

*Bethany Lutheran Church
2900 Parkview Drive
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February 2021 Devotional

God's Blessings to . . .

February 2021 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,
please let Pastor Megan know!

Lectionary texts and some quotes taken from Wednesdays And Seasons
(Augsburg Fortress)

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. Our devotional this month has a special focus on stewardship and our stewardship season theme “Building From Our Cornerstone” as well.

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.

Sunday February 28th, 2021

Scripture—Mark 8:31-38

Story— I often find myself feeling sorry for Peter. He tries his best to be a “great disciple”, but he falls short so often. I think I find myself connecting to him so much because I see myself in his stories.

His wanting to keep Jesus near to him always, his worries about the realities of this world, and even here is heartbreak at hearing that his teacher, his messiah, has his eyes on a cross for the future.

The rebuke is a harsh one—especially since before this moment Jesus told Peter that Jesus would build his church upon the rock of Peter’s faith.

But it’s a reminder how easily we can slip into our own difficult moments of trusting in Jesus, of following Jesus’s call to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves, and this is a reminder of how we too might look towards the cross not just in this season of Lent, but pick up the crosses in our own lives.

Prayer— Good and gracious God, this Sunday help us to let go of our fears and worries, guide us as we continue to grow as disciples in our learning, in our service, and in our worship. Help us to be the rock upon which you build your church with faith, hope, love, and grace. In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, who speaks truth to us even when we don’t want to hear it, we pray. Amen.

Connect— It’s Sunday! Take some time today to connect with members of your church family!

Thursday February 25th, 2021

Scripture—Job 4:1-21

Story— I invite you when you have time to read all of Job, this piece today is just a response from one of Job’s friends trying to explain to Job that he must have done something to earn God’s wrath. I’m grateful to be in a Christian tradition that does not treat people this way (I mean really, these are terrible friends). But I do wonder how we can help to support those who have been hurt by well-meaning people of faith, particularly in issues of loss, grief, and blame.

Prayer— Lord, help us to be comforting sources of grace and love to those in grief and pain, guide us to see new ways to care for others and refuse to blame or undermine the hearts of others, amen.

Connect— Connect with your own stories of grief and well-intentioned but hurtful conversations. How might you find healing in God for those hurts, or grace if you have unintentionally been the well-intentioned friend?

Friday February 26th, 2021

Scripture—Ephesians 2:1-10

Story— “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” Need I say more?

Prayer / Connect—Take some time to reflect on your own faith journey, whether through journaling or drawing and take some additional time to pray and connect with God.

Saturday February 27th, 2021

Scripture—Psalm 77

Story— This may be one of my top favorite psalms, mainly because when I am feeling the most down, this psalm is a helpful reminder to slow down, to connect with God, and to pray to the one who hears my cries.

Prayer— Lord, thank you for hearing us when our spirits feel faint, lead us towards your light and love in our lives and in our community, amen.

Connect— The psalmist communes with their heart in the night, meditating and searching their spirit, I invite you today to connect with your heart, your spirit, and with the Holy Spirit in meditation and prayer over this psalm today.

Monday February 1st, 2021

Scripture—Psalm 147:1-11

Story— I love the idea of starting this month with a song of praise, celebrating God’s lifting up of the lowly, God’s healing of the brokenhearted. I love the idea of beginning February with a sense of joy, awe, and trust in God. Particularly as we begin to look towards our Lenten season beginning later this month.

In this psalm we are met with the reminder that God isn’t impressed, God doesn’t care about how much we do or how quickly we do it, but simply that we fear (or maybe “have awe in”) the Lord and await God’s steadfast love.

And I don’t know about you, but I’ve gotten pretty good at waiting this last year. And receiving God’s steadfast love is something that we can encounter every day.

So in the midst of our waiting for things to return to some semblance of normal, waiting to gather with our loved ones, waiting to see our acquaintances, maybe we can begin this month remembering that God’s steadfast love comes to us each day, and the waiting in between those moments may not be so long.

Whether it’s in singing praises to God, experiencing God’s healing power in our lives, or participating with God as God lifts up the lowly—let’s begin this month with song and joy and thanksgiving to the God whose love is steadfast with us and for us.

Prayer— Amen!

Connect— Take some time to connect with song and joy and thanksgiving to God today.

Tuesday February 2nd, 2021

Scripture—Isaiah 40:21-31

Story— Isaiah writes to a people in exile, providing hope to a people who may struggle to find hope otherwise. Isaiah reminds the people of Israel—and us—of God’s steadfast present in our lives: bringing strength and freedom to those in need of it. We’re not in exile but in isolation, I wonder how God’s strength may help provide us with patience and perseverance in this time.

Prayer— Lord, everlasting God, renew our strength during this time, help us to not grow weary as we continue to seek safety and health for ourselves and for our community, amen.

Connect— What might wings look like for you? For the people of Israel these wings were a sign of freedom and hope. What might your wings look like?

Wednesday February 3rd, 2021

Scripture—1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Story— I have a bit of a love/hate relationship with the apostle Paul, but I do appreciate his ability to create relationship with those he encounters. It might be easy to read this as him pretending to be like those he encounters in order to boast of bringing them the Gospel.

But the truth is—in Paul’s life he has been all of these things. Under the Law in his Jewish faith, particularly in his life as a Pharisee—but also Paul is a Roman citizen, someone who might be considered “outside of the Law”.

So this isn’t a boast of how Paul can pretend to be similar to those he shares Jesus with, but rather that Paul uses all of himself to connect with, create relationship with, and share the love and grace of Christ with so many. I wonder how we might do that in our own lives as well?

Prayer— Lord, help us to connect with others, building relationships with our whole selves and sharing your love with those in our lives, amen.

Connect—Take some time today to reach out to someone you know outside of your church family to share love and grace today.

Wednesday February 24th

Scripture—Romans 4:13-25

Story— I appreciate Paul’s message here around faith and trust in God over and above any works of the Law that we might do to try to “earn” God’s grace.

But the truth is—Abraham was not perfect or blameless. And as someone who is also not perfect or blameless who needs the grace Jesus gives us, I will be the first to point out Abraham’s imperfections.

Particularly around Abraham’s truthfulness and trust in God. In Genesis 22 Abraham swears to God that he will treat those he comes in contact with in the country he visits with honesty and kindness. But proceeds to lie often about his relationship with Sarah. To the point of allowing a king to nearly take her as his wife.

Aside from the direct consequences this has for Sarah in terms of her own safety, he puts both Sara and the king in situations that could cause both to sin against God and it’s all because Abraham doesn’t trust that God will care for him and Sarah and keep them safe in an unknown land.

Sort of less than righteous if you ask me.

And the truth is—I’m glad we have scriptural evidence of Abraham’s imperfections (although I wish they didn’t endanger Sarah), because it is a reminder that we can’t earn God’s grace by any righteousness that we can do, only through Jesus are we able to fully experience the grace and life of God.

Prayer— Lord Jesus, through your saving grace, through hearing your good news, you have brought us into faith and closer to God, help us each day to grow deeper in our faith and trust in you, in your name we pray, amen.

Connect—It’s been a while since we’ve connected with our church family via phone, take some time today to make some calls and reach out to those you haven’t spoken to lately.

Monday February 22nd

Scripture—Psalm 22:23-31

Story— During this wintery season as the temperature drops on and off again into freezing, I find myself thinking a lot of the people who live in the encampment on Alabama St, those who seek refuge in the emergency cold weather shelter, and those who find themselves struggling to pay the heat bill during this time. Our psalm for today reminds us of God's great love for all, particularly for the impoverished, and maybe this reminder can help us to seek out ways to care for and support those in need in our own community as well.

Prayer— Lord, help us provide shelter for those unhoused, warmth for those in the cold, and food for those who hunger, in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Connect— Connect with local organizations or service through our church today on how you might help support these services that care for those in need.

Tuesday February 23rd

Scripture—Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

Story— Something I love about this season is the emphasis we find in our readings on God's promises, particularly in our Old Testament scriptures. Both Abram and Sarai are blessed, and in their promise with God, receive new names.

Our names are so much a part of who we are. I remember growing up there were so many other Megans! We had three in my middle school English class, and one ended up being my best friend who I still connect with today. (She spells it with an H though, so it's sort of different.)

I wonder how we might hear God saying our names and naming us today, blessing us with a blessing to be shared.

Prayer— Lord, we give you thanks for your promises to us, with us, and for us. Continue to keep us in your covenant of blessing, amen.

Connect— Connect with your own name today! What is your name's meaning? Maybe take some time to do some journaling or doodling around your name and the blessing God calls you to share.

Thursday & Friday February 4th & 5th, 2021

Scripture—Psalm 84

Story— One contemporary song by Marantha! Music is titled "How Lovely is Your Dwelling Place", if you have internet, I invite you to look up the song online and listen to how this psalm might be sung. You can also view the lyrics and put your own music to it here:

Chorus: *How lovely is your dwelling place, almighty Lord
There's a hunger deep inside my soul*

Only in your presence, are my heart & flesh restored

1. *In your court there's shelter for the greatest and the small*

The sparrow has a place to build her nest

The pilgrim finds refreshment in the rains that fall

And each one has the strength to meet the test

Chorus: *How lovely is your dwelling place, almighty Lord
There's a hunger deep inside my soul*

Only in your presence, are my heart & flesh restored

2. *A single day is better when spent in humble praise
than a thousand years of living without You*

The Lord bestows His favour On each one who obeys

And blessings on the ones Whose heart are true

Chorus: *How lovely is your dwelling place, almighty Lord
There's a hunger deep inside my soul*

Only in your presence, are my heart & flesh restored

Prayer— How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord, make home in our hearts and fill us with songs of praise, amen.

Connect— Connect with this psalm today, imagine God's dwelling place within your own heart, and thank God for making a home with you.

Saturday February 6th, 2021

Scripture—Malachi 3:1-4

Story— As we begin to look at the upcoming season of Lent, I enjoyed re-reading through these verses again. We always talk about the refiner's fire, and we have quite a few songs that relate there as well.

But now that I make soap, I couldn't help but wonder— what exactly is fuller's soap? How is the Lord of hosts (who we as Christians know to be Jesus) like soap??

And apparently, fuller's soap was an extremely harsh soap used to scrub out all the dirt and filth from freshly sheared sheep wool.

Knowing how often I find myself bathing my goats, even with their short fur, and from my own experience having sheep growing up.

Sheep are really gross. Like really, really gross.

So imagining that Jesus is not just like a refiner's fire, but like a harsh and rough soap that scrubs us until we present offerings to the Lord in righteousness....Well there aren't any songs about that are there?

I wonder how we imagine this refining and purifying in our own lives? Is it something that happened once in our baptisms and now is done? Or can we begin to imagine that Jesus is constantly refining us, cleansing us, and making us into something new?

Prayer— Refiner's fire, fuller's soap, Lord of hosts, help us to seek your righteousness, refine us and purify us in your saving grace, in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Connect— Take some time today to connect with how Jesus may be refining, purifying, and growing your own life, faith and discipleship today. Maybe take some extended time in prayer, write in a journal, work with art or a craft you care about as you listen for Jesus's work in your life today.

Sunday February 21st

Scripture—Mark 1:9-15

Story— I love wilderness imagery. Well, at least I do now anyway. One of my favorite authors is Brene Brown, a researcher who focuses on shame, vulnerability, and whole-heartedness. She wrote a book called "Braving the Wilderness" - not that the wilderness was a bad place or a place to escape, but rather a place where we contend with our own vulnerability and shame.

With her book as the backdrop for me in our reading for this Sunday, I can't help but wonder how Jesus's temptation in the wilderness actually felt for Jesus. Mark's Gospel doesn't give us much detail, but the other gospels do help fill in some of the blanks. Jesus's temptations in the other gospels are around using his power for himself, for political gain, for meeting his own needs.

If that is the wilderness for Jesus, the place where he contends with his own vulnerability and even shame, I wonder how Jesus's own whole-heartedness and faith in his father came through his own feelings.

These are the things pastors wonder about I suppose. I also wonder about our own wildernesses, our own places of temptation, of contending with our own feelings of vulnerability. During this Lenten season, when so many of us feel in the wilderness as we wait for some kind of normalcy to return, I wonder how we might, with Christ in our hearts, experience our wildernesses today.

Prayer— Jesus, Son of God, as we find ourselves in wilderness places, may your presence be ever felt, amen.

Connect— It's Sunday! Take some time today to connect with members of your church family!

Thursday February 18th, 2021

Scripture—Psalm 25:1-10

Story / Prayer / Connect— Spend some time connecting with our psalm for today. Read it several times over, speak it out loud as a prayer, and listen for how God might be lifting up your soul today.

Friday & Saturday February 19th & 20th, 2021

Scripture—Genesis 9:8-17, 1 Peter 3:18-22

Story— I've included both these readings together as they both point to the saving grace of God. For Peter his focus is clearly on baptism, as we are made alive in the spirit through God's promise in the water and word. For our reading in Genesis, we read the story of another promise God made around water and life.

A colleague once shared with me that one interpretation of God's promise not to "flood" the earth can also be understood as God's promise not to "overwhelm" the earth. I find during this last year, I've been leaning on that promise of hope and grace, seeking God's presence whenever I feel overwhelmed, remembering that together we have been promised hope and grace.

It's one of the reasons I love the rainbow pride flag from our LGBTQ+ siblings, for all the hope and diversity the rainbow flag represents, it also can remind each of us of God's promises to remember us, to care for us, and not to overwhelm us.

As with most 3 year-olds, Hadley is particularly obsessed with rainbows. Our house is covered in reminders of this promise from God, particularly because Hadley tells us that along with Jesus and her grandpa that passed away, in her heart are rainbows. Colorful bright promises of God's covenant with creation.

So no wonder why rainbows bring me joy and hope too.

Prayer— God of all creation, of love and promise, guide us into your covenant of care and promise, in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Connect— What reminders of God's promise to care for you and not to overwhelm you might you look for today?

Sunday February 7th, 2021

Scripture—Mark 1:29-39

Story— I don't know if it's interesting to others or not, but something that has always stuck with me about this passage is the beginning paragraphs—with the healing of Simon's mother-in-law. When I was younger I was always bothered a bit by her response to healing was her beginning "to serve them". I read it as she started making them sandwiches or something. It always seemed a bit...patriarchal to me.

Then I studied Gospel of Mark in Greek. I learned that the word used here is not the same as serving a meal, but rather "diakoneo". This does mean to serve, and also to minister. It's the basis for our rostered leaders of word and service in the ELCA, known as "deacons".

What might it mean that instead of making sandwiches or following the roles we most often attribute to mothers-in-law, she began to minister to Jesus and the disciples. Attending to them sure, but also speaking and caring for them in a spiritual way as well? How might that change our own responses to the healing power of Jesus?

Not to simply be grateful and get back to our regular duties, but to fully engage with the ministry Jesus shares in his life on earth?

Prayer— Lord, help us serve and minister to others in our lives, sharing your grace and healing, amen.

Connect— It's Sunday! Take some time today to connect with members of your church family!

Monday February 8th, 2021

Scripture—Psalm 50:1-6

Story— I love the image here of God not keeping silence. With the continued conversations in our community and country around white supremacy and racial justice, sometimes it seems easier to just stay silent. But that is just not something that God can do. I wonder how we might speak out of our own silences for marginalized peoples as Jesus did throughout his ministry.

Prayer— Lord, gather us to you as loyal followers, shine in our lives and strengthen us in our call to seek your justice in the world. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Connect— Take some time to connect with God's calling to renounce sin and evil in the world, to pray over how you might use your own voice to break silences with God in God's causes to reconcile all of creation to God.

Tuesday February 9th, 2021

Scripture—Acts 16:1, 11-15

Story— The conversion of Lydia is one of my favorites, and I could honestly talk about it for a long time—but I've been thinking about a new song that has been introduced into our online worship, "The River" by Jordan Feliz. And I think often during this time, the chorus of this song brings me back to that river with Lydia, back to quiet spaces around water and prayer, back to the new life we are washed in through Jesus:

We're going down to the river;

Down to the river, down to the river to pray;

Let's get washed by the water;

Washed by the water and rise up in amazing grace;

Let's go down, down, down to the river (You will leave changed)

Let's go down, down, down to the river (Never the same)

Prayer— Lord, fill us with the open and eager hearts of Lydia as we listen for water in our lives and pray, amen.

Connect— Connect with water and hope and prayer today.

Wednesday February 10th, 2021

Scripture—2 Kings 2:1-12

Story— This reading from 2 Kings is meant to give us a backdrop for the story of Jesus's transfiguration which we

Wednesday February 17th, 2021

Scripture—Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Story— If you haven't noticed a theme already with the readings leading up to Ash Wednesday, I'll give you a hint—our scripture is trying to remind us that repentance and fasting is not just about what we eat or what we give up, but also about what we take on.

I've always found this reading interesting for Ash Wednesday, as so many of us choose this time to give up something as a fast to bring us closer to Christ in the wilderness dealing with temptation, as a way for us to turn our focus to God and to our faith.

Jesus reminds us that fasting and giving up as spiritual practices are good and fine and to be commended of course. But to think deeply on our motivations so that we are also reminded that this is a season to ground ourselves deeply in our faith, in our callings from God, and in all the ways God calls us to act out our faith in our world.

Prayer— Lord, as we remember this day our own mortality, as we remember that God created us out of dust, we take solace and hope in the remembrance of your great mercy and love for each and every one of us, in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Connect— Take some time today to go through your Lenten kit you have received in the mail today. Connect with your own plans for this season, on what you might be giving up, what you might be taking on, and how you might root yourself and grow in your own discipleship of Christ.

Monday February 15th, 2021

Scripture—Psalm 51:1-17

Story— If you have a hymnal at home or the ability to look up songs and lyrics, I invite you today to read and sing through “Create in Me a Clean Heart O God” ELW #185.

Prayer— Create in us a clean spirit O God, and renew a right spirit within each of us, amen.

Connect— Connect with music today. What songs speak to you as we begin this Lenten season of rootedness, growth, and action in God’s love?

Tuesday February 16th, 2021

Scripture—Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Story— I think I’ve already mentioned before in our devotional (and if I haven’t I’ll say it again) - my hope for our Lenten season is not one of solemn fasting, but of grounding ourselves in our faith, rooted and growing in our discipleship. Mainly because these last 12 months have felt like a solemn fast. Fasting from in-person gatherings and so much more during this pandemic.

But with our usual Ash Wednesday reading from Joel, I’d like to particularly focus on the last verses of our reading for today. The ones that reassure of God’s steadfast love, grace, and mercy. I’d like for us to begin this season with a focus on returning to God, from wherever we might have wandered, and grounding ourselves in the hope and love we receive from God through Jesus.

Prayer— Lord, return our hearts to you, guide us to turn from sin to look towards your light of love and hope in our lives. In Jesus’ name we pray, amen.

Connect— Connect in prayer today, what are you needing to ground yourself in love and hope this season?

celebrate this coming Sunday. It’s about transferring of power and duty from one prophet to the next, about ascension, and for us as Christians, it’s often the historical connecting piece for what happens when Jesus begins to shine so brightly in front of his disciples.

But in reading this again today, there’s another piece that I think seems to get missed in all of the Judeo-Christian history and prophecy—grief.

Elijah lets Elisha know that he will be “taken”, and asks what Elijah asks what he can do. There is this piece of one like a son asking for the strength/courage/spirit to do as the father has done.

But the requirement to receive this doubling of the spirit is for Elisha to witness Elijah being taken. And I don’t think that’s an easy thing to ask.

Elijah isn’t dying necessarily, there are no death beds or difficult breathing to hold a hand through—but a chariot and horses of fire.

But Elisha still responds to the moment when Elijah is no longer in his sight by tearing his clothes—with grief. He cries out to Elijah the entire time, calling out “Father, father!”

Even when we know that our loved one is in the everlasting arms of God, even when we know we are called into the faith that those before us have shared, even when we know a loss is coming—grief is still grief.

And even if it’s only a single verse in this story—scripture makes space for Elisha’s grief here. Which might be an important reminder for us that whatever grief we might be experiencing—we can and should hold space for these moments too.

Prayer— Lord, whatever we might be experiencing this week, this month, this year, where we find ourselves in grief, may your presence comfort us, may we bring your comfort to others experiencing loss today. Amen.

Connect— Who or what do you need connecting with today? Your own feelings of grief? A friend or loved one you know is hurting? Take some time today to hold space for yourself and/or for others.

Thursday February 11th, 2021

Scripture—2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Story— One of my favorite songs to sing with our Small Seeds kiddos is “This Little Light of Mine”. I appreciate the reminder from Paul here that the light we sing of us Christ’s light shining through us, through the shadows of our hearts, our lives, and our world.

Prayer— Lord, strengthen your light in us that we may share this bright hope and love with others, proclaiming the good news of your Son, Jesus Christ, amen.

Connect— Connect with light today, whether it’s in singing “This Little Light of Mine”, in lighting a candle, in spending some time in the sunshine, how might you connect with the light of Christ today?

Friday February 12th, 2021

Scripture—Isaiah 58:1-12

Story— Isaiah reminds us of God’s calling not to “perform” repentance in our call to faith, but rather to act for God’s justice in the world by feeding the hungry, sheltering the unhoused, and clothing the naked. How might we act as God calls us to today?

Prayer— Lord, help us to choose your fast today, to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke. Amen.

Connect— As we look towards next week and the beginning of our Lenten season—connect with your own calling from God to act during this time.

Saturday February 13th, 2021

Scripture—2 Corinthians 5:20b--6:10

Story & Connect— This is one of my favorite readings from Paul, and there is far more to unpack in a single devotional writing. I invite you during this time to write in your bible (or print out the reading if you prefer). Circle the words and verses that are calling out to you today. Make notes, doodles, and pray over God’s calling to us.

Prayer— Lord, guide us during this season with your love and mercy, in Jesus name we pray, amen.

Sunday February 14th, 2021

Scripture—Mark 9:2-9

Story— Every year on the last Sunday before Lent we celebrate and observe Transfiguration Sunday. A day when we remember this moment in Christ’s life and ministry—a day when once again God spoke over Jesus, “This is my Son, my beloved” and this time not with affirmations of Jesus, but as a command to the disciples witnessing this event—“Listen to him!”

Listen to him.

Something that’s been a big part of my prayer and meditation this last year has been exploring prayer in silence. Giving myself space to just listen to Jesus in my life. That may be in reading scripture and letting it ruminate in my mind while I wait in silence, or just praying for that peace and presence that I so often need.

Listening to Jesus isn’t always easy. As we see in his calling to love God and love our neighbor, listening to those commands has become more difficult in these last twelve months. With a pandemic, civil unrest in seeking to protect the lives of our black and brown siblings, political turmoil and so much more. It’s difficult to say the least. But I wonder, as we begin this season of Lent this week, if we might all take on a practice of really listening for and to Jesus to see what he might be calling each of us towards today.

Prayer— Lord Jesus, shine brightly in our hearts, so much so that as we listen to you, as we listen for you, we too might shine with your grace and love and justice in our world. In your name we pray, amen.

Connect— It’s Sunday! Take some time today to connect with members of your church family!