

Lenten Daily Devotional



2026

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Welcome and Introduction

Welcome

On Ash Wednesday we begin the 40-day Lenten journey to the cross and empty tomb. It is time for renewal. We are invited to renew our intentions for prayer and a deep listening for God. Significant Gospel lessons from the Gospel of John will help us listen, so too a return to the Sacraments, gifts of God. All of this will be under the theme of “Common Elements of Home,” which is a continuation of our broader theme for this year, “Stories of Home.”

Please note that this devotional is meant to be used alongside a Bible. On weekends, you are encouraged to read the Gospel lessons and you will need the Bible to do so, as we did not print the full readings here. You can also utilize an online Bible and look up the text via an internet search engine. If you need a Bible, reach out to one of the pastors at Central.

Devotional Cadence

There is a cadence you will notice in these Lenten devotionals. Fellow members have written reflections on the theme of home, on one of the Gospel lessons, or on a sacramental insight from their lives. Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday we will dwell in the Gospel lesson for the weekend. Wednesday will be the hinge day when we begin looking toward the weekend, with the devotional and during the midweek worship service or the Lenten Bible study. Thursday and Friday we will ponder Lent, Sacraments, and the common elements of home. On Saturday we will reflect on the Sacraments through a portion of Luther’s *Small Catechism*. If this all is confusing, no worries, as you pause for the devotional time over these weeks you will pick up the flow!

Common Elements of Home

Every home is built around common elements: sustaining water, a nourishing table where people gather, food that nourishes, and a shared welcome. These common elements shape our daily lives and reveal God’s real presence.

In Holy Baptism, God claims us with water and word, naming us beloved and making us part of a household of faith. At the Lord’s Table, Christ feeds us with his own body and blood, gathering us into a communion that stretches across time and space. These are the means of grace that create and sustain a home for us.

These devotionals explore the common elements of home that Jesus reveals in remarkable lessons in John’s Gospel. Each of the Lenten Gospels is a window into the sacramental life we share. As we reflect on these Gospel lessons, some of the teaching of Martin Luther on the Sacraments, and the theme of common elements of home, we will listen for how God’s mercy renews and restores. We are invited to pay attention to how God meets us as we gather for worship and in the daily rhythms of our homes, our relationships, and our daily tasks.

May you rediscover that God’s home is in, with, and under your life. May this Lenten journey offer you rest and renewal in the One who makes a home among us and welcomes us into new life.

Lenten Daily Devotional

Ash Wednesday, February 18

We gather for worship today at noon or 7 p.m. In worship we begin with a time for confession, receive the ashes on our foreheads that are a reminder of our mortality, hear the promise of God's love, and celebrate communion. A soup and salad lunch follows the noon worship.

The Lenten Wednesdays that follow (February 25, March 4, 11, 18, and 25) are shaped by worship at noon and then a soup and salad lunch at 12:30 p.m., or the 6 p.m. Lenten Bible study that is offered in person or on Zoom. Plan to attend worship or the study as you are able in this shared journey of Lent.

Today, read the prayer of the day and reflect the words of imposition: "Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return."

Prayer of the Day

Almighty and ever-living God, you hate nothing you have made, and you forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and honest hearts, so that, truly repenting of our sins, we may receive from you, the God of all mercy, full pardon and forgiveness through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Thursday, February 19

A Devotion on Common Elements of Home

When I was in Confirmation, our pastor emphasized the significance of fasting and self-denial during Lent. He requested that we identify three things we would forgo and how we would fast. As anticipated, responses varied widely from lighthearted to sincere. Our group often questioned the pastor's tenets, and one student asked why the Lenten practice could not focus more on positive actions—such as engaging in good works or abstaining from negative behaviors like complaining or selfishness. This idea resonated with many in the class, but the pastor did not agree with that concept, and we were instructed to continue as originally directed. I know not all of us kept to what the pastor asked of us, some preferring to put a positive spin on Lent. I do know that the conversation left a lasting impression on me and has formed my Lenten practices to this day.

Some years ago, a widely circulated Facebook post attributed (though not verified) to Pope Francis suggested a similar perspective: encouraging individuals to fast not only from food, but also from negative attitudes such as indifference, selfishness, and anger. These recommendations closely reflect that discussion from my Confirmation class. Regardless of how you choose

to observe Lent, and whatever the source of the following suggestions, they are offered here for reflection:

- Fast from hurting words and say kind words
- Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude
- Fast from anger and be filled with patience
- Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope
- Fast from worries and have trust in God
- Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity
- Fast from pressures and be prayerful
- Fast from bitterness and fill your hearts with joy
- Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others
- Fast from grudges and be reconciled
- Fast from words and be silent so you can listen

Blessings.

Susan Troselius

Friday, February 20

Sacraments: Baptism

"You belong to Christ in whom you have been Baptized."

These are the lyrics to music sung at each Baptism at Central Lutheran Church. You may have sung along while you read these words. They are some of the words of hope and promise read and heard during the service of Baptism. Can you also hear the applause we offer as we welcome the newly Baptized? Familiar and joyous sounds!

"Into your hands, O merciful Savior, and in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection we commend your servant _____. Acknowledge, we humbly beseech you, a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own flock, a sinner of your own redeeming. Receive them into the arms of your mercy, into the blessed rest of everlasting peace,

and into the glorious company of the saints in light."

These are some of the words of commendation used at the end of a funeral service. The accompanying music is often muffled tears. I've never heard anyone applaud. These are also words of hope and promise.

I've ushered at a lot of funerals at Central over the years. I never hear applause at the reading of these words which come at the end of a funeral service. I sometimes imagine the cloud of witnesses singing with joy, and maybe even adding a round of applause, as the promises of Baptism are fulfilled.

Judith Hedman



Saturday, February 21

From the *Small Catechism*

Introduction

On these Lenten Saturdays we will pause to reflect on a portion of Martin Luther's teachings on the Sacraments. As you reflect on Luther's teaching, how is God at work in, with and under your life?

Martin Luther wrote his explanations for each of the core expressions of faith in 1529, after struggling with how little people knew about the essentials of faith. The catechism includes his explanations to the 10 Commandments, the Apostles Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, and the Office of the Keys. Luther's Small Catechism has been a standard for confirmation instruction in Lutheran Churches for centuries. Yet, Luther intended it for the home, for the daily life of the faithful at the kitchen table.

What is the Sacrament of Baptism?

Baptism is not simply plain water. Instead, it is water used according to God's command and connected with God's word.

What then is this word of God?

Where our Lord Christ says in Matthew 28, "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."

What gifts or benefits does baptism grant?

It brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it, as the words and promise of God declare.

Sunday, February 22

Today's Gospel: John 2:1-11

Introduction

You are invited to begin your devotional time with the prayer of the day, then turn to the Gospel lesson for this weekend. After time with the Gospel, the words for the hymn of the day for the weekend are offered for you to pray and ponder as you close your time.

Prayer of the Day

Lord God, source of every blessing, you showed forth your glory and led many to faith by the works of your Son, who brought gladness and salvation to his people. Transform us by the Spirit of his love, that we may find our life together in him, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Hymn of the Day: *Look Who Gathers at Christ's Table*

1 Look who gathers at Christ's table!
Hear the stories that they bring.
Some are weeping; some are laughing;
some have songs they want to sing.
Others ask why they're invited,
burdened by the wrong they've done.
Christ insists they all are welcome.
There is room for ev'ryone.

2 Clouds of light surround the table;
ancient followers appear,
saints confessing how they wrestled
with their guilt, their doubt and fear.
Peter tells of his denying
Christ was ever in his sight;
Paul relates his fruitless efforts
to obliterate the light.

3 Their sad stories are repeated
in a thousand different ways,
but they share one thing in common:
they all end in thanks and praise
for the host who has invited
north and south and east and west
to converge around this table,
where all life is fed and blest.

4 Bring your joy and bring your sadness,
and prepare to be surprised
by the host whose hands are wounded,
who will open wide your eyes
when he blesses bread and breaks it—
truth and manna from above!—
and then passes wine that wakens
in your heart the taste of love.

Text: Thomas H. Troeger, b. 1945

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Week One

Monday, February 23

A Reflection on the Wedding at Cana

The Gospel story we turn to at the beginning of Lent is this familiar tale of Jesus's first miracle, labeled "The Wedding at Cana." As an aside, I visited the purported site of this miracle a year ago during my trip to Israel and was struck by how out-of-the-way, down narrow alleys, in the midst of an ancient neighborhood, it was. Not a grand place at all, and here was where his ministry began.

I'm sure we all recognize the broad outlines of the miracle story. At the beginning, Jesus is with his mother and disciples at the wedding, when the wine gives out. The story ends with this surprising act as Jesus turns water into fine wine.

It's the interactions that happen in the middle of the story that I want to focus on. It's Mary who comes to Jesus with news that the wine has run out. And Jesus's reply is where I want to pause: "Woman, what concern is that to you and me? My hour has not yet come." Now, I don't know about you, but I've always heard this reply as a rebuke of Mary. Go away, Mom, this is not my problem – I'm all about bigger and better things.

But in a recent article, Jesuit theologian Michael Buckley, has suggested that there is a deeper and more nuanced meaning to Jesus's response. Mary does not make a request, she simply states a fact: there is no more wine. Jesus responds with a question that gets at the heart of his entire ministry – Buckley rephrases the response this way: "How do we include essentially within our lives those who we might otherwise forget as we go about the business of our lives." In other words, Jesus is noting in his question the truth that we are inextricably bound up with each other. To be concerned is to be truly human.

And the interesting thing is that Mary seems to get it. Instead of responding with some sort of moral argument for why Jesus should be concerned, she turns to the servants and tells them to do whatever Jesus tells them. She understands that the

concern Jesus has for the needs of others demands obedience, not arguments.

And here is the lesson for us in this story, here is the vocational challenge for faithful people. The gift of faith from our gracious God carries with it both Mary's statement that the wine is gone and the response Jesus gave to his mother: "What is this to you and me?"

Again, Buckley challenges us with this lesson for our contemporary lives in the world:

"Those parents who watch their children grow up without education, without much hope for a better life...they have no wine. The millions of aged, hidden away in our cities or in dreadful convalescent homes...they have no wine. The despised or feared or uneducated, whose lives are terrorized by the violence on our streets...they have no wine. Women demeaned and threatened by violence and their disproportionate level of financial insecurity...they have no wine."

And we could go on with the threats against our immigrant neighbors, the systematic racism in our country, the corruption in organizations and countries around the world...they have no wine. To which Jesus calls us to grapple with what concern this is to you and me, to recognize our common human experience, and to get to work as those called to follow him. Obedience, not arguments.

I love how this story is told as the beginning of Jesus's public ministry, because from here, from this claim that being concerned is at the heart of the life of faith, we then are offered lesson after lesson of what Jesus calls us to be and do. We are called to heal the sick, to free the imprisoned, to feed the hungry, to comfort the heartbroken, to fight for peace and justice for all God's creation.

So, back to Vocation 2.0. One the most distressing ways in which the theological concept of vocation

Monday, February 23 (cont.)

has been corrupted in the public discourse is the idea that a calling is simply a personal possession, unencumbered by the demands of others, and always it seems on an upwardly mobile life trajectory.

Well, no. The message we must proclaim for all to hear is your vocation, your calling, is never separated from the needs and aspirations of the communities and organizations and neighborhoods in which we live and work. Our callings are an obedient response to those who have no wine, because we are called to be concerned. No arguments, follow Jesus. We must reclaim the fact that at the core of our lives together in the world, our gracious and loving God intends for us to love each other as God loves us, to be concerned for

each other as our God is concerned for us.

And here's the cool thing about all of this as we return to our Gospel story. Jesus tells the servants to fill the jars with water, to then draw some out and take it to the chief steward, who then exclaims to the bridegroom: "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." The story ends with this powerful lesson. For those who follow Jesus, for those who are called to be concerned and do God's work in the world, the best, the very best, is yet to come. Thanks be to God.

Paul C. Pribbenow



Tuesday, February 24

A Reflection on the Wedding at Cana

In all the years I've been a member of the Central community, we have never run out of wine during the communion meal, not even on Easter Sunday or Christmas Eve. Our dedicated sacristans seem to be the modern day equivalents of the wine stewards at the wedding in Cana. Whenever we come forward for communion, we are served an abundance of grace and mercy as we hear the words, "the blood of Christ shed for you."

In contrast, at the Cana wedding, the hosts do run out of wine. Mary plays a prominent role in turning around that situation, while at the same time launching her son into his ministry. She's had many years to "ponder" the signs pointing to some great purpose for Jesus here on earth: from the greeting of the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation, to the adoration of the shepherds at her son's birth, to the gifts of the magi following the star, to the Song of Simeon at the time of presentation, to Jesus' precocious interaction with Temple teachers at the age of 12.

Mary seems to sense something that even Jesus is hesitant to recognize. What does he mean when he claims, "My hour has not yet come?" I don't know, but I do know that there will be many hours ahead for Jesus (three years worth according to historians) filled with acts of turning things around for people living at the margins. The blind will see, the lame will walk, the sick will be healed, little children

will be seen, the lost will be found, prodigal sons will be welcomed home, the temple tables will be overturned, and the dead will be raised to new life.

At the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus ascends to heaven, but I don't think of heaven as some far off inaccessible place. Heaven encompasses earth, and through the Gifts of the Spirit, Jesus continues to make his home amongst us mortals, walking with us through all the twists and turns of our daily lives. He shows up at all our important celebrations, from baptisms, to weddings, to funerals. Particularly at funerals, he does more miraculous turning, turning sorrow into joy as we remember we are claimed by God at our baptisms and are called by name at our deaths. Here at Central, at the conclusion of most funeral services, we recess to the open doors of the back narthex, and weather permitting, through the doors to the North Plaza, where we hear the Resurrection Peal from our bells in the tower. Then, we gather in the Great Room to be surrounded by more abundance, often with little sandwiches and cookies, but always with the abundant love of family and friends who have shown up to remember a beloved child of God. Thanks be to God.

(By the way, at Central, we have been turning water into coffee since 1919. It warms the soul.)

Ann Oyen

Wednesday, February 25

A Reflection on Nicodemus

Do you ever wonder about Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus that night. Was he ready for the conversation that would occur after he put on his coat, closed the door behind him, and wandered out into the darkness?

I love this story because Nicodemus clearly had questions about Jesus. He and the other religious authorities had seen and heard of Jesus' signs and wonders, but rather than asking a question, Nicodemus made a statement. He said, "We know you are a teacher who comes from God." It's almost as if Nicodemus wanted to set the stage. He wanted to make sure Jesus knew who was leading the conversation. Nicodemus approached Jesus as an authority, not as one who had come out at night who was vulnerable and seeking understanding.

Jesus' response is one of enlightenment and one that invited many questions. As the two of them stood there in the dark, dear Nicodemus was transformed from a religious authority with status to one who yearned for understanding and

belonging. "How can one be born after growing old?" he asked. Perplexed and disoriented, Nicodemus turned to Jesus for answers.

This is the beauty of our encounters with Jesus. Our intellect informs our understanding, and yet is it in the vulnerability of seeking Jesus that we experience the grounding and homing of God. It is in our vulnerability that we are connected, enlightened, and transformed.

Perhaps, this is an invitation to follow the path of Nicodemus. Maybe this Lenten season is a good time to let go of what we think we know and get curious about how and where Jesus leads us. How might we learn more from places of love and vulnerability, from postures of servanthood and humility?

Like his meeting with Nicodemus, Jesus meets us where we are and calls us toward a life of daily renewal and rebirth.

Pastor Stephanie Friesen

Thursday, February 26

Sacraments: Baptism

The bright star of Epiphany has come down from the vaulted ceiling of our sanctuary, but it's still with us, stored safely somewhere under the Great Room, or in the undercroft. A couple years ago, I spotted it in a back corner off the Free Store's sorting room. I'm not certain where it will be this year. I'm tempted to go on a treasure hunt, but that's not necessary. For I have an inner spark, a gift of my long ago baptism, still struggling to shine a light on a troubled world.

Especially during this somber Lenten season, I find my inner spark, my inner light, needs frequent kindling from the light reflected by those around me. Who and what kindles my light?

- Neighbors who notice my struggles with overloaded grocery bags and offer to carry them to the door
- The crew that reliably shows up to clear my walks of snow and ice after every winter storm
- The Minneapolis community which has organized in multiple ways to help people too afraid to leave their homes for school or work or shopping because of the presence of ICE

- The immigration attorneys who are seeking legal due process for those who have been detained
- The opportunity to regularly show up at church to worship and serve, to both contemplate and act
- The chance to confess my sins and then hear the pastoral declaration of forgiveness
- The gratitude of Free Store shoppers who find what they need on the shelves or racks
- Inspiring poetry set to music and sung by a choir, but also
- My grandmother's favorite hymns sung by the congregation (*What a Friend We Have in Jesus, I Love to Tell the Story*), and
- Mood setting orchestral works like Nimrod
- Meals with family and friends to mark a special occasion or just to be together
- Hugs from my grandchildren even though they're now young adults and much taller than I
- Opportunities to reflect my light back to others, for I have been blessed to be a blessing
- and many surprises yet to come.

Ann Oyen

Friday, February 27

Sacraments: Baptism

Usually being baptized in the Lutheran tradition is as a very young child. Passion can be described as a strong and barely controllable emotion. Passion can also be an intense desire or enthusiasm for something.

So, as you grow, you develop many passions as God places them in your heart.

The baptism is not just water, but Spirit through the water. I was young when I thought about nursing. I continued to work toward getting accepted into a nursing program.

In the clinical lab we learned to check vital signs, TPR (temperature, pulse, and respiration). Then we learned to check blood pressures. In learning to check blood pressures, we used a special stethoscope for two people; the instructor and the student could do it at the same time. I had a difficult time because I could not hear the pulse beats very well.

The morning the clinical became "live" I got to the nursing station; I was whiter than my bib and apron. In those days we had special uniforms. My instructor had me sit on a stool at the nursing station and told me not to move. As I sat there, my passion was disappearing before I even got started.

So, I sat there in a "Holy Still." My instructor came back to get me. She had found a female patient with a "bounding brachial pulse." The patient and instructor were very compassionate toward me. I was able to obtain blood pressure clearly and accurately. Everyone's face glowed with passionate success. It was a compassionate event. It has not been forgotten after so many, many years. My specialty practice was in the perianesthesia arena, where blood pressures were taken frequently.

Marie Wiegert

Saturday, February 28

From the *Small Catechism*

Introduction

On these Lenten Saturdays, we will pause to reflect on a portion of Martin Luther's teachings on the Sacraments. As you reflect on Luther's teaching, how is God at work in, with, and under your life?

The Sacrament of Baptism

How can water do such great things?

Clearly the water does not do it, but the word of God, which is with and alongside the water, and faith, which trusts this word of God in the water. For without the word of God the water is plain water and not a baptism, but with the word of God it is a baptism, that is, a grace-filled water of life and a "bath of the new birth in the Holy Spirit," as St. Paul says to Titus in chapter 3, "through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is sure."

What then is the significance of such a baptism with water?

It signifies that the old person in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily sorrow for sin and through repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.



Sunday, March 1

Today's Gospel: John 3:1-17

Introduction

You are invited to begin your devotional time with the prayer of the day, then turn to the Gospel lesson for this weekend. After time with the Gospel, the words for the hymn of the day for the weekend are offered for you to pray and ponder as you close your time.

Prayer of the Day

O God, our leader and guide, in the waters of baptism you bring us to new birth to live as your children. Strengthen our faith in your promises, that by your Spirit we may lift up your life to all the world through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn of the Day: *Baptized and Set Free*

1 We are people created,
chosen by God.
Then we're washed, ever gently,
in mercy and love.
Sin has power no more.
Jesus opened the door
to a fountain bringing healing,
and wholeness and more.

2 We are fed and we're nourished,
filled and refreshed.
Then our hunger returns and
again we are blessed.
For whatever the need,
God is greater indeed:
endless ocean, always deeper
than all of our need.

3 We are nourished by water,
all living things,
and by life that the Spirit
abundantly brings.
As we journey toward home,
may your presence be known:
precious river, ever-flowing,
now carry us home.

4 Now with praise and thanksgiving,
we join the song.
All are welcome! We gather
to sing loud and strong.
Not enslaved, but set free!
From now on, all will be
one in Jesus, one in water,
baptized and set free!

*Text: Cathy Skogen-Soldner, b. 1956
Text © 1999 Augsburg Fortress.*



Week Two

Monday, March 2

A Reflection on Nicodemus

Was the Pharisee Nicodemus a coward, coming to Jesus under cover of darkness? He didn't want to be seen visiting someone who the Pharisees were plotting against. Was Nicodemus brave, reaching out to someone the ruling authorities were plotting against and risking his position?

I sometimes find myself in the same predicament. Wanting to reach out, to help choose a new path for myself and this community. And I sometimes step back because the consequences seem daunting. Will I be alienated from friends or family? Do I want to give up my current situation for the unknown? Is it dangerous? The thoughts can be frustrating and immobilizing.

I'm thinking and writing at the end of January. Our community and the world are scary some days. We are fearful and determined in the same breath. Today, I read a short quote on Facebook from the Rev. Ingrid Rasmussen: God is "more interested in tending our dreams than in fueling our despair." It's like a light bulb turned on for me.

Whether we are brave or timid in our actions, God is there for us in our questions and certainties. God provides us a refuge fueled by love to be and become. God speaks to us through the words of others – family, friends, former students, sermons, music, late-night text messages, and phone calls.

We hear about Nicodemus again in John (chapter 19). He and Joseph of Arimathea helped care for Jesus' body after the Crucifixion. He provided tangible signs of love and support to Jesus' friends and family when their world seemed out of control and scary.

Dear God: Thank you for giving us the story of Nicodemus as an example. Thank you for being a safe home when our lives and the world seem out of control.

Judith Hedman

Tuesday, March 3

A Devotion on Common Elements of Home

Spiritual teacher, Ram Dass, said, "We're all just walking each other home." I love that image of mutual support for one another as we journey through life. I can think of many examples of people walking with me, making me feel like part of a caring community. My son touches base with seemingly insignificant things like Wordle scores and also with hugely helpful things like emptying and cleaning my condo for a sale. My adult granddaughters take time out of their busy schedules to gather at my home to bake cookies and fill me in on their lives. Central members welcome me on Saturday, Sunday, and Monday, and miss me when I'm not there. Spiritual leaders and the people in the groups they lead nurture my spiritual growth through deep listening and sharing. Jerry's former care providers at Pillars greet me by name, and sometimes with hugs, and ask me how I'm doing. Friends from the past, including couples, continue to include me in social outings. Friends join me in writing letters to legislators because they support my concern for those without a home. New acquaintances turn into friends as we listen to one another's stories. Almost daily, service providers, business people, and even strangers on the street surprise me with their best work, offers of assistance, or friendly smiles. I see God at work in all of these, whether they're aware of it or not. They are all helping to make our home on earth a beloved community, a glimpse of our final home with God.

Loving God, in gratitude, I ask you to guide me in being a loving presence to others in our shared journey through life. Amen.

Gayle Dustrud

Wednesday, March 4

A Reflection on the Woman at the Well

Two things stand out to me upon re-reading the story of the Samaritan Woman at the Well. The first is the sacredness of water. As creatures who walk *maq* (grandmother earth), we ought to appreciate the importance of water. We need it to survive, of course, as all living things do. But water is also sacred in the way it nurtures us in our mother's wombs, in the way it powerfully moves and shapes terrain, and the way it ties us to one another. Jesus even names water as a connection to our faith and to God – *living water*.

If you think about communities where water is scarce and/or access to it is limited, you might picture a place with the dry, hot summers of Samaria, where access to a well is tantamount to survival. The well becomes a gathering place where connections are made and information is shared.

This brings me to the second thing that stood out, which is a common element of home: invitation. Jesus invites the woman to engage with him and she in turn invites the people from her community to engage with her and with Jesus. All are welcome. And then, the Samaritans invite Jesus to stay.

Jesus is ever invitational and interested in building community. And it doesn't go unnoticed that he does all this, while recognizing and utilizing the sacredness of water. Do you feel water's sacredness at work in your community and life of faith?

Brenda Blackhawk

Thursday, March 5

A Devotion on Common Elements of Home

The greatest commandment, Jesus said, is to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Practicing that at home you'd think would be easy. After all, at home we are safe, loved, and have so much in common. Yet, we always have differences. I can remember my two-years-younger brother and I having many clashes in our teenage years, like after the time he put a snake in my bed. When we had a fight, I certainly wasn't thinking about loving him. After one big fight, our parents sent us out to the garage and told us not to come back in until we had kissed and made up. It took a while! Being the older sister and the practical one, I finally said to him, "OK let's get it over with." We gave each other a peck on the cheek and came back in. But as we grew up love was there and to this day we are close, despite our current religious and political differences.

We frequently experience differences in our relationships because we are all unique individuals. But love, God's love, accepts us as we are. So practicing the kind of love Jesus was talking about becomes an increasing challenge as our experience of "home and neighbor" widens. Home expands into our neighborhood, then it includes our school and work settings, perhaps another state or even a different country. With an expanded community come many more differences to challenge our capacity to love.

As a child of missionary parents in China, I was a prisoner of war and interned for two years during the Japanese occupation. Was I expected to love these armed soldiers who had taken all our possessions, made us their captives, and treated us roughly? Over time I learned one of our guards was a young father and he actually gave me a little doll. I didn't have to love what his nation was doing to my family and my country but I could show love to him.

I've learned that God loves us and calls us Beloved, because God's love is for us, not our behavior. And that's the model I hear God saying I can apply to my relationships with all the people in my life. I have come to experience God as my home and the world as my neighbor. I currently live in a community of people, many of whom hold very different views politically, yet I can choose to love them and show compassion for them as God's children.

May God, who IS LOVE, ground us in God as home and let God's love spread through me and through each of us to all our neighbors, no matter what they say and do.

Bobbie Spradley

Friday, March 6

A Devotion on Common Elements of Home

On the coldest days of winter, wisps of “sea smoke” swirl on the surface of the frigid but unfrozen waters of Lake Superior. Scientists and those smarter than I could explain this phenomenon, as well as why the mighty lake does not turn to ice, but it remains a beautiful mystery to me. While I have never resided on the scenic shores of Lake Superior, they feel to me like a part of my home.

On a recent trip to the North Shore, I watched the waves rhythmically crash over the ice-glazed stones that are frozen in place and time. I remembered that the Big Lake is a divine teacher. More than an impressive body of water, it is a reminder of awe and reverence. A confirmation that I am indeed a small speck of dust amidst the vast cosmos. The depths of those waters have been there long before me and will outlast my earthly existence without an ounce of effort. It is a reminder of continuity and connection. I know my grandparents admired the same shoreline that my own parents showed me how to appreciate when I was young. It is a reminder to breathe. The lapping waves on the shore do not mind the state of the world. They do not mind the news. They do not mind the anxieties of division and unrest. They only continue to flow. In and out, without effort, in a stable rhythm of equanimity.

So too is our breath. Each inhale complemented by an exhale. In and out. Emptiness and fullness, existing in harmony and wholeness that tells me we are held by God.

So when things feel hard, I remind myself to return to the waves of Lake Superior. I return to my breath. I return home.

Ben Berg

Saturday, March 7

From the *Small Catechism*

Introduction

On these Lenten Saturdays, we will pause to reflect on a portion of Martin Luther’s teachings on the Sacraments. As you reflect on Luther’s teaching, how is God at work in, with, and under your life?

The Sacrament of Holy Communion

What is the Sacrament of the Holy Communion?

It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ himself for us Christians to eat and to drink.

What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?

The words “given for you” and “shed for you for the forgiveness of sin” show us that forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament through these words, because where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation.



Sunday, March 8

Today's Gospel: John 4:5-42

Introduction

You are invited to begin your devotional time with the prayer of the day, then turn to the Gospel lesson for this weekend. After time with the Gospel, the words for the hymn of the day for the weekend are offered for you to pray and ponder as you close your time.

Prayer of the Day

Merciful God, the fountain of living water, you quench our thirst and wash away our sin. Give us this water always. Bring us to drink from the well that flows with the beauty of your truth through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Hymn of the Day: *For All the Faithful Women*

1 For all the faithful women
who served in days of old,
to you shall thanks be given;
to all, their story told.
They served with strength and gladness
in tasks your wisdom gave.
To you their lives bore witness,
proclaimed your pow'r to save.

2 Recall the outcast woman
with whom our Lord conversed:
Christ gave her living water
to quench her deepest thirst.
Like hers, our hearts are yearning;
Christ offers us his word.
Then may our lips be burning
to witness to our Lord.

3 All praise to God the Father!
All praise to Christ the Son!
All praise to God the Spirit,
who binds the church as one!
With saints who went before us,
with saints who witness still,
we sing glad alleluias
and strive to do your will.

*Text: Herman G. Stuempfle Jr., b. 1923–2007
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Monday, March 9

A Reflection on the Woman at the Well

“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done.”

“It is so good to see you!” What a welcome greeting! It resonates within us at a very deep level. It feels so good to be seen.

Many of us wish for someone who will see us, really see us behind the masks we wear, to see our hopes and dreams and needs, to see us and accept us as we are.

I met Firoozeh for the first time in a parking lot outside a writing retreat we were both attending. She took one long look at me and told me I was the most pained person she had ever seen. I was in deep pain but I’d put on my make up carefully, and dressed nicely. How could she do that, know me, at my core? My face, she said, revealed my deep pain. She saw me. The encounter was so powerful for both of us we stay connected. She didn’t tell me everything I’d ever done, which wasn’t a lot, really, but she saw through the façade I had constructed and, frankly, she moved me to seek help. It turned out that I had undiagnosed Parkinson’s Disease. I had been suffering not knowing why for months. It was such a relief to learn and receive the ‘miracle medication’ I desperately needed.

I still remember that moment, feeling shivers and thinking, wow, you see me to the core, like the woman at the well. I didn’t have that woman’s baggage but I did have a serious issue that needed attention. The experience had all the power of the sacred.

Jesus sees us. Jesus sees us all the way to our core. And he sees us with love. He sees us, and he tells us about himself. “I am the One, of God, I am the Spirit whom you seek. I see what you need. I will heal you.”

Jesus sees you and loves you unconditionally. No exceptions.

The woman at the well went nuts with happiness and relief and told everyone about Jesus. I get shivers remembering my encounter with Firoozeh and wonder, is God sending me to share this good news? Who in your world may be desperate to be seen, by you, by Jesus?

Jan Erickson-Pearson

Tuesday, March 10

A Reflection on the Woman at the Well

When Bob and I built our new house, in 1989, we had to be out of our old house Thanksgiving weekend. We could not move into the new house until December 23, three whole weeks without a home to call our own, and right before Christmas. We wondered where we should go, to a motel (Inn)? But then some good friends of ours called to say that, if we wanted to, we could stay in their cabin about a half hour north of us.

Yes, we wanted! This was such a blessing. The

cabin was cozy, looking out on a lake, now covered with ice and snow. When the moon shone on that expanse of frozen water, it was magical and felt like a gift from God. We felt at home there right away, completely furnished and sheltered from the elements. Our family was together experiencing a new adventure, and we were content.

It took more than three weeks to actually feel at home in our big new house. But, after moving all our belongings to the places that we thought we

wanted them, then moving them again, hanging pictures, filling the refrigerator, and hanging clothes in closets, it too felt like home, mainly because our family was together in one place.

When Jesus visited with the Samaritan woman, at the well in the city of Sychar, he had no place to stay. He was resting after a long journey and his disciples had gone into the city to buy food. Now Sychar just so happened to be near the land that Jacob had given to Joseph, to make his home there. It was Jacob's well! I don't think it was a coincidence that Jesus, just so happen, to stop at that well, which was Joseph's prior home, to rest his body. Jesus stayed two days in Samaria, at the

request of the inhabitants of that place, where Jews were loathe to set foot.

You see, Jesus made his home anywhere he laid his head, starting in a lowly stable, amongst animals and shepherds, and visited by kings.

He was comfortable among the least of us and the mighty.

We can also feel at home wherever others care about us and reside with us or where Jesus resides in us. I pray that we can all feel that.

Jesus has made his home in us, so that we can feel safe and loved and at home no matter where we lay our heads.

Bonnie Weisenburger



Wednesday, March 11

A Reflection on the Man Born Blind

One of the amazing physical attributes of being human is the gift of sight. How often we take our physical eyesight for granted. Likewise, spiritually, we may be easily blinded to God's constant presence in and around us amidst life's daily complications and uncertainties. The story of Jesus healing a man born blind offers powerful insight, primarily highlighting that both our physical and spiritual frailties are an opportunity for God to break through human blindness and suffering in miraculous ways. Suffering is not a punishment for sin, rather part of the human condition, an opportunity for God to reveal divine presence and healing power. It is well to note the man born blind neither sought Jesus out nor asked to be healed. Rather, it is Jesus who sees this man and simply invites him into a healing relationship. Jesus instructs him, and this man's simple act of

obedience allows for healing to take place. The man receives not only his physical sight but spiritual insight, as he comes to believe in the power of Jesus, both as healing presence and a spiritual guide for his life. Ultimately, this parable is about "enlightenment"; seeing differently through a new light. How do you see the world as a person of faith? How does your baptismal promise inform how you care for others and give care for God's creation? For more than simple physical health or bodily wellbeing, we acknowledge a constant spiritual need in trusting Jesus to open our eyes to His truth. Our response than, to expresses hope and healing to a world in the midst of despair, serving as a powerful sign of Jesus' claim to be the "light of the world."

Pastor Brian Gutzmann

Thursday, March 12

A Devotion on Common Elements of Home
External sounds and sights abound
Independent particles each responding to its own
quantum entanglement twin
They target my soul with laser-like precision
Seeking to dominate, control, submerge everything
including
The God Particle within my soul.
Placed there by God during Baptism.
It is my Homing Beacon
It only responds in entanglement precision to
God's Particle
The God Particle is everywhere at once.
Across all space and time.
In perfect quantum entanglement with my soul.
God's Homing Beacon.
All Day and all Night.
The God Particle in my soul
Quivers in response to this perfect Homing Beacon
"Yahweh is Here."

Caron Porthan



Friday, March 13

Sacraments: Holy Communion

When we gather at the Lord's Supper, there are overtones and undertones of being home in God. I believe a meal no matter how large or small reminds us of home and brings us a sense of home. I remember visiting my Aunt Polly's home out in the country, not far from Ashby, MN. I knew that there would be a meal when I arrived and coffee and some sort of sweet treat before I left. I felt at home there. I am at a point in my life when I hear the words in the communion liturgy: "And so with the Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven..." my hope and sense of home soars to think that at this meal, whenever served, I'm home. I'm home with my parents, my sister, my in-laws, my friends, my Aunt Polly, and all who have died, they are at this table with me and I am home, around a table with bread and wine hosted by the Lord himself, just like my Aunt Polly. The real miracle is that all of us are welcome at this meal at home with God. The table is set and there is a place for everyone. Everything is so different from what we might have thought or even feared that because of who we are or what we had done we might not be welcome at this table in this home. The great news is Jesus invites us and welcomes us today and forever to share this meal in this home. The ultimate secret of all of this is this: we have a home in God and our place in it is both here and coming, both within us and beyond us. God's meal, God's table, God's home is the promise of a life now and a life to come.

Glenn Nycklemoe

Saturday, March 14

From the *Small Catechism*

Introduction

On these Lenten Saturdays, we will pause to reflect on a portion of Martin Luther's teachings on the Sacraments. As you reflect on Luther's teaching, how is God at work in, with, and under your life?

The Sacrament of Holy Communion

How can bodily eating and drinking do such a great thing?

Eating and drinking certainly do not do it, but rather the words that are recorded: "given for you" and "shed for you for the forgiveness of sin." These words, when accompanied by the physical eating and drinking, are the essential thing in

the sacrament, and whoever believes these very words has what they declare and state, namely, "forgiveness of sin."

Who, then, receives this sacrament worthily?

Fasting and bodily preparation are in fact a fine external discipline, but a person who has faith in these words, "given for you" and "shed for you for the forgiveness of sin," is really worthy and well prepared. However, a person who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, because the words "for you" require truly believing hearts.

Sunday, March 15

Today's Gospel: John 9:1-41

Introduction

You are invited to begin your devotional time with the prayer of the day, then turn to the Gospel lesson for this weekend. After time with the Gospel, the words for the hymn of the day for the weekend are offered for you to pray and ponder as you close your time.

Prayer of the Day

Bend your ear to our prayers, Lord Christ, and come among us. By your gracious life and death for us, bring light into the darkness of our hearts, and anoint us with your Spirit, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn of the Day: *We Come to You for Healing, Lord*

1 We come to you for healing, Lord,
of body, mind, and soul,
and pray that by your Spirit's touch
we may again be whole.

2 As once you walked through ancient streets
and reached toward those in pain,
come, risen Christ, among us still
with pow'r to heal again.

3 You touch us through physicians' skills,
through nurses' gifts of care,
and through the love of faithful friends
who lift our lives in prayer.

4 When nights are long with wakefulness,
through days when strength runs low,
grant us your gift of patience, Lord,
your calming peace to know.

5 We come to you, O loving Lord,
in our distress and pain,
in trust that through our nights and days
your grace will heal, sustain.

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Week Four



Monday, March 16

A Reflection on the Man Born Blind

“He was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him” (John 9:3). So, God, you make his parents feel guilty because they think they sinned? The man is forced to beg and live at the edges of the community? After regaining his sight, he is doubted and called a liar. There is tension between him and his parents? Surely, God, you had ways to reveal yourself rather than torment this man and his parents.

Yes, tormented. My cousin became deaf in 1928 because there were no antibiotics to cure his ear infection. His parents, even at the age of 90+, felt the torment of “we didn’t do enough.” Rightly interpreted or not, they took this parable into their hearts and lived with guilt.

My cousin was a gift to our family who taught us so many things. Patience when it was hard to communicate. Inventiveness to include him in a world full of sound. The ability to recognize birds by their flight patterns not by their songs. Sadness when he touched a record player to see if it was on yet never heard a Christmas carol.

I guess God found a way for my cousin who was deaf to show our family how to love those who were “different,” to advocate for services for him, to be able to hear our world with thankfulness. I understand the metaphor of being able to hear or see in new ways but really, God, couldn’t you have found another way? Couldn’t we all?

Dear God: Thank you for my cousin who taught me to hear with my heart.

Judith Hedman

Tuesday, March 17

A Reflection on the Man Born Blind

One of the most beloved hymns invites us to ponder one common element of life: our sight. In the healing of the man born blind, Jesus reveals that he comes to heal our physical sight but also our spiritual sight. John Newton’s famous verses of Amazing Grace invite us to ponder both our physical sight and spiritual sight.

Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound

1 Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
was blind, but now I see.

2 ‘Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed!

3 Through many dangers, toils, and snares
I have already come;
’tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.

4 The Lord has promised good to me;
his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.

Text: John Newton, 1725-1807

Wednesday, March 18

A Reflection on the Resurrection of Lazarus

“If you had been here...” both Mary and Martha say to Jesus when he responds to their call to come because their brother is very ill. Lazarus has died. He was with them at home. A home where Jesus had eaten, a home where Jesus had taught them, a home where Jesus had laughed with them.

A well known prayer in the American Black Church used in the morning says, “I thank you Lord that the four walls of my room was not my grave, that my bed was not my cooling board, and my cover was not my winding sheet.” For Lazarus his bed had become his cooling board and his sheets had become the cloth used to bind him.

In death, the very things of home that have supported us and comforted us in our lives become of no use to us. Death strips us of possessions, attachments, and connections. We look at the things our beloved dead have left behind with sadness and longing for a return, for a reunion. Heather Maloney sings in her song, *All in Your Name*:

*“Ain’t that your jacket in the mudroom?
Ain’t those your shoes there by the door?
You never left the house without them.
Now you don’t need them anymore.”*

When the reality of Lazarus’ death hits Jesus full force. He weeps. He cries for his friend. He cries for all the love they have shared. Jesus also knows that this isn’t the end of Lazarus. Jesus knows that he will raise him from the dead. That we all will be raised from the dead. That death will not have the last word for any of us. And he still cries. So, we get to cry too.

The tears on our cheeks in the face of death are like a tiny baptism in the face of such loss. We believe and trust in Jesus’s words of resurrection and reunion, and we are washed anew in those promises of everlasting life that were made to us in our first baptism and we claim in our death.

It is not unheard of for people who are dying to ask to go home. Rarely do they mean back to their specific four walls, or back to their bed, or back under the soft covers. They ask for Jesus to come so that they, like Lazarus, can go home with Christ.

Pastor Melissa Pohlman

Thursday, March 19

A Devotion on Common Elements of Home

My mom sectioned grapefruit for my dad almost every day. She always stood to the left of the kitchen sink and purposefully cut the grapefruit in half and then carefully cut around the membranes of the fruit so they were easily scooped out of their self-contained citrus bowl.

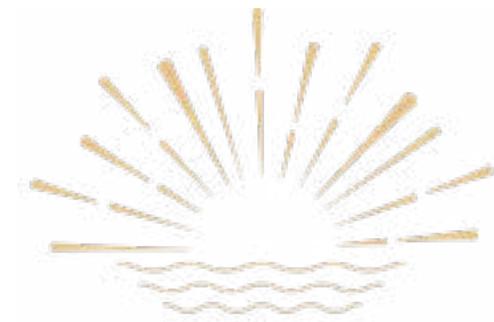
The knife that she so carefully cut grapefruit and peeled apples with bears her spirit and it lives in my kitchen among all the other utensils I use for food prep and cooking. The paring knife is worn, and when I grasp the handle and get it situated just right between my thumb and forefinger, I can almost feel my mom’s hand on my shoulder and hear her voice.

In the same ways that water, bread, and wine so organically situate us in God’s love and Jesus’ presence, so too are the many treasures and images of home that call us to remember the goodness of God and the emotional grounding of a place that holds us. Often, it is in the presence of these objects that we remember that we are beloved and holy.

What are the objects, the images, or the practices that hold you? Perhaps it’s a table grace or a nighttime prayer. Perhaps it’s a painting or a photograph. Perhaps it’s a bowl or a cross or a Bible.

Whatever it is that holds and grounds you as beloved and holy, consider this invitation to offer a prayer of thanks today. You can pray with thanksgiving for the object or practice itself and you can pray for the people and experiences that come to mind as you pause in reflection.

Pastor Stephanie Friesen



Friday, March 20

Sacraments: Confession and Forgiveness

"If we confess our sin, the One who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

It is hard to imagine human relationship without forgiveness being asked of us from time to time. Christian community, although surrounded by God's blessing, is also vulnerable to frailty and misunderstanding. Although we commit to modeling the life of Christ, at times we hurt others or have felt hurt by the others, regretfully a source of suffering. Socrates said, "the unexamined life is a life not worth living." Self examination is a sacramental source of healing; sharing one's

private burden with another person or directly with God in worship. Within our Lutheran tradition, the act of corporate confession allows us to name our weakness, admit hurtful ways, share vulnerabilities, and open ourselves to God's unconditional and unending forgiveness. Confession reminds us that we do not have to be perfect. Where might confession be needed in your life today? Forgiveness is characterized by a sense of renewed opportunity to start again in daily life and relationships. The invitation awaits to release the guilt, find renewal, and ultimately experience forgiveness as a way of "coming home" to the true self God created you to be.

Pastor Brian Gutzmann



Saturday, March 21

From the *Small Catechism*

Introduction

On these Lenten Saturdays, we will pause to reflect on a portion of Martin Luther's teachings on the Sacraments. As you reflect on Luther's teaching, how is God at work in, with, and under your life?

The Sacrament of Confession and Forgiveness

What is confession?

Confession consists of two parts. One is that we confess our sins. The other is that we receive the absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God himself and by no means doubt but



firmly believe that our sins are thereby forgiven before God in heaven.

Which sins is a person to confess?

Before God one is to acknowledge the guilt for all sins, even those of which we are not aware, as we do in the Lord's Prayer. However, before the pastor we are to confess only those sins of which we are aware and which trouble us.

Which sins are these?

Here reflect on your walk of life in light of the Ten Commandments: whether you are father, mother, son, daughter, master, mistress, servant; whether you have been disobedient, unfaithful, lazy, whether you have harmed anyone by word or deed; whether you have stolen, neglected, wasted, or injured anything.

Sunday, March 22

Today's Gospel: John 11:1-45

Introduction

You are invited to begin your devotional time with the prayer of the day, then turn to the Gospel lesson for this weekend. After time with the Gospel, the words for the hymn of the day for the weekend are offered for you to pray and ponder as you close your time.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, your Son came into the world to free us all from sin and death. Breathe upon us the power of your Spirit, that we may be raised to new life in Christ and serve you in righteousness all our days, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn of the Day: *God, When Human Bonds Are Broken*

1 God, when human bonds are broken
and we lack the love or skill
to restore the hope of healing,
give us grace and make us still.

2 Through that stillness, with your Spirit
come into our world of stress,
for the sake of Christ forgiving
all the failures we confess.

3 You in us are bruised and broken:
hear us as we seek release
from the pain of earlier living;
set us free and grant us peace.

4 Send us, God of new beginnings,
humbly hopeful into life.
Use us as a means of blessing:
make us stronger, give us faith.

5 Give us faith to be more faithful,
give us hope to be more true,
give us love to go on learning:
God, encourage and renew!

Text: Fred Kaan, b. 1929

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Monday, March 23

A Reflection on the Resurrection of Lazarus

The tepid waters splashed inward giving of great waves; then they waited. The waters waited. To see, to hear, what way there was. “Calm,” he said, “Lazarus was asleep.” Then there was a tumult in the waters. A churning. He then said Lazarus had died. At this, the waters became choppy.

When they arrived, the sisters of Lazarus, Mary and Martha, carried great sadness. He attempted to assure them it seemed. Then the waters were curious, yet wary. He kept the current and prayed words in front of them all. The waters now were uneasy.

Weeping for his friend. Doubtless, met his end. Countless things they would have said. The regrets and questioning. Wait here go, go don't wait. Thomas ponders the same fate. Mary wonders why so long. Martha moans, the funeral song. Community all gathers around. Jesus bellows, “Come out, come out.” Lazarus comes, a'shuffling

out. Gasps, they ripple through the crowd. The voice, and time, had become slow. “Unbind him now, and let him go.”

In Palestine and Ukraine, at their home - unbind them and let them go.

Venezuela and Greenland, at the home - unbind them and let them go.

They come from Somalia, South Korea, Cuba, and Mexico that this may be home – unbind them and let them go.

All of us, our globe on loan, God unbinds us to be a home.

And the light and the color collided with the water, a kaleidoscope, in, with, and under the water.

Ben Longman

Tuesday, March 24

A Devotion on Common Elements of Home

That feeling of being at home can happen anywhere and come as a surprise. It's a feeling that I don't want to be anywhere else, doing any other thing at that moment. It just feels like home.

For me it has been in quiet places: a summer night on my Grandparent's farm listening to the crickets, or sitting along River Road watching the water. And it has been in incredible places: silently biking in the rain through rural Holland, or lighting a candle in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

On Sunday mornings it can happen during the quiet moment after a sermon where we let the words fall over us, or when the organ drops out and congregation sings “Beautiful Savior” in parts, even saying The Lord's Prayer with the entire congregation and hearing the perfect cadence of the words. It is just where you want to be at that moment; nowhere else. It is home.

May we all find those special moments of feeling at home during Lent as we wait to celebrate the Risen Lord.

Sara Klomp

Wednesday, March 25

A Reflection on Common Elements of Home

Palm Sunday has the flavor of a homecoming for Jesus. As a tiny baby he was brought to Jerusalem and to the temple for his dedication. He stayed behind when he was a child after a visit to the temple, and he told his parents when they found him, "Did you not know that I must be in my father's house?" As an adult Jesus visits the temple in Jerusalem to teach and to heal and to call people to justice. He watches the widow give her tiny penny's worth of offering. He turns over the table of the money changers and the dealers of sacrificial animals. He opens the outer courts of the temple so that folks on the margins could have access to his father's house again.

Jesus tells us that the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but he has nowhere. Even his hometown from his growing up years has refused to welcome him, and after he preached, the residents tried to throw him off the cliff outside of town. Home is not always a welcoming place. The closest thing Jesus has to a home during his ministry is the temple in Jerusalem. He never sleeps there, but it calls him and he returns to it over and over.

Jesus knows where all this healing and teaching and feeding ministry is going to lead him. It will take him back home: to Jerusalem and to the temple. He eats the Passover meal with his friends in the city, and after his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, he is taken to the high priest who lived very near the temple. They will question him and beat him and trade him from one authority to the next until everyone in power has washed their hands of him. Outside of Jerusalem is where he will be killed. The curtain of the temple is torn in two when he dies.

Jesus is raised on Easter morning to prove to us once again that home is where he is. Home is where your heart resonates with the deep needs of God's people. Home is wherever Jesus sends you to do the work he has placed on your hearts. Home is in the midst of his people.

Pastor Melissa Pohlman



Thursday, March 26

A Reflection on Lent

Why do we pray to the unknown god that masks our souls to deceive our minds to the peace and understanding of the eternal? A prayer to live our lives in but a moment where we can hide from all our pain but never heal.

To follow the path of an illusion of heaven on earth of a life without lessons, without cares, and only blame. Our delusions of never failing, always being

in the right and never reconciling to share the peace with our neighbors and family.

Dear Christ, encourage us to breath and awaken our souls to reconcile our minds to life around us. Encourage us to breath each breath of a life where you are present to affirm our faith and live a life of gratitude for all your blessings. Amen.

Bill Nicol

Friday, March 27

A Reflection on Lent

The Lenten Journey can be a challenging path to walk. It is predictable to get off track and find ourselves lost. A directional guide to help is Luther's *Small Catechism*. We can get continual help by turning to the Apostles' Creed.

The second article of the creed can ground us as we walk with Jesus during these 40 days.

"I believe in Jesus Christ our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell, on the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father."

The second article of the creed focuses on the major elements of the Jesus story. Each of the beliefs is rooted in scripture.

Matthew 3:17 - a voice shouts out from Heaven, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Luke 23 - Jesus was arrested by Pilate, which led to His death by Crucifixion.

Matthew 28 - we hear the story of Jesus' resurrection and ascension into heaven.

Luther goes on to explain the meaning of the Apostles' Creed:

"Jesus is a true human being, born of the virgin Mary and is our Lord. Jesus has purchased freedom from all sins, death and the power of the devil with his precious blood, innocent death and suffering. Jesus has done all of this that we might belong and live in the Kingdom of God. Now we can serve Jesus with innocence and blessedness."

This part of the Apostles' Creed brings us to the place of Jesus' humanity and divinity. This Lenten journey blends our walk with the path that Jesus took.

A path of living, teaching and dying so that we may rise and be saved.

Praying together, direct us, Almighty God, in all that we do and give us your continual help. Grant that we who walk with you will be born into new life through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Daniel Carlson

Palm Sunday Weekend, March 28-29

Saturday, March 28 Reading: Matthew 21:1-11

Sunday, March 29 Reading: Matthew 27:11-54

Holy Week Begins

You are invited to begin your devotional time with the prayer of the day. On Saturday, read the Palm Sunday Gospel lesson that will guide evening worship and begin worship on Sunday; it is the account of Jesus entry into Jerusalem. On Sunday, read the Passion Gospel from Matthew; it is the account of Jesus death on the cross. After time with the Gospel, pray and ponder over the processional hymn for the weekend as you close your time.

Prayer of the Day

Everlasting God, in your endless love for the human race you sent our Lord Jesus Christ to take on our nature and to suffer death on the cross. In your mercy enable us to share in his obedience to your will and in the glorious victory of his resurrection, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn of the Day: All Glory, Laud, and Honor

Refrain:

All glory, laud, and honor
to you, redeemer, king,
to whom the lips of children
made sweet hosannas ring.

1 You are the king of Israel
and David's royal Son,
now in the Lord's name coming,
our King and Blessed One. (*Refrain*)

2 The company of angels
are praising you on high;
creation and all mortals
in chorus make reply. (*Refrain*)

3 The multitude of pilgrims
with palms before you went;
our praise and prayer and anthems
before you we present. (*Refrain*)

4 To you, before your passion,
they sang their hymns of praise.
To you, now high exalted,
our melody we raise. (*Refrain*)

5 Their praises you accepted;
accept the prayers we bring,
great author of all goodness,
O good and gracious King. (*Refrain*)

Text: Theodulph of Orleans, 760-821; tr. John Mason Neale, 1818-1866, alt.





Holy Week

Monday, March 30

Holy Week

Welcome and Invitation

These are the final days of this Lenten journey. There is a simplicity called for here in Holy Week. God meets us in the common elements of our lives, inviting deep listening and preparation for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. Each day here in Holy Week you are invited to meditate on one verse of Brian Wren's remarkable hymn. When you are ready, offer your prayers to God and conclude with the verse for today.

Great God, Your Love Has Called Us

1 Great God, your love has called us here
as we, by love, for love were made.
Your living likeness still we bear,
though marred, dishonored, disobeyed.
We come, with all our heart and mind
your call to hear, your love to find.

Text: Brian A. Wren, b. 1936

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Tuesday, March 31

Holy Week

Welcome and Invitation

These are the final days of this Lenten journey. There is a simplicity called for here in Holy Week. God meets us in the common elements of our lives, inviting deep listening and preparation for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. Each day here in Holy Week you are invited to meditate on one verse of Brian Wren's remarkable hymn. When you are ready, offer your prayers to God and conclude with the verse for today.

Great God, Your Love Has Called Us

2 We come with self-inflicted pains
of broken trust and chosen wrong,
half-free, half-bound by inner chains,
by social forces swept along,
by powers and systems close confined
yet seeking hope for humankind.

Text: Brian A. Wren, b. 1936

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Wednesday, April 1

Holy Week

Welcome and Invitation

These are the final days of this Lenten journey. There is a simplicity called for here in Holy Week. God meets us in the common elements of our lives, inviting deep listening and preparation for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. Each day here in Holy Week you are invited to meditate on one verse of Brian Wren's remarkable hymn. When you are ready, offer your prayers to God and conclude with the verse for today.

Great God, Your Love Has Called Us

3 Great God, in Christ you call our name
and then receive us as your own
not through some merit, right, or claim,
but by your gracious love alone.
We strain to glimpse your mercy seat
and find you kneeling at our feet.

Text: Brian A. Wren, b. 1936

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Maundy Thursday, April 2

Gospel Reading: John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Welcome and Invitation

This is the final day of this Lenten journey. You are invited to meditate on and offer this verse of Brian Wren's remarkable hymn. When you are ready, offer your prayers to God and conclude with the verse for today.

You are invited to worship at noon for a simple Holy Communion service. You are invited to worship at 7 p.m. for the service of foot or hand washing and Holy Communion. Please note that

there is no soup and salad luncheon after the noon service in Holy Week.

Great God, Your Love Has Called Us

4 Then take the towel, and break the bread,
and humble us, and call us friends.
Suffer and serve till all are fed,
and show how grandly love intends
to work till all creation sings,
to fill all worlds, to crown all things.

Text: Brian A. Wren, b. 1936

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Good Friday, April 3

Gospel Reading: John 19: 23-42

Welcome and Invitation

It is Good Friday, God's Friday. You are invited to begin by meditating on the crucifixion as recorded by John. Take time to listen deeply for God's abiding presence in this deep moment of the common elements of home. When you are ready, offer your prayers to God and conclude with this final verse in Brian Wren's remarkable hymn.

Today at Central, you are invited to Good Friday worship at noon or 7 p.m.

Great God, Your Love Has Called Us

5 Great God, in Christ you set us free
your life to live, your joy to share.
Give us your Spirit's liberty
to turn from guilt and dull despair,
and offer all that faith can do
while love is making all things new.

Text: Brian A. Wren, b. 1936

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Holy Saturday, April 4

Readings: Genesis 1:1–2:4a, Baruch 3:9-15,
32–4:4, Ezekiel 36:24-28, and Daniel 3:1-29

Welcome and Invitation

Today is Holy Saturday. It is the day between the death of Jesus and his resurrection on Easter. Tonight, we gather at 5 p.m. for the Easter Vigil, a service of light, readings, baptism, and communion. For your devotional time today, the readings for this year's vigil are shared for you to ponder, as well as one option for the prayer of the day.

Prayer of the Day

O God, you are the creator of the world, the liberator of your people, and the wisdom of the earth. By the resurrection of your Son free us from our fears, restore us in your image, and ignite us with your light, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Easter Sunday, April 5

Gospel Reading: John 20:1-18

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

The good news rings out for us and we join in singing our alleluias. For devotional time, you are invited to pause today and offer one option for the prayer of the day and then read the Easter account from John's Gospel. Close your time with the verses for the great Easter hymn: "Jesus Christ is Risen Today!"

Prayer of the Day

God of mercy, we no longer look for Jesus among the dead, for he is alive and has become the Lord of life. Increase in our minds and hearts the risen life we share with Christ, and help us to grow as your people toward the fullness of eternal life with you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

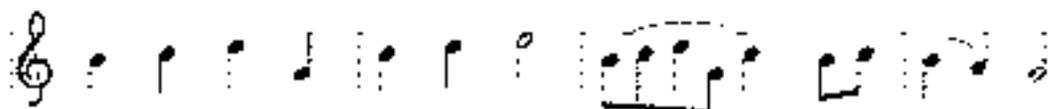
Jesus Christ Is Risen Today



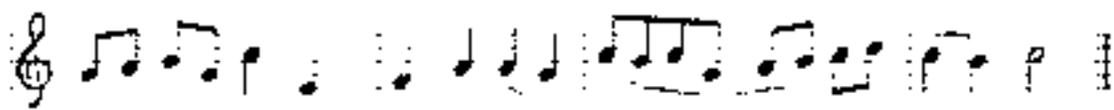
1 Je - sus Christ is ris'n to - day, Al - le - lu - ia!
2 Hymns of praise then let us sing. Al - le - lu - ia!
3 But the pains which he en - dured. Al - le - lu - ia!
4 Sing we to our God a - bove. Al - le - lu - ia!



our tri - um - phant ho - ly day. Al - le - lu - ia!
un - to Christ, our heav'n - ly king. Al - le - lu - ia!
our sal - va - tion have pro - cured: Al - le - lu - ia!
praise e - ter - nal as his love: Al - le - lu - ia!



who did once up - on the cross. Al - le - lu - ia!
who en - dured the cross and grave. Al - le - lu - ia!
now a - bove the sky he's king. Al - le - lu - ia!
praise him, al - ya! heav'n - ly host. Al - le - lu - ia!



sub - ter to re - deem our loss. Al - le - lu - ia!
sin - ners to re - deem and save. Al - le - lu - ia!
where the an - gels ex - ce - sing. Al - le - lu - ia!
Fa - ther, Son, and Ho - ly Ghost. Al - le - lu - ia!

Lyrics: Elizabeth Prentiss, 1831; Tune: Welsh Lullaby, 17th C. (C) Charles Wesley, 1739. (S) 1839. © 1987.
Mus. © EASTER HYMN, L.W. Kirk, 1875, 1881, 1884.

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Artist's Statement

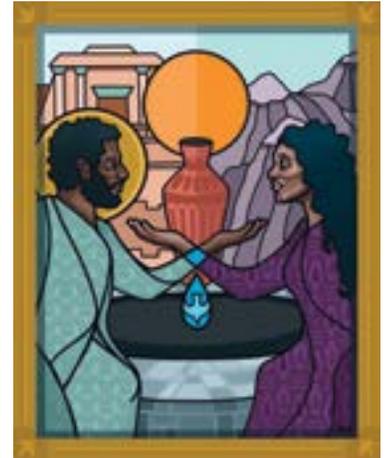
Living Water

Digital Painting

By Lauren Wright Pittman

Inspired by John 4:5-42

In a quick Google image search of this story, I noticed that, in most of the art, Jesus and the Samaritan woman are almost never on the same level. In my piece, the positioning of Jesus and the Samaritan woman is inspired by the work of Karoline M. Lewis in her commentary on John. She introduces a fresh way of looking at this text, with a focus on their “mutuality of need.”¹ Jesus needs water to drink, and the woman needs living water. She writes: “Jesus needs her to be a witness, and she needs Jesus to invite her into this new identity.”²



In this image, their body positioning is mirrored, with their eyes on the same plane. Where their arms overlap becomes a vibrant blue, creating a water drop with a dove in it, representing the living water that springs forth from their mutual need and relationship. Each of their clothing is patterned with the other's need. In Jesus' clothing are simplified “springs of water gushing up to eternal life” (John 4:14). In the Samaritan woman's clothes, her water jar is positioned upright and poured out, representing her wrestling with whether she will interact with this man—and further, whether he is the awaited Messiah.

The image is subtly divided in half by slight shifts in color value. There is a chasm between them socially, culturally, religiously, etc. Referencing a primary dispute between the Jews and the Samaritans, their places of worship are in the background: on the left is the temple in Jerusalem, and on the right is Mount Gerizim.

In the center is the Samaritan woman's vessel. We are not told whether she fills the jar or gives Jesus water, however, we are told that she leaves the jar behind. Her need is not the water in the well; her need is for grounding in a new identity,³ and to be seen for who she really is. She needs to not be defined by the worst parts of her life, the number of her husbands, or others' assumptions, but to be seen through the lens of mutual need—to be seen as one of the first witnesses of the Messiah,⁴ and now a vessel of living water herself.

—Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

¹ Lewis, Karoline M. *John: Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentaries*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2014). 55.

² Ibid. 56.

³ Ibid. 56.

⁴ Ibid. 60.

Notes



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