



MAKE Every Day COUNT

WEEKLY DEVOTIONS
FROM THE LUTHERAN
HOME ASSOCIATION

– VOLUME 2 –

THE LUTHERAN HOME
ASSOCIATION



(888) 600-TLHA | tlha.org | info@tlha.org



PUBLISHED BY
THE LUTHERAN HOME
ASSOCIATION



Copyright © 2021, The Lutheran Home Association.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—except for brief quotations in reviews, without prior permission from the publisher.

Scriptures taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® 2011.

The Lutheran Home Association

National Ministry Offices

337 South Meridian Street, Belle Plaine, MN 56011

1-888-600-TLHA (8542) • (952) 873-6000

E-mail: info@tlha.org • **Website:** tlha.org



*Where the care of the soul
is the soul of care.*

This mindset is part of our everyday life. Our direct caregivers are the hands and feet of Jesus.

At a much deeper and even more personal level are the direct caregivers of the soul, our chaplains. They are not only the hands and feet of Jesus, but the voice of Jesus.

Our chaplains' work fulfills our mission to share Christ's love with the souls in our care and others whose lives we touch.

This collection of devotions, shared by our chaplains, will help you rest in and live out God's love wherever your week takes you.

It is our prayer you will be blessed and inspired by these personal reflections on God's Word.

**Remember, every day there is evidence
of how much God loves you.**

Every day counts.

Hope in God

By Mark Hayes, President of Ministry

Week 1

*“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.”
(1 Timothy 6:17)*

Money, although not inherently bad, universally points out the flaws in all of us. At whatever level we reside, we passionately seek the next level. “If only I had (insert that thing you think you need right now), THEN I would truly be content.”

That thing we think we need isn’t the same for everyone. But money is the most ubiquitous way for us to recognize our dependence on things in this world more than God.

In March 2020, many businesses closed, people lost their jobs, and the market experienced a drop like it hasn’t seen since 2008. This is a vivid snapshot of why not to put our hope in unstable things. A spouse can disappoint or pass away. A job can become disposable. Your reputation can be tarnished. Here’s the hint: Anything that isn’t God is unstable.

But after the warning comes a beautiful promise and clear specific direction for your hope. “Put your hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.”

- Hope in God to weather a job interruption. Your hope in the job crushes you. Your hope in God opens up opportunities.
- Hope in God to remain emotionally intact when a loved one hurts you. Your hope in your loved one destroys your connection to that person and mankind. Your hope in God gives you peace and grants you the ability to forgive.
- Hope in God for personal value and self-worth when the world mistakenly labels you. Your hope in your reputation debilitates you. Your hope in God gives you a clear view of your status as his beloved child.

God led His only son Jesus to a cross, relinquishing His relationship with him so that He could have one with you. God is love. Put your hope in Him.

Prayer: Dear Father, lead me to see life as a gift and every day as a blessing. Send your Spirit to redirect the eyes and heart of my faith to rely solely on you.

Established and protected by the Lord

By Rev. Ed Fredrich, Chaplain

Week 2

Still, the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and protect you from the Evil One. (2 Thessalonians 3:3)

“Established in 1839.” This is the byline of the oldest Lutheran church in the state of Wisconsin. That is almost 10 years before Wisconsin became a state. In 1843, immigrants from the same area of Germany came to settle in the place where I grew up. Remembering that heritage was an important part of our training as descendants of those who came to America.

In 2 Thessalonians, Paul is requesting the prayers of the Thessalonians on behalf of him and his fellow workers. His goal is “that the word of the Lord may spread quickly and be glorified just as it was among you.” (verse 1)

It was important that the Good News of Jesus continued to spread. An eternity was at stake. The Thessalonians were examples of the Gospel’s success. Paul continues in verse 2: *“Pray also that we may be rescued from evil and wicked people. For not everyone has faith.”*

Not everyone has faith. Paul found that out firsthand. Based on that truth, Paul asserts this blessed truth. “Still, the Lord is faithful!” Paul learned that truth firsthand, too.

Look how he applies it: “He will establish you.” “Establish” can also be translated as “strengthen.” But “establish” hits the meaning of the Greek word better. There are times in life when we find that we have no strength. The future is dark, and it looks like there is no hope. On our own, that is true. That is why it is important to remember that our faithful God established us. Even when we have no strength, our God is with us. He has established us.

Our faithful Lord also protects us. Protection in a dangerous world is always important. It is dangerous because the devil is always looking for ways to destroy and hurt. Pray to the faithful Lord because his Word defeats evil. The devil can’t stand against it. How do we know that God is faithful? He has given us faith in Jesus. Rejoice in the victory that he has won!

Prayer: Lord, what a comfort to know that you have established us and that you continue to protect us. Keep us in your Word that we will always trust in you, our faithful Lord. Amen

There's still room for more!

By Rev. Joel Gaertner, Vice President of Ministry

Week 3

"I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered." (Isaiah 56:8b)

Because of COVID, we are more aware of the capacity of rooms and buildings. I'll be honest I've never considered what 25 percent or 50 percent capacity of a facility is, but that is how we've been living as things have opened up. Have you ever thought about what the capacity of heaven is?

There are some who try to take some of the figurative language of the Bible and make it literal. They come up with numbers like 144,000 as those who will be saved and be in heaven. When you understand the Bible, you learn God does not have a capacity limit for heaven or a cap on how many can be saved. As a matter of fact, he tells us that he, "Wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:4)

Take a moment and do a quick survey of your loved ones. How many of them believe in Jesus as their Savior? Are there some in that group whom you could share your faith with so that they could be part of that group that our Savior says, "I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered"?

Surveys say the most common reason a person becomes a Christian and joined a church is because someone they know invited them. Another opportunity to share your faith with people is when they are facing certain difficult situations such as in sickness, death, loss, and challenges. People are more open to having a spiritual conversation. Is there someone in your life right now that you could invite to join you in the unlimited space of heaven?

Think about it for a moment. Looking forward to an eternity of no social distancing, no masks, no fears, no worries and eternal joy in God's presence. Whom would you like to have be with you there? There still is room!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for making me your child and giving me the comfort and confidence which I have through my faith in Jesus as my Savior! Sadly, there are many in our world and many in my own life who don't have that comfort and confidence. Make me bold and comfortable to share my faith so that those who are nearest and dearest to me will be with me forever in heaven. I humbly ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

The mind of the Lord

By Mark Hayes, President of Ministry

Week 4

Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? (Romans 11:34)

“And it came to me then that every plan is a tiny prayer to Father Time.”

These song lyrics were written from the perspective of someone experiencing their final moments of life in a hospital bed. Her beautiful plans of having a family, making an impact in the world, and living to a ripe old age were cut short by an unexpected illness.

If we were writing those song lyrics, we would name God instead of addressing an obscurity like “Father Time,” but we might take the same secular approach to the decisions that God makes. Feeling cheated of the lives that we had envisioned for ourselves or a loved one, in the same situation, we would ask God “Why?” or claim “Unfair.”

And even now as I write this, we are several months into a worldwide pandemic, we question God’s control and intentions when we see an unruly unemployment rate, a rising death toll, and a constant sense of discomfort just by being around other people.

Who has known the mind of the Lord? Who has been the Lord’s counselor? No one, of course. Although we may not know the mind of the Lord, we do know his heart. He unfolded for us the master plan that He put in place the moment His perfect world was tainted with sin.

He promised a Savior, predicted the arrival and death of His own Son, and carried out every detail to precision—the life of Jesus in place of our own. He sacrificed His Son to bring us close to Him and to prepare an eternity for us in Heaven with Him.

The heart of the Lord gives us insight into the mind of the Lord. If He gave up everything to save us, we can be sure that He has a reason for everything we are facing now. Like a sculptor who turns a piece of rock into a beautiful image, God shapes our rocky life circumstances into something amazing, even if it wasn’t what we planned.

Prayer: Dear Father, forgive me for the times when I question your power or even your motives. Let the cross of Jesus continually remind me of your deep love for me in the middle of life’s changing circumstances. Amen.

Share the Gospel

By Rev. Mark Bartsch, Chaplain

Week 5

Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a snare to me because you are not thinking the things of God, but the things of men." (Matthew 16:23)

Have you ever found yourself standing in Jesus's way? Have you thought too much about the "things of men"? Have you ignored the "things of God," the gospel? At first glance, those are sharp words. Jesus just called Peter by the name "Satan." Does that mean that Peter is on the side of the devil? Let's put Jesus's words into context to understand his words to Peter. Earlier in Matthew 16, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They responded, John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

He said to them, "But you, who do you say I am?" Peter had a wonderful response. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon... You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overpower it." (Matthew 16: 13-18)

Then, we come to chapter 16: 21-22: From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and experts in the law, and be killed, and on the third day be raised again. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "May you receive mercy, Lord! This will never happen to you."

In his response to Jesus, Peter was acting as an agent of the devil. Peter was in Jesus's way; he was standing in the way of the gospel. Jesus had to go to Jerusalem, he had to suffer many things, and he had to be killed and then rise again. This is the plan of salvation for you and me and all people. We have all sinned. Jesus was sent by the Father as our substitute. If we somehow prevent the Word of God from being proclaimed, then people will not know their sins are forgiven and that their guilt is removed. God loves us so much that he lovingly sent his Son to live, to die, and to rise again for us. In him, our forgiveness is guaranteed, and our place in heaven is prepared. May we never act as an agent of the devil. May we never hinder or prevent the proclamation of the gospel.

Prayer: Dear Lord God, help us to put away worldly, selfish thoughts. Move us to speak of your great love and your willingness to be the Savior for all people. Forgiveness is ours, and the joy of heaven awaits. Amen.

Justified by faith in Christ

By Rev. Roger Woller, Chaplain

Week 6

We know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. So we also believed in Christ Jesus that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law. (Galatians 2:16)

If you are familiar with Mankato, Minnesota, you know there is a Lower Mankato and an Upper Mankato. When you are driving on Main Street to get to Upper Mankato to where I live, you must drive up a very long hill to get to Upper Mankato. The other day when I went to pick up my granddaughter, Olivia, who lives a few miles west of Mankato, we were saying how difficult it would be to walk or bike up that hill. I know for a fact that I would never make it now with the shape that I am in. Olivia might make it because she is younger and in better health and shape. She did admit that it would be very difficult even for her, though.

It is easy to get up the hill when like me you have a pickup truck with good tires and a large enough engine, and the street is not icy or slippery. When we ask the question “How do I get up the hill?,” there are a lot of answers. But what if we ask the question this way: “How Do I Get to Heaven?” There is only one answer to that question. To be sure that you can get to Heaven, you need to be right with God.

How do I get myself right with God? There is no way you and I can make ourselves right with God by our own thoughts, efforts, or deeds. Sin has separated us from God. We do not deserve to go to heaven. You and I are sinful. Just like I could never make it up the hill in Mankato by myself, there is no way I can make myself right or just before God to deserve heaven.

Our loving, gracious God gives us the answer. Read again our passage from Galatians 2:16.

My dear friend, live your life with thanksgiving and joy knowing that you are on top of the hill. You will be in heaven someday because Jesus has paid for all your sins and made you right with God.

Prayer: Dear Lord strengthen my faith knowing that you have been crucified for me and have made me right in your sight. Help me to show that Christ lives in me. Help me to live by faith in Jesus, who loved me and gave himself for me. Amen.

Come to the banquet

By Rev. Mark Bartsch, Chaplain

Week 7

"For many are invited, but few are chosen." (Matthew 22:14)

In 2020, many wedding ceremonies took place, but due to lockdowns, COVID restrictions, and social distancing, the weddings were much different than first planned.

- In one case, the bride and the groom, the maid of honor and the best man, the parents of the couple, and the pastor were the only people present at the wedding.
- In another situation, a mother told me this past summer that her daughter was getting married. The guest list had included 200 people. Now, there would be only 20 attending the wedding.
- The wedding ceremonies are happening, but many wedding receptions are being postponed until sometime next year.

Many people wanted to attend these weddings, but health regulations and guidelines kept them from doing so. Sometimes things just don't work out as we would like them to. God could say that also.

Invitation after invitation was sent out to attend this wedding for the king's son. The king sent out his servants to those who had been invited and urged them to come, but they refused to come. He sent out more servants and they said, "Everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet." But they paid no attention. One went to his field; another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them, and killed them" (Matthew 22: 5, 6). In response, the king killed those who had been invited.

The kingdom of heaven is the wedding banquet. "For many are invited, but few are chosen." Not everyone who is invited to the kingdom of heaven will come. They reject the Word of God. In their unbelief, they turn away from the Lord and his gracious invitation.

Come to the banquet! You and I are so thankful that we have been invited to the kingdom of heaven, and by faith, we graciously accept that invitation.

Prayer: Dear Lord God, thank you for inviting us to your wedding banquet. You have given us the gift of faith to accept your invitation. In faith, we promise to remain faithful to you until we take our place at this heavenly banquet. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Live as children of light

By Rev. Kenly Mann, Chaplain

Week 8

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. (Ephesians 5:1)

If you are a terrible cook and I ask you to bake me a cake, you would be stressed. But let me change the scenario: say you are a great cook and I ask you to bake me a cake. It would be easy for you to do.

When God commands us to be imitators of God, you might be all stressed out. And you would have reason to be, as by ourselves, we don't have the power to make ourselves imitators of God.

But look ahead to Ephesians 5:8-9: For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.

When we were unbelievers, we were darkness. We did not have it in us to imitate God. (The therefore in 5:1 relates to the previous verse telling us to forgive each other as Christ God forgave us.) But God filled us with his Spirit. We now are light. So Paul writes, "Live as children of light."

If you were a living apple tree, you would bear apples without being commanded to do so. You would bear apples because that is the nature of an apple tree.

God made us believers who naturally bear fruit. One of those fruits is that we imitate Christ. When you imitate someone, you are complimenting that person.

Our faith naturally praises Christ by imitating Him. We forgive because that is the nature of faith. We imitate Christ naturally because he made us light, and therefore, we live as beloved children of light.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we praise you for your love in coming to us when we were dead in sin and filling us with your Spirit of light. When we are tempted to imitate the world instead of You, lead us to remember who we are – children of light – and say "no" to sin and instead imitate you. We praise you that you do not tell us to earn salvation by imitating you but instead made us your children of light, who want to mimic you like children do their dear parents. Amen.

We can trust the Lord!

By Rev. Ed Fredrich, Chaplain

Week 9

*Certainly my plans are not your plans, and your ways are not my ways,
declares the LORD. (Isaiah 55:8)*

Things happen in life that we don't plan. To use a baseball picture, there are things that throw a mighty curveball. We can plan, but until it becomes fact, it remains a plan. Sometimes the plan is even abandoned.

Our verse today is part of a beautiful invitation that the Lord had Isaiah record for the people of Israel. Isaiah lived at a time when the majority of the Israelites were being "rebellious children."

The northern kingdom, Israel, also suffered from godless leaders, who may have been politically savvy but did not love or believe in the true God, the Lord. In Judah, some kings who served at the time served the Lord, but the people wavered between worshipping the Lord and the idols of the people around them. Many didn't accept God's invitation.

Even though the Lord knew that Israel chose to learn the hard way, he was still going to carry out his plan. Their rejection of the Lord would bring the loss of their land. They would be exiled, but the Lord wasn't going to forsake them.

He would bring them back so that his plan could be carried out. His promised Savior would come, and he would fulfill the promises that God had made.

We now live with the knowledge of those promises fulfilled. It is this assurance that helps us when life throws us a curveball. God's plans are not our plans. Who would have expected that God would love us so much that he would send his Son to be our Savior.

Despite our plans of rebellion, God overcame them. Jesus took our sin and paid the price. We now live with that knowledge that no matter what, we can trust the LORD!

Prayer: Lord, always help me to remember that your plans for me always include the love that you have revealed in Jesus. Help me to set my plans according to your will. When they don't, lead me always to see that in the way you lead, you continue to work it all for my good. Amen.

See your true citizenship!

By Rev. Patrick Feldhus, Chaplain

Week 10

But our citizenship is in heaven. We are eagerly waiting for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. (Philippians 3:20)

When we vote, we exercise our rights as citizens of the U.S. We are free to vote for presidents, senators, and representatives.

When Paul wrote to the Philippians, they, too, understood citizenship. Because Philippi was a Roman colony, its people were citizens of Rome. They received the perks of being Roman citizens. They could call on Caesar to hear their cases if they thought they were unfairly treated.

But here, Paul tells us that we are citizens of somewhere even more glorious than anything on Earth. We are citizens of heaven, the very home of God himself. But this citizenship is costly. However, we did not have to purchase this citizenship because Jesus bought our citizenship with his holy, precious blood. Our true forever home is not an earthly kingdom like Philippi or the U.S. It is heaven!

We are blessed to be able to see where our true citizenship is. We are blessed to know without a doubt that heaven is ours. And we eagerly await the return of our Savior, Jesus Christ. The only reason why we can see heaven as our true home and why we can eagerly anticipate the return of our Savior is because Jesus gathered us under his wings as he spread his arms out on the cross.

He gathered us to himself. He did that knowing that we would fall back into sin every day of our lives. The fact that we continue to sin does not stop him from bringing us back into his kingdom through the message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. And he constantly focuses our attention on the glorious things to come.

No earthly kingdom can compare to the glory that we will have in our heavenly home.

Prayer: Dear Holy Father, thank you for showing me where our true citizenship belongs. Help me to find comfort when things on Earth are difficult. Let us wait with joyful anticipation of Jesus's return to bring us to our heavenly kingdom. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.

One people truly united

By Rev. Ed Fredrich, Chaplain

Week 11

Then, the nations will know that I, the LORD, make Israel holy when my holy place is in their midst forever. (Ezekiel 37:28)

A retired pastor whom I know has a stock answer when I ask him how he is doing. He replies, “The future is looking up!”

For us, we have just come through the 2020 election. Those of you who like the results would probably agree with the sentiment expressed above: the future is looking up. Those disappointed by the election would disagree. Remember that God’s Word reminds us not to put our trust in princes—earthly rulers.

Our verse today is the closing verse of a section in Ezekiel where the Lord revealed his plan for the future. He revealed how the future is one people united under the new David. He would be the one Shepherd. Set in the picture of the restoration of the people of Israel in Palestine, the Lord was revealing an even greater future.

Verse 27 states: My Dwelling Place will be over them. I will be their God, and they will be my people. From the rest of Scripture, we know that God is referring to the glorious goal that he has for his people. We call it “Saints Triumphant.”

The future is looking up because Jesus won the victory. That new David went against a greater foe than the giant Goliath. He went toe to toe with the Devil. Just when Satan thought that he had succeeded in getting rid of Jesus, he found himself defeated. His hold of death and sin on us is now gone. The victory is ours.

Oh yes, the election results are important. They do indicate what may be in the immediate future. But no matter what those results are, we, by God’s grace, know that “the future is looking up!” What a privilege we have by faith to be assured of that future and to know that our faithful King and Shepherd will safely bring us there.

Prayer: Lord, I look forward to the day when I will be face to face with you in your holy place. What a privilege to be rejoicing in that joy for all eternity with all of your saved. Lord, help me to always remember that no matter what is happening in my life right now that thanks to you, the future is looking up. Amen.

Where does strength come from?

By Mark Hayes, President of Ministry

Week 12

"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service." (1 Timothy 1:12)

I once had a coworker who was very refined. He grew up in Italy and had a vast knowledge of food and wine. He spent some time in New York City as a waiter at a five-star restaurant, where tending to a celebrity was a common occurrence. Waiters in that setting had to have an intimate knowledge of the menu, which changed daily, along with an eloquent description of each dish and every possible wine pairing. Most waiters lasted no more than one week. Many didn't make it through one day. He worked there five years. He was the best of the best.... He told me so himself.

Paul was a "master" of everything religious. He was very well educated in the most stringent disciplines of the day. But in Paul's words to a young pastor named Timothy, he makes no boasts and takes no credit. No Christian who truly understands the Gospel has any right to be anything but humble before God.

No Pastor who truly understands the incredible task of shepherding God's people can be anything but grateful for God's grace in allowing him to serve. It is God who provides the strength for a pastor to gently walk a child of God through the storms of life, show compassion in the face of depression and anger, and deliver comfort to the hurting. It is mentally and spiritually exhausting. Strength from God is essential.

When Sophie Boessling gave her gift to start The Lutheran Home Association, she went to her church. She had in mind to provide a place to care for widows and orphans and to make sure that everyone who lived there was connected to Jesus.

We have been incredibly blessed throughout our history to have dedicated pastors to keep the care of the soul at the center of our ministry. As they humbly serve in this honorable work, I pray that they will accept our thanks for their tremendous dedication.

Prayer: Dear Savior, it is you who set apart pastors for service in your kingdom. It is you who provides strength for them to minister to others with the Gospel. As we give thanks for these dedicated servants, grant them perseverance in their service and joy in their work.

Repent and live!

By Rev. Joel Gaertner, Vice President of Ministry

Week 13

"For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!" (Ezekiel 18:32)

Think for a moment about the things that we have been encouraged to do in 2020 during COVID-19 to protect our lives. Stay home! Wash your hands! Use hand sanitizer! Wear a mask! Now think of the reactions that people have had to those guidelines. People have scoffed at them, ignored them, reluctantly followed them, or promoted them and been scoffed at by others.

Across the pages of the Bible, God consistently sends the message that he wants to preserve our lives – both physically and spiritually. Reread the verse above, and note how God clearly says that he doesn't want anyone to die. Then, notice the simple directive that God gives every human being to ensure that he or she will live spiritually – repent.

This might seem like a simple directive. But why is it so hard for us human beings to repent of our sins? Is it pride that we don't want to be told that we are wrong or have someone tell us what to do? Might it be shame over what we know that we have done, and are we too ashamed or embarrassed to own up to what we have done?

In love, God gives us the directive to "Repent and live!" He doesn't want anyone to die. He was so serious about that, that he gave the life of his only son, Jesus, in exchange for our lives. Now that is commitment and putting your money where your mouth is. The challenge is that too often our pride, guilt, or shame gets in the way, and we don't want to let Jesus be the payment for our sins.

Lay aside your pride, guilt, shame, or whatever else is keeping you from coming to the cross and laying your sins there. Repent of them. Then, go on living your life with your conscience set free, your heart at peace, and a renewed relationship with God!

Prayer: Dearest Jesus, in my heart of hearts, I know that I am a sinner. Deep down, I am troubled by what I have said, thought, or done that goes against what you have directed me to do. Give me the faith and humility to repent of my sins, trusting in the payment that Jesus made for them on the cross. Thank you for your what you have done for me, and in your precious name I bring this prayer. Amen.

Sheep among wolves

By Rev. Roger Woller , Chaplain

Week 14

“Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” (Matthew 10:16)

It is not easy to be a Christian. Never has, and never will be. Do not expect everyone whom you meet or talk to about Jesus to like you and to believe in the same way as you do. Do not expect people to like you when you let your Christian faith shine.

When you share your faith with a person who does not believe that what the Bible says is true, don't expect him or her to agree with you. You may tell this person what it means to you to be sure that you going to heaven because of what Jesus has done for you, not because you deserve to go to heaven.

However, he or she may not appreciate what you say or believe. When you are honest about your faith in Jesus, Jesus tells you what to expect.

Just as he told his disciples what to do and what to expect, Jesus tells us the same. This has not changed. He is telling us, his disciples of 2020, “Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.”

We are his sheep. Jesus is our Good Shepherd. Jesus laid down his life for his sheep, and he leads us through this valley of the shadow of death to heaven to be with him forever.

We live in a world of unbelieving wolves, but our Good Shepherd is always there feeding us with his precious promises of the Gospel. “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Matt. 11:28)

We, his sheep, know that we are sinful and have fallen far short of God's perfection. We are honest with that truth, and we patiently and courageously – and with discretion – share that truth with the wolves of the world. With the innocence of a dove, however, we show the wolves the Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for them, too.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, fill me with the Spirit of truth so that I as a sheep of the Good Shepherd may always be a faithful witness to the truth of the Gospel and never be ashamed. Fill me with the truth of the Gospel. Make me wise unto salvation and always courageous to be your witness. Amen.

Jesus comes suddenly to restore

By Rev. Kenley Mann, Chaplain

Week 15

*For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come
like a thief in the night. (1 Thessalonians 5:2)*

In the early morning hours of March 18, 1990, a pair of thieves disguised as Boston cops entered the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. They tied up the two security guards and then proceeded to steal 13 pieces of art worth more than \$500 million.

The art has never been recovered. It was one of the largest heists in the history of the United States. Or was it?

Another heist goes back much further, back to the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, and Satan. Satan tempted them to sin, and they sinned by choice. In doing so, Satan robbed what is most precious of everything that God gives us – life.

God could get it back in only one way, and that was to give his Son on Calvary's cross. Jesus put it this way: The thief comes to only steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that you may have life and have it to the full.

John the Baptist told us, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Through his word, Jesus says, "Look at me. I'm the Lamb of God. I'm the Lamb of God because I've lived a perfect life for you; I took away all your sins: I gave you back what's so precious – life. Look at me!"

Jesus does not tell us when he will return visibly as the victorious Lamb of God. Thieves do not tell you when they will invade your home. It will be an unexpected event. That is Paul's point in our text. Stay in God's word.

God gives us eyes that are looking for Christ's return, not to steal as Satan did but rather to restore us to life in the fullest. Don't let this truth sit. Instead, Paul tells us: Encourage one another and build one another up (1 Thessalonians 5:11) with this truth.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, lead us to wonder vividly each morning if today
is the Day of your Second Coming. We join with the Apostle John in
praying in Revelation 22:20, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."*

*If you do not come today, keep us on fire for sharing your word of life so that
others may join us in louder praise for your Coming. Amen.*

The mystery of salvation is revealed!

By Rev. Patrick Feldhus, Chaplain

Week 16

Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him. (Romans 16:25-26)

When celebrating the greatest gift that God the Father has given his fallen world. You might get the impression that it was a shock and surprise to hear that Jesus was finally in the world. Perhaps Jesus's entry into the world was even a bit mysterious. However, God gave plenty of clues pertaining to the mystery.

1. Immediately after the first sin, God promised Adam and Eve, "I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head, and you will crush his heel."
(Genesis 3:15)
2. God gave the clue to be on the lookout for a child from the seed of a woman. Normally, children come from the seed of a man, but not so with this special child. Later, God provided another clue: "Therefore the Lord himself will give a sign for all of you. Look! The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and name him Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14)

God even told his people where the virgin would give birth to the one who would crush the serpent's head. "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, from you, will go out the one who will be the ruler for me in Israel. His goings forth are from the beginning, from the days of eternity." (Micah 5:2)

All we need is God's word, which reveals the truth to us—a truth that releases us from the guilt and shame that wells up inside of each of us. It is no longer a mystery. The clues were given and fulfilled! Let us ever cling to God's word, which strengthens our faith in the Christ who crushed the serpent's head under his foot. Let us hold tight to the word of God, which helps us to be prepared for Christ to return triumphantly and to bring us into his eternal kingdom!

Prayer: Dear Gracious Father, thank you for fulfilling your promise to send your Son to be our Savior. Help us stay connected to your word every day so that our faith may increase as we wait for Jesus to return! In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Ready for heaven

By Rev. Mark Bartsch, Chaplain

Week 17

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.” (Luke 2:29)

People worry and fret a great deal about when they will take their last breaths. Some would like to find a “fountain of youth,” hoping to remain young so that they do not have to face death.

The thought of dying brings fear to many people. People are afraid of the unknown. You and I don’t know what it is like to die. You have heard people say “He died before his time” if the person died at a young age. You might hear this comment made about a baby or a child who dies: “She never had a chance to live her life.”

God gives each of us a certain number of days to live, and then, we will die. Moses wrote in Psalm 90, “A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death – they are like the new grass of the morning: In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered. Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

Simeon was privileged to know through the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen Jesus, his Savior. In the temple courts, he had to be overflowing with excitement and anticipation. When Simeon took the baby in his arms, he said, “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.” He was ready for heaven, ready to be with his Lord in glory.

Simeon went on to say, “For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations.” Every day, our eyes can see God’s salvation. We, too, know the fulfillment of the promise. Jesus, our Savior, was born. He lived for us, he died for us, and he rose again from death for our salvation. By faith, we are ready each day to go to be with our Savior. Death does not make us afraid. We will know then that the trials and troubles of this life will be over. We will be in the special place prepared for us in heaven. What joy will be ours! We are ready for heaven.

Prayer: Dear Lord God, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, to be our Savior. You have forgiven our sins. You have taken away our fear of death. We now live in constant hope and anticipation as we await the coming of that great and glorious day. Keep us ever watchful for your return. In Jesus’s name we pray. Amen.

New & improved year

By Mark Hayes, President of Ministry

Week 18

Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. (Isaiah 43:18–19)

Ski instructors strongly advise new skiers to be aware of what is ahead of them instead of worrying about people behind them. If a new skier focuses too much on what is happening behind him or her, he or she may stumble into something in his or her path or, worse, come to a painful stop at the base of a tree. Although we have experienced a challenging 2020, to say the least, dwelling on the past will put a damper on our faith in God's promises for our future.

Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. (Isaiah 43:18–19)

This promise was magnificently larger than promising a happy new year. He promised a happy new life. The circumstances of Isaiah's audience were desolate and scary. They were away from their homes, living in captivity. God promised them something new. It went beyond their circumstances in life, beyond their physical captivity, and reached toward eternity. Jesus would come to Earth and be shattered by his Father to heal our brokenness. Healing our relationship with God is a promise that surpasses healing from a pandemic, repairing financial ruin, or getting things back to normal where we live. It gives us security regardless of our struggles in life.

The next year will be better, regardless of circumstances, when we cling to the One who promises to forgive us, love us, hold us, and stay by our side. He makes a way for us in the desert of depression and provides a stream in the wasteland of fear. We will ultimately experience this when we close our eyes and wake up by our Savior's side in heaven, but our confidence in that future will grow along the way. The more we look ahead in faith, the less we will worry about the past and present.

Prayer: Dear Father, teach us to pray big. Extend the vision of our faith beyond what we experience around us, and prepare us for our final home in heaven. Plant your promises in our hearts to get us through the struggles that we face today, and bless us richly. Amen.

God's new world is coming!

By Rev. Patrick Feldhus, Chaplain

Week 19

For this world in its present form is passing away. (1 Corinthians 7:31b)

Last year has become synonymous with misfortune and suffering. Anytime we have trouble going forward, all we have to say is, “I’m going through a 2020.” Most people will immediately understand what you mean. However, there is something important to take away from the year 2020. As bad as this year has been, it is not going to get better.

Through the Apostle Paul, God reminds us that the world as we know it is passing away. This should excite us! One day, this world—the one that has brought us a year like 2020—will be gone. But that begs the question: what will the new world be like?

The best way to describe the new world that is coming is to say what it is not.

- The new world is not contaminated with sin! Every misfortune and every difficult moment that we suffer is a result of sin in the world. The moment that Adam and Eve fell into sin, the world changed for the worse. Every virus, every natural disaster, the anger and hatred that people have toward one another, and death are a result of sin. This is the reason why the world must pass away. It is completely tainted by sin.

As we look at ourselves, we, too, are tainted completely by sin. How can we look forward to the new world? God pulled back the curtain to show us his Son, who would come to make us pure and holy. Every evil thing that we have done in thought, words, and actions has been removed from us, and Jesus’s perfection covers us. In God’s eyes, we are righteous and heirs of the new world.

God reveals this to us to comfort us while we are still in the world that is passing away—a world that gives us a year like 2020. We have a new view of the future. No matter how difficult things become, through Jesus, we will inherit a new world where there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain, as the former world in its present form has passed away.

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father! Thank you for giving us a new look for the future. Help us to find comfort in knowing that the present world will pass away and give way to a new world without sin and its consequences. In Jesus’s name we pray! Amen.

Be considerate of those weak in faith.

By Rev. Mark Bartsch, Chaplain

Week 20

Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. (1 Corinthians 8:9)

I have a daughter and a grandson who have eliminated gluten from their diets. When they come to visit, we have a gluten-free alternative; for example, a gluten-free pizza crust, or corn chips in place of wheat crackers. We could tease them about their special diets. We could make them feel very self-conscious about what they can and cannot eat. But that would express a hurtful, uncaring attitude. Out of love for them and our Lord, we do not treat them in that way. The Bible passage above is in a section titled “Concerning Food Sacrificed to Idols.” Paul writes, “Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, the food is defiled.”

There is such a thing as Christian liberty. As Christians, we are free to participate in various God-pleasing activities. We know, for example, that it is acceptable to eat almost any food, or to drink nearly any drink. Someone, however, may be offended if I would drink a glass of wine. If that person is offended by my drinking that wine, and if I am free to do so, I want to be considerate of him or her and not force my liberty upon him or her. It would damage his or her conscience. “Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak.”

I would be sinning against that person by causing him or her to act against his or her conscience, and I would also be sinning against Christ. I may have the liberty to eat or drink or to engage in various activities as a Christian, but not if the exercise of my rights is a stumbling block to those who are weak in faith.

How can you be considerate of those who are weak in faith? Listen to Paul: “If what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.” Help those who are weak in faith to grow in faith. Read and study the Word of God together. Help them to grow in their understanding of Christian liberty.

Prayer: Each day, help all of us to grow in our faith in you. Move us to pray for those who are weak in faith. Move us to be instruments to help them to grow in faith through the power of your Word. Help us all to be prepared for the Last Day so that we may go to be with you forever in glory. In Jesus’s name we pray. Amen.

Revered, Not Overlooked

By Mark Hayes, President of Ministry

Week 21

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’” (Matthew 25:40)

Our God, the King of all, cares for the daily needs of billions of people in the world every day. That concept amazes me. But sometimes it also makes me feel very small and insignificant. Does God notice me? Does he care about the little problems I bring to Him? Does He have time for me? That question is perhaps more prominent in the lives of people society tends to forget:

- Seniors who are no longer as active in the community as they once were, now living quietly as a resident in a care community, many whose abilities are diminishing with age.
- People with developmental disabilities whose gifts don’t seem to make a splash in this big world.

When a widow named Sophie Boessling became one of those people, she took everything she had to provide a solution. That solution was not just for herself, however. She had in mind to remember others who were overlooked and felt insignificant and found a way to provide for them. That was the beginning of The Lutheran Home Association on November 6, 1898. Her faith in Jesus and her loving heart set the tone for our mission to share Christ’s love while caring for the needs of others.

Our King cares deeply for those whom some may consider “insignificant.” In fact, He considers them with reverence. He says that the faith of a little child is a model of faith. He says that the least by our standards are the greatest in His Kingdom. And He tells us that anytime we care for them, we are showing love directly to Him.

We are incredibly blessed to carry on this ministry for more than 100 years. May God allow us to continue to nurture the significance and value of these wonderful children of God until He returns to take us all home.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, our Savior and King. We are so grateful that you include us in your family and give us a significance that the world cannot give. Thank you for the privilege of serving people who are incredibly special to You. Please help the ministry of TLHA to continue to endure and thrive. Fill us with the joy of knowing that when we serve others in need, we are serving You. Amen.

Everything is subject to God!

By Rev. Joel Gaertner, Vice President of Ministry

Week 22

“When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.” (1 Corinthians 15:28)

You don’t have to look very far to see the efforts and threats of anarchy which want to overthrow government and let people do whatever they want with no consequences. If you are bothered by what you see and hear in our country, the verse above should give you comfort and peace.

At a time God determines, he will “be all in all.” While it may seem people “get away” with evil plans or corrupt government officials run rough shod over God, Paul’s inspired words reassure us that it will all eventually come to a screeching halt and God will reign supreme.

You might wonder why God seemingly lets evil go unchecked or lets people run wild in their sinfulness. While we don’t know the mind of God, Jesus gives us this understanding in John 16:33 “I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world.”

Did you notice the assurance which Jesus wants us to have as we see trouble in the world?

- 1) “I have overcome the world.” This is another way of stating that God is in control and will end all the seeming trouble at a time he determines is best.
- 2) “in me you may have peace” Jesus says this because he knows things in this world can upset us and rob us of the peace we desire. Not only does Jesus tell us that we can have the peace we desire, he also tells us where we can find it –in him alone!

You likely realize that the challenge is to keep things in this perspective. Understand that no matter how bad it gets, God is in control. “In all things God works for the good of those who love him” (Romans 8:28).

Prayer: Heavenly Father, as I go through this life, it is so easy for me to take my eyes off of you and focus on the troubles in this world. Remind and reassure me that no matter what I see or hear, that you are in control and will end all these troubles and bring everything under your control in the way and at the time you know is best. Give me your peace which is far greater than my feeble human understanding and let it calm my heart and let me rest secure in you. Amen.

Following after we're found

By Rev. Kenley Mann, Chaplain

Week 23

Follow me. (John 1:43c)

Want to know something interesting about the Apostle Philip? He was personally reached by Jesus himself. Although Philip brought Nathanael to Jesus, and Andrew brought Peter to Jesus, no one brought Philip to Jesus. Instead, Jesus found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

Normally, God reaches people through people. Andrew heard John the Baptist say, "Look! The Lamb of God," and he followed Jesus. The first thing that Andrew did was to find Peter, his brother, and to bring him to Jesus. But this time, Jesus came directly to Philip and said, "Follow me."

Want to know something interesting about yourself as a believer? No matter whether it was your parents bringing you to the waters of baptism, or someone inviting you to hear God's word, or your picking up the Bible for yourself and reading it, it was still Jesus who personally met you.

He let you see himself as "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," and you were brought to faith in him.

When Jesus spoke to Philip, he said, "Keep on following me." That means that Philip had already met Jesus. Where did Philip meet Jesus? He met Jesus through the pages of the Old Testament.

Concerning Philip, Nathanael, Andrew, and Philip, the simple question is: Who really finds whom? It is Jesus who came and found them all. Jesus finds us by having us meet his word, and then, we continue to follow him. As we read the Old and New Testaments, we see that Jesus meets us personally, and we continue to follow him.

"When you are dead and gone, how would you like to be remembered?"

We all want to be remembered, but HOW do you want to be remembered? I can't think of a better way to be remembered than for people to say, "Hey, he brought people to Jesus."

Prayer: Dear Jesus, when I could not come to you, you came to me. Thank you for being the Lamb of God who took away my sin, and thank you for personally finding me through your word. Please keep coming to me through your word. In this way, I can keep following you, and others may follow me to you in your word as well. Amen.

The destruction of the world is coming

By Rev. Roger Woller, Chaplain

Week 24

Therefore, dear friends, as you look forward to these things, make every effort to be found in peace, spotless and blameless in his sight. (1 Peter 3:14)

Why didn't someone tell me this was going to happen? This question is asked by someone who never believed what God's Word told him or her. This person will ask this question when the end of the world happens. He or she had his or her lifetime to listen but didn't want to hear it or believe it.

- This person scoffed, mocked, and laughed at anyone who told him or her what God's Word says about the end of the world.
- This person scoffed, mocked, and ridiculed what God's Word says about the creation of the world. He or she said it is ridiculous to believe that God created the world and everything in it in six days by his all-powerful Word.

There will be an end to this world; an end to everything in it. When will it happen? We do not know! God does not tell us the exact day or time. God does tell us that a day of judgment and of the destruction of the ungodly will come. If you believe what God's word tells you, you will never ask the question, "Why didn't someone tell me this was going to happen?"

Do you know the reason why this world will come to an end? It is because of sin. We do not live in a perfect world, like the one that God created in the beginning. Sin ruined that perfect world. God did not destroy the world when our first parents sinned. If He had, we would not exist. We would never have the hope of living in new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

After sin came into this world, God promised a Savior from sin, death, and the devil. He kept that promise. Jesus, our Savior, was born, lived, died, and rose again for us. He paid for our sins. Jesus promised to always be with us even to the end of the world. When we die, or when the world comes to an end, Jesus will take us to be with him in heaven, where there is no sin. He will give us a new and perfect world in which to live forever.

Prayer: Dear Lord, continue to give me your peace, and help me to be spotless and blameless in your sight until you take me to be with you forever. Amen.

The day when the son becomes the sun

By Rev. Kenley Mann, Chaplain

Week 25

*But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise,
and there will be healing in its wings. (Malachi 4:2a)*

I would often share Psalm 103 with church members who were in the hospital: *bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits – who pardons all your guilt, who heals all your diseases.* Sometimes those church members passed away.

I would think, “But what about the part that says who heals all your diseases?” It all clicked in my mind when I heard a sermon by Pastor Enter. He shared that when he went to visit a member who had cancer, she ministered to him. She explained to him, “Don’t worry for me, Pastor Enter. I will either get better or get perfect.” The Lord would either improve her earthly health or He would take her to heaven and she would fully be healed from all of her diseases. She would be perfect. That’s the fullest healing.

Malachi speaks of the day when the Lord will make perfect every person who boasts in Christ alone as his or her reason for heaven—every person who reveres Jesus’s name. Yes, we are already perfect in God’s eyes on Earth, but on the Last Day, the rays of the sun on that day will be replaced with Jesus, who is the sun of heaven, for heaven needs no sun because “the glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its lamp” (Rev. 21:23).

The “wings” to which Malachi refers are the rays of the sun. On Judgment Day, Jesus will shine on us and will bring us perfect healing, for our bodies will be raised perfect and reunited with our souls.

There is one promise that God has not yet kept, however. Still, God keeps his promises, so we know that he will keep this one. This time, in glorious Sun, he will fully heal every believer with a body that is free from death and sin. We stay in the light of His word so that we will be in his healing light on that Day.

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, keep us in the sunlight of your word to
prepare us for the day when you shine on us as the Sun of righteousness
and bring the fullest healing with your rays. Keep us excited thinking
that today could be THE day. Amen.*

The light of salvation

By Rev. Roger Woller, Chaplain

Week 26

“the Lord said: It is too small a thing that you should just be my servant to raise up only the tribes of Jacob and to restore the ones I have preserved in Israel, so I will appoint you to be a light for the nations, so that my salvation will be known to the end of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6c)

“It is so dark. I can’t see anything.” A person who doesn’t know about Jesus or what he has done is living in spiritual darkness—spiritual separation from God. That is what unbelief is. It is darkness—spiritual darkness.

There is no light, no forgiveness, no salvation, no hope, no peace, no joy. When we as believers were born, we inherited spiritual blindness—spiritual darkness—and if we would have remained in that darkness, we would have been lost forever. That is what sin has done to us.

The worst thing about this darkness is that we are unable to turn the light of salvation on by ourselves. If by chance we realize our sinfulness, we might ask, “Why doesn’t someone turn on the lights?” or “Is there anyone out there who can remove this darkness, remove this guilt, remove this hopelessness, remove this separation from God?” The answer is YES.

- The one who was appointed as “the light for the nations.”
- The one who has brought salvation to all people of the world.
- The one who was conceived by the Holy Spirit as the true God yet born of a virgin as a true man.

When you were baptized with the water and the Word, the light of faith was turned on. The blindness of unbelief was turned off, and spiritual life began. You received what Jesus did for you when he lived, suffered, died and rose again for you. Salvation is yours. Forgiveness is yours. Eternal hope is yours. Eternal peace is yours. Eternal joy is yours.

The eternal light has been turned on for you. You and I need to grow in this light. Continue to use the means of Grace, the Gospel in the Word, and Sacraments. Also, don’t keep this salvation to yourself. Share this good news with those who are still in darkness of unbelief.

Prayer: Thank you Jesus for being my Savior. You brought me out of the darkness of unbelief to the light of salvation. Keep me in this light of salvation, and guide and direct me with your Word and sacraments. Help me to share this Gospel message to the ends of the earth. Amen.

Bring people to the Lord!

By Rev. Mark Bartsch, Chaplain

Week 27

I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (1 Corinthians 9: 22b-23)

Have you noticed in your life that the anticipation of an event is often much worse than the event itself?

Do you remember when you first learned how to ride a bicycle? You did not want to tip over. With patience, practice, and “training wheels,” one day, you could suddenly ride. You achieved balance. Your fear to ride your bike disappeared.

In school in speech class, you prepared your talk, and you practiced diligently. But you still fretted and worried for days before the big speech. You survived. And the speech went well.

You have an interview for a new job coming up, and you worry you will say the wrong thing. You are afraid that the job you are seeking will go to someone else. You go into the interview ready to share your strengths and your weaknesses. You are offered the job.

I think there are times when we are all afraid to share the gospel. We worry about what responses we may hear. We are afraid that someone will become angry.

Paul tells us that there is no need to be afraid. “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”

Our love and faith in Jesus will move us to share the gospel with joyful enthusiasm. Trusting in the forgiveness of sins that Jesus has given us will encourage us to leave our fears behind. We will reach out with the Word. People will come to know the love of Jesus, and many will be saved.

*Prayer: Dear Lord God, so often we are afraid. Our sinful nature makes us doubt. We fear that we might say the wrong thing. But you give us courage like Paul had. We can become all things to all people so that some will come to the Lord, and they will be saved.
In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.*

God keeps all of his promises

By Rev. Roger Woller, Chaplain

Week 28

"I will bless you greatly, and I will multiply your descendants greatly, like the stars of the sky and like the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the city gates of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." (Genesis 22:17-18)

If you know your Old Testament history, you know the story well. God made promises to Abraham and Sarah that they would be parents to a son. This was humanly impossible because both Abraham and Sarah were too old to have children. But God promised! Not once but more than once. There was even an added promise: "All of the families of earth will be blessed in you." (Gen. 12:3).

Sarah laughed when she heard the news of her having a child. This was not a laugh of joy but of doubt. God kept his promise. Abraham and Sarah had a baby boy. They named him Isaac.

It seemed like everything was going great until God asked Abraham to take his only son, the fulfillment of the promise, and sacrifice his son Isaac. That meant Abraham was being asked to kill his son. Abraham could have said, "God you promised, and now, you want me to end my son's life. That is not fair."

God promised. Abraham did not know how God would keep his promise, but he knew that God would. He told the men who came along that they should wait for Isaac and him to go and worship, and he added, "We will come back to you." When Isaac wondered where the lamb for the sacrifice was, Abraham told him, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering."

God kept his promise. All people of all nations of the earth have been blessed through Jesus our Savior, who was born as a fulfillment of this promise. Be like Abraham—believe God's promises. God keeps his promises.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, thank you for keeping all of your promises to me and all other believers. You never go back on your promises. Keep me faithful unto death that I may eternally enjoy the crown of life that you have earned for me. Amen.

Jesus prays fervently to the Father

By Rev. Mark Bartsch, Chaplain

Week 29

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ...and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. (Hebrews 5: 7, 9)

Good communication is vital. If you wanted or needed to share important information with someone but you did not speak the same language, one of two things will happen.

1. You will find a person who can act as an interpreter for the two of you.
2. You could learn enough of the new language to communicate with the other party.

It is so comforting to know that in whatever language we pray, God will hear us, and he will answer us.

Jesus prays to his Father in heaven. Is that unusual? Not at all. During Jesus's life on Earth, he communicated regularly and consistently with the Father. He knew what he was on Earth to do. He knew there would be trials and troubles to face. He knew that he had to endure the incomprehensible agony of taking all of humanity's sin upon himself.

He knew that he came to keep the law in our place and to die on the cross. He needed strength and encouragement from his Father to do the work that he was called to do. He did ask that the cup of suffering be removed, yet he knew the Father's will and knew that he would carry out that will. He came to fulfill all righteousness for us.

"Once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

We respond by placing all of our sins at the foot of Jesus's cross. We rejoice that we have forgiveness and peace in him. He is our perfect substitute. We thank God that he sent his Son to be our Savior, and we give thanks that Jesus has accomplished the work God sent him to do.

Prayer: Dear Lord God, thank you for sending Jesus to be our loving Savior. Your communication with him was perfect. He fulfilled all righteousness. We are thankful we can come to you in prayer and that you promise to hear us. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.

Listen to him!

By Rev. Joel Gaertner, Vice President of Ministry

Week 30

“This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” (Mark 9:7b)

Did you ever stop to think about how many ways you are pulled in by “voices” that say “Listen to me!” in a single day? How many voices inside your home want you to listen to them?

And then, you have all of those other “voices” – those on TV, on your social media feeds, and in other places – inside your head.

So, how do you determine which voice or voices to listen to? Does it depend on where you are, how they speak, what role they play in your life, or some other factors? I would imagine that the voices you trust and those that have proved to care for you receive the highest priority.

The voice in the verse above should have the number-one place in our lives. It is God the Father telling us that Jesus is his Son and that we should listen to him. Now that might seem obvious. Maybe it even seems a little silly to think that God has to tell us to listen to our Savior.

But stop for a moment and look at your life. Does the “voice of God” always have the number-one place in your life? Do you always listen to him and let his word guide and direct your thoughts, words, and actions?

The questions show us how often we let the voice of our sinful nature overrule what we know God tells us and we should be doing. They show us how often we give greater weight and value to other “voices” around us and push God into the background.

When we listen to the voice of God in devotions, worship, and Bible reading, it give us peace and the strength to seek to live as his children in every area of our lives.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, forgive me for the times that I have listened to other voices ahead of you and have let them lead me in a way that is sinful and not pleasing to you. Guide and strengthen me by your Word to give you the number-one place in my life and to think and act in ways that are pleasing to you. Let me gladly listen to and follow your Son, my Savior, all of the days of my life. Amen.

Jesus rebuilds the greatest temple!

By Rev. Patrick Feldhus, Chaplain

Week 31

“Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again.’” (John 2:19)

How do you measure the time it takes to build large structures? Weeks, months, years? Even with our technological advances, it still takes months to build skyscrapers. It took years to build ancient mega structures, such as the pyramids, the Great Wall of China, and the Roman Colosseum, which still stand tall today.

In our Bible passage, Jesus is standing in the great temple complex in Jerusalem. It took 46 years to get the temple to the level it was, and Jesus talked about raising it in three days! Even if Jesus had access to all of our modern equipment and unlimited manpower, it would be impossible to rebuild the temple in only three days to the way it was before being destroyed.

Unfortunately, the people did not understand what temple he was talking about, which also showed that the people did not understand who Jesus was. Jesus was not referring to the physical building but rather to his body. Many of the people to whom he was talking were going to hate Jesus so much that in three years’ time, they would call for his crucifixion. But they did not know who he was. He is God Almighty.

He had the power to raise his temple in three days! And that is exactly what he did on Easter morning. Jesus rebuilt his dead and broken temple to shine with the glory of Lord. He finished the work of bringing life to those who are dead in their sins. This is good news for all of us.

The wages of sin are still destroying temples in death. We have all earned the grave by being born in sin and displaying sin in our lives. But thanks be to God! He sent his Son to rebuild his temple in three days so that he can do away with sin and death for all of us. You need not fear that which Jesus can and will rebuild. Life has defeated death. Your bodily temples will rise from the dead and inherit eternal life all because Jesus raised his temple in three days!

Prayer: Dear gracious Savior! Through your resurrection, you promise to raise us from the dead and to give us eternal life. Help us to find comfort in the face of death – that our bodily temples will rise on the last day when you return, and that we will live with you in glory forevermore! In your name we pray. Amen.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord

Week 32

By Rev. Joel Gaertner, Vice President of Ministry

“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Mark 11:9)

Have you ever given anyone a hug? How about a handshake and an embrace? Or, maybe it was an exuberant high five. You are probably wondering, “What is the point?”

If you have ever given any of those expressions of welcome, then you can begin to understand what it felt like to be there on that first Palm Sunday and sing Hosanna. Imagine you are standing with the crowd on that first Palm Sunday.

You would have been a Jew who heard the following from your parents and grandparents, as well as those from many generations before them: “The Savior is coming!” “The Savior is coming!” “The Savior is coming!”

As you stood there on that first Palm Sunday, you would have understood that this man riding through Jerusalem on a donkey was different from those who had come before him claiming to be the Messiah.

Do you now start to see why we are encouraged to join them in shouting “Hosanna?” We need him – Jesus approaches God on our behalf. Perhaps you have joined fellow Christians in confessing the following: “Heavenly Father, I have sinned against you in the things that I have thought, spoken, and done over the past week, as well as the things that I have failed to do to show your love to other people.”

We join them in shouting “Hosanna” because like them, we recognize that Jesus is the only solution to the problem of our sin.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, I join the people on that first Palm Sunday in shouting “Hosanna” not just today but every day. I realize how much I needed you to have lived on this earth and then enter Jerusalem to ultimately die to pay for my sins. No matter how many times I shout “Hosanna,” it is never enough to give you proper thanks for all that you did for me. May my life reflect the gratitude that I have for your coming as my Savior. Amen.

How awesome is this place!

By Rev. Kenley Mann, Chaplain

Week 33

He was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.' (Genesis 28:17)

There was a lot on Jacob's mind. After deceiving his blind father and making his brother, Esau, murderously angry, he fled. He lost his home. He lost his family. There was a fear of failure. There was also a fear of the future. Look at how God's promises addressed each concern.

- Loss of home? "I will bring you back to this land." (Gn. 28:15b)
- Loss of family? "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring." (Gn. 28:14b)
- Fear of failure? "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go." (Gn. 28:15a)
- Fear of the future? "I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised." (Gn. 28:15b)

As the saying goes, this is as good as it gets. It's as good as Jesus's death on the cross. It's as good as Jesus's Resurrection. It's as good as Jesus's Ascension. It's as good as His promise that He will return on The Last Day.

What's good for Jacob is also good for you and me. While you are wondering about what your Tuesday is going to be like, God already has your Friday all planned out.

Worried about next week? Forget it. God is already there. Worried about next year? Don't sweat it. God is already there, too.

Wherever you are now, Jesus is with you. That is what makes any place you are at awesome. Your life is the house of God. He dwells with you and in you. Where you go in the future, God is with you.

Wherever you are, whatever you do, God will not leave you until He has kept every single promise in your life and until that final day when you climb the stairway to heaven, only to be embraced in His arms in permanent, welcoming joy.

Prayer: Abide with us, O Jesus. Keep us amazed at your forgiveness and grace so that we may be aware of how awesome You are and feel that any time and any place is awesome because you are with us. Amen.

I am inviting you to come to heaven with me.

Week 34

By Rev. Roger Woller

“Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is the truth. As you sent me into the world, I also sent them into the world. (John 17:17–18)

My dear friends, Do you want to come to heaven with me? I am inviting you to come to heaven with me.

Do you want to be in heaven where there is no pandemic? Covid? Covid shot? Sickness? Sadness? Tears of hurt? Pain? Anger? Painful labor? — none of these.

A place where there is nothing bad, only perfection? No falseness, only truth? No unfaithfulness, only faithfulness? No disrespect, only respect? No dissatisfaction, only satisfaction?

I could go on and on in describing the perfection of heaven by contrasting it with hell.

How do I know I am going to heaven? I know because Jesus is my Savior from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

- Jesus made me holy and acceptable before my Father in heaven. He paid the wages of my sins, not just a few of them, but all of them.
- Jesus made me righteous before God in heaven. That is the truth of the Gospels’ message. The means of Grace by which I have been brought to faith is the Gospel of God’s Word and Sacraments. That truth brought me to faith, to believe in Jesus as my Savior.

I am going to heaven where there is no sin.

Jesus is sending all his believers out into this sinful world with that message of the truth. Why? Because he wants everyone to be sanctified with that truth. Listen to God talk to you about what Jesus has done for you in His Word—it is the TRUTH.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, sanctify me and make me holy with your TRUTH. Your word is TRUE. Amen.

Live like a child of God.

By Rev. Roger Woller

Week 35

*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, inasmuch as God is making an appeal through us. We urge you, on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.
(2 Corinthians 5:20)*

What does “reconciled with God” mean? Why is it so important to be reconciled with God? Remember when you were mean to a sibling, either physically or verbally, and your mom or dad said, “Say you are sorry”? And do you remember reluctantly saying “I’m sorry” so that you wouldn’t get into more trouble than you already were?

Your parents wanted you to reconcile with your brother or sister. They wanted you not to be so mean or hurtful toward each other but rather to be nice and loving. Your parents wanted you to be family members who got along.

It is so very sad when family members do not get along with each other — when they are separated due to jealousy, hatred, or anger.

How would you feel if God treated you in the same way that you treated your brother or sister when you hit or said something mean to him or her? You would not like it.

God wants you to be reconciled. When our first parents, Adam and Eve, sinned, they ran away from God. They were no longer reconciled with God. The three of them were no longer the family they once were.

God did not want that separation to continue. He made a promise to send a Redeemer—a Savior to make them one with Him again. That Redeemer, that Savior, is Jesus. He is the Reconciler whom they needed and whom we need.

God forgives us for Jesus’s sake. Not because we are able to make ourselves right with God but because Jesus has made us right with God. Jesus has reconciled us with God. Are you reconciled with God? Yes, you are! Now, live like a child of God, a member of his family.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, to reconcile me with you. Help me to tell others about what Jesus has done for them so that they, too, may by faith be reconciled with you. Amen

What One Mother Pondered

By Mark Hayes, President of Ministry

Week 36

"But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19)

Her youngest son had turned 16 and had just gotten his driver's license. Her oldest son had just graduated from college and was on his way to a new career three states away. She was trading in the family minivan. They just wouldn't need it anymore. She put it in park after a final drive and turned around to look at the empty seats behind her. The memories of car seats, toys, and Cheerios on the floor sent the tears rolling.

A mother ponders in her heart the blessings of every moment she has had with each child. She wants her children to be healthy and successful. More than anything, though, as they move on to the next stages of life, she wants them to hold onto the relationships with God that Mom and Dad taught them to develop.

"But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19)

We read these words about the mother of Jesus when he was born. Her miracle baby would be the Savior of the world. Mary would see things beyond what any other mother would ever experience because this was also God's child. She would see Jesus heal the sick and stand up for the poor. She would hear him preach to thousands. She would also see him suffer at the hands of enemies, and she would be at the cross with him when he took his last breath. She saw firsthand what we believe from the Gospel: his life was the payment for every sin of every child ever born.

On Mother's Day, we celebrate the love a mother has for her children. Mary pondered in her heart the love that her child, God's son, had for all mankind. The love of Jesus empowers and inspires the love of a mother. The love of Jesus is the source of the greatest hope that a mother has for her children—that her children will arrive safely in Heaven.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for loving mothers and women who fed us, cleaned up after us, and instilled values in us. Thank you for the women who taught us about You and gave us an eternal gift. Continue to bless them, as they have been a blessing to us. In your loving name, Amen.

Jesus is alive. "Peace be with you."

By Rev. Roger Woller

Week 37

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:31)

It was a Sunday. We now know it as the first Easter Sunday. The disciples heard that Jesus was alive, which is exactly what he had said would happen. They just could not believe that Jesus was alive. How could this be true? The people who had convinced Pilate to crucify Jesus were still out there. The disciples were afraid, terrified. The body of their master, rabbi, was missing, not in the tomb.

Even with doors locked, the disciples were shaking with fear. Suddenly, there stands the risen Jesus before them. The first thing Jesus says to them is "Peace be with you!" Jesus was alive. He was not a ghost. He had a real body. They could touch and feel him. He was alive.

Thomas the disciple was not in the room that day. Later, he did not believe that Jesus could be alive. Even though the other disciples had told him that Jesus was indeed alive, he would have to see Jesus for himself.

The next week, the disciples were in a locked room again, and this time, Thomas was with them. Suddenly, the risen Jesus is standing in the room. The first thing he says is "Peace be with you!" Thomas saw. Thomas touched. Thomas believed. Jesus had risen from the dead and was alive, just as he had promised.

What does it take to make you believe? What will it take for you to have the same peace that Jesus offered to his disciples? That peace is yours through faith in Jesus the risen Savior.

What will it take to make you believe? The answer is in the verse from the Gospel of John 20:31: "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, I may have eternal life in your name. Amen.

Experience the fulfillment of God's promise.

Week 38

By Rev. Kenley Mann

I will put my Spirit in you and you will live. (Ezekiel 37:14a)

A power line can look plain and boring. But when it is connected to your house and electricity flows, exciting things happen; you can read by a lamp, and you can stay warm through the winter.

The Holy Spirit is the electricity that flows through the power line of the Bible. You could say that the Bible looks plain and boring and if you choose not to be connected to it, you will not have the light on and see the beauty of Jesus.

You will not have your heart warmed by the Holy Spirit's fire. When you are in God's word, you will experience the fulfillment of this promise by God; I will put my Spirit in you and you will live. (Ezekiel 37:14a)

Despair is the scene for Ezekiel 37. Captive Israelites in Babylon concluded that their nation was dead. The Lord pictures this despair by showing Ezekiel a valley full of very dry skeletons and explains that these bones are the whole house of Israel.

But when these dry bones hear the word of the Lord, God pours His Spirit of Life into them. They become alive with trust that God will keep his promise and re-establish them in Israel.

When you feel dead and hopeless, anticipate that when you are in God's word, His Spirit will breathe the life of the Son into you, and you will be lifted as you are connected to Him who is the Life and the Resurrection.

Prayer: Dear Lord of Life, I confess that there are times when I am self-centered and not centered on You, and those times lead me to feel despair. Cause me to remember that your Spirit of Life will always meet me when I am in your Word. Change me from despair to anticipation for your life to be put into me, and then propel me into your word. Amen.

Jesus is the Exuberance of God

By Rev. Kenley Mann

Week 39

How would you describe God? When I asked a Catechism class this question, I would hear many adjectives, including “love,” “good,” “holy,” “all powerful,” “forgiving,” “merciful,” etc.

In all of my years, I have never heard the answer that God is happy. But God is happy. 1 John 2:2a says, “The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it.”

In verse 1, John writes that his hands have touched the Word of life. That is Jesus. The word “life” in its original definition carries the meaning of exuberance or vitality. Think about that – describing Jesus as exuberance!

Remember when Jesus was baptized? The Heavenly Father could not contain Himself. He exuberantly proclaimed, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

When one sees something that is perfect, it pleases and makes one excited or exuberant. When God the Father looked at Jesus in the Jordan River, He saw perfection and rejoiced. Our God is a happy God.

This is cause for us to be exuberant because when we were baptized and brought to faith in Christ, we were put into Christ. Remember that when you look at something perfect you rejoice?

Well, you are not “something” but rather “someone” who is perfect. Although you sin, by faith, you are united to Christ, so the Lord delights over you as he delights over Christ. You are a cause for God’s exuberance. He delights over you.

Prayer: We praise you, O Lord, for being perfect for us and then joining us to you by faith so that we are holy and blameless. Restore to us the joy of your salvation that we may exuberantly proclaim you as the exuberant life of God. Amen.

The Shepherd searches for his sheep!

By Rev. Patrick Feldhus

Week 40

I also have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. Then there will be one flock and one shepherd. (John 10:16)

The image of Jesus as our Good Shepherd is one of the most cherished and comforting descriptions of our relationship with Him. Many of us can recall artwork of Jesus carrying one of his sheep on his shoulders.

The fact that Jesus would search for his sheep when they go astray is a testimony to his amazing grace. You benefited from the work of the Good Shepherd. You lie securely in his green pastures.

We might get the impression that the Good Shepherd would be content with the sheep he has. Our Bible verse says the opposite. Our Good Shepherd has other sheep who have not been gathered into his sheep pen. His work continues until the last sheep is gathered.

Here comes the shocking part!

The Good Shepherd uses the sheep that he has already gathered into his sheep pen to go and seek out his other sheep and bring them into his pen. He wants you to go out into the world and tell others about the tremendous love of the Good Shepherd—that he gave up his life and took it up again for those other sheep as well.

You have a unique perspective. You know the comfort of the green pastures of Christ's righteousness. You know the quiet waters of forgiveness. You get to tell other sheep about these gifts of the Good Shepherd.

When they hear about the Good Shepherd from you, it will be the Good Shepherd's voice they hear! You are part of the mission of our Good Shepherd. You can tell the good news from your home while on the phone, via Facetime or Zoom, and even from your hospital room.

Prayer: My Good Shepherd, thank you for searching for me and giving me the blessed assurance of forgiveness and eternal life. Help me to hold on to those gifts of grace as I continue to live in this world. Give me opportunities to tell other sheep about the sacrifice you made for them so that they can join us in your eternal pen. In your name we pray! Amen.

Jesus is the vine of salvation

By Rev. Mark Bartsch

Week 41

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

Almost everyone is “connected” today by various means. From cell phones to computers, laptops, tablets, and iPads, most have wireless capability. Some may even have a landline.

To perform well, a computer, a laptop, a smart phone must be connected to a reliable power source. The machine must be plugged in to power, or the battery must be fully charged.

In Jesus, we have a special connection, and we need that special connection. We make mistakes and experience problem after problem. You might start to think that you have broken the connection due to your sinful behavior. You may feel unworthy or disconnected from the Lord.

Jesus, our Savior, is our special power source along with the Holy Spirit. By the power of God’s Word, the Spirit gives us the gift of faith to always trust and believe in what Jesus has done for us.

No matter what we have done, he wants to maintain that connection with us. Jesus says to us and all believers, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

Because we the branches on Jesus’s vine, we will bear fruit to the glory of God. In Jesus, we know that we have the forgiveness of our sins, the desire to live godly lives, and the promise of eternal life together with Jesus. This is the best and the greatest connection.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for the special connection we have with you, our loving Savior. We know we have forgiveness for our “disconnected” behavior. We are so thankful that we can come to you with prayers and petitions and you will hear and answer. Thank you for keeping us connected to you by the power of the Spirit. In your name we pray. Amen.

It is all about Jesus!

By Rev. Patrick Feldhus

Week 42

Indeed, we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus's sake. (2 Corinthians 4:5)

It is not difficult to figure out how to gain notoriety at work. You serve those who are higher ranking than you. Once you get their attention with your good work ethic and determination to serve well, you will most likely be promoted.

This, of course, is not guaranteed to work every time, but you have a better shot to work up the corporate ladder if you serve well than if do the bare minimum.

What do you expect when you serve the Lord? Do you expect to gain notoriety among the saints? Do you hope to get to the level of the Apostles or the Patriarchs? Or maybe ascend to the ranks of angels?

These things are not on our mind or hearts. Our only focus is telling others about Jesus Christ and promoting him as Lord! We serve others only to point them to Jesus.

It is imperative for us to continue to tell others about Jesus. It is a matter of life and death. We serve others so that we can have opportunities to shine the spotlight on their Savior. The devil has blinded their spiritual sight. By shining the light on Jesus as Lord, it will break through that spiritual darkness.

We shine the light of Christ by serving them and gaining opportunities to proclaim the free and full forgiveness that Christ won for all of us. Let us show them Christ, and the gospel will reveal Jesus and only Jesus!

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, send us your Spirit to help us to promote Jesus as Lord. Give us opportunities to serve other so that we can point them to Jesus as their Savior! In his name we pray. Amen.

Look ahead to the unseen.

By Rev. Mark Bartsch

Week 43

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:18)

Have you noticed that with each passing day, your body is not as strong as it once was? As time goes by, your strength goes away. If you focus only on yourself, you will see your strength and your abilities diminish and fade. What is seen is indeed temporary...

Paul's second letter to the Corinthians is filled with the encouragement to give our weaknesses to the Lord and he will strengthen us. "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body." (2 Cor 4: 8-10) The things of the world may attack us. Our bodies may weaken, but by faith, we hold on to the suffering, death, and life of Jesus to keep us strong.

People have so many questions about what heaven will be like.

- "Will there be animals in heaven?"
- "Will I know my spouse, my children, or my parents?"
- "What will we do when we get to heaven?"

The Bible gives us some answers. "There before me was a great multitude that no one could count, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.

And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'" "For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (Rev 7: 9, 10, 17)

We look forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

Prayer: Dear Lord God, help us to concentrate not on the things of this world, which are quickly fading away. Help us to instead place our hope for tomorrow in you and in your unfailing love. Direct us to focus on what is unseen because the unseen is eternal. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

You are not going to like what I have to say

Week 44

By Rev. Roger Woller

*"You are to speak my words to them whether they listen or they do not,
for they are rebellious." (Ezekiel 2:7)*

Have you ever had to tell someone something that made them very upset? When you told them the truth, they became angry at you. This anger, this rebellion, and this not wanting to listen to the truth are what sin has done to all of us.

We do not want to hear that we are sinners and that we have fallen short of what is right and good in God's eyes. We do not want to hear that we need to repent and turn away from our sins.

The prophet Ezekiel was told by God to tell the people of Israel that they were disloyal to God, rebellious, brazen-faced, and hard-hearted. Keep in mind the people of Israel did not think they were that bad. They did not want to hear the truth.

God told Ezekiel to tell them the truth whether they wanted to hear it or not. "You are to speak my words to them whether they listen or they do not, for they are rebellious." (Ezekiel 2:7)

Have you ever had to tell a loved one that you think they are abusing alcohol or drugs? That if they do not stop the abuse, they are ruining their life? It was for their own good. You told them because you really loved them.

God wants us to know that we are sinners and need a Savior. God wants us to know that we need help. He wants us to hear the truth because there is hope for us. God really loves us. There is forgiveness for us. Jesus earned that forgiveness for us when he died on the cross and rose again. Listen to God's Word!

*Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, help me listen to your soul-saving Word.
Send your Holy Spirit to change my attitude to always
want to listen to you. Amen.*

Praise Christ for spiritual blessings

By Rev. Mark Bartsch

Week 45

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.” (Ephesians 1: 7)

Are you able to have good, well-rounded conversations with family and friends? Do you know where your family members stand on spiritual issues?

Where do you stand with your friends? Are you afraid to ask questions because you fear their response and the possible repercussions?

You do not want to alienate family members or push them away. You probably do not want to be seen as someone who pushes their faith on someone else.

You want to be as tactful as you can be when the topic is Jesus Christ and what he has done for you.

Here again are Paul’s words, “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.”

These are words I cannot keep to myself; people need to know they have a Savior from sin. Take note of the cost to the individual person—there is no cost. Redemption is purchased, whereas salvation is free.

Jesus paid the price by shedding his blood to pay for the sins of all people. Therefore, we are redeemed.

We can rejoice in the riches of God’s grace.

Prayer: Dear Lord God, help us to have good, open conversations with our family and friends. Help us to share the joy that we have in the free forgiveness of our sins. Move us to share the riches of God’s grace.

Dear Lord, thank you for your grace, love, and forgiveness.

Your redemption is free. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Jesus is the Bread of Life.

By Rev. Patrick Feldhus

Week 46

“I am the Bread of Life,” Jesus told them. “The one who comes to me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:35)

We all know how important it is to eat and drink. Our bodies need food and water to survive. Go one day without food and water and your body will suffer. The hunger pains and the dehydration cramping can leave you in rough shape. There is only one sure way to end the pain—eat food and drink water. But there is one problem with this—we can never be completely satisfied.

No matter what we eat or drink, we will need to do it repeatedly. The cycle never ends.

Jesus uses this concept in spiritual matters. There is a deep hunger and thirst every person deals with on a spiritual level. But what causes this spiritual hunger and thirst? When we miss God’s demands for perfection, it causes a deep-seated hunger and thirst that we cannot satisfy. We try to feed ourselves with positive thoughts, and we try to drink in our own good works, but the guilt remains. Our sins and our attempts to fix them cannot satisfy the spiritual hunger and thirst that will lead to eternal death.

But all hope is not lost! Look at the words Jesus uses, “I am the Bread of Life. The one who comes to me will never be hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Jesus is the only one who can give food that offers life to the dead!

Jesus is the only one who can satisfy the spiritual thirst welling up in each one of us! He is the Bread of Life. Turn to Jesus when sin and its guilt cause you to hunger and thirst and he will completely satisfy your need. Can you imagine the price of such a meal? It cost Jesus his life so that he can offer it to you for free! This is the love Christ has for you. Eat and drink it up.

Prayer: Jesus, you are the Bread of Life. Fill us with forgiveness and let us drink it up every day! Help us turn to you for the food and drink that cannot spoil. Do not let us take this food and drink for granted. Give us opportunities to share you with others so that they too can be completely satisfied. In your name we pray. Amen.

Accepting wisdom's invitation

By Rev. Ed Fredrick

Week 47

*"Leave your simple ways and you will live;
walk in the way of insight." (Proverbs 9:6)*

In this section of Proverbs, wisdom is personified as a woman. She is preparing her house for company. Getting together with friends and family is one of the enjoyable life experiences that we missed during the time we were dealing with the pandemic. Now with the pandemic rules relaxing, once again we can plan gatherings and accept invitations.

Deuteronomy 8:3 states: "Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

The banquet that Wisdom has prepared provides that "bread of life." She invites us to leave our simple ways. The Hebrew word for "simple" can be translated as "naïve," "inexperienced," or "gullible."

The word in Proverbs generally denotes a person who is without moral direction and inclined to evil. To accept the invitation means we must admit that those words describe us. By nature, we are "simple" people.

God's Word points out our sin. But it also declares the cure for sin.

The Good News of Jesus is the cure. It is Wisdom's invitation. The Holy Spirit works through the Word and enables us to believe what Jesus has done. James 1:22 tells us to be people who do what the word says, not people who only hear it. Such people are deceiving themselves.

Putting that Word of God into practice, coming to the Lord in repentance and receiving that assurance of forgiveness in Jesus is accepting the invitation. What a blessed invitation it is. All our sins are removed. We are made children of God by grace. All ours by the gift of God.

Yes, listen to Wisdom's invitation: "Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of insight."

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your gracious invitation! All we had to offer was sin and death. But you offer forgiveness and eternal life. Continue to send the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts, enabling us to accept Wisdom's invitation. Amen.

Take the Word to heart

By Rev. Mark Bartsch

Week 48

*“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.
Do what it says.” (James 1: 22)*

You and I might have difficulty at times understanding the Word of God. A passage like this from the Letter of James is an example. What does it mean, “Do not merely listen to the word.”? Listening is *NOT* enough.

If you “merely” listen to the Word, you are not understanding or comprehending what the Word has to say. Perhaps looking at another passage will help.

“Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” (Psalm 37: 4)

What does this mean?

- As you read and learn more in the Word of God, you will desire or seek after those things that God wants you to have.
- As you take delight in the Lord, you will desire that he desires to you. It is a lovely cycle in which to get involved.
- As you grow more and more in knowledge and in love for the Lord, you will delight in him, and your desires for your life and your faith will be exactly what God desires for you.

Looking again at the passage from James, listening to the Word is never enough. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Word will come alive in your heart. The more you hear and learn in the Word, the greater your desire will be to “do what it says.”

The letter to the Hebrews says, “For the Word of God is alive and active.” The Word moves us to love God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Word moves us to take to heart the forgiveness of our sins in Jesus. The Word moves us to look forward to the eternal joys of heaven.

*Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, thank you for sharing your Word with us.
Through the Spirit, thank you for moving us to come to faith in the Lord.
Dear Jesus, thank you for your willingness to die on the cross for us
and for our salvation. In your name, we pray. Amen.*

Greatness is measured in selfless service

Week 49

By Rev. Patrick Feldhus

"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me, welcomes not just me but also him who sent me." (Mark 9:37)

Sibling rivalries. With four older brothers, I saw my fair share of sibling rivalries. I did everything in my power to be better than my brothers. For you who have siblings, you know what I am talking about. We are well versed in rivalries.

We try to be better than others and we like to have proof. I threw the shotput 50 feet while my older brother could only throw it 48 feet. But he could throw the hammer over 200 feet, and I could throw it only 150 feet. We liked to argue based on the evidence of our greatness.

We can even try to measure our greatness in spiritual matters by what we do. Our offerings, our time dedicated to church matters, and the times we help others can be used to display our greatness.

But there is a problem with this measure of greatness: It is self-serving. Each of these examples about greatness is self-serving. If we measure our greatness like this, it will lead to death.

Think of the billions of people Jesus bled and died for who do not know that he is their Savior. Most people do not recognize the sacrifice he made for them, but he did it anyway. He died because we all needed him to die. He demonstrated his greatness by giving up everything for us so that we can have forgiveness and eternal life.

Now he wants us to follow him in selfless service to others. And when we serve in this way, we are serving Jesus and our Father, to thank them for the selfless work in rescuing us from sin and death. This is the true measure of greatness.

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, give us a heart of selfless service to the people in our lives. Help us throw out the sinful desire to make ourselves great in the eyes of the world. Let us do everything we can to point people to the greatness of your Son. In his name, we pray. Amen.

"Take and eat, this is my body which is given for you."

Week 50

By Rev. Joel Gaertner , Vice President of Ministry

"Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf." (1 Corinthians 10:17)

We show we are united around a cause or situation in many ways. We might wear our team's colors or wear a uniform or another piece of clothing to show that we are on the same side.

If you think about it, one of the greatest uniters is food. A meal has a way of bringing people together and letting them express and enjoy the unity they share.

Today, Christians remember and partake in a special meal that Jesus gave his followers more than 2000 years ago.

In the verse above, the Apostle Paul uses a unique lesson from the meal that Christians remember and partake of on Maundy Thursday and throughout their lives – a loaf of bread.

Unlike the wafers that we often use for the Lord's Supper today, at the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus very likely used a loaf of bread, and the disciples tore off pieces as it was passed around.

During this time, they heard Jesus say those very special words: "Take and eat, this is my body which is given for you." (Matthew 26:26)

Paul uses this imagery of a loaf of bread to talk about how all who partake of the loaf of bread are united in faith. This is because they not only eat from the same loaf but also share the same faith and receive the same spiritual blessings.

Sin so quickly and easily tears us apart. However, in Holy Communion, God gives us a real and special way to mend those divisions, receive forgiveness, and express the faith we have in Jesus.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, today, we remember and celebrate your institution of that special meal that assures us of our forgiveness and helps us to remember the unity of faith that we have as your children. Help me to remember what this Sacrament is all about, the forgiveness of my sins, and the strengthening of my faith. I ask this in your name. Amen.

Our Father's heart

By Mark Hayes, President of Ministry

Week 51

A billboard on the highway was placed near a church and depicted the hand of God with the following caption: “Don’t make me come down there!” It immediately brought back memories of my own father saying those very words when I was making too much noise with my brothers in the basement.

Reflecting on that message, I realized how often we think of God in just that way. We think of him as an angry father, disgusted with how we are living our lives on Earth. And when he shows up, we will be sorry.

However, these verses from Titus show us our Father’s heart: but when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. (Titus 3:4-5)

When God really did come down here, he did so with a cosmically loving purpose—literally to save our lives and the lives of the whole world. And his gift of love was independent of how we were acting down here on Earth. His gift was based entirely on his mercy.

- When our relationship with our Father, God, is based on our fear of doing enough righteous things to please him and to convince him to love us, it is a dysfunctional relationship.
- When our relationship with God has its roots in his deep love for us as he intended, we strive to please him because we know that he already loves us.

The angels are in God’s presence continually and know his heart. They delivered a message directly from God to us. On the night that Jesus was born, they proclaimed with confidence, “On earth PEACE to those on whom his favor rests.”

Soak that in. God’s favor rests on you. God likes you. God LOVES you. God cares what happens to you. God will never leave your side. In Jesus, God proved his dedication to you.

***Prayer:** Dear Father, you are loving and gracious. You forfeited your relationship with your Son, Jesus, to secure a relationship with us. Instill in us true peace secured in your mercy and cradled in forgiveness for our broken lives. We rejoice this season and always that we belong to you. Amen.*

Your ascended Savior prays for you

By Rev. Joel Gaertner, Vice President of Ministry

Week 52

“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you.” (Ephesians 1:18a)

Have you ever been in a difficult or troubling situation and someone says to you, “I’m praying for you”? Those words are meant to reassure you, and they are an effort by the person who spoke them to show you that he or she cares about you.

We need to remember that the only thing needed to connect with Jesus in prayer is faith in him as our Savior. It doesn’t matter how strong or weak, or how young or old our faith is—prayer is one of those blessings that God has given to all of those who are his children by faith.

Our ascended Savior working on our behalf—praying. Now that is something on a higher and different level than our prayers are. Just imagine, the perfect Son of God speaking to his Father as he sits at his right hand.

Can you picture it? Jesus leaning over and whispering his requests in his Father’s ear. When Jesus prays for us, his prayers are always perfect prayers. They aren’t tainted with sin, selfish desires, or impure motives like our prayers often are.

As you remember that Jesus ascended into heaven, let it assure you that you truly do have someone whose prayers are perfect. Jesus is next to your heavenly Father, and his prayers are constantly being offered for you even when you don’t realize it or request it.

Just imagine what those prayers are like: “Father God, I see and know what (insert name) is dealing with. I ask that you strengthen him/her and lead him/her to see that you are there and will bring him/her through it.”

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for coming to Earth, for living and dying. Thank you for rising from the dead and ascending back to your Father’s right hand. Remind and reassure me daily that not only can I speak to you in prayer but also that you constantly pray on behalf of me and all of God’s children. May this incredible thought calm my heart. Amen.



Gain insight from God's Word

Our chaplains share God's Word directly with our residents and team members. Now you can read their words of encouragement through our YouVersion plans.

We invite you to check out our plans listed on our website and available for download on YouVersion.

*View all of our YouVersion devotions at
tlha.org/make-every-day-count/devotions/.*



If you would like to ensure others receive free resources like this devotional, please consider supporting the efforts of The Lutheran Home Association.

Donate online at tlha.org/donate or use your phone camera to scan the QR code to donate on your phone.

THE LUTHERAN HOME
ASSOCIATION

(888) 600-TLHA | tlha.org | info@tlha.org

