March 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.

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.

Monday March 1st, 2021

Scripture—Psalm 19

Story— Verse 14, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer” can sum up this entire psalm of prayer of praise for God’s glory and petition for God’s mercy. I quietly pray this verse to myself each time before I preach, pray publicly, or find myself unsure of what needs to be said. Not only does this psalm remind us of God’s glory, God’s teaching, and God’s mercy, but it gives us words to pray when we’re not sure what to say, and during this time I find myself praying these words.

Prayer— Lord, during this season of Lent, as we wonder at what may unfold in our lives, as we seek words, let our words and our meditations be acceptable in your sight, amen.

Connect— Take some time today in prayer, praying this psalm, lifting up your own petitions to God.

Tuesday March 2nd, 2021

Scripture— Exodus 20:1-17

Story— “After escaping from slavery, the Israelites come to Mount Sinai, where God teaches them how to live in community. The Ten Commandments proclaim that God alone is worthy of worship. Flowing from God, the life of the community flourishes when based on honesty, trust, fidelity, and respect for life, family, and property.”

Prayer— God, help us to live into your commandments to love you and our neighbor as ourselves, amen.

Connect— Connect with our faith tradition a bit more deeply today, if you have a copy of Luther’s Catechism or can look it up online, take some time to read through Luther’s explanation of these commands.

Wednesday March 3rd, 2021

Scripture—1 Peter 4:8-11

Story— There isn’t much more that needs to be added to Peter’s words here today. As we grow together as disciples of Christ, the call to maintain love for one another is maybe an obvious one.

And it’s not always so easy as that. As a congregation, part of the greater Body of Christ, we all have our differences. We can see this often in the way we experience worship differently, whether that be the songs sung or the liturgy spoken.

We’re also all dealing with a global pandemic and with major transition in the congregation with myself and our family moving north. And we’re all going to deal with these things differently, stress and grief are never easy, and it becomes more difficult when we can’t as easily lean on each other (at least not physically) for comfort.

But in this reminder of love, of care for one another, we are also reminded that we are not alone in this. God is here with us, God’s glory and power in our lives. God can give us words to speak to one another in love and care as we journey during this time, and through God’s love we continue to grow as disciples of Jesus who gave each of us more love and mercy than we can even imagine.

Prayer— Lord, continue to be with each of us, with your church during this time. Help us to continue in love and hospitality for one another in whatever ways are safe and possible, in Jesus’ name we pray, amen.

Connect— Join us this evening at 6pm on Zoom for our Lenten weekly fellowship and bible study!

Thursday March 4th, 2021

Scripture—Psalm 89:1-9

Story— The psalms during this month of Lent are nearly all focused on God's steadfast love and faithfulness. And I think during a season that is often solemn with a focus on repentance, prayer, and meditation—as our theme this year is a hopeful one of being rooted and growing in our discipleship, I appreciate each psalm reading for the new way the psalmist sings of God's love. Psalm 89 is a song of praise for God's covenant to David and David's people, a promise of caring for David as a parent would. A promise that we reading generations later as a promise for us as well. Because the God who created the universe, the heavens, the seas, and all, promises to continue to share that steadfast love and faithfulness with each of us, and that is worth singing about.

"I Will Sing of the Mercies of the Lord"

by James Fillmore

I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever,
I will sing, I will sing,
I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever,
I will sing of the mercies of the Lord.
With my mouth will I make known
Thy faithfulness, Thy faithfulness,
With my mouth will I make known
Thy faithfulness to all generations,
I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever,
I will sing of the mercies of the Lord.

Prayer— Lord, continue to share with us the incredible love that you promised to David, help us to always sing your praise, amen.

Connect— What best reminds you of God's steadfast love and faithfulness? Take some time today to connect with that reminder.

Friday March 5th, 2021

Scripture—1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Story— This is at the core of Paul's teaching—Jesus's work on the cross for us turns upside down what we might expect, sharing power and love through vulnerability on the cross.

Prayer— Jesus our redeemer, we give you thanks for showing us a new way, a new wisdom, one of love and mercy, of vulnerability and care, guide us with your wisdom today and always, in your name we pray, amen.

Connect— Jesus teaches us that love and vulnerability hold wisdom and power in his kin-dom, how might you connect with others sharing love today?

Saturday March 6th, 2021

Scripture—Hebrews 5:5-10

Story— The author of Hebrews uses references and imagery around priesthood, particularly the priesthood found in ancient Israel, to explain to those receiving the letter Jesus' own obedience to God in his life on earth.

Prayer— Christ our Lord, you trusted in God's saving power, offering up prayers and supplications for yourself and those you met in your ministry, strengthen our own trust in our Lord, guiding us to pray for our needs and the needs of others, we pray all this and more in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, amen.

Connect— Take some time today to reach out to someone you haven't talked with for a while, check in, ask how you might pray for them today and share your own prayer needs as we trust in God together.

Sunday March 7th, 2021

Scripture—John 2:13-22

Story— This is always one of my favorite stories from scripture, mainly because it shows Jesus in a way that we generally don't think of him—angry.

Truthfully, that is an emotion that we all can relate to in some way, and what intrigues me about Jesus's anger is that it isn't for an injustice that he has been victim to, but how a system of greed has taken over a space meant for worship, for caring for the poor, for God.

The temple was not meant to be a marketplace or a place where money changers would profit off those coming to worship and sacrifice to the Lord, and it makes Jesus so angry that he is cracking a whip and flipping tables. Because honestly—greed and systematic injustices should make us angry.

And in all of this, Jesus prophesies his own death and resurrection. That the body of his temple will be destroyed by the sin of this world, but will be raised back up in 3 days, raising the world into something new.

So I love this part of Jesus's life, because it reminds me that anger and action are often necessary in the fight for God's justice in the world and that no matter what, Jesus always rises again.

Prayer— Lord, strengthen us to care for others, to work against injustice, and to share in the new life you bring to us and to all, in your name we pray, amen.

Connect— It's Sunday! Take some time to reach out to members of our church family today!

Monday March 8th, 2021

Scripture—Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

Story— God delivers us from our troubles, even though we sin, even though we fail, God still hears our cries for help and turns towards us in steadfast love. Looking at tomorrow's reading, the pairing of these scriptures together paints a picture of our divine parent who cares for children who stray.

Prayer— Lord we give you thanks for your mercy, for your love, for all your wonderful works, gather us together in your saving grace, amen.

Connect— This psalm is often found throughout worship music, connect with songs of thanksgiving today.

Tuesday_March 9th, 2021

Scripture—Numbers 21:4-9

Story— What a weird story! I mean, I understand God wanting to punish the Israelites for speaking against the Lord, but still—serpents! And then when the Israelites do repent and turn back to God and Moses seeking forgiveness, praying God will take the serpents away. The solution is that the serpents will stay—but if they get bitten they can look to this pole and be healed.

But I suppose God maybe realized that God had already solved problems straight away several times at this point. Hungry? Here's food. Thirsty? See water coming from a rock. I wonder if God knew that if the serpents disappeared, the Israelites would go right back to speaking against God and Moses.

So instead there is this reminder of what God has done for them—a bronze snake on a pole for them to look towards whenever they need God's healing.

It makes me wonder what reminders we might need to look to God for help in times of trouble?

Prayer— Lord, help us to not need reminding of your great love and mercy for us, and when we do, guide us to those

who share your love through service, wisdom, and mercy, so that we may always turn to you in times of need, amen.

Connect— Connect with God in prayer today, lifting up your needs, your thanksgiving, and growing in this relationship with the one who saves.

Wednesday March 10th, 2021

Scripture—Revelation 22:1-5

Story— For this Wednesday's Lenten evening time of fellowship and bible study, I chose this text to help us think about growing in connection with our world.

Particularly around this imagery of the healing of the nations and river of the water of life through the city, it makes me think about the way we as servants of the lamb—disciples of Christ—might worship Jesus, and also participate in his healing work. How might we as a community be the leaves of the tree of life, providing healing for the nations?

Prayer— Lord, guide us with the shining light of your glory, as your servants growing in our discipleship, help us to be your servants caring for one another and our neighbors in need, in the name of Jesus, the Lamb of God, we pray, amen.

Connect— Join us this evening at 6pm on Zoom for our Lenten weekly fellowship and bible study!

Thursday March 11th, 2021

Scripture—Ephesians 2:1-10

Story— I'm not sure there is much more that I can say than has already been said in today's reading: "By grace you have been saved" - thanks be to God!

Prayer— God, you save us even when we don't deserve it, your grace knows no bounds, help us to share this grace with our community, in the name of Jesus Christ, our savior and Lord, we pray, amen.

Connect— Martin Luther taught that God doesn't need our good works, but our neighbor does. Connect with local organizations or projects serving our neighbors in need today.

Friday March 12th, 2021

Scripture— Philippians 2:5-11

Story— Jesus didn't come for status or glory, but to share God's love with all the world, and he calls us into this same saving love as his disciples, sharing grace however we can.

Prayer— Lord, let the same mind that was in you be in us, so that we may share your grace with the world, amen.

Connect— Connect with someone from our church family today, checking in and sharing the love and care of Jesus.

Saturday March 13th, 2021

Scripture—Psalm 45

Story, Prayer, **Connect**— I've been feeling really musical this month, maybe it's this Lenten season, maybe it's looking towards Easter Sunday when we celebrate the return of Jesus, who we understand to be the king this psalm may be referring to.

So for our prayer and connection point for today, I invite you to connect with this old hymn, a hymn of prayer for Jesus' kingdom; read the lyrics, listen to the music online, or sing from your hymnal if you have one:

"Come, Thou Almighty King" #408

Come, thou Almighty King, help us thy name to sing, help us to praise.
Father, all glorious, o'er all victorious, come and reign over us,
Ancient of Days.

Come, thou Incarnate Word, gird on thy mighty sword, scatter thy foes.
Let thine almighty aid our sure defense be made, our souls on thee be
stayed; thy wonders show.

Come, Holy Comforter, thy sacred witness bear in this glad hour.
Thou who almighty art, now rule in ev'ry heart, and ne'er from us
depart, Spirit of power.

To the great One in Three eternal praises be, hence evermore.
His sov'reign majesty may we in glory see, and to eternity
love and adore.

Sunday March 14th, 2021

Scripture—John 3:14-21

Story— I've never been a big fan of the word "saved" in relation to faith. For me it drums up difficult memories of a fundamentalist bible camp I went to as a preteen. And all the damage that week did to my faith as a young person. "Saved" language is most often used in traditions very different from our own, and it's often used in spiritually harmful ways.

But reading John 3:16 in its full context, especially with some of our other readings this week, gives the idea "saved" a lot more joy and life than my experiences of it, because we are reminded that Jesus and what Jesus brings to us is a gift. A gift of love, a gift of mercy, a gift of new life in Jesus.

A gift we are meant to share.

Our Gospel for today tells us, we are being saved for eternal life, new life and relationship with Jesus. So that we would do good in this world that God loves so much.

So that we can be God's hands and feet, serving those in need and sharing this love and mercy in our community and in our world.

The love and mercy the Son who God sends as a gift to this world to save this world, to bring each and every one of us new life.

A life of love, of mercy, of shining light through the shadows of our lives and our world.

Prayer— God, you so love this world you gave us your only Son, help us to share this incredible gift with others in our lives, in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Connect— It's Sunday! Take some time to reach out to members of our church family today!

Monday March 15th, 2021

Scripture—Psalm 51:1-12

Story, Prayer, Connect— One of my favorite hymns during Lent is "Create in Me a Clean Heart O God", take some today to read the lyrics, listen to the music online, or sing from your hymnal if you have one as we connect with this psalm today:

"Create in Me a Clean Heart" #188

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a right spirit within me.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from Thy presence;
Take not Thy holy Spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation;
And renew a right spirit within me.

Tuesday March 16th, 2021

Scripture—Jeremiah 31:31-34

Story— "The Judeans in Babylon blamed their exile on their ancestors, who had broken the covenant established at Sinai. Here the prophet looks to a day when God will make a new covenant with the people. There will be no need to teach the law, because God will write it on their hearts." Through Jesus we know God, and we know God's laws—love God and love our neighbor as ourselves. God writes this on our hearts and calls us into love with all.

Prayer— Lord, continue to write your love and mercy on our hearts, guiding us to care for our neighbors in need and filled with love for you, amen.

Connect— How might you share God's law of love and mercy today? Connect with others sharing love and hope today!

Wednesday March 17th, 2021

Scripture—Ephesians 2:11-22

Story— As we grow together as a community of disciples, I often think about how incredible it is that we have all been gathered together. Each of us our own individual selves with our own experiences, beliefs, preferences, and opinions, and yet…

And yet Jesus still gathers us all together, holding only one thing in common for certain—him. Christ's peace draws us together for all of our similarities and all of our differences, calling us into this discipleship of peace, love, and hope. As we focus this Wednesday on growing in our discipleship as a community, I give thanks for the foundation upon which our church is built—love.

Prayer— Lord, continue to gather your people together in person, through technology, through the power of your Holy Spirit, grow this community in new ways, in their discipleship, in their faith, and in their love, in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Connect— Join us this evening at 6pm on Zoom for our Lenten weekly fellowship and bible study!

Thursday March 18th, 2021

Scripture—Psalm 119:9-16

Story— Through this season, our hope is to focus more deeply on rooting ourselves in God's love and growing as disciples through Christ's grace. This psalm is an example of how we might continue in the Lenten practices of prayerful repentance and meditation, while also rooting ourselves deeply in God's command to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves.

Prayer— Lord, we seek you with our whole hearts, ground us in your promises, and lift us up as we grow in delight for your commandments, amen.

Connect— Take some time today for prayer and meditation, prayerfully rooting yourself in God's love.

Friday & Saturday March 19th & 20th, 2021

Scripture—Psalm 40:5-10

Story, Prayer, **Connect**— As we continue in this season of Lent, journeying alongside Jesus to the cross, today's psalm is a reminder of God's continued faithfulness and love, even as we patiently wait for Jesus's death and resurrection to come.

This psalm is a prayer, not just for the psalmist, but for us as well, as we continue to wait for God's kin-dom in its fullness on earth, as we continue to find ourselves waiting for so much in this time, we seek our refuge and our strength.

We seek God. We seek Jesus. We seek love and grace.

There is a Taizé meditation song that we sometimes sing during Advent and Lent that I always find myself moving towards the closer we get to Holy Week titled "Wait for the Lord".

Take some today to read the lyrics, listen to the music online, or sing from your hymnal if you have one as we connect with this psalm today, even if you don't, as this song is meant to be a chant, a prayer, a meditation, take some time to connect with the waiting in this season:

"Wait for the Lord" #262

Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.
Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!
Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.
Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!
Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.
Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!

Sunday March 21st

Scripture—John 12:20-33

Story— "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

It might seem like a simple request. And really, by this point in Jesus's ministry, it shouldn't be surprising to the disciples that people want to see Jesus.

He's been healing and teaching and people are hearing about it. And when Jesus hears these words, he knows what humanity he must see next. He knows that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it cannot become new, it cannot bring new life.

Jesus knows that in order to see this world that God so loves, to see all who are on the inside and outside, to be in relationship with those who are considered "other", to heal the brokenness and division in this world, to bring hope and new life in the midst of sin and death, Jesus knows he is going to the cross.

It's probably not the response Jesus' disciples were expecting, especially as Jesus names that his soul is troubled in knowing what is to come. Jesus also knows his path, and even as he speaks aloud to God in front of witnesses, even as God's voice speaks back like thunder in the sky, Jesus tries to explain to those listening, to those who want to see him—that in his death and resurrection he will draw us all together with him again.

Prayer— Lord, we wish to see you, draw us close to you and continue to share your grace with us so that we may share your grace with the world, in your name we pray, amen.

Connect— It's Sunday! Take some time to reach out to members of our church family today!

Monday March 22nd

Scripture—Psalm 31:9-16

Story— During this Lenten season, this time of transition, as many continue to wait for vaccinations, we might find ourselves feeling weary like the psalmist in our reading for today. But together we can pray to God, trusting that God's hands will hold us safely, God's face will shine upon us, and through God's steadfast love we can always find hope.

Prayer— Lord, help us to trust in you, as we commend ourselves to your hands in so much of our lives, continue to let your face shine upon us and surround us with your steadfast love and hope, amen.

Connect— Take some time to connect with God's hope and love today in prayer or in music.

Tuesday March 23rd

Scripture—Isaiah 42:1-9

Story— Today's reading form Isaiah describes the "mission of the servant", who we often imagine to be Jesus. I wonder if we, as disciples growing in our faith together, can read these words and find our own mission, our own calling as disciples.

Prayer— Lord, may we know how to sustain the weary with your word, open our ears, help us, so that we might stand together in service for your children, amen.

Connect— How might you share some words today with someone who might be feeling weary? In a call, a card, or however you connect, share some encouragement today.

Wednesday March 24th

Scripture— Revelation 3:20

Story— This verse is in my top 5 scripture verses for lots of reasons, as we close out this last Wednesday in Lent, my hope is that together we can focus on growing in our relationship with God—particularly through Jesus, the one who knocks on our door and not only loves us and saves us, but also comes in to eat with us. Jesus sits at our table with us, and I imagine him with a handful of bread laughing with us in true loving relationship, and what joy that brings.

Prayer— Lord, keep knocking, be with us always, amen.

Connect— Join us this evening at 6pm on Zoom for our Lenten weekly fellowship and bible study!

Thursday, Friday, Saturday
March 25th, 26th, 27th, 2021

Scripture—Mark 14—15

Story— This coming Sunday is Palm Sunday! Often in congregations, this is also “Passion Sunday” when we walk through Jesus on his journey to the cross. There are so many voices in this reading for this weekend.

The voices of disciples, questioning Jesus, angry at a nameless woman we are called to remember; the voice of Jesus, honoring that nameless and voiceless woman; the voice of Jesus, guiding the disciples on their next steps, knowing of their coming betrayal, still vowing to give his body and his blood for them and for the world; the voice of Jesus, praying, his voice crying out for help; the voice of a disciple, betraying Jesus, the voice of Jesus, fulfilling scripture, the voices of witnesses and priests, unsure of who this Jesus really is.

The list goes on and on throughout these reading, there are so many voices with so many different motivations, emotions, and questions.

Voices of joy and honor and praise, voices of betrayal and fear, voices of sorrow, and worry, and pain, voices that follow Jesus to the cross.

For this new covenant, this new love, this new mercy.

Prayer— Lord, as we begin this Holy Week on Sunday, we pray that your presence be felt and your voice be heard among us as we journey with Jesus to the cross, in Jesus’ name we pray, amen.

Connect— Connect with Jesus’s story today, take time to pray, to listen, and to wonder how your voice might share Christ’s love and mercy too.

Sunday March 28th, 2021

Scripture—Mark 1:1-11

Story— As I was getting excited and ready for today, for Palm Sunday, I was thinking to myself about when I was younger, very young, like around five or six years old. I have this memory of Palm Sunday in my church. I don't really remember the story of the donkey and the Colt. I don't even really remember that it was supposed to be about Jesus. I do however remember getting a giant palm leaf, and being able to whack my sister with it. And don't worry it was just a leaf it didn't hurt her, but it was a joyous occasion for me. I was happy to hear that my husband had a similar memory of himself and his brother turning their giant palm leaves into swords and battling each other. These are our memories of Palm Sunday, and they are happy and care free.

No longer a child, and during a global pandemic knowing that parading around the church building with our palm leaves won’t be possible this year, I’m hoping to still create something “palm like” to whack Greg with, probably a cut out piece of paper that Hadley helps me to color.

My hope is that today we can still find ways to celebrate Jesus’ triumphant entry, still declaring “Hosanna, Hosanna!” with all the joy we have each year, with laughter and hope, because Jesus still enters Jerusalem, whether we have palm leaves to wave or not.

Prayer—

Connect— It’s Sunday! Take some time to reach out to members of our church family today!

Monday. Tuesday, & Wednesday
March 29th, 30th, & 31st, 2021

Scripture—John 12:1-11, John 13:21-32

Story— I wanted to keep the beginning of Holy Week together since we are now at the point where Jesus's journey to the cross is coming to an end. We begin with Mary anointing Jesus feet on Monday, people of all faiths coming to see him on Tuesday (from our March 21st reading), and then on Wednesday Jesus telling his disciples that he knows one of them will betray him.

Personally, it's never easy to walk with Jesus during this week as we lead up to Good Friday, but remembering these moments in Jesus' life all help us to grow in our own discipleship as we follow Jesus.

And so as we begin this week, as I've mentioned before I have been particularly drawn to music during this season, I invite you to join me in praying, in singing, in meditating upon the words we'll hear on Good Friday from the man next to Jesus on the cross.

You can look up this Taizé song online, in your hymnal (ELW# 616), or just pray along with me. Repeat the verse as many times as feels right for you:

Jesus, remember me
When you come into your kingdom.
Jesus, remember me
When you come into your kingdom.

Prayer— Jesus, as we remember this part of your journey, remember us when you come into your kingdom, you give us so much love and grace and hope, that even in the difficult days of Holy week when we hold the grief of your last days, we give thanks for all the ways you continue to shine light and hope even in the difficult moments, in your name, Jesus, our redeemer, we pray, amen.

Connect— Connect with Jesus in prayer as we begin this week, remembering Jesus's journey and the gifts of grace and love he brings us.

Bethany Lutheran Church
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March 2021 Devotional

God's Blessings to . . .