on the cross. He also cried out against the fury of God's wrath. Been there?

When I was young I can remember praying and feeling very much like my words bounced off the ceiling only to fall flat on the floor to be trampled. Life as a teenager can be filled with crushing emotions. Yet there I was crying out into emptiness. Now I am older and understand that God is there, I believe it with all my heart. Even so, when my cries to God for our world, that often lays in ruins, go out in prayer I still sometimes feel that they go into ... emptiness. Where do we begin to find God in our current sadness when we feel that God is not there?

The lamenter takes a "tragic reversal" and turns from despair to hope. It is deliberate. In spite of all the ruin and abandonment, even feeling targeted the lamenter is determined to see God's steadfast, never-ending, faithful showering of love and mercy.

The beginning of hope is our determination to remember God is with us even in the darkness, Jesus shares our brokenness. Every day we can awaken and look for new mercies. They are there, all around us, hidden like gems in the ruins. Every night when we say goodnight to God we can expect that God, though often silent is actively listening. And we can know, determined to believe, that when God speaks the words will bring love, mercy and comfort. I am comforted in knowing that will not change. You can be too!

PRAYER: *Lord God, you always hear us. Help us to see, to experience your tender mercies and great love for us. Amen*



Saturday, February 27, 2021

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 5:17

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

REFLECTION: A fresh start is something we think of throughout our lifetimes. Things seem to be going awry and we wish 'it' could be different – we can start new again. This passage allows me to think about just that; new beginnings. I am an optimist, so when my life is challenging for so many different reasons, I love the idea of a reset. My house is disorganized? Tomorrow is a new day! I will start by organizing my bathroom and work from there. I am not happy about my health? Tomorrow I will begin walking once a day and making better eating choices. I feel disconnected from my faith, maybe from my church family? I can begin by starting my day with prayer or meditation. I will make sure I participate in our church zoom meetings and attend weekly services virtually, until it is safe for us to gather once again. Today is a new day – it is the perfect day to start over, IF we feel we need to. Change can be scary, but it can also be so good! Embrace the opportunity to improve an aspect of your life. I guarantee you will be happy that you did.

PRAYER : *Thank you Lord for the gift of a new day. Thank you for blessing us with that unique ability to start fresh when we are ready for change. Please guide me as I embrace healthy change in my life. Amen.*



Week Three: Journeys



February 28- March 6

Monday, March 1, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 23:4

Even though I walk in the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff-comfort me.

REFLECTION: Growing up, I learned the version....Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil... Reading that, I still envision walking with God in a pretty valley with large mountains surrounding it. And all of a sudden, the sky darkens, a shadow covers our path, and it takes an ominous feel of pending death.

This year in particular, more people than I ever knew personally or with my hospital work have walked that dark valley in their battle with COVID 19. Like Jesus, we each have our own life's journey, that has a beginning and end on Earth, filled with good times and bad. During these pandemic times with so much sickness, death, financial burdens, domestic violence, isolation and fear, it is commonplace to call out and ask God..." Where are you?" But when we are still and open our hearts, spirit and mind, we realize God has been helping us along even now as he always has and always will.

This verse which used to make me sad, now gives me comfort. Because like a good shepherd, God is with us every moment on our life's path, to guide and protect us. So even in our darkest hours, we are not alone; and what security that brings. Psalm 23 ends with a recap and finale of our lives that was a promise paid in full by Jesus' journey to the cross. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Amen to that brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus!

PRAYER: *Dear Jesus, help us to not lose sight of your presence and love even on our darkest days. We may not yet understand your purposes for suffering and loss, but help us to trust you and be thankful for all your blessings and constant love. Amen.*

Tuesday, March 2, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Proverbs 16:9

The human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps.

REFLECTION: "Journeys" Let me start with the journey of marriage. It all started with a prayer " Lord, send me someone who will love me for me". I prayed this for about one year and along came a traveling sales man. Pretty much since our first date we have been together, that was 34 years ago. In hindsight I believe the Lord sent me to him to show him what love is. (1 Corinthians 13: 4-8).

My next Journey has been/is parenthood and the prayer went like this "Dear Lord please help me change my life". I prayed this for 2 years. I had a home and a marriage, a good job but was lacking substance/direction. I was not attending church and felt as thou I was sinking. No one knew this, on the outside it all looked good. I was going thru day to day life as I should. We were not planning a family so at 34 years old I did actually ask my doctor "How did this happen". We had been together 12 years and were careful. Well it was at that point I high tailed it back to church. I knew I would need extra help in raising a child. Becoming a parent is not what I had in mind when asking God for help. I must say parenthood has been the ABSOLUTE best journey ever. (We even had a second child) It has been 22 years and I refer back

to 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. My love for our children has shown me what God our father feels for us. Learning that takes me to my Spiritual Journey.

I told you I returned to church and have continued getting involved here and there over the years. What a joy it is to be part of a church family. My Journey now is one I do not want to take. It is the one where I am care taker for my elderly mother. Oh people say "You are lucky to still have your mother". To be honest watching her struggle thru her day, losing her strength, seeing her confusion brings me to this prayer "Lord have mercy" and of course 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8. I now have Faith over Fear and will take this journey with Jesus by my side.

PRAYER: *Dear Lord, Thank you for this day, I know you have been with me thru out my life, I am praying for those who have not known you yet. If I can help send me. Amen.*



Wednesday, March 3, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Mark 10:17

As Jesus started on his way a man ran up to him, fell on his knee before him. "Good Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal Life?"

REFLECTION: As I sit and reflect on the recent events of this past year I can see why many people are not trusting of God's Plan. These past months have been trying for so many and grief, disbelief, fear, and suffering seem to be prevalent in our day to day lives. As a Christian I too have sat and cried and ask God for some sort of explanation of His Plan. Life, in fact, is controlled by, His Plan. We are asked to follow him and trust that this Plan is set before us for a

reason. Our journeys' in life may be very different in some ways but as a Family of Faith we share in the hope for a brighter tomorrow and an answer to our questions.

No one, including Jesus, has a journey without trials and struggles. It is by Faith that we know that we will make it through with God's help. To inherit eternal life we must trust in the journey and follow God's plan for us. Accept Jesus into our hearts and know that he is always with us along the way. We are all bound to stumble and sometimes fall but knowing that we travel along this journey with the Love and Help of Jesus makes it a worthwhile task. May our Journey be filled with Love and Grace and may your share that with those around you as well.

PRAYER: *Dear God, please be with us this day and always help us to trust in Your Plan and follow along the chosen journey. Amen.*



Thursday, March 4, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Luke 10: 29-33

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.

REFLECTION: I think we are all familiar with this story, and it is a good one to be reminded of. But I would like to think of it in a different way. I have always read it as the Samaritan felt pity for the man who was beaten and robbed and laying there half dead because he then goes and helps him. But what if the pity he felt is for the people who walked by the man. To feel nothing for a man who is near death and bleeding and calling for help just because it may inconvenience you at the time or you feel that person is beneath you. Those are the people who deserve pity.

I have been watching a show and one of the reoccurring sayings in it is “A man asks for help, you help him.” And they stop what they are doing and go help. That was profound to me. No one has to check a schedule or has to discuss if they like the person “enough” to help. They just help. If someone comes to you for help, and you are able to, you help.

PRAYER: *God, in this world we live in, it is hard for us not to take the easy path and only help who we want to help. So much divides us. Please give us the wisdom to realize that we all are loved by you and we need to treat each other with compassion and know that you gave us the ability to help one another, not for us to keep it to ourselves, but to share it with the world.*
In Jesus name, Amen.



Friday, March 5, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 25:13.

“Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

REFLECTION: This verse ends the telling of the parable of the Ten Bridesmaids – five wise and prepared, five foolish and unprepared. In this strange world of today with crises upon crises this seems like very good advice, but also very exhausting – being aware/awake all the time on this journey. And we cannot not know what is right around the corner with any certainty although we make plans upon plans.

So how can I unpack this to be manageable while still hearing Jesus’s words? Perhaps the journey is not moving forward each day but digging deeper into what is in front of me. “We don’t see things as they are, we see them as we are.” Anais Nin. This is one of my very favorite quotes. I have had it in my wallet for years and come across it now and again in articles and books. I am trying to see a bit more of things as they are during this unusual time.

In “normal” times I would be breezing along with a proper schedule and tasks to be accomplished. Now I have more time to dig deeper. I have time to reflect on my deeply held beliefs and be challenged. I have been taking a couple of on-line courses/classes and reading books I would never have picked up before. This all is changing my perceptions and understanding of race relations in this country in all its forms, including my own. I hope that I will be able to answer the challenges to these learnings when called upon to do so, knowing neither the day or hour. And I pray at the end of this deep digging I will meet God again.

PRAYER: *Heavenly Father help us to be ready when called on to answer to our faith in You that leads us down paths we never expected to be on. And because we sometimes lack the courage to be awake and alert, but prefer the comfortable place, help us with your Holy Spirit to trust in You always. In the name of your Son, Jesus, we pray. Amen.*



Saturday, March 6, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

REFLECTION: 2020 has shown us more than ever before how little control we have over the course of both world events, and our own lives. It can be both unsettling and frightening to realize this inability, shared by all, to prepare ourselves for the unexpected (like a pandemic). It is in these times, when we can neither make sense of the present, nor predict the future, that we must rely on God for our safety and survival. People always say that God works in mysterious ways, but this past year has exemplified this expression perfectly.

There was very little anyone could do to change the events experienced in our world, leaving us with no alternative but to trust in God to bring us out of these challenges. Our lacking insight into the future can bring us closer to God if we let it. In such uncertain situations as we have faced in the past year, we must abandon our own concerns and look to the Lord for guidance. Yet, challenging times can also push many of us away from God as well. The seemingly excruciating length of 2020 pushed many of us Christians to

a point of questioning God this year. Why would he allow such horrible things to happen, and persist for so long? How can we be expected to live in a world where people are scared of each other, and fighting almost every day? Though we may be unable to find the answers to these kinds of questions, the continuance of our daily lives should be evidence enough of God's compassion to his children. Regardless of how dangerous the world may appear to us, faith in the Lord will guide us to safety and salvation.

PRAYER: *Dear Lord, please help us to give all instincts over to you in times of severe struggle and uncertainty. You are infinitely wiser than we could ever be, and we must rely on you to straighten our paths. Through faith in you we can persevere and thrive as your children walking in the ways you clear for us. Amen.*



Monday, March 8, 2021

Week Four: Amid The Darkness



March 7-13

SCRIPTURE: ACTS 7:59


While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

REFLECTION: This story starts when Stephen is put in charge of charity among Christians to fulfill God's command, allowing the apostles to continue spreading the good news. He is arrested by the Jewish authority on false charges and in his trial he compares the Priests' denial of Jesus' divinity to the followers of Moses turning to idols. The scene of his death is a powerful one to me. Presumably steeped in despair and anger, he prays that his spirit be revived, and he goes on to pray for the forgiveness of his executioners, just as Jesus had.

This act of grace in the face of annihilation gives me ample food for thought. I can think of no greater epitome of forgiveness than this circumstance. I wonder whether they knew how their deeds would inspire those who heard of them, if that light shone in the distance amid their darkness. And that such a miraculous moral feat was done by not just the messiah but also a follower demonstrates how anyone can embody Christ's Holy Spirit. It is evident how personal crisis can influence the arc of an individual's life, I often consider how spiritual and social crisis, championed by small groups of individuals through history, have and continue to expand the horizons of human's endeavors and increase the synergy among conflicting groups of people.

PRAYER: *I pray for more tenderness in discourse, so that we may each better see where another person stands through the veil of our ignorance. And more aggressive devotion in our personal pursuits of those principles which we believe to be supremely valuable.*

Amen.



Tuesday, March 9, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 10:21[The Ninth Plague: Darkness]

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be felt.”

REFLECTION: In the Book of Exodus, the ninth plague was darkness to cover the face of the land. God was angry. He was fed up with the Egyptians' sin.

Like Moses, we are living in dark times indeed. I'm pretty sure that after the last year we know how the people felt. Sickness surrounds us. Death has touched everyone we know in one way or another. Countries are dealing with climate woes and famine threatens already fragile food supplies in parts of the world. Wars still rage and people are enslaved. Is this all a punishment from God? Certainly not. The God I know and worship just does not work that way. All these terrible events were wrought by human hand. Greed and lies, envy and anger have all contributed to getting us to the point where our world itself is rising up against us to say “enough.”

Unlike the Pharaoh of Exodus, we know through Jesus that no matter how dark things appear, God hears our cries and is there to comfort and defend us.

Can we change the direction of our world? Of course we can. With a prayer in our hearts and our eyes turned to Jesus we can become the people God wants us to be. We can heal our world and each other. We can become a people of love for our God and our fellow man.

Pharaoh feared the darkness. We need not fear. We have the light of the world. We have Jesus.

PRAYER: *Help us to go forth Lord out of the darkness of our sinful past and once again walk into the future in the light of Jesus Christ. Amen.*



Wednesday, March 10, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Proverbs 4:19

The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what they stumble over.

REFLECTION: Amid the Darkness...PWC! A command with dire consequences? Secret code to go somewhere and carry out a mission? Or both? When I was a young kid my Dad announced my birthday by telling me my birth story. “Joe, it was a cold dark night when you were born. I was notified your Mom was taken to the delivery room and I began to run like crazy to the hospital. I ran through the snow-covered park and I crashed into a lady carrying groceries, helped with the groceries, yelled back to her ‘My wife’s having a baby!!’ and kept running.” When he finished, he just muttered under his breath...PWC.

“Amid the Darkness” sounded intriguing and I had not read Proverbs in some time. Proverbs is plain old good advice, passed down generations after generations! Chapter 4 is interesting because it’s advice given to sons by the father who reminds his boys he was also a son to a father. He knows whereof he speaks! In this case, stay away from Dumb Wicked People Who Don’t Know What They Fell Over! Wisdom always leads to a better and new life.

We are well into the season of Lent, when repentance and denial are emphasized. There is a historical tradition of teaching Luther's Small Catechism: Lent is a time of renewing our understanding of the basic tenets of Lutheran faith and practice. As we do so, we discover we have much to be thankful for. We have a story of grace and forgiveness. We have a loving God who has created all things good, both light and darkness! We have been given His Son, who has made us clean through His sacrifice on the cross. And we have a people to surround us, giving us the wisdom of their lives and showing us the path that gives God's life and blessings to all people.

I conclude with the wisdom of PWC. "Joe, it was a cold dark night when you came into the world. Having turned 16 on this day, the 21st day of December, and having passed your driver's test, I now give you a set of keys to the Studebaker. And remember this, PWC, Proceed With Caution! It may be slippery out there and I don't want you crashing into anything!"

PRAYER: *Loving God, thank you for caring about all of life and what we do. AMEN, AMEN, AMEN.*



Thursday, March 11, 2021

SCRIPTURE: ACTS 13:11


And now listen - the hand of the Lord is against you, and you will be blind for a while, unable to see the sun." Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he went about groping for someone to lead him by the hand.

REFLECTION: But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who also *is called* Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, *you* son of the devil, *you* enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord *is* upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time." And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord. (NKJV)

The thought of walking in darkness is scary at best. You know, when it's so dark you can't see your hand in front of your face. Can you image being blinded and having to navigate life in total darkness? The sorcerer sure found out that God wasn't messing around. God didn't want anyone keeping people from hearing the teaching of the Lord.

We spend so much time, looking at social media and absorbing news reports which constantly bombard us with, self-loving, self-serving, political and moral negativity. When these are our only source of daily input, it can cause us to feel like we're walking in darkness. Joy is gone, hope's depleted, love is out the window, you desperately want to know your purpose is and you wonder why you're even alive. That is darkness. But we are never without hope. If we spend more time reading God's word, ingesting it daily, listening to positive Christian pod casts and loving our neighbors as ourselves, we will be uplifted and walking in the light. We do get to choose how we walk through life, in darkness or in the Light.

PRAYER: *God, help me to read your word more, hear your voice clearer and feel your Love deeper so I can help others walk out of darkness and into your loving light. Amen.*




Friday, March 12, 2021

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 2:11

But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.

REFLECTION: As a child growing up, we were not allowed to use the word HATE when referring to anything we disliked and certainly refrained from using the "H" word when referring to a person. My Mom would say "hate is the opposite of love and we should try to love everyone around us as if they were Jesus." This explanation has always stuck with me, especially now that I have got children of my own. I find myself scolding my boys for the same reasons today. There is no doubt that the last few years have been a challenge in our society: hate and blindness are a mainstream topic that seem to be around every corner. Even if this darkness has always been a part of our lives, it is crucial that we replace it with the LIGHT of Jesus. When we see hate between one another, we are blind to the possibility of love.

PRAYER: *Dear Jesus, help us to lead our lives in love. As we wander through dark paths, help us to see the light, YOUR LIGHT. Steer us from the hate we have within and help us to find love that exists in all of us. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.*



Saturday, March 13, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 1:13

He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son.

REFLECTION: Even though daylight starts to increase after the Winter Solstice on December 21, darkness predominates during the winter and those with Seasonal Affective Disorder (S.A.D.) feel blue, lack energy, and are subject to weight gain from eating too many carbs during the darkness. Add to that, the year-long Corona-virus Pandemic and the darkness seem unbearable.

Recently I was treated for a mass behind my left eye with a gamma knife (a method using gamma rays instead of cutting into the brain). Having something growing in your head pressing on your eye is very frightening and distorts your vision. The neurosurgeon explained I would first be fitted with a mask so I didn't move my head during the procedure. He put a hot material on my face and explained it would cool down rapidly and conform to my skull. Next, I was moved into a very narrow chamber and told not to move for the duration of about 6 or 7 songs on the Oldies station. The nurse put a warm blanket on me and turned off the lights. I felt alone and was frightened. My heart was beating a mile a minute. It was very dark! I decided to pray. I prayed that God would guide my doctors and that Jesus would be with me in that dark chamber. I had the urge to blink and clear my throat but didn't want to get yelled at. It seemed like an eternity before the procedure ended. They turned on the lights and I was grateful that the Lord was with me and with my doctors and nurses. Jesus was with me in the darkness. My doctor told me he prayed for me too.

Have you had an experience where you felt you were in darkness? What restored light in your life?

PRAYER: *Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the blessing of your son, Jesus Christ, for forgiveness of sin and for all the blessings you have bestowed on me. Thank you for being with me in the darkness. Be our ray of light. Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Amen.*



Week Five: Light Lengthens



March 14-20

Monday, March 15, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 9:2

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.

REFLECTION: Going from darkness to light can be sudden, as with turning on a light switch, or more gradual, as with the dawn of a new day. Sometimes it's a question of being in darkness, but knowing that there is light nearby, such as when we're in a tunnel where we can see the light growing larger and brighter, the closer we get to the end of the tunnel. When there is light, we can see much more clearly, be more certain of what we're doing.

This past year has been one of great darkness, for too many reasons, chief among them the coronavirus. But now we see bright signs of hope, such as with the availability of vaccines becoming more accessible. That has been a ray of light in our darkness.

So it is in this passage of Isaiah, where God points out that people can be in the dark spiritually as well as literally. Walking around in a spiritual darkness is quite disorienting. We can't see where we are going, what we are doing. But God can shine a light in that darkness, to help us to see clearly. He does this through scripture, through the preaching of the Word, the practice of worship, through our following Jesus's example in our daily lives, which gives light to ourselves and to each other.

Lent is a time of somber reflection, a type of darkness, looking forward to the great light of Easter. We are grateful for the light that God shines on us in our dark times.

PRAYER: *Dear Lord, you are our Light in the darkness we find in this life. We thank you for shining that Light on us. Assist us in being beacons of your Light to those around us, to help bring others to You. Amen.*



Tuesday, March 16, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 4:16

“The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.”

REFLECTION: When I was in my early 20s and straight out of graduate school, I had great difficulty finding a job in my field. It took me approximately 2 years to get hired as a counselor. I had no income and bills were mounting. As it turned out, I wouldn't have been able to physically work, anyway. During that same period, I was also having physical problems. I was experiencing severe pain throughout my entire body and could barely walk. I started going to various doctors, trying to determine the cause of my problems. Each doctor said the same thing: “you have severe Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA).” I would always dismiss their diagnosis. I had seen from early childhood, the severe and painful effects this disease had on a close aunt and uncle of mine. My uncle had both legs amputated because of it and my aunt had physical deformities and was wheelchair bound for the last few years of her life. My quest for a different diagnosis finally ended one year after I began my journey, when I met with a neurosurgeon. He examined me and then asked in a matter-of-fact manner, “What is it you want me to do about your rheumatoid arthritis?” When I questioned his diagnosis, he

looked at me as if I had two heads and he asked how could I not know that I had RA throughout my body. He then proceeded to point out various indicators. That was when I finally believed the diagnosis.

I learned through this and other experiences in my life, that these difficult times which I considered dark times, really weren't dark. That's because God, the Light of the World, was always with me. As Psalm 23:4 states, "even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me....." God doesn't say that we won't have difficult times, but that He will get us through them. He is always with us.

PRAYER: *Lord, please help me to remember that you are with me always and will never desert me. Help me to focus on You at all times, and not on the circumstances. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.*



Wednesday, March 17, 2021

SCRIPTURE: John 8:12

Again Jesus spoke to them saying "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

REFLECTION: Our journey through life is wrought with ups and downs and highs and lows! Days filled with joys, sorrows, challenges, surprises, and tragedies. How does one remain calm and stay positive and focused and hopeful with everything going on and ever changing? I believe it is our Christian faith put into practice that makes all the difference in our world outlook.

As Christians we believe in the "Arising Son" who promises us eternal life. Of course, we need to actively put our faith trusting in Jesus Christ into daily practice. During the first three months of the pandemic starting in March 2020, I forgot that God was always there with me through the darkness. I felt like I lost everything in life that had given me meaning and been so important. My job, seeing my friends and family, attending my church, my volunteer activities, my yoga classes, traveling to warmer places, eating out, seeing movies and concerts were some of the things that I could no longer do. These activities were all curtailed during the pandemic. I became addicted to watching news stories on TV twenty-four seven. I also became anxious and depressed filled with despair. I felt isolated and alone.

It took some time for me to realize that Jesus never left me! He was there with me all along, giving me the strength to get through each day and begin each new one! Though I lost the job I loved and was unable to see the people I cared about Jesus never leaves me. All I must do is call on Him and ask Him to help give me the strength to go through the challenges I am facing. I realized I still had so much to be grateful for and it changed my perspective on the situation.

Jesus assures us through John 8:12 that if we follow Him, we will have the light of life despite all the darkness around us. This passage gives me hope. We need to remember even in our bleakest hours, Jesus is always still with us. Jesus said belief in Him is the way to everlasting life. This provides me with consolation, knowing that when I leave this world, I will be reunited with my Lord and my loved ones who have passed before me.

PRAYER: *Lord, let me remember that when all seems hopeless, you are right here with me giving me the strength I need to carry on and bring me through all the darkness into your radiant light. I trust and believe in you, O God, to continue to guide and carry me through whatever challenges I am facing. You are our constant steadfast light. We need never despair or fear because you will never abandon us. You are the one truth that stands solidly in times of trouble and chaos. Amen.*



Thursday, March 18, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Romans 13:12

The night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

REFLECTION: What an appropriate verse for this time of year, and for the current state of our country! We are beyond the darkness of December, when the day is at its shortest. It is a time of darkness, when many people get up before the sun rises and arrive home after the sun sets. When I was working, I was one of those people. The days of increasing darkness were, frankly, depressing, especially when the day was cloudy. The holidays, which take place during this time, are also difficult for many people, as they are not associated with joyousness, but some type of tragedy. All in all, the darkness inherent in this time of year emphasizes the hopelessness felt by many.

Although we have months to go before spring, the number of daylight hours is increasing. We can look forward to crocuses and daffodils and tulips brightening the landscape outside our windows, which has for so long lain dormant.

We can feel the increasing warmth of the sun on our faces. The fresh scent of spring fills the air and is a balm for our spirits. With all of this going on, we cannot help but be reminded of Jesus's resurrection and the hope that it brings.

As our country looks forward to another spring, it is hoped that the tide of COVID will be turned, as more people are vaccinated. The warmer weather also draws people outside, where the air is fresher and in gentle movement. We all fervently anticipate the day when our lives return to some form of normalcy.

PRAYER: *Dearest Lord Jesus, please help us to emerge from our spiritual hibernation and darkness of the soul to clothe ourselves in the light of your resurrection. Amen.*



Friday, March 19, 2021

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 4: 6

For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

REFLECTION: Light. Perseverance. Optimism. These are my favorite Biblical images and some of the strongest influences of Christ in my daily life. When life gets me down - as it inevitably does in big ways like the passing of a loved one or small ways like a bad day with my health - I turn to these words for peace and solace. The power of their imagery should not be a surprise. Have you ever experienced awakening in total darkness? The disorientation, confusion and eventually fear? When that happens, I immediately reach for a flashlight, a light switch or even my cell phone. When

the light comes on, I settle down and see the path forward. This is a lesson in God's power and presence in my life. When I am lost, confused or even bereft, I need to find that switch in prayer or peaceful thought or just plain calling out and then optimism and perseverance return. The tricky and wonderful part is that light shines forth from within all people because we are created in God's image.

During Lent, when we are called to add or subtract something from our daily routine. What can we do to let God's light, perseverance and optimism, shine forth through us? What can we do to recognize those God-given traits in others even others we don't like or perhaps even fear? What would the world be like if we succeeded in doing so just a tiny bit?

This past year has been a year like we have never seen. We are all hoping to see the light at the end of the tunnel, on finding that hope in our brokenness. On finding that light in the very darkness that we often find ourselves in. As we reflect on God's 'What If?... through this Lenten season, we are reminded that Jesus, who gave his life for the sake of love and peace and a more just world, is God's ultimate 'What If?...'What if the light of God's presence and glory shines in you, and through the cracks of your brokenness?

PRAYER: *Father, you are the light of this world. Thank you for giving me the light of life! Amen.*



Saturday, March 20, 2021

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 2:8

Yet I am writing you a new commandment that is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

REFLECTION: To say that the past year has been difficult is an understatement. Between the global pandemic and the racial and political unrest in the US, we seem like a people divided, trying to navigate uncharted territory. I'm tired... tired of people getting sick, tired of people dying, tired of being so isolated from friends and family. Sometimes it feels like the darkness is overwhelming and I am alone. In fact, though, the true light is already shining. Like the warmth of an early summer breeze, we need to open the doors to our hearts and minds and open the shades that keep us hidden and blind of the light that we so desperately need.

PRAYER: *Longing for peace, our world is troubled. Longing for hope, many despair. Your word alone, has power to save us. Make us your living voice. Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts, shine through the darkness. Christ be our light. Shine in your Church, gathered today. Amen.*



Monday, March 22, 2021

Week Six: Omega (endings)



March 21-27

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 44:6

“Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.”

REFLECTION: “I am the first and I am the last.” “The resurrection and the life.” These particular lines of scripture resonate with me. The beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega for without a beginning how would there be an end. It seems to me they go together. Beginnings and endings, I thought a sentence, a story, a school year, a romance, a marriage, and life itself. Our lives have a beginning. Psalm 139 tells us, “For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.” God is there. We have a mortal end when the “angels come to greet us and carry us home.” God is there. Jesus shared in this, our human cycle of life.

These are some of my thoughts during the time of the story I share with you. It was several years ago my daughter who lived out of town came for a visit. We stopped to visit my mother, her grandmother, in the nursing home on a sunny August day. My daughter was expecting a baby in December. My first grandchild, mom would become a great grandma. Mom was happy to see us that day. Eyes wide, she raised a hand and pointed her finger in the direction of my daughter’s beachball shaped tummy. “It’s a boy”, she predicted with a great deal of conviction. Mom would never know how correct she was for she passed away that December. I remember saying to my clergy friend, “We have had the Omega, now we await the Alpha.” My grandson was born three days after her passing. An end but yet a new life for each. Mom returned to the loving arms of her heavenly Father. My grandson to the waiting, loving arms of his

mother. I love this little Celtic prayer. I do not remember the source.

PRAYER: *“On my heart and on my house, the blessing of God. In my coming and in my going, the peace of God. In my life and in my seeking, the love of God. At my end and new beginning, the arms of God to welcome me and bring me home.” Amen.*



Tuesday, March 23, 2021

SCRIPTURE: John 3:16

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

REFLECTION: What greater sacrifice is there then to offer up your child, for the lives of others? Complete selflessness and quite frankly, something I cannot begin to imagine, for it is too painful a thought to even consider. God, with his endless and everlasting love knew what he needed to do for the greater good. What an unimaginable act this was for him to make. A true testament to his adoration and commitment to all Christians, not just his loved and adored Son.

Attempting to understand such a level of sacrifice and love is difficult for we mere humans to understand in today's day and age. As Christians, we do our best to be selfless, so we donate our time and money to those less fortunate. We participate in finely organized 5K races to bring attention to very worthy causes. But, to give the thing we love and cherish the most in the world, your own flesh and blood? Your child, to benefit another? That is something that takes a level of love and commitment few can imagine. Can you?

I will be forever thankful and grateful for God's unending love and acceptance of me as a fallible human being. I will do my best to give back to those in need and offer the gifts which He has bestowed upon me, to add to the betterment of my community. It rarely feels like enough, but I will continue to do my part.

PRAYER: *Lord God, thank you for the sacrifices you have made to allow my family and I to have eternal life. Please continue to show me how to be the best Christian I can, to give of myself in some small way to emulate all that you have given up for me.*
In your name, Amen.



Wednesday, March 24, 2021

SCRIPTURE: 1 Peter 1:20

He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake.

REFLECTION: I think we are near the end of ages now. Our country is divided; there are riots and uprisings all over. We have had major wildfires that destroyed property and forests also took lives all over the world. There have been hurricanes, tornadoes, floods and earthquakes also causing millions of dollars of damage and taking innocent lives. We now have COVID Virus that has caused the death of more than a million people around the world. We feel alone, overwhelmed, lonely, and some of us feel hopeless and depressed. What are we to do? We need to put God and family first in our lives again. We need to remember that God loves us so much that he gave his only son to suffer and die on the cross for us.

I remember when I was a child back in the 1950's and 60's. On Sundays we got dressed in our Sunday best and went to Sunday school and church. The church was full of generations of families worshiping God, and on holidays it was standing room only. After church we reconnected with our family and friends then went home to Sunday dinner. The day was mostly spent with family. Our hearts and minds were full of the love of God and family and we were ready for the rest of the week. We were a kinder and gentler people. Now Sundays are for sports practice or tournaments. Kids are in the house playing games on computers rather than playing outside with friends. We are rushing to go who knows where and if anyone gets in our way, we get mad. We are living with the darkness.

We need to bring God back into our lives. God revealed Christ to the people back when they were living with the darkness of the times. Now when we feel we are in the darkest of times we need to remember that God loves us and put him first in our lives again. If we do this, we will find that the light will come back in our lives.

PRAYER: *God help us to open our eyes to your love and bring the light back into our lives. Amen.*



Thursday, March 25, 2021

SCRIPTURE: John 17:3

And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

REFLECTION: We live in a world that is very materialistic and has many limits and restrictions. For the most part we come to understand that is just the way of life in this world. As these changes in our lives occur, we try to accept the changes and move on with our lives. Over time we learn that all of the material things we have in life have a life cycle and do not last forever.

We also learn that many of our personal relationships don't last forever either. Some of our close friends and beloved family members will move out of the area and not be seen very much or even not at all anymore. Another limit that occurs in our lives has to do with our jobs and careers. Sometimes in spite of our best wishes and even prayers we lose our job because the business is leaving the area or is shutting down. We are left to scramble to put the pieces together again. But perhaps the most difficult limits and restrictions we deal with in our lives are the health and mortality of our family and friends. So as we deal with these life on earth limits and restrictions, especially the end of our earthly lives, God's message of eternal life - "Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live" gives us the assurance we were never able to achieve during our earthly trials and tribulations. So my friends, take a deep breath and relax knowing that God has lifted all these earthly burdens by granting us, the faithful, eternal life! No more limits or restrictions, just our resurrection!

PRAYER: *Dear Lord: We thank you for the many, many blessings you have given us, especially eternal life in heaven with only true God. Amen.*



Friday, March 26, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 1:17-18

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.

REFLECTION: In Revelation, Christ reveals himself to the apostle John, and his writing of this book was to give hope and encouragement to those Christians who were suffering severe persecution for their faith in Jesus Christ. These Christians needed to know that God controls whatever happens here on earth. I doubt any of us Christians here in the United States, have experienced the kind of severe persecution that these Christians did. But this still is happening in several parts of the world today. Where it does occur, I can imagine the faith of those Christians is tested every day, and strengthened by the struggles they go through. I wonder if the lack of severe persecution here has let our faith go on a kind of “auto-pilot”. We are clearly tested daily in our faith, but not to the degree that the severely persecuted are. We need to daily be aware of our faith and strengthen it, and know that God really has control here and now, as it was written by the apostle John in Revelation. We can't afford to remain on “auto-pilot”, we know that the day will come, the “last” or the Omega, when the Lord will someday judge and punish what is evil.

PRAYER: *Lord, please help us sustain our faith in you. To know, that you have control in this world, especially at those times when we doubt. Help us to exercise our faith daily, and strengthen it so we may do the good things you wish of us all. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.*

Saturday, March 27, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 21:6-7

Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

REFLECTION: Given that my image of the Book of Revelation is a documentation of Armageddon, I wondered how I could possibly write anything uplifting that references this Biblical text. Nevertheless, I persistently struggled to find encouragement in today's verses, and continued this effort by delving into Chapter 21 in its entirety. With each of these iterations, I began to consider the possibility that rather than the **end of time**, the **continuity of life** is presented here. With each additional perusal of God's declaration in Verse 6 that He is “the Alpha **and** the Omega, the Beginning **and** the End”, I became more and more convinced that He always has been, is and will continue to be with us for all time. Beginning with the World being ‘without form and void’, followed by ancient and modern history, then on to the present time and ultimately into the future and eternity. He is with us!!!!

I found additional confirmation of my newly discovered image of the Book of Revelation in a synopsis which presents the intent of Revelation as an encouragement to Christians in every age to maintain their faith, and to share in Jesus' victory over all forces that oppose him and his people. After His declaration of being the Alpha and the Omega in Verse 6, God concludes with the promise of spiritual strength from the Spring of the Water of Life. Continuing in Verse 7, He notes that with this gift we are enabled to conquer any adversity, and we will be His children. It seems to me that all



that's expected of us is to simply accept this gift; i.e. to have faith in Him. What a blessing to be His Children!!! The imperfect Alpha morphs into the perfect Omega, so there's no Armageddon. We have eternal life. May each of your days become, in their own way, this blessing of the Omega.

PRAYER: *Thank you God for granting the privilege of being Your children and encouraging our obedience to You each day. Send us chances to contribute to making this World a pleasing sight to You, and guide us in all our endeavors. Amen.*



Week Seven: Prince Of Peace



March 28 - April 3

Monday, March 29, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 9:6

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; And the government will be upon his shoulders; and his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

REFLECTION: If you have ever listened to Handel's Messiah, this verse is familiar to you. I can hardly read it without hearing the chorus in my mind. It is a powerful statement of who this child, this Jesus, is; and how he will be perceived. Jesus was not, and is not always recognized as “owning” these names. When we accept Jesus we accept that He is indeed all of these things and more. But what does Prince of Peace mean? Does it have to do with wars and conflicts? We pray for peace in our world and especially recently for peace in our country. Or, does it really mean peace within ourselves? By trusting in God we can have peace in our hearts and minds and then we can follow the Prince of Peace to spread peace in the world.

Years ago we had bracelets from our Youth Group that said WWJD, or What would Jesus Do? It's not as catchy but how about WWPPD, What would the Prince of Peace do? That would surely help us in all of our interactions and would help to bring about the peace we are praying for. Let the Prince of Peace bring peace to your own heart so that you can spread that peace throughout the world in every interaction you have. If we all would think of how the Prince of Peace would deal with those we disagree with, with those who are different from us, with those who treat us badly, we could change our behavior and find peace. Jesus gave us the way to spread peace... love your neighbors as yourselves... so simple, but so hard. Jesus came to show us the way to

achieve peace. He is the Prince of Peace; we just need to follow his example.

PRAYER: *Prince of Peace help me to be a peacemaker, to do what you would have me do in all of my interactions. Amen.*



Tuesday, March 30, 2021

SCRIPTURE: John 14:27


Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

REFLECTION: This has been a difficult, challenging, stressful year for everyone. As we adapt to losses of loved ones, jobs, remote learning, health issues, food shortages etc., one thing we didn't lose was Jesus Peace. His peace has sustained me throughout this pandemic. Financially it has been the hardest year I can remember. Yet as I looked upon the pile of bills I wasn't filled with anxiety, Jesus' peace was very present, I knew in time they would get paid, and slowly they are now.

My daughter is a nurse and works on the COVID Unit often 12-16 hour shifts. Many of her coworkers have gotten COVID. Although I am very concerned for her and my granddaughter, I have peace inside, Jesus peace, that gets me through everyday without becoming short with others or anxious. Oddly I can feel his peace and if I do start feeling upset I repeat Jesus words, "My peace I give to you my peace I leave with you." There really is power in his word, I can feel inside a calmness taking over. Jesus gives us parts of himself, his peace, joy-a subtle joy, love and his

righteousness, priceless gifts. Our hearts need not be troubled for God takes all our worries upon himself and we need not be afraid because God is with us and we can trust in our God for he will help us to endure whatever we have to go through.

PRAYER: *Thank your Heavenly Father for Jesus, our Prince of Peace and for his gifts to us. For never leaving us or forsaking us and for taking our worries upon yourself so our hearts need not be troubled and we need not be afraid. In Jesus name, I pray. Amen.*



Wednesday, March 31, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 4:6-7⁶


Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

REFLECTION: We live in scary times. There is always something to worry about; sometimes trivial, sometimes serious, but worry is often a part of life. Three years ago, I faced a serious health concern. A tumor growing in me presented a life changing, if not life ending scenario. A couple of surgeons told me that surgery was too risky and they would not do it. A third surgeon suggested removal. Was I worried? Of course. Worry was an under-statement, terrified was more like it. But what could I do about it? The surgeon was highly rated. The hospital was excellent. Doing nothing was not an option. I faced the reality of the situation knowing that I had no control over what was to happen.

Realizing that prayer was the best and frankly, the only option for me, a great weight was lifted from my mind. When I turned the problem over to the Prince of Peace, it was as if the old catchphrase took over, “let go, let God”. The “peace that passes all understanding” was now helping to carry the burden.

There is incredible power and potential in prayer. Through prayer, we invite the God of the Universe into a situation and into our lives. Prayer changes things, but even more, prayer changes us. When we name our worries, our fears, in prayer, we rest them in God’s hands. Someone has said, “When you get to your wit’s end, you’ll find that God lives there.” And to this kind of dependency comes real strength, real peace, the peace that passes all understanding.

PRAYER: *Gracious God, thank you for being with me at all times, but especially when I am feeling anxious. Your presence in my life is my rock and my strength enabling me to endure whatever the world throws at me, and allows me to live my life in peace. Amen.*



Maundy Thursday, April 1, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Romans 5:1-2

“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.”

REFLECTION: We all experience the need for God’s closeness in our lives. We crave His attention to our problems that so often seem unsurmountable. We need that

undeniable connection in a more tactile way, though that is not possible. But is it?

This past year has been tough, for me, my family, for everyone on this earth. After months of dealing with the pandemic (personally), the political unrest, the unsettled feeling of it all, I find myself not despairing, but optimistic.

At the center of this is “the grace in which we stand”. I see it everywhere. In the concerned calls from friends, the donated dinners, the unexpected holiday treats, and the general calmness among my “people”. I am especially awed by my good friend who lost her husband in a tragic accident away from home during this COVID time. Unable to be with him as he died within hours of his emergency surgery, she finds peace and comfort from many, many family members and friends who have stepped up. She has put her faith in Jesus to carry her through this. Her large group of supporters obviously have the love of God in their hearts and share it freely and joyfully. She gets calls and texts all day, every day. She welcomes them and in return, feels blessed and on the road to healing.

Open your hearts to this faith that we have at our disposal. Feel it, absorb it, and share it ‘tactically’ with those around us that need it so desperately.

PRAYER: *Dear Lord, Please help us remember that all we have to do is ask. Help us to feel the peace in our hearts and souls that is ours if we want it. As you gave your son to us, give us the strength to share whatever gifts we may have to lighten the load for others in need as you have for us. Amen.*



Good Friday, April 2, 2021

SCRIPTURE: John 16:33

“I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!”

REFLECTION: In John’s gospel, these are the last words Jesus says to his disciples before he is left utterly alone to face the horrors he knew were before him. Yet, in his heart and soul, he knew he was not alone. “...the Father is with me.” (vs 32) Consider: His best friends were about to fail him. Every conceivable humiliation and agony were about to be heaped upon him. Who among us could blame Jesus if he were to question God; to wonder if his ministry had meant anything! On a scale hardly worth mentioning in comparison, we have just come through a very trying, burdensome, scary year. And who knows what the days ahead will bring? More chaos? Another variant of the virus? More businesses going under? More grieving? More social and political unrest? It’s a time of anxiety!

Friends, hear these words of Jesus: “Yes, in the world you face persecution (stress, anxiety, threats, chaos, etc.) But take courage; I have conquered (overcome) the world!” He uttered these words to his companions who were about to abandon him and face their own fearful days. He speaks these words to you and me, too, as we face **our** fears and worries. Why? Because he wants us to know the peace we can have ... peace in Him!! “The Father is with me (and you) ... courage ... I have overcome the world ... be at peace.”

PRAYER: *Jesus, you faced your crucifixion with faith, courage and peace. Help us to face our fearful unknown with the faith, courage and peace that only you can give. Amen.*



Saturday, April 3, 2021

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 13:11

[Final Greetings and Benediction]

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

REFLECTION: Siblings in Christ: In today's climate and culture this verse though relatively short in length holds great weight and is quite deep. So let's break it down:

“Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell.”

I know usually my goodbyes are different for each situation. The intention of my earnest I love you's and I can't wait to see you vary on the situation. Life lately has taught me to never take for granted the time frame of when we see each other again. In March when I said goodbye to my students and co-workers, I had no idea it would be 6 months until I saw them again because of the COVID pandemic that shut down schools. I have learned that each goodbye hug should last as long as you need and each goodbye “I love you” said with depth and honesty. Life is so unpredictable and uncertain. Each farewell should be a vehicle of your true intentions!

“Put things in order” This reminds me of back in my pre-school teaching years when things were getting too loud or out of control in the classroom I called for “Clean-up time”. We all need to reset and focus. It's so important to get things in order to be able to move on.

“Listen to my appeal” The word listen is so misunderstood in today's world. We often listen to respond instead of listening to understand, especially when someone is “appealing” to us. In today's world that usually means arguing and trying to get you to see their side! If only we would take time to listen to really hear the other person, the world would be a much better place!

“Agree with each other” That is difficult to do during the best of times. The world is full of strife. People disagree about most everything, from ranch vs. blue cheese to which sports team is tops. Healthy disagreement

“Live in Peace” I must admit this is the part of this passage I'm struggling with. There has not been a lot of peace in our world, both globally and for my family personally. There are days I have trouble finding even a moment of peace much less be able to Live in it.

“ And the God of love and peace will be with you.” And... And?? So are you telling me I have to put things in order, listen to others, agree with them, live in peace AND then God will be with you...oh that AND....hmmmm this does not sit well in my very human, there for willful spirit. But upon retrospect I realized Jesus is the AND!!! He is the one who will put things in order for you, will help you listen to others with your heart, will help you agree on the issues that matter and will of course be the one who will Live in Peace with you. It's Jesus, he's our AND!

PRAYER: *Dear Jesus, thank you for being our AND! For bringing us peace and love! May we be a vehicle of your love to others. Amen.*



Easter Sunday, April 4, 2021

SCRIPTURE: John 11:25

I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live...

REFLECTION: The question to ponder is this: To what do we wake up?

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross wrote that when she visited concentration camps in post-World War II Germany, what she found on the barrack walls were images of butterflies or night moths breaking free of their chrysalises. Over and over again in the midst of fear and evil was this symbol of the soul's transition.

At Christmas, it is "Arise, Shine, for your light has come! Today it is Arise, Church, for Christ is risen from the dead! We arise to new life and new dreams. Arise, church.

So, it is a new day! Look to the Scriptures and let them speak to your new life. In John's text, Jesus calls Mary's name and in her grief, she hears and recognizes that Jesus is risen and is standing before her. Today, Jesus speaks to each of us.

What is Jesus saying to you? This is a wake-up call to end all others. Easter morning is an annual wake-up call addressed to Christ's own body, the church...and to each of us. It has been a difficult year with a pandemic and all that has brought. But this Easter, we have new hope. As Jesus rises for all of us, let us arise! Let us break out of our chrysalis and fly into new life, free from sin and the fear of death. A new and bright future awaits us. Alleluia! He is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.



Long ago the word Lent was used to identify the time of year when the light of day began to lengthen. The season of Lent in our church year marks a time when we lengthen or increase our knowledge and understanding about God and the depth of His love through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Light of the World. During these forty days, we have an opportunity to reflect, meditate, and grow spiritually. It is a time to renew our relationship with God and nurture our spirituality.

The overall theme for 2021 is “Arising Son”. It is our belief in the resurrection that makes (or marks) us as Christians and brings us together. Together in love, service and joy is what Jesus asks of us. As we walk with Jesus on his journey to the cross, this Lenten Devotional starts with the Transfiguration and ends with the resurrection. The weekly topics selected are: Transfiguration, Alpha (Beginnings), Journeys, Amid the Darkness, Light Lengthens, Omega (Endings) and Prince of Peace. The goal of the 2021 forty-day Lenten Devotional is to help each of us recognize and acknowledge that as Christians we believe in the “Arising Son”. Christ works through us to recognize and share His endless grace, mercy and love that renew us spiritually and strengthen our commitment to our Lord and to each other.

As the church does not include Sundays in the forty days of Lent, the first day of each week is used to introduce the weekly subject. This also affords an opportunity for individuals and/or families to reflect on the many blessings for which we are thankful. Be sure to check out the activity pages found in the devotional. We pray that your personal Lenten Journey will be marked by the example and presence of Christ.

The Lenten Devotional for 2021 has been a cooperative effort among St. David’s Episcopal Church, Grace Lutheran Church and St. John’s Evangelical Lutheran Church. It is wonderful to share this penitential time of the Church year with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Personal experiences of the contributors have made this Lenten Devotional possible. Appreciation and recognition are extended to the following persons who have shared their spirituality by writing a meditation.

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| BELIEVE | LENT | RESURRECTION | |
| CHRIST | LIFE | SON | |
| CROSS | LIGHT | TRANSFIGURATION | |
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| ENDINGS | LOVE | | |

