

Saturday, April 2, 2020

TEACH ME, O LORD

Psalm 143:10 Teach me to do your will, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground!

Remember the saying, “garbage in, garbage out?” We associate this saying with the computer age. It meant, didn’t it, that whatever information you put into the computer determined whether the output would be of any help? Good information inputted into a computer usually means good results come out.

We dare not stop learning. What we learn matters. There is a lot of garbage for us to take in. There is also a lot of good information available to us. How then do we filter it? How do we know what is garbage and what is good?

The Psalmist in Psalm 143 prays to the LORD to teach him His ways. Why would he ask the LORD to teach him? Why not go to the teachers of the day? Why not go to the leading university? Or, in our case why not Google?

For the Psalmist and for us, the source of what we are taught makes all the difference in the world. Solomon wrote, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. . .” (Proverbs 1:7) In this verse, fear does not mean to be afraid, but it means to be in awe, to reverence, to have great respect. Solomon here points out the source for true, reliable, useful knowledge. It is God!

Should it not be true that God is the source for all knowledge? After all, He created everything. He knows “all” intimately as He not only formed it all, but also sustains it all. Solomon then concludes the verse, “fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:7)

Who then will you turn to each day as your teacher? Only God knows all! Only God is in control of all! Only God loves all of you unconditionally! Only God wants what is best for you! God, with His Law and Gospel, always steers you in the right direction. Ultimately, only God desires your salvation in Christ Jesus.

“Teach me to do your will, for you are my God!”

Prayer: O LORD, lead and guide me each day in Your way that I may be certain of life with You for all eternity. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Oh, that the Lord would guide my ways To keep His statutes still!

Oh, that my God would grant me grace To know and do His will!

Order my footsteps by Thy Word And make my heart sincere;

Let sin have no dominion, Lord, But keep my conscience clear.

Assist my soul, too apt to stray, A stricter watch to keep;

And should I e’er forget Thy way, Restore Thy wand’ring sheep.

Make me to walk in Thy commands—’Tis a delightful road

Nor let my head or heart or hands Offend against my God.

(LSB 707)

Friday, May 1, 2020
YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN

Luke 7:48 "And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

Armchair quarterbacking is a national past-time in the United States. From over-the-back-fence conversations, neighborhood on-line chats, informal or formal discussion groups, to organized protests and the like, we Americans are quick to judge and condemn what others say and do. Reluctantly, we must admit, we hold ourselves up as paragons of virtue, being on the right side, knowing better than others. The truth is, we also come-up short, do bad things and to use a Bible word, sin.

In Luke 7, a woman with a "bad" reputation came to Jesus when he was dining with a group of Pharisees. She washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. Then she anointed his feet with an oil or spice of some kind. The Pharisees were horrified that Jesus permitted this "bad woman" to do this. Worse yet, they couldn't comprehend Jesus saying to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

Our human sinful nature finds it much easier to see the sins of others than our own. This leads us to judge and condemn those whose political positions, ethnicity, status or life does not conform with our own. Who have you criticized lately? President Trump? The governor? A community leader? The decisions that these leaders have been making are not all popular, are they? Yet, they are responsible for making decisions. How many times have we said things about them that, frankly, break the fourth (disrespect of those in authority) and eighth commandments (defame, slander, not speak well of them).

The Pharisees criticized Jesus. We know eventually their hatred for Him caused them to bring Him to Pilate wanting Jesus condemned to death by crucifixion. Thinking we are right is not always right, is it?

Thankfully, Jesus willingly went to the Calvary's cross to suffer and die to pay that terrible price for our sins. To those of us who believe in Him, Jesus says when we confess our sins and repent of them, "your sins are forgiven."

Prayer: O Almighty God, I confess to You I have sinned against You by what I have done and not done. I repent of my sinful thoughts, words and actions. Forgive me for Jesus' sake. Help me to always be ready to support and slow to condemn. I pray this in the name of Jesus, Your Son, my Lord and Savior. Amen.

Drawn to the cross, which Thou hast blessed
With healing gifts for souls distressed,
To find in Thee my life, my rest,
Christ crucified, I come.

Thou knowest all my griefs and fears,
Thy grace abused, my misspent years;
Yet now to Thee with contrite tears,
Christ crucified, I come.

Wash me and take away each stain;
Let nothing of my sin remain.
For cleansing, though it be through pain,
Christ crucified, I come.

And then for work to do for Thee,
Which shall so sweet a service be
That angels well might envy me,
Christ crucified, I come.
(LSB 560)

Thursday, April 30, 2020

THE FOUNDATION IS CRITICAL

Luke 6:47-48 Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.

Ask the engineers who are trying to save the Leaning Tower of Pisa, why it leans? They will tell you those who originally constructed the tower did not place it on a solid foundation. The tower leans because the soil and rocks underneath are giving way. Thus, it continues to sink.

Our lives are no different than a building. A stable life that will withstand all that happens during a lifetime requires a bedrock foundation. Few would dispute that such a foundation is needed.

Where, oh where, is such a foundation to be found? Jesus gives His answer to this critical life question, "Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: ⁴⁸ he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. . ." (Luke 6:47-48) This man's life, Jesus says, will withstand all that life brings his way. Why? Because his life is anchored on the Jesus, His words and promises.

Jesus said, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me. . ." (John 5:39) As we search the Scriptures and learn about Jesus, we see the depth of His love and care for us. He says, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep." (John 10:14-15) He is the rock upon which our faith is anchored. Anchored on Christ, our life "is well built." (Luke 6:48)

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, in Your love for us You have given us Jesus, our Good Shepherd, the "rock" upon whom our life is anchored. Send Your Spirit to keep us in the true faith anchored to Jesus who has promised to be with us always." In His holy name. Amen.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood, From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure; Cleanse me from its guilt and pow'r.

Not the labors of my hands Can fulfill Thy Law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know, Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring; Simply to Thy cross I cling.
Naked, come to Thee for dress; Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die.
While I draw this fleeting breath, When mine eye lids close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown, See Thee on Thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee.

Wednesday, April 29, 2020

LIFE AND STRENGTH ARE FOUND IN GOD'S WORD

Palm 119:37 Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways.

This soon will pass. These words have somehow become a fairly common response to our life of isolation and social distancing. We have received advice and counsel from men and women with impeccable scientific and medical expertise. We have also been exposed to off-the-wall advice as to how we need to move forward. Of course, there have also been any number of comments and suggestions that are somewhere between these two extremes.

By now it is quite apparent there is no quick way to bring an end to the pandemic. A covid-19 immunization program seems a long way in the future. There is hope, for the short run, that some drug company will find a medication or combination thereof to help those who are ill. But a quick fix is most likely not going to happen.

Psalms 119 has a number of verses with the theme, "life and strength are found in God's word." (vv.25, 28, 37 and 40) We know that God's Word is the means used by the Holy Spirit to bring us to faith in Jesus Christ. By means of that faith we derive life and strength for our daily physical and spiritual life.

In Psalm 119:37, the Psalmist writes, "Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways." Since our sinful human nature is susceptible to quick fixes and easy answers, we can be influenced by those who are purveyors of "worthless things." The Psalmist, after encouraging us to not look at worthless things, then points us to God to "give me (us) life in Your (His) ways."

We know that God's ways do not always provide quick fixes and easy answers. We do know God's Word is true, reliable and powerful. In fact, it IS the means used by the Holy Spirit to create faith in our hearts to rely upon God, believe what His word says and especially trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, eternal life and salvation. Jesus says, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." (John 6:63) Pray daily to the Holy Spirit to turn your eyes through the power of God's Word to Him, who alone knows all that you need for today, tomorrow and even into eternity.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, give us Your word that speaks to us spirit and life. Amen.

Blessed Jesus at Your Word We are gathered all to hear You.
Let our hearts and souls be stirred Now to seek and love and fear You,
By Your teachings, sweet and holy, Drawn from earth to love You solely.

All our knowledge, sense, and sight Lie in deepest darkness shrouded
Till Your Spirit breaks our night With the beams of truth unclouded.
You alone to God can win us; You must work all good within us.

Gracious Savior, good and kind, Light of Light, from God proceeding,
Open now our heart and mind; Help us by Your Spirit's pleading.
Hear the cry Your Church now raises; Hear and bless our prayers and praises.

Father, Son, and Spirit, Lord, Praise to You and adoration!
Grant that we may trust Your Word, Confident of our salvation,
While we here below must wander, Till we sing Your praises yonder.
(LSB 904)

Tuesday, April 28, 2020

“YOKED TO CHRIST”

Matthew 11:29-30 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

A yoke is a wooden device that is carefully shaped to fit over the front quarters of oxen. It is used to distribute the weight of a wagon or cart that is connected to it by a tongue (long heavy board attached to a wagon or cart.) Two oxen yoked together are capable of pulling a much heavier weight placed on one wagon or cart compared to the two pulling the weight of an individual wagon or cart alone.

A yoke makes the work for the oxen easier. It enables them to do far more work together than they can do alone. Thus, you can now picture in your mind Jesus inviting us to take His yoke upon ourselves. Jesus’ words picture a yoke connecting our shoulders to His shoulders. Living our life yoked to Him, He says, will be easier and the burdens of life will be lighter because He helps us carry our load.

By God’s grace, through His gift of faith in Jesus Christ, we are yoked to Him. Yoked to Him we never bear the burdens of life alone or carry the weight of each day on our own shoulders. There is no reason for us to feel burdened or inadequate. There is no reason for us to try to carry alone the load that life often lays upon us. Yoked to Christ, at the end of each day we can close our eyes commending everything from our heart, mind, body and soul to Him. I encourage you to read and meditate upon the words of Hymn 869 below. The words of this hymn expand upon Jesus’ words in Matthew 11:29-30.

Prayer: Thank You Jesus, for providing us with a yoke that connects us to You whereby You support us in our daily temporal (earthly) and spiritual life. Jesus, lead us onward each day, even to the day when You come to take us to be with You. Amen.

With the Lord begin your task; Jesus will direct it.
For His aid and counsel ask; Jesus will perfect it.
Ev’ry morn with Jesus rise, And when day is ended,
In His name then close your eyes; Be to Him commended.

Let each day begin with prayer, Praise, and adoration.
On the Lord cast ev’ry care; He is your salvation.
Morning, evening, and at night Jesus will be near you,
Save you from the tempter’s might, With His presence cheer you.

With your Savior at your side, Foes need not alarm you;
In His promises confide, And no ill can harm you.
All your trust and hope repose In the mighty Master,
Who in wisdom truly knows How to stem disaster.

If your task be thus begun With the Savior’s blessing,
Safely then your course will run, Toward the promise pressing.
Good will follow ev’rywhere While you here must wander;
You at last the joy will share In the mansions yonder.

Thus, Lord Jesus, ev’ry task Be to You commended;
May Your will be done, I ask, Until life is ended.
Jesus, in Your name begun Be the day’s endeavor;
Grant that it may well be done To Your praise forever.
(LSB 869)

Monday, April 27, 2020

WITH THE LORD WE CAN SOAR LIKE AN EAGLE

Isaiah 40:31 “. . .they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

In Old Testament Hebrew, there is a root word that can be translated into English as either “wait” or “hope.” Isaiah, in today’s devotional text, says whoever “waits” or places their “hope” in the LORD, renews their strength. They can soar like an eagle, run and walk without growing tired.

So, how are you doing? I don’t know about you, but for me the days seem to be dragging along. I’m not physically tired, but the same cannot be said regarding how I am doing emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. Not knowing if my two grandsons will or will not have graduation exercises and if they do will Debbie and I be able to travel in order to share in their momentous day? Knowing I am not in control of any part of my life is disconcerting. How about you?

“Wait for the LORD!” “Hope in the LORD!” God is all knowing. God is all powerful. God is faithful in keeping His promises. He not only created this world and all in it, but also preserves it. When we put our faith and trust in Him, wait for Him, place our hope in Him, we no longer depend upon our own wisdom, intelligence, ingenuity, knowledge, and strength. In faith, placing everything into God’s hands, frees us to live unencumbered lives. He helps us soar like an eagle, run like a world class champion distance runner, and have the energy to walk as far as necessary.

Isaiah’s words are exactly what we need today as the marathon of life continues. God knows who we are, where we are, where we need to go and what we need to get there. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, “wait for the LORD.”

Prayer: O LORD, hear my prayer. I come to You, Almighty, All knowing God, seeking You to help me to soar, run, walk or crawl. You alone know what is good for Me and prevent what is not. Into Your hands I commit my body, mind, soul and spirit. In the name of Jesus. Amen

“Come unto Me, ye weary, And I will give you rest.”
O blessed voice of Jesus, Which comes to hearts oppressed!
It tells of benediction, Of pardon, grace and peace,
Of joy that hath no ending, Of love that cannot cease.

“Come unto Me, ye wand’ers, And I will give you light.”
O loving voice of Jesus, Which comes to cheer the night!
Our hearts were filled with sadness, And we had lost our way;
But Thou hast brought us gladness And songs at break of day.

“Come unto Me, ye fainting, And I will give you life.”
O cheering voice of Jesus, Which comes to aid our strife!
The foe is stern and eager, The fight is fierce and long;
But Thou has made us mighty And stronger than the strong.

“And who-so-ever cometh, I will not cast him out.”
O patient love of Jesus, Which drives away our doubt,
Which, though we be unworthy Of love so great and free,
Invites us very sinners To come, dear Lord, to Thee!

Sunday, April 26, 2020

THE LORD SETS US FREE

Psalm 118:5 Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free.

In my dictionary, there are 45 different definitions and/or illustrations for the word free. Basically, free means not being under the control of someone or something. It means to think as one pleases or do as one decides for one's self.

With covid-19 free means not having the virus active in our body. It means, for those who have been infected that their body has successfully fought off the harmful effects of the virus and their health and strength has returned. In either case a person, free of the virus or its harmful effects, is able to lead a normal, full and healthy life.

The opposite of free is burdened, bound, restrained. When covid-19 is unleashing its devastating effects on the body it takes over control. The body becomes burdened. The virus saps the body's strength. It can even cause death.

Spiritually, we are under attack by Satan, the world in which we live and the old sinful nature we all have. They are intent on controlling us, enslaving us to their sinful way of life, and literally taking heaven away from us.

Satan tries many different approaches to take control of our heart, soul and mind. Jesus came to brake Satan's deadly hold on us. "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32) Although Jesus' primary work was to set us free from sin's bondage and the Devil's power, He also cares about our everyday challenges. His freeing work is all inclusive.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, Savior, Good Shepherd and friend, thank you for giving of Yourself to free us from the grasp of our old sinful nature, the world and Satan. Send the Holy Spirit to work mightily through the power of the Gospel and the Sacraments to strengthen our faith in You who alone keeps us free from the old evil foe. Amen.

What a friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry Ev'rything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit; Oh, what needless pain we bear—
All because we do not carry Ev'rything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged—Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our ev'ry weakness—Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden, Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge—Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer.
In His arms He'll take and shield thee; Thou wilt find a solace there.

Saturday, April 25, 2020

GOD IS STEADFAST IN HIS LOVE TOWARD US

Psalm 117 Praise the Lord, all nations! Extol him, all peoples! For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord!

"Psalm 117 celebrates God's grace, (His undeserved love), which began in Israel but is extended to all nations through Christ. If God's love had to be earned, there would be no reason to praise Him. His love would also be severely limited. But because His love is His alone to give, it is great, and it reaches to people of all nations." [Lutheran Study Bible Notes]

On the one hand, especially in these last several months, we have witnessed in the midst of a pandemic, a major national and world health and economic crisis, the fickleness of human beings, politicians, government, perhaps even family, friends and neighbors. One would think basic human need would drive all decisions. But, watching the United States Senate at work, showed us how politicians and political parties seemingly cannot avoid trying to gain an advantage over one another even with the country in free-fall.

On the other hand, our God is so different. He has only one agenda. His agenda is to love the people He created. His love is for everyone. His love is freely given. His love is so great that He literally sent His Son Jesus to earth to take the sins of all humanity as His own. Because of His Father's and His own love for us, He suffered and died on account of our sins. Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us, "For by grace (God's undeserved love) you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." God out of His love for us does what He does, not for self-promotion or benefit, but solely for our benefit and good.

While the stimulus checks are not for everyone, while the small business loans are not for all businesses, while we often need connections of one type or another to obtain what we need, God's love, His mercy, and the saving work of His Son is for all. "The LORD is good; His steadfast love endures forever, and His faithfulness to all generations. (Psalm 100:5)

God is love. Every day He loves us. Our response, says the Psalmist, is to Praise Him! We give our thanks and praise to God whose love is steadfast, enduring, for all.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, even when we through our sins are unlovable, You love us unconditionally through Jesus Christ, Your Son our Lord. We offer our thanks and praise to You for all Your gifts and blessings! Amen.

How wide the love of Christ! It knows not class or race
But holds our one humanity Within its broad embrace.

How long the love of Christ! Its patience will not cease
Until this broken world is bound In everlasting peace.

How high the love of Christ! Beyond all thought it soars,
And yet upon our passing lives Unmeasured mercy pours.

How deep the love of Christ, Descending to a cross!
He bears within His wounded hands All human pain and loss.

All praise to You, O Christ, For love whose depth and height,
Whose length and breadth fill time and space With endless life and light!

Friday, April 24, 2020
GOD'S WORD IS TIMELESS

The following was written by Johann Sebastian Bach based upon Jeremiah 16:16. His date of birth was March 31, 1685 and he died July 28, 1750. Although Bach wrote these words around 300 years ago, they are very relevant today.

Jeremiah 16:15b-16 For I will bring them (the Children of Israel) back to their own land that I gave to their fathers. "Behold, I am sending for many fishers, declares the Lord, and they shall catch them. And afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the clefts of the rocks."

How easily, though, could the Highest do without us
And turn away His mercy from us,
When our perverted hearts in evil from Him part
And in their stubbornness
To their destruction run.
But what response
From His paternal spirit?
Withhold His loving kindness
From us, and, just as we from Him, withdraw,
And then betray us to the foe's deceit and spite?

NO, God is all the time intending
On the proper path to keep us,
Sheltered by His glory's grace.
Yea, when we have gone astray
And the proper way abandon,
He will even have us sought for . . .

If God commands, then must His blessing
In all that we may do
Abundantly endure,
E'en though both fear and care oppose us.
The talent He hath given us
Would He with int'rest have returned Him;
If only we ourselves not hide it,
He gladly helps, that it may bear its fruit.

What can then thee in all they dealings frighten,
If thee, my heart, God doth His hands extend?
Before His merest nod doth all misfortune yield,
And He, most huge in might, can shelter and protect thee.
When trouble, hardship's toil, grudge, plague and falsehood come,
Intending all thou dost to harass and to hinder,
Let passing discontent thy purpose not diminish;
The work which He assigns will be for none too hard.
With steadfast joy go forth, thou shalt see at the finish
That what before caused pain occurred to bring thee blessing.

Sing, pray, and walk in God's own pathways,
Perform thine own work ever true,
And trust in heaven's ample blessing,

Then shall He stand by thee anew;
For him who doth his confidence
Rest in God, He forsaketh not.
--Johann Sebastian Bach

Prayer: LORD, in Your Holy Spirit's work through word and sacraments, perform Your work in us. Strengthen our faith in You giving us confidence that rests in You alone knowing You will never forsake us. Amen.

(There is no hymn with this devotion)

Thursday, April 23, 2020

WAIT FOR THE LORD

Psalm 27:14 "Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!"

"Is it time?" "When are we leaving?" "Will I ever get a bicycle?" We adults have heard these and similar questions from children. A child lives for the moment. The future always seems beyond their grasp.

Aren't we all currently having some difficulty "waiting?" When will we be able to go out without a mask, eat in a restaurant, take a trip, go on vacation and attend worship services in our church? When LORD? When?

We adults, even though more sophisticated than a child, have difficulty with waiting. Waiting is hard to do, isn't it? We want it now, not tomorrow. So, even though you cannot make a car payment today, the car companies are enticing you to purchase a new car now by "deferring" payments for three to six months. Just think, for up to six months you can enjoy a new car without paying a dime. Just sign and drive one company advertises.

A plaque purchased from a Christian bookstore reads, "Lord, give me patience NOW!" Here are several Bible passages that encourage us to have patience and wait for the LORD

"Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the LORD!" (Psalm 31:24) "For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken." (Psalm 62:5-6) "I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope" (Psalm 130:5)

Life is not a sprint race. It is much more like a marathon. The word "wait" in these Psalms has in mind endurance, not giving up, trusting. You will note the waiting that is encouraged is anchored in God, not self. Anchored in God we are like a huge skyscraper anchored on bedrock that can withstand a mega earthquake. God is "our rock," "our salvation," "our fortress." "We shall not be shaken." (Psalm 62:5-6) ". . . let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. . . ." (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Psalm 27:14 "Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!" (See also: Joshua 1:9 and Ephesians 6:10)

Prayer: O Christ, my light and my salvation, comfort me and strengthen my faith. Amen.

Fight the good fight with all your might;
Christ is your strength, and Christ your right.
Lay hold on life, and it shall be
Your joy and crown eternally.
Run the straight race through God's good grace;
Lift up your eyes, and seek His face.
Life with its way before us lies;
Christ is the path, and Christ the prize.
Cast care aside, lean on your guide;
His boundless mercy will provide.
Trust, and enduring faith shall prove
Christ is your life and Christ your love.
Faint not nor fear, His arms are near;
He changes not who holds you dear;
Only believe, and you will see
That Christ is all eternally.

Wednesday, April 22, 2020

GOD'S WORD IS A LAMP THAT LIGHTS OUR WAY

Psalm 119:105 "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

When we think of the Ten Commandments we think Law. Of course it is God's Law, but they are still law. Our sinful nature does not like God's Law because of its restrictions and judgments. Who likes it when one of those pesky Ten Commandments point out a sin we commit or directs us in a direction we do not want to go?

God's gave His Law for our good. The Small Catechism summarizes three good purposes of God's Law: 1) "It helps to control violent outbursts of sin and keeps order in the world (a curb); 2) The Law accuses us and shows us our sins (a mirror); and, 3) The Law teaches us Christians what we should and should not do to lead a God-pleasing life (a guide.)" "The power to live according to the Law comes from the Gospel." (Small Catechism, pp. 94-95)

The words of Psalm 119:105, the Scriptural basis for today's devotional thought, tell us how God's word guides us in the way that God wants us to think, speak and act. For example, as social distancing continues we become more and more tempted to loosen our behavior. We are inclined to "do our own thing." We want to exercise our First Amendment right of the pursuit of freedom and happiness.

In these unprecedented, dangerous and troublesome times, God Law guides us to honor those who are in authority over us (4th Commandment.) In our case this is the governor of our state and his advisors as well as the President of the United States and his advisors. We may not like what they order us to do or want to follow the behavior they strongly encourage. They are, however, God's instrument to do what they do and say what they say for the good of every citizen.

We may be suffering severe cabin fever. The Laws that we chafe against may be irritating. They may not even make sense. We may think we know better than the "experts." Yet, God's Law tells us to honor those who are in authority over us. As Christians His Law tells us to obey our government's laws. These Laws are meant by God to be "a lamp to our feet and a light to our path."

Prayer: Thank You LORD, for giving us Your Law to prevent chaos and anarchy, to preserve order in society, and protect ourselves and our neighbors. Through the faith You have given us in Christ send Your Holy Spirit to cause Your word to be a "lamp unto our feet and a light to our path." Amen.

God bless our native land;
Firm may she ever stand through storm and night
When the wild tempests rave,
Ruler of wind and wave,
Do Thou our country save
By Thy great might.
So shall our prayers arise
To God above the skies;
On Him we wait.
Thou who art ever night,
Guarding with watchful eye,
To thee aloud we cry:
God save the state!

Tuesday, April 21, 2020

STIMULUS CHECK

Psalm 27:7-8 Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me! You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, Lord, do I seek."

Have you received your stimulus check? You know, the \$1200 that is supposed to be coming your way from the federal government. It is meant to rescue people from their dire financial straits. Observing how the news media has run with this, one could believe these checks were a significant answer to the financial crisis many now face due to coronavirus.

With Social Security, unemployment insurance, Obama Care, WIC and many, many, many government social safety net programs, one would think that the government is the source for our personal security and well-being. There are those who actually want this to be true, if indeed, at this point it is not.

In who or whom do you put your faith and trust? If it is the government, it is finite. Yes, it can print money. It can print lots of money. But eventually the money it prints will be virtually worthless.

We Christians, on the other hand, know from God's Word, that God is the source for all things temporal and spiritual. By the infinite power of His word He created all that is. (Genesis 1 & 2) Jesus says, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." (Matthew 10:29-31) God does not use printing presses to take care of His creation. He uses His almighty power and gracious word.

David wrote, "You (God) have said, "Seek my face." David's response: "My heart says to you, "Your face, Lord, do I seek." (Psalm 27:8) God says the same words to us as He did to David, "Seek my face." Being a country that has enjoyed abundance for a long, long time, perhaps, even we Christians have forgotten that it is God who creates, provides and protects. The government is one of His instruments to do that. But God does not need the government. He knows how to send manna and quail from heaven and water out of rocks. So, God says to us today, "Seek my face."

Prayer: We praise and thank You LORD, that You permit us to come to you in all of our needs and You do not turn us away. Give us faith to put our trust in You alone for the things we need in this world and especially for our eternal salvation. In the name of Jesus, Your Son our Lord and Savior. Amen.

God of grace and God of glory, On Your people pour Your pow'r;
Crown Your ancient Church's story; Bring its bud to glorious flow'r.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage For the facing of this hour.
For the facing of this hour.
Lo, the hosts of evil round us Scorn the Christ, assail His ways!
From the fears that long have bound us Free our hearts to faith and praise.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage For the living of these days,
For the living of these days.
Cure Your children's warring madness; Bend our pride to Your control;
Shame our wanton, selfish gladness, Rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage Lest we miss Your kingdom's goal,
Lest we miss Your kingdom's goal.
Save us from weak resignation To the evils we deplore;
Let the gift of Your salvation Be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, Serving You whom we adore,
Serving You whom we adore.

Monday, April 20, 2020

O GIVE THANKS UNTO THE LORD

Psalm 106:1-2 Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! Who can utter the mighty deeds of the Lord, or declare all his praise?

How many of your prayers during the last 24 hours, or over the past week, were requests you presented to God for something or someone? How many times in the same span of time did you speak to God a prayer of thanks or praise? If you keep a prayer journal you can quickly answer these two questions. Few of us, however, keep prayer journals, so we will need to trust our memory.

These questions caused me to look over the prayers I have been writing as part of these devotions. If you have kept a copy of the devotions, a simple review will tell you petitions seeking something from God have far outnumbered prayers of thanksgiving or praise. See, even the prayers of this pastor are heavily weighted toward requests.

The Children of Israel had difficulty seeing the good God worked in their lives. Note verses 6 and 7 of Psalm 106, "Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not consider your wondrous works; they did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love, but rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea. Yet he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make known his mighty power."

In spite of the fact you might be feeling that the Red Sea is in front of you and the Egyptian army is quickly coming up behind you, take some time to also reflect upon the blessings God has been giving you. Think what it would be like if God gave you what you deserve instead of giving you good gifts out of the abundance of His love for you. God doesn't play favorites. "For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matthew 5:45) He sent Jesus to save the world, not just a select few. (John 3:16)

Prayer: LORD, we give You thanks, for You are good and Your steadfast love endures forever. Thank you for your mighty deeds, but also for your common everyday gifts too. To You we give our thanks and praise. Amen.

Now thank we all our God With hearts and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done, In whom His world rejoices;
Who from our mothers' arms Has blest us on our way
With countless gifts of love And still is ours today.
Oh, may this bounteous God Through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts And blessed peace to cheer us
And keep us in His grace And guide us when perplexed
And free us from all ills In this world and the next!
All praise and thanks to God The Father now be given,
The Son, and Him who reigns With them in highest heaven,
The one eternal God, Whom earth and heav'n adore;
For thus it was, is now, And shall be evermore.

Sunday, April 19, 2020

EASTER CONTINUES – TELL THE GOOD NEWS

Matthew 28:8 “they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.”

With social distancing and virtual isolation, we have perhaps become focused mostly on ourselves. Think of your concern list: 1) groceries, 2) staying well, 3) what if I do get the virus, 4) will I be able to pay my bills, 5) will my family be OK?, etc. As we review our concern list, if you are like me, most everything on it is all about me and you or those closest to our heart.

The women on Easter morning witnessed an awesome sight. Imagine having an angel speak to you. And, then Jesus came and spoke with them. They were so taken by what they had seen and heard that they “ran to tell his disciples.”

I know you and I have experienced the resurrection of Jesus over and over as every Easter we, through God’s word, hear our resurrected Savior. So, perhaps, just perhaps, we are not nearly as excited as the women were. But this year we experienced Easter’s Good News of Christ resurrection in a new way. Whether we heard or saw an Easter service on-line, through U-Tube, live streaming or just reading it from the Scriptures, this year gave us a new way to celebrate Easter.

Today’s devotion is an encouragement to “run and tell.” I encourage you to find a creative way to figuratively “run,” and literally tell others what you have seen and heard. Send a forward of last Sunday’s Easter service to a family member, friend or neighbor. Send them the Good News you heard with your ears and saw with your eyes. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!

If you are like Debbie and myself, you downloaded more than one church’s Easter service. Decide which one you felt best communicated the Easter message. Then, send access information to family, friends, neighbors, fellow workers. “Run and tell” Jesus died and rose again for all.

Prayer: Thank You LORD for permitting me to hear again the Easter message of Christ’s resurrection. Guide and use me to share this Good News, especially with someone that does not know or who has not heard this message in awhile. Bless me with the same joy the women had that first Easter morning. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

REFRAIN:

Listen, Listen, God is calling Through the Word inviting,
Offering forgiveness, Comfort, and joy.
Jesus gave His mandate: Share the good news
That came to save us—And set us free. (refrain)
Let none be forgotten Throughout the world.
In the triune name of God Go and baptize.
Help us to be Faithful, Standing steadfast,
Walking in Your precepts,— Led by Your Word.
(LSB 833)

Saturday, April 18, 2020

EASTER CONTINUES – WHO DO WE BELIEVE?

Matthew 28:13 “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’”

Jesus’ empty tomb on Easter morning created a problem. The problem for the followers of Jesus was believing He was alive. An angelic messenger told the women He had risen. Jesus appeared to and spoke with Mary. Jesus appeared and spoke to the Disciples. For 40 days Jesus continued to appear and interact with His followers. Jesus’ followers needed an abundance of spiritual assurance and encouragement that He was alive, which He gave.

For the Jewish leaders, Jesus’ resurrection was a different problem. They had to figure out how to explain His empty tomb and counteract any thought that He might be alive. After deliberation they decided to bribe the guards to tell people Jesus’ disciples stole His body while they were sleeping.

Who is right? To have to be bribed to say what the guards said doesn’t give a lot of credibility to their testimony, does it? Hundreds of eyewitnesses saw Jesus alive. Certainly, their testimony goes a long way in convincing us. We, however, have an even better source for our faith. We have God’s word. His word is truth! (John 17:17) As someone once wrote, “God said it, I believe it, that settles it.”

Why is Christ’s resurrection so important to us? Christ’s resurrection is the lynch-pin of our faith. A dead savior cannot save. A dead savior gives no hope, assurance, comfort or peace. As St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:17, “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”

In these troubled times we are blessed by the faith given us by God in our living, loving Savior. His word is true. He keeps His promises. Jesus rose from the grave on the third day, just as He said He would. His physical appearances to many, assures us God keeps His word. His word is reliable, sure, trustworthy. His word to us is, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Prayer: Heavenly Father, send Your Holy Spirit to work faith in my heart to believe Your word and promises so that no matter what occurs in my life I am confident that you will be with me today. Tomorrow, until finally You will take me to be with You forever, in the name of Jesus, Your Son, my Lord and Savior. Amen.

I know that my Redeemer lives; What comfort this sweet sentence gives!
He lives, He lives, who once was dead; He lives, my ever-living head.
He lives, to bless me with His love; He lives to plead for me above;
He lives my hungry soul to feed; He lives to help in time of need.
He lives to grant me rich supply; He lives to guide me with His eye;
He lives to comfort me when faint; He lives to hear my soul’s complaint.
He lives, my kind, wise, heav’nly friend; He lives and loves me to the end;
He lives, and while He lives, I’ll sing; He lives, my Prophet, Priest and King.
(LSB, vv 1,3,4,6)

Friday, April 17, 2020

EASTER CONTINUES - FAITH LOOKS TO GOD

Hebrews 11:13,16 These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth . . . they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.

“These all died in faith.” Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah are the “these” referred to in Hebrews 11:13. They were people who lived by faith in God and His promises. It wasn’t easy for Noah to hear ridicule and receive insults as he built the ark, but his faith was in God’s direction to build it and a fervent trust that God would keep his family and himself alive. Sarah was well beyond the years of child bearing, yet she trusted God’s promise she would conceive and bear a son.

Hebrews 11 is the FAITH chapter of the Bible. It gives an account of the faith of a number of the patriarchs of the Old Testament. The key verse of this chapter is verse 16, “. . . they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.”

Our worry and fears come when we take our eyes off of what God says He will do and the fact that He keeps His word. In fact, worry and fear come about because we put our faith and trust in ourselves, checking/savings/investment accounts, our ability to problem solve, and the other distractions of this world. When we worry, we are like the Disciples on the boat in the storm on the Sea of Galilee with Jesus in the boat. Remember what they said, “Lord, we are going to die . . .” They had Jesus in their boat and they were afraid of high waves, driven by gale force winds swamping their boat. “He (Jesus) rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm.” (Luke 8:24)

Our God saved us not with money, not with an army, not with human reason, but with the holy innocent bitter suffering and death of His beloved Son and His Easter resurrection. Easter morning was God’s thunderous shout to all of us who believe in Jesus to not take things into our own hands, but to look to our resurrected Lord for all that comes our way. As He conquered the world, Satan, death, the grave, through faith in Him we “are more than conquerors.” (Romans 8:37) Like Able, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sara, we have been given faith by God to overcome all this world brings into our lives.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, by Your grace and in Your mercy, give me a faith that will not shrink though pressed by many a foe, in the precious name of Jesus, my resurrected Lord and Savior. Amen

Children of the heav’nly Father Safely in His bosom gather;
Nestling bird nor star in heaven Such a refuge e’er was given.
God His own doth tend and nourish; In His holy courts they flourish.
From all evil things He spares them; In His mighty arms He bears them.
Neither life nor death shall ever From the Lord His children sever;
Unto them His grace He showeth, And their sorrows all He knoweth.
Though He giveth or He taketh, God His children ne’er forsaketh;
His the loving purpose solely To preserve them pure and holy.
(LSB 725)

Thursday, April 16, 2020

EASTER CONTINUES – OUR FATHER’S LOVE

1 John 3:1 “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”

A parent’s love for their child is like an elastic band that stretches, bends, draws back, but rarely breaks. A parent will do virtually anything for the benefit of their child. A parent’s love, however, is only for their child and their child only. They may love other children, but not to the depth they love their own.

There is a limit to parental love. When their child breaks the law, the parent can hire the best attorney to defend them, can provide the attorney with an unlimited amount of money to mount the defense of their child in a court of law, and can pray for their child. But, when the judge announces a guilty verdict, the parent cannot go to prison in their place.

The Gospel is about God’s love. Unlike the limits of parental love, God’s love is not for one child but for all people. Because of God’s love for all people, Jesus out of His love for His Father and at His Father’s request became a true human being, took the sins of all people as His own and paid the penalty of their sins with His death. In love, God accepted Jesus’ substitutionary saving work for all sinners.

Because of His love for us, in and through faith in Christ, God has adopted us as His own dear children. (Galatians 3:26 “. . . in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.”) We receive two important blessings through this adoption. First, while on earth God treats us as a loving Father treats His children providing all we need to support us during our earthly life. Second, Out of His love for us in Christ Jesus, when our earthly life ends, God through His Son has promised, “I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” (John 14:3)

Our Heavenly Father has our back every day. While we remain on earth, He provides us with His providential care. In Luther’s words, “He provides all that I need to support this body and life.” This includes, Luther says, “clothes, shoes, food, drink, house, home, livelihood.” He also “defends me against all danger, guards and protects me from all evil. . .” Luther says He does all of this out of His “Fatherly divine goodness and mercy.

Through God’s gift of faith to me in His Son Jesus, I am adopted as His child, as Luther says, “. . . to be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.” This is as sure as Jesus died on the cross and rose from the grave.

Prayer: Dear Father in Heaven, thanks and praise to You for loving me and adopting me into Your holy family. Please, keep me in the faith You have given me in Jesus by which you have gifted me with life everlasting. In His holy name. Amen.

Jesus lives! The vict’ry’s won! Death no longer can upcall me;
Jesus lives! Death’s reign is done! From the grave will Christ recall me,
Brighter scenes will then commence; This shall be my confidence.
Jesus lives! For me He died, Hence will I, to Jesus living,
Pure in heart and act abide, Praise to Him and glory giving.
All I need God will dispense; This shall be my confidence.
Jesus lives! I know full well Nothing me from Him shall sever.
Neither death nor pow’rs of hell Part me now from Christ forever.
God will be my sure defense; This shall be my confidence.
Jesus lives! And now is death But the gate of life immortal;
This shall calm my trembling breath When I pass its gloomy portal.
Faith shall cry, as fails each sense; Jesus is my confidence!
(LSB 490, vv 1,3,4,5)

Wednesday, April 15, 2020

EASTER CONTINUES — DOUBTING/BELIEVING

John 20:25 “. . . he (Thomas) said to them (disciples), “Unless I see in his (Jesus’) hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

Opinion polls, Opinion polls! Opinion polls are treated by at least some in the news media, social media, and by many others as the basis of fact. Opinions, however, are not always based upon facts.

Thomas would have blended in well today. Eyewitness testimony, even from good friends and fellow disciples, was not enough for Thomas. He clearly and emphatically stated what it would take for him to believe Jesus was alive. He had to see Jesus with his own eyes. He had to personally, physically examine Jesus’ body. Only after he had convincing proof, he would believe Jesus was alive.

Jesus, after His first appearance to the Disciples, made a second, special, appearance. This time Thomas was present. Jesus lovingly offered Thomas His hands to touch, His side to explore, His body to examine. Thomas doubts were answered. He believed! He exclaimed, “My Lord and my God!”²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:28-29)

You and I have some of Thomas’ DNA. Daily, we must decide who to believe and what to believe. Honestly, haven’t there been times in your life when you have even struggled to believe something God’s word says?

Today’s Thomas questions: “If God is really all powerful, why doesn’t He directly intervene and end the pandemic?” “If God is love, why does He permit the very doctors and nurses treating covid-19 patients to contract this illness and even die from it?” “If God is truly God, aren’t the pastors who kept their churches open on Easter Sunday right when they said, ‘God will protect us?’ ” Are the rest of us Christians simply “spiritual wimps”?

There are actually three different answers with which God responds to our prayers. The first is No! Yes, God is all-powerful, all-knowing and loves completely. These attributes of God, however, do not mean He cannot say NO. And, He does say NO!

The second answer God at times gives is, not yet. There are no “may-be’s” with God. He is decisive! God does say not yet. St. Paul in 1 Timothy 6 writes, “God will, at the proper time. . . .” God’s time is not our time. The Palmist writes, “. . . a thousand years in Your (God’s) sight are but as yesterday. . . .” (Psalm 94:4)

Finally, God says yes! Jesus’ crucifixion was God’s yes to our salvation. Jesus’ resurrection was God’s yes to our resurrection.

Jesus, knowing God’s three answers, taught us to pray, “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10) It takes all the faith God gives to pray this petition. The Holy Spirit works this faith in us through the Means of Grace (God’s Word and the Sacraments.) We walk by faith and not by sight.

Prayer: Lord, I believe, help my unbelief. Amen.

I walk in danger all the way. The thought shall never leave me
That Satan, who has marked his prey, Is plotting to deceive me.
This foe with hidden snares May seize me unawares
If I should fail to watch and pray. I walk in danger all the way.
I pass through trials all the way, With sin and ills contending;
In patience I must bear each day The cross of God’s own sending.
When in adversity I know not where to flee,

When storms of woe my soul dismay, I pass through trials all the way.
I walk with Jesus all the way, His guidance never fails me,
Within His wounds I find a stay When Satan's pow'r assails me;
And by His footsteps led, My path I safely tread.
No evil leads my soul astray; I walk with Jesus all the way.

My walk is heav'nward all the way; Await, my soul, the morrow,
When God's good healing shall allay All suff'ring, sin, and sorrow.
Then, worldly pomp, begone! To heav'n I now press on.
For all the world I would not stay; My walk is heav'nward all the way.
(LSB 716, vv. 1,2,5,6)

Tuesday, April 14, 2020

EASTER CONTINUES — IN JESUS WE HAVE PEACE

John 20:19 “... Jesus came and stood among them (Disciples) and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

Frightened, Jesus’ disciples were hiding behind a locked door. Jesus’ enemies had killed Him. The disciples must have thought they were next on their hit list. Jesus, locked door and all, suddenly appeared among His disciples. He was their living, life-giving, hope-providing Savior and leader.

Jesus’ greeting was simple. “Peace be with you.” Jesus said this under the umbrella of His crucifixion and entombment. He said this after His Easter morning resurrection. The disciples had to be troubled by their recent behavior of failing to pray for Jesus in the Garden, deserting Him at His arrest, not giving Him their support during His trial and their absence while He was dying on Calvary. Their consciences and hearts needed peace.

Jesus said, “Peace be with you.” Peace is what Jesus came to earth to give to sinners one and all. That included His disciples. It includes us. The peace He gives is far different from what we think of when we hear this word. Jesus indicates this in John 14:27-28, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

Jesus gives peace having lived the perfect life we cannot, paying to God the debt for our sins which we are unable to do, and overcoming death and the tomb over which we are powerless. The peace He gives is our victory of everlasting life with our LORD.

When we confess our sins and seek God’s forgiveness, Jesus’ peace means His blood washes every one of them away. When the happenings in our world frighten us, Jesus’ peace means we have nothing to fear because He is with us. No virus, no future uncertainty, no one, nothing can separate us from God’s love which is ours in Christ Jesus. This is the peace Jesus gave to His disciples on Easter. This is the peace Jesus gives us this Easter.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, we are in need of Your peace. We come to you asking for it this day. Amen.

Christ Jesus lay in death’s strong hands For our offenses given;
But now at God’s right hand He stands And brings us life from heaven.
Therefore let us joyful be And sing to God right thankfully
Loud songs of alleluia! Alleluia!

Christ Jesus, God’s own Son, came down, His people to deliver;
Destroying sin, He took the crown From death’s pale brow forever;
Stripped of pow’r no more it reigns; An empty form alone remains;
Its sting is lost forever. Alleluia!
Here our true Paschal Lamb we see, Whom God so freely gave us;
He died on the accursed tree—So strong His love—to save us.
See, His blood now marks our door; Faith points to it; death passes o’er,
And Satan cannot harm us. Alleluia!
Then let us feast this Easter Day On Christ, the bread of heaven;
The Word of grace has purged away The old and evil leaven.
Christ alone our souls will feed; He is our meat and drink indeed;
Faith lives upon no other! Alleluia!

Monday, April 13, 2020

EASTER CONTINUES

John 3:17-18a "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned. . ."

In our culture, we quickly move from one event to the next. Overnight, store shelves are changed from Christmas items to Valentine's and then to Easter. On and on it goes. While this is true in the commercial world, this is not the way it is with Christians. We will continue to celebrate the season of Easter for seven more weeks.

Why would we do this? We do this because Easter is a season that emphasizes Christ's victory over sin, Satan, the world and death. It is about our own victory over these same deadly enemies. This is true because Christ's victory, by God's gracious gift of faith to us in Jesus Christ, is our victory.

Especially this year in our physical, emotional and spiritual struggles with the coronavirus our future seems so uncertain. The grim statistics associated with this horrendous virus are chilling. After weeks and weeks of heroic human efforts, the daily news offers at best a glimmering light on the horizon of our future. Most experts are saying our lives will never again be like they have been in the past.

Keeping our eyes on Jesus' earthly life and ministry, His death on the cross and His resurrection from the tomb alone creates within our hearts, minds and lives hope for the future. In Christ we have a hope that cannot be taken from us by a virus, financial set-back, loss of job, the death of a loved one, or our own. Our heavenly Father sent His Son Jesus Christ "not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."

What does Easter mean for us? The hymn A Mighty Fortress Is Our God answers this question so well:

A mighty fortress is our God, A trusty shield and weapon;
He helps us free from ev'ry need That hath us now o'er taken.
The old evil foe Now means deadly woe; Deep guile and great might
Are His dread arms in fight; On earth is not His equal.

With might of ours can naught be done, Soon were our loss effected;
But for us fights the valiant One, Whom God Himself elected.
Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is, Of Sabaoth Lord,
And there's none other God; He holds the field forever.

Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill; They shall not overpow'r us.
This world's prince may still Scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none,
He's judged; the deed is done; One little word can fell him.

Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020

CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! HALLELUJAH!

Matthew 28:5-6 "The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for He has risen!"

The women were on their way to Jesus' tomb expecting to complete the preparation of Jesus' body. However, grieving over Jesus' death, in the depth of their loss, prepared to apply spices to His body, they found His grave was open. Had someone removed His body? They must have been crushed by such a thought.

An Angel met and spoke to the women, "He is not here, for He has risen!" Did the women hear correctly? "He has risen?" They knew Jesus brought back to life Jairus' daughter and Mary and Martha's brother? How could they have forgotten that Jesus had demonstrated His power over death? How quickly the women forgot Jesus had taught, "I am the resurrection and the life?"

In our time of loss, especially the loss of a loved one or contemplating our own death, we may also forget what Jesus has promised. His promise IS, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die." (John 11:25-26) Jesus' resurrection, His victory over sin, death and the grave (Easter), assures us of our victory over these same foes. Jesus says, "Whoever believes in Me shall live. . . he shall never die."

St. Paul explains well what Christ's resurrection means for us who believe in Him, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. . . Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. . . Death is swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵ "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, 20-21, 54-57)

The death toll from covid-19 is staggering. The numbers have caused great fear and panic among the citizens of the world. Literally, the governments of the world, in an effort to prevent even greater loss of life, have brought life as we have known it to a near standstill. As Christians, our Easter celebration in the midst of pandemic and death is exactly what we need. If we live, Jesus is with us. If we die we are with Jesus. So whether we live or whether we die, because of Easter, that is, Jesus' resurrection, we who believe in Him have the gift of eternal life.

Prayer: Thanks and praise to You, O Father in heaven, for Your gift of Jesus, His life, death and RESURRECTION for our salvation. Thank You for the certainty You give us that because He arose on Easter morning so also will we rise from our graves to life everlasting. Preserve this faith in us until that day when we come to be with You forever. Amen.

I know that my Redeemer lives;
What comfort this sweet sentence gives!
He lives, He lives, who once was dead;
He lives, my ever living head.
He lives triumphant from the grave;
He lives eternally to save;
He lives all glorious in the sky;
He lives exalted there on high.
He lives and grants me daily breath;
He lives, and I shall conquer death;
He lives my mansion to prepare;
He lives to bring me safely there.

He lives, all glory to His name!
He lives, my Jesus, still the same;
Oh, the sweet joy this sentence gives:
I know that my Redeemer lives!
(LSB 461, vv 1,2,7,8)

Saturday, April 11, 2020

THE TOMB

Matthew 27:66 “. . .they (the chief priests and pharisees) went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.”

Jesus was crucified, died and was buried. The chief priests and pharisees realized the death of Jesus was not the end of their quest to get rid of Jesus. They felt a need to make sure that Jesus remained dead and buried. They posted a guard at Jesus' body in the tomb.

Not much has changed. Many, if not the majority, in today's world want to keep Jesus dead and buried. That is, they want nothing to do with Him. They try every which way possible to discredit Jesus' saving work, that is His life, death and resurrection.

If Jesus did not die! If Jesus was not buried (what is done with a dead body!) If Jesus did not die and was not buried then our faith in Him is useless. It is useless because God insisted, as was stated in yesterday's devotion, that Jesus had to die to pay the wages for our sin.

Deep down in the hearts and minds of the chief priests and pharisees they knew that if Jesus' prophecy of His resurrection happened, they, their power, their control over the Jews was gone. They, therefore, determined to do everything possible to prevent Jesus' body exiting the tomb in which it was buried.

How foolish Jesus' enemies were. Armed guards could not thwart, could not prevent, could not stop God's plan of salvation. Tomorrow, Easter Sunday, the futility of the Jewish leaders actions to prevent Jesus' resurrection would become evident.

You and I know about Easter Sunday. . .so, in our devotion today we pray the Holy Spirit to give us patience and faith to stand outside Jesus' tomb, not to prevent His resurrection, but rather to anticipate it because IF HE LIVES, then His promise is true, "Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,"²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." (John 11:25-26)

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for Your life, Your death. Send Your Holy Spirit into our hearts this day to wait with faithful anticipation for tomorrow's Good News. Amen.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Oh. . .Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble,
Where you there when they crucified my Lord?
Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?
Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?
Oh. . .Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?
Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb? Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb?
Oh. . .Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb?
(LSB, vv 1-3)

Good Friday, April 10, 2020

THE GREAT EXCHANGE

Matthew 27:45 "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

To be wanted, loved, desired, is a basic human need. In fact, a person who even feels abandoned usually loses their will to live. To be forsaken by a parent, or worse yet, both parents is even a greater threat to one's existence.

Already in the Garden Jesus' disciples deserted Him. Peter denied knowing Him in Caiaphas' courtyard. The crowd asked for Barabbas rather than Jesus. His enemies pleaded with Pilate to execute Him. Dying on the cross Jesus experienced the worst abandonment of all, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Jesus hung on the cross. Alone! Forsaken! Suffering Unbearable Pain! Suffering with no relief! Suffering in DARKNESS, Pitch Black Darkness! Abandoned! He gave His life not to satisfy Pilate, nor the Roman Government, nor His Jewish enemies, but to pay-up in full to His Father, God Almighty the debt, the wages of our sins. "The wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23)

There is no live video of Jesus' three hours of pain, suffering, darkness and abandonment. No visuals exist depicting what He had to go through to save us from our sins. Jesus literally experienced God's abandonment. Ours sins separated Him from God. "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us. . ." (2 Corinthians 5:21) Theologians refer to what Jesus did for us on Calvary's cross as the "Great Exchange." [*He took our sins and gave us His sinlessness.*]

Prayer: Dear Jesus, as we meditate upon You dying on Calvary's cross, we give You thanks for Your great love which caused you to suffer crucifixion in our place. Thank You! Thanks to who cried out from the depth of the feeling of being abandoned by Your Father that we will never be abandoned by Him. Send Your Holy Spirit to keep us in the true faith receiving forgiveness of our sins, eternal life and salvation. In Your holy name. Amen.

Stricken, smitten, and afflicted, See Him dying on the tree!
'Tis the Christ, by man rejected; Yes, my soul, 'tis He, 'tis He!
'Tis the long-expected Prophet, David's Son, yet David's Lord;
Proofs I see sufficient of it; 'Tis the true and faithful Word.
Tell me, ye who hear Him groaning, Was there ever grief like His?
Friends through fear His cause disowning, Foes insulting His distress;
Many hands were raised to wound Him, None would intervene to save;
But the deepest stroke that pierced Him Was the stroke that justice gave.
Ye who think of sin but lightly Nor suppose the evil great
Here may view its nature rightly, Here its guilt may estimate.
Mark the sacrifice appointed, See who bears the awful load;
'Tis the Word, the Lord's anointed, Son of Man and Son of God.
Here we have a firm foundation, Here the refuge of the lost:
Christ, the Rock of our salvation, Is the name of which we boast;
Lamb of God, for sinners wounded, Sacrifice to cancel guilt!
None shall ever be confounded Who on Him their hope have built.

Maundy Thursday, April 9, 2020

BLOOD OF THE COVENANT

Matthew 26:26-28 Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." ²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus instituted the Holy meal of His body and blood which we receive through the power of His Word connected to the bread and wine of Holy Communion. In Matthew 26:28 He tells us His purpose for giving us this sacred gift, "...this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

Many of us are probably not very familiar with the word covenant. The dictionary defines a covenant as a "binding agreement between two or more people that spells out the benefits the parties will receive." Covenant language is found a number of times in the Old Testament. The two most memorable would be first with God's covenant with Abraham, "I will be your God and you will be My people." The other was when God told Moses to tell every household of Israel to paint the blood of an unblemished lamb over the door post of their homes so that the Angel of Death would pass over their family.

By virtue of God's covenant, the lives of the first born male children of Israel were spared on the night of the first Passover. Jesus, by the shedding of His blood and offering it to us in Holy Communion, has made a covenant with us to spare our lives. Peter writes, "...you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." (1 Peter 1:18-19) Jesus says in His words of institution, "...this is My blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:28) This is His covenant (binding agreement) with all of us who by God's grace, in faith, receive His body and blood in the Lord's Supper. Our sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake. We shall not die but live forever with Him in paradise.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, I thank and praise You for feeding me the life-giving body and blood of Your beloved "Son, Jesus Christ. Send Your Holy Spirit when I receive this holy Sacrament, that I may by faith obtain and eternally enjoy Your divine grace, the forgiveness of sins, unity with Christ, and life eternal; through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen. (Taken from LSB)

What is this bread? Christ's body risen from the dead;
This bread we break, This life we take,
Was crushed to pay for our release. O taste and see—The Lord is peace.
What is this wine? The blood of Jesus shed for mine;
The cup of grace Brings His embrace
Of life and love until I sing! O taste and see—The Lord is King.
Yet is God here? Oh, yes! By Word and promise clear,
In mouth and soul, He makes us whole—
Christ, truly present in this meal. O taste and see—the Lord is real.
Is this for me? I am forgiven and set free!
I do believe That I receive
His very body and His blood. O taste and see—the Lord is good.

Wednesday, April 8, 2020

WHAT IS TRUTH?

John 18:38 "Pilate said to Him (Jesus), 'What is truth?'"

John, in ten verses (John 18:29-38) records the trial of Jesus before Pilate. Pilate asked only a few questions. He knew Jesus had already been judged guilty by Caiaphas. Those who delivered Jesus to him made it clear they had come to Pilate because only he could condemn Jesus to death by crucifixion.

Pilate's actual interrogation takes up eight verses in John 18. At the end of questioning Jesus, Pilate announced his verdict, "I find no guilt in Him." That, however, was not the outcome of Jesus' trial. Under extreme duress, Pilate had Jesus flogged and then sentenced Him to be crucified.

In the verse prior to announcing Jesus not guilty, Pilate had asked a question. It was a simple question. He asked, "What is truth?" Pilate spoke the truth when he announced to the crowd, "I find no guilt in Him." The truth, was God had laid upon Jesus the sins of us all. (Isaiah 53:6) The truth is by Jesus' stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:3) The truth is Christ died for all. (2 Corinthians 5:15)

The truth is "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned . . ." (John 3:16-18a)

Prayer: Dear Jesus, You are the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father except through You. Thank you for coming to this world to save us from our sins and be the way for us to go from here to heaven. Send the Holy Spirit into our hearts to keep us in this faith to life everlasting. Amen.

A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth, The guilt of sinners bearing
And, Laden with the sins of earth, None else the burden sharing;
Goes patient on, grows weak and faint, To slaughter led without complaint,
That spotless life to offer, He bears the strips, the wounds, the lies,
The mockery, and yet replies, "All this I gladly suffer."
This Lamb is Christ, the soul's great friend, The Lamb of God, our Savior,
Whom God the Father chose to send To gain for us His favor.
"Go forth, My Son," the Father said, "And free My children from their dread
Of guilt and condemnation. The wrath and stripes are hard to bear,
But by Your passion they will share The fruit of Your salvation."
"Yes, Father, yes, most willingly I'll bear what You command Me.
My will conforms to Your decree, I'll do what You have asked Me."
O wondrous Love, what have You done! The Father offers up His Son,
Desiring our salvation. O Love, how strong You are to save!
You lay the One into the grave Who built the earth's foundation.
(LSB 438, vv 1-3)

Tuesday, April 7, 2020

THEY BOUND JESUS

John 18:12 "So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him."

Like a common criminal the soldiers arrested Jesus. They bound Him. After binding Him they must have thought they were in control and had the situation well in hand.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, the world's most epic war was entering its final hours. Satan used Judas, the soldiers and the accompanying crowd in his effort to defeat his adversary Jesus. The Devil, once and for all, was going to destroy Jesus and His reign over heaven and earth.

What Satan, Judas, the soldiers and the crowd did not know was Jesus, who they took bound from the garden, was on His way to Calvary to make full and complete payment with His death for the sins of human kind. He endured arrest, physical binding, a subsequent trial and crucifixion to defeat all the forces of evil in our behalf.

To those of us who should be bound, tried and convicted because of our sins, the good news of the Gospel is simply this, "So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. . . if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." (John 8:31-32, 36)

Prayer: Gracious Savior and Lord, during this Holy Week, we meditate upon You, Your suffering and death for our salvation. Thanks, and praise to You through whom we have complete forgiveness of all our sins. Thank you for freeing us from the bondage of sin and Satan. Amen.

Make me see Your great distress, Anguish, and affliction;
Bonds and stripes and wretchedness And Your crucifixion;
Make me see how scourge and rod, Spear and nails did wound You,
How for them You died, O God, Who with thorns had crowned You.
If my sins give me alarm And my conscience grieve me,
Let Your cross my fear disarm; Peace of conscience give me.
Help me see forgiveness won By Your holy passion.
If for me He slays His Son, God must have compassion.
Graciously my faith renew; Help me bear my crosses,
Learning humbleness from You, Peace mid pain and losses.
May I give You love for love! Hear me, O my Savior,
That I may in heav'n above Sing Your praise forever.
(LSB 440, vv 2,5,6)

Monday, April 6, 2020

TAKING MATTERS INTO OUR OWN HANDS

John 18:10-11 Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) ¹¹ So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" (The entire passage is John 18:1-11)

How many times have you and I wanted to help God out. By this I mean, rather than give everything in our life over to God, we want to take matters into our own hands. A simple example: We say to people we own the home in which we live, when in fact God has provided it for our protection and good. We are merely the stewards, the managers, the care takers. The current shrinking of the United States economy demonstrates we are not in control. We are seeing the old saying come true, "Here today, gone tomorrow."

Peter took matters into his own hands when Judas and the Jewish leaders came into the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus. Imagine, Peter thinking he could, as a one-man army, take on Jesus' enemies. Peter drew his sword and drew blood.

Peter was not in sync with God's will. Jesus told Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" At that moment, Peter failed to see Jesus as the one come to save all people from the condemnation of their sins. Jesus knew His Father's will. He did not let Peter derail God's plan of salvation. He even healed the ear Peter severed.

Satan uses every trick in the book to distract us. He redirects our thoughts and actions. He is using the current pandemic to cause us Christians to look to the government, medical community and our own ingenuity to deal with the crisis. Indeed, all of these are God's gifts for our good, but, "Unless the LORD builds the house, those who labor, labor in vain."

Jesus, as yesterday's devotion directed us, came to save. He came to save, but not necessarily from a virus, accident, or financial collapse. He came to "seek and save the lost." He came to save us from eternal death and condemnation. Holy week points us to the fact that we cannot take eternal, spiritual matters into our own hands. Instead, God sent His Son to take our sins, their punishment, our salvation upon Himself. In turn God gives to those who believe and trust in Jesus complete forgiveness, pardon, absolution.

Prayer: "Not my will, but Your will be done." Jesus, you taught us to pray this simple prayer. Give us faith, O Holy Spirit, to pray this prayer every time we are tempted to take matters into our own hands. Dear Jesus, we ask this in Your holy name. Amen.

My Shepherd, now receive me; My Guardian, own me Thine.
Great blessings Thou didst give me, O Source of gifts divine.
Thy lips have often fed me With Words of truth and love;
Thy Spirit oft hath led me To Heav'nly joys above.
My Savior, be Thou near me When death is at my door;
Then let Thy presence cheer me, Forsake me nevermore!
When soul and body languish, O leave me not alone,
But take away mine anguish By virtue of Thine own!
Be Thou my consolation, My shield when I must die;
Remind me of Thy passion When my last hour draws nigh.
Mine eyes shall then behold Thee, Upon Thy cross shall dwell,
My heart by faith enfold Thee. Who dieth thus dies well.

Sunday, April 5, 2020

HOSANNA

John 12:12-13 "The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³ So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"

This week, being Holy Week, the Devotional Thoughts will focus upon Jesus on His way to Calvary, His death and burial.

Palm trees grew plentifully near Jerusalem. They had become a Jewish national symbol. They appeared on Judean coins. The people waved palm branches because Jesus had instilled a new hope in them for release from Roman control. With palm branches The people acknowledged Jesus as the one who had come to save their nation. Their hope was He would restore their nation to be like it had once been under David and his son Solomon.

Hosanna literally means "help, save, I pray." Although by now some of the Jews worshiped Jesus as their spiritual savior, the majority followed Him because of the great power and authority He had displayed through His miracles of healing, feeding and speaking. People, who had lost all hope, had their hope restored by what they had heard and saw Him do.

In the current pandemic, people are looking to Jesus for hope and freedom. Many prayers are being said for protection, health and healing. Even though we are encouraged in the Scriptures to turn to Jesus for all of our needs, today we shout HOSANNA to Him who is our Lord, our Savior and our King who came to set us free from our sins and eternal death.

The Angel told Mary Jesus would come to save His people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21.) Jesus came and did just that. While many want freedom from the coronavirus, infirmities, financial difficulties and bodily death, Jesus came for a much more important purpose. As was shared in a previous devotion, "What good is it if a person gain the whole world, but loses his soul." (Matthew 16:26) So this Sunday we shout HOSANNA, acknowledging Jesus as our Savior from sin and eternal death. He is the saving one who came to earn for us the way to Heaven. HOSANNA! HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST.

Prayer: O LORD, send Your Holy Spirit into our hearts to fill them with Hosanna's to Jesus who is our Savior from sin and the only way for us to enter into eternal life with You. Keep our hearts and voices singing our Hosanna's. Amen.

"Hosanna in the highest!" That ancient song we sing;
For Christ is our Redeemer, The Lord of heav'n our King.
Oh, may we ever praise Him With heart and life and voice
And in His blissful presence Eternally rejoice!
(LSB, 443, verse 3)

Saturday, April 4, 2020

REJOICE IN THE LORD

Psalm 118:24 This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Good Morning Pastor Ray & Debbie,

As always, appreciate these devotions and look forward to receiving them daily.

Humn, what should we do today? Perhaps we could watch television and the news, or put on a movie, or watch a 5 year old sports event? Nah, we did that yesterday and the day before, and the day before that. . . . or maybe we should go for a walk and stay many feet away from other humans, or maybe we should make some telephone calls or text / send friends some stuff? Nope did that recently too.

Are we bored? Well, YES!!

But then we reflect . . . we have a television that works and provides electronic linkage to the outside world, and we have food, and medicine. We further have decent health, and material to read and study. We also have the means to purchase essentials (food, medicine) when needed.

But, mostly, we have the presence of God in our lives, a deity that helping us to understand the epidemic that we are experiencing and the need to stay focused and alert, and to help others as needed (from a distance). So, in the end, we are blessed, as this time shall pass and we will once again be among others.

Jerry & Sheri

Thank you Jerry and Sheri for today's devotional thought.

PRAYER Lord God, You have called us to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet traveled, through perils unknown. Give us faith to live this day and each day with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supports us; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Oh, that the Lord would guide my ways To keep His statutes still!
Oh, that my God would grant me grace To know and do His will!

Order my footsteps by Thy Word And make my heart sincere;
Let sin have no dominion, Lord, But keep my conscience clear.

Assist my soul, too apt to stray, A stricter watch to keep;
And should I e'er forget Thy way, Restore Thy wand'ring sheep.

Make me to walk in Thy commands Tis a delightful road
Nor let my head or heart or hands Offend against my God.
(LSB 707)

Friday, April 3, 2020

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

Matthew 6:11 "Give us this day our daily bread."

Every shelf, normally filled with loaves of bread, was empty. Workers suddenly are without jobs. Retirees are concerned their retirement nest egg will run out due to the slumping stock market.

The Children of Israel, wandering through the wilderness, were sure they would starve to death. God was aware of their basic life needs. Every day He sent from heaven manna, (a type of bread.) He enlarged their diet with quail. Jesus fed a large crowd on the shores of the Sea of Galilee by multiplying five loaves of bread and two fish.

As Christians, we should not panic about anything during these troubled times of sickness, closures and shortages. Instead, in faith Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." The Psalmist writes, "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing." Psalm 145:15-16 Luther comments: "God provides all we need to support this body and life."

Instead of worry and fear, in faith pray, (Our Father) "Give us this day, our daily bread."

PRAYER: The eyes of all wait upon You, O Lord, and You give them their food in due season; You open Your hand and You satisfy the desire of every living thing. Amen.

In Thee, Lord, have I put my trust;
Leave me not helpless in the dust,
Let me not be confounded.
Let in Thy Word My faith, O Lord,
Be always firmly grounded.

Bow down Thy gracious ear to me
And hear my cries and prayers to Thee,
Haste Thee for my protection;
For woes and fear surround me here.
Help me in mine affliction.

With Thee, Lord, have I cast my lot;
Of faithful God, forsake me not,
To Thee my soul commending.
Lord, be my stay, Lead Thou the way
Now and when life is ending.

All honor, praise, and majesty
To Father, Son, and Spirit be,
Our God forever glorious,
In whose rich grace We'll run our race
Till we depart victorious.
(TLH, vv. 1,2,6,7)

Thursday, April 2, 2020

MY HELP COMES FROM THE LORD

"My help comes from the LORD. . .The LORD . . . will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore." Ps. 121:2, 7-8

Sentries are posted by the military to watch over, guard, and protect their fellow soldiers, especially while they are asleep or resting. If a sentry is caught asleep or even worse, deserts his post, he can be imprisoned, court martialed or even executed.

The Psalmist, in Psalm 121, verse 8, says "the LORD will watch over your coming and going." The LORD is our sentry or guard. He is on duty 24/7 during the entire time of our earthly life. This certainly means He is with us during these difficult times. Jesus states this clearly in Matthew 28:20, "surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Our God faithfully carries out His promise to guard us. He says, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)

We certainly need God's protection from the coronavirus. Those who are ill from the virus, the medical personnel treating them and their families need Him to "watch over them." How important it is for us to meditate upon Psalm 121:7-8, "My help comes from the Lord. . .The LORD . . . will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore."

Even more important, we need God's protection from Satan, the evil, sin filled world and our own sinful flesh. Thanks be to God for sending Jesus to defeat these evil, wicked enemies. Our God watches over us, through the power of His Spirit, giving us our eternal victory by keeping us in the true faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit works through the Gospel to bring this about as we read in Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. . ."

Lord God, heavenly Father, we pray that by Your great mercy you will watch over our bodies and souls keeping them safe and secure from all enemies that would separate us from You. Do this, we pray, giving us faith daily in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior that endures to life everlasting. Amen.

Commit whatever grieves thee Into the gracious hands
Of Him who never leaves thee, Who heav'n and earth commands
Who points the clouds their courses, Whom winds and waves obey,
He will direct thy footsteps And find for thee a way.

Though all the powers of evil The will of God oppose,
His purpose will not falter, His pleasure onward goes.
Whate'er God's will resolveth, Whatever He intends,
Will always be accomplished True To His aims and ends.

Leave all to His direction; In wisdom He doth reign,
And in a way most wondrous His course He will maintain.
Soon He, His promise keeping, With wonder-working skill
Shall put away the sorrows That now thy spirit fill.

Give, Lord, this consummation To all our heart's distress;
Our hands, our feet, e'er strengthen, In death our spirits bless.
Thy truth and Thy protection Grant evermore, we pray,
And in celestial glory Shall end our destined way.
(TLH 520, vv.1,5,8,12)

Wednesday, April 1, 2020

OUR HOPE

Psalm 39:7 "And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you."

Have you noticed the number of times the political and health leaders of this country have had to "update" their information, counsel and advice? Update is a nice way of saying, based upon newer information please ignore what we told you before. 15 days of social distancing has now changed to an additional 30 days. It had been stated that fever is one symptom of the illness, but yesterday I heard that some of the infected have not had a fever.

All of the political and medical leaders are doing their best. COVID-19 once again demonstrates to us that human wisdom and knowledge is finite. Science centers around hypotheses. The practice of medicine is exactly that. No two patients necessarily respond in the same manner to identical treatments. 97% (plus or minus) are recovering from the coronavirus, but not all.

In what or from whom can we place our HOPE? In the opening verses of Psalm 37, the Psalmist had meditated on the shortness and uncertainty of life. In verse 37 he turns his eyes and heart heavenward. While human wisdom, knowledge and experience cannot always offer hope or comfort, God's offer of hope is sure and secure.

A Christian's hope in God is far more than a wish or strong desire. Our hope is sure and secure, anchored in Jesus Christ and directed heaven-ward: "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." (Romans 5:1-5)

Heavenly Father, we commend to You our President, his leadership team, our governor and his leadership team, our local leaders, all health care workers, all citizens of this country and the world for in You alone through Christ Jesus we HOPE. In the name of Jesus, Your Son, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

My hope is built on nothing less Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
No merit of my own I claim But wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand.

When darkness veils His lovely face, I rest on His unchanging grace;
In ev'ry high and stormy gale My anchor holds within the veil.
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand.

His oath, His covenant and blood Support me in the raging flood;
When ev'ry earthly prop gives way He then is all my hope and stay.
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand.

When He shall come with trumpet sound, Oh, may I then in Him be found.
Clothed in His righteousness alone, Redeemed to stand before His throne!
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand.

Tuesday, March 31, 2020

CALL UPON GOD

“Call upon Me in the day of trouble. . .” Psalm 50:15

How is your prayer life? I suspect, if you are like me, by now you have developed callouses on your knees. Your fingers are permanently entwined.

Perhaps Satan has whispered in your ear that God is tired of hearing your prayers. Worse yet, the evil one is trying to convince you that your prayers aren't doing any good. If they were, the pandemic would soon end.

Our God never tires of hearing our prayers. Today's Psalm verse (above) is His gracious invitation to pray. In this verse He invites us to pray, especially in “the day of trouble.” Jesus encourages us to pray with these words: “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

Jesus, knowing our need to pray, taught His simple prayer that incorporates virtually every topic to be included in our prayer life:

Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;
Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us;
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil,
For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen

“. . . the prayer of the upright is acceptable to Him (the Lord) . . . He hears the prayer of the righteous.” (Proverbs 15:8,29) Through the pen of St. Paul the Holy Spirit encourages us to “pray continuously.” (! Thessalonians 5:17)

O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer;
When I call answer me. O Lord, hear my prayer,
O Lord, hear my prayer; Come and listen to me. (LSB 780)

Monday, March 30, 2020

DIE BUT LIVE

John 11:25-26 Jesus said to her (Martha), "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

With the coronavirus, there are many statistics fed to us every day. They include the number of confirmed cases locally, state-wide, nationally and world-wide. There is one statistic that, more than any other, that grabs our attention. It is the number of deaths. Over 10,000 in Italy. Over 1,000 already here in the United States.

If we were dealing with coronavirus sniffles, there would be no social distancing, self-quarantines, wearing of face masks and so forth. Life would go on as usual. However, depending on the country, one to over four per cent of those infected with this virus are dying. This statistic, more than any other, has people on edge.

None of us know the exact time of our death. We all, however, know one day we will die. We Christians have no need to be afraid of dying. When that day comes, we, who believe in Jesus Christ, have His word of promise, "Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die."

"I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:38-39

Dear heavenly Father, gracious Lord, prevent us from becoming frightened, worried and fearful. Keep our hearts and minds focused upon the promise of Jesus so that nothing is able to separate us from Your love which is ours in Christ Jesus, Your Son, our Lord and Savior. In His name we pray. Amen.

Your hand, O Lord, in days of old Was strong to heal and save;
It triumphed over ills and death, O'er darkness and the grave.
To you they came, the blind, the mute, The palsied and the lame,
The lepers in their misery, The sick with fevered frame.
Your touch then, Lord, brought life and health, Gave speech and strength and sight;
And youth renewed and frenzy calmed Revealed You, Lord of light.
And now, O Lord, be near to bless, Almighty as before,
In crowded street, by beds of pain, As by Gennes'et's shore.
O be our great deliver'rer still, The Lord of life and death;
Restore and quicken, soothe and bless, With Your life-giving breath.
To hands that work and eyes that see Give wisdom's healing pow'r
That whole and sick and weak and strong May praise You evermore.
(LSB 846)

Saturday, March 28, 2020

THIS TOO IS FOR YOUR SPIRITUAL ENDURANCE

“Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So, let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.” James 1:2-4 (NLT)

Why does it take something like a pandemic, tragedy, or monumental problem to draw us back to our spiritual roots? Yes, this can even be true for those of us who go to church, attend Bible class, frequent the Lord's table and pray regularly. The out-of-ordinary seems to better get our attention than the routine and mundane.

I've read, heard and seen reports of people who have found it difficult to take the coronavirus pandemic seriously. Well, that is true until it comes closer to home. A fellow Christian's brother-in-law, aged 81, but in fairly good physical shape, died a few days ago from the virus. His wife and their 45-year-old son, who lived with them, are still in the hospital. It is hoped they will soon be weaned off of their respirators. I was told of another person who had not taken the virus as seriously as perhaps he should have. Recently he learned of a cousin, much younger than 81, has been diagnosed with the virus. Is this what it takes to get our attention?

Yesterday's devotion by Dr. Kieschnick was strong law that called out the idolatry that exists throughout our land. We can fall into the sin of idolatry without even knowing we have done so. That is why we need God's law to get our attention. God's law causes us to sit up, take notice, and stop us in our sinful tracks.

For sure, the virus has drawn many of us more closely to our need for the grace, mercy and presence of our God. Daily we sin. Daily we need God's forgiveness. By God's grace, through faith in Jesus, we receive God's forgiveness.

As a muscle needs exercise to remain strong so our faith also needs exercise. James says, when our faith is tested our endurance grows. It grows as our daily struggles move us to God's Word and the sacraments. Thus, my encouragement today is be in God's Word, on your knees, singing hymns and psalms and giving praise to God. As the Psalmist writes in Psalm 146, "Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being. Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. . .blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God." (vv1-3,5)

Almighty and merciful God, our heavenly Father, we humbly pray, imploring You out of Your boundless goodness and mercy to forgive our sins. Through Your word and the sacraments strengthen our faith. Protect us during this current health crisis and by Your grace give us patience to endure through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Friday, March 27, 2020

COVID-19 HAS BEEN DECLARED A WORLDWIDE PANDEMIC.
COULD IT ALSO BE A PLAGUE?

A few Facebook friends expressed it this way:

In three short months, just like He did with the plagues of Egypt, God has taken away everything we worship. God said, "You want to worship athletes, I will shut down the stadiums. You want to worship musicians, I will shut down Civic Centers. You want to worship actors, I will shut down theaters. You want to worship money, I will shut down the economy and collapse the stock market. You don't want to go to church and worship Me, I will make it where you can't go to church."

In Exodus 7-12, God sent plagues upon the Egyptian people who were holding the nation of Israel captive, beginning with turning the Nile River from water into blood. Then came plagues of frogs, gnats, flies, dead livestock, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, and death of the firstborn children throughout Egypt. Finally, the Egyptian Pharaoh let the people go.

Could COVID-19 be God's way of dealing with a wayward world?

"If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." 2 Chron. 7:14

While the idea of the God of the universe being the cause and source of destructive, disrupting, and deadly disease is frightening at worst and distasteful at best, it's surely a question for pondering: Is coronavirus a pandemic disease or a divinely initiated plague?

Be that as it may, consider this prayer of Dr. Cameron Wiggins Bellm, pastor of Woodhaven Baptist Church in Seattle, Wash., sent to me by longtime friend Bill Siegrist:

May we who are merely inconvenienced remember those whose lives are at stake.
May we who have no risk factors remember those most vulnerable.
May we who have the luxury of working from home remember those who must choose between preserving their health or making their rent.
May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close remember those who have no options.
May we who have had to cancel our trips remember those who have no safe place to go.
May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of the economic market remember those who have no margin at all.
May we who settle in for a quarantine at home remember those who have no home.
During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other, let us yet find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbors. Amen.

Written by Rev. Dr. Gerald Kieschnick, former President of the LCMS. Used with permission.

Thursday, March 26, 2020

GOD PROVIDES NEEDED ARMOR

The current efforts underway to deal with the coronavirus pandemic have been described, at least by some, as a war. President Trump has initiated a special “wars power act” to enable him and our government to better provide methods and means to battle the disease.

God’s word also uses war language. Our spiritual enemies, Satan, the world and our sinful flesh, are at war against our souls. Satan does use things like the coronavirus to challenge our faith. The Bible tells us what God provides for us to do battle with these enemies. I encourage you, as you are affected by the current pandemic, to read and meditate upon Ephesians 6:10-18. This section of Holy Scripture lays out for us clearly God’s providence to us for battling these enemies.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints . . .”

Fight the good fight with all your might; Christ is your strength, and Christ your right.
Lay hold on life, and it shall be Your joy and crown eternally.
Run the straight race through God’s good grace; Lift up your eyes, and seek His face.
Life with its way before us lies; Christ is the path, and Christ the prize.
Cast care aside, lean on your guide; His boundless mercy will provide.
Trust, and enduring faith shall prove Christ is your life and Christ your love.
Faint not nor fear, His arms are near; He changes not who holds you dear;
Only believe, and you will see That Christ is all eternally. (LSB 664)

O most merciful Father in heaven, I lift up my prayers this day in behalf of President Trump, his advisors, the governors and mayors of this land and all who are in authority. Grant them wisdom, understanding and discernment to lead this nation in the current battle against the coronavirus. Enable them to rightly address the needs of the sick, those who minister to the sick and to all citizens. In the name of Jesus, Your Son, my Lord. Amen.

Wednesday, March 25, 2020

500-YEAR-OLD WORDS FOR THIS VERY MOMENT

“Faith. . . is a firm trust that Christ, the Son of God, stands in our place and has taken all our sins upon His shoulders and that He is the eternal satisfaction for our sin and reconciles us with God the Father. He who has this faith. . . devil nor hell nor sin can harm him (or her.) Why? Because God is his protector and defender. And when I have this faith, then I am certain God is fighting for me; I can defy the devil, death, hell, and sin, and all the harm with which they threaten me. This is the great, inestimable treasure given us in Christ, which no man can describe or grasp with words. . .”

“[You are holy] if you believe That God steps in for you and stakes all He has and His blood for you, as if He were saying: Fall in behind ME (my emphasis) without fear or delay, and then let us see what can harm you; come devil, death, sin, and hell, and all creation, I shall go before you, for I will be your rear guard and your vanguard (Is. 52:12 For you shall not go out in haste, and you shall not go in flight, for the LORD will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.); trust me and boldly rely upon me. He who believes that can not be harmed by devil, hell, sin, or death.” (Written by Martin Luther)

I am trusting Thee, Lord Jesus, Trusting only Thee;
Trusting Thee for full salvation, Great and free.
I am trusting Thee to guide me; Thou alone shall lead,
Ev'ry day and hour supplying All my need.
I am trusting Thee for power; Thine can never fail.
Words which Thou Thyself shalt give me Must prevail.
I am trusting Thee, Lord Jesus; Never let me fall.
I am trusting Thee forever And for all. (Hymn 729, LSB, vv. 1,4,5,6)

Almighty God, grant us a steadfast faith in Jesus Christ, a cheerful hope in Your mercy, and a sincere love for You and one another; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Tuesday, March 24, 2020

I SEEK TO LIVE IN GOD'S HOUSE

*The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?*

*The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?*

² *When evildoers assail me*

to eat up my flesh,

my adversaries and foes,

it is they who stumble and fall.

³ *Though an army encamp against me,*

my heart shall not fear;

though war arise against me,

yet I will be confident.

⁴ *One thing have I asked of the Lord,*

that will I seek after:

that I may dwell in the house of the Lord

all the days of my life,

to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord

and to inquire in his temple.

⁵ *For he will hide me in his shelter*

in the day of trouble;

he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;

he will lift me high upon a rock.

Psalm 27:1-5

In the coronavirus crisis there are critics galore. President Trump isn't doing enough! The Democrats are blocking critical legislation in the Senate. Young people are not taking the pandemic serious enough.

In whom or in what are you putting your confidence today? David, the Commander-in-Chief of Israel's army, writes in Psalm 27, his confidence was in the Lord God Almighty. His mind, his heart did not dwell first and foremost on worldly answers. Verse 4 shows us David's focus was on Prayer and the Almighty God: **"I asked of the Lord . . . that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple."**

We note in the next verse the confidence David had as a result of His unshakeable faith in God, ". . . He will hide me in His shelter in the day of trouble; He will conceal me under the cover of His tent; He will lift me high upon a rock."

The first five verses of Psalm 27 focus our hearts and minds in the one and only ultimate hope we have as we contend with today's challenges, for all of life's issues and for our eternal life. God is changeless. He remains almighty, all-knowing, full of unconditional love for us and intent on showing us His kindness as He has shown us through the saving work of Jesus. This is our confidence in the face of coronavirus or any earthly difficulty we may face.

O Lord, I believe. Help me with my doubts, anxieties and fears by sending the Holy Spirit to work a faith like David's in my heart this day. AMEN