

August 2020

A Pandemic Devotional

Bethany Lutheran Church



During this difficult time of physical separation, God calls us together through the power of the Holy Spirit. We invite you during this time to join together each day with our Bethany family through this daily devotional. Your Bethany family continues to hold you in prayer, and we look forward to being physically together again.

If you enjoy this devotional and would like this to continue for September, please let Pastor Megan know!

A message from Pastor Megan:

Throughout this time at home, many of are experiencing “Zoom-out”, and as we begin to become accustomed to our new routines, making time for scripture, prayer, and connection becomes more difficult. We invite you during this time to use this daily devotional as little or as much as you like.

Each day follows a similar format:

Scripture—Spending time in God’s Word each day

Story—Meditate over the stories, questions, and applications

Prayer—Pray together with your Bethany family, connected through time and space with words and Spirit.

Connect—Make some time to connect with others, discuss the day’s devotions, touch base, help others to remember that we are in this together.

Saturday August 1st, 2020

Scripture—Psalm 27:13-14

Story—Throughout this time, we've all found ourselves waiting. Waiting to for the next phase of stay home and stay safe orders. Waiting for COVID cases in our community to decrease. Waiting for time with friends and family and our church. Waiting in lines at the grocery store. Waiting for videos to load on our computer screens. Waiting, waiting, waiting. The psalmist reminds us that God's goodness is still for us, even in our waiting, and that with God's help, we can be strong, take courage, and wait with God and for God's light in this time.

Prayer—Together, as we miss the physical presence of those we care about, as we wonder at what might come next, Lord we look to you, we wait for you. Give us courage and strength to look with hope at your future for our world, our community, for us. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Connect—As we wait together for the ability to gather again, make some time today to call those who you are waiting eagerly to see in person. Whether it be those you sit with at church on Sundays, someone you sit next to at breakfast group or bible study, someone who shares your table at coffee hour. Connect with your Bethany family members who you are longing to see.

Sunday, August 2nd, 2020

Scripture—This Sunday's scripture readings are:

Isaiah 55:1-5, Psalm 148:8-9,14-21, Romans 9:1-5, and Matthew 14:13-21

Story—Jesus is always surprising us with abundance. The disciples in our Gospel reading today see scarcity in the face of so many hungry people, but Jesus sees the way to turn scarcity into abundance. What are some ways Jesus is turning scarcity into abundance in your life today? In our community? Where do you see abundance today?

Prayer—Lord, we look to your guidance in our lives, as Jesus directed his disciples, direct us to care for the least of these, to see your abundance in the midst of scarcity, and God bring us your hope and grace today and always, in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Connect—What is your favorite story of abundance? Maybe it's a story from scripture, maybe a story from your life. Reach out today to someone from church you don't super well—ask them to share a story of abundance, of hope, of joy in their lives and share your own story. Listen for the ways God is working in our lives.

Monday August 3rd, 2020

Scripture—Psalm 85:8-13

Story—Sometimes listening is the hardest thing we can do. We often find ourselves waiting for our turn to speak. With prayer especially, we sometimes forget to take a breath and give space for God's nudging in our lives. Take some time to read through our scripture reading a few times. Sitting in silent prayer, listen for God. Breathe in deeply...exhale completely....what peace is God speaking to you today? How might your heart turn more towards God's love and faithfulness? How might God's faithfulness be springing up in your life?

Prayer—God, as we lift our prayers to you, we also listen for your words in our hearts. Guide us to share your love and faithfulness, help us to participate in your righteousness and peace in our world, and give us the patience to listen to your calling. In the name of our risen Lord, Jesus Christ, we pray, amen.

Connect—In your time of prayer today, listen for ideas of how you might connect with others. Maybe it's in sending a card to someone who is living alone, who you haven't talked to in a while, who you feel might need extra encouragement during this time.

Tuesday August 4th, 2020

Scripture—1 Kings 19:11-13

Story—There is so much noise in our lives, what ways might we experience God's presence in the silence? Take some time to go to a quiet place. Listen for the silence of God's presence around you.

Prayer—Lord, help us to feel your presence in the quiet moments of our days, amen.

Connect—Take some time to connect with God and with yourself today. Look for moments of silence, for small ways God's presence shows itself around you.

Wednesday August 5th, 2020

Scripture—Romans 10:8-13

Story—Sometimes we forget to proclaim our faith, sometimes it's difficult or awkward to talk about Jesus with others. Paul reminds us here that Jesus is the Lord of all, and our confessions of faith are an important part of our own faith walk.

Prayer—Lord, we confess your salvation with our lips, guide us to sharing our own faith stories with others, amen.

Connect—Sometimes the best way to get comfortable sharing our faith stories is to practice! Connect with someone you trust and share your own faith story today.

Thursday August 6th, 2020

Scripture—Psalm 105:1-5

Story—Gratitude is shown in studies to be an integral part of living happy, whole-hearted lives. Take some time today to give thanks to God for all of God's gifts in your life, from the small moments to the big joys.

Prayer—Good and gracious God, we give you thanks for your marvelous works, help us to sing your praises all the day long. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Connect—Reach out to someone you are thankful for and let them know what they mean to you.

Friday August 7th, 2020

Scripture—1 Peter 4:8-11

Story—What a gift to share in all the ways our congregation continues to serve others with God's love. Whether it be through FISH, Family Promise, Duct Tape Crew, or offering donations from home. What are ways you can use your gifts to serve others with God's love today?

Prayer—Awesome God, with the gifts of your grace you guide us to serve others, continue to guide us and strengthen us in this time so we might love others as you have loved us. Through Christ Jesus we pray, amen.

Connect—Take some time to reach out and share love with others today, maybe in a card, phone call, or even some baked goods! Share your gifts with others today.

Saturday August 8th, 2020

Scripture—Jeremiah 29:11

Story—I'm a planner. I prefer to have long to do lists that I can check off as I complete my tasks. I love to see my days, my weeks, my months planned out in my calendar. In the midst of a pandemic, plans start to fall apart very quickly. To do lists are quickly changed as the necessary tasks change. In the midst of this time, we might find ourselves in some levels of anxiety, grief, and disappointment as the plans we had made seem to crumble. But God knows the plans for us, and as we let go of our own plans, we can begin to seek out the hope and future that God provides for us.

Prayer—Amazing Lord, guide us today to seek your hope and future in our lives, help us to grieve the plans that have been lost or changed, and give us the strength to seek you and your grace today. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Connect—For those plans that were changed or cancelled that we grieve, take some time today to reach out to those you often make plans with. Share together in memories from previous gatherings, and dream together of what safe options might look like for gathering with one another again. Begin to make new plans together for the future, and may you find hope and joy in the excitement of making new plans.

Sunday, August 9th, 2020

Scripture—This Sunday's Gospel reading is: Matthew 14:22-33

Story—So much of what we are going through as a world right now revolves around fear. Fear of the unknown, fear of illness, fear of the "other". Jesus invites us in our Gospel reading today not to live in fear, but to live in hope and in faith. In many ways the small and big actions we take are ways we are taking big steps onto the water, trying to care for ourselves and others. But as we see cases in our own community rise, as we begin to hear from those we love who have tested positive, we find ourselves once again in fear. Our lesson today reminds us, that no matter what, no matter our fear, our doubt, our worries, Jesus is always right there besides us, ready to reach out his hand to us and pull us back into the boat.

Prayer—Calm of the Waters, we lift our hearts to you. Calm our own fears, reach out your hand to us and guide us so that we might share your hope and comfort with others. In the name of the one who always reaches out to us, we pray, Amen.

Connect—We need each other most during times of fear and worry, take some time today to join in an online worship service, to call those who bring you comfort, to find some moments of peace and hope today.

Monday August 10th, 2020

Scripture—Psalm 67

Story—What are your favorite songs of praise? Our Psalm today reminds us that all the nations will sing for joy. Take some time to sing or listen to your favorite song of praise and experience God's light of hope and love today.

Prayer—God be merciful to us and bless us, shine your light upon us, help us to find ways to sing your praises in our homes and in our hearts. Amen.

Connect—If you would like to check out a hymnal from the church to keep at home, reach out to Pastor Megan or Rick L. to coordinate pickup!

Tuesday August 11th, 2020

Scripture—Romans 11:29-32

Story—Paul reminds us in this Sunday's New Testament reading that God's gifts and calling are irrevocable, God gives us mercy and grace and love and nothing can separate us from that, even when we are separated from one another.

Prayer—Amazing God, turn our hearts to you so that we might see your gifts among us and seek your ways, in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Connect—Take some time today to connect with God and to give thanks for God's gifts of mercy and grace.

Wednesday August 12th, 2020

Scripture—Lamentations 3:22-23

Story—On days where the news just seems to be too much, when hope is hard to find, these words from Lamentations can remind us that we can always find glimmers of hope in scripture. That God's great love, God's compassion, God's faithfulness, will always be present with us through whatever we might face.

Prayer—God of the morning, may your light shine brightly over the horizon in our lives, and fill us with hope in your love. Amen.

Connect—If you would like to check out a hymnal from the church to keep at home, reach out to Pastor Megan or Rick L. to coordinate pickup!

Thursday August 13th, 2020

Scripture—2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Story—What are ways God might be renewing you today? We might be surprised by the small ways God's light is shining through us.

Prayer—God of light, fix our eyes on you, help us to find courage and perseverance through these times, and guide us to one another. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Connect—Spend some time today renewing yourself with God. Maybe in scripture, in meditation, in a long rest.

Friday August 14th, 2020

Scripture—Deuteronomy 31:6

Story—In the midst of this pandemic, many of us are simply going through the motions of our "new normal". Whether we are dealing with worry, fear, boredom, isolation, or a host of other emotions, we are reminded that no matter what we are not alone—God is beside us all along the way.

Prayer—Good and gracious God, strengthen us with your presence and love today and always. Amen.

Connect—Is there someone who you haven't reached out to in a while? Take some time to call them today.

Saturday August 15th, 2020

Scripture—Isaiah 58:11

Story—One thing I look forward to when we are able to gather safely again more regularly is visiting everyone's yards. So many of us have found solace in our gardens, in the outdoors, in walks, and in the sunshine. God reminds us that we too will be like well-cared for gardens.

Prayer—God of creation, may your water of life pour out over us today and help us to grow as your disciples. Amen.

Connect—Let's get outside and connect with creation! Maybe just a walk, some time in your yard, whatever it might look like, connect with the one who satisfies our needs in God's good creation.

Sunday, August 16th, 2020

Scripture—This Sunday's Gospel reading is:

Matthew 15:10-28

Story—This was the lectionary text for my daughter Hadley's baptism which was...an interesting choice. Rev. Latterell did a great job of weaving in the story of Jesus and the perseverant woman into the promises of baptism in his sermon, and that Sunday always remains with me. Jesus reminds us that what proceeds from our mouths comes from our hearts, and gives us a call for good intentions, not evil ones. Life, loyalty, righteousness, honesty, and truth are the good intentions Jesus calls us to share, and the Canaanite woman reminds Jesus this calling, this grace, is for all in her perseverance. How might we persevere in seeking God's justice in the world? What—or who—are we willing to fight for?

Prayer—Lord, help us to listen and to understand, change our hearts and help us to share love and grace in this world, strengthen us to persevere in seeking your justice in our communities and all around us. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Connect—Take some time today to connect with God's justice seeking, what causes has God put on your heart to persevere in? How might you help that cause today?

Monday August 17th, 2020

Scripture—Isaiah 51:1-6

Story—Isaiah is not always the easiest reading, a few years ago we tried to do a bible study through the entire book as part of our Sunday Adult Ed and it was...well it wasn't easy. In the midst of Isaiah's frustration and anger with God's people, he also gives glimpses of hope, of light, and of song. Where might you find glimpses of hope and joy today?

Prayer—Lord we seek you, we lift our eyes up to you in prayer, help us to see your light among us. Amen.

Connect—Share some of your glimpses of hope and joy today with others, give someone a phone call, send a card, or share with someone in your home.

Tuesday August 18th, 2020

Scripture—Psalm 138

Story—"God's steadfast love endures forever", what more can we say than those words? As we seek to follow God today, as we call out to God for answers, God's love surrounds us today and always.

Prayer—God you hear our prayers, may we sing of your ways, your glory, and your love, in Jesus' name, amen.

Connect—What is your favorite psalm? Take some time today and write out your favorite to send to someone who might need that encouragement, hope, and love.

Wednesday August 19th, 2020

Scripture—Romans 12:1-8

Story—Throughout Lent and the post-Easter season this year, our PSALM student Chris led us in conversations around spiritual gifts. Many of our members took assessments, we had discussions over soup supper and Zoom, Chris's sermon for Pentecost focused closely on this text. One thing I noticed was that people fell into two camps—either they already knew their own spiritual gifts before the assessment, or they struggled to name any gifts they might have. Paul reminds us here that we are all gifted, in many different ways, and what whatever camp we may fall in, the gifts are there. I wonder during this time of staying at home and staying safe, what gifts have you discovered in yourself that you didn't realize you had?

Prayer—Awesome God, by your mercies you give each of us gifts according to your grace, guide us to use these gifts for your kingdom, sharing your Good News, your grace, and your love with others. In the name of our risen Lord we pray, amen.

Connect—Take some time to connect with your giftedness and make plans to use your gifts. Examples: Serving with Family Promise or FISH, writing for our newsletter, calling others to share compassion and cheerfulness, etc.

Thursday August 20th, 2020

Scripture—Zephaniah 3:17

Story—There is something about the way God rejoices over us. It reminds me of our faces when we first greet a small baby. God does that with us too, rejoicing and singing over us, loving us as only our divine parent can love us.

Prayer—Awesome God, help us to experience your rejoicing, your love, your song in our lives today, may we celebrate your creation as you celebrate us. Amen.

Connect—Is there a young one in your life? Maybe a child, grandchild, niece, nephew, friend, neighbor. Maybe make some time today to reach out, let them and their family know how much joy they give you, sing to them, rejoice over them.

Friday August 21st, 2020

Scripture—Matthew 19:26

Story—With God all things are possible, throughout this time, sometimes we just need that reminder—with God all things are possible.

Prayer—God, be with us today, give us the imagination to see all the ways you make the impossible possible in our lives and in our world. Amen.

Connect—It's Friday! Who would you normally see or visit with today? Give them a call to say hello!

Saturday August 22nd, 2020

Scripture—Psalm 46:1-3

Story—My neighbor tells a story of her first winter here, as the rain poured and poured and the creek began to rise closer and closer to her door, she felt panic and worry for what might happen. She ended up staying with another neighbor for the night, and in the end learned from our neighbors that although the creek rises and rushes and seems like an overflowing river, it hasn't reached our doors yet. God is like that neighbor who will always have a place for us refuge, while still reassuring and comforting us in the midst of the storm.

Prayer—God of all creation, quiet the storms of our lives today, whether they be actual storms or the storminess of our emotions. Comfort us in our fears, and give us refuge through these waters. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Connect—Who has been your person to call in times of trouble? Who has called you when they are in need of refuge and comfort? Reach out to them today, giving thanks for this connection and for all those whose love brings us comfort and strength.

Sunday August 23rd, 2020

Scripture—This Sunday's Gospel reading is

Matthew 16:13-20

Story—"Who do you say I am?" Jesus asks his disciple, and Peter gives the answer that begins the early church. It's an interesting idea—Jesus asking us who we say he is. Who do you say Jesus is? Who is Jesus to you? We likely have the same answer as Peter—the Messiah, Son of the Living God—and we also have others too. Teacher, guide, friend, savior, and more. But how often do we say who Jesus is to others? Spend some time today thinking about how you think about Jesus, and some meditation on how often you talk about who Jesus is with others and what that looks like for you.

Prayer—Messiah, Son of the Living God, you tell us we are God's children, help us to testify to your saving grace in our lives and in our communities. In Jesus' name, amen.

Connect—As part of our Sunday post-worship time, we usually come together after church for coffee hour to check in, touch base after our service ends. Since we can't gather around tables and food safely yet as a larger group, take some time today to call those you would often sit with at coffee hour to check in and maybe ask the question—who do you say Jesus is?

Monday August 24th, 2020

Scripture—Psalm 26:1-8

Story—The psalmist has lived a life above reproach in his prayer to God, asking for God to test and try him. Few of us feel as comfortable saying these words, as we often fall short of the lives God would want for us. But throughout the psalmist's prayer, he tells of God's love behind his eyes, of God's house, of a relationship built on song and thanks giving. Knowing we are saved through Christ, and that through Christ we are made righteous, maybe we too can sing this psalm of praise and thanksgiving.

Prayer—O Lord, you know our hearts and our minds, fill them with your love and grace so that we might sing your praises all the day long. Amen.

Connect—When we falter in our faith, when we need a fellow child of God to help us in prayer, in study, in our lives, who do you turn to? Give them a call today to give thanks for their presence in your life!

Tuesday August 25th, 2020

Scripture—Jeremiah 15:19-21

Story—God’s generous gift of grace is always for us, God is always reaching out and waiting for us, ready to call us to participate in God’s reign here on earth.

Prayer—Thank you God, for saving us and delivering us, for always redeeming us. Amen.

Connect—Take some extra time for prayer today, spend some time just listening to God and connecting with the God who always saves.

Wednesday August 26th, 2020

Scripture—Romans 12:9-21

Story— “They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love”

by Peter Scholtes

*We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord
And we pray that our unity will one day be restored
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yeah they'll know we are Christians by our love
We will work with each other, we will work side by side
We will work with each other, we will work side by side
And we'll guard each man's dignity and save each man's pride
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yeah, they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

Prayer—Lord we pray that your love might shine through us in our words and actions, may your love be the standard by which we live each day of our lives. Amen,

Connect—Reach out to a fellow member or friend of Bethany Lutheran and invite that person into a time of prayer. Pray for one another, sharing in God’s love and mutual affection.

Thursday August 27th, 2020

Scripture—Philippians 4:13

Story—How might God be strengthening you today? What strength are you needing from God?

Prayer—God strengthen us for this day. Amen.

Connect—Connect with God in some extra time of prayer today, sharing your thanksgiving and your needs with God.

Friday August 28th, 2020

Scripture—1 Thessalonians 5:11

Story—Hospitality has always been one of Bethany Lutheran's gifts, but how do we share hospitality in the midst of a pandemic? 1 Thessalonians reminds us one of the key pieces of hospitality and welcome: encouragement. How might we encourage one another today? What encouragement are you needing?

Prayer—Awesome God, help us today to seek out ways to share your love through encouragement and connection with others. Amen.

Connect—Take some time today to call a fellow church member you haven't talked to in a while and ask: "What encouragement are you needing today?" You might be surprised by the ways you are able to support one another!

Saturday August 29th, 2020

Scripture—Psalm 32:8

Story—Even when we're not sure where to go or what to do, God watches over us along the way, guiding us, instructing us, and helping us as we make decisions, choices, and whatever may come along our journey.

Prayer—God of love, continue to teach us and guide us each day, pour out your wisdom over us and teach us the ways we should go.

Connect—Take some time for a walk today and meditate, how might you experience God with you on your way?

Sunday August 30th, 2020

Scripture—This Sunday's Gospel reading is: Matthew 16:21-28

Story—Just after Peter has declared Jesus's identity as the messiah, Jesus begins to share with the disciples the truth of their future. What a difficult epiphany for Peter and the other disciples, to hear what suffering their messiah, teacher, and friend would be enduring. Jesus gives a well known and most difficult command—"take up your cross and follow me". What cross is Jesus asking you to pick up today? Even as Jesus promises to provide us comfort, love, and hope, he reminds us today that following him is not always comfortable, but often following love and grace means difficulties and struggles.

Prayer—Lord, give us the strength to take up our crosses in following you, help us to find the path ahead so that we might share your Good News through our words and actions each and every day. In the name of our messiah, Jesus Christ, we pray, amen.

Connect—Coffee Hour time! Take some time today to call several people from church that you've been missing. Pour yourself a cup of your favorite beverage, grab a small snack, and reach out to share what you've been up to, yard work you've completed, family updates, etc.

Monday August 31st, 2020

Scripture—Psalm 119:33-40

Story—As we close out another month during these difficult times, we look to God in search of understanding, comfort, and hope. The psalmist today asks God to teach him God's ways, to give understanding, and to turn his heart towards God's truth. As we look towards the end of August and the coming fall months, we too lift our prayers to God in this time, knowing that throughout the staying at home, the going out, the masks, the social distancing, throughout all of this, God is here with us all along the way.

Prayer—Lord be with us today, teach us, lead us, and incline our hearts to you, so that we might be your hands and feet in this world. Amen.

Connect—Find a new way today to connect with your church family. Maybe for you that's engaging with our Facebook page by commenting on posts or videos. Maybe it's in sending an email to our church council thanking them for their work during this time. Maybe it's a card to someone you don't know very well. Maybe it's trying out the call-in option for Zoom for bible study tomorrow or church on Sunday. Take some time to try something new and to connect with your church family, know that you are missed, and we look forward to gathering together with you soon!