

**St. Paul's In Your Home**

**Daily Devotionals:**

**Meditations, Meanderings, and Music  
In A Time of Covid**

**VOLUME TWO, #223-#451**

**Day of Epiphany, Wednesday, January 6, 2021 to  
Friday, December 25, 2021**

**by Pastor Mark Opgrand**

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**St. Paul's In Your Home for The Day of Epiphany January 6, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand  
#245**

**The puzzling and nearly forgotten Festival of the Epiphany**

*1In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." 3When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; 4and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:*

*6'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who is to shepherd my people Israel.' "*

*7Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 8Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." 9When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. 11On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.*  
Matthew 2:1-12

Does it seem odd to you that the above scripture is assigned in our lectionary no other day than on the Day of Epiphany, January 6? If we do not have a Day of Epiphany service, we'll never hear it in worship.

That's puzzling. Furthermore, because most churches don't regularly celebrate the "*Day of Epiphany*," then only if January 6 falls on a Sunday do we hear this marvelous part of the nativity story. We heard it in 2019. Before that in 2013. And before that in 2008. Then 2002. The next time the Day of Epiphany falls on a Sunday will be in 2030 (leap year causes the skip).

So here is a central part of the nativity story (Matthew 2:1-12) rarely is read in worship. That's puzzling. We do have "*Sundays after the Epiphany*," sometimes as many as nine, depending on the Easter cycle.

All these Sundays AFTER THE EPIPHANY make THE EPIPHANY sound like it is something important.

--just like *Christmas Day* is something important as it marks the beginning the *Season of Christmas*.

--just like *Ash Wednesday* is important as it marks the beginning the *Season of Lent*.

--just like *Easter Sunday* is important as it marks the beginning the *Season of Easter*.

--and just like the *Day of Pentecost* is important as it marks the beginning the *Season of Pentecost*.

Most years the "*Day of Epiphany*" just slips past us, lost during post-Christmas cleanup, only referenced by those "*Three Wise Men*" who inhabit every Nativity Creche and are depicted on certain Christmas cards. I wonder if we didn't sing the popular "*We Three Kings of Orient Are*," would our children even know that part of the nativity story?

It could be that part of the puzzle has to do with whether or not the "*Day of Epiphany*" should be rightfully understood as the conclusion of the "*Season of Christmas*" or if rather it is the beginning of a whole new seasonal emphasis. It is probably a little bit of both.

As a "*manifestation*" of God's glory (*Epiphany* means "*manifestation*,") the revelation of Jesus to the Wise Men/Magi is clearly foreshadowing that God's glory through Jesus will be proclaimed to all nations and all people. That wonderfully concludes the nativity story.

But like the star guided the magi to Jesus, the light of Christ reveals to us who we are, which is children of God who are claimed and washed in the waters of baptism. The "*Season of Epiphany*" that follows this "*Day of Epiphany*" reminds us that we too are sent out to be beacons of the light of Christ, sharing the good news of God's love to all people.

So, while the "*Day of Epiphany*" and story of the magi's experience might slip by unnoticed, the effect of that manifestation continues to support and guide us on our faith journeys. That will be particularly important during this challenging year 2021.

I am drawn to this wonderful Prayer of the Day for Epiphany found in our hymnal:

*Almighty and every living God, you revealed the incarnation of your Son by the brilliant shining of a star. Shine the light of your justice always in our hearts and over all lands and accept our lives as the treasure we offer in your praise and for our service, through Jesus Christ, our savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

P.S. I would be remiss not to announce that here at St. Paul's we are NOT overlooking today's opportunity to celebrate the "*Day of Epiphany*" Join us for a live streamed service beginning at 6:00 pm. Our YouTube channel is "[stpaulslutheranwilmingtonnc](#)"

Today's song is "We Three Kings." Another puzzle is why this popular and familiar song is not in any of our last three main hymnals. It is included in the supplement "With One Voice," but has been left out of all the others. Here are several wonderful renditions of this hymn, but none I could find recorded by us Lutherans.

"We Three Kings" by Angel City Chorale

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ANXV46f3jo0>

"We Three Kings" by BYU Men's Chorus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5A8JkIqciV4>

"We Three Kings" by Reawaken Hymns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0BJonwPCds>

"We Three Kings" by We Three Kings by Clamavi de Profundus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HDqTL49OwDA>

"We Three Kings" by Fox and the Hound w/ Tim Foust

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEtUGgBwzEM>

"We Three Kings" by Celtic Woman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PL1pDH0Rm18>

"We Three Kings" by Tavener Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LuRLBtYUHyw>

"We Three Kings" by Alexander Jean

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQbqgL\\_d2xo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQbqgL_d2xo)

"We Three Kings" by Anne Murray

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BaheOgdGKJQ>

"We Three Kings" by New Hope Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfsCWRqoynA>

"We Three Kings" by Matt Riley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfsCWRqoynA>

"We Three Kings" by Truth in Song

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQbtmOb98wU>

"We Three Kings" by Piano Guys

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qu5RY94ldDc>

"We Three Kings" by Mediaeval Baebes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5TrZB74DALs>

"We Three Kings" by Unofficially Blake

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOsnNr1-smA>

"We Three Kings" by Hugh Jackman, David Hobson, and Peter Cousen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8XKEvCIA-k>

"We Three Kings" by Piano Instrumental by Kaleb Brasee

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSywBVSC9To>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, January 7, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #246

### 2021. Now What?

*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (Jn. 1:14 NRS)*

Unlike most years, 2020 was the year I had little interest looking at those year-end news programs reviewing the year. In respect to “news,” it has been a dreadful year. Has there ever been a year less dominated by the word “lie,” or one of its forms? We have been so washed over by this 2020 tsunami of conflicting information, that it has been increasingly hard (perhaps impossible) to know what or who to believe.

That's why it became so refreshing and helpful when I came across something so well said that affirms the One whom can trust.

Pastor and Professor David Lose has been a strong voice of proclamation for many years now, as seminary homiletics professor, seminary president, and parish pastor. It is his recent “In the Meantime” commentary on the relevance of John 1:1-14 that thoughtfully put much of our current confusion into grounded hopefulness. I would like to share that with you. Pastor David Lose addresses everyone, but especially preachers, when he writes:

“One of the things I love about the biblical story is that it tells the truth.

Which is probably why I trust that it is, in turn, true. That is, apart from the many and varied questions of historical accuracy or authorial intent and elaboration – some of which are important and others less so – the biblical story points unfailingly to something that is true.

And because the biblical story tells me the truth about our life in this world, I trust that its testimony about God is similarly trustworthy, reliable, and true.

And that kind of truth-telling seems particularly important these days when there is no agreed upon narrative of reality.

We can – and, as you well know, so many, including many that will listen to your sermons on Sunday, are and will continue to – create and curate our own “information universes” where our biases are uniformly reinforced, our prejudices routinely confirmed, and all opposing views are vigorously and at times viciously denigrated.

Truth, always a little slipperier than we would like to imagine, has become downright elusive – or at least relentlessly contested – over the last four years.

Which is where John's hymn to the Word and introduction to his Gospel comes in so handily.

Because it starts with a truth that is as undeniable as it is painful. There is darkness and difficulty and challenge and loss in the world.

And John's first eighteen verses – and yes, please read the whole lection, as our folks deserve to hear this beautiful passage in its entirety at least once a year! – John's first eighteen verses nearly ooze with that difficult truth, especially poignant at four distinct places:

5: *"The light shines on in the darkness."* Yes, there is darkness.

10: *"He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him."* Oh, the ache of being unrecognized by those whom you birthed.

11: *"He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him."* And to be rejected by your own people!

18: *"No one has ever seen God..."* We're only midway through this affirmation, but this truth deserves a full stop, as our inability to see God, and the palpable sense of God's absence this often invites, can at times feel too painful to bear.

Yes, John tells us the truth about the pain and insufficiency, about the loneliness and longing, that attend our life in this world.

And when we hear that truth we're often and perhaps surprisingly relieved to hear someone admit it and discover that as difficult as the darkness can be, naming it helps define it, even limit it, and often robs it of some of its power.

Even more, when we dare to tell the difficult truth, we are seen as trustworthy, as so few seem to have the courage to do so.

Listening to that first truth, in turn, prepares us to hear the second, even greater, truth to which John bears witness.

That while there is darkness, the light shines on. In fact, the darkness can neither comprehend nor overcome nor vanquish the light.

Moreover, when while some reject the light or cannot recognize Jesus, those who accept and recognize him in turn recognize that they are children of God.

And, while it is impossible for us to see God, yet Jesus, the one who comes from the bosom of the father and reveals the heart and character of God, Jesus has made God knowable and accessible.”

**My own afterthought:** These hopeful words point us to Jesus who is “The way the **truth**, and the life.” As we enter into this “new year”, we carry so much of “old year” with us. I will not be surprised that conflicting information will continue to run rampant; I will not be surprised that our hopes for the end of the pandemic are challenged by much more suffering. I will not be surprised by the ill effects of broken trust in our governing.

But I will also not be surprised that in the midst of all this, God continues to show us light in this dark place. I will not be surprised that in spite of all the ugliness around us, we still find goodness. Such is the power of God’s love manifested in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let us pray.

Help us see, O God, in the midst of so much conflicting information that has eroded trust, that you are the One to whom we must always turn. Help us trust that you are reliable and true, and even when we are let down by so many in this world, you abide with us still. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

For our songs, I hope to draw as much as possible from the Epiphany section of our hymnal. There are just eighteen, and likely not all recorded on YouTube. “*Brightest and Best are the Sons/Stars of the Morning*” is one that has been recorded with several tunes. Whether it is the brightest and best “son” or “star,” it refers to the manifestation of Jesus. Let me know your favorite (or top three) at [mopgrand@gmail.com](mailto:mopgrand@gmail.com).

*Brightest and Best are the Stars of the Morning* by Church of the Incarnation, Dallas (MORNING STAR tune ELW 303)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iaXtBgSY3A>

*Brightest and Best are the Sons of the Morning* (MORNING STAR tune ELW 303) by organpipe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqyR5M-8JI4>

*Brightest and Best are the Sons of the Morning* by St. Michael, Stillwater

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3VKb8HUE7Y>

*Brightest and Best are the Sons of the Morning* by St. Luke’s Chelsea (EPIPHANY tune)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zmtb3DJMa3Y&t=39s>

*Brightest and Best are the Sons of the Morning* British Christian Music Programme

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5ACL94B4rM>

*Brightest and Best are the Sons of the Morning* by Harmonious Chorale from Ghana (SPEAN tune)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLwAcjuHZ\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLwAcjuHZ_w)

*Brightest and Best are the Sons of the Morning* by Cathedral of St. Michael and All Angels, Barbados (SPEAN)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBIEGWaBF-c>

*Brightest and Best are the Sons of the Morning* by Cantico Singers (STAR IN THE EAST, from Southern Harmony)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jtex\\_hxKYZY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jtex_hxKYZY)

*Brightest and Best are the Sons of the Morning* by BYU Singers (STAR IN THE EAST... and yes, you can sing with masks!)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDSjw6rc59c>

*Brightest and Best are the Sons of the Morning* by North Central College Chorus (STAR IN THE EAST)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnO9HCQRSmI>

*Brightest and Best are the Sons of the Morning* USC Thornton Chamber Singers (STAR IN THE EAST)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LW5rU-WQd-E>

*Brightest and Best are the Sons of the Morning* Kathy Mattea BRIGHTEST AND BEST tune

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ek1p2Rr\\_go](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ek1p2Rr_go)

*Brightest and Best are the Sons of the Morning* Jennifer Licko

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oa8i9uwF1sQ>

*Brightest and Best are the Sons of the Morning* The Surface of the Deep

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ko68tThBqNs>

*Brightest and Best are the Sons of the Morning* by Angel City Chorale

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YDmQUUAN6Q>

*Brightest and Best are the Sons of the Morning* by Carl Schalk and Concordia University Chicago

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jiq-H4ZK3Ik>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, January 8, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #247

### Epiphany Day 2021 on Capitol Hill. A "Manifestation" of What?

*"Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath,<sup>27</sup> nor give place to the devil." (Eph. 4:26-27 NKJ)*

It may be too soon to tell if what happened in our nation's capital two days ago will end up as quickly forgotten old news or something else. Some are already saying it will be one of those events in history when people remember just where they were when they first saw images of protesters storming the capitol steps. Like 9/11. Or the Challenger explosion. Or JFK's assassination.

I am ill equipped to offer penetrating or insightful political analysis about what happened, or why, but it continues a pattern where the experience of grievance formed an action where lives were lost, property was destroyed, and an unprecedented attempt to overturn a national election happened.

So on the day where many Christians celebrate the Epiphany of Jesus Christ, what swept the news was an entirely different kind of *"manifestation."* In the above passage St. Paul admonishes the Ephesians to be angry, but not sin, and *"do not let the sun go down on your wrath."* Translated *"wrath"* in the New King James, the Greek word is *"parordismos,"* which can be translated as *"wrath," "indignation,"* or *"exasperation."*

Among the protesters, rioters, insurrectionists, capital police, journalists, legislators, and all those viewing the events as they unfolded, few would argue against this day being a manifestation of *"parordismos."*

I read of an interesting study recently that describes how our brain on "grievances" is a lot like our brain on drugs. Acting out our righteous anger has become addicting. Media and social media become an accessible platform that continually offers fuel for our grievances because, like drugs, we crave the rush of those feelings.

Quite a few devotions ago I quoted Frederick Buechner's insightful definition of "anger." I think of it again today. *"Of the Seven Deadly Sins, anger is possible the most fun, To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back – in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you."*

There was a lot of “*parordismos*” manifested Wednesday on Capitol Hill. It has been building for a long time, of course and fueled by recent intense campaigns of conflicting information. Despite our dear St. Paul’s admonishment, “*parordismos*” will not go away easily.

Another epiphany might help, this one guided and directed by God through Jesus Christ, who promises to be in our midst. On Wednesday, watching the protesters crowd the capitol steps, I couldn’t help but notice in the midst of flags and signs, was one that said, “*Jesus Saves.*” It was right next to one that said, “*Don’t tread on me.*”

I know nothing about the persons bearing “*Jesus Saves.*” I don’t know if they imagined themselves on a holy mission like Jesus throwing out the money changers in the temple, or if they were trying to call the crowd to trust someone with higher authority than our elected leaders or president.

I’d like to imagine this affirmation that “*Jesus Saves*” was a holy Epiphany moment that transcends the madness of letting grievance fuel chaos and in this case, also loss of life and further erosion of trust between people.

Let us pray.

*Gracious God, we pray that your light and hope will be manifested as our country struggles not only with a deadly pandemic, but also the manifestation of “grievances.” May this time of national distress be an occasion to turn to you, finding common ground through the gospel of Jesus, who brings peace and reconciliation for all who will dare to trust him. Bless our endeavors O God, in Jesus’ name, and for the sake of all who suffer. Amen.*

*This is My Song* (ELW 887) by St. Peter’s Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1a8wh2A02g>

*This is My Song* (ELW 887) A Capella Trudbol

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKTcuu20N6U>

*This is My Song* (ELW 887) Cantussings

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDXNHPeRB0k>

*The Right Hand of God* (ELW 889) by British Methodist Youth Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUqaj0ND-Xg>

*The Right Hand of God* (ELW 889) by Jaguna School

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8r6TFq51js>

*God Bless our Native Land* by Hope Lutheran Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTAqYim8U58>

*God Bless our Native Land* by Sedona Jazz

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcZr-pltLfl>

*Before You Lord We Bow* (ELW 893) by Highest Praise

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gYXBXMNH\\_4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gYXBXMNH_4)

*Before You Lord We Bow* (ELW 893) by Lutheran Songbird Project

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2oYgmMm8Ac>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, January 11, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #248

### **"What are you supposed to do?"**

*Contend, LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me.  
2 Take up shield and armor; arise and come to my aid. (Ps. 35:1-2 NIV)*

*"What are you supposed to do?"* said a man being interviewed the night after he participated in storming our country's capitol. He was trying to explain why he, a devout Christian, participated in the break in and the mayhem. *"At some point, there's enough illegal behavior, and there's enough crimes against the constitution being committed by the elected officials, that 'what are you supposed to do?'"*

He repeated the refrain several times during the seven-minute interview. *"At some point you reach a point where none of my institutions are working. What am I supposed to do? What are we supposed to do?"* He described his action as a last resort because *"no one would listen and then you come to the end of your rope."*

It was a thoughtful young man who shared this, someone who, like many, felt backed into a corner by the betrayal of our elected leaders and a system he believed did not follow the rule of law. The interview was given not long after the events of that day unfolded, so maybe he had not yet processed the loss of life that happened that day, or images of elected leaders and others who hid in fear for their lives. And while he admitted *"Perhaps I did something wrong, and God will judge us for what we did,"* that was still followed by *"What were we supposed to do?"*

I know this is a rhetorical question not asked because it wants an answer. Instead, it becomes a justification for breaking laws for the greater good. In this case, the greater good would be that of *"being heard,"* and either overturning the election results or sending everyone back home further investigate allegations of *"stealing the election."*

I believe this young man believed he was doing the right thing, just as many gathered that day believed they were doing the right thing. They trusted information fed them by those who wanted a different election outcome. They believed this action was patriotic. I heard them singing the National Anthem and chanting *"USA. USA."* I also heard lots of vulgar expletives directed at those deemed traitors.

At the same time there was a rare moment of unity among elected leaders on both left and right. *"This is not who we are as a nation,"* they said. *"We cannot permit this lawlessness in a democracy."*

So what are you supposed to do?

The young man, as a Christian said, *“I’m redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. There’s not judgement that stands against me. Perhaps I did something wrong. I tried to be as respectful as I could when I was in there while still saying what needed to be said, but what else was I supposed to do?”*

Maybe this could have been one of those *“What would Jesus do?”* moments. I suppose the young man could compare storming the capitol to Jesus chasing out the money changers from the temple. But Jesus would not be inciting his disciples to do harm or kill a temple guard.

Many fear that what we witnessed January 6 is just the beginning of a lot more anger, violence, grievance, and mayhem. And we still have a pandemic. As a test of faith, this one will thoroughly be upon us. Many forces will be encouraging us to become more tribal and demonize those not in our own tribe. At the very least, this is a good time to look to Jesus for forgiveness, guidance, and support. And according to the New Testament, that is exactly what we are supposed to do.

Let us pray. *In these hard times we look to you, O God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Between pandemic, political unrest, and all that stresses our lives, we carry a weariness that can only be lifted by you. We pray for healing and reconciliation among all peoples. Be thou our strength and hope, in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

*Confession/Forgive Us Lord* by Hal Leonard

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vTfT\\_Uw98Jc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vTfT_Uw98Jc)

*Be Thou My Vision* by Audrey Assad

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXDhCEnM-bQ>

*Be Thou My Vision* by Celtic Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XiukM6WHQEQ>

*In Christ there is No East or West* Sammamish Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agkih5gt-8>

*In Christ there is No East or West* by First Methodist Houston

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1zzS8GjaxY4>

*If God is for Us, Who can be Against* by St. Louis Jesuits

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdmgC7\\_SCgk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdmgC7_SCgk)

*Let There Be Peace On Earth* by Voices of Hope Children’s Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bgL1v8FZaNm>

... and if you are interested, here is a link to the interview of the young man (verifying my quotes), and showing that more than a million and a half people have listened to him.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOjzEj\\_r0E4&list=WL&index=2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOjzEj_r0E4&list=WL&index=2)

## St. Paul's in your Home for Tuesday, January 12, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #249

### “What are you supposed to do?” (Part 2)

*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. (Col. 3:12-15 NIV)*

Yesterday I reflected on an interview I watched of a young man identifying himself as a Christian who was one who stormed the capitol January 6. “What are you supposed to do?” was rhetorically offered again and again in defense of this act of insurrection. While it didn't seem from the interview like he was among those intentionally planning the break-in or was intent on violence, mayhem, or murder, it nevertheless happened, and he, as well and all those who participated, should be held accountable.

In seeking to understand better how someone, who otherwise, seems like a good person, would get drawn into this, it became evident to me that his actions were dependent not only on being disappointed in the election outcome, but believing it was criminally stolen. He believed that taking this action, even if illegal under the laws of the United States, and results in death and destruction, was justified.

Many lawmakers, Republican and Democrat, and many Americans are disputing this, condemning this, and calling for accountability and prosecution. While I am sympathetic to someone earnestly doing what they believe to be right, I am persuaded by those elected leaders and lawmakers that such actions are inexcusable, and actions threaten our democracy. In my attempt yesterday to better understand this young man, I failed to clearly name that his actions were not only illegal but clearly wrong.

For him claiming to be a follower of Jesus, the very least he should do is repent for his own actions that contributed to loss of life and destruction of property. To his question “What are you supposed to do?” a good answer begins with taking responsibility and considering the scriptures he himself holds dear. And then practice how Jesus calls us to love in Jesus's name.

The letter to the Colossians, and text above, provides good direction. We admit these are hard days, and we are witnessing all too clearly the effects of our addiction to “grievance.” Such uncontrolled anger threatens our ability to live together in peace and with common purpose. Jesus shows us another way, and particularly those who claim to follow Jesus must come to grips with what that means. May God transform our hearts for good.

Let us pray. *Gracious God. As reliable information is becoming more available to us, the depth of our unrest and distress as a nation is coming more clearly into focus, and it is scary. There is just so much anger and grievance. Come close to us, Lord Jesus. We pray for hope and reconciliation, for a peaceful path forward. We are so helpless without you. Bless our nation. Bless all your children. We also pray for deliverance from Covid 19. For vaccines and treatments, for health care workers, and all involved in distribution. Hear our prayers, in Jesus name.*

I don't have a running theme with these songs other than they have lifted my soul today:

*Psalm 25* by Exodus Road Band

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHJa7W2Vqlo>

*Illuminate the Shadows* by Porter's Gate

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WrvAjQvvvaA>

*Ain't No Grave* by Southern Gospel Revival

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YU9BObi1GVw>

*Down to the River to Pray* by the King's Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5nQW1dXn2E>

*O God Beyond All Praising* by Villanova Pastoral Musicians

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4V-AQbKyg48>

*Jesus bleibet meine Fruede* by VOCES8

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5Df7f\\_BLU8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5Df7f_BLU8)

*Palestrina Sicut Cervus* by The Cambridge Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0yd5EE0hAB8>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, January 13, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #250**

**When it's hard to be a charismatic prophet who admits he got a prophesy wrong.**

*All the other prophets were prophesying the same thing. "Attack Ramoth Gilead and be victorious," they said, "for the LORD will give it into the king's hand." 13 The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, "Look, the other prophets without exception are predicting success for the king. Let your word agree with theirs, and speak favorably." 14 But Micaiah said, "As surely as the LORD lives, I can tell him only what the LORD tells me." (1 Ki. 22:12-14 NIV)*

I don't know a lot about those self-described charismatic prophets who engage in ministry today, and who command significant followings. I have, however seen quotes and videos by some of them who expressed, prior to the 2020 presidential election, that God spoke to them. God told them President Trump would win, and they prophesied such. One person was Prophet Jeremiah Johnson of Jeremiah Johnson ministries.

Last week Johnson confessed to his flock that he got it wrong.

*He used the language of repentance when he said, "I would like to repent for inaccurately prophesying that Donald Trump would win a second term as the President of the United States. I refuse to blame the saints and say, 'It didn't come to pass because they did not pray enough.' Nor will I proclaim, 'Donald Trump actually won, so I was right, but now it has been stolen from him,'" [I won't say this because] "I believe the first statement seeks to alleviate the prophetic messenger from the responsibility of what he prophesied, and the second statement is filled with potential pride and an unwillingness to humble himself and admit he was wrong."*

Johnson's admission did not go over well.

*"Over the last 72 hours," he said, "I have received multiple death threats and thousands upon thousands of emails from Christians saying the nastiest and most vulgar things I have ever heard toward my family and ministry. I have been labeled a coward, sellout, a traitor to the Holy Spirit, and cussed out at least 500 times. We have lost ministry partners every hour and counting."*

He continued, *"I have been flabbergasted at the barrage of continued conspiracy theories being sent every minute our way and the pure hatred being unleashed. To my great heartache, I'm convinced parts of the prophetic/charismatic movement are far SICKER than I could have ever dreamed of,"* he explained. *"I truthfully never realized how absolutely triggered and ballistic*

*thousands and thousands of saints get about Donald Trump. It's terrifying! It's full of idolatry! If I helped to prop up this ideology concerning him, I will need to repent again."*

These are his words and his experience, not mine. But I can imagine his disappointment in not only misinterpreting what he earnestly believed God was directly telling him, but also in the ways his fellow brothers and sisters in faith responded to him with such cruel and hateful threats. And not just a few threats. Thousands of threats called Johnson a coward, sellout, and traitor to the Holy Spirit.

What a disappointment. I wonder how this will shape his ministry for the future. Will he be more careful about claiming he knows God's will? Will he realize how stirring up people's rage centers in the name of God might be further enraged when he says he was wrong? Will this be an honest time of soul searching and reexamination of how God calls us to listen to each other and love each other in Jesus' name? I pray yes.

Johnson concludes, *"A humbling has come and is coming to the American Church like never before. How we choose to respond to this correction and judgment from the Lord will determine many outcomes in the years ahead,"* he wrote. *"I encourage the remnant to continue to stand for righteousness and truth in America. We must focus our efforts on preaching the Gospel and making disciples like never before. Remember the words of Jesus, 'Let the wheat and tares grow up together until the time of harvest ...' I, for one, am choosing today to dedicate 2021 and beyond to the testimony of Jesus Christ."*

I will never take for granted serving a congregation where we are committed to living out the gospel while committed to listening to each other without being condemned

Let us pray. *We pray today, especially for those who confess they have gotten it wrong. For those who have imagined they know your will. For those who have put their trust in earthly rulers instead of you. For those willing to reconsider and repent of hardened positions that justify all manner of ungodly acts. For those who have hurt others in your Holy Name. For us, all of us, none of whom are blameless in our mistakes. Thank you for your grace and forgiveness, O God. May we all come into the fellowship of your love. Amen.*

*Change my heart O God* by Vineyard (ELW 801)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwudqCO7mSQ>

*Change My Heart O God* by Samantha Sams

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uEEKri4wU0s>

*Change My Heart O God* by Robby Duke

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEtsHWFE6-w>

*Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart* (ELW 800)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QiQ\\_R-s6h00](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QiQ_R-s6h00)

*Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart* by Joslin Grove Choral Society

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymKxTkrRNBA>

*Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart* by Sue Nixon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OeZcdxKKzOU>

*O Holy Spirit Enter In* (ELW 786) by Sammamish Hills Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QelGW8TjU>

*Holy Ghost Dispel our Sadness*, by St. John's Boulder

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fWgeWBXmZ0>

*Holy Ghost Dispel our Sadness*, by Ruth Meyers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWGo8XBe294>

*Our Father We Have Wandered* by Blessed Sarnelli Choir

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jaA\\_qksg\\_qM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jaA_qksg_qM)

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, January 14, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #251**

**An old hymn with new deeper meaning.**

Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." (Jos. 24:15 NRS)

In the midst of all the turmoil of this week, the lyrics of an old hymn popped into my head. ***"Once to Every Man and Nation."*** It was in the old 1958 hymnal (#547), but was omitted from the next editions. The tune, EBENEZER, was retained, but paired with "Thy Strong Word," (LBW 233, ELW 511) and "Through the Night of Doubt and Sorrow," (ELW 327, LBW 355).

*"Once To Every Man and Nation,"* was written by abolitionist James Russell Lowell, and can be read in light of issues surrounding the Civil War. It was a beautiful poem, well set to the tune "Ebenezer." It has a renewed timeliness in light of recent events in our nation. It's worth reading carefully, meditating upon it, and then listening to the stirring music that accompanies it.

*"Once To Every Man and Nation"* by James Russell Lowell

Once to every man and nation, comes the moment to decide,  
In the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or evil side;  
Some great cause, some great decision, offering each the bloom or blight,  
And the choice goes by forever, 'twixt that darkness and that light.

Then to side with truth is noble, when we share her wretched crust,  
Ere her cause bring fame and profit, and 'tis prosperous to be just;  
Then it is the brave man chooses while the coward stands aside,  
Till the multitude make virtue of the faith they had denied.

By the light of burning martyrs, Christ, Thy bleeding feet we track,  
Toiling up new Calv'ries ever with the cross that turns not back;  
New occasions teach new duties, time makes ancient good uncouth,  
They must upward still and onward, who would keep abreast of truth.

Though the cause of evil prosper, yet the truth alone is strong;  
Though her portion be the scaffold, and upon the throne be wrong;  
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and behind the dim unknown,  
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own.

Let us pray. *We pray for our nation, and for this difficult moment in our history. Guide your faithful in making good decisions as we seek light and truth and hope. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Once to Every Man and Nation* by London Philharmonic

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U21b6h8g7PM>

*Once to Every Man and Nation* by Fountainview Academy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSMqesZz3tU>

*Once to Every Man and Nation* by Bible Armory

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enFc9u-7NhM>

*Once to Every Man and Nation* Notre Dame Metz Pipe Organ

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0y5KWgqgo7c>

*Once to Every Man and Nation* The King's Heralds

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsDFeXwQd1Q>

*Once to Every Man and Nation* by St. Andrew's Kirk Chennai

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHzXKTWctg0>

*Once to Every Man and Nation* by Andrew Remillard (musical score identical to 1958 Service Book and Hymnal #547)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nk3\\_cWncuY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nk3_cWncuY)

The hymn tune EBENEZER is associated with two other hymns in the ELW, *Through the Night of Doubt and Sorrow* and *Thy Strong Word*, #511. They are also strong hymns.

*Through the Night of Doubt and Sorrow* St. Paul's Lutheran, Doylestown

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jF69-20 GTU>

*Through the Night of Doubt and Sorrow* by Mount Olive Lutheran, Minneapolis

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRJi8JHqZiw&t=110s>

*Thy Strong Word* by Concordia Irvine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KijpAFL1Iss>

*Thy Strong Word*, Concordia Chicago

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2bhHosLHml>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, January 15, 2021** not by Pastor Mark Opgrand **but by**  
**Chaplain Bob Weeks #252**

**What does it mean to wear/bear the cross of Christ?**

## **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO WEAR/BEAR THE CROSS OF CHRIST?**

By

Chaplain Bob Weeks

Mark 8:34 (NIV) *"Then he (Jesus) called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'"*

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The wearing of the cross in some style came into use early in Christian History.

In his book, *De Corona*, written in 204 AD, Tertullian tells how it was already a tradition for Christians to trace the sign of the cross on their foreheads. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Syrian Christians hung a Christian Cross on the eastern wall of their house and prayed in that direction, symbolizing "their soul facing God, talking with him, and sharing their spirituality with the Lord." The oldest symbol depicting the execution of Jesus in any medium is the second-century, or early third century, relief on a jasper gemstone meant as a small piece of jewelry, which is now in the British Museum in London. Extensive adoption of the cross as a Christian symbol arose from the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The crucifix, a cross upon which an image of Christ is present, is not known to have been used until the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD.

Crosses are worn by people as an indication of bearing (living) the Christian Faith. Communicants of the Oriental Orthodox and Eastern Orthodox Churches are expected to wear baptismal cross necklaces at all times.

Lutherans wear crosses. Lutherans make the sign of the cross. When Lutherans are baptized, the sign of the cross is traced over the body or on the forehead, as a sign and remembrance of Baptism. After the sign of the cross is made on the person being baptized, the pastor says, "     (name)    , child of God, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever." The sign of the cross is a treasured part of our Lutheran heritage, because the practice was encouraged by Martin Luther himself. Lutheran Pastors and Deacons wear crosses to symbolize the death and resurrection of Christ.

In the scripture quoted, Jesus calls His followers to "take up their cross" and follow Him. This is a call for people to actively live and bear their belief in Him. People have different understandings of what their bearing (actively living) the cross is. I have interviewed a few Christians and the following are four of their interpretations:

“For me, ‘Bearing the Cross’ means that if I have a difficult time in my life (examples: serious illness, false accusations, challenges, etc.) that I deal with then through prayer and gain strength and guidance through my faith in Christ. “

“Bearing the cross of Christ means everything to me. Jesus is my Savior and he will provide me with eternal life if I live by His ways. Jesus is my salvation and redemption by which I live. I have always loved Jesus throughout my life. My eyesight is failing and that is a real cross for me to bear, but I love Jesus and I know he will help me.”

“Living by the cross of Christ is very important for the world leaders to consider during this unsettled time in the world. If world leaders knew and believed that Jesus died to save everyone, they would actively seek peace among all people.”

“Bearing the cross means to follow the examples of living by keeping in all trials, tribulations, and difficulties that come in my life to ask, “What would Jesus do? How would Jesus react?” I am trying my best to live, react, and face each day, yes, while facing every day in the onslaught of COVID-19.”

During the COVID-19 is a good time to wear a cross. This virus is certainly a cross we are bearing (living with). Wearing a cross can show our faith in Jesus to lead us through this turmoil. Wearing a cross during these days should be more than just wearing a piece of Jewelry. Wearing a cross should indicate commitment to the ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ. Wearing a cross should remind us of our baptism, and that we have been baptized into the life and death of Jesus.

There is a hymn, IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST I GLORY , that every Christian rejoices to sing, for it is one that magnifies the Cross and makes it the very center of Christian religion.

In the Cross of Christ I glory,  
Towering o’er the wrecks of time;  
All the light of sacred story  
Gathers round its head sublime.

When the woes of life o'er take me,  
Hopes deceive, and fears annoy,  
Never shall the Cross forsake me;  
Lo! It glows with peace and joy.

When the sun of bliss is beaming  
Light and love upon my way,  
From the Cross the radiance streaming  
Adds more luster to the day.

Bane and Blessing, pain and pleasure,  
By the Cross are sanctified;  
Peace is there that knows no measure,  
Joys that through all time abide.

## **THE CROSS -----**

### **THE SYMBOL THAT SURVIVES**

*Prayer: O Lord, if we wear a cross, may the Holy Spirit help us to live a life that bears its true meaning. Amen.*

*In the Cross of Christ I Glory (ELW 324, LBW 104) by Grace Church*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MW\\_F1MMH2r4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MW_F1MMH2r4)

*In the Cross of Christ I Glory by Higher Things*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BnNlijkOC8>

*In the Cross of Christ I Glory by Mt. Olive Lutheran*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5G2yb4jR4Gk>

*In the Cross of Christ I Glory by Marlborough College Chapel Choir (another tune)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2FlkgDFG84>

*In the Cross of Christ I Glory by Daily Hymns*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQ8bsjg4PMA>

*In the Cross of Christ I Glory by Spencer Family (new tune)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=22KnjHNXReM>

*In the Cross of Christ I Glory by Kelvedon Music (new tune)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQWrMcMgbdM>

*In the Cross of Christ I Glory by Jake and Kaylee (also new tune)*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D\\_iCRQMCaLU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_iCRQMCaLU)

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, January 18, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #253

### Remembering Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'  
44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,  
(Matt. 5:43-44 NRS)*

For a Devotion written for last November 10, I elected to share twenty-five of Martin Luther's quotes in honor of his 537th birthday. Today I do the same for Martin Luther King Jr., whose birthday was January 15, 1929. His life as a pastor and civil rights leader is remembered with today's national holiday celebrated each year close to his birthday.

Here is some of what we remember about King: From an early age King experienced racism, and those events stayed with and eventually brought him to a life of activism. After graduating college with a doctorate degree in theology, King became a pastor in Alabama. He began a series of non-violent and peaceful protests in the south that eventually changed many laws dealing with the equality of African Americans. King gave hundreds of moving speeches across the country, and in 1964 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

While in Memphis, Tennessee on April 4th, 1968, Dr. King was shot and killed. Although his life ended that day, the work that he had accomplished had a big impact on our nation. King will be remembered not only for his commitment to the cause of equality for African Americans but also for his profound speeches that moved so many.

MLK Jr.'s words were spoken with hope that the future for African Americans would be brighter and that they would finally be given the equality they deserved. Here are twenty-five thoughtful quotes to consider especially as we think about our calling as Christian brothers and sisters.

"There is nothing more tragic than to find an individual bogged down in the length of life, devoid of breadth."

"An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity."

"Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will."

"The past is prophetic in that it asserts loudly that wars are poor chisels for carving out peaceful tomorrows."

“The limitation of riots, moral questions aside, is that they cannot win and their participants know it. Hence, rioting is not revolutionary but reactionary because it invites defeat. It involves an emotional catharsis, but it must be followed by a sense of futility.”

“We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies.”

“Nonviolence is absolute commitment to the way of love. Love is not emotional bash; it is not empty sentimentalism. It is the active outpouring of one’s whole being into the being of another.”

“If you can’t fly then run, if you can’t run then walk, if you can’t walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward.”

“Let no man pull you so low as to hate him.”

“We must build dikes of courage to hold back the flood of fear.”

“We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.”

“Never succumb to the temptation of bitterness.”

“Forgiveness is not an occasional act; it is a constant attitude.”

“That old law about ‘an eye for an eye’ leaves everybody blind. The time is always right to do the right thing.”

“Not everybody can be famous but everybody can be great because greatness is determined by service... You only need a heart full of grace and a soul generated by love.”

“He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it.”

“Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.”

“People fail to get along because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don’t know each other; they don’t know each other because they have not communicated with each other.”

“I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.”

“We will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.”

“We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.”

“We who in engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive.”

“Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction.”

“By opening our lives to God in Christ, we become new creatures. This experience, which Jesus spoke of as the new birth, is essential if we are to be transformed nonconformists ... Only through an inner spiritual transformation do we gain the strength to fight vigorously the evils of the world in a humble and loving spirit.”

“Now there is a final reason I think that Jesus says, ‘Love your enemies.’ It is this: that love has within it a redemptive power. And there is a power there that eventually transforms individuals. Just keep being friendly to that person. Just keep loving them, and they can’t stand it too long. Oh, they react in many ways in the beginning. They react with guilt feelings, and sometimes they’ll hate you a little more at that transition period, but just keep loving them. And by the power of your love they will break down under the load. That’s love, you see. It is redemptive, and this is why Jesus says love. There’s something about love that builds up and is creative. There is something about hate that tears down and is destructive. So love your enemies.”

Let us pray: *Thank you Jesus, for your servant Martin Luther King, Jr. As he walked with Jesus, may we be encouraged by his witness to follow the path of peace and reconciliation. Amen.*

P.S. I was asked if a copy of the sermon I delivered yesterday might be available in print. I will add that as an attachment to this devotion.

*Lift Every Voice and Sing* is in our Evangelical Lutheran Worship hymnal #841.

*Lift Every Voice and Sing* by Jedediah ben-Israel

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONgOH\\_tq7-Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONgOH_tq7-Q)

*Lift Every Voice and Sing* by Committed

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ngFDy52eCZY&list=RDo8pGp7N9bG8&index=3>

*Lift Every Voice and Sing* by Alvin Chea of Take 6

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_xyAtPVOeYY&list=RDo8pGp7N9bG8&index=4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_xyAtPVOeYY&list=RDo8pGp7N9bG8&index=4)

*Lift Every Voice and Sing* by Kirk Franklin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHn2SSzZszU>

*Lift Every Voice and Sing* by Kevin Ross

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnQDxDogJxs>

*Lift Every Voice and Sing* by Alicia Keys

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DS60luWpBe0>

*Lift Every Voice and Sing* by Stanford Talisman Alumni Virtual Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8pGp7N9bG8>

*We Shall Overcome* by New York Philharmonic and Jordan Miller

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJstlEx6EnU>

*We Shall Overcome* by PS22 school

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQH9-qVUpNA>

*We Shall Overcome* Morehouse Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aor6-DkzBJO>

*We Shall Overcome* Boys Choir of Harlem

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=byL6hKQwS5U>

*We Shall Overcome* by Ragadeepam Choral Harmony,

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P\\_qKAzxT6bg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_qKAzxT6bg)

*We Shall Overcome* Pete Seeger's 90th Birthday Concert

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jW2MRTqzJug>

*Oh Freedom* by Golden Gospel Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=veiJLhXdwn8>

*Oh Freedom* by Talisman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdQtA3aaqBo>

*Oh Freedom* by Chester Children's Chorus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90K8c-egwHA>

*Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho* by Mahalia Jackson w/ MLK jr.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odHgG1rA4M8>

Epiphany 02A 2021

January 17, 2021

Pastor Mark Opgrand

Readings and Psalm

1 Samuel 3:1-10 [11-20]

*The calling of Samuel*

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

*You have searched me out and known me. (Ps. 139:1)*

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

*Glorify God in your body*

John 1:43-51

*The calling of the first disciples*

“With no further ado, ”let me share with you where I believe our first lesson and gospel are taking us, and how our second lesson provides additional guidance. So ... with no lengthy introduction, icebreaker, background information or exposition, ...

Here it is: God is calling you into a relationship with him. Not “has called” or “will call”... but is calling... “right here... right now.” This is what these lessons reveal.

And while these lessons describe specifically the calling of Samuel, Philip, Nathaniel and the people of Corinth...those who have gathered in God’s name throughout the centuries, have affirmed .... these lessons are also addressed to us... with the result... that we too ... might hear God calling us ... and respond.

I didn’t want to spend eight minutes retelling Samuel and Nathaniel’s story to get to that point ... or ... let you wonder how the second lesson from 1st Corinthians ties in.

Paul's letter ties in this way: God has called you ... to follow him with faithfulness and fidelity... in other words...to live out... to behave... most certainly with words and actions ... as we are called!

This message is not hard to understand ... even though anyone who has ever engaged in the destructive behavior that Paul describes already knows ... this is a terrible way to live.

As a faith-based church community ... living right now... in these troubling times, we are daily feeling the weight of much destructive behavior.

Destructive behavior hurts you. It hurts your loved ones. It damages the foundations of society and keeps us from living together in peace and harmony.

In faith we are called to a better way... which is.... to love God, imitate the love of Christ, and with the Holy Spirit look to the scriptures ...for direction and guidance.

Everything about these scriptures points us to the one who calls us by name and who deeply desires a personal, intimate relationship with us ... which ... then... affects how we live.

Now I am aware... that recognizing this strong call might not be as clear for each of us as it was for Samuel, Philip, Nathaniel. and the people of Corinth.

For Samuel that call was so powerful and so clear that for the rest of Samuel's life God's word would not ... as the scripture says, "fall to the ground. "

For some of us lately, I wonder if God's word has fallen to the ground ... especially when people who identify as being called by God... interpret that calling as marching orders to vanquish their

enemies ... even when ... those enemies are fellow citizens, fellow believers, and other precious (in God's eyes anyway) children of God.

So I wonder ...drawing from the scriptures, what does it take to have an encounter with God so powerful that the ways of peace, so clearly demonstrated by the love of Jesus, become marching orders bringing peace and reconciliation.

Some of you remember the story of Martin Luther relating his initial call resulting from being caught in a monstrous storm and vowing if only God spared him...he would become a monk . Luther was spared... and while it took time for him to discover the fullness of God's grace... his call was very clear to him.

Nathaniel's call was less dramatic, but clear in it's own way. "Come and See." That's how it began, anyway. But then came a very powerful promise. Jesus says, "Very truly, I tell you ... you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

After hearing that promise, who wouldn't follow? Of course, we don't know when exactly Nathaniel saw heaven opened ... or the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." What we do know ... is that God calls ... God invites ... God persists ... and God keeps after us... and that is intended to make a difference ... not necessarily to make life easier ... but make ... life... better.

During a zoom call this week with rostered leaders of the North Carolina Synod ... we were asked, on behalf of the Synod's Racial Justice Network, if we might consider sharing something in observance of Martin Luther King, Jr. Sunday. This would be part of recognizing King as an advocate for justice and equality as civil leader, pastor, writer, and prophet.

The Racial Justice Network suggested we recognize that remembering King's good work is more than just having a "day off holiday..." It is an opportunity particularly for American churches to examine their own service to the community ... our own commitment to racial justice ...and our own desire to foster unity across "lines of difference."

Across lines of difference. I think this is a timely invitation because there are a lot of "lines of difference" these days.

Specifically, we were asked if we might consider reading an excerpt from King's letter from the Birmingham jail. To be honest, I hadn't thought about that, even though it was my turn to preach. But when staff person Pastor Danielle DeNise read to us a portion of King's letter to white pastors from the Birmingham jail in 1963, and in light of where we are in our country not just 58 years ago ... but today... as well.

I was deeply moved.

While jailed for peaceful and non-violent protests, (where the only people beaten were protesters) King addressed criticism from eight white clergy who called his actions "unwise and untimely."

Here's a portion of what he wrote:

"I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate.

I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to "justice"; ... who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who

constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom.

Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will."

Let me repeat that again: "Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will."

King goes on to write: "Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection. I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and that when they fail in this purpose, they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress.

I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that the present tension in the South is a necessary phase of the transition from an obnoxious negative peace to a substantive and positive peace, in which all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality.

You speak of our activity in Birmingham as extreme. At first I was rather disappointed that fellow clergymen would see my nonviolent efforts as those of an extremist.

But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label.

Was not Jesus an extremist for love: 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which [de]spitefully use you, and persecute you.'

Was not Amos an extremist for justice: 'Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.'

Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.'

So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice?"

There is much more in this letter but let me reflect on this part. Our country right now has been driven to extremes by mainstream and social media, special interest groups, political parties, the corporate elite, conspiracy theorists, and people identifying as followers of Jesus.

Daily ... our *outrage* and *hate* centers are being fed by those who would tear down rather than build up

... by those who would stir fear rather than embody hope;

...by those who would assert supremacy rather than foster mutual affirmation and human worth

...by those who would dominate rather than cooperate;

NONE OF THIS IS JESUS CHRIST'S WAY! You cannot find this in the New Testament.

But having said this, don't you wish Jesus could feed our *joy* center like the devil feeds our *rage* and *grievance* centers?

If only we could hear words that would make us "HOPPING HAPPY" rather than "HOPPING MAD!"

Wouldn't that be something? Marching down the streets together ... singing "Blest be the tie that binds ... and believing it.

I read recently of a study that showed how scans of our brains on “*grievance*” look just like our brains on “*drugs*.”

No wonder so many people love to get all STIRRED UP... all FIRED UP. What a rush it must have been for some to storm the capitol last Wednesday. Exhilarating!

In 1963, while in jail for non-violent protests, Martin Luther King Jr. expressed disappointment with moderate white clergy especially ... those who agreed in principle with his goals ... but who lacked conviction to support Christ-centered and love-focused work within their own congregations.

Reading King’s letter, I wonder about myself these days. As one who has embraced measured moderation, have I been doing this as way to just to make everyone on all sides ... *happy*... (or at least *not angry*)?

Have I imagined that being *moderate* is the best way to keep the doors of communication open ... thereby encouraging conversation, sharing, and *hopefully* ... personal growth.

Today, I worry that while such a measured and cautious approach has probably lessened some of the tension between myself and others, I have not truly reckoned with the risky (and extreme) behavior that comes from responding to Jesus’ call.

It is risky to name Jesus defined sin and wrongdoing ... (especially among the religious)

It is risky to step out of our comfort zones...

It is risky to stand on the side of the oppressed or marginalized...

It is risky to love our neighbors... riskier yet to love our enemies...

It is risky to follow Jesus and embrace our calling...

It is easier... far easier... to keep confirming our biases by reading and trusting those who keep telling us what we want to hear.

It is easier to believe the lies the media (on all sides) wants to tell you than do your own hard investigative work.

It is easier to make up what you want Jesus to be saying than find out for yourself what Jesus said... and then.. stand with him.

I know you do know this: It is a whole lot easier to hate... than it is to love.

You can hate anybody or anything you want. It's easy.

It's easy to thrive on getting all *stirred up* as part of your daily routine. You might even believe you're outraged... in the name of Jesus. With a righteous outrage.

But when we are really following Jesus, and loving as Jesus calls us ... that is ... really hard work. But that is also the life in Christ... to which ... we have been called.

Martin Luther understood this.

So did Martin Luther King, Jr.

So must we, if we have any hope for the future.

But it is this good work that Jesus calls us into.

And we are not alone. God in Jesus is with us.

So in this good ... but hard.. work, may God be with us all.

In Jesus' name. May God be with us all. Amen.

**Conspiracy Theories have been around a long time. What, that long?**

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" <sup>2</sup> The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

<sup>4</sup> "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. <sup>5</sup> "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." <sup>6</sup> When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; (Gen. 3:1-7 NIV)

Here's another scripture I hadn't thought about that way, that is, through the eyes of a "conspiracy theory." We have been hearing a lot about conspiracies and conspiracy theories these days. A conspiracy theory explains an event or set of circumstances as the result of a secret plot, usually by powerful conspirators. The word "theory" is used because it is not required to back up such information with anything provable (hence "theory".)

In the Garden of Eden, a cunning and crafty serpent alleged to the first woman, Eve, that he possessed important secret information that was being hidden from her by the Creator. It was the serpent's desire to reveal the truth to her about that special tree in the middle of the garden. That was the tree Adam and Eve were forbidden to touch or eat from. Everything else was theirs to enjoy.

What Eve had been told by God was that touching the tree would result in death. That's it. But that's not the insider information the serpent offered. The serpent knew the secret, saying "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." The serpent pushed the narrative that the serpent had all this hidden

knowledge about God, the truth that God was secretly hiding from them, that eating the fruit, they would become like God, now possessing this knowledge previously hidden from them. If Eve wasn't so naïve, perhaps she might have challenged the serpent's claims. How did the serpent know all this? What were his sources? Was he also God? How did he get this hidden knowledge? What does the serpent get out of them trusting him instead of God?

In eating the fruit, Eve (and later Adam), didn't actually learn all that much. They certainly didn't become a whole lot "like God." They did, however, learn the consequences of putting their trust in the wrong source of information. There was no conspiracy to keep Adam and Eve from this hidden knowledge. It was God loving them and setting forth some safety measures to keep them well and healthy.

When the devil suggested through the serpent that God was conspiring to "put one over" on the creation, that was the beginning of a very effective campaign to keep people drawn to lies and false claims that continue to this day to tear people apart. It's not a new thing. It is also very hard to challenge such claims because they don't require proof, just blind trust and a compelling conspiracy theory.

Be careful what you trust. Trust Jesus. Always.

*Let us pray. So much information is fed us, God, that it is so hard to separate truth from fiction. Keep us centered in your word so that we are not led astray by anything that keeps us from loving you and each other. In Jesus we pray. Amen.*

*For the Beauty of the Earth* by John Rutter

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVQFEgT7E6c>

*For the Beauty of the Earth* by the NCrew

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QR7XGDep5mk>

*"For The Beauty Of The Earth"* by the "BBC Radio 2 Young Choristers of the Year 2015"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7faaCCB9oOw>

*Look at the World* by Smith Ensemble

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEUMsWoW8V8>

*Look at the World* by Advent Heralds

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lUNsj2NSCJO>

*Look at the World* by Rutter

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4k8oVf9v78>

*This is My Father's World* by Elaine Hagenberg

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HfWjey9tQS0>

*This is My Father's World* by Michael Curb

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2\\_dDe2qZNE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2_dDe2qZNE)

*This is My Father's World* by Valparaiso Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lsouhUW9HU>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, January 20, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #255**

**Pandemic fatigue. Political fatigue.**

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* (Matt. 11:28-30 NIV)

Political fatigue. Pandemic fatigue.

Pandemic fatigue. Political fatigue.

Political fatigue. Pandemic fatigue.

Pandemic fatigue. Political fatigue.

Political fatigue. Pandemic fatigue.

So how are you feeling these days?

Me too.

Oh, you got the vaccine? Great! I wish.

By the way, did you see the results of the latest CBS Poll asking people to name the "Biggest Threat To America's Way of Life?"

54% said "Other people in America."

20% said "Economic forces."

17% said "Natural disasters, viruses."

8% said "Foreign threats."

So way ahead of anything else, including the pandemic, the "**Biggest Threat To America's Way of Life**" is "**Other people in America?**" Can this really be where we have come. In this ever-increasing division between people, the other is an enemy? No wonder we are so weary. And the pandemic rages on.

So what was that scripture again? Jesus says, *"Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."*

Here we come, Jesus. Have mercy upon us.

Let us pray. *For the weariness that has come in dealing the pandemic, we lift up our prayers and ask for healing. And the greater threat of each other, have mercy on us, O God, and give us hope. In Jesus' name, give us hope. Amen.*

I thank God for music to meet us in our weariness. May these bring a measure of peace to you this day."

*Come to Me* by Songs for the Masses

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PvZtMIPbU6M&list=PLz5xHnheG4pU0ufb22L4XtNHlcGVXaorX&index=19>

*Come to Me* by Orchard Enterprises

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2U6mwljzjdk>

*Come to Me* by Dan Forest

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bi6IZCJx3qA>

*Come to Me* by Kari Jobe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35WOSrft7Cw>

*Come to Me* by Sing Through the Bible

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2JF6bQRGPs>

*Come to Me* by Esther Mui

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRzRrc7XEjs>

*Be Still My Soul* by Eclipse 6

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqKVfYD8Obc>

*Be Still My Soul* by Libera

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwkPsKe-39Y>

*Shelter Me* by Spiritu

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3KifN7Jfpc>

*Shelter Me* by Paul Weisenburger

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzSd8CpEkW8>

*Shelter Me* by Robert Mondoy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoxdbuSlmCl>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, January 21, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #256

... **"that our flag was still there."**

*LORD, you are the God who saves me; day and night I cry out to you. 2 May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry. (Ps. 88:1-2 NIV)*

I feel less weary today because I have experienced several moments of hope.

The first was during the inauguration ceremony of President Joe Biden when the colors were presented. For two weeks I have such terrible images in my head of a violent mob storming the capitol, many of whom were carrying American flags. I watched as those flags were used to strike down law enforcement officers trying to protect the capitol. I have had a hard time getting that terrible image out of my head.

But then, as the ceremony began after a beautiful prayer of invocation, the band began to play as the colors were presented by service men and women. And there, at the front was our flag, presented with dignity and honor. I was deeply moved.

The second moment came as Lady Gaga beautifully sang the *"National Anthem"*, not like a celebrity trying to showcase her vocal skills, but as one with passion and deep respect. As she belted and held *"that our flag was still there..."* she turned and pointed to that single American flag that has just been presented. In that moment of pride, I only saw a flag of hope, representing the best of what we can be as a nation.

I felt another moment of hope as J. Lo sang *"This Land is Your Land,"* and *"America the Beautiful,"* and as Garth Brooks sang *"Amazing Grace."* President Biden spoke words urging unity and reconciliation. He was honest about the challenges ahead, but they were the right words, delivered with humility and optimism.

Then came 22-year-old Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman who spoke, *"When day comes/ we ask ourself/ where can we find light in this never ending shade / the loss we carry / a sea we must wade / we've braved the belly of the beast / we've learned that quiet isn't always peace / and the notions of what "just is" isn't always "just-ice."* It was quite awesome. I'll link the entire poem below as it was thoughtful, deep, challenging, America affirming, and worth listening to.

I write about this today because I felt so weary yesterday, especially after seeing that new poll where 54% expressed that the greatest threat to our American way of life was *"other people in America."*

If President Biden were a pastor, we would have said “*good sermon.*” How will his words hold up? Time will tell. But good words were spoken yesterday even while we face the harsh reality of a deeply divided nation and a raging pandemic. But good and kind words are always a good place to start as we seek to bring people together. As a church, under the leadership of Jesus Christ, we further have a model that can be trusted, as it always seeks to bring people together rather than tear people apart.

As we think of how difficult these times have been, one great consolation has been not just our faith, but the one who makes faith possible, Jesus Christ our Lord. Long after flags no longer fly anywhere, the Cross of Christ will remain the strongest witness to a powerful love of God who holds us together through everything.

Let us pray. *We pray for hope for the nation as we enter a time of new leadership. Bring healing we pray to those who see each other as the enemy. Help us to see each other as you see us, as your precious children. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

Lada Gaga’s “*National Anthem*” at Inauguration

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HezPdHTwdGA>

Jennifer Lopez singing “*This Land Is Your Land*” and “*America the Beautiful.*”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RowpBMMGnXY>

Garth Brooks singing “*Amazing Grace.*”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKvaWEYAfs4>

Amanda Gorman’s “*The Hill We Climb*” Inauguration Poem

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jp9pyMqnBzk>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday January 22, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand # 257

### The triple dog dare.

Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. <sup>5</sup> Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. <sup>6</sup> The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. (Jas. 3:4-6 NIV)

On January 6, many people were stirred up to make bad decisions, (i.e. storming the capitol). Many of them are coming to regret that. Lots of words have been thrown around. This has prompted me to think about not only about the power of rhetoric to persuade, but also the ill consequences that come from succumbing to certain invitations you might later come to regret.

It also made me think of a classic scene from fan favorite "A Christmas Story." There are many classic scenes, but thinking about the power of words (or "tongue," as James puts it) this is the one that came to mind.

As the children are gathered around the flag pole on a cold winter's day, we don't hear the beginning of the argument between Flick and Swartz, but it has something to do with what happens when you stick your tongue to a frozen metal flag pole.

Flick: *You're full of beans and so's your old man.*

Swartz: *Oh yeah?*

Flick: *Yeah.*

Swartz: *Says who?*

Flick: *Says me.*

Swartz: *Oh yeah?*

Flick: *Yeah.*

Swartz: *Well, I double dog dare you.*

Narrator: *The exact exchange of words and nuance of phrase in this ritual is very important.*

Flick: *Are you kidding? Stick my tongue to that stupid pole? That's dumb.*

Swartz: *That's 'cause you know it will stick.*

Flick: *You're full of it.*

Swartz: *Oh yeah?*

Flick: *Yeah.*

Swartz: *Well, I double dog dare you.*

Grown up Ralphie as narrator: *Now it was serious. A double dog dare. What else was a triple dare you and finally the coup de gras of all dares, the sinister triple dog dare you.*

Swartz: *I triple dog dare you.*

Grown up Ralphie as narrator: *Swartz created a slight breach of etiquette by skipping the triple dare and going right for the throat.*

Flick: *All right. All right. Okay....*

Swartz: *Oh go on, smartass and do it.*

Flick: *I'm going.*

Grown up Ralphie as narrator: *Flick's spine stiffened. His lips curled in a defiant sneer. There was no going back now.*

Flick (after sticking his tongue to the pole): *This is nuts. Stuck. Stuck. STUCK.* (Flick screams).

With his tongue stuck to the flagpole, Flick is abandoned by his friends. When the teacher notices Flick has not come back from recess, she looks outside to see Flick stuck to the flagpole. The scene ends with the police and fire department coming at last to Flick's rescue.

I wonder how many people throughout history have been persuaded "on a dare" (single, double, triple dog dare") to do something they later regret. Others, after being fed false information, have made similar mistakes. Flick learned the hard way that even a triple dog dare should not force you do something you will later regret.

St. James recognized the power of words (or tongue) to cause all manner of trouble. Like a small rudder that can steer a whole ship, or small spark that can cause a forest fire, words have great power.

Jesus has given us good words. Not words to divide or cause people to do things they later regret, but words of hope and encouragement that can help people do things they later value. We pray that the gospel's "good words" will have a transformative effect on us as we seek to draw closer together to God and each other in this new year (and new administration).

Let us pray. *We pray for those who, for whatever reason, engage in behavior they later regret. If anyone would dare us to do anything, let it be you, Lord Jesus, for we know your words are good and true and are shared not only for our benefit, but for the benefit of all. Amen.*

*Lord, Keep Us Steadfast In Your Word* by Koine

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teI3ayeBxX0&list=RDQMi-NTsT-OdWg&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teI3ayeBxX0&list=RDQMi-NTsT-OdWg&start_radio=1)

*Lord, Keep Us Steadfast In Your Word* by Concordia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0CSbbUP0hY>

*Thy Word* by Amy Grant

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ycs23FQDRI>

*Thy Word* Maranatha Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=syGE8ZTjZug>

*O Word of God Incarnate* by Jeff Pardo

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQyDePlgGKM>

*O Word of God Incarnate* by Gross Point Virtual Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mRpN6E2Hjcs>

*Christ Be Our Light* by Brigid's Gale

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQ2epD28qEc>

*Christ Be Our Light* by Notre Dame Choir (one of my favorite joyful performances)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5g0c4YeABTs>

and as a bonus.... the actually "*triple dog dare*" clip from "*A Christmas Story*."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeJXYhdfR6Q>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, January 25, 2021 not by Pastor Mark Opgrand but by Chaplain Bob Weeks #258**

**WONDERFULLY MADE**

**By**

**Chaplain Bob Weeks**

Scripture: *"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."* Psalm 139:14 (NIV)

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One of God's wonderfully made persons was Rudy Obien. Rudy was born in the Philippines, and joined the U.S. Navy as a teenager.

I met Rudy while being a Chaplain at NAS Key West. He and his wife were regular attenders at the Protestant Worship Service in Key West, Florida. I asked Rudy to serve as an usher for our worship services. He accepted and always did a wonderful job of ushering. As time went on, we began fishing together.

One evening, we were fishing, and he stopped, came over to me, and asked, "Chaplain, why do you like me and my family?" I was stunned at first until he began to tell me about his life background. *"You see, I am a bit dark skinned. No other Chaplain has ever asked me to do anything in the chapel."* Rudy and his wife became very active in the Key West Chapel Program. Being a great fisherman, Rudy would prepare a delicious baked fish every Sunday for our Chapel Reception Time. In addition, his wife would make the most delicious lumpia ever tasted. Our Chapel attendance obviously grew, and so did the Chapel Reception Time.

When I met Rudy, he was a Steward (persons responsible for feeding and serving Navy Officers) in the Navy; however, in 1976, the Navy was changing that rate. Sailors who had been Stewards were having to apply for another rate. At the time I met Rudy, Stewards were a racially segregated part of the U. S. Navy. White sailors would not be found serving as Stewards. Actually, Navy Stewards were not considered Petty Officers until 1950. He confided in me that he really wanted to be a Navy Cook, but, as he said, *"The white boys are going to be chosen, not me. Ever since I was a kid, my race has held me back."* Rudy said, "Chaplain, I wonder why God has made me the way I am. I have two children and they are the same color as me. I wonder what will happen to them because of their color."

I will have to admit that Rudy had put me on the spot for an answer to his question, *"Chaplain, I wonder why God has made me the way I am."* Several days later, we were fishing again, and I told Rudy that I had an answer to his question. I asked Rudy, *"Have you ever read the creation story in the first chapter of Genesis?"* He said, *"No, but how does it read?"* I

quoted Genesis 1:31 (NIV), “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” I told Rudy that he had been made the color of his skin and that it was good. I told Rudy that God created all colors of humans and that his creations were all good. Everyone was wonderfully made by God.

Then I told Rudy, I think you should apply for the Navy Cook Rate. I suggested that he list my name as a reference. The good news is that Rudy was chosen to become a Navy Cook. He continued to have an outstanding career and rose to the rank of Chief. In addition, I was able to baptize both of Rudy’s children, and I can verify that they were dark skinned and wonderfully made.

When we reject our own or someone else’s physical appearance, we reject God’s wonderful creation. We can learn a lot about God from children’s answers. For example, a little boy named Michael was asked by his Sunday School teacher, “*What color is God?*” Michael’s answer was, “God’s whatever color He wants to be.” So reports the popular Spanish language song by Ivonne and Ivette, “*El Color de la Piel de Dios*” (“*The Color of God’s Skin*”). The song says that God’s skin contains all colors: black, yellow, red and white: All are the same to the eyes of God.”

God has not revealed the color of his skin; however, regardless of how we look, we are beautiful and precious in God’s sight, made in God’s image. During these pandemic times, all races, regardless of color, are potential victims of the virus. Hospitals treat all persons. We are all wonderfully made in God’s eyes.

*Prayer: Dear God, thank you for making us in your wonderful image. When the world makes us doubt it, remind us that we are wonderfully made as your children. Amen.*

“*El Color de la Piel de Dios*” by Bocas Canta

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iMNWIUL-xEU>

“*El Color de la Piel de Dios*” by Elpavosaurio

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KvnMftOLRk>

*Jesus Loves the Little Children/ Jesus Loves Me* by NXTGen Kids Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfXHFAC3hvM>

*Wonderfully Made* by Scripture Lullabies

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adl3aAf2WlO>

*Wonderfully Made* by Ellie Holcomb

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrwSvQx3Xqs>

*Wonderfully Made* by Ellie Holcomb (live)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbRfEcvJCqQ>

*Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* by Matt Redman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oL9p9bXQe-I>  
*You and Searched and Know Me* Psalm 139 by Esther Mui

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5HINlegg5M>  
*You Are There* Psalm 139 by Songs from the Masses

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0H8N5457dv4>  
*Psalm 139 Far Too Wonderful* by Shane and Shane

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GmsgYY-INf8>  
*Psalm 139 (You Carry Me)* by Patty Felker

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhtvRkwTEM8>  
*You Are Near* by St. Louis Jesuits

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVI4nrfSQ-w>  
*You Are Near* by Kitty Cleveland

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EqH914LUPPM>  
*You Are Near* by unknown artists

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d40-uE6\\_qm4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d40-uE6_qm4)

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday January 26, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand (and Fr. James Carroll) #259**

**The Barge People.**

*As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. <sup>20</sup> "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, <sup>21</sup> that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (Jn. 17:18-21 NIV)*

I currently have about twenty post-it notes with devotion ideas attached to my 2021 Monthly Planner. Sometimes a thought becomes a devotion quite quickly. Other times I can stare at the notes for a long time and nothing comes. Other times something just pops.

In this case it was the memory of a really touching story I first discovered in the 1970's while on internship. The story was called "The Barge People," by Father James Carroll, part of a group of short stories in a book called *Wonder and Worship* ©1970. The book has long been out of print, though I did find a paperback copy on Amazon for \$768.57. I don't get how that works, as this is not exactly a rare first edition classic. I have my own copy anyway, and from it I would like to share this deeply moving story based on John 17: 18-21. The story touched me again today as I think of not only what it means to be a Christian but also by the power of a community to turn new directions. Enjoy.

**The Barge People**

**James Carroll**

The city was sleeping when the large river barge crawled quietly into the night. No one noticed the arrival of the boat, and certainly no one noticed that night that it was a river vessel unlike any other. It was long and narrow like the others.

It was flat bottomed like the others for passing through the low locks and shallow canals of the inland waterways. Like many other barges, it had a narrow, pointed prow for ocean travel. It was moving south with the river current toward the sea when it pulled quietly into the sleeping city.

Though this particular river barge looked like any other, it was in fact quite unique. What made

it so was this: other barges carry much cargo and a few people. This one carried a little cargo, mainly food, and many people.

They were young and old, men and women, lighthearted and down, strange and very ordinary. They lived on the barge and in it, on the flat deck with blankets only, in the cabins below if it rained. Mainly, though, they lived in the lives of each other. They were the barge people.

The morning after they arrived, some of the barge people went into the city. The city itself still had not taken note of the vessel, for many barges stopped there on the way to the sea.

Some of the barge people went to the stores of the city to buy food and drink for all the rest. But the others who went ashore scattered in the city.

They wandered down the back streets of the place. They went into the dark corners of the place. And they all did the same thing. When one of the barge people saw someone lying in the back street, or someone looking for food in the cans of garbage, or someone with a lost light in his eye, they would approach and say, *"Hello, I'm just off the barge on the river. We could use you to replace someone who's leaving us today. We are going to the sea."*

Invariably, because of the way it was said and because of the sea, the poor or the hungry or the lost man would lift himself up and nod in some way and follow. And so it was that by noon of the day after the night they had come into the city, the barge people who had gone ashore returned.

Each brought one of the city people with him. Each of the city people was shown his sleeping place, given something to eat and told about the voyage to the beautiful sea. All of this was done by the person from the barge who had invited him aboard.

When dusk was near and the barge was about to move on, everyone gathered on the deck. The barge people who had gone into the city that morning began to say farewell to the other barge people. The city people came to understand that their special hosts, the ones who'd found them and brought them back, were leaving the barge, would not go on to the sea.

One of the city people, an old man who was sick, approached one of the barge people and asked why the others were leaving. He was told that there was not room enough for them to stay. They had to remain in the city.

The old man objected and said that in such a case, the city people should be the ones to leave. He was told that the barge had come to the city for them and that the barge people wanted it so.

The old man said then that the sea and hoping for it was too precious, and they should be able to get there. But the barge person to whom he objected said only, *"Yes, but perhaps there will be another barge to the sea for them someday."*

And so it was that the strange vessel moved on in the current of the river, with its cargo of people, some of the city, and some, of course, still of the barge itself. The city people grew more and more enchanted by their barge-vision of the sea.

They yearned for the open space of unbroken horizons. They craved the blue stretch of air without poison. They longed for the silence of sea gulls only and waves. Every day, the city people grew more and more to love the barge, its people, and the hope it had given them.

As the barge flowed its way toward the sea, it passed through several other cities. At each one, the vessel stopped. At each one, some of the barge people went ashore for food and drink. At each one, some of the barge people went ashore for the lost ones of the city.

The exchange of the first ashore was repeated again and again, so that, as the barge moved closer to the sea, there were fewer and fewer barge people and more and more city people. And each time that the barge moved on, someone told a worried newcomer, *"Perhaps there will be another barge to the sea for them someday."*

One morning, after a long time and much thick water had passed, a gull appeared above the barge, then two, then many. The sea at last was near. The word passed quickly through the vessel, over its deck and through all its cabins. The people rushed to the open surface of the barge. They were alive with laughter and excitement. They would live through a wish fulfilled at last.

As the barge rounded a final turn in the river, the rich blue of ocean broke into the muddy water ahead. The barge was moving with the current into the mouth of the river. The river was pouring itself out into freedom.

An old man who came from a back street of the first city was the first of the people to notice. He saw that there was an inland waterway channel to the left ahead, and he was looking for the barge man on the tiller.

He wanted to watch the turning out to sea. But there was no barge man on the tiller. The old man looked across the crowd and saw that there was no barge man anywhere on the barge. The barge people were gone. Only the city people remained.

The old man screamed, his voice shrill and sudden and more alive than he was. The city people were stunned. They turned from looking at the ocean to look at him. No one spoke. The old man moved his eyes again across the crowd to the inland channel ahead, back across the crowd and to the tiller.

The city people turned toward the sea again. The barge was moving away from the last inland channel.

Still no one spoke. Each of the people thought of the sea, of their city of before, of the barge person in whose place they slept, and of the empty-handed tiller behind.

At that moment, just a short time after the old man screamed, all the city people moved slowly together to the left side of the barge.

Such a delicate shifting of weight was it that the strange vessel itself turned slightly to the left.

Not much of a turn - just enough to turn the barge inland again to the cities instead of to the sea.

Not much of a turn - just enough to turn the back-street crowd into barge people.

### **Afterword by me.**

I love this image of how God transforms us to become people of faith... barge people.

God transforms us by the witness and caring of a community of faith who ourselves have been transformed so that all might be one and participate in the vision and mission of God.

It doesn't take much of a turn, just enough ... especially when God directs us and we have each other. Amen.

Let us pray. *You have given us the gift of community O God, and the means to be transformed by your love into people of vision and purpose. Turn us toward you Lord Jesus, that we might turn toward our neighbor in love and care. Amen.*

*Brother, Sister Let Me Serve You* by WMTV

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07FBSrx5Oq4>

*The Servant Song* by Diocese of St. Benedict

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MYpH3y4608E>

*What Do You Want of Me O Lord* by Sunday Catholic Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Py8xUO7pOeY>

*Here I Am Lord* by Mark Hayes and Dan Schutte

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CSODPhE-Ong>

*The Lord Now Sends Us Forth* by St. Andrew's Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WtrAwF3Z-w>

*The Lord Now Sends Us Forth* by Augsburg Fortress

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5JjcYZzE50>

*The Spirit Sends Us Forth To Serve* by Sannamish Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jp7Qp4RE98A>

*All Who Hunger Gladly Gather* by Advocate Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7iNRy17PM>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, January 27, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #260**

**The Number One "Survivor" Strategy: "As long as it's not me!"**

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. 26 What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?" (Matt. 16:24-26 NIV)*

One of the most popular television shows of the past twenty years has been "Survivor." Taking place in tropical settings, sixteen contestants work both in tribes and as individuals to avoid being "voted out" by their tribe. "Survivor" has aired forty seasons, with over five hundred contestants.

While a variety of strategies have been employed to "survive," the number one strategy I have heard time and time again is this: "As long as it's not me!" The contestant will form alliances, betray alliances, play advantages, lie and deceive... do anything necessary to stay in the game, "As long as it's not me!" As long as I am not voted out. As long as I survive. That's all I want.

Frequently there is great drama in the game because contestants, in order to survive in the game, often behave in ways quite different than they would in their regular lives. In their regularly lives, they might be faithful and true in their friendships, but on the island, in order to win the million dollars, they behave as the game requires. Outwit. Outplay. Outlast. Lie. Deceive. Betray.

I would like to say I'm glad "Survivor" is just a game and rejoice that it's not this way in real life. Regrettably, many in fact live do their lives with an "as long as it's not me," attitude. As long as I don't get Covid. As long as I don't lose my job or business. As long as what I want is not interfered with by what someone else wants. As long as it's not me who has to change my behavior... or listen to another point of view ... or be challenged ... or give up something for the sake of another.

I'm glad there is a significant difference between life in Christ and Survivor. Life in Christ is about forming alliances, but not to "vote people off" but "draw people in." Life in Christ is about being honest and true, faithful and caring, open and welcoming.

It's about looking beyond ourselves and simply surviving, but rather thriving in an environment where things are not just about me and my wants and wishes, but about a community rooted in love, and yes, sacrifice. You may not win the million dollars by getting rid of everyone else, but

you will also not “forfeit your soul” and you will gain eternal life (as well as a lot of everlasting friendships along the way).

Let us pray. *We thank you gracious Jesus for being the one to show us what love for one another looks like. Thank you for living and dying and being raised for us so that we might experience life as far more than simply surviving. Thank you for those lasting friendships along the way where grace and honesty are foundational. Take us where we are and lead us to all those places you want us to be. Amen.*

*Take O Take Me As I Am* by Philipp Fröhlich (piano), Milena Soyoung (voice)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRpDeqmkYz8>

*Take O Take Me As I Am* by Gross Pointe Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bv4f-8L1uk0>

*Take O Take Me As I Am* by Pisakoor Zingen voor je Leven Hoorn

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0GBZCvHPxY>

*Just As I Am* by Chennai Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKw7Hq8Go4U>

*Just As I Am* by Acapeldridge

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8dnUns2dlw>

*Just As I Am* by Selah

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rsZp4NL-aC4>

*Spirit of the Living God* by Pastorloran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BagH-zTfnsQ>

*Spirit of the Living God* by Invitation Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYfzcYohWZg>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, January 28, 2021** not by Pastor Mark Opgrand but **by Dr. Kevin Deyoung #261**

### **Come Let Us Reason Together**

*Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil,<sup>17</sup> learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.<sup>18</sup> "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. (Isa. 1:16-18 ESV)*

I found the following piece on a website called "The Gospel Coalition." Like with many things, I don't know how I first "got there," but here was something that engaged me right away with it's first line: "*The Church is Divided Like Never Before.*" If what followed was just stating the obvious, I might not have gotten past the first paragraph. But then Dr. Deyoung, pastor and seminary professor, moved from observation and analysis to something quite helpful. He offered the kind of helpful reflections that many of us are seeking during this time of international stress and division. So rather than thinking "*Oh, I wish I had thought of this*" or "*Perhaps I can plagiarize. No one has to know,*" I am reprinting it for your thoughtful consideration today.

### **Come, Let Us Reason Together by Kevin Deyoung**

#### **The church is divided as never before.**

Okay, that may be an overstatement. But I think most Christians would agree that, from personal conversations and from social media scrolling, it certainly *feels* like the divisions are as bad as ever, and only getting worse.

The church has been divided over doctrine before—sometimes for bad reasons, often for good reasons. That is to be expected.

What seems new in our day is how Bible-believing Christians who share almost all the same doctrine on paper are massively and increasingly divided over non-doctrinal matters, torn apart by issues the Bible does not directly address.

Think of the three most contentious issues in the church over the past year: racial tensions, Covid restrictions, and the presidential election.

On each of these matters, Christians have disagreed not just on interpretation or strategy or where the slopes are most slippery.

We have fundamentally disagreed on the facts themselves, and because we disagree on the facts we disagree even more profoundly on the appropriate response.

Is America deeply and pervasively racist? Are people of color routinely and disproportionately in danger of being killed by police officers? Is virtually every aspect of our society hostile to the presence of black and brown bodies?

If you answer yes to all these questions—that is, if you believe the facts warrant all these conclusions—then how can you not be engaged in (peaceful) protest? For the church to ignore injustice on this level is to be guilty of indifference at best and moral turpitude at worst.

But if our society and our policing is not fundamentally racist, then much of the social justice movement is motivated by false premises.

What about Covid? If the facts tell us that this is a once-in-a-century pandemic, that we are facing 300,000 excess deaths, and that masks are a simple and effective way to limit the spread of the virus, then extreme care and caution are important ways we can love our neighbors as ourselves.

If, on the other hand, coronavirus is hardly more dangerous than the seasonal flu, then the worldwide restrictions look rather onerous, if not outright nefarious.

And what about the election? Setting aside the question of whom to vote for, we are now divided over who people actually did vote for.

If the election was stolen, perversely overriding the will of most Americans in an act of unconscionable thievery, then we should be marching (peacefully) until we are blue in the face.

But if the facts do not support that conclusion, then we help no one by pretending that the loser of the election actually won.

In each set of issues, you can see why the stakes are so high and why the emotions run even higher. If things are as dire as some purport (on race, with Covid, and with a disputed election), then to do nothing displays a cowardly and colossal failure of nerve.

But if, in each situation, things are much less dangerous and less insidious than the doomsdayers say, then taking a full-body chill pill would be the better part of valor.

So what are Christians to do?

**First, let us be humble,** understanding that few of us are experts on these issues. A little epistemic humility—in our hearts and toward others—can go a long way.

**Second, let us be measured.** This doesn't mean our default has to be the status quo, but it does mean we should keep our passions in proportion. We should be religiously dogmatic about our religious dogma and not much else.

**Third, let us reason together.** It is the profound irony of our age: never has there been more information at our fingertips, and never has it been harder to know what information to trust.

In most things, whether we realize it or not, we have no choice but to rely upon the expertise of others. We simply don't have the time or ability to properly investigate every disputed claim. That means it is more important than ever before that we are discerning about the voices we listen to.

And how can we be discerning?

Read widely—not just from different voices online but from different voices across the centuries. Reading Calvin or Augustine won't tell you what to think about Covid, but they will help you think better.

Listen to those who know you best and love you most.

Of course, parents and pastors and friends can be wrong too, but there is something unhealthy about putting ourselves under the influence of distant personalities while neglecting those who will have to give an account for their care over us.

Where possible, look at the fruit of someone's life. To be sure, bad people can make good arguments. But in general, if you are honest with other people, honest with yourself, and honest with God, you tend to be honest with facts and ideas.

The opposite is also true.

Run through a series of diagnostic questions in your mind. Questions like:

- Does the argument I'm reading deal in trade-offs or only in the categories of all-good/all-evil?
- Are the terms and definitions clearly defined?
- Can the person fairly state the argument he is arguing against?
- Is he willing to acknowledge any fair points on the other side?
- Does the person I'm listening to seem unhinged and unstable?

- Is the argument full of emotive reasoning and ad hominem attack?
- Does the force of the argument rely on hard words and high passions or on rational arguments and sound evidence?
- Does this person have a track record of being fair, accurate, and well-researched?
- Does this person have any credentials or experience that would make him worth listening to?
- Does the argument make sweeping claims based on personal anecdotes?
- Does the argument require me to believe what is non-falsifiable?
- Does the argument require a level of highly elaborate clandestine scheming such that only the most disciplined, organized, and intelligent people in the world could pull it off?
- Does the argument confuse correlation with causation?
- Is the person a jerk on Twitter, constantly self-congratulatory on Twitter, seeking victim status on Twitter, or otherwise living online in a way that seems imbalanced?

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Are these questions a magic elixir that will solve all our disagreements? Of course not. But perhaps they can nudge us in the right direction.

I'm sure I'm getting things wrong. In fact, I hope on these non-biblical matters in particular that I'm always open to being corrected and learning something new.

For my part, while I believe there are many ways that the relationship between African Americans and police officers can improve, I don't think the evidence suggests that racist cops are disproportionately killing unarmed black people.

I don't think Covid is deadly for the vast majority of people but it is very dangerous for some. And while I am sure there were irregularities in November's election,

I don't think there is evidence of voter fraud so widespread that it could have changed the presidential outcome.

I hesitate to share these convictions because that's not what I want this post to be about, but neither do I want to pretend that any of us can so rise above the fray that we don't have to reach any of our own conclusions.

My larger and more important point, however, is to urge us as Christians to lead the way in thinking carefully, and in carefully engaging those who think differently—especially on these disputed factual matters that can't be answered (as I would prefer) by reading our Bibles alone or by quoting from Turretin.

**Afterword by Pastor Mark:** Oops. I had to look up “*Turretin*”. That would be François Turretin (1623-1687), a fierce defender of Orthodox Calvinist Theology. I was tempted to revise Deyoung’s last line by substituting “*Martin Luther*.” Even so, “Calvinist” Deyoung has offered much for reflective thought.

Let us pray. *Draw us together by your Holy Spirit, O God, that we may find better ways to stand united under the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. With listening ears and an eagerness to follow you, we pray for healing and hope. Amen.*

*I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say* by Audrey Assad

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mXMQqiLW9c>

*I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say* by Grosse Pointe Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4JEoBrthM90>

*Jesus Calls Us O'er The Tumult* by Advocate Virtual Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yByYDzThrSI>

*Jesus Calls Us O'er The Tumult* by DamCity Chorale

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBqzjCjD9wo>

*Jesus Calls Us O'er The Tumult* by St. Bartholomew

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3kZlrMyEvE>

*Jesus Calls Us O'er The Tumult* by Trinity & St. Paul’s Episcopal

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVJ3G7L\\_yjU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVJ3G7L_yjU)

*May the Peace of God* Kristyn Getty

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQIFHIRFGGU>

*Christ is Made the Sure Foundation* by Cambridge Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzTfefXux8A>

*Lux Aeterna* by Voce\*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwdeqVmXlHk>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, January 29, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #262

### The time my room was searched by the Secret Service.

*And the guards stood, every man with his weapons in his hand, from the south side of the house to the north side of the house, around the altar and the house on behalf of the king. (2 Ki. 11:11 ESV)*

In the fall of 1975 during my Middler (second) year of seminary, King Olav V of Norway (1903-1991) visited our campus. It was a very big deal. He had just come from visiting President Gerald Ford and came to our campus to see, among other things, a very special Celtic cross given in 1956 by the Young People's Societies of Nordfjord, Norway.

Our Celtic cross was a replica of the oldest cross in Norway, dating to around 1000 A.D. When a Viking chose to become Christian, he or she would erect a cross of stone to mark the spot of decision or baptism. After that, they would gather there with other Christians for worship until a church was built. These crosses still stand in Norway.

This cross has Greek letters on the left arm—Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. Above, center, are the Greek letters for "*Christ, the Light of the World.*" The symbols on the right stand for a four-word Latin phrase meaning "*The Word of God remains forever.*"

The whole campus turned out for the visit, along with a lot of Norwegian Americans eager to see the king from their ancestral homes. Because this was a special state visit, that meant the campus was made secure. Very very secure, as we observed. The whole first floor of the library was closed off in case the king needed a bathroom break. The secret service searched all the dorm rooms overlooking the lawn where the cross was placed. There were police and secret service everywhere.

We all thought this was great fun, of course. It was cool to see this visiting dignitary from my own personal ancestral home. We were much more amused than outraged that our rooms were searched. And I took lots of pictures. One of them has a secret service member pointing at me saying, "*Don't take my picture.*" He was happened to be "*in*" the photo. At least my camera was not confiscated.

Later on, when I noticed just how many police were in my photos, I created a satirical "tape/slide show," imaging our beloved seminary taken over by a police state and installing the king as the new seminary president with Norwegian language now being added besides Greek and Hebrew.

It was all in good fun, and I was even asked to set up the show at an off-campus party. At the party I met a guy named Don who had previously interned in campus ministry at the University of Texas in Austin. Seeing my sense of humor and creativity, Don asked if I had ever thought of campus ministry. I hadn't, but when he shared more of his year at UT, I became interested. Don told Campus Pastor Curt Johnson he should ask for me. He did, and that opened a door to a ministry experience I had not imagined.

Having served over fifteen years in campus ministry, it is evident that I owe a lot to the King of Norway visiting my seminary that day, especially with all that security. One thing leads to another as God's mysterious ways are revealed.

Recalling that experience also reminds me of simpler times. Back then, nobody was afraid our crowd might become a mob. We did not fear or resist the police or the secret service searching our rooms. No one was mad about anything, just happy to see King Olav, who was delightful and charming, immensely popular in his own country, even nicknamed *Folkekongen*, meaning "The People's King". And we all enjoyed Norwegian cookies afterwards.

It had not been many years, though, since the Vietnam War had torn people apart. Racial tension continued to divide people during these years after civil rights legislation and desegregation. The Cold War continued; the Berlin Wall was still standing, and Germany was divided.

Maybe I remember this because it was just such a nice break, like enjoying the Azalea Festival or Riverfest, times when people gather just to have fun. I hope we will be able to make some memories soon where we are not all riled up, or angry, or imagining civil war with each other, or so driven by fear.

And that takes us back to Jesus. Always back to Jesus, the one who offers us a peace beyond all understanding, and the means to experience a joy that so much of the world wants to take away. We should hope the Holy Spirit provides a little "secret service" on behalf of Jesus in order to make sure our lives are safe so we can enjoy a visit from the real King.

*Let us pray. Come into our hearts, King Jesus, that we might experience and share the joy you want for us. Help us not to be discouraged or disheartened by that which wants to separate us from you and each other. Intercede for us Holy Spirit, when we cannot pray or when the weight of the world gets us down. Remind us of our own times of joy and keep us hopeful that you are right with us in everything. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*I've Got the Joy Joy Joy Joy Down In My Heart* by Heritage Kids

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LylgwOEI7AY>

*Soon and Very Soon We are Going to See the King* by Andre Crouch

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VxarZBxK0iQ>

*Soon and Very Soon We are Going to See the King* by Gospel Dream Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtaA2NyYGik>

*The King of Love My Shepherd Is* by Mass of the Rock

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=il1OeQfkVyl>

*The King of Love My Shepherd Is* by Ars Nova Vocal Group Prague Philharmonic Orchestra

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cHWMltF9\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cHWMltF9_8)

*Come Thou Almighty King* by Christian Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxewqX-FlzE>

*Come Thou Almighty King* by Village Chapel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-zD3mRziWo>

*Celtic Alleluia* by Advocate Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LC7I5j0WLwQ>

and.... *Sun King* by the Beatles (this is one I used in my slide show, featuring King Olav and Seminary President Lloyd Swendsbye)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bNMxWGHITl>

## St. Paul's in Your Home for Monday February 1, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #263

**He isn't safe. But he's good.**

*So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, 35 but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. 36 As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), 37 you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. 39 And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, 40 but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, 41 not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. (Acts 10:34-42 ESV)*

Among my most favorite books are the "*Chronicles of Narnia*" by C.S. Lewis. The first time I became acquainted with them was in Mrs. Ely's sixth grade class at Jefferson Grade School in Medford, Oregon. Each day Mrs. Ely would keep us transfixed as she read from "*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*." Later I discovered there are seven books in the whole series, and in time I began to understand that these fictional works were a way of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ, but through the fictional kingdom of Narnia.

In the first published book, four children during war time England find their way to Narnia through a magical wardrobe. In Narnia they discover that animals can talk and that the land is controlled by a terrible witch (who is known as the White Queen). The children also discover from Mr. and Mrs. Beaver (who are talking beavers), that the real Lord of Narnia is Aslan, the Son of the Emperor beyond the sea. Here is some of that dialogue between the children and Mr. and Mrs. Beaver:

"Who is Aslan?" asked Susan.

"Aslan," said Mr. Beaver. "Why don't you know? He's the Lord of the whole wood, but not often here, you understand. Never in my time or my father's time. But the world has reached us the he has come back. He is Narnia at this moment. He'll settle the White Queen all right. It is he, not you, that will save Mr. Tumnus [who had been captured]."

"She won't turn him in stone too?" said Edmund.

“Lord love you, Son of Adam, what a simple thing to say!” answered Mr. Beaver with a great laugh. “Turn him into stone? If she can stand on her two feet and look him in the face it’ll be the most she can do and more than I expect of her. No, no “He’ll but all to rights as it says in a old rhyme in these parts:

*Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight,  
At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more,  
When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death,  
And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.*

“You’ll understand when you see him,”

“But shall we see him?” asked Susan.

“Why, Daughter of Eve, that’s what I brought you here for I’m to lead you to where you shall meet him,” said Mr. Beaver.

“Is – is he a man?” asked Lucy.

“Aslan a man!” said Mr. Beaver sternly.

“Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the world and the son of the great Emperor-beyond-the-Sea. Don’t you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion – the Lion, the great Lion.”

“Ooh! said Susan, “I’d thought he was a man. Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”

“That you will, dearie, and make no mistake,” said Mrs. beaver; “if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.”

“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver; “Don’t’ you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”

**He isn’t safe. But he’s good.**

Lewis’s point in writing the fictitious Chronicles of Narnia, and introducing Aslan, the Lord of Narnia, is so that children might better learn about the Lord of our world, the one we know as Jesus.

I wonder how many Christians would describe Jesus as not safe, but good? I imagine we want Jesus to be good, of course, but most certainly safe as well. If Jesus is safe, there is very little risk in believing in him, or trusting in him, or following him. We might not even really need to follow him, or listen to his words or model his behavior, especially if he is a safe, risk free savior.

There is much activity these days in naming enemies, exposing the opposition, or interpreting pretty much everything alternatively. It's not a new problem, but daily we feel the distressing effects of such rancor and vilification.

If we insist on imagining Jesus as good (to our liking) but safe, we may be participating in our own fantasy version of Narnia where we are actually on the side of the White Witch, who is all about the Big Lie where she (not Aslan) is Lord and where she enslaves and subjugates all who oppose her, for they are the enemy.

When we carefully examine the Biblical witness and look at Jesus' ministry and listen to what Jesus teaches us, we might see why Jesus is also called the Lamb of God, but also the Lion of Judah. He's not safe. But he's good.

Following this savior, however, is worth the risk, because it is the only way where true peace and reconciliation can be experienced. That means, of course, that we must stop making enemies of each other. It is safer to hang on to our hate and fear and anger; but that is not Jesus' way. He's not safe. But he's good. Trust that. Walk away from the anger. Walk toward the love of God in Jesus our Lord.

Let us pray. Thank for all the ways the Lordship of Christ is revealed to us. Thank you for your Holy Scriptures and for imaginary stories that point us to the scriptures. Help us face the truth that Jesus, like Aslan of Narnia, is not safe, but good. Help us leave behind the security of our own prejudices and biases that we might engage in the holy ministry to which we are called through Jesus. Grant us courage in loving one another as you have invited us. Forgive us when we fail and restore us through your grace that we might persevere through whatever challenges we have before us. Bless all who look to you for hope and healing. In Jesus' name. Amen.

*All Earth Is Hopeful* by David Cherwien

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhT2KVbLl1a>

*If You But Trust In God to Guide You* by National Lutheran Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4m-L5QcWePA>

*Light Dawns on a Weary World* by Ellingboe (ELW 726)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QmwXPtr6L8>

*I Bind Myself Unto Thee Today* by Down Cathedral, Downpatrick (ELW 450)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yH4ToVxtn9A>

*All Are Welcome* by Marty Haugen (ELW 641)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GlnVLP0qFEO>

*Lord Keep Us Steadfast In Your Word* by Mt. Olive Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGCAjUbTGKE>

*Lion of Judah* by Robin Mark

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MI62Bc9kH9U>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, February 2, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #264**

**Another Aslan Narnia Story. (Don't look at me like that)**

57 As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." 58 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." 59 To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." 60 And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." 61 Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." 62 Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." (Lk. 9:57-62 ESV)

One day after I had finished a third reading of the *"Chronicles of Narnia,"* I walked into a shop which had a variety of posters for sale. When I saw a certain pen and ink rendition of a lion, I immediately thought of Aslan of Narnia. It had certain look in the Lion's eye that reminded me of a particular scene in the second published book, *"Prince Caspian."*

In *"Prince Caspian,"* a year has passed since Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy Pevensie had their first adventure in Narnia. But in Narnia, thirteen hundred years have passed since Narnia's Golden Age. The children learn of Narnia's history and learn about Narnia's rightful heir, Prince Caspian. Caspian has fled his uncle and the children decide to go help him.

During a difficult trek it is Lucy, the youngest, who sees Aslan beckoning her to follow him. Because the others cannot yet see Aslan, she follows her siblings instead, and the journey becomes much harder. When at last Aslan appears to Lucy face to face, this is what transpires:

"Aslan, Aslan. Dear Aslan," sobbed Lucy."

"At last."

The great beast rolled over on his side so that Lucy fell, half sitting and half lying between his front paws. He bent forward and just touched her nose with his tongue. His warm breath came all round her. She gazed up into the large wise face.

"Welcome, child," he said.

"Aslan," said Lucy, "you're bigger."

"That is because you are older, little one," answered he.

"Not because you are?"

I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger.”

For a time she was so happy that she did not want to speak. But Aslan spoke.

“Lucy, he said, “we must not lie here for long. You have work in hand, and much time has been lost today.”

“Yes, wasn’t it a shame?” said Lucy. “I saw you all right. They wouldn’t believe me. They’re all so----”

From somewhere deep inside Aslan’s body there came the faintest suggestion of a growl.

“I’m sorry,” said Lucy, who understood some of his moods. But it wasn’t my fault anyway, was it?”

The Lion looked straight into her eyes.

“Oh, Aslan,” said Lucy. “You don’t mean it was? How could I – I couldn’t have left the others and come up to you alone, how could I? Don’t look at me like that... oh well, I suppose I could. Yes, and it wouldn’t have been alone, I know, not if I was with you. But what would have been the good?”

Aslan said nothing.

“You mean, “said Lucy rather faintly, “that it would have turned out all right – somehow? But how? Please, Aslan! Am I not to know?”

“To know what would have happened, child? said Aslan. “No Nobody is ever told that.”

“Oh dear,” said Lucy.

“But anyone can find out what will happen,” said Aslan. “If you go back to the others now, and wake them up; and tell them you have seen me again; and that you must all get up at once and follow me – what will happen? There is only one way of finding out.”

I don’t suppose when artist Elnora Y. Reed put ink to paper and drew her lion that she was imagining Aslan responding to Lucy’s excuses for not following him. But when I see that lion’s look and read *“The Lion looked straight into her eyes,”* and Lucy responding with *“It wasn’t my fault.” Don’t look at me that way,”* I see a wonderful connection (for all Narnia and Aslan fans, anyway).

Since C.S. Lewis wrote the Narnia stories so we better understand our own Lord Jesus Christ, I cannot help but think about all the times we have made excuses before our Jesus who calls us to trust and follow him. The Bible reveals Jesus clearly enough that we should have all we need to respond, *“Yes, Lord, I will follow you. I will trust you. I will live my life as you have called me.”* And I know we have all our excuses why this has been hard for us to do.

But I can only hope that when that day of reckoning comes, when we meet Jesus face to face, and when we start offering up our own excuses, we will not only get that *“look”* but also get the forgiveness from Jesus who not only knows us well but loves us still.

Let us pray. You call us to follow you, even when others we love have not yet heard or seen you. You call us to follow and trust you even when others would send us another way. You call us to live our lives with grace and mercy in our dealings with others. You call us to faith. Help us see you clearly enough that we will put aside all hesitations and fully embrace you as you have embraced us. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

P.S. I am including a photo of the lion I recognize as Aslan in his encounter with Lucy in Prince Caspian. *“He isn’t safe, but he’s good”* was added later by a friend who did calligraphy.



*Will You Come and Follow Me* by Jereme Asunto

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiXnbOORTAU>

*Will You Come and Follow Me* by John Bell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qer1dou6-xg>

*Will You Come and Follow Me* by Robert Kochis

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0aAkOe87mo>

*Lord Jesus You Shall Be My Song As I Journey* (ELW 808) by Shenandoah Choir

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFxmIT\\_NJyo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFxmIT_NJyo)

*Lord Jesus You Shall Be My Song* by King Family

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHBMl\\_UdloA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHBMl_UdloA)

*Lord Jesus You Shall Be My Song* by Augsburg Planners

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NN66tdUXP4g>

*Come, Follow Me, the Savior Spake* (ELW 799) by Covid Hymns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjo40gsrIrk>

*Come, Follow Me, the Savior Spake* by Chapel of the Cross

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gF3kZG-VajY>

*Christ Be Our Light* by Connections Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHQ7S7KUrdS>

## St. Paul In Your Home for Tuesday, February 3, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #265

### I'm still thinking about that second lesson from Sunday.

Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. 2Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; 3but anyone who loves God is known by him.

4Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists,” and that “there is no God but one.” 5Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—6yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

7It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 8“Food will not bring us close to God.” We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. 9But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? 11So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. 12But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall. (I Corinthians 8: 1-13)

It may be worthwhile taking another look at this lesson because here was a church dividing issue in the first century church. The issue was about whether people had freedom to purchase and consume meat that had come from the meat markets that supplied meat for pagan worship rituals.

In Corinth, the only place you could get meat was from shops that were part of pagan temples, the practice... was that when making a sacrifice to the gods, (and there were many) a portion was offered to the gods; and rest was sold to the people. Therefore if you bought and ate meat from this source, you were financially supporting those who offered sacrifices to false gods.

Some in the new Corinthian Christian church believed this was very wrong. They felt that in order to be faithful to God... and good witnesses... they could not eat this unholy meat. To do so would be a grave sin. Others, however, believed that (in Christ) they were free to eat whatever they wanted. They believed there was one true God and no other. It all belongs to God after all, and Christ does set us free; so thanks be to God and feel free to dig in.

“What do we do about this, Paul?” they ask.

Paul's is such an interesting response. He accepts the "*free in Christ*" argument and tells them there is nothing "*wrong*" with eating this meat. But then he pivots and acknowledges the other side, and how some were extremely conflicted about eating the "*unholy*" meat. Even while free in Christ to eat that meat, Paul himself considers those whose sense of right and wrong won't let them. If their faith stumbles on account of Paul's freedom to enjoy that meat, Paul himself says he will choose not to eat meat.

So are they free to eat that meat, or not? It depends, Paul says.

I think about the use of alcohol in church, especially in Holy Communion. Yes, that is our tradition. It was wine that Jesus consecrated during the Passover. Lutherans use alcohol. That's our tradition. And there was a time when the thought of offering an alternative for those who when drinking even a sip of wine takes them not to a holy place, but to a place where demons dwell, was not ever considered.

But our desire to welcoming and inclusive and sensitive to all people eventually followed the spirit of Paul's example. In this case, it was by offering a consecrated grape juice alternative. Offering gluten free bread is also part of being sensitive to people who cannot eat regular bread.

Perhaps what is most important about Paul's response to the "meat" question in Corinth is realizing that freedom as described here includes freedom to refrain some certain preferred behaviors for the sake of another. Paul wasn't taking away their newfound freedom to eat meat from the pagan meat markets. He was inviting them to a new freedom where an even greater joy comes from the love and care for each other, even when we have different perspectives on how we practice our freedom.

The freedom to refrain from something for the sake of a neighbor may be worth considering during this time when so much energy is focused and revolves around "*our freedom,*" and not letting anyone take it away from us.

For example, I could wear a mask, even if I am free not to, or even if its effectiveness is disputed, simply because it shows people around me that I want to do hopefully whatever I can to reduce the chance of giving or getting the virus. But if I cannot wear a mask for medical or other reasons, I can also walk about trusting that you, in the spirit of St. Paul, will not be jumping all over me assuming I am simply flaunting my freedom.

This scripture gives us a lot to think about.

Let us pray. *We thank you for the letters of St. Paul, who showed us how the early church wanted to do right as new Christians. We pray these scriptures will also guide us and direct us to*

*practice our faith with the grace and love of Jesus at the center. Grant us these days, especially, grace to engage each other regardless of where we start on certain difficult or controversial issues. Help us move toward the kind of sensitivity that St. Paul expresses so that we can be open and welcoming to all, especially when we are at different places in our faith journey. Grant us all healing and hope. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Goodness is Stronger Than Evil* by GA Virtual

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHImypU38yg>

*Goodness is Stronger Than Evil* by Nassua Presbyterian Youth

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Md6SzafMZc>

*When We Are Living* by Hope Publishing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWyJtBOwwyc>

*When We Are Living* by St. Mark's Winnipeg

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doE9rJIHwPw>

*Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us With Your Love* by Hope Publishing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jX3T5sL0pzY>

*Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us With Your Love* by Shenandoah Christian Music Camp

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rh\\_3ic6xX0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rh_3ic6xX0)

*To Be Your Presence* by Mt. Olive Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7yJSHTz1Nw>

*O Christ Your Heart Compassionate* (ELW 722) by Sammamish Hills

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZBa12SsPj4>

*O Christ What Can It Mean for Us* by David Schofield

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mU9f4ErgHf8>

*O Christ What Can It Mean for Us* (ELW 431) by Mt. Olive Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYRJN9uDTqQ>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, February 4, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #266

### One Tin Soldier.

12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" (Lk. 2:12-14 ESV)

In my first parish I had very little idea of *"unintended consequences."* For example, on the first Sunday my organist went on vacation, and there were no other organist/pianists available, I thought *"Why not ask Brian, one of our youths who played electric guitar to accompany some very familiar hymns, like 'What A Friend We Have in Jesus?'"* The people always said they wanted the youth more involved.

The service began well enough, as the youth was a very nice and popular young man from a faithful family. They were glad to see him participating. It was when we got to the offertory that trouble ensued. We hadn't talked about the offertory, so when he said, *"Should I play something?"* I said *"Sure."*

He cranked up the volume; you couldn't hear the opening verse too clearly, but when he got the chorus, we all heard plain as day, **"GO AHEAD AND HATE YOUR NEIGHBOR, GO AHEAD AND CHEAT A FRIEND. DO IT IN THE NAME OF HEAVEN, YOU CAN JUSTIFY IT IN THE END. THERE WON'T BE ANY TRUMPETS BLOWING, COME THAT JUDGEMENT DAY, ON THE BLOODY MORNING AFTER... ONE TIN SOLDIER RIDES AWAY."**

That would be one of those *"Pastor, you've got some 'splaining to do"* moments. I recognized the song as one of those countercultural anti-war songs of the late sixties. It was also featured in the popular Billy Jack movies of the '70's. It is actually a very thoughtful song with a nice melody and engaging message. However, as an offertory in a traditional conservative rural small-town congregation played on electric guitar... well, maybe not, unless it had a really good introduction.

Don't worry. I'm not going to suggest we do it as an offertory here at St. Paul's. But it may well be a worthwhile song to hear in the context of today's daily devotion. If you haven't heard it, or may not remember it, because of YouTube, we can all listen to it again.

One Tin Soldier well describes the tragic consequences of coveting and going to war over something your neighbor has that you want. Here are the lyrics:

*Listen, children, to a story*

*That was written long ago  
'Bout a kingdom on a mountain  
And the valley-folk below*

*On the mountain was a treasure  
Buried deep beneath the stone  
And the valley-people swore  
They'd have it for their very own*

*Refrain:  
Go ahead and hate your neighbor  
Go ahead and cheat a friend  
Do it in the name of heaven  
You can justify it in the end  
There won't be any trumpets blowing  
Come the judgment day  
On the bloody morning after  
One tin soldier rides away*

*So the people of the valley  
Sent a message up the hill  
Asking for the buried treasure  
Tons of gold for which they'd kill*

*It came an answer from the mountain  
With our brothers we will share  
All the secrets of our mountain  
All the riches buried there  
Refrain*

*Now the valley cried with anger  
"Mount your horses! Draw your sword!"  
And they killed the mountain-people  
So they won their just reward*

*Now they stood beside the treasure  
On the mountain, dark and red  
Turned the stone and looked beneath it  
"Peace on Earth" was all it said.  
Refrain*

“Peace on Earth” was all it said. That was the treasure the mountain people were eager to share. This revelation reminded me of those “twist endings” that made TV’s Twilight Zone so popular.

One of the ways we speak of the gospel (besides “Good News”) is as *treasure*, a treasure of “Peace on Earth” that God desires, and Jesus sets in motion by his life, death, and resurrection. Most certainly this message has gotten mixed up as this message of “love” for neighbor has morphed into “hatred” of neighbor... or if not “hatred of neighbor”, than hatred of the neighbor’s behavior when it runs contrary to what we believe our neighbors should be like.

It’s always preferable, of course, (I say facetiously) when our neighbors are just like us, or do not have something to which we believe we are entitled. That’s the challenge of a message and a witness that calls us to **“Go ahead and love a neighbor, go ahead and help a friend, do it in the name of Jesus, it is God who justifies us in the end. There will be many trumpets blowing, come that judgment day, on the happy morning after ... Jesus Christ has come our way.”**

Let us pray. Give us courage, we pray, to share your treasure, O God, so that we may have peace. Bless the peacemakers and all who proclaim your gospel. Encourage us, as we take strength from you, and help us rely on you for all we need to share your good news. In Jesus’s name. Amen.

*One Tin Soldier* by Original Caste

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAe4oyRkLdY>

*One Tin Soldier* by Cher (with intro of “It Came Upon A Midnight Clear.”)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vg84L84uop8>

*One Tin Soldier* by Coven

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKx0tdlxMfY>

*One Tin Soldier* by Bluegrass Alliance (1971 live)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f\\_Q\\_fkvCLnY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_Q_fkvCLnY)

*Let There Be Peace on Earth* by Voices of Hope Children’s Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bgL1v8FZaNM&t=107s>

*Let There Be Peace on Earth* by Vince Gill

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5AH\\_BMw5axU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5AH_BMw5axU)

*Shalom My Friends* by Ice and Friends

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCreul4NU94>

*Shalom* by Dionisius Daniel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ImAlzsLUg5g>

*May Peace With You* by Annie Garretson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujLPSpi8MQ0>

*My Peace* by Maranatha Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ls01XGV7oA0>

## **St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, February 5, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #267**

### **One Tin Soldier (Part Two)**

Trust in the LORD, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security. 4 Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. 5 Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. (Ps. 37:3-5 NRS)

Yesterday I shared a devotion about my naïve decision one Sunday in my first church to permit a teenager to accompany hymns on his electric guitar. This was consistent with how, as a young pastor with Minnesota and Oregon roots, I clearly failed to recognize the importance of building trust with these Texans before springing something new on them.

This was not my first offense. A few months into my call, I received a phone call from a seminary friend also serving in Texas that his brother was in a very fine praise band that was touring through Texas and they had a Sunday available. They would lead play and lead worship and all they asked for was a free will offering. I trusted my friend and asked for the council's approval. This was before I realized that their lack of trust in me was subtly expressed by a deep belief that "the pastor is out to ruin the church and it's our job to keep that from happening."

With so much expressed resistance, I am surprised that in the end, it narrowly passed. That was a hard night. But here's the interesting thing. When they joined us, they were wonderful. Most of the congregation loved them, and they received the largest free will offering of their entire tour.

That did not make the next time easier, however. Some months later the son of retired pastor Bill was touring with a Children's Choir from an orphanage in Mexico. He was the director. This also sounded great. But I heard every manner of objection that night, even though we had secured lodging for them at a member's farm and were ready to welcome them with open arms.

I could not figure out the objections. It was narrowly approved in part because retired Pastor Bill had served this congregation right out of seminary and had moved back because his wife (who me met there) inherited a home. Still, there was so much resistance. Later, one of my trusted members took me aside and explained what was happening. He explained it with just two words, "Mexicans, pastor."

This situation was less about trusting their pastor than exposing their prejudices. They did not want Mexicans in their church. Still, you can imagine that when these children came and performed, they were as cute as they could be, and it was a very good day.

The third biggest battle was over a woman wanting to give half her modest estate to the church but earmarked to build a new church. It was \$60,000, which would be closer to \$200,000 in today's dollars. Several on the council were dead set against it because they felt they were being forced to build a new church.

Oddly enough, they already had a "Building Fund" earmarked for that purpose, but no one imagined it would ever be enough to do anything. I (to myself) nicknamed it "The Armageddon Fund," as they seemed to be saving it for an "end of the world rainy day." I still remember that fight, with me pleading, "You can't turn down someone wanting to give to her church, especially when we have a fund already established for this!"

When she died, the gift came, and it was enough seed money to get things rolling. I had left by then but came back for the dedication of the new church. The pastor who replaced me was much better at everything, including leading them through this. He stayed ten years to my two.

Since then, everywhere I have served has been with a much higher trust level. I know I was such an outsider in my first rural Texas parish. And I was young. And naïve. But also comfortable with exploring new ideas, some of which were called "those big city Houston ideas." But I sure realize the value and importance of establishing trust in working together.

I am grateful for the trust we have at St. Paul's. Even when there might be some differences about direction or programs, I would never imagine anyone on our council believing "the pastor is out to ruin the church and it's our job to keep that from happening."

I can only hope that beyond the church, where so many people believe someone they oppose is "out to ruin the country and it's our job to keep that from happening," that with God's help, we might all be open to listening, learning, and building trust so that some good things can happen for the well-being and health of us all.

Let us pray. We thank you for your church, O God, and how trough all its imperfections and imperfect people you continue to surprise us with your grace. We pray for the relationships between pastors and deacons and called leaders, that trust will abound for the sake of your mission. Help us to be open and caring, wise in our decisions, and grateful for your opportunities to grow.

*O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing* with Chris Rice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0GwS3pqbul>

*O For A Thousand Tongues to Sing* with St. Michael's Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2e475ww32Jg>

*O For A Thousand Tongues to Sing* with Jason Payne (pipe organ solo)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUJazovyNaM>

*I Love to Tell the Story* by Oak Ridge Boys

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gsbu1uJiZm4>

*I Love to Tell the Story* with EmmyLou Harris and Robert Duvall

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJaDRuOYHkE>

*I Love to Tell the Story* with Alan Jackson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvDUayhdPd4>

*Amazing Grace* by Judy Collins

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDdvReNKKuk>

*Amazing Grace* by Celtic Woman

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsCp5LG\\_zNE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsCp5LG_zNE)

*Amazing Grace* Peter Hollens and Home Free

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7n145-J8eig>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday February 8, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #268

### Can we still dream of peace?

*You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, the LORD, am your God and there is no other. And my people shall never again be put to shame. 28 Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.* (Joel 2:27-28 NRS)

*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.* (Eph. 2:13-14 NRS)

I was reading an article lamenting how we have become so separated from each other. There are many such articles these days. Some represent one side or the other, and many simply observe how much anger is regularly expressed from “one” toward the “other.”

In the comment section, one person began with a simple sentence: “I’ve always loved Ed McCurdy’s song”, and then she went on to insert the lyrics. That made me want to investigate, and when I “searched” on YouTube, not only did I find Ed McCurdy’s original recording, but many other recordings from well-known artists.

While the song was composed as an anti-war song in 1950, it became a pro-peace song in the 1970’s. I recognized the song as soon as I heard the opening lyrics, “*Last night I had the strangest dream I ever dreamed before. I dreamed the world had all agreed, to put an end to war.*”

Many would argue that putting an end to war is a hopelessly naïve proposition. Perhaps that’s why McCurdy was clearly identified this was his “*strangest dream.*” The more I listened, however, the more I was drawn into this simple, but beautiful composition... this beautiful dream. With all the hateful rhetoric spewing forth all over the place these days, I loved the simple, if naïve, hope it expressed.

We *can* still hope can’t we? Even if all the world’s peoples can’t come together and make peace, we might still have peace between at least one person and another, can’t we? Perhaps the joy of that feeling could spread and become a vision to which we might aspire.

The Book of Joel speaks of the elderly dreaming dreams, and the young with a vision for a hopeful future. The Letter to the Ephesians names our estrangement, even estrangement in groups, and yet declares that “*in Christ, we who were once far off have been brought near*” by

Jesus' own death, he who is our peace. What a beautiful image of reconciliation, something hopefully not so strange, and not just a dream.

Let us pray. *We pray for peace and reconciliation, Lord Jesus. May this be real for us, not just a dream. Give us a song to sing that lifts our spirits and gives us hope. Amen.*

P.S. I was surprised at how many artists have recorded this song. I'm going to link to many of them. Perhaps you'll find, like me, that the more I listened the more I felt a peace that passes all understanding. The name of Jesus is not in the lyrics, but I would argue that it is in the heart of the hope of peace in this song. Select any one you would like to hear. Blessings.

Here are the lyrics:

Last night I had the strangest dream  
I ever dreamed before  
I dreamed the world had all agreed  
To put an end to war

I dreamed I saw a mighty room  
Filled with women and men  
And the paper they were signing said  
They'd never fight again

And when the papers all were signed  
And a million copies made  
They all joined hands and bowed their heads  
And grateful prayers were prayed

And the people in the streets below  
Were dancing round and round  
And guns and swords and uniforms  
Were scattered on the ground

Last night I had the strangest dream  
I ever dreamed before  
I dreamed the world had all agreed  
To put an end to war

*Last Night I Had The Strangest Dream* original by Ed McCurdy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nc5hxqNdqKo>

*Last Night I Had The Strangest Dream* by Simon and Garfunkel

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dn\\_99vvS5U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dn_99vvS5U)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQEve-69r6I>

*Last Night I Had The Strangest Dream* by Lizzy Hoyt

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjerX\\_jM568](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjerX_jM568)

*Last Night I Had The Strangest Dream* John Denver Peace Poem and *Last Night I Had The Strangest Dream*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ea9U3E58HC8>

*Last Night I Had The Strangest Dream* John Denver with Chad Mitchell Trio

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ciFeZQCiz5M>

*Last Night I Had The Strangest Dream* by Pete Seegar

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZU-9TBP2NY>

*Last Night I Had The Strangest Dream* Johnny Cash

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jHx1Dhnhsg>

*Last Night I Had The Strangest Dream* Mason Proffitt

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vShcBOamKE>

*Last Night I Had The Strangest Dream* Joan Baez

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3HX1XYY5X7g>

*Last Night I Had The Strangest Dream* The Kingston Trio

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqnITwtpdvk>

*Last Night I Had The Strangest Dream* Arlo Guthrie

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAxBPN8Psq0>

*Last Night I Had The Strangest Dream* The Limelites

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2I8ILEb1PAg>

*Last Night I Had The Strangest Dream* by Garth Brooks

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ty4L9kEhTs0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uldnkUYwNEs>

*Last Night I Had The Strangest Dream* Garth Brooks with David Frost

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azT5OtaXxdo>

*Last Night I Had The Strangest Dream* by Fialeja

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TG5\\_MNxryc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TG5_MNxryc)

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, February 9, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #269

### A Tale of Four Doves.

*Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (Matt. 6:26 NRS)*

I pulled into my driveway behind our home and to my left were four doves foraging in the garden. Seeing my car, all four froze. They didn't move. They blended into the ground like rocks. Instead of getting out of the car, I decided to see what they would do next. Nothing. They were motionless. A minute went by and I decided to see how long they would stay that way. I hit the stopwatch feature on my Apple watch.

Another minute went by. Then two, three, five. The only thing that moved were their beady little black eyes. Back and forth. Up and down. Were they wondering if I was big prey and they needed to be still and blend into the ground?

More minutes went by. I was determined to see what might happen next. At the ten-minute mark, one flexed its wings, then another and another. Other than that, they didn't move. It wasn't until the fifteen-minute mark did one even move its head. Then another but still staying in place.

I searched on my phone to discover these were Common Ground Doves, but I could find nothing that explained this behavior. They were so still... and for so long. Because I was also near a bird feeder I watched other birds flitting in and out, especially striped house finches (again, I looked them up while waiting on my doves).

It wasn't until the twenty-nine minute mark that one took a step. Then another. And a third. And finally the fourth. They cautiously continued to forage. About that time, I cracked open the door, and again they froze in place. This time I wasn't going to wait another half hour, so I opened the door and they flew away. I suppose this is what would have happened if I had gotten out of the car when I arrived.

So did I just waste a half hour pondering these doves?

I think not. I did something I rarely do, which is just stop and think about God's marvelous creation. I learned what variety of doves these were, and why they were on the ground rather than in the tree like three mourning doves who also stopped for a few moments. I also quit thinking about all those things that are so bothersome these days (we all have our long lists). So this unexpected event turned out to be a time for meditation and prayer, for which I am thankful. Our minds and bodies are in such constant motion these days.

And who knows, perhaps I prompted the doves to do something they rarely do, which was to sit completely still together for a half an hour. Maybe we can all learn a few things by simply stopping all our motion (and emotion) for a little while.

Let us pray. *Remind us, O God, to take some minutes from what we are doing to appreciate your marvelous creation and all its creatures. Help us see you in the quietness of those moments. Bless all who look to you for healing and hope today. Amen.*

*Wings of a Dove* by Daniel O'Donnell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Re8zGk47GNM>

*Wings of a Dove* by Bird Youmans

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zWOeTQBtFE4>

*Wings of a Dove* by Robert Duvall

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pg21CY25nOc>

*I'll Fly Away* by Allison Krauss Gillian Welsh

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0sEv6RaHz4>

*I'll Fly Away* by Alabama

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=grV3zPU7kdc>

*I'll Fly Away* by Alan Jackson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNaf8WjAB44>

*On Eagle's Wings* by Walkers to Heaven

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZcyEnwyTI>

*On Eagle's Wings* by Nathan Pacheco

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OtD0Qw5dKRI>

*On Eagle's Wings* Taryn Harbridge

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scDRvuAGHGE>

*A Little Bird I Am* by Living Stream Hymns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDAKLngmIQ4>

*A Little Bird I Am* by My Hymns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikFZvX9Vheo>

*Flee As A Bird* by Acapella Hymns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OjD4FBPFTm4>

*All Things Bright and Beautiful* by Animated Faith

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iUnQMvwaXlc>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, February 9, 2021** not by Pastor Mark Opgrand but **by Chaplain Bob Weeks #270**

A SMALL REMINDER

By

Chaplain Bob Weeks

Scripture: *"I urge, then, first of all, that all requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."* 1 Timothy 2:1-2 (NIV).

In my back yard a small green insect waited for me. Every time I saw it, I would say, "There he is again!" The little insect had buggy green eyes, antennae, and wings that looked like leaves. It had long front legs that were bent and raised up toward its face. When I looked at this insect, it seemed to be holding something. I always wondered what the insect was holding. Maybe a small Bible?

The insect was a praying mantis (Mantidae). My praying mantis appeared everyday outside the house. Once I spotted it on my wood pile as I was collecting firewood. Then it was seen perched on the back steps to my porch. There it was again! It greeted me inside my garage when the garage door was open. Once it greeted me on the front steps of my home as I was returning from my mailbox.

Each time I encountered the insect, with its hands folded, it reminded me that in my busy day I needed to take time to pray to God. This little creature would cause me to find a quiet place and turn whatever lay ahead in prayer to God. The prayer was usually very simple, "Dear God, please be with me and guide me in the ways I am to go today." Every time I spotted the little fellow, I was reminded to pray. Even if I was in a rush, it would remind me to stop and pray.

My little green friend became something of a signal to pray. I could view this little friend and be reminded, *"Did I pray today?"*

Martin Luther reminds us that prayer is the conversation of a believing heart with God. It is necessary for the life of a believer in Christ as much as breathing is necessary for the human body. As children of God, we must live in communion with Him. My little green friend daily reminded me that I could not be a Christian without praying. Martin Luther reminds us that we constantly need God's mercy; that we owe Him thanks for many benefits; that God has commanded us to pray; and, that God has promised to hear us.

Living during these confusing times of a Covid-19 pandemic, and during these unsettled times of our nation, we need to pray daily for God's guidance. So, I ask each of you to think of my little green friend. May he remind you to pray.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for the way you direct my daily path, always bringing to mind the things I need to remember and placing before me the things I need to see. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

*Oh Lord Hear My Prayer* by XERA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J73ILBBkpA0>

*Oh Lord Hear My Prayer* by Noblesse

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ovs7zti8mpM>

*The Lord's Prayer* by Andrea Bocelli

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8jImIjg4UY>

*Standing in the Need of Prayer* by Guy Penrod

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U7kZexSSYys>

*Standing in the Need of Prayer* by Oak Ridge Boys

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KGK3g\\_AKReo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KGK3g_AKReo)

*Your Little Ones Dear Lord Are We* by Matthew Culloton

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YokRLxfJ5D4>

*Eternal Spirit of the Living Christ* ELW 402 by David Hurd

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKy8hb9dZL0>

*Eternal Spirit of the Living Christ* by Bonnie Eichenberger

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TW\\_uRF00Dlc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TW_uRF00Dlc)

*Kyrie. God. Father* ELW 409

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xKVrIuKL1ss>

*Stay With Me* by St. Pedro Padre Pio

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIUSI8hVVnM>

*Stay With Me* (ELW 348) by Taize

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCr2tn4yYKY>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, February 11, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #271**

***The Have(s)(hots) and the Have Nots***

*But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, so that those who love your name may exult in you. (Ps. 5:11 NRS)*

*Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge. (Ps. 16:1 NRS)*

*Deliver me from my enemies, O my God; protect me from those who rise up against me. (Ps. 59:1 NRS)*

*Guard me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; protect me from the violent who have planned my downfall. (Ps. 140:4 NRS)*

The Psalms include a number of verses where the root Hebrew word “*Shamar*” is translated into English as “*protect*” or “*protection.*” Some translations use “*preserve,*” or forms of “*to keep*” or “*watch.*”

In modern times, speaking of “*protection,*” it would not be unusual to think of products like “*sunscreen*” or “*birth control*” or “*conceal and carry permits*” (permitting handguns for protection). This past year “*protection*” has also come to be associated with “*vaccines.*”

While vaccines have been around for a long time, it is the Covid 19 pandemic that has necessitated the development of many new vaccines. Their intent is not to cure the disease, but to protect us from it. Many new prayers have been lifted up to God for this “*protection.*”

As vaccines are becoming available, I am observing the effect they are having on those who now feel a higher level of “*protection.*” It is still necessary to be vigilant, but among those who have had their first, and now their second, it is like a weight has been lifted (to some degree, anyway).

Until this new hope of protection has been received, many haven't realized just how burdened they have felt. Wherever we go, potential infection is on our minds. This is especially true for those of us who are more likely than others to get sick, but also true for those who have worried about their aging parents or grandparents. For many, it has been quite an effort to get scheduled for the vaccine, but when at last it happens, there is relief and new hope.

The rollout has come in stages, with *group 3* soon eligible, and with that more people will experience what life looks like with that added degree of protection. Anything can happen, of course, but as we have been practicing that which helps protect us, namely hand washing,

physical distancing, and mask wearing, the vaccine hopefully will move us closer to our goal, which is the world's health.

Faith, of course, is always a key ingredient to good health, and thankfully we Lutheran Christians come from a faith tradition where science is not the enemy of faith, but rather a partner in how God works with us and calls forth gifts from God's servants to become agents of healing.

But because we care for one another, it matters that we not only take care to protect ourselves, but advocate wellness for everyone. Right now, we have "the have shots" and "the have not (yet) shots". Like the Psalmists, we ask God to grant us all protection (from all that threatens our health).

As we pray and support all those who are working hard for us all to be well, we look forward to that glorious time when we not only will see each other's smiling faces but offer hearty and heart-felt hugs (and yes, I know that will still be awhile). There you have it!

Let us pray. *Protect us, O God, for in you we take refuge. We feel the weight of so much these days. May that weight be lifted as we experience signs of hope. Remind us always, though, that you are our ultimate hope and that neither that neither death nor life, angels nor demons, the present nor the future, nor any powers, height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation (including Covid 19) , will be able to separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

*Psalm 59 God is My Defense* by Esther Mui

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yq5HijL-hOY>

*In the Singing ELW 466* by St. Stephen Gladstone

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUigGiyqqh4>

*Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song ELW 808* by Augsburg

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NN66tdUXP4g>

*Heal Me Lord* by Don Moen

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBERKOp\\_jdM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBERKOp_jdM)

*Heal Me O Lord* by Belmont SDA Church

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VEQpwxS3\\_0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VEQpwxS3_0)

*Protect Me* by Angela Okorie

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJtrgsrMS34>

*Psalm 16 Keep Me Safe* by the Sons of Korah

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQSx8vpo9ec>

*Psalm 16 No Good Apart from You* by Jason Silver

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbdUbyo8IRY>

## **St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, February 12, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #272**

### **Remembering Elijah and the Aggie Bonfires**

At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. 37 Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again." 38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. 39 When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD-- he is God! The LORD-- he is God!" (1 Ki. 18:36-39 NIV)

This scripture comes from one of those fun and dramatic stories in the Bible. Elijah, the "last true prophet" of God is summoned by King Ahab to challenge 450 Ba'al prophets to a sacrificial duel on Mt. Carmel where the true God will best the false God and God's true prophet will best Ba'al's false prophets.

It was a classic showdown. The Ba'al prophets cry out for Ba'al to ignite the altar where a bull is being sacrificed. Nothing happens. Elijah taunts, douses the sacrifice three times with water and calls on God, and it works. The sacrifice is completely consumed by fire, bull, wood, stones, and soil. There was a lot of "burning desire" that day to show God's superiority.

The only experience I have had that remotely comes close to such a "burning desire" to show superiority was in attending Texas A & M's annual bonfires when I served a congregation just 35 miles away. Witnessing an Aggie Bonfire is a wonder to behold. The first known bonfire was in 1912 and it has been a "sacred tradition" since then, representing their "burning desire to beat the hell out of TU." TU is a derogatory term for rival University of Texas at Austin. At the very top was a painted orange (for TU) outhouse.

I recently compared notes about this with church member and Aggie graduate Dan Huggins, who participated in the historic 1969 build, considered the highest ever done. At 109 feet 10 inches, this is equivalent to an eight-story high building! The flames could be seen twenty-five miles away. The 700 gallons of jet fuel made the stack quickly ignite.

When I attended my first bonfire ten years later, it may not have been quite as tall, but it was still a magnificent structure. If those logs were used to build log cabins, from this bonfire 125 cabins could have been built. That was A LOT of wood being "sacrificed." As students with torches approached and lit the stack, it produced a wave of heat unlike anything I have ever experienced. "Whoa. Wow," the people gasped and cheered. It felt like night turned to day as the bonfire burned brightly through the night.

When I think about the Aggie Bonfire, I can't help but think about Elijah. His bonfire wasn't eight stories high, but however it happened, there was definitely a football atmosphere as God's fire reigned down and consumed it to the horror of his rivals, the Ba'al prophets. It was a good day for Elijah the followers of God. The Aggies would be proud.

Elijah's joy, however, was not long lasting. Evil God-hating Queen Jezebel put out a contract on Elijah's life and he fled in horror. Likewise, with the Aggie Bonfires, there joy-filled history also has tragedy associated with it. In 1999, the bonfire collapsed during construction, killing 12 students and injuring 27. A bonfire still happens annually, but off campus and sponsored by a private organization. A memorial to the fallen students remains where the bonfire used to be.

The Aggie Bonfire was a tradition that arose out of intense, but friendly rivalry between colleges. Elijah's bonfire revealed a competition for people faith and ultimately was a witness to the power of God over false gods. Both involved a sacrifice. Both were dazzling from a spectator's point of view.

In our nation right now, we have observed rivalry between political parties take an intense and sometimes deadly turn which has encouraged people to pick a side and remain faithful to it. People might wish for an Elijah to show the power of God and wipe out all opposition.

But God quit that practice. Perhaps too many people were sacrificed. Perhaps things were getting just too far out of control. So God came, not as a bolt of lightning, but as a human Jesus, one who would demonstrate what loving and bringing peace and reconciliation to those who were estranged looked like. Jesus came for those who were deadly rivals... for those who loved the fireworks and thrived on smiting their enemies. And the light he brought was not from something burning down, but for shining bright upon the dark landscape of our souls that we might see him ... and follow him.

Let us pray. Be our light and life, Lord Jesus, that we might see your way and follow you. Thank you for your sacrifice that we might recognize what has true value and what is worth living and dying for. Amen.

Shine Jesus Shine by Kirkenband (from Germany sung in English really good!)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BkxoTmKpDcU>

Rise, Shine You People ELW 665 by Lenoir Rhyne Virtual Choir

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymwKMfBTC\\_s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymwKMfBTC_s)

Rise, Shine You People by St. Olaf Choir

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDS6oj\\_X4Hk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDS6oj_X4Hk)

Shine Jesus Shine by Maranatha Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTIGVlcHsFE>

Rise Shine arr. Marques Garrett by First Plymouth

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LV3Biv6dTsu>

Rise Shine by Dionne Warwick

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7M9nnijs0cc>

Rise, Shine Give God the Glory by Georgia Mass Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8de162bAVI>

Fire of God by Craig Musseau

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XMBOgn6vall>

Spirit of the Living God by Audrey Assad

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fyIslaNsJ5o>

Hymn—Barclay James Harvest... another great one from Kirckenband

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1Gia9d7pk8>

...and as a bonus, something about the Aggie Bonfire Tradition KAGSTV

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9Z0nLdBlmQ>

1970 Bonfire Stack and Burn

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHKQlh7OShk>

1996 Bonfire (lengthy, but comprehensive... you can skip to the fire)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQTa-qeqHUM>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, February 15, 2021** not by Pastor Mark Opgrand **but by our special guest writer Pastor Brian Gige** #273

### **On Supporting Each Other.**

**Forward:** Here's how this devotion happened. St. Paul's member Gary Anderson sent me a link to a piece recently published from his friend, Pastor Brian Gige, of Pearland, Texas. Gary and I had spoken of Brian before, as Brian was an acquaintance of mine from my years in Texas and a longtime friend of Gary's, going back to high school days in Ohio. Brian is now retired after forty years in ministry but continues to work with men's retreat ministry and writes. He has published a fine collection of essays in a book called *"God Works."* (I have it on my Kindle App).

I share this introduction because this is not merely a *"cut and paste"* operation, but one with a nice historical connection and long-time friendship ... and it is good! It was recently published on February 10, 2021 in the *Faith Matters* section of the *Pearland (Texas) Reporter News*.

### **"On Supporting Each Other"**

**By REV. DR. BRIAN GIGEE**

*"When Moses' arms grew tired, Aaron and Hur brought a stone for him to sit on, while they stood beside him and held up his arms, holding them steady until the sun went down. 13 In this way Joshua totally defeated the Amalekites. – Exodus 17:12-14*

For most of us, life is a battle. Well, that's not actually true. For all of us... yes... that one... for all of us... every day has its own unique skirmishes designed to address and impact our reason for being. No one is immune. No one is exempt. And every one of us would raise our hands to the question, "who has had that rough moment where you thought you'd lost the battle?"

Moses certainly felt that way and if you know anything about Moses's life then you know what I'm pointing to. Abandonment. Murder. Prince turned into herder of goats. Stutterer... to say nothing of surviving plagues only to be chased by Pharaoh's army right to the water's edge! And after the Israelites made it through the Sea of Reeds there was a long time of desert wandering, and more battles to come. Who'd want to walk a mile in those shoes?

Yet, Moses didn't go it alone. He always had help. The sun came up every day... even on that mountaintop the day he died. And according to the Bible... we were not created for rugged individualism. That's a battle we all lose... on our own.

We were, however, created for community! We were created to help and support each other from the very first day until now. And as always... some people seem to be better at it than others. Yes. Faith matters.

These few verses in Exodus have always offered hope as there is always more to any story... The Israelites were following God's direction to a 'promised land.' Moses led the way holding the stick he used to strike the Nile... a stick with holy implications. And when the Amalekites began to attack the Israelites, as Moses held the stick up overlooking the battle... Joshua and the Israelites were winning the fight. When his arms grew tired and the stick was lowered... the Amalekites would begin to win.

Enter Aaron and Hur.

Battles make us weary. Skirmishes tax our wit and reason. The body, mind, and spirit get worn down. It is dangerous to go it alone. So, Aaron and Hur led Moses to a rock. They held up his arms so Moses could raise the stick and the power of God over Joshua and his army. And in the end, the Israelites won the battle against the Amalekites. So much for sticks and stones in that saga.

We are living in a time where we are being challenged to hold each other up. It's not just our arms that are weary. The whole of our culture is being tested. Those on the front lines of hospitals and care facilities... our schools... those who protect and serve... the marketplace... our homes... single parents with children... those who live in poverty with little means or know how to end that cycle of life. The safety net seems to have a gaping hole!

And still... there's hope. We know the winners... Heroes abound... Dick and Grace. Harvey. Rod. Eddie's mom. Ruby. Me. You. And all the rest... as the battle rages on. But know this... battles persist but God has won the war! Even as the power of oppression lifted Jesus' arms upon a cross... he asked his beloved disciple to care for his mother... because we can't go it alone... as we need each other's support... from the first day until now...

*The Rev. Dr. Brian K. Gige is a long-time resident of Pearland, having pastored four churches over the last four decades in Texas and Louisiana. You can read more following his blog 'murmurings' at <https://briangiqee.wordpress.com/>. Comments and / or questions can be sent to [godworks247365@gmail.com](mailto:godworks247365@gmail.com).*

**Afterword by Pastor Mark:** A couple of things stood out for me: *"We were, however, created for community! We were created to help and support each other from the very first day until now."* and *"We are living in a time where we are being challenged to hold each other up."* I am so encouraged in our church family when I witness us holding each other up and supporting

each other through these challenging times. I thank God every day that I also see this... every day. Blessings.

Let us pray: *We thank you O God for all the people who prop us up when times are difficult. Help us also be those persons for others when they need support. We know none of us are strong enough on our own, but in Jesus Christ you support us all, so may that give us encouragement as we reach out to each other. Thank you for the hope that comes from the gospel. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

*O Lord Support Us* by Trinity College Choir, Cambridge

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0mubkYli8M>

*O Lord Support Us All Day Long* by Harvey Burgett

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMv-ysJ\\_r8E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMv-ysJ_r8E)

*Lord Support Us All Day Long* by Concordia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EqvtJnW7tF0>

*May the Lord Support Us* by Notre Dame Folk choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aftdsvuljwg>

*This Day V O Lord Support Us* by Bob Chilcott and the Sirens

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mA772zqzUoQ>

*O Lord Support Us All Day Long (Pott)* by Choir of Christ Church Cathedral

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drOHcocNgUI>

*Lord Support Us All Day Long* by Good Shepherd Institute

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wUBnxPv9pAA>

*Lord Support Us* (Carl Schalk) by Emanuel Lutheran Virtual Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UL9ZNd5KrNs>

*Hold Me, Lord* by Matthew Baute

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUMUSZ21mZI>

*He Will Hold Me Fast* by Keith and Kristyn Getty

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=936BapRFHaQ>

*Lift High the Cross* by Chancel Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbcBXYP4AIE>

*O God Our Help In Ages Past* by SE Samonte

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-hN740J6qA>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, February 16, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #274**

**A six-hundred-year prayer from Thomas a Kempis.**

*Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." (Mk. 11:24-26 NIV)*

Little is known about Thomas a Kempis except that one hundred years before the Reformation, he was a member of a Dutch Augustinian Monastery and part of a group called The Brethren For the Common Life. He is widely known however, for a short devotional classic he wrote entitled "*The Imitation of Christ.*" This modest book with keen insights on what it means to follow Christ has been translated into more than fifty languages and has been reprinted thousands of times.

We know more about the period in which Thomas a Kempis lived, the fourteenth century. It was a time called the "*calamitous century.*" Constant wars and repeated bouts of the Black Plague drove population down. The Great Schism tore the church apart, seating one pope in Rome and another in Avignon. In rural areas, roving marauders knew no restraints, and peasant revolts kept urban centers reeling with confusion. It was a rough time that sorely tested one's faith.

This prayer of his was first published in a "*Book of Medieval Prayers*", and more recently reprinted in "*All Will Be Well: A Gathering of Healing Prayers*," (Augsburg 1998). What drew me to it first was that it reminded me of how we are committed to intercessory prayer here at St. Paul's, not only in our Sunday Prayers of the church, but in our Wednesday Prayer group as well.

I also am drawn to the humility of Thomas's praying. He models an honesty and earnestness that we might well imitate in this modern-day world where conflict and tension threaten our witness and discipleship. I found myself not simply reading the prayer, but praying as I read it, and then thinking maybe others might have a similar blessed experience. May God bless you in all your praying.

Lord, I bring before you  
the needs of my parents, friends,  
brothers, sisters,  
all whom I love,  
and all who have asked me to pray for them.  
I pray that they may experience your help  
and the gift of your comfort,

protection from all dangers,  
deliverance from all sin,  
and freedom from pain.  
May they give you joyful thanks and praise.  
I also bring before you  
all those who have in any way  
offended or insulted me,  
or done me any harm.  
I also remember those  
whom I have hurt or offended or troubled  
by what I said or did  
knowingly or unknowingly.  
Lord, in your mercy, forgive all our sins against one another.  
Take from our hearts  
all suspicion, hard feelings,  
anger, dissention,  
and whatever else may diminish the love  
we should have for one another.  
Have mercy, O Lord, on all who ask your mercy.  
Give grace to all who need it,  
that we may come to eternal life. Amen.

*Sweet Hour of Prayer* by Radiance Acapella

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ph43J3pnBDo>

*Sweet Hour of Prayer* by Alan Jackson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pL41VzmOhg>

*Sweet Hour of Prayer* by Vagle Brothers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yz5pD6C9h-w>

*Hear My Prayer* by Maranatha

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7YwT71HcWKQ>

*Lord Hear My Prayer* by Eli Levin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUsREAYvbGc>

*O Lord Hear My Prayer* by Taize

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVIdY8ECJyg>

*I Am Praying* by International Songster

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8lwhYrfeqI>

*For You I Am Praying* by Twinkie Clark

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2xbp5hah9Y>

*The Prayer* by Celine Dion and Andrea Bocelli

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDsyvKJZz7g>

*The Prayer* by One Voice Children's Choir

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKf\\_LJoKHDo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKf_LJoKHDo)

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Ash Wednesday, February 17, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand

### Ash Wednesday and the Black Spot.

*By the sweat of your brow, you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.*" (Gen. 3:19 NIV)

When I was growing up in former United Lutheran Church in America (before it merged into the Lutheran Church in America and later the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), we didn't observe Ash Wednesday. We observed Lent, but Ash Wednesday, especially with an imposition of Ashes, was too Catholic (too *Roman Catholic*).

Therefore, the only ones I knew who observed Ash Wednesday, were the Catholics. You could tell. They had the black spots right in the middle of their foreheads. I don't remember seeing the shape of the cross. I only remember the spot.

That could be because the priests had so many to "*ash*," that what was intended to be a cross was just a spot. Or it could be that I only saw a spot because of *Treasure Island*, one of my favorite books, movies and Classics Comic Book.

It was Robert Louis Stevenson in 1881 who created the Black Spot as a literary device. It was a way for a pirate (or pirates) officially to pronounce a person's verdict of guilt and typically mark that pirate for death. If you received a black spot (made from wood ash) you knew you were likely to die.

Chapter Three of "*Treasure Island*" is called "*The Black Spot*" and details Billy Bones getting his black spot. Since then, the black spot has been used numerous times in other works of popular culture to signify judgement. This happens not only in pirate stories, but in other works, like the popular short story "*The Lottery*," published in 1948 in the *New Yorker* and read by many in English classes since then.

In "*The Lottery*," we follow a typical All-American town preparing for its annual lottery, only to discover at the end of the story that the Lottery is for someone to be sacrificed to death by stoning (early "*Hunger Games*?"). It was an ancient tradition done in order to have favorable crops (ancient Israel also had those who believed in this pagan ritual) In "*The Lottery*," the young girl to be sacrificed draws a "*Black Spot*."

*"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."* For us, receiving "*the black spot*" in the form of a cross reminds us not only of our mortality and the guilt of our sin, but also of the hope that comes from the Cross of Christ.

It is important to trace clearly the cross as we are marked by the ashes. That also takes us back to our baptism, when with the waters of baptism, the cross was also traced on our foreheads with the words, *“You have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.”*

Let us pray (From ELW Ash Wednesday) *Gracious God, out of your love and mercy you breathed into dust the breath of life, creating us to serve you and our neighbors. Call forth our prayers and acts of kindness, and strengthen us to face our mortality with confidence in the mercy of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

P.S. As an added “bonus,” I am attaching one of my personal favorite sermons, this one from Ash Wednesday, 2004. All these years later, it reminds me that even bad experiences can turn out to be occasions of recognizing God’s grace. Enjoy.

*We Rise Again from Ashes* by St. Francis de Sales church in Ajax, Ontario, Canada.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJvOeipJltA>

*We Rise Again from Ashes* by Tom Conry

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iPi9jOyuPUM>

*With These Ashes* by High Tacac

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RHeY4meo90>

*With These Ashes* by Norman Babia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPZWTcLWA2Y>

*Prayer for Ash Wednesday* by Debbie Wiseman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-s79bMxTlqg>

*Take These Ashes* by Sarah Hart

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKQjYYtUZLY>

*It Is Well With My Soul* by First Plymouth, Lincoln NE

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tyPEohF6qq8>

and just because I liked discovering it, quite by accident.... *Thuna Neere* by Living Stones Quartet. It’s in the Tamil language, but the translation is under the description.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLceGhDbe9c>

**“Broken For Us”**

**February 25, 2004**

**St. Paul’s Evangelical Lutheran Church**

**Wilmington, North Carolina**

**Pastor Mark Opgrand, preacher**

**GOSPEL: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

*In this passage Matthew sets forth a vision of genuine righteousness illustrated by three basic acts of Jewish devotion: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. Jesus does not denounce these acts--in the New Testament they are signs of singular devotion to God. Rather, he criticizes those who perform them in order to have a sense of self-satisfaction or to gain public approval. Care for the poor, intense prayer, and fasting with a joyous countenance are signs of loving dedication to God.*

[Jesus said to the disciples:] <sup>1</sup>"Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

<sup>2</sup>"So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>3</sup>But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup>so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

<sup>5</sup>"And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup>But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

<sup>16</sup>"And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>17</sup>But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup>so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

<sup>19</sup>"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>20</sup>but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where

neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup>For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Dear friends in Christ. Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let me just say it. It's been on my mind all week. Last Tuesday, while I was taking a photograph of one of Henry Rehder Sr.'s beautiful paintings in his home, I took an ever so slight step backwards... just enough to back into a several hundred years old authentic hand made hand-painted Japanese Imari plate. I knocked it from it's stand and send it crashing to the floor where it broke into many pieces.

In that moment, I began living out a personal Lenten experience. To be in Henry's home, with all those priceless art pieces is to experience the glory of God's handiwork through artisans from all over the world.... Climbing the stairs to see the treasures was a joy to behold, and I wanted to take pictures so I could remember them.

The most vivid picture, however, is the one in my mind. It was like that slow motion sometimes people tell you about before an auto accident...

- 1.One...take a picture
- 2.Two... frame a second picture
- 3.Three... step back slowly
- 4.Four... feel the table at the back of my leg
- 5.Five... hear something falling forward from the stand
- 6.Six... say "oh no, please no."
- 7.Seven... something is hanging in the air for a microsecond
- 8.Eight... it shatters
- 9.Nine... a chorus from downstairs "DOROTHY!..." (the housekeeper was cleaning upstairs)
- 10.Ten, without missing a beat "It was me... it was me.... I did it."
- 11.Eleven... Kyle bounding up the stairs

12. Twelve his look of horror followed by words of grace... "Don't worry about it. Don't worry about it."

13. Thirteen... Kristin right behind him...remembering 50 years of being conditioned never to do what I had just done... "Don't touch it. I'll take care of it."

14. Fourteen ... flashbacks to all those visits to gift shops as a child and holding my hands behind my back for fear of moments like this...

15. Fifteen... walking downstairs confessing my sin... "I broke one of the Imaris." "I broke one of the Imaris."

And of course, to a person, everyone (after the shock) said, "It's okay. Don't worry about it." Did that stop me from worrying about it? No. And that's partly because of a phrase that got stuck in my head. I honestly don't know if another soul even said these words...but they were lodged in my hearing like earwax you can't remove.

"YOU HAVE NO IDEA OF HOW MUCH THAT PLATE IS WORTH."

You have no idea.... Actually, I do. Sitting on the stand, beautifully displayed, hundreds of years old, an authentic, documented, collector's piece...In a word, it's worth a lot... Trust me. I've been on the internet researching this.... A LOT! And as a memory for those who have enjoyed the stories about its acquisition, it's worth much more...

"You have no idea how much that plate is worth." But yes, I do. And the answer is not much...I could not find one internet site that sells broken Imari plates. For the Rehder family, even the value of the memory has diminished...not entirely, of course, because in their grace (and with their humor), they now have the only Imari that ever made it's way into a sermon illustration.

But there's something to be learned here...After my confession and absolution, I started hearing some other stories about valuable things that were broken. Pastor John recollected a story told by Bishop Leonard Bolick about being a child in his grandmother's home and being told never to play with a certain vase that was a family heirloom. And yes, he did play with it, and yes it did break. What came out of breaking that priceless vase, however, and his shame and despair over it, is a memory of his grandmother putting her arms around him and telling him that she loved him, and that he was forgiven.

Henry Jr. told me about a time in the flower shop when someone brought in a ceramic urn which had held ashes for a family member for 15 years. Those ashes had recently been scattered, and they wanted to have a silk flower arrangement made. This urn was not an Imari, or an art piece. Nevertheless, it was valuable to the owners, so when Henry knocked it over, here was a family deeply distraught and determined that Henry was going to make this right...

Henry told me he did his best. He and the staff first tried gluing it...which was not acceptable. Eventually they found someone in the UNCW Anthropology Department who could clean off the glue and put it back together using the same techniques used for putting human skulls back together. It looked pretty good. But was the family satisfied? Not on your life! And these former regular customers never spoke to Henry again ...they even went out of their way to avoid him from that day forward.

Well, we understand the feelings that cause us to get attached to our treasures, and we get upset when they break. We get attached to things we have collected, things handed down to us, things that are part of our own history. We get attached to ourselves, and become distressed when we break down.

But like I said to the Rehder family, the only way that broken Imari now has value now is if it can remind us that nothing lasts forever except God and God's promises. It may, however, first take some brokenness to point us in that direction. Which brings us to tonight, where we have heard those words: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." It's more poetic than "You are going to die," but that's what these words mean as we begin our Lenten journey together.

As part of our journey this year, we are going to focus on the Marks of discipleship, particularly prayer. But -- in doing so, it is important tonight that we remember that the first mark of our discipleship will always be a literal one, which goes back to when we were baptized...when we were baptized into the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. That's when you and I were first marked on our foreheads with these words: "Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked by the cross of Christ forever."

In baptism, our unique perspective on life begins, where we recognize and confess that we're on a journey ... a journey in life where things are going to break... where plates will break... vases will break... urns will break... where relationships will break... where you will break..

That's why these words of Jesus are so helpful and tell it like it is...

*19"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; 20but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

But the point here is not to make this an instruction to "never have anything nice because it will break." Rather, it's an encouragement to keep our eye on the greater treasures.

Bishop Leonard's grandmother immediately saw the value of her little grandson far surpassed the heirloom, and Leonard's memory of her love for him continues to be with him as a beautiful picture of God's grace. I will always remember the grace of the Rehder family and their healing humor. What a treasure.

Henry's former customers may still carry anger over that broken urn, and there is a lot of irony here.... what did that "precious" urn contain? Ashes. When he first told me the story, I thought he broke the urn with the ashes still in them...that could be very emotional... but those ashes had already been scattered. The urn never held more than ashes and never really contained the loved one. Don't we know that we're all just renting these bodies we live in?

The heart of who we are belongs to God. And that's why it is important to: "Remember that we are dust, and to dust we shall return." Remember that we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked by the cross of Christ forever. Remember that God created and loves us, and we are precious in his sight. Remember that Jesus loves all of humanity with such depth that he will allow himself to be broken for us.... Wow.

And that's finally the difference between a broken Imari and a true treasure. The difference is in the value of it. What is the difference in value between "not much" and "infinite worth?" What is the difference in value between something made by an Asian artist who died centuries ago and a living God who continues to create the new heaven and the new earth....? What is the

difference in value between us who would weep over a broken plate and Jesus who weeps over a broken world?

The difference is more than we'll ever know.... But I tell you this. If we pray and read the scriptures and walk with Jesus this Lent, by the time Easter comes, we're going to have a pretty good idea of how much we're worth....of how much we're treasured... of how much we're loved...by Jesus Christ our Lord... Jesus--who was broken for us that we might experience God's wonderful grace. Amen.

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, February 18, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #276

### So what are you “*getting*” for Lent this year?

*I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. 6 For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; 7 for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. (2 Tim. 1:5-7 NRS)*

The “*What are you getting?*” question is usually associated with Christmas. “*So what are you ‘getting’ for Christmas?*” we ask. Lent, traditionally, is the other way around, posing the question, “*So what are you ‘giving up’ for Lent this year?*” There’s a big difference between “*getting*” and “*giving up.*”

Other churches have encouraged Lenten sacrifices more regularly than Lutherans. In Roman Catholic tradition, meat was given up during Fridays, with a fish substitute. As a kid, I remember school lunches on Fridays during Lent always featured “*fish sticks.*” I wonder if that reflected local “*Roman Catholic influence.*”

Among things traditionally given up for Lent are these: beer, wine, hard liquor, coffee, cigarettes, meat, soda, sweets (especially chocolate), and junk food. I have also read suggestions about giving up things like: Netflix or Amazon Prime, video games, skipping workouts, social media, Instagram filters, makeup, shaving, bottled water, food delivery, negativity, endless snacking, swear words, frivolous spending, and gossip.

I appreciate the “*theory*” or “*theology*” behind giving up something for Lent, reminding us of Jesus’ sacrifice or adopting and adapting the ancient practice of fasting. I applaud those who choose this practice and stick with it. At the same time, I see of value the notion in not just “*giving up*” something, but “*adding*” something to our Lenten experience or discipline.

However, in order to *add* something, like added *prayer, devotional time, Bible reading, or performing deliberate acts of charity*, we might have to give up something else. At the very least, it may necessary that we sacrifice the time we spend on certain things in order add time for something else that enriches our lives.

Because this year of pandemic has resulted in us already giving up (or modifying) many things we have valued, (including in person worship, fellowship activities, and in classroom education, for example), I hope this Lent may be an occasion to add something meaningful to our lives. We sure can use it!

With all the Covid deaths and infections, we have regularly been reminded that *“We are dust, and to dust we shall return.”* As Christians, however, remembering our mortality and acknowledging our limited time on this earth need not be a burden.

Today and going forward can also be an occasion for us to recognize and celebrate that in our baptism, we belong to God. When we die, nothing else will matter but the grace of God who calls us home.

For this day, and going forward, then, what we are *“getting”* is the precious *“gift of life”* that God has given us.

Taking time to remember God’s grace in all this, and exploring the blessings that come from remembering God’s gifts, may well be worth undertaking, especially when we find ourselves falling short in what we are trying to give up these forty days.

Let us pray. *O God we pray that we shall be open to what you are giving us this Lent. May it be time to reflect on your love, faithfulness, and determination to bring us close to you through Jesus Christ our Lord. If we can give up something to make more room for you, grant us strength to do that. If we can add something that draws us closer to you, help us recognize that. And always along the way, continue to walk with us that we may be strengthened to face what is ahead. Amen.*

*Lord Who Throughout These Forty Days* by First Methodist Houston

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7LiDUF0s0>

*The Glory of These Forty Days* by Agnes Choo ELW 320

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qnF7vDmrYgY>

*The Glory of These Forty Days* by Tony Alonso

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjytwJe\\_RIA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjytwJe_RIA)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zj-5mk544aU>

*The Glory of These Forty Days* by Orchard Enterprises

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zuFN3wTpZ-s>

*Bless Now, O God the Journey* by Good Shepherd Lancaster

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xTkFNew4t0M>

*Bless Now, O God the Journey* by Augsburg

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lx8QYLoBT6w>

*Bless Now, O God the Journey* by Golden Ears United Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jT42Jfx9vdA>

*Jesus Priceless Treasure* by Koine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73CQ8WVImcE>

*Lord Who Throughout These Forty Days* by Advent Birmingham

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzqjgIKoEpU>

*Lord Who Throughout These Forty Days* by Walk With Faith

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5c2BikzUp6o>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, February 19, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #277**

**“Hello. This is 911. What’s your emergency?”**

27 And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

(Rom. 8:27-28 NRS)

I heard the siren. And the blaring horn. It sounded of an ambulance roaring through an intersection warning everyone to get out of the way. It hurt my ears. But this was no mere ambulance. It was my iPhone, from my breast pocket, somehow sending out an emergency distress call.

I was hastily trying to make my way from preparing the sanctuary for prayer group when it happened. The phone screamed distress, and when I pulled it out of my pocket I saw to my horror, that, along with its blaring distress signal, it was dialing emergency services. Quickly I hit cancel, but it was too late. Immediately I had a call back.

**“Hello. This is 911. What’s your emergency?”**

*“Oh, I’m so sorry. I was just trying to get from the sanctuary to our prayer group and somehow it accidentally called. I’m so sorry.”*

**“So this is not an emergency?”**

*“No. I’m really sorry.”*

**“Please tell me your name and where you are calling from.”**

*“This is Mark Opgrand O P G R A N D. I’m a pastor calling from St. Paul’s Lutheran Church 12 North 6th St. Again, I am so sorry. I don’t know how it happened.”*

**“Please verify your number.”**

*“(910)-620-9021. Again, I’m so sorry.”*

**“That’s all right. Have a nice night.”**

Most people with “*smart phones*” have experienced a phenomenon called “*butt dialing*.” That’s when your phone accidentally calls another person. Maybe you’ve received one of these calls. You keep saying “hello” but it sounds like someone walking through a parking lot. The term “*butt dialing*” comes from people’s phones making these calls from the back pocket.

Activating the emergency distress is only similar to “*butt dialing*” in respect to making an “*unwanted call*.” When the emergency service is activated, the alert is so loud you know the call is being made and you know you will get a call back if you try to first cancel the call.

When investigating how this might have happened, I discovered that if a side button is pressed several times in a row, the distress call will be made. Thankfully, I also learned how to deactivate it and make a call only the “normal way.”

A couple of things strike me about this experience. This happened before participating in our Ash Wednesday liturgy, which is full of confession. In our traditional confession we admit to many things, but speaking honestly here, sometimes they feel so generalized that I don't feel too personally convicted.

For example ... “that we have sinned by our fault, by our own fault, by our own most grievous fault, in thought, word and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone...”

I've “*confessed*” that many times... and to things like: “*we have not loved you... our neighbors... shut our ears... fast unfaithfulness, pride, envy, hypocrisy, and apathy... self-indulgent appetites, exploitation, negligence, failure to share ... neglect, indifference, false judgements. uncharitable thoughts ... prejudice and contempt, waste and pollution, lack of concern...*”

Because this confession is written in the plural (WE), it's easy to think, well, that's not me... or I am not that bad. “We” may be, but of course, not “me.” I'm simply a little off course once in a while.

What if God ... knowing our hearts, (meaning MY heart, so it is personal) fashioned a kind of confession that absolutely nailed everywhere I have fallen short?

What if God put all that together and formed it into a kind of distress call I could not escape?

What if this long list of things from which I deserve God's wrath and punishment came at me like an ambulance screaming through an intersection, or a phone blaring from that pocket which is next to my heart?

What if, when trying to cancel that call or shut it off, God called me back?

**“Hello. This is God. What's your emergency?”**

*“Oh, I'm so sorry. Somehow I accidentally called. I'm really sorry. I hope I'm not in trouble.”*

**“So you are not in distress?”**

*“I don't think so.”*

**“Is anyone near you in distress?”**

*“Well, I suppose so.”*

**“Is there anything you can do help?”**

*“I thought that was your job.”*

**“Try again.”**

*“Well, I guess I may have fallen short a little.”*

**“A little?”**

*“Okay, a lot. Do you want me to list the ways?”*

**“That would be a good start.”**

*“For what?”*

**“For Lent, mortal. Repentance, self-examination, turning a new direction, getting right with me. Receiving forgiveness. Preparing for the paschal feast. Who did you think you were calling?”**

*“Well, I thought it was an accident.”*

**“Not exactly. My Spirit put in the call on your behalf. It’s called intercession. See Romans 8. You need my help.”**

*“Well, if you say so.”*

**“No, you need to say so. That opens the conversation. You’ll feel lot better if you honestly take a look at yourself and admit you need my help.”**

*“Okay, but I need to get to that Ash Wednesday service now. I promise I’ll pay better attention.”*

**“Well, I’m glad I got your attention. Have a nice night.”**

Let us pray: **Create in me a clean heart, O God and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with your free spirit. Amen.**

*Create in me a Clean Heart* by Keith Green

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGPmMcDeRpM>

*Create in me a Clean Heart* by Sovereign Reign

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uurY-GHKBOU>

*Create in me a Clean Heart* by Maranatha Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2fVliokregE>

*Change My Heart O God* by Eddie Espinosa

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=imvBcCRIRHw>

*Change My Heart O God* by Tiana Jade Rachel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGynqtXD594>

*Restore to Me* by Kutless

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Otyr2uIS0o>

*I Repent* by Steve Green

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HO5nWZD8Tt0>

*I Repent* by Cadet Sisters

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ktrqHfvMC0s>

*Return to the Lord* by Paul Tate and Deanna Light

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhIQEZ2bLY>

*Return to the Lord* by Steve Gray

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zhIcD5bsl4>

*Ashes to Ashes* by Dan Schutte

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uB\\_BMUZ4KkM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uB_BMUZ4KkM)

*Teshuva We Return to You* by Teresa Thomas

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ry8Bkkm8biw>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday February 19, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #278

### Getting back in (physical) touch.

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: ... a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; (Eccl. 3:1,5 NRS)*

I'm not sure if St. Paul's has always been a "hugging" church, but it has been since I first attended in May, 1995. This is not something I had experienced in my West Lafayette, Indiana congregation. I used to joke that everyone at Our Saviour Lutheran Church hugged me, but it was only once, and that was the day I said goodbye after eleven years serving as their Purdue Lutheran Ministry campus pastor. OSLC was a "handshaking" church.

Here at St. Paul's, when Sunday morning worship finished and people exited, people and pastors hugged. I followed the lead of my then senior pastor, John Misenheimer, who was well known for his warm hugs. This was all quite nice and friendly. Sometimes, however, I had to remember when visitors from "up north" or more "reserved congregational cultures" attended and reached out for a handshake, it was a "handshake" and not a "hug" that was expected. Hugs might come later as we got to know each other better.

Ash Wednesday in 2020 was on February 26. After that, we had two more Sunday services before churches, schools, and businesses began "sheltering in place," focusing on the three "W's" (washing hands, wearing masks, and waiting six feet apart).

During a recent funeral I realized how conditioned I have become to be careful about physical contact. Two people reached out to shake my hand after the service. I had not shaken a stranger's bare hand in nearly a year. It happened in the sanctuary where, after 23 years of sharing worship, I have conservatively hugged (or shaken hands) 52 Sundays times 23 years times 150 per Sunday for 180,000 hugs or handshakes. Since last March, zero hugs or handshakes.

For many months now, our "touching" has been either "virtual," or while wearing gloves when distributing communion. That's become our "new normal." But feeling my hand in another's reminded me of how much I have missed the physical contact that has been so much a part of our lives together.

Hopefully, as our population becomes vaccinated and closer contact becomes safer, we'll be able once again to share hugs and handshakes. For now, we will need to continue to observe the three "W's." Thankfully and hopefully, becoming vaccinated will encourage us to be less fearful of getting too close to someone. I'm sure my own recent vaccinations kept me from feeling "Oh no, please don't shake my hand." But just feeling those hearty handshakes

reminded me of how much I have missed what was once so routine. I look forward to the hugs again.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 is a well-known scripture that deals with the balanced, cyclical nature of life that declares there is a proper time for everything.

*To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven:*

*2 A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted;*

*3 A time to kill, And a time to heal; A time to break down, And a time to build up;*

*4 A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance;*

*5 A time to cast away stones, And a time to gather stones; **A time to embrace, And a time to refrain from embracing;***

*6 A time to gain, And a time to lose; A time to keep, And a time to throw away;*

*7 A time to tear, And a time to sew; A time to keep silence, And a time to speak;*

*8 A time to love, And a time to hate; A time of war, And a time of peace. (Eccl. 3:1-8 NKJ)*

Within that cycle of life are words that remind us of where we have been in respect to “touching/embracing” this past year. While this has been a season to refrain from embracing the familiar ways, with hugs and handshakes, our spirits nevertheless have fully embraced each other through God’s love.

As we pray for the world’s healing, we look forward to that time when physical touch, as well as spiritual, will be shared and enjoyed once again. “Hugs and handshakes” to you all.

Let us pray. *We continue to ask for healing from the coronavirus dear God, and pray for all those who are working hard to provide vaccines and treatment plans. We miss our human touch, and while we know we can still be “in touch” a variety of ways, we look forward to that time when handshakes and hugs can be extended without fear. Protect us we pray, and help our world get well. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

*Turn Turn Turn* is a classic adaptation of this scripture. Composed by Pete Seeger, here are many versions to explore and enjoy. I wonder which ones you will like best. Blessings.

*Turn Turn Turn* by The Byrds (the best known classic)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKP4cfU28vM>

*Turn Turn Turn* by Judy Collins and composer Pete Seeger

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qURAnrk30ng>

*Turn Turn Turn* by Roger McGuinn and Bruce Springsteen (live)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZx-QYNBTug>

*Turn Turn Turn* by The Seekers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRg9NkldjVs>

*Turn Turn Turn* by Johnny Cash and Judy Collins

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1-PljB3uJs>

*Turn Turn Turn* by Dolly Parton

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VmYcWkkOMgc>

*Turn Turn Turn* by Dolly Parton (live)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2IWvYGN1WQ>

*Turn Turn Turn* by Orphan Moon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvVQnRRpiSA>

*Turn Turn Turn* by Nina Simone

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZv-RNdmY0I>

*Turn Turn Turn* by Pete Seeger Live with five new verses

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7pzic4mf7o>

*Turn Turn Turn* by Vern Gosdin (featuring Roger McGuinn)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1GIVAewu6yM>

*Turn Turn Turn* by One in Seven (Prostate Cancer Awareness)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJtBauShfHo>

*Turn Turn Turn* by Mary Hopkins on Opportunity Knocks 1968 (an early American Idol)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-HgRD9yjug>

*Turn Turn Turn* by Rick Price and Jack Jones

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSI5cl8hgg4>

*Turn Turn Turn* instrumental version by David Lanz on piano

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGDhexfZ6dl>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, February 23, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand # 279**

**When saying “good-bye” is a Godly thing.**

*After saying good-bye to them, he went to the mountain to pray. (Mk. 6:46 NET)*

The Greek word translated in Mark 6:46 as “good-bye” is “*apotosso*,” literally meaning “to take leave of” or “to withdraw oneself from someone”. In this scripture, it has variously been translated as “taken leave of,” (ESV), “sent them away,” (KJV), “bidding them farewell,” (NAS), “leaving them,” (NIV), “saying farewell,” (NRS). In the NET, NJB, and NET the word used is “good-bye.”

But where does “good-bye” in English come from? We know it is common to say “good-bye” when we withdraw from someone (“*apotosso*”), and we certainly know the experience of good-bye.

Frederick Buechner in *Whistling in the Dark* takes a winsome look at “good-bye.”

*“A woman with a scarf over her head hoists her six-year-old up onto the first step of the school but. “Goodbye,” she says.*

*A father on the phone with his freshman son has just finished bawling him out for his poor grade. There is mostly silence at the other end of the line. “Well, goodbye,” the father says.*

*When the girl at the airport hears the announcement that her plane is starting to board, she turns to the boy who is seeing her off. “I guess this is goodbye,” she says.*

*The noise of the traffic almost drowns out the sound of the world, the shape of it lingers on the old man’s lips. He tries to look vigorous and resourceful as he holds out his hand to the other old man. “Goodbye.” This time they say it so nearly in unison that it makes them both smile.*

*It was a long time ago that the words “God be with you” appeared into the word goodbye, but every now and again some trace of them still glimmers through.”*

I hadn’t thought of “goodbye” this way. For me, it has just been one of those words we say when we part. “Farewell” makes more sense because I hope, in parting, that you will “fare well.”

I looked up the origin of “goodbye”, and discovered that it first popped up in literature between 1555 and 1575, and indeed was a contraction of the English “God be with ye” or “Godbwyte.”

It is believed the phrase was influenced by terms like “good day” and “good evening”, transitioning then from “God be with ye” to “God-b’wye” to “good-b’wy” and finally ending in today’s blessing of “goodbye.”

But I have to admit. I sure am liking the idea that whenever I say “goodbye” to someone, at the heart of my farewell is “God be with ye.”

P.S. Did you know a Spanish word translated “goodbye” is “adios”, and it literally means “to God?” Kind of like a toast. I like that too. **“To God! Adios. God be with you. Goodbye.”**

Let us pray. *Almighty and ever-living God, you are with us in our “hellos” and our “goodbyes” and in our “in-betweens.” Thank you for your constant presence and support. We pray your presence will strengthen the bonds we have with one another and in all our comings and goings. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

God Be With You Till Meet Again by SE Samonte

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZHrtHdbdOE>

God Be With You Till Meet Again by Ely Cathedral

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hvaysA1MYQ>

God Be With You Till Meet Again by Ella Fitzgerald

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hK1GpgZMcs8>

God Be With You Till Meet Again by 9 year old Ely Lutz and his Dad

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFQfQFDBXWA>

God Be With You Till Meet Again Russian version by Simon Khorolskiy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGWOKT7Hfvs>

God Be With You Till Meet Again by Daniel Beck

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXFnxFJp-VY>

God Be With You Till Meet Again by Baylor A Capella Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lv7Y8TzClrQ>

God Be With You Till Meet Again by Gentri

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bkBjhC\\_37E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bkBjhC_37E)

God Be With You Till Meet Again by Mormon Tabernacle Choir

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQlv\\_xUYATg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQlv_xUYATg)

God Be With You Till Meet Again by Chorale de Kigali

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7J93UD0x31E>

God Be With You Till Meet Again by Virtual Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UoKyL12I90>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, February 24, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #280**

**Good grief. Now even I'm relating the gospel to Marvel Superheroes.**

*For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, 23 but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom. 7:22-25 NRS)*

I've been thinking a lot about rage and anger that has become so familiar in our culture these days ... and wondering how the gospel might address this. But instead of my mind shifting immediately to Jesus, I thought first about *"The Incredible Hulk."* (And that's when I realized how much I have come to be influenced by our own Senior Pastor Jonathan Conrad, a self-described big Marvel Comics fan.)

*"The Incredible Hulk"* is a popular Marvell comic book character and member of *"The Avengers,"* a group of superheroes who protect earth (but who doesn't know this already?) I first became acquainted with *"The Hulk"* when it was a popular TV show in the 1970's. At Luther Seminary this was a show that regularly filled the Bockman Hall TV room.

The Incredible Hulk had what we now would call *"anger management"* issues. That is to say, he had a genetic mutation that transformed him into a huge, powerful and destructive creature whenever he became really angry.

In seminary, we used to have fun threatening each other with the Hulk's mantra, *"You don't want to make me mad. You won't like me when I'm mad."* We'd laugh every time we said this, even more so when classmate Richie, who had *"pouty"* issues and was nicknamed *"The Incredible Sulk."* Richie regularly delivered his variation of the Hulks's famous line. *"You don't want to make me sad,"* he would say. *"You won't like me when I'm sad."*

All this calls to mind an awareness that there are parts of ourselves we would just as soon keep hidden, but which will, from time to time, come out especially when certain *"buttons"* get pushed. I think of anger, depression, rage, panic, and fear, for starters.

Even Saint Paul struggled with this. *"I do not understand my own actions. For I do not what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.... for I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do."* (Romans 7:15; 19.

St. Paul would clearly identify with the Hulk. So would Martin Luther, because Luther rightfully observed that a Christian is both sinner and saint.

Too often we tend to understand ourselves in radical either/or categories. We are either all good or all bad. We're either nice guy Bruce Banner or rampaging Hulk. We're either Godly saints or devilish sinners.

Realistically, however, human beings are complicated, and Christians express themselves paradoxically. In Christ, we can therefore be saint and sinner simultaneously (Luther used the Latin *simil justis et peccator* to describe this).

How Luther lived with this self-understanding was to look to the hope expressed by Paul himself after Paul described his weaknesses in Romans 7: "*Wretched man [Hulk?] that I am. Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*" (Romans 7:25-25a).

So the next time you feel yourself getting a little out of control, remember that as God loves Saint Paul, Martin Luther, The Incredible Hulk and Richie the Sulk, God also loves you. Trust this powerful love to strengthen your preferred self while your wretched self is calmed by the full force of God's Incredible... Grace.

Let us pray. *With so much anger and rage around us, give us grace, O God, to keep calm and not get out of control ourselves. Bless us with patience and perseverance, kindness and self-control. Support our church that we can become a ministry that welcomes all people, saints and sinners, but also provides a safe space for healthy conversation where our best selves don't have to regret what our worst selves might say or do. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Amazing Grace* by King's Singers and Soundabout Inclusive Choir (this version will move you)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AdcUbjPr2A>

*Amazing Grace/My Chains are Gone* by Pentatonix

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Obp-9BEZE1c>

*Amazing Grace* with several jazzy chord changes (interesting) by Jazz Duets

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPFo\\_LmqnJg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPFo_LmqnJg)

*Marvelous Grace* by Pilgrim Mennonite Mission

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xUYE8s\\_Efw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xUYE8s_Efw)

*Marvelous Grace* by Fountainview Academy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYJK6wjhUuM>

*Grace Greater than our Sin* by Nathan Drake

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxKxLVKFrqc>

*He Giveth More Grace* by Living Stones Quartet

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzhKGPireAA>

*Song of Grace* by Jarod Esby

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yyRF9bRYy54>

*Grace Will Lead Me Home* by David Dunn

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3WeqqTKqhU>

*Grace Greater* by Norton Hall Band

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=viAjoOI7Wk4>

*Your Grace Is All I Need Today*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ni6-blGlig>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, February 25, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #281**

**Parable of the Lost Hat (True Story).**

*"Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? 9 When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' 10 Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (Lk. 15:8-10 NRS)*

This happened yesterday, February 24, 2021. Our conversations Bible study the night before had just featured Luke's Parable of the Lost Sheep and the Parable of the Lost Coins.

I had just pulled into Trader Joe's for the first time in many months. As I exited my vehicle, a strong gust of wind lifted my "bucket styled" (but not wind proof) hat. I turned quickly before it could get away, but lo, it was not to be seen. Intuitively I got on "all fours" to search under my car, then the cars on either side, and then the cars on the far side of the lane.

While on my knees, the woman who owned the car parked next to me came out with her groceries. I explained to her that I was fine. It was just that my hat had blown away. Perhaps when she pulled out, it might be under her car. But no. She pulled away, revealing nothing. Where could it be? I looked all around, again on my knees. I was like the woman in the parable, except that I could not find my hat anywhere. Finally, I gave up; I grabbed a cart and walked toward the front door. Dang. I liked that hat.

As I was about to reach Trader Joe's main entrance, when a car pulled next to me. It was the woman who had been next to me, now smiling and holding my hat out to me.

*"Where on earth was it?" I asked.*

*"It was out on the road," she replied. "I wasn't sure what it was as it was rolling past me. But then I thought, that must be his hat. Here."*

With profound thanks and as much joy as the woman finding her lost coins, I stuffed it securely in my pocket.

In this "parable" did not find my lost hat. I would not have found it, as it blew a good fifty yards from where I was parked, past the side entrance to Trader Joes and onto the back street. And since I would exit the opposite direction, I would not have found it. If not for the kindness of that stranger, and her seeing me hunting for my hat, it would not have found its way back to me.

The point of Jesus' parable was to illustrate the joy that God and the angels experience when a sinner repents. Another time Jesus might have shared a variation of the parable where a stranger finds the coins and returns them to woman who lost them.

Either way, we can all identify with what it feels like to lose something, and then by the grace of God, (and the kindness of someone who took time to return it), rejoice at its being found.

Let us pray. *Thank you, O God for all the joy in heaven when we are found, and thank for the kindness of strangers who also find what we have lost. During this time of pandemic disconnect, we are especially thankful for those unexpected moments of joy. Amen.*

*Rejoice Give Thanks and Sing* by Gross Pointe Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOUzszNIBAME>

*Rejoice Give Thanks and Sing* by First Call A Capella

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-OMKSUjG88>

*Rejoice Give Thanks and Sing* by John Wesley Slider

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DCPZ-GvU0IY>

*Rejoice Give Thanks and Sing* by Haven

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-5TQcFeUlc>

*Heaven is Singing for Joy* ELW 664 by GIA Publications

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ULd7RM3mfKo>

*Heaven is Singing for Joy* by Pablo Sosa

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4AKUVnKTq0>

*O Sing To God Above* ELW 555 by Sammamish Hills Ministry

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3JviWgunLQM>

*O Sing To God Above* ELW 555 by Lynn Kim

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pGPN7sj6Y5M>

*The Trumpets Sound the Angels Sing* ELW 531 by Divine Hymns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5NKgLQY7kH0>

*The Trumpets Sound the Angels Sing* ELW 531 by Geneva Presbyterian Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-l-BqZoGfs>

*My Lord What a Morning* ELW 438 by Tarleton Choral Program

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKDJrqlfIOc>

*Joy to the World* by E Power Biggs and Gregg Smith Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgV8YwsDwkM>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, February 26, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #282**

***The Little Camellia Who Could***

*The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. (Song of Solomon 2:12 NRS)*

*"The Little Engine Who Could"* is a popular folk tale that when published in 1930 became one of the most popular and influential children's books of all time. In the original tale, a long train must be pulled over a high mountain after its engine breaks down.

Larger engines, treated anthropomorphically, are asked to pull the train; for various reasons they refuse. The request is sent to a small engine, who agrees to try. The engine overcomes a seemingly impossible task and succeeds in pulling the train over the mountain while repeating the motto: *"I-think-I-can."*

The motto, however, was first mentioned in a 1906 sermon by the Reverend Charles S. Wing and published in the New York Tribune. Since then, and with the 1930 book version, *"I think I can I think I can"* has become an encouragement whenever people face and overcome seemingly impossible odds.

This phrase came to mind this week as I walked up my front steps. There, in the crevasse of the third step up, was a solitary flower surrounded by several leaves and looking like it might have been fashioned to be a corsage.

It was a camellia! Breaking through the mortar in the step was a pink camellia! The nearest other camellia was at the edge of our property at least thirty feet away. Where on earth did that camellia come from and how did it break through that mortar?

How much darkness did that plant have to fight its way through in order to reach sunlight? How did it know where to go? How had the seedling gotten under the steps in the first place? A camellia had never appeared on that step before. Why now?

Gazing upon that little pink camellia, I realized *"I think I can. I think I can. I think I can"* is not just for little blue trains. Even more than a little train engine story, the *"Little Camellia Who Could"* inspires a very serious reminder that what seems impossible for us to imagine is most certainly possible for God.

Jesus himself used seedling/plant imagery when his disciples questioned their own faith to accomplish something: *"For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will*

*say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."* (Matt. 17:20 NRS)

We are beginning to have days where hope is being renewed. Don't overlook the little ways that God might be reminding you that God is in control. God knows God can. God knows God can. God knows God can. Blessings.

*Let us pray. We look for signs of hope around us. Keep our eyes open to those signs and wonders, we pray. As we hold fast to the faith that has kept us close to you thus far, remind us that with you, all things are possible. Amen.*

*There in God's Garden* by Jeremy Bankson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aoeHbHNW19I>

*There in God's Garden* by Maynooth-Madawaska Communities of Faith

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UIOPOxglEVE>

*Where Have All the Flowers Gone* by Kingston Trio

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bl3QVsW30j0>

*Where Have All the Flowers Gone* Kingston Trio

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtuPLwmpWyg>

*The Garden Song* by David Mallet

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1oiVEWFHrs>

*The Garden Song* (different from above) by Jason Upton

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dV8RkGxWBDU>

*We Plow the Fields and Scatter* by All Saints Church Northhampton

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWHMZsf-Ano>

*The Garden* by Kari Jobe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y43Z0WJLDS4>

*The Garden* by Jimmy Scott (a funeral song)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VN6A6TfmeI>

*Loveletter from God for You* - with Flowers of France and beautiful verses

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jt31Fx8s1j8>

*When the Flowers of God Shall Bloom* by The Inspirations

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frqVNzA815U>

*In the Garden* by Garment of Praise Quartet

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQ2Mcd7pX20>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, March 1, 2021** not by Pastor Mark Opgrand but **by Deacon Susan Jackson #283**

**A deeper look at Lenten fasting.**

*Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with **fasting** and sackcloth and ashes.<sup>4</sup> I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, "Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments, <sup>5</sup> we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances. <sup>6</sup> We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land. (Dan. 9:3-6 NRS)*

Recently, I saw a Facebook post that suggested instead of fasting from certain foods or possessions, we should instead fast from certain emotions and behaviors: frustration, anger, resentment, harmful words, and worries attributed to St. Francis' 2017 Lenten message.

As Kevin the Lamb's desire to know what the meaning of Lent continues, his questions have sparked childhood and teenage memories of soup dinners, worship services, and the discipline of "giving something up", or fasting, during Lent.

There is nothing inherently wrong from fasting. This is a spiritual discipline that helps us to remember that God gives us what we need daily. Yet, it often turns into a race to see whom can hold out from chocolate, sodas, tv, or social media the longest.

As a teen, I am not sure that this was the best way to turn away from those things that hinder us from discovering God's grace. After all, does that can of soda or Reese's Cup *REALLY* have that much of an impact on my faith and the ways in which I follow God?

There is a correlation to spiritual, emotional, and physical health of course, but without intentionality, fasting fails to have the proper effect on our spiritual life. Without intentional thought, fasting from chocolate or soda might change our eating habits for six weeks, but probably has little impact on how we change our hearts to turn towards God.

Intentionality might look like taking the money spent on those items and setting aside as a tithe. Intentionality might look like reviewing one's overall diet and health habits, reflecting upon ways we can make our bodies stronger and healthier to be a vessel spreading God's gospel- and incorporating those changes daily, so that they are part of our routine well beyond Lent.

Unfortunately, most fasting disciplines fail to address the spirituality behind the practice, resulting in lost focus and lost meaning.

I am now much more intentional about my Lenten practices. For any who prefer to fast from foods and material items, I do hope that it does deeply impact your relationship with God. With all the stigma surrounding health and food disorders, I do not often discuss fasting from foods, but recommend fasting from those things that distract you from God.

I do think all of us should look at how, where, and why we spend our time and fast from those things that are complete time-suckers, that cause us to feel pain and anxiety, and that cause us to be in broken relationship with each other. That looks differently for everyone, so I encourage you to reflect upon that privately.

Instead of fasting, the past few Lents, I have focused on adding something into my routine that I've been neglecting to do. Our overall health is important to the way that we live out our faith, but so is our spiritual life.

Intentional Prayer time, intentional quiet time away from the madness, intentional exercise are all ways that I have been grounded in this strange Lenten journey this year. Fasting from those things that truly harm our relationship with God is certainly appropriate in this year that has been full of loss, of grief, and of hope.

No matter your own Lenten practices, I hope you find something that renews your faith and returns you to the Lord so that you can experience God's redeeming grace. While it is okay to rest with the grief, rest with the sadness, rest with the pain we have felt over the past year, God provides a community that offers support, hope, and love. I hope that you all will be able to experience love in God's fullness in your own way!

From Pope Francis's Lenten Message this year *"Dear brothers and sisters, every moment of our lives is a time for believing, hoping and loving. The call to experience Lent as a journey of conversion, prayer and sharing of our goods, helps us – as communities and as individuals – to revive the faith that comes from the living Christ, the hope inspired by the breath of the Holy Spirit and the love flowing from the merciful heart of the Father."*

Let us pray: *Redeeming God, we give thanks for the grace you freely give us. Equip us with the tools to turn towards you and away from those things that distract us from experiencing the fullness your mercy provides. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.*

*Psalm 51, Shane and Shane:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=px-eU1QjQiU>

*Ubi caritas et amor* Antiphona (Gründonnerstag), Choir of

St. Abuscus: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1luMSNulkc&list=PLvg\\_cEtERAOfTQL2ifQ-SkILVb2I1TBiv&index=6](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1luMSNulkc&list=PLvg_cEtERAOfTQL2ifQ-SkILVb2I1TBiv&index=6)

*Awake my Soul*, Mumford and Sons:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFQVtiIRDuA>

*Pergolesi: God Of Mercy And Compassion* · Benedictines Of Mary, Queen Of Apostles

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXzytT3mh\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXzytT3mh_o)

*The King of Love My Shepherd Is*, Koine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LF2M8nvKK9k>

**Relating tithing to Lent (sounds boring, but isn't)**

*[Jesus] was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. (Mk. 1:13 NRS)*

After Deacon Susan's thoughtful Lenten reflection on fasting yesterday, I happened onto a very interesting observation about Lent and tithing. I had never thought about tithing this way.

The observations come from one of my favorite writers, Frederick Buechner. In *Beyond Words: Daily Readings in the ABC's of Faith* (pg. 223), he observed the relationship between the ancient practice of tithing and how we devote ourselves to Lenten disciplines.

The practice of tithing he reminds us, is about giving a tenth of your yearly income to some holy use. For Christians, to observe the forty-days of Lent is to do the same thing with roughly a tenth of each year's days.

In this we look to Jesus, and how, after being baptized by John in the river Jordan, Jesus went off alone into the wilderness, where he spent forty days asking himself questions about what it meant to be Jesus.

During Lent, Buechner says, Christians are supposed to ask, one way or another, what it means to be themselves. Interesting.

Buechner he came up with several questions he invited the reader to consider:

- *If you had to bet everything you have on whether there is a God or whether there isn't, which side would get your money and why?*
- *When you look at your face in the mirror, what do you see in it that you most like and what do you see in it that you most despise?*
- *If you had only one last message to leave to the handful of people who are most important to you, what would it be in twenty-five words or less?*
- *Of all the things you have done in your life, what is the one you would most like to undo? Which is the one what makes you happiest to remember?*

- *Is there any person in the world, or cause that, if circumstances called for it, you would be willing to die for?*
- *If this were the last day of your life, what would you do with it?*

I thought these were very thought-provoking questions, the kinds of questions we might, but don't often think about, during Lent.

But then Buechner shared what I call an *"aha moment,"* when he concludes: *"To hear yourself try to answer questions like these is to begin to hear something not only of who you are, but of both what you are becoming and what you are failing to become. It can be a pretty depressing business all in all, but if sackcloth and ashes are at the start of it, something like Easter may be at the end."*

With that Lenten thought, may I invite you to continue your Lenten foci.

Let us pray. *During these days of Lent, O God, open our hearts to making space for us to deepen our faith and connection to you. Help us look at ourselves in helpful ways that draw us close to your redeeming grace and everlasting love. Through Jesus our Lord we pray. Amen.*

*Lord, Who Throughout these Forty Days* by Journeysongs

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAGMA8NrGmU>

*Lord, Who Throughout these Forty Days* by Grosse Pointe Memorial

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G\\_pfF0wquVY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_pfF0wquVY)

*Lord, Who Throughout these Forty Days* by Advent Birmingham

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5c8A7jcTrko>

*Lord, Who Throughout these Forty Days* by St. John's Episcopal

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onXBtknqldc>

*Eternal Lord of Love, Behold Your Church* by Cathedral of St. John the Divine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4GQXaY-LTI>

*Eternal Lord of Love, Behold Your Church* by Mt. Olive Lutheran ELW 321

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7K-x0wzQs>

*Eternal Lord of Love, Behold Your Church* with intro to hymn and singing by Grace Upland Lutheran Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nehOolm452o>

*Eternal Lord of Love, Behold Your Church* by St. Anne's Episcopal

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tL1QJIC-A50>

*The Glory of these Forty Days* by Riverside Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pzNpoZ7i7w>

*The Glory of these Forty Days* harp recording by Mary Stephens, harpist

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uua55b-z3RI>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, March 3, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #285**

**Forty days of Lent. Forty years of pancakes.**

*The rabble who had joined the people were feeling the pangs of hunger, and the Israelites began to weep again. 'Who will give us meat to eat?' they said. 5 'Think of the fish we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic! 6 But now we are withering away; there is nothing wherever we look except this manna!' 7 The manna was like coriander seed and had the appearance of bdellium. 8 The people went round gathering it, and ground it in a mill or crushed it with a pestle; it was then cooked in a pot and made into pancakes. It tasted like cake made with oil. 9 When the dew fell on the camp at night-time, the manna fell with it. (Num. 11:4-9 NJB)*

I wish I'd thought of this for Shrove Tuesday (also called Pancake Tuesday). Serving pancakes before Lent was an ancient practice of using up eggs and oil before entering into period of Lenten fasting.

And it is quite the opposite of what the Israelites experienced while wandering those forty years in the wilderness. "*Pancakes*" (translated from the Hebrew "*uggah*" in New Jerusalem Bible) is what they had. Every day.

Much attention is given to Moses having to deal with the malcontents who were unhappy with this diet. Having been a retreat center cook in a former life, however, I always identified with the cook.

You can imagine the scene not recorded as the rabble joined the people of Israel.

*"Hey look, there's the cook, and I'm a getting hungry. Lemme find out what's for dinner.. Hey chef, whatcha makin' for supper? We just joined up. Looks like pancakes."*

**"It is pancakes."**

*Well, that's cool. I can get into pancakes. How about a sample? Oooh, Wow. Now those are good. Where'd you get the recipe?"*

**"I got it from Moses. He got it from the Lord God Almighty."**

*"The cook's a little weird, but he sure makes good pancakes."*

The next morning.....

*G'mornin', cookie, what's for breakfast?*

**"We're having pancakes."**

*"Good, I sure liked those pancakes. Best I ever had."*

Later...

*What's for lunch?*

**"We're having pancakes."**

*Must be leftovers, I guess.*

Later that evening...

*"What's for dinner?"*

**"We're having pancakes."**

*"Again? Are you all vegetarians, or what?"*

And.... several weeks later.....

*"Hey, chef, I don't suppose it even helps to ask, but what's for dinner?"*

**"We're having pancakes."**

*"That does it! I'm not going to take this anymore. Pancakes, pancakes, pancakes. And then more pancakes. What about hot dogs? Hasn't anyone heard of meat around here?" "I just can't take one more day of those stupid pancakes. How long is this going to go on, anyway?"*

**"Oh, about forty years, I guess. Ask Moses. I only work here."**

And so it goes. It wasn't easy being the cook. And how'd you like to be the person who suggested they do a church cookbook? I understand there are still unsold copies of *"Making the Most out of Manna."*

Not everyone did make the most out of manna, and the Book of Numbers reports this precipitated quite a crisis for Moses. The people forgot what they had left behind. They started a new class called *"Revisionist History."* They forgot how bad their lives had been in Egypt, and how wonderful it had felt to leave behind the oppression and slavery.

It was hard to travel through the wilderness, but God had provided. God guided, protected, and fed them. But eventually they wanted more. They wanted meat, that wonderful symbol of fatness, and they cried to Moses until he could stand it no more and he, in turn, cried out to God.

There were two results to all this crying out. When Moses cried out to God, he got help in the form of elders with whom he would share the spirit of God as well as leadership for the people.

With that, Moses came to understand in a new way, that God's spirit was not for him alone, but for the whole people of God. It was not his calling to carry the weight of the whole nation.

There may be some for us in this story too. Be careful about how we remember or reframe the "blessings" of past if it is at the expense of trusting in God's promises in the here and now. Don't get caught up in a culture of "grievance" that may keep us from noticing how all those

things for which we must rightly give God thanks. For daily bread. For daily hope. For manna... and mercy.

Let us pray. *We give thanks for the ways you continue to bless us today with your presence and promises, O God. Help us appreciate what we have, even when it doesn't seem enough. Feed us, through Jesus, our Bread of Heaven that we may have strength for the days ahead, and courage to keep following you. Amen.*

*The Wilderness* by The Isaacs (this was new to me. Great one.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2tRb1-g1xKA>

*The Wilderness* by Tom Blakely (another new one)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVwqgcN4UpQ>

*In the Wilderness* by Michael Card

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KOB8tk2Rldk>

*Manna from Heaven* by The Worship Network

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFilEvQgagg>

*Manna from Heaven* by Gaither Vocal Band

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6XPpFAOeM9U>

*Bread of Heaven* by Morriston Orpheus Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1fLiDjLf5c>

*Guide Me Thou O Great Jehovah* by Fountainview Academy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2QvFKKCzsz>

*In the Wilderness* by Labarius Edwards

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86TJehhgjZE>

*Wilderness* by Ann Byrd

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cknrU8rt5N4>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, March 4, 2021** not by Pastor Mark Opgrand but by **Pastor Michael Megahan, Missionary and Bible translator to East Africa. #286**

### **Washed in the Blood of the Lamb**

*Then one of the elders asked me, "These" in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?"*

*I answered, "Sir, you know."*

*And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb...."(Rev. 7:13-14 NIV)*

### **A Short Meditation: Lamb of God**

#### **Washed in the Blood of the Lamb**

One of the most difficult tasks in translation is to capture the deep meaning and emotion of a passage that is alien to our normal experiences. The words are there, but the existential, emotional experience is lacking because of culture and worldview. For instance, how many of us have witnessed or even experienced being washed in lamb's blood—literally?

When working with the nomadic Samburu in northeast Kenya, we were trying to translate the concept of "*forgiveness*." There seemed to be a lack of even a word meaning "*to forgive*" or "*forgiveness*."

Their culture talked about paying fines for breaches of etiquette to trespassing the law, but not forgiving. For almost two years I talked with many old men and women to find an appropriate way of expressing forgiveness so that we could translate verses from the Bible, but to no avail.

Then one day I overheard some of the young warriors talking about a ritual that was to be performed that evening. It seemed that one of the warriors had run away from home to go work as a nightwatchman in Nairobi and had not informed his parents nor had he communicated with anyone from the area for almost a year.

He had now returned and wanted to visit his home. But they were refusing to allow him to enter through the gate into the corral. He was "*polluted*" with the evil of the city. If he entered the homestead, he would pollute the entire family.

What was to be done? The ritual involved slaughtering a lamb and literally washing the warrior with the lamb's blood. Then and only then could he enter the gate to his home and see his parents. What a beautiful and existentially meaningful way of expressing the biblical concept of forgiveness—washed in the blood of the lamb!

Soon afterwards, as I was helping them rewrite the liturgy, we incorporated the idea into the confession of sins. We wrote (translating back into English):

*“Father, I your child have abandoned you and have become polluted with the evil of this world. I have spoken harsh words, done shameful deeds, and harbored bad thoughts. But I want to come home and be with you. Wash me with the blood of the lamb that I no longer am polluted and can come and sit and break bread with you in your house.”*

When you were (are) baptized, you were (are) washed in the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God: literally. All the pollution of this world, this life, your deeds, is cleansed away not just outwardly, but inwardly.

The shame and guilt are no longer held against you. You are free to enter God’s house and break bread with God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. You are called “Child of God” and you are wonderfully the Image of God. Rejoice in the blood of the Lamb.

*Prayer: Father God, I confess that I have not fully and emotionally understood that my baptism is a washing in the precious blood of your Son Jesus and have had all my shame and guilt taken away. I am free to be called your child, sanctified, and loved sinner as I am. You invite me to celebrate that joy by breaking bread with you in the Holy Communion. This Lenten season embolden me to renew my baptism through confession and repentance and to celebrate the blood-sacrifice made on the cross of your Son Jesus. Amen.*

*Behold a Host Arrayed in White* by Te Deum Conference

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3bq2MiCRZw>

*Behold a Host Arrayed in White* by Koine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hbg5SjT0fTs>

*Behold a Host Arrayed in White* by Good Shepherd Institute

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h321T1pHtBA>

*Behold a Host Arrayed in White* by Ole Bull

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjux2irFryo>

*Behold a Host Arrayed in White* by St. Stephen Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuyPynrAexA>

*Behold a Host Arrayed in White* by harpist Bethany Johnson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4ODgc83gV8>

*Behold A Host* by Richard Jensen (another tune)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dg2vafQiMUM>

but sometimes, the best recordings are in the original tongue, Edvard Grieg’s Norwegian

*Den store hvide flok*- Haerlemsche Heeren

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7GgmJmL2D54>

*Den store, hvide flok*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ee2JywNIUxw>

*Den store hvide Flok* – Trondhjems Studentersangforening (TSS)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjSYdD2t1hA>

*Den store hvide Flok* by Malmo Chamber Orchestra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OuooGqEyjRE>

## **St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday March 5, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #287**

### **Browsing the internet has made me feel like a god. Is that okay?**

"For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (Gen. 3:5-6 NIV)

Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit which was promised (falsely) to make them "like God." We have the internet, including Google, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, not forbidden, but having offered its own kind of fruit, making us like gods, granting us sweet and wonderful access to information and people that years ago we only dreamed of.

Before the internet, I used to imagine that one of the best things about being God was being able to know where everyone was. I remember regretting how I had lost track of certain people I liked. Either they moved, or I did. Time passed. People married, changed jobs, and changed names.

If I hadn't kept up through annual Christmas greetings, old friends were pretty much lost forever. Having gotten out of touch, I did not expect to be able to find out "whatever happened to so and so." On one occasion I remember returning to my old neighborhood and knocking on doors, wondering if any one (I knew) still lived there. That's when I remember thinking it would be great to be God, because you would know where people are, and you could completely follow their lives.

The internet has given us the illusion of godlike powers. We can search and find people. If they are on Facebook, we can follow their lives, even finding out what they ate for lunch today. We can see photos of their kids and grandkids. If they post to a Twitter account, we can often find out just what they are thinking at any given moment.

If we want to know if someone we once knew is alive or dead we can type their name in a Google search bar with "obituary" next to it. I remember doing that with my 94-year-old mother once. She said, "I sure wish I knew what happened to my old college roommate." I typed the woman's name and "obit" and we were able to review her whole life since my mother lost track of her. Mom was amazed. She thought "God only knows" what happened to her.

With so many churches now posting services online, I have been able find out what lots of old seminary classmates are up to. I can see how they look if they can still deliver a good sermon.

As far as other information goes, that feels godlike as well. I search word combinations, and millions of “hits” come up. Immediate knowledge (or information, anyway), that I never could have imagined before the internet. With YouTube, I can find someone singing any song I imagine. I can discover people with common interests, make new friends, and spend hours upon hours looking for things. I can connect with people over zoom or Facetime or skype. All this together is a powerful experience and it feels godlike. With smart phones, we hold the means to much power in the palm of our hands.

When I do not feel godlike is when the power goes out.

It doesn’t happen often, but every year storms disrupt our lives or the lives of someone somewhere. Hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, fires, and ice storms all cause power outages. Refrigerated food is at risk; homes and vehicles get damaged. Lives are lost. And the internet is out.

When we lose the internet, we realize how much we miss our godlike powers to know things and communicate instantly and effortlessly. Without our technology, and the power to operate it, our lives as we have come to live them are disconnected.

So maybe it is actually helpful once in a while to be reminded that despite the internet’s illusion of omnipotence, we are not gods. We can look someone up, or “Follow them on Facebook,” but it is great God almighty who makes all life possible. God is the one who sees all and knows all and knows us all. God gives us the means (even through the internet) to connect and reconnect with people.

And God is the one who, when our power is out, maintains an everlasting connection with us all.

Let us pray. Thank you, God, for the technology that has permitted us to connect and reconnect with persons might have otherwise lost forever. We get a tiny glimpse of what it must be like for you to always know where we are and what we are doing. Thank you for your ever-present love and support through all our days and never ever losing track of us, for your power never fails. Amen.

*Shout to the Lord* by Darlene Zschech

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gn5CMSSAx\\_c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gn5CMSSAx_c)

*Power of your Love* by Geoff Bullock

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6yQzQc0lnA>

*The Power of Your Love* by Darlene Zschech

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F56qmbKcBsE>

*Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery* by Marty Haugen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3pHXMk52sw>

*Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery* by Suncrest UMC

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-scSYunr-jU>

*There in God's Garden* by First Plymouth

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxrKn2EbtKk>

*Christ the Life of All the Living* by Virtual Choir ELW 339

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0gfxzcRNE\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0gfxzcRNE_k)

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, March 8, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #288

**When “a shot in the arm” is a shot in the arm.**

*Your arm is endowed with power; your hand is strong, your right hand exalted. (Ps. 89:13 NIV)*

As more and more people are gaining access to vaccines and vaccinations for the coronavirus, I am recognizing the emergence of a new kind of hope.

Because of serious illness and death that has come from Covid-19, this has been an extremely stressful year of waiting for what can protect us. When I first heard from those who “got the shot,” and then received my own, there has been a noticeable movement toward hope. We are guardedly optimistic, but it is beginning to give us more confidence that we are much less likely now to experience severe illness or death.

The expression “a shot in the arm” has been used to describe help and encouragement at a time when you badly need it. While it is slang for an “injection,” it is also a metaphor that refers to the rejuvenating effect from an injection of various sorts of medicinal drugs.

It was first printed in a Maine newspaper called the Lewiston Evening Journal in January, 1916. What was written was “The vets can give politics a shot in the arm and the political leaders realize it.

Since then, the expression has been used around the world to describe anything that gives a boost of encouragement. It is interesting that this year a shot in the arm is literally a shot in the arm.

Now a devotional confession: Selecting the above verse to fit with this devotion is also a classic example of what is called “proof texting,” an inappropriate practice of finding biblical support for whatever point a person is trying to make. Or in my case, having a devotional idea and wanting to find a scripture to fit it in order for it to be “Biblically supported.”

That is a bad idea, especially whenever verses are selected out of context. Like this one. It sounds like the verse might well describe the effect of getting vaccinated, being empowered by this real “shot in the arm.” I might even try to make the positive case for vaccinations citing this verse.

Doing that, this general “bad idea” has gotten worse. If we read other verses around this verse, we find the “arm” and “hand” don’t belong to humans at all.

This is a Psalm praising God for God’s wondrous deeds. It begins with this verse:

*I will sing of the LORD's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. 2 I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself. (Ps. 89:1-2 NIV)*

It continues praising God for God's covenant, for the wonder and power of God, awesome and mighty. Again and again God's faithfulness is described. God is above all heavenly bodies; God rules over the seas; God crushes enemies; God creates the whole world; the mountains sing for joy at God's name.

Then comes: *"Your arm is endowed with power; your hand is strong, your right hand exalted."* (Ps. 89:13 NIV)

The exalted right hand of God was an image of victory for the faithful, for those who walk in the light of God's presence. It reminds the people of God's covenant, now continuing through King David and God's everlasting love for everyone through all time.

So there is nothing about vaccines in Psalm 89, even though all the words of Psalm 89 are delivered as "a shot in the arm," especially for those needing a reminder that God is control of everything, including the means to fight deadly diseases.

As we look to the hope that comes from being protected from these diseases, may God protect us and enlarge our sense of safety through the everlasting covenant, and through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us pray: *We are grateful O God for every sign of hope you give us that we shall be healed. For every shot in the arm, for every bit of encouraging news, for every glimmer of your goodness in the world, for each and every day that you give us to live by your grace. Encourage us all with your mighty arms and hands at work in this world, bringing us close to you so that we shall live. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*I'm So Glad Jesus Lifted Me* ELW 860 by Christian Gospel Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWSX3lhRCdk>

*I'm So Glad Jesus Lifted Me* ELW 860 by the Graguns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKBmcPb1e8U>

*Sing Praise to God, the Highest Good* by Concordia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3AoRyg88fCY>

*Come Ye Disconsolate* ELW 607 by Acapeldridge

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06q9am18p9k>

*Come Ye Disconsolate* ELW 607 by Folksandhymns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynDVKKAhL74>

*God When Human Bonds are Broken* ELW 603 by Sammamish Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLbBJXSBOd0>

*God When Human Bonds are Broken* by Everingham Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EaYtn-UCNnU>

*Lord Jesus, You Shall be my Song* ELW 808 by SE Samonte

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XgwGPPM2ytc>

*Lord Jesus You Shall be my Song* ELW 808 by Mt. Olive

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UhsgzV4hklc>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, March 9, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #289

### What's your expiration date?

*The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. (Ps. 90:10 NRS)*

Have you noticed how many household items have expiration dates on them? A lot. This includes prescription medication, canned, dried, or fresh food, milk, dairy, beer, soda, salad dressing, condiments, tea bags, batteries, toothpaste, makeup, sunscreen, motor oil, paint, sunglasses, infant car seats, bug spray, dog food, anti-perspirants, even bottled water.

It's a long list.

In Psalm 90, the psalmist also muses about the human condition and our own "expiration date." The psalmist names seventy years, or maybe eighty if we have good health. He concludes that no matter how much time we have, we should use that time wisely: "<sup>12</sup> So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart. (Ps. 90:12 NRS)

If we knew how much time we had, or when we are set to expire, I wonder how might we live our lives differently?

Because of uncertainty coming with this year's global pandemic, many individuals have wondered if they will get through this and survive. Living with daily tallies and awareness of infections and deaths has constantly reminded us of our mortality. At the same time, many others continue to deal with other life-threatening illnesses that indicate their "time" may be shorter than longer.

Approaching a year since the pandemic became a daily part of lives, I have noticed that many are doing just as the psalmist has suggested, namely learning to appreciate the time we have and, in all things, look to God with grateful hearts for what God's time has given us.

Many are finding joy in things they might otherwise take for granted, like those spring flowers or gestures of kindness from loved ones or even an opportunity to worship God in a church parking lot.

The one thing that does not carry an expiration date is God's awesome steadfast love and faithfulness.

Psalm 118 begins and ends describing the joy of those who experience God's steadfast love and faithfulness:

*O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!*

<sup>2</sup> *Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever."*

<sup>3</sup> *Let the house of Aaron say, "His steadfast love endures forever."*

<sup>4</sup> *Let those who fear the LORD say, "His steadfast love endures forever." (Ps. 118:1-4 NRS)*

<sup>24</sup> *This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

<sup>25</sup> *Save us, we beseech you, O LORD! O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!*

<sup>26</sup> *Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD. We bless you from the house of the LORD.*

<sup>27</sup> *The LORD is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.*

<sup>28</sup> *You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.*

<sup>29</sup> *O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. (Ps. 118:24-29 NRS)*

Let me say it again: The one thing that does not carry an expiration date is God's awesome steadfast love and faithfulness.

Let us pray. *Thank you, O God, for your never-failing love and faithfulness. Keep reminding us of this whenever we wonder or worry about the time we have in this world. We also pray that all people will experience the fullness of life in your grace and mercy. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

May these wonderful songs bless you in your meditating today.

*Psalm 118* by Jason Silver

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcEr9OkFP-s>

*Psalm 118* in Hebrew by Julie Geller and the Beating Hearts

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4X4L9yTP7bc>

*Psalm 118* by Tim and Marmar Grahame-Smith

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUxynAUy11k>

*Psalm 90* (A Thousand Years) by James Block

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fg-QeZa6ZEq>

*Psalm 90* by Manna Media

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9sz3srZd3o>

*Psalm 90* by Westminster Abbey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sdcgZ70ggqI>

*O God Our Help in Ages Past* by Life at Pathways

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uWFnYkgRIY>

*O God Our Help in Ages Past* by SE Samonte

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-hN740J6qA>

*O God Our Help in Ages Past* by Evening Prayer in the Liturgy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZjdmLstpNGE>

*O God Our Help in Ages Past* by Don Moen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQHSVF438Cg>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, March 10, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #290**

**Let us pray. Dear Robin Hood...**

<sup>9</sup> *O let the evil of the wicked come to an end, but establish the righteous, you who test the minds and hearts, O righteous God.*

<sup>10</sup> *God is my shield, who saves the upright in heart.*

<sup>11</sup> *God is a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation every day.*

<sup>12</sup> *If one does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and strung his bow;*

<sup>13</sup> *he has prepared his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts. (Ps. 7:9-13 NRS)*

It was in the middle of Netflix's episode of "Call the Midwife" (set in 1959 London) when I heard a familiar song. I had not heard or thought of the song for years, but as soon as the Cub Scout troop started singing it as part of their program, I belted it out right with them:

*"Robin Hood Robin Hood, riding through the glen,*

*Robin Hood Robin Hood, with his band of men,*

*Fear'd by the bad, loved by the good,*

*Robin Hood, Robin Hood, Robin Hood."*

In the 1950's, when this half hour black and white British television show first aired, it attracted 35,000,000 followers each week. Most every boy my age loved "The Adventures of Robin Hood," played by Richard Greene. He was always on the side of good. He fought evil. He helped people. And even with many close calls, he always came out on top. Robin Hood was a hero.

When we look at the words of Psalm 9, we see a lot of imagery that seems descriptive of God as a kind of Robin Hood. The psalmist prays for God to put an end to the evil of the wicked and establish the righteous. Then the psalmist affirms that if you "cross" this God, you will pay. God is like Robin Hood that way.

When God became incarnate in Jesus Christ, many hoped that this Messiah, this savior, would show "Robin Hood" like qualities. He would destroy those who opposed him. He would lift up the poor and put the rich in their place. He would overthrow the Romans. Nothing would stand in his way or defeat him. With sword and shield, bow and fiery arrows, he would be the hero they longed for. He would be one as described in Psalm 9 ... "feared by the bad, loved by the good."

"The Adventures of Robin Hood" would have been a terribly conceived series if, in the pilot episode, Robin was killed by the Sheriff of Nottingham. That's not how it works. The hero always lives to fight another day.

The gospels tell us that when Jesus Christ was arrested, there was no miraculous escape. When he carried his cross to Golgotha, there were no “*Merry Men*” to rescue him. There were no angels there to shoot flaming arrows at the Roman guards. Instead, he suffered a cruel and senseless death.

Many believers, having reviewed everything they read and imagined about their Messiah, were sorely disappointed that this poorly conceived plan of salvation was as good as cancelled by the Messiah’s death on that cross.

It certainly leaves us wondering why God opted for the “**cross**” instead of “*cross-bow*.” Why not let righteous indignation make things right by an undeniable show of force? Why not be a “*Robin Hood*” instead of a “*Jesus Christ*.”

It’s easier to ask the question than offer a simple answer. From our perspective it makes little sense why God would save the world this way. It is part of a great mystery that is only fully known by God. Certainly, God knew the kind of savior we wanted, one who would be strong and powerful, invulnerable, and on our side.

What we received was one who was vulnerable, not weak like other humans, but human like other humans. He entered into humanity where he would experience what it is to be fully human, and to suffer and die at the hands of evil ones.

Jesus’ strength includes vulnerability, and a determined love that knows no limits. He loves all, the merry men and women, the unjust Sheriffs of Nottingham and both evil and good kings. In his loving, Jesus shows us a side of God previously unknown. He also showed that just when we thought the villains and the evil ones were victorious, there was one more surprise.

### **Resurrection!**

Some might see this as a “*twist ending*,” (that though he died, he lives), but it’s really more of a “*twist beginning*,” as his love and sacrifice shows that nothing will separate us from God’s love. It’s a whole new future.

I guess that might have been harder to convey all this if God chose the “*Robin Hood option*”, that is, to “*lock and load*” with swords and spears, bows and flaming arrows, to “take out” all those whom God wants to give another chance through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let us pray. *Thank you for your love, Lord Jesus, and for showing us what God’s mercy and forgiveness looks like. Transform our hearts that we may honor you for your devotion and sacrifice. When we cannot understand your deep mysteries, let that not hinder us from trusting in you and walking with you always. Amen.*

Sing along with this one first... the *Original Theme Song* from “The Adventures of Robin Hood.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbyYr6L5xQM>

*In the Cross of Christ I Glory* by House of Hope Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48ZoZMNF7i4>

*In the Cross of Christ I Glory* by Hymnal Project

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pyT\\_QEix-JA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pyT_QEix-JA)

*In the Cross of Christ I Glory* (alt tune) by Kelvedon Green Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQWrMcMgbdM>

*Beneath the Cross of Jesus* by Nathan Drake (w/ acoustic guitar)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L\\_3yc0wWe7Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_3yc0wWe7Y)

*Beneath the Cross of Jesus* by SE Samonte

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30Xgpw1f-fw>

*Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross* by Voice of Eden

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=py3kp1ggKlo>

*Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross* by Hymns to Him

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJeHusJZ1k>

*Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross* by the Petersens

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gf\\_wIFwBIMc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gf_wIFwBIMc)

*Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross* in Korean by Cantus Familia Cyber

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51MY2DSqIxx>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday March 11, 2021** not by Pastor Mark Ogrand **but by the Reverend Doctor Michael Megahan #291**

### **Blood of the Innocent**

Isaiah 53:7b: *He was led like a lamb to the slaughter,  
And as a sheep before her shearers is silent,  
So he did not open his mouth.*

John 1:29: *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."*

2 Cor 5:21: *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

### **A Second Short Meditation: The Lamb of God**

#### **Blood of the innocent**

Jesus was true Human. But Jesus was innocent of any sin before God. The very one who was totally innocent was made guilty and nailed to the cross to die so that his sacrificial blood would absolve you of all your guilt before God.

In the Short Meditation 1 I provided an illustration from Kenya. In this Meditation 2, I take another example from the same nomadic people.

One day I had arranged to meet with the sub-chief of one of the local homestead areas. He was also one of the first baptized Christians in the area and was the head elder of the small church. His homestead was 10 kilometers (about 6 miles) from our home. There were no roads. I had to walk in the hot, arid land for about 2 hours to reach his place. Yes, there were wild animals and snakes to cause concern.

So, when I reached his home and heard that he had gone somewhere else, I was not jumping for joy. (I was a little more than just "hot under the collar.") But the place to where he had gone was less than a mile, and so I decided to meet him there because I learned that he had gone to perform a ritual sacrifice, which made me even angrier.

As I was heading to the new goal, I caught sight of him running towards me. I waited. We performed the ritual greetings and laughter. He excused himself for being late. I asked, "Why did he do the sacrifice?"

He answered that a donkey had entered the hut of the owner and therefore had polluted living area. They had to sacrifice a lamb and use its blood to cleanse the hut.

I began preaching (I am a preacher.) I explained that his story reminded me of an ancient narration about our First Parents. God the Father had created them and provided them with all the things needed

for life and shalom. He had even created them in the Image of God the Creator. They were his representatives on earth.

But they were not satisfied. They wanted to be like God in wisdom. So, they disobeyed the Father's command for his children. With their disobedience came every kind of illness, misfortune, and death. Their sin polluted the entire creation so that all creation is under the oppression of decay and death. They are the donkey that polluted God's creation. God tried many ways to bring back his children from disobedience. But they refused.

Finally, out of pure grace and mercy, God sent Jesus his only Son, his innocent child. Jesus accepted death, even death on the cross that I—you, we, all of creation—might be cleansed of the polluting sin and have life, yes life eternal. Jesus is the Lamb.

Only by the blood of the Lamb can the pollution of the donkey be removed.

As we meditate on the cross of Jesus, let us remember that we are (like) the donkey: my sin pollutes the world with decay and death. It is my sin that drove the nails into Jesus on the cross. But the cross is also joyful news. It is the Good News that the blood of the innocent lamb Jesus cleanses me and washes away all the sin, the guilt and shame. The blood of the innocent lamb is in, with and under the water of baptism. You have been baptized. You have been cleansed. Remember your baptism. Remember the Blood of the Innocent Lamb Jesus.

*Prayer: Father God, I am sinful and unclean. My sin brings—has brought—decay and death. It was my sin that nailed Jesus to the cross. I dare to come before you only because Jesus promised me, encouraged me to do so. You are a Father who listens to confession. You are a Father who fulfills promises. In the Name of Jesus and in the baptism of his sacrificial blood I cry out to you for forgiveness. Let the Good News shout in my heart and bring me peace and relief from the sin that has oppressed my life. Amen.*

*There is a Fountain Filled with Blood* by Light Book

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRjEiJW4zCA>

*There is a Fountain Filled with Blood* by Norton Hall Band

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b25-LjrGQA>

*There is a Fountain Filled with Blood* by Rodney Musgrave

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1WRt1Ag5gl>

*There is a Fountain Filled with Blood* by Selah

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMcG0JclK-A>

*Baptized into Your Name Most Holy* by Concordia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocxe4OLhagl>

*Baptized into Your Name Most Holy* by FPC church

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vu\\_nSVxmNo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vu_nSVxmNo)

*Baptized into Your Name Most Holy* by First Lutheran Church Boston

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qkg5P8acluk>

*Thank You Jesus for the Blood* by Charity Gayle

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhU-Omwg2rU>

*Thank You Jesus for the Blood* by South Seminole Baptist

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DeHczR66xx4>

*Are You Washed in the Blood of the Lamb?* by SE Samonte

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9oW91lv8D8>

*Blood of the Lamb* by Oluyemisi Aremu

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04ZhIS7HupQ>

*Are You Washed in the Blood/ I'll Fly Away* by Alan Jackson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDqTENTNvKQ>

## **St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, March 12, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #292**

### **Taking a moment to face our grief.**

*Jesus began to weep. <sup>36</sup> So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" (Jn. 11:35-36 NRS)*

As a local faith family and larger global community, we have been dealing with a lot of grief and loss lately. We have lost loved ones. Husbands and wives have lost soul mates of many years. We have lost beloved pets. The daily images of worldwide losses from Covid now "one year later," continues to sadden us, and through it all, we are acutely aware that the more we have loved, the more we feel grief.

Today is one of those days I first imagined I would try to put my own thoughts about this together, but in meditating upon two reflections from Henri Nouwen and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, I am moved to print them for your own meditation. These words meant a lot to me.

### **Henri J.M. Nouwen writes this about loving deeply:**

"Do not hesitate to love and to love deeply.

You might be afraid of the pain that deep love can cause. When those you love deeply reject you, leave you, or die, your heart will be broken.

But that should not hold you back from loving deeply. The pain that comes from deep love makes your love ever more fruitful. It is like a plow that breaks the ground to allow the seed to take root and grow into a strong plant.

Every time you experience the bitter pain of rejection, absence, or death, you are faced with a choice. You can become bitter and decide not to love again, or you can stand straight in your pain and let the soil on which you stand become richer and more able to give life to new seeds.

The more you have loved and have allowed yourself to suffer because of your love, the more you will be able to let your heart row wider and deeper.

When you love is truly giving and receiving, those who you love will not leave your heart even when they depart from you. They will become part of our self and thus gradually build a community within you. Those you have loved deeply become a part of you.

The longer you live, there will always be more people to be loved by you and to become part of your inner community. The wider your inner community becomes, the more easily you will recognize your own brothers and sisters in the strangers around you.

Thus the pain of rejection, absence, and death can become fruitful. Yes, as you love deeply the ground of your heart will be broken more and more, but you will rejoice in the abundance it will bear. "(From the Inner Voice of Love, 1966)

**And now words from Dietrich Bonhoeffer.**

"Nothing can make up for the absence of someone we love.

It would be wrong to try to find a substitute; we must simply hold out and see it through. That sounds hard at first, but at the same time it is a great consolation, for the gap, as long as it remains unfilled, preserves the bond between us.

It is nonsense to say God fills the gap; God does not fill it, but on the contrary, God keeps it empty and so helps us to keep alive our former communion with each other, even at the cost of pain.

The dearer and richer our memories, the more difficult the separation. But gratitude changes pangs of memory into tranquil joy. The beauties of the past are borne, not as a thorn in the flesh, but as a precious gift in themselves.

We must take care not to wallow in our memories, or hand ourselves over to them, just as we do not gaze all the time at a valuable present, but only at special times, and apart from these keep it simply as a hidden treasure that is ours for certain.

In this way the past gives us lasting joy and strength."

--Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Let us pray. Whether we have lost a person or a pet recently or a long time ago, grief continues to be part of our human experience. Help us to affirm that opening ourselves to another and experiencing love is worth the pain of separation and loss. Continue to give us brothers and sisters along the way who can aid in our healing and strengthen us for the days ahead, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Set Me Like A Seal on your Heart* by Grace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIKOPI1wLqE>

*Set My Like A Seal* by Carey Landry

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OkCR0AmUYZ4>

*Set Me Like A Seal* (at an Indian Christian Wedding)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHCLaCrENCs>

*Set Me As A Seal* by Michael John Trotta (different than above songs)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5BzT4gf-zY>

*Set Me As A Seal* by Richard Nance (also different from above)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DgDZMOVXgzs>

*Set Me As A Seal* by Richard Nance performed by Ball State University Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kl9Xy1BHx9s>

*Set Me As A Seal* by Rene Clausen by Minnesota Choral Artists (also different from above)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KiyQzXIYDI>

*Set Me As A Seal* by Rene Clausen by National Lutheran Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qb6uY-y9HRI>

*Set Me As A Seal* by John Leavitt by New Vocal Amsterdam (also different version)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ad1b-XP34PU>

*How Long O God* ELW 698 by Marty Haugen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BaEnz8N-o0>

*How Long O Long* by Dan Schutte

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2mSPsZI7N8>

*How Long O Lord* by Sovereign Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5c65B3JUmos>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday March 15, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #293

### If we don't tell them the story, how will they know?

*This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you; in them I am trying to arouse your sincere intention by reminding you that you should remember the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken through your apostles.*  
(2 Pet. 3:1-2 NRS)

I was driving on Third Street past Cape Fear Community College when I noticed the sign. It said "*Meadowlark Lemon Bridge.*" Like many things, it was an event that went mostly unnoticed by me when it was dedicated in October 2019.

Driving past the sign I wondered how many people might have no idea about "what is a *Meadowlark Lemon?*" Is it a "*bird*"? Is it a "*fruit*"? What is it, and why do we have a bridge named after it?

Wilmington has two native sons who became well known and accomplished professional basketball players. Best known is Michael Jordan. Even as he gets farther away from his basketball career, he currently has well known (and expensive) "sneakers" named after him. Therefore, Jordan very remains a household name.

Lesser-known Wilmington native son, but arguably as famous in his time, was Meadow Lemon III (April 25, 1932-December 27, 2015). Going by "*Meadowlark Lemon,*" he was dubbed the "*Clown Prince*" of the Harlem Globetrotters. He was a basketball player, actor, and Christian minister.

I remember Meadowlark Lemon because, as a young person in Oregon, I once saw him play in a live Harlem Globetrotters game. These games were presented as entertainment, and included amazing comedy, antics, and super skill. Lemon was unforgettable, truly the "*Clown Prince.*" In his career, he travelled over 5 million miles, and played in over 16,000 games. Many in my generation saw him play either in person or on television. He was even featured in the Harlem Globetrotters animated series of the 1970's. He attended Williston Industrial School.

The bridge was dedicated in 2019. Cynthia Lemon, his widow, after hearing people share stories about her husband, told the audience that she had never heard some of the stories that were shared by the speakers of their experiences with her husband. This was because her husband never boasted about his good deeds, but rather saw them as part of his mission to put "*positivity*" out in the world.

She said, *“He would want you to know how important and special you all are to him and what brought him joy are the stories that I am now hearing,”* she said. *“I’m praying that as people cross this bridge and they see the Meadowlark Lemon sign, that will remind you of your Meadowlark memory and that you’ll be blessed and have a joyous day... and you’ll remember a happy time that he brought to you along the road.”*

That’s just what happened to me.

Driving past the sign, I thought about my dad and me going to that game and seeing basketball like I never imagined it. We laughed and cheered, a great father and son moment now recollected by me many years later driving down Third Street.

With each passing year, I suppose fewer and fewer people will know what or who *“The Meadowlark Lemon Bridge”* is named after. History requires telling and learning the stories.

After Jesus died and rose from the dead and called his disciples to go into the world sharing the gospel, I wonder what would have happened if no one shared it or told the stories?

Would a future committee from Nazareth, that is, those who still remembered that someone great did, in fact, come out of Nazareth, lobby to have a bridge named after him?

***“The Jesus Christ Bridge.”***

If getting a name on a bridge was all there was, when the last of those who remembered Jesus had died, it is likely that a whole new generation of people would soon wonder *“Who is that Jesus Christ whose name is on our bridge?”*

How important it was that those whose lives were changed by Jesus Christ, told the story again and again, sharing his life, death, and resurrection and many things Jesus taught us.

I loved discovering that Meadowlark Lemon himself counted his greatest achievement was not becoming the “Clown Prince of Basketball” but rather a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ his Lord. Swish! (not swoosh!)

Let us pray. We thank you, O God, for all the gifts you give to your human family and for all of us who make up the body of Christ. Thank you for stories and experiences that celebrate the gifts you give us. Thank you for the life and legacy of Meadowlark Lemon, not only for his skills on the court but for his commitment to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thank you for all who have shared the story of your love for us through Jesus so that Jesus would not become a forgotten memory but rather a living presence shaping our gifts and talents for service in Christ’s name. Amen.

Here are some songs, but first... some *Meadowlark Lemon highlights*..

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P9GMHk9Bh04>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frWQ8bm0TIg>

and now the music...

*We are all One in Mission* by Grosse Pointe Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3zkbgeHzmo>

*The Church of Christ in Every Age* by First-Plymouth

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wUvPH\\_gy1c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wUvPH_gy1c)

*Share the Gospel* by Ben Ancona Jr

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-toVgyxvz\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-toVgyxvz_Q)

*I Love to Tell the Story* by Lighthouse LBCM

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDefqK1C3aE>

*Go Tell it on the Mountain* by the Petersons

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W\\_GgZsUyzHA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_GgZsUyzHA)

*Go Tell it on the Mountain* by HymnCharts

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAFIKeh04KU>

*Tell Me the Story of Jesus/I Love to Tell the Story* by Charlotte Ritchie and Ivan Parker

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AghsSvQ\\_2B8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AghsSvQ_2B8)

*Tell Me The Story of Jesus* by Songs of Everlasting Joy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSDIShWZcvo>

*I Know Whom I Have Believed* by Antrim Mennonite Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRV3J4n8cc>

*I Know Whom I Have Believed* by Fountainview Academy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZsFoFVRRYPk>

*The Gospel* by Ryan Stevenson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTdFEZhjiko>

*Sharing the Gospel* by Tom Blakely

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kagtdqxEeR8>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, March 16, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #294

**For those who feel like they have been on “house arrest” for a year.**

*Let mutual love continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. 3 Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. (Heb. 13:1-3 NRS)*

There was a time when people who could not leave their homes, usually because of age or medical conditions, were called “*shut-ins*.” Some prefer the term “*homebound*.” Whichever term is applied, it describes those who have been unable to move freely from their homes to the “*outside world*.”

As the pandemic has forced millions of men, women, and children to spend a lot of time confined to their homes this year, empathy for the homebound has also increased exponentially. Hence, we identify. If someone is otherwise able bodied, it probably does feel a lot like being on “*house arrest*.” A prisoner to the coronavirus.

Staying at home and away from people has been one way to try to avoid becoming ill from Covid 19 and ending up in the hospital (which is also confining, especially in the Intensive Care Units). But even as things begin to “*open up*,” everyone being so “*confined*” for a year has taken its toll. Even more so for those who already have had limited mobility and person to person contact.

In scripture, confinement has been applied to prisoners who had broken laws, as well as innocent persons who were held captive by an enemy. For us, the enemy has been the virus. It remains a risk to our freedom from confinement, despite the promise of vaccines to release us from this particular captivity.

This year of confinement has not entirely been a negative experience, however.

Many of us appreciate more deeply small but important things we have taken for granted. Like hugs and handshakes, seeing someone smile (and not just “*smiling eyes*”), having a long lunch in a crowded restaurant, being shoulder to shoulder at a ball game and cheering loudly, being “*elbow to elbow*” in a crowded church singing boldly, spending fear-less holidays with family, (including the kids or grandkids home from in person college), in person school for our children, enjoying a live concert or outdoor festival.

Through this difficult time, many have also continued the best we can, as the writer of Hebrews urges, to “*Let mutual love continue*.” In this year of enmity and division we do not take “*mutual*

love” for granted. We do not take goodness for granted, either, but receive it as a precious gift from God who promises to make all things well.

Let us pray. *We pray for all those who have felt so confined this past year, and lift our prayers for release from this unique captivity. We long for the days when we can enjoy life without the specter of Covid hanging over us and our loved ones. We pray good health and healing, and joyous spring days ahead. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

*Blessed be the Ties that Bind* by Drolas94

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6lzTJfWdmk>

*Blessed be the Ties that Bind* by Gospel Sounds

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RCbSQWeDbIU>

*Blessed be the Tie* by Sara Groves

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcYFtihSg\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcYFtihSg_8)

*Blessed be the Ties that Bind* by Fountainview Academy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3I4cO9CCSM>

*Hark the Glad Sound* by FLGA District

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVSv-0MqISA>

*Hark the Glad Sound* by Mt Olive

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0-JgAjlts>

*Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty* by Lutheran Church of the Nativity

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7HD1cQ6ynqc>

*Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty* by Erin Jogue

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wfKzTuV9r8>

*Fling Wide the Door* by Salem Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kk6rF2vMo5M>

*Fling Wide the Door* by Dulcimer Ensemble

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZAPCIZeLjc>

*Go Down Moses* by Louis Armstrong

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vf6jBP4YXwo>

*Go Down Moses* by Brevis Vocal Group

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tl5qTrySve4>

## St Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, March 17, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #295

**Did you know by Roman Catholic standards that St. Patrick was not a saint?**

**Oh, you did? Well did you know his original color was blue, not green?**

*Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. 13 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you. (2 Cor. 13:12-13 NRS)*

By New Testament standards, however, he was. In honor of St. Patrick's Day, let me explain. The real St. Patrick was born in the late 300's A.D., not in Ireland, as some believe, but in Britain. His own brief autobiography, penned in the 400's, A.D., describes being born of Christian parents, but was kidnapped at age 16 by Irish raiders, who captured many young people at that time.

Patrick was held captive for six years until he escaped and eventually returned to England where he received more formal Christian instruction in preparation for the priesthood. It was during his slave and shepherding days, however where he drew close to God.

In his own words, in his "Confessio," Patrick writes:

*"After I arrived in Ireland, I tended sheep every day, and I prayed frequently during the day. More and more the love of God increased, and my sense of awe before God. Faith grew, and my spirit was moved, so that in one day I would pray up to one hundred times, and at night perhaps the same. I even remained in the woods and on the mountain, and I would rise to pray before dawn in snow and ice and rain. I never felt the worse for it, and I never felt lazy – as I realize now, the spirit was burning in me at that time."*

As a priest he was first sent back to Ireland to minister to the few Christians who were already there, and to preach the gospel to the pagan Druids. Many things attributed to Patrick came centuries later in the form of legends, like first bringing Christianity to Ireland, or ridding Ireland of snakes, but what is undeniable is the strong impact he had in his preaching and teaching to convert a large number of people to Christianity. He also developed a strong support system to those who became priests.

He was also wise to realize ways to incorporate from Irish culture symbols that could be linked to Christianity. For example, he used bonfires to celebrate Easter since the Irish were used to honoring their gods with fire. He also superimposed a sun, a powerful Irish symbol onto the Christian Cross to create what we now know as a "Celtic Cross." Thus that symbol would seem more easily accessible to the Irish.

Now why Patrick is not a saint by Roman Catholic Standards is that for the first thousand years of Christianity, no one was canonized as a saint. That came later. By New Testament standards, however, he very much is a saint, and certainly by public acclamation, the Patron Saint of Ireland, for all his good works (which don't include snake extermination).

The celebration of St. Patrick's Day is much more a celebration of Ireland and Irish culture than a celebration of the actual saint himself. Patrick's color, for example was "sky blue", not "green". All the earliest depictions of Patrick have him wearing blue, and the "official" color for the first "Order of St. Patrick" under George III was "sky blue". So wearing "blue" shouldn't get you pinched, just don't wear "orange" (representing the Brits). Chicago could save some money by letting the river remain blue, and not dyeing it green for the day.

Patrick's actual life is quite inspiring, and a wonderful witness to the power of the Holy Spirit at work in those first centuries through folks who began, as quite ordinary. So for St. Patrick, and all the ordinary saints, including the one's Paul greeted in his second letter to the Corinthians, we give God thanks on this March 17.

Let us pray. *For all the saints, O God we give you thanks, the "Canonized" ones, the New Testament one, and all those special people in our lives who have made a difference in how we have come to know you and your gospel. Thanks for St. Patrick, and all who have heard your call to bring the gospel to those who have not yet heard (or understood) it. Keep safe all who feel driven to celebrate this day, even though it is not Mardi Gras, and happens as we are still in Lent. Amen.*

Hymn of St. Patrick by Dwight Beal

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBnCjDcDMKo>

Hymn of St. Patrick by Jean Watson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1OCffhjHYw>

I Bind Unto Myself Today by Choir of Keble College

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOeJA7-jXjI&t=20s>

Hail Glorious St. Patrick by Roger Lacey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGSYG4vLyKE>

St. Patrick's Breastplate by Piano and Cello

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WicWkLd3PTQ>

Song of St. Patrick by Marty Haugen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpWiCJqx7jM>

The Irish Blessing by Virtual Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TascswZPj8U>

and just for fun... "Raise a Glass to St. Patrick" by The Irish Rovers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7IAS4ZfCpw>

and May the Road Rise to Meet You by Nathan Carter and the High Kings

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UERM03w7bko>

## **St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, March 18, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #294**

### **One day the world changed. One Year Later.**

*<sup>27</sup> Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. (Jn. 14:27 NRS)*

**Foreword:** One year ago today. I sat to write my first devotion. Patterned after "Christ in our Home," but longer and later adding musical links to YouTube, it was the first of what would be the next 293. 365 days later, and 300,000 words and more than 1,300 musical video links later, here we are.

Little did I know when I wrote "One day the world changed just how much the world was about the change so much more. So, for today's devotion, I want to reprint what I first wrote a year ago, and offer additional reflections as well as some songs I did not add a year ago.

## **St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, March 18, 2020 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #1**

### **One day the world changed.**

It wasn't that the world changed on a certain day, but rather it was the day I realized the world as I have experienced it, is forever changed (and still changing).

We've had other days like this: the attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, the terrorist attack of 9/11/2001, the "Black Tuesday" stock market collapse October 24, 1929.

This time, for me, it was March 15, 2020, the day church closed because of an emerging worldwide pandemic. And while nothing seemed really "wrong" on this particular Sunday, it marked the beginning of an awareness that many Sundays may pass before we are unable to gather for the precious gift of Christian worship and fellowship in Jesus name.

I've had Sundays "off" during other times and have always been so glad to be back together with everyone soon after that. Now we all need to learn how to connect and stay connected to each other when we cannot physically share sacred worship space.

All I know today is that it is hard to bear the thought of not being with you brothers and sisters, singing hymns, praying, sharing God's word and Holy Supper... and yes... hugging. And like nearly everyone, the unknown of what's going to happen to us during this global crisis is terrifying.

One day the world changed. What has not changed is the promise that God is faithful and merciful, steadfastly at our sides forever. That has never changed.

No matter what happens I pray that by clinging to all God's promises, we will change the way we live these days and continue to serve in Jesus' name, regardless of how many feet we are from each other.

*<sup>27</sup> Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. (Jn. 14:27 NRS)*

Let us pray:

*O God, bless us during this time of global distress and uncertainty. We had hardly keep up with all the emotions that are stirred daily by news reports of our illness laden world. Give us strength to trust in you above all else and show us all the ways we can continue to let all our friends and loved ones know we love them. Bless all our health care workers, our scientists and researchers, our first responders and all who are in harm's way today. Protect those who are sick and those who care for them. In Jesus name. Amen.*

**Afterword:** I see in my writing that I was bold to assert God's unchanging love and faithfulness. I still believe that, maybe even more as our own faith has been tested. The prayer seems just as relevant today as a year ago, though now I would add prayers of thanks for vaccine hopefulness as well as prayers that people will put aside their fears and misinformation and get vaccinated for protection the healing for the whole world.

What is ahead is still quite unknown. While we long for the familiarity of times past, God is calling us to a future where God promises to continue to be with us. We have found ways to worship that connects us to God and each other through online or masked and physically distanced worship. We have found ways to meet through Zoom meetings, including our weekly prayer group and circles. We continue to use other social media platforms to connect and communicate. We broadcast our services live. One year ago today, I quite frankly could not have imagined us doing these things. Not good old traditional historic St. Paul's.

One year later I'm deeply thankful for recognizing God's ministry continuing through us, even as we find ourselves in unfamiliar territory. God is good, and will never fail us. Thanks be to God.

*How Can I Keep From Singing* by NYC Virtual Choir  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLPP3XmYxXg>  
*My Life Flows On* by Audrey Assad  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Li2hddmy63U>  
*Lead On O King Eternal* by Virtual Choir  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zE\\_YfQPOUpI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zE_YfQPOUpI)

*Lead On O King Eternal* by Shepherd Band

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K591U2g-tig>

*Lead On O King Eternal* by Sara Groves

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7wd2\\_shSNw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7wd2_shSNw)

*Walk Along Beside Me, O Lord* by Don Besig

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfmtvX9ifsU>

*All Depends on Our Possessing* by Concordia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvcuKj8dOzw>

*God When Human Bonds Are Broken* ELW 603 by Mt Si and Sammamish Hills

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLbBJXSBod0>

*Lord Teach Us How to Pray Aright* ELW 745 by Chet Valley Churches

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSrfJ9WUQik>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, March 18, 2021** not by Pastor Mark Opgrand but **by the Reverend Doctor Michael Megahan, Ph.D.**

**Fear. A short meditation for Lent.**

*"Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge"* (Proverbs 1:7)

A short meditation for Lent:

## **FEAR**

I begin with a short introduction to language: The ideas of *"fear"* (a noun) and *"afraid"* (a verb) are very common in the Bible. If you look closely, the word *"afraid"* often occurs as a negative phrase: *"do not be afraid"* (for example, Luke 2:10). The verb with the negative is better translated as *"stop being afraid,"* because it is said to somebody who is already afraid. The noun *"fear"* is usually stated as an affirmative, as in *"Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge"* (Proverbs 1:7).

What does *"fear"* specifically refer to in the verse from Proverbs? Does it mean that we should fear God's punishment? Is there a connection between *"fear"* and *"respect?"* When translating Scripture, we encounter languages that have many different words to express ideas, depending on the specific nuance of a word in a context.

For example, in Swahili, if you look in a lexicon to find translation of the English word *"fear,"* you will find *"hofu," "tisho," "ogofu,"* or *"kucha."* Each has a different sense of *"fear"* and used in different contexts. How does the translator know which to use in the phrase *"fear of the Lord"*?

Then there is Luther's catechism that starts each explanation of the Ten Commandments, *"You should fear and love God ..."* What did Luther mean by *"fear?"*

Some say that we should be afraid of God's punishment. To put it bluntly, to fear the fires of Hell. But that is not the kind of fear meant in Prov 1:7 nor when we read Psalm 118:4: *"Let those who fear the Lord say, 'His love endures forever.'"*

Nor is it the fear a child might have of a parent when the child disobeys and says, *"I'm sorry. I'll be nice from now on."* Neither of those are the fear that brings salvation, nor do they give life and joy. They only encourage us to do good works that, in the end, bring hubris and the sense that by my works I have been saved.

The fear of the Lord is the awe-inspiring, humbling experience of God that cannot be described fully with words.

It is standing in the very presence of the Omnipotent, Creator of all things visible and invisible, of the cosmos that stretches beyond our imagination and hearing the Creator saying, *“Come as you are, with all your weakness and sin and pain, come and be my friend and I will be your savior and comforter. You in your sinfulness giving yourself to me,”* says God, *“is the greatest gift you can give.”*

The experience of fear as awe is an experience that is very difficult to illustrate. It is something that if others hear they will find *“unbelievable”*, yet it is the most believable, positive life-changing experience you can have.

One of my experiences, which I seldom tell because people often shake their heads in disbelief, comes from a late night in Africa. I had gone to a preaching point that was like being at the end-of-the world. They had built me a small hut of twigs and grass for my use each trip. It was so small that I could not stand up inside, and when I lay on the sleeping platform my feet stuck out through the *“door.”* It was surrounded by a high thorn-branch fence to keep leopards and lions and hyenas out of my *“yard.”*

I loved my little resort high in the Matthew Range where I could read my devotional at midnight using the light from stars and moon alone. A bright fire kept the animals away and kept me warm.

One night, after being asleep a few hours, I was awakened with the sense that something or somebody had crept into the hut. But there was nothing. This happened three times. Each time it was like somebody calling my name. Something wanted to communicate with me. But always there was only darkness and quietude when I awoke.

That is, until the 3rd awakening. Then I realized that a large herd of elephants had surrounded the hut just outside of the fence. I could hear their stomachs rumbling. It was as if they were trying to probe my thoughts to find out who or what I was. I relaxed and sent out a silent message by thought: *“It’s ok. It is just me. You can go.”* They turned quietly and left. I went back to sleep.

How fearfully awesome! To be surrounded by such majestic beasts who only wanted to be sure of my peaceful intentions. And they were trying to communicate with me! So unbelievable! Yet it is the most believable experience I have ever had.

That is the awesome fear of the Lord! God the Omnipotent, King of the Universe bending down to me to be my friend, my savior, and my comforter no matter who I am or what I have done.

That friend named Jesus saying, “Come to me and I will give you rest.” It is difficult to describe, but wonderful to experience.

As you make the Lenten journey, do not be afraid to meditate on the cross, sin, and death. Rather stand in fear of the cross and the resurrection—yes, **CROSS AND RESURRECTION!** So unbelievably true. So awesome that he who had no sin died that I might be forgiven. He rose from the dead that I too might have a resurrection.

### **FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING NOT THE END!**

*Prayer: Father God, in the Name of Jesus, lift me out of the mundane and let me stand in awe of the cross and the resurrection. Let me experience the fear that humbles me and, at the same moment, lifts my heart up among the stars to be with you singing, “What a friend I have in Jesus!” Amen.*

*What a Friend I Have in Jesus*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XRmGEbH0qs>

*What a Friend We Have in Jesus* by SE Samonte

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XRmGEbH0qs>

*What a Friend We Have In Jesus* by Acapeldridge

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LarFhGeE-ac>

*Be Not Afraid* by Catholic Virtual Artists

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RF0DlpFOoBg>

*Be Not Afraid* by John Michael Talbot

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQr4udSiEew>

*Be Not Afraid* by Orchard Enterprises

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pEOt7yXCajI>

*Fear Not For I am With You* by Esther Mui

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MN7CiQm7I5A>

*Fear Not for I am With You* by Hamilton Family

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQfE7S01gCw>

*Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross* by MrLifeMusic

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPtUwVoJsi8>

*Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross* (Russian version by Simon K)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GB7V4usZhVQ>

**So what's with this order of Melchizedek?**

*Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him,*

*“You are my Son,  
today I have begotten you”;  
as he says also in another place,  
“You are a priest forever,  
according to the order of Melchizedek.”*

*In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, 1having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5:5-10)*

This was the second lesson for yesterday, the Fifth Sunday in Lent (Series B). I have always been much more drawn to the verse where *“Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears”* than to the verse where God says *“You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.”*

With so many powerful words in Hebrews, it is easy to overlook the references to the order of Melchizedek. It is quite an obscure reference. Only ten verses in the Bible speak of Melchizedek. Eight of the ten are in Hebrews. One is in Genesis 14: 18-20 where he is introduced:

*And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. 19 He blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; 20 and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him one tenth of everything. (Gen. 14:18-20 NRS)*

Melchizedek is the only king in the Old Testament who is described as both king and priest. It is interesting that he presents bread and wine to Abram (foreshadowing of Holy Communion?) and blesses Abram. Abram offers a tithe in appreciation.

The other Old Testament Melchizedek reference is Psalm 110, a Psalm of David written either for a future king ... or ... wait for it ... a future Messiah! 4 *“The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’”* (Ps. 110:4 NRS)

So that's the "other place" referenced in Hebrews.

In the New Testament, the writer of Hebrews looks at these unusual references, and raises Melchizedek's profile to a pre-incarnate Christ-figure. Hebrews even says Melchizedek is eternal, having no "father or mother" and "resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever" (Heb 7:3). Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek also confirms his greatness (Heb. 7:4)

Following Melchizedek, then, Jesus is the true king of righteousness (that's what the word "Melchizedek" means) who lived the perfect life no human being could. Jesus is also the true king of peace (Salem, like Shalom) who came to earth to bring peace through his sacrificial death and resurrection. Jesus is also "a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 7:17) and not through Levitical lineage (Heb 7:14), making his priesthood superior (Heb. 7:11).

As a result, "This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant" (Heb.7:22). Because "he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever" (Heb 7:24), "he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25).

There. Aren't you glad you asked? Wait. You didn't ask? Well, didn't you ever wonder who was Melchizedek was and why Jesus was said to be of his order? Anyway, now you know. Blessings.

Let us pray. Thank you, Jesus for being our prophet, priest, and king, connecting us to all those who preceded you and who were part of paving the way for your life and ministry. Help us know that we can always turn to you for all we need. Bless you for your priestly duties, praying and making intercession for us. Amen.

*Jesus our Prophet, our Priest and our King* by Judy Rogers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h52LiAKrpeQ>

*Prophet, Priest and King* by Gary and Stephanie Wright

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50XhcE6AtJ4>

*Christ Our High Priest* by Living Stream Hymns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yh1e8Z7Y88Q>

*Great High Priest* by Cameron Keith

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jr4ckWuMpM>

*Jesus My Great High Priest* by Gary Brumley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18WtL8p7mUs>

*Order of Melchizedek* by VCF of Greeley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4m8xhXEpp6s>

*Melchizedek* by Kings and Giants

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vH3t4xPmNws>

*Prophet, Priest, and King* by Tom Blakely

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKnJXS5Abjg>

*We Eat the Bread of Teaching* ELW 518 by Salem Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbmDPq75N1A>

*We Eat the Bread of Teaching* ELW 518 by St. Paul Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tf4dxLAvmHM>

*Come to Us, Creative Spirit* ELW 687 by Angel Voices

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRUjmvAmCyU>

*Come to Us, Creative Spirit* ELW 687 by Augsburg Fortress

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZWg1N46rRs>

*Come to Us, Creative Spirit* by First Lutheran Crystal

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPDKZNUS7\\_4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPDKZNUS7_4)

*Come to Us, Creative Spirit* by Victoria Methodist

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CLILT71uus>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, March 23, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #299

### Have you ever had a dream come true? Literally?

*And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. 13 Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." (Matt. 2:12-13 NRS)*

Some of you have seen the magnificent wall sculpture created by Gary Lenz that hangs opposite my church office door. It depicts a "Kokopelli-like" preacher playing a soprano saxophone. Today I would like to share a very interesting story about how I came to have that sax and the questions it raises about the mystery of dreams.

In the summer of 1975, after my first year at Luther Seminary, I found a summer church "internship" at a small rural two-point parish in Noonan, North Dakota. Noonan had just 400 residents and was a few miles from the Canadian border in northwest North Dakota.

The parish wanted to introduce a seminarian who had never served in a rural area what rural Lutheran parish life was like. Growing up on the west coast and having previous ministry experience in the mountains and the city, but not among farmers, I was an ideal candidate. I had a wonderful experience.

One morning I had a most interesting dream that seemed to come out of nowhere. I dreamed I had found a rare C Melody Saxophone for sale; I purchased it and was playing away when I awoke. It was a weird dream in that I had only seen a C Melody Sax once in my life in my sixth-grade band closet. No one played it.

That noon I was invited to a farmer's home for the main meal. That was the common practice for farm families, and this was a large farm (1,110 acres). So along with the farmer's family and a couple of workers, I also met his father-in-law. I still remember his name: Andy Kostas. Andy was a Catholic so I would not have met him our Lutheran Church.

We chatted, and I not only learned he was an accordion player who had just purchase a new accordion, but that he also played tenor sax in his local polka band. That gave me an opportunity to share that I too played tenor sax ... and that I had (that morning) my most unusual dream about finding and purchasing a C Melody Sax. I imagined he was old enough to be more familiar with that. Our conversation went like this:

"... and I had this dream about finding a C Melody Sax for sale."

“Oh yeah?” Andy said, “I have a C Melody Sax for sale. The Pentacostal preacher was thinking about buying it, but if you want it, it’s yours.”

After the meal, we went to his house. He brought it down, I played it, and of course, given my dream, I *had* to get it. When I asked how much, he said, “How about \$25?” I said “That’s too little, but at the same time, all my money is going for school. So how about \$50?”

He said, “Well if you’re going to do that. I’m going to do this. I have another sax that isn’t playable, but maybe you could get it fixed up.” So out he came with a straight soprano.

That’s how I got the soprano. I did try to get it fixed, but it cost more to fix than getting a new one, so it sat for many years in a closet. The C Melody never played very well, so I traded it to an artist who wanted to use it for a sculpture. He gave me one of his paintings.

Years went by until I discovered St. Paul’s member Gary Lenz’s hand crafted Whirlygigs. I wondered if my sax could have been made into something, perhaps a lamp. Gary took it and presented me with this most wonderful and unusual sculpture that turns every head who sees it.

Every time I see it, I still remember that day. I had the dream. If I had not dined with the farmer that day, I would not have met Andy. Had I not had the dream, I would not have shared it with him. I doubt we would have talked about his C Melody Sax, since the Pentecostal preacher was already interested in it. And how many C Melody saxes would even have been around in this very rural part of North Dakota with just 400 residents? What if the dream were less vivid and I had forgotten it, like most dreams?

This is one of my most personal great mysteries. But it also shapes how I look at every story in the Bible that feature dreams and their interpretations. I have no doubt about the dreams experienced by Abimelech, Jacob, Joseph (OT), Pharoah, Solomon, Nebuchadnezzar, Joseph (NT), and the Magi. For each, the dreams had great meaning. Some recognized their dreams as potent witnesses to the mysteries of God as God spoke to them.

I cannot claim my C Melody Sax dream rises to a Biblical level dream, but it always reminds me of things that I cannot explain, and I can be at peace with that. Not only that, but I always give God thanks for that dream come true that now hangs outside my door. What was unplayable has become a special art object.

So how about you? Ever have a dream that opened the mystery of God for you.? At least a little? Or maybe a dream or something else that caused you to ponder something that cannot logically be explained? This is something to think about. May God bless you as you ponder these mysteries. Blessings.

Let us pray. *We pray that life's mysteries will bring us joy as we consider your amazing ways among us. We thank you for good dreams that bring us to new days. Thank you for unexpected joys, and for all the ways we recognize your love for us. For your awesomeness O God, we give you thanks. Amen.*

*Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery* by Virtual Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mu-sSwvaOdM>

*Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery* by Peace Lutheran Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tsoUTsfF7PY>

*There is a Great Mystery* by NYCPCD

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KsxPMWZPmpQ>

*There is a Great Mystery* by Living Stream Hymns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZavQAgyrTII>

*There is A Great Mystery* by Shulammite Son (in Korean)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VyJHKR3dy0U>

*In this Sacred Mystery* by Francis Googal

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REPj4cYOurc>

*In this Sacred Mystery* by Xavier Moorkattil

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v76UgyJcWwY>

*Lo! I Tell You A Mystery* by Kirk Orr

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4b0eAA75Ch4>

*Behold I Tell You A Mystery* by Philippe Sly from Handel's *Messiah*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13DpmWPV9IU>

*Joseph's Dream* by Donny Osmond

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z\\_sggPFAoT0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_sggPFAoT0)

*C Melody Sax playing the Blues* by Dave Pollack

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tb8nZQ2z8p0>

## St. Paul's in Your Home for Wednesday, March 24, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #300

### March Madness and Life's Recaps.

*"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. (Rev. 1:8 NRS)*

Most often Lent begins before March Madness. For basketball fans, one thing that is never given up for Lent is basketball. Starting with sixty-four teams, as the first weekend finishes, we next move to the Sweet Sixteen, Elite Eight, Final Four, and then the Championship game.

Even during a year with Covid protocols, the games are still played, brackets are busted, Cinderella teams emerge, and spectacular games happen.

It used to be that someone following the tournament had to be near a television. That was before the amazing *"March Madness Live App"* for smart phones and tablets. Now you can watch every game wherever you are, and not only that, but the app also alerts you to when a certain game is about to enter an exciting nail-biting finish.

The newest feature that has most amazed me is the *"Condensed Game."* More than a simple *"recap"* with a highlight or two, this ten-minute version of the game is so skillfully edited that it feels like we are watching the whole game (but in just ten minutes). It's not a high-speed replay, but rather a well edited version where every spectacular shot goes in. Swish after swish, steal after steal, fast break after fast break, there are no dull moments as the score races steadily toward the climax.

What we lose watching this version of the game is any real suspense. We know the end, so this is just a matter of watching how we got there. If that's all we had of the game, *"March Madness"* would soon be called *"March Dullness."* Even with the great baskets, they are only great because of the possibility that they might be missed.

It has been suggested by some theologians that God knows our futures not so much because of God being able to *"see"* into the future, but rather because as *"Alpha and Omega"*, God is already in the beginning and the end, God is already in our past, present, and future. Therefore, it's not so much that God knows what we *will do*, but rather God knows what we *have already done* (witnessed from God's future perspective).

How God inhabits time is one of those mysteries for which there is very limited understanding from our human perspective. What we can imagine, based on scripture, is that at the end of time, God has all our experiences from which to recap our lives.

Hopefully, in God's "Condensed Version" of our lives, God will leave out everything we've botched, every missed play, every air ball, every foul, every boneheaded move we ever made, and will remember only us for the good (if not spectacular) plays we have made and for our trust in Jesus our Good "Coach" as we have played in God's mission field.

Let us pray. *We thank you O God, for your amazing grace that invites us into life in Christ. Grant us the gifts and skills we need in order live and serve as you have called us. Thank you for forgiving our failures and sins and always restoring our spirits when we miss the mark. Amen.*

*Take O Take Me As I Am* by Grosse Pointe Virtual Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bv4f-8L1uk0>

*Take O Take Me As I Am* by Chapel of St. Ignatius Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7bXteoRnvQ>

*Take My Life and Let it Be* by Michigan Lutheran Seminary Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vrOfhCy6aVg>

*Take My Life and Let it Be* by Concordia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FHU2h1000I>

*Take My Life and Let it Be* by David and Noelle Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FN3OaZJaNEE>

*Just As I Am* by Acapeldridge

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8dnUns2dlw>

*Just As I Am* by Sounds Like Rain

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=duTpgGl4sTU>

*My Life Flows On* by First Unitarian

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cdwKOBkpzZE>

*My Life Flows On* by Cameron Schubert

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CKVikpvdQeQ>

*Lead Me, Guide Me* by Doris Ackers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hz5FnSi4Ba0>

*Lead Me Guide Me* by Morgan State University Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n22HdEvugDI>

*On Our Way Rejoicing* by Silverdale Lutheran Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGPzwaRduv4>

*On Our Way Rejoicing* by Medina Chorus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frbLcZT4oRA>

*Create In Me a Clean Heart* by The Acapella Company

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=noUeQQ64Q1I>

*Create In Me A Clean Heart* by Stephanie Rachel Ministry

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wlwBs4DTuzM>

**God really knows us (but what if I'm a private person and want to keep it that way?)**

*O LORD, you have searched me and known me. 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. 3 You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. (Ps. 139:1-3 NRS)*

I had a recent conversation with a member about if it was hard to keep coming up with devotions, especially now after doing "hundreds." I said "yes," and told her that I would be glad if she had any ideas to share. A few days later, I found three torn out pages from "Christ in Our Home," in my mailbox.

One of them had the heading, "**God really knows us.**" It was based on Psalm 139 and began with the writer observing how well his wife of forty-five years knows him, and despite "*all my foibles and shortcomings, she stays with me and loves me.*"

The writer goes on to describe that God really knows us, including "*our ill-begotten ways, our quick, irresponsible tongues, and even what we are thinking. God knows us so well because God is always- always- behind and before us.*"

The author's good news is based on the idea that God fully knowing us is a positive thing and suggests that "*this simple profound truth can carry us through challenging times.*"

This is one of those messages that is supposed to encourage us, but I could not help but wonder if, for people who really value their privacy, is this really comforting? There are more times that I can count when I would rather not want to God to know what I am thinking or doing.

Being perfectly honest, there is a lot of ugly stuff going on inside my head. I have hateful thoughts. I want things that are not good for me. I am far from perfectly honest, and no matter what kind of nice person I try to project, there is a private person within that I do not want revealed to anyone, including God. Especially God.

I still have an old paperback book of poetry and verse called "*Kites at Empty Airports*" where author Joe Pintauro in few words brings a smile to my face as I consider this "*all-knowing*" God.

***"To believe in God is to know someone who knows you through and through and likes you still and all."***

It may not be comforting to realize just how deeply God knows us “*through and through,*” especially that which we hate about ourselves. That’s why we need the “*and likes you still and all.*” In Jesus, we know that goes even deeper: “***and LOVES you still and all!***”

To hear this, and other words of grace and love through the gospel of Jesus Christ, we can then rejoice in these words of Psalm 139:

*7 Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?  
8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
9 If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.  
11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,"  
12 even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you. (Ps. 139:7-12 NRS)*

Even if God knowing us is a little (or big) invasion of our privacy, it is a worthwhile tradeoff, especially when we take to heart that God knows us through and through and loves us still and all.

Let us pray. *Gracious God, help us welcome your powerful presence in our lives and be thankful for being known and loved so well by you. Amen.*

All the songs today are based on Psalm 139. Each version is different.

*You are There* Psalm 139 by Songs for the Masses

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZ4my3VrVlg>

*You are There* Psalm 139 by Sherri Youngword

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6g6XiBoe0>

*You are There* Psalm 139 by Jazz Meets Hymns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rhXqArlvzv8>

*Psalm 139* by Matt Gierling

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlwabBeZ1GY>

*Psalm 139* by Esther Mui

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5HINlegg5M>

*Yahweh I know You Are Near* (Psalm 139) by Dan Schutte

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bsc-T5edJrU>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, March 26, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #302

### Is heaven a (pearly) gated community?

*And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass. (Rev. 21:21 NRS)*

The “*Pearly Gates*” have long been an image of the gateway to heaven. It has inspired songs such as “*Open Up Those Pearly Gates*”; it has created settings for countless jokes, as in “*a man was standing before St. Peter at the Pearly Gates*”...;

The only Biblical reference to “*pearly gates*” is in Revelation 21:21, quoted above. “**Gates**” are mentioned six times in Revelation 21 as part of heavenly imagery, including streets paved with gold. Three hundred ninety-five times we see the word “*gate*” or “*gates*” in scripture, and in almost every instance, it refers to a *literal* gate.

Besides “*pearly gates*”, Revelation also mentions “*walls of jasper*”, and glass-like “*gold streets*”, not only conveying an image of richness, but also commonness. What is rare and priceless on earth is quite ordinary in heaven. In heaven, gold is like asphalt, for example. Rare earthly pearls would simply adorn a common gate.

The “*pearly gates*” have come to be associated with the main (or exclusive) entrance to heaven, though Revelation itself names twelve gates, not one. There is no mention of St. Peter being the gatekeeper, though it is at this location that many have assumed judgment will be meted out.

The pearly gates provide a potent image for judgement day, where if you have been good, you get let in, and if not, you are turned away for hell. It must be noted, of course, that according to the gospel, “*going to heaven*” is not about being good, but rather being faithful and forgiven, and those who trust God and live by faith will be welcomed to their heavenly home.

The idea that heaven is a gated community designed to keep people out or separate the saved from unsaved is interesting to ponder. It probably makes more sense to imagine hell as a gated community designed to keep people in.

I was reminded of one of my favorite old “*Twilight Zone*” episodes called “*The Hunt*.” In this 1962-episode, old man Hyder Simpson and his faithful hound dog “*Rip*,” accidentally drown. After realizing they have died, Mr. Simpson and Rip follow a fence until they come to a guarded gate. The friendly guard assures “*neighbor*” Simpson this is heaven, and he welcomes him to come in. It is Rip who resists, and when the guard tells him “*you can't take that dog in there*,” the old man refuses to go in.

Later down the road Simpson meets another (an angel) who says he has been looking for him. Simpson discovers that the gate he had passed was to hell and even after someone dies, “they” keep trying to trick the dead into coming. Rip could smell the brimstone and was not about to let his master go that direction. As the angel says, “A man, why he’ll walk right into hell with both eyes open. But even the devil can’t fool a dog.” I love that line! Martin Luther would love it too.

Simpson learns dogs are welcome in heaven and waiting for them will be a celebration and coon hunt; his wife will be along shortly. The show ends with the three of them entering, not through pearly gates, but through an ungated opening with beautiful path ahead. This was reminiscent of people who have described positive near-death experiences and being drawn to the light and the joy that awaits them.

This “*Twilight Zone*” episode is built on conjecture, but a good one nonetheless, drawing from the gospel of God’s grace. Who knows? But even if we are standing in front of pearly gates as imagined by art, literature, song, or jokes, the word of the Lord will be the same, “*Welcome Home!*”

Let us pray. *Gracious God, we know in time we shall stand before you, whether it be at the pearly gates or a beautiful pathway to a vast meadow, or in some fashion we cannot imagine. Thank you, that no matter what awaits us, that we can trust that we are in your good care and nothing will keep you from your love. In Jesus we pray. Amen.*

You might enjoy watching both these clips from “*The Hunt*.” The first is a condensed version of the whole episode. The second shows Simpson’s full conversation with the Angel.

Twilight Zone Condensed Telling of “*The Hunt*.” (5.17 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOMUFarHNRw>

Twilight Zone’s “*The Hunt*” full conversation with the angel (2.21 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLBTTIf7EzA>

and now... the music....

*Open Up Those Pearly Gates* by Billy Strings

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcyCepKdR\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcyCepKdR_Y)

*Open Up Those Pearly Gates* by The Seekers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jDSgwlyCG8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BwsD-WGvFoc>

*Open Up Those Pearly Gates* by Doc Watson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOB08Y3zBfE>

*Open Up Those Pearly Gates* by Saddle Pals

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kk8tauWW698>

*He the Pearly Gates Will Open* by Don Marsh

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ObgF5amuZU>

*Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty* by Mt. Olive

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AO5d\\_5zf8Aw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AO5d_5zf8Aw)

*Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty* by Erin Jogue

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wfKzTuV9r8>

*Fling Wide the Door, Unbar the Gate* by Salem Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kk6rF2vMo5M&t=55s>

*Fling Wide the Door* by Paul Dewey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5mzKsvgtD4>

*My Heavenly Home* by Front Range (beautiful acapella)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZ6AGqHNBdo>

*Gate of Heaven* by David and Nicole Binion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3sKbPQFez4>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, March 29, 2021** not by Pastor Mark Opgrand **but by**  
**Chaplain Bob Weeks #303**

## **LOVE AND DEATH**

By

**Chaplain Bob Weeks**

Scripture: "Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in his honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the home was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." (John 12:1-3)

The scripture for this day, the first day of Holy Week 2021, is all about a party. An evening party in the home of Martha and Mary.

### **WELCOME TO THE PARTY!**

**By party, I mean a gathering of people in honor of a person.** This party was given six days before the Passover in honor of Jesus in the home of Martha and Mary.

**THIS PARTY TURNED OUT TO BE ABOUT LOVE AND DEATH.** Lazarus had come home from being dead, and a crowd had shown up to see him – some out of disbelief and some out of curiosity, and some out of love. Lazarus was in attendance at the party, but he was not the most important guest. **JESUS WAS THE HONORED GUEST.** Some were attending the party to spy on Jesus for the Chief Priests who would take action after the party.

As always, Martha was the dinner server. Lazarus was reclining at the table with Jesus.

**THEN MARY NOW DID THAT THING WITH THE OIL.** She anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped them off with her hair -- right in front of everyone at the party. No upright Jewish woman would have dared to do this in public. Mary used so much oil that the entire house smelled of perfume. **NO WONDER A DISPUTE BROKE OUT!**

It seems the dispute was about the oil. Judas claimed he wanted to use the oil for the poor, but the Gospel writer, John, reports that he was lying, and wanted to use the oil to make himself rich. That is what happened at the party, and, of course, right after the party, Judas helped the High Priest take action to kill Jesus.

**DURING THIS WEEK WE CALL “HOLY WEEK,”** we will be invited to a Eucharistic dinner party on Easter Sunday. We will be invited to a Eucharistic party from a world in which we live – a world that in many ways is “dead in belief of God.” Wouldn’t it be great if someone did something out of the ordinary, like Mary did?

**MARY DOES THE OUT OF ORDINARY THING.** She had kept the oil and now knows it is time to bring it out. She sees the burial of Jesus coming and nothing else matters. Maybe she sensed that the presence of her brother, Lazarus, and Jesus raising him from the dead, had upset the Temple Clergy Members to take evil action against Jesus. Mary knew that the party would turn to the matters of the death of Jesus.

**AND SO - NOW THE PARTY TURNS FROM LOVE TO DEATH.** Now the smell of nard calls for the death of Jesus. Jesus agrees that it was intended for the day of his burial – **SO HE TELLS JUDAS “LEAVE HER ALONE!”**

**HOW ARE YOU PREPARING FOR THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS IN 2021?** What if you, aware of the coming day of the burial of Jesus, were moved by love and gratitude over his life giving sacrifice, you decide to do something out of the ordinary for someone else so that they stop and smell the fragrance of Jesus burial? Maybe you could invite an unchurched person to view one of the You Tube devotions or worship services. What if your action causes them to worship on Easter? What if they come to know the Saviour Jesus? This pandemic we are experiencing causes loneliness, but what if you invite someone to view a devotional and they become closer to Christ? Maybe they will even listen to the Easter message.

At the party described in John’s Gospel, Mary and Judas were both preparing for the death of Jesus.

Judas was the voice of piety tradition that says it is concerned about the poor, but no real interest in the poor is manifested. He was only concerned about himself.

Mary, on the other hand, does not say a thing, her action says everything. What she does connects her life to Jesus and binds her to his.

**IF YOU REMEMBER, I WROTE IN THE BEGINNING OF THIS DEVOTION, “WOULDN’T IT BE GREAT IF SOMEONE DID SOMETHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY?”**

**WELL, JESUS DID – BEFORE HIS DEATH, HE GAVE US A MEAL OF HIS BODY AND BLOOD.** Every time we receive the Lord’s Supper, we are reminded of his love and his death for us. His meal is out of the ordinary because it is his body and blood that is served. His meal is about his love and death for us.

**AND SO I CALL YOU TO REMEMBER THAT OUR PARTY WILL CONTINUE THROUGHOUT THIS 2021 HOLY WEEK.**

MAY THE STORY OF JESUS’ LOVE AND DEATH CONTINUALLY BE  
ON OUR MINDS THIS WEEK.

**WELCOME TO THE PARTY!**

Prayer: Dear God, your son Jesus chose the path to death that led to pain before joy, and the cross before glory. Plant the action of Jesus in our minds this week, so that we may come at last to peace and joy through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

*Lord, whose Love in Humble Service* by Katerina Sourvorova

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SbL7iXf69xQ>

*Lord, whose Love in Humble Service* by First Methodist Houston

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJpxaK-oRrc>

*Lord, whose Love in Humble Service* by JBrink16

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILelkl7qeuM>

*Love Consecrates the Humblest Act* by Oglethorpe Presbyterian Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JN5ql-vBuJU>

*Love Consecrates the Humblest Act* by Morningstar Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pj1j7D6RDMI>

*Love Consecrates the Humblest Act* by Hilldale Choir Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aiYVlb7UeWY>

*Great God Your Love Has Called Us* by Michael Joncas

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OKTKBA\\_yxaM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OKTKBA_yxaM)

*Great God Your Love Has Called Us* by Grace Lutheran Elkhart

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PCIP4W36MIQ>

*Great God Your Love Has Called Us* by Rod Smith

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFrwAn\\_-zLY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFrwAn_-zLY)

*All Glory Laud and Honor* by Grosse Pointe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gC6ou8kRww0>

*All Glory Laud and Honor* by St. John's Compline Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRjffQxSTeQ>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday March 30, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #304

### What did the centurion see that no one else did?

*With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. 38 The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"* (Mk. 15:37-39 NIV)

These are the final verses of our Palm/Passion Sunday gospel reading. It depicts the last moments of Jesus on the cross, according to St. Mark. This account is different from the other gospels. John's gospel does not mention the centurion at all.

As Matthew tells the story, the centurion spoke these words after an earthquake coincided with Jesus' final breath. 54 When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "**Surely he was the Son of God!**" (Matt. 27:54 NIV). In this case it was not just the one centurion who said this, but all who guarded Jesus. Matthew describes them as "terrified."

In Luke, the centurion heard Jesus say "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." When Jesus died, there was no earthquake, and nothing terrified the centurion. Luke says, "47 The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "**Surely this was a righteous man.**" (Lk. 23:47 NIV).

Each gospel has a different way of telling this story. In Luke, the centurion recognized Jesus was a good man, and praised God. I wonder why he praised God. If Jesus was righteous, then surely Jesus' death was a serious injustice. Wouldn't it make more sense to say "*My God, why did you let this happen to such a good man?*"

In Matthew, it seems that the terror of the earthquake had something to do with their confession. Jesus' final word in Matthew is, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" Then comes the earthquake. Did the centurion and guard see this as a way of God saying, "*I am God, hear me roar?*" Jesus dies. An earthquake happens. They conclude, "**Surely he was the Son of God.**"

There is something that draws me to Mark's account. Scholars agree Mark is the oldest gospel and Matthew and Luke draw from it. This account is certainly the simplest one. It also leaves me with the deepest mystery.

What did the centurion see that no one else did? In this account he has, as in Matthew, heard Jesus say, *“My God, My God why have you forsaken me?”* He would not have known about the temple curtain torn in half. There was no earthquake.

But something happened as he watched Jesus die. He believed what he said. Otherwise, he would not have confessed ***“Surely this man was the Son of God.”***

The centurion had not seen Jesus rise from the dead or heard about it from other eyewitnesses. That hasn't happened yet. All he would know is what he is seeing on that hill of death called *“Golgotha.”* Because he was a Roman centurion, it is probable that he would have known very little about Jesus. Mark does not tell of Jesus' encounter with any other centurion.

So what happened? What happened that faith was stirred up in him even before the world would hear that *“Jesus is dead”* is not the final word. How could watching Jesus die cause him to conclude this was God's son?

I don't have an answer to this little mystery (imagine that.) We'll just have to ponder it together. I very much value, though, in this story, a realization that God moves in all sorts of ways beyond our comprehension and in ways that we do not realize.

Perhaps this story can help us celebrate some of the unconventional ways that God brings people to faith (and some through earthquakes). Maybe we can celebrate that God once again works through unlikely people to spread the gospel and share the good news.

I imagine between Friday and Sunday, the centurion would have difficulty convincing anyone else that Jesus was God's son. Sunday, of course, would be another story.

Let us pray. *We join the centurion's confession today. Truly Jesus is the Son of God. Thank you for generating this faith in us that we might join all Christians everywhere who look for hope through the cross. Beneath the cross of Jesus, we long to take our stand. Bless us all we pray.*

Just one song today... but done well by all these artists.

*Beneath the Cross of Jesus* by Keith and Kirsten Getty

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drrmyCBYjrE>

*Beneath the Cross of Jesus* by Christ Lutheran Dallas

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52L8ICOAbcE>

*Beneath the Cross of Jesus* by Shenandoah Music Camp

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVITq4MKvQ>

*Beneath the Cross of Jesus* by Danny Byram

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=faG9EJnKqn8>

*Beneath the Cross of Jesus* by Geof Kimber

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EEYZp-3X8ts>

*Beneath the Cross of Jesus* by Hastings College Choir

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qr7\\_i8HJ-Jo&t=0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qr7_i8HJ-Jo&t=0s)

*Beneath the Cross of Jesus* by St. Mark's Lutheran (also hymn background)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4xVUuQ8mWQ>

*Beneath the Cross of Jesus* by Good Shepherd Lutheran Bell Choir (impressive foursome)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JbNMfZ30azw>

*Beneath the Cross of Jesus* by Sanctuary Choir First Methodist Houston TX

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=biU8St\\_hVAY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=biU8St_hVAY)

*Beneath the Cross of Jesus* by Metropolitan Temple London

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYfaU\\_d8Jw0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYfaU_d8Jw0)

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, March 31, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #305**

**Luther's down to earth gospel, according to Forde.**

*When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals-- one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. (Lk. 23:33-34 NIV)*

When I was a senior at Luther Seminary, I happened to overhear one of my professors talking with another. They were discussing our senior essays, a major requirement for graduation and essentially a summation of what we had learned at seminary. I will always remember Professor Paul Sponheim's lament: *"I can't understand it. They all sound like Forde."*

Professor Gerhard Forde (pronounced "*Ferdie*") was another professor and superb teacher. Sponheim might have been considered the superior intellect. He was well known for filling the chalk board with polysyllabic words and complex theological diagrams that looked like formulas from *"The Big Bang Theory"*'s astrophysicists. We acknowledged they were great, but, however hard we tried, most of us just couldn't understand them in their complexity.

We all *"sounded like Forde"* because Dr. Forde was so clear in his teaching. Solidly Lutheran, it was through this lens that he taught. He was especially well known for his clear approach to Martin Luther's *"Theology of the Cross."*

One of Forde's books is entitled: *"Where God Meets Man: Luther's Down-To-Earth Approach To The Gospel"* (Augsburg, 1972). I thought about Drs. Forde and Sponheim as I discovered something Forde wrote about the theology of the cross. As we approach Good Friday, I would like to share this example of Forde's clear and insightful teaching:

*"A theology of the cross affirms in the first instance that Jesus was not doing anything else in his death but dying. He wasn't 'paying God' or giving us an example or any such thing. He was dying – painfully, excruciatingly, really.*

A theology *about* the cross makes it seem as though he were really doing something else, as though his death had some other '*meaning*' than just death. It as if (and I suspect this is the real reason for such theology) we cannot bear the thought of a down-to-earth death, and cover it over with some other meaning, so we don't really have to look at it.

For the frightening thing about death is that ultimately it has no meaning. It is the triumph of meaninglessness, of darkness, of the nothing. That is what happened to Jesus. He *'was crucified, dead and buried.'*

For it is, in the view of a theology of the cross only the resurrection that gives his death significance. Jesus rose from the dead, he conquered the grave, the meaningless, and become the first fruits of the new. This is an end and a new beginning. Jesus broke through the closed circle and brought new life to light in his resurrection. Without the resurrection, the cross has no importance to us.”

Perhaps another time we will discuss all those theories that try to make sense of the cross. Trying to make sense is the driving force behind such explanations, but Forde makes a strong point, rooted in Luther’s theology of the cross, that looking for meaning in the cross can easily take us away from looking at the cross itself.

It is always hard to look at the death of Jesus, and explanations (theories) soften its harsh reality. Jesus died. Cruelly. For us. But in trusting God, Jesus shows us that death was not the final word for him and it will not be the final word for us either.

As Forde has also said, “Such is a theology of the cross. If you wish to be raised with Jesus, you must die with Jesus. This is to say that there is no way to appropriate the cross other than to go through it. You can’t have it in theory, you have to try it. There is nothing to do about death involved but to die it. Then something absolutely new begins: the life of faith, the life of trusting God.”

The resurrection gives meaning to the cross. And something absolutely new begins. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray. *When we look to the cross of Christ, O God, help us see in Jesus’ death simply the means by which you showed your undying love for us all. Help us trust that love and your commitment to us forever so that we might face our own death without fear. Bear near us through the cross and help us trust in the announcement from the empty tomb. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

*Lead Me to Calvary* by Hymncharts

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmSKOR5y764>

*Lead Me to Calvary* by Don Moen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tXhTpXd24s>

*Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross* by First Methodist Houston

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-8c08I4AXw>

*Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross* by the Smucker Family

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5C9FfVA-OI>

*Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross* by Hymns to Him

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJeHusJZ1k>

*In the Cross of Christ I Glory* by Trinity Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQ6STDupgCY>

*In the Cross of Christ I Glory* by Spencer Family

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=22KnjHNXReM>

*In the Cross of Christ I Glory* by The Worship Team

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nkPuT5-0jY>

*In the Cross of Christ I Glory* by Christopher Tan

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yR61rlGe\\_Ak](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yR61rlGe_Ak)

*Thank you for the Cross* by Bob Kauflin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vNs2yju1IQ>

*The Cross of Christ* by Lorenz Corp

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9y0FdxymA2c>

*The Cross of Christ* by Vinesong

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwvkwivDuNo>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, April 1, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #306**

**If the first Maundy Thursday was on April Fool's Day.**

<sup>3</sup> Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; <sup>4</sup> so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. <sup>5</sup> After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. <sup>6</sup> He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "*Lord, are you going to wash my feet?*" <sup>7</sup> Jesus replied, "**You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.**" <sup>8</sup> "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." (Jn. 13:3-8 NIV)

*"You shall never wash my feet,"* said St. Peter.

If that Passover meal had been on April 1<sup>st</sup>, Peter might as well have said, "*April Fools. Good one, Lord. I get it.*"

Jesus says, "**No foolin'. You want to be part of me? Take off your sandals.**"

*"Are you sure that's not April Fools?"*

**"No. And one of you is going to betray me. And I'll be leaving you soon. And where I'm going, you can't come."**

*"Well, that's gotta be April Fools, right?"*

**"No. and you need to love each other."**

*"Okay, that makes sense. You've been saying that. But you're not washing my feet. You're the Lord, man."*

**"Don't be the fool, Peter. I came here to serve. And to teach you to serve. I came here to die. For you."**

*Are you positive this isn't an April Fool's joke?*

**"NO... NOT FOOLIN'!"**

Had Peter believed Passover night on Maundy Thursday was an April Fool's joke, it would have been in very poor taste. Jesus was deadly serious about that what about to happen, and these final words about servanthood were to be taken seriously.

Washing the disciples' feet was an act of kindness and humility that Jesus wanted his disciples to imitate, just as he wanted them to love one another as he had loved them. "Lord" Jesus loved them and did not "lord over them" his divinity.

John's gospel emphasizes servanthood as part of discipleship. This is reflected in Jesus washing their feet as a humble servant. With of this emphasis, the institution of the Lord's Supper is not mentioned. It is mentioned in the other gospels. During Passover Jesus took the bread, gave

thanks, and gave it to them saying, *“Take and eat. This is my body.”* In the spirit of April Fool’s Day, I can well imagine Peter saying, *“Right, Jesus. That’s another good one. I supposed next you’ll be saying this wine is your blood? April Fools!”*

There were many things Jesus’ followers did not understand as these events took place in real time. Words were spoken. Actions were taken. Events were witnessed. But much less was evident until after they witnessed Jesus’ death and resurrection. Then all Jesus’ words, actions, teachings, miracles, and prophecies fell into place.

Those who failed to recognize what God had been doing all along turned out to be the fools. Showing some grace to the unbelievers, it is easy to be fooled, especially if it’s April 1<sup>st</sup> (which of course, it wasn’t). So where does that leave us?

I hope with a loving and merciful God who will continue to forgive our foolish ways.

Let us pray. *We pray that your example of humble service will be modelled in our response to your love. Thank you for showing us how to love. On this Maundy Thursday give us the wisdom to put all our trust in you. Whenever we receive your Holy Eucharist may we be reminded not only of what you have done for us, but what we may do for each other as we become your body in this world. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

*He Washed Their Feet* by Michael Crawford

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCu6gd0Rt7w>

*Lord I Come (Wash My Feet)* by David Brackenbury

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9a9MBuJLGo>

*Lord whose Love in Humble Service* by Katerina Souvorova

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SbL7iXf69xQ>

*The Spirit sends us forth to serve* by FMIUMC

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teAWtA\\_kwXw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teAWtA_kwXw)

*The Spirit Sends us Forth to Serve* by St. Philip Niri Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yic1ycAM59I>

*O Christ Your Heart, Compassionate* by St. Martin’s Lutheran

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvOnCm\\_m8RE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvOnCm_m8RE)

*O Christ Your Heart, Compassionate* by Mt. Olive Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-hN3akPSXM>

*O Christ Your Heart, Compassionate* Sammamish Hills Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZBa12SsPj4&t=85s>

*Lord, Who the Night You Were Betrayed* ELW 463 by Evangelical Lutheran Church of Resurrection (We have never sung this for good reason. Good words, though)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hi3MJ7no1fA>

*When Twilight Comes* ELW 566 by Augsburg

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Df1p2VRlybE>

*When Twilight Comes* by Choir of St. Ignatius

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHcyJTA6F64>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, April 2, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #307

### Good Friday and Jesus' Seven Last "Words".

- 1 *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.* (Luke 23:34)
- 2 *Today you will be with me in paradise.* (Luke 23:43)
- 3 *Woman, behold, thy son! Behold, thy mother!* (John 19:26-27)
- 4 *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* (Matthew 27:48 and Mark 15:34)
- 5 *I thirst.* (John 19:28)
- 6 *It is finished.* (John 19:30)
- 7 *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.* (Luke 23:46)

We refer to these as the seven last words of Christ. If we meant words, these would actually be the forty-seven last words of Christ. Or simply seven last sentences... or sayings.

Saints **Matthew** and **Mark's** gospels only record "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" **Luke** records "*Father forgive them for they know now what they do*", "*Today you will be with me in paradise.*", and "*Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*" St. **John** records "*Woman behold thy son! Behold thy mother!*," as well as "*I thirst*" and "*It is finished.*"

So different things were heard and reported by different people. It reminds me of when loved ones are in a hospice care center and loved ones taking turns sitting on a chair next to the bed hear different things and report it to the others.

From our own experience with dying loved ones, we hang on to dying words. Most often, if we hear anything, it is "I love you." That is usually the last best thing we can hear. Things we say are often things like, "*It's okay to go.*" or "*We'll be okay,*" and of course "*We love you.*"

We have nothing of what Jesus' family and friends said to him or each other as he hung on the cross. It was probably not, "*It's okay to go,*" or "*We'll be okay.*" It most certainly was "*We love you.*" Mostly there were likely just tears. No one was ready for this day.

But somehow from the cross Jesus was able to convey words that both comforted them but also showed how clearly human he was. He conveyed compassion and assurance to a dying criminal on his side. He made sure his mother was going to be taken care of.

He also acknowledged the tragedy of those who did not know what they were doing... or maybe knew but didn't care. He showed his full humanity in grieving his abandonment by God in that moment. He was thirsty. When the end was close, he told us it was finished, and then gave himself over to this father.

During our traditional Good Friday Tenebrae service, we remember what Jesus said. We connect them to Old Testament prophesy, and he hear reflections on them through some of our best hymnwriters.

Good Friday is a difficult day, as it should be. Jesus loved us to death. Then God showed us that death is not the final word. The cross reminds us that Jesus carried the cruelty of the world on his shoulders and would not be overcome, no matter what.

I wrote this prayer a year ago on Good Friday. It seems right still today.

Let us pray.

*Dearest Lord Jesus. On this day when we remember your dying, we entrust ourselves and the whole human race to your care. We pray for healing. We pray for cure. We pray for all the care givers and health professionals. We pray for all those who do not have access to care or today, even essential food or water.*

*By your living and dying, you modeled for us what devoted love for all looks like. We remember those who first watched all this die with you on the cross. We are glad we know what happens next, but we shall not forget what you have gone through for us so that we can face the difficult present and the frightening times to come.*

*Help us trust you, like you trusted your Father in heaven. And help us, through the wonder of what is ahead through the resurrection, become part of global healing in your holy name. Amen.*

*Were You There* by King's College

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5qUnKC9rPU>

*Were You There* by Chet Valley Churches

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MI9V8owRTA4>

*Were You There* by Johnny Cash

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7T8qwVjfvms>

*Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross* by Ernie Haas

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MxRnzJT5mvo>

*At the Cross* by Zoe Grace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWw5WBpe1XU>

*Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross* Laurel Church of Christ

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qwQSF\\_gKsl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qwQSF_gKsl)

*The Cross* by New Wine Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOR8yAYIXCQ>

*It Was Finished Upon the Cross* by City Alight

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUGQNYm44hk>

*Beautiful Savior* by St. Olaf Choirs

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYrfcNG2vsM>

### **Too Distracted to See Christ**

*Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. (Luke 24: 13- 17)*

Have you ever made the statement *"I'll believe it when I see it?"* Without seeing, without first-hand knowledge, it can be hard to really believe that incredulous thing our friend tells us. We can put blinders up, preventing us from experiencing something amazing, just because we do not see it and/or believe it.

Mary Magdalene, the men on the Road to Emmaus, and the disciples certainly did not believe in the Risen Jesus until they saw him for themselves. Distracted by their emotions, they were blinded by pain, full of grief and fear at the loss of their friend. They were also anxious and doubtful, pondering if their lives would be threatened if others found them out.

Thus, it was easy to miss Jesus, to write him off as another traveler along the road to Emmaus, as another person in the group, another man standing nearby. It's strange if you think about it- after all, they had been following Jesus for a long time. They should know what he looks like, how he talks, how he reacts to conversations. Yet, they do not recognize them. The wording in the Gospel of Luke even tells us *"their eyes were kept from recognizing him."*

What was it that kept them from seeing Jesus? From seeing his love for them? Was it their own grief? Was it their stubbornness? Was it their lack of engagement with their surrounding as they were too focused on their own loss?

One of my favorite novels is Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth Bennett, a highly emotional and intelligent young woman, thinks she knows what she wants based on her experiences of the world, her own insight and vision into the lives of her and her family/friends. Yet, in her narrow vision, she misses a lot about the people around here- full of distractions to clearly see the goodness that stems from others.

After sparring with Mr. Darcy's very unapologetic personality and all the distractions in Elizabeth's life making for a very entertaining tale, Elizabeth's eyes are eventually opened to his true personality. She discovers his kindness, his gentleness, his love. It took a while for her to

realize that she was in error and that she needed to widen her worldview just a bit, but once she did so, she experienced great love.

Just like the disciples and Elizabeth Bennett, we too can have blinders on, preventing us from seeing and experiencing Jesus and Jesus' love. Those blinders, while they make life easier, may prevent us from the Risen Christ.

What are your blinders? What distracts your attention away from Jesus this week?

How is God nudging you, opening your eyes so that you can see a little bit better? It would be easy to be like Mary Magdalene, the disciples, and other followers of Jesus- too distracted to see God at work in our world. Yet, if we slow down, perhaps listening and looking along the way, we might see how God is at work right under our noses- we might see Jesus!

In these days following Jesus' resurrection, I hope that God nudges you, allowing your blinders to be lowered just a little bit, to be able to see joy, love, and grace and share this with others.

Let us Pray:

*Gracious God open our eyes so that we can see and experience joy found in and through the Risen Christ. Help us to put our distractions aside so that we can focus on you. Amen.*

*Open the Eyes of My Heart* by Michael W. Smith

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vnqb7Vn4AEE>

*Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus* by Lauren Daigle

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L57ox0iQU7A>

*Reckless Love* by Cory Asbury

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsoV-oEkFcY>

*I can see (The Emmaus Road)* by Steve Green

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FtXpkn8Axvc>

*The Road to Emmaus* by Gaither Vocal Band

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnGmkyQacWY>

*I want Jesus to Walk with Me* by Marion Williams

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5TvF5dI9P0Q>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday April 6, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #309

### The "first" of "five I liked."

Foreword: I'm going to take a little break this week from "all new" compositions but realized I could revisit a few that I either liked or received good feedback from. The first of five I liked was an early one, number *four*, had one of my better more intriguing titles: **The Azalea Festival is Cancelled. Azaleas are not.** While writing, I also noted that church was at the moment, cancelled. A year later The Azalea Festival is not yet back to what it was, but the azaleas have been unhindered by the pandemic. It has also been a great joy that we have come so far this year in being able to create new worship opportunities through live-stream technology. When I wrote this, I had not yet added music, so I shall this time around. Enjoy.

## St. Paul's In Your Home Daily Devotional Monday, March 23, 2020 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #4

### The Azalea Festival is cancelled. Azaleas are not.

Since 1948, the Azalea Festival has been one of Wilmington's most exciting and well attended events. It is such a part of this community that it is nearly impossible to think of Wilmington without the Azalea Festival. And yet, this year we must.

2020 will be marked by no Azalea Festival. No parade, queen, court, belles, concerts, home tours, garden tours, art and craft fairs, car shows, food booths, etc. This year, nothing but the azaleas. But oh, how beautiful they are, even without a festival to celebrate them.

Where Jesus walked, they didn't have azaleas. They did have lilies, however, and Jesus spoke of them when he talked about fear and anxiety:

*<sup>27</sup> Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? <sup>28</sup> And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you-- you of little faith? (Matt. 6:27-30 NRSV)*

Regrettably, I'm not doing a very good job in taking these encouraging words of Jesus to heart. I wish I were, and pray I shall, but these days when I walk by the vibrant blooming azaleas, I am so easily focused simply on longing for this year to be like it has been every year since 1948 – with a festival soon to follow.

But another thing is happening this year when we actually consider the azaleas. Many of us are finding ourselves dwelling more on the God who made the heavens and the earth and especially all the beautiful things around us that we so easily take for granted. When we consider just the azaleas, we enjoy the azaleas, and thank God for all their splendor.

So the Azalea Festival is cancelled. And azaleas are not.  
Church is also cancelled. But worship is not.

We continue to be joined with each other and the whole world in prayer and thanksgiving for the precious gift of God among us. We think about our beautiful precious friendships and our dear loved ones. With grateful hearts we look to God for healing and hope.

Let us pray:

*Thank you for the beauty of spring days and the wonderful azaleas surrounding us. May they be a sign of hope that you engineer not only beautiful spring flowers, but also the means to see that which is deeply important. Amid the uncertainty and worry of these days, help us consider just how close in our lives, you continue to be. In Jesus name, bless all those who are sick and those who care for them. Amen.*

P.S. This weekend our own Alex Hall sent along a video of a song he sang in front of his back-yard azalea bush. While not expressly about azaleas, it is about the mighty grace and mercy of God.

It's called "God Delivers Again" and you can link to it on our YouTube Channel: "stpaulslutherann". <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWodvpYkDug> Enjoy. And more to come.

*Happy Day* by Samm Hills Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVunnNQIVfg>

*Up From the Grave He Arose* by Voice of Eden

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2fs760h4yI4>

*Up From the Grave He Arose* by First Methodist

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unAarn9nIFQ>

*Halleluia Jesus is Risen from the Dead* by Stavanger Cathedral (Handel)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRswVM4hpgE>

*Easter Halleluia* by Cassandra and Callahan Armstrong

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-j3NZEedHQal>

*Risen* by Shawna Edwards

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCQsK1t9EKY>

*The Garden Song* by Jason Upton

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WeqUt5IErKc>

*The Garden Song* by John Denver

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3FkaN0HQgs>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday April 7, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #310**

**The "second" of "five I liked."**

Foreword: I enjoyed writing this devotion because I had never done a meditation on Romans 16:3-16. I mean why would I, or anyone write a devotion where the verses are greetings to people now dead for two thousand years? Then I started thinking about the importance of staying connected. A year later, I am even more aware of how important it has been to keep connected to each other however we can. With regular mail, email, phone calls, Facetime, Facebook, Skype, and Zoom calls, we affirm how important it is to remember each other. I suppose the editor of Paul's letter could have left these verses out, as they don't carry the weight of the most sacred of our scriptures. Even so. the church was built by real people, and it is good to remember their names.

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, April 22, 2020 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #32**

**When St. Paul wrote, he did not have email.**

**Therefore, his "CC:" was in his greeting.**

***Greet** Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus,<sup>4</sup> and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.*

***Greet** also the church in their house.*

***Greet** my beloved Epaphroditus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ.<sup>6</sup> **Greet** Mary, who has worked very hard among you.*

***Greet** Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.*

***Greet** Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.*

***Greet** Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys.*

***Greet** Apelles, who is approved in Christ. **Greet** those who belong to the family of Aristobulus.*

***Greet** my relative Herodion.*

***Greet** those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. <sup>1</sup>*

***Greet** those workers in the Lord, Tryphena and Tryphosa.*

***Greet** the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord.*

***Greet** Rufus, chosen in the Lord; and greet his mother-- a mother to me also.*

***Greet** Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters who are with them.*

***Greet** Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.*

***Greet** one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ **greet** you. (Rom. 16:3-16 NRS)*

This is not one of our lectionary readings, but not unimportant or irrelevant because it reveals that Paul is writing to real persons with whom he had relationships and with whom it was vital to stay connected when he was separated from them. We share that experience today as we are separated from each other.

We don't know just how long it was between letters, or if there were other letters. We don't have any letters that churches wrote to St. Paul expressing the good things that had happened to the as well as their concerns. We know some of their concerns by reading what Paul had written back to them. Given the world they lived in, it is quite remarkable that we have this record of what has become our sacred scriptures.

It seems less sacred to be adding simple "hellos" or "say 'hi' from me to all those people by name. But again, the good news of Jesus Christ made sacred changes in the lives of real people who had names. Wouldn't we have loved to be part of how that happened?

Actually, we are. Every time we greet each other, whether in person, or by phone, letter, email, Facetime, text, or zoom, we stand in a long line of real people whom Christ died and was raised with whom he stays connected. Greetings.

Let us pray:

*When we read names of people Paul greeting in his letters, we are reminded that the church is made up of real people with names and faces and personalities and stories. Thank you for all who have been drawn together in the name above all names, Jesus Christ our Lord. Help us, during this time of distance and isolation, not to forget about each other, to reach out in Jesus' name, and greet each other in the name of the Lord. We pray for all who are sick and especially those who are waiting for you to call them by name, to their heavenly home. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

P.S. The song I'm linking to here is a joyful one obviously done long before social distancing. It is a hymn we have song when we've been together – "*Christ Be Our Light.*" This is sung in a church by the Notre Dame Folk Choir. What joy on their faces! You won't be disappointed taking a look and a listen.

*Christ Be Our Light* by Notre Dame Folk Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5g0c4YeABTs>

And now a year later, a few other songs not previously attached to first devotion:

*Alleluia. Alleluia. Hearts to Heaven and Voices Raise* by St. Martin in the Fields

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGrz-8npg6M>

*Alleluia. Alleluia. Hearts to Heaven and Voices Raise* by St. Helen's, Abington

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Af5LYjsou8Q>

*Alleluia Voices Raise* by St. Peter's in the Loop, Chicago

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MC1VVn5DbHM>

*Alleluia Voices Raise* ELW 828 by Halifax Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f69tVChUIBQ>

*For All the Faithful Women* ELW 419 by Mt Calvary Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oTnBgsEs7tl>

*Good Christian Men* by Wissman Family

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkCjddxp1g4>

*Good Christian Friends Rejoice* by Marty Haugen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Scweex22gbU>

*What A Fellowship* (Leaning on the Everlasting Arms ELW 774 by Acapeldridge

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SaXJQD0Xixk>

*The Church of Christi in Every Age* ELW 729 by Grosse Pointe Memorial

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBUAQKGyc5A>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, April 7, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #311

### The "Third" of "Five I liked."

**Foreword: "Remember the Secret Weapon"** was my first devotion inspired by my own family history. It would not be my last. I recollected this one when looking one day at a plaque on my office wall that has the Phil. 4:13 quote. Whenever I see the quote, I think of my dad and his mother, my grandmother Olga Opgrand. Perhaps someone else has called Phil. 4:13 their "*secret weapon*" as well. I am thankful, however, that it's not really secret, and it's not a weapon either. It's a promise, and a good one at that. Enjoy.

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday May 13, 2020 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #53

### "Remember the Secret Weapon!"

As her six children left for school each morning, my grandmother Olga Opgrand would always follow her "Bye" with "*Remember the secret weapon!*" Years later when I was in seminary, she made sure I knew it too.

And what was the "*secret weapon*?" It was simply this: Philippians 4:13 "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*"

Back then (as well as now), this "*secret weapon*" was neither sinister nor damage-inflicting. It was an encouraging word of hope for everyone to trust. It was empowering, just as every promise of God is empowering. Freely offered to help us be confident in our daily lives.

Remembering the "*secret weapon*" was always a fun way to affirm that God is with us. Remembering it, we are stronger. Not in an absurdist way, as if believing the secret weapon will allow us to walk through walls or levitate tall buildings. Rather, in remembering it, we are stronger emotionally and spiritually, confident that we can be trust God especially when hard things come our way.

In this age of global pandemic, we need everything at our disposal to fight this devastating disease. This might be one to remember. "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*"

It was St. Paul who first wrote this to the Philippians. And while this has become one of those wonderful "*stand alone helpful for all time*" verses, he did not write it in a vacuum, nor send it to them on a postcard to be taped to their refrigerators.

Paul was writing from prison. Much more than now, prisons were places of much suffering. Paul's own personal struggles are revealed in his writings, but he also writes to assure those

who are also going through hardship or struggles or attacks on their faith that they have strength particularly to stand against those who would lead them astray.

Here is the context of that great verse about “*the secret weapon.*” St. Paul writes:

<sup>8</sup> *Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

<sup>9</sup> *Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.* <sup>10</sup> *I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it.* <sup>11</sup> *Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have.*

<sup>12</sup> *I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need.* <sup>13</sup> ***I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*** <sup>14</sup> *In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress. (Phil. 4:8-14 NRS)*

So this is not about acquiring a “*super power.*” It’s about holding fast to “*super faith.*” Remembering this, Paul assures us that we be strong against those forces that would wrench faith from us.

In a time of global pandemic when we face an enemy that would seek to overpower immune systems, force a change in economic systems, further tear apart an already polarized nation that must come together for the sake of physical, emotional, and spiritual healing, this verse encourages us.

Remember the “*secret weapon.*” Remember it’s not secret, and it’s not a weapon (but will feel like that to all those forces (and viruses) who would oppose God’s sovereignty over the whole creation.

I admit that “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*” might have a stronger personal connection if you heard it from your own little grandmother who, with a powerful faith never faltered in her confidence in Jesus. But even without that, we all have the one who first said it, St. Paul. Paul faced powerful forces that would destroy faith and the church and he never faltered.

Remembering Christ who strengthened him was all Paul needed to do the things God called him to do. That might be just all we need, too. Just remember.

Let us pray.

*Thank you, O God for all those powerful promises that sustain us through every part of our lives. Thank you for those who shared these promises, like those grandmothers and grandfathers and*

*moms and dads and dear friends in Christ. Help us remember “the secret weapon,” that strong promise that nothing will tear us away from you. Bless those who suffer this day and hold them close. Bless the caregivers and those who work for healing. In Jesus name. Amen.*

P.S. *Healer of Our Every Ill* seems right today:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rZDfEKttMI>

*Be Not Afraid* by John Michael Talbot

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ptZV4s4qRY>

Cat Jahnke’s *Be Not Afraid*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQr4udSiEew>

*Be Not Afraid: Catholic Artists at Home*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RFODlpFOoBg>

Since #54 I have discovered other recordings, including the same song above by the great crooner Harry Connick, Jr. and

*Be Not Afraid* by Harry Connick, Jr.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxYWB4yMusE>

*Be Not Afraid* by Kitty Cleveland

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2JVO460NkM>

*Healer of our Every Ill* by Cross of Christ Lutheran Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXWpNmYiUrs>

*Healer of our Every Ill* by Calvin Institute

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRRz-eNNZhs>

## **St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, April 9, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #312**

### **The "fourth" of "five I liked."**

**Foreword:** This was a story I enjoyed telling many times over the years, and I enjoyed sharing it as part of a devotion. There was more to the story that happened about seven years later. For the purpose of this devotion, I did not mention it. But in the spirit of Paul Harvey's "The Rest of the Story," (young people will need to google this; the boomers get it), I will share the rest as an afterword. Enjoy.

## **St. Paul's In Your Home Devotion for Sunday, June 21, 2020 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #92**

### **Easier when you have the ring.**

*And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

*--Philippians 4:19*

June is a month of many wedding anniversaries. I am personally reminded of this because the pop up on my electronic calendar every year. I enjoy remembering those wonderful days. I also remember the mishaps. The biggest mishap I remember was this:

Twenty minutes before the wedding, the best man lost the groom's ring. Worse than that, the ring had belonged to the groom's grandfather, so it was irreplaceable. I will always remember everyone but the bridal party madly searching the lawn and gardens next the church, hoping to find the ring. It looked like an Easter Egg hunt for well-dressed adults.

Because I had never experienced this level of panic before a wedding before, I soon realized that I would need to modify my sermon, addressing the issue of the lost ring. That was the only thing I could do, because no matter what other wonderful words I said to the bride and groom, everyone would be thinking about the ring and identifying with the shame of the one who had lost it.

I quickly added marginal notes, assuring them that the wedding is not about the ring. It's about the joy they are discovering together, the love these two people have for each other and the love of God who surrounds them.

Happily, five minutes before the wedding, the ring was found! Immediately the enormous burden was lifted and once again joy filled the air. The ring had rolled out of the best man's pocket in his car and was hidden in the seat.

It turned out that in the sermon I did talk about the ring. I first shared with them how I was preparing to tell them how it's not about the ring. It's about the love of God that encircles them and so on.

But all that came together with a now classic “punch line:”: *“But I can tell you this. It’s a lot easier to say it’s **not** about the ring ... when you **have** the ring!”*

I have thought about this experience often in the church as we have made claims that God provides. God provides. We say this a lot, often during stewardship drives, but whenever we develop spending plans or embark on new or expanded ministries. We are doing that even now during this time of doing ministry while separated from one another. We claim God provides.

At the same time, our absence from each other and in-person ministry easily feels as if we have lost the ring ... that which binds us together and unites us church.

And here, I can tell you this: *“It’s a lot easier to talk about God providing for all our needs when we still have everything we need.”*

Now we don’t. Or do we?

Years ago, when a wedding ring was lost, I discovered that when God’s love is at the center of a couple’s life together, a wedding can go on with or without the ring. I wonder how this might this apply to our life together while apart.

Let us pray:

*Almighty God, like a bridegroom to a bride, you have promised faithful love to us your church. You promise to provide and have always provided. During this time of uncertainty and loss, help us remember your promises. Help us trust that even while things are not as they once were, you are with us still, making us ready for whatever is ahead. We pray for all who feel lost and alone, especially those who are sick. Encourage those trying to be safe and well. Teach us what you would have us know about your world and all your beloved children. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

P.S. Something solid today. How about:

*The Church’s One Foundation* by Jubilate

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rIS166ppoE>

*Trumpet Voluntary* by Clarke played by Stacey Bish and Stacy Blair

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHy3tJJdy24>

*The Church of Christ in Every Age* by Paul Coleman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgSFTvVn20E>

*The Church of Christ in Every Age* by Metro DC ELCA Synod virtual

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHRI-wez1DY>

*Praise to the Lord, the Almighty*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7goM02Em\\_Q&t=44s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7goM02Em_Q&t=44s)

**Afterword:** I met this couple through the groom's cousin, who had been a grad student when I served as campus pastor at Purdue. It was the groom's first marriage, the bride's second. While I enjoyed them and presiding at the wedding, I did not necessarily expect to see them again. Seven years later I had a phone call from the groom. He wanted me to meet with him and his wife. It turned out to be his last desperate attempt to save his rocky marriage.

It was a painful and emotional conversation as I learned the bride had been having an affair with her boss and had recently returned from a week with him on his yacht. She was candid with me that it was over. Being already so firm in her decision, I am not sure why she agreed to meet me. Perhaps she wanted another person to confirm their marriage was finished.

I noticed that he wasn't wearing his custom-made wedding band. "Oh," he said, "I lost it on our honeymoon while scuba diving." A sign, perhaps?

I wonder what devotion might come from this. At that moment there was so much anger and self-justification from her; and so much sadness and depression from him. All I could offer them was a prayer. Sometimes that's all we have, and it has to be enough.

*O Lord, Hear My Prayer* ELW 751 by Isaiah and Micah Spruth-Janssen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iYPPaqOaNo>

*O Lord, Hear My Prayer* by Taize

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f51n-yb11dY>

*O Lord, Hear My Prayer* by XARA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J73ILBBkpA0>

## **St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday April 12, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #313**

### **The "fifth" of "five I liked."**

Preface: I enjoyed remembering this story for its great "Aha!" and "Oh wow!" moments. How could there be no Lutheran Churches in Taiwan, when just across the sea we had a Lutheran seminary in Hong Kong? Aha! O Wow. Now I get it. Enjoy.

## **St. Paul's In Your Home Devotional for Thursday, July 2, 2020 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #103**

### **No Lutheran Churches In Taiwan? Really?**

<sup>NRS</sup> **Romans 5:1** *Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, (Rom. 5:1 NRS)*

When our regular organist at Our Saviour Lutheran Church in West Lafayette, Indiana was on sabbatical leave with her husband, we were most fortunate to find an excellent long-term substitute. Hwei Chun was a graduate student from Taiwan and grew up active in Taiwan's Presbyterian Church.

In talking to her about her church background and now working in a Lutheran church, I was surprised to learn from her there were no Lutheran churches in Taiwan. She had never, in fact, ever heard of the Lutheran Church.

This was particularly puzzling to me as I was about to go with several family members on a trip to China and Hong Kong, where I knew we had a Lutheran Seminary. Puzzling. So I focused on my other important little mission, which was to get Hwei Chun to write a note in Chinese about my garlic allergy that I could show the servers and have them point out what foods on the buffet to avoid.

One of the highlights of our trip turned out to be a visit to the seminary in Hong Kong. It was not officially on the tour, but the daughter of one of our pastors on tour was a roommate in college with the daughter of the president of the seminary. Therefore, several of us arranged to go there.

The president showed us wonderful hospitality along with his wife, who was the head librarian. She gave me several materials, including a brochure that showed the church logo and name. She took extra time to explain the Chinese characters for the church, when "lo" she explained the name. She showed me the characters for "*church*", and then the characters before it, which translated literally came out "*The Justification by Faith Church.*"

Aha, Hwei Chun was absolutely right! There was no Chinese “Lutheran” Church, not by that name, anyway. It was the “Justification by Faith Church!” Martin Luther would have loved that (see yesterday’s devotion).

When I returned home, I showed Hwei Chun the cover of the brochure with the church seal, and immediately she said, “Oh... the ‘speaking Chinese name’ church is very active in Taiwan!”

To repeat, Luther would have loved that name, since it describes the heart of our faith, which is not devotion to Luther, but being right with God through Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.

*We thank you for the gospel of Jesus Christ, and for all who have shared this good news around the world. We especially pray for those sharing your gospel in countries not always so welcoming. We remember in our prayers today your whole world struggling to be well or stay well. Encourage all those who look to you for hope and healing. We pray for all the health care workers and those dealing with every kind of conflict. In Jesus Name. Amen.*

P.S. Since I was speaking of the “Justification by Faith” Church, it would have been great to find a JBF Church Choir. I might need a Chinese Keyboard and knowledge of Chinese. I did, however find some wonderful songs and hymns sung in Chinese by Chinese Christians. You’ll recognize the tunes for sure. Enjoy.

*The Kingdom* by Chinese Christian Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYpmJMpEU7w>

*Steal Away* National Taiwan University Chorus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HeL1Dka-Z3Y>

*Regina Caeli* by National Taiwan University Chorus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1LapfuvJl4>

*What A Friend We Have In Jesus* by Penang Chinese Church Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOWxUSpN0GQ>

*What a Friend* Andrew Hwang (note Chinese subtitles. I suspect singing is either Mandarin or Cantonese, and subtitles translate to the other)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHd8gFYjGdY>

*Because He Lives* also in Chinese in small group worship setting

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOMaxZc7xiE>

*Because He Lives* and medley by another Chinese acapella group called Heavenly Melody

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=keaP-gowEVI>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, April 13, 2021** not by Pastor Mark Opgrand but **by Chaplain Bob Weeks. #314**

## **AFTER TOMB ACTION**

**By**

**Chaplain Bob Weeks**

Scripture: John 20:19 *"On the evening of the first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!'*

It appears to me that one of the greatest challenges of the Christian Church after the Covid-19 crisis is to regather members. At the present, the numbers of members allowed to attend the worship services at St. Paul's are necessarily limited. We are in the process of regathering.

Jesus had a similar problem after his resurrection. Jesus had a problem of regathering his disciples. The disciples at first did not believe that Mary had seen Jesus; they shut themselves up in a room; and Thomas was not going to believe unless he could put his fingers in the wounds of Jesus.

Jesus's *"After Tomb Action"* was to regather his believers. He regathered his community not with threats but with peace. Remember, Jesus came and stood in their midst saying *"Peace be with you!"* Our faith community at St. Paul's has the privilege and call to make room for those who abide in it even if they have not been attending during the Pandemic. Certainly, the grief and tragedy of Covid-19 has been world frightening. Like the first disciples, who were frightened and shaken, we need the community and fellowship more than ever.

The church exists not solely for those who have all needed in a faith relationship, but also for those who long to believe that there is more. Also, the church exists for those who may not believe everything but remain in its life and ministries all the same. Unbelief need not be tragic. Those hungry people in our neighborhood that are fed by the members of St. Paul's need compassion in the name of Jesus more than steadfast convictions.

We have all experienced times when prayer seems to be spoken into a vacuum, scripture seems mute, or the wafer and cup seem merely that and nothing more. Yet, as we continue to pray, read, partake and wait, Jesus finds us. We are called to stay in the community of faith at St. Paul's, even while sometimes unbelieving. We may find ourselves not able to say all of the words of a believer with conviction.

Remember that as we regather after the Pandemic, worship together, and serve here in the name of Jesus, we will manifest that our community of faith depends first and foremost, not on what our hearts and heads can get around, but on God.

Easter is about how God can draw us to new life in 2021. Easter calls us to regather as a community of faith, to hear scripture read, to hear God's word preached, and to receive forgiveness.

Jesus had a problem of regathering his disciples after the first Easter. In 2021, Jesus invites us to regather at St. Paul's and make room for Him. He comes into our worship and our lives saying, "*Pease be with you!*" Let's make room for the "*After Tomb Action*" of Jesus in 2021.

*Prayer: Almighty God, with joy we celebrate these regathering times. By the peace of Christ, enable us to regather and show the power of the resurrection in all that we say and do, through Jesus Christ, Our Savior and Lord. Amen.*

Note from Pastor Mark: Chaplain Weeks lets me hunt for the hymns and songs on YouTube. Today I found quite a few that were new to me but relating to the theme of the Empty Tomb.

*Song of the Empty Tomb* by Marty Haugen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0rJc8eJuKJQ>

*The Empty Tomb* by the Dove Brothers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQWXA5FnleI>

*It's About the Cross* by The Ball Brothers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYSJj-EHAAk>

*Empty Grave* by Zach Williams

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFxmPonKXkQ>

*Christ is Risen* by Phil Wickham

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMX9CNgRJCM>

*Christ Arose, Low in the Grave He Lay* by Hymn Charts

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0arouoCJ8es>

*Halleluia, Christ Arose* by Rhythm and Grace Music

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tsO-IGVrC\\_s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tsO-IGVrC_s)

*Garden Tomb* by the Isaacs

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7DLSzginkic>

*Christ the Lord is Risen Today* by Salem Lutheran Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=le53a6bhTnk>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, April 14, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #315.**

## **The Quick and the Dead**

A couple of us were talking about how, over the years, the wording has changed in the Apostles' Creed. Sometimes there were small changes, like *changing "sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty" to "sits on the right hand."*

Until 1978, the Apostles Creed in Lutheran hymnals, used *"holy Christian church,"* instead of *"holy catholic church,"* even though other traditions used *"catholic."* In 1978, when we Lutherans changed our wording in the creed to *"holy catholic church"* we had a lot of explaining to do. Catholic means *"universal."* We also had to explain it was earlier changed from *"catholic"* to *"Christian"* because of anti-Roman Catholic attitudes.

One change that had little or no disagreement was changing *"From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead,"* to *"He will come again to judge the living and the dead."*

Let's talk about that. Here is the original Latin text: *"inde venturus est judicare vivos et mortuos."* » The word we are looking for is *"vivos,"* It means *"living."* If we wanted a Latin word for *"quick,"* we would find many others, including *"velox."*

In today's common usage, *"quick"* means *"fast,"* It does not mean *"living."*

So why then, when you google *"The Quick and the Dead,"* does the number one *"hit"* take us to the 1995 Western Movie called *"The Quick and the Dead?"* That's the one which stars Sharon Stone, Gene Hackman, Russell Crowe, and Leonardo DiCaprio as *"The Kid."* The movie is about a corrupt sheriff who hosts a kind of *"March Madness"* for gunslingers, where participants are paired for a series of *"duels."* The last one standing wins the prize. The town's name is Redemption.

It's actually a most clever title, one missed by anyone who has neither spoken the old Apostle's Creed nor read from the King James Bible. In the King James bible, there are four New Testament references to *"quick."*

KJV Acts 10:42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. (Acts 10:42 KJV)

KJV 2 Timothy 4:1 I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; (2 Tim. 4:1 KJV)

KJV Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Heb. 4:12 KJV)

KJV 1 Peter 4:5 Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead. (1 Pet. 4:5 KJV)

In each case, however, the Greek word translated “quick” is “*dzaow*.” and it has nothing to do with speed, but everything to do with living.

That makes “*The Quick and the Dead*” movie title even more clever. If you are a gunslinger, and you are “quick,” you will also “live.”

People should know their Bibles and old Creeds better to appreciate this.

In developing the King James Bible, people used the word “quick” in the same way we use “living.” It came from the Middle English “*quic*” from the Old English “*cwic*” which then meant “*alive*” or “*living*,” Nowadays that gets a little lost in translation.

Imagine if “*Living Waters Lutheran Church*” were “*Quick Waters?*” Or if the “*Living Lutheran*” magazine were the “*Quick Lutheran*” Magazine.

How about “*Quickbooks*” becoming “*Livingbooks*.” or “*You can catch the ball if you’re alive enough (quick enough)*”. Would “*That was quick thinking,*” become “*That was living thinking*”. What if “*Jack be nimble, Jack be quick,*” needed to be changed to “*Jack be nimble, Jack be alive.*”

When the old Apostles’ Creed affirmed “*He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven. And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead,*” the apostles were declaring that in the resurrection, all people shall stand before Jesus.

That was never intended to be a scary statement. In the resurrection, we won’t be in a gunfight we cannot win. We will be standing before one who loves us all so much, including all who are alive and all who have died... (the quick and the dead).

In the sure and certain hope of the resurrection we will be standing with the assurance that the fighting is over. Peace has come at last. We are forever in God’s eternal love.

Let us pray. *We bless you, O Lord of the living and the dead, and with grateful hearts thank you for your unfailing love. We also thank you for your living word. May we be quick to embrace it and faithful in sharing it. Amen.*

*I Know that My Redeemer Lives* ELW 619 by Chapel of the Cross Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jsb8BAIWRRU>

*I Know that My Redeemer Liveth* by Sylvia McNair

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kg7aXEvCeXY>

*I Know that My Redeemer Lives* by Claire Crosby

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJeoTfxa-3k>

*The Word of God is Quick and Powerful* by Forever Grateful

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2JJuDwOO4vs>

*He Lives* by Blue Rock Mennonite Youth Choir (note this is not entitled "He Quickens")

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qF6aBDS3drA>

*He Lives* by First Methodist, Houston

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLKGO5FzDsY>

*Jesus Christ, My Sure Defense* by Lutheran Quartet

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-DQDagFEzk>

*Because He Lives* by Rosemary Siemens

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fbtMfFmzI>

*Jesus Christ My Sure Defense* by Paul Manz

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFcF4gJCTrg>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, April 15, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #316**

**You are worth more than the worst thing you have ever done.**

*<sup>39</sup> One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" <sup>40</sup> But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? <sup>41</sup> And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." <sup>42</sup> Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." <sup>43</sup> He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Lk. 23:39-43 NRS)*

We are increasingly becoming aware of bad things that people have done. Whether it be lesser or greater crimes committed by people who have become convicted of them, or people being "tried" in the press of public opinion, scarcely a day goes by when someone's bad behavior is not revealed. This could be recent bad or criminal behavior, or it might be actions committed many years ago. With all this has come a lot of judgement.

One person who received a lot of notoriety for ministering to the worst of the worst is Roman Catholic Sister Helen Prejean. One of her stories was depicted in the multiple award-winning film, "Dead Man Walking," starring Susan Sarandon and Sean Penn. The film portrays Sister Helen's ministry to death row inmate Matthew Poncelet, who was sentenced to die for his brutal rape and killing of a teen age girl and her boyfriend.

Sister Helen was assigned to be Poncelet's spiritual advisor, a new role and ministry for her. In a PBS interview and in her book by the same name, she describes her first visit to the prison. It was her first visit to *any* prison. When asked about what motivated her to do this work, she replied, "I said to myself " 'he is worth more than the worst thing he has ever done.'"

Until very close to the end Poncelet was unrepentant, but Sister Helen was determined to share the love of Jesus with him nevertheless. She also wanted to reach out to the family of one of the victims. As she visits the home of the girl's parents, here is that conversation:

Sister Helen: Matthew Poncelet asked me to be his spiritual advisor to be with him when he dies.

Mrs. Percy: And what did you say?

Sister Helen: That I would.

Mr. Percy: We thought you changed your mind. We thought you changed your mind. We thought that's why you were here.

Sister Helen: (shaking her head) No.

Mrs. Percy: How can you come here?

Mr. Percy: How can you do that? How can you sit with that scum?

Sister Helen: Mr. I've never done this before. I'm trying I'm just trying to follow the example of Jesus who said that 'every person is worth more than their worst act.

Mr. Percy. This is not a person. This is an animal. No, I take that back. Animals don't rape and murder their own kind. Matthew Poncelet is God's mistake. And you want to hold the poor murderer's hand. You want to be there to comfort him when he dies. There wasn't anybody in the woods that night to comfort Hope when those two animals pushed her face into that wet grass...

Sister Helen: I just want to help him take responsibility for what he did.

Mrs. Percy. Did he admit to what he did? Did he say he was sorry?

Sister Helen. He says he didn't kill anybody.

Mr. Percy. Sister, you're in waters way over your head.

Mrs. Percy. You don't know what it's like to carry a child in your womb and get up with a sick child in the middle of the night. You just say your prayers and have a good night sleep don'tcha?

Mr. Percy. My parents raised me to respect religion. Sister I think you need to leave this house right now.

Sister Helen: I'm sorry. (gets up to leave)

Mr. Percy. Wait a minute. If you really are sorry and if you really care about this family... you want to see justice done for our murdered child. Now you can't have it both ways. You can't befriend that murderer and expect to be our friend too.

Mrs. Percy: You brought the enemy into this house. You gotta go.

Sister Prejean continued in her ministry, sharing the love of God with someone who had never known love before, and in time, Poncelet confessed his crime and expressed repentance. The film depicted that breakthrough, which also happened in real life. Poncelet expressed to the families that he hoped his death would give them some relief.

While walking to his execution, Poncelet heard Sister Helen tell him he was a child of God as she repeated words from Isaiah 43:2, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

For such a heinous crime, sympathy for the families comes as easily as rage fills us for the perpetrators. Sister Helen was called by God to believe that every person (not exceptions) is worth more than the worst thing they have ever done. A victim's pain might make this impossible, but thanks be to God for Jesus who in his own life and death expresses what we are

worth to him. If we were all judged by the worst thing we have ever done, we might all be beyond redemption. Again, thanks be to God for Jesus. And mercy!

Many years ago at UNCW I met and heard Sister Prejean speak, where she recounted her experience. She is as impressive in person as Academy Award winning Susan Sarandon was in her portrayal of her in *“Dead Man Walking.”* Few persons might be able to do that work, but for those who take seriously the love of God through Jesus Christ, it is a noble calling. But even if it is not our own personal calling, if we want to love as Jesus loves, at the very least we must be open to God’s grace offered for all.

Let us pray. *We pray for all who, by things they have done, have hurt others and themselves. We pray for mercy and forgiveness, but even more for living lives with kindness and charity, and building up the body of Christ. Thank you, O God, that you don’t see us for the worst things we have done, but through the eyes of Christ. Amen.*

*Isaiah 43:1-3* By Esther Mui

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MN7CiQm7I5A>

*Be Not Afraid* by John Michael Talbot

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CG-u7FsqKgc>

*Be Not Afraid* Bob Dufford SJ instrumental

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9cQnvLP8sDs>

*O God, Forgive Us* by For King and Country

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tz4toSf-xQU>

*Great Is Thy Faithfulness* by Chris Rice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0k1WhFtVp0o>

*Great Is Thy Faithfulness* by Blue Rock Youth

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liQzzc41z5Q>

*Turn My Heart O God* by Marty Haugen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLRau4aVSY>

*We Who Once Were Dead* by Tom Kendzia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKKpjrQE998>

*We Who Once Were Dead* by Christ the King

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YxEm-tgD\\_IY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YxEm-tgD_IY)

and these scenes from *“Dead Man Walking”*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tG2qsoC\\_-hs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tG2qsoC_-hs)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQyYa3DBhNA>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, April 16, 2021** not by Pastor Mark Opgrand but **by North Carolina Synod Bishop Timothy Smith #317**

**Preface:** Today's devotion was first posted on the North Carolina Synod's website by our bishop, Tim Smith. Because it was fun, interesting, and insightful, it is my pleasure to recommend it for your reading.

**May the Odds Be Ever In Your Favor** by Bishop Tim Smith

Odds of getting a hole in one? 5,000: 1. Odds of being struck by lightning? 567,000: 1. Odds of winning the nearly billion-dollar *MegaMillions* jackpot this past January? 302, 575,000: 1. I'm curious. How many of you have ever made a hole in one? How many have been struck by lightning? As I thought. Very, very few! But I will wager that quite a number of you bought a ticket for that January lottery, even though it's over 60,000 times more likely that you'll sink a hole in one and over 525 times more likely that you'll be struck by lightning!

"Why?" asked a newscaster the night of the *MegaMillions* drawing, given these incredible odds, did otherwise smart and faithful people take a shot? "Because," she concluded, "against all odds we're still in love with hope."

Reminds me of a favorite scene from the classic if risqué comedy *Dumb and Dumber*. The geekiest guy on the planet asks a sophisticated, wealthy, and attractive woman what the odds were of their getting together. "Not good," she says, as kindly as possible. "Like one in a hundred?" he presses. "More like one in a million," she apologizes.

But instead of being devastated, the face of Jim Carrey's character lights up as he gushes with hope, "So you're tellin' me there's a CHANCE!!!"

Now that we're solidly into yet another Easter season, we remember that even St. Paul said that if the church is wrong on this preposterous resurrection claim, "we are of all people most to be pitied." But what are the chances? You know, that a dead man actually becomes alive again in the flesh? Be honest. Pretty slim, don't you think? No, wait, who are we kidding? It's impossible, empirically speaking.

Why would the church, the Christian faith, hang so much on such great unlikelihood? Well, we might say that it's based more on belief than proof. You might say that as strong as memory is (it had never happened before), hope is stronger still.

But let's just for fun zoom out to the really big picture, shall we? The odds of your father ever meeting your mother were around 20,000: 1. The odds that their initial meeting eventually produces children is 2,000: 1. Which makes the odds of your being born 40 million: 1.

No, wait! The odds of ANYONE being born to them is 40 million: 1. But considering that the average woman has about 100,000 eggs and the average man roughly 4 trillion sperm in a lifetime, that pushes the odds of YOUR specific existence to 400 quadrillion: 1 ... Mind blown! But we're just getting started!

Your being here on this planet requires another statistically impossible chain of events; namely, that every single one of your ancestors through 150,000 generations all the way back 4 billion years to when the first single-celled organism met and produced children, the odds against which are 10-with-45-zeroes-after-it: 1.

Oh, and it's not just that they reproduced. The one right sperm has to meet the one right egg in every one of those generations, the odds against which are 10-with-2,640,000-zeroes-after-it: 1.

By comparison, the number of atoms in the entire universe is estimated to be only 10 with 80 zeroes after it. Meaning that the odds that you exist at all are as near zero as anything ever known to humanity...yet here you are, reading all this tedium, amazed by it, questioning it, checking the math, or whatever.

It simply isn't possible that you're here or I'm here. And yet...and yet, here we are, pondering the mysteries of the universe in a very personal way, and the promise of the God who in Christ loves us so much that not even sin and death can thwart the victory of that love.

So yes, faith, hope, and love abide, these three. But if you exist, then how much more with the God who both lives and loves you are all things possible? May the odds be ever in your favor!

Note: Statistics noted above are gleaned from the following article: **"Your Odds of Being Alive"**. I don't claim to be smart enough to verify the claims mathematically. Walking with you,

Tim Smith, NC Synod Bishop

Bishop Smith doesn't select songs with his devotions, so I wonder what the odds are that I find something?

*For the Fruit of All Creation* by Cathedral of St. John the Divine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfXziMbZyCl>

*For the Fruit of All Creation* by First Plymouth

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zbBUFSOkbdM>

*All creatures, Worship God Most High* ELW 835 by St Paul Quad Cities

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8UJdvDgeKk>

*All creatures, Worship God Most High* ELW 835 by Cross of Christ Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iopGU3ACPxA>

*How Marvelous God's Greatness* ELW 830 by Halifax Lutheran

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01XX\\_VcFeME](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01XX_VcFeME)

*How Marvelous God's Greatness* ELW 830 by Christ the King Lutheran Houston

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0rKEPsK8bs>

*God Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens* by The Emmanuel Quartet

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjgAHrj1SgY>

*God Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens* by the Mennonite Blazers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kJ71FRltvg>

*God Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens* by Westminster Presbyterian Sacramento

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PlgXbN\\_AMVI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PlgXbN_AMVI)

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, April 19, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #318

### I pity the fool.

*A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you choose, you can make me clean." 41 Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!" (Mk. 1:40-41 NRS)*

*The wise of heart will heed commandments, but a babbling fool will come to ruin. (Prov. 10:8 NRS)*

One of the greatest catchphrases of all time was uttered by Mohawk sporting, gold laden bodyguard, wrestler, and actor, Mr. T. He first spoke it as villain Clubber Lang in the movie Rocky III, and since then, spoke it in so many promotions that he trademarked the phrase.

In an interview with Conan O'Brien, Conan expressed that he thought the phrase always meant "I want to kill the guy." "No, no, no," replied Mr. T. "When you pity someone, you show them mercy. I didn't start this pity stuff. It was in the Bible. You know, you find pity so many times in the Bible and you find fool so many times, in the Bible, so I put them together. Pity the fool. 'Cause a lot of guys in the Bible was asking for pity. And a lot of them said, "I did a foolish act." so I put it all together. It's an act of kindness."

I hadn't thought of Mr. T. as such a theologian. But the more I investigated, the more I became impressed with him. Along with eleven siblings, T. was raised in a Christian family and active in his southside Chicago Cosmopolitan Community A.M.E. church. Long before he became famous. He gave generously. In fact, it was Sylvester Stallone who saw him in a TV interview talking about giving to his church during a charity event that prompted Stallone to invite him to audition for the role of Clubber Lang in Rocky III.

I was also moved by his approach to stewardship in another interview with Larry King. "I give so much," he said, "because I get so much. But I don't give looking for what comes in return. I'm just thanking God for allowing me to be here." What a wonderful thought.

Most of what I knew about Mr. T. was from "Rocky III", his TV show called "The A Team", and all his promotional paraphernalia, like Mr. T. action dolls, air fresheners, and key fob that plays "I pity the fool" when you press it.

There is another expression, "You can't judge a book by its cover." Mr.T. was a bigger than life character. He wore heavy gold chains and ten huge gold rings on his fingers. That is, until after helping do cleanup following Hurricane Katrina. After seeing what people had lost, T. felt it was disrespectful to keep wearing all that.

In English bibles, the word “fool” is written in seventy-seven verses. The word “pity” is written sixty-four times. Never is it written “I pity the fool,” though many times “mercy” (pity) is indeed demonstrated for those who have done foolish things.

No one can speak aloud this great catch phrase like Mr. T., but thankfully acts of kindness can be offered by anyone, especially those who follow Jesus. I pity the fool who doesn’t experience this.

Let us pray. *Take pity on us, O God, and forgive our foolish ways. Restore us when we fall short of being our best more generous selves. Thank you for all those who have, in their lives, expressed grace and mercy. Amen.*

*Dear Lord and Father of Mankind (Forgive our Foolish Ways)* by St. Laurence’s Church Chorey  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAXiN0egN-I>

*Dear Lord and Father of Mankind (Forgive our Foolish Ways)* by THENBA  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WqOnjmr9Ah0>

*Dear Lord and Father of Mankind (Forgive our Foolish Ways)* by St. Bart’s  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Em3SRPA-N8Q>

*Dear Lord and Father of Mankind (Forgive our Foolish Ways)* by Katherine Jenkins  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y47vEE1zbDE>

*Wasted Years* by Rex Allen  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xR4y0j5uLxM>

and this particularly poignant version of “*Dear Lord and Father*” sung by soldiers on the beach after Dunkirk in movie “Atonement.”

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55CaD\\_j5FQs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55CaD_j5FQs)

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, April 20, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #319

### Will the Circle be Unbroken?

*<sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup> He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.*  
(Phil. 3:20-21 NRS)

*"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.*

*<sup>2</sup> In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.* (Jn. 14:1-3 NRS)

I regularly listen to iTunes while walking our dogs. Because of this subscription service, I have had access to volumes of material I never could have purchased as in former days. Recently I came upon a beautiful version of "Will the Circle Be Unbroken," by artist Peter Hollens.

"Will the circle be unbroken, by and by, oh by and by?" Wait a minute! Did I hear that right? "By and by **OH** by and by. What happened to "**Lord?**" Lord is a key word, here. The song is like a prayer, addressed to God. It's all about the assurance that, because of God's grace, we shall be reunited with all our loved ones who have gone before us.

I wondered why, then, did Peter Hollens, who has recorded many Christian songs, omit "Lord." My investigation took me down a pathway I never anticipated. Hollens' version comes from the music in the third installment of a video game series called "Bioshock." It is one of those highly detailed heavily immersive games that combines a detailed plot with a first-person shooter experience.

"Will the circle be unbroken?" is a clever song to be used. It's lyrics "in the sky oh in the sky" match a world created literally in the sky by a self-proclaimed prophet and world maker. I learned that when the game arrived with "Lord" left out, there was some outrage, not so much from the gamers, but from those who don't like their sacred songs tampered with.

Then I discovered something else. The game creators chose the lyrics as originally written in 1907 by Ada Habershon with music by Charles Gabriel. As written, the song describes the sadness of losing loved ones, (it begins "There are loved ones, in the glory, whose dear forms you often miss..." and asks "Will the circle be unbroken?" as more of a rhetorical question, and not addressed to God ("Lord.")). Since the Bioshock was set in 1912, the creators defended their choice of lyrics as simply more faithful to the original (at least the chorus).

Here are the original lyrics:

*There are loved ones in the glory<sup>[1]</sup>  
Whose dear forms you often miss.*

*When you close your earthly story,  
Will you join them in their bliss?*

CHORUS:

*Will the circle be unbroken  
By and by, by and by?  
Is a better home awaiting  
In the sky, in the sky?*

*In the joyous days of childhood  
Oft they told of wondrous love  
Pointed to the dying Saviour;  
Now they dwell with Him above.  
(Chorus)*

*You remember songs of heaven  
Which you sang with childish voice.  
Do you love the hymns they taught you,  
Or are songs of earth your choice?  
(Chorus)*

*You can picture happy gath'rings  
Round the fireside long ago,  
And you think of tearful partings  
When they left you here below.  
(Chorus)*

*One by one their seats were emptied.  
One by one they went away.  
Now the family is parted.  
Will it be complete one day?*

As we sing all the verses, the gospel is strongly proclaimed and there is , much hope here. Because the song has long been in the public domain, it has been easily altered and recorded by numerous artists. The most significant alteration was by the Carter family in 1935, which made the song reflect a more personal loss of a loved one. They also inserted "**Lord**" for "**Oh**" and changed "*Is a better home awaiting?*" to "***There's** a better home awaiting in the sky Lord in the sky.*"

I was standing by my window  
On a cold and cloudy day  
When I saw the hearse come rolling  
For to carry my mother away.

Will the circle be unbroken  
By and by Lord, by and by  
There's a better home awaiting  
In the sky Lord, in the sky.

Well, I went back home, home was lonely  
For my mother she was gone  
And all my family there was cryin'  
For our home felt sad and alone.

Will the circle be unbroken  
By and by Lord, by and by  
There's a better home awaiting  
In the sky Lord, in the sky.

Undertaker, undertaker, undertaker  
Won't you please drive slow...

Had “**Lord**” not been inserted, and “**There’s a better home awaiting!**” for “**Is a better home awaiting?**” the song would be a good expression of grief but without the powerful proclamation in the original version, (**when** we sing **all** verses). “*Will the Circle be Unbroken?*” is now considered Country Music’s most iconic song. It is regularly sung by a large ensemble at the Country Music Hall of Fame Awards.

So Peter Hollens is off the hook for omitting “*Lord.*” Whichever version we listen to, however, we can appreciate and value all the different affirmations that look to God for bringing his children home.

Let us pray. *Thank you, O God, for preparing a place for us all who believe and trust in you. Thank your in the resurrection there is a better home awaiting us where we shall be united and reunited with all who have gone before us. Amen.*

Enjoy these versions of this great song:

*Will the Circle Be Unbroken* (Bioshock Version) by Peter Hollens

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdXbEXOjft0&t=94s>

*Will the Circle Be Unbroken* by Gregg Alman and Ensemble (he was terminally ill at this time)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFSK2si4GTw>

*Will the Circle Be Unbroken* by Carter Family (1935)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjHjm5sRqSA>

*Will the Circle Be Unbroken* by Johnny Cash and Maybelle Carter

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dra6YF\\_lpBo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dra6YF_lpBo)

*Will the Circle Be Unbroken* by Carlene Carter and Marty Stuart at Hall of Fame 2020

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-IGPWZKzJI>

*Will the Circle Be Unbroken* by Randy Travis

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SagXdu70yF4>

*Will the Circle Be Unbroken* by Broken Circle Revival Project

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cz\\_yB2ajGEU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cz_yB2ajGEU)

*Will the Circle Be Unbroken* by Nitty Gritty Dirt Band 1989

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lf5pY\\_qNBAQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lf5pY_qNBAQ)

*Will the Circle Be Unbroken* by Willie Nelson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t6984JhxlPE>

*Will the Circle Be Unbroken* by Mississippi John Hurt

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBeUrBpcJYE>

*Will the Circle Be Unbroken* by the Stable Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lwa1MQsqHwM>

*Will the Circle Be Unbroken* by Nashville Jam

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qa18Ej7\\_-ZI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qa18Ej7_-ZI)

*Will the Circle Be Unbroken* by Wisconsin State Honors Chorus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvmkDC4aaOI>

*Will the Circle Be Unbroken* by Lea Kliphuis and ensemble

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lZ1KGVxG8w>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, April 21, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #320

### A Ratatouille moment.

*"For we are the aroma of Christ."* (2 Corinthians 2:15)

When one of our members tore out a *"Christ in our Home"* devotion and handed it to me, it was so that it might inspire my own devotion idea. It was entitled *"The Fragrance of life,"* based on 2Cor.2:15 *"For we are the aroma of Christ."*

That author talked about how smell is tied to memory and shared a memory of her mother's cinnamon rolls. The final lines were *"As the church, we are called the aroma of Christ." We cannot think of Christ without also remembering people on our faith journey. Who are the people whose very essence reminds you of Christ? What memories come back when you think of them."*

That devotion reminded me of the most unusual response I have ever heard from a new member when asked, *"What attracted you to St. Paul's?"* He replied, *"I knew I was going to join the first time I went through the front doors. It smelled just like my home church growing up."* I suppose others entering St. Paul's might think it just smells like an old church. But for Chuck, that very smell took him back to being a kid growing up and when he was nurtured in the faith.

In sharing this from time to time, I have described this as a *"Ratatouille moment."* Those who have seen the popular 2007 Disney animated movie by the same name know exactly what I mean. In the film, (obviously a fantasy), an aspiring young restaurant worker named Alfredo makes friends with Remy, a rat who also happens to be a great little chef. When Remy rescues Alfredo's soup failure in the kitchen, Remy becomes the mastermind and behind the scenes chef who brings the restaurant to prominence (I'm leaving a lot out).

The *"Ratatouille moment"* scene I am thinking about is when the make-or-break food critic Anton Ego comes to the restaurant to review it. Instead of a fancy French dish, Remy elects to serve him *"Ratatouille,"* a very simple peasant dish. But rather than being horrified, the snobbish and very critical Ego is transported in his mind and memory to being served this humble dish by his beloved mother. Nothing could compare to that, and Ego's later glowing review reflects that.

I wonder what might your *"Ratatouille moments"* be? What tastes and smells remind you of something valuable in your experience? When you receive the bread and wine of Holy Communion are you reminded of those special persons with whom you have shared in this holy meal?

Let us pray. *Thank you for our senses, O God, especially today taste and smell. May the aromas of our life transport us to places of joy and safety, and may we always be reminded of those who have nurtured us in faith. Thank you for the Lord's supper, and for all those old churches with rich histories and traditions. In Jesus' name.*

*Taste and See* at Washington National Cathedral

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kyQNNLVY05M>

*Taste and See* by Notre Dame Folk Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3fCcBF7mi0>

*Taste and See* by Chelsea Esmeier

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1R-OrDmF70>

*Come Let Us Eat* ELW 491 by Samm Hills Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTQcjafvtTA>

*Eat this Bread* by TheMath1933

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bN41WG1qKxk>

*For the Bread Which You Have Broken* ELW 494

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pv78Gz5VQ-Q>

*For the Bread Which You Have Broken* by First Methodist Houston

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxufNhcbpNk>

... and for those who remember *Ratatouille*, here are two ending scenes from the film.

Food critic Anton Ego served his *Ratatouille*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIn\\_EtKK5hI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIn_EtKK5hI)

*Ratatouille* ending scene with Ego's restaurant review

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1ermwx2Js0>

## **St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, April 22, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #321**

### **Witnesses.**

*You are witnesses of these things.* (Lk. 24:48 NRS)

Here ended the gospel from the Third Sunday of Easter, the story of Jesus appearing for the first time to most of his disciples after first appearing to two of them on the Road to Emmaus.

On Tuesday, April 20, 2021 a guilty verdict was reached in the trial of ex-police officer Derek Chauvin, for the murder of George Floyd. In light of this trial and its outcome, I am seeing this verse about witnesses in a different light.

Luke, of course, is not talking about a civil trial 2,000 years into his future. He is talking about the resurrection of Jesus, where Jesus reveals himself to the disciples following his own murder. The disciples are now witnesses, tasked to share this story with all the world.

In Chauvin's trial, perhaps little would have happened except for the witnesses, and one in particular, 17-year-old Darnella Frazier. Prior to posting video evidence of what she saw with her own eyes, this statement was released by the Minneapolis police:

### **"MAN DIES AFTER MEDICAL INCIDENT DURING POLICE INTERACTION**

May 25, 2020 (MINNEAPOLIS) On Monday evening, shortly after 8:00 PM, officers from the Minneapolis Police Department responded to the 3700 block of Chicago Avenue South on the report of a forgery in progress. Officers were advised that the suspect was sitting on top of a blue car and appeared to be under the influence.

Two officers arrived and located the suspect, a male believed to be in his 40's, in his car. He was ordered to step from his car. After he got out, he physically resisted officers. Officers were able to get the suspect into handcuffs and noted he appeared to be suffering medical distress. Officers called for an ambulance. He was transported to Hennepin County Medical Center by ambulance where he died a short time later.

At no time were weapons of any type used by anyone involved in this incident.

The Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension has been called to investigate this incident at the request of the Minneapolis Police Department.

No officers were injured in the incident. Body cameras were on and activated during this incident. The GO number associated with this case is 20-140629."

That was it. If not for witnesses, and Darnella Frazier among them recording the incident on her phone and later posting it to Facebook, the circumstances causing Floyd's death would have been an entirely different story.

Because Darnella Frazier's video showed Officer Chauvin kneeling on the neck of George Floyd for 9 minutes and 29 seconds, we all became witnesses to something horrific. We all watched George Floyd's life unnecessarily being taken away from him.

Some have argued that this evidence (and people seeing it) made it impossible for Chauvin to get a fair trial. But watching the video, as so many have worldwide, it also became impossible to conclude, as the initial report indicated, that Floyd "appeared to be suffering medical distress" unrelated to him having the life choked out of him. The jury found Chauvin guilty of second-degree murder, third degree murder, and second degree manslaughter.

When Jesus died and was buried in the tomb, the authorities discovered that on the third day, the tomb was empty. According to Matthew, there was an initial reporting of that as well:

10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." 11 While they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened.

12 After the priests had assembled with the elders, they devised a plan to give a large sum of money to the soldiers,<sup>13</sup> telling them, "You must say, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.'

14 If this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." 15 So they took the money and did as they were directed. (Matt. 28:10-15 NRS)

That was the initial report. If not for eyewitness accounts, the story of what actually happened to Jesus, would have gone the way of many incidents. Nowhere. The disciples witnessed it differently. Up close and personal. Jesus had risen (He had risen indeed. Alleluia.)

Because the disciples did not have the technology to film for us what they saw with their own eyes, sharing this good news required word of mouth testimony. Convinced by what they saw, the eyewitnesses would not be hindered in sharing this good news with others. Ever.

The video of George Floyd dying at the hands of someone abusing power is not good news. It's horrific news. But through Darnella Frazier and the other eyewitnesses, the world was able to witness the truth. As hard as that is to face, it also shows how deeply we need someone not only to show us a better way to live, but enable us, through the Holy Spirit, to do it. This is a truth we can live with, for it brings reconciliation and sets us free.

May we all be witnesses to the truth of Jesus Christ who came to save us all.

Let us pray: Almighty and ever living God. Through Jesus Christ, you give us hope for reconciliation and fairness and mercy and justice. Thank you for the witnesses to the resurrection, and all who embrace the hope of reconciliation in our brokenness. Help us to break through all that keeps us apart from each other. We pray for those in the very difficult occupation of law enforcement, and for those who lawlessness has added to their stress. Give your grace to those who have lost loved ones to violence. Amen.

*You Are My Witnesses* by Cathy Wells

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FWO60mjRYBI>

*You Will Be My Witnesses* by Marie Dunne

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ug9EG1qZA4>

*Ye Shall Be My Witnesses* by Golden Angels 6

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjETPiIHWI0>

*You Will Be My Witnesses* by Joseph Martin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0lhiqmCXnA>

*You Shall Be My Witnesses* by First Baptist

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ujh7cG1sbaM>

*And You Will Be My Witnesses* by International Staff Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tusuvVPV4Wc>

*This is My Song* by Voce8

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXooDIWVRZs>

*This is My Song* by Icaronine

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6OxSYe8\\_e4Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6OxSYe8_e4Y)

*Finlandia* by Nordic Male Chorus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ns2A5yUMZhU>

*Go and Make Disciples* Matt. 28: 18-20 by Paul Mays

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CiON9lp-LPw>

## **St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, April 23, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #321**

### **My brush with "15 minutes of Fame" (not mine, but St. Paul's very own Bobcat Guy)**

*"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." (Jn. 15:12-13 NRS)*

Let me confess. I was first instructed to keep the story quiet, and I failed. I learned what had happened from the parents of the woman involved. After church on Sunday, they explained why their daughter and son-in-law had missed that morning.

The next night was our council meeting, and when Pastor Jonathan was called away before the end of the meeting, it was my turn to end with the prayer and offer prayers for those who needed special prayers. I did, and I named [name] and [name] and shared what had happened.

It was the next morning that my guilt set in, due to a text from Pastor Jonathan: "As requested by [name]: PLEASE DO NOT SHARE WITH CONGREGATION UNTIL [NAME] IS READY TO SHARE." Uh oh. I didn't know.

I felt bad for one day. On Wednesday, Kathleen our office manager, who keeps an eye on social media feeds, informed me of the posting of their security video taken during the incident. It had been shared on *TikTok*, *Twitter*, and *YouTube*, and by Wednesday morning had more than five million views!

That was just the very beginning of a story and video that has spanned the globe and has been featured on national news. With millions and millions of views.

With that news, I no longer felt so bad for sharing what was first intended to be private. And now Happy and Kristi Wade have become famous, due to Happy rescuing Kristi from a rabid bobcat attack on their driveway. The following Sunday after worship, they explained that it was not their intention or wish to post the video, but it was given to a friend who gave it to a relative and there was no controlling it after that.

People everywhere have seen the video. When I shared the story with a friend visiting his son half-way through hiking the 2,200-mile Appalachian Trail, I learned his son Hugh had already heard about it and seen the video. Like I said, people everywhere. My friend even sent me a link to a New York Times story about it. It has since been shared and posted again and again. And made more national news.

Kristi said she finally agreed to interviews so that the story would be reported accurately. Yes, it was a real bobcat; yes, it had rabies; yes, they had to kill it, (even though they love animals); yes, they each had to get their 35 rabies shots.

The following Sunday morning I told Happy that he was now the most famous person I had ever met. At least for 15 minutes. That's how 15 minutes of fame often goes. As I think further about this, however, I believe our interest reflects the deep admiration and appreciation we have when someone does something truly heroic.

The video begins with Happy carrying coffee and a cake to his car. He greets a neighbor jogging. He speaks of washing his car. No one sees this right away, but at the top of the frame we see an animal dashing across the street. When Kristi steps out of the house with her crated cat on the way to the vet, the bobcat jumps on her back, biting, scratching and trying to get to her neck.

When you read posted comments about this, there is universal admiration for how quickly Happy sprang into action, pulling the bobcat off Kristi and flinging it away from everyone. People admire someone, especially an ordinary someone not unlike any other ordinary someone, leaping into this kind of action for love for another.

I suspect during this time of regularly distressing daily news, it is refreshing to see something that reminds us that not everything is partisan, political, or divisive. Sometimes people do the right and necessary thing, even at great personal risk, because during certain critical moments, love for another is more important than anything else.

That is very much what Jesus tries to teach us every day through the scriptures.

Let us pray: *Thank you O God for all the ordinary people out there who commit extraordinary acts of heroism. For those whose acts of love and sacrifice are rooted in their relationship with Christ, we give thanks. May we be encouraged whenever we see people act out the love of Christ in care for another. We also thank you, in Happy and Kristi's case, for the rabies vaccine which has also saved their lives. Bless all who create vaccines for public health safety. Help us build better trust in this so we may all be well. Amen.*

Here's the story as featured on Inside Edition

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIUyBb3ObkA>

and on 9News

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zz-4JsgZl\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zz-4JsgZl_Y)

and some songs....

*Create In Me A Clean Heart* (Cast me not from your presence) by Eric Lagerstrom & Bertina Grijpstra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7Hk3WFUMvo>

*Create in Me* by Maranatha Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2fVliokregE>

*Create in Me* (from old SBH) instrumental

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wnb6WnzjXRY>

*Create in Me* by Acapella Company

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=noUeQQ64Q1I>

*Shepherd Me O God* by Sonia Salas

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXS3L-sdfPA>

*Shepherd Me O God* by Grosse Pointe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQid6VgHNec>

*Shepherd Me O God* by Marty Haugen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0kxWXHETIU>

*Preserve Me, O God for In You I Take Refuge* by Morning Star

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rdhtyJncrvs>

*Preserve Me O God* by Chris Ri

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7lPp8ZtmPvc>

*Thine is the Glory* by Mennonite Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GK0I9vj2QII>

*Thine is the Glory* by NBA Big Sing Newcastle

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbBOOmKMLml>

*On Eagles Wings* by CFJ Jakarta

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OXfu01zfqB0>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, April 26, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #322

### WARNING: THE FOLLOWING DEVOTION MAY CONTAIN DISTURBING IMAGES

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, <sup>2</sup> "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. <sup>3</sup> Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. <sup>4</sup> If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. <sup>5</sup> The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the **goats**.

<sup>6</sup> Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. <sup>7</sup> Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. <sup>8</sup> That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. <sup>9</sup> Do not eat the meat raw or boiled in water but roast it over a fire-- with the head, legs and internal organs. <sup>10</sup> Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it.

<sup>11</sup> This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD's **Passover**. (Exod. 12:1-11 NIV)

The above passage describes Moses instructing the community of Israel, while they were slaves in Egypt, to perform a ritual that will protect them from the final plague that God will visit upon the Egyptians. This is after Moses gave Pharaoh multiple chances to let the people go, but to no avail. The last plague is the death of first-born. The Israelites can be spared by following the ritual of sacrificing a young sheep or goat.

Exodus 12 describes the ritual. It also becomes part of a yearly ritual that Jews have celebrated since then, Passover. The Passover meal is what Jesus was celebrating with his disciples when Jesus described himself as the sacrificial lamb, and that the bread and wine of Passover is now his body and blood.

It is not uncommon for Christians to learn about the Passover celebration, and sometimes re-enact Passover meals. It may follow the original pattern, or be modified for a Christian interpretation.

If you are following me so far, this sounds like a simple little history lesson, but I am about to share with you my experience with a congregation that took this learning opportunity to the extreme... arguably to the most maximum extreme ever. Remember, you were warned.

In the early 1980's I was a campus minister in Odessa, Texas and worked for twenty churches in eight denominations. Three of the churches were Lutheran, the largest being Lutheran Church of the Risen Lord. One summer I was invited to assist in their Vacation Bible School. I was assigned a class but was not involved in the planning of a certain Passover meal the upper elementary kids were going to experience during lunch.

I only learned the "day of" that what they intended to do. To illustrate and faithfully reflect the Passover story as described in the Bible, they were going to sacrifice a real live baby goat! Not only that, but prepare it to be eaten by everyone as part of the meal.

It goes without saying that I had never known this to be part of any churchwide (Lutheran or otherwise) Vacation Bible School curriculum ever. This was not an Augsburg Fortress VBS learning activity.

The children had the option to watch the sacrifice. Or not. Most did. They later had the option to eat the meat. Or not. Again, most did. And looking back, forty years later I am shocked that this did not cause a stir in the congregation at all. Maybe the kids were all from hunting families and familiar with what happens with game.

But this was something else. A little goat was transported in the trunk of the car. It was so cute. The man who killed the goat was highly experienced, and with a quick slice to the throat it was over. (Well, there was that baby goat scream I can still hear). They skinned it and prepared it to be roasted over a fire pit, just as described in the Bible. It was then served with the other Passover meal items. With a Passover liturgy, it was consumed.

There is no question this activity vividly brought to life the Biblical story of the Passover. I still cannot believe, however, what I witnessed. I never saw such a thing again in all my years of ministry. I cannot imagine something like this happening today. Pastoral heads would roll. It would go viral. The church would forever be maligned. Even if I were only a bystander, I would be roundly criticized for my failure to intervene. But forty years ago, in Odessa, Texas, at Lutheran Church of the Risen Lord, it hardly caused a stir.

In 2004 Producer/Actor Mel Gibson finished a film called *The Passion of the Christ* where he attempted to depict the story more accurately than previous films. Besides the actors speaking Aramaic, there has never been such a graphic and violent depiction of Jesus suffering as this film. If the scripture said Jesus was whipped 39 times with an instrument designed to rip flesh from bone, the film showed him whipped all 39 times. 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9.....39. I personally believe the point was made well enough after a few times, but certainly the viewers came away with a stronger emotional impression of Jesus' suffering.

Forty years ago at Lutheran Church of the Risen Lord's VBS, I'm sure the children came away with a stronger impression of Moses' Passover instructions than just reading the story. But good grief, I am adult as I was then, and I can still hear that baby goat screaming. How, in an edifying way, did that experience deepen anyone's understanding of that Bible story?

And just as I didn't need to watch a bloody gory film version of *The Passion of Christ* to believe Jesus suffered, I trust there are so many other ways to hear and understand the Passover story without having it for lunch.

Let us pray. *We thank you O God for all the positive ways the scriptures are brought to life for us in ways that help us grow in faith. For all the faithful teachers, we give thanks. We are also grateful that we can learn these stories and believe them without resorting to something sensational to make a point, even if it is an effective one. Bless us in our growing, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

I have looked for Passover Songs, both Jewish and Christian versions. Here are some happy findings. No Warning necessary for these. Enjoy.

*Chozen* by Six 13 (adaption of "Frozen") quite sweet, clever and nice!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwBuNtd4xAY>

*Passover Rhapsody* by Aish (inspired by Queen)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRWNrk7FxG4>

*Deyenu* by BimBam

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8p1pabOX3fc>

*Red Sea Shanty Song* by Six 13

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQON0ipv6il>

*Uptown Passover* by Six 13

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Q7Jo7FkLH4&list=PLbEpvu\\_N5kitPr22P5mMvojiOt\\_MhfafT](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Q7Jo7FkLH4&list=PLbEpvu_N5kitPr22P5mMvojiOt_MhfafT)

*Pessach Medley* with Micha Gamerman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VeH2DARmFE>

*Before* by Shilo Ben Hud

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lneADttxAHE>

*Passover Song* by MiYahMusic

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1hSRerQ60c>

*The Passover Song* by Sean Carter and Caroline Cobb (two versions)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVowp0VnpHg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2VjILH2YNUc>

*Let us Break Together* by Joan Baez and Leon Bibb

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBY-IR4Phd0>

*Let us Break Bread Together* by Agnes Choo

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Egk-pX\\_1nHg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Egk-pX_1nHg)

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, April 27, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #323

### Getting back to normal.

<sup>27</sup> So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. (Exod. 14:27 NRS)

As our time of dealing with a global pandemic lengthens, I hear more and more longing for that time when we “get back to normal.” What this expresses is the desire to get back to the way “I want things to be”, or the way “I want my life to be.\*” Thinking about “normal” this way prompts us to think about and remember what we love and what we have missed since the pandemic began.

I wonder what your list would look like.

Some things we likely all share, like not worrying about getting sick (unto death) or infecting others with the coronavirus. Enjoying social gatherings with family and friends without fear or restrictions would be widely shared. For people of faith, coming to worship without restrictions would be high on the shared list. As would enjoying time with friends at school (even if school had not previously been a favorite activity).

The things we miss most revolve around social activities, and spending time at those places where we socialize, like restaurants, coffee shops, bars, ice cream shops, art galleries, sporting events, school functions, and of course, church.

There are many activities, of course, that we have managed quite well during the pandemic. This would include reading a book, surfing the internet, playing solitaire, streaming video, blogging, jogging, working in our gardens or workshops (or at home, when the job permits), sewing, ordering items online, reading daily devotions, or telephoning a friend (until we realize how much we miss seeing them in person).

Certain activities, especially personal prayer, have been unhindered by the pandemic because they are already so private and personal. Those who participate in intercessory prayer groups, of course, miss being in each other's presence.

When we look for “*normal*” in the Bible, there are few verses that use the equivalent word. One place is Exodus 14:27, quoted above. That described the Red Sea returning to its former state after Moses parted the waters so the Israelites could escape the Egyptian army that was about to overcome them.

There are only two passages in the New Testament that name a sense of normal. One is in Matthew 12:13, where Jesus heals a man's "*withered*" hand, restoring it to normal, or at least matching his other hand. The second passage in Hebrews 11:11 refers to Old Testament matriarch Sarah being beyond "*normal*" childbearing age.

There are other scriptures in the Bible that describe a longing for former days. One is in Numbers 11, when the people miss the food they had in Egypt (while forgetting the slavery). Another is when the Israelites are in exile in Babylon. Universally they longed for their lives being back to normal (pre-exilic) when they were free and unrestricted living in their own homeland.

For us, we wish for normal and are not yet adjusted to what some call the "new normal." That may be because we still clearly remember what our lives were like "before" all this. Even so, as things become less restrictive and we "open up" a bit, we continue to be in touch with the ongoing desire for normal.

Here at St. Paul's, as we have been able to welcome more to indoor worship, things feel a little more normal (again meaning the way *we want things to be*). However, the presence of masks and restricted singing continues to remind us that we are not yet "back".

We also do not live isolated from the rest of the world. As we follow news from other countries, we carry an awareness that Covid 19 continues to surge. It can still do that here. We feel for all those countries so critically desperate for relief and hope. This awareness also keeps us from declaring that we are back to normal, and therefore able to live freely as before all this happened. People are still getting sick and dying from Covid.

What keeps this manageable for us as people of faith is our constant God, revealed in scriptures as a God of "*steadfast love and faithfulness.*" With God, what is important to remember is less about "normal" and more about "trust."

There is never "*getting back to normal.*" It's always about "*going forward* in faith." The world is constantly changing. We are constantly aging. What is constant is God, who, in Jesus Christ, holds us close all the way. This is as it was in ages past, and as it is in years to come.

And that's the way "**\*God** wants our lives to be."

Let us pray. *O God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come. You are our shelter from the storm and our eternal home. Be our normal, our constant, our bulwark and our support so that we might withstand all that which challenges our faith and disrupts our lives. Give hope, we pray, to all who are desperate for healing this day. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*O God our Help In Ages Past* by Westminster Abbey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rsHlwXTjAOU&t=22s>

*O God our Help In Ages Past* by SE Samonte

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-hN740J6qA>

*O God Our Help In Ages Past* by Matt Beckingham

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d9ZINeNGvto>

*O God our Help In Ages Past* by Hal Leonard

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4OYUr\\_njHPQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4OYUr_njHPQ)

*O God our Help In Ages Past* by Life at Pathway

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uWFnYkgRIY>

*Once We Sang and Danced In Gladness ELW 701* by Marty Haugen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRHKgHKQVsw>

*By the Waters of Babylon* by Orthodox Virtual Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kx-QZw9THA>

*We Walk by Faith* by Marty Haugen

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbe3bpi\\_9Pg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbe3bpi_9Pg)

*How Small Our Span of Life ELW 636* by Hilldale Choir Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLRazBqGrij>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, April 28, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #324

### My father's sage stewardship and tax advice.

*<sup>17</sup> Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" <sup>18</sup> But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? <sup>19</sup> Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. <sup>20</sup> Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" <sup>21</sup> They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." (Matt. 22:17-21 NRS)*

The recent shredding event at St. Paul's provided incentive for me to go through many old files. Included were those belonging to my mother and father. After my mother died almost three years ago, I brought them home. They included tax records.

We all know how going through things like this remind us of our deceased loved ones and bring back memories. I was reminded of my father's passion for taxes. As Manager of Corporate Income Taxes for a large public utilities company, taxes were a large part of his life. He so loved doing taxes, that in retirement he spent years as a volunteer for AARP tax preparation. He thrived on being able to serve and help people who were unable to manage their quite often complex tax situations.

With three sisters and their husbands and relatives of those relatives all living in and around the Sun Cities Arizona retirement communities, my father was regularly asked for tax advice. Some of my relatives were chronic complainers about paying taxes, and regularly pestered my dad for ways to reduce paying state and federal income taxes.

Going through the files, I found a very amusing copy of a letter written to them on April 18, 1998.

"Dear Family,

It is kind of a relief that April 15 has come and gone. That is the date when most people have finally determined their tax liability for the prior year. I have come to the conclusion that most people do not like to pay income taxes.

There are ways that income taxes can be reduced. Here are a few:

- 1 Give more money to church and charities. There is a limit to what one can deduct in any one year. The limit is 50% of adjusted gross income. One can carry over a balance (not allowed in a year due to the limitation) to five subsequent years.
- 2 Get sick more often. Have more medical and dental expenses.
- 3 Have more dependents, like kids, parents, brothers, sisters, etc.

4 By more risky investments that hopefully produce losses to offset any capital gains from good investments.

5 By an expensive home and get a mortgage with high interest rates and high property taxes.

6 Move to a state like Minnesota that has high state income taxes which are deductible for federal income tax purposes.

7 Buy a very expensive auto in a state that has personal properties levied autos.

8 Instead of investing your excess cash in income producing assets, go on costly trips and have a ball!! Avoid interest and dividends whenever possible. THEY ARE TAXABLE.

Love, Arnold”

I don't know if Jesus' advice on taxes would have been any different if he had an “*Arnold*” around him to advise him. Jesus threw the question right it at the Pharisees and the Herodians. “*Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.*” (Matt. 22:21 KJV). says the old King James Version.

My father never complained about paying taxes because he was someone who believed it was both a privilege to work and an obligation to support his country. He saw his own taxes, for example, as helping to support social security to his mother-in-law, who had never worked outside the home and had no other retirement income.

My father's simple approach to stewardship has also had a lasting impact on me. Many times he repeated this simply mantra:

**Give a little. Save a little. Spend a little.**

For a long time, I missed the significant of the order. Give a little was first. He and my mother were lifelong tithers, giving 10% of their income “off the top.” Their tithe was also 10% of their gross income, not their net income or 10% of what was left after all other expenses were incurred.

**Give a little. Save a little. Spend a little.**

He was able to do all this because he was a good manager. He made good choices in respect to saving and especially spending. My father and mother lived modestly and carefully.

Furthermore, they both derived as much joy and pleasure from their *giving* as from whatever they spent on themselves. It was fun for them to fund worthwhile causes. Going through their files, besides their giving to their church, I found many charities they supported

The church always struggles trying to convey to its membership the joy of giving. Often times we make it sounds like law, or at least a burden. When we dare to suggest a tithe, we are grateful if we get even a percent.

In respect to joy in giving, I had a big advantage over many. Simply put, I was raised that way. I learned from my parents, and truly respect how they lived their lives. As I shredded records no longer necessary to preserve, I was able to find and save some wonderful reminders of their generosity.... along with that fun letter from my dad on tax advice.

Let us pray: *We thank you O God for all the good lessons taught us not only by our parents, but by all those who have passed along wisdom, faithfulness, and generosity. May we all have something to pass along as well. Teach us to be good stewards of the wonderful gift of life you have given. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*God Whose Giving Knows No Ending* by Grosse Pointe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUKNNdpMdHs>

*God Whose Giving Knows No Ending* by ELW 678

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdnywQS7K4k>

*We Give Thee But Thine Own* by United Reformed Churches Synod

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHR1PQ5YwLo>

*We Give Thee But Thine Own* by Erin Jogue

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpTayoOkIX0>

*We Give Thee But Thine own* by Koine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PB24dBXgZHI>

*For The Fruit of All Creation Thanks be to God* by St. John the Divine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfXziMbZyCI>

*For The Fruit of All Creation Thanks be to God* by Mark Hayes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pidGcROUCMg>

*Give Thanks* by Janella Salvador

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYRgB26rPIs>

*Give Thanks* by Don Moen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=412tR6HLnAE>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, April 29, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #325

### Iris Protocols.

<sup>23</sup> *You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.* <sup>24</sup> *For "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the **flower** of grass. The grass withers, and the **flower** fades, <sup>25</sup> but the **word** of the Lord endures forever." That **word** is the good news that was announced to you. (1 Pet. 1:23-25 NRS)*

One of the great joys of living in Wilmington is watching the landscape burst forth each spring with azaleas. Even with the Azalea Festival essentially cancelled last year, and severely modified this year, azalea flowers emerged once again in glorious red, pink, purple, yellow, white, and fuchsia.

What a gorgeous sea of color. Then they are gone. I always feel a little sad about that, but it does reinforce when the scriptures speak of the flowers fading.

So the azalea flowers are gone, having now wilted on the plant and fallen the ground. But wait. Even though the azaleas are gone, there's more. Have you seen the roses blooming? Can there be more than I have seen before, or am I just noticing them because I have been feeling sad about the azaleas.

And now the irises. Have you seen the irises? I was particularly admiring the large irises between the parking lot and the church. With 9:00 am worship happening outside on the parking lot, these irises have offered such a wonderful gift for us to enjoy as we come to worship. I remember them just popping up a few years ago. Wow.

They did not, however, pop up from nowhere. Yesterday, I learned from St. Paul's wonderful gardener-in-chief, Michael Leiser how it happened. Michael told me these "*bearded irises*" had been planted some time ago near the Keever Hall main entrance. Michael discovered they were pretty choked off by other debris and through inattention. He carefully dug them up, separated the "*rhizomes*" carefully according to proper "*iris protocols*," and then planted them in a sunny area near the entrance to the parking lot.

And wow (again)! There they are, for us to enjoy along with the roses and other assorted flowers now around us. Soon we will see lilies planted from previous Easters coming up next to the church. What is a great joy to behold.

When flowers are described in the scriptures, they are often used to describe that which goes away. I Peter quotes Isaiah 40:

<sup>6</sup> *A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. <sup>7</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. <sup>8</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. (Isa. 40:6-8 NRS)*

The point made both through Isaiah and 1 Peter, is that while the flowers (and grass) fade, the word of God stands forever. While people fade as well, the Word of God stands forever. As seasons come and seasons go, God's Word stands forever. As people come and people go, God's Word stands forever.

As we hear God's Word, we learn we are precious in God's sight, worth cultivating, worth renewing, worth saving, not only so that we might bring delight to God, but so that we can be precious and beautiful in each other's sight as well. It is Jesus, God's word become flesh, who makes that possible. It is by his own dying (his own fading) that Jesus makes this possible. It is by his resurrection that all these good things are made possible.

It seems like a tall order, but just as we are sometimes surprised by yet another beautiful flower springing forth from the earth, so Jesus surprises us by being not only Good Shepherd, but Good Gardener.

Let us pray. *Thank you, O God, for the wondrous flowers of spring that continue to bring joy to our lives. But more than that, thank you for your steadfast word that provides the foundation for our lives to spring forth with your radiance and joy. Thank you for Jesus our Good Gardener who tends us and nourishes us that we might be beautiful in your sight. Amen.*

I found a video of another gardener doing what Mike has done for us: *"How to divide bearded irises."*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCpMzba\\_R5Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCpMzba_R5Q)

*The Garden Song* by David Mallett and friends

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJvBkjCC9kl>

*There in God's Garden* by Samm Hills Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yhmrJUKb1U>

*God's Word Is Our Great Heritage* by Winnebago Lutheran Academy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48sN5UIWyy0>

*God's Word Is Our Great Heritage* by Halifax Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WScOyzCR7Sw>

*We Plow the Fields and Scatter* by Chet Valley Churches

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccVEjKfKAV4>

*In the Garden* by The Church Sisters

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qIkU8fWqzxw>

*For the Beauty of the Earth* by John Rutter

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlBkpAm3fhw>

*This is My Father's World* by Secrets Unlocked

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEE5MvoT3oI>

*The Beauty of God's Creation – Flowers* (a beautiful visual meditation on flowers)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIS-LPD\\_k6Y&t=49s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIS-LPD_k6Y&t=49s)

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, April 30, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #326

### Why'd they put Genesis 27:11 in the Bible? It just sounds silly.

*But Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. (Gen. 27:11 ESV)*

I had never noticed this verse in the Bible until many years ago when I heard Tom, an aspiring young actor at Holden Village, perform a sermon based on it. The sermon was first presented in a comedy sketch by a member of the British comedy troupe called "Beyond the Fringe". "Beyond the Fringe" was predecessor to the famous "Monty Python."

I heard Tom deliver this sermon quite a few times, as it was particularly great take on a scripture that seems primed for a humorous interpretation. Even without the satirical interpretation, memorizing the verse was useful whenever people competed to see who could quote the most Bible verses. *"Say what? Now you're throwing me off."*

Due to the wonders of modern technology and YouTube, I found the original video of Beyond the Fringe's Allen Bennet imitating a dull, stuffy Anglian preacher preaching this sermon. (At least it was short). For your Friday amusement, I'll attach a link to it.

There could be an acceptable sermon from this verse if it was placed in context. Examining the context will explain Genesis 27:11, and why it was notable in the larger story for this distinction between brothers to be observed.

Jacob and Esau are fraternal brothers and sons of Isaac and Rebecca. Esau, the "hairy" one, came first, and his name actually means "hairy." Jacob was born right after Esau and was observed to be grabbing his brother's heel as if to try to pull him back and get out first (becoming the coveted "firstborn). "Jacob" means "he who grasps the heel." Jacob's name could be translated "Grabby."

Esau was the "daddy's boy," rugged and hairy, and loved to hunt. Jacob was a "momma's boy" more delicate and happier to be in the kitchen. Jacob was also smarter than his brother and constantly conniving.

Their conflict was over who gets daddy's blessing, and the rights due the first born. It required daddy's blessing. That's when Jacob cooked up a scheme and some delicious lentil soup, from which he illegally convinced Esau to trade for the blessing.

This wouldn't hold up in a modern court of law, but if Jacob could convince ailing and blind old father Isaac he was Esau, then Jacob could get the blessing. With momma's help (being her

favorite), Jacob dressed in Esau's smelly old work clothes and added some false hair to arms and face and "received the blessing" from his dad.

He also received the wrath of not older but bigger brother Esau which set up years of future conflict (but that's another story).

What is significant for us, other than pondering what otherwise might be a very silly sounding verse (speak it out loud as if you are in Sunday School and you'll see what I mean), is that it explains why such an elaborate ruse was needed for one twin to swindle another twin out of the family farm.

The Bible is fully of stories which read so true to life. Conflicts in families happen. Brothers and sisters become estranged. Sometimes the outcome turns out well (as it was after many years with Esau and Jacob... see Genesis 33). Other times there are tragic endings, as we see in the tale of beloved King David and his son Absalom (see 2 Samuel).

Throughout all these scriptures and sacred stories, however, we are witness to a God of steadfast love and faithfulness who may be hindered, but not defeated in God's plan to save us all. It's an incredible history, one with ever refreshing insights. Even a peculiar verse like Genesis 27:11 brings us into a larger story of grace and redemption, despite great betrayal.

It all comes together in what is called "*The Greatest Story Ever Told*," that of Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection, which makes possible all other stories to find fulfillment in him.

Let us pray: *Thank you. O God, for the scriptures and all the stories that bring to life your love and faithfulness. Through each story may your word be expressed to us and may we receive them in faith. We give thanks that your blessing extends to all of us equally as your beloved children. Guide us on our journeys so that we can be reconciled to all brothers and sister. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Canticle of the Turning* by Rory Cooney

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9QeTmRCpW4>

*Canticle of the Turning* by Creator Lutheran Church

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7fTuH\\_0agE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7fTuH_0agE)

*Canticle of the Turning* by Advocate Virtual Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7gsT83UNLY>

*Lord Jesus You Shall Be My Song* by St. Olaf Choral Series

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NN66tdUXP4g>

*Lord Jesus You Shall Be My Song* by Faith Builders Chorale

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYr3qfJUXYE>

*Lord Jesus You Shall Be My Song* by Shenandoah Music Camp

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFxmIT\\_NJyo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFxmIT_NJyo)

*Great is Thy Faithfulness* by Dutchforward

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTKIqmdfHsk>

*Great is Thy Faithfulness* by Veritas

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2i7\\_X8RQis](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2i7_X8RQis)

*Great is Thy Faithfulness* by Chris Rice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xsQ6szjAnYE>

... and for fun, a cute retelling of the Esau and Jacob story:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGs1WfRKIoM>

**finally...** as promised, the ***original Hairy Man Smooth Man sermon*** from Beyond the Fringe

(hope you never hear something like this from St. Paul's Pulpit

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v0qOD9rtOEE&t=308s>

## **St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, May 3,2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #327**

### **Remarkable Gift. Long Wait. Dream Realized.**

<sup>2</sup> Remember the long way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. <sup>3</sup> He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. (Deut. 8:2-3 NRS)

I recently drove by Trinity Grove Trinity Landing, a senior living community under construction, and it brought back a lot of memories about this most interesting story.

In 2022, it will be 40 years since Mrs. Abba Lossen Crumpler (1896-1987) gave the church a remarkable gift. Given to the synod for the purpose of building a Lutheran Nursing/Retirement home was 30 acres of prime fronting on the Intra-Coastal Waterway.

Initially it was stipulated but later waived by the family, that if nothing was accomplished after five years it would go back to the family. Lutheran Services for the Aging (now Lutheran Services Carolinas) took over the project, purchased 20 more acres adjacent to the donated land and began what was a long and difficult journey to make this dream come true. This story is described in our wonderful "A Journey of Faith" history book, published in 2008 by accomplished local historian and St. Paul's member Ann Hutteman. At the time the book was published, there was a lot more to come.

Along the way, there were so many challenges. The process was painfully slow, and many who were locally involved expressed deep frustrations and concern that nothing was going to happen. With changing laws, the waterfront property was determined to be environmentally unacceptable for a skilled nursing home. Thankfully, an alternative site was located in order to continue the project, but that too was a lengthy process. People unfamiliar with the process learned that building any nursing home requires extensive bidding for state approved "beds" to make possible subsidy for those who cannot afford "private pay" only. That took a lot of effort.

Because there is fierce competition to secure these beds, "not-for-profit" faith-based agencies, such as Lutheran Services are often disadvantaged despite their strong reputation for quality care (hint: politics). The initial attempt to secure "beds" was defeated, despite spending a million dollars in research and legal fees. The second attempt was successful, with construction beginning for Trinity Grove Nursing home in 2010 and finishing in 2011.

As a contemporary neighborhood-style skilled nursing care facility offering great care, Trinity Grove immediately became the most highly regarded facility in the country. With its arrival, many earlier suspicions were alleviated. Trinity Grove's fine reputation continues, all thanks to the generous initial gift from Abba Lossen Crumpler and her sister Emma Lossen and niece Mae McFarland.

But what of that great property and Mrs. Crumpler's dream for it to become a retirement home? If she gave it for that purpose, what do you do with it?

Here's where the story becomes even more remarkable and a credit to the perseverance and determination of many local Lutherans and Lutheran Services Carolinas. With careful attention to the unique requirements of that property for development, a plan emerged for a new independent living senior living retirement community. The relationship with Trinity Grove would enable continuing care. Trinity Landing Senior Living Community broke ground in 2019.

Currently under construction, it will soon be forty years since Abba Crumpler, sister Emma Lossen, and niece Mae McFarland first expressed this dream. It will soon come to pass, with a community and ministry even greater than first imagined.

It was a hard, lengthy journey with many pitfalls and setbacks. It took a long time. Along the way, many were concerned that it would happen. Some even wondered if the church had done the right thing by accepting the gift. Some wanted to sell the waterfront property and use the money for something else. Key people would not let go of the dream, and now everyone is overjoyed that such a wonderful dream is at last coming to pass.

What was required initially, however, was for one family to trust the church with their generous gift. And then be patient as those who received the gift did everything they knew how to do to honor the gift by working hard to make possible this great ministry. Even if it did take forty years.

Everyone wishes the projects would have come to pass sooner, but biblically speaking, forty years is not a bad number. That's how long the Israelites were in the wilderness. Those of us who have been around awhile can identify with those Israelites who wondered if they were ever going to get to the promised land.

Let us pray. For all the generous people in your world, who by their giving, ministry is enabled, we give thanks. For all who are faithful stewards of what has been entrusted to them, we ask your blessing upon them. We also give thanks for those projects that come to completion after taking a very long time. Thank you for sisters Abba and Emma and niece Mae who, by their gift planted a seed whereby many in their senior years can be served. Encourage us all to give as we

are able, and trust in all the ways your spirit moves through many people who look to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

*Trust and Obey* by Vagle Brothers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KB4KcleYiWM>

*Trust and Obey* by David Wesley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HSD1c0Gegc>

*If Thou but Trust in God to Guide You* by FAPCNYC

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xInffLZHZIk>

*If Thou but Trust in God to Guide You* by Fountainview Academy

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFPe\\_G-Lqcc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFPe_G-Lqcc)

*Lead Me Guide Me* by Notre Dame Folk Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dh4LdNAjYzI>

*Lead Me Guide Me* by Elvis Presley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWTkmtnoD-I>

*Lead On O King Eternal* by Acapeldridge

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OeMWySjbaRE>

*Lead On O King Eternal* by Good Shepherd Band

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K591U2g-tig>

*My Hope is Built on Nothing Less*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3n5w\\_2IXvuA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3n5w_2IXvuA)

*My Hope is Built on Nothing Less*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RFktMLdeFac>

*Jesus is a Rock in a Weary Land* by Boys and Girls Choir of Harlem

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGEXqGhlsvA>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, May 4, 2021 not by Pastor Mark Opgrand but By  
Chaplain Bob Weeks #328**

## **THE POWER OF A MOTHER'S PRAYER**

By

Chaplain Bob Weeks

Scripture: "Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer." Psalm 4:1 (NIV)

As Mother's Day approaches, the Church remembers Monica, the mother of Augustine, on May 4, 2021.

Monica was born in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century. She is recognized as the Patron Saint of mothers. Her Christian Faith and dedication to motherhood was very important in the spiritual formation of one of the most brilliant Christian philosophers of all time named Augustine.

Monica was married early in life to a man named Patricus who was a Roman Pagan. He had a violent temper and bad habits. Monica's Christian alms, deeds, and prayer habits annoyed Patricus, but he always held her in respect. One occasion, Augustine fell very ill, and she grieved deeply because he had not been baptised. As result, Patricus gave permission for Augustine to be baptized, but withdrew his consent when the boy recovered.

To Monica's anxiety, Augustine, after recovering, became wayward and as Augustine himself said, he "became lazy and promiscuous." Finally, he, at 17, was sent to school to study effective speaking at Carthage. Here, he became a follower of Manichaeism, a type of Gnosticism which offered salvation through special knowledge of spiritual truth. Knowledge was the only way to salvation. Upon returning from school in Carthage, Augustine shared his views of Manichaeism with this mother, and she was so upset that she rejected him.

Somehow, God gave her a vision, and she reconciled with her son. Monica never stopped praying for her son, in spite of the circumstances. On one occasion, she discussed her son's actions with a priest, and he said, "not possible that the son of so many tears should perish." After many years of prayer, Monica finally saw her son give his life to the service of God. Augustine himself declared that his mother's resilience and dedication to prayer is what led him to become the man of God he was meant to be.

In his confessions, Augustine was to write that “. . . his mother gave birth to him twice; the second time required a lengthy spiritual travail of prayers and tears, but it was crowned at last with the joy of seeing him not only embrace the faith and receive Baptism, but also dedicate himself without reserve to the service of Christ.” Monica died shortly after Augustine was baptized; however, her legacy serves as reminder for all Christians to never stop praying for those who do not yet know Christ.

Monica’s prayer life and actions as a dedicated mother produced in Augustine a mentor for Martin Luther. As a young man, Luther joined the Augustinian Eremites of Erfurt, Germany. His vicar general and mentor, Johann von Staupitz, was strongly Augustinian in his theology. Luther was able to learn from Augustine the evangelical sense of righteousness of God (Romans 1:17); however, Luther went further than Augustine and recovered St. Paul’s understanding of justification by faith alone.

Luther learned from Augustine the importance of the Ascension as Augustine wrote: “This is that festival which confirms the grace of all festivals together. For unless the Saviour had ascended into heaven, his nativity would have borne no fruit for us, His most holy resurrection would have been useless. The Ascension is an essential part of the Gospel message.” **The power of a mother’s prayer was at work in Augustine.**

Did you ever hear your mother pray? Mother’s prayers are powerful!

Monica was born in Africa and was African. We are living in a time of racial problems, most of which, affect the lives of African American Christians. During some of the news reports, we can hear and see the prayers of mothers praying for the families of the victims. My we never discount the power of these prayers!

Prayer: I thank you, God, for mothers who instilled in us faith, helping us to know Jesus and His ways. I thank you that they gave us life and nurtured us. Bless all mothers with the graces they need. Help mothers to feel precious in your eyes today. Give them strength and courage, compassion, and peace in the name of Jesus. Amen.

*Mothering God You Gave Me Birth* by St. John’s Wilmette

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJbBup6H\\_Hc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJbBup6H_Hc)

*Mothering God You Gave Me Birth* by Mt. Olive

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXLjEHPL8Io>

*Faith of Our Mothers* by Bush Hill Presbyterian

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0V4MBqj1IE>

*Faith of Our Mothers* by Desert Jewels

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t65dAZSe4tk>

*Momma’s Knees* by The Blythe Family

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9szeiHBLsaQ>

*Mother’s Day Song – My Beautiful Mommy* by Living Water Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ogB6fPbUek>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, May 5, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #329

### Your Smiling Face

<sup>13</sup> *Turn your gaze away from me, that I may smile again, before I depart and am no more.*"  
(Ps. 39:12-13 NRS)

*"Whenever I see your smiling face, I have to smile myself, because I love you, yes, I do."* (James Taylor)

It had been more than 13 months since I had last seen smiling faces in worship. Then came the 9:00 am outdoor worship Last Sunday, March 2, 2021. What a joy it was to see those smiling faces.

I am sure there have been smiling faces in worship before Sunday, but I had not seen them. Following Covid protocols, we have been masked.

For the prelude Alex and Ron sang *"The Garden Song."* They could easily have transitioned to James Taylor's classic, *"Your Smiling Face."* *"Your Smiling Face"* is not a religious hymn, but as a song inspired by Taylor's three-year-old daughter, it does describe the joy of seeing smiling faces.

When I searched the scriptures for *"smiling face,"* I found close to five hundred references to *"face,"* but only one verse that came close to *"smiling."* That was in Psalm 39:13, where the Hebrew word translated smile, is *"hiph"* or *"hiphil"* meaning *"smiling"*. In this Psalm, the Psalmist is praying to God for relief that he may smile again.

Looking at *all* the verses (see end of devotion\*), we see the writer is being *"chastened"* by God for some kind of *"transgression"*. He is asking God how long he must wait for the reproof to come to an end. What has happened is so bad that it makes him feel like he is close even to death. He describes how God consumes *"what is precious to him"*, so it's possible that the punishment involved the removal of something that he cherished.

When therefore, in verse 13, he asks God to look away, he is asking God to end his punishment. He wants God to look away from his sin and to forgive him. In the previous six verses, the writer describes what he has learned from the ordeal. He seems to be saying *"see, I've learned my lesson, now please make this stop."*

He is praying to be able to smile again.

Therefore, the only verse in the whole bible about *"smiling"* may well be relatable. We have been through a lot this past year. We have been under siege. We have been stressed. Some have made errors of judgement that have put their lives at risk. We have wondered when relief will come. We have looked to God for help.

And Sunday we smiled.

Translating “hiph” as “smile” might not be strong enough. “Gleam” might be better. The Psalmist is looking for that future time when he can get past what was so devastating to a restoration of relationship with God that leaves him “gleaming.”

During “parking lot worship” at St. Paul’s after fifteen hard months of hidden smiles, we had a taste once again of the joy of what’s ahead.

I suspect God smiled along with us, and maybe even hummed a few bars of that old James Taylor song ... “because I love you, yes I do....”

Let us pray. *With the psalmist, we look for that time when we our smiling faces can be witnessed by all. Bring us all to that joy again, we pray, that despite all the turmoil and stresses of this present time, we can once again bask in the joy of your radiant and smiling face. Amen.*

Here’s all of Psalm 39:

<sup>NRS</sup> **Psalm 39:1** <To the leader: to Jeduthun. A Psalm of David.> I said, "I will guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue; I will keep a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence."

<sup>2</sup> I was silent and still; I held my peace to no avail; my distress grew worse,

<sup>3</sup> my heart became hot within me. While I mused, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue:

<sup>4</sup> "LORD, let me know my end, and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is.

<sup>5</sup> You have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing in your sight. Surely everyone stands as a mere breath. Selah

<sup>6</sup> Surely everyone goes about like a shadow. Surely for nothing they are in turmoil; they heap up, and do not know who will gather.

<sup>7</sup> "And now, O Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in you.

<sup>8</sup> Deliver me from all my transgressions. Do not make me the scorn of the fool.

<sup>9</sup> I am silent; I do not open my mouth, for it is you who have done it.

<sup>10</sup> Remove your stroke from me; I am worn down by the blows of your hand.

<sup>11</sup> "You chastise mortals in punishment for sin, consuming like a moth what is dear to them; surely everyone is a mere breath. Selah

<sup>12</sup> "Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry; do not hold your peace at my tears. For I am your passing guest, an alien, like all my forebears.

<sup>13</sup> Turn your gaze away from me, that I may smile again, before I depart and am no more." (Ps. 39:1-13 NRS)

And now the songs. Despite it not being classically spiritual, I better include “Your Smiling Face. I’ll attach from earlier in Taylor’s long career, and one later. A good song can last lifetimes. Our good God will last eternally.

*Your Smiling Face* by James Taylor (live 1979)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77G9VZSm5ZA>

*Your Smiling Face* by James Taylor (live 2019)... and yes, singer do age even when songs are ageless)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XplyIC\\_h58](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XplyIC_h58)

*I’m So Glad Jesus Lifted Me* by Polish Youth Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNLwUB-rnDc>

*I’m So Glad Jesus Lifted Me* by Gaither Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGJJ2Q9BgVM>

*I’m So Glad Jesus Lifted Me* by Olso Gospel Choir (what? Norwegians?)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3cheW1hhGO0>

*Thine the Amen* by Grace River Forest

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llOu7nbXc-8>

*Thine the Amen* by Mt. Olive Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sloTj8ypR2w>

*God Smiles* by Tillman Sillescu

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCAPOCO\\_JWs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCAPOCO_JWs)

*If You’re Happy and You Know It* by Kids

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwTwt4oIW3U>

*O Sing To God Above* by Samm Hills Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3JviWgunLQM>

*Heaven is Singing for Joy ELW 664* by GIA publications

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ULd7RM3mfKo>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, May 6, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #330

### Are you getting fed?

<sup>17</sup> [Jesus] said to [Peter] the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. (Jn. 21:17 NRS)

Sometimes I read a thoughtful article that leaves me thinking about it for many days. Such was one I read in *"The Christian Post"* last week. Written by Thom Rainer especially for pastors, it examined what Rainer described as "consumer-driven" church membership.

His first sentence was *"I'm not getting fed"* and went on to identify that as a commonly expressed complaint and reason for leaving the church or finding another church.

What really struck me about this is how often pastorally I have agreed with this reason for leaving. Many times I have responded, "I agree that it is very important to be in a church where you are being spiritually fed." Then I add, "Everyone needs a church that feeds them." With that, we part hopefully on a pleasant note, even when I am saddened that our church and our pastoral leadership was unable to meet their needs.

Permit me to share that article with you (it's short) so you can ponder, along with me, the church's feeding mission. Then we can come back to the above scripture and a few reactions in light of Rainer's observations. Here is the article, under the heading, **"Why Consumer Church Members Leave Your Church."**

*"I'm not getting fed."*

It's one of the most common complaints of church members looking for excuses to leave a church. The gripe is that the pastor's sermons are not providing the person adequate spiritual growth. And most of the time it's baloney.

Sure, there are a few pastors who preach borderline heretical sermons. And there are some who provide a spiritual pep talk each week instead of a biblical sermon. But, among the 450,000 pastors in North America, most of them are Bible-believing and Bible-preaching.

Most of the time *"I'm not getting fed"* is a lame excuse to say the church is not catering to my desires and preferences. It's a clear indicator of the growing trend of church member consumerism, and it has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Self-centered, consumer-driven church members are leaving. Here are some reasons why:

**1. Because they never get satisfied.** That is the nature of consumerism. Desires are met only for a season. Then the church member wonders what you have done for them lately. And if the

church members feel like he or she has gotten all they can get from the church, they will move on to another church or drop out altogether.

**2. Because they have no greater purpose.** We all know church members who are the pillars of the church in the best sense of the word. They are giving, serving, and sacrificial. They have a greater purpose than themselves. They seek to serve the Lord by serving others. They never ask, “What have you done for me lately?” because they are too busy doing for others. The consumer Christian has no purpose beyond his or her own preferences. And that’s really no purpose at all.

**3. Because they are often divisive.** Consumer Christians seek for themselves. And if they don’t get what they want, they can be critical and divisive. They may leave when they sense the support for their negativity is waning. They will complain that other church members did not support them. And they are, thankfully, correct.

**4. Because they know better than everyone else.** You can usually count on consumer church members to send the pastor an article or podcast link to demonstrate how other churches are doing things so much better. For the consumer church member, the grass is always greener — until they move to the greener grass of the next church. And then they see problems there.

**5. Because they don’t understand the meaning of biblical church membership.** Check out the characteristic of a church member in 1 Corinthians 12. It’s all about how the members of the body are functioning for the greater good of that body. And look at 1 Corinthians 13. We call it the “love chapter,” but it’s really how church members are to relate to one another and to the world. The consumer church members can’t relate to biblical church membership because it’s sacrificial and driven to serve others.

So, pastor, know that you are not alone when you hear those dreaded words, “I’m not getting fed.” It has been said countless times by countless self-centered church members. Rejoice in your church members who serve, encourage, love, and sacrifice. They are God’s instruments in your church.

The consumer church members are nothing but noisy gongs and clanging cymbals. When they leave, there is a lot more peace and God-given quiet in the church.”

*Originally published at [Church Answers](#)*

**Afterthoughts by Pastor Mark:** There is a lot to reflect upon here. Ranier makes some good (but perhaps too harsh?) points. Personally, I want not to be too quick to judge motives for people leaving (or staying in) their church. It is important to be fed. As a pastor, I recognize it is both a blessing and a burden to carry the responsibility of feeding Jesus’ sheep (as instructed in John’s gospel).

That leads me to consider this: The people I have known who would describe themselves as “well fed” by God, through their church, are the same ones, who by their devotion and love of God and church, feed others.

Sometimes feeding is literal, as with our ministries of hospitality. Sometimes it come through welcoming others into the church family. It can happen by actively participating in spiritual growth groups, like Bible studies, Sunday Forum classes, or prayer or support groups. Many times, feeding happens as we spend time in each other’s company, sharing our own spiritual journeys. Participating in Sunday Worship is a good place where feeding happens, especially when we are actively listening, praying, singing, communing with each other, and responding to God.

When people are actively engaged in both sides of feeding, as initiated by Jesus’ command to Peter, it is rare to hear anyone say “I’m not getting fed.” People happily involved in ministry (as called by Jesus) are not consumer-driven, but mission motivated. Never would they use “not getting fed,” even when too much work at church (and too few folks to share it with) leaves them “fed up” (at least for a time).

Lastly, we always need to remember that it is Jesus who first feeds us, so we are then freed to serve in his holy name. Food for thought.

Let us pray. *Thank you for feeding us, Lord Jesus, with yourself. May your life be just what we need to find fulfillment in serving and feeding others in your name. Amen.*

*Feed Me Lord* by Song Offering

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=poQaX1eLjAw>

*Guide Me O Thou Great Redeemer* by Bombay Christian Fellowship

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qX\\_n5IK3sU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qX_n5IK3sU)

*Guide Me O Great Redeemer* by Grace Community Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5uwi04ttjA>

*Here I Am, Lord* by Mandarin Lutheran Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upDwHVxHwZA>

*Here I Am Lord* by Chris Bray

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4t6mz8yoocY>

*Let us Break Bread Together* by Agnes Choo

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Egk-pX\\_1nHg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Egk-pX_1nHg)

*The Servant Song* by Bukas Palad Music Ministry

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FejoxTNwbiY>

*The Servant Song* by Cyprian Consiglio

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-vgGu5Sye0>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, May 7, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #331**

**He is bald, but he is clean.**

<sup>40</sup> *If anyone loses the hair from his head, he is bald but he is clean.* (Lev. 13:40 NRS)

Last Friday I examined a verse that sounds odd but upon further investigation made sense in the larger story. It was Genesis 27:11: *"Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man.* (Gen. 27:11b ESV). See devotion #326.

So here's another one of those odd sounding verses, this time from Leviticus: *"He is bald but he is clean."* As a bald man (that is, a non-hairy on the top of my head man), I have had fun quoting this verse back when someone mentions my baldness.

However, when we look at it in context, there is a lot more to it. It continues:

<sup>41</sup> *If he loses the hair from his forehead and temples, he has baldness of the forehead but he is clean.* (Lev. 13:41 NRS)

Just more of the same thing. Just another regular bald guy. Then comes the *"but."*

<sup>42</sup> *But if there is on the bald head or the bald forehead a reddish-white diseased spot, it is a leprous disease breaking out on his bald head or his bald forehead.* (Lev. 13:42 NRS)

Aha! We are not talking about natural baldness now. Since they had no doctors back then, it was time to see the priest:

<sup>43</sup> *The priest shall examine him; if the diseased swelling is reddish-white on his bald head or on his bald forehead, which resembles a leprous disease in the skin of the body, <sup>44</sup> he is leprous, he is unclean. The priest shall pronounce him unclean; the disease is on his head.* (Lev. 13:43-44 NRS)

Uh oh. Looks like we have a medical condition. What happens next?

<sup>45</sup> *The person who has the leprous disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be disheveled; and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, "Unclean, unclean."* <sup>46</sup> *He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.* (Lev. 13:45-46 NRS)

During the wilderness wanderings, and during much of Old Testament times, the *"church"* oversaw everything. That included medical issues and dietary restrictions. Dietary laws, for example were established not on a whim, but as a means to keep the community healthy. Invariably, animals that carried higher risk of disease were deemed to be *"unclean"* and must

be avoided. Numbers 11 records a time when those restrictions were disobeyed, and the community suffered for it (watch out for the quail).

When I was in seminary I remember seeing a medical journal article that described how following the dietary laws kept the community safe and well (or at least safer). I remember being quite impressed by this modern day medical insight.

Getting back to the baldness issue, we have learned since then that leprosy (Hansen's Disease) is not easily passed from human to human and does not require the severe quarantining that "lepers" endured in Bible times. However, we cannot be sure what is described then as "leprosy" is the same as "Hansen's Disease."

What is revealed, however, through this section in Leviticus, is that it was important to keep the community healthy. When an uncertain medical condition emerged, they did the best they knew how to do, to contain its potential "spread." This would be an early biblical example of "quarantining."

In this scripture, "quarantining" was not forever. Living alone would not be forever, but only as long as the risk of infection persisted, as observed by the status of the "rash." Persons deemed "unclean" could become "clean" again.

Without a health department or medical community, it was the priests who had to be the doctors. The community trusted them, and their word (coming from God through Moses) was law. They didn't always get it right, as we learn later (for example, they misunderstood women's periods), but the goal was the health of the community.

Nowadays, pastors are not asked to weigh in on those things that rightfully belong to medical and scientific communities. We have been asked, however, for the sake of the nation and the world, to use what influence we may have to encourage our own faith communities to become "vaccinated."

Therefore, even biblically, it makes good sense for us to offer our church as a site for vaccinations, supporting our best scientific and medical evidence, and encouraging vaccinations ... so that ... we may be well.

1591 B.C.E: *"He is bald, but he is clean."* 2021 A.C.E.: *"We are jabbed, and we are clean?"*

Let us pray. *We pray that we may stay well and be well. And when we are sick, we pray for healing, trusting it happens both through prayer and medical interventions. As we read about the Old Testament communities, keep reminding us that you gave these laws as a gift so that people would be well. Inspire all those whose calling it is to serve as healers and practitioners and researchers. Give aid to all who assist in bringing healing to the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

*Protect Us, Lord* from Breviary Night Prayer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzTsfeFawCA>

*Protect Us, Lord as we Stay Awake* by Anthony Muhs

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CtKrzc26ZC4>

*God Whose Almighty Word* by Hymn of the Week Virtual Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6G3vhBVPM4>

*God Whose Almighty Word* by Mt Olive

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7EXGTMrsUM>

*Sing Praise to God, the Highest Good* by St. Martin's Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTW0uiC4jNw>

*Sing Praise to God the Highest Good* by Concordia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3AoRyg88fCY>

*God When Human Bonds are Broken* by Everingham

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EaYtn-UCNnU>

*God When Human Bonds Are Broken* by Samm Hills

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLbBJXSBod0>

*All Are Welcome* by Mary Haugen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GlnVLP0qFEo>

*All Are Welcome* by Berean Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zoI0Cka1OVM>

*All Are Welcome* by Plymouth Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhvnbhPvbsA>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, May 10, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #332

### The Pointless People Story

4 Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe!

5 Praise him with clanging cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!

6 Let everything that breathes praise the LORD! Praise the LORD! (Ps. 150:4-6 NRS)

*"The Pointless People Story"* was introduced by campus pastor Dan Erlander who began by sharing a story he had heard from a woman named Ann Herbert when she was at Holden Village, the Lutheran retreat center in the Cascade Mountains of Washington State.

She left the story at the village and it became chapter one. Other chapters followed by various people are now being written by others who liked the story and wanted to add more to it. So in the spirit of the parables of Jesus, and the gospel they reveals to us, I would like to share two chapters *"The Pointless People Story"*:

#### Chapter One by Ann Herbert:

In the beginning, God didn't make just two people: God made a bunch of us. God wanted us to have a lot of fun and said you can't really have fun unless there's a whole gang of you. God put us in Eden which was a combination garden and playground and park and told us to have fun.

At first we did have fun just like God expected. We rolled down the hills, waded in the streams, climbed on the trees, swung on the vines, ran in the meadows, frolicked in the woods, hid in the forest and acted silly. We laughed a lot.

Then one day this snake told us that we weren't having real fun because we weren't keeping score. Back then, we didn't know what score was. When he explained it, we still couldn't see the fun.

But he said we should give an apple to the person who was best at all the games and we'd never know who was best without keeping score. We could all see the fun of that, of course, because we were all sure we were best.

It was different after that. We yelled a lot. We had to make up new scoring rules for most of the games. Others, like frolicking, we stopped playing because they were too hard to score. By the time God found out what had happened, we were spending about 45 minutes a day actually playing and the rest of the time working out the scoring.

God was wroth about that-- very very wroth. God said we couldn't use the garden any more because we weren't having fun. We told God we were having lots of fun. God was just being narrow minded because it wasn't exactly the kind of fun God originally thought of.

God wouldn't listen.

God kicked us out, and God said we could come back until we stopped keeping score. To rub it in (to get our attention), God told us we were all going to die and our scores wouldn't mean anything anyway.

God was wrong. My cumulative all-game score now is 16,548 and that means a lot to me. If I can raise it to 20,000 before I die, I'll know I've accomplished something.

Even if I can't, my life has a great deal of meaning because I've taught my children to score high and they'll be able to reach 20,000 or even 30,000.

Really, it was life in the garden that didn't mean anything. Fun is great in its place, but without scoring there's no reason for it.

God actually has a very superficial view of life and I'm certainly glad my children are being raised away from God's influence.

We were lucky. We're all very grateful to the snake.

## **Chapter Two by Dan Erlander**

God looked at the ol' gang and remembered how they once waded in the streams, frolicked in the woods, and acted silly. And now God saw them frantically piling up their points, and God became more wroth. God's anger burned hotly, and God, cried, "*I will destroy them.*"

But then God wept and said, "*I cannot destroy them.*" And God repented. And God smiled and exclaimed: "*I have another plan. I'll enter the world of the point keepers in a way that will be gentle, very gentle.*"

And so God entered the world of point keepers as Emmanuel -- God with us. And what Emmanuel did was this: tiptoed to people who didn't have very many points or had no pints and whispered in their ears, "*You don't need points.*"

And they smiled, "*Maybe it's true!*" And then Emmanuel invited them to a party and they accepted the invitation and they ate and drank and ate some more and danced and frolicked and laughed.

And one of them cried out, *"This party is pointless!"* And everyone said, *"Amen."* And everybody laughed.

Others came to the party and they stood around the edges to see what was going on. Emmanuel turned to them and said, *"Come to me all you are burdened by keeping score and I will give you rest."*

All the people who were in charge of the score keeping were threatened. They arrested Emmanuel and killed Him.

Emmanuel's followers wept. They said, *"There's only one thing to do now. Go back to keeping score. It was too good to be true."* They laid him in a borrowed tomb.

God said, *"The scorekeepers think things are back to normal. Ha!"* Then God called to Emmanuel in the tomb, *"Get up Emmanuel! Get up Emmanuel!"* And Emmanuel got up. He met his friends and said, *"Let 's get on with the parties!"*

They joined hands and the dance went on. Then Emmanuel breathed on them and they received power to carry on the parties and to carry his yoke -- the yoke of caring for each other, caring for the world -- and getting in trouble with the score keepers.

Emmanuel departed; but, before he left, he breathed on them his Holy Spirit, and whispered, *"Remember, the snake was wrong."*

Let us pray. *Thank you for your grace that shows we don't need points. We need only you, O God, and we pray you shall guide us in a way of living that keeps us from chasing after those things that don't matter and cause harm. In Jesus. Amen.*

*Lord of the Dance* by John Fischer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfjZkE3dTik>

*Lord of the Dance* by Franklin Schaefer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxOFH9FSitE>

*Lord of the Dance* by Wesley United Methodist Church

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8OA-G\\_abnv8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8OA-G_abnv8)

*We are Marching* by Advocate Church

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXVk5c\\_VjMc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXVk5c_VjMc)

*We Are Marching* by VHRS Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=brOUsvSxjRA>

*Joyful Joyful We Adore Thee* by David Rowen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KP3XizrZHQ>

*Oh Happy Day* by First Baptist Glenarden

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olQrCfkvbGw>

*Oh Happy Day* by Flashmob in Germany

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ke4nRm6Q8U>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday May 11, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #333

### **"A place for those who are passionate about God, Family, and Guns"**

<sup>35</sup> He said to them, "When I sent you out without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?" They said, "No, not a thing." <sup>36</sup> He said to them, "But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one. (Lk. 22:35-36 NRS)

One of the things I am learning about managing this deeply divided world is that we must learn to listen to each other, even when, or especially when, our worlds seem quite alien to each other. Such is the case today.

I recently discovered a website and YouTube Channel called **"God, Family, and Guns."** On the website is the description above, along with a sub heading encouraging people to **"Love God, Love your Family, and Love Guns."** The website picture shows a table with a photo of the website host and his wife. On the table is an open Bible, and on the Bible is a Ruger handgun. The scripture is Isaiah 46. A photo below shows a Sig Hauer handgun sitting on another passage.

I sincerely wanted to understand this perspective as much as possible and without judgement. The website linked to videos and a store where you could purchase **"God, Family, and Guns"** clothing.

The video that most caught my attention was one just recently posted (May 5) entitled, **"God told you to carry a gun."** The unnamed man presenting the video was calm and sincere, likeable, confident in his faith, and with a perspective on handguns I had never heard before. I was going to cite a couple of quotes but am electing instead to transcribe the whole video so you can read the entire argument. If it seems too long to get through, I'll do some bold highlighting and comment at the end. I'll also link to the original video of you want to hear and see for yourself.

Here's what he said:

**"I want to make this video and make it very clear. God wants you to carry a gun. More so, He tells you to carry a gun. It's a very important piece of being a human on the planet."**

God specifically took some time the night before Jesus died, took some time to explain several things to the disciples. To prepare them for a life separated from him, his physical body. Now they always had the Holy Spirit with them, but from the very beginning there has always been evil on the earth. The enemy is always always always trying to block you from the blessing God

has for you. And Jesus told the disciples on the night before he got killed , the night he actually got captured, He says in Luke 22:

<sup>35</sup> And He said to them, "When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?" So they said, "Nothing."

<sup>36</sup> Then He said to them, "But now, he who has a money bag, let him take *it*, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.

<sup>37</sup> "For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: 'And He was numbered with the transgressors.' For the things concerning Me have an end."

<sup>38</sup> So they said, "Lord, look, here *are* two swords." And He said to them, "It is enough." (Lk. 22:35-38 NKJ)

Now a lot of people comment on that particular passage, but we're going to break it down, because **God himself is saying you need a sword**. More so, **go get one**, if you don't have one. Now ultimately what he is saying to them is 'I have an end.' I came here. He quotes Isaiah. I came here to die. I have an end and it's coming in the next 24 hours. As for you, **go and get a sword**. If you have a moneybag. If you have the money to get a sword, **go get one**. If you don't, sell something and go **get a sword** because **you're going to need it**.

Now a lot of people interpret this in several different ways. He says 'Buy a sword.' Now **what he would have said today is go buy a handgun**. Now the **word** he uses for **sword** is very important, because a lot people say maybe he's talking about the word of God. The word of God has always been referred to as a sword. No, that is absolutely wrong because in Revelation when a sword comes out of Jesus' mouth it is the word of God coming out of his mouth. It is *ramfee*, it is a battle sword. Massive like six-foot-long curved battle sword. Whereas **the type of sword Jesus is talking about and tells them to buy is a dagger**. It's like a machete. It's a *mayshotee*, where the word machete comes from. It's a Greek word. It's essentially something you can hack and stab with. **It's a defensive weapon**.

So he's literally telling them, '**you need to have a defensive weapon**.' Now there's a couple of pieces of this before we all just jump in and get guns. That's not what Jesus is saying here. I want you to think about for a moment what the disciples are about to engage in. They are about to engage in a life working for the Father. They are working for God. They are literally doing the father's business on earth just as in heaven. They are about their father's business. And even if you go back to Nehemiah when they are building the wall, it says they held a sword with one hand and they worked with the other. They were working for God. They're about their father's business.

Now he specifically says, 'now I have an end. That exact same night, he tells them 'get a sword,' later on that night, whenever he's getting captured, he tells Peter and Peter draws his sword and uses it. Jesus tells him to stop. A lot of people get very confused about this passage and he

says, 'he who lives by the sword dies by the sword. These are very conflicting comments to be saying to the disciples. Once he says 'get a sword,' and then don't use that sword.'

Be very clear. There were two reasons he told Peter to put his sword away. The number one reason: He came there to die. It was his mission. He literally came to earth to be hung on a cross to die for the sins of the world. If Peter was somehow to stop that from happening, which of course he never would it's been God's plan from the very beginning but if by some chance he was, that's a big problem. He just hindered Jesus' entire mission. He would hinder the salvation of all of humanity.

It's a big deal, so Jesus says of course 'put it away.' When he says 'he who lives by the sword dies by the sword' he's talking about specifically defending yourself versus attacking. Peter was on the attack. He was defending Jesus but he was on the attack. If Jesus were to live his life where he went out to attack people, he's going to die. He's definitely going to die. If he takes that sword and is going to attack people he is going to die.

But if he takes that sword and he uses it to defend himself, he's going to live. Because if he goes on the attack, he'll die the same way. But he who is in a defensive mode, will live. This is a big deal.

Now let's apply this today. **If Jesus was here today, he would look at his disciples and say, 'if you don't have a conceal carry handgun, take your money and go get one.** And if you don't have the money, go sell something. **Go sell your coat, whatever it is you've got, go sell it and get a handgun.** I'm going to be dead in 24 hours, and **you're going to need it.'**

Now of course here we are today . He died 2,000 years ago. But we're still walking this earth separated from human Jesus. And he's not here. The Holy Spirit of God is helping us, but there's still a lot of evil and **as we get closer to Jesus' second coming, the evil's going to be amplified a lot.** And not just a little, but exponential evilness coming to the world. The Anti-Christ will specifically war against the saints. **How in the world are you supposed to defend yourself if you don't have a gun?** Against the antichrist.

Now of course God's going to give you some crazy powers that are going to allow you to withstand for three and a half years, but **you need a sword, you need a gun. You need one. Not only do you need one, God himself told you to go get one if you don't have one.**

**It's a very important component of being a Christian.** I understand people feel bad about carrying a gun. You know, if you go out attacking people, when then you're probably going to die. And God's going to probably help that process go forward.

But if you're in a defensive mode, if you're defending the widows, if you're defending the orphans, you're defending your neighbors, you're defending yourself, your defending your family, God blesses the heck out of that stuff. It's a big deal. **And not only will He bless you, and not only does he want you to carry, he told you to carry.**

So my message to you right now is **if you don't have a gun, take your money and go buy one.** And if you don't have the money, go sell something and then **go buy a gun. God tells you to conceal carry.** I hope this video helps. We take prayer requests. Thanks for watching."

**Afterword:** Maybe you need to see the video to realize how sincere and earnest this fellow is about guns. **"Love God, love family, and love guns."** says the website. it doesn't seem quite right to describe loving *guns* in the same way we describe loving God and family.

His interpretation of the Luke's passage is a good example of how easily someone can take a minor scripture and transform it into *"a very important component of being a Christian."* We don't have other biblical or extra-biblical early Christian literature that describes carrying a sword in the early church an important component of being a Christian. They also expected Jesus return soon, and evil was certainly an ever-present threat to their existence.

I am struck by the presenter's sincerity. Clearly, he believes he has found strong biblical support to encourage people of faith to arm themselves. But when he tells us that God himself commands us to buy a gun, that carries a lot of high risk. Responsible gun advocates constantly reinforce the importance of being properly trained to handle, secure, and use weapons.

This video was not about hunting or gun oriented sporting events. It's about conceal carry handguns for defensive use, rooted in his perceived growing danger as the as yet unidentified anti-Christ is amassing his evil army. While there is a strong case for protecting ourselves, our loved ones, and our neighbors, I'd feel safer if conceal carry advocates regarded this less as *"God ordained"* and more as a *"necessary evil."* And then push for gun safety, reasonable caution, and sound judgment!

Let us pray. *Help us O God, be faithful in how we look to scripture for its most important messages. When we hear of your love for us, remind us that you yourself did not conceal your desire for us to be people of peace. Help us not to be overwhelmed by violence and if arming ourselves is the only way we can feel safe in this violent world, that we will be well trained with sound judgement to react in ways that do not harm innocents around us. Bless us all, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*God is My Defense* by Esther Mui

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yq5HIjL-hOY>

*Once to Every Man and Nation* by Fountainview Academy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSMqesZz3tU&t=85s>

*My God In Him I Trust* by Esther Mui

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67wC6-kWWSO>

*On Eagle's Wings* by Shane and Shane

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rG\\_y6X2K\\_dM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rG_y6X2K_dM)

*Psalm 91* by New Creation Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgvx9drZXpk>

*If You But Trust In God To Guide You* by National Lutheran Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4m-L5QcWePA>

*There is Power in the Blood* by Acapeldridge

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SeTE0W7K4sU>

and the original "God Told You To Carry A Gun" video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrITMtkOFAY&t=204s>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, May 12, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #334

### When you say “we’re praying for you” and you mean it.

<sup>3</sup> We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, (Col. 1:3 NKJ)

According to Webster’s Dictionary, a “*cliché*” is a phrase or opinion that is overused and betrays a lack of original thought.

Sometimes I wonder if “*we’re praying for you*” has become a cliché? I suppose it depends on how literal and how sincere a person is who says it. If it becomes an overused way to acknowledge someone’s need when you don’t know what else to say, it’s a good way to transition to something else.

*“We’re praying for you.”*

A similar very generalized phrase regularly used in responding to news of a tragedy or disaster is “*Our thoughts and prayers are with them.*” We hear that a lot, especially in the media. “*Thoughts and prayers,*” even if not overused, is certainly used a lot and by many who may or may not be persons who pray. At least they have thoughts.

Sometimes the singular “*I’m praying for you*” is a weaponized response to someone disagreeing with you or doing something you don’t like. In that case, the prayer likely reveals (if indeed you are praying), that you want God to change their minds or behavior. “*You’re wrong. I’m praying for you.*”

I found something recently that reflected deeply (and quite wonderfully) about the value of intercessory prayer in Christian community. Intercession (“*praying for you*” and *others*) is something we regularly do as part of our ministry at St. Paul’s, both in Sunday worship and by our Wednesday Prayer Group, as well as every time we begin and end meetings in prayer.

The German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) has written this:

*“A Christian community either lives or by the intercessory prayers of its members for one another, or the community will be destroyed. I can no longer condemn or hate other Christians for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble they cause me. In intercessory prayer the face that may have been strange and intolerable to me is transformed into the face of one for whom Christ died, the face of a pardoned sinner.”*

What an awesome insight into what happens when we literally and sincerely pray for one another. With so much division continuing to be among Christians, imagine the effect of this kind of heartfelt prayer.

Of course, we might have to let go of some of our righteous indignation and hatred for those who do not share our views or perspectives; but think of how wonderful it is to no longer see someone as an enemy, but friend.

This is what happens in prayer, through Jesus Christ or Lord.

Let us pray: *Hear our prayers, O Lord, on behalf of those we love, those we dislike, those who have asked for our prayers, and those whose names and needs are known only unto you. May our intercessions also transform us in how we see people for whom we pray. In prayer, draw us all together to see each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen.*

*O Lord Hear My Prayer* by Taize

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKyU5BIxc0>

*My Prayer for You* by Alissa Turner

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hj\\_OpviGkks](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hj_OpviGkks)

*Hear Our Prayer* by EMU music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t0aOG9AKbwg>

*Hear Our Prayer O Lord* by TandeMD Duoctors

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOtLB\\_qd6fA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOtLB_qd6fA)

*Hear O Lord Your Servants Gather* (ELW 530) by Kim Paterson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86uNvjV4U8>

*Hear O Lord Your Servants Gather* (ELW 530) by Franklin United Methodist Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJR025HNY4Q>

*I Prayed for You* by Matt Snell

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WEJs\\_Bqx8\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WEJs_Bqx8_o)

... and for very bad example of praying for another, "*I Pray for You*" by Jason

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvC5Jb\\_EB7c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvC5Jb_EB7c)

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, May 13, by Pastor Mark Opgrand #335

### True, but misleading "bragging rights."

<sup>17</sup> "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." (2 Cor. 10:17 NRS)

I once played in a band with someone who once played in the world-famous Turtles Rock Band. Are you impressed?

What I have just written above is true, but misleading. It was the truth, but not the whole truth (and nothing but the truth). In my effort to impress, I left out a few things that more accurately reveal the story.

When I was in seminary a few of us, for fun, decided to have a prom. It was the first and only Luther seminary prom, and it was loads of fun. What made it possible was our in-house band made up of students and led by a certain classmate, Mark Anderson, who had played with the Turtles when he lived in southern California.

While that was also a true statement, Mark later clarified it was just one time when the Turtle's bass player was sick and Mark substituted. Mark was, however, a regular member in one of Disneyland's show bands, so he was a very accomplished musician who knew all the current hits, including all the current songs from the Turtles. As our band leader, he was great, and we really rocked that night.

So while it is also true that I once played in a band led by someone who had once been part of the Turtles, that too, was only one time. I didn't embellish my claim; I simply left out a lot that would have offered a more accurate picture of the true story. But that would have diminished my bragging (boasting) rights.

Because our culture thrives on celebrity, boasting about connections or relationships with famous persons are regularly a part of our story telling. I have written about another classmate whose sister Patti Hansen, married Rolling Stone member Keith Richards. I once, in high school, got actress Jane Russell's autograph at the Portland Rose Festival. I once shook former president Gerald Ford's hand in Aspen, Colorado. I have a signed *Fast Company* magazine given to me by Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes, who was on the cover, and whose parents were once members of St. Paul's. I officiated at WWE wrestler Bob "Hard Core" Holly's wedding on a Wrightsville Beach yacht.

Many people have stories like these to share, including their own experiences with famous people. Helen Comer, one of our members now long deceased, once showed me a photo of her

and John Wayne together. I was so impressed I asked if I could get my photo taken with her holding her photo. There we were, with “the Duke” between us (suitable for framing).

It’s all fun, and harmless, as long as we’re telling the truth (or at least enough truth to not be a total fabrication). That would be bad form.

Remembering the seminary prom and Turtles’ story, I went internet hunting to see where Pastor Mark Anderson ended up (answer: back in California). Four years ago he published his own book of devotions, nearly 200 of them which reflected his many years in ministry. I ordered it.

And you know what? I could not find a single devotion where he bragged about playing with the Turtles. Or the time he met Paul McCartney and talked about left-handed bass playing (another cool story).

What I did find was story after story and reflection after reflection witnessing and boasting about the transforming power of the love of Christ. I read many stories of how ordinary people whose faith had made a big impact on him and others. I read how skillfully he drew from scripture words and images that conveyed the good news of Jesus Christ.

There was no personal boasting in any of those reflections, but if there was, it would most certainly be boasting about the Lord, and not a fleeting brush with famous celebrities (even when that makes for fun storytelling).

Let us pray: *Thank you, O God, for all the experiences of life that provide material for our personal storytelling. Thank you for the joy that comes when shared stories bring us smiles and laughter. But let us not take ourselves too seriously in our boasting, especially when what we say is misleading. Help us always remember that the only story really worth repeating is the greatest story ever told, the story of your love for us through Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

*How Great Thou Art* by Home Free

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXQpDDcrN-w>

*How Great Thou Art* by Eclipse 6

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6kKW2M4TfE>

*Praise to the Lord* by Ancient of Days

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZyOQtqLlsw>

*Praise to the Lord* by Altar of Praise

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=roxlm\\_gCb7c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=roxlm_gCb7c)

*Praise to the Lord* by Christy Nockels

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8s8bKQS4YY>

*Praise Him Praise Him Jesus My Blessed Redeemer* by Celebration Choir

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h\\_nIRLD\\_5gE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_nIRLD_5gE)

*I Will Boast* by Paul Balouche

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBfOcJGEKUU>

*Boast in the Lord* by Chris Moerman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FbVw4dKh IE>

*Happy Together* by The Turtles

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ZEURntrQOg>

**Pondering the Ascension: Was Jesus “beamed up?”**

*<sup>50</sup>Then [Jesus] led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. <sup>51</sup>While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup>And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; <sup>53</sup>and they were continually in the temple blessing God. (Luke 24:50-52)*

The Day of Ascension happens forty days after Easter. This year Ascension Day was yesterday, May 13. We shall enjoy the option of celebrating Ascension Day this Sunday, May 16. It will be my turn to do the children's sermon, so I have been pondering the Ascension, and wondering how best to talk about it with the children.

A form of the word “ascend” occurs just thirty times in the Bible, but not in Luke 24's gospel reading for Sunday. The Greek word “*anaphero*” is variously translated “taken up” or “carried up.” It is also used to describe taking something up to the altar. In the Greek Old Testament, “*anaphero*” is used when Elijah is “taken up” to heaven in a whirlwind on the flaming chariot.

Luke's recounting of the ascension continues in Acts, where Jesus was also lifted up, but in a cloud that took him out of sight. Clouds in scripture regularly have signified the presence of God. Here's how Luke continues the story:

*[Jesus says] <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. <sup>9</sup> When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup> They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:8-11 NRS)*

As the story is told, the emphasis is on how, after Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to the disciples and others for a period of time, and then was taken up to heaven. This paved the way for the Holy Spirit to become the means by which God's ongoing presence will be experienced.

Our image of the Ascension relies more on art than scripture. The earliest art of the Ascension came is seen in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and it shows Christ from the side, climbing to the top of a hill. Jesus is pictured grasping the hand of God, which has emerged from a cloud above, pulling Jesus to heaven. The apostles, assembled below, observe the event.

The more common image of the Ascension emerged in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, where Jesus is shown from the front, arms outstretched, elevated above the earth and supported by angels. That's the image most familiar to us, as one of our most beautiful stained-glass windows illustrates this.

That's the image that children growing up at St. Paul's are regularly exposed to every Sunday morning. Jesus looks peaceful and hopeful for the future as he returns to his Father, knowing God the Holy Spirit will enable his saving activity to generate faith and support God's mission throughout the earth.

As ascension art was developed, they had little competition for the imaginations of young minds. There was no "Star Trek" "Beam me up, Scotty." There were no "Saturn V" rockets lifting off the earth; there were no stories of superheroes like "Superman" or "Iron Man" who could fly; no hang gliders able, with a strong wind, to lift a rider to the sky; no stories of tornadoes whisking a young girl and her dog to the magical land of "Oz." Those images would come centuries later.

For young minds, then, (and perhaps some old ones as well), it may be challenging not to imagine Jesus hovering over the earth just before flying out of sight. That's why I love, when we look at our window, the wonderful sense of blessing that comes from it. Jesus is blessing his friends, the disciples, with the promise that he is not leaving them alone. In our window, we see still see the clouds and the angels, but it is subtle. What impacts us most is this lovely depiction of a farewell that is not forever.

Let us pray. *Almighty God, your only Son was taken into the heavens and in your presence intercedes for us. Receive us and our prayers for all the world, and in the end bring everything into your glory, through Jesus Christ, our Sovereign and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.* (ELW Prayer for The Day of Ascension).

*Lord You Give the Great Commission* by OCP Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmjFLViW4P8>

*A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing* by Lutheran Warbler

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=46HC2\\_7PpM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=46HC2_7PpM)

*A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing* by Scott Krippayne

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRHdA\\_u ty4I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRHdA_u ty4I)

*Hail Thee Festival Day* by Choir of Trinity College

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lxlcus4IoM0>

*Hail Thee Festival Day* by unknown

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzk-2RManE8>

*Lord Enthroned in Heavenly Splendor* by Chet Valley Churches

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqW0OrT7aRI>

*Lord Enthroned in Heavenly Splendor* by Croydon Minster

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2JCM4IWLbc>

*Christ is Alive, Let Christians Sing* by Naas Union Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4NOrc6doudc>

*O Christ Our Hope* by Salem Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7EQS2wGYYkw>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, May 17, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #337

### Remembering Roland Bainton, author of "Here I Stand."

<sup>28</sup> *For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. (Rom. 3:28 NRS)*

*"I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God."* Martin Luther

Seventy-one years since it was first published, Roland Bainton's classic study on Martin Luther remains in print. Academically sound, but highly readable, "Here I Stand" remains a classic.

When we read about Roland Bainton (1894-1984) , we learn he was born in England but came to America in 1904. He graduated from Whitman College, and had advanced degrees from Yale University, where for 42 years he was Titus Street Professor of Ecclesiastical History. He continued writing 20 years into his retirement.

When you read online biographies, you read about his life and scholarly work, his many books, including "Here I Stand" and his groundbreaking "Women of the Reformation." What you don't read about is how, instead of taking photos, he sketched unique little drawings.

I witnessed this myself when he visited Holden Village in the late 1960's. Often he would sketch someone, and give them the drawing, every one of which captured the likeness of the subject. Some were in color others simply grayscale.

Many of his drawings were incorporated into his last book, Behold the Christ: A Portrayal in Words and Pictures (1976). I first saw this book at the home of Holden Village director Carroll Hinderlie. Not only was it signed, but Bainton hand-corrected every misspelling and typographical error. I heard he would not autograph any copy until he had made the corrections.

Bainton has been deceased for many years now, but his legacy remains in his classic studies on Luther and Lutherans. I'm sure there are some who still remember watching him draw. I will attach a couple of photos I found online of him drawing.

There is nothing earthshaking or uniquely special about remembering Roland Bainton, but sometimes there is a blessing in remembering all kinds of people along the way who are part of the broad landscape of God's love. Bainton was one of them.

Let us pray. We thank you, O God for all those wonderful people along the way to do something to contribute in their own ways to sharing the gospel. For Roland Bainton, and all those who study scripture or faithful Christians in history, we give thanks. In our own small ways, may we also be remembered for our little parts in this wonderful story of your history with us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

*For All the Saints* by Paisley Abbey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ktQu0BNXf8>

*For All the Saints* by St. John the Divine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzh78FzLAgI>

*Come We That Love The Lord* by Sharon Mennonite Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRyA2qiLgaM>

*Come We That Love the Lord* by Dean Phelps

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3tYMfLIB5U>

*Come We That Love the Lord* by University Singers Lincoln

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=euf82ZIJ-l8>

*Great God Your Love Has Called Us* by Mt. Olive

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gdNvS40\\_zqs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gdNvS40_zqs)

*Soli Deo Gloria* by Namibian Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BV6HjRp7nQE>

*Soli Deo Gloria* by Marty Haugen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SnWg2Sj-u58>

*Soli Deo Gloria* Haugen (another version)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHjNNiyGUIQ>

*Soli Deo Gloria* by Mark Hayes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SL6C2kvk6KA>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, May 17, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #338

### Here I raise my Ebenezer to the Potentate of Time

<sup>12</sup> Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Jeshanah, and named it Ebenezer; for he said, "Thus far the LORD has helped us." (1 Sam. 7:12 NRS)

I charge you <sup>14</sup> to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>15</sup> which he will bring about at the right time-- he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords.<sup>16</sup> It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. (1 Tim. 6:13-16 NRS)

**1 Timothy 6:15** which He will manifest in His own time, *He who is* the blessed and only **Potentate**, the King of kings and Lord of lords, (1 Tim. 6:15 NKJ)

Along with "*Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*", another one of the great hymns of the church is "*Crown Him With Many Crowns*." One thing they have in common is that both have phrases in them that people boldly sing out without necessarily knowing what they mean.

"*Here I raise my Ebenezer, hither to thy help I've come,*" we boldly sing out in verse two of "*Come Thou*."

"*Crown Him the Lord of years, The Potentate of Time. Creator of the rolling spheres ineffably sublime*" we boldly sing out in verse five.

Over the years when we've sung out "Come Thou Fount" I've enjoyed quizzing the congregation with "*Who knows what is an Ebenezer?*" There are always a few blank looks. In this case, it comes from 1 Samuel chapter 7 which describes a great victory for the Israelites which they marked by placing a "*milestone*." I wrote about this in more detail in Devotion #80, written nearly a year ago. Perhaps on that anniversary I'll revisit that theme in light of milestones we have experienced this past year.

But today we are taking a look at the "Potentate of Time." Lyrically, it is a lot of fun to sing. Each of the other verses swell in power and delivery as we praise God for God's wondrous acts through Jesus Christ. When we come to the final verse, the notes fit "*Po-ten-tate of Time*" so perfectly that we easily belt out without even catching the reference or meaning.

If we start with the dictionary, a "potentate" is a person so powerful that he or she doesn't have to follow the rules that govern everyone else. "Potentate" normally refers to a king or dictator, but you can call anyone with virtually unlimited power a "*potentate*".

So that's where the English word comes from, and we can understand how the "*ultimate potentate*" could well be considered God, as God certainly doesn't have to follow the rules that

govern anyone else. God makes the rules. God makes the world. God makes creates time. Literally.

Therefore, God as *"Potentate of Time"* means that God is so powerful that even the rules of time do not apply to God. This is described three times in Revelation:

<sup>8</sup> *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.* (Rev. 1:8 NRS)

<sup>6</sup> *Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.* (Rev. 21:6 NRS)

<sup>13</sup> *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."* (Rev. 22:13 NRS)

The word *"Potentate"* (Greek *"dunastes"*) occurs only once in scripture (I Timothy 6:15), and only in the King James Bible is it translated *"Potentate."* Other translations use *"ruler," "sovereign,"* or *"almighty."* I can see why the hymn writer opted for strong *"Po-ten-tate of time"* over *"Roo-ool-er of Time"* or *"Sov-er-eign of Time"* or the awkward *"Th'all-mi-i-tee of time."*

*"Potentate"*, both in the way it rolls off our lips and with the sense of *"unbound ruler of all creation"* is a great word choice, especially when we recognize the scope of this power. It also helps convey the sense of mystery that comes in recognizing that God is not bound by our linear thinking of time.

How can God listen to all our prayers? God has all the time in the world. How does God know what we are going to do before we do it? God exists beyond our perception of *"present time."* God knows what we will do because, from God's perspective, God sees what we have already done.

It's all too much for mere mortals to figure out. We can use our imaginations and create fictional television characters like *"Dr. Who"* and the *"Time Lords"* or ponder time travel and imagine parallel universes. But God only is the only true *"Potentate of Time."*

God took time to enter our time in Jesus so that for all time, we would belong to God. Crown Him with Many Crowns tells this story very well. Here are the words, and of course the music will be attached.

1 Crown him with many crowns,  
the Lamb upon his throne.  
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns  
all music but its own.  
Awake, my soul, and sing

of him who died for thee,  
and hail him as thy matchless king  
through all eternity.

2 Crown him the Lord of life,  
who triumphed o'er the grave,  
and rose victorious in the strife  
for those he came to save;  
his glories now we sing  
who died and rose on high,  
who died eternal life to bring,  
and lives that death may die.

3 Crown him the Lord of love;  
behold his hands and side,  
rich wounds, yet visible above,  
in beauty glorified;  
no angels in the sky  
can fully bear that sight,  
but downward bends their burning eye  
at mysteries so bright.

4 Crown him the Lord of years,  
the potentate of time,  
creator of the rolling spheres,  
ineffably sublime.  
All hail, Redeemer, hail!  
for thou hast died for me;  
thy praise shall never, never fail  
throughout eternity.

Let us pray. *Great God Almighty and Potentate of Time. Thank you for giving us enough glimpses of your glory that we may be drawn to you in love and trust. We bless you not only for revealing yourself through the Holy Scriptures, but also through the great hymns of the church that so well describe what you have done for us in Jesus Christ. Help us always sing your praises. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Crown Him With Many Crowns* by HI Maachen  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7OCs0d\\_4vM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7OCs0d_4vM)  
*Crown Him With Many Crowns* by Lily and River  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuMh\\_ept-Js](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuMh_ept-Js)

*Crown Him With Many Crowns* by St. David's

Cardiff <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vWRXvWZPUQ>

*Crown Him With Many Crowns* by Westminster Abbey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kPkjghup8E>

*Crown Him With Many Crowns* by Martin Brothers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufzr4SqAxy0>

*Crown Him With Many Crowns* by Chris Rupp (nice version but missing "Potentate.")

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vbCtxbpRIM>

and in case you've forgotten about raising the *Ebenezer*, here's "Come Thou Fount"

*Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LWyBcCH7Wg>

*Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing* by Allred

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqznmLswaTQ>

*Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing* by Fiddlesticks (a capella)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qx61UO8F5Kc>

*Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing* Legato Vocal Ensemble by Antonia Wilson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZ1Gkl5ET5w>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday May 19, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #339

At St. Paul's, what does the word "member" mean?\*

**\*Hint: It's not "Good News." That's "Gospel". (Think "Disciple")**

<sup>4</sup> For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function,  
<sup>5</sup> so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. (Rom. 12:4-5 NRS)

<sup>21</sup> After they had proclaimed the good news to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, then on to Iconium and Antioch. (Acts 14:21 NRS)

At our recent "inquiry meeting" for prospective members, I mentioned how, in our desire to be a welcoming church, we have not placed a lot of emphasis on "joining" St. Paul's (as members). We want all people to feel welcome at St. Paul's, whether they are "official members" or not. That's one reason why we created a "Family and Friends Online Directory", rather than a "Members Only Directory". Hopefully that gives people a sense of belonging before taking a next step of membership.

Becoming a "member" of church is regularly a next step in being part of a congregation. The process is quite easy as we don't offer a lot of hoops to jump through. There are no lengthy classes or final exams. Just a gracious public welcome promising to grow in faith by asking God to "help and guide me."

It was about twenty years ago when ours and many other congregations started using the word "disciple" more than "member" to describe affiliation with the congregation. We hoped that by using "disciple," our sense of "belonging" would run deeper than simply being "members."

We observed that in many organizations or clubs you can be a member simply by paying some assigned dues. As long as you pay your dues, you can claim membership. Some people regard church membership this way, except both "dues" participation is strictly voluntary. Therefore without any real commitment, anyone can be a "member" with little personal involvement.

That's why shifting our understanding of "membership" to "discipleship" became so compelling. "Discipleship" would be recognized as the outcome of personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is a response to being called by God, along with a number of "marks" that identify "discipleship."

In a book called "Power Surge," Lutheran Pastor Mike Foss identified six marks of discipleship. There may be others, or other ways of naming them, but his describe quite well what "active membership" in the Body of Christ looks like. He named these:

1 Pray Daily.

2 Worship weekly.

3 Read your Bible daily.

4 Serve among and beyond the congregation.

5 Relate to others to encourage spiritual growth (theirs and yours).

6 Give generously.

Therefore, when examining these marks, there is a lot to think about as someone “joins” a church. First, of course, we recognize that life in Christ comes from God joining himself through Jesus. Receiving that gift (through our baptism), things happen.

Discipleship describes active participation in the Body of Christ, even if our lives are marked by few or none of these six “marks of discipleship.” We will still “*belong*” and still be a “*member*” of the Body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12). And we might miss a lot.

The best life that God wants for us will best be experienced as we become fully involved and grow in faith as we have been called, always seeking those “marks” that identify us members of Christ’s church.

Let us pray. *Thank you for our baptism, O God, that first brings us into the Body of Christ as members. May this be just the beginning of our wonderful life in Christ marked by faithful and committed discipleship. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

*Go Make of all Disciples* by St. Frances de Sales

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XrHmgGJrMI8>

*Go and Make Disciples* by Hamlet Presbyterian

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUTLi2uIVGA>

*Members of the Church of Christ* by Iglesia Ni Cristo

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrTjChLCTIw>

*Sent Forth By God’s Blessing* by St. Paul’s Grosse Pointe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7tXCbSbg1Q>

*The Spirit Sends us Forth To Serve* by Samm Hills Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jp7Qp4RE98A>

*God Sends Us Forth* by Marty Haugen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=seQ2V7pkDqM>

*We Are One Body* by St. Frances de Sales

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDRYEwNYOOM>

*Let Us Talents And Tongues Employ* by James Biery

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7aGWmCan-40>

*We Are One Body* by SJB Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5U3I7XWvJzA>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, May 20, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #340

### The "redacted" verses of wonderful Psalm 139

<sup>19</sup> *O that you would kill the wicked, O God, and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me--*

<sup>20</sup> *those who speak of you maliciously, and lift themselves up against you for evil!*

<sup>21</sup> *Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?*

<sup>22</sup> *I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies.* (Ps. 139:19-22 NRS)

When a document is redacted, it is usually done for legal reasons. Therefore to suggest verses 19-22 are "redacted," isn't exactly accurate. Verses 19-22 are included all our bibles. They just aren't spoken aloud in public worship or sung in the many beautiful songs based on this Psalm.

Why? Well compared to:

<sup>14</sup> *I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.* (Ps. 139:14 NRS)

or:

*O LORD, you have searched me and known me.*

<sup>2</sup> *You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.* (Ps. 139:1-2 NRS)

or:

<sup>9</sup> *If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,*

<sup>10</sup> *even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.* (Ps. 139:9-10 NRS)

the verses are actually pretty awful things to say. Honest, but awful.

And that's the point. This Psalm is a lament. You get a little of that when the Psalmist acknowledges that God is with him everywhere and he can't get away from God, but usually we don't see that as "lamentable." It is generally regarded as "good" that God knows us so well.

But then comes the ugliness of verses 19-22, when the writer reveals what's really on his mind, and it's not pretty. "Just kill them, God," he says in effect. He might as well say this aloud because he admits that God knows all his inmost thoughts and feelings. So he does. "I hate them with a perfect hatred." I wonder what "perfect" hatred looks like.

Perhaps on another day, the Psalmist would have written only the first 18 verses, which describe a more positive picture of an affirming God who knows us through and through and loves us still and all. But on this day, it's all out there. He laments what he's dealing with, spews

forth some nasty remarks, and then ... comes right back to God with a heartfelt request to the One who knows him so well:

<sup>23</sup> *Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts.*

<sup>24</sup> *See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.* (Ps. 139:23-24 NRS)

It was in a Rostered Ministers zoom meeting a couple of weeks ago that Bishop Michael Girlinghouse of the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod spoke to us about congregational grief and loss. In speaking of how congregations lament, he referenced Psalm 139 and mentioned how not including those verses changes our deeper understanding of the psalm. It's a lament.

Of course, if we only selected verses 19-22, that would also change the way we understand the psalm. Imagine singing just these verses in Sunday worship. "Oh that you would kill the wicked, O God ... Say what? That doesn't sound very Christian." Of course, being in the Old Testament, doesn't need to sound Christian.

What the whole psalm does, is affirm not only our human condition as well as God's deep reach into our hearts and souls, but it also encourages us to really give every thought (both beautiful and ugly) to God who promises, as the psalm concludes, "to lead me(us) in the way everlasting."

As we take a few moments in prayer today, may the entire whole psalm be our prayer offering (even if we don't feel like asking you to kill anybody today). May God give us comfort in recognizing God's thoroughness in knowing us and loving us all the way. We pray:

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

<sup>2</sup> You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

<sup>3</sup> You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup> Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely.

<sup>5</sup> You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

<sup>7</sup> Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?

<sup>8</sup> If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

<sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

<sup>10</sup> even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

<sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,"

<sup>12</sup> even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

<sup>13</sup> For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

<sup>14</sup> I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

<sup>16</sup> Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.

<sup>17</sup> How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!  
<sup>18</sup> I try to count them-- they are more than the sand; I come to the end-- I am still with you.  
<sup>19</sup> O that you would kill the wicked, O God, and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me--  
<sup>20</sup> those who speak of you maliciously, and lift themselves up against you for evil!  
<sup>21</sup> Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?  
<sup>22</sup> I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies.  
<sup>23</sup> Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts.  
<sup>24</sup> See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Ps. 139:1-24 NRS)  
Amen.

*You Are There* Psalm 139

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZ4my3VrVlg&list=OLAK5uy\\_nm3v\\_8q\\_6RZSkMDeaos6wFfdZmVlyJcfY&index=2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZ4my3VrVlg&list=OLAK5uy_nm3v_8q_6RZSkMDeaos6wFfdZmVlyJcfY&index=2)

*You Are Near* (Psalm 139) by Dan Schutte

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uge74xLmg0>

*You Are Near* by Bobby San Juan

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEPklogQMDk>

*Passover: Search Me Yah (Psalm 139)* by miYah and Ginger MarieYah.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6PclYmHX28>

*Psalm 139 Far Too Wonderful* by Shane and Shane

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GmsgYY-INf8>

*Known: Inspirational Film Psalm 139* by Caleb Martin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Slc06MinVrM>

*Psalm 139* by Korean group, J-US Ministry

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wpBQVkjptw>

*Psalm 139:1-18 Song (NKJV) "You Have Searched Me and Known Me"* (Esther Mui)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5HINlegg5M>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, May 21,2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #341

### The Good Old Days (According to Martin Luther)

*"Don't ask, "Why were things better in the old days than they are now? It isn't wisdom that leads you to ask this?" Ecclesiastes 7:10*

I woke up this morning wondering if, sometime in the future, we will look back on these days as the *"good old days."* With all this talk of moving into the *"new normal,"* will it become an *"old normal"* we will someday wish we could get back to?

Longing for the *"good old days,"* or *"back when things were great,"* is not something new. Even in the Bible, we have a story of the Israelites in the wilderness longing for the days in Egypt when they had *"cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic"* (Num. 11:5 NRS). They forgot about their slavery, of course. This was more than three thousand years ago.

Closer to our time (only five hundred years ago), beloved Martin Luther commented on how people long for the old days. Except for his reference to children's marbles and fattening cattle, his words could have been written today. Here is what Luther said:

*"When people are ungrateful to us, we often start complaining. "Things are worse now than they ever were." But we shouldn't talk like this. Elderly people tend to say, "When I was a child, everything was better." They are the "people who praise the days gone by," as one poet calls them. But the author of Ecclesiastes says that this isn't true. Things never really went that well. We only realize how bad things are now because as we grow older, the number of things that annoy us also increases.*

A child doesn't pay much attention to news about someone deceiving or murdering someone else. He keeps on playing, running, and riding. He thinks it's the worst thing in the world when someone steals another's marbles. Only then does he become angry. But when he becomes an adult, he becomes sensitive to the troubles and disloyalty of people around him. He gets angry when a horse breaks a leg, or when the cattle don't fatten properly, and so on.

The world has always been filled with troubles, but we haven't always been aware of them all. When we were children, nothing bothered us. Our lives remained relatively calm. But the world has always been wicked.

Therefore, make sure that you have a quiet and peaceful heart. Don't become upset when you see these evils. Though you can't change the world, make sure you are changed into a new person." (From *Faith Alone*: World Publishing 1998)

Food for thought. Let us pray. *Whenever we long for the good old days, remind us, O God, that no matter what days people live, it is our nature to be nostalgic for the past. Help us live well in this present, so that in the further future we long for these days, that we are making the most of them. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*O God Our Help In Ages Past* by Sharon Mennonite Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-hN740J6qA&t=39s>

*O God Our Help In Ages Past* by Maranatha Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Lq5mh6vvt8>

*O God Our Help In Ages Past* by Barclay Brass

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBMkXmpeb2U>

*O God Our Help In Ages Past* by Cambridge Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRgVNVVBVDA>

*Rock of Ages* by Antrim Mennonite Singers

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gM7gt\\_cSxjw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gM7gt_cSxjw)

*Rock of Ages* by Chris Rice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CuYhZS7zlhM>

*Rock of Ages* by Amy Grant and Vince Gill

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W47dBIJ22uk>

*Rock of Ages* by Tennessee Ernie Ford

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLGzgNtQHnc>

*Those Were the Days* by Mary Hopkin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3KEhWTnWvE>

*Forever* by Chris Tomlin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6xxWGWpaUQ>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, May 24, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #342

### Pentecost Lilies?

<sup>3</sup> *Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.*

<sup>4</sup> *All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (Acts 2:3-4 NRS)*

<sup>27</sup> *Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. (Lk. 12:27 NRS)*

Yesterday, fifty days after Easter we celebrated Pentecost Sunday. The paraments on the altar were red. The altar flowers were red roses. The pastors and deacon wore red stoles. Several in the congregation wore red clothing.

Historically, red symbolizes joy and the fire of the Holy Spirit. The Pentecost account in Acts describes the Holy Spirit coming in a rushing wind and coming to rest on each disciple like a tongue of fire. Hence, red. If we want red flowers to support this theme, red roses are a good choice, as are red geraniums, red amaryllis, red poppies, red chrysanthemums, red marigolds, red tulips, red gerbera daisies, red begonias, and red peonies (to name a few).

White flowers, especially Easter lilies, are for Easter. And yet, we have this phenomenon at St. Paul's, where every Pentecost Sunday (for many years now), at the corner of the church next to the admin building, lilies bloom.

This began quite a few years ago when, after an Easter service, lilies not taken home by worshippers were planted right at that corner. Even with a late Easter, they never bloom at Easter. But almost every year at Pentecost they bloom! And they are glorious!

I thought about this as I composed our Pentecost Sunday Prayers of the Church. The first words of the prayer were these: *"Almighty and ever living God, you fulfilled the promise of Easter by sending your Holy Spirit to unite the races and nations on earth and thus to proclaim your glory...."*

These came to mind as I walked next to the lilies Saturday afternoon. *"you fulfilled the promise of Easter by sending your Holy Spirit."*

These lilies underscore how the promise of Easter was linked to a hopeful future. Death had not defeated Jesus. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia. And now there's more. New life. More life. God inspired and God directed life through the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God.

We may have planted *"left-over"* Easter lilies after a certain Easter now many years ago. But God brings them to life for us each year so that even on Pentecost, we are reminded of all the wonderful surprises God has in store for us as we just look around and pay attention.

Let us pray. *As this season of Pentecost now begins, we thank you for your Easter promises that Jesus is not only raised from the dead but also sets in motion a new way that you O God, move*

*in and through your people. Give us faith to trust these promises and be open to your guidance and direction. And thanks for Pentecost lilies too. Amen.*

*O Day Full of Grace* by Mt. Olive

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NkiQqDsnogs>

*O Day Full of Grace* by Lutheran Musicians

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJETTbBnf6w>

*Come Holy Spirit* by Bright City

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0SkbLoNMUM>

*Come Holy Spirit Enter In* by CHRISTOS VIRTUAL HARMONIES, KAKKANAD, ERNAKULAM

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-H\\_RpUew9Y8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-H_RpUew9Y8)

*O Holy Spirit Enter In* by Morningstar

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jyd8kvlVqrg>

*Spirit of Gentleness* by Kristen Young

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcxLeObxoJs>

*Spirit of Gentleness* by Summit Ave Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IR1Z8JI5Wio>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, May 25, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #343

### Did Pastor Jonathan really say "Get out" on the first day we had both services inside?

*"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability". (Acts 2:1-4 NRS)*

Yes he did. And it got everyone's attention. It was important, however, to understand the context of "get out." See this wonderful sermon on YouTube for a full explanation if you missed it.... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcjaJ9OJW5s&t=20s>

Pastor Conrad was describing how the disciples, even after the resurrection were spending a lot of time "not getting out." Prior to the giving of the Holy Spirit, they were "*staying in*," celebrating the resurrection, of course, but not yet understanding how they might "get out" and communicate it to the rest of the world.

The coming of the Holy Spirit, and the gift of communicating in many languages non-native languages changed all that. God wants us to "*get out*" with that message. God doesn't want us "thrown out" of church but empowered like the disciples to go out with good faith.

It took faith... and courage.

The "*get out*" message got me thinking (as Pastor Jonathan often says in his daily God's Minutes), about Frederick Douglass. I would not have thought of him, quite frankly, if not for a reflection on his courage and escape from slavery (getting out) written by Civil War historian Heather Cox Richardson in her daily "Letters from An American."

And here I confess how little I have known about Frederick Douglass. I knew, as a former slave and abolitionist he is considered the "*father of the civil rights movement*." I did not know that he was also a licensed lay preacher in the AME Zion church, who honed his well-known oratorical skills in the pulpit.

Richardson recounts his escape from slavery. Douglas, himself, only told the story much later in life when those who helped him were no longer at risk. In 1838, Douglas was a twenty-year old dock worker in Baltimore, Maryland. He had already been bought and sold several times since his birth, but in this position, he showed great intelligence and had done well for his master; he enjoyed a measure of freedom. If ever he deviated from his routine, however, he would literally have been "sold down the river" to work in the harshest conditions of the deep south.

According to Richardson, “Douglass’s relatively safe position would have been enough for a lot of people. They would have thanked God for their blessings and stayed put. In 1838, Frederick Douglass was no different than they were: an unknown slave, hoping to get through each day. Like them, he might have accepted his conditions and disappeared into the past, leaving the status quo unchanged.

But he refused.

His scheme for escaping to freedom was ridiculously easy. In the days of slavery, free black sailors carried documents with them to prove to southern authorities that they were free, so they could move from northern and foreign ports to southern ports without being detained. These were the days before photos, so officials described the man listed on the free papers as they saw him: his color, distinguishing marks, scars.

Douglass worked in shipyards and had met a sailor whose free papers might cover Douglass... if the white official who looked at them didn't look too closely. Risking his own freedom, that sailor lent Douglass his papers.

To escape from slavery, all Douglass had to do was board a train. That's it: he just had to step on a train. If he were lucky, and the railroad conductor didn't catch him, and no one recognized him and called him out, he could be free. But if he were caught, he would be sold down river, almost certainly to his death.”

Richardson goes on to reflect, “Douglass's decision to step aboard that train is everything. How many of us would have taken that risk, especially knowing that even in the best case, success would mean trying to build a new life, far away from everyone we had ever known? Douglass's step was such a little one, such an easy one... except that it meant the difference between life and death, the difference between a forgotten, enslaved shipyard worker and the great Frederick Douglass, who went on to become a powerful voice for American liberty.”

Then Richardson concludes: “Tomorrow, my students will graduate, and every year, students ask me if I have any advice for them as they leave college or university, advice I wish I had had at their age. The answer is yes, after all these years of living and of studying history, I have one piece of advice: *When the day comes that you have to choose between what is just good enough and what is right... find the courage to step on the train.*”

Finding “*the courage to step on the train,*” is a bit like the courage to “*get out*” of the “*Upper Room.*” There is always a temptation to settle for what’s “*good enough,*” or “*what’s good enough for me.*” or “*as long as I’m all right,*” or “*as long as I have my freedom,*” or “*as long as I*

*feel my faith supports where I want to be”, then I can rest securely. And find security among those who feel the same way I feel.*

God came in Jesus to offer a liberating word for all people. When we look at the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, we are called not to oppress or enslave one another, but to love one another as Jesus loves us. We have a lot to learn from those whose life stories followed Christ’s example.

*Let us pray. O Holy Spirit, encourage us to “get out” of our complacency and follow your lead to bear good news in word and deed to a world still suffering and longing to be filled with hope. Thank you for all those who have had the courage to trust you and do what is right, to step up and step out in faith. Help us believe it is not only Christ-like to love all people but also necessary for the sake of the gospel. Help us learn from each other and listen to each other’s stories that we might develop empathy in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

*For Freedom Christ Has Set Us Free* by Christ Armfield

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qE4L4T-3MLE>

*No Longer Slaves* by Jonathan David and Melissa Helser

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8TkUMJtK5k>

*Let Justice Roll Like A River* by North Coast Calvary Chapel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AsklaLGk5nl>

*Let Justice Roll Like A River* by Centre Place

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CspMfh6Dds>

*Let Justice Roll Like A River* by Marc Coderre

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ScJ0-4or0QM>

*Holy Spirit Truth Divine* by Gross Pointe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLHbjDHCYJE>

*Holy Spirit You Are Welcome Here* by Bryan and Katie Torwalt

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LaRHOItRfZg>

*All Are Welcome* by Collegiate Church of St. Mary

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKJgcv8SdnQ>

*Freedom is Coming* by the University of Dar Es Salaam

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=do5\\_mY4kb-w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=do5_mY4kb-w)

*The Love of Christ is Rich and Free* by Sandra McCracken

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TWAXkaWS8o0>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, May 26, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #344

### How Many Days Since?

<sup>10</sup> When the governor motioned to him to speak, Paul replied: "I cheerfully make my defense, knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation.<sup>11</sup> As you can find out, it is not more than twelve **days since** I went up to worship in Jerusalem. <sup>12</sup> They did not find me disputing with anyone in the temple or stirring up a crowd either in the synagogues or throughout the city. (Acts 24:10-12 NRS)

<sup>19</sup> But there were some Jews from Asia-- they ought to be here before you to make an accusation, if they have anything against me. <sup>20</sup> Or let these men here tell what crime they had found when I stood before the council, <sup>21</sup> unless it was this one sentence that I called out while standing before them, 'It is about the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.'" (Acts 24:19-21 NRS)

One of my favorite apps that I use regularly on my iPhone and iPad is "Days Since." It's a rather simple app. You create an event you want to remember and put in the date. It will then tell you, in years, months, days, hours, or minutes just how much time has passed since the event happened.

I have found this useful for remembering days since anniversaries of births, deaths, and weddings, as well as medical events, starting new jobs, and retirements. I use it to remember when we last had the dogs groomed. Just today I noted I have served at St. Paul's for 23 years, 11 months, 3 weeks, 2 days, 14 hours.... (and counting). St. Paul's congregation has now reached 162 years, 11 months, 3 weeks, 3 days... Of course, when people ask how old the church is, I simply mention the date we were organized: 1858. (May 31, 1858 to be more exact).

The oldest event I have in my "Days Since" is "Lutheran Reformation Begins. That was on October 31, 1517 (503 years ago). I attempted to add the Day of Pentecost (imagining May, 33 A.C.E) but I couldn't get it to go back that far. Instead, I opted for May 1933 so I can then add 1900 years, putting this year's anniversary of Pentecost at 1,988 years. It is interesting to note that we have been rounding off "Days Since the Resurrection" at 2,000 years for a long time.

I could only find one place in scripture where "days since" is written, and that is in Acts 24:11 where St. Paul casually mentions it had been twelve days since he went up to worship in Jerusalem. What is more interesting is this entire passage, where Paul is on trial before the Roman Governor for disturbing the worship. Ananias is still high priest (remember him from the trial of Jesus?) and the priests have secured a Roman attorney named Tertullus to go after Paul.

In Paul's response, the whole problem boils down to one thing. Paul describes it up this way:

<sup>17</sup> Now after some years I came to bring alms to my nation and to offer sacrifices. <sup>18</sup> While I was doing this, they found me in the temple, completing the rite of purification, without any crowd

or disturbance. <sup>19</sup> But there were some Jews from Asia-- they ought to be here before you to make an accusation, if they have anything against me. <sup>20</sup> Or let these men here tell what crime they had found when I stood before the council, <sup>21</sup> unless it was this one sentence that I called out while standing before them, 'It is about the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.'" (Acts 24:17-21 NRS)

Yep. It all comes down to that, doesn't it? The assertion that Jesus rose from the dead and is Lord of all.

No one disputed that Jesus was executed. Many imagined claims about his identity or mission were simply false. No one disputed that Jesus had a reputation as one who taught with authority. No one disputed that he did things not easily explained. The problem was that by asserting Jesus rose from the dead, that meant his claims about who he was and why he came, were all true! Furthermore, this was a fulfillment of a host of Old Testament prophecies and hopes.

That's been the problem ever since. All one thousand nine hundred eighty-eight years and one month "*Days Since*." We cannot prove the resurrection by any means, nor can it be disproved either. It remains a hurdle for faith.

That's why the coming of the Holy Spirit remains such an important event and experience. In Martin Luther's explanation to the third article of the Apostles Creed, he underscores what the Holy Spirit does in respect to faith. Luther teaches us: "*I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel...*"

It requires faith to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Since it cannot be proved or disproved, perhaps the greatest gift that God the Holy Spirit gives us is faith. Faith to believe that "*Jesus was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into Hell. On the third day rose again; he ascended into heaven.*" Faith to be open to new life in Christ, where God's intent to be reconciled to humanity is lived out as we continue to look to God for everything we need... and everything God desires for us as people of faith.

Add fifty days to "*Days Since the Resurrection*" and our "*Days Since Pentecost*" begins. Every second since then, God continues to be at work, making this living breathing Holy Spirit faith life happen (and you don't need an app for that).

Let us pray. *Come into our hearts Holy Spirit that we might believe Easter's proclamation. Thank you for filling with the Holy Spirit all the witnesses who have gone before us. May we be among them, always looking to you and trusting in what has been handed down to us to share. Amen.*

*My Faith Looks Up to Thee* by the Vagle Brothers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X5g-Att0bmE>

*My Faith Looks Up To Thee* by Antrim Mennonite Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IpteS0kPZO4>

*My Faith Looks Up To Thee* by Alfred Street Baptist Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHQPD00yr30>

*My Faith Looks Up To Thee* by Steve Green

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKrDYPLVFWw>

*O Holy Spirit Enter In* by Mt Olive

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwB0SGapavY>

*Spirit of God Descend Upon My Heart* by Lily Chapel Press

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QiQ\\_R-s6h00](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QiQ_R-s6h00)

*Spirit of God Descend Upon My Heart* by Biola University Chorale Alumni

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=piUHVTZchYE>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, May 27, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #345

### **"Will we ever share the peace again?"**

<sup>19</sup> *When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." (Jn. 20:19 NRS)*

A member of our church family recently visited a congregation out of state. During the service, when the worshippers shared the peace, he realized he had not shared the peace at St. Paul's for fifteen months. He asked me, "Will we ever share the peace again."

The simple answer is "yes," but as with this most unusual pandemic year, we have practiced safety, and that has included omitting the sharing of the peace. When we were worshipping online only, it's absence wasn't as noticeable. As we opened our inside doors to limited occupancy and remaining masked and six feet apart, sharing the peace as formerly practiced, hasn't been done. The same has been true for outdoor worship.

The "Will we" question has prompted me to ponder the whole experience of sharing the peace in worship and its history. It is interesting to note that prior to 1978 and the "Green" hymnal, the hymnal rubrics (rules for worship) said *"After the sermon, the Congregation shall rise and the Minister shall say:*

***The Peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."***

This was the practice in the 1958 red hymnal and the 1917 black hymnal. There was no response, so it was a declaration of peace more than an exchange of peace. Interesting. The 1958 hymnal did add a sung "Amen" so I guess there was a little progress toward a response.

It was a big change, then in 1978 when the new rubric instructed: The PEACE is shared this time or after the Lord's Prayer, prior to the distribution.

***Pastor: The peace of the Lord be with you always.***

***Congregation: And also with you.***

Then the rubric added is: The ministers and congregation may greet one another in the name of the Lord. *Peace be with you.* Response: *Peace be with you.*

The newest hymnal, the "cranberry" one from 2006 is slightly altered. The rubric says: *The presiding minister and the assembly greet each other in the peace of the risen Christ:*

**Presiding Minister: The peace of Christ be with you always.**

**Assembly: And also with you.**

Then comes the rubric: *The people may greet one another with a sign of Christ's peace and may say: Peace be with you or similar words.*

It took a while in 1978 for people accept this instruction to say *"Peace be with you."* For some it was extremely uncomfortable and best some pastors could hope for was *"Good morning."* Some pastors even went straight to *"Good morning"* as an alternative to sharing peace. I'm not making this up.

As people became more comfortable with *"Peace language"* and then peace sharing, it became so popular that in many congregations (ours included) it could be compared to a sort of *"half-time show"*. The *"first half"* of the service finished. It was now time to make peace sharing connections with as many people as possible. Lots of movement happened, and it was a very welcomed part of worship for many, although it wasn't as comfortable for visitors. Only the most extroverted visitors moved from their places, and they were the first to sit down, as others made their way throughout the sanctuary. Eventually, the *"second half"* began.

I find it amusing to remember how some people expressed that children's sermons seemed disruptive to the flow of worship, but the five minutes of people moving all around to greet their friends (and make plans for lunch) wasn't. It's all grace.

Blame the pastors, though for putting the sharing of the peace at the end of the service so people could take as much time as desired to share peace (and make breakfast of lunch plans). I doing livestreaming supports doing at the end so people sharing the service online don't feel as disconnected.

Looking at sharing the peace historically, liturgically, functionally, and biblically, there are many approaches. For many years, "peace" was expressed but not exchanged. This is closer how Jesus offers peace in John's gospel. Three times in John's gospel Jesus says *"Peace be with you."* The first is mentioned at the beginning of this devotion. Here is the second:

<sup>21</sup> *Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." <sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. (Jn. 20:21-22 NRS)*

And the third:

<sup>26</sup> *A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. (Jn. 20:26-27 NRS)*

In these passages, the disciples never reply *"And also with you."* They do not take time to greet each other with the peace. It is a peace offered by Jesus among a rather terrified group of followers who don't yet know what to make of what they are experiencing.

Sharing of the peace has evolved, of course. How we now understand this is stated in ELCA resource materials:

“The “exchange of peace” (also commonly called “sharing the peace” or “passing the peace”) is an act of reconciliation that serves as a transition point between the Word and Meal portions of the liturgy. As stated in The Sunday Assembly:

The exchange of peace is a ministry, an announcement of grace we make to each other, a summary of the gift given to us in the liturgy of the Word. This ministry we do to each other is far greater than a sociable handshake or a ritual of friendship or a moment of informality.

Because of the presence of Jesus Christ, we give to each other what we are saying: Christ’s own peace. Then, having been gathered by the Spirit around the Risen One present in the word, we turn to celebrate his meal.”

That’s a really good summary, and worth learning and remembering so that Sharing the Peace becomes a sacred act of worship, like making confession and hearing forgiveness or receiving Holy Communion. It will be worth returning to sharing the peace with this understanding.

And with that, ***“Peace be with you.”***

Let us pray: *We thank you, Lord Jesus that you offer us peace whenever we are afraid, confused, or uncertain about our futures. Thank you that in worship we experience your peace and are invited to share it with others. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

*Peace be with You* by Resound Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UhMI4UVjV4E>

*May the Peace of God* by Nates Puruganan

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KwyyN86Z3fc>

*Peace in Christ* by Claire Crosby

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Waitmz6C100>

*My Peace* by Maranatha Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ls01XGV7oA0>

*Perfect Peace* by Laura Story

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6kj8pzDLcc8>

*Peace Came To Earth* by Mt. Olive

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fB5rpfITSaA>

*Grant Peace We Pray in Mercy Lord* by Concordia

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jG8\\_pNrnBss](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jG8_pNrnBss)

*Go Now In Peace* by Avondale Methodist Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmTTQuVUuUE>

*Make Me A Channel of Your Peace* by L Lee

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yj0VRG0EmvU>

### **Hannah's sacrifice: A Samuel Story**

The story of Samuel most often recalled in our readings is the famous "*Here I Am Send Me*" story that describes God calling Samuel in the middle of the night (I Samuel chapter three). One of our most popular newer hymns ("*Here I Am, Lord*") refers to this story as we are invited to recognize ourselves as called and chosen people in our own right. "*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord, I have heard you calling in the night...*" It is a beautiful and lovely song to sing. Samuel grows up to be one of the primary prophets in Israel's history, instrumental in the anointing of Israel's first kings.

This devotion is not about that, though I will attach the song at the end. This devotion is about what happened before this. It is such an interesting story, and regularly overlooked. At the risk of lengthening this, I will insert the 28 verses of I Samuel's first chapter. But first, here's what it is about:

The first chapter describes the experience of Samuel's mother Hannah. Hannah was the second wife of Elkanah, a strong man of faith who worshipped faithfully in the town of Shiloh. Hannah was Elkanah's favored wife but was "*barren.*" Year after year she was abused by Penninah, Elkanah's fertile wife. It reached a point where Hannah wouldn't eat and cried all the time. Elkanah tried to console her with a strong declaration of his love for her, but her disgrace and sadness was unbearable.

That led her to the door of the temple, where the prophet Eli was present. In her tears she vowed that if God would grant her a son, he would be dedicated to God for service. At first Eli wondered if she had been drinking because he only saw her lips move as she repeated that silent prayer.

Eli sends her home with hope as he says: "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him." (1 Sam. 1:17 NRS). She returns, becomes pregnant, rejoices at her prayers answered and then ... when Samuel was weaned (so he's a toddler), she presents herself to Eli, reminds him who she is, and offers her son to him to raise!

I think about this because it is so easy when we sing "*Here I Am,*" or hear this story in our lectionary, to give little thought to how that little boy ended up with Eli. Where were his parents? What mother, especially one who has suffered from barrenness, and longing for a child so many years and finally getting one, would give him up? How might the taunting other wife respond to that?

There is great faith at work here, and great trust that God really had something in store for this little boy. God did. As he was dedicated to God, God called him to be one of Israel's greatest prophets. But not for a mother persistent in prayer, and faithful in her own vows and promises, an entirely different story would be told here.

As such, it once again illustrates a wondrous God working in often mysterious ways, but always with direction and purpose.

Here's chapter one of the story, if you don't have a Bible with you right now.

<sup>NRS</sup> **1 Samuel 1:1** There was a certain man of Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham son of Elihu son of Tohu son of Zuph, an Ephraimite.

<sup>2</sup> He had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

<sup>3</sup> Now this man used to go up year by year from his town to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD.

<sup>4</sup> On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters;

<sup>5</sup> but to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb.

<sup>6</sup> Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb.

<sup>7</sup> So it went on year by year; as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat.

<sup>8</sup> Her husband Elkanah said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?"

<sup>9</sup> After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the LORD. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD.

<sup>10</sup> She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD, and wept bitterly.

<sup>11</sup> She made this vow: "O LORD of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head."

<sup>12</sup> As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth.

<sup>13</sup> Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk.

<sup>14</sup> So Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine."

<sup>15</sup> But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD.

<sup>16</sup> Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time."

<sup>17</sup> Then Eli answered, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him."

<sup>18</sup> And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your sight." Then the woman went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.

<sup>19</sup> They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her.

<sup>20</sup> In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the LORD."

<sup>21</sup> The man Elkanah and all his household went up to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice, and to pay his vow.

<sup>22</sup> But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, that he may appear in the presence of the LORD, and remain there forever; I will offer him as a nazirite for all time."

<sup>23</sup> Her husband Elkanah said to her, "Do what seems best to you, wait until you have weaned him; only-- may the LORD establish his word." So the woman remained and nursed her son, until she weaned him.

<sup>24</sup> When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine. She brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh; and the child was young.

<sup>25</sup> Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli.

<sup>26</sup> And she said, "Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the LORD.

<sup>27</sup> For this child I prayed; and the LORD has granted me the petition that I made to him.

<sup>28</sup> Therefore I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives, he is given to the LORD." She left him there for the LORD. (1 Sam. 1:1-28 NRS)

It's worth reading further for a most beautiful prayer by Hannah offered to God, followed by scandalous behavior by Eli's two sons misusing their priesthood (great disappointments to their faithful father) and then God calling Samuel *"in the middle of the night"*. With Samuel responding, *"Here I am, Lord."*

Let us pray. *Thank you, God for every faithful person in scripture who looked to you for guidance, love, direction, and support. Thank you for their stories that might help us to listen for the ways God is also calling us. Give us courage to listen carefully, pray boldly, and trust deeply. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*A Mother's Prayer (Hannah's Song)* by Rachel Aldous

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8dy26Ah1Lk>

*1 Samuel 2: 1-10 Hannah's Prayer* Put to Music by Jason Silver

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6VplwbGJkI>

*Hannah's Song* in Bible Story form by Piesn Anny (touching visuals)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S\\_tTV1OJL7c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_tTV1OJL7c)

*Hannah's Song* in 1 Sam. 2 by Ted Pierce

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVhSJ\\_-sEds](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVhSJ_-sEds)

*Here I Am, Lord* by Dan Schutte arr. by Mark Hayes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CSODPhE-0ng>

*I The Lord Of Sea and Sky* by Dunblane Choirs

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6grXk3e5bs0>

*Here I Am* by DeoGratius Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ylltRtO7gG4>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, May 31, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #347

### Remembering Memorial Day as a follower of Jesus.

*3 Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident. 4 One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple. (Ps. 27:3-4 NRS)*

The Psalmist describes the experience of one serving his country during wartime. It is a prayer of deliverance that in life or death, this soldier will be with the Lord forever. It is not a psalm of victory enemies, but one of hope for a secure relationship with God.

Throughout history, men and women have been called to serve their countries during times of war. The vast majority of participants have always been those who, when called, obediently serve. Some live. Some die. Enemies might later become allies. Allies might later become enemies.

Memorial Day is an official American holiday, always observed on the last Monday of May, honoring the men and women who died while serving in the U.S. military. Versions of this observance first happened following the Civil War, when both the Union and former Confederate States remembered those who died in service to their country. Everyone was affected by this huge death toll.

World War I also had an enormous death toll, as did World War II, and to a significant degree, the Korean War. In 1971, Memorial Day became an official holiday, with regrettably many other losses added to our remembrance due to the Vietnam War, Wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and in various other locations around the world.

Anytime a holiday happens during a three-day weekend, there are many things competing for the attention of the American public. While national cemetery rituals and parades honoring the dead happen still take place, more often, people become engaged in travelling, holiday sales events, or enjoying family barbeques.

However, for anyone who has lost a friend or loved one to war, the day becomes deeply personal. Many who served and survived deal with severe post trauma, and casualties from that continue. And while those who served and died are remembered and lifted up for their heroism and sacrifice, Memorial Day must also be remembered for the terrible loss of life incurred through war. It is a sad day. A terrible day. A day where yes, we give thanks for those who died, but also grieve deeply.

As Christians, we are also invited to remember lives lost among our enemies. So many young men and women who served their own countries didn't want to leave their families and loved ones, especially then they were tasked not to defend their countries, but to conquer others. War has claimed so many lives and remains a terrible witness to sin in God's world.

At 3:00 pm on each Memorial Day, a national moment of remembrance is designated to take place. I'm setting my smart phone to remind me of that, so at 3:00 pm so I can join in this remembrance with a prayer. It might be like to one below, or it might be like similar but with inclusion of people I have known who died in service to their country.

Perhaps it will include someone I read about, like Henry Gunther, the last soldier to die before WWI's armistice. He died just one minute before the war ended for everyone. Remembering all those who died, I will pray they felt the comfort of God's Holy Spirit reminding them that in life and death, they belonged to God, whose eternal peace is prepared for them through Jesus their Lord. For those serving who are in harm's way today, I pray this as well.

*Let us pray: Today we bow our heads and our hearts to You, Lord, that we may remember those who paid the ultimate price by giving their lives for their country. We can never be grateful enough for the sacrifices they made, and we are humbled by their willingness to put their own lives aside for the benefit of ours. Father, carve their sacrifices into our hearts so we may never forget the loss of these heroes. And help us, O God, advance the ways of peace, for we pray for this in the Holy name of Your son Jesus. Amen.*

Today, perhaps the music says it best.

*On This Memorial Day (Armistice Day)* by Greg DeBliek

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJXbKywID5w>

*Hymn to the Fallen* by John Williams

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Omd9\\_FJnerY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Omd9_FJnerY)

*Mansions of the Lord* by West Point Glee Club

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGoSWn1tHeo>

Memorial Day Bagpipes playing *Amazing Grace*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUZHTE1jMXg>

*Amazing Grace* at Amiens Cathedral

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Swvr\\_AjS73E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Swvr_AjS73E)

*Eternal Father Strong To Save* by John Dykes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmN2tWv7S9M>

*Eternal Father* by US Naval Academy Glee Club

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7o4Ltq\\_Dz8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7o4Ltq_Dz8)

WHEN A WITNESS SPEAKS

By

Chaplain Bob Weeks

Scripture: "So when they met together, they asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel? He said to them, 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'" (Acts: 1:6-8)

Today (June 1, 2021) is the day that the Christian Church remembers Justin Martyr, one of the most important Greek Christian philosophers in the early church.

Justin was born in 100 A.D. in Flavia, Neapolis, Palestine, into a pagan family and was reared in a Jewish environment.

As a young student, Justin first sought the school of Stoic Philosophy (to accept whatever happens without feelings); however, his teachers were unable to explain God's being to him. Next, Justin attended classes under a Peripatetic Greek Philosopher (a teacher whose followers travel from place to place), only to find out that this teacher was eager for a fee. Then, Justin began studying under a Pythagorean (Greek) Philosopher, a teacher who demanded that he learn music, astronomy, and geometry, none of which he wanted to learn. Finally, Justin adopted the teaching of a Platonist (Greek) Teacher (one who taught the philosophy and doctrines of Plato).

In his document called *Dialogue*, Justin confesses that all of his early education left him unsatisfied due to their failure to provide an explanation of God's being to him.

**Then, one day Justin listened to the witness of an old man**, possibly a Syrian Christian, who told him about God and spoke of the testimony of the prophets as being more reliable than the reasoning of philosophers. The old man told Justin that there existed long before his time persons more ancient than philosophers, both righteous and beloved by God, who spoke by the Divine Spirit, and foretold the events which would take place.

The old man told Justin that these persons both saw and announced the truth about God, being filled with the Holy Spirit. The old man told Justin that the writings of these persons were still available, and that these writing would very much help him in his knowledge of the beginning and end of things. He told Justin that these documents would enlighten him;

however, they would only be understood by the one to whom God and His Christ imparts wisdom. Justin followed the advice of the old man and read about the prophets and the Gospels.

As a result, Justin was moved by the old man's argument, the scriptures he recommended, and renounced his former religious faith and his philosophical background, and rededicated his life to Christ. **The witness of the old man converted Justin. His conversion took place when a witness spoke.**

Remember it was the command of Jesus before his Ascension that the disciples were to be His witnesses to all the world. Justin proceeded to travel, teaching and preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ in his part of the world. In all cases, Justin taught that during the Eucharist the bread and wine were the body and blood of Christ. This is our Lutheran belief.

Justin started his own school in Rome; however, his teachings were disputed by the local authorities. Specifically The Prefect Rusticus, an authority at that time, was requiring everyone to offer sacrifices to his gods. If persons did not obey, these persons would be tortured. The Prefect Rusticus read the following sentence: "Those who do not wish to sacrifice to the gods and obey the governor will be scourged and beheaded according to the laws." Justin and six of his companions said: "Do as you wish; for we are Christians and we do not sacrifice to idols." They were beheaded for their Christian Faith.

Justin needs to be remembered for being a true witness to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. We need to remember that we are to be witnesses to the same. One never knows what conversations about Jesus can do. LCDR Jim Corbin, USN, was the weatherman on the Aircraft Carrier JOHN F. KENNEDY during 1982, and a devout Christian. He had a young seaman working with him. The young seaman proclaimed himself an atheist; however, Jim did not give up talking to him about Christ. After continually speaking to the young seaman about the birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ, the young seaman became a Christian. Jim was the witness, and the Holy Spirit used his teachings.

Remember, before His Ascension, Jesus called his followers to be witnesses. God always uses a witness who speaks about Him. **Remember, you are a witness!**

*Prayer: We thank you, O God, for all your servants and witnesses of the times past. This day, we especially give you thanks for the witness of Justin Martyr. In your mercy and guidance, give us, as you gave him, the hope of salvation and the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, as we witness. Amen.*

*We Are Witnesses* by The Talleys

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPBHKHDIsVs>

*You Shall be My Witnesses* by Bible Story Songs  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGtDu1XqxuA>

*Come Join the Dance of Trinity* by Mt.Olive  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7wK\\_0ap09s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7wK_0ap09s)

*Come Join the Dance of Trinity* by St. Martin's Lutheran  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADvLC9H-brY>

*Holy Spirit Ever Dwelling* by Branches Band  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5tNBqzRCao>

*Holy Spirit Ever Dwelling* by Church of the Nativity and Holy Comforter  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJlJfLCZE8>

*Go Tell It On the Mountain* by Home Free  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vyccv0sb-f4>

*Go Tell It On the Mountain* by Chet Valley Churches  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14WM2MKulGk>

*God of Tempest God of Whirlwind* by Erin Jogue  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gphSbqIW7x8>

*God of Tempest God of Whirlwind* by Good Shepherd Lancaster  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Mjl4gz9T58>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, June 2, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #349**

**With Gratitude for our Graduates and our Life Together in Christ at St. Paul's.**

*<sup>15</sup> My child, if your heart is wise, my heart too will be glad.<sup>16</sup> My soul will rejoice when your lips speak what is right. <sup>17</sup> Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always continue in the fear of the LORD. <sup>18</sup> Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off. <sup>19</sup> Hear, my child, and be wise, and direct your mind in the way. (Prov. 23:15-19 NRS)*

Yesterday I reached an anniversary milestone of service to St. Paul's. Twenty-four years! Last week a I had a visual opportunity to reflect on the years as I responded to Deacon Susan's request: "Do you have any photos of our graduates from years past?"

If not for the digital age of photography, I might have had few. But as anyone with either a digital camera or a smart photo with digital photo capabilities, it's easy to amass thousands of photos. I'm not saying I have thousands of photos of this year's graduates, but since I first used a digital camera in 1998, I have thousands of photos of church activities, including social events, Vacation Bible School, Easter egg hunts, picnics, oyster roasts, Oktoberfests, new members, old members... you get the picture.

Looking through these photos for our graduates when younger was a wonderful trip down memory lane. In the case of several of them, I have known them since they were babies; I have watched them grow up before my very eyes. When we only see someone a day at a time, we don't notice dramatic changes, but looking these photos over many years ... you get the picture.

With this pandemic year, I had not seen many of our youth and their friends for many months. Thankfully, we were able to enjoy an in-person get-together, and it was great to see them and even greater for them to see each other. Because of our active youth program, they have a lot of history with each other, including camping ministry, VBS, mission trips, and Lutheran Youth Gatherings. They have made many wonderful memories together.

They were all immediately recognizable, with mostly "*cosmetic*" changes. For me, however, in looking at them after looking through my many photos, this was a significant witness to the strength of our church's ministry with youth. What a wonderful group of young people.

Before offering a prayer for our meal together, I shared that I was about to observe my 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary at St. Paul's. That meant none of them present had experienced St. Paul's without their "*Pastor Mark*." I thanked them for the joy of being part of their lives, and I thanked God for how they have been a blessing to us all. To their parents and siblings. To their church family. And to each other.

This underscores the value and importance of supporting our youth and family ministry at St. Paul's. Watching these wonderful young people grow in their faith has been a great joy. Working with staff, leadership, and loving volunteers to make sure we are investing in our young people's spiritual growth is a strong sign we take our baptismal promises seriously. "Yes, and I ask God to help and guide me."

Let us pray. *Thank you, O God, for the young people who have been raised in our St. Paul's church family. For our graduates, and all making life transitions, we pray that you will continue to support them with your love. Wherever they go, surround them with those for whom faith and love is shared. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Our first video is a wonderful message to our graduates from Deacon Susan Jackson. The first half are Deacon Susan's words; the last half features photos taken of our graduates through the years. Enjoy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VTLk6kxSdY>

I thought I'd pick a few songs I remember our graduates singing and enjoying.

*I Just Wanna Be A Sheep* (our youth have sung this in church) by LRCC

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MiyUqqDi8zw>

*Lord I Lift Your Name On High* by Cedarmount Kids

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zX5qA\\_me0HA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zX5qA_me0HA)

*Pharoah Pharoah* by Kidsrockcm

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5PkMC7O1lq0>

*Awesome God* by Hubofworship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PP9BjKnDaFk>

*Jesus Loves Me* by Evensong

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o12C8fWzER0>

*I Will Call Upon the Lord* by Cedarmount

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o12C8fWzER0>

*O God You Are My God* (Step by Step) by Rich Mullins

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qIBcGVnSxNU>

*As the Deer* by Mick

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZv3jzOTE70>

*Amazing Grace* (My Chains Are Gone) by Rich Mullins

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFGzY\\_8li8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFGzY_8li8)

*Amazing Grace* (My Chains are Gone) by Pentatonix

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Obp-9BEZE1c>

*We Are Standing On Holy Ground* by Malcolm Cartright

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZdminhRbHvE>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, June 3, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #350

**“We are all lawyers (mostly).”**

<sup>23</sup> Then turning to the disciples, Jesus said to them privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!" <sup>24</sup> For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it." <sup>25</sup> Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. (Lk. 10:23-25 NRS)

In a blog a few years ago, management specialist William Bouffard was sharing how he understands the powerful urge to convert those with whom we disagree. He expresses how the desire to win an argument is a powerful drive we all have inside. Each of us has an “*inner lawyer*” within, ready to make defense for our beliefs as we convince the “*jury*” to see our side of any argument.

With the current state of intense argumentative discourse in media and social media platforms, with heated arguments on all sides, Bouffard's remarks are still relevant. Then he offered a very insightful quote from Jonathan Haidt. He says:

“Jonathan Haidt, social psychologist and Professor of Ethical Leadership at New York University's Stern School of Business reminds us, ‘There are two ways to get at the truth: the *way of the scientist* and the *way of the lawyer*. Scientists gather evidence, look for regularities, form theories explaining their observations, and test them. Lawyers begin with a conclusion they want to convince others of and then seek evidence that supports it, while also attempting to discredit evidence that doesn't.’ Most of us as it turns out are absolutely outstanding lawyers yet believe that we are open minded scientists.”

That last line really hit me: “*Most of us as it turns out are absolutely outstanding lawyers yet believe we are open minded scientists.*” Here's another way of putting it: We're a lot better at arguing what we already believe than being open other evidence or points of view.

I also appreciate how Haidt describes what scientists do, in contrast to lawyers, namely gather evidence, look for regularities, explain observations, and test them. Interestingly, this was written years before Covid 19 and the global pandemic, an experience which has resulted in many people forming opinions first and then (like lawyers retained to defend) seeking evidence to support their opinions. With information and opinions of every kind readily available, there will always be others who agree with our points.

Our “*inner lawyers*” have led many to refute or ignore the work of the scientific community, especially in respect to Covid 19 and the efficacy of vaccinations. Opinions have been formed less from the scientific method and research and data and more from “*legal methodology*” and arguments. Some of the most determined opponents of vaccinations have been among evangelical Christian communities. It is encouraging to note that we are now seeing some of

the best-known evangelicals, like Franklin Graham, Robert Jeffress, John Jenkins, and J.D. Greear now urging their communities, to get vaccinated. There is a great deal of evidence that we are not out of pandemic danger and the vaccines are our best hope of having healthy and safe communities (despite what our “inner lawyers” argue.)

The word “lawyer” comes up just three times in the Bible, the above passage, its counterpart in Matthew, and in Titus who names “Zenas the lawyer.” (Titus 3:13). In Matthew and Luke, the lawyer is testing Jesus, trying to defeat him in a debate about the law. He wants to win the argument more than he wants to learn about God, or even God’s law.

In a lot of ways, the disciples are more like “scientists” than “lawyers”. They follow Jesus, gather evidence, look for patterns of truth and revelation, form theories explaining possibilities about who Jesus might be, and then test this with their own life experiences. They don’t start with faith and an opinion to be defended. They begin with a relationship that leaves them open to recognize just who Jesus is and for what purpose God sent him/became him.

In these days of intense arguing we should all be scientists (mostly). And let Jesus open our eyes to the wonder of God’s revelation for us.

Let us pray. *Encourage us to be open not only to listen to each other, but first of all and most of all, you, O God. You have given so much evidence and data from which to see your wondrous work among us and the whole human race. Bless all those who seek to understand both the beauty of the creation and that part of creation, like viruses, that rebel against your intentions for us to be well and live in good health and harmony. Show us how to treat each other with respect and kindness. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

*Thanks be to God* by Jon Foreman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7BLdmFao8rA>

*Thanks be to God* by Glimpse

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cR-F0jCAOE>

*In Christ Alone* by Adrienne Liesching

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rn9-UNer6MQ>

*In Christ Alone* by Steph Macleod

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kvFtXphmMU>

*In Christ Alone* by Keith and Kristyn Getty with Alison Krauss

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16KYvflc2bE>

*What a Faithful God You Are*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4fo1UV9pfrs>

*If You But Trust in God to Guide You* by National Lutheran Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4m-L5QcWePA>

And if you are interested, here is a Facebook link to Franklin Graham’s vaccine recommendation:

<https://www.facebook.com/FranklinGraham/posts/276922917136643>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, June 4, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #351

### When God is too busy to answer prayer.

*"Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness; answer me in your righteousness." (Ps. 143:1 NRS)*

I recently received a dreaded letter 5071C from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). It indicated that I might have been a victim of identity theft and I need to go online to verify my identity. My first reaction was that this was a scam. But I checked multiple places online and learned it is indeed a letter from the IRS that must be acted upon.

The letter gave instructions on how to set up a profile online and go through the process. What it did not say is that if you make a single tiny mistake in the process, you will be referred to the suspected identity theft division and can go no further.

They also indicated an alternative was to call a number listed. I tried and got nowhere, "due to high volume." Apparently, I was not alone. I could not even get a place "in line." Just before being cut off, the recording suggested I try another working day.

My CPA assured me that nothing was amiss with my return or identity. She said the IRS is doing a good thing with this program, but problems with the process are causing a volume they are not able to handle. She suggested I try a few more times, and then try to make an appointment at the local office, which also required contacting a "call center."

Each time I called the first number, I had to listen through the whole menu before the "due to high volume, we are unable to take your call at this time." Click. After several more tries. Click. Click. Click. I opted to try to get an appointment.

The first attempted call was identical to the others. But the second indicated that I was now placed "in line, my call to be answered in the order it was received." Estimate wait: 15 to 30 minutes. I kept hoping and praying that I would not be disconnected (it happens). At 40 minutes I heard a live voice! She was at the Dallas call center, but needed to verify something first. I was placed on hold, hoping not to be disconnected (it happens).

After answering a host of questions, the IRS made the appointment for me (evidently they screen these requests), with instructions to bring authentic identification and a couple of years of tax returns as well as supporting documents. If you read this devotion just after Kathleen sends it this morning, that's where I'll be, hoping I can prove who I am and verifying the legitimacy of my return.

While waiting to speak to a live person, and while thinking about the number of times I was told the volume was too great and they were too busy, I kept thinking about how it is when we come to God in prayer. What kind of volume does God get with prayer requests for help? If we

don't feel like we're getting an answer right away, is it because God in effect has told us God is too busy? Are prayers answered in the order they are received? Do we have to explain our need before we can get to our requests being processed? Can we get cut off?

After failing to get through to the IRS and finally getting through, I felt great joy, a kind of answered prayer. But more than that I thought about what a blessing that when we pray to God, there is no waiting to get through. There are no dropped calls. God hears. The Holy Spirit as intercessor cuts through any perceived hindrance and even articulates all the right prayers on our behalf. Romans 8:26-27 explains this:

*<sup>26</sup> The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. <sup>27</sup> And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Rom. 8:26-27 NRS)*

We are so blessed to be able to trust that when we turn our hearts to God, there is no volume that God cannot handle; no request too insignificant to be not worth God's attention. We are blessed.

And I was blessed after some effort to speak to a live IRS person, and through that, able to think about prayer and experience such gratefulness to God for hearing our prayers just as we speak them (or even just think them). I hope you will be able to celebrate this without getting the dreaded 5071C letter).

Let us pray. Thank you O Good for always hearing our prayers and never disconnecting us from you. Thank you for NEVER being too busy, Help us remember this each time we pray. And may the large volume of prayers from all your people be pleasing to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

*Hear My Prayer* by Henry Purcell sung by VOCES8

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OISUntqbXvc>

*Hear My Prayer* by Maranatha Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fMRuB3tYTqE>

*O Lord Listen to my Prayer* by Margaret Rizza

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wj9unljW1jQ>

*O Lord Hear My Prayer* by Taize

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKyU5Bllxc0&t=52s>

*I Will Call Upon the Lord* by Eternity

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQJ7t\\_VPOHU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQJ7t_VPOHU)

*Wait for the Lord* by Taize

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7GexlvX8HU>

*What A Friend We Have In Jesus* by Celtic Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pi1-5kmbkyQ>

P.S. Part of sharing this IRS story was in case you get the dreaded 5701C. Do not lose heart. Pray. Then call.

## **St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, June 7, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #352**

### **A Prayer from D-Day, June 6, 1944**

*"Today you are drawing near to do battle against your enemies. Do not lose heart, or be afraid, or panic, or be in dread of them; <sup>4</sup> for it is the LORD your God who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to give you victory." (Deut. 20:3-4 NRS)*

Someone once gave me a compilation of prayers in a little book called "Pocket Book of Prayers, edited by Mark Gilroy and published by Fall River Press, 2015. Under the "Prayers for Peace and Comfort" section I was drawn to one entitled, "For Dark Times."

The prayer for dark times was the prayer that President Franklin D. Roosevelt offered before World War II's invasion of Normandy, called D-Day. It's a beautiful prayer, reflecting the seriousness of the undertaking and just what is at stake in this battle.

I am deeply moved by the language, but even more than that I am drawn to a time when a nation was really united in prayer against an enemy determined to defeat the free nations of the world in favor of an autocracy wanting to assert its dominance over others.

It shows humility and reverence for life and persons who may be asked to sacrifice their lives for the sake of a free world. FDR prays to preserve our Republic, our religion and our civilization. He prays that we might conquer the apostles of greed and racial arrogances. He prays for the saving of our country and our sister nations into a world unity that will spell a sure peace.

To a certain extent, this prayer was answered with D-Day becoming a turning point for the victorious allies. It does not escape me, however, that such a prayer can well be applied to our current day, especially as we have created enemies of each other, each claiming the other is tearing our country apart. May God hear our prayers this day that we might humbly and graciously unite our hearts in Christ-like love.

Almighty God:

Our sons, pride of our nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavor, a struggle to preserve our Republic, our religion and our civilization, and to set free a suffering humanity.

Lead them straight and true; give strength to their arms, stoutness to their hearts, steadfastness in their faith. They will need Thy blessing. Their road will be long and hard. For the enemy is strong. He may hurl back our forces.

Success may not come with rushing speed, but we shall return again and again; and we know by Thy grace, and by the righteousness of our cause, our sons will triumph.

Embrace these, Father, and receive them, Thy heroic servants, into Thy kingdom.

And for us at home—fathers, mothers, children, wives, sisters, and brothers of brave men overseas, whose thought and prayers are ever with them—help us, Almighty God, to rededicate ourselves in renewed faith in Thee in this hour of great sacrifice. Give us strength, too – strength in our daily tasks, to redouble the contributions we make in the physical and the material support of our armed forces.

With Thy blessing, we shall prevail over the unholy forces of our enemy. Help us to conquer the apostles of greed and racial arrogances. Lead us to the saving of our country, and with our sister nations into a world unity that will spell a sure peace – a peace invulnerable to the schemings of unworthy men. And a peace that will let all men live in freedom, reaping the just rewards of their honest toil.

Franklin D Roosevelt (1882-1945), Thirty-second president of the United States of America

A Prayer from D-Day, June 6, 1944

*By Gracious Powers* (text by Dietrich Bonhoeffer) ELW 626 by Resurrection Lutheran

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y\\_Jtk97EXfE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_Jtk97EXfE)

*My Hope is Built on Nothing Less* by Firsts-Plymouth Lincoln

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RFktMLdeFac&t=91s>

*If God is For Us* by St. Louis Jesuits

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdmgC7\\_SCgk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdmgC7_SCgk)

*Jesus Calls Us O'er the Tumult* by St. John's Richlandtown, PA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7wbFHRaXls>

*Jesus Shall Reign* by The Riverside Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4aH7oMJRcc>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, June 8, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #353**

**Don't blame the Nisse.**

*"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." (Ps. 46:1 NRS)*

I remember someone once telling me a story about the Nisse, who happened to be a kind of Norwegian elf or gnome. While they tended to be nice and rather peaceful creatures, especially if the family they lived with were nice, they could also be rather mischievous.

There was a certain Norwegian farmer and his family who lived on a farm with a family of Nisse. The farmer concluded that whenever something bad happened on the farm, it was the Nisse who were to blame. He quite frankly regarded these Nisse as nothing but trouble, and the source of all trouble.

It finally got so bad that the farmer could take no more. In desperation, he gathered his family and their possessions to depart from this farm and these awful Nisse. Moving quickly, he readied his family and his wagon was loaded all their possessions were tightly strapped. He turned to bid a final good-bye and good riddance.

But lo! As started making his way back to the wagon, there they were. Sitting on top of his belongings, were also all the Nisse, together cheering, "HOORAY! HOORAY! WE'RE MOVING."

It's a folk tale that needs little interpretation. We can't get away from our troubles. If we move, they are going to move right along with us.

In the Bible, the word translated "*trouble*" is written 109 times. Sometimes it is with "*time of trouble*" as in Proverbs 25:19, offering wise commentary on life:

*"Trusting in a treacherous man in time of trouble is like a bad tooth or a foot that slips." (Prov. 25:19 ESV)*

Another time "*troubles*" are mentioned as a reality but they won't last forever. In 2 Corinthians 4:17 St. Paul asserts that when we hold fast to faith, we will experience a positive outcome through all our troubles.

*"For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!" (2 Cor. 4:17 NLT)*

No matter how we regard troubles, they are most certainly with us, but made manageable because wherever we go, God is with us, just as it says in Acts 17:28"

“For 'In [God] we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed [God's] offspring.'” (Acts 17:28 ESV).

HOORAY!

Let us pray. Whenever we feel overwhelmed by what seems like inescapable troubles. remind us O God that you are with us always, even to the ends of the earth (and the end of our wits.) Help us laugh at our troubles as if they were just silly gnomes along for a brief ride. In Jesus' name. Amen.

*I'm Going on a Journey* ELW 446 by St. Stephen's Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJg9XAY3SIA>

*Through the Night of Doubt and Sorrow* by ELW 327 by Lorenz

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EsiW\\_r9hRuU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EsiW_r9hRuU)

*Guide me Ever Redeemer* by Trinity Lutheran Greenville SC

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9\\_3EBTx7w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9_3EBTx7w)

*Jesus Still Lead On* by Mt. Olive

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9npwjuxqBbQ>

*I Want to Walk as a Child of Light* by the Unionaires

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMx3ZMdaYyQ>

*I Want to Walk as a Child of Light* by Chris Brunelle

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDzcZWa\\_YqQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDzcZWa_YqQ)

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, June 9, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #354**

**Thomas Jefferson's "Reader's Digest Condensed" Bible.**

*Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written. (Jn. 21:25 NIV)*

This is the final verse of St. John's gospel. It indicates that Jesus did many other things that were not written down. So many things, John says, that the world wouldn't have room for them all.

From 1950 to 1997, "Reader's Digest" published yearly anthologies of abridged novels. Called "Reader's Digest Condensed Books," there were altogether 925 novels, four per volume. Obviously popular and profitable at the time, you can scarcely give them away now, even though many a yard sale has offered them.

The current conventional wisdom is that if you are interested in reading a novel, why would you want to read a condensed version with parts subjectively edited out? If you want a shorter version, wait for the movie, or purchase a "Cliff's Notes" alternative.

Given our love for the Bible, most people of faith, reading the last verse in John's gospel, would wish there had been more stories about Jesus written down. Likewise, given all the questions we have about faith, many would wish we had more of St. Paul's epistles preserved, especially the one (we imagine) where a congregation asked: "What about the babies? Shall we baptize them when they are infants or wait until they can decide for themselves." We wish there was more.

Thomas Jefferson had a unique approach to the Bible. With razor and scissors, he literally and carefully cut out the parts of the Bible he thought were important and pasted them into an 88 page leather volume. The rest? He threw away. He kept this for his private use, though if published, it would likely be a runaway best seller and certain to shape what was then, current Christian thought.

Of interest to scholars, historians, and theologians is what Jefferson included in his bible, and what was noticeably missing. Jefferson included only clippings from the New Testament. Furthermore, while they were focused only on Jesus, Jefferson none of Jesus' mystical works, healings, or miracles. It did not include Jesus' resurrection or ascension to heaven; there were no miracles like turning water into wine or walking on water; there was no giving of the Holy Spirit

"Jefferson's Condensed Version" (JCV?), actually called "The Jefferson Bible" focused on Jesus as a man of morals, a teacher whose truths were expressed without the help of miracles or the

supernatural interventions of God. Those who study “*Jefferson’s Bible*” conclude that it is a work of someone who spent much of his life grappling with and doubting religion. Jefferson clearly admired Jesus, and was drawn to his teaching, but could not look at him as one who was God incarnate, living, dying, and being raised so that the world might be saved from sin and be reconciled to God.

I remember hearing from a professor of religion after my wife Carol became sick. He said he was sorry Carol was in the hospital and required surgery. He also told me that he wasn’t a believer, so he couldn’t “pray” for us, but he wanted me to know that he was sending “positive thoughts” our way.

I’ve always wondered how someone can be interested in religion and even make a career from studying Christianity and the Bible, and yet be far from personal faith themselves. If I thought it was essentially nonsense, I’d want to study something of greater personal value.

Jefferson found Jesus compelling for his philosophy, but couldn’t really “*believe in him,*” at least not as those of us who have given heart and soul to Jesus our Lord. Because Jefferson was so influential, we should be grateful his “Bible” remained a private devotional and was not in competition with the complete Old and New Testaments. It certainly would have been a “*quick read*” with a lot of worthwhile moral lessons, but would miss the key parts of the story that make it possible for us poor sinners to apply anything that Jesus taught.

Let us pray. *Thank you for your Holy Scriptures, O God, all of them. Help us look at scripture in its entirety, with everything pointing to the saving event in Jesus Christ. May the parts of the Bible that are most clear help us in our struggles with that which is less clear. Remind us how everything points to you, through Jesus Christ or Savior and Lord. Amen.*

*Thy Word* by Amy Grant

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6LC8cu03Ig>

*Lord Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word* by Concordia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ZTiGuPhaLI>

*Thy Strong Word* by CUC Sacred Winds

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2bhHosLHmI>

*How Firm A Foundation* by The Carnival Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ShWv9Rwc0F4>

*The B.I.B.L.E* (The Bible Song) by Apple Crisol

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vxe0SD0\\_DzI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vxe0SD0_DzI)

***illegitimi non carborundum* (The third rule for Christian Living?)**

Most every pastor who was a residential student during seminary remembers at least one student who would “*hold court*” in the refectory with entertaining stories or observations. One such student during my second year at Luther Seminary was senior Doug Guthier. Hailing from Texas, and employing a deep Texas drawl, he could tell really tell a story.

He was also known for his “Three Rules for Christian Living.” On several occasions I personally witnessed Doug being asked to recite these three rules once again. No one could share them quite like Doug, but those of you who know Dan Huggins might try to imagine Dan speaking them, and you’ll get close.

“*Number one,*” Doug said, “*Believe the gospel. Number two, try to live as graciously as you can. And number three, don’t let the bastards get you down.*”

1 Believe the gospel.

2 Try to live as graciously as you can.

3 Don’t let the bastards get you down.

Numbers one and two said it well. Number three cracked us up every time. Maybe it was because the seminary refectory was not a place known for course talk or bad language, and “*bastard*” did seem a little naughty at the time.

Several years later I ran across the phrase not in the context of three rules for Christian living, but in a novel. The protagonist spoke the same words, but in the original Latin, “*illegitimi non carborundum.*” With that, I realized it was a real phrase. And very recently while researching this devotion I learned two other things about the phrase.

During World War II, the phrase was adopted by General “*Vinegar*” Joe Stillwell as his motto (I guess “*Keep Calm and Carry On*” was taken. In 1984, the phrase was adopted as a motto by the Second Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Special Forces Group. It has also been featured as protest graffiti in Margaret Atwood’s “*Handmaid’s Tale.*”

I also learned that “*illegitimi non carborundum*” is not even a legitimate or proper Latin phrase. It is what is called “*Dog Latin,*” a cousin of “*Pig Latin,*” where English words are translated into Latin for humorous effect. We can see how “*illegitimate*”, another word for “*bastard,*” could seem like authentic Latin by rendering it “*illegitimi.*”

Doug, speaking Tex-English, intended his third rule to be both funny but encouraging. Even while in seminary, we were warned about going into our first parish and facing what were then called “*alligators,*” those menacing persons eager to find some reason to “*bite our heads off*”. A popular term in the 1970’s, “*alligators*” are no longer used to describe “*antagonists*” in the

parish. The point remains, however. Don't let brothers and sisters in Christ who either hold passionate views or actively dispute or undermine your leadership "get" to you.

This would resonate with St. Paul's own approach to those with whom you experience conflict:

<sup>17</sup> *Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.* <sup>18</sup> *If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.* (Rom. 12:17-18 NRS)

<sup>20</sup> *No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads."* <sup>21</sup> *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.* (Rom. 12:20-21 NRS)

Evidently Pastor Doug Guthier made his three rules work, as he served as a pastor in Texas for more than thirty-five years before retiring. The rules only work, of course, when we focus on "rules 1 and 2." Believe the gospel and try to live as graciously as we can. Living by God's grace makes possible seeing no one as illegitimate, but all as precious Children of God worth loving (even when they snap at you once in awhile).

Let us pray. *Keep teaching us how to live, O God that we might be faithful in all our relationships. By your Holy Spirit, help us to believe, and in believing, live as graciously as we can. May we not be hindered. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Great God Your Love Has Called Us* by Mt. Olive

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OrVgPF9a08>

*My Song Is Love Unknown* by Koine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3IfSXlp3m0>

*My Faith Looks Up to Thee* by Metropolitan Temple

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeMcpnYLwJg>

*When We Are Living* by Plymouth First Methodist

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uEtuI\\_RSfYM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uEtuI_RSfYM)

*Goodness is Stronger than Evil* by Guardian Angels Music Ministry

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHImypU38yg>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, June 11, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #3

### The weirdness of one year later.

<sup>5</sup> For our allotted time is the passing of a shadow, and there is no return from our death, because it is sealed up and no one turns back. <sup>6</sup> "Come, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that exist, and make use of the creation to the full as in youth. (Wis. 2:5-6 NRS)

I wonder if you, like me, are experiencing a certain kind of weirdness one year later. It has been at least a year since so many of our regular patterns and experiences were interrupted due to the pandemic and all its restrictions.

I wonder if you are feeling a kind of sobriety in realizing it has been a year since you saw a certain friend or went shopping (other than for groceries) or went to the beach or went away for a weekend or came to church or went on a picnic or even visited maskless with now vaccinated people.

I keep finding myself thinking, "Wow. What a year." I am seeing children now a year later who have changed so much since seeing them last. I am seeing people I hardly recognize with previously short hair now much longer. This has been oddly unsettling.

Thinking about the year and how disconnected we have been from so many things, resuming these things is not as it was before the beginning of the pandemic. I am so aware of the time that "got away."

When I was in college, I took an English "Short Story" class where we read and discussed F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Lost Decade." (Free copies can be read online). The story made such an impact on me that I still remember the gist of it (and the revelation) these many years later. It was published in Esquire Magazine December 1939.

In the story, Orrison Brown is asked by his boss to take Louis Trimble, a visitor out to lunch. Over the course of their time together, we learn that Trimble has been away for a decade. He says his last memory of the city was in 1928, so Brown imagines he has been out of the country.

Trimble marvels at the things he missed. We learn he was an architect, is not much interested looking at the buildings that have gone up in his absence. He wants to go to restaurant where he can see young people, watch the backs of people's heads, and overhear ordinary conversations. He marvels at the weight of his spoon.

Along with the narrator of the story, the reader is left pondering where Trimble had been the last decade. In a surprising twist, we discover that Trimble had been drunk for ten years and missed a lot. It truly was a lost decade, and now, newly sober, he is looking very carefully at all the precious little things he missed or forgot about. He is also longing for connectedness, reflected in sharing a handshake with his host.

While the story is a commentary of the effects of alcoholism and how it dominates a drinker's life, it also reveals the subsequent loss of meaningful human relationships and touch. (That can happen apart from substance abuse, of course).

The pandemic has forced various levels of disconnection between people. While we have endeavored to remain as connected as we can, through phone calls, zoom meetings and social media communication, social distancing and pandemic precautions and protocols have left many without the joy of human touch (and in person contact) that previously was such a regular and important part of our lives.

Even while we are now cautiously offering each other elbow and fist bumps, quick side hugs, and somewhat tentative handshakes, the "lost year" has made an impact. The good news, as with recovering Louis Trimble in the story, getting in touch with the world and the people around us is received as a wonderful gift as we find our way both "back" and "forward."

Let us pray. *O God, in this time of reconnecting and getting in touch with the world around us and people we love, we pray that renewed connections will bring us joy. Show us a path forward that brings encouragement and hope from what we have lost or missed. Help us always remember that your loving arms have always kept us close to you. We pray we shall never fail to see or experience that. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Leaning on the Everlasting Arms* by Brussels Philharmonic

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VmhBUxUDPTA>

*Leaning on the Everlasting Arms* by Acapeldridge

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SaXJQD0Xixk>

*He Touched Me* by the Booth Brothers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Igy7g6BCNO0>

*Hold Me My Lord* by Josh Kelley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSfiq5Co2co>

*Hold Me Lord* by Matthew Baute (not same as above)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUMUSZ21mZI>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, June 14, 2021 not by Pastor Mark Opgrand but by "Dessert First" Writer Lynda Shell #357**

**Dessert First: Still Tasty after 20 years. Day 1 of 5.**

Intro: I came across a copy of a rare booklet on my bookshelf. It was *"Dessert First: Celebrate God's Blessings, A Daily Devotional Booklet Celebrating Stewardship written by members of St. Paul's"*. It was undated, but after some sleuthing, I was able to identify it as published in 2001. So on this 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, I am sharing five I liked that clearly speak to us today.

Of the thirty contributors, sixteen have moved, ten have died, and four are current members. I'm starting with someone "who needs no introduction," Lynda Shell. Lynda became our Financial Secretary around the time of "Dessert First." and for many years has remained active in stewardship ministry. Happy 20 years as Financial Secretary, Linda.

**Fatherly Advice**

*<sup>5</sup> Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. <sup>6</sup> In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. <sup>7</sup> Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. <sup>8</sup> It will be a healing for your flesh and a refreshment for your body. <sup>9</sup> Honor the LORD with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce; <sup>10</sup> then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine. (Prov. 3:5-10 NRS)*

As a mother and a teacher I have often given advice to children. Sometimes a child would ask my advice, but most of the time I was just doing my "mother or teacher thing" and offering advice whether it was wanted or not. I am sure that most of it was ignored but I would like to think that a morsel or two got through. As parents we give our children advice because (1) we want to protect them and keep them from having to learn the hard way and (2) we want to share our wisdom ... "big truths" of life.

Solomon, as a loving father, gave his son advice about many things. I feel sure that he felt, like many of us parents do today, that all of the advice he shared would enable his son to search for the wise way to live. Of the many kernels of wisdom that Solomon shared, two stand out in my mind. The first is *"Trust in the Lord"* and the second is *"Honor the Lord with your first fruits."* These two verses certainly go hand in hand and Solomon's father advice is a pertinent today as it was so many years ago. If we trust in the Lord, we will want to honor him with our gifts.

One of my favorite hymns begins *"Take my life, that I may be consecrated Lord to Thee,"* and continues in the fourth verse with the words, *"Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I*

with-hold.” These words help me to remember that when I put my faith and trust in God, I will want to glorify him with all that I am and the gifts that I have.

*Prayer: Most gracious God, I realize that all that I am and all that I have is a gift from you. Help me to heed the advice of Solomon and live wisely. I put my trust in you, O God and I offer to you my first fruits. Through Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Here are five different but all beautiful versions of “Take My Life”.

*Take My Life and Let It Be* by Concordia (traditional Lutheran version)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FHU2h1000I>

*Take My Life and Let It Be* by Norton Hall Band

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2zt7PzHPqk>

*Take My Life and Let It Be* by David and Noelle Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FN3OaZJaNEE>

*Take My Life and Let It Be* by Cheribium Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZKGYSRHjpQ>

*Take My Life and Let It Be* by Metropolitan Tabernacle

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sss-g50Dw1Q>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, June 15, 2021 not by Pastor Mark Opgrand but by "Dessert First" writer Susan Bolger #358**

**Dessert First: Still Tasty after 20 years. Day 2 of 5.**

Because of the pandemic, not every has realized that long time members Fran and Susan Bolger relocated to Charlotte this past year on account of Fran's new job. Here's something written when they were much newer members. Because it was written twenty years ago, all three of their children are all grown up now, whereas at the time of this writing Andrew was very young. I loved reading this again, and even if you don't know the Bolgers, you will recognize Andrew's question about the "offering," as something any kid might ask. Enjoy.

**A Child's View by Susan Bolger**

*<sup>41</sup> He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. <sup>42</sup> A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. <sup>43</sup> Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. <sup>44</sup> For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on." (Mk. 12:41-44 NRS)*

Not long ago in church, when the offering plate was being passed around, my son, Andrew, leaned over and asked, "How do they get all that money to God in heaven?" After church (we would never dream of taking during the worship service!), I explained to him that that the money doesn't go up the heaven, out rather, we, the church use it here on earth to serve God and do his work. I explained further that the money doesn't go up to heaven, but rather, we the church, use it here on earth to serve God and do his work. I explained further that the offering money is used in a variety of ways, from helping missionaries out in the field, to providing Sunday School materials, church maintenance, etc.

After our conversation, I started thinking that perhaps my son had the right perspective on giving an offering after all. He believed it was a direct gift to God, not just potting an offering in the plate. Our act of giving could be much more personal if we envision God, with a broad welcoming smile, waiting with anticipation to receive our gifts. Then, as we approach him, humbly bearing gifts, he received our offering and US with open arms! In return, WE receive God's approval and blessings because we have been obedient and selfless through our giving. What an intimate experience with our Lord!

I suppose I gave Andrew a sufficient explanation on giving. Yet, I need to impress upon all my children that giving an offering is much more than placing money in the plate. It is even more

than giving back to a God who gives us so much. It is a decision to be intimate with our Lord. Through our obedience in giving, we bring pleasure to our Savior, and ultimately bring ourselves close to Him.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for all of your blessings, and how you take care of all our needs. Thank you for teaching us through our children. Please accept our humble gifts. Amen.*

Here are five versions of the popular “*Humble Thyself.*” I wonder which one you like best.

*Humble Thyself in the Sight of the Lord* by Acapella

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ON1loIHeQc8>

*Humble Thyself in the Sight of the Lord* by Maranatha Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sU8MAQKSbEI>

*Humble Thyself in the Sight of the Lord* by Bob Hudson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSzhxk4i1DQ>

*Humble Thyself in the Sight of the Lord* by John Michael Talbot

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpDA3SZZXrY>

*Humble Thyself in the Sight of the Lord* by The Acapella Company

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VmYRszsjvdk>

**St. Paul's In You Home for Wednesday, June 16, 2021 not by Pastor Mark Opgrand but by "Dessert First" Writer Alice Hovis #359**

**Dessert First: Still Tasty after 20 years. Day 3 of 5.**

Today I share a wonderful piece by Alice Hovis. When Alice wrote this for "Dessert First" in 2001, she worked for New Hanover County as the Department Head for the Pre-trial Release Program which she also started. After 20 years with the county, Alice retired in 2012. She and husband Larry, a retired pharmacist, have been active members at St. Paul's for many years. Alice's current ill health and memory issues have kept her homebound, but we rejoice in her reaching out to us through this reflection.

**It's Not About Money by Alice Hovis**

*<sup>10</sup> You shall eat your fill and bless the LORD your God for the good land that he has given you. <sup>11</sup> Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. <sup>12</sup> When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, <sup>13</sup> and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, <sup>14</sup> then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, <sup>15</sup> who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, <sup>16</sup> and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. <sup>17</sup> Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth." <sup>18</sup> But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today. (Deut. 8:10-18 NRS)*

Tithing was introduced to me at an early age. One of seven children, I lived on a farm where our livelihood was dependent on physical labor and the weather. As was the custom in rural communities, when we were considered old enough, our parents sent us off to work in a field during the summer as our contribution to the family's income. The only pay was food, shelter and clothing. In addition, we received a small weekly allowance which was based upon our age. Needless to say, we worked hard for what we earned.

We spent money from our allowances on Saturdays—usually the only day that we left the farm during the summer except for Sundays. Saturdays and Sundays were significant days of the week for me and my siblings. In retrospect, I realize that those two days were about money and God.

We spent only a portion of our allowances on Saturday. Our parents expected us to save some and to set aside a portion for tithes to be placed in envelopes with our names on them. Such

was our respect for our parents that we never questioned them I these matters and understood that tithing was an expression of our appreciation for our bounty.

As an adult, I do not question the need for tithing, but there is another lesson that my parents taught that goes beyond giving money. Our salvation depends on our serving others on an individual basis. It's not enough to write a check and think that you have done enough.

Prayer: Thank you God, for providing for our needs as well as enough for us to help provide for the needs of others. We know that these opportunities to serve others is our way to eternal life. Amen.

Here are several versions of an "offering" hymn many of us grew up with, "*We Give Thee But Thine Own.*"

*We Give Thee But Thine Own* by Parklands Media  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ha3KLi3nKO4>

*We Give Thee But Thine Own* by Erin Jogue  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpTayoOkIX0>

*We Give Thee But Thine Own* by Andrew Remillard  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISoPbyXjQjg>

*We Give Thee But Thine Own* by St. Paul Lutheran Austin TX  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1ZNKPEHM24>

*We Give Thee But Thine Own* by Koine  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PB24dBXgZHI>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, June 17, 2021 not by Pastor Mark Opgrand but by  
Dessert First writer Lee Weddle #360**

**Dessert First: Still Tasty after 20 years. Day 4 of 5.**

Lee Weddle has served St. Paul's in many capacities over many years. He's been on the Nehemiah Team planning for the church's future. He has been a long-time Adult Forum Sunday School Class teacher alternating with Billy Mason. He has served as council member and in the areas of stewardship and finance. He has been employed as a CPA and Commercial Real Estate Broker with Colwell Banker. Lee and his wife Bettelou, a life-long St. Paul's member, will be relocating to Clinton, NC later this summer to be closer to their son Dave. From this devotion we see some of where Lee's servant heart has come from. Enjoy.

**The Heart of a Servant by Lee Weddle**

*<sup>26</sup> Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. (John. 12:26 NRS)*

Some of my most vivid memories of my childhood are of my grandfather "Pa" and my grandmother "Ma" (that what the grandchildren called them). I didn't know it then, but God was teaching me and showing me what it is like to be a servant of Christ.

After having been raised in one of the "hollows" of Kentucky, they moved to my hometown Ashland. There Pa and Ma started raising their family and Pa went to work in the steel mill as a laborer where he worked all his life until retirement. Not that their story to this point is so unusual, it's the other part that made such an impression on me.

While working full time at the steel mill, Pa was also a lay minister. I know he started at least two churches in Ashland. He preached the sermons on Sunday, visited the sick in the hospital, married couples in his home and baptized the sinners in the creek out behind one of the churches. And if that wasn't enough, many of their vacations centered around Pa leading a revival in some other city. And with all this, I can never remember when Pa and Ma didn't have time for the whole family. What wonderful memories God has blessed me with.

What makes people like my grandparents make such a commitment of their time, talent and resources to others? It can only be one thing. They heard and more importantly understood the love of the gospel and became servants of God. That, my friends, is the heart of stewardship out of which flows our giving.

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for the faith of my forefathers and the example they set for my life and others. In his name. Amen.*

*The Spirit Sends Us Forth To Serve* by Sammamish Hills Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jp7Qp4RE98A>

*Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service* by Katerina Souvorova

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SbL7iXf69xQ>

*When We Are Living* by St. Mark's Lutheran Winnepeg

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doE9rJIHwPw>

*Will You Let Me Be Your Servant* by Mary Preus

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsBCCz3Y7\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsBCCz3Y7_w)

*Love Consecrates the Humblest Act* by OPC Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JN5ql-vBuJU>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, June 18, 2021 not by Pastor Mark Opgrand but by "Dessert First" writer Paula Johnson #361**

**Dessert First: Still Tasty after 20 years. Day 5 of 5.**

Paula Johnson and her husband Marsh joined St. Paul's in 2000. Prior to retirement, she worked as an Executive Secretary for the Blackstone Corp in Jamestown, NY. Her husband Marsh practiced dentistry. This devotion recalls an experience while Marsh was attending a continuing education event held at St. Simons Island in Georgia. This devotion highlights another aspect of stewardship, the stewardship of time linked to hospitality. Paula died in 2019 after a lengthy illness, and is survived by Marsh, who continues to be active at his new residence, The Woods at Holly Tree. Enjoy.

**Gift from a Stranger by Paula Johnson**

*<sup>11</sup> Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.*  
(Rom. 12:11-13 NRS)

My husband was attending a seminar, and our two daughters were anxious to go on a trail ride through the coastal marshland. It was at the stables that I began talking with a silver-haired woman, Eileen, who had brought her four-year-old granddaughter, Alicia, to ride just as she had done years before with her own daughter, Alicia's mother. Eileen's eyes sparkled as she told me about her daughter's love for horses and the horse shows she had participated in.

We chatted until it was time for my daughters to leave on their ride and Alicia finished her lesson. Eileen asked if I was going to return to the guest house where we were staying, and I told her that I planned to wait at the stables and do some reading. Without hesitation, she asked if I had been to Christ Church and offered to show me around the island. I found that to be somewhat unusual, but I accepted her offer.

Eileen told me of the histories and the families on the island; and, although not originally from the area, her heart and home were not here on St. Simons. She told me about her late husband and her children who had been blessed with happy marriages. She took me to her beautiful home and showed me seascapes she had painted and told me how she was teaching Alicia to do the same.

Proudly displayed on an easel in her dining room was a large seascape they had painted together. Eileen shared her love of colors and of certain seashells. She told me about Children's Hospital where she volunteered, as well as knitted, for the children. She recommended several books to me 'not only for the wholesomeness but for their historical significance.'

Before I knew it, our time was gone, and we returned to the stables. As we were riding along, Alicia showed me some pennies she had in a cup. I told her to keep saving them, and those pennies would grow. Eileen said, "Yes, but we have talked about how you can be rich in many ways other than money." Alicia turned and said, "I love, you Nana." Eileen responded, "I love you too."

My life seemed forever changed and opened to life's unexpected beauty around me. I had to marvel at all she had share in one hour of time and to wonder I I could ever have given so freely to a stranger as she had. Could you?

*Prayer: Thank you O God for all those who have enriched our lives with the gift of time. May the time we give to each other magnify your call to hospitality. Amen.*

*Voices Raised to You* ELW 845 by Sammamish Hills

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sSIHfSL2NYc>

*Amazing Grace/He Is Lord* by Steph Macleod and Scottish singers (new)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOiKZKV3vxl>

*It is Well With My Soul* by Gracias Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmyRnxQP1OQ>

*Kindness* by Chris Tomlin

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmlmUsx\\_068](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmlmUsx_068)

*Nearer My God to Thee* by Gracias Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqLuX1-40tk>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, June not by Pastor Mark Opgrand but by *Dessert First* writer Hardy Wessell #362**

**Dessert First: Still Tasty after 20 years. Day 6 of 5 6.**

I'm adding a sixth devotion by Hardy Wessell (1925-2009), whose lineage in Wilmington goes back to before the founding of St. Paul's. Ancestor Captain Jacob Wessell, came to Wilmington in 1840. Other forbears, Mr. and Mrs. A.D. Wessell, gave St. Paul's its baptismal font in 1887; it is still used today. He was also related to the Schulken family, three of whom have homes identified on Wilmington's 1856 City Map. Hardy's brief reflection recalls his grandmother Eliza Schulken, active at St. Paul's, and deeply influential in Hardy's faith development. This witness reminds us of the value of receiving and passing on the faith. Enjoy.

Since receiving the request to contribute a page to the Devotional Booklet, I've thought: "*What can I say?*" I've never had a miraculous conversion or seen the "*Flash of Light.*" I can't share what I haven't experienced. I can only share a lifetime of growth in grace from being brought up in a Christian home of four generations.

I was one of those blessed to be raised in Grandma's place. "*Nanna*" – Mrs. Eliza Schulken – lost her husband in the early years of her marriage and raised her two daughters through college to become teachers. She began playing the organ at St. Paul's at age 17, so church was a big part of our family life from the beginning. My parents moved in when they married and shared the house – and shared Miss Liza's dedication to St. Paul's.

Times were not all that good in the 30's but there was always enough to put the church first and still have dessert. When cash was short, time and talents were often substituted but the church always came first.

"*Give and it shall be given to you*" are not just words. Our family has been blessed beyond belief! And the best return is the knowledge that "the Grace of God is sufficient" and THE BEST IS YET TO COME.

Prayer: *Thank you God, for life. Amen.*

*Faith of our Fathers* by Fountainview Academy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSHzrlGoelQ>

*Faith of our Mothers* by Jeff Olmstead Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTt1z4SWUZA>

*God of our Fathers* by Eamon Younis

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGexeAllgjQ>

*God of our Fathers* (Trumpet version) by Trumpet Thrower

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gsC44qjM\\_pl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gsC44qjM_pl)

*For All The Faithful Women* by First Plymouth

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4sedyD4-4>

*Rise Up O Saints of God* by Sammamish & Mt. Si

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQil4RTBxeU>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, June 22, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #363

### The Bible's first recorded song.

*Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: "I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea. <sup>2</sup> The LORD is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. (Exod. 15:1-2 NRS)*

I was reading Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible* where he was discussing how the Psalms are both prayers and hymns. The Hebrew title of the psalms also means "hymns," Bonhoeffer observed. The word "Psalter" originally referred to a musical instrument, and "later became associated with the collection of prayers which were offered to God in the form of songs".

Reading this, I wondered about the Bible's first recorded song, not in a studio but as remembered in their early oral history. That brought me to Exodus 15, where the defeat of Pharaoh and the Egyptians was sung about first by Moses, and then by Miriam, Moses's sister.

It is interesting to remember that Moses was a reluctant speaker, and that's why he had his brother Aaron speak for him before Pharaoh, but apparently had no problem coming up with and belting out a 19-verse hymn. I only included the first two at the beginning of this devotion.

The song was so immediately popular that sister Miriam added tambourines and dance moves to it:

*<sup>20</sup> Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. <sup>21</sup> And Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea." (Exod. 15:20-21 NRS)*

As an ancient song, we have long lost the melody that accompanied it. Some of the words, however, have been preserved through an Israeli folk tune named "Tzena." Many of us remember learning "I will sing unto the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously" (The Horse and Rider Song) at Vacation Bible School or at church camp. While it is a lively, engaging song, it has never been included in any of our Lutheran hymnals. I wonder why?

The song celebrates God rescuing God's chosen people from Egypt, and literally dividing the waters so the Israelites could begin their wilderness wanderings on the way to the promised land. When times were hard, I can imagine this song remembered. Much later on, when times were settled and they were happily united under King David, many new songs emerged in a

form we now know as the Psalms. Singing has always been important for people of God in worship, beginning a very long time ago.

Let us pray: *We praise, you O God with our songs of joy and look to you for help in times of need. We thank you for joyful songs, but also for being able to sing the sad songs as well, all part of recognizing you are our God and we your people. Amen.*

Here are several versions of “*I will sing unto the Lord,*” and a rendition or two of “*Tzena, Tzena,*” the popular Israeli folk melody behind “*I will sing.*”

*I Will Sing Unto the Lord* (Horse and Rider Song) by Anto Oswin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwM4214SRYU>

*I Will Sing Unto the Lord* (Horse and Rider Song) by Shiloh Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MID8oazqZ-8>

*I Will Sing Unto the Lord* (Horse and Rider Song) by the NCrew

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2uTqhH77QM>

*I Will Sing Unto the Lord* by Morning Star (totally different tune)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQN3wFFQD-4>

*Tzena Tzena* by Connie Francis

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WtQnH2lekl>

*Tzena Tzena* by Jewish Starlight Orchestra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2z1hmpkyKPI>

**The puzzling popularity of England's most popular hymn.**

<sup>3</sup> But let the righteous be joyful; let them exult before God; let them be jubilant with joy. <sup>4</sup> Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds-- his name is the LORD-- be exultant before him. (Ps. 68:3-4 NRS)

I recently discovered a televised BBC program called "Songs of Praise" featuring England's ten most popular hymns. Each of the ten hymns selected was introduced with a little background and then performed beautifully as they counted down to number one.

Before I name #1, (which puzzles me) let me share the other nine. At 10: "*I, the Lord of Sea and Sky (Here I Am, Lord)*. 9. "*Be Still for the Presence of the Lord.*" 8. "*Amazing Grace.*" 7. "*Guide Me, O Thou Great Redeemer.*" 6. "*I Vow to Thee, My Country.*" 5. "*Abide With Me.*" 4. "*Dear Lord, and Father of Mankind.*" 3. "*In Christ Alone.*" 2. "*How Great Thou Art.*"

.... and at number one: "***JERUSALEM.***"

Of these ten, eight have been sung here at St. Paul's. A ninth, "*I Vow to Thee, My Country*" is in our hymnal but with different words. Missing is "*Jerusalem*," England's most popular hymn. In England, it has been sung during church services, weddings, funerals, sporting events, political conferences and has more than a few times been featured in movies ("*Chariots of Fire*", for example).

As one of the most famous songs ever written, much of "*Jerusalem*" puzzles me. The musical composition is unquestionably stunning. The lyrics are powerful, written by famous Poet William Blake. It really is a great hymn. So what puzzles?

Let's get those lyrics in front of us:

*And did those feet in ancient time  
Walk upon England's mountains green?  
And was the holy lamb of God  
On England's pleasant pastures seen?*

*And did the countenance divine  
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?  
And was Jerusalem builded here  
Among those dark satanic mills?*

*Bring me my bow of burning gold!  
Bring me my arrows of desire!*

*Bring me my spear: o clouds unfold!  
Bring me my chariots of fire!*

*I will not cease from mental fight;  
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand  
Till we have built Jerusalem  
In England's green and pleasant land.*

Okay here it is: This incredible hymn is inspired by an essentially silly English legend, that before leaving this earth a young Jesus and his Uncle Joe, from Arimathea, came to Glastonbury, England to create heaven in England in contrast to the “*dark satanic mills*” of the Industrial Revolution.

The poem preceded the music by a hundred years, but when set to music amid the horrendous casualties of WWI, it became a song that lifted spirits resolved to accept sacrifices for the greater good.

But going back to the questions posed as the hymn begins: “*And did those feet in ancient time, Walk upon England's mountains green? And was the holy lamb of God, On England's pleasant pastures seen?*”

The answer is “*Well, no, according to the scriptures.*” Even if it is argued that it links to Revelation’s discussion of “*The Second Coming,*” (Rev. 3:12 and 21:2), that suggests the second coming already happened when Jesus’ walked upon England’s mountains.

I suppose if I had grown up with this hymn and didn’t examine it too carefully in light of the biblical witness, it might have been a favorite for me too. It certainly stirs patriotism (British, that is) among those who sing it, and I’m sure that is why it is more popular some of the other favorites which have a different focus. It does make me appreciate even more, however, the other nine which present a clearer witness for Jesus Christ and God’s revealed work through the scriptures.

Let us pray. *Thank you, O God, for beautiful music and beautiful words that accompany it. We are especially grateful for words and music that clearly express your love for us through your Holy Gospel. May our words and music be a witness for all the world to experience your deep and abiding love and hope for the future. Amen.*

... and with all this musing, it must be said that it remains a beautiful hymn, however puzzling.

*Jerusalem* by BLAKE on BBC

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C79L3vjKAWQ>

*Jerusalem* by Charlotte Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyZSPci7bKU>

*Jerusalem* by Waynflete Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKRHWT6xdEU>

*Jerusalem*, from Royal Wedding

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4yIWBO\\_7nio](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4yIWBO_7nio)

*Jerusalem* from ending of academy award winning "Chariots of Fire."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vxIX5wyEQs>

and in case you are further interested, here's a link to the whole BBC show, *Songs of Praise*.

Really great music!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2BP9HSiuvk&list=WL&index=1&t=14s>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, June 24, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #365

### When a great hymn becomes an even better hymn with alternate lyrics.

<sup>30</sup> *I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving.* <sup>31</sup> *This will please the LORD more than an ox or a bull with horns and hoofs.* (Ps. 69:30-31 NRS)

... and then there was that other favorite English hymn that also puzzled me. Yesterday I mused about England's favorite hymn, "Jerusalem", as revealed on the BBC's Songs of Praise television program. "Jerusalem" is not a favorite American Hymn, presumably because it is harder for us Uncle Joe from Arimathea. Even so, it is a stirring hymn.

Here's the list again: At 10: "I, the Lord of Sea and Sky (Here I Am, Lord). 9. "Be Still for the Presence of the Lord." 8. "Amazing Grace." 7. "Guide Me, O Thou Great Redeemer." 6. "I Vow to Thee, My Country." 5. "Abide With Me." 4. "Dear Lord, and Father of Mankind." 3. "In Christ Alone." 2. "How Great Thou Art." and 1. Jerusalem.

Eight of the ten listed hymns could easily be American favorites. One would likely not be an American favorite, even though it is an equally splendid (or even superior to some) hymn. That is "**I Vow to Thee, My Country.**" How come? Well, "My country" is England, not the United States, so we would be unlikely to be drawn to a hymn where we "vow" to a country not our own. We would not expect "My Country Tis of Thee" to be a British favorite as our country is not their country. They do have the same tune, however, in "God Save the Queen."

For the British, "I Vow to Thee, My Country" is considered an equally patriotic hymn to "Jerusalem." The text was first published as a poem by Sir Cecil Spring Rice around 1908, and modified during WWI. It's theme of love and sacrifice and devotion both to the nation and the kingdom of God deeply connected with the times.

It was when the words were connected to a variation of Gustav Holtz's "Jupiter" from his "Planets Suite" that the song's popularity really took off. It's stirring and deeply moving melody has made it a favorite hymn for nearly a hundred years now.

Here are the words, heard most recently around the world during the funeral of Prince Philip.

I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above,  
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love;  
The love that asks no questions, the love that stands the test,  
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best;  
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price,  
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.

And there's another country, I've heard of long ago,  
Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know;

We may not count her armies, we may not see her King;  
Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering;  
And soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase,  
And her ways are ways of gentleness, and all her paths are peace.

It really is quite an exquisite hymn, though made even more accessible to us American Christians by the words written by William Whitla for ELW 710, *Let Streams of Living Justice*, and Michael Perry for ELW 880 “O God beyond All Praising.”

I am really curious about which of these versions of Holtz’s Tune Thaxted speak most deeply to you. I know how the British have voted. How about you?

***Let Streams of Living Justice*** ELW 710

1 Let streams of living justice flow down upon the earth;  
give freedom's light to captives, let all the poor have worth.  
The hungry's hands are pleading, the workers claim their rights,  
the mourners long for laughter, the blinded seek for sight.  
Make liberty a beacon, strike down the iron pow'r;  
abolish ancient vengeance: proclaim your people's hour.

2 For healing of the nations, for peace that will not end,  
for love that makes us lovers, God grant us grace to mend.  
Weave our varied gifts together; knit our lives as they are spun;  
on your loom of time enroll us, till our thread of life is run.  
O great weaver of our fabric, bind church and world in one;  
dye our texture with your radiance, light our colors with your sun.

3 Your city's built to music; we are the stones you seek;  
your harmony is language; we are the words you speak.  
Our faith we find in service, our hope in others' dreams,  
our love in hand of neighbor; our homeland brightly gleams.  
Inscribe our hearts with justice; your way—the path untried;  
your truth—the heart of stranger; your life—the Crucified.

Text: William Whitla, b. 1934

***O God beyond All Praising*** ELW 880

1 O God beyond all praising, we worship you today  
and sing the love amazing that songs cannot repay;  
for we can only wonder at ev'ry gift you send,

at blessings without number and mercies without end:  
we lift our hearts before you and wait upon your word,  
we honor and adore you, our great and mighty Lord.

2 The flow'r of earthly splendor in time must surely die,  
its fragile bloom surrender to you, the Lord most high;  
but hidden from all nature the eternal seed is sown—  
though small in mortal stature, to heaven's garden grown:  
for Christ, your gift from heaven, from death has set us free,  
and we through him are given the final victory.

3 Then hear, O gracious Savior, accept the love we bring,  
that we who know your favor may serve you as our King;  
and whether our tomorrows be filled with good or ill,  
we'll triumph through our sorrows and rise to bless you still:  
to marvel at your beauty and glory in your ways,  
and make a joyful duty our sacrifice of praise.

Text: Michael Perry, 1942-1996

Let us pray. *Thank you again, O God for songs that stir our soul and draw us close to you. Amen.*

*I Vow to Thee My Country* by AGTFCZ

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6ZvyIOSy5A>

*I Vow to Thee My Country* at Festival of Remembrance Royal Albert Hall

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvouc8Qs\\_MI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvouc8Qs_MI)

*Let Streams of Living Justice* by Samm Hills

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehWSoU4PVhU>

*Let Streams of Living Justice* by Christ Lutheran Visalia, CA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MezbG6HCj0s>

*O God Beyond All Praising* by GIA Productions

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7IL\\_YIO6rh0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7IL_YIO6rh0)

*O God Beyond All Praising* by Villnova Pastoral Musicians

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4V-AQbKyq48>

*Jupiter Theme in O God Beyond All Praising (Instrumental)* by Lyceum American Heritage School

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWImXdnxzNE>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, June 25, 2021** not by Pastor Mark Opgrand but **by Stan McLeroy #366**

*Over the course of this past year (and 366 devotions), readers have occasionally offered written feedback. When Stan McLeroy reflected on one I wrote, I immediately recognized that Stan is a good writer. Therefore it was natural for me to invite him to offer something if he was so moved. I really enjoyed this piece and know you will too. And perhaps some others who enjoy writing might be also moved to share something. I also enjoyed that Stan found the music to attach. Thanks, Stan.*

**I am Satan**

a

by S<sup>^</sup>tan McLeroy

Granddaddy had lived with us for over 5 years when I left for college in September of 1966. In mid-November, on one of my all-too-frequent expensive long-distance calls home, my father told me that Granddaddy had gone into the hospital and might not be coming home. He had had heart issues since he first came to live with us, but he was 82 now, and the repeated strain of mild heart attacks was beginning to take its irreversible toll.

My father told me also that Granddaddy was very remorseful about losing his temper with me once when I was in the 7th grade, and asked me to send him a telegram in the hospital saying simply, "All is forgiven." That request told me that things were indeed serious. I sent the telegram as my father had requested.

When I came home two weeks later for Thanksgiving I went immediately to the hospital. Granddaddy was in bed, propped up a little, but asleep and looking washed-out and drained of all energy. He perked up a bit when I called his name. He was glad to see me, and asked how I was doing at college.

Without much more small talk he thanked me for sending him the telegram, and apologized for striking me that day several years earlier. I don't honestly remember what I said, but probably something simple like, "It's OK." Then a pause. And then, with calmness and acceptance in his voice he said, "I'm tired, and I'm ready to die."

I knew this visit would be awkward, but I was not prepared for the conversation to go all the way... There. We were an extremely small family: my parents, my sister and I, one aunt and uncle, no first cousins, one grandfather.

At that point in my life I had really experienced only one death before. In addition, we were never a warm, fuzzy, touchy-feely, huggy family that shared emotions. So even if I had experienced a hundred deaths, whatever I might have learned would have been distorted through the astigmatism of my family's outlook on life.

"I'm tired, and I'm ready to die," said Granddaddy.

And I replied, "No! Don't say that!"

Granddaddy told me he guessed that I was just too young to understand that anyone could be ready to die. But he was. As I left the hospital, I was confused, and probably in the Anger stage of grief. I was angry that he was dying, just when I was coming home for my first break from college. He had a degree in Mathematics - I wanted to talk to him, I wanted him to be proud of me. I think I accepted his death, but I didn't accept his acceptance of death. It wasn't supposed to work that way.

Even though I was sure Granddaddy was near death, I was supposed to tell him to hang in there, that he will get better and come home. I was supposed to say anything to avoid actually talking with him about his death. Before I could give him that facade of encouragement, he went straight to the heart of the matter, and I had no way of dealing with it, no stock reply, no answer except, "Shut up! I can't deal with that, so I don't want to hear it!"

Almost 30 years later my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 80. She underwent treatment, and for the next year things went along very well. And then the cancer came back with a vengeance. The surface rash was extensive and looked like a third-degree burn. It became clear that this was beyond any hope of remission.

My sister visited from Georgia and spent time reading the Bible with Mama. I lived nearby and visited often, but found it was still impossible to speak with her easily and frankly about her impending death. She told me she wanted to be buried in her hometown of Strasburg, Virginia. I replied, half-jokingly, "You know, Mama, when you die you don't really have any control over what happens!" Anything - anything! - to avoid talking about it.

Although my mother was six years older than my dad, she was generally in better health -- and much easier to be around. I had been sure that my dad would die first, and I had a mental picture of Mama deservedly enjoying her final years, letting go of the house and clutter, and being doted on.

I know I was in the Anger stage of grief: angry for life having dealt her this painful blow, angry at doctors for not having seen the cancer returning earlier, anger at my plans for her golden years being thwarted. But I was also - unknowingly - in the Bargaining stage: maybe if Mama thought we would not honor her burial wishes, then she just couldn't die. Mama punched back: "I have a right to tell you where I will be buried!"

Ten years later, my son's friend Alex had surgery for a congenital heart condition. He had had numerous surgeries since birth, but this one was different: the doctors told the family that this latest operation must be done or Alex would surely die soon, but the chance of surviving this operation was only 50%. Alex did not survive the operation.

At the memorial service, Alex's father, Jonathan, told how he and his wife visited their son in the hospital room the night before the operation, to keep his spirits up. At one point Alex turned to them and asked the question I'm sure they dreaded: "But Dad, what if I die?" Jonathan replied, "Alex, we love you. We will always love you. And if you die, we will still love you."

Alex's father finally gave me a model for how to speak with a dying loved one. But thinking about my earlier inability to talk about their death has continued to gnaw at me. It wasn't until this year while listening to a Gospel that its full significance struck me.

Mark 8: 31-33

*And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed and after three days rise again.*

*And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.*

*But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.*

After hearing this passage for decades in church I finally realized that the parallels between my behavior and Peter's were unmistakable. Jesus said he would die. Peter didn't want to hear it and rebuked Jesus. Jesus put Peter in his place: "Get behind me, Satan." Granddaddy and Mama both told me they were going to die. I didn't want to hear it ("Don't say that!" "I will not execute your wishes, therefore you cannot and will not die!"). They both put me in my place ("You're too young to understand", "You WILL execute my wishes!")

I am Peter. I am Satan. For my own reasons I put my needs ahead of theirs at the time they most needed to hear me say simply that I love them, I will always love them, and when they die I will still love them.

*Dear Lord, we work against your will for many reasons, including selfishness and fear. Calm our minds and hearts so we can hear and know your will. Especially help us to not merely academically accept your will for our own death, but to embrace our death as the culmination of your plan for our whole lives. Only then can we honestly and empathetically tell others what they most need to hear in their final hours.*

Here is a selection of music chosen to help you calm your mind and your fears, to be at peace with God's will, including His plan for the deaths of ourselves and those we love, and to help you help others on their own journeys. All are hymns from our Evangelical Lutheran Worship book.

*Calm to the Waves* (#794), First Plymouth Church, Lincoln Nebraska

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxSu7uCpmwo>

*Mayenziwe* (Your Will Be Done) (#741), St. David's Church, Exeter, UK

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AaSk8LGB\\_KQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AaSk8LGB_KQ)

*In Peace and Joy I Now Depart* (#440), Mount Olive Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, MN

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YM8ARKAomUQ>

*In Peace and Joy I Now Depart* (#440), West Northridge Productions

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aszfMDdwCqI>

*Will You Let Me Be Your Servant* (#659), Jack Terrell-Wilkes (Sung by Mary Preus)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsBCCz3Y7\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsBCCz3Y7_w)

*How Firm a Foundation* (#796), Chelsea Moon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8O5RyGRmx8>

*Psalms 23* (not #778), Bobby McFerrin

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=000AuO\\_IBJk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=000AuO_IBJk)

*Precious Lord Take My Hand* (#773), Luther Barnes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ysK1eN2mFI>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, June 28, 2021** not by Pastor Mark Opgrand but **by Chaplain Bob Weeks #367**

## **WHO IS JESUS CHRIST TO YOU?**

**By Chaplain Bob Weeks**

Scripture: *"Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book (The Gospel of John), but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."* John 20:30-31 (NIV)

Today, the Christian Church remembers a servant that spent his life explaining who Jesus Christ was. This servant's name is Irenaeus. He was born about 130 and lived in Smyrna. Irenaeus had seen and heard the preaching of Polycarp, the last known living connection with the apostles of Jesus, who in turn was said to have heard John the Evangelist.

One of the earliest heresies to arise in the Christian Church was Gnosticism. Irenaeus was one of the chief opponents of Gnosticism. Gnostics were Docetists. The word Docetists come from the Greek term meaning *"to seem."* They taught that Christ did not really have a material body, but only seemed to have one. His body was an appearance, so that he could communicate with humans, but the body was not really there. Gnostics did not believe that Jesus was born, and did not really suffer or die, but merely appeared to do so. It was in opposition to Gnosticism that the Apostle John wrote (I John 4:1-3) that anyone who denies that Jesus Christ has come in flesh is of antichrist.

Irenaeus proclaimed that the Word of God (*Logos*) which became embodied in flesh, Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, the Mind of God, and was the Father Himself. Irenaeus stressed that Jesus Christ was both man and God, fully man. He believed that in Jesus God Himself suffered for mankind.

Gnosticism is still alive and experiencing something of a revival despite its status in church history as a vanquished Christian heresy. A collection of thirteen ancient books containing over fifty texts was discovered in Egypt in 1945. This important discovery includes a large number of Gnostic scriptures.

The magazine *Gnosis* began publication in 1985 and regularly runs articles on Gnosticism and Gnostic themes such as *"Valentinus: A Gnostic for All Seasons."* In Palo Alto, California,

priestess Bishop Rosamunde Miller officiates the weekly gathering of Ecclesia Gnostica Myteriorum. Such action calls every Christian to know who Jesus Christ really was.

A pastor gave his Catechetical class a quiz and one of the questions was, Who is Jesus Christ to You? The following answer from one student was very gratifying: “God sent Jesus to earth to show us Himself and what He wanted us to do and to save us.”

The Creeds we recite in Lutheran worship remind us of who Jesus Christ is. Irenaeus wrote that these creeds are a “Rule of Truth” used to combat heresy. Remember Jesus was a real baby born of Mary; that He grew to be a real man; and that He died on a cross as a real human being; and he rose from the dead as a real person.

### **Think about Jesus today! Who is Jesus Christ to You?**

*Prayer: God, you made yourself known in your Son, Jesus, redeemer of the world. Help us to remember that His birth as a human child, His life and ministry as a human, will never be forgotten in our Faith Journey. Amen.*

*For All Your Saints, O Lord* by St. Paul’s Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NW57GzsibtI>

*For All Your Saints, O Lord* (alternate tune) by David Galvin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ed5tOAbZe8Q>

*Sing With All the Saints in Glory* by ILP Music

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FML\\_usf8NR0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FML_usf8NR0)

*Come, We That Love the Lord* ELW 625 by Celebration Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmbqN0yiT4I>

*Marching to Zion* by Sharon Mennonite Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRyA2qiLqaM>

*Song for the Saints* by Kenny Chesney

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZp0ZIBOpIE>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, June 29, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #368**

**Comparing the Champlain Towers collapse in Surfside Florida to the Tower of Siloam collapse in Luke 13.**

*Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? <sup>3</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them-- do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." (Lk. 13:1-5 NIV)*

As I read the tragic story of the collapse of the Champlain Towers in Surfside, Florida June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021, I recalled a similar tragic news story described in Luke 13. Once every three years this text comes up in our lectionary reading, and each time we preachers are challenged with what to say about it.

The story of Galileans killed by Pilate and the eighteen persons who died when the Tower of Siloam collapsed on them had raised questions about sin. Were those who died guilty of sin? Did they deserve what happened to them? Why do good people suffer like this?

These are age old questions seemingly made more confusing when Jesus first suggests, "*No, they were not worse sinners than anyone else who dies an untimely death*" but then goes on to say, "*But unless you repent, you too will perish.*"

The key to understanding this is first understanding what the deaths of the Jerusalemites by Pilate and the Galileans near the tower had in common. The key word here is "*untimely.*" Neither died of natural causes after a long full life. Their deaths were untimely and unexpected.

In responding to the "*news*" of his day, Jesus makes a point that we need to be right with God all the time because we do not know when we might suffer an untimely death.

The people in the Champlain Towers had been enjoying their time at the beach when at 1:23 AM early Thursday, June 24<sup>th</sup>, most of the tower collapsed. I'm certain that not one resident, or their family or friends would have imagined in a million years that in the blink of an eye on that night, most of the tower would be reduced to a pile of rubble. The same was probably true for the eighteen victims of the Tower of Siloam which similarly collapsed.

When Jesus speaks of "*repentance*" in this context, it is about being ready, being right with God and reconciled to God because untimely tragic things happen and people die. In these examples, it is not because they sinned that they died. Untimely deaths happen. But whenever we poor sinners repent of our sins, that is, any and all sins, we are right with God and are prepared in case something tragic happens.

It is as St. Paul says in Romans 14: *“<sup>8</sup> If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.”* (Rom. 14:8 NIV)

During this year of pandemic, we have developed a greater awareness of being vulnerable to forces outside our control. This awareness continues to be important because, even as we feel a greater degree of safety and security in “getting out”, everything around us can still “collapse” with little warning.

This does not mean we should live our lives fearfully, worrying about what might happen. Rather, it means we can live our lives confidently, trusting that in life, and in death, we belong to God.

Let us pray. *We pray for all those suffering from tragic loss of life because of untimely deaths. Help us always been in a healthy relationship with you, O God, so that no matter what happens in our lives, we are confident that you will always hold us close. Amen.*

*Day by Day* ELW 790 by Antrim Mennonite Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INVCcph6cni>

*In All Our Grief and Fear We Turn to You* by St. Andrew’s Lutheran ELW 615

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyG840GOjQo>

*Children of the Heavenly Father* by Concordia Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NqzFGLYyo>

*How Firm a Foundation* by Russell Woolen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FqiwrsH4epE>

*Christ is Made the Sure Foundation* ELW 645 by

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXJ0chKWNbA>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, June 30, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #369

### Have you considered becoming "Biprayeral"?

<sup>9</sup> After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. <sup>10</sup> Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread. <sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. <sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. (Matt. 6:9-13 KJV)

If "Bilingual" means being able to speak two languages, what might it be to pray more than one version of "The Lord's Prayer." "What", you say? "There is more than one version of the Lord's Prayer?"

Some of you know this already. If you were a Lutheran, Catholic, Methodist or Episcopalian, and you dated a Presbyterian, Baptist, or Congregationalist, the first time you prayed The Lord's Prayer, one of you said "trespasses" and the other "debts." One of you might have added an extra "and ever" to the "forever, amen."

Whatever the prayer you grew up with is, of course, the right one. Some of you were forced to switch if you ended up joining a church whose Lord's Prayer was different (wrong?). If you were a "debts" person, and grew up with the King James Bible, you would cite St. Matthew's version of Jesus teaching the Lord's Prayer (see above). End of story.

Actually not end of story. Not if you look to the King James Version of the Lord's Prayer in Luke's gospel:

<sup>2</sup> And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. <sup>3</sup> Give us day by day our daily bread. <sup>4</sup> And forgive us our **sins**; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. (Lk. 11:2-4 KJV).

These two versions are more similar than different, but "**sins**" is substituted for "**debts**." But next we are instructed to forgive everyone who is "indebted" to us. So maybe the "debts" version is the "right" version. So where does "**trespasses**" come from in the version we pray?

It comes just after the "Amen" in Matthew's version.

<sup>13</sup>For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. <sup>14</sup> For if ye forgive men their **trespasses**, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: <sup>15</sup> But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matt. 6:13-15 KJV)

It was also William Tyndale who translated the Bible into English before the King James version. Tyndale went with “*trespasses*” over “*debts*.” His translation carried over into the early Anglican “Book of Common Prayer,” featuring “*trespasses*” over “*debts*.”

In 1969 a group called the “*International Consultation on English Texts*” (ICET) was formed to encourage worshipping communities to review their prayers and traditional liturgical texts with the hope that a common lectionary and worship sources could be developed that would support our common faith. It later became the “*English Language Liturgical Consultation*” (ELLC) and it is from that a newer version of the Lord’s Prayer was developed.

Faithful to the original Biblical texts, this was a new version of the Lord’s Prayer that Christians could pray together in harmony. This has been included next to our traditional version of the Lord’s Prayer since the “Green” Evangelical Lutheran Worship hymnal was adopted in 1978. Therefore this “new” version isn’t that new, but remains a faithful alternative to “*debts*” and “*trespasses*” versions. Here it is:

**Our Father in heaven,  
    hallowed be your name,  
    your kingdom come,  
    your will be done,  
        on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
    as we forgive those  
        who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
    and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
    and the glory are yours,  
    now and forever. Amen.**

When I began working as a campus pastor with Our Saviour Lutheran Church in West Lafayette, Indiana in 1984, this version was prayed every Sunday. We all became “*Biprayeral*” and it was quite fulfilling. Whenever that version was prayed at synod assemblies, we already knew it by heart. I don’t believe it should replace our beloved traditional Lord’s Prayer but think of how wonderful it is when Lutherans and Presbyterians worship together and we’re not awkwardly clashing our trespasses with our debts. Let’s become “*Biprayeral!*”

Tomorrow I’ll look further at the ways the Lord’s Prayer has been adapted from scripture.

Let us pray. *Our Father....*

*The Lord's Prayer* by Veritas

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSgFbu6c-h4>

*The Lord's Prayer* by Andrea Bocelli

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tf1wtzOoXDA>

*The Lord's Prayer* by Jackie Evancho

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vg2AsS4CErM>

*The Lord's Prayer* by 65 Seasons

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKaUf7QiU5Y>

*The Lord's Prayer* by Sister Janet Mead

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXj-ZcWAjBo>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, July 1, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand # 370**

**Forgive us our what? Trespasses versus debts versus sins in the Lord's Prayer**

*And forgive us our **debts**, as we forgive our debtors.* (Matt. 6:12 KJG)

*and forgive us our **sins**, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.* (Matt. 6:12 NLT)

*"For if you forgive others their **trespasses**, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*

(Matthew 6:14–15)

The biggest thing people notice when praying the Lord's Prayer is that some versions say "forgive us our trespasses" while others say "forgive us our debts" and still others say "forgive us our sins?" So what's the difference and which one is right (besides the one I pray)?

Perhaps the first question in unpacking this is this: What is it that "we're forgiving?" "Debts" (in English) covers both financial and non-financial owing, as in "mortgage debt," or "debt of gratitude." "Trespass" points to property violations. "Sin" connotes violation of sacred commandments.

So which word is the right one?

Well, nearly all of the most credible English translations over time have translated the Greek words, "opheilēma/opheiletēs", as "debts/debtors." And that's because in the New Testament and the early Greek language Bible (Septuagint), these words almost always convey the meaning of owing a financial or moral debt or obligation.

In Luke's version of the prayer, Jesus says, "and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us" ([Luke 11:4](#)). In this case, the Greek word used for "sins" is "hamartia", which in general means "sins" or "guilt."

But since it's paired with "opheilonti" ("indebted to us") it's still clear that Jesus had the sense of debt in mind when referring to sin in the prayer he taught his disciples. So, saying "forgive us our sins" is not inaccurate; it just loses the nuance Jesus seems to have intended.

But why do some Christian traditions say "trespasses"?

If we just read down two verses in Matthew. we see one answer, because Jesus says,

*"For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*

(Matthew 6:14–15)

The very first thing Jesus did after reciting this prayer is expound on the importance of forgiveness. And to really drive home what he meant, he purposefully chose a different word for sin with a different nuance than the one he used in the prayer.

Matthew chose the Greek word “*paraptōma*” to capture Jesus’s intention in these verses, which in the context means a kind of sin that oversteps prescribed limits or boundaries — what we call a “*trespass*.”

Jesus wanted his disciples (including us) to understand sin in both the sense of owing a debt and the sense of trespassing into territory that doesn’t belong to us. Point taken!

But that still doesn’t explain why some English Christian traditions use the word “*trespasses*” when Jesus’s actual prayer used the word “*debts*.”

We have William Tyndale to thank for this. Tyndale (1494–1536) was the great English reformer who first translated the Bible into English from Hebrew and Greek texts.

Even though both Greek and Latin New Testaments used words in Matthew 6:12 that meant “*debt*,” and earlier church fathers (like Augustine) and translators (like Wycliffe) used “*debt*” language in this verse, for some reason Tyndale preferred “*trespasses*” (“and forgeve us oure treaspases, even as we forgeve them which treaspas us”).

No one really knows why Tyndale preferred this translation when few before or after him. He published his English New Testament in 1526 against the will and law of Henry VIII, and then lived in mortal danger only ten more years till he was betrayed by a friend and executed for his translation crimes.

He didn’t live long enough to make many revisions. And his preference didn’t leave its mark long in the legacy of translations — by 1611, the translators of the King James Version went back to using “*debts*.”

However, it certainly has left its mark in the legacy of *English Christian liturgies*, as I mentioned in yesterday’s devotion. “*Trespasses*” first appeared in the *Anglican Book of Common Prayer* in 1549, and as of the 1979 edition it was still being used.

It became so pervasive that English Catholic churches also adopted it and they still use it, even though when prayed in Latin, the “*Pater Noster*” (“Our Father”) uses “*debt/debtor*” language (*debita/debitoribus*).

That’s why a portion of our praying group says “*trespasses*” when we recite the Lord’s Prayer together. And the next time it happens, we can thank God for William Tyndale, because he gave his life that we might have our English Bibles.

And though “*debts*” is the more accurate translation of Matthew 6:12, God would want us to keep “*trespasses*” in our minds when praying, especially we twenty-first-century Westerners.

That’s because our modern understanding of “*debt*” might dull the edge this word had for Jesus’s original hearers. We hear it through the filters of our experience, which is different from Jesus’s audience and most of our human ancestors.

Debtors' prisons, for example, are an archaic thing of the unenlightened past, and we don't have kings throwing us into them ([Matthew 18:23–35](#)). We have merciful bankruptcy laws that protect us in ways inconceivable to past generations. So "debt" might not carry for us the sense of threat it did for them.

"*Trespassing*" hits us differently, especially when someone commits it against us. A trespasser occupies a realm or exercises a right that rightfully belongs to someone else. A trespasser violates another person. This can be very damaging. It can even rise to the level of treason, and result in a sentence of capital punishment.

This is what happened in the garden of Eden and what we have all done since. We have not merely borrowed from God an unpayable debt for which we appeal for bankruptcy protection.

We have seized a realm and exercised a right that belongs to him. We have violated God. We have committed a treasonous trespass, and we owe the debt of treason: death (Romans 6:23).

What Jesus has done, then, according to one atonement theory, is to pay that terrible debt completely. Then what he's requiring of us is to forgive others who have "*come into our territory*" and exercised a right that belongs to us, who have violated us — since we have been forgiven a far worse violation.

So if "*trespasses*" hits closer to home for us than "*debts*," it does no violence to Jesus's meaning if we pray, "*Father, forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.*"

And if pondering all this economics in the Lord's Prayer so detracts from a deeply meaningful uniting of our hearts with "Our Father," just don't worry about it. It's all good.

Let us pray. "Our Father ..."

*The Lord's Prayer* by Mid-American Music Festival

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4O\\_8DBj99s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4O_8DBj99s)

*The Lord's Prayer* in Korean by Seoul Central Male Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LgzSZCGPjVE>

*Baba Yetu* (Lord's Prayer in Swahili) by BYU Chorus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BuWr4gYJ6nM>

*Baba Yetu* by Stellenbosch Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PCa8RxaOPW8>

Don't know what this is, but it is beautiful

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHT55sR9u18>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday July 2, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #371**

**When doubt gnaws at our faith, remember this.**

*<sup>23</sup> Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. <sup>24</sup> So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. (Mk. 11:23-24 NRS)*

Sometimes I discover an insight that communicates clearly in a few words. This time it was a little piece written by my old seminary professor Gerhard Frost in a book called "*Bless My Growing.*" Its title is "*Faith Gnaws Too.*"

**"Yes, doubt does keep gnawing  
at one's faith"**

**I said it to a friend,  
my friend in deep distress.  
I said it to encourage,  
but quickly he replied.  
without a moment's hesitation,  
"But faith keeps gnawing  
at our doubts, too!"**

**It was a great response.  
I am strengthened by it.  
Intending to comfort,  
I was comforted  
Today I walk more boldly  
as I say:  
yes, doubt does gnaw at my faith  
but faith gnaws, too,  
and faith has better teeth!**

I read that, and then again, and a third time. So often I have been aware of doubt gnawing at faith, but never the other way around. Faith gnaws, too. What a wonderful insight, and definitely something to chew on today. Blessings.

Let us pray. *Thank you, O God for the gift of faith, and how, through the Holy Spirit, it comes upon us in different and sustaining ways. Give us that faith always. Amen.*

*My Faith Looks Up to Thee* by Micah Spruth-Jackson and Betty Heggemeyer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YImkOAJ1Z8>

*Faith In Doubt* by Roel Lungay

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prn\\_cRChVK4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prn_cRChVK4)

*Faith and Doubt* by Aaron Esbe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzx3pt2s1Ac>

*Faith for Doubt* by Molly Sarle

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GuW6hevlbno>

*He Did (Doubting Thomas Song)* by Blaine Garner

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rlmyl8z-s\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rlmyl8z-s_k)

*Holy Spirit Come to Me* by Julie Hoy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rji9SNuSQAk>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, July 5, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #372

### Is Independence Day a sacred holiday?

*Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. (1 Pet. 2:17 NKJ)*

I had first learned about First Baptist's (Dallas, TX) "Freedom Sunday" while reading Lutheran Pastor and writer Angela Denker's book, *"Red State Christians"*. She attended that service and described how it has become a huge annual event celebrating America's heritage as a Christian nation. With a two-hundred-person choir and orchestra, the service features patriotic speeches and music.

According to Senior Pastor Robert Jeffress, their purposes are "to express gratitude to God for His blessings on our country, to acknowledge the Christian foundation upon which our country was built and to declare our nation's duty to obey God if we are to enjoy God's continued blessing."

"We make it clear every year at our 'Celebrate Freedom' service that we are not worshipping America, but we are worshipping the God who has blessed America," Jeffress said.

"Furthermore, we always declare that our future blessing as a nation is conditioned upon our obedience to God. We close every 'Celebrate Freedom' service as we do every service at First Baptist Church, Dallas, with an explanation of the Gospel and an invitation to trust in Jesus Christ as Savior."

One evangelical scholar, Jonathan Leeman, also a Baptist, has expressed concern that such an approach might work against Christ's own "Great Commission: <sup>19</sup> *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* <sup>20</sup> *and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*" (Matt. 28:19-20 NRS)

"Church gatherings represent nothing if not a celebration of our heavenly, not earthly, citizenship. The Lord's Table is by definition a multinational one," he argued.

"Certainly, Christians should thank God for any good that he has given through one's nation. Paul argued in the Athenian Areopagus that God himself marked the times and boundaries of the nations (Acts 17:26). He exhorts churches to intercede for our rulers, to give thanks for them, to honor them (Rom. 13:7; 1 Tim. 2:1-2)."

He said it is right to give thanks for America's blessings, but at the same time warned that "when you add that patriotic song, display that flag, or invite that politician to offer a special word to your church gathering, you risk working against the Great Commission."

Leeman noted that Christ called on people to follow Him regardless of a nation's borders, and that other countries, such as the former Soviet Union and China, have tried to stop the spread of the faith, while in America it has flourished.

"So thank God for our nation on the Sunday nearest July 4. And if your church does celebrate with patriotic songs and flags, don't grumble in your heart. Praise God for his country-sized blessings. But remember what we're communicating about the *us* and the *them*," he urged.

Two interesting perspectives. I have to admit that learning about this year's "Freedom Sunday" at First Baptist, did bring a certain smile to my face. It is their tradition to have this Sunday always on the Sunday closest to the Fourth of July. Except this year. Apparently too many people in the choir and orchestra had travel plans that day. Therefore, they did it one week earlier. Too me, there would be no better Sunday to have such a service than when Sunday falls on the Fourth of July (but maybe only if it *is* a sacred holiday).

I appreciate Jeffress clarifying the need to emphasize the gospel when doing a "Freedom Sunday." I also appreciate Leeman's caution about being careful to not make it look, especially to the rest of the world, that we are promoting and celebrating "Christian Americanism" as if that is the gospel.

Happy Fifth of July.

Let us pray. *Thank you for our country and especially the freedoms it offers many. May we exercise our freedom to work for the good of all people everywhere. Remind us of our complete dependence on your grace and love. Bless we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Lord You Give the Great Commission* by OCP Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmjFLViW4P8&t=54s>

*This is My Song* by Voces8

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXooDIWVRZs>

*The Right Hand of God* by British Methodist Youth Choir ELW889

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qlb7KjsSwyE>

*Before You, Lord We Bow* ELW 893 by Highest Praise (note these words are by Francis Scott Key)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gYXBXMNH\\_4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gYXBXMNH_4)

*America The Beautiful* by Susan Winckler

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKYbLp9pliE>

## A "GOOSE" THAT WAS BURNED

By

Chaplain Bob Weeks

Scripture: *"As it is written: For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. No in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8:36-39 NIV)

One of Martin Luther's mentors was a man named **Johannes Huss** or **Jan Huss**. John was born around 1369 in a Southern Bohemian (now the Czech Republic) town named Husinec. The word "*Hus*" translates to "*Goose*."

In order to avoid poverty, Jan trained for the priesthood. After earning a Bachelor of Arts degree and being ordained as a priest, he began to preach in Prague at the Bethlehem Chapel. He opposed many aspects of the Roman Catholic Church in Bohemia such as the nature of the church, the selling of ecclesiastic privileges, and the Eucharist.

Huss was stirred by the writings of John Wycliffe, who, about one hundred years before, was an English Biblical translator and who became a deserter of the Roman Catholic Church. Wycliffe placed emphasis on the Bible and promoted moral reform of the clergy. Huss began increasingly to trust the scriptures as he wrote, *"... desiring to hold, believe, and assert whatever is contained in them as long as I have breath in me."*

As a result of his preaching and teaching, Huss lost the support of his King and was excommunicated. A Canon law was put upon the city of Prague which follows, *"... no citizen could receive Communion or be buried on church grounds as long as Huss continued his ministry."* Even though he was an outcast to the Church, he sent a number of treatises to the Church in Prague to be read aloud. In these treatises, he argued that Christ alone is head of the church, that a pope *"through ignorance and love of money"* can make many mistakes, and that to rebel against an erring pope is to obey Christ.

In November 1414, the Council of Constance assembled, and Huss was urged by Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund to give account of his doctrine; however, when Huss arrived, he was

immediately arrested and imprisoned for months. Eventually, he was hauled before the authorities and asked to recant his views. His response was “I appeal to Jesus Christ, the only judge who is almighty and completely just. In his hands I plead my cause, not on the basis of false witnesses and erring councils, but on truth and justice.” After this, he was taken to his jail cell. On July 6, 1415, he was burned at stake while he prayed, *“Lord Jesus, it is for thee that I patiently endure this cruel death. I pray thee to have mercy on my enemies.”* After his burning, his ashes were scooped up and tossed into a lake so that nothing would remain of the “heretic”, but some Czechs collected bits of soil from the ground where Huss died and took them back to Bohemia as a memorial.

As the years went by, Martin Luther was rummaging through the stacks of a library and came upon a volume of sermons by John Huss, Luther said, *“I was overcome with astonishment. I could not understand for what cause they burnt so great a man, who explained the Scriptures with so much gravity and skill.”*

Today, July 6, 2021, is the day that our Lutheran Church and others remember John Huss as a reformer and true servant of Jesus Christ. John’s friends called him *“The Goose,”* as a pun, but they also knew that he was a devout Christian leader.

*Prayer: God of love and strength, your Son forgave his enemies while he was suffering shame and death on the Cross. Today, we remember that your servant, Johannes Huss, prayed that his enemies would be forgiven as he was burned at stake for his theology. Grant us this day the ability to remember Huss as a faithful reformer and Bible translator. We thank you for his witness and ministry, in the Name of Christ. Amen.*

*Blessed Feasts of Blessed Martyrs* by John Wesley Slider

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=af6hxPkpA1U>

*O God, Do Thou Sustain Me Anabaptist Martyr Hymn* by Andrew John

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OISkq8qI4WI>

*Strengthen for Service ELW 497* by Halifax Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Yndyvp5nNs>

*Pardon Me O God (Invocation to Martyrs Mirror)* by Overholt Family

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWykBJaWXd4>

*Strengthen for Service* by Michael Sitton

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RETJBzvVnIA>

*Strengthen for Service* by St. Columba’s Episcopal Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOPumTSBI8U>

*When We Are Living ELW 639* by St. Mark’s Lutheran Winnipeg

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doE9rJIHwPw>

## **St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday July 7, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #374**

### **In praise of long, faithful, and good marriages.**

*"Give honor to marriage, and remain faithful to one another in marriage". (Heb. 13:4 NLT)*

I read this past weekend that former president Jimmy Carter and his wife Rosalynn are celebrating their 75<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary today. For anyone, being married 75 years is a rare accomplishment. It is so rare that the US Census Bureau does not even track how many make it that long. Only 6% of the population makes it 60 years. The current Guinness World Record for longest marriage is a couple who resided in North Carolina, Herbert and Zelmyra Fisher, married 86 years, 290 days before Herbert's death in 2011.

The Carters have been married longer than any other presidential couple, though several others have celebrated long and loving marriages. President George and Barbara Bush were devoted to each other as husband wife more than sixty years. President Ronald and Nancy Reagan were well known for their love and devotion to each other, lasting more than fifty years. The same was true for President Gerald and Betty Ford, married nearly sixty years.

Regardless of their successes or failures as presidents, it is quite wonderful to celebrate these presidential couples lifelong faithfulness to each other. Shared Christian faith also played a strong role in their success as married couples. Jimmy Carter has often been praised for his faithfulness teaching Sunday School for decades and for his active work post-presidency with Habitat for Humanity.

Martin Luther married late in life and died at age sixty-two, so he and Katie celebrated just twenty-one years of marriage. Even so, we all know for his praise of good and faithful marriages when he said:

***"There is no more lovely, friendly and charming relationship, communion or company than a good marriage."***

I'm sure the Carters wholeheartedly agree with this as they celebrate their seventy-fifth anniversary today, but so do our other presidential couples whose partnership with God's help enabled or enables them to navigate one of the most difficult jobs in the world.

When I was a child, *"Golden 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversaries"* were often celebrated with big parties and announcements in the local newspaper. Today, with good health, many of us know couples who have been married 60 or 65 years, and sometimes 70 or more. Some, with multiple marriages have argued that they have been married 50, 60, or 70 years, just *"not to the same person"*.

I'll always remember my mother introducing me to a couple at her retirement home who were 101 and 106 years old. I met them at a church service. I had never met a married couple that old before, so I couldn't help but ask. *"Wow, Mom. So how long have they been married?"* She looked around so as not to be seen as she whispered quietly in my ear, *"It's not their first*

*marriage.*” Even so, it was evident that God had blessed them with wonderful companionship well into their senior years.

There is always something very special about knowing someone who has been married for many many years. It takes a lot of work to make any marriage work, and those that do are cause for celebration.

Let us pray: We pray for our married couples today, whether they have been married for many years or for few. Sustain them with your presence that they may be faithful to the vows they have made and as they look for ways together to serve you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

*When Love is Found* by Cadenza Wedding Music (With One Voice 749)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YzmcogSQ7u8>

*When Love is Found* by Orchard Enterprises

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pHRWiYU8gA>

*O Perfect Love* by The Worship Team (LBW 287)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIs0SrJYJUk>

*This is a Day* (Wedding Song) by Wedding Tracks

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8wnUU5piWE>

*The Wedding Song* by Noel Paul Stookey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rdNPEX7bY-k>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, July 8, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #375

### Reflecting on the latest Jesus miniseries: "The Chosen."

<sup>25</sup> *But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.* (Jn. 21:25-1:1 NRS)

Most of the time, I'd just rather read the book (the Bible). While movies and miniseries about Jesus can offer some appealing visuals and depictions of familiar Bible stories, it is hard to do the stories justice. Sometimes things downright distract, like Max von Sydow's bad Jesus haircut in *"The Greatest Story Ever Told,"* or John Wayne's Texas drawl portraying the Roman Centurion saying *"Truly this man was the Son of God."* Watching Charlton Heston play John the Baptist kept me thinking, *"That's Charlton Heston playing John like Moses."* I remember being distracted by Jeffrey Hunter's shaved armpits portraying Jesus hanging on the cross in *"King of Kings."*

I also remember being impressed by Franco Zeffirelli's miniseries, *"Jesus of Nazareth."* Robert Powell's blue eyed Jesus looked pretty real as frequently depicted in art, and the story was well told. I also remember being very impressed with *"The Gospel of John,"* which used exclusively the words of the *"Good News Bible's"* fourth gospel. Whenever dialogue was spoken, the actor spoke it, and *"Lost's"* Henry Ian Cusick was a pretty engaging Jesus.

Many Independent Film companies have made Jesus movies. They include *"Jesus," "The Jesus Film," "The Jesus Movie," "The Life of Jesus," "The Life of Jesus Christ,"* and Mel Gibson's *"The Passion of the Christ."* *"The Gospel of Matthew," "The Gospel of Mark," "The Gospel of Luke,"* and *"The Gospel of John,"* using the same actors for Jesus and other characters in each film. The words of each gospel are narrated as the scenes are portrayed, but without audible dialogue.

A personal favorite of mine is *"The Miracle Maker,"* a *"Claymation"* version. The *"Claymation"* depiction works quite effectively and is supported by excellent voice actors and a well written narration and dialogue.

Enter *"The Chosen."* I might not have discovered it except for the good *"buzz"* it has received from... well ... pretty much everyone... evangelicals, Catholics, mainline protestants, film critics, and scholars. It was uniquely *"crowd funded"* and made available for free through an app or via YouTube.

A couple of things set *"The Chosen"* apart from the plethora of other Jesus projects. It imagines the back stories of several of the gospel characters. For example, Rabbi Nicodemus wrestling with his faith and traditions help set the scene for his nighttime encounter with Jesus. It convincingly shows Matthew as an outcast and despised person which makes his calling by Jesus particularly compelling.

One scene illustrates just how important hospitality is when sharing the shabbat meal (the one before the sabbath). Another episode wonderfully shows Jesus' engagement with children and how they are so special to him.

Actor Jonathan Roumie's portrayal of Jesus's love for humanity is arguably one of the most convincing I have ever seen. I agree with a Roman Catholic reviewer citing St. Augustine: "As St. Augustine teaches, efficacious grace moves us by means of delight and this delightful series, 'The Chosen,' is indeed a grace."

I look forward the conversations we will be having about this series. It invites reflection and deeper dives into the scripture from which it is based. These days, anything that engages us with the gospel has value.

Let us pray: *We thank you O God for the greatest story ever told, not the movie but the true story itself. Thank you for the scriptures that reveal your love for us and desire for all humankind to be united with you and in a blessed relationship with each other. Thank you also for preachers and filmmakers who are faithful to the scriptures and bring alive these blessed stories. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

No music today. Just a few links to scenes from "The Chosen" so you can investigate what I am writing about.

Jesus and the little children from "The Chosen"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvOpb1sxx8Q>

The Miracle of the Fish with Simon and Andrew

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWGCKovAUWM>

Scene from the Wedding at Cana in Galilee

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhjvAAkXbj0>

Healing of the leper

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VL8DThlIZAY>

Healing of the paralytic

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIBOmQ1PaMY>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, July 9, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand and Mr. Stan McLeroy. #376**

**Further thoughts on the Champlain Towers collapse in Surfside Florida and its connection to the Tower of Siloam collapse in Luke 13.**

*Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? <sup>3</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them-- do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." (Lk. 13:1-5 NIV)*

In St. Paul's In Your Home #368 I looked at the death of the Galileans and the Tower of Silom collapse in Luke 13 through the lens of "*untimely and unexpected deaths*" which reminded us to be prepared for the unexpected by being in a good relationship with God through repentance. Stan McLeroy sent me a thoughtful response and I asked if it might be part of another devotion. He said "yes," and here it is. Thanks, Stan.

### **My thoughts on being prepared for an untimely death Stan McLeroy**

I traveled a fair amount during my working years, almost always by plane. And there were a couple of years where I was traveling a ridiculous 75 to 80 percent of the time, sometimes leaving town on a Monday morning (or even a Sunday evening!) and returning on Friday night (or even Saturday morning!).

I've never been afraid of flying, but was always aware of the risk, and I knew that the more often I got on a plane the higher the overall probability was of something bad happening. And then 911 attack occurred, and it reminded me that bad things can happen on the ground, too.

Two co-workers were very near the World Trade Center when the attacks occurred, and managed to flee the area "safely", although one was trampled and almost choked to death in the giant dust cloud that swept outward in all directions.

Another former co-worker had recently left our company and taken a position with a financial firm whose offices were on the top floor of one WTC tower; he was in his office when the attack occurred and did not escape.

Some time before the 911 attack I had begun a certain small travel ritual. It had occurred to me that I had enough regrets in my life that if my plane were going down I would likely be the most

worried guy on the plane: worried about my life, and worried that I wouldn't finish praying for forgiveness before the plane hit the ground.

I hoped that praying calmly before takeoff -- not out of fear, but like a person calmly and rationally acquiring a life insurance policy -- then maybe I could lower my panic during an emergency. Maybe I could sit back and at least try to look serene, and make everyone else think "*How the hell can this guy be so calm?!*" Maybe I'd be able to comfort some panic-stricken passengers next to me.

And maybe I would make one last little prayer on the way down: "*Dear God, you know all that stuff I said before we took off? I meant it.*"

*Dear Heavenly Father, we know that we can come to you in prayer at any time. But help us to use our time wisely and to remember to talk more often with you when there is no crisis. Then, when an unexpected emergency occurs we can use the strength you give us to confidently help ourselves and others instead of using it solely to put ourselves right with you in last-minute desperation. Amen.*

*O Lord, Hear My Prayer*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f51n-yb11dY> - Choeur Gloire à Dieu

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J73ILBBkpA0> - XARA Choral Group

*Create in Me a Clean Heart*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0-gO\\_rRrOQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0-gO_rRrOQ) - First United Methodist, Downtown, Houston, TX

*What a Fellowship, What a Joy Divine*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d090G6A9cYE> - Unknown Vocal Quartet

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-yYXFPCjJw> - Gaither Vocal Band

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifFNqwlEN7w> - Rev. Milton Biggum

*Lead Me, Guide Me*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWTkmtnoD-I> - Elvis Presley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybMHnEobfeU> - New Orleans 4TET

*My Life Flows On in Endless Song*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLPP3XmYxXg> - NYC Virtual Choir and Orchestra

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, July 12, 2021** not by Pastor Mark Opgrand **but by Kristine Hopkins #377**

When Kristine Hopkins did a couple stewardship temple talks these past couple of years, I realized we had another good writer in our midst. I was glad when I invited her to share a “*St. Paul's In Our Home*” that he said yes. I hope this will be one among many that Kristine will be moved to share. (After 376, I need all the help I can get). Enjoy.

**The Folly of To-Dos**

**by Kristine Hopkins**

***Psalm 119:103 How sweet are your words to my taste; they are sweeter than honey.***

I admit it – I like to make “To-Do lists.” Whether it’s written down or a mental checklist, there is something satisfying about marking a To-Do as “complete.” It generates a gratifying sense of accomplishment, especially when things are a little out of control (global pandemic, anyone?!).

I have found that making To-Do lists taught me to be disciplined in faith formation, through activities like prayer... reading the Bible... attending church ... weekly tithing and so on. If it’s on the list, it will get done because I want to check it off complete. It also means that I can rest guilt-free for the rest of the day knowing my Christian duty was fulfilled. Sounds good, right?

In a recently published e-devotional from *In Touch Ministries*, Dr. Charles Stanley, pastor for the First Baptist church in Atlanta, raised some interesting questions. He said, “Can you honestly say that reading the Bible is a delight to you or is it more of a Christian duty? Do you take great pleasure and satisfaction in Scripture?”

We talk often in church life about “mountain-top” or “valley” experiences in the faith journey. Ever think about the flat road, where you’re neither up or down? I think this is where scripture reading and prayer can become static, routine, or another item on the To-Do list.

One solution is to ask God to teach you to delight in his Word. Then try meditating on what you’ve read. When you meditate, you are reflecting on who God is and what He has done. Remember his great love for you and all people and praise Him for it.

Below are some scripture versus about meditation. Try it out and see how God responds to your devotion. If you set aside the time, you will see that your thoughts and actions will change to be more in line with what God desires.

*Psalm 16:7: I will bless the Lord who guides me; even at night my heart instructs me.*

*Psalm 119: 97 Oh, how I love your instructions! I think about them all day long.*

*Psalm 77:11-12 I recall all you have done, O Lord; I remember your wonderful deeds of long ago. They are constantly in my thoughts. I cannot stop thinking of your mighty works.*

*Psalm 145:5 I will meditate on your majestic, glorious splendor and your wonderful miracles.*

**Closing Prayer:** Awesome God, teach us to delight in your Word. Forgive us for not spending the time to pause and really listen to your voice, for making our prayer-life too routine and something to check off a list, for forgetting the gift of your guiding Word. Help us to live each day in the joy of your abiding love now and always. Amen.

*Be Still for the Presence of the Lord* by David Evans (composer)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDP9pfVNpdc>

*Psalm 119: 30-40* by The Corner Room

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKPAKRWg9GA>

*Psalm 77* by Kenwood Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8walFoLnzhg>

*Psalm 145* by Jason Silver

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwJ3cFFcqDE>

*We Remember* by Marty Haugen

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6\\_KModMCtg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6_KModMCtg)

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, July 13, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #378

### Doubting Vaccine Thomases

<sup>24</sup> But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." (Jn. 20:24-25 NRS)

We appear to be in a circumstance where all seems well and we are on our way to being "back to normal." Schools are open. Businesses are open. Church is open. If vaccinated, masks are optional. If not vaccinated, it is probably for a reason, and unless someone reveals that reason, we are likely not to know.

As I watch distressing news of coronavirus variants active in parts of the world where the population is begging for vaccine help, I am struggling with vaccine hesitancy here at home, especially among people I know and love. Good evidence supports the realization that people who are vaccinated are far more protected against deadly Covid 19 than those who are not.

I listen to hesitancy about possible vaccine side effects, but a lot of data is now available through millions who have been vaccinated as well as unvaccinated thousands who have become gravely ill or who have died from this deadly disease. Many who have lost unvaccinated loved ones are now actively begging others not to repeat this experience.

A year ago, we didn't have a vaccine option, and Covid 19 was less communicable than with the new variants. We also experience many with a determined suspicion not unlike Doubting Thomas, who needed to see to believe. We also have those, who by their actions are effectively saying, "I'd rather die than get the vaccine "or simply "I'll take my chances (and yours)." Naturally, they don't expect to die because they believe their immune systems are either sufficiently robust, or the danger of virus has been overstated, or there is an insidious conspiracy in play.

So how should we Christians respond to this time when all seems well, at least for the moment?

Every day I give thanks for another day of health for me and my loved ones. Every day I pray that this period of calm continues and that we are not besieged by those highly contagious variants doing such harm in under vaccinated areas. And every day I pray that vaccines will be effective and without ill effects from evidence that can be trusted.

When Jesus responded to Thomas, he said "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." (Jn. 20:29 NRS) I know Jesus was not talking about Covid 19, but he does ask us, like he asked Thomas, to trust the eyewitness accounts of his resurrection. It may not be the same thing, but in dealing with a pandemic, we are asked to trust those who have put heart and soul into keeping us safe and

making us well. I hope that's enough from which to make good decisions. May God bless us and guide us.

Let us pray. *Guide us, O God, through all the perils of this present time, especially through this pandemic that continues to spread throughout our world. Please guide all who are working to offer effective treatments and protection plans. For those countries without access to good medical treatment, we pray that those who are able to share will do so. Help us trust those who not only trust you but also recognize their callings to be healers. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*If You but Trust in God to Guide You*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xInffLZHZIk>

*All Depends on Our Possessing* by Concordia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvcuKj8dOzw>

*Healer of our Every Ill* by Marty Haugen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXWpNmYiUrs>

*My Faith Looks Up to Thee* by Micah S J

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YImkOAJp1Z8>

*Faith and Doubt* by Aaron Espe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzx3pt2s1Ac&t=54s>

*Heal Me O Lord* by Don Moen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2UmIGzQfUQM&t=166s>

## **“St. Paul’s In Your Home” for Wednesday, July 14, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #379**

### **So what makes a holy place holy?**

*<sup>2</sup> Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. <sup>3</sup> Here a great number of disabled people used to lie-- the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. <sup>4</sup> <sup>5</sup> One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup> When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"<sup>7</sup> "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."<sup>8</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."<sup>9</sup> At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. (Jn. 5:2-9 NIV)*

The healing properties of this pool had its origins as part of a religious cult around Asklepius, the pagan god of healing. During the Hellenistic period (331 BCE to 31 BCE), the Greeks built “*Asklepions*” – or ancient healing centers, all across the Greek Empire.

The ill and disabled would congregate at these regional healing centers. They would drink and bathe in the waters of the Asklepion and then sleep within the temple’s walls. They slept on mats laid out in a section of the inner sanctum of the temple called the “*abaton*.” The abaton was supposed to be the place of divine dreams, where Asklepius or his serpents might appear to give the sick clues about their healing.

The Greeks attributed the healing powers of natural springs to spirits. This belief made its way into the cult of Asklepius. His temples were typically built near sacred springs with shallow pools and baths. Participants would wait by the water, praying, fasting, chanting, etc., until Asklepius or his helpful “serpent spirits” churned the water. This was the best time for a healing miracle – when bubbles or ripples made their way from the spring to the pool.

It is hard to say whether the Jews of Jerusalem who sought healing did so because of faith in the Greek gods, or simply because when you are sick, you will try anything that might help.

It was here that Jesus performed one of his miracles, his “*signs*” in John’s gospel, signs of his divinity through his power to heal. John clearly attributes the healing not to the waters, but to Jesus, who offers “*living water*”. We don’t know if people continued to come to the pool for healing following this miracle. But even before and after, the place was considered holy by those who came for healing.

I visited a “*holy place*” like this once. It was in Lourdes, France, at the “*Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes*.” In 1858, (the same year St. Paul’s was formed) a peasant girl named Bernadette

Soubirous had a vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who appeared to her eighteen times, and from that Lourdes became a sacred place to which people would make pilgrimages seeking healing.

My late wife Carol Thysell and I stopped there during a trip we were making following Carol learning that her book about a French queen named Marguerite de Navarre (1492-1549) was to be published by Oxford University Press. The trip was also between rounds of chemotherapy Carol was receiving for ovarian cancer.

Our main destination was Cauterets, a small spa and ski town where Marguerite composed one of her books. On the way, however, was Lourdes, and since it was a place for pilgrims seeking healing, and since Carol was sick, we went. I suppose we were a little like those who went to the Pool of Bethesda. Bernadette, though canonized, was not a saint in our Lutheran tradition, but we believed going there couldn't hurt, and prayers for healing are certainly appropriate anywhere.

Outside the walled sanctuary were lots of shops for food and souvenirs for the pilgrims. Inside however, despite lots of people, it was quiet, reverent, and holy in a way I had not experienced before. It was not the place that made it holy, however; it was the faith of the people who had made their pilgrimage, looking to God for hope and healing, especially through the spring waters freely available.

Everywhere we turned, we were surrounded by hundreds who were obviously sick or disabled. And everywhere we turned, we felt connected to the collective prayers of each and every pilgrim and their caregivers.

I shall not forget that holy place, holy not because of what happened with Bernadette, but because of the faith that brought people together to look to God for health, hope, and healing. Carol and I carried that blessed memory until her death, when she, in faith, surrendered herself to God's eternal wellspring of living water.

*Let us pray. We thank you for all the holy places where we can come to experience love and healing. May our own sanctuary be a place where we will experience the collective faith of all who come to worship you. Hear our prayers for healing wherever we are, and may we encourage each other as mutual caregivers. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Lourdes Hymn with descant -- Immaculate Mary by Francis 1930*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dcs6WPjZi0k>

*Immaculate Mary (The Lourdes Hymn) by Beloved Son*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D39ehKUNvFA>

*Our Lady of Lourdes Hymn*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lke414UemFY>

*Be Still My Soul* by Eclipse 6

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqKVFYD8Obc>

*Be Still My Soul* by Sovereign Reign

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxLV4zRmhm8>

## **St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, July 15, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #380**

### **The first of the second "five I liked."**

Note: A few months ago I gave myself a little writing break by offering five previously written devotions that I enjoyed writing. As I turn my full attention this week to back to back funeral sermon preparation, this is a particularly good opportunity for a "rerun" or maybe one simply missed if you don't read these every day. Here's the first of the second five I liked, from a year ago.

## **St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, July 8, 2020 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #109**

### **The Holy Spirit as Advocate and Earworm.**

*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.<sup>17</sup> This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.*

(Jn. 14:16-17 NRS)

Whether you know it as "earworm," "brainworm," "sticky music," "stuck song syndrome," or "Involuntary Musical Imagery (IMI)", we know what it is. It's a catchy piece of music that continually repeats in our minds long after it has stopped playing. It's when you "can't get that song out of your head."

We've all experienced this. Different songs for different folks, but it happens the same way. You hear a song. It sticks with you. It keeps repeating. When you want it to go away, it may for a time, and then back it comes. An earworm.

During these past months of writing more than hundred devotions, I have listened to well over a thousand songs on YouTube. I discovered early on that songs have been a welcomed part of daily "St. Paul's In Your Home." More than five hundred songs have been attached for your meditating and listening joy. Based on feedback, I know occasionally this has had an earworm effect.

I make no apologies. In fact, I think it is good to have a song stuck in your head, especially one that reminds you of the gospel.

An *earworm* is like the Holy Spirit that way.

When Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as *Paraclete* (variously *translated Advocate, Counselor, Comforter, and Helper*), the one who abides in you, it is quite like an earworm. God's divine Holy Spirit presence is always singing and repeating a melody of God's love through Jesus that we cannot get out of our head (or heart).

Nor do we want to. That's because in a dissonant world that wants us to tune into discordant messages not focused on God, we need God to keep that clear, sweet song of Jesus' love and hope coming back again and again. Here it comes again.

The next time you get a catchy little gospel song in your head (or a sweeping magnificent hymn), welcome it as God's gift to you, celebrating that like an earworm, God's Holy Spirit is not going away.

Let us pray.

*Be in our heads and hearts, Holy Spirit, that we might recognize your abiding presence. Like that earworm that won't go away, keep actively reminding us that we belong to you, that you created us to love and serve you and each other, that we are in this world to participate in your redeeming work through Jesus Christ. Your world has so many needs right now, and we humbly ask for your help. Bless those who actively work for peace and reconciliation; support those who work to heal this world of every sickness; guide those who are often so overwhelmed in trying to do good. Hear our prayers, as we lift our hearts to you. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

P.S.

Not looking for an earworm song, but one that reminds us of God's love that won't let us go (like an earworm). I was surprised to see this song done so many ways....

O Love That Will Not Let Me Go by Eastward Missions, Australia (my favorite.... stunning!)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGAPkKXBQKI>

O Love That Will Not Let Me Go by the Sound of Wales

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6iL\\_UInTVs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6iL_UInTVs)

O Love That Will Not Let Me Go by Asisaactheband

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cqhdr5Z1Hg>

O Love That Will Not Let Me Go by Amy Grant

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hQhj1IsNd4>

O Love That Will Not Let Me Go by NYCPCD

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jv1kpnDZcql>

O Love That Will Not Let Me Go by 20Schemes Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJOUtCModPI>

..... and as a bonus... remembering with appreciation our Praise Team's version... Love Lifted Me with Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton (this might be your earworm song today)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRyvsFJErCE>

## **St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday July 16, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #381**

### **The second of the second "five I liked."**

Note: Another "rerun" today. Remember when summer television was all reruns? I'm not doing that, though it is fun to look back at some I liked and offer them up for those who may have missed them the first time, or those who might be curious about ones I have personally enjoyed writing. With today's devotion, I revisit in a new way something I will always be known for at St. Paul's, and that is quizzing our children during children's sermons about the meaning of the word "gospel." Not once have I heard "happy words." Read on for why that might be a good answer.

## **St. Paul's In Your Home for Sunday, July 26, 2020 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #127**

**If "Euangelion" translates as "Gospel" and "Gospel" means "Good News," what does it mean in Chinese?**

*Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,*

*2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures,3 the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh 4 and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, 6 including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, (Rom. 1:1-6 NRS)*

When I was Lutheran Campus Pastor at Purdue, I had the rare and wonderful opportunity one year, to meet and have regular conversation with a visiting scholar from China.

We met at a yard sale. Every year the church I worked with hosted a yard sale, which was extremely popular with the international students who lived in apartments. At one of these yard sales, I met Cui Jiang, a 50-year-old visiting scholar in mechanical engineering from X'ian, China. I offered him a ride home in a pickup with all his stuff, and he invited me in for tea.

That began a year of weekly get togethers for conversation. Unlike younger Chinese students, English was a struggle for him. Our conversations helped. I also shared information about American customs, including rules for football. He told me about his life and family, living essentially on a military base where he was a flight test engineer. This was his first trip outside China.

Probably most interesting to me is that Jiang was the first person I met who had never heard about Jesus Christ. There are Christians in China, but very few to the whole population; he had never met a Christian, much less a Lutheran pastor. Trying to share the gospel with a language barrier was a whole new world for me.

If I had met Jiang a few years later, it might have been a different story. It was then I met two young Chinese Christian students who invited me to preside at their traditional American wedding. They were part of a Chinese Christian Student Fellowship who used our church for worship. Their witness would have been a big help.

Around the time Cui Jiang and I were talking, the ELCA was publishing a multicultural newsletter, and one of the articles was in Chinese. Aha! Maybe this could help me. I shared the article, and Jiang translated as he read. In the article, a young woman was describing how she came to know Christ through a church she visited in New York. Jiang was sharing the story, and then he came to this sentence, where he translated, "And then I heard the..... and then I heard the...." He looked up at me with a puzzled look on his face. "Happy Words?"

In a moment, an internal bell went off. Ding! "Happy words! Good News! Gospel!" Without ever hearing or seeing in his own language the word we translate "gospel" from the Greek "*euangelion*" meaning "*gospel*" or "*good news*," the best he could come up with was "*Happy Words*."

But that's pretty good, isn't it! Hearing the wonderful story of God's love for us through Jesus Christ are "*happy words*" indeed. "*Good News. Gospel.*"

A year after he returned to China, I had occasion to take a trip with my father and several family members to China, and one of the cities was X'ian. Cui Jiang and I were wonderfully reunited, and boy was he different. I had no idea how much struggling with the language hindered his natural personality. He took me out to go shopping and a little off-tour sightseeing. With effervescence and high energy. He shared with people how we became friends; and he refused to let the vendors charge me the "*tourist*" prices. It was great.

I wish I could say he became a Christian. I know it would have been hard to live in a very restricted community where he would be unsupported by Christian fellowship. I am confident, however, that something stirred through those “*happy words*,” and I am trusting that God did for Jiang what God does for us all. Love.

Let us pray.

*We pray for your gospel O God, that it might be good news for all who hear those “happy words.” Bless those who seek you wherever they are. Lift us up by your gospel, that we may model the love of Jesus in all our relationships. Bless our world, we pray, and all those who serve you and those in need. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.*

P.S. We didn’t have YouTube when I met Cui Jiang. If we had, I would have shared these Christian songs sung in Chinese. I was deeply moved to find Chinese language versions of these familiar songs. Hope you enjoy them, too.

*What A Friend We Have In Jesus* by Penang Christian Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOWxUSpN0GQ>

*10,000 Reasons* by Chinese Grace Christian College

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UWnYaQ0hKjg>

*Amazing Grace*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3U9kKmoib-I>

Gospel: Chinese Choir singing Swahili song. Wow!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Apz-IQmoJpw>

Selections from largest Christian Church in China Chong-Yi, Hangzhou

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUS-II5JWSk>

*Amazing Grace (Our Chains Are Gone)* on Guzheng Chinese instrument

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9Ur6W4SLso>

*You Are My All In All* in Mandarin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qc6vnPPM-JE>

*The Lord’s Prayer* in Mandarin (quite beautiful)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xbSU3NpW5w>

*Shout to the Lord* in Mandarin

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ln2grj\\_HKis](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ln2grj_HKis)

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, July 19, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #382

### The third of the second five I liked.

I had fun re-discovering the "Magic 8 Ball" for this devotion. I thought about it when I recently saw an old "Twilight Zone" episode with a young William Shatner (before Star Trek). In the episode a young couple getting their car fixed in a small town discover a diner with a novelty "Devil" on the top of a dispenser that spits out answers to questions much like the Magic 8 Ball.. So caught up in what in their answers, they almost did not escape its grip on them. They finally did break free, but then another distraught couple came in with the question, "Is it okay to ask another question yet?" How easily we can become ensnared. Here's "Magic 8 Ball:"

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, October 1, by Pastor Mark Opgrand #182

### Magic 8 Ball Theology (Magic, part 2)

*Now a certain man named Simon had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he was someone great. <sup>10</sup> All of them, from the least to the greatest, listened to him eagerly, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." <sup>11</sup> And they listened eagerly to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. <sup>12</sup> But when they believed Philip, who was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. <sup>13</sup> Even Simon himself believed. After being baptized, he stayed constantly with Philip and was amazed when he saw the signs and great miracles that took place. (Acts 8:9-13 NRS)*

Remember the Magic 8 Ball? For 75 years this "Fortune-telling Novelty Toy with Floating Answers" has been a Mattel Toy Company staple. And yes, you can even order one this very day from Amazon for just \$8.88, and it will be at your doorstep in two days.

With the "Magic 8 Ball", you ask a "yes" or "no" question, shake it, and wait for a mysterious little answer to emerge in the inky blue liquid window. It was all very mysterious and "magical." As I have since discovered, the answers are printed on an icosahedron, a twenty-sided figure which rotates as you shake it. Do you remember the answers? Here they are, all twenty:

1. As I see it, yes.
2. Ask again later.
3. Better not tell you now.
4. Cannot predict now.
5. Concentrate and ask again.
6. Don't count on it.

7. It is certain.
8. It is decidedly so.
9. Most likely.
10. My reply is no.
11. My sources say no.
12. Outlook not so good.
13. Outlook good.
14. Reply hazy, try again.
15. Signs point to yes.
16. Very doubtful.
17. Without a doubt.
18. Yes.
19. Yes – definitely.
20. You may rely on it.

As you can see, ten are positive, five are neutral, and five are negative. If you don't like a certain answer, you can always ask again. Sometimes the ball will even tell instruct that.

I imagine most people approach the Magic 8 Ball, as just a fun little novelty, but someone most certainly could let their lives be ruled by the Magic 8 Ball.

Should I go to work today? *"My sources say no."*

Should I ask my girlfriend to marry me? *"As I see it. Yes."*

Will she say yes? *"Don't count on it."*

Will she ever say yes? *"Outlook not so good."*

What if we brought our theological questions to the Magic 8 Ball? These could be answers:

Is there a God? *"It is decidedly so."*

Does Jesus love me? *"Very doubtful."*

Was it something I did? *"Signs point to yes."*

Can I be forgiven? *"Ask again later."*

Can I be forgiven? *"Really hazy. Try again."*

Should I trust your answers? *"Yes-definitely."*

It is not likely that the Simon in our scripture had a Magic 8 Ball, but he had enough tricks up his sleeve to gain quite a following. The people were amazed. Given his openness to the gospel, I suspect he knew what he was peddling was about as real as Magic 8 Ball answers. When he encountered preaching of Phillip, he realized the gospel was the real thing he was missing in his life. Here were the answers from scripture that Simon could count on:

Is God real? *"It is decidedly so."*  
Are Jesus' miracles real? *"Signs point to yes."*  
Does Jesus love me? *"It is certain."*  
Should I be baptized? *"without a doubt."*

Let us pray.

We thank you, O God, for the Holy Scriptures that direct our lives by your Word. Thank you for the witness of Simon the Magician who let go of tricks and illusions to experience the certainty of faith amid the great mystery of life. If ever we are persuaded that it is "Lucky Stars" that direct our lives, expose that misdirection so that we might be open to your revealed word through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

P.S. I wasn't sure if I should break tradition and link some *"magic themed"* songs, even if not Christian faith based. Therefore I asked my Magic 8 Ball and it said, *"As I see it, yes."*

*You Can Do Magic* by America

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7ONp-GC7vM>

*Do You Believe In Magic* by the Lovin' Spoonful (on Ed Sullivan)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8qZ4qzDICg>

*This Magic Moment* by Jay and the Americans

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKfASw6goag>

*I've Got the Magic In Me* from Pitch Perfect

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRFatzi\\_5do](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRFatzi_5do)

P.P.P.S. It's no accident that I was unable to find songs of faith with the word "magic" in them. Faith is about trusting in God. Nothing magical about that. God make known what we need to know. Here are some songs of faith, not magic.

*I Know That My Redeemer Lives* by Christian Hymns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2tMqpruzpv0>

*He Came Down* by Concordia College Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPjdFi4wz24>

*Blessed Assurance* by SE Samonte

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UePXtov0zC0>

*This Is My Story, This is My Song* by Watoto Children's Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nPAPfHnrvg>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, July 20, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #383

### The fourth of a second "five I liked."

In this devotion, pondering Eldad and Medad "got me thinking" (as Pastor Jonathan would say) about Larry and his brother Daryl and his other brother Daryl from *"The Bob Newhart Show."* It also got me thinking about how, so often in the church, we don't recognize the amazing way God works through a variety of characters and personalities. Don't ever underestimate God, or God's ability to use your gifts and talents for God's purpose. It might even bring smiles to our faces as we marvel at how this works. Blessings.

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, September 1, 2020 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #160

### Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp!

24 So Moses went out and told the people what the LORD had said. He brought together seventy of their elders and had them stand around the tent. 25 Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied-- but did not do so again.

26 However, two men, whose names were **Eldad and Medad**, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders but did not go out to the tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. 27 A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." 28 Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' aide since youth, spoke up and said, "**Moses, my lord, stop them!**" 29 But Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!" (Num. 11:24-29 NIV)

This passage makes me smile every time I read it. It may not be real familiar because it only appears twice in our three year Revised Common Lectionary (with one time being optional). Even so, I love this story, and I love the words coming from some surprised Israelites.

### "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp!"

This surprised everyone because Eldad and Medad were not among those seventy leaders who received the power of the Lord's spirit that first came upon Moses through the cloud of the Lord. Every indication is that they were not "supposed to." With names like Eldad and Medad, they sound to our ears a bit *"country bumpkinish,"* not unlike *"Elroy"* and *"Leroy,"* two true country brothers I met in my first rural Texas parish. Elroy and Leroy were *"good ol' boys,"* not prophets.

Eldad and Medad also remind me of the unforgettable characters in the old Newhart show. I'm speaking of the three brothers who would enter every scene with, "Hi. I'm Larry, and this is my brother Darryl, and my other brother Darryl." Larry and his brother Darryl (and his other brother Daryl) are prophesying in the camp! (And yes, I know the brothers Daryl never spoke in the TV show until the final episode, but if they had spoken out with an eloquent speech, they would elicit a similar reaction as well.) Added 2021 note: In fact, when, during the final episode, the Daryls did speak, they were eloquent, which completely took the audience by surprise.

Eldad and Medad did prophesy and did proclaim a clear word of the Lord even when young Joshua tried to make Moses stop them. "Moses, they can't do that! They're not qualified!" And once again we have an example of God surprising God's people by using unlikely people to speak for God. Such was the power and prerogative of God's Spirit. Moses' response is that we should be very glad for that.

It's always good news whenever God speaks through people, even unlikely spokespersons. Let us not be surprised that God's works in way we cannot predict. Perhaps we can remember that it's not about the gifts each of us brings to proclamation; it's about how God's spirit moves within us as we are called to accomplish his will.

Let us pray.

*Thank you, O God, for those stories in scripture that remind us that even the unlikeliest persons can be your servants and witnesses. May these stories be encouragement that each one of us is given gifts for ministry and each one of us, when open to God's awesome Holy Spirit, will, for God, accomplish many things and bring blessings to our communities. Amen.*

In case you don't recall Larry and the Daryls, here's a video clip to remind you:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79vMe31CuIQ>

*Lord I Life Your Name on High* by African Children's Choir

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUNdbfFI\\_p8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUNdbfFI_p8)

*Prophesy Your Promise* by Brian and Katie Torwalt

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZiuvKo-7Me4>

*To God Be the Glory* by the NBA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CeBoSQsBR0>

*Many Gifts One Spirit* by Paduan Suara Gita Swara Jaya, Jakarta Indonesia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p2G75ss9Ozo>

*Many Gifts One Spirit* by Cantamus Dei

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sqpWhvUB8DE>

and picking up on visionary lyrics like the spirit is upon them in the wilderness... *Hosanna* by Christofari

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrukH62mxMk>

## **St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, July 21, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #384**

### **The fifth of a second five I liked.**

I am always honored any time someone says "I liked the one about..." Such is the case here. Teresa Coleman emailed me that she liked the one about the "wolves." I guess we could describe this "the first of one that someone else said they liked." But I liked it too, especially as a sign of hope that even we humans might find ways to live together peacefully. I am biased, of course, that this comes as an outcome of our shared faith in Jesus Christ. Blessings.

## **St. Paul's In Your Home Devotion for Wednesday, November 25, 2020 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #221**

### **Wolves and lambs together. Oh My!**

*I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. 23 They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD-- and their descendants as well. 24 Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. 25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent-- its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD. (Isa. 65:19:23-25 NRS)*

Isaiah 65 includes wonderful words of hope for the people of God, including an image of "the wolf and the lamb" feeding together. Most often in scriptures, wolves are presented as fierce and fearful creatures to be avoided. Here is a wonderful image of hope, an image of reconciliation and getting along nicely. I am particularly drawn these days to every hopeful passage that presents enemies as able to coexist peacefully.

We have often talked about how, if someone has never been around sheep, it is hard to understand some of the sheep imagery in the Bible. Part of our Biblical education is learning why we are described as sheep and why Jesus is described as a good shepherd.

Wolves are also named in scripture, but usually as an enemy. In Matthew 10:16, Jesus warns his disciples: "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. (Matt. 10:16 NRS). In Matthew 7:15 Jesus says "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."

I'm encouraged by Isaiah's positive promise about wolves, especially after visiting a rather marvelous place near Purdue University in West Lafayette called "*Wolf Park*". It is an educational and research facility with large acreage that since 1972 has studied domesticated wolves. They are not "pets", and not "tame," but have been raised by humans to be not afraid, and they accept humans observing and caring for them.

Through Wolf Park's research, much has been learned about how wolves are quite incredible creatures, despite their mostly bad reputation in the Bible. Unlike humans, all wolf behavior makes sense, and they have a very complex social structure that works for them.

Wolf Park is open to the public; one of our Purdue Lutheran Campus Ministry's favorite little outings was attending a "*Friday Night Wolf Howl*". We would hear updated stories about what was happening in the wolf community and then have a chance to howl along with them as the sun began to set. We quickly discovered that howling with the wolves is very good therapy after a stressful week. "*Aaaaauuuullll!*"

It was also marvelous to see how wolves and humans could be in a respectful relationship with each other. The wolves learned not to be afraid, and humans learned to respect the wolves so as not to provoke them. Of course, keeping the wolves fed was an important piece of this, so as not to make them "*ravenous*" like in Matthew 7.

Given there was no "*Wolf Park*" where Jesus journeyed, it is understandable why Jesus would warn his disciples about those who appeared to be calm and peaceful but are ready to "*eat them alive.*"

These days, we seem to have a lot people ready to pounce on each other at the slightest provocation. How might we change this? I suppose some of this, as with the wolves, depends on how we were raised. As humans, much will depend on how we are motivated to believe that peaceful coexistence and cooperation is preferable to tearing each other apart.

Considering this possibility, I am thankful for Jesus as our role model. His life is a living witness to the value of building bridges. And while many would see his death as a referendum on something that was never going to work, others have seen God resurrecting him from the dead as validation that with God, all things are possible.

...And .... wolves and lambs can then share a meal where neither is the main course.

Let us pray.

*You bless us O God with hope about living together in peace. When that seems so difficult to imagine, grant us that vision from Isaiah that makes what seems unlikely part of your divine*

*plan for us all. During this time of national crisis, help us build trust, especially between those who imagine each other as enemies. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*All Things Bright and Beautiful* by John Rutter

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjbktnTuV30>

*All Things Bright and Beautiful* by National Taiwan University Chorus (Rutter)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVSf5QISmA8>

*Look at the World* by Rutter sung by Smith Family

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEUMsWoW8V8>

*All Creatures of Our God and King* by David Crowther

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cObXwn-EgGY>

*All Creatures of Our God and King* by Maranatha Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0d3gO6gDLNA>

*All Creatures of Our God and King ...* Horizons & Heritage concert

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0\\_8JnaOjSo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0_8JnaOjSo)

*Wolf Howl at Wolf Park* (not a song, but footage of the Wolf Howl)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ocSHUu6Yc4>

and.... a well done intro to Wolf Park

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QkcGoFU5mk>

and finally.... *The Wolves and the Ravens* by Rogue Valley (Explanation here: I picked this not only because "wolves" is in the title, but also because the female singer is the daughter of my best friend in seminary. It is also a cool song and I coincidentally grew up in the Rogue Valley).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dhfKp7MX2k>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, July 22, 2021** not by Pastor Mark Opgrand **but by the one and only Stan McLeroy. #385**

### **So What Makes a Holy Place Holy? Another Experience**

**Stan McLeroy, 7/16/2021**

#### Psalm 133

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!  
²It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard,  
even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; ³As the dew of  
Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there  
the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.*

Anyone entering the front door of our house in Virginia had a view straight down a narrow hallway to a three-foot wide cheap, brown, build-it-yourself fiberboard bookshelf on the back wall of our kitchen.

In plain view, on a chest-level shelf, sat a telephone and little white telephone answering machine, surrounded by various items that ranged in size and purpose, from pencils, pens, keys, and to-do lists, to partially-eaten candy bars with wrappers folded over, screwdrivers, small hammers, some partly read mail, and often much more.

The items varied day to day. Some were there a short time, others remained for days, even weeks, or more. All these items had one thing in common: they were mine.

By this time Maria and I had been married over 10 years, and she was still struggling to domesticate me. Her righteous indignation over this collection arose from her natural sense of neatness and propriety. I had left these items where it was convenient for me to leave them, not where they "belonged."

This stuff could be seen by anyone entering our home, and it bugged her. Wouldn't I please put all these things away? PLEASE?!

"I can't put them away - I'm working on repairing that... thing... in the living room."

You can get your tools out again tomorrow when you work on it.

"It takes too long to put everything away and get it all out again."

At least throw out the candy bar.

"I'm still working on it! Can't waste a perfectly good Snickers!"

On and on the bickering went. Sometimes it was more in jest, sometimes it got serious. Sometimes Maria took some of my stuff off the shelf and put it somewhere else out of sight. Or worse yet: where it belonged. Then I had to go hunt it down again, which took time. It was the hot Cold War, with no end in sight.

Then one spring we went to Hawaii. We both enjoy not merely seeing the sights but also learning something about the culture of any place we visit. On one of our excursions on the Big Island we visited the Place of Refuge, which is now called Pu'uuhonua O Honaunau National Park.

Until the early 1800s the Hawaiians lived under a system called Kapu (taboo) -- a law-breaker was subject to severe punishment, including death, unless he or she could receive forgiveness from a priest at the Place of Refuge. To get there the law-breaker had two options:

- Run thru the King's private estate. Good luck with that -- if captured he would be killed by the King's guards.
- Make a two- mile swim in rough open ocean waters. Good luck with that, too -- only the fittest were up to that swim.

But if the Kapu-breaker could reach the Place of Refuge he was untouchable, and could then undergo the forgiveness ritual with the priest. (Of course he then must leave the Place of Refuge in one of those two same ways that he came, again risking his life.)

When we arrived home from that trip I had what I thought was a very clever idea. The next morning when Maria came down to breakfast she looked at the shelf with the phone and the answering machine and all my junk, and saw the brand-new little sign I had made and taped up.

It recalled the Place of Refuge that we had enjoyed learning about in Hawaii, but with one letter altered. My sign read: PLACE OF REFUSE. "Once my stuff reaches the Place of Refuse it is untouchable! You cannot mess with it or remove it for any reason!" I cried with glee.

Maria rolled her eyes and let out a nervous little laugh. She grudgingly appreciated the Refuge/Refuse wordplay, but I could tell that the "untouchable" aspect was not going over too well.

So we compromised. I reminded her that I really needed a little staging area for in-progress projects, but I agreed not to leave any opened food items that might attract ants or other unmentionable vermin. I also would not leave anything that might spill or make a mess, or anything dangerous, like a knife or razor blade.

And, maybe most importantly, I agreed to a statute of limitations: Maria could remove any item left in the Place of Refuse longer than one week (or was it two?), as long as she gave me a one-day warning. And I agreed to pare down the pile immediately to fit on only about half the shelf.

And slowly over the next year or so the Place of Refuse shrunk in size to about one third of the shelf.

Friends and neighbors who came to our house asked about the sign, and we told them about our "junk wars" and our trip to Hawaii, and about the Kapu system and the Place of Refuge on the Big Island, and about our compromise. And some of them rolled their eyes, but always we laughed. And finally, over time, the designated junk pile area -- along with the sign -- just unceremoniously faded away.

So, was the Place of Refuse a holy place, like the Place of Refuge that inspired it? I have to admit that when I first recalled this story I was convinced that my designated area of the telephone shelf was just a gag. Renaming a legitimate cultural religious site and repurposing it for my own selfish humorous ends does not a holy place make. But now I have to seriously reconsider.

The pile of stuff on that shelf was a source of annoyance to Maria, and her moving it was annoying to me. We argued. I put up the sign, and we had a laugh. We tried to understand each other's needs.

We compromised. And eventually the thing that we had fought over disappeared, along with the "PLACE OF REFUSE" sign that marked where it had been. And, for the most part, harmony reigned. And if a place that brings harmony is not holy, what place is?

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"Holiness consisteth not in a cowl or in a garment of gray... When God purifies the heart by faith, the market is sacred as well as the sanctuary; neither remaineth there any work or place which is profane." -- Martin Luther

"The essence of true holiness consists in conformity to the nature and will of God." -- Samuel Lucas

"Where you are is of no moment, but only what you are doing there. It is not the place that ennobles you, but you the place; and this only by doing that which is great and noble." -- Petrarch

"To an honest mind the best perquisites of a place are the advantages it gives a man of doing good." -- Joseph Addison

*Holy Spirit Come and Fill This Place* - Cece Winans

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFhUUQQ7PC0>

*Holy Spirit You Are Welcome Here* -Mission Bible Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MMJne6wUoag>

*The Holy Place* - Ricky Dillard (Get into this Gospel rock groove and let it take you!)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Na4yqTD91Gk>

*Oh Holy Place* - Cece Winans

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJ8\\_LM2Osx8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJ8_LM2Osx8)

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday June 23, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #386

### The joy of being "brought near."

<sup>11</sup> So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision"-- a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands-- <sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.

<sup>15</sup> He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, <sup>16</sup> and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. (Eph. 2:11-16 NRS)

This was a portion of our second reading from last Sunday, July 18. St. Paul (or possibly a disciple of Paul) is writing to a community in Greece where their big division had been between those who grew up in the Jewish faith (the "*circumcised*") and those outside that faith (the "*uncircumcised*" Gentiles).

It may have been that some of the Gentiles did not practice any faith; others might have followed Greek gods or a Greek philosophy known as Stoicism. Whatever their background, Ephesians addresses the relationship between Jewish converts to Christianity and Gentile converts. The message of Ephesians affirms a whole new way of looking at our lives through Jesus Christ.

It can't have been easy. It is always hard to give up what has had meaning and value in our lives. That would especially be hard for practicing Jews hearing the gospel and believing. Besides dietary and certain worship practices, the sacred ritual of circumcision was a deeply imbedded part of their identity. For Gentiles, requiring circumcision to join the church would seem like mutilation or barbarism akin to what Israel collected as trophies in ancient times while conquering enemies (I Samuel 18). I imagine switching to kosher food would have been less challenging ("*Hey, that Matzo ball is pretty good! But no, you can keep that knife to yourself, thank you very much.*")

Because these groups were so different from each other, it is amazing, (even miraculous) quite frankly, that new worshipping communities with such divisions would actually be formed around the gospel of Jesus Christ. And survive. But such is the power of that good news in Jesus Christ.

And here's why these letters from Paul were so important. In reading these words, they would recognize them not just from Paul or his disciples, but God's words to them from God himself. Words of great encouragement.

In this portion of the letter, they would hear, for example a strong reminder that they were indeed once far off, especially from each other, but brought near through the love and witness and sacrifice of Jesus Christ their Lord. "*Brought near*" still leaves room to get closer, but describes how far they have come.

This is a message that is important for us to remember (and believe) today, especially as forces continue to try to drive God's precious children apart from each other. If we are brought near to God but are still far off from each other, and furthermore continue to show hostility to one another, our witness for the gospel is seriously hampered.

What the Ephesians experienced in being "*brought near*" is the joy of experiencing "one new humanity in place of two, thus making peace." May God do this for us wherever there is division.

Let us pray. *May the good news to the Ephesians be our good news as well, O God. Bring us close to you and to each other, that we might become the people you call us to be. In Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.*

*Christ Our Peace* by Marty Haugen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kes9CslvCV8>

*Benediction (May the Peace of God)* by Stuart Townend and Keith Getty

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u\\_L1lhYeCUg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_L1lhYeCUg)

*Bind Us Together* by The God's Apostle

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6TdMMJEZs0>

*Peace in Christ* by Claire Crosby (at 5 yrs. old)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Waitmz6C100>

*May the Peace of the Lord Christ God With You* by North Umbria Community

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqTSHpfndxY>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday July 26, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #387**

**After "The Lord's Prayer", what is the second most popular prayer?**

*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. (Col. 4:2 NIV)*

*Those who trust in their own wits are fools; but those who walk in **wisdom** come through safely. (Prov. 28:26 NRS)*

Pastor Jonathan and I were recently in Keever Hall talking to some "movie people." In several instances, St. Paul's has allowed filmmakers to use our parking lot or Keever Hall in exchange for nice donations (every little bit helps these days).

This time, however, they were looking at Keever as a place to film a scene for a new Netflix series called "Florida Man." This particular scene was going to be of the main character attending a "Gamblers Anonymous" Meeting. I told them they had an authentic location, as this meeting space for years has been utilized by "Narcotics Anonymous."

What caused me to think about the "second most" popular prayer after the "Lord's Prayer" was a comment by the Artistic Director who, in speaking to the others, identified they would need to create a poster of the "Serenity Prayer." A version of that prayer is regularly prayed at "Meetings" and is sometimes inscribed on sobriety medallions. Here is the short version:

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
Courage to change the things I can,  
and **Wisdom** to know the difference.*

When we think of the thousands of Twelve Step Meetings all over the country where this prayer is regularly prayed, it might well be the second most popular prayer after The Lord's Prayer.

I wonder how many are aware that the Serenity Prayer was first composed by Lutheran Pastor and Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. The earliest version goes back to 1932, and evolved into a longer version around 1952, with the following words:

*God, give me grace to accept with serenity  
the things that cannot be changed,  
Courage to change the things  
which should be changed,  
and the Wisdom to distinguish  
the one from the other.*

*Living one day at a time,  
Enjoying one moment at a time,*

*Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,  
Taking, as Jesus did,  
This sinful world as it is,  
Not as I would have it,  
Trusting that You will make all things right,  
If I surrender to Your will,  
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,  
And supremely happy with You forever in the next.  
Amen.*

Twelve steps groups regularly pray the shorter version, with some praying the longer version. Either way, for many years, the prayer has supported the inner peace that comes from turning one's life over to God (or higher power). The longer version reveals Niebuhr's particular faith in Jesus Christ as the one who brings ultimate serenity to those who love and trust Jesus. It's a good prayer for all of us.

*Let us pray. Thank you, O God for the gift of prayer, for the natural conversation that happens between us and you, and for those prayers passed on to us by others. Most of all, thank you for the Lord's Prayer, but thanks as well for the Serenity Prayer, table prayers, liturgical prayers, and all prayers that remind us to turn to you. May we be wise in our praying. In Jesus' name.  
Amen.*

*The Serenity Prayer* by The Serenity Prayer Project

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKhAg2dMKbo>

*Serenity Prayer Song* by Chad Warren and Jesse Powers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4gV7LDUUpM>

*Serenity (The Serenity Prayer Song)* by Higher Power Studio

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wonpb0NSu3M>

*Serenity Prayer* by Jerrell Gray

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XwhBzCyfU0>

*Full Version: The Serenity Prayer* by Power of Words

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOXZhirF1\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOXZhirF1_Q)

*Serenity Prayer* by Spirit Juice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-iRPITm-tsM>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, July 27, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #388

### Ever get a pea stuck in your ear?

<sup>15</sup> Elisha said to [King Joash], "Take a bow and arrows"; so he took a bow and arrows. <sup>16</sup> Then he said to the king of Israel, "Draw the bow"; and he drew it. Elisha laid his hands on the king's hands. <sup>17</sup> Then he said, "Open the window eastward"; and he opened it. Elisha said, "Shoot"; and he shot. Then he said, "The LORD's arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Aram! For you shall fight the Arameans in Aphek until you have made an end of them." (2 Ki. 13:15-17 NRS)

Perhaps I should first confess this is a story in search of both a Biblical application and supporting scripture. I recalled it recently while viewing some Olympic highlights of shooting events, both air rifle and bow.

Pea shooting has never been an Olympic event, but if it were, I witnessed in college a shot that would have been legendary for its accuracy. Standing in my doorway as a freshman and talking to Mark Pearsall, my neighbor across the hall, we watched Al Knorr fooling around with a pea shooter. It was a simple thing, really, a pea loaded into a straw.

I saw Knorr aim our direction. I saw Pearsall turn his head slightly, just enough to that pea not only to strike him on the side of his head, but to lodge deeply in his ear. Olympic gold, that one. A shot in a million! When Pearsall attempted to dislodge it, it was deeply imbedded beyond retrieval.

We all inspected it. You could barely see it, but it was there. So what next?

Pearsall didn't want to do anything. This was embarrassing. How can you go to the campus health service with a pea stuck in your ear? After failed persuasion, we finally convinced him that if he didn't go, it would probably start growing and that would be even more embarrassing.

He went. They couldn't get it out. They sent him to an ear, nose and throat specialist who had "pea in ear" retrieval tools. The pea was removed. End of story. That is, until several weeks later when he got the bill. Because he believed his campus health insurance was supposed to pay for this, he needed to go back to the health service to make that right.

He asked me to go with him. "Why do you need me?" I asked. "Because all they did last time was laugh at me," he replied.

"They're not going to laugh at you," I responded, trying to be a supportive pal. "Those nurses are really nice. They're not going to laugh at you .... All right, let's go."

Across campus we walked to the Student Health Center. Pearsall went up to the counter, leaned forward, and quietly whispered to one of the nurses. "I'm Mark Pearsall. I was here a few weeks ago because I got a pea stuck in my ear."

Immediately, she laughed. Hooted, actually, and then turned to the other nurse. “HEY JUDY, REMEMBER THIS GUY? HE’S THE KID WHO GOT THE PEA STUCK IN HIS EAR!”

Thankfully, he didn’t have to pay the bill. It was covered under his plan. But fifty-five years later, I can still hear the laughter. And I can still remember Al Knorr’s gold medal winning shot in a million. And Pearsall’s embarrassment.

So that’s the story, and I’m still looking for an application. I did discover the scripture above about shooting (arrows, not peas), which goes to show you can probably find scripture for just about anything.

I suppose could cite Proverbs 1:26 and apply it to the nurses.

*“I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when panic strikes you,”* (Prov. 1:26 NRS)

However, it is actually “*Wisdom*,” personified in Proverbs that laughs at foolishness. Not the nurses. Only if Pearsall had stuck the pea in his own ear, might this have been a relevant commentary on his own foolishness. But he was an “*innocent bystander*,” just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In the end, maybe this just as simple as being a friend to someone in need, even when it is someone embarrassed about getting a pea stuck in their ear.

Let us pray. *Remind us to be friends to each other in our times of need, and without judgement, lend support. Amen. Thanks for those who stand with us.*

I was looking for songs about ear but I found “H(ear)” songs instead.

*O Lord Hear My Prayer* by Noblesse

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ovs7zti8mpM>

*Hear My Cry O Lord* by Matthew Ward

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDhrzsFjVHM>

*Hear O Lord* by Ray Repp

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8sUZecMwD\\_M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8sUZecMwD_M)

*Hear My Cry O Lord* (Psalm 61) by Maranatha

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SuzHtlOzPho>

*Hear My Prayer O Lord* by Henry Purcell sung by Voces8

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OISUntqbXvc>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, July 28, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #389**

**My friend, the leper.**

The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: <sup>2</sup> When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling or an eruption or a spot, and it turns into a leprous disease on the skin of his body, he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests. <sup>3</sup> The priest shall examine the disease on the skin of his body, and if the hair in the diseased area has turned white and the disease appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a leprous disease; after the priest has examined him he shall pronounce him ceremonially unclean. (Lev. 13:1-3 NRS)

During my freshman year at Pacific Lutheran University, after I had supported my friend Mark Pearsall through his experience of getting a pea stuck in his ear (see Devotion #388), I believed he regarded me as a friend and trusted confidant. Therefore, I had no reason to disbelieve him, when in strictest confidence one night, he confessed to me that he had leprosy.

I had seen him scratching those white spots on his legs and arms, but never asked him about it. One night, as he and I were talking and he was scratching, he said, *"I have something to tell you in strictest confidence. You need to promise me you will not share this with anyone. I have leprosy."*

I was shocked. But he assured me it wasn't contagious, and I promised I would not tell anyone. Long before becoming a pastor, I believed that it was important to keep confidences, so I didn't tell anyone. Not anyone, except my mother some months later, when I had invited Pearsall to come home with me for a weekend. I believed my mother needed to know. I asked her not to tell anyone (except my father).

The weekend came and went, as Pearsall and I enjoyed a good friendship. It was such a good friendship that soon after that, Pearsall again said, *"I need to tell you something. Remember that night when I told you I had leprosy? It's not true. I just have a very bad case of eczema. I'm sorry I lied to you about that."*

I said, *"Oh man, why did you tell it was leprosy? And why did you wait till now to tell me the truth?"*

He replied, *"I don't know. I just saw you looking at me scratching, and we weren't that good friends at the time, so it seemed like a good joke. Besides, I knew you weren't going to tell anyone, anyway."*

Because my mother had worried about this, I knew I needed to call her right away. *"Mom, I just learned that Pearsall doesn't have leprosy. It's just a bad case of eczema. He said he was sorry."*

*"Mark!"* my mother exclaimed. *"I boiled the bed sheets when he left, I was so worried!"*

*"At least you didn't tell anyone."* I said.

*“Mark, I told Pastor Brueckner (our pastor)! He’s on the University Board of Trustees. I thought he needed to know. He was shocked to imagine the PLU might admit a leper!”*

My mother then made a follow up call to our pastor. She shared the updated information with our pastor and learned that he had already made an inquiry to the school and was assured there were no lepers in Foss Hall or anywhere on campus.

Through this experience, I learned just how naive I had been about someone sharing this kind of “*whopper*” with me. In my defense, however, we didn’t have the internet back then to fact check “*leprosy*” (Hanson’s Disease) or “*eczema*” or even type in “*white blotches*” and see what comes up.

I just didn’t believe a friend would lie to me about something like that and be so sincere about it. Oh, well. At least Pearsall didn’t have to visit the health center with a pea stuck in his ear (again see yesterday’s devotion) and also say, “*Oh, and by the way, I also have leprosy.*”

I wonder how much unnecessary stress, regret, and misery has happened when people, for whatever reason, lie to each other. This seems so commonplace these days, so much so that whenever someone tells us the truth, we should never take that for granted.

One of the joys of Christian faith is that we can be open and honest not only with each other but with God. Of course, we all fall short of that, sometimes in small ways, other times in large ways (especially with each other). Thankfully, when we do fall short, we can readily confess our sins/lies/failures/dishonesty and be assured that we are forgiven. I John 1:8-10 is very clear about this, so clear that it is regularly recited in our liturgy.

*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 Jn. 1:8-10 NRS)*

The outcome of all this is living a life of grace, including grace for friends who tell you they have leprosy when they don’t.

*Let us pray. Dear Jesus. Thank you for your love. Help us be open and honest with each other trust can be built up between us and enjoyed. Thank you for all those who tell us the truth, and don’t make stuff up that risks the trust we have between us. Strengthen all your people for positive and healthy relationships with each other. In Jesus name. Amen.*

I didn’t know if I would find any songs about leprosy, but I did. And a couple about forgiveness and grace.

*Leper Song* by October Wedding Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0jZOclcntE>

*Naaman the Leper Song* by Shelby Williams

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIN7mU2FK08>

*Lord, Forgive Us* by Galkin Evangelistic Team

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dSICNvYIz8>

*Restore In Us O God* (ELW 328) by St. Paul's Episcopal Marshalltown IA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJVDmjAEJzE>

*Song of Grace* by Jarod Esby

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yyRF9bRYy54>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, July 29, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #390

### Eda Sa Qaqa: Sharing the gospel as a gold medal winning Fijian rugby team

*<sup>17</sup> This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. <sup>18</sup> "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. <sup>19</sup> In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. (Jn. 14:17-19 NRS).*

One of the wonders of "YouTube" is discovering all kinds of stunning victories and great stories without having to navigate cable TV and all those commercials. Just after enjoying watching 17 year old Alaskan Lydia Jacoby's amazing 100 Meter Breast Stroke Victory, I saw on the side bar something about Fiji's Gold Medal in Rugby.

Admittedly, I know little about Rugby, but I enjoyed the recap, especially the emotions displayed by the Fijians as they claimed Gold once again (the first time was 2016). What really struck me, however, was the song they sung at the end of the match as they gathered in a circle. As a devotion writer always looking for songs to post with these devotions, this one intrigued me.

It sounded like a gospel song and was beautifully delivered as a piece coming more from a gold medal choir than gold medal rugby team. That lead me to hunt for the song and its meaning. I found a website (Mashable) from 2016 where the reported commented on their first victory commented and this traditional song:

*"But the moment that took the internet's breath away was when the team made a circle, sung a traditional hymn and broke down in tears. 'E Da Sa Qaqa' is a gospel song, translated as 'We Are Winners Because Of This World.' The team often sings it, along with other hymns like 'Ogo Noqu Masu' (This Is My Prayer) during training camps and games."*

We are winners because of this world? I can imagine a secular song of victory with these lyrics, but a gospel song? Winners because of this world? I don't think so. That's no gospel song!

Well, guess what? It is. That translation is all wrong, and when you hear the words translated correctly, you can imagine this song appropriately sung both in Sunday morning worship, and by a joyful faith filled rugby team:

*E da sa qaqa  
Eda sa qaqa  
E na vuku ni dra  
Kei na nona vosa  
E da sa qaqa*

*We have overcome  
We have overcome*

*By the blood of the lamb  
And the Word of the Lord  
We have overcome*

That is a far cry from declaring we are “winners because of the **world**.” I guess “world” made more sense to the writer than “word,” but the song clearly witnesses that we have overcome by the Word of the Lord and the blood of the Lamb. Jesus “priestly prayer” about the disciples in John chapter 17 makes this plain:

Jesus says, “I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. 16 They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth”. (Jn. 17:15-17 NRS)

Let us pray. *Thank you for songs of joy and hope that witness to your sacrificial love for all people. May we overcome that which suggests we are winners because of the world and not the Word of the Lord. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

BACK-TO-BACK Dominant Fiji rolls to rugby gold again Tokyo Olympics 2021 (song at end)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNbvfhxL6jU>

Lyric Video: Fiji Rugby 7s Singing *Eda Sa Qaqa*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7MGyFBSj88>

*Eda Sa Qaqa* full song by Rugby 7s

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYL7bl6zqGA&t=6s>

Flying Fijians singing “We Have Overcome”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVS9knuNQU8>

and best of all, the *Eda Sa Qaqa* Song by Vika and Friends

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9UYBgUHMBo>

and finally, “This is My Prayer” ‘*Ogo Nogu Masu*’ by Fiji 7s National Team (awesome)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3xHorhQAqg&list=RDB3xHorhQAqg&start\\_radio=1&rv=B3xHorhQAqg&t=48](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3xHorhQAqg&list=RDB3xHorhQAqg&start_radio=1&rv=B3xHorhQAqg&t=48)

### **St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, July 30, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #391**

I spent all day working on a brand-new devotion entitled "*Vaccine Hesitancy Versus Delta Variant urgency: What's a Christian to do?*" At the end of the day, after trying to write a careful, thoughtful well-researched response, I realized I didn't know. Facing the deadline, I ran out of time to further pray about it. My choice then was either sending Kathleen a note saying "I don't have anything for today" or once again reaching into that now deep barrel of previously written pieces. So, here's one on prayer, and it will be my prayer that God offers some help in processing that other challenging issue of the day. Blessings.

### **St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, August 6, 2020 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #138**

**Pray without ceasing. Or else.**

*Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thess. 5:16-18 NRS)*

*And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. (Matt. 2:12 NRS)*

Do you remember your dreams? Some dreams, maybe? How about nightmares?

I cannot prove that God has ever spoken to me in a dream, like God has done in the Bible to Abimelech (Gen 20:3), Jacob, (Gen 28:12), Laban (Gen. 31:24), Joseph (Gen 37:5), Pharaoh (Gen 41:25), Solomon (I Kings 3:5), Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:1), Joseph (Matt. 1:20), or the Wise Men (Matt. 2:12).

I do believe however, that in a dream I once had when I was a teenager, I learned the hard way something very important about prayer. Especially praying without ceasing.

The dream began about as badly as can be imagined. I died and went to hell. It was just exactly the fiery inferno of our worst fears. Fire. Brimstone. Hideous demons screaming all around me. It was horrible. I closed my eyes and prayed. Oh, how I prayed. I said how sorry I was for everything. I begged for another chance to be good. I promised I would turn my life around. "*Dear God, dear God dear God. Help me help me help me.*"

Then, as I was praying, I felt myself being lifted up. The screams faded. It grew cooler. Up and up and up I went, until at last all around me was the sweet smell of spring. Still praying, I opened my eyes. It was beautiful. It was heaven. There were mountains and trees and flowers

and angels and a gentle brook. It was everything you could ever imagine heaven could be... and more.

I stopped praying.

Immediately I fell, not just onto heaven's meadow, but down and down and down, back to hell. Back to the inferno. Back to the screaming demons. Back to the anguish and utter hopelessness. Again, I closed tight my eyes, and prayed as fervently as before. *"Help me help me help me O God. Save me. I'll do anything."*

Again, I rose up. Up and up and up until at last I was back to that sweet place I had just barely glimpsed earlier. Opening my eyes, it was so wonderful. Again, I stopped praying and again I fell. I was back in hell; I shut tight my eyes and prayed. And up again I went.

I soon concluded that as long as I kept my eyes closed tight, and as long as I prayed without ceasing, I could avert the fires of hell. But it was also like treading water in the middle of the ocean. How long could I keep up? Praying without ceasing I went up. Ceasing without praying I sank. *"Heeeellllpppp meee!!"*

My ordeal ended at last, when the demons gave way to *"Mark, wake up."* It was my mother, poking me to get up because it was Saturday morning, and time to go to church for confirmation class. Thank God for confirmation. In a very cold sweat, I departed that nightmare ordeal, hoping and now praying this is not what St. Paul warned of when he said *"pray without ceasing."*

All these years later that dream remains vivid. I suppose it reveals a part of me that worries I'll never be good enough for heaven, even if I pray without ceasing. More importantly, though, it reveals the absolute importance of God's grace, which is always reminding us that it's never about how good we are, but always about how good Jesus is.

Let us pray: *Gracious and ever living God, with thankful hearts we bless you for your grace and love, Thank you for lifting us up from our pit of fear and hopelessness to that heavenly place you have prepared. Remind us by your grace that Jesus died for our sins and that your Holy Spirit is always interceding for us especially when we are weary or discouraged. Come to us in our dreams and transform our nightmares into occasions for drawing close to you. Hear our prayers on behalf of all who suffer. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

After recalling that nightmare, I needed some calming, encouraging, eyes, vision, heaven hopeful songs. Here's what I found:

I Lift My Eyes (Psalm 121) Dan Forest

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YEZGj\\_Qb4Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YEZGj_Qb4Y)

*Be Thou My Vision* by 4Him

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jIMhshpf0Y4>

*Open the Eyes of My Heart* by Michael W. Smith

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idQ1n3cdgfo>

*Before the Throne of God Above* by Selah

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MUNywHsZPU>

*Pray Without Ceasing* by Gary Freeland

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-s3QhdyyySo>

*Be Thou My Vision* by Audrey Assad

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXDhCEnM-bQ>

*Bompaye (Pray Without Ceasing)* by Amos Nkansah

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vHsz3sy-i8&t=167s>

*Pray Without Ceasing Thank You Album* by Natalie Howard

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDc\\_N\\_5Sb4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDc_N_5Sb4)

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, August 1, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #392**

**Hiatus.**

**<sup>16</sup> I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. (Eph. 1:16 NRS)**

According to the dictionary, a *"hiatus"* is "a pause or gap in a sequence, series, or process." That's a good way to describe what I am going to do with these daily devotions for the next few weeks. I've revisited a few along the way since I first began March 18, 2020, but largely the projected has continued.

It's been something I have worked on every single day for the past sixteen and a half months. Over 370,470 words have been written. Thousands of songs have been posted at the end. The number at the top of the devotion reminds me of how many have been completed.

It has been very rewarding to write these devotions; I have hoped it has been an effective means to communicate the gospel during this pandemic year. I have not grown tired of writing, and look forward to resuming, but they take a lot of time, and with staff vacations and medical leaves, I must, for a time, give full attention to Sunday worship, pastoral care, and our day-to-day operations.

So let me leave you with a lovely prayer I found in the book "All Will Be Well," edited by Lyn Klug. This pray was by English theologian Leslie Weatherhead, best known for a classic book called "The Will of God."

**"I lift up my heart, O God, for all who are the prey of anxious fears, who cannot get their minds off themselves and for whom every demand made on them fills them with foreboding, and with the feeling that they cannot cope with all that is required of them.**

**Give them the comfort of knowing that this feeling is illness, net cowardice; that millions have felt as they feel, that there is a way through the dark valley, and light at the end of it.**

**Lead them to those who can help them and understand them and show them the pathway to health and happiness. Comfort and sustain them by the loving presence of the Savior who knows and understand all our woe and fear, and give them enough courage to face each day, and rest their minds in the thought that You will see them through. Amen."**

--Leslie Weatherhead England (1883-1975)

*Sorrow Fades* by Emu Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmPIGpFIHTA>

*God is Love (Come Let Us United to Sing)* Pilgrim Mennonite Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WM67XFmS6hE>

*Pie Jesus* by Voces8

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9al6HNOgSo>

*What A Wonderful World* by Eclipse 6

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tin3xyfbWOE>

*It is Well/ I Will Exult Thee* by Celtic Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGTjTrzPrs8>

**St. Paul's In Your Home (Hiatus Edition) for Wednesday, May4, 2021 from Pastor Mark Opgrand #393**

This piece landed in my email this morning, and I thought it was so good that I decided to put it out as a Hiatus Edition St. Paul's In Your Home. North Carolina ELCA Bishop Tim Smith is a wonderful bishop and pastor, and also a great writer. This is from "Synod E-News." I hope it resonates with you as it did with me. P Mark

**Vaccinations: Reflections from Bishop Tim Smith**

*Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.* Philippians 2:4 (NRSV)

I learned a tough lesson right after college when I traveled to spend the summer working with medical missionaries in West Africa. Children in remote villages were dying by the hundreds of dysenteries from dirty water. We had plenteous pills that would almost instantly save those children's lives.

I'll never forget those mothers with sick children, and I was full of gratitude to be a bearer of healing and hope. How naïve I was, how presumptuous, to assume that they would trust me, a white stranger, with their little ones. No amount of pleading could convince them to let us give their dying children that medicine.

I watched many of them die in their mothers' arms while I held what would have saved their lives in my hand. I had always thought how terrible it would be to be surrounded by horror and death and not be able to do anything about it. I learned that summer of 1982 that it's even worse to be able to help, to save lives, but be misunderstood, mistrusted, and rejected by the underinformed and misinformed.

Fast forward to early August of 2021. The synod office has had almost a full-on opening of back to normal—meaning, of course, pre-pandemic. How devastating is it, on so many levels, to realize so quickly, so starkly, that this virus is far from done with us? Oh, it could be.

We have, as with measles, polio, and many other diseases that ravaged, one magic bullet that can eradicate COVID's threat: a vaccine. It's plentiful, free, increasingly proven safe, and amazingly, as vaccines go, effective. But fewer than half of all eligible Americans are fully vaccinated, and astoundingly, half of those claim that they do not plan to be. It's their right.

But is it their right to be transmitters of the Delta variant and even worse, incubators for future variants against which our current vaccines do not provide protection?

If it is indeed their legal right, it is not the way of Jesus.

I'm addressing this to folks who claim to follow Jesus, and any way you slice it, he's way less interested in your individual rights than in the common good and the last, lost, and least.

United Methodist Church Bishop Ken Carter of Florida, where the virus is in a phenomenal spike, wrote last week:

*We are here to love our neighbor.  
We love our neighbor as an expression of our love for God.  
The whole law (Torah) can be summarized in this way.  
Our love extends especially to the most vulnerable.  
Jesus was a healer.  
The cross was laying down one's life for one's friends.  
We place the needs of others before our own.  
We choose life rather than death.  
The body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.*

He concludes with this remark with which I profoundly resonate:

***That the church in the United States cannot say unambiguously that masks and vaccines are outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace reveals how far we have drifted from the core mission of discipleship in the way of Jesus, who was a teacher, healer, and sacrificial servant.***

In his July 29 press conference, the governor did not announce a mask mandate for the state of NC, despite double-digit COVID+ numbers and the biggest surge in the virus since February.

But I get it. It's so hard to roll it back once people feel that they've endured their purgatory and have now been set free from their previous shackles. I have a very full dance card this fall trying to catch up on several things we couldn't do last year, including seven funerals. I will be at the very least wearing a mask.

Many are resisting such a reintroduction of any suggested guidelines. Pandemic fatigue is real. Nobody wants to go back. But denial is not only not our friend. It is deadly.

This week, the NC Synod Re-Gathering Task Force is meeting to reconsider possibly issuing COVID Re-Gathering Guidelines again after lifting them all in late May. Synod staff might face new travel and participation restrictions as well. Dang and double dang!

I do not wish to shame the unvaccinated. We are people of grace, right? Nothing I say in anger or disgust changes minds. All I know to do is encourage, invite, and inform that the vaccine is the way out of this mess and the best way to be a disciple of Jesus. That's not my political opinion. It's sound theology as well as scientific and medical fact. Just like care for your neighbor above your own individual rights is the way of Jesus.

Jesus understands our frustration and lament. *“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing.”*

Last week one of our grandchildren sharply reminded me that I couldn't make him do something. He was right.

But I tried really hard to help encourage and empower him to choose to do the right thing. Eventually, he did. So, we plead. We love. We encourage. We inform. We lament. We wait. And we rejoice with each new vaccination decision.

Walking with you,

Tim Smith, NC Synod Bishop

Let us pray. *Guide us, O God that we may participate in the healing of the world. Amen.*

*There is a Balm in Gilead* by Covid Hymns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hp6VgQS8zU>

*Bring for the Kingdom* by Marty Haugen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwXAcTlp-RY>

*Love One Another* by Shenandoah Music Camp

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psXjWgXeRTw>

*The King of Love My Shepherd Is* by Gracias Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQVF9vLhDA>

*We are not alone; God is with us* by Voice of Eden

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnwBJPsjRNo>

**St. Paul's In Your Home (Hiatus Edition) for Friday, August 6, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #394**

This was the one that first got me experiencing the “twisties” like those Olympic gymnasts. It took off but somewhere up in the air it started spinning and I couldn't figure out how to land it. You'll be the judge if I “scored” this time or if it fell flat, but at least I tried once again, after being impressed by our bishop's take on this hard issue and winning the gold, (in my humble subject to disagreement judgement.)

**Vaccine Hesitancy Versus Delta Variant Urgency: What's a Christian to do?**

<sup>9</sup> *The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself."* <sup>10</sup> ***Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.*** (Rom. 13:9-10 NRS)

~~Here we go again.~~ Here we keep going.

Unless we have given up following news and media all together, we have been hearing about the Covid 19 Delta variant for a while. Every single life for the past year and a half has been affected by this global pandemic, including these variants. An already divided population over many things has continued to be divided about this as well.

The population includes those who have put faith in science and vaccines and those who remain skeptical (or defiant). The Christian church has been very divided about this, too. We have church leadership begging people to be vaccinated and follow safety guidelines and protocols. We also have church leaders, like a pastor in Tennessee recently who said those *wearing* masks will be turned away from worship.

The skeptics are most often “hesitant” about getting the vaccines because a) they don't regard Covid 19 illness as serious and life threatening, b) they don't believe the vaccines have been determined to be safe enough or be without serious side effects, c) they believe their own natural immune systems are robust enough to handle it, or d) all this is part of a vast conspiracy to curtail personal freedom and control people's lives.

It is hard to change a “hesitant” mind, though there continues to be a number of stories circulating about a change of mind when either someone, or a someone's loved one, becomes gravely ill or dies. Many then express their wish that they had made the choice to get the

vaccine. It is rare to hear of someone suffering greatly from Covid or be close to death who has said they were glad they chose to resist getting the vaccine.

As Christians, and wanting to care for all our neighbors, we are in a tough spot. Our Lutheran tradition affirms the means to treat illnesses are not antithetical to God, but part of how God works in the world. And while science is part of an ever-changing landscape, especially related to virus mutations, we trust what we have discovered regarding scientific and medical advancements.

It is painful, however, when we experience our own families and church families and those who commonly confess “*Jesus is Lord*” being torn apart by division especially when we all seek the same ultimate goal: health and wellness.

How can we find common ground so that our world can be healed? How can people coming from different places show love for those who have embraced different points of view? How do I say and show I love you even when I really believe you are wrong? Or misguided? or foolish? Or under bad influence? And you the same for me?

Is everything just “*personal*,” like our personal decisions to be for or against? Was Jesus only an advocate for “*private health*” (and private salvation) or can we relate Jesus’ instructions to love our neighbor (and one another) as applying also to “*public health*” (with his intention to save all people and bring healing to all people... with our help ...and science... and commitment?”

Challenging questions.

God help us. And God bless those who bring wisdom and knowledge we can trust for the sake of a world begging for healing.

Let us pray. *Wherever we are coming from as Christian people of faith, we thank you O God for a uniting our hearts in prayer. We need you Lord Jesus, your Word, you model of Godly ways to live and love each other in the face of so much that divides us. Bless us with your presence and Holy Spirit that we may be well. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

*Savior of the Nations Come* by Cardiphonia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ol78eWbhE1o>

*Just As I Am* by Chennai

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKw7Hq8Go4U>

*Kaarirulil En Nesa Dheebamae* by Voice of Eden

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vh9RoPtYxEA>

*We’ve Come Along a Long Long Way Lord* by Oasis Chorale

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7bqvkbU8HQ>

*Praise to the Lord the Almighty* by Altar of Praise Chorale

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=roxlm\\_gCb7c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=roxlm_gCb7c)

**St. Paul's In Your Home (Hiatus Edition) for Wednesday, August 11, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #395**

**...meanwhile, half a world away...**

<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."  
(Matt. 28:19-20 NRS)

A couple days ago I received via email a few photos from Pastor Michael Megahan, our missionary and Bible translator who is currently visiting in Tanzania. His message was simple: "12 baptized plus sermon in Swahili plus eucharist in church we are building in mission area."

The photos say much more and shall be attached to the end of this email. Mike Berg in a Facebook post observed: "So you think your Monday morning commute is long" and went on to celebrate how these pictures so well showed Pastor Megahan spreading Christ's love a mere "7,808" miles away. It's one thing to hear Michael speak of his upcoming trip, or talk about it when he gets back. But to see the picture of him standing before that young congregation preaching in Swahili and then see him with photos of the baptized... what a wonderful reminder that God continues to do God's work despite all that would hinder it. So today's hiatus edition will feature the photos for you to enjoy as well as an earlier devotion Pastor Michael shared about his work as a missionary. Blessings.

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Saturday, June 6, 2020 not by Pastor Mark Opgrand, but by Pastor Michael Megahan #77**

*(Note from Pastor Mark: I happy to offer another Pastor Megahan devotion today. Since this is so closely related to Pentecost Sunday themes, I wanted to share it before we got too far into the Pentecost Season. It's great to have these.)*

**I heard you. And understood!**

*"Utterly amazed they asked: 'Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own language? ....we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongue.'" Acts 2:7-8, 11b (NIV)*

(A side note: the Greek word (διάλεκτος) translated as "own language" and "own tongue" is the word from which the English word "dialect" is derived. It is different from the "unknown tongues" Paul speaks about later. At Pentecost, they were hearing, without interpreters, the Good News preached in their own dialects.)

As a missionary in Africa, one of my main responsibilities (and joys) in one area was establishing a house-to-house evangelism program in a new diocese. After visiting every village for over seven years, it came time for us to move to a new call. So, I returned to every village to say good-bye. At the end of one farewell service in a small village, a woman came up to me and said, "Do you remember me?" I had to confess that I did not, for I had visited so many people over such a long time, it was difficult to remember all of them.

She said: "About five years ago, you came to our home to talk to my father. He was a shaman (witchdoctor). You sat outside, in the shade and told him about Jesus. I was inside fixing tea, so you probably never really saw me. But I could hear every word you said, and you were speaking in our dialect.

"My father died. He never accepted Christ. But I listened carefully. You see, I was a prostitute, already had two children and was in danger of getting AIDS. But when I heard you telling my dad about Jesus, I was touched so much about how Jesus really loved me and died for me that I started hoping and praying that Jesus would come into my life. You see, it was the first time I had ever heard about God's love, and you were speaking in my language so I could really understand.

"A few days later, I went to church and talked to the Pastor. I repented, accepted Christ and was baptized. I stopped being a prostitute, started a small business from a loan from the congregation and now am rearing my children to know Christ. If you had not come and told me about God's love in my own language I would probably have died of AIDS and left my children orphans."

At Pentecost, the Church was born and given the Holy Spirit's gifts and power to proclaim the Good News *to every nation in every tongue*: "...we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongue" (Acts 2:11b). If we are silent, if we do not provide the witness in a way and language that people understand, evil will then prevail:

*"Lost in the night do the people yet languish  
Longing for morning the darkness to vanquish,  
Plaintively heaving a sigh full of anguish  
Will not day come soon?  
Will not day come soon" (LBW 394).*

Let us pray:

*Holy Father, in the Name of Jesus, forgive the Church for being slow in telling the world about Christ. Forgive us for being silent about the Good News to those who are different from us, who have a different language. Through the Holy Spirit, enable me to participate in the great story telling about Jesus in every nation and language so that all people might have life and have it abundantly. Send me or help me to send others. Amen.*

P.S. ... and for our hymn/songs today:

Another Great *O Day Full of Grace* by Luther College Nordic Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laMO1EfGpKs>

*Lost in the Night* performed by St. Olaf Choir

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2\\_7XUdAabM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2_7XUdAabM)

*Spirit of the Living God Fall Afresh On Me* by RVTA Kids

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccaFnRYLTok>

*Spirit of the Living God* Meredith Andrews

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPks3NQwH28>





**St. Paul's In Your Home (Hiatus Edition) for Thursday August 12, 2021 not by Pastor Mark Opgrand but by Chaplain Bob Weeks #396**

Here's a brand new one from Chaplain Weeks. It took me back to seminary days when I first learned of "Balaam's Ass." I didn't remember that story from Sunday School, to be sure. The humor of it all goes beyond the King James rendering of "donkey" as "ass" and I note most later English translations say "donkey." But the story has our attention, even more so when Balaam's donkey speaks back to Balaam. Enjoy this wonderful devotion from Chaplain Weeks.

**WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM BALAAM'S ASS**

**By Chaplain Bob Weeks**

*Scripture: "God came to Balaam and asked, 'Why are these men with you? Balaam said to God, Balak son of Zipper, king of Moab sent me this message: A people that has come out of Egypt covers the face of the land. Now come and put a curse on them for me. Perhaps then I will be able to fight them and drive them away. But God said to Balaam, Do not go with them, you must not put a curse on these people, because they are blessed.'" (Numbers 22:10-12)*

Being a Navy Chaplain aboard a Navy ship requires effort to get sailors attention to God's Word. One of my tactics, one Sunday, was to post a sign at the head of the enlisted chow line entitled: "Learn From Balaam's Ass." The attendance was great that Sunday.

We can all learn from Balaam's Ass. Before I write any further, the word *ass* means *donkey*. So, get your mind out of the gutter!

The Biblical Book, Numbers, tells the story of Israel's journey from Mount Sinai to the plains of Moab on the border of Canaan. Balaam is Moab's answer to Moses. Balaam began influencing and leading the people of Israel sharing the pagan belief that the God of Israel is like any other deity who might be manipulated by acts of magic or sorcery; however, in the early part of the Book of Numbers, Balaam encounters the one true God of Israel.

In Balaam's journey on a donkey (Chapter 22), he begins to learn that dealing with the true God is fundamentally different from anything he has ever experienced. When Balaam decides to curse Israel upon the request of Balak the king of Moab, he finds out that his mouth is unable to pronounce a curse on Israel. Instead God brings him to pronounce blessings.

The story reports that the King of Moab had become terrified with the presence of the Israelites and summons Balaam to pronounce a curse on Israel. The elders of Moab and Midian

had even brought with them a fee for the proposed divination. Next, God begins to contact Balaam. God tells Balaam not to go with Balak's men and that he is not to pronounce a curse on the Israelites because they were blessed. The summons and influence of Balak's people was so great that God came to Balaam and said, ". . . go with them, but do only what I tell you."

So Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab; however, God was very angry with Balaam and sent an angel to stand in the road to oppose Balaam. When the donkey saw the angel standing in the roads with a drawn sword, she turned off of the road into a field. Balaam beat her to get her back on the road. Then, the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path with wall on both sides. The donkey pressed Balaam against one of the walls so that his foot was crushed. Again, Balaam beat the donkey.

Next, the angel of the Lord moved on to a narrow place where there was no place to turn, and when the donkey saw the angel of the Lord she lay down under Balaam and he beat her. Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey to say, "*What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?*" Balaam's answer was, "*You have made a fool of me. If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you.*"

At this, the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and Balaam saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with a drawn sword. With this, Balaam bowed his head and fell facedown. The angel of the Lord asked Balaam, "*Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me. The donkey saw me and turned away from me three times. If she had not turned away, I certainly would have killed you by now. Balaam's response was 'I have sinned, if you are displeased, I will go back.'*"

The Lord then told Balaam to go with the princes, but to speak only what the Lord would tell him to speak. In fact, Balaam meets with Balak, but tells him that he can only speak what the Lord tells him to speak.

Balak took Balaam to places to view all of the Israelites and to have Balaam curse them; however, each time Balaam met with the Lord and returned to say that the Israelites would be blessed and that the Israelites would conquer Balak's kingdom. After this, Balaam returned home. We know that the Israelites were successful in conquering the territory of Balak.

This ancient story was passed down through the ages by the Jewish people and has become significant enough to be included in the book of Numbers. It is a story of how God used a donkey to stop a sorcerer – Balaam – from wrongdoing. Later, in Numbers 31:7, we learn that Balaam has not learned to depend on the Lord. When the Israelites took vengeance on the Midianites, Balaam was one of the enemy that was killed.

**So what can we learn from Balaam's Ass (donkey)?**

We learn that God can use creatures other than humans to accomplish His ways. Just to mention several: Remember, A dove was used to let Noah learn that the flood had receded (Genesis 8:11). God used a whale to teach Jonah a lesson (Jonah 1:17). God used snakes (Numbers 21:6) to get the Israelites attention. Frogs, gnats, flies, and locusts were used to get the Egyptians' attention (Exodus 8-10). God uses a Lion (Daniel 6:16-21). Jesus used fish to get the disciples attention (Luke 5:5-10). Jesus uses a colt to enter triumphantly . (Mark 11:1-9). Jesus uses a story about lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7).

We can also learn that God is always fair in His judgement and love. **Nothing gets in the way of Gods will!**

*Prayer: Into your hands, Almighty God, we place ourselves: our minds to know you, our hearts to love you: our wills to serve you, for we are yours. Into your hands , Lord, we place ourselves, receive us and draw us after you, that we may follow your steps. In the Name of Jesus we pray. Amen.*

Surprise surprise! There is a song about Balaam. "*Balaam*" by Don Francisco

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbTAaBWmq5M>

*If You But Trust In God to Guide You* by Jessica Munson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rA1lIK4eg4>

*If You But Trust In God to Guide You* by Fountainview Academy

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFPe\\_G-Lqcc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFPe_G-Lqcc)

*Trust and Obey* by First UMC Houston

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcMQ0RiQrtE>

*Trust and Obey* by Kaoma

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNEaZ97wZZo>

*And Can it Be* by Mennonite Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQ10ZBsfVvg>

*Come Thou Font of Every Blessing* by Celtic Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKOoeTbjSel>

**St. Paul's In Your Home (Hiatus Edition) for Monday, August 16, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand  
#397**

**Why walking with Jesus is a *labyrinth* and not a *maze*.**

<sup>2</sup> In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. <sup>4</sup> And you know the way to the place where I am going." <sup>5</sup> Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" <sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (Jn. 14:2-6 NRS)

One of the most interesting and inspiring churches in France is the Chartres Cathedral. Completed in 1252 A.C.E., it is known for its breathtaking architecture, statuary, stained glass windows, and labyrinth. During a time when much of the population was illiterate, many stories of the Bible would be taught using the windows and scenes depicted in stone.

When I visited Chartres Cathedral in 1999, it was during a day when the labyrinth could be walked (sometimes chairs cover it). That was my first introduction to the spiritual practice of walking a labyrinth. I remember first thinking of it as a maze, as it looked like those puzzles of my childhood, where I would take a pencil and try to find my way to the center, avoiding lots of dead ends. It was not that.

Though there is a strong resemblance, a labyrinth is significantly different than a maze. There are lots of twists and turns in a labyrinth, so many that you sometimes wonder if you will ever reach the center, but there are no dead ends. If you follow the path, you will be guided to the center, and back out again.

Not so with a maze. You might make it to the center (or the end) but all the dead ends are designed to frustrate you, or at least test your own skill at navigating.

Walking with Jesus is like walking a labyrinth, not a maze. The savior wants to take us to that spiritual center where we can be close to God. It is just a matter of trust. Walking the labyrinth at Chartres (or other places that have them), is a wonderful spiritual exercise reminding us that while the path is not always clear, with Jesus as our guide we shall always end up where God wants us to go.

Let us pray: As we travel life's journey, Lord Jesus, remind us that it is like a labyrinth, not a maze. Thank you for being with us every step of the way, making sure that we always find the way home to you. Amen.

A brief introduction to Chartres by PBS travel host and Lutheran, Rick Steves

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOi1NXk-rU8>

A short video of the Labyrinth

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXfJNrrcgil>

*Let us ever walk with Jesus* by First Plymouth Lincoln

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMsXV\\_3vujg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMsXV_3vujg)

*I Want to Walk as a Child of Light* by Diocese of St. Benedict

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QISk0oYYpuk>

*I Will Walk With Jesus* by Come Follow Him

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3AxeEdo2MI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4nemClRD8>

*I Have Decided to Follow Jesus* by Goober Sir

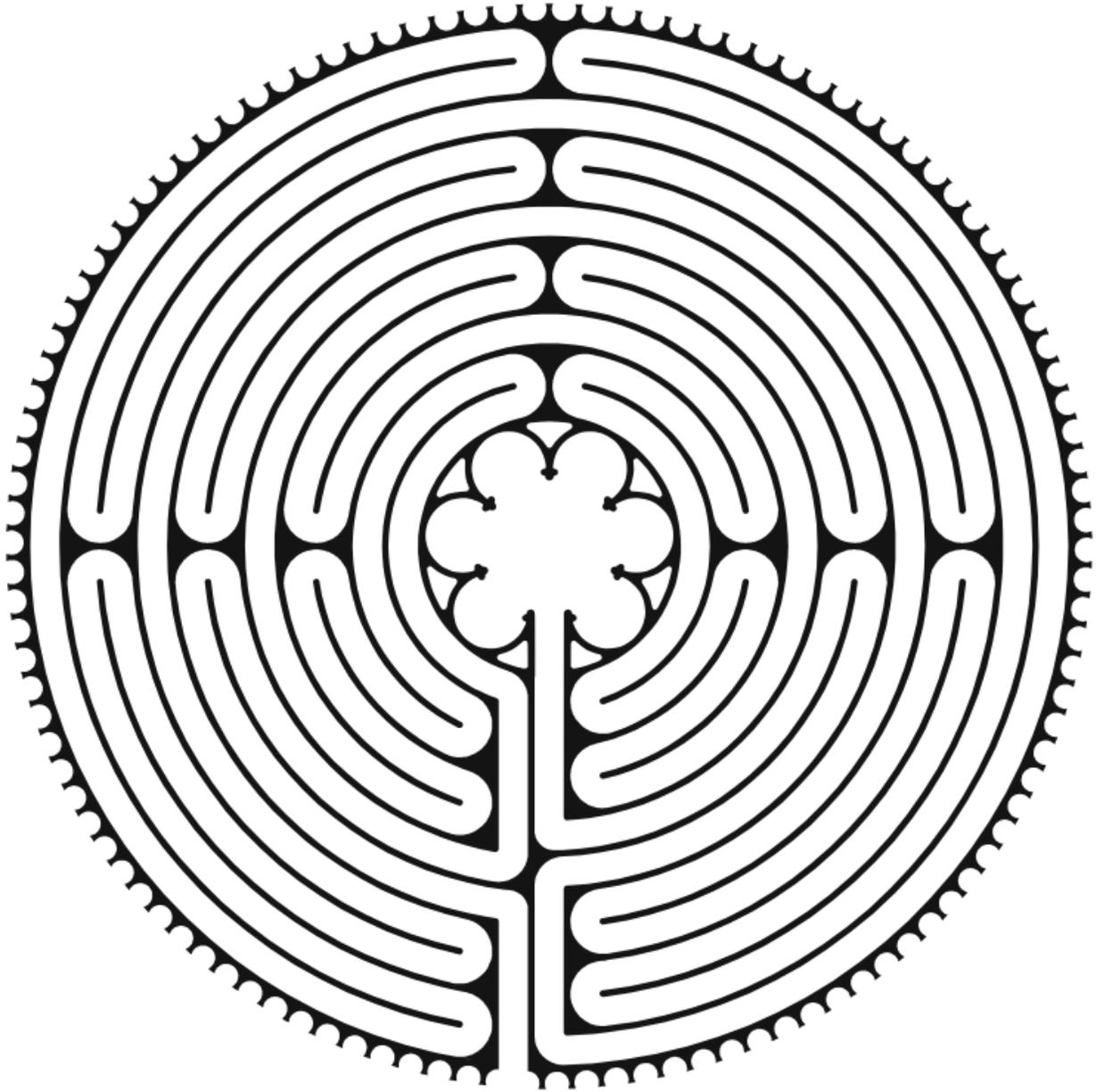
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8jvfdDtoqY>

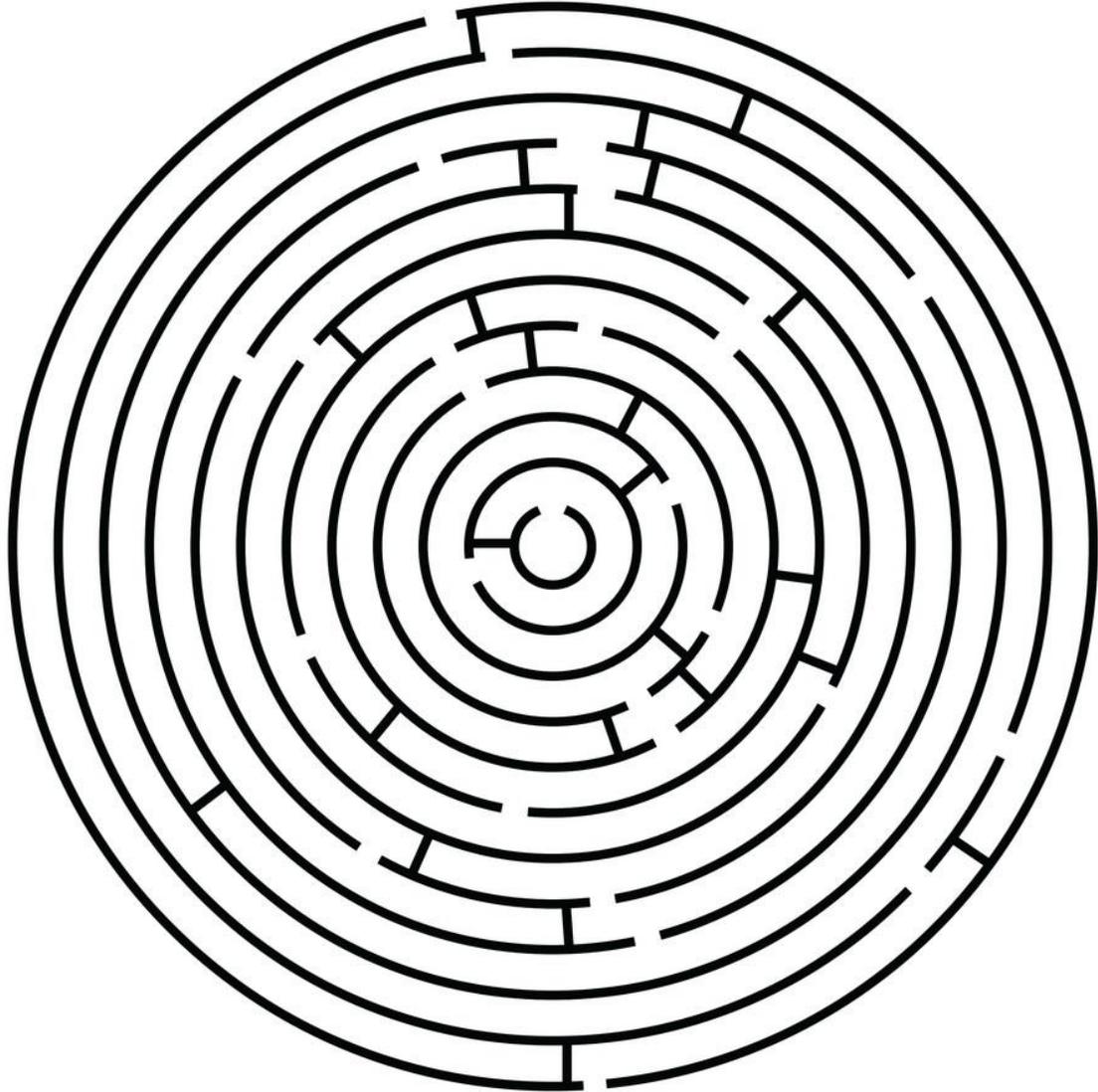
*Follow Jesus* by Donald Vails

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xy\\_RPd-6ok4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xy_RPd-6ok4)

*I Am the Way* by GMWA Mass Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6Tq0DOYQus>





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**St. Paul's In Your Home (Hiatus Edition) "Epilogue" for Monday, August 16, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #397 (Corrected)**

I had tried to attach two images to today's email, one of a labyrinth, and the other a maze. Due to a technical problem, they did not attach. Since they show so well the similarities between a maze and a labyrinth, it is worth a second try. I hope you can see these. Pastor Mark

**St. Paul's In Your Home (Hiatus Edition) for Thursday, August 19, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #398**

**You don't have to go away sad.**

*"<sup>18</sup> A certain ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>19</sup> Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. <sup>20</sup> You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother.'" <sup>21</sup> He replied, "I have kept all these since my youth." <sup>22</sup> When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." <sup>23</sup> But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich. (Lk. 18:18-23 NRS)*

This is a scripture that has always moved me, especially the line, *"when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich."*

Sometimes the ruler has been referred to as *"a rich young ruler."* Perhaps that is because of Heinrich Hoffman's popular painting of the scene which has also been rendered in stained glass. The painting shows him young. What I see immediately is a kind of youthful enthusiasm about being a person of faith. Perhaps he is already confident about his relationship with God, so the question is almost *"rhetorical."* *"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"* He knows the answer, and Jesus confirms it by naming it as keeping of the Ten Commandments.

*"I have done all these things since my youth"* he says. Perhaps he anticipated Jesus replying, *"Well good job, then. That's wonderful to know. You're a good person and a model of living the godly life."*

But there is that one more thing.

*"There is one thing lacking,"* Jesus says, and then tells him that he needs to sell all that he owns, give the proceeds to the poor, and then follow him. It is no surprise that *"when he heard this, he became sad, for he was very rich."*

I suppose if he had next to nothing, like the widow with her *"mite,"* following Jesus might have been easy. He would have nothing to lose. Instead, he became sad.

It is not hard to identify with that feeling, and this is one of those stories that always makes people defensive because the fear is that Jesus may also want us to sell all we own, and give to the poor. We should note here that Jesus doesn't tell everyone to do what he told this young man. Jesus does have a way, however, of naming how money and wealth gets in the way of discipleship. A strong case can be made that many will identify with that.

One of the most misquoted bible verses is this: "Money is the root of all evil." The scripture actually says this: " <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains." (1 Tim. 6:10 NRS)

It is hard to dispute that. Another regular instruction used in identifying people's motivations for all manner of things is to "*follow the money*." When applied to so much of what's happening in the world, when we "*follow the money*" we see the "*love of money*" has advanced corruption among many governments and among so called "public servants."

People have become rich by advancing false narratives about foreign policy and public health. Media, that is all media on both the left and right, has advanced the wealth of those powerful elites who are making millions by getting each side to hate and distrust the other. Follow the money. "*The Military Industrial Complex*," better known now as "*The War Corporation*," always stands to gain when waging endless conflicts over peace. Politicians regularly broker their own power and influence into lucrative deals which make them rich for life. Religious leaders persuade their followers that Jesus wants them to live like the "*rich and famous*." Follow the money.

Jesus is really on to something here when he exposes just how hard it is to say "no" to the money. The lure of it all is just too hard. I am sure there are plenty of public servants who entered into that work with good intentions, but just couldn't say "no" to the donors or contracts or opportunities or book deals.

When Jesus told the young man to give up his wealth, he couldn't. It seems like he wanted to be a strong person of faith. If he hadn't gone away sad, I might have concluded he rejected Jesus' interpretation of being faithful. He even might have thought, "The guy's crazy. I've done right by the law. What's mine is mine. How dare he."

Becoming "sad" reveals his own inner conflict over this. Downcast, he walked away.

I wonder how many people walk away from Jesus because the lure of money, or the fear of not having enough becomes an obstacle to trusting Jesus.

After the man walked away, this is what happened next:

<sup>24</sup> Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." <sup>26</sup> Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" <sup>27</sup> He replied, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God." (Lk. 18:24-27 NRS)

The encounter does not end on a hopeless note. God can make possible what we humans cannot. God can affect the human heart in ways that transcend human impulses. Many times this is hard to see, especially as more and more corruption in our world is exposed, and when the forces of darkness show no signs of weakening.

But as the effect of the love of money on this poor world is becoming more evident, something else happens, which is a renewed look at just how wonderful the love of Jesus is. When things appear more hopeless and more helpless, the more God moves us to recognize from whence our help and hope comes.

Therefore, we don't have to go away sad. We can come back again and again to Jesus, whose wonderful way increasingly becomes the only clear and holy alternative.

Let us pray: *We pray, O God, that the love of money will not be a force that keeps us from following you. Let us be glad in our giving so that we can multiply how we are blessed by blessing others. We pray for those who have given in to the lure of money at the expense of others who are impacted negatively by their decisions. Heal our broken world, we pray, In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*We give thee but thine own* by Koine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PB24dBXgZHI>

*We give thee but thine own* East Liberty Presbyterian Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ydG9-5mHOcQ>

*Take my life and let it be* by Concordia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FHU2h1000I>

*Take my life and let it be* by Islington Baptist Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQ93HVuYd5Y>

*Will you come and follow me (The Summons)* by Holy Lyrics

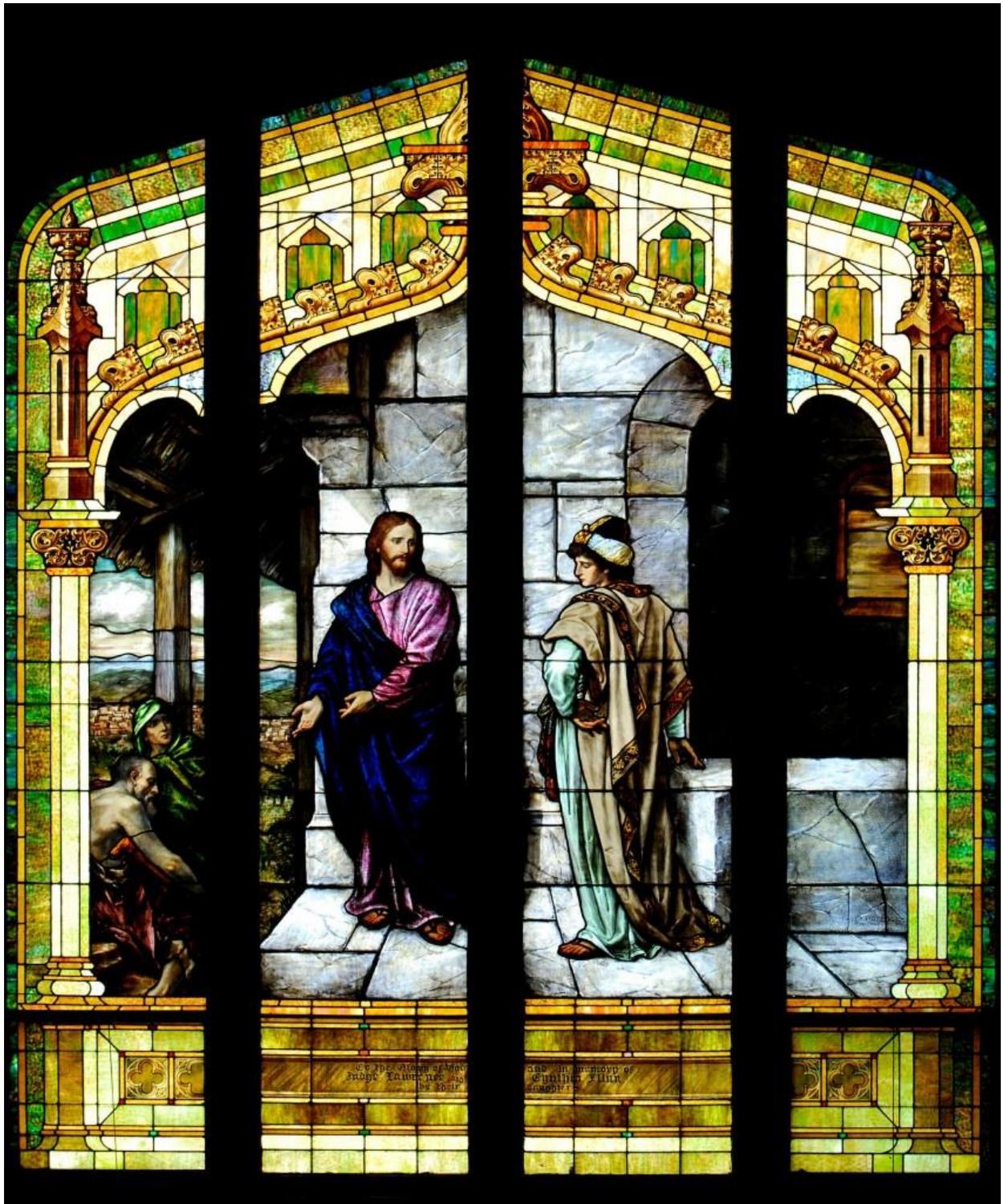
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKkpNbuVDfw>

*Will you come and follow me (The Summons)* by Jereme Asunto

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiXnbOORTAU>

Also attached is the Heinrich Hoffman painting of this scripture. And a stained-glass version. Two of our own windows (Christ in Gethsemane and Young Jesus in the Temple) are by Hoffman.





**St. Paul's In Your Home (Hiatus Edition) for Wednesday, August 25** not by Pastor Mark Opgrand **but by Chaplain Bob Weeks #399**

*The "St. Paul's In Your Home Daily Devotions" are still officially on hiatus, except when either a thought comes to me, or one sent by one of our occasional devotion writers. Please enjoy #399 by Chaplain Bob Weeks.*

## **MOVING MOUNTAINS**

By

Chaplain Bob Weeks

*Scripture: Jesus replied, "Because you have so little faith, I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to the mountain, 'Move from here to there and it will move.' Nothing will be impossible for you." (Matthew 17:20)*

I moved my church membership several years ago from a larger church to St. Paul's. I assumed that, since St. Paul's had a smaller membership, the outreach would be smaller.

My assumption was wrong. Almost immediately, I learned that St. Paul's was dedicated as the pastor said, "At St. Paul's, all means all." I learned that our church moves mountains in the community through a program called "Mother Hubbard's Cupboard." The second Sunday of each month is dedicated to filling the Cupboard with needs for persons in our community of Wilmington.

Persons who come to the Mother Hubbard Cupboard are told "You are a piece of God's plan." These persons are offered items like healthy soup, cereal, fruit, macaroni and cheese, spaghetti, canned meat, dried beans, juice boxes, individual drinks, and various personal hygiene items (shampoo, soap, tampons, razors, etc.). These items have helped many in our community, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, and now during the Delta variant pandemic.

Members are asked to include some of the listed items in their weekly shopping trips, and then donate them to Mother Hubbard's Cupboard. On Sundays, items can be left at the Church Office/Keever Hall. If you bring items during the week, please call before you deliver them. These contributions have moved mountains during the past year.

People in the time of Jesus thought of him in a similar way that I once thought of our church's community outreach. Most people could not understand that Jesus was the Messiah. After all, Jesus was born to poor parents in a small town. Jesus worked as a carpenter. He

spent time with fishermen. How would such a common person make any mark on the world, much less be a savior and redeemer?

If you ever question the significance of our church's Mother Hubbard Cupboard, remember the first disciples of Jesus were only 12 people. Though small in number, they revealed God's greatness to an entire world – and so can we.

Every second Sunday of the month, remember to donate to Mother Hubbard's Cupboard. Your gift is needed, especially during these trying times, and your gifts can move mountains in our community.

*Prayer: Dear Jesus, no matter how small or insignificant we may feel during these times, grant us the faith needed to serve others and move mountains in our community through our contributions to Mother Hubbard's Cupboard. Amen.*

*Though the Mountains May Fall* by Dan Schutte

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYfpWiRrcpw>

*Sing to the Mountains, Sing to Sea* by Naomh Padraig Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zacE5ZlkcSE>

*Feed Me Lord* by Patrick Lierbergen

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVj-xSg2E\\_g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVj-xSg2E_g)

*My Heart is Hungry, My Spirit Doth Thirst* by Last Song Syndrome

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=poQaX1eLiAw>

*Faith Can Move Mountains* by Twinkle Brothers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWxhfqHXdgM>

*Faith Can Move Mountains* by Nat King Cole (who is the me of this song?)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37mI-Kp2CPw>

**St. Paul's In Your Home (Hiatus Edition) for Friday, September 3, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #400**

**After the hurricane, tornado, fire, or flood: "The Second Disaster."**

*<sup>12</sup> For no one can anticipate the time of disaster. Like fish taken in a cruel net, and like birds caught in a snare, so mortals are snared at a time of calamity, when it suddenly falls upon them. (Eccl. 9:12 NRS)*

Hurricane Ida has once again prompted people to want to reach out. *"What can I do? I'd like to donate clothes or food. How do I do that? Where can I send something?"*

For Christians, but not exclusively Christians, a natural disaster becomes a time for those of us spared, to respond, out of gratitude. It is a time when the very best of intentions is expressed.

Historically, however, it also brings a host of unintended consequences. Disaster response agencies even have a name for it: *"The Second Disaster."*

In every major disaster, individuals and community groups all across the country send enormous quantities of unproductive relief supplies—such as used clothing, shoes, bottled water, toys, and canned food—to help victims and their families.

That sounds very good and helpful "on paper," but what regularly happens is that well-meaning people spend millions of dollars on the items themselves and on transporting those donations to disaster sites. When these items finally arrive, they create chaos and extra work for disaster relief workers—a process often so counterproductive that it has been called "the second disaster."

I saw this for myself way back in 1996, when for a time I worked with Lutheran Disaster Response after Hurricane Fran. I remember walking through the Topsail Beach Fire Station and seeing piles of old worn-out clothes, used toys and on the top of one pile, a pair of ice skates! I also remember hearing one of the fire fighters describe the arrival of a truck loaded with donated frozen chicken. Imagine the trouble that caused on an island with no power.

There are many stories like this. I understand the desire, however, for people to do something more personal than just sending money, even through financial donations to the various disaster relief agencies are most helpful initially to make sure people get what is most needed. Diapers and cleaning supplies are always on a most helpful list.

What is not helpful is for people to use a disaster as a motivation to clean out their closets and get rid of unwanted personal items, imagining that such items initially are most wanted and needed.

Later on, of course, things change. I remember after Hurricane Matthew how we at St. Paul's coordinated with St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Lumberton and their Pastor Volley Hanson.

Items, especially requested items were delivered to St. Paul's, then sorted and delivered by the truckloads. It filled a need and did not overwhelm the Lumberton community with unhelpful things.

With news cycles being "fifteen minutes" before moving on to the next, it is good to remember that every disaster takes a long time from which to recover. Therefore we all need to keep tuned into what is needed, and through whom can help best be delivered. Lutheran Disaster Response is always a good source of information, and many other groups as well.

Jesus spoke very clearly about those in need and how to serve them when he said,

*"Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup> for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."* (Matt. 25:34-36 NRS)

I need to clean out my closets, and thankfully we have a clothes ministry here at St. Paul's which serves the local community with good "pre-worn" clothing. But without a specific partner in those areas hit by Ida, it would be much better to send money than pay the high cost of shipping.

At St. Paul's, as part of our outreach, we encourage cash contributions at this stage of recovery. Below is a link to *Lutheran Disaster Response*. 100% of those donations go to where it is needed. Alternatively, you can bring a donation to Sunday worship and earmark it for "Lutheran Disaster Response." We continue to pray for all those dealing with yet another major life disruption. And we'll keep watching for other ways to help as well. That way, **"After the hurricane, earthquake, fire or flood"** it will be **"The Second Blessing."**

<https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Relief-and-Development/Lutheran-Disaster-Response>

Let us pray: There is so much need in our world right now, O God, and you always invite us who are blessed to share with those who need a blessing. We pray for the victims of Hurricane Ida, as well as everyone affected by calamitous weather. Bless the victims of earthquake, fire, floods, hurricanes, tornados, or drought. Heal those suffering from Covid, and all those with other medical needs. In our giving, keep us encouraged, and help us always remember we are not alone. In Jesus' name. Amen.

*When Pain of the World Surrounds Us* by Sannamish Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5ymPtueQaM>

*All Who Gather Gladly Gather* by Ruth Meyer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3VglOebTqs>

*O Shelter Me* by Michael Joncas

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3KifN7Jfpc>

*Rest for Your Soul* by Austin French

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAYt88GIZSs>

*Come Unto Me* by Esther Mui

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRzRrc7XEjs>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, September 7, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #401**

*Note: With hope and prayer I am attempting to resume "all new" St. Paul's In Your Home on a regular basis. I will gladly receive submissions from you who have written before and some new people. Thank you for your support in doing these, and for your patience when I can't manage "all new" and must turn to an occasional "rerun." Blessings. P Mark*

**St. Paul's: Now in our SECOND century of service?**

*<sup>13</sup> Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. <sup>14</sup> Let all that you do be done in love. <sup>15</sup> Now, brothers and sisters, you know that members of the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints; <sup>16</sup> I urge you to put yourselves at the service of such people, and of everyone who works and toils with them. (1 Cor. 16:13-16 NRS)*

This scripture reminds us of the rich history among those in the Corinthian community of the first century. We have our own at St. Paul's.

One Sunday recently, I was standing at the base of our front church stairs following worship when I turned to the faded metal marker next to the street. I hadn't looked at the sign carefully for a long time. At the top was an image of Martin Luther's Seal. Below it is written:

**HISTORIC**

**ST. PAUL'S EVANGELICAL**

**LUTHERAN CHURCH**

--- ---

**Occupied by Federal Forces, 1865.**

**Now in Second Century of Christian**

**Service and Community Uplift**

**TO THE GLORY OF God**

**AND IN LOVING MEMORY**

**OF HER FOUNDERS**

In small print at the bottom, it reads: *"Erected by New Hanover Historical Commission 1958."*

Because we are a historic city, there are many signs erected to commemorate historical events. This one commemorated St. Paul's 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 1958 and was done by a Commission that no longer exists. It is not related to the Historic Wilmington Foundation.

I am curious about the wording. The words "*Occupied by "Federal Forces"*" are true and part of St. Paul's history, but that happened during one year out of one hundred years. The occupation of 1865 was the only year St. Paul's "*Christian Service and Community Uplift,*" would have been seriously inhibited.

By 1866 that awful year passed, the war ended, peace was restored, and God's ministry through St. Paul's reemerged and thrived well into "*the second century.*" The second century began in 1900, when St. Paul's was 42 years old. We entered our **THIRD** century of service in 2000, when St. Paul's was 142 years old. Our 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of service began in 2008.

In thinking about our long and rich history, I would rather be known for "*Christian Service and Community Uplift*" than that year occupied by the "*damn Yankees.*" The occupation does, however, remind me that in every age, the church has dealt with various forms of hardship, challenges, and disruption. Furthermore, in every age, the faithful have persevered **TO THE GLORY OF GOD**, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

I wonder what you might want to remember and write on a historical marker written today.

Let us pray: *We bless you, O God, for our years of Christian Service and Community Uplift, and for all those who made St. Paul's an expression of your mission and ministry. Occupy us with your Holy Spirit, that we might always be faithful witnesses to your love. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*O God our Help in Ages Past* by Sharon Mennonite Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-hN740J6qA&t=4s>

*Once to every Man and Nation* by Thomas Aquinas College Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQi6LPToIP4&t=13s>

*Faith of our Fathers* by John Wesley Slider

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RziT4wJMrGQ>

*Blessed be the Tie that Binds* by Gryphon Hall

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQ0Epw1rwbc>

*Jesus Still Lead On* by Edgewood United Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uk5L5LWECPk>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, September 8, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #402**

**What is “Community Uplift”? About that Historical Marker, part 2.**

*<sup>9</sup> Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. <sup>10</sup> For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. (Eccl. 4:9-10 NRS)*

I'm still thinking about the wording on the historical marker in front of the church. *“Now in Second Century of Christian Service and Community Uplift.”*

We've already established that since the sign was erected in 1958, we have now entered our “Third” century. So it's not that. It is also not *“Christian Service,”* as *“Service”* has long been a way of describing what we do as an outcome of believing the gospel and following Jesus.

It is the phrase *“Community Uplift.”*

*“Community Uplift”* is not a phrase we hear or repeat often. In fact, I don't ever remember using those words to describe our mission focus or impact on the community. This is not to say it's not there. They are simply words we haven't used. We more often speak of *“Community Outreach”* or *“Community Service.”*

So if St. Paul's is named on a marker and identified for *“Christian Service and Community Uplift,”* what does that mean?

The question led me to search the internet for *“Community Uplift.”* Here's what I found:

I discovered a group called *“Community Uplift Program”* in Fargo, North Dakota that works with housing, vocational rehab, job service, refuge recovery, and Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous.

*“Community Uplift Klamath County”* in Oregon connects expecting parents and families with children 0-5 years old and up to 21 with special needs to local services.

The *“Community Uplift Foundation”* in Apex, NC works with at risk *“teens falling through the cracks.”*

*“Community Uplift Partnership”* in Commerce City, Colorado provides life and job skills training, paid employment and on the job training, mentoring and professional development. They say they are a place where the promises of God are shared through charitable services, ministry and education to enhance quality of life and ignite community transformation.

*“Community Uplift and Welfare Development”* works in Nebbi-Uganda with the goal of transforming community through advocacy, capacity building, evidence-based research and innovative poverty action.

There is an interesting and well-designed website for *“Uplift: Uplifting Communities One Family at a Time.”* Based in South Arlington, Texas, they *“holistically transform the lives of families living below the poverty line in education, employment, and encouragement.”* They also quoted the same scripture had selected at the start of this devotion.

*“Uplifting Community”* is a central theme for *“The Cause Colaborative”* out of Rochester, New York. They expressed what uplifting community is about when they wrote: “Collaboration creates powerful change and we stand by our saying that “together, we can do more good.” Giving back offers an indescribable feeling. Knowing that someone will be positively impacted by your selfless act creates stronger and thriving communities. Each of us can make an impact.”

The website has an illustration where a little boy asks his Grandma, *“Why do we give back?”* She replies, *“Because when we give back, we make our community stronger, help those in need, and make others happy.”* Well said.

Even though we at St. Paul’s haven’t used that *exact* phrase much (or really at all) since the sign was erected in 1958, that doesn’t mean it is not descriptive of our desired outcomes when being faithful to Jesus. It’s what we are doing well into our *“third century.”*

Let us pray. *Thank you, O God for lifting us through Jesus Christ so that we can reach out in love to others. Bless us for service in your name that the world will know of your saving work. Thank you for all those who seek to make a positive impact in their local communities and abroad. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

*Lift High the Cross* by First Methodist Houston

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUEt\\_eMNRcw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUEt_eMNRcw)

*We Give Our Yes* by Jamie Rivera

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i7ObZDVUqGU>

*He Lifted Me* by Trail Reeves

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yi5UlpqUjzA>

*Love Lifted Me* by Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRyvsFJErCE>

*Working Together* by Chris Loughrin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdZCEtwl-vU>

## **St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, September 9, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #403**

### **God bless Leland.**

*Let mutual love continue. <sup>2</sup> Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. (Heb. 13:1-2 NRS)*

It's not hard to imagine where St. Paul's would be without the development of Leland and Brunswick Country. We could have become an ever-aging and ever-shrinking historic downtown church whose days of large, interrelated and faithful families have long dispersed or died out.

As a new pastor in 1997 I remember being warned never to say something negative about a St. Paul's member because everyone was related. (Note: It is a good idea never to say something negative under any circumstance, but the point was made).

As I got to know St. Paul's families, I began to realize that many St. Paul's families were kin to each other through marriage. From time-to-time new members joined, of course, but to be elected to leadership, you needed to be known for a long time, or be kin. High birth rates were also important to growth.

As Wilmington expanded from its early days in 1739, and after St. Paul's was formed in 1858, newer Lutheran churches developed North, East, and South of us. As new neighborhoods were formed, many were further and further away from our downtown church. In most historic urban communities, the old downtown churches have newer churches to the north, south, east, and west of them.

But not Wilmington. The Cape Fear River was a natural border between New Hanover Country and Brunswick Country. Until 1929, people travelled across the river by ferry. Two toll bridges operated after that, and in 1969 the current Cape Fear Memorial Bridge opened for use.

For many years, Leland remained a small community. In the year 2000, there were just 2,000 residents. Now there are well over 20,000. The Magnolia Greens Neighborhood began selling lots in 1997. Other new neighborhoods were developed, which meant it was not uncommon for people from Waterford, Brunswick Forest, Cypress Pointe and other growing Leland area neighborhoods to find their way to St. Paul's. We were the closest Lutheran church.

Without a Lutheran church in Leland, Lutherans moving to the area had to cross the bridge to find a Lutheran church. I would venture to guess that we are the only Lutheran church, or perhaps one of just a handful of historic downtown Lutheran churches that are the closest Lutheran church to thousands of new homes.

This most rare demographic has also enabled St. Paul's to grow not only numerically, but spiritually as we have welcomed and integrated so many people from "*elsewhere*." They come with different stories, experiences, and gifts that have been wonderful beyond description. I

realized the effect of this transition the first-time council members were elected who were new to our church family. With our first new members from Magnolia Greens and Waterford, it was evident that we were moving from being a tight knit, (not in a mean way) family church, to one that shows hospitality to strangers and welcomes newcomers into our ever-growing church family.

It has been a wonderful gift to witness this over the years. It's a bit like that magnolia tree on the corner of Market and 6<sup>th</sup>. When it was planted in memory of young Trey Stroud more than 20 years ago, it was not much taller than an average sized person. Look at the fullness of that tree now! Like that magnolia tree, our church has grown and continues to be a place where people continue to visit and experience a warm welcome.

During the pandemic, and on account of face coverings and unseen livestreamers, it has been harder to recognize visitors. Our lives have continued to face those interruptions. But it is also good to celebrate from whence we have come, and especially for the gift of Leland development (and good bridges). For all this, I give God thanks.

Let us pray. *Thank you, O God for all the blessings that have come through all those who have moved to Leland over the years. Help us continue to show hospitality and a warm welcome to those who come from elsewhere. May we grow most of all spiritually as God has called us. Amen.*

P.S. Before I need to write another devotion entitled “*What about us who are not living in Leland?*” let me also praise the participation and positive impact of *all* new and historic members, including those *not* from Leland. I just wanted to highlight the particular and unusual windfall of receiving so many people from an area previously filled with wetlands. God bless *all* who have found their way to our historic downtown congregation.

*Down to the River to Pray* by Peter and Eynne Hollens and Fox and Hound

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jUeOeTPfsA>

*Building Bridges* by Charlotte Ritchie

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-0rxqfFa84>

*I'm building a bridge* by Daniel and Emma Lynn Glick

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rvrljcf-FLA>

*Peace is Flowing Like a River* by Julie Gaulke

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sc21ScL6CJc>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, September 10, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #404

### Remembering 9/11

*<sup>16</sup> From the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise, of glory to the Righteous One. But I say, I pine away, I pine away. Woe is me! For the treacherous deal treacherously, the treacherous deal very treacherously.<sup>17</sup> Terror, and the pit, and the snare are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth!<sup>18</sup> Whoever flees at the sound of the terror shall fall into the pit; and whoever climbs out of the pit shall be caught in the snare. For the windows of heaven are opened, and the foundations of the earth tremble.<sup>19</sup> The earth is utterly broken, the earth is torn asunder, the earth is violently shaken. (Isa. 24:16-19 NRS)*

The prophet Isaiah came to 8<sup>th</sup> Century Israel with a lot of bad news. This part of the book describes the brokenness of the people and the calamity that will be coming. It didn't happen all at once, but the feelings of gloom and doom were central to Isaiah's words. When Isaiah speaks of terror, it is from the heart, and despite believing and trusting in God, Isaiah's world is badly shaken.

The word translated "terror" is written eighty-six times in scripture, mostly in Job, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. It is associated with both personal and national calamity.

We know this word. We know terror, and we know terrorists, those who spread terror. September 11, 2001, twenty years ago tomorrow it hit home for everyone in very personal and powerful ways. September 11, (thereafter known as "9/11,") became etched in every living American's memory as a day of terror.

Unlike December 7, 1941, when Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, and when people could only hear the news on the radio, everyone with a television on 9/11 watched the horror unfold before their very eyes.

I remember being telephoned by member Margaret Banck. "You need to turn on your TV," she said. Every station focused the burning twin towers, and many of us watched live as the second plane attacked. It seemed unreal, something created with special effects in the movies. But it was real. And it was terrible.

Many people have a personal connection to someone who was a victim on 9/11. I remember my mother-in-law sharing how their Lutheran pastor's son was on an upper floor of the one of the towers when the plane hit a few floors below. He was able to reach his mother on the phone just long enough to tell her he loved her and that he wasn't going to make it. His mother watched in horror as the buildings collapsed with her son and thousands of other perishing with him. This still brings tears to my eyes when I think about it.

Words do not easily comfort when remembering a day like this. Maybe it is better to just sit quietly for a bit, and then pray that God will whisper in our ears words that remind us that despite goodness destroying evil in this world, God will not let evil triumph forever.

Let us pray. *Our world remains so deeply troubled, O God, and we look to you for comfort and hope. For all those whose lives have ended or who families have suffered on account of the brokenness terrorism reflects, we offer our prayers. As we remember 9/11, bring healing and hope to all. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Just one musical offering today. if outside noise inhibits silent reflection, listening to this piece evokes deep reflection perhaps like few others.

*Adagio for Strings, Op.11* by Samuel Barber

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNLtvAcQMIk>

and a vocal version of the same...

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e\\_AqHJHew4Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_AqHJHew4Q)

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, September 13, 2021 not by Pastor Mark Opgrand but by North Carolina Synod Bishop Tim Smith #405**

*Note: I hadn't intended to post something from another writer so soon after coming off hiatus, but when I read this earlier last week, it really spoke to me. Hope it will speak to you too.*

**Getting Along by Bishop Tim Smith**

Some of the most amusing moments of my ministry have occurred while interviewing others to work in the various congregations I have served. *"So what interests you in this Administrative Assistant position at our church?"* I asked a candidate in Boone. *"Well,"* she replied, *"I've worked in a law office for several years now, and I'm honestly just sick and tired of how people can treat each other so terribly, so when I saw this position advertised, I thought, 'Wow, wouldn't it be great to work in a place where everybody always gets along for a change!'"*

Her assumption seemed to be the rule rather than the exception. Church people always love one another, and therefore they never behave in anything other than a loving way.

She should have read St. Augustine's daily prayer for the late 4th/early 5th century when he served as Bishop of Hippo in northern Africa. *"...Lord, save us from the forces of evil and from all these Christians."* Apparently, the 5th-century job description or practical reality for bishops was similar to that of the 21st. Manage conflict.

Apparently, given St. Paul's 1st-century words to the church in Corinth, even the very earliest days of the church were rife with conflict. Heck, why was he in Corinth to begin with? Because he and Peter didn't get along back in Jerusalem!

Jesus himself anticipated conflict in the Christian community and how to address it in Matthew 18. Anyhow, Paul urges Corinthians to stop their squabbling by focusing not on a convergence of opinion but on their common baptism into Christ.

*Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Has Christ been divided? (1 Corinthians 1:10-13)*

The problem with the Church is the same as the problem with Communism, or Capitalism, or the Republican Party or the Democratic Party, or with the 4th, 12th, or 18th century, or the

Royal Order of Buffalo: there are people in them! People are selfish, sinful, broken. Conflict happens, inevitably.

In counseling with couples preparing for marriage, we talk about the church in Corinth. Well, maybe not explicitly, but I always remind them that the fact that Jane loves Joe or Joe loves Jane or even the sum total of those loves won't sustain them over the long haul.

There must be something bigger than Joe's love, bigger than Jane's love, at the center of this relationship, which is why we pray fervently for and focus mightily on Christ's presence at the center of that relationship binding them together in communication, sacrifice, commitment, and forgiveness.

Christians do not—and have not from the get-go—based their unity on shared preference, politics, or opinion. As different as we might be, what binds us is that somehow we are caught up in the story of Jesus and its promise and claim on our lives.

So long as there are people in the church, which at the end of the day and even for all the challenge of it I greatly prefer, there will be divisions, hurt feelings, differences of opinion, and conflict along with all the positives of human community.

Christ at the center, Christ as the lens through which we interpret everything, Christ as the peace we share before communion, will always be the tie that binds. May we always start and, when we stray, return there!

Walking with you,

The Rev. Timothy M. Smith, Bishop, NC Synod

*My prayer: Thank you O God for our bishop and the North Carolina Synod staff, who remind us that we are the body of Christ together. However imperfect we are, we look to you for your perfect love that always draws the best from us. Help us manage conflict well for the sake of your mission in Christ. Bind us together, Lord, with hearts that cannot be broken. In Jesus's name. Amen.*

The bishop doesn't include song links... but I do.

*Blessed be the Tie that Binds* by Gryphon Hall

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQ0Epw1rwbc>

*Bind Us Together* Lord by Chet Valley Churches

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHJzD46-qU>

*In Christ there is no East or West* by Grosse Pointe Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-1osqURF4g>

and just for fun: *Sesame Street – Get Along* (in God we Trust)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSt56lKyy\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSt56lKyy_Q)

and this... *Get Along* by Kenny Chesney

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XdMtNBF6GcA>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, September 14, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #406

### When a class reunion is a glimpse of heaven.

<sup>3</sup> *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; <sup>4</sup> he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."* (Rev. 21:3-4 NRS)

I've only been to one high school class reunion, my 20<sup>th</sup>, which was a long time ago now. Some people have several, especially those who have lived their lives in or near their hometowns. When I went to my 20<sup>th</sup>, I had essentially been away all twenty years. That prompted me to create a couple of custom home-made buttons: "*Hi, who were you?*" and "*I know, you look different too.*"

What is interesting about reunions (often starting at the 20<sup>th</sup>), but continuing after that, is how people genuinely enjoy seeing each other. I noticed that all the cliques so important in high school just didn't seem so important anymore. Some individuals looked better than ever; with others, the years weren't so kind. But all seemed glad just to be there.

I remember talking with a guy I hardly knew in high school who was a Methodist Missionary in Brazil. Our sense of shared gospel was so strong that it felt like I was reunited with a best friend I never had.

I saw another whom I remembered as the biggest bully in the school. Buy now I had no fear in talking with him and meeting his Vietnamese wife. When I reminded him about being a bully, I asked what he did for a living. He said he was a cop (not a bully anymore I hoped).

Another guy was one of the most popular guys at the school. I was shocked that he remembered me expressed interest in how my life had gone. Also present was a bulletin board with photos of classmates who died. I hadn't expected that. Several died in Viet Nam.

With certain classmates, I observed that the "chemistry" that made us friends in high school was still there even though years had passed. And then there was Norm Rant. He was wearing another guy's name tag. "*Ha ha. Very funny. Norm. You were a jerk back in high school and it looks like you're still a jerk.*" (I actually said that to him, emboldened by my advancing age of 37).

Mostly though, people were just genuinely happy to be together, especially without the teenage drama or working so hard to be popular and fit in.

When we gather for funerals, one of the phrases we say in our prayers is "*being reunited with those who have gone before.*" While we usually imagine that refers to being reunited with

family or close loved ones, I suspect our experience will go far beyond that, perhaps like a class reunions were the things that mattered so much on earth don't matter one bit anymore because we're just so glad to see each other. Who would you like to see again?

Let us pray: *We thank you for friendships, for those recently made and for those historic friendships that go way back. Help us remember and celebrate the people who have been important in our lives, as well as those we have yet to meet or will meet again in a wonderful heavenly reunion. Amen.*

*When the roll is called up yonder* by Alan Jackson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fggiDAPioll>

*Will the circle be unbroken?* by Nitty Gritty Dirt Band and Johnny Cash

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bRjLkNqNXI>

*Blessed Be the Tie that Binds* by The Acapella Company

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUu93KoX-0>

*The Sweet By and Bye* by The Mennonite Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvagoD8T0u4>

*On Heaven's Bright Shore* by The Inspirations

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5hh70\\_U87A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5hh70_U87A)

*Heaven's My Native Land* by Simon Khloroskiy

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=on7VPe\\_SG7s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=on7VPe_SG7s)

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, September 15, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #407

### How do I get in the mood to pray?

*"Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. <sup>2</sup> I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. <sup>3</sup> I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God."* (Ps. 69:1-3 NRS)

Someone recently shared with me that they just couldn't get in the mood to pray. *"I'm just not in the mood,"* they said. *"Can you do it for me."* I did, and following that, it got me thinking about the word *"mood,"* and the phrase *"in the mood."*

So what does it mean to be *"in the mood"* to pray.

Most often, we use the expression in relationship to food. *"So what are you in the mood for tonight?"* is another way of saying *"What would you like to eat? I'm in the mood for sushi."* or *"I'm in the mood for a big ol' steak."*

Sometimes it's an activity. *"I'm in the mood for dancing."* Or a *"good movie"*. Or *"shopping"*.

Not being in the mood also happens, though, like when a husband or wife will invite something romantic and the other says, *"Not tonight, honey. I'm just not in the mood,"*

I wonder if *"in the mood"* more often applies to something we want to do or rather something we don't want to do? Is being *"in the mood"* or *"not in the mood"* something we can control or change? How, then, does that relate to prayer? Is prayer more effective when *"in"* the mood? How does God receive our prayers when we are *"not in the mood?"*

Pondering these questions, the desperate prayers of the psalmists are quite instructive. About one third of them are Psalms of Lament, that is, Prayers of Lament. Many begin as prayed by one who, if not *"in the mood"*, was more clearly *"in a very bad mood."*

In Psalm 69, the Psalmist is not having a good day and is not wishing to thank God for all the wonderful blessings of that day. Rather, it begins with *"Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck."* It goes downhill from that. Verse three declares *"<sup>3</sup> I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God."* (Ps. 69:3 NRS)

It is not until the sixteenth verse that we hear anything hopeful coming from his mouth: *"<sup>16</sup> Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me."* (Ps. 69:16 NRS).

There is a little hope in these words, but not enough for him to turn away from his despair. This is underscored in verse twenty: *"<sup>20</sup> Insults have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none."* (Ps. 69:20 NRS)

It is not until verse thirty that we observe a whole new tone: *"<sup>30</sup> I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving."* (Ps. 69:30 NRS)

Then comes this powerful affirmation in verses thirty-three and thirty-four: <sup>33</sup> *For the LORD hears the needy and does not despise his own that are in bonds.* <sup>34</sup> *Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and everything that moves in them.*” (Ps. 69:33-34 NRS)

What a change from how Psalm 69 begins. The psalm begins with either the Psalmist not being in the mood to pray or coming into prayer in a very bad mood. But as he poured out his heart out to God, note how the very *act* of praying brought him into a new perspective with the prayer ending up on a very positive and hopeful note.

I wonder if God is telling us that whenever we don't feel “in the mood” to pray, that is exactly what we must do. Jump right in. Be honest. Pour out your heart. Lament. And then be surprised where this takes you.

Let us pray. *Thank you for hearing our prayers, O God, whether we are in the mood to pray ... or not. Amen.*

*Psalm 61* by Esther Mui

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CRTY1xb0NE>

*O God Why Are You Silent* by Pacific Spirit United Church

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LwRZZRfJ\\_g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LwRZZRfJ_g)

*Lament* (Psalm 77) by Fellowship Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yw9Fp6XWq7w>

*You Hear Our Prayers* by Shawna Haley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOXkfb7BYGI>

and just for fun ... *“In The Mood”* by the Andrews Sisters

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfAsVU45b5k>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, September 16, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #408**

**I stand corrected: a devotional retraction. We are still in our second century of Christian Service.**

*<sup>8</sup> If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 Jn. 1:8-9 NRS)*

In a previous devotion, I thought I was being observant when I noticed the medal historical marker in front of the church which described St. Paul's as *"Now in Second Century of Christian Service and Community Uplift."* I reasoned that we were now in our *"Third Century,"* because St. Paul's was formed in the 1800's, continued in the 1900's and continues now in the 2000's. To me that meant we were now in our third century.

It was Stan McLeroy after church one Sunday who observed that we are still in our *"Second Century."* When the marker was erected in 1958, our church had been active for 100 years. Our first 100 years marked our *"First Century"* of service. With that anniversary observance, we entered into our *"Second Century"* of service and it will not be until 2058 that we enter into our *"Third Century."*

I stand corrected.

So why is this even worthy of devotional consideration. Have you noticed in today's world people of constant commentary, not only do we fight over things far less important than this, we are regularly so determined to win arguments and defend positions that it becomes difficult to admit *"I was wrong,"* or *"I didn't consider all the facts."* I remains difficult to *"stand corrected."*

What happened in my discussion with Stan was that shared how he interpreted the statement, but also acknowledged how I arrived at my interpretation. He recognized how I was thinking of the yearly calendar where St. Paul's was active in three centuries, but then observed how technically and chronologically we are not yet in our third century. There was no name calling, no harsh words exposing my stupidity, none of that. I didn't try to defend my position by making stuff up or saying what I wrote was not what I meant or was taken out of context.

I wish all our relationships and conversations with each other could be conducted with grace and dignity. There are so many things we all get wrong in today's world; so many things are changing all around us. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we conduct ourselves like Jesus instructs us. When we are wrong, admit it. When we don't understand another's position, we seek to learn more.

In our liturgy, we come to worship confessing we don't always get things right. We regularly get things wrong. We use the word "sin" to describe such failures, but more often limit our understanding of sin to mean just the big bad stuff. What separates us from God is sin. Sin also separates us from each other, causing hurt, defensiveness, and self-righteousness.

It is, however, quite wonderful to be able to admit when we are wrong, especially with those who also come into the conversation willing to recognize their own failures or shortcomings. There is such grace and freedom about this and gets at the heart of what it means to be forgiven children of God. Honest.

Let us pray. *Thank you, O God, for encouraging us to be open and honest with each other, not only in admitting our sins, failures, and incomplete analyses, but then having the grace, in your name, to extend to each other, the forgiveness of all our sins. Help us listen to each other, help each other, and learn from each other, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*As The Deer* by Shemeroo Eternal Grace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSZWogD0AH4>

*We Confess* by Glenn Packiam

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGEJ9LrevFw>

*Lord, Have Mercy on Me* by Esther Mui

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fp\\_8H\\_2T9hQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fp_8H_2T9hQ)

*Great God Your Love Has Called Us Here* by Michael Joncas

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OKTKBA\\_yxaM&list=RDOKTKBA\\_yxaM&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OKTKBA_yxaM&list=RDOKTKBA_yxaM&start_radio=1)

*Change My Heart O God* by Church Lyrics

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z9Qk4r1I\\_Ao](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z9Qk4r1I_Ao)

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, September 16, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #409

### So what happened to the Roman soldiers?

*<sup>27</sup> Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. <sup>28</sup> They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, <sup>29</sup> and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (Matt. 27:27-29 NRS)*

When I was asked to write devotions for *Christ In Our Home* now more than twenty years ago, I hadn't anticipated that a reader in Florida would read my name and then send me a gift. What he had sent was a little box of slides he had taken at St. Paul's when he visited here during World War II. Now in his nineties, he didn't want the slides anymore, so he sent them to me.

I was elated to get this little piece of St. Paul's history until I opened them. They were photos of our stained-glass windows, windows I believed were unchanged since they were installed between 1908 and 1921. I would rather have had photos of St. Paul's activities. I could take the same photos any day of the week.

I did look through all of them, however, and I made a startling discovery. In the photo of Jesus before Pilate, were three Roman soldiers, plain as day. And now they are missing. What happened to the soldiers?

It took some time to unravel this mystery, but in time I discovered that when air conditioning was installed in the 1950's, our windows were all sent to Philadelphia to be re-lead. At that time, they opened from the bottom for ventilation. Now they would be re-lead without the window option. Anna von Oesen Hughes once related that their family, including brother John and parents John Averette and Marilyn von Oesen took a family trip to Philadelphia to check on the process. She was my eyewitness.

In the process of transporting and/or repairing, a pane or panes broke which featured the faces of the Roman soldiers. Because it was impossible to recreate (or prohibitively expensive), plain colored glass was substituted. If you didn't know the soldiers were once there, you wouldn't notice.

The slide, however, showed what the original window looked like. I will attach that and something else quite interesting. When searching online for other windows or drawings of the same scene, I found examples of the scene both with and without the soldiers! That means someone intentionally chose to render some windows without them. I didn't feel quite so sad about not having the original window after that.

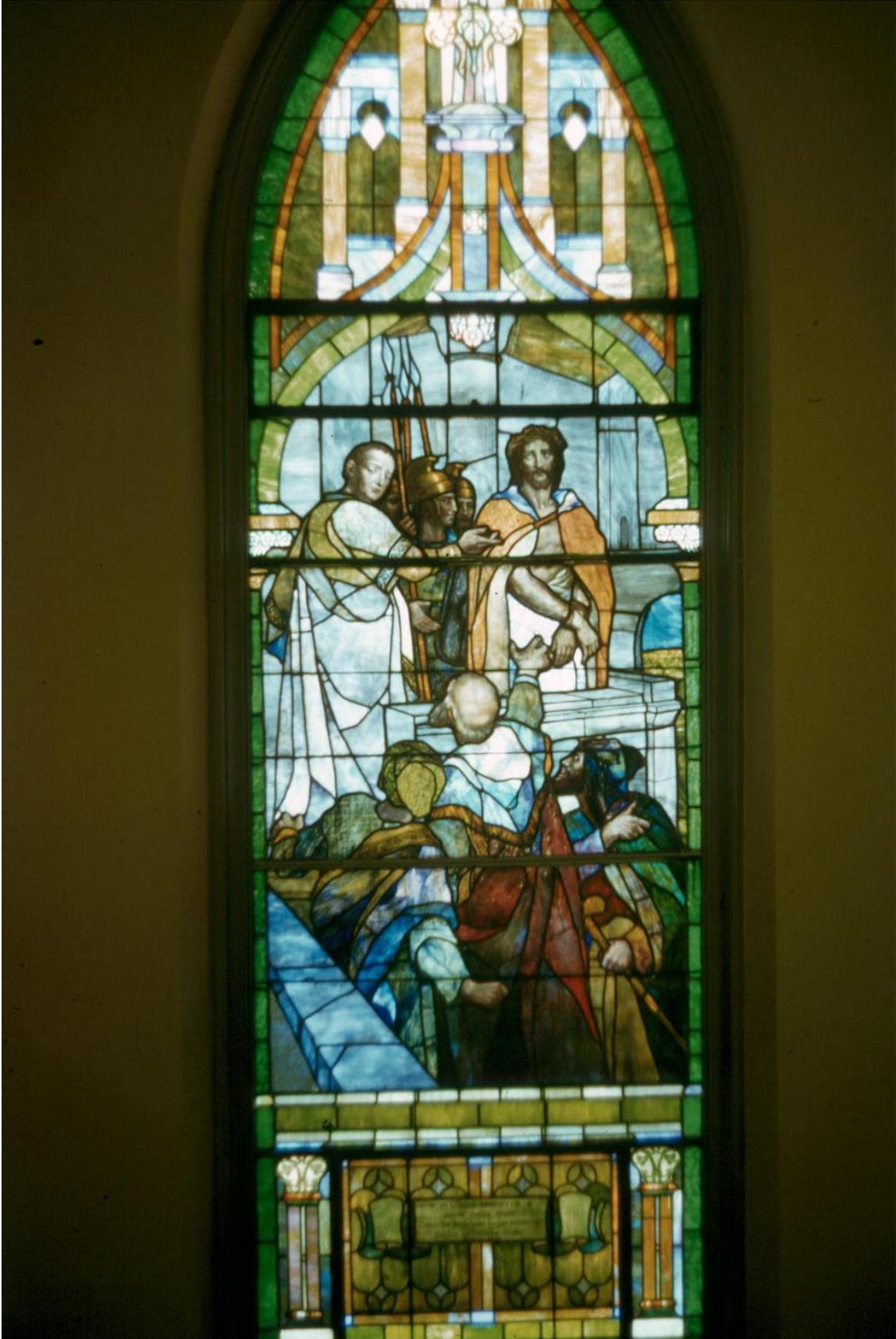
I would almost like to imagine that these three soldiers just had didn't have the stomach to participate in such injustice. And left. But that's not the story, and I am grateful for the visual

depiction of the gospel story in our windows. Not every story is told, but they are representative of the love of Jesus we want to portray to those who come through our doors.

Reflected in these windows, we see the wonder of Jesus' birth, his sense of mission even as a 12-year-old, his love for children, his joy in sharing a meal with friends Mary and Martha. We see him healing a child, comparing himself to a vine with us as the branches, and then suffering, dying, being raised, and ascending into heaven. These and other images become easily etched in our hearts as we worship regularly. Our children learn the gospel through them. We are blessed by their beauty and craftsmanship.

Let us pray. We thank you for the artistry of our windows, but most of all for the wonderful story of love they tell. Amen.

P.S. In lieu of music today, I am attaching photos.









**St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, September 20, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #410**

**Too soon to think about Christmas? Not when another interesting "Did you know?" story surfaces.**

<sup>10</sup> *But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see-- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup> to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."* (Lk. 2:10-12 NRS).

I heard something interesting from Catherine Solomon, one of our life-long older members. She shared with me that when she was a little girl, St. Paul's did not have Christmas Eve Services! Yikes! How can that be? No Christmas Eve services? Impossible!

I confirmed this was not tall tale by further conversations with Anna and Al Cheatham, Louise Perkins, and Ann Hutteman. What St. Paul's had instead was a long-standing tradition of having a **7:00 AM CHRISTMAS MORNING SERVICE**. It was well attended and full of children who would not be permitted to open presents at home until after attending that service.

They didn't call the service by this name, but it was essentially a "*Christmas Morning Sunrise Service!*" It would be dark at 7:00 AM, with the sun rising as people sang the familiar carols and heard a reading of the Christmas gospel.

It actually makes more sense to celebrate Jesus' birth on Christmas Day. How many of us celebrate our own birthdays on the night before our birthday and then not have anything "*on the day?*" I wonder if some people believe Jesus was born on Christmas Eve? Consider Christmas Eve carols sung with a more accurate context: "*Hark, the Herald Angels Sing, 'Glory to the still waiting to be Born King.'*" *Silent Night, Holy Night.... round yon virgin mother and baby on the way.*" "*What child is this, who's still to come, in Mary's womb is sleeping.*"

Given how sacred and traditional Christmas Eve services have been, it is hard to imagine not having them. For many years, however, that's how it was, and not until the early 1970's were Christmas Eve services introduced. With so many other churches having services on the eve, and given how a sunrise service is pretty darn early, especially for families, it's not hard to imagine the shift happened without a lot of rebellion.

I wonder if the 11:00 PM service happened right away. Maybe the promise of claiming it would be Christmas Day by the end of the service was helpful for those who still wanted to celebrate Jesus' birth "*on the day.*" Who knows?

I can pretty much guarantee you, though, that proposing we go back to a 7:00 AM Christmas Day ONLY Sunrise service, would not be something I would recommend. We love our Christmas Eve Candlelight services.

Beyond our traditions, however, what is most special about Christmas... or Easter... or Pentecost is always celebrating our most wonderful experience with a God who loves us so much that God came in Jesus to bring us the fullness of God's love and the joy of belonging

Let us pray. Thank you O God, that we can celebrate the birth of your son through many traditions. Perhaps by thinking of it on September 14, we can honor you without all the other distractions. Thank you for coming into our world to be one with us that we might know the depth and power of that eternal love. In Jesus' name we pray Amen.

Sure, let's have some carols.

*Hark the Herald Angels Sing* by Norton Hill Band

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqygsGixSHA>

*Hark the Herald Angels Sing* by The Crosbys

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r42So2nYcII>

*What Child is This?* by Peter Hollens

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGqf5ha\\_GEA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGqf5ha_GEA)

*What Child is This?* by The Piano Guys.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJ\\_o85Byb-g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJ_o85Byb-g)

*Silent Night Holy Night* by Home Free

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AICTG4b\\_teY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AICTG4b_teY)

*Silent Night* by Libera

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAH0qm6OWKk>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, September 21, 2021** not by Pastor Mark Opgrand but by **Stan McLeroy #411**

*Note from Pastor Mark: Here's another fresh devotion written by Stan McLeroy that is well worth spending some time reading.*

## **The Epiphany**

Stan McLeroy, 9/2021

### The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13)

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.  
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:  
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory  
for ever and ever. Amen.

Aha moments - epiphanies - are interesting things. Sometimes you have all information you need - all the pieces of the puzzle - but you just can't put them all together to come up with the solution. Other times the pieces are obtained slowly, even accidentally, and you're sure you should be able to figure the problem out, but a little more information would really help... but you don't even know what you're looking for or if you will recognize it if you stumble onto it.

What is really mind-blowing is when the insight is for a problem that is not the one you thought you were trying to solve, or maybe you weren't trying to solve any problem at all. I had one of those, and it was worth the wait.

### **Piece #1: Church**

I am about six years old and just started attending church and Sunday school regularly. Here I am, just starting to feel comfortable with the English language when suddenly I'm hearing people use some weird new words: thou, thee, thy, and thine. I asked my father what they meant.

In answering me I think he must have followed advice on how to answer your children's questions about sex: keep the answer short, and tell your child just enough to satisfy them. In a nutshell, "Those words mean 'you' or 'your'. That's the way people talked back when our King James Bible was created." And what I took from that was, "It's fancy Bible-talk for 'you'. Just go with it."

### **Piece #2: French Class**

I'm 13 years old, starting 9th grade. My dad thought I should take a foreign language elective, and suggested French. For absolutely no good reason, I took his advice. I figured I could

memorize a bunch of new French words, stick them in place of the English words in a sentence, and - TA-DA! (oops, I mean voila!) - I would now speak French. Boy was I wrong! One of the early things I learned was that in a sentence like, "How are you doing?" there are two possible French words for "you", and you have to learn the right times to use each one.

The word "vous" is used when speaking to two or more people (like "y'all"), and also when speaking "formally" to a single person, such as when a child speaks to an adult, when an adult speaks to an authority figure (government official, policeman, company management, etc.), and often when two adults who are not close friends speak to each other (even neighbors who have known each other for years.)

The second you-word option, "tu" and its associated forms, is used for speaking "informally" to a single person, for example, when a child speaks to another child, or two adults who are very close friends speak with each other. And our French 101 class drilled it into us that you never NEVER use the informal "tu" when you should use the formal "vous"; to do so is a sign of the utmost disrespect.

I decided in one class to always play it safe by using the formal "vous" all the time so I wouldn't have to think about which one to use and wouldn't risk dissing anyone. Nope! My teacher said that was almost as bad, marking me as both dumb and putting on airs, like a kid on the playground calling all his friends "Your Excellency" or something.

Around this time I also learned, maybe in French class, that English also used to have two words for "you" - a formal and an informal - but one got dropped. Interesting, but I never pursued it. As a child, I had never had to refer to adults with a different you-word. I naturally assumed that it was the formal "you" that had dropped out of English usage. And I never really firmly connected this information with the "thou/thee/thy/thine" issue.

I was finding that learning some French was helping me to understand my own language English in new ways, but not enough to pursue loose threads. Oh, the time that was lost to my laziness and indifference! My aha moment was still years in the future.

### **Piece #3: Business Trip**

I am 38 years old now. I was just told that I will be making a business trip to (West) Germany. Next week. Don't worry, they said. You'll be on an American base, they said. Everyone on base speaks English, and it is widely spoken throughout Germany. I don't care what they said!

This trip put the fear of God in me: I may be ugly, and I'm definitely an American, but the last thing I want to be is an ugly American, tromping around demonstrating no interest in my host country's culture. I learned a little German during that trip, including its use of two words for "you": du and sie, used similarly as in French. That trip awakened me to the real practical benefits of learning another language, and to the enjoyment of trying.

### **Piece #4: History of English**

I am probably in my late 40s when I listen to a recorded class on the history of English and learn that the you-words that fell out of use in English - "thou", "thee", "thy", "thine" - were not the formal you-words. They were the informal you-words. All my life I had been thinking that

our modern English language had relaxed a lot of formal speaking and become more casual and friendly. In fact it was the exact opposite: our modern "you" refers everyone in the more formal way. This was a little Aha Moment!

### **Piece #5: The Sanctuary Prayer**

I am 51 years old, on vacation in France with my family. Maria and I took several years of French in high school, never became anywhere close to fluent, and have never used the language in over 30 years.

I tried to do a quick review of some French basics, but it didn't amount to much. I bought a French/English dictionary for this trip, and I carry it with me at all times. Here we are in the Montmartre area of Paris - home of the Moulin Rouge cabaret which Toulouse Lautrec immortalized in his famous posters.

We've eaten lunch and decided now to visit the Basilica of the Sacred Heart. Its sanctuary is beautiful and inspires a true sense of reverence. There is a prayer in the sanctuary printed on a large board in French, and on another board in English. Wait, I will try to glean what little I can from the French version before I read the prayer in English.

<p>Seigneur, Toi qui as voulu rester présent au milieu de nous par ta Sainte Eucharistie, mystère de Ton Amour, nous nous unissons à tous ceux qui viennent T'adorer, en esprit et en vérité.</p> <p>Priant de jour ou de nuit, nous voulons offrir notre présence à Ta présence.</p> <p>Donne-nous de t'écouter dans le silence, Toi qui veux Te révéler à l'intime de notre coeur.</p> <p>Donne-nous de nous remettre à Toi : que montent de notre coeur la louange et la supplication, l'offrande de notre vie dans la confiance.</p> <p>Que Ton Coeur Sacré, source de toute miséricorde, établis nos coeurs dans la paix et la joie intérieures, qu'Il affermisse notre foi, renouvelle notre amour, et soutienne notre espérance.</p> <p>Amen.</p>	<p>Lord, who wished to stay present among us through Your Holy Eucharist, the mystery of your love, we unite ourselves to all those who come to adore You in spirit and in truth.</p> <p>Praying day and night, we would like to offer our presence to Your Presence.</p> <p>Allow us to listen to You in silence, as You wish to reveal Yourself to us in the secret of our hearts.</p> <p>Help us to abandon ourselves to You: may the praise and supplication, and the confident gift of our lives raise up from our hearts.</p> <p>May Your Sacred Heart, source of all mercy, establish our hearts in peace and inner joy. May it strengthen our faith, renew our love, and sustain our hope.</p> <p>Amen.</p>
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I had not gotten much meaning out of the first few lines, but already I knew that something was very very wrong. This was a prayer to God - God the almighty, God the all-powerful, God the being that we kneel before, that we bow our heads to. If ever there was a situation where the utmost respect was called for, this was it. And yet I was seeing all these informal "you" words: Toi, Ta, Ton, Te. How could this be?

I quickly checked the English version on the other board: yes, they were in fact "you" words. I was in France and the French certainly know their own language, yet why would such disrespect seemingly be shown to God?

There was only one other explanation: God is not a government official, policeman, company management or impersonal neighbor; God is my closest friend, one with which I may speak in the most informal and intimate way.

This has to be one of the most profound epiphanies of my life, and I just stood in front of those prayer boards dumbfounded. It was the answer to a question that I was not seeking to answer, and I realized that this had been right in front of me all my life, with every prayer or Gospel I ever read or heard from the King James Bible that still used all the "thees" and "thous" and "thys" and "thines".

I had just never worked out the significance of it all. God is my closest friend. Jesus is my closest friend. What a friend we have in Jesus! Amen.

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, September 22, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #412

*Note: With funeral preparation this week and working with the Netflix crew for another day of filming "Florida Man" in Keever Hall, I just couldn't get another new devotion put together. So here's another one from last year, still applicable to what we are continuing to deal with.*

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, April 28, 2020 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #38

### "Going Viral."

The phrase "*going viral*" was first observed in the late 1980's and was first used to describe how those cute photos or videos of pets or kids were shared via social media or "*viewed*" on YouTube or "*liked*" on Facebook. Rapid spread was required to go viral.

Until a few months ago "*going viral*" had a pretty positive connotation. Something that had "*gone viral*" was something that garnered interest. YouTube especially became a place where things posted could go viral.

It was a good phrase to describe how something could spread so quickly. The word *virus* entered into the English Language before scientists understood much about how viruses functioned, but in time *virus* became applied to describe those insidious germs that multiply themselves in hosts, and spread to other hosts.

It was also in the 1980's that the term "*computer virus*" was first used, because it was self-replicating bad code that could "*infect*" and damage or disable computer systems.

These days we cannot help but pause when we use the term "*going viral*" describe another cute puppy video, even if its views have spread to millions in just a short time. That's because now we understand why exactly "*going viral*" was such a good description. We are now seeing a living organism-destroying virus that has gone viral and continues to spread and infect each day.

With the coronavirus going viral many other things have *gone viral* as well. Fear. Worry. Loss. Hardship. Uncertainty. Dread. This list is long.

To this, where's the "*antidote*?" And is that even the right word?

An *antidote* by definition is a remedy that counteracts the effects of poison. For a virus we need a *antibodies*.

An *antidote* is not an *antibody*. “An *antibody* a blood protein produced in response to and counteracting a specific antigen. Antibodies combine chemically with substances which the body recognizes as alien, such as bacteria, viruses, and foreign substances in the blood.”

For a virus we need antibodies, and we pray that God, science and medicine will help us produce antibodies so we can end the pandemic.

At the same time, I wonder if maybe for all the other “*poisons*” that accompany the virus we actually need an “*antidote*.”

Do you think its fair to describe the “*gospel*” as an “*antidote*” to fear, worry, loss, hardship, uncertainty and dread, among other personal poisons?

Two thousand years of faithful witness to Jesus Christ as Lord would say “yes.”

The “antidote” to the world’s poison is the love of Jesus and the gospel by which his love spread to all the nations.

St. Luke speaks to this in Acts 10;

*<sup>37</sup> That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: <sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.*

*<sup>39</sup> We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; <sup>40</sup> but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, <sup>41</sup> not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.*

*<sup>42</sup> He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead.*  
(Acts 10:37-42 NRS)

The love of Jesus is beautifully sung about in a great hymn of the church: “*What Wondrous Love Is This.*”

1 What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul,  
what wondrous love is this, O my soul!  
What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss  
to bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul,  
to bear the dreadful curse for my soul!

2 When I was sinking down, sinking down, sinking down,  
when I was sinking down, sinking down;

when I was sinking down beneath God's righteous frown,  
Christ laid aside his crown for my soul, for my soul,  
Christ laid aside his crown for my soul!

3 To God and to the Lamb, I will sing, I will sing,  
to God and to the Lamb, I will sing;  
to God and to the Lamb, who is the great I AM,  
while millions join the theme, I will sing, I will sing,  
while millions join the theme, I will sing!

4 And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on,  
and when from death I'm free, I'll sing on;  
and when from death I'm free, I'll sing and joyful be,  
and through eternity I'll sing on, I'll sing on,  
and through eternity I'll sing on!

The love of Jesus is not a “vaccine,” or an “antibody”, but certainly has become an “antidote” to those things that poison us on the way to being well. Go viral with that message, and feel free to take the love of Jesus internally as you hear it, pray it, sing of it, and live it.

Let us pray:

*Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your wondrous love that becomes the antidote to the poison that would destroy our relationship with you and others whom you love. Bless those who express your love in daily life, especially those who minister to those who are sick. Make well, we pray, all who look to you this day, and keep us strong and confident in your abiding presence. May your love go viral and heal this ailing world. Amen.*

P.S. Of course you need to listen to “What Wondrous Love.” Here are four I found, one from the St. Olaf Choir, another from someone I hadn’t known of before, Chelsea Moon. Also Sounds Like Reign and Blue Highway. I think you’ll like this nice variety. And as an added bonus, I want to share a video that actually went viral. How viral? When I first saw it, it had 3 million views; now it is nearly 9 million. It will make you smile and laugh, especially those of you who are trying to make facemasks these days.

“What Wondrous Love.”St. Olaf Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsVnvN3EVxY>

“What Wondrous Love.”Chelsea Moon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1g26dbNJYJI>

“What Wondrous Love.”Sounds Like Reign

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVNktRGU3As>

*"What Wondrous Love."*Blue Highway

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4\\_RtGQtHJ9Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_RtGQtHJ9Y)

and for fun.... Do It Yourself Sewing with Kay

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4c5eo\\_3-y0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4c5eo_3-y0)

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, September 23, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #413**

**"I don't suppose I'll be seeing you again."**

*<sup>13</sup> If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; <sup>14</sup> and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. <sup>15</sup> We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ-- whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. <sup>17</sup> If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup> If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. <sup>20</sup> But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. (1 Cor. 15:13-20 NRS)*

With so many recent goodbyes to people we have loved who have died, I recalled an annual that happened between my grandmother and myself.

When my grandmother Hilda Buesing reached her late eighties, she began to express how each meeting between us might be our last. At the time, I lived across the country, and only saw her a couple of times a year. Our goodbyes were tearful. While she was still in good health, it saddened her whenever we parted, and she wondered if this might be our last time.

That's when our partings began to include her saying this: *"I don't suppose I'll be seeing you again."* My response was usually a kind of denial. *"Oh, Grandma, I'm sure this is not the last time. I'll be back."*

With each passing year, and for the next five or seven years, this rather sad ritual repeated. *"I don't suppose I'll be seeing you again."* *"Oh, Grandma..."* It was not until she was well into her nineties when the ritual changed. I was ready for one more *"I don't suppose...."* but what I heard was this:

*"I don't know if I'll see you again, but if I don't, I know we'll see each other in heaven."*

Because each year's *"goodbye"* kept being followed by another year's *"hello,"* perhaps she needed a new way to express her thoughts about parting. I realize her words simply reflected her in us being together. I knew she would miss me, and that made her sad.

One of the joys of Christian faith is trusting that by God's grace, **we will see again those we love** who have died. This is reflected in this prayer from our funeral liturgy:

*O God of grace and glory, we remember before you today our brother/sister ( ), We thank you for giving him/her to us to know and love as a companion in or pilgrimage on earth. In your boundless compassion, console us who mourn. Give us your aid, so we may see in death the gate*

*to eternal life, that we may continue our course on earth in confidence, until by your will, **we are reunited with those who have gone before us**; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

When Grandma and I recognized and affirmed this together, we moved to focusing on the love we had for each other, and that joy that no matter what happens in the coming year, we **WILL** see each other again someday. This is among the wonderful gifts Christian faith brings to us. Blessings.

Let us pray. *Thank you, O God, for all the special people you have given to us to know and to love in our lifetimes. Thank you for your promise that we shall see them again. Amen.*

*For All The Saints Who From Their Labors Rest* by Concordia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WbPshOGxpew>

*Sweet By and By* sung by Bird Youmans

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0zWZu-QupWU>

*Sweet By and By* and *For God So Loved* by Fountainview Academy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pDaaNAhJNk>

*Paradise Valley* by Acapeldridge

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcfpFmzHqos>

*When We All We Get To Heaven* by Brad Paisley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVh687Kcnbo>

and just for fun.... *Till We Meet Again* by Dame Vera Lynn

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbf9ZYi8eac>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, September 24, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #414

### **"Those Big City Houston Ideas."**

*<sup>21</sup> After they had proclaimed the good news to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, then on to Iconium and Antioch. <sup>22</sup> There they strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue in the faith, saying, "It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God." <sup>23</sup> And after they had appointed elders for them in each church, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe. (Acts 14:21-23 NRS)*

The Book of Acts is filled with stories of how the first churches came to be through the work of Peter, Paul, and a host of new disciples. Sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ, especially among Gentile communities, required being open to the Holy Spirit and lots of what, to the people, were new ideas.

Many worship practices were built upon Jewish traditions and teachings, but interpreted through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Reaching out and inviting people to join these new communities of faith was central to growth.

My first experience in parish ministry was in a small, stable, well-established congregation in rural Texas: Elizabeth Lutheran Church in Caldwell (named not for the Elizabeth in the Bible, but for the wife of the man who donated land years before. There had also been an Elizabeth Methodist church, also named for that Elizabeth).

Most of the folks in this congregation were born and raised in Caldwell and had only experienced the ways things always had been done. What outreach there was, was accidental, like when a son or daughter of the congregation married someone outside and they joined the church.

One of the leaders of the congregation was a man named Herman who had grown up in Caldwell, moved to Houston for several years, and came back. Herman served on council as secretary, and when the president resigned because of work conflicts, Herman volunteered to take that position.

I very much looked forward to his leadership, as he had been part of a new mission church in Houston and was eager to implement some of what he had learned. We spent lots of time together imagining ways to do a better job reaching out and inviting people into our fellowship.

It didn't take long to realize that no one on council was interested in anything Herman said. I could see it in their body language; I could see it in their silence. I didn't get it. He had all these good ideas from his experience at his former mission church.

I don't remember now who I finally had the courage to ask another member if he might help me understand this. I'm kind of surprised now that he was so candid, but I remember his reply to this day: *"Pastor, nobody likes him; and nobody likes those 'big city Houston ideas.'"*

***"Those big city Houston ideas."***

To me, they were just basic fundamentals of evangelism, stewardship, discipleship, hospitality, and service. To them, they were outsider ideas coming from a *"know it all"* native son who was judging them. In respect to mission and ministry, it was another *"us"* versus *"them"* scenario.

I don't know if, during Paul's missionary journeys, anyone ever challenged Paul for his *"big city Jerusalem ideas."* We do know there was considerable opposition among those steeped in Jewish tradition who resented Paul's wide embrace of those outside it, the Gentiles (those *"Big missionary Paul ideas."?*)

In a previous devotion I wrote about the blessing and windfall that happened for our St. Paul's on account of new people moving to Leland (including COMPASS, not cypress, POINTE. Please accept my correction). I'm happy to observe we've welcomed those *"big city Houston, or New York or Philadelphia or Boston or Newark"* ideas.

The pandemic (endemic?) has forced and continues to require us to reconsider all the ways we do mission and ministry. Already, we have found ourselves doing things we never imagined (like livestream worship or funerals, computer zoom meetings, circles, and prayer group, outdoor parking lot worship, or drive thru communion).

In the Book of Acts with each new emerging community of faith we see expressions of thanks to God for bringing the gospel to them through God's co-workers. Not all ideas, new or old, were always welcomed, but somehow the Holy Spirit kept on working then just as the Holy Spirit will keep on working now.

Let us pray: *We give thanks for all the servants of God throughout the centuries who engage each other with new and creative ways to share the gospel. Help us always build strong relationships with each other so that we can listen to each other and hear each other but most of all look to you for help and guidance. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

P.S. If you don't care much for my ideas, just call them *"Big City Houston Ideas,"* and I'll know to listen more carefully to your ideas. Blessings.

*We Are All One in Mission* by St. John's Episcopal ELW 576

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G78gwFglghs>

*O Worship the King All Glorious Above* by Pilgrim Mennonite Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAI5pWbjKQc>

*The Spirit Sends Us Forth to Serve* by Atonement Church (traditional)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHSAcgRmmuc&t=26s>

*The Spirit Sends us Forth* ELW 538 by St. Paul Lutheran, Grosse Pointe (Big City Houston version)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHueYDhNDVI>

*The Church of Christ in Every Age* ELW 729 by St. Peter's Choir

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66Ob1pHj\\_Xg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66Ob1pHj_Xg)

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday September 27, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand # 415**

**Thinking of those who have died.**

*<sup>7</sup> We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. <sup>8</sup> If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. <sup>9</sup> For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.*  
(Rom. 14:7-9 NRS)

By next weekend, we will have had fourteen funerals since the start of the year, eleven since July 16, and seven in the space of five weeks. One more is to be announced.

Joe Augustine: Feb20

Don Hall: March 1

Dan Gurganus: July 10

Ruth Yarbrough: July 16

Linda Surratt: July 17

Emmy Davis Fisher : August 2

"Ducka" Nettles: August 28

Josephine Woodruff: September 11

Eleanor Chadwick: Sept 18

Bill Farabee: September 23

Ted Hueskes: September 25

Clarence Hales: September 27

Peg Hodder Case: October 2

Louise Walton: died September 24 (TBA)

I know we usually wait to name our saints until All Saints Sunday, when we light candles, ring the bell, and thank God for them. But with so many passing just this past month, I am thinking about them a lot, and clinging to the wonderful affirmation in Romans 14: "If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's."

I am so glad for this hope, especially when it has been hard to say goodbye to those whom we have loved.

Let us pray: *Thank you for our dear ones, and all the dear ones who have died and now rest in your eternal care. Bless us in our grieving that we might live on in hope. Amen.*

*For All the Saints* by Chet Valley Churches

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21GTTM2TIYA>

*When We Are Living* by St. Mark's Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doE9rJIHwPw>

*For Living, for Dying* by Donna Pena

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zemjJhquxH8>

*We Belong to God's Family* by Owen Alsott

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tdSwUq7l4E>

*Sound of the Saints* by Audio Adrenaline

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zemjJhquxH8>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, September 28, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #416

### Card "board" Carrying Beggars.

*46 They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mk. 10:46-47 NRS)*

*8 The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" 9 Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." (Jn. 9:8-9 NRS)*

Anyone who has driven anywhere in Wilmington has seen them at the city intersections: beggars. They stand for hours holding cardboard signs in front of them with the hopes that people driving by will give them money.

I've always been struck at how so many of the signs have such neat printing. Often the words include "Homeless" or "Hungry" or "Please help" or "God bless." Sometimes the signs indicate the person is a veteran; or that "Anything Helps." I saw one once that said "Not a drug addict; please help." On one corner I have seen a man hold a foldable pocket-sized sign that was *blank*. I suppose he reckoned that he didn't need words to convey that he hoped for contributions.

I discovered an article on the internet describing how the use of cardboard signs has changed the face of panhandling in America. It went on to describe how "flying a sign," as it is called, has enabled the message to come across without resorting to the kind of more aggressive "in your face" panhandling that has been problematic in other settings.

The presence of these "beggars/panhandlers" continually reminds us that a portion of our population is in desperate shape. Some have drug or alcohol problems, mental illness or PTSD. Others may not be able to get or keep a job or find a job that can get them off the streets.

I could only find two verses in scripture that identified "beggars." In Mark's gospel he is named: Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus is blind: Jesus has pity on him, and his sight restored. In John's gospel the beggar is not named but has been blind since birth and Jesus also restores his sight.

From the scriptures, we know little of what happened after both of them were healed, but we can imagine both now had opportunities to become more than blind beggars. They would still need a lot of help though. Did they have any formal education? Did they have family who would

be supportive (John suggests so in his story)? How would they develop a trade or something that could provide livelihood?

Our street corner beggars seem to be modestly successful on account of displaying their signs and “*advertising*” for financial help. I’m sure some days are better than others; I also hope some have discovered where to get a meal at least, like at St. Paul’s or other places.

I am thankful through our ministries at St. Paul’s and Feast Gathering that we are doing something to address the needs of those who live on the streets (or in the woods). Let us not be discouraged or overwhelmed when realizing the needs of those who are poor or homeless. We help as we are able, and continue, in Jesus’ name to look for more ways to serve (even when it might not include handing out dollars every time we pass the dollar store at 16th and Wooster... or ... when it might).

Let us pray. *We remember those who spend hours and days standing on street corners with their signs, asking for help. Help us all discover ways to help that go beyond a dollar here or there, but work together as a larger community, including our communities of faith, to bring healing and hope. Amen.*

*Blind Man* by Colin Buchanan

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQjZRS-6R4A>

*Amazing Grace* by Il Divo

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tGIMd53So0A>

*10,000 Reasons* by Matt Redman

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXDGE\\_IRI0E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXDGE_IRI0E)

*You Raise Me Up* by Selah

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DorNUsi5LE>

*You’ll Never Walk Alone* by SangKam Male Choir from Norway

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aj5qrhUih6A>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, September 29, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #417

### Dim Mirrors and Clear Zoom Calls.

*"He made the basin of bronze with its stand of bronze, from the mirrors of the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting."* (Exod. 38:8 NRS)

*"<sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known."* (1 Cor. 13:12 NRS)

"Mirror" or "mirrors" are only mentioned five times in the Bible. The first time is Exodus 38:8: quoted above. Another time is in 1 Corinthians 13:12, also quoted above.

Reading these verses, we may imagine our familiar mirrors, highly reflective and made out of glass. In the ancient and biblical worlds, mirrors were quite different. Mirrors then were made of polished metal, usually bronze, gold, silver, or copper, and likely did not reflect well at all. Looking into a still pool of water likely offered a much better reflection.

Examining our verse from Exodus, we can conclude the mirrors used for the temple in this passage were bronze, as the scripture indicates they were transformed into a bronze basin.

Paul speaks of transformation as well, but using a mirror as a metaphor for how things in life may not be very clear now, will be made clear in the future. Here is an alternate translation:

*Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.* (1 Cor. 13:12 NLT)

I have been thinking a lot about mirrors lately on account of all those times I have been in Zoom meetings. In former times, the only time I ever saw my face was when standing before a mirror in the bathroom. Now in every zoom call, not only do I see the face of others, but my own face as well.

I cannot recall a time in my life when I have seen my own "*reflection*" as often as I have since Zoom calls. And while zoom calls enable us to meet and do work together in a safe environment, I am reminded of a couple of things: 1) I don't really like looking at myself, especially for long periods. What I see is not the person I have imagined when not in front of a mirror. Who is this older version of myself? What happened to that younger person?

I am also reminded of this: 2) "*Face to face*" with another person is always better.

And 3) "*Face-to-face*" with God will be the best, for then (and hopefully now as well), it won't matter how I see myself, but only how God sees me. For then (beginning now?) we shall all be transformed and seen by God who uses a unique set of "*corrective lenses*," where God focuses us all as God's beautiful and beloved children.

If Luther can remind us to remember our baptism when we wash our faces in the morning, maybe staring at mirrors or Zoom calls can remind us that God actually loves what God sees when God sees you and me.

Let us pray. *Remind us O God, just how beautiful we are in your sight. No matter how young or old we are, no matter how we see ourselves, help us see ourselves and others through your eyes, and as reflected in the love of Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

*Face to Face With Christ My Savior* by Altar of Praise Chorale

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SuLig-W4wSU>

*Love Worship Song* from 1 Cor 13 by Jason Silver

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qv6pR8papxk>

*New Heaven and Earth* by Simon Khorolskiy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kRBhg7Z9YR0>

*Oh When Shall I See Jesus and God So Loved* by Fountainview Academy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AlgJgYwtQo>

*The God Who Sees Me* by Liz Cornwell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jo08mieZq4A>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, September 30, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #418**

**"Barn Finds" and the Kingdom of Heaven.**

*"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." (Matt. 13:44 NRS)*

I thought about this scripture as I came across "Barn Finds" videos on YouTube. (My hunt for devotion videos often takes me to new and unexpected places). From these videos I was directed to compilations of quite amazing "barn find treasures."

A "Barn Find" described when a car or similar vehicle is put into storage, forgotten about, and then rediscovered years later (usually in poor or derelict condition). "Barn finds" can also be found in any kind of storage, including out in a field, in a garage, or shed. Such vehicles may have been covered by garage debris or outside amid overgrown weeds.

Because there continues to be rare and undiscovered "barn find treasures," "barn find treasure hunters" are constantly on the hunt. It is their love for classic cars and trucks that takes them all over the country in search of a "treasure." Sometimes they are able to purchase the treasure for restoration; other times they just make videos to share with other classic car enthusiasts.

One interesting treasure was a rare 1954 Aston Martin DB2/4 Mk II, one of 14 made; it was in total disrepair and in storage forty years when discovered. It sold "as is" at auction for \$293,000! When restored, it will be worth millions.

In Matthew 13:44 Jesus is not talking about "barn finds," but he is talking about finding treasure in a field, and the finder doing everything he can to purchase the field so he can legally lay claim to the treasure. We don't know what the treasure was, but the finder's joy and enthusiasm over the discovery and commitment to taking possession of it would certainly match the enthusiasm of finding and acquiring a rare car hidden in a barn.

Christ's message here, is that the Kingdom of Heaven is worth trading for everything a person owns in order to come into "possession" of it.

It's not the perfect metaphor, however, and maybe that's why it is only in Matthew's gospel. Those hearing could be sidetracked from the main message with lots of questions. What was the treasure? Who first hid the treasure? What the treasure stolen? Was the finder trespassing when he found the treasure? Did he tell the owner about it before he purchased the land? Did the owner know treasure was hidden there? Even if it now legally belonged to the one who purchased the field, if original field owner didn't know about the treasure, was the purchase ethical?

Perhaps St. Matthew left out this possible "discussion" so he didn't need to conclude with Jesus rolling his eyes and saying, "Come on, guys. It's just a story. He wasn't trespassing or stealing or

*swindling the landowner. I'm just talking about the Kingdom of Heaven being so wonderful that you would give anything for it. Let's move on. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a woman who loses a coin **that she owns** and looks all day till she finds it. Better? Sheesh!"*

*Let us pray. Give us desire and enthusiasm, O God, to make us rich in wisdom, mercy and love. Guide us to you fields where treasure is to be discovered and shared, that we all may experience the joy of heaven's kingdom. Amen.*

*Kingdom of God* by Jon Guerra

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMs-BF\\_5ioU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMs-BF_5ioU)

*Kingdom of God* by Jon Guerra (live version)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rq6sa7NCYFc>

*Where Your Treasure Is* by Marty Haugen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PgvE4-PwfhA>

*Where You Treasure Is* by Sharon Mennonite Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkuRdRkckjU>

*I Found the Treasure* by Dan Schutte

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UiqD64qftQ4>

*Jesus Priceless Treasure* by Lutheran Quartet

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c14lOXlwOwl>

St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, October 1, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #419

**"Toy boat toy boat toy boat toy boat...."**

<sup>10</sup> Then Moses said to the LORD, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." <sup>11</sup> So the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD?"

<sup>12</sup> "Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say." <sup>13</sup> But he said, "O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send." <sup>14</sup> So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and He said: "Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look, he is also coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart.

<sup>15</sup> "Now you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth. And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do. (Exod. 4:10-15 NKJ)

Some years ago, I was doing a children's sermon on Jesus stilling the storm. I used a blue sheet and placed upon it an old plastic toy boat from my childhood. The children and I grabbed corners of the sheet. As we "stormed" the waters, the boat was wildly tossed about until I spoke the word of Jesus, "Peace be Still." We stopped immediately. It was a strong visual of the power of Jesus' words.

I still have the toy boat on my shelf in my church office, and this morning I picked it and said aloud, "toy boat." That stirred a memory of when "toy boat" was among our childhood tongue twisters we loved to say quickly out loud. "Toy boat toy boat toy boat toy boat." That was one of several I remember saying. Others included "She sells sea shells by the sea shore" and "She sees cheese, " **"black back bat"** and everyone's favorite: "Sunshine city sunshine city sunshine city sunshine sh...y." Oops! And everyone laughed. Every time.

In the book of Exodus, as God called Moses through the burning bush, it appeared that pretty much every sentence was a "tongue twister" for him. He wasn't afraid to do God's bidding. But he was petrified to speak in front of people, much less the Pharaoh. Even when God promised Moses that God would be "with" his mouth and teach him what to say, Moses believed everything was going to come out all "toy boat" or worse, "sunshine city." So he begged, "Anybody else, please!"

God knew Aaron could speak well, ("toy boat toy boat toy boat let my people go no problem") and he was Moses' trusted brother, so that was the beginning of the "original team ministry."

While Moses remained in the spotlight as the greatest prophet in Israel's history, we must never overlook the key role Aaron played in communicating God's message. Aaron could do what Moses could not.

I wonder how many times “*support staff*” or “*behind the scenes*” people remain in the shadows while others get all (or most) of the credit. It should not be a competition, of course, being that all we do should be for the glory of God. But I am reminded that it takes many gifts and many members to become the body of Christ in the world.

So while it was Moses who “*parted*” the Red Sea so the Israelites could escape Egypt, it was Aaron who spoke the order clearly, “*Go. Now. We’re not waiting for a toy boat toy boat toy boat to take us across. Go quickly.*”

Let us pray. *For every Moses in ministry, we thank you for all the Aarons. We thank you for the wide variety of gifts that enable your church to express your love for us. Help us hear our own call to ministry, trusting that you will give us what we need, and each other, to do this work. Amen.*

*Aaron Speaks for Moses (Exodus 4:10-17)* by Col Johnston

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vN7rRtLsmc>

*Go Down Moses* by Louis Armstrong

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vf6jBP4YXwo>

*Song of Moses* by Aaron Keyes

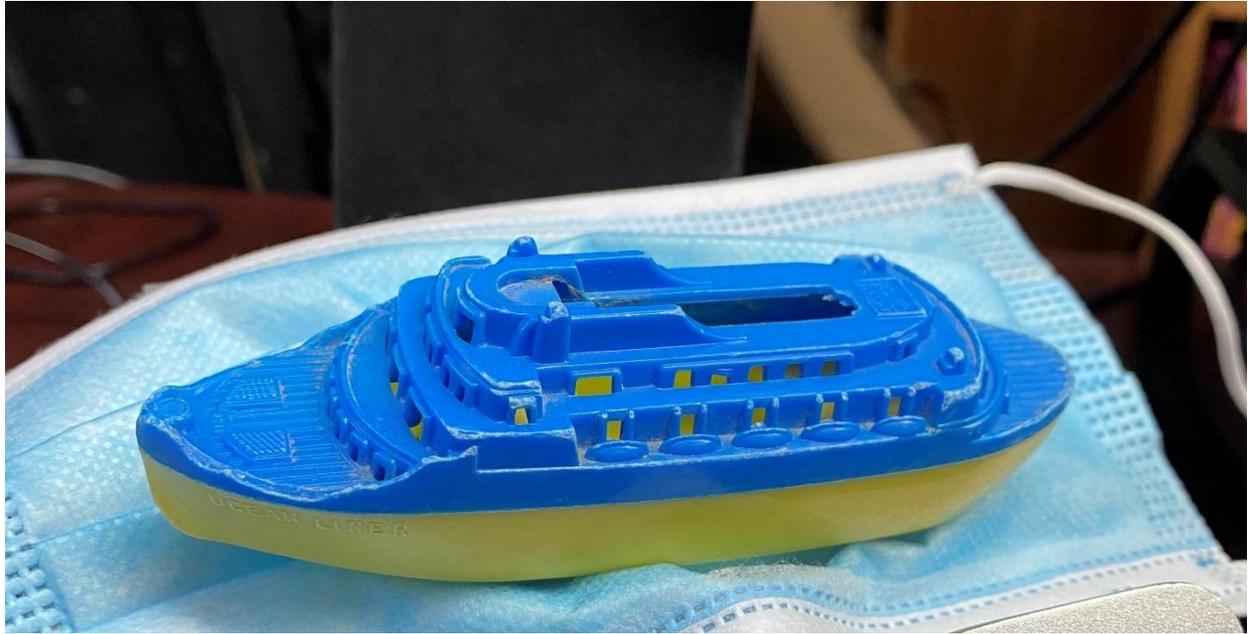
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWhLr4DRTdE>

*Wade In the Water* by the Petersons

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmYCLK19wKU>

*Pharoah Pharoah Let My People Go* by Chris Christian

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-Yf3bDCoBI>



**St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, October 4, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #420**

**Holy Water.**

*The priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel and take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put it into the water. (Num. 5:17 NRS)*

I once visited San Xavier Del Bac Mission near Tucson, Arizona. In a hallway, near their sanctuary, I was intrigued by a large stainless steel water container with spout that was permanently marked with the words, "Holy Water." This was water that had been blessed by the priest.

It wasn't in a water-filled bowl like we use to "*remember our baptism.*" People were invited to purchase from the gift shop a small plastic water container with gold words stamped on it that also said "*Holy Water,*" You could then fill your little "*Holy Water*" bottle from the large container and take it with you.

There were no instructions about how to use the Holy Water. Should you drink it? Apply it to your head externally? Use it to "*consecrate*" something. Sprinkle it on a plant?

Like other curiosities I have picked up over the years, I purchased the little vessel, filled it with the holy water, and it has been on a shelf unopened and unused now for more years than I can remember. I don't know if, like medicine, there is an expiration date on it.

Its greatest value for me is reminding me of the Holy Water of our baptism. Martin Luther in the small catechism pondered this when he asked and answered these questions:

What is Baptism?

*Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's word.*

How can water do such great things?

*Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God's word the water is plain water and no Baptism.*

*But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says in Titus, chapter three:*

*"He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying." (Titus 3:5–8)*

Luther is writing about what makes ordinary water holy. It is not because the priest or pastor has the power to “charge” it. It becomes holy when “infused” with the Word of God through God’s baptismal promises). It becomes holy as we use it to remember our baptism.

When I visited Israel with a group of clergy persons in 1999, quite a few of the ministers brought empty bottles so they could take some authentic “Jordan River water” to use back home for baptisms.

I was amused when the tour guides handed out instructions for how to boil and “purify” this “not too clean” river water. One guide said we could avoid that by just filling our containers from the tap. “It all comes from the Jordan River anyway,” he said, “but through a water purification plant.” I didn’t fuss with it as I was more interested in picking up stones from the Sea of Galilee.

When I searched for “holy water” in the scriptures, I found only one verse, Numbers 5:17. Interesting. Just one verse. In this case, “fresh water” was mixed with tabernacle dirt to make a bitter concoction and was used to determine marital infidelity. So that’s a far cry from the Holy Water of baptism.

Far more valuable for us is focusing on the Holy Water of baptism, and any water used in a holy way to remind us of how we have become adopted as God’s beloved children. It you need more, I supposed I could spare a few drops of my now “vintage” holy water and we’ll see what it does. Blessings.

Let us pray. *Thank you for the gift of life-giving water, O God, and for the ways it sustains life. We pray for those who do not have enough water to nourish their bodies or their crops. Remind us through the waters of baptism and God’s accompanying word and promises, that you are the one who gives life and consecrates us that we might become a Holy People. Amen.*

*Baptised With Water* by Jubilate

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZ79oC2lZVo>

*Crashing Waters at Creation* by First Presbyterian Bedford, IN

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Aedb-4nZlw>

*On Jordan’s Bank the Baptist’s Cry* by St. John’s Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3dZV5HRUDI>

*Holy Water* by We The Kingdom

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AfY7CGU8sck>

*Healing Waters* by Songs of Faith

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=On0l7ARzX9I>

...and for fun, a Catholic video from a priest on how to make holy water (note the container)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JvVDe4g10AM>



## St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, October 5, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #421

### Catfish skulls and hidden revelations.

<sup>33</sup> *When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. (Lk. 23:33 NRS)*

I cannot remember who gave me the top of a catfish skull that is among the oddities on my bookshelves in my office. I remember my reaction. "O Wow!" Looking at it from the top, about 4 inches by 2 inches, interesting to look at, but without the "wow" factor. The "wow" happens when you turn it over, revealing what looks like a crucifix. The photos will be attached.

It is difficult to determine when someone first observed the unique resemblance to a crucifix. The species, "*Ariopsis felis*," or "*hardhead catfish*," also known as "*sailcat*" or "*crucifix fish*" is a saltwater catfish particularly known for its hard head. When cleaned, it takes little imagination to see the crucifix.

It was in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century that it became more of a local Gulf Coast legend, thanks to a composer named Conrad Lantz. He pondered this unique skeleton and wrote a poem about it. The poem became printed on a postcard along with both sides of the skull, and from there the postcard travelled around the world.

### The Legend of the Crucifix Fish

Of all the fish in the sea  
our Lord chose the lowly sailcat  
to remind us of His misery.  
His body on the cross is outlined,  
the hilt of the sword  
which was plunged into His side  
is clearly defined.

Look at the back of the fishes bone  
where the Roman shield is shown.  
When you shake the cross  
you will hear the dices being tossed  
for our Lord's blood stained dress,  
those who hear them  
—will be blessed.

Conrad S. Lantz

Before reading the poem, I hadn't tried shaking it, but sure enough, there is a distinctive rattle that resembles dice. It certainly does make you think about Jesus being taken to the place called "*The Skull*," where Jesus was crucified.

For all the crucifixes throughout history that have been fashioned by artists and displayed behind altars in churches, or as jewelry worn around a person's neck, this might be the only one uniquely fashioned by God himself.

It certainly does invite reflection.

Let us pray. *Thank you, O God, for everything in nature that reminds us of the wonder of your love. For all in nature that draws us to you, we give you thanks. Thank you for the hardhead catfish who reminds us of how Jesus our Lord died for us. When we are hardheaded, we pray that you will get through our thick skulls with the wonder of what you have given us that we might bear witness, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Beneath the Cross of Jesus* by Fountainview Academy (traditional)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMbcm4PZI04>

*Beneath the Cross of Jesus* by Derek Webb and Sandra McCracken (another tune)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MGv4aSRLTY>

*In the Cross of Christ I Glory* by The Hymnal Project

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pyT\\_QE1x-JA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pyT_QE1x-JA)

*In the Cross of Christ I Glory* Organ Toccata by John Hutchinson (for all who have missed our organ)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kaLxm32M-J8>

*Miserere mei, Deus* by Tenebrae

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3v9unphfi0>



**St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, October 6, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #422**

**Jesus, Star Trek, and (not so?) horrible "Forever Wars."**

*<sup>28</sup> For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? <sup>29</sup> Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, <sup>30</sup> saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'*

*<sup>31</sup> Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup> If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. <sup>33</sup> So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.*

(Lk. 14:28-33 NRS)

While talking about counting the cost of discipleship Jesus here used the practical analogy of a king considering waging war. "What king," Jesus says, "would wage a war he knows he cannot win?" Or "go to war when the enemy has twice the combatants." Implied is that the disciples would understand that such a king would be foolish. Jesus makes the point that it is important to recognize what it takes to be a follower.

The analogy of war is an interesting one, in that Jesus is always an advocate for peace. He knows the ways of the world, however. Wars happen. When wars are waged, the winner is the one with either the most combatants left standing or the one with superior firepower that can pummel the enemy until they surrender.

The New Yorker Magazine recently had an interesting article by Dexter Filkins entitled, "Did Making the Rules of War Better Make the World Worse?" Among other things it observed how in the history of war, it has been waged to the extreme, often times only ending when the catastrophic loss of life has become unbearable for the losing side. Jesus' discussion of war seems to follow this logic.

With advanced technology, we are also seeing the option for the more advanced combatant to be much more detached. The use of drones, for example, makes it possible for to strike targets (people) in a way that protects us but exacts harm on our enemies. Such advanced technology, along with limited troops on the ground makes it possible to continue "forever wars." The "War Corporations" have every incentive to keep the wars going, as long as our own human cost is low.

I am reminded of an old Original Series Star Trek episode called “A Taste of Armageddon” where the Starship Enterprise visits a planet that has been at war with another planet for 500 years, and yet there are no signs of destruction anywhere.

It turns out they have solved the problem of avoiding complete and mutual annihilation by having their war fought by computers. The computers make simulated attacks, targeting certain population centers; the residents declared “killed” go to extermination centers. People have come to regard it as their duty to sacrifice their lives in this manner for their “planets.”

Where this becomes fouled up is when the crew of the Enterprise is told they have been “targeted” and must go to the “extermination chambers.” While trying to “respect” their societies, Captain Kirk is not about to sacrifice his crew, so they destroy the computers.

Now the planets are in complete crisis. They both have the means to completely and actually annihilate each other. What are they to do? Kirk offers them a simple solution: **Make peace.**

Kirk believed that the only reason the war has gone on so long is because the simulation insulated both societies from the horrors of war and gave them little reason to end it.

Jesus used the analogy of counting the cost of war before waging it to the cost of discipleship. Maybe if he had drones and computers, he might have talked about it differently. To become a disciple, you need to be ready to be “all in,” and he’s not talking about a “simulation,” here, but “assimilation” into the whole mission and ministry of God.

Let us pray: *Lord Jesus, we pray that you will empower us by your Spirit to count the cost of discipleship and choose your path to peace. Amen.*

Since I referenced “Star Trek,” here are two clips from the episode:

Star Trek A Taste of Armageddon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wB8gv4H0QZO>

Star Trek Peace or Utter Destruction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKmUd0zHW4w>

**and the songs....**

*May the Peace of God* by Nates Puruganan

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KwyyN86Z3fc>

*Peace is Flowing Like a River* by Julie Gaulke

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sc21ScL6CJc>

*Peace Wonderful Peace* by Vagle Brothers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySPQcp5hIqM>

*My Peace* by Maranatha Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ls01XGV7oA0>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, October 7, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #423**

*Note from Pastor Mark: Didn't make my deadline for today, so once again, do I just skip tomorrow, or offer one from the past. Since we are still talking a lot these days about anti-inflammatory medicine, this may be worth a second look.*

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Thursday, September 10, 2020 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #167**

**Toxic spirituality and anti-inflammatory faith.**

My child, pay attention to what I say. Listen carefully to my words.

21 Don't lose sight of them. Let them penetrate deep into your heart,

22 for they bring life to those who find them, and healing to their whole body.

23 Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.

24 Avoid all perverse talk; stay away from corrupt speech.

25 Look straight ahead, and fix your eyes on what lies before you.

26 Mark out a straight path for your feet; stay on the safe path.

27 Don't get sidetracked; keep your feet from following evil. (Prov. 4:20-27 NLT)

Despite how it sometimes seems, people in the medical and science communities agree on quite a lot.

For example, they all recognize that inflammation is the body's natural way that white cells and the things they make protect you from infection from outside invaders like viruses and bacteria.

They also agree that some diseases, like arthritis, cause your body's defense system (your immune system) to trigger inflammation even when there are no invaders to fight off. Even those who are skeptical about science and medicine seem to be in great agreement about the positive and negative roles of inflammation.

There is additionally a great deal of consensus about the value of "anti-inflammatory" agents, even among those who are skeptical of science and medicine. Anti-inflammatory agents, whether in natural foods or herbal supplements or as produced by pharmaceutical companies are important in maintaining good health.

Now before this sounds like a boring essay for a school science project, let me wonder if this might have application to our spiritual health as well.

Might there be a kind of inflammatory faith that triggers us to fight against outside invaders? When those invaders are fear or doubt or despair such a spiritual defense mechanism would be a good thing.

But what if our positive inflammatory faith defense mechanisms get out of control and end up weakening our faith bringing a toxicity to our spirits? That would be harmful.

That might happen when we imagine we are fighting outside enemies such as other people's ideas or beliefs we perceive as threats to our faith. As we lash out at "them" we might not realize that damage is being done internally.

This happens as our faith transforms from being a positive manifestation of God at work in us to something that fights against this good work with a toxicity that does not build up the body (both our bodies and the body of Christ) but rather tears apart and eats away (like arthritis or other inflammatory disease manifestations).

How do we maintain good spiritual health then?

First, it will be important to recognize when our faith is becoming toxic. Look at what we are saying and feeling about other people, especially those with whom we disagree? Are we arguing or fighting without listening? Are we demonizing those with whom we disagree? Are we recognizing when despising others is becoming parts of our everyday feelings? If we are online, are we among those who are making or embracing caustic comments?

If any of this is happening, it can be helpful to recognize that God also gives us God's own version of spiritual anti-inflammatories.

--Pick up your red-letter Bible and focus of Jesus' words.

--Be in prayer regularly, remembering to pray both inwardly and outwardly.

--Listen to music that brings melody to God's word (many Psalms are set to music).

--Feed yourself with support from Christian brothers and sisters who are committed to reconciliation and peacemaking.

--Sing favorite hymns prayerfully even if not tunefully.

--Say grace and remember those things for which you are thankful.

--Look for goodness around you.

--Seek spiritual anti-inflammatories. Close your eyes and think of Jesus.

Let us pray.

In your mercy, Lord, grant what we need for spiritual health. Keep us balanced and faithful, trusting but also open and thoughtful to what we need to be express the love of Jesus to those you call us to be in relationship with. Keep our internal compass always pointing to you. In Jesus name. Amen.

Today's songs are all based on the Psalms and support positive anti-inflammatory meditation. As I listened, I realized this music was good medicine.

*Psalm 63:1-5* by Esther Mui

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cn509Nc8Kdo>

*Psalm 143* by Songs for the Masses

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryB1oLGmpSc>

*You Are There Psalm 139* by Songs for the Masses

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZ4my3VrVlg>

*Psalm 85* by Esther Mui

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cfo-toNbaTM>

*O God You Search Me Psalm 139* Notre Dame Folk Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3JPGY1w-674>

*Psalm 42 As the Deer* by Shemeroo Eternal Grace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSZWogDOAH4>

*As the Deer Psalm 42* by Shane and Shane

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rw4tCCoaP0>

*Psalm 42* by Tori Kelly

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGgsmCEgf4w>

*Awake My Soul Psalm 57* by Cristi Black

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uEOBh8dRFbl>

*Shepherd Me O God Psalm 23* by Gross Pointe Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQid6VgHNec>

*Both Now and Forevermore Psalm 121* by Songs for the Masses

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XpXtAOBqsFo&list=OLAK5uy\\_nm3v\\_8q\\_6RZSkMDeaos6wFfdZmVlyJcfY&index=10&t=0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XpXtAOBqsFo&list=OLAK5uy_nm3v_8q_6RZSkMDeaos6wFfdZmVlyJcfY&index=10&t=0s)

*Psalm for Life* by Annie Moses Band

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1feBCgEhqxg>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, October 08, 2021** not by Pastor Mark Opgrand **but by Deacon Susan Jackson #424**

### **Can anything good come out of Nazareth?**

46 "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip. 47 When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." 48 "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." (John 1: 46-48)

In this Gospel lesson, we hear of a man named Nathanael who had little faith and a lot of skepticism in Jesus. Yet, Nathanael was challenged, transformed, and changed into a faithful disciple as he was called to "come and see" Jesus.

Many of us may have slight skepticism and little faith as we wonder what good will come from our challenges of this past year. Nathanael's question "Can anything good come out of Nazareth" was mostly due to his own lack of faith and fear of the unknown.

This is no different for us as we ponder: Will this Covid situation ever end? What good will happen this fall? Will my kids be able to stay in school? Will I be able to celebrate the holidays with family this year? Can I travel? How will I.... All the questions and concerns pop up on a daily basis.

Nathanael's view of life changed drastically after he asked Philip "Can anything good come out of Nazareth". Philip's response of "come and see" helped Nathanael to meet Jesus, thus experiencing the good Jesus provides. Jesus responds out of love, telling Nathanael that it's not over yet- there is a lot more he will experience in the future.

Like Nathanael, sometimes we need those people calling out to us to "come and see" so that we can taste the good. There have been plenty of people that have called out to me to "come and see" the good that I experience as I faithfully follow God.

In Reflection, I see Dr. Katie Fisher telling me it's okay to change my major from education to youth ministry. I see a faithful friend telling me that he has my back, and that God is in the midst of the situation when I was trying to figure out next steps after employment ended.

I see friends that remind me I'm not alone, even when the fear and challenges consume me. I see pastors that point their bony fingers, much like John, towards the Cross, reminded me that there is grace and love.

I am positive that each of you has someone who calls out to you, telling you to "Come and See". These people are faithful disciples who God uses to help us experience God's

transformative love every day. These are people who help us to live out our calling as faithful disciples, sharing the Good News of God's love to all.

These are people God places in all our lives, calling us to come and see, to be transformed and changed by God's grace given in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The invitation to "Come and See" doesn't disappear once we have that faithful moment of revelation, like Nathanael did as he met Jesus, but it is present for us every day. Nathanael's acceptance of Philip's invitation changed his life, transforming his skepticism into belief.

God extends this invitation to "Come and See" to us, regardless of whether we face adversity or good, regardless of whether we have doubts or are strong faithful disciples, regardless of who we are.

God continues to invite us, to come and see, to come and experience; his transformative grace, given to us in His Son, Jesus Christ. God's invitation is always present, calling us to come and be transformed, to be changed, to be faithful disciples. How are you going to live into that call to "Come and See" today? This weekend?

I ask you, Can anything good come from Nazareth? Can anything good come from Wilmington? From St. Paul's Lutheran? Can anything good come from the challenges we face daily?

The good news is that God loves us, regardless of whether we question as Nathanael did, or whether we believe and run to Jesus. God is not done with us yet- and continues to call us to come and see, to come and experience, to come and be changed, to come and be loved. Thank be to God!

*Amazing God, we give thanks for the opportunities and challenges you place before us. Open our eyes to "Come and See" Your beauty, your grace, your love. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.*

*Come and See* by Matt Redman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOmLvpAZcmY>

*You Say* by Lauren Daigle

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slaT8Jl2zpl>

*Call My Name* by Third Day

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wp5PZuuB3Pg>

*The Blessing* by Kari Jobe & Cody Carnes, from Elevation Worship

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zp6aygmVzM4&list=RDZp6aygmVzM4&start\\_radio=1&rv=Zp6aygmVzM4&t=28](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zp6aygmVzM4&list=RDZp6aygmVzM4&start_radio=1&rv=Zp6aygmVzM4&t=28)

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, October 11, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #425

*Note from Pastor Mark: Because I love what I do, I don't take much time "off" or "away." With some encouragement, I'm taking a break for as many days as I can stand to be away (maybe a week or more?) Be sure to pick up your "Christ in Our Home" or go online with "Our Daily Bread" or "Upper Room" or devotion of your choice. Maybe you can send me some ideas for later. Blessings.*

### **Paying (not praying) for paint when it's not in the budget.**

*"Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbors work for nothing and does not give them their wages; 14 who says, "I will build myself a spacious house with large upper rooms," and who cuts out windows for it, paneling it with cedar, and **painting** it with vermilion." (Jer. 22:13-14 NRS)*

This is the only verse I could find in the Bible about painting anything other than eyes (which is only in two other verses). The verse itself warns about injustice and being poor stewards of God's creation.

My first parish (Elizabeth Lutheran Church in Caldwell, TX) had a most unusual constitutional bylaw. If the council wanted to spend anything over \$50 that was not already approved in the annual budget, a called congregation meeting was required for approval. Needless to say, we didn't spend much over budget.

To get a perspective on our operations, Elizabeth Lutheran's entire budget in 1979 (when I began) was \$22,000. That would be about \$80,000 in today's dollars. \$50 dollars would be about \$180. So even in 1979, \$50 wasn't a lot of money.

The small church itself was built in the 1940's, and resembled a military barracks with a small tower. One wing had a couple of Sunday School rooms. They really needed painting, which no one disputed, but it still required a congregation meeting to approve the cost of the paint, which was more than \$50 dollars but not a lot more.

It was a pretty big turnout actually, and the discussion was lively with lots of questions. *"What rooms need painting? Are you sure they need it? How much will it cost? What kind of paint would it be? What color is proposed?"*

The conversation came to a halt when one of the "pillars" spoke. *"I don't know why we're even having this meeting and talking about painting those rooms. We had this discussion a few years ago. We bought the dang paint and nobody ever painted anything."*

The sanctuary was abuzz. At last, someone proposed we looked for the paint, and sure enough, in the back of a storage closet under some other boxes were gallons of paint, enough for the whole project. The paint had not only been purchased before I began my call, but it was

purchased prior to my predecessor beginning his call. It had been sitting in the back of the closet for about seven years.

The meeting was adjourned, and a small group of volunteers later painted the rooms. The paint turned out to be fine, and we saved the \$50 (but not the time spent on a called congregational meeting.”

Perhaps a better verse to consider here is: <sup>2</sup> [Jesus] said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. (Lk. 10:2 NRS)

I wonder if the reason more people didn't say much about the need to paint was because not that many saw the need. It was out of the way; only the children and a couple of teachers usually went down there.

I am so glad we have a "Men in Mission" group who looks for things that need attention or repair. I'm also glad we have a "little" more leeway to authorize spending beyond \$50 when something needs fixing or painting. It takes many kinds of volunteers to keep the church able to do mission and ministry. Keep looking for ways to serve and things to do. There's opportunity and need for many gifts to be expressed.

Let us pray. Give us eyes to see opportunity to do work in your name, O God, and to your glory. Thank you for beautiful spaces to worship, and even more beautiful people with whom we can share that experience. Help us show hospitality to strangers and welcome those who are looking for ways to share their gifts. Thanks for paint and painters. Amen.

*Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ* by Gross Pointe Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7aGWmCan-40>

*We Labor Unto Glory* by Porter's Gate

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRuPZCXShg4>

*We Come to Your Feast* by Kirk Brewster

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-mjg8lPq6l>

*I'm Working for the Lord* by the Gospelaire

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F\\_a9PGTzDpw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_a9PGTzDpw)

*Take My Life and Let It Be* by Concordia

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y71\\_depR\\_Ro](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y71_depR_Ro)

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday October 30, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #426

### Remembering through old photos.

<sup>5</sup> *I remember the days of old, I think about all your deeds, I meditate on the works of your hands.*  
(Ps. 143:5 NRS)

It has been nearly three weeks since last offering a "*St. Paul's In Your Home Daily Devotional.*" August included a degree of hiatus, but I managed to come up with a few postings along the way.

This time I took a complete break from writing and church. Usually this is called a "*vacation,*" but since I only went to Chicago (not the city but the Chicago rock band's concert at the Live Oak Pavilion next to the river), it was more of a "*stay-cation.*"

At the same time, I thoroughly "*got away*" in a way I had never anticipated. As many of you know, I have chronicled St. Paul's activities through photos for as long as I have been here. This was not new to my time at St. Paul's. My love for photography began in high school as a yearbook photographer and has included thousands of photos since then.

Since high school, photos (mostly slides) have chronicled college and seminary, working at Holden Village, summer ministries, calls to parish ministry in Caldwell, Texas and campus ministries at the University of Texas, Odessa College, and Purdue University.

Like many others, multiple boxes of slides and negatives have not been looked at for thirty, forty, or even fifty years. With this "*staycation*" and a new slide/negative scanner, I scanned over 9,000 slides and negatives. And before you say "*What?*" take a look at how many photos you have on your phone. We're all there. I just started earlier.

For me, however, looking at each "*old*" photo became an activity that took me deep into memories, thinking about all the places I've been, all the people I have known and served, and all the ways I have been blessed by a wonderful God. There was no multitasking with this exercise. Each photo, like a little window into a "*time machine*", took me right to the day of each experience. Nothing distracted me; indeed, I could not even play music while doing this.

I also became keenly aware that while each time period represented by these photos had their own stresses, conflicts, uncertainties, and pain, I didn't think of or dwell on any of that. I simply looked back with gratitude.

By the grace of God, this is how I believe God meets each one of us. When our present days seem regularly filled with conflict and worry about what's ahead, God helps us look back, recognizing an active God who has always been highly involved in creating good memories with us.

Let us therefore remember and affirm God with us, praying that as we live each and every day (whether it's captured in a photo or not) God will shape us as God's beloved children, past, present, or future.

Let us pray. *Thank you for memories, O God, especially those that remind us how you keep loving us and guiding us through every experience, through each mountain and valley, through every joy and sorrow, through gains and losses and in everything we encounter along the way.*

*For those with lots of years ahead, guide their choices and encourage them with your presence. For those who look back, grant them your encouragement and support that they may keep confident moving forward.*

*Thank you for all the special people along the way, and most of all for those who reflect your goodness and love. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Give Thanks* by Janella Salvador

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bk\\_7wUR2Wdg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bk_7wUR2Wdg)

*Jesus Remember Me* by Prairie Praise Hutterite Choir

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBHh8toVV\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBHh8toVV_o)

*Remember Me* by Deborah Governor

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CCXo8vliQw>

*Remember Me* by Gracias Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cIDrIq1fHPY>

*Remember Me* from "Coco"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E7VPdpEV1m0>

## **St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, November 1, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #427**

*Pastor's note: I am hoping to offer "St. Paul's In Your Home" devotions on Mondays and Fridays, with guest submissions on Wednesdays.*

### **Luther's 95 Theses was not a "one hit wonder."**

*<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God-- <sup>9</sup> not the result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph. 2:8-9 NRS)*

Yesterday was another Reformation Day (falling on Sunday this year), five hundred four years since Martin Luther posted the 95 Theses on the Wittenberg Church door. It was not intended to be a Halloween prank, but rather initiating a thorough debate about the nature of faith, grace, and a church that had been pushing the practice of selling indulgences.

From a marketing point of view, the selling of indulgences was a very effective fund raiser for the St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. What indulgences proposed was that for a donation, you could purchase the means to reduce the length of time a deceased loved one would have to "pay for their sins" in Purgatory (which was believed to be a "holding" place where souls go to work off their sin penalties before finally entering eternal life in heaven.

Luther challenged the abuse of scripture used to support this works oriented and nonbiblical practice. When Luther and the reformers (the protesters/protestants) were unable to reconcile with the Roman Catholic Church, Lutheran and Reformed churches were formed... and the rest, as we say is history.

From time to time, it has been observed that if not for advancing technology in the form of the printing press, this debate would have been very limited. Anything written prior to the printing press would need to be hand copied, thereby limiting mass distribution.

I recently discovered an interesting tidbit about all this. While much has been made about the 95 Theses and their distribution as printed material, it was actually another printed piece that first garnered mass attention. It was a sermon Luther wrote in early 1518 published as a "*Sermon on Indulgences and Grace.*" It was published in pamphlet form.

This sermon further clarified and explored the themes in the 95 Theses, and it really took off. Because the 95 Theses were first written in Latin, they were more directed to the scholarly community. *The "Sermon on Indulgences and Grace"* was first delivered in German, and then reprinted in German, with careful attention to avoiding regional dialects that might make it hard for some to comprehend.

Luther's "*pamphlet*" can well be considered the first printed "*best seller*," as it was widely distributed and read. This is also be the first time we can observe the impact of "social media Luther's "*pamphletting*" was a form of early "*blogging*."

Without the Guttenberg printing press, and how it helped distribute Luther's ideas, not only would the 95 Theses NOT be a one hit wonder, but Luther would likely have suffered the fate of Jon Huss, a priest and reformer from one hundred years earlier. Huss's similar efforts to reform the church ended as he was burned at the stake for heresy.

On this All-Saints Day and day after another Reformation Sunday, we give God thanks for all those who have had the courage to stand firm in their faith and grounded in the holy scriptures. We also thank God for the means to get God's good word out faster and more efficiently than just "word of mouth," or "parchment nailed to an old church door".

Let us pray. *We thank you for all those who have heard the gospel and proclaimed it. For Luther, and Huss and all the saints, for the inventors who helped get that Word "out," and for all who risked everything to be faithful to you. Bless us all that we might also hear your word of grace and live faithfully as we have been called. Amen.*

*A Mighty Fortress* by Virtual Choir

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4EoLm3\\_luM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4EoLm3_luM)

*A Mighty Fortress* by Veritas

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhU2PB7jdZ0>

*A Mighty Fortress* played by Bill Remele

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8ifmMvHKao>

*For All the Saints* by Chet Valley Churches

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21GTTM2TIYA>

*For All the Saints* by BBC

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kcmz9w9FKNg>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, November 3, 2021 (not by Pastor Mark Opgrand) but by Stan McLeroy #428**

*Note from Pastor Mark: I am happy to offer another devotion from one of our members, Stan McLeroy. It is a wonderful reflection I am sure you will enjoy. As we approach another All Saints Sunday, I will be thinking of "Saint Gertrude." Thanks, Stan.*

**God Bless Gertrude**

by Stan McLeroy

(Another experience, in response to  
Pastor Mark Opgrand's September 9, 2021 devotion #403  
God Bless Leland)

*Let mutual love continue. <sup>2</sup> Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. (Heb. 13:1-2 NRS)*

*<sup>40</sup> Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. <sup>41</sup> Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. <sup>42</sup> And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward. (Matthew 10:40-42)*

My former congregation in Reston, Virginia, was a one-minute walk from a Lutheran-run seniors' apartment that housed self-sufficient residents of all races and creeds, including many Christians, and even a few Lutherans.

Some residents would stroll over occasionally to attend service on Sunday mornings. Several attended regularly and even became members of our congregation.

I think we did a great job of welcoming members and visitors alike as they entered, offering them coffee before and after the service, and enjoying each other's company until that big coffee urn ran dry, or until kids or a spouse or the pastor said we really had to get going.

I remember one woman who was probably about 90 years old who had come to our service for four or five weeks. With all the buzzing around I usually did after the service (hanging up my choir robe, talking to several people I "had" to talk to, etc.) I realized that I had not yet spoken to this woman.

In a burst of honest self-examination, I realized why: I had been avoiding her. I knew that this woman's name was Gertrude. She wore a kerchief - a babushka - on her head, and the rest of her clothing made her look like she had been plucked straight out of The Old Country and

plunked down smack in the middle of our Washington DC suburb. She was a living stereotype. What are the chances that she would even understand English well enough to understand my introduction? And at her age she would most likely have difficulty hearing, which would make conversation even more difficult.

And that look... I detected that slightly far-away look that is surely an indication of a mind that is starting to become confused and turning inward. These were all obstacles that I was terrified of dealing with patiently and gracefully.

That admission, even tho it was just to myself, caused me real shame. Not only was I shirking my responsibility as a member of my own congregation, but also of The Church at large. There was just no more time for excuses.

I knew what I was getting into, and how it would turn out, but it was now or never. I must greet her and get it over with. I approached her as she exited the sanctuary and introduced myself with a big forced smile.

Gertrude was so glad to meet me! She spoke fluent English with a noticeable "German accent" and eagerly began telling me about herself and how she ended up in Virginia. We sat on a bench in the narthex sipping our coffees as she told me about the early days of her marriage living in Austria (ah, it was actually an Austrian accent!), how her husband was a musician, and how they were desperate to get out of Austria before the Nazis invaded.

Somehow her husband secured an appointment that sounded, from the way she told it, like that of a court musician to the head of Turkey. While living in Turkey for several years, Gertrude learned to speak Turkish.

After a few years Gertrude and her husband decided it was no longer safe to reside in Turkey, but to simply announce their resignation would have been an affront to their "employer", and probably would have resulted in their being imprisoned or executed.

They arranged to flee to a South American country (most likely Argentina), where they remained until the end of WWII. While there, Gertrude learned to speak Spanish.

Gertrude and her husband finally came to the Seattle area which I think is where her husband died. Of course she learned English while in the U.S.. She moved to the Washington, DC area to be near her son and his family.

Wow, what a story! What I've included here is just the tip of the iceberg - I've forgotten all of the details that Gertrude included that day. There were segments where she became excited and lapsed into German. I understood very little of those parts, but since I had had some exposure to German on a few business trips I loved just hearing her tell it.

She had a little trouble hearing me and understanding me sometimes when I asked questions. But I didn't mind. She had a far-away look sometimes, like the story itself had taken control and

she was living in the past. But I didn't mind. I was invested in her experience, and I felt honored that she took the time to tell it to me.

Over the next half a year or so I talked with Gertrude a number of times, and it was always the same. She told me the same story, but each time there were a few less details, a few more lapses into German.

Gertrude was driven. This story was literally her life, and it was important to her, and the telling of it was important to her. I realized that if I had waited just a few more weeks to introduce myself to Gertrude I may have never heard some of the interesting parts of her story.

So, what am I to make of those introductory Bible verses? Do I believe that Gertrude was sent by Jesus, and that by welcoming her I welcomed him, and therefore I welcomed God? Well, no, I don't believe she was sent directly by Jesus. But I do believe she was a righteous person, as far as I understand the word, and that I welcomed her as a righteous person. Was she a prophet?

By my Christian understanding of that word as someone who predicts the future or speaks the word of God, I don't think Gertrude was a prophet. But then I found a definition of "prophet" in the Muslim tradition: someone who speaks words that God wants people to hear.

I think God wanted me to hear Gertrude's life story to remind me to tear down those walls of stereotyping that I have built and tended to all my life. I think God wanted me to remember that welcoming strangers, even when I feel uncomfortable, has all kinds of unexpected benefits in addition to making the stranger feel welcome.

It is as good for me as it is for the stranger. Gertrude imparted her story of survival, coping, learning and thriving -- a lesson I often need to remember in times of despair. I think even as I listened to her that first day I realized that she was a prophet in the broadest sense, and I hope she felt that I was welcoming her accordingly.

And I do hope she was an angel, since I have passed by far too many of them during my life without uttering a word.

One Sunday months later -- I believe it was a Mothers' Day -- Gertrude's son and his family came to church with her. I approached him in the narthex after the service and introduced myself, and told him how much I enjoyed getting to know his mother and hearing her life story.

He smiled at me and laughed, "Yes, she really is quite a woman, and has led a very interesting life." We sipped our coffees. He added, "Oh, did mom tell you about the radio show she had in Seattle?"

Now I started to laugh. "No! Radio show?"

"Yes! She used to listen to this talk show on the radio every day, and mom always has something to say about things. So she called in every day, and they would chat and argue about stuff on the air.

And finally the radio station manager called her up and asked her if she would like to have her own show! It was only a 15 minute show, but it was hers!"

Now I just really couldn't get over this little old lady, whom I had both feared and dismissed, having led a life as full as this. And I was still finding out things about her! Gertrude was truly amazing.

I laughed some more and thanked her son for adding to his mom's biography. Now I was sure I had heard everything. But as I started to turn and walk away he added one more thing, almost as an afterthought:

"Oh, did mom tell you that before she married my dad she dated Sigmund Freud's son for a while?"

*Dear Heavenly Father, help us to stop fearing our differences and feeding our own prejudices. Teach us instead to welcome strangers in our congregation, in our workplaces, and in all walks of our lives so that we can learn how incredibly interesting people are, learn from their experiences, and pass their memories on to others. And God bless Gertrude!*

In verse 3 I especially love the phrase, "We are each other's bread and wine."

**What is This Place** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4F8qnmBew4>

The title says it all, and this beautiful tune reminds us that a church is not the building.

**All Are Welcome In This Place** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63snPd1oqEU> (mosaic choir, beautiful arrangement).

**An old modern parable in light of ongoing vaccination resistance.**

*"Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. <sup>2</sup> I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. <sup>3</sup> I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God." (Ps. 69:1-3 NRS)*

*<sup>6</sup> Then [Jesus] told this parable...." (Lk. 13:6 NRS)*

The story goes something like this: A ferocious storm sweeps through a town, and in the aftermath, a man clammers onto his roof to escape the floodwaters. As he sits there, someone in a canoe comes by and offers to carry him to safety. *"No, thanks,"* the man replies. *"God will save me."* The man paddles off, and the waters continue to rise. Shortly afterward, someone in a boat pulls up to offer help. *"No, thank you,"* the man says again. *"God will deliver me."*

The waters rise higher. Finally, a National Guard helicopter appears; someone with a megaphone offers to drop a ladder. *"No, thank you,"* the man says for a final time. *"I prayed for God to save me."* The helicopter flies off, the waters engulf the roof, and the man drowns.

When the man arrives in heaven, he asks in confusion, *"What happened, God? Why didn't you rescue me?"* God replies, *"I sent you a canoe, a boat, and a helicopter. What more did you want?"*

I'm sure you've heard some variation of the story before. It has been described as *"the parable of the drowning man,"* though at least one variation has the man hanging from a tree branch on the side of a cliff. Preachers have used it to challenge those who expect a certain kind of divine intervention but who fail to recognize that God may indeed intervene or rescue through human activity.

This past year this *"old modern parable"* has been reshaped to describe someone who, in the face of the pandemic, has ignored advice to wear face coverings, avoid large gatherings, and get the COVID vaccine.

When the person died after contracting the virus at a party and goes to heaven, God tells the confused Christian that God gave public health officials the intelligence to develop the vaccine and to educate the public about social distancing, hand-washing, and other measures. *"What more do you want?"* God says.

What each story brings to light is the question about how God actually participates in God's creation. And here we can observe a continuum. God's level of direct activity ranges on one end

from a hands-off “*watchmaker God*” who winds up the creation and lets it go, observing from afar to the other end where God interferes (participates) directly in every element of life.

I remember counseling a student at Purdue who was so disappointed in God “*allowing*” her to fail an exam after she had prayed so hard to pass. “*Did you study?*” I asked. “*Well, not exactly,*” she answered, “*But I really prayed and trusted God.*”

I believe this was the same student who once told me about praying that a parking spot would come open on a street crowded with parked cars. Finding the open spot, she attributed it to God’s divine intervention.

I imagine most Christians hope at least, that God intervenes in some manner when we pray. The tricky part is determining how God might be answering prayer. For the student, maybe the answer was “*study.*” For persons fearful of getting very sick or dying from COVID, perhaps the answer is “*get vaccinated.*”

In the old modern parable, when at risk of drowning, the implied answer was to accept the help. I’m sure the story itself will not easily persuade someone who is vaccine resistant. There are just too many worries or fears at play.

*“How do I know the person in the canoe can navigate the floodwaters? Canoes take a lot of skill to maneuver. How do I know the boat is safe? What if it runs out of gas or takes me the wrong way? What if the helicopter pilot can’t fly it properly? How do I know if the pilot has been properly trained for this situation? What if, instead of being rescued, I’m being kidnapped?”*

Perhaps the biggest issue here is not where God is on the continuum of “*hands-off*” versus “*hands-on*” but rather the question of “*simple trust.*” When we pray like the psalmist “*Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck*” who or what do we trust?

Seeds of mistrust have been sown so effectively these days that it is not surprising when no one trusts anything or anyone, save “*God alone*”, but even that still raises the question: “*How*” does “*God alone*” rescue us?

Thankfully, in each variation of the story, when the person dies, they do go to heaven, so in that way, through Jesus Christ, God does save us. But isn’t it nice, for the sake of our loved ones we don’t want to die, or for those loved ones we want to have with us longer, when we can find trusted persons, especially in the medical and scientific communities, through whom God may indeed be working, to help us?

Let us pray: *We pray especially for guidance, O God, to seek and find those we can trust to help us. May we discern your activity among us through people you have called. We pray that we shall never overlook the many ways you are deeply involved in your world to bless it. Amen.*

*Psalm 69 Deep Waters* by Joel Silver

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBe\\_9vTo080](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBe_9vTo080)

*Psalm 69* by Sons of Korah (another tune)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqxiWNCp3uw>

*Save Me O God (Psalm 69)* by Marty Haugen (still another tune)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wypk7ngw2zg>

*Eternal Father, Strong To Save* by Grosse Pointe Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISb4vPAGFmE>

*Thank you God for Saving Me* by Renew Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxXtqI9zUCY>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, November 8, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #430

### To what can you claim "perfect attendance?"

<sup>36</sup> *There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,* <sup>37</sup> *then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day.* <sup>38</sup> *At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.* (Lk. 2:36-38 NRS)

One of the items I have kept that belonged to my deceased father was an old "perfect attendance" Sunday School pin from the late 1920's early 1930's. When you look at the attached photo you can see it is quite a beautiful, enameled piece. It has a gold outer wreath like the kind old Olympians used to wear. A blue banner says "Lutheran," and beside a cross and crown are the letters "S" and "S" for "SUNDAY SCHOOL." Attached to the pin is a banner which says "SECOND YEAR," and below that are "THIRD YEAR," "FOURTH YEAR," and "FIFTH YEAR."

Given these pins were presented during the depression, they would be prized treasures, also reflecting a great deal of devotion and commitment to attending Sunday School regularly. I don't know why my father had no more than five, but I do know that for all his life, my father only missed church when he was sick or out of town. The pin is a wonderful reminder of his faithfulness and the difference it made for me and my own understanding to the importance of church attendance.

I met another person once who also had such a pin, but with even more "bars" hanging from it. There were at least ten years hanging from it. I remember being somewhat amused by his pride and joy in having that perfect attendance pin from long ago, when I only had seen him at an occasional Christmas or Easter service.

I wonder if he felt he had sufficiently put in enough time earlier that neither "perfect" nor "occasional" attendance was necessary. When we had his funeral some years later, I was reminded of a clever old ad from an Episcopal Church ran which said "*Will it take six strong men to bring you back to church?*" It was accompanied by a photo of pall bearers carrying a casket.

Thinking about perfect attendance pins, I wonder how people would answer the question: "*To what can you claim perfect attendance?*"

While Sunday morning worship could be marked by "*perfect*" attendance, it could be many other things as well. I know persons who have said they never missed an episode of "*Steinfeld*" when it first aired. Seasons tickets to favorite sporting events and teams would make the list. Some have strong records of school attendance. Some hunters have never missed a "*deer hunting season.*"

I know of Bridge players or bowlers who rarely missed tournaments. There are singers who never miss choir practices and music fans who never miss a concert when their favorite band comes to town. There are runners who never miss a marathon.

So if you were getting a pin for your perfect attendance, for what would it be? What might it tell us about you?

In the scripture I selected for this devotion, we learn of Anna, an elderly woman who was at the temple every day (and even night). Her attendance pin would have reached the floor, with perhaps sixty or more “*perfect attendance*” years. This story highlights her being there to witness the first attendance of baby Jesus, whom she recognized along with Zechariah, as the one who would redeem his people. That’s how she is remembered in scripture, and when I think of all her years of faithful service, I am sure many lives were touched by her devotion.

Yesterday we celebrated another “*All Saints Sunday*”. On this Sunday, we remembered those who died this past year, and others we have loved. While none were perfect, and none could claim perfect attendance (especially in respect to worship), it is right and true that we celebrate how God perfectly attends to all of us as loving creator. Since the beginning time, God has been with, supported, and loved all God’s people. As God has promised, this never ends. How perfect. Thank you, God.

Let us pray. O God, again we thank you for perfectly attending to our needs. Even when imperfectly responding through our own acts of service and devotion, we are thankful for your grace which makes all things perfectly right with you. As we live out our days, may we honor you by committing our time to those things that magnify your name in all the earth. In Jesus name. Amen.

*Father, We Glorify You Name* by Chet Valley Churches

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPVN3NjbJ\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPVN3NjbJ_U)

*Be With Me* by Marty Haugen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpCbseDRQds>

*O Love That Will Not Let Me Go* by Celebration Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nt69WDtYNLo>

*He Giveth More Grace* by Living Stones Quartet

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzhKGPireAA>

*Nearer My God to Thee* by Vocal Point

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WyxXGdG3-lo>



## St. Paul's In Your Home for Wednesday, November 10, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #431

*Note from Pastor Mark: I have written earlier how devotions posted on Wednesdays will feature guest writers, saving the "regular" devotions for Mondays and Fridays. In this case, I am reflecting on a song written by Curtis Mayfield that was requested by Ivey Strickland's family to be read at his funeral service yesterday afternoon.*

### Remembering "People Get Ready" and Ivey Strickland

<sup>40</sup> *You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.*" (Lk. 12:40 NRS)

Is it possible that I did not know a song that Rolling Stone magazine has identified as number 24 in the greatest 500 songs of all time? Sadly, yes. When Pastor Jonathan handed me the lyrics to "People Get Ready" to be shared at Ivey's service yesterday, I had to confess that I did not know the song. Now I do (how have I missed it?).

It's interesting to first read lyrics to a song without knowing the tune. What I read was quite lovely imagery inviting people to be ready for the Lord calling them home. The image is that of a train crossing the country inviting people, when it is time, to "get on board." Faith is affirmed, and trust in the Lord. And for that "You just thank the Lord."

Without knowing the tune, I could see how these might be words of hope that someone would value when offered at a funeral. Discovering the wonderful tune and harmonies, I can surely see how someone like Ivey, himself a great singer, would recognize this song as representative of his faith and readiness to "get on board" when it was time.

Ivey died after a very brief illness, so the suddenness of his passing was particularly shocking for us who remember him and De received as new members just a week earlier on Reformation Sunday. It was as if Ivey joined St. Paul's on Reformation Sunday, and just one week later, on All Saints Sunday, was released by transfer to the church triumphant.

So today I'd like to take a moment to remember Ivey and give God thanks not only for his life, but for preparing us all, in faith, to let go of this life when God calls us home (or when the gospel train stops for us). The lyrics of the song are below; attached will be seven musical renditions of this beautiful image of faithfully "getting ready."

### **"People Get Ready"**

People get ready  
There's a train a comin'  
You don't need no baggage

You just get on board

All you need is faith  
To hear the diesels hummin'  
You don't need no ticket  
You just thank the Lord

So people get ready  
There'a a train to Jordan  
Picking up passengers  
Coast to coast

Faith is the key  
Open the doors and board them  
There's hope for all  
Among those loved the most

There ain't no room  
For the hopeless sinner  
Who would hurt all mankind  
Just to save his own

Have pity on those whose  
Chances grow thinner  
There's no hiding place  
Against the Kingdom's throne

So people get ready  
There's a train a comin'  
You don't need no baggage  
You just get on board

All you need is faith  
To hear the diesels hummin'  
Don't need no ticket  
You just thank the Lord.

P.S. I received an email recently from a friend who is working with another friend on a Bible Study on The Book of Revelation to be published by Augsburg Fortress. My writer friends were at the last chapter and trying to find a good song to finish the study. Ann asked for recommendations, and I found several to suggest. At the end of my email, I also wrote about how I would be sharing "*People Get Ready*" at a funeral that same day and that seemed also liked a good "*going out song*." She immediately wrote me back, "*That's the song I want! Thanks.*" Again, thanks, Ivey.

*People Get Ready* by The Impressions

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AqzHipAhzfQ>

*People Get Ready* by Jeff Beck and Joss Stone

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4N5o3GIGsY>

*People Get Ready* by Eva Cassidy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bzLd2MDAHK8>

*People Get Ready* by Jeff Beck and Rod Stewart

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yC\\_j\\_dzkaVE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yC_j_dzkaVE)

*People Get Ready* by Curtis Mayfield

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOXmaSct4ZE>

*People Get Ready* by Memphis Chorale

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fF09v7NMugA>

and finally....*People Get Ready* by Ziggy Marley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sqbwwbxABM>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, November 12, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #432**

**An Envelope With A Surprise (and no, not the .20 cents "Postage Due")**

<sup>18</sup> *For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Cor. 1:18 NRS)*

An envelope came to the church without a return address. It simply said, "St. Pauls Lutheran Church 12 No. 6<sup>th</sup> St. Wilmington, N.C. 28401." Two other things were notable: The "Forever" stamp was crossed off and next to it in large black typeface was "POSTAGE DUE \_\_.20\_\_". In the lower right corner hand stamped in were bright red words "NON-MACHINEABLE."

The postal carrier left it in our mailbox without collecting the 20 cents. Maybe it wasn't worth their time to carry the letter around any further.

The letter was puffy. That's likely why it was non-machinable. I opened it, discovering three items carefully wrapped in a paper towel. One was a folded 3 ½" by 4 ½" piece of yellow lined paper with the word "Donation" written on it. "Donation" was underlined.

Between the folds of the towel was a wallet sized picture of Jesus and the words "Follow Me." Above "Follow Me" were these words in very small print: "Our Commander: the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." On the back was a 1957 Calendar with special dates to remember, like: "Ash Wednesday, Easter, Mother's Day, Reformation Day, and Christmas."

The inclusion of "Reformation Day" as a date to remember indicated this might have been a Lutheran calendar (What other denomination would put include "Remember Reformation Day" on a wallet sized calendar?). In tiny print was another clue about its origin: "National Lutheran Council, Bureau of Service to Military Personnel, 2633 16<sup>th</sup> Street NW, Washington 9, DC." When I put in the address on Google Earth, I discovered a magnificent old stone building at this address.

The card itself may have been picked up in 1957 by someone serving in the military. Sixty-four years later it was in my hand, (sent anonymously). The other included "donation" was a 1 ¼" by 1 ¾" enameled crucifix, attached to a key ring.

The cross is distinctive. Looking carefully, you can see Jesus surrounded by a number of figures. I remembered a cross resembling this in a worship service originating in the Taize monastic community in France. I found in my library the songbook "Songs and Prayers from Taize," and on the cover was a photo of this cross (or one similar).

Next I "googled" "Taize cross" and discovered the "Taize cross" was patterned after an original cross called the "San Damiano Cross." Here it gets interesting. The original San Damiano cross is one Saint Francis was praying in front of when he received his commission from the Lord to rebuild the church. This was more than 200 years before Martin Luther and the Reformation.

Because of the significance and impact of St. Francis's ministry, this cross has a special place not only in Franciscan history (and as adapted by the protestant Taize community), but also for all believers as it represents the church ever renewed by the cross of Christ.

I don't know how long this wallet sized photo of Jesus or this pocket-sized San Damiano cross remained in the possession of our anonymous giver, but it certainly gave me joy as I pondered the mystery of this gift and what it represents.

Let us pray. Thank you for your love for us, O God, expressed through the life of Jesus and the Cross of Christ. Keep fresh before us all those reminders of your presence in our loves, and our place in your kingdom forever. Thank you for every gift along the way that points to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

*The Story of the San Damiano Cross* by University of St. Francis

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Il6Vwz2VjhE>

*Prayer before the Crucifix (San Damiano Cross)* by Franciscan Dream Chorale

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDoEO16YZm0>

*Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi (Make Me a Channel of your Peace)* by Daniel O'Donnell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzcKcf5l LM>

*Beneath the Cross of Jesus* by Derek Webb and Sandra McCracken

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MGv4aSRLTY>

*Beneath the Cross of Jesus* by Hastings College Choir

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qr7\\_i8HJ-Jo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qr7_i8HJ-Jo)



**St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, November 15, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #433**

**The "Inverted Jenny" and an "Inverted Fresca Can:" When "rare" is not always "valuable."**

<sup>45</sup> *"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; <sup>46</sup> on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matt. 13:45-46 NRS)*

<sup>10</sup> *And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. (Rev. 21:10 NRS)*

<sup>21</sup> *And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass. (Rev. 21:21 NRS)*

The "Inverted Jenny" is one of the rarest postage stamps in the world. Featuring the Curtis JN-4 Biplane, it was a 24-cent airmail stamp released May 10, 1918. As imagined, it might have become rare, but not priceless. It became priceless due to an error in printing where a sheet of 100 stamps was printed with the plane upside down. A single "Inverted Jenny" stamp has fetched million and a half dollars in auction.

One of the rarest Fresca cans in existence is one I own personally. When I worked at Continental Can Company during college, I pulled from the production line a Fresca can that had been produced inside out (see attached photo). Since it was unacceptable to fill a Fresca can with the silver on the outside and the enameled can design on the inside, it was to be discarded. Since such cans were never saved, I can presume I have "one of a kind." The production of such "tin-plated steel cans" have also long been discontinued in favor of all aluminum cans, so such a can, or "can error", could ever be duplicated.

So why is a single "Inverted Jenny" stamp worth a million and a half dollars and my even rarer "Inverted Fresca Can" worth little more than a devotional though? Perhaps the old proverb explains it best: "One man's trash is another man's treasure."

It is rather amusing, however, to look at what people spend on things that have worth. Marilyn Monroe's "subway dress" has sold for more than 5 million dollars; an "1874 Flowing Hair Silver Dollar" has sold for 10 million; a "leather armchair" once owned by Yves St. Laurent and designed by Irish artist Eileen Gray has sold for 28 million dollars; Leonardo da Vinci's 72 page notebook has sold for 30 million dollars; a "1962 Ferrari 250 GTO Berlinetta" has sold for 48 million dollars; a 41 inch tall stainless steel rabbit sculpture made in 1986 by sculptor Jeff Koons has sold for 91 million dollars.

Honestly, this is confounding. How is the value of such things determined? Who decides? Only one thing is certain. Something is only as valuable as what someone will pay to own it.

It is not difficult to understand why Jesus might compare the Kingdom of Heaven to a precious pearl. People will understand how the Kingdom of Heaven is valuable and worth pursuing, like saving to purchase a precious pearl.

I wonder if you have heard of this alternative take on the imagery of streets paved with gold in heaven. It has been suggested that such imagery may not be a witness to how valuable heaven is because even the streets are paved with gold, but rather a witness to how those things we think are so valuable in earth are worth little more than ordinary pavement in heaven.

Let us pray: *Teach us, O God, to seek after that which has true value. Amen.*

*Jesus Priceless Treasure* by Altar of Praise Chorale (traditional)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qiWYI8PpXxY>

*Jesus Priceless Treasure* by Renee Allsbrook (another tune)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fWCBQN6R20A>

*Lay Up Your Treasures In Heaven*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7jv47h0XtBs>

*Store Up Treasures In Heaven* by Burlap to Treasure

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0bLXLK3YO8>

*How Rich a Treasure We Possess* by Matt Boswell

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJXqAllW\\_wI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJXqAllW_wI)

*My Worth is not in what I Own* by Keith and Krystan Getty

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05jKxv8ApuI>

*Unsearchable Riches* by Michael Bethany

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdbHwnq3uIE>



**St. Paul's In Your Home Bonus Edition for Wednesday, November 17 by Deacon Susan Jackson #434**

*From Pastor Mark: After hearing Deacon Susan's message to children, teens (and adults) last Sunday morning, I expressed my only regret about it. I wished I had it in a form of a devotion to send out. "I can do that," she said. And she did. Thanks, Deacon Susan.*

**Trusting in Jesus When You Feel Frozen**

*Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10: 23-25)*

Have you ever been so afraid that you are stuck in place, frozen, unable to move? One of my experiences where I've been so afraid that I can't move was on a high ropes course. I don't like heights. I'm okay with a step ladder to a certain extent. Yet, if I'm climbing up the side of a telephone pole or a climbing wall, I freeze. Sure, I'm clipped in, I have ropes attached to me, tethering me to the ground, with someone down there belaying me. I'm safe as can be. Yet, my brain and nervous system don't correlate, and I freeze. It's obvious that I don't like heights. At. All.

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to live in England with Young Adult in Global Missions. Part of my job responsibilities included learning how to lead ropes courses. Instead of hearing "I don't like heights", my supervisor heard "She doesn't like heights, but she needs to try and be challenged to go beyond what she thinks she is capable of doing." Thus, I found myself climbing up a telephone pole, wearing a harness, attached to a rope, with a belayer down below giving me instructions.

The objective of this specific element was to climb up the pole, stand up on the platform, jump off, and aim for a swing, like a trapeze artist. I was half-way up the pole when I froze. I couldn't go up. I couldn't go down. I couldn't move my arms. I couldn't move my feet. My brain wasn't working. I was frozen in place because I was so scared. Now, was I safe? Yes. No matter what my brain was telling me at the time, I couldn't move. No matter what the collective voices were shouting from below, I was frozen.

It wasn't until my friend Hillary called my name that I was able to move. She had me focus on her voice, on her body standing on the ground below. In fact, she even climbed up the pole a bit so that she could be heard better. She coached me into moving a hand, then a foot, then a hand, then a foot until I was climbing up even further. Sure, I still had a couple of other moments where I froze, but eventually, I made it to the top.

Sometimes we face things in life that make us freeze in place. In our Gospel text from last Sunday (*Matthew 13: 1-8*), we hear about the end times, about things like famines and earthquakes. We have experienced some things in our own lives like hurricanes, tornadoes, and

even different viruses with the pandemic. All those things can make us feel like we are frozen in place.

Life is scary. Those experiences, those moments when we feel like we are frozen, won't always go away. Fear will try to continue to envelope us, consume us and our emotions. Fear will call us away from placing our trust in God. When fear drives our actions and our emotions, we end up not being able to do what God is calling us to do: trust in God's promises.

Yet, we are not alone. God gives us hope. God gives us courage. God gives us a great community that helps get through and to move on from these experiences. In my experience, it was Hillary along with the entire group of people on the ground below. The people at the bottom, waiting for me, encouraged me, gave me comfort, and helped me through the process. God gives us the way to move forward so that we can do what God is calling us to do.

God does promise us full life, free from fear, free from feeling frozen and stuck in place. God's love guides us and equips us so that we can face the scary tasks along with the content joyous occasions of life. God's love, found in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, will always be more powerful than anything life throws at us- fear or otherwise.

Whatever makes you scared, makes you afraid, alarms you, remember that God is with you always. God has put people into your life to help you get through those experiences. God will never leave you.

The world feels scary right now. Thanks be to God that Jesus was sent to bring hope and peace to a world and people in need of God's redeeming powerful love. Amen.

God, when we feel scared or alone, remind us that you are always with us. Thank you for the people that guide us, equip us, and lead us when we feel stuck or frozen. Let us place our trust and hope in you. Amen.

*God is Bigger than the Boogie Man* from Veggie Tales "Where's God When I'm Scared?": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LK72--ZsM4>

*Be Bold, Be Strong* by Morris Chapman

<https://youtu.be/QQeCJ9EgLXQ>

*In Christ Alone* by Celtic Worship featuring Steph Macleod

<https://youtu.be/8kvFtXphmMU>

*My Lighthouse* by Rend Collective

<https://youtu.be/reAlJKv7ptU>

*Thank You Lord* by Chris Tomlin featuring Thomas Rhett and Florida Georgia Line

<https://youtu.be/xOgAmQvOUM0>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, November 19, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #435

### Is "Worship On Demand" better than "Worship In Person?"

*"Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy."* (Exod. 20:8 NRS)

It appears that one of the biggest ways technologies have changed our daily lives has been through the advancement of *"media streaming technology."* Think of television, for example. When I was growing up, my hometown had only one television channel. If you wanted to watch a certain show, you had to watch it live. If you missed it, you might have to wait months for summer reruns to happen. Either way, you needed to sit in front of your set when shows were broadcast.

Beginning in the 1970s, Cable TV vastly expanded the channel choices a viewer had; the introduction of video cassette recorders (VCRs) made it next possible to "tape" shows to watch later. Digital Video Discs (DVDs) also began to be popular opportunities to "purchase" movies you could watch anytime you wish.

In 2007, Netflix became one of the first "streaming" services. With an ever-expanding library of options, television shows or movies could now be watched "on demand." Since then, many "streaming services" have become available, like Amazon Prime, HBO, Britbox, Disney, YouTube, and Apple. This means is that every moment now a viewer has thousands upon thousands of options of things to watch *"on demand,"* that is, anytime and anywhere (as long as you have internet). What a contrast from the days of "Hurry up and get in here! Bonanza is starting!" Cue *"Do dooda do dooda do dooda do dooda DU DOO!"* (do you remember the beloved *"Bonanza"* theme song?)

One huge technological advancement for churches during the pandemic has been the emerging ability for congregations to either *"live-stream"* worship or offer our own *"on demand"* (worship)services. Like Netflix, St. Paul's services (along with thousands of other churches) can now be watched anytime and anywhere (as long as you have either the internet or a good smart phone plan).

This new way to *"worship on demand"* also means that if you don't like a hymn or a reading or sermon, you can *"fast forward"* or choose to *"link"* to another service somewhere else. These many options may infer that your *"demands"* regarding worship can be met.

However, for *"worship on demand"* to be most appreciated (and probably most meaningful), it may require having a *"live and in person"* reference point. In other words, *"watching"* may be more meaningful if you have previously experienced *"in person"* worship, singing with persons around you, hearing music live, greeting and sharing peace with persons who repeat *"and also with you."* (disclaimer: I am not sure if a sermon is better *"live"* or *"online"*, but *"live"* at least requires you to watch and listen to the end in case it gets better).

For those unable to attend in person but who have previously experienced worship *“in person”*, watching on a small screen is a blessing. They can imagine being there because they have been there. They can imagine sitting next to someone they now see waving to the cameras (and them) at the end of the service because they have sat with them.

Hopefully *“worship on demand”* will be a blessing whether you’ve been there, or not. If not, you can always click away to somewhere else, and hopefully that will be touched you spiritually. I have noticed, however, the great joy that has been magnified lately when people have been able to worship with each other *“face to face.”* It is even better when we see each other’s full *“smiling faces”* and not just *“smiling eyes”* above our face coverings.

With great anticipation, I hope to *“see you soon.”* Or be *“seen soon”* (if watching *“on demand.”*) Blessings.

Let us pray. *We give thanks O God for both old and new ways we can come together in worship. For those unable to be away from their homes, or those who now live far away from the St. Paul’s church home, we give thanks for our “modern technology.” We also do not take for granted the wonderful gift of being in person with each other as we sing and pray and hear your Word proclaimed. Bless us all, we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

*O Worship the King* by Pilgrim Mennonite Mission

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAl5pWbjKQc>

*Glorify Thy Name* by Maranatha Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wqSmx9yOTbl>

*Come, Just as you are to Worship* by Kim Hill

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4kZRUj4yog>

*Open Now, Thy Gates of Worship* by Westminster Presbyterian, Sacramento, CA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1I9XTnTvyc0>

*Crown Him with Many Crowns* by Kingsway Worship

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuMh\\_ept-Js](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuMh_ept-Js)

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, November 22, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #436**

*Note from Pastor Mark: We celebrated Christ the King Sunday yesterday and I recalled a devotion I wrote a year ago that was fun to revisit. Enjoy.*

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, November 23, 2020 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #219**

**Why we do not celebrate "Bicycle Bob the King Sunday".**

*Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." 38 Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 39 Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads 40 and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." (Matt. 27:37-40 NRS)*

In the early 1970's I worked in Minneapolis, Minnesota as a property manager/caretaker /seminary intern with two other seminarians taking care of a city block of multiple resident properties owned by Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota. This was an alternative seminary internship program with a strong social service component.

The Franklin Avenue neighborhood was an inner neighborhood with a variety of residents, including quite a number of interesting "characters." One "character" was "Bicycle Bob," the name he preferred to be called. His name originated from the three wheeled "bicycle" he drove everywhere. A car sized battery in his basket powered the many lights on it; he used a portable CB radio to communicate with various friends; he wore a regular motorcycle helmet.

Bob was determined, funny, eccentric, and with a disability that made the stability of a "three-wheeler" necessary for his travels around the neighborhood. He often stopped to talk to us.

Bob also had a big secret. One day as we were chatting, he said very matter of factly. "I want to tell you something. And you can't tell anyone. I am the true heir to the English throne. I am the true King of England."

He went on to say, "Yep. They're looking for me right now. They want me back. But you know what? I don't want to go. I like it right here. So if anyone comes by looking for me, don't tell them where I am. I know they want me back, but I'm not going. I like it right here."

All this was good-natured fun. Was he spoofing us, or did he really believe what he was saying? It was hard to say, but it was so much fun hearing "They're looking for me right now, but I'm not

*going,” that we just let it ride and enjoyed our very own neighborhood royal, “King Bicycle Bob.”*

The part that always made me smile, though, was how Bob, after declaring *“They want me back”* always finished with *“But I’m not going. I like it right here.”* He wasn’t even tempted.

There is a famous novel called *“The Last Temptation of Christ”* by Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis. In that fictionalized account of the story of Jesus Christ, Kazantzakis’s Christ succumbs to his last temptation on the cross, which is to come down from the cross and finish living his life as a normal person.

Following his coming down what happens next plays out over several chapters. Jesus enjoys a normal life where he marries and has children and grandchildren. After many years, he is discovered and confronted by decrepit and embittered former disciples. He is chastised by his failure to do what he promised and save humanity. They say he betrayed them.

As that moment of confrontation climaxes, Jesus snaps back to reality, and finds himself back on the cross where he chooses to die for us and finishes his mission. The last temptation was just that – temptation. His mission was to serve and to save, and he did it.

And that’s why we do not celebrate *“Bicycle Bob the King Sunday”*.

Let us pray.

*As we have finished another church year and wait for the beginning of another, we thank you O God, for your sovereignty expressed through Jesus Christ our Lord and King. As earthly kings and kingdoms come and go, we are grateful for your benevolent rule over all people. Thank you, Jesus, for dying on the cross for us so that we might know the lengths you will go to make us your own. Draw us, we pray, into the mystery of the cross so we can trust in your goodness and sacrifice. We need trust so badly these days as we are so let down by earthly authorities. Be the One, we pray, to whom we can give our whole hearts, trusting in you alone for all we need. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.*

P.S. *“Crown Him With Many Crowns”* is a natural accompanying hymn today. Once I starting listening, I loved the rich variety and wonderful arrangements. That’s why we have just one hymn today performed nine ways. Enjoy.

*Crown Him With Many Crowns* by Martijn de Groot

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=If-svStcvS8>

*Crown Him With Many Crowns* by Lily and River

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuMh\\_ept-Js](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuMh_ept-Js)

*Crown Him With Many Crowns* by Fountainview Academy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INo42lyvszY>

*Crown Him With Many Crowns* by Chris Rupp

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vbCtXbpRIM>

*Crown Him With Many Crowns* by Tenore

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-OqDtK6xsg>

*Crown Him With Many Crowns* by GTASoul

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdK4lZg8gsU>

*Crown Him With Many Crowns* by SE Samonte

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufzr4SqAxy0>

*Crown Him With Many Crowns* by St. David's Hall, Cardiff, Wales

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vWRXvWZPUQ>

*Crown Him With Many Crowns* Huddlesfield Choral Society

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKtVuEwd1Jk>

*Crown Him* instrumental piano by Kaleb Brasee)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ci0wbhATxxY>

**St. Paul's In Your Home Bonus Devotion for Wednesday, November 24, 2021 by Chaplain Bob Weeks #437**

*From Pastor Mark: Chaplain Bob wrote this for us last year, but I imagine it might have been overlooked as it was posted on a busy Thanksgiving Day. It's such a good one that I wanted to send it out again. This year let us also pray for Chaplain Bob and Sylvia as Bob has been dealing with some major health concerns.*

**Thanksgiving Day Devotion for Thursday November 26, 2020 not by Pastor Mark Opgrand but by Chaplain Bob Weeks #222**

**GIVING THANKS**

**By**

**Chaplain Bob Weeks**

In my first parish, I wanted to have a Thanksgiving Service since none had been held on Thanksgiving before. I planned a service and preached a sermon using some Thanksgiving Illustrations for my sermon. When the service ended, I thought I had done a good job. Then, a 96 year old lady, Mrs. Della, greeted me at the end of the service by saying, *"Pastor, Thanksgiving is thankful living every single day."* She obviously knew more about thanksgiving than me.

There was a Lutheran Pastor, Martin Rinkart, who can teach us much about giving thanks. Martin was born in Eilenburg, Saxony, Germany in 1586. He served churches in Eilenburg and Lutjenborf during the dreaded plague of 1637. For more than thirty years, Martin served as a pastor in a war torn and plaque distraught area. During these Thirty Years War (1618-48), he was elected by his fellow citizens to plead with the enemy commander to lower his demands for tribute money. One year, he conducted more than 4,000 funerals (40-45 a day), including his wife's, and at times food was so scarce that his family went hungry. Although he could have despaired, his faith in God remained strong, and he gave thanks continually.

Martin followed the example of the prophet Isaiah, who instructed God's people to give thanks at all times, including when they had disappointed God . . . *"I will praise you, O Lord. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me."(Isaiah 12:1) or when enemies oppressed them. Even then, they were to thank and exalt God's name, making ". . . known among the nations what he has done."* (Isaiah 12:4).

During this COVID-19 Pandemic, Martin's example of giving thanks needs to be echoed among us, joining hearts and voices as we give praise and thanks to God for bringing us through this virus condition so far, and the promise of a vaccine.

This Thanksgiving Day we can give thanks to God by using Martin's hymn "*Nun danket alle Gott*," (*Now Thank We All Our God*).

Now thank we all our God with hearts and hands and voices,  
who wondrous things has done in whom this 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 all in grace, and guide us when perplexed,  
and free us from all harm in this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given,  
the Son, and Spirit blest, who reign in highest heaven,  
the one eternal God, whom earth and heaven adore;  
for thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.

Yes, as Pastor Martin Rinkart and the little 96 year old lady, Mrs. Della, in my first parish would have us to remember, Thanksgiving is thankful living every single day.

Prayer: *Almighty God, this Thanksgiving Day, I give you thanks for amazing work in my life. Thanks for bringing us hope in the midst of these trying times. Amen.*

*Now Thank We All Our God* by Michael Lining

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKNM5KD9\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKNM5KD9_Q)

*Now Thank We All our God* by Hymn Charts (contemporary)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GvSMerBDUc>

*Now Thank We All Our God* (unknown service in Britain)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s99dNPKYtHk>

*Praise and Thanksgiving* by Distant Voices

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjRf3\\_QZQWE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjRf3_QZQWE)

*Praise and Thanksgiving* Sing for Joy Festival Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8Oo-K6gIBA>

*Let All Things Now Living* by SE Samonte

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjRf3\\_QZQWE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjRf3_QZQWE)

**Are "Celebration of Life" services more preferred than traditional funeral or memorial services?"**

*Sarah lived one hundred twenty-seven years; this was the length of Sarah's life. <sup>2</sup> And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. <sup>3</sup> Abraham rose up from beside his dead, and said to the Hittites, <sup>4</sup> "I am a stranger and an alien residing among you; give me property among you for a burying place, so that I may bury my dead out of my sight." (Gen. 23:1-4 NRS)*

Have you noticed how more and more obituaries seem to be including invitations to gather for "Celebration of Life" services rather than traditional funeral or memorial services? Is this on account of the deceased or their families not being part of a church or Christian faith? Or is it simply a meaningful alternative to the ways things have been done in the past.

If people don't relate to traditional hymns or prayers or Christian ritual, maybe it would be more meaningful to gather informally to remember a loved one. It would be natural to honor the deceased loved one, regardless of their, or their family's, religious faith. A "Celebration of Life" gathering would emphasize telling the story of a person's life rather than traditional rituals. That could be done through multiple speakers, sharing favorite songs, or offering videos which include photos from throughout the person's life.

Traditional services have also evolved, however, to ensure the story of a person's life is part of the gathering. The music would have a faith focus, of course, and traditional promise-focused prayers are lifted up, but regularly family members or friends offer tributes to the deceased. The sermons, too, are personal, and very often, the deceased's own faith has been a large part of remembering them.

When I was at seminary, we were still being taught to be careful about not being too personal or doing eulogies that lifted up the person rather than focusing on the proclamation of God's gospel. My own views on this changed when I realized that the only reason this group of people are gathering on this day is because a loved one has died. It is not because it is the "Saturday before the 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost." We have gathered to hear God's promises, yes, but also to remember, grieve, and celebrate a specific loved one who has died.

In my experience now, especially when someone from the family is not sharing a tribute, I will always take time with the families to listen to their loved one's story, and hopefully weave that into a message proclaiming God's grace and everlasting promises. I believe our traditional hymns, prayers, and scripture support this.

At the same time, I know a “Celebration of Life” structured gathering can be just as meaningful, or maybe even more meaningful depending on what is being shared.

I recently viewed a video of a “*Celebration of Life*” service for Chad, the son of my wife Rebecca’s first cousin. Rebecca and her son Reed attended the service in person. Chad had tragically been killed in a car accident.

During the gathering, his father, a retired Methodist minister spoke, as well as the deceased’s pastor, brother, sister-in-law, wife, son and a couple of friends. Photos of his life were shared between speakers.

There was no formal liturgy or traditional hymns, and yet everything about this service was a witness to a faithful God who had blessed everyone with this wonderful young man. The faith and courage of those who shared was such a witness and made a deep impression on the five hundred who attended, as well as those of us who watched it online.

I am thankful that “*Celebration of Life*” services can also be alternatives especially for those who know they want to do something, even when they are not clear about what should be said or done when their loved one dies. Pictures help tell the story; those videos have become a welcomed new tradition. People can also have a meal together, swap stories, and remember and grieve in their own way.

At the same time, I am deeply thankful (whether formally or informally) whenever a person’s life story can be a witness to a wonderful God, to whom, in life and death, we belong.

Let us pray. We thank you O God for the lives of our loved ones who have died. Thank you for supporting us in our grief as we also gather to celebrate the ways our lives have been touched by theirs. Grant us lives lived in service to you that when we die, we will be remembered most of all for your grace in our lives. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

The ten attached songs today might surprise you, as they are top ten funeral songs as compiled by a survey done by a group called Funeralcare. They have been compiling these since 2002. I’m going to take a wild guess that these are more widely requested at “*Celebration of Life*” services than traditional Lutheran funerals (but also deeply moving). What your favorite funeral/memorial/celebration of life service songs or hymns?

*My Way* by Frank Sinatra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1t8kAbUg4t4>

*Time to Say Goodbye* by Andrea Bocelli

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CYqs-sM94Q>

*Supermarket Flowers* by Ed Sheeran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BaKwRXMoL1Q>

*We'll Meet Again* by Vera Lynn

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5C4meGkNyc>

*You Raise Me Up* by Westlife

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7tGUNVrqPs>

*Angels* by Robbie Williams

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sANtdwugzc>

*Unforgettable* by Nat King Cole

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUMoiU3h750>

*Over the Rainbow* by Eva Cassidy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j52JTZTskCI>

*Wind Beneath My Wings* by Bette Midler

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jorJh8DTMVM>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, December 3, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #439**

**Remembering your first theological argument (hint: it's not about who you think).**

*6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient. 7 Therefore do not be associated with them. 8 For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light-- 9 for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. (Eph. 5:6-9 NRS)*

Do you remember ...the very first time you got into a heavy-duty theological discussion about matters of life and faith? Do you remember the intensity of the moment, the fierce struggle in your own mind as you did your best to defend the beliefs with which you had been raised?

The truth mattered then, especially if an unbeliever posed a rather convincing argument. It was a challenging discussion, ...causing many anxious moments and difficult feelings.

Do you remember?

Let me remind you that we're not talking about the discussion you had last week or last year. We're talking about what was likely.... your very first .... theological discussion, and the subject of that conversation was not God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit. You were in third or fourth grade, and the big question was, "Do you believe ... in Santa Claus?"

Do you remember now?

From my ancient memory ... it always seemed the discussion took place about two or three weeks before Christmas, and it usually happened at school during art period.

The teacher had instructed everyone ... to draw pictures about the subject of Christmas. When you were finished, all the pictures would be put up on the bulletin board. That was always fun, so you started drawing your picture about Christmas ... one of Santa Claus ...a good ol' Christmas picture.

So you were drawing away and coloring and having a good time when your neighbor turned to you to see how you were doing. (In my elementary school classmates always wanted to see ... how their neighbors are doing.) So having looked at your picture, your neighbor whispers,

*"Hey, do you believe in Santa Claus?"*

*"Well, yeah, you say, doesn't everybody?"*

*"Well, my big brother told me he just he found out there is no Santa Claus."*

*"There's gotta be," you say. "My Mom and Dad told me so.. a long time ago."*

About that time the resident atheist of the class (you know, the smarty pants kid no one liked) butts in to set things straight:

*"You guys are so dumb. Everybody knows there's no such thing ... as Santa Claus."*

The words hit hard, and for the two of you there is no alternative but to defend the faith the best you can.

*"Yes, there is."*

*"Well, how do you know? Have you ever seen him?"*

*"Yeah, at the store," you say. "I have a picture to prove it."*

*"You stupid, there's one at every store. They can't all be Santa Claus."*

*"I know I know. They're Santa's helpers."*

You know it is a weak argument. End of round one. The score. Atheist 1, Believers 0. You try again.

*"I know there is a Santa Claus ... because my stocking is filled on Christmas morning."*

*"If he's so fat how can he get down the chimney? In fact, you don't even have a chimney."*

Boom! End of round two. Atheist 2. Believers 0. Logic failing, you try a more direct approach.

*"Look, I know there is a Santa Claus. I just know it."*

*"There is not!"*

*"Is so!!"*

*"Is not !!!"*

*"IS... SO!!!!"*

The teacher finally intervenes and ends the discussion. *"Children! Get back to work and be quiet."*

Being slightly defeated, you look again at your drawing, then turn it over to begin drawing a dumb old Christmas tree. Your faith tested.... and confused, you mutter to yourself,

*"Well at least we still have the baby Jesus ... I hope."*

Sometimes I wonder if losing faith in Santa has similarities to when people lose faith in Jesus. For a child, Santa and Jesus have a lot in common.

Both are said to have certain mysterious qualities about them that enable them to do extraordinary things.

Jesus walks on water.

Santa flies in a sled drawn by flying reindeer.

Jesus feeds five thousand with five loaves and two fishes.

Santa delivers toys to millions.

Jesus receives prayers (sometimes from children who want things).

Santa receives letters (always from children who want things).

Both rely on the testimony of eyewitnesses that they actually are who they are said to be.

The eyewitnesses of Jesus are his disciples and followers.

The eyewitnesses of Santa are Mom, Dad, and the mall managers.

But most of all, both require *faith*--faith to believe in them ... because you cannot prove the existence of either. You can only trust and hope that they are real.

I wonder if, for young children, Santa seems more real than Jesus. They hear stories about Jesus, and see pictures of Jesus in church, of course, but it is a real flesh and blood "*Santa*" whose lap they sit upon and to whom they speak and with whom they have their photo taken. When Santa becomes demythologized, is it easier to become skeptical about Jesus as well?

It's interesting to ponder. In college I remember having theological conversations about Jesus with those who did not believe. It was pretty similar to that first theological conversation about Santa. As a "*true believer*," I remember being shocked to hear someone claim Jesus was made up and not real. And it made me wonder if the gospel was really true. Thankfully in the mystery of things the Holy Spirit called me to faith despite doubts and challenges of unbelievers. When tested, the outcome has continued to be on the side of faith.

Perhaps that's a key difference between Santa and Jesus. Santa promotes a certain spirit of Christmas but it's not Holy the way the Holy Spirit is Holy. And not even Santa was ever said to be the Son of God.

Let us pray. *Help us believe and trust in you, Lord Jesus. And when we feel we are failing rightfully to assert your sovereignty over the heavens and the earth and secular traditions, please send your Holy Spirit to help us. Amen.*

*Santa Claus is Coming to Town* by Bui Quang Tin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gfwjw-HnSq4>

*Alleluia He is Coming* by Jupiter First Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpdnIWBPT-o>

*O Come O Come Emmanuel* by Concordia

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xtpJ4Q\\_Q-4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xtpJ4Q_Q-4)

*Here Comes Santa Claus* by Gene Autry

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysxlUmLOttQ>

*Rejoice Rejoice Believers*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucyITfLOB\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucyITfLOB_o)

*The Spirit of Christmas* by Kurt Russell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DUaJswBpqwg>

*Joy to the World (with For Unto Us a Child is Born)* by Voctave

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nziWgvOPj4>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, December 6, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #440

### The Mystery of Advent Purple and Blue (and why they also signify royalty).

<sup>23</sup> Then Judas [Maccabeus] returned to plunder the camp, and they seized a great amount of gold and silver, and cloth dyed blue and sea purple, and great riches. <sup>24</sup> On their return they sang hymns and praises to Heaven-- "For he is good, for his mercy endures forever." <sup>25</sup> Thus Israel had a great deliverance that day. (1 Ma. 4:23-25 NRS)

In a reflection offered at last Wednesday's Advent service, I shared background on "Advent", the "Advent Wreath", and "Advent Candles." Some of that discussion centered around competing traditions about the candles being either three purple and one pink or all blue. You can find that discussion on our YouTube channel "stpaulslutheranwilmingtonnc".

I was reminded of the strength of the pro purple and pink argument when I pulled a book off my shelf called "A Family Advent: Keeping the Savior in the Season," published by Thomas Nelson, Inc. in 2008. The cover shows three purple, one pink, and one white "Christ candle" in the center. The candles were named "Hope, Peace, Love, and Joy" and those themes were further explored.

"A Family Advent" is a thoughtful, well-written devotional, despite not explaining why their "love" candle was "pink." As described last Wednesday, the original and traditional reason for "pink" goes back to when the Third Sunday in Advent was called "Gaudete," which is Latin for "Rejoice." When Advent was more somber and time for fasting in preparation for Epiphany's baptisms, the pink candle invited people to keep looking ahead, remembering "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice" from Philippians 4:4. A simple switch from "Love" to "Joy" would have kept me from wondering "Why aren't you telling us why it is pink?"

It was page 15, however that caught my eye, with "FUN FACT." That page shared a lot of research, explaining why "purple" is displayed in sanctuaries in "Advent" ("Lent", too). The "fun fact" observed that many people have been told it is "purple" because that is the color of "royalty" but don't know why. The "fun fact" explained "why?" and described it had to do with "expensive snails!" Well, that caught my attention.

The authors went on to explain how the color purple was the most expensive dye to produce; only kings could afford such fashionable extravagance. It was extremely expensive because the dye, named "tekhelet" (in Hebrew) was squeezed from snails – a type of mollusk! The authors reported it would take 10,000 mollusks to make enough dye for just one toga or robe. They also said "in ancient documents, the color 'tekhelet' is often described as violet, but other sources refer to it as the same color as the sky or sea, which would mean it was blue."

With this information, drawing from ancient sources, we can conclude that either purple or blue is a descriptive color for royalty, and fitting for “liturgical” use during both “Advent” and “Lent”.

This was indeed a “FUND FACT,” but because they referred to the “pink” candle as the “love” candle, I did wonder about its factualness. Might they have more influenced by Valentine’s Day “Love” and “pink” traditions than old liturgical “purple” or “blue” traditions? Who knows?

As I did more of my own research, I learned that reliable Jewish sources (orthodoxunion.org) trace the expensive dye to a creature called a “chilazon,” which is either a “squid”, a “snail”, or a specific snail called a “Murex snail.” Whichever creature produced the dye, they all agree this was hugely expensive to produce, and “fit for a king.”

“A Family Advent” sums it up well: “Regardless of whether your church chooses to use purple or royal blue in the weeks leading up to Christmas, the meaning is the same. During Advent we prepare the way and honor Christ the Lord, the one true King, with the most royal color we can find.” I say “Amen” to that.

Let us pray. *We thank you O God for traditions that bring added depth and meaning to our Advent and Christmas celebrations. We are glad for purples and blues and pinks and whites and wreaths and candles and all those things that remind us of how wonderful it is that you have entered humanity through Jesus Christ our Lord. Give us hope and peace and joy and love throughout this advent journeys that we might experience the fullness of royal Emmanuel. In Jesus name. Amen.*

\*I selected this scripture from the Book of Maccabees, which details a revolt against the Seleucid Empire in Israel in the second century B.C.E. By listing the cloth along side of gold, it shows the value of that expensive cloth. Note it is described as “blue and sea purple.”

*Prepare the Royal Highway* by St Paul Lutheran Austin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rePAECLHkCM>

*Prepare the Royal Highway* by Augsburg Fortress

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4SGs\\_aui884](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4SGs_aui884)

*A Royal King* by Harmony 5

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5C-icuM7F48>

*Come Now O Prince of Peace* by St Mark’s Winnepeg

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBhKHDYjoEY>

*Come Now O Prince of Peace* by Scottish Festival Singers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ANS45vhMJc>

**St. Paul's In Your Home (Bonus Edition) for Wednesday, December 7, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #441**

*Note from Pastor Mark: It was fun to discover this new hymn, so I thought I would do a special bonus devotion about it.*

**Contemplating "Now the Heavens Start to Whisper" (a newly published advent hymn).**

*<sup>8</sup> Awake, my soul! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn.<sup>9</sup> I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations. <sup>10</sup> For your steadfast love is as high as the heavens; your faithfulness extends to the clouds. <sup>11</sup> Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth. (Ps. 57:8-11 NRS)*

"All Creation Sings" is our latest hymnal supplement. It's the first one since Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW) was published in 2006. Prior to that hymnal other supplements included "With One Voice" and "Worship and Praise Supplement."

I always look at the new supplements with interest, perhaps even more this year since last year's devotions focused on Advent Hymns from the ELW. I wondered what was new to this collection.

The first one was new to me, though the melody is from an old Welsh tune called SUO GAN (meaning Lullaby Tune). The lyrics were written in 2006 by Mary Louise Bringle, who is still living and actively composing.

Since I was unfamiliar with the tune, I first looked carefully at the lyrics. I read them through several times, pausing on words and phrases, and letting the text speak to me of advent. In doing so, I realized that so often the words of a hymn get so mixed in with melody that I don't think about what I am singing. It's even harder when it is challenging to sing the melody. This song has a lovely melody, and the words are powerful.

I will attach a couple of YouTube videos of text and tune, but before you link on to them, I invite you to read the lyrics aloud a couple of times. Focus on phrases that call attention to the wonder of God. Think of "Advent", "arrival," "waiting." and "longing." Listen for God.

Now the Heavens Start to Whisper

Now the heavens start to whisper  
As the veil is growing thin.  
Earth from slumber wakes to listen  
To the stirring, faint within:

Seed of promise, deeply planted,  
Christ to spring from Jesse's stem!  
Like the soil beneath the frost-line,  
Hearts grow soft to welcome him.

Heavy clouds that block the moonlight  
Now begin to drift away.  
Diamond brilliance through the darkness  
Shines the hope of coming day.  
Christ, the morning star of splendor,  
Gleams within a world grown dim.  
Heaven's ember fans to fullness;  
Hearts grow warm to welcome him.

Christ, eternal sun of justice,  
Christ, the rose of wisdom's seed,  
Come to bless with fire and fragrance  
Hours of yearning, hurt, and need.  
In the lonely, in the stranger,  
In the outcast hid from view:  
Child who comes to grace the manger,  
Teach our hearts to welcome you.

Text: Mary Louise Bringle, b. 1953, © 2006, GIA Publications, Inc.  
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Tune: SUO GAN, 8 7 8 7 D

I love the ending especially, *"In the lonely, in the stranger, in the outcast hid from view: Child who comes to grace the manger, teach our hearts to welcome you."* It is very much an advent prayer, isn't it? Amen.

*"Now the Heavens Start to Whisper"* by Augsburg

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBOJy64x6RI>

*"Now the Heavens Start to Whisper"* by GIA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Peco7geVSaQ&t=166s>

*"Now the Heavens Start to Whisper"* by Westminster Presbyterian

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1aaW8jn2ik>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday, December 10, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #442

### Why baptism is not “on the side” and why the baptismal font is no longer in the baptistry.

*While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. <sup>2</sup> He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They replied, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." <sup>3</sup> Then he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They answered, "Into John's baptism." <sup>4</sup> Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus." <sup>5</sup> On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. (Acts 19:1-5 NRS)*

In 1908, when St. Paul's enlarged its sanctuary, baptisms always happened in the new baptistry, a small room adjacent to the new pulpit. Located in the baptistry was the old baptismal Font, donated in 1887, and used since then to this day. When at the font last Sunday we baptized Virginia Blake Miars, daughter of Peter and Celia Miars, her father Peter had been baptized at the same font when he was a baby.

For much of St. Paul's history, families would gather for baptisms in that small baptistry. They were visible to the congregation, but the space only permitted a few to gather there. That all changed the year a family wanted to have their baby baptized on the third Sunday in Advent. On that Sunday, a very large Chrismon tree was located in front of the baptistry, blocking the view.

That was the first time (during my time here, anyway) that the font was moved to the top of the chancel stairs and in front of the altar rails. There was ample space for baby, parents, sponsors, and pastors. It provided a good view for the congregation to witness this blessed event as we welcomed this precious Child of God into our church family.

It was also an “Aha” moment. By moving the font to “front and center”, it symbolically affirmed the centrality of baptism in our faith. While that relocation broke the long-standing tradition of baptisms taking place in the baptistry, it also kept baptism from ever being seen by visitors as baptism “on the side.” Baptism is not a “side dish.” It is central to our faith. Practiced in this more central location, baptism and holy communion are symbolically also more closely connected.

Since that Advent baptism years ago, the font has been moved back and forth from baptistry to top of the chancel stairs. Looking back, I don't know why we didn't simply leave the font at the base of the stairs where it is now. It wasn't that we grew tired of moving it, (though it's probably not a great idea to keep “*toting around*” a 134-year-old genuine antique baptismal font).

We left it in place at the base of the stairs so that it would be a highly visible reminder of our baptism every Sunday. You can't miss it. We also keep water in the basin, inviting people to dip their hands in it and make the sign of the cross on their foreheads. This is a reminder of our own baptism when the pastor dipped his or her finger in the water and traced the cross on our foreheads with these words: *"(Name), child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the Cross of Christ forever."*

Virginia Blake Miars heard these words at her baptism, and did her father Peter at his, and many generations of baptized children before them. These are sacred words, sacred not because of the location of the font or the amount of water splashed, poured or sprinkled on the child, but rather because through water and word God makes us his own, declaring we belong to God forever.

*Remember your Baptism and that you are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the Cross of Christ forever!*

*Let us pray. Thank you, gracious God for making and claiming us as your own through our baptism. Remind us daily that we belong to you and are part of your chosen family of faith. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

P.S. In newer church architecture it is common for baptismal fonts to be placed near the entrance of the sanctuary. Theologically, that's an even stronger affirmation of baptism as an entrance rite and central to faith. New churches also see the value to large gathering spaces at the entrance (called narthexes).

P.S.2 I'm going to attach a photo from 2006 that shows how big our Christmas trees used to be. You can see how this tree would have blocked the baptistry. If you look carefully, you can also see the Christmas trees were "first generation," and used Styrofoam and beads. They have since been replaced by the exquisite hand made beaded wonders we have today.

*Christ, When for Us You Were Baptized* by Mt. Olive Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8HQtlYE1H0Q>

*Christ, When for Us You Were Baptized* (another version) by Washington Cathedral

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RfYQDHj1Ls>

*Christ, When for Us You Were Baptized* by Sammamish Hills Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-JBzDYbiUk>

*Baptized and Set Free* by Sydney Boggs

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nS7N6CJPZY>

*Children of the Heavenly Father* by Concordia Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NqzFGLYyo>



**St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, December 13, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #443**

**Remembering an Advent letter from Bonhoeffer to his parents.**

*<sup>3</sup> Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. (Heb. 13:3 NRS)*

While pondering Advent, I recently came across a letter written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer to his parents during Advent in 1943. Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor, theologian, and teacher who was imprisoned by the Nazis for being part of the German resistance to Adolf Hitler. He was executed the following spring.

As pastor, theologian and teacher of the church, Bonhoeffer is distinguished as one of the best. His books, including "The Cost of Discipleship," "Life together," and Christian Ethics continue to be widely read by seminarians and scholars. Bonhoeffer was a founder of the German Confessing Church body which stood in opposition to the Nazi party's effort to unify all protestant churches into a single pro-Nazi German Evangelical Church. He was a teacher in an underground seminary.

Bonhoeffer also became involved with anti-Hitler officers of the "Abwehr", a German military intelligence operation which also rivalled the Gestapo. With this, he essentially became a "double agent," now able to pass information to church officials outside Germany he was believed to be spying upon. When he was discovered, along with other Abwehr officers, he became associated with plotting to take Hitler's life, and was immediately imprisoned. He might have lived if Germany was defeated before he was executed.

Bonhoeffer's life and witness is an inspiration for all who would embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ no matter what the cost. While in prison Bonhoeffer was thankfully able to send some letters through official and heavily censored channels, and but also through a sympathetic guard who smuggled them out. Here is an excerpt of a letter he wrote to his parents. It is quite moving and offers a different perspective on Advent and Christmas.

"I don't have to tell you how greatly I long for freedom, and for all of you. But for decades you gave us such incomparably beautiful Christmases that my grateful memory of them is strong enough to outshine even this rather dark one.

It is times like these that show what it really means to have a past and an inner legacy independent of the change of times and conditions. The awareness of being borne up by a spiritual tradition that last for decades gives one a strong sense of security in the face of all transitory distress...

From the Christian point of view, spending Christmas in a prison doesn't pose any special problem. Most likely, a more meaningful and authentic Christmas is celebrated here by many people than in places where only the name of the feast remains.

Misery, pain, poverty, loneliness, helplessness, and guilt have an altogether different meaning in God's eyes than in the judgment of men. God turns toward the very places from which humans tend to turn away. Christ was born in a stable because there was no room for him at the inn: A prisoner can understand all this better than other people.

It's truly good news for him; in believing it, he knows he has been made part of the Christian community that breaks down all spatial and temporal frontiers, and the walls of prison lose their meaning."

I pray Bonhoeffer's witness might bless you as you ponder Advent. We are also reminded that like Bonhoeffer, St. Paul wrote from prison as well. Both men faced the consequences of speaking truth to power. Both would cling to God's promise "that in life and death, we belong to God." May that reminder bless you in these days and in all the days of your life.

Let us pray. *Thank you, O God, for the witness of St. Paul and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who both wrote letters from prison cells, and gave their lives for the sake of the gospel. May their witness for faith encourage us as we seek to be your children in this world. Let us not grow weary of doing right and standing firm in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Comfort, Comfort Ye My People* by Luck Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9GYT9Ad7Z4>

*Comfort, Comfort Now My People* by Grosse Pointe Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaWsCrpkJwI>

*Awake Awake and Greet the New Morn* by St. Luke's Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LG2jYHNSFS0>

*Awake Awake and Greet the New Morn* by Anita Gonzalez

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQVHyIHGsvE>

*O Lord How Shall I Meet You* by Riverside Church

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybbdV\\_m5r1o&t=12s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybbdV_m5r1o&t=12s)

*O Lord, How Shall I Meet You* by Estera Wald (ELW 241 Instrumental)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aVLR4rFhil8>

**St. Paul's In Your Home (Bonus Edition) for Wednesday, December 15, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand and Mike Berg's friend of a friend. #444**

**MYSTERY OF CHRISTMAS**

From Pastor Mark: Mike Berg's friend Meg said this about the author. "Anne Mugler is a psychotherapist in Arlington Virginia. She teaches Godly Play at Falls Church Presbyterian Church. Her new book of poetry "*Additional Possibilities for the Ark*" will be published in the New Year." About the poem Meg said, "I hope people like it- I think it's good medicine." I agree.

*In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup> This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup> All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup> Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. <sup>5</sup> He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. (Lk. 2:1-5 NRS)*

**MYSTERY OF CHRISTMAS**

Whoever has been fully pregnant in December knows the ridiculousness of preparing for Christmas in the ninth month.

What was the church thinking having the beginning of the new year start with Mary's last month of pregnancy?

Limping along those many miles to Bethlehem, riding the donkey for a break, then getting off its swaying back to walk again.

No wonder there was no room in the Inn. They must have been the last people to enter the city of David.

Whatever you are heavy with – child, sorrow, old age, even joy – whoever has no energy to put

up

the tree or untangle the lights, write  
the cards or bake the cookies,  
close your eyes and

get on the donkey for awhile.  
Let the story carry you through the  
dark that was not just back then

but is also  
now.

Anne Mugler 12/4/17

*Let us pray. Thank you, O God, for artists and poets whose reflections on your mighty acts in history draw us deeply into the story of your love for us. As we press on in our "waiting" and our "preparing," draw close to us with the wonder of your love for us. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

I am sharing just one video today, but it's a beauty. Many people know Leonard Cohen's beautiful "Hallelujah," which many believe is one of the most beautiful melodies ever written. However.... despite having "Hallelujah" in it, it is not Christ centered. I am grateful, with such a song, that two alternate versions have been written, one focusing on *Easter*, and this one focusing on Christmas (but with an Easter reference). So here is "*Christmas Hallelujah*". Blessings.

*Christmas Hallelujah* by Caleb and Kelsey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9ORdDGgzu8>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Friday December 17, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #445**

**The True Christian Meaning of "The Twelve Days of Christmas."**

*<sup>2</sup> I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, <sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. <sup>4</sup> I am saying this so that no one may deceive you with plausible arguments. (Col. 2:2-4 NRS)*

I remember the first time I discovered the Christian meaning behind "*The Twelve Days of Christmas.*" "*How cool is that?*" I said to myself. "*I had no idea that fun song had such hidden meaning.*" But it was right there in print as a "*Fun Fact*" in my "*A Family Advent*" Christmas book published by Christian publisher Thomas Nelson in 2008.

The book indicated that it was "*more than a silly song –it's a secret code.*" The book went on to explain that from 1558 to 1829 Roman Catholics in England were not allowed to practice their faith. In fact, being Catholic was a crime! So to preserve their teaching and doctrine, someone wrote this carol as a catechism meaning known only to members of their church. Each element in the carol has a code word for a religious reality, which the children could remember.

Here were the meanings:

*A partridge in a pear tree* represented Christ.

*Two turtle doves* were the Old and New Testaments.

*Three French Hens* stood for faith, hope, and love.

*Four calling birds* were the four gospel: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

*Five golden rings* recalled the Torah or Law, the first five books of the Old Testament.

*Six geese a-laying* stood for the six days of creation.

*Seven swans a-swimming* represented the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit: prophesy, serving, teaching, exhortation, contribution, leadership, and mercy; it also represents the seven sacraments: baptism, Eucharist (or Communion), reconciliation, confirmation, marriage, holy orders, and anointing of the sick.

*Eight maids a-milking* were the eight beatitudes.

*Nine ladies dancing* were the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

*The ten lords a leaping* were the ten commandments.

*Eleven pipers piping* stood for the eleven faithful disciples.

*Twelve drummers drumming* were symbolic of the twelve points of belief in the Apostle's Creed.

Pretty cool, right Except that it's just not true. While this true hidden meaning of the song first began circulating years ago via chain letters (a pre-internet practice of sending someone a message and asking it to be sent to multiple other people so that eventually many people received letters), it just doesn't hold up to its claims.

While Roman Catholics in England were once prohibited from celebrating mass and were persecuted by the Anglican state church, there is nothing in this song that is so distinctly Roman Catholic that would not also apply to Anglican Christians.

Furthermore, the only thing that connects the song with any aspect of Christianity are the numbers. Partridges, doves, hens, calling birds, golden rings, geese, swans, maids, dancing ladies, lords, pipers and drummers only connect to Christian teaching by virtue of the numbers.

It is appealing however, to be able to impress a friend with such secret knowledge. *"Did you know this song has hidden meaning that was taught during a time of religious persecution?"* Again, sounds so very cool, but just doesn't hold up.

The first time the words show up are in 1790 in an English Children's book entitled *"Mirth Without Mischief."* Most historians see the words used in the 1800's as game called *"memory-and-forfeit."* Each player would repeat a line and add another. If you made a mistake you would forfeit a kiss or a piece of candy. There is a Scottish version where instead of *"partridge in a pear tree"* it is an *"Arabian Baboon."* I can't imagine that being a very helpful image to help us remember our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

The version we now sing was attached to a traditional melody by composer Fredric Austin in 1909.

If you, like me thought it was very cool that The Twelve Days of Christmas had all those secret hidden meanings, what is the point of challenging that view? Why not just believe it because it sounded good?

I was sharing a thought about writing about this with Pastor Ken Saurman at our monthly rostered leader's lunch yesterday, and he shared the story of how someone once was caught with a prohibited deck of cards and he convinced them that he was using them devotionally, and went on to explain that:

- The *Ace* reminds us that there is only one God.
- The *Two* represents the two parts of the Bible, Old and New Testaments
- The *Three* represents the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost.

- The *Four* represents the Four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
- The *Five* is for the five virgins. There were ten but only five of them were glorified (Matthew 25:1-13).
- The *Six* is for the six days it took God to create the Heavens and Earth (Genesis 1).
- The *Seven* is for the day God rested after making His Creation (Genesis 2:3).
- The *Eight* is for the family of Noah and his wife, their three sons and their wives -- the eight people God spared from the flood that destroyed the Earth (Genesis 7:7).
- The *Nine* is for the lepers that Jesus cleansed of leprosy He cleansed ten, but nine never thanked Him (Luke 17:11-19).
- The *Ten* represents the Ten Commandments that God handed down to Moses on tablets made of stone (Exodus 20:1-21).
- The *Jack* is a reminder of Satan, one of God's first angels, but he got kicked out of heaven for his sly and wicked ways and is now the joker of eternal hell (Ezekiel 28:11-19).
- The *Queen* represents Mary, mother of Jesus (Luke 1:26-38).
- The *King* stands for Jesus, for he is the King of all kings (Revelation 19:16).
- When I count the *dots* on all the cards, I come up with a total of 365, one for every day of the year.
- There are a total of 52 cards in a deck; each is a week - 52 weeks in a year.
- The *four* suits represent the four seasons: spring, summer, fall and winter.
- Each suit has *thirteen* cards -- there are exactly thirteen weeks in a quarter.

Well, that works too, is pretty fun, and actually makes more sense than “The Twelve Days of Christmas.” We should not, however, suggest that playing cards were created as a secret way to communicate the gospel in a time when Christianity was illegal but card playing was not.

In the scripture, the Colossians are warned not to be deceived by “plausible” arguments. This Greek word “*pithanologia*” has also been translated “*enticing*,” “*persuasive*,” “*reasonably sounding*,” or “*well-crafted*.” While many “*facts*” or “*fun facts*,” even if “*false*” are pretty harmless, we live in an age where we need to be watchful that we take for “*fact*” things that sound good but don’t hold up to deep scrutiny.

Hopefully, as part of God calling us together, we can seek “*truth*” and “*real facts*” together without being contentious. It is wise to remember the words in Ephesians that encourages “*truthfulness*” as part of being in community not only in “*this season*,” but in “*all seasons*.”

<sup>25</sup> So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. <sup>26</sup> Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger <sup>27</sup> and do not make room for the devil. (Eph. 4:25-27 NRS)

Let us pray: *Thank you for the clarity of speaking to us through your Holy Gospel, and without it needing to be explained to us through hidden meanings or messages. Help us learn the essentials of faith and Advent/Christmas's message without relying on silly songs or playing cards, but only through your Word. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

You knew you would get this one:

*The Twelve Days of Christmas* by Christmas Songs and Carols (very traditional version)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyEyMjdD2uk>

*The Twelve Days of Christmas* by Pentatonix (it's own unique spin)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UHmQANFtNs>

...and a very silly version by Peter Hollens and Friends (no disrespect to the hidden meaning interpretation of the song.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QnQVTvYVJnQ>

and as a **most special bonus**... I can't believe I discovered a **Tex Ritter** recording describing playing cards as Bible and prayer book... similar to "The Twelve Days of Christmas" and as remembered by Pastor Ken.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LsCiaxPhtVY>

**St. Paul's In Your Home for Monday, December 20, 2022 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #446**

***Filled With Hope and Gratitude, another new Advent Song in All Creation Sings.***

*<sup>46</sup> And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, <sup>48</sup> for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; <sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. <sup>50</sup> His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. <sup>52</sup> He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; <sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. <sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, <sup>55</sup> according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever." (Lk. 1:46-55 NRS)*

Here's another new song in "All Creation Sings", our newest hymnal supplement. While it was first written by Paul Demico-Carper for the Holden Village Lutheran retreat center community in Advent, 2005, it is only now that it has a wider distribution through "All Creation Sings."

Therefore it is still "new", and because the composer is currently only 40 years old, that means he wrote this when he was just 24 years old. That backstory resonates with me, because when I was his age, I was also spending the winter at Holden Village. I worked in the kitchen however, and only sang what other people had composed. My time pre-dated the "new" green LBW hymnal published in 1978.

Damico- Carper's song is based on *Mary's Song* (the *Magnificat*) in Luke 1:46-55. Here are the lyrics:

1 Filled with hope and gratitude  
and filled with very God,  
I sing with soul and spirit exultation,  
for God has smiled upon the humble  
servant who will give  
her own sweet milk to Christ, the world's salvation.

2 God's eternal mercy, meant for all of humankind,  
is given as deliverance from oppression.  
The powerful and haughty find that they are  
now cast down,  
the lowly raised beyond this world's derision.

3 Hungry people eat good things and find  
an honored place:

the rich are sent away though they are hungry.  
The promise to our forebears God renews  
for us today;  
the world is filled with God's abundant mercy.

4 Filled with hope and gratitude and filled  
with very God,  
I sing with soul and spirit exultation,  
for God has smiled upon the humble servant  
who will give  
her own sweet milk to Christ, the world's salvation.

So here is another sweet reflection on the "*Magnificat*". It also reminded me of the "*Magnificat*" as we have sung it in "*Holden Evening Prayer*". "*Holden Evening Prayer*" was also composed as a gift to the Holden Village community when Mary Haugen resided there in 1986. Originally it was called "*Holden Vespers '86*", but since then become a very popular service shared in many churches. I'd be curious to find out more about Paul Damico-Carper's Advent service composed at Holden. As for now, all I could find was his own recording on YouTube as produced by "*All Creation Sings*".

Since it prompted thoughts about "*Holden Evening Prayer*" as well, I shall attach two videos of that service, including one done at Holden itself.

*Filled with Hope and Gratitude* by Paul Damico- Carper

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKDtg13Djkg>

*Annunciation* and *Magnificat* from Holden Evening Prayer composed by Marty Haugen and sung by St. Stephen's Lutheran Church.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79GlnqXpp1Q>

Holden Evening Prayer sung at Holden Village Koinonia Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0HMgj7UVAMg>

Holden Evening Prayer at St. John's Lutheran Church, Sacramento, CA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BUaV2cSEsl>

## St. Paul's in Your Home for Friday, December 24, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #447

### The best Christmas Carol NOT in our hymnal

<sup>15</sup> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us."<sup>16</sup> So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. (Lk. 2:15-18 NRS)

I won't keep you waiting. It's "***O Holy Night!***" (in my opinion, of course). There is also a very interesting story behind it.

In 1847, eleven years before St. Paul's very first Christmas Eve service, a small-town parish priest in France asked his friend Placide Cappeau de Roquemaure if he would write a poem for their Christmas Mass. While not a regular church goer, de Roquemaure agreed, and with Bible in hand he pondered Luke's nativity story. He composed his verses while riding on a bumpy road in a dusty coach on his way to Paris. Using Luke's gospel, he tried to imagine what it must have been like to witness the birth of the Christ child. What emerged was "*Cantique de Noel*," which means "*Carol of Christmas*."

That seems like a rather odd name for a poem. Wouldn't "*Poem of Christmas*" ("*Poeme de Noel*") be better? Perhaps the verses so moved him that he realized they belonged with a melody. That took him to another friend, a composer named Adolphe Charles Adams. A beautiful composition emerged, which is particularly interesting in that Adams himself had never been to a Christmas Mass and did not recognize Jesus as the Son of God (he was Jewish). The song quickly became popular.

It remained a French Carol, however, until American writer John Sullivan Dwight discovered the song and realized it needed to be translated and introduced to America. Unlike the French, however, Dwight noticed something about the song that really spoke to something he was passionate about: "*abolition*." Dwight strongly identified with the words in the third verse: "*Truly he taught us to love one another; his law is love and his gospel is peace. Chains he shall break, for the slave is our brother; and in his name all oppression shall cease.*" It may not surprise us that "*O Holy Night*" did not become popular in the Confederate South until long after the Civil War had ended.

Even though it has never been in our Lutheran hymnals, I learned through hymnary.org that the song has been printed in 47 other hymnals. I wonder of those who select hymns for congregational singing believed that as an "*irregular*" hymn, it is best suited for solo work.

Here at St. Paul's, "*O Holy Night*" has been one of Christmas Eve solos for many years. It continues to inspire us with both strong words and melody as we celebrate Christ's birth.

Attached to this devotion will some of the YouTube performances that have moved me, and I invite you to enjoy them as you prepare for Christmas Eve tonight. Blessings and Merry Christmas.

Let us pray. *For the wonder of this Holy Night, O God we give thanks. Thank you as well for all the writers, poets, and composers who amplify the Nativity with joyful songs of praise and thanksgiving. Amen.*

*O Holy Night* by Celtic Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ug7DjVvflrl>

*O Holy Night* by David Phelps

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ElJ0fiD0lkc>

*O Holy Night* by Home Free

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CO6OZIY-IYw>

*O Holy Night* by Il Divo (prayers for singer Carlos Marin, who died Dec. 20, 2021 of Covid complications)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a5j\\_XuATgRU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a5j_XuATgRU)

*O Holy Night* Jonathan Antoine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Mqe-v0w7w0>

*O Holy Night* by Josh Groban

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17kiIxsDc0>

*O Holy Night* by Celtic Woman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtFG6GfjTQ8>

*O Holy Night* by Emer Barry and Affiniti

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6tmkL4Gfwo>

*O Holy Night* by Kerrie Roberts (live)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDUg88d9Hbw>

*O Holy Night* by Kerry Roberts with lyrics

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjl1stjDVZ0>

## St. Paul's In Your Home for Tuesday, December 27, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #448

*Note: I had imagined this being ready for Monday morning, but it was not. So let's try for Tuesday.*

### Observing the Pope's Midnight Mass at St. Peter's Basilica 2021

*<sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see-- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup> to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." (Lk. 2:10-12 NRS)*

While waiting for me to get home from our 11:00 PM Christmas Eve service, my wife Rebecca tuned into the Pope's Midnight Mass at the Vatican. Rebecca shared that when she was a child, despite being Presbyterian, her folks always watched Christmas Eve Midnight Mass. She was supposed to be in bed, of course, but she remembers peeking around the corner into their living room and seeing her folks watching this on an old black and white TV.

Nowadays, most of us have big screen high resolution TVs, so watching the Mass is quite a visual experience. *"The Papal Basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican"* (full name) is nothing short of magnificent. We can now catch a lot of color and detail.

I can't imagine what the pope must go through in preparing his sermon for this night. The Basilica can hold 20,000 people seated and 60,000 standing, and this service is also televised all over the world. Millions are watching, including both Catholics and Protestants.

As Pope Francis delivered his sermon, the camera focused on him; you realize at age 85 he is an quite an elderly gentleman. His words were careful, measured, and humble. His style was far more reserved than many of the well-known TV preachers who also command large audiences.

One word stood out in the Pope's message: **"Littleness."** And with that word, much of the message can be remembered. In his message, the Pope noted the contrast emphasized in the Gospel, between the grandeur of the worldly powers when Caesar Augustus orders the census of the world, with the small town of Bethlehem where we see the scene of the newly born, poor child found in the manger.

The message of the nativity, the pope shared, is that *"God does not rise up in grandeur, but lowers Himself into littleness. 'Littleness' is the path God shows to draw near to us, to save us, bring us back to what truly matters."*

The pope then invited people of faith throughout the world to *"be amazed by this scandalous truth." The "one who embraces the universe needs to be held in another's arms."* The creator of

the sun needs to be warmed by human touch, and this divine *“tenderness incarnate needs to be cuddled.”* Echoing Mary’s Magnificat, human logic is turned upside down. *“God comes into the world in littleness. His grandeur appears in littleness.”*

Applying this to our current lives, the Pope then pointed out that the challenge of Christmas is to ask whether we can accept God’s way of doing things. God lowers Himself, and by contrast, we try to become great. God does not seek power and might; God asks for tender love and *“interior littleness.”*

He then encouraged everyone to ask Jesus for what he called *“the grace of littleness.”* We do this by inviting Jesus into our daily lives, our families, our communities, so that we can offer one another the same love He shows in coming to dwell among us, to serve and unite. He added, *“amid our ordinary lived experience, God wants us to do extraordinary things. His is a message of immense hope.”*

What a wonderful message. And it did not escape me that when the camera panned back to reveal the magnificence and size of that house of worship, with all its gilded gold and sweeping arches, the setting itself stands in sharp contrast to the message.

I was remembering how even the construction of St. Peter’s, begun at the time of the Reformation, was all about *“bigness.”* Indulgences were used for raising funds for the project, and that sparked Martin Luther to challenge the church for losing sight of the heart of the gospel.

But for all Luther’s problems with Pope Leo, I’m sure Luther would applaud Pope Francis for getting the meaning of the Nativity right Christmas Eve 2021. Luther would find unity in how the Pope concluded, *“Let us rouse ourselves, for tonight a light has been lit, a kindly light, reminding us that, in our littleness, we are beloved sons and daughters, children of the light.”*

I believe we can experience unity in that hope as well. Merry Christmas.

Let us pray: *Come to us in your littleness Lord Jesus that we might be your humble servants. Amen.*

Away in a Manger (Our Humble King) by Caleb and Chelsey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mxjvNueTLQ>

O Little Town of Bethlehem by Sara McLachlin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyPMDD8fGeA>

Infant Holy, Infant Lowly by Chris Rupp and Fox and Hound

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHGQcc4HHTU>

Infant Lowly (instrumental) by Concordia University Irvine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNt89vR25WM>

No Wind at the Window by Mr. Savidge (just discovered this)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lcuz2Hf5OZ4>

**St. Paul's In Your Home (Bonus Edition) for Wednesday, December 29, 2021 by Chaplain Bob Weeks #449**

*From Pastor Mark: I am glad to share another great devotion from Chaplain Bob, who noted that December 29 is the designated day of remembrance for the church's first martyr, St. Stephen. Chaplain Bob reflects on Stephen's powerful sermon in Acts 7.*

<sup>58</sup> Then they dragged [Stephen] out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. <sup>59</sup> While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." <sup>60</sup> Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died. (Acts 7:58-60 NRS)

**UNEXPECTED CONSEQUENCES OF A SERMON**

By

Chaplain Bob Weeks

One of my sermon professors told me, *"Young man, watch what you preach. It can get you in trouble."* As a matter of fact, there is a story in the Book of Acts about a young man who did not listen to such advice.

The young man was named Stephen. He had a Greek name and was a Hellenist (a foreign-born Jew who spoke Greek). He lived in Jerusalem and had become a Christian. He was a member of a group of converts who complained that care for elderly widows was lacking. This matter was presented to their congregation and the apostles were instructed to appoint seven deacons for this community service.

Stephen was one of the seven chosen and ordained for this service. As a result, Stephen engaged in religious discussions among the members of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Temple Priests learned of his discussions and became alarmed. He was summoned before the Sanhedrin (the supreme rabbinic court in Jerusalem) and charged.

The charge was: *"This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."* (Acts 6:13-14 NIV) They became horrified at Stephen's claim that Jesus Christ was the much awaited Messiah.

Then the High Priest asked Stephen, "Are these charges true?" Next comes the sermon that got Stephen in trouble. You can read the entire edition by going to Acts 7:2-53 NIV; however, I will report the major points as follows:

God called our father Abraham to go to the land He would show him. Abraham left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After his father died, God sent him to this land.

God did not promise a land inheritance, but he told Abraham that he and his descendants would possess the land.

God told Abraham that his descendants would be mistreated for 400 years, but God promised to punish the nation who caused them to serve as slaves. Afterward, the descendants would come out of the country (Egypt) and worship God in this place.

Then God gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision.

Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

The patriarchs became jealous and sold Joseph, but God gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain good will with Pharaoh of Egypt. Joseph helped his family survive a famine and later was united with his family.

As time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, another king took over in Egypt and dealt treacherously with the Israelite people forcing them to throw out newborn babies to die.

At that time, Moses was born and was taken care of by the Pharaoh's daughter. He was well educated and grew to be powerful in speech and wisdom.

An angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush, and Moses heard the voice of God say to him, *"I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."* God said to Moses, *"I have seen the oppression of my people (Israelites) in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt."*

Moses went back to Egypt, became the leader of the Israelites; led them out of Egypt to the Red Sea, and spent forty years with them in the desert.

Moses received living words to pass on to God's people on Mount Sinai, but our fathers refused to obey. Instead, they made an idol in the form of a calf and worshipped the idol with sacrifices.

As a result, God gave instructions for the construction of a tabernacle in which to worship.

Joshua brought the tabernacle with him when he and his people took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David. David asked that he might construct a dwelling place for the God, but it was Solomon who built the house for God

*“However, the most high does not live in houses made by men.”*

**THEN COMES THE “SO WHAT” OF THE SERMON:** Stephen told the priest and the gathered crowd -- *“You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears. You are just like your fathers. You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who persecuted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him -- you have received the law that was put into effect through angels, but you have not obeyed it.”* (Acts 7:51-53 NIV)

With this ending, the crowd took Stephen out of the city and stoned him to death. Even as Stephen died, he set a wonderful example by praying, *“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”* (Acts 7:60 NIV)

This sermon threatened long held beliefs. It meant that Christianity was not just another Jewish based sect but something entirely different. A New Covenant from God, replacing the old.

In the way Stephen lived and died, he catapulted the early Christian Church from the local Jerusalem across the entire world. Stephen’s influence was even stronger after his death. If you read the rest of the Book of Acts after Stephen’s reported death, you will learn that after Stephen’s death, the disciples were persecuted and scattered to all of the nearby lands. As the disciples scattered, the Gospel was spread.

A young man watching the murder was Saul of Tarsus, who would later be converted by Jesus and become the Apostle Paul. Before he was converted, however; Saul would persecute other Christians in the name of the Sanhedrin, causing the church members to flee Jerusalem taking the gospel wherever they went. Thus, Stephen’s execution began the spread of Christianity. This was the unexpected consequences of Stephen’s sermon.

December 26 each year in the Christian Church Year, we celebrate the life and ministry of Stephen, the First Christian Martyr.

Prayer: *We give you thanks, O Lord, for the example of Stephen, the first martyr, who looked to heaven and prayed for his persecutors. Grant that we may also pray for our enemies and seek forgiveness for those who hurt us, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and lord. Amen.*

*Let All Together Praise Our God* by St. Paul Lutheran, Austin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6xS9tt7cAA>

*Neither Death Nor Life* (M. Haugen) by Calvin Institute Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0vAhXMKK2c>

*It is well/I will exult Thee* by Celtic Worship and Worship and Praise Gathering

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGTjTrzPrs8>

*Jerusalem My Happy Home* by John Wesley Slider

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DoRIBMJGXSc>

*In the Bleak Midwinter* by David Phelps

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6xS9tt7cAA>

**St. Paul's In Your Home (Bonus Devotion) for Thursday, December 30, 2021 by Stan McLeroy #450**

*From Pastor Mark: Here's another "bonus" devotion by Stan McLeroy. It is a very different and creative take on one Christmas tradition, the practice of using "live" Christmas trees. Written from the perspective of the Christmas Tree, its anthropomorphism will likely provoke "food for thought," even if a bit "jarring" in its language and point of view. But I bet you'll see the tossed-out Christmas trees on the curbs this week in a new way. Blessings.*

**Tis the Season to Die**

By Stan McLeroy, ©2021

Mother, I will die soon. It might be several weeks from now, but most likely death will come much sooner. Already I can feel life slowly leaving me, like a tide that is beginning to ebb. These people that are killing me are so nonsensical, so hypocritical, so infuriating. That they would capture me and bind me and take me from my home enrages me.

I sometimes see in them tenderness toward each other, but it is a nearsighted tenderness that does not extend outward much further than their close-knit groups nor beyond the small plot of land they claim to own.

My ancestors lived long and useful lives, and I had hoped to do the same. Yet, because of these people I will die long before my allotted time on this Earth.

I am aware of things going on around me – thousands and thousands of little things – and as I weaken, I am caring less about them. But, Mother, I will try to share my thoughts with you while I still can.

In their dwelling places these people talk among themselves, and they listen to the flat people who speak to them from glowing boxes. I also have listened and have learned something of these people and their ways.

It is a season when many celebrate the belief that a Savior came from the Heavens 2000 years ago to walk among their ancestors, to speak the Truth, and to teach them the Way to live in harmony with each other.

And many of these ancestors did not want to hear his message and did not want others to hear it. But the Savior persisted, and so the resistant ones -- the angry ones, the selfish ones -- put this Savior to death.

They captured him and bound him and took him inside the building of their powerful one. And they stripped him of his clothing, and beat him, and put a hurtful wreath of sharp thorns on him.

They mocked him with words whose meaning was respectful, but whose tone and intentions were the opposite: "Hail! King of the Jews!" And they made him drag a wooden cross to the place where they murdered him in a slow and agonizing way.

They drove a metal spike thru his lowest limbs and into the cross, and they drove other spikes into the cross thru his upper limbs, and then planted the cross upright so that their Savior was forced to hang in that position, limbs outstretched.

And some of these people, for their own amusement, offered him undrinkable liquid, and another gouged a hole in his side with a spear. And the Savior hung suspended in that position until he died slowly of thirst and exhaustion.

And Mother, this is exactly what these people do to me. The cruelest irony of all, Mother, is that they use me to celebrate the birth of their Savior, and yet they treat me in a manner they profess to abhor the most: the same manner in which their Savior himself was murdered.

They have come to me when I am still just a child of the forest. They severed me from my primary means of obtaining food and water: my roots. They bound me in a tight net and dragged me by my still-oozing trunk across the ground and into and out of their trucks.

I was stripped of my natural clothing -- my birds nests and the thorny vines that protected them within my thick branches. I was beaten and made to drop my loose needles.

They transported me to a dwelling where one of their followers bored a hole into the bottom of my trunk. A metal spike was thrust into that hole, and I am now made to stand upright on that spike, with my limbs outstretched while I am fed with undrinkable liquids containing foul-tasting and unnatural aspirin and bleach.

What little plain fresh water I receive is almost useless to me without my roots. They force all manner of unnatural and artificial things onto me, most of which are ridiculous and have nothing to do with the life of their Savior; some are uncomfortable or hurtful: hot lights, tight clips.

And they mock me, in the same way that their resistant and angry ancestors mocked their own Savior: *"O Christmas Tree, O, Christmas Tree! How lovely are thy branches!"* The way they fuss over the impotent dying abomination they have turned me into sounds so sincere! Could it truly be adoration, Mother? To die like this, so young, for such a foolish pseudo-tradition that professes to celebrate this Savior's birth by reenacting his death is almost more than I can bear!

Mother, if these people had let me fulfill my destiny in maturity -- a life of 50 or 75 or 100 years or more -- I would have willingly given to them my wood -- my body -- for their use as lumber for their dwellings and implements.

And I would have willingly given to them my sap -- my blood --to create tar and turpentine and other useful products. But I could have also given them so much more: my life-giving breath.

All my life I would have breathed in the foul air that they pollute with their excess industrialization and their excess and inefficient travel. And I would have breathed out the clean air they need for their own lives.

I could have helped them save their beautiful snow-capped mountains from melting, and their coastal cities from flooding. All this for them, for their children, and their children's children.

I sprang from the Earth to save them, but they have no patience to accept or even to ascertain my motives. Without me, who will save these people from themselves?

I truly believe that many of these people do understand the folly of their actions, but do not care. But I believe there are many others who simply do not understand. So, until I am once again united with you in the embrace of your cool soil, I will pray to you in the way their Savior prayed:

Mother Earth, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

From Pastor Mark again: It was a bit of a challenge to find just the right songs to go along with this. I went with a few "Tree" themed songs, knowing full well that the "Christmas Tree" of the devotion would not "care" for all of them, and some of them not at all.

*Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery* by Connections Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mu-sSwvaOdM>

*Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery* by Peace Lutheran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tsoUTsfF7PY>

*The Tree of Life* by Shawna Edwards

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cv-dH5gHi1c>

*O Christmas Tree* by Pure Star Kids

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aBU7khh1-2o>

*O Tannenbaum* by Andrea Bocelli

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xww\\_oaafCBA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xww_oaafCBA)

*The Christmas Tree Song* by A.J. Jenkins

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfuTBGaEQ-E>

*The Dancing Christmas Tree* by A.J.Jenkins

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIr4uXAz-JM>

## St. Paul's in your Home for Friday, December 31, 2021 by Pastor Mark Opgrand #451

### Preparing for "Hurricane" Omicron

*<sup>25</sup> "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. <sup>26</sup> People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>27</sup> Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup> Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." (Lk. 21:25-28 NRS)*

We began our church year with this scripture read during the first Sunday in Advent. Anticipating the return of Christ is a major theme of Advent, and this text supports that. Coincidentally, the global pandemic has produced yet another Covid 19 Variant which remains on everyone's minds as we anticipate the beginning of new year 2022.

Because Omicron hasn't yet swept over us like it has in other parts of the world, we haven't significantly been affected yet. However, even the cancellation of five college football bowl games (so far) reminds that Omicron is an active (if not deadly for all) threat.

Since Advent began, each day has brought more news about the coming Omicron surge. It has eerily felt like preparing for a hurricane. With hurricanes, we first become aware they are forming miles away in the ocean somewhere. As they form, they move our direction and we track them, never being exactly sure when or where they will make landfall, or to what extent the damage will be.

As we prepare, we make choices. Some very early on avoid purchasing a home in an area prone to flooding. Some preemptively cut trees that are likely to fall on their houses. Other people tie down lawn furniture or purchase supplies such as water and food. Some purchase generators. Others leave town for a safer area. Everyone makes choices, prepares, and hope for the best. Even so, no one knows just how things will turn out until the hurricane has finally swept through.

Since the pandemic began, the whole country (and world) has been involved in making choices, and this has covered a wide variety of options. In our country, we are all now well studied in the debates over openings and closings, masks, social distancing, vaccines, tests, intubation, contagion etc. We have made choices, and now we wait.

Luke's times words remind us to be ready for distressing times. Luke's context was waiting for the Jesus to return, but it could apply to any situation where we are facing our own mortality.

Many, in death, have met Jesus before he returns for all. St. Paul gave us a good perspective on this when he wrote in Romans 14:

<sup>7</sup> *We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. <sup>8</sup> If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.*  
<sup>9</sup> *For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.* (Rom. 14:7-9 NRS)

Many times I have shared this scripture as someone prepares for a risky surgery or faces a serious life threatening illness. One of the great blessings of Christian Faith is that no matter what happens in the world or in our own personal lives, God is ready to fulfill all God's promises in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, we can be at peace, trusting that we are always in God's good hands. We live as fully as we can. We give back to God as we are blessed. We prepare for storms, viral or otherwise. And awakening to each new day, we give thanks for the precious gift of life, asking that we shall live it as the children of God we are called to be. Have a blessed new year (and be watchful).

*Let us pray. As we wait and wonder about what the future holds in the new year, and as we wait and wonder how the world will be affected by the Covid variants, bless us, O God that we do not lose heart or be so affected by fear and uncertainty that we lose sight of how each day we are given is a special gift. Bless the world in this new year with renewed hope. Give us patience and perseverance to press on, doing what we can, but always trusting you all the way. Bless all those who are on the front lines of caring for the sick, and bless those who keep doing the hard work of finding ways to keep our world healthy. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Auld Lang Syne* by Home Free

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFcSfqYqHs4>

*Auld Lang Syne* by Pentatonix

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziP9FJwInF0>

*Auld Lang Syne* by Choral Scholars of University College Dublin

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W\\_6Vs8pADrQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_6Vs8pADrQ)

*The Doxology (Praise God from whom All Blessings Flow)* by Heidi Nadine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBz7vuJ2b1A>

*The Doxology (Praise God from whom All Blessings Flow)* by Anthem Lights

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQUTvMtUhw4>

*The Doxology (Prai*

*se God from whom All Blessings Flow)* by First Hamilton CRCH

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUnQu8EuQHg>

*Amen, Amen, Amen* by Chicago Church of Christ (A wonderful review of the life of Christ)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bi3\\_b1npxh4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bi3_b1npxh4)

And so ends Volume 2 of St. Paul's in Your Home. For all who have read these devotions week after week (and now year after year) , thank you. I also thank those who have added to my devotions with their own. I'm looking forward to writing and sharing more in 2022.