

Hope for the Journey



Outreach
for
Hope, Inc.

Committed to raising awareness and financial support
for ministries serving low-income communities
in the Greater Milwaukee Synod.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Welcome to the 2019 Outreach for Hope Lenten Devotions. As the Lenten season approaches, we feel privileged you have chosen us to accompany you on your daily Lenten journey.

The theme for this year's Lenten Devotions is **Hope for the Journey**, based on Lamentations 3:24, "*The Lord is my portion, says my soul, therefore, I have hope in him.*" (ESV) Our devotion writers share experiences of blessings and challenges, joys and disappointments, and how, amidst it all, they found hope on their journey of faith.

This year, we have added some new features:

- *Opening Daily Prayer:* Bishop Paul Erickson has provided us with a prayer to focus our thoughts and prepare our hearts for the daily devotion.
- *Cross generational devotions:* Each Monday (plus the first and last Wednesday) of Lent we have included one of eight Cross-Gen devotions and activities to deepen your and your family's devotional experience.
- *Questions for reflection and discussion:* At the end of each devotion there are either questions for reflection and discussion or a prayer that reflects the theme of the day. In some instances, there are both.

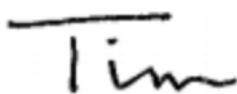
We hope these added features will engage and deepen your devotion time.

When you complete your Lenten journey, I hope you will emerge with a sense of renewed hope, ready to share your compassion, talents and treasure to support Outreach for Hope ministries. Together, we will continue the journey to bring hope to all our brothers and sisters in Christ. (Donations can be made at outreachforhope.org.) Thank you.

Thank you to all who assisted in the coordination of this year's Lenten devotion. It truly is a synod-wide effort and I am grateful to the creative team, editor, writers and Synod staff who make it all happen. You will see the acknowledgements of contributors throughout the devotions and a list of coordination support staff appears on the final page.

Get ready to meet God each day of this Lenten season and be reminded that no matter what you are facing on the journey, there is hope because you are the beloved of God.

In God's Service,



Tim Larson

Executive Director – Outreach for Hope



P.S. We love to hear from our readers! Let us know what **Hope for the Journey** means to you by emailing me at tim@outreachforhope.org.

Outreach for Hope in Your Inbox

You can also enjoy the faith-building inspiration of Hope for the Journey wherever you are! Receive each day's devotion via e-mail on your computer, tablet or smartphone. Go to outreachforhope.org/subscribe, fill in your name, home address and email address, then click the box "Lenten Devotions."

An opening *Prayer*

from Bishop Paul Erickson

Read it once or read it daily with each devotion.

God of all grace and compassion, we give you thanks for
the gifts that give us strength for the journey:

for gently warming sun and the renewal of your creation;

for the surprising ways that you remind us that we are not
alone in our journey;

and for the hope that guides our path and lets us put one
foot in front of the other.

We ask that you speak to us in this time of Lenten
reflection, opening our hearts and challenging our
imaginations, that we might discover new ways to tell the
ancient story of your love for us in Christ and new ways to
love our neighbors and develop relationships grounded in
truth, faith, and humility, through Christ our Lord; Amen.





Be Still

Julie Ische, Child of God
Trinity Lutheran Church, Cedarburg

"Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.' "(Isaiah 30:21)

"Excuse me, God, but could you please speak up?"

I can't count the number of times I have prayed this. All I want in life is to find the path God intends for me, and I will embrace the journey, struggles and all. I am a "do-er" – I am all about the action. Give me the plan, and I will do everything I can to make it happen!

But when I don't know the plan, I'm lost. Fear grips me, the fear I may head in the wrong direction. When this happens, I feel like I'm seeing hundreds of paths in front of me, and all I do is spin in circles until I collapse in frustration.

And that's when something else happens. *"Be still and know that I am God."*

Be still. Sometimes we need to remember we are human "be-ings", not human "do-ings." I want God to speak up, to shout His will loudly so I can hear it. But maybe I'm the one who needs to change. Maybe I'm making too much noise with all my doing.

When Elijah finally heard God's voice, it was a small voice, a still voice. *Be still.* God is talking to you. Remember, the voice of God is right there with you. If you're still uncertain of your path, that's OK. God promises to be with you, guiding you. You can turn left or right, and God won't abandon you. If you feel lost, be still and listen. Choose a path and step off, confident that God is journeying with you. Even if you end up taking the scenic route, you'll get to your destination.

* * *

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: How/when do you practice being still? Can you listen for God's still, small voice speaking to you today?

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Donations to Outreach for Hope help support seven congregations that have medical clinics or parish nurses available at their site.

Ash Wednesday, March 6, 2019
See next page for today's companion Cross-Gen Corner.

Cross-Gen Corner

"Be Still" Cross-Gen Corner

An Invitation for Families and Disciples of All Ages to Dig Deeper into the Devotion
Pastor Adam Moreno, Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Kenosha

Green Light, Yellow Light, Red Light. Adults, do you remember that game? Kids, have you ever played it? Racing as fast as you can when Green Light is yelled, having to slow down when you hear Yellow Light, then trying to come to a full stop and be completely still when Red Light is called out. Such a fun game...but coming to a full stop and being completely still is super difficult! Find time this week to play, then come together as a family and reflect on this devotion. Why is it so hard to stop and be still?

It's not just in the game where we find slowing down, stopping, and being still difficult. Our lives are so busy, running from one thing to another, we barely have time to catch our breath, let alone experience God in the stillness. Now the truth is, God is in every activity on our very full calendars. God is with you at school and work. God is with you on the sports field and the theatre stage. God is with you in the traffic jam and fast-food drive-thru. In the game, it is fun to race towards your goal of "winning." But the light can't stay green forever or the game loses its joy.

Today's devotion is not to condemn the full life you and your family are leading. But it is challenging you to find time to experience God in a different way. Not only in the fun and frantic activities of your day, but also in intentional stillness. That is our challenge--to move from a Green Light day, to a Yellow Light moment, to a Red Light stillness in which we can experience God in new and unexpected ways. Don't worry. The light will change and once again be green, but we'll be able to run the race with renewed energy, joy, and faith!

Prayer: Lord of Light, be with us in our busy Green Light days. Help us slow down and discover you in Red Light moments of stillness. Amen.





Journey to Victory

Mike Naumann, Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Menomonee Falls

"Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth." (Psalm 124:8)

It's all about the journey.

In this season of my life, my current work centers around helping organizations and their leaders grow. I do this through coaching, chairing peer learning groups, and facilitating strategic planning sessions.

Strategic planning (or most any planning) starts with an understanding of where we are today. It articulates where we want to go. It specifies how we will get there and what guideposts we'll look for along the way that will tell us we're headed in the right direction.

It's all about the journey.

As I reflect on the Lenten theme of "Hope for the Journey," I note the similarities of my own life's journeys:

- A Destination.
 - *Even when I can't see it or I feel lost, I know where the journey must end.*
- Accompaniment by God and others.
 - *When I feel like I'm all alone, God is there with me and the prayers of others sustain me.*
- Encouragement by God and others.
 - *When things get difficult or seem impossible, the encouragement of God's word and God's people compel me to continue.*
- A Calling – to something bigger or better than just myself.
 - *The paths on which I've been guided connect me to my life's purpose: To use the gifts I have been given for the building up of the body of Christ.*
- Hope – that I will be successful in getting to where I'm going.
 - *And that destination is everlasting life in the real presence of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.*

It's all about the journey. We go together, not alone. Thanks be to God that we know how the journey ends – in victory over sin and death!

* * *

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: How do you keep things in perspective when everything seems to be off track? To whom and where do you turn for guidance and help along the way?

Thursday, March 7, 2019



The Magic Wand

Pastor Jonathan Barker, Grace Lutheran, Kenosha

There has been a shortage of overnight shelter beds available in Kenosha for three winters since a local homeless shelter lost its operating license. For each of the last three winters, our CUSH (Congregations United to Serve Humanity) Homeless Taskforce has organized to find additional shelter solutions. This has sometimes pitted us against our city and county governments.

There have been moments of this journey that have been difficult, tense, and conflicted. Three years ago, one of the aldermen became so angry with me after a city council meeting that he walked up to me and shouted at me, inches from my face. And there have been many other moments when the situation has felt utterly hopeless as phone calls and emails went unreturned for months.

But one of the most encouraging moments on this journey came one day when I was especially tired and discouraged. A dear sister in Christ (who was impacted when the shelter closed, slept in front of Grace for a month, and is now one of our newest members) showed up an hour early for our soup kitchen. She presented me with a handmade magic wand with a stitched white star on top. She blessed me saying, "Pastor, you are always trying to do the impossible for us against the city. I thought you needed a magic wand."

I thanked her and shared how her gift reminded me of a Bible verse that has carried me through many adventures: *"Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen"* (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Because sometimes, despite all the obstacles and hardships, beautiful miracles and blessings open up. Like this winter, for instance, when the county released \$30,000 for Hotel Vouchers. Our God is amazing!

* * *

Questions for reflection and discussion: Can you think of seemingly hopeless moments on your personal journey – or in the life of your faith community – where an unexpected blessing set you back on track? Did you perceive this as a miracle?

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Located just blocks away from the large empty space that was once an American Motors plant, the diverse neighborhood that Grace Lutheran Church serves in Kenosha is faced with economic challenges. The Grace Welcome Center is a daytime drop-in center for homeless, providing up to 140 people with breakfast as well as opportunities to be connected and feel welcomed during the day.

Friday, March 8, 2019



Hope on Wheels

Howard & Marica Vrankin, Senior Meals volunteers
Port Washington and Saukville

In 2012 my wife, Marcia and I moved to Port Washington in retirement. We were looking for a number of ways to volunteer, and one choice was delivering senior meals. I've always enjoyed driving and making deliveries. I also really like food! So it seemed a perfect match.

Over the past six years Marcia and I have been delivering to many of the same people, so a sense of community has developed. Sometimes when returning after having been assigned a different route for a few weeks, we hear comments like "I missed you!" or "It's nice to see your smile again." We find the personal rewards to be far greater than our volunteer efforts.

It's not only meals, but also hope that goes out "on wheels." Though we're asked to make our conversation at the door brief, we sometimes are invited to step in. We may see or hear what our recipients are experiencing, and we see the condition of their homes. Our visit may be the only actual human contact for them on that day. Sometimes a person will mention a difficulty, need, or setback they are experiencing. We notify our site director so a professional follow-up can be made. But we also remember them in prayer on our route, hoping that they will experience help and compassion beyond the nourishment of a warm meal.

During this season of Lent we especially remember that Jesus brought not only bread and fish, but also compassion, healing and hope to those he met along the road. It's both blessing and privilege to serve in his name.

* * *

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: What are some of the ways that you and others in your congregation spread hope, similar to what Howard and Marcia Vrankin are doing? How have you and other people you know benefitted by receiving services from compassionate volunteers?

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

During an average week, 4,334 meals and food bags will be shared at congregations and ministries supported by donations to Outreach for Hope.

Saturday, March 9, 2019



Let's Get Cooking!

Pastor Gary Erickson, Emeritus Pastor
St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, Wauwatosa

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1)

I serve my wife, Suzanne, dinner, and halfway through the meal she will say, "Gary, you're such a good cook! Thanks for making dinner." Our children would laugh at such a declaration because I never had an interest in cooking while they were growing up. The closest I got was when their mother was out of town, and I would "cook" what I proudly called a "one-at-a-time meal." It was served in this manner: I would give them one item to eat, and if they ate it, they would be surprised with the next morsel of food – and so on until they were filled.

I can now prepare dinner with grilled salmon or chicken or beef, a microwaved potato, and a tossed green salad, but I cannot cook from a recipe or use my "creative juices." I suspect Suzanne's praise of me is only an ENCOURAGEMENT for me to continue my efforts to reach my cooking potential.

In a way, Hebrews' proclamation that "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the

conviction of things not seen," is God's word of ENCOURAGEMENT for each of us to reach our "faith potential," to follow the recipe of God's way for our lives, to be the serving ingredients of God's compassion and mercy with others.

During this Lenten season, we center ourselves on God's action in Jesus for God's Kingdom of love to come. As Christians, we believe God holds the recipe for life. Encouraged by our faith, let's get cooking with God's recipe for faithful living and serving. It is our only HOPE!

* * *

PRAYER: Lord, open me this day to being a master chef of your recipe for life. Amen.

Monday, March 11, 2019
See next page for today's companion Cross-Gen Corner.

Cross-Gen Corner

"Let's Get Cooking" Cross-Gen Corner

An Invitation for Families and Disciples of All Ages to Dig Deeper into the Devotion
Pastor Adam Moreno, Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Kenosha

As you reflect on today's devotional, find a recipe to use for reference. It can be a cherished recipe, like your abuela's recipe for tamales or your farfar's recipe for lefse. You can look on the back of the bag for Nestle's famous Tollhouse chocolate cookies or online for some Top Chef Jr. masterpieces. Whatever it is for, look at it and see what makes up a recipe. First, you have the ingredients, then a list of instructions on how the ingredients go together. It might have directions for baking or cooking and some recipes even have suggestions for serving the dish.

Once you have looked over the recipe, take a moment to discuss how living our faith is like a recipe. What would a recipe for a big bowl of love look like? How about for a pie of peace or justice jambalaya? What ingredients would be needed, how much time would it take to be fully "cooked," how could it be served to a hungry world?

A cup of this, a tablespoon of that, mix in a sprinkle of these and a dash of those. . .and *voila*, a delicious faith-filled recipe! Cooking can be so much fun! So can learning and growing and living our faith. Let's create a recipe: have fun, use your imagination, and don't worry about it being perfect. Some of the best meals are made when one gets creative with the recipe. I mean, who thought of putting chicken and waffles together!

Here are a few suggestions to get your "creative juices" flowing and encourage your full "faith potential":

- Use measurements: do you need a lot of the Holy Spirit or because of the Spirit's power, might you just put in a dash?
- If you need ideas for ingredients, maybe start with the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).
- How do we mix the ingredient together? A gentle stir or perhaps it takes a bit more effort and we need to beat them together like eggs?
- Finally, how is it served? Does each person get their own like a cookie, or does everyone to come together around a table to enjoy a family (of God)-style meal?

So many possibilities. Once your recipe is written out, hang it on your fridge, to remind you to cook it, bake it, make it, serve it each and every day. A big batch of faithful living!

Prayer: Lord, open me this day to being a master chef of your recipe for life. Amen.





Called to See the Invisible Among Us

Kenneth W. Wheeler, retired ELCA Pastor

Suggested reading: Matthew 9:35-38

My wife and I have been visiting our youngest son in San Jose, California for the last four years.

Not far from the complex where he lives is a running trail. The first year I ran the trail there were a few homeless people I'd see sleeping on the park benches. By 8:30 in the morning the police would do a sweep to make sure that the trail was clear of the homeless. I'm not sure where they went during the day but they could not remain in the park.

On Thanksgiving of this year when we were visiting our son, I ran that trail again. But this time there were tents everywhere throughout the park. The homeless population is at critical levels in this very wealthy community that is a part of the Silicon Valley. The morning air was ripe with human waste. By 8:30 a.m. the police were there to do a sweep.

This time as I ran I could not get my mind off this disparaging sight. The people who slept in this park were basically invisible to all those running or jogging along that trail. And the homeless people who were sleeping in those tents had set them up in the thick brush way off the trail – as if they themselves believed they were invisible. But they are not invisible. These are real human beings. They are husbands, fathers, sons, mothers, and daughters who belong somewhere, who belong to some family.

This passage from Matthew has always been a powerful one for me: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. . . ." (Matthew 9:36)

I believe that first we have to *see* the homeless. We have to see them the way that Jesus saw the crowds and, moved to compassion as Jesus was, we are called to action. Within the Greater Milwaukee Synod there are remarkable ministries that *see* the crowds of hapless, hopeless people living in the heart of the city, pressed down by the oppression of poverty. Those who serve in these ministries see as Jesus saw and they have been moved to serve. Standing in the breach, they are a source of light and hope!

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Prayer: Lord Jesus, help us to see as you have seen. Move us toward compassion, the kind of compassion that brings hope. Amen.

Tuesday, March 12, 2019



Lenten Journey of Hope

Pr. Matt Hacker
First United Lutheran Church, Sheboygan

Most of us have heard about “giving something up” for Lent. This spiritual practice *can* be transformative in our spiritual journey; however, I fear for many it has simply become the spiritual equivalent of a New Year’s Resolution. I think this has happened because most people think of Lent as a time of suffering where you listen to depressing church music, beat up on yourself for not being perfect, and give up something that brings you joy. But I believe this approach misses the point of Lent. Lent is not meant to be a journey of suffering (Jesus suffered *for* us), but rather a *journey of hope*.

Lent is meant to be a time of growth when we concentrate on looking at how our spiritual journey is going—where we take an account of the awful and beautiful life we all live. We sometimes then choose to find one thing to concentrate on that would enhance our growth or foster someone else’s. While this could entail giving up something, it is just as likely to mean doing something differently. For example, if you are constantly worrying about money, this can dramatically impact your quality of life (and by extension, your *journey*.) So find a free financial wellness class—tons of non-profits offer them. Or if you do not have time to pray or meditate or read a devotional, make some time in your schedule for the next forty days.

I have seen a lot of people worry about what to pick or somehow “doing it wrong,” but Lent is a journey of hope because it ends with Easter. If you pick the wrong Lenten discipline, know that you can simply stop, and next year you will pick something different. On the other hand, if what you’ve picked for your Lenten discipline in 2019 works, then you’re better off for it.

* * *

Questions for reflection and discussion: Have you practiced a Lenten discipline in the past? How has that worked for you? How can you use this Lenten season for spiritual growth?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, you have suffered for me, giving me hope for my personal journey. Give me the gift of discernment, helping me choose a Lenten discipline that will help me grow closer to you. Amen.

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Outreach for Hope provides grants to 20 or more ELCA church ministries in Milwaukee, Racine and Kenosha with funding priorities focused on basic needs, empowerment, leadership development and poverty justice.

Wednesday, March 13, 2019



Honoring Our Native Goodness

Rev. Christie Melby-Gibbons
Spirit of Peace Lutheran Church, Milwaukee
Tricklebee Cafe—a ministry of the Moravian Church in America

"Goodness is native to us." - E. Stanley Jones

A high school boyfriend gave me two tiny aquatic frogs in a glass bowl as a Christmas present. Given the festive season, I named my new wet pets Hark and Harold. Though a forest-dweller, I had no experience keeping indoor animals alive. I followed care directions exactly about how to feed and water them. One morning, I saw that Hark was floating motionless while Harold repeatedly nudged him to play. Harold died a day later from a broken heart. In retrospect, I saw this as an omen for my high school romance. Also, I learned that I am not good at keeping pets (alive).

Over the years, it has been tempting to believe only the first part of that sentence about myself: *"I am not good."* (At basketball, small talk, parenting, business management...) This tendency to internalize failure as something one deserves because *"I am not good"* is like illness in the body, beginning as discomfort and progressing into excruciating pain. Over the years, wisdom has taught me that I did my best and the frogs still died. I am doing my daily best as a mom and as executive director of a non-profit pay-what-you-can restaurant (currently Wisconsin's only) and I still experience regular mishaps and unanticipated let-downs. Today I know, though, that life is full of goodness. *I am good—deemed so at creation.*

When I begin to doubt that I'm thoroughly good, I do two things to remind myself of my goodness: 1) I make an acrostic poem of my name, with each letter beginning one of my positive attributes, and 2) I look into my eyes in a mirror when I'm alone and say ten times: "You are good." Good friends, I advise you to do that regularly. You're worth it!

* * *

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: Do you remember to spend time honoring your "native goodness"? Can you make an acrostic poem of your name?

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Tricklebee Café is a pay-what-you-can community café whose mission is making fresh, healthy, and delicious food accessible to everyone regardless of their ability to pay.

Thursday, March 14, 2019



Making a Pathway

Rev. Brad Brown, North Cape Lutheran Church

"A voice cries out: In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." (Isaiah 40:3)

Recently, I heard a drive-time DJ complain about a person who was walking in the middle of the road during a snowstorm. I wondered if this radio personality understood the bravery and resiliency displayed by that road-bound walker. She was making a way where there was no way.

As a culture, we place a larger systemic value on making travel easier for wealthier individuals who own cars. Therefore, our tax dollars are used to clear roadways as quickly and efficiently as possible. We have a whole industry in place, funded by our government to keep roadways clear. But sidewalks are another story. We don't have a communal plan for keeping them clear. So people who do not have cars, people who ride the bus, and people who have mobility issues have to depend on the individual charity of homeowners or landlords to clear the sidewalk. Judging by what I see, this is not always a priority. (In fact, sidewalks don't even exist in many communities in Southeast Wisconsin). So. . . in order to walk on a clear path to the bus stop, or the store, or the doctor, brave and resilient people walk along the road.

As Christians who partner with Outreach for Hope to seek justice for all through Word and Sacrament ministry, we hear the call to individual action and systemic change to make a pathway for all people to equality, health, and healing.

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Prayer: Lord, use us to make clear pathways for the reign of your justice. Amen.

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Eleven of the ministries receiving funding from Outreach for Hope organize to be a collective voice with people who have little power on their own. Through organizations like Wisdom and Common Ground they work together to make systemic change possible for the common good.

Friday, March 15, 2019



Strength for the Journey

Pr. Jennifer Rose, Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Hartland

"Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:31)

I have four children, and I love telling them stories to help encourage them to try new things—especially new foods. Just a few days ago, I was telling my children about Popeye the sailor man, and about how he loved to eat spinach to help him develop his muscles. "I'm strong to the fin-ich, Cause I eats me spinach, I'm Popeye the Sailor man . . . toot toot!" The story did help one of my children to try spinach, and—he discovered he liked it!

Speaking of muscles, do you ever wake up and feel like all of your muscles have gone to putty? As if you have gotten the wind knocked out of you? Or that your energy is gone and you don't know where to turn to replace it?

The reading for today is spinach-of-sorts. Isaiah promises us that our strength, our energy, and even our muscle comes from our loving Father. Isn't it a beautiful picture to imagine flying in the sky like an eagle? As Christians, we know that life isn't always easy or fair. And yet, perhaps God is nudging us to get out of our nest—to look out and observe the good creation that surrounds us. What a sight we will see with our eagle eyes and our newfound strength and energy!

* * *

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to remember that you are the source of my strength and my resolve. Help me to remain steadfast in my faith. Amen.

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Each week, nearly 2,200 people gather in churches receiving support from Outreach for Hope, for worship and devotions, to hear God's Word, lift up prayers together and receive hope and strength for daily living.

Saturday, March 16, 2019



Forgive, As We Are Forgiven

Pastor Heidi Borkenhagen, Grace Lutheran, Grafton

"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." (Colossians 3:13)

I stood by the lakeshore and prayed my heart out. I was a camp counselor, in my first "official" role as a faith leader. I had just said goodbye to a camper who I felt I had failed that week. I prayed for forgiveness from God, and I felt God answer that prayer. Thanks be to God for the blessed peace of forgiveness.

However, to this day I still feel a sting whenever I think of that young girl and what I could have done better. I have trouble forgiving myself, but I have confidence in God's forgiveness.

Over the years there are other times when I've said or done something I regret. But I have always experienced the feeling of being forgiven by God when I come with a truly repentant heart. I have even been blessed to know forgiveness from some of my sisters and brothers in Christ.

Christ modeled forgiveness for us. He offered God's forgiveness to the whole world. The image of him lifted up on a cross with arms open, forgiving with his last breath, is a powerful picture for us all.

We live into this each week when we confess and receive God's forgiveness, when we forgive others, and when we hear the words ". . . for the forgiveness of sins" at God's table. May these words and our experience practicing forgiveness in our faith communities give us the peace that only Christ can bring. No matter how many mistakes or sins we commit, there is always hope in Jesus.

* * *

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: Can you recall a time when you experienced a strong need for forgiveness? Did you receive the reassurance of forgiveness? How does the experience of *being forgiven* help you to be more forgiving toward others?

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Capitol Drive Lutheran Church provides the Sherman Park Gathering Place for older adults. It works with the YMCA to offer physical exercise, and complements that activity with a nutritious noon meal, special worship services and Bible Study.

Monday, March 18, 2019

See next page for today's companion Cross-Gen Corner.

Cross-Gen Corner

"Forgive, as we are Forgiven" Cross-Gen Corner

An Invitation for Families and Disciples of All Ages to Dig Deeper into the Devotion
Pastor Adam Moreno, Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Kenosha

This is a wonderful devotion for families and anyone who is part of a family, which is all of us. Why? Because confession and forgiveness are so important and yet so difficult within families. Right?

Parents, we get mad at our children and can say or do things in anger that, once we cool down, we know wasn't the best way to handle the situation. In reflecting on frustration, can we confess our mistake and ask our children for forgiveness?

Kids, you know that there are times you don't listen, push buttons, break rules. . .when you fight with your siblings or parents, even though you know that you made a mistake. Can you confess these times of disobedience and ask your family for forgiveness?

We all make mistakes. No one is perfect. Not parents, not children -- no one. And yet, God forgives us each and every time. Through Jesus, we are given the assurance that we are forgiven. As we reflect on this devotion, can we seek to follow God's holy example and forgive. As a family, come together. Without getting into the hurtful details or rehashing old offenses, confess your mistakes.

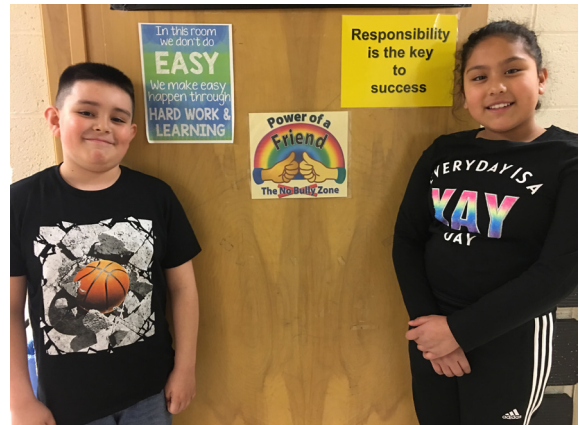
For example, a parent might confess: "I know I get angry when I feel I am not being listened to. I apologize when I express that anger by yelling." A child might confess: "I know it bothers you when I ignore you when I am playing on my phone. I apologize for not responding even though I hear you."

Take it seriously and try to be sincere when confessing. Then, comes the harder, but holy part. Offer one another forgiveness. Not with strings attached, like "As long as you don't do it again." Rather, offer free and unconditional forgiveness.

We sin and make mistakes ALL THE TIME. Yet God forgives. We cannot and will not perfectly forgive, like God, but we can try. Today, choose to forgive. See how the difficult decision to offer forgiveness can free us from grudges and anger and open us to love each other more deeply and fully.

Prayer: God of Grace, We pray it in every worship: forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. This day... let it be so. Amen.





God's Treasure

Cindy Halverson

Director of Lutheran Planned Giving – Wisconsin
St. Johns Lutheran Church, Brookfield

"But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair." (2 Corinthians 4:7-8)

One of my favorite birthday presents is an oddly-shaped clay platter I received from my daughter when she was ten. She described to me how she intended it to be a tall vase, but she couldn't get the sides to stay firm and upright. "Do you like it?" she asked with hope in her eyes.

I hold on to this now-cracked, chipped and faded piece of clay, not because of its utility or beauty. I hold on to it because of the treasure it holds for me—a reminder of love given and love received—a nourishing, life-giving love that sustains me.

Paul's words give encouragement to the church at Corinth. Times are challenging. People are misbehaving. Worldly gods are distracting people from mission.

Stay in the game, he implores. Don't lose heart. Faithful living is hard but we have this treasure. Here Paul speaks beautifully to the Gospel and the life of discipleship. Although pain and suffering are part of discipleship, they are not what defines us.

We are like clay jars. No matter what our shape, skill, ability, or the scars we bear, God's love comes to us just as we are—cracks and all. It fills us up, equipping us for life and ministry. And God holds on to us because there is work yet to do in the vineyard. God holds on to us and loves us—replenishing us again and again through the waters of our baptism so that we might pour ourselves out for the sake of God's people and creation.

* * *

Prayer: Thank you, God, for loving us just as we are—cracks and all. When we are discouraged, renew our faith and commitment to serve you. Amen.

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Racine Neighborhood Camps offer free, multi-site, summertime Christian programming to children of unemployed and 'working poor' in the urban neighborhoods of Racine, including "God Time" worship and opportunities for teens to be employed as camp staff.

Tuesday, March 19, 2019



God Is Here

Vicar Isabelle Barry, Cross Lutheran Church

"You have turned my mourning into dancing." (Psalm 30:11)

Psalm 30 is a psalm of thanksgiving but, like numerous psalms, it does not assume that we lead lives from which hardships and doubts are absent. We all experience times when we believe that God is far. Life is filled with things that weigh us down, make us fear that God has abandoned us: we lose our job, a relative is diagnosed with a serious disease, an old friend no longer returns our calls. These are the kinds of feelings that lead the psalmist to say, *"You hid your face; I was dismayed."*

But the psalmist also affirms that we are not alone in our struggles. Even when we think God may have deserted us, God is present in both our joy *and* our trouble in every experience of life, including life's worst. Psalm 30 proclaims good news of divine involvement in the world. God is not "up there or "back then," God is "down here" with us, even in the pit. And God does not leave us in the pit, but moves us from mourning to joy. The psalm beautifully reminds us that *"Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning."*

To affirm our faith in the resurrection does not mean that, because we are Christians, we will avoid pain and suffering. Rather, we believe that darkness, sin, and death do not have the last word and that God's life-giving power is what guides and orients our existence.

* * *

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: Have you ever felt that God had abandoned you? Have you experienced the kind of joy that "comes with the morning" following this period of lost hope? When the daily news is bleak, do you have difficulty believing that, despite everything, God is here with us in our suffering?

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Vicar Isabelle is a Seminary Intern at Cross Lutheran Church in Milwaukee. Her internship is funded through OFH's Urban Internship Fund in partnership with the Greater Milwaukee Synod. This Fund, which began in 2017 in thanksgiving for former OFH Director, Jim Bickel's leadership, is among Outreach for Hope's programs supporting leadership development.

Wednesday, March 20, 2019



Beautiful and Hard

Kevin Kretzmann Farrar
Associate Pastor,
Atonement Lutheran Church, Muskego

In her memoir about living with incurable cancer, Kate Bowler writes:

"I can't reconcile the way that the world is jolted by events that are wonderful and terrible, the gorgeous and the tragic. Except I am beginning to believe that these opposites do not cancel each other out. I see a middle-aged woman in the waiting room of the cancer clinic, her arms wrapped around the frail frame of her son. She squeezes him tightly, oblivious to the way he looks down at her sheepishly. He laughs after a minute, a hostage to her impervious love. Joy persists somehow and I soak it in. The horror of cancer has made everything seem like it is painted in bright colors. I think the same thoughts again and again: *Life is so beautiful. Life is so hard.*" (*Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I've Loved*, by Kate Bowler, p. 123)

Life is so beautiful. Life is so hard. In my first year of marriage and first year as a pastor, I find these two realities often coexisting. Marriage is so wonderful. Marriage is so frustrating. Being a new pastor is filled with anxiety. Being a new pastor is filled with joy.

In a world that is both beautiful and hard, my hope often coexists with my fear, self-doubt, and worry. Sometimes my hope triumphs. I wish it did more. Often, it doesn't. As we trudge towards Easter and to new life, hope doesn't mean the absence of anxiety, disappointment, and even failure. Might hope be more than just waiting for life to be less hard or expecting things to get better?

* * *

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: Have you ever seen hope lingering in a moment when life felt so beautiful yet so hard? Reread Bowler's quote. Where do you see hope in it?

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Unity Lutheran Church in Milwaukee is an intersection of ministries that connect people at various levels through a Soup Kitchen, an Active Adult Center and an Open Door Free Clinic, all housed within its walls, combined with an emphasis on spiritual growth and worship, leading back to community service.

Thursday, March 21, 2019



Open the Eyes of Your Heart

Sonja Wolfe, ELCA Churchwide Council Member, GMS Rep

"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, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people." (Ephesians 1:18)

Many of us walk around with so much pain and hurt each day that we scowl at any brightness. Our hearts are hardened through the pain we see others going through and the pain we experience ourselves. We must remember that in all this we are never alone and do not need to carry this burden. God always holds us; He will always walk with us.

We need to let go of the hurt and practice forgiveness. We need to let go of the hate and be open to understanding our differences.

If we drown our love with all the negativity surrounding us, we will miss the very joy of God's love and grace given so freely. "Open the eyes of your heart." When we open our hearts to God's love, no words can describe the complete peace we will experience.

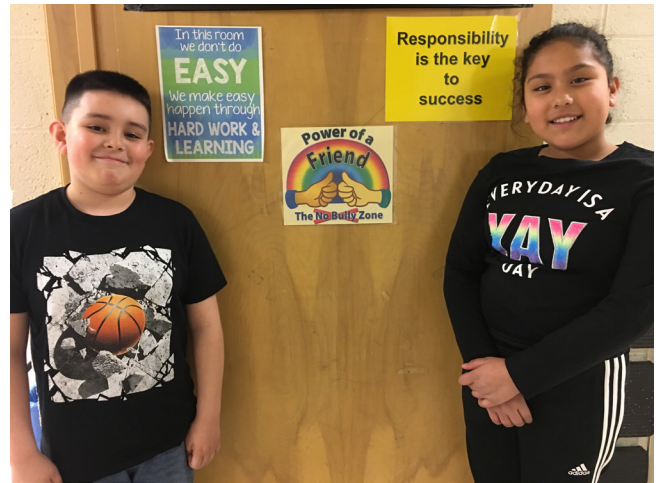
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Prayer: Lord, help me to experience the enlightenment and hope promised in Ephesians. Amen.

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

The Urban Retreat Center at Spirit of Peace Lutheran Church in Milwaukee brings together youth and young adults from urban, suburban, and rural areas along with local volunteers and neighbors to provide leadership training through week-long summer and weekend retreats that include service projects, educational field trips and training exercises to develop leaders for the church and the world.

Friday, March 22, 2019



Journeying with Jesus

Robin Nehring Brodie
Christian Education Director, Whitnall Park Lutheran Church

"They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?' "(Luke 24:32)

When our children were young and we were planning a vacation, my husband and I agreed that the journey should be just as important as the destination. So when we planned our road trips, long or short, we built in several features. First, we picked hotels that had pools and breakfast, waysides with picnic tables and grassy play areas, sight seeing along the way, time to visit with old friends, and music and books to listen to while in the car.

Perhaps that is why I've always liked the story of the Road to Emmaus. Though the disciples had a destination in mind, they were spending the journey talking about events of the past few days and reflecting on what they had seen and heard. When someone joined them on the road, they welcomed him to share in their conversation and brought him up-to-date on current events. At the end of the day, they even invited him to stay with them since it was evening. It wasn't until he broke bread with them, that they realized they had been walking with Jesus all day. Luckily, they had walked and talked and enjoyed the journey, despite their sadness and a certain amount of fear.

As we look at our own journeys through life, do we focus so much on the destination that we ignore the many wonderful things we encounter along the way? Do we forget that Jesus walks with us every day, not just at the end of our lives?

It's heart warming for me to hear my now-grown children talk about the memories of the journey as much as they talk of their experiences at the destination.

* * *

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: In your life, do you make time for reflection, conversation, and play—or are you so busy rushing onto the next thing that you forget to relish the moment? How can you take more time to let Jesus walk with you, as he walked with the disciples on the Road to Emmaus?

Saturday, March 23, 2019



© Work of Art

Solitude with God

Pastor Jennifer Rose, Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Hartland

"And he said, 'Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord.' And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice." (1 Kings 19:11-12)

There are days on the journey of life that are noisy. As a mother of four children, I have days when I struggle to hear the sound of my own breath, because the noise of everything (and everyone) overpowers it all. Do you ever feel like this? Whether you have a work colleague who interrupts you regularly, a yipping puppy, or the everyday noise that the world brings, we all struggle with this outside interference at times.

So, dear traveler on this journey of life, whether you find yourself today in a cacophony of sound, or in a quiet space, I invite you to take a few minutes and spend time in solitude with God. Whether you need to go outside to a quiet place or to a quiet library, or even if you need to find a little solace in your personal devotional time, may you be encouraged today to seek a bit of quiet rest. As you do so, may you have an experience of the living God in that "still small voice."

That "still small voice" speaks to us and calls us to action—to be a light, to be hope, and to be justice in the world. How is God speaking to you today?

* * *

Prayer: Holy Father, teach me to listen for that "still small voice" that is always ready to speak to me in the undercurrent of life's daily rush. Amen.

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

During an average week, the churches and ministries receiving funding from Outreach for Hope welcome nearly 6,900 people through their doors, to join in the many opportunities, connections and spiritual support being offered.

Monday, March 25, 2019

See next page for today's companion Cross-Gen Corner.

Cross-Gen Corner

"Solitude with God" Cross-Gen Corner

An Invitation for Families and Disciples of All Ages to Dig Deeper into the Devotion
Pastor Adam Moreno, Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Kenosha

Shhhh. . .listen. No really. . .stop talking, stop moving around, sit still, be quiet, and listen. What do you hear? Really focus and listen carefully. . .what do you hear? Do you hear God? It may sound like a silly question, but if you listen and if you are open to hearing God, God is speaking all around us. Listen. . .what do you hear?

- Do you hear your own breath or the breathing of someone else in the room? Well, that is the very Spirit of God that was breathed into you when you were created.
- Do you hear the sound of a ticking clock on the wall? Well, our God of all time and space is reminding you that there is a perfect amount of time in the day to do everything that needs to get done, so do not worry: trust God.
- Do you hear a dog barking or a bird singing outside? Well, that is our Creator speaking through creation, reminding you that from the tops of mountains to the depth of the sea, God is always faithfully with you.

It is wonderful to read and reflect on these Lenten devotions each and every day, but it is equally as important to put what they are teaching into practice. Today and this Lenten season, intentionally take time to sit in silence, at home, at school, at work--

wherever you are. Sit in silence and listen. Try it right now, alone or together with family, listen. What do you hear? And how is God speaking to you through these "still small voices" and sounds?

Prayer: All-powerful God, you are revealed in all things...even in the silence. Let us listen for you and hear you speaking in every moment of every day. Amen.





Our Lord – Alive in the Church

Pastor John Norquist
Faith Lutheran Church, Cedarburg

Suggested Reading: Isaiah 60:1-4

My upbringing in the church included many experiences, but it wasn't until seminary that I was introduced to Epiphany. It is a great festival of the church year often overshadowed by our cultural emphasis on Christmas. A recovery of this tradition has been growing among congregations where I serve, including aspects from other cultures around the world.

We gather for a meal followed by a procession into worship, then outside to follow the Magi under the stars before returning indoors for a piñata and Rosca de los Reyes (King Cake). This year the star that led us to worship was carried by a child from my congregation. Our difference in height kept me from noticing how seriously she took her job until afterward when I saw some photos. Her face conveyed an expression of wonderful reverence as she held the star high above her. She was leading us to Jesus!

Although Epiphany is long past, its gift of light informs our Lenten journey. The night enfolding the earth and its peoples is broken by an amazing light coming from the most unexpected of places: *"Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you."* (Isaiah 60:1) The lengthening days of this season reveal our Lord no longer in a cradle but alive in the church, dwelling in you and in me – and working in our world.

* * *

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: What rituals and ceremonies in church remind you that Christ is alive among us? In what ways have you witnessed the light of Christ working in our world?

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Faith/Santa Fe Lutheran Church in Milwaukee ministers to the Spanish-speaking community with an emphasis on outreach through worship, spiritual direction, leadership formation, a Saturday outreach ministry, and food programs.

Tuesday, March 26, 2019



Hope on the Phone

Vicar David Rebey, Redemption Lutheran Church, Wauwatosa

"For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." (Matt. 18:20)

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 15:13)

Our ministry team visits Breaking the Chains Church at Felmers Chaney Correctional Center every Wednesday night to lead Bible study, and returns Saturday night for worship with communion.

Before Christmas last year, the number of men joining us for Bible study tapered off a bit as some of our most faithful members had recently been released back into the community to start new lives. A few others were working second shift in their outside jobs. One Wednesday night I found myself waiting in our usual meeting place wondering if anyone was going to join me.

Eventually one of our most faithful members arrived. After a brief opening prayer, we started studying the psalm for the coming Sunday. I quickly realized that he had other things on his mind and just wanted to talk. I decided to let him lead the conversation wherever he wanted to take it. He started telling me that there was some tension between him and his wife because he had been away for so long and she was raising their sons on her own. He then told me that they had started reconnecting by phone and that things seemed to be slowly getting better as the entire family was looking forward to his release early in the coming year. He was full of hope about the possibilities of his family becoming reunited and was hoping to become a role model for his sons.

I realized that we were experiencing a holy moment together and that God was present in our midst.

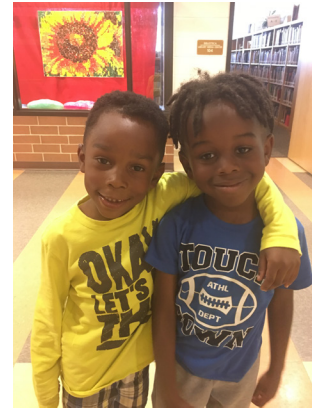
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Questions for Reflection and Discussion: Can you recall a time when another person voiced his or her hope to you? Have you been able to share a personal time of hope with another? What is the value of listening in situations like these?

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Breaking the Chains is a worshipping congregation within the walls of Felmers O. Chaney Correctional Center. In addition to its funding from Outreach for Hope, it is affiliated with the nation-wide network of Prison Congregations of America, and relies on funding from partner ELCA congregations, individuals, and other grant programs.

Wednesday, March 27, 2019



God's Promise

Rev. Karl-John N. Stone
Member of Mount Pleasant Lutheran Church, Racine

Egypt had once been the answer to their prayers, a dream come true. Their long-lost brother Joseph, whom they had sold into slavery and left for dead, was not only alive but by God's grace had risen from slavery, poverty, and imprisonment to be Pharaoh's second-in-command. Because of Joseph's leadership and stewardship, Egypt was poised to survive the approaching years of famine. Facing a famine in their homeland of Canaan, Joseph's brothers and their kin received new life from Joseph who cared for them, helped them move, and gave them choice grazing land in Egypt.

The Israelites made the most of their opportunity. They were fruitful, prolific, strong, successful—just what their ancestors would have hoped. But then *"a new king arose. . . who did not know Joseph"* (Exodus 1:8). Their success and miraculous survival now seemed to mean nothing. Egypt became the place of their worst nightmare, as the new Pharaoh oppressed them with forced labor. Despite the ruthless treatment they endured, God kept fulfilling in them his promise to Abraham: *"Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able. . . . So shall your descendants be."* (Genesis 15:5).

As people of faith, we live by the promises of God. Our worth is determined neither by prosperity nor poverty. Our future and salvation in Christ is not dependent on whether we are living a dream or a nightmare. Our true identity comes from the God who keeps promises. Even if we find ourselves like the Israelites—stuck in a reversal of fortune that is difficult to fix, control, or understand—Christ is always present in faith and helps us walk the long journey from death to new life.

* * *

Prayer: Dear God, help us to live secure in your promise no matter what the present circumstances of our lives. Amen.

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

All Peoples Church in Milwaukee uses youth programming to raise up new leaders for the church and community. Emerging leaders participate in Kids Working to Succeed and empowering events like summer and family camp and the ELCA Multicultural Youth Leadership Event.

Thursday, March 28, 2019



Ask. Search. Knock.

Sharon Adams, Neighbor and Developer
Cross Lutheran Church, Milwaukee

"Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who ask receives, and everyone who searches finds." (Matthew 7:7-8)

In 1997 I returned home to Milwaukee from a career in New York City, planning to settle back into our family duplex on North Avenue and 17th Street. It was the neighborhood where I had grown up. But it wasn't the same. All the trees were gone. Police sirens filled the air at night. And the neighborhood just felt—unhappy. The stores were mostly gone. Over 1,000 homes had been torn down. It was blighted and abandoned.

It was a time when I could have felt hopeless, but that is not my nature. With the help of my husband Larry Adams and many other people, especially my neighbors, we developed the Walnut Way Conservation Corporation in 2000. We have planted fruit trees and gardens, led efforts in storm-water management, and we have rebuilt over one hundred homes. The revitalization of this area continues.

The quoted Bible verse from Matthew has been the source of my hope for these past 22 years. Every morning without fail I take time for prayer, asking God, "What I can do?" Bugged down with any problem, I don't need to see the final answer. I just need to know "What's the next step?" Trusting God and then following his directions—taking the next step—is often the only hope we need.

Ask. Search. Knock: those are the keywords that help me undertake any task. They give me hope.

* * *

Prayer: Dear God, teach us not to despair but instead to place our hope in you. Help us to believe that if we ask questions, you will give us answers; if we search, you will help us find what we are looking for; and if we knock, you will open the door of opportunity. Amen.

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

In 2018, Outreach for Hope added Alice's Garden to the array of funded ministries. Alice's Garden is part of The Table, a worshipping community located in the heart of Milwaukee, which provides regenerative farming, community cultural development and economic agricultural enterprises in an urban setting.

Friday, March 29, 2019



The Soloist and the Choir

Rev. Brad Brown, North Cape Lutheran Church

"So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another." (Romans 12:5)

I love the mysterious communion that emerges in a choir where voices blend to make a full and rich sound. I also like listening to a good vocalist who can fill a room with just their own singular voice. (Although I am not that kind of vocalist.)

Claiming our individual gifts while also standing back to blend into the choir is a tricky transition for us who live in a society that values self-sufficiency and thrives on homogeneity. The dialectic of unity and diversity is one of the great riddles of American Christian history. How do we make sure that every voice is lifted up while also working toward common compassion and shared effort?

I want to make sure that we lift up that question. The truth is—we are not the same. I am privileged with wealth, access to education, and relative empowerment. But it is not the reality for others. So it is disingenuous for me to believe that everyone gets to stand at the mic and magnify their voice like I do.

Outreach for Hope ministries exist to put us right in the middle of this social conundrum. How do we find unity and purpose in the midst of such a broken, fragmented, and individualistic society? Being together with others who are not like us (whose voices don't blend so easily) is a really good start. Recognizing differences without rushing to eliminate them is another fine effort.

* * *

Prayer: Lord, surprise us with moments of new and creative expression through the gifts of others. Amen

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

The ELCA Outreach Center in Kenosha empowers more than 1,500 people annually through Bible Study, free clothing closet, infant supplies, GED, resume help, computer classes, youth programs and legal advice. It aims to help individuals develop skills and self-confidence to become self-sufficient and caring members of the community.

Saturday, March 30, 2019



Stronger Together

Julie Ische, Child of God, Trinity Lutheran Church, Cedarburg

You're trying to empty the ocean with a teaspoon.

That's the way I feel when I'm struggling to make a difference – when I'm struggling to be church in the world for the sake of my neighbor. I've donated my clothes, stocked food pantries, assembled food packs, and advocated for causes. I've given money to ministries and I've given blood. The list goes on. But so does the need. I look around feeling I've done all I can, and there is still so much need. I get frustrated and want to give up, feeling I've failed.

It's called compassion fatigue. I've managed to move just a teaspoon from the ocean of need.

But here's the thing – God does not call you or me to solve the problem. Surely God calls us to act on behalf of our neighbors and equips us to do so. But God created us to work, live, and love in community. God calls us to be in relationship with each other, that we may strengthen our relationship with our creator. It is together that we find our strength, and our cumulative power to serve is exponentially magnified. It is together we become so much more than the sum of our parts.

I need you. We need each other. And the world needs us all. The ocean of need is surely vast, but the strength of the Body of Christ – the Church – is limitless when we work together. Together we can take on the oceans of challenges in front of us, even if it feels like just a teaspoon at a time. It is through our togetherness that we fight the fatigue and embrace compassion.

* * *

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: Can you remember a time when you felt *What's the use?* because the task was so much bigger than you could handle. Did you give up or did you keep plugging away? Or did you enlist some help?

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Churches and ministries receiving funding from Outreach for Hope give more than 600 volunteers a place to serve, grow in faith, and develop an appreciation of God's diverse world, every week.

Monday, April 1, 2019

See next page for today's companion Cross-Gen Corner.

Cross-Gen Corner

"Stronger Together" Cross-Gen Corner

An Invitation for Families and Disciples of All Ages to Dig Deeper into the Devotion
Pastor Adam Moreno, Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Kenosha

Heads up...for this devotion, you are going to need lots of pencils. So go get some from your bookbag or from the junk drawer...maybe pick up a box of pencils from the dollar store on your way home today. Why? Cause we're practicing our karate skills and learning a lesson about togetherness!

So you have your pencils...go ahead, someone hold both ends and another person use your hand to karate chop it in half. Did you do it? I would venture to say, most of us can. One pencil is not that hard to break. Now...add a few more. Maybe one for each person in your family. If you are single or have a small family, go ahead and add some for important friends and loved ones in your life. The hope is that everyone will be able to add in four, five, maybe even more pencils. Bunch them together and try to break them...be careful that you don't hurt your hand. It's an important warning because a group of pencils is much harder to break than a single pencil.

Now maybe you are super strong and broke through a big group of pencils...but even if you did, it was harder than just one. Right? Now, think about adding a pencil for everyone who is important in your life, who loves and supports you beyond your family. Teachers, coaches, counselors, work colleagues, friends, teammates, Sunday School teachers, youth leaders, pastors...I pray that you can come up with a long list. Why? Because we are stronger together!

Like the single pencil, we may see the hardships in this world and not feel strong enough to stand against them on our own. But the good news is that we are not alone! We have other "pencils," I mean people, in our lives at school, at work, and at church. These people make us stronger and our presence in their lives makes them stronger...strong enough to endure struggles that might break us if we were alone. And together, we're strong enough to begin to heal the brokenness in the world. You and me and so many more people working together...and let's not forget the strongest of all. We have God with us all the time! So even when we're hit with a big karate chop, we won't break, because we are together with one another and with God...strong and one!

Prayer: God of Unity, by your Spirit make us one with each other and one with you in whom we find unfailing strength! Amen.





Getting Through Difficult Times

Vicar David Rebey, Redemption Lutheran, Wauwatosa

"But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." (Isaiah 40:31)

Early in November of last year, a close friend lost her husband after a long chronic illness. We all knew that his death was imminent; he had lived much longer than his doctors predicted.

Shortly after my friend's death, his widow was devastated when she found a large pile of bills that he had been putting in a drawer and that he had stopped worrying about a long time ago. She had not been to church for a long time, but started coming to my church shortly after he died. I suspect that her coming was more about not wanting to be alone on Sunday mornings and less about coming to hear me preach!

The day after Thanksgiving, our social ministry team was going to a homeless shelter to feed lunch to a group of men who were facing hard times and were living there until they got back on their feet. To my surprise, my friend's widow offered to join us and help serve the men lunch that day. As we were driving home after lunch, she told me that this experience helped her to realize how many people have it a lot worse than she did.

God gives us strength and courage to get through the difficult times in our lives when we start to recognize Christ in the suffering of our neighbor.

* * *

Question for Reflection and Discussion: Can you recall a time in your life when your hope was renewed after going through tough times?

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Fourteen congregations that receive funding from Outreach for Hope operate food pantries and meal programs to provide food to unemployed and under-employed people and their families.

Tuesday, April 2, 2019



A Letter from God

Sonja Wolfe
ELCA Churchwide Council Member, GMS Rep

Dear brothers and sisters; fathers and mothers; my beloved children,

I write to you with a heavy heart amidst the struggles you face daily. I see the hurt of not belonging that you carry each day. I am crushed by the chains of hate that weigh you down. I feel the slash of each harsh word or act committed upon each of you, by each of you. My entire being feels your aches and your burdens brought about by this overwhelming pain.

My heart is heavy, not because of the challenges you face but because I fear you have lost hope. I write to remind you of the hope I give to you – and to share my hope.

I share my hope that you remember who I AM, that you remember the sacrifice made for you so long ago. I share my hope that you know you are always loved and accepted. I share my hope that you break the chains of hate that weigh you down, that you remember I paid the price to save you from all things that would be against you. I share the hope that you remember in loving me and one another, all things can be overcome.

My beloved children, no matter the hardships you face, keep faith and hope burning so bright that it lights the deepest pits of darkness. Keep your hope shining so bright that it wipes the darkness away. Keep your hope burning so brightly that it shines away the suffering of all your brothers and sisters. I share my own hope until you all can share the same. One day you will all come together loving as one.

Lovingly,
I AM

* * *

Prayer: Thank you, God, for the gift of hope. Help me to keep faith and hope burning bright within me. Amen.

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

The Outreach for Hope Family Bike Ride brings together over 60 churches and 400 people to enjoy recreation, fellowship, and the opportunity to raise funds for Outreach for Hope. 2019 marks the 12th Anniversary of the ride and will be held September 7.

Wednesday, April 3, 2019



The Rainbow Vine

Pastor Jonathan Barker, Grace Lutheran, Kenosha

"Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 'Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.'" (Jeremiah 29:4-7)

A local public middle school has gifted Grace Welcome Center (our Thursday and Friday community breakfast program) several pieces of art with the goal of bringing greater hope into our space during meals.

One six-panel piece especially speaks to me and to our community. Weaving through these six panels is a rainbow and the black silhouette of a vine. The 8th grade artist explained the painting: "In Kenosha we come from different neighborhoods, races, classes, and cultures, yet as the vine shows, we are totally dependent on one another."

I have seen this interconnectedness play out in powerful ways at Grace Welcome Center: guests who come for meals tithing food donations off food stamp cards, Pastor Jim Lynch bringing a group from St. John's and Holy Nativity Lutheran to make breakfast each month, Taylor Mitka (a St. Mary's Lutheran youth) bringing her group to help run our soup kitchen, one of our 90-year-old quilters making special fleece blankets as apartment-warming gifts, and members of Grace working tirelessly to keep the coffee, sugar, and creamer running. Each person who joins us comes to be part of our Grace Welcome Center family.

What ties us together is a deep love for one another, and that love empowers each of us for the task of the day ahead.

* * *

Prayer: Dear Lord, bless those who provide welcoming places for the needy in our midst. Help us all to be like that rainbow vine which connects us in Christian love with one another. Amen.

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Donations to Outreach for Hope support 20 or more congregations and ministries of the Greater Milwaukee Synod in Kenosha, Racine, and Milwaukee - working to be the presence of God's love in low-income communities.

Thursday, April 4, 2019



Hope in Times of Struggle

Pastor John Norquist
Faith Lutheran Church, Cedarburg

Suggested Reading: Isaiah 43:1-7

"Are you OK?" The voice on the other end of the phone call was a member of my congregation spending the winter in Florida. "I've been thinking about you."

It had been a rough couple of weeks, filled with a disorienting mix of gratitude and dread that can accompany pastoral ministry. I had been wrestling with doubts concerning my leadership and role amid congregational challenges, even as signs of God's activity kept reminding me of the bigger picture. A difficult meeting was ahead and I wanted to help congregational leaders see the good things taking place, but the challenges kept dominating my mind. "I even had a dream about you!" The person sounded slightly sheepish, yet felt compelled to tell me. Like an illuminating light, the words lifted something in my spirit and I felt the greater power of God.

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you" wrote the prophet, testifying to the mystery of God inhabiting our struggles. (Isaiah 43:2) When crisis demands all of your attention, another truth awaits. Isaiah invites us to see amid the brokenness the great reunion of God's beloved community.

* * *

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: Who are the people who hold you in prayer? Has that ever surprised you? Who could use your prayers today?

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Racine provides Terrific Tuesdays/Martes Maravillosos, an after-school program for neighborhood children including a meal, "God Time," homework help and academic enrichment. During this time, LC of the Redeemer also provides Pan de Cielo/food pantry and Bible study for adults.

Friday, April 5, 2019



Bright Stars

Rev. Christie Melby-Gibbons
Spirit of Peace Lutheran Church, Milwaukee
Tricklebee Café – a ministry of the Moravian Church in America

"Praise God, sun and moon; praise God, all you shining stars!" (Psalm 148:3)

Sometimes I lament that Pluto was demoted from "ninth planet from the sun" to "dwarf planet." (I always favored that tiny planet with five moons!)

Both in and far outside of this world, things don't stay the same. New discoveries change what we were taught to be true. These realities riddle our lives with disappointment. It is often difficult to find contentment, and we find ourselves desperate to rest in the familiar lap of our Creator, who – like the Sun – is our source of lasting warmth and light.

While imagining the contentment of resting secure in the warm glow of God, ponder this:

If a planet is too close to its star, it will be too hot and no life can be there.

If a planet is too far from its star, it will be too cold and no life can be there.

I have known people who were too close to their Star – so blinded by, and steeped in, the brightness of the Divine that it hindered loving interactions with all of creation. This makes relationships suffer, because the focus is so much on the Source that others are afterthoughts at best, unholy burdens at worst.

I have also known people who were too far from their Star – so independent from, and disinterested in, the Divine that it hindered abundant living. Living too far from our Heavenly Star makes it difficult to live a life of gratitude and interconnectedness. And it's certain to cause anxiety.

But there is a place in between where we will do well to dwell, a place where we can thrive with balance and joy. Love meets us there.

* * *

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: How does your connection to God help you deal with disappointments in life? How does it help you connect with love to other people?

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Tricklebee Café serves roughly 4,600 meals annually and hosts 14 weekly Healthy Choices Workshops. Brighten your day with a nourishing weekday lunch there.

Saturday, April 6, 2019



We Are All Children of God

Pr. Matt Hacker, First United Lutheran Church, Sheboygan

"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

One of my personal passions is food. I love food because it speaks to both our diversity and common humanity at the same time. For example: having grown up in South Texas, I rank empanadas as one of my favorite foods. For many folks in Wisconsin, this is probably considered an exotic food, but I can assure you that every culture has its own "empanada." Empanadas can be either savory or sweet; they can be fried or baked bread dough that is folded and full of just about anything delicious.

This idea of bread folded and filled with delicious meat, veggies or sweet treats lives in almost every culture, just by different names. Depending on your background you might call it a Calzone, or Dim Sum, or Porgies. Others call them Runzas, Beirocks, Pasties, Hand Pies, Pocket Pies, Pirozhki, Knish or a Jamaican Patty. The list goes on.

Just as these foods are greatly diverse due to the different historical paths that developed them, we too as humans have a great diversity of experiences. We are gifted in this great variety of lived experiences that make us unique. Our varied experiences should be celebrated and shared (much like the above-named foods.) However, sometimes we pull back and begin to feel that we are fundamentally different. But Christ reminds us that what binds us together is more than what makes us different, for we are all children of God. Perhaps before we look at someone and say the equivalent of, "I am an Empanada and you are a Calzone—we have nothing in common," remember: they're both deliciousness wrapped in bread.

* * *

Questions for reflection and discussion: How has your faith been enriched by cultural diversity? How have you experienced the unity in Christ that is promised in Galatians 3:28?

Prayer: Dear God, help me not to be so quick to notice differences among us but instead to find the common bond that links me to my brothers and sisters all over the world. Amen.

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Unity Lutheran Church organizes six faith communities to take turns providing a Wednesday evening meal for over 200 hungry people from the community.

Monday, April 8, 2019

See next page for today's companion Cross-Gen Corner.

Cross-Gen Corner

"We are all Children of God" Cross-Gen Corner

An Invitation for Families and Disciples of All Ages to Dig Deeper into the Devotion
Pastor Adam Moreno, Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Kenosha

This is a fun devotion, isn't it? Especially the last line, "I am an Empanada and you are a Calzone...we're both deliciousness wrapped in bread." While fun, it also makes a really important point about who we are as God's children. Yes, each of us are different. We are uniquely created by God and given "delicious" gifts and talents we can use to serve God and others. It is good to celebrate our differences! AND to recognize that, although we have many things that are different, there is ONE big thing that makes us all the same. We are ALL beloved children of God. You are a beloved child of God. Moms and Dads are beloved children of God. Grandmas and grandpas, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters are all beloved children of God. Your friends, your neighbors, even people you don't know and people you don't get along with...they are beloved children of God. (*Did you hear that adults, even people you don't get along with are beloved children of God!*)

Let's play a game...like Empanadas and Calzones, can you think of different things that have a big thing that is the same? Here are some examples:

I am crayon, you are a marker... we're both good for coloring!
I am coffee, you are hot chocolate... we're both wonderful on a cold winter's day!
I am comet, you are a star... we're both outta this world!

How many different ones can you come up with? Be creative, be silly, and have fun! Now, try focusing on things that make people different and then proclaim the one BIG thing that makes us all the same. For example:

I am a boy, you are girl... we're all children of God.
I am black, you are white...we're all children of God.
I am Jewish, you are Christian... we're all children of God.

Can you think of more? We are all different and those differences make us uniquely beautiful and needed in this world. It is so important to also remember and proclaim how we are the same, how we "are all one in Christ Jesus," beloved children of God!

Prayer: God, our loving parent, let us celebrate our differences and rejoice in the one thing we all have in common, that we are your beloved children! Amen.





Finding Hope in the Midst of Despair

Rev. Karl-John N. Stone
Member of Mount Pleasant Lutheran Church, Racine

Suggested reading: Lamentations

The Old Testament book of Lamentations is a series of five poems, one poem for each chapter. In the very middle of these poems (Lamentations 3:21-36), the writer spends 15 verses expressing hope in the Lord's steadfast love, mercy, faithfulness, salvation, and compassion. Everything else in these five poems, before and after, is about despair, pain, suffering, rejection, doubt, and uncertainty.

Reading these poems might feel unsatisfying if all we are looking for is easy answers to the difficulties of life. Yet if we are looking for truthful descriptions of human experience, Lamentations will hit the spot because it acknowledges the hard truth that life is often unfair and that at some point we are all going to meet suffering and doubt.

Lamentations teaches us that we cannot deny reality—and neither can God. When the only offering we have for God is our doubt, suffering, or despair, Jesus gratefully receives this from us as a holy and precious gift. He accepts us as we are and points us toward the cross. Like the middle verses of hope in Lamentations' poems of despair, the cross of Christ reveals the heart of God – a God who hides in the middle of reality, right where the world would least expect to find him.

Look for Jesus there in your doubt, suffering, or despair: A crucified Messiah knows how to meet the broken and lift the fallen.

* * *

For Further Reflection and Discussion: After reading Lamentations 3:21-36, consider the messages of hope you discover there. If possible, discuss your thoughts with others who are reading these Lenten devotions.

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Redeemer Lutheran Church, located on the edge of Marquette University campus, and rooted in a Milwaukee neighborhood marked by both poverty and promise, focuses on community collaborations with businesses, students and partnerships to serve their neighbors. Ministries include a noon community meal served by Marquette Lutheran Campus Ministry students and the "Bee the Change" educational and entrepreneurial beekeeping program.

Tuesday, April 9, 2019



All About Grace

Jeffrey Barrow, former Bishop of ELCA Greater Milwaukee Synod

It has been five years since the death of my wonderful colleague Pastor Walter Hermanns. He died after a long, sometimes painful, very courageous battle with MS. In that time he made a huge impact on the life of Holy Communion Lutheran Church and on a much wider community.

It was my privilege to serve with him for 15 years. In that time he taught us all so much about what it is to live in grace. He taught us more about health than about illness, taught us more about wholeness than about brokenness.

Make no mistake – there were difficult days on that journey. Sometimes even at the depth of his own journey, he would preach what I called “Walter’s blood sermons.” By sharing his own pain, he would allow others to face theirs. I will never forget the night he preached at the funeral of a man in our congregation who died after a long battle with MS. Walter said, “The thing about living with MS, is that the box you live in keeps getting smaller and smaller.” At the same time both his sermons and his living were, in the end, ALL ABOUT GRACE.

Looking back on those years I remember most how much fun we had together. While MS claimed so much of his mobility, it could never seem to get at his creative mind nor force him to surrender his razor-sharp wit.

Neither could MS force him to surrender his ability to discover and welcome those on the fringes. Life at Holy Communion was fun because it was never tidy. Just when the church was getting too comfortable, Walter was forever mucking things up by bringing Jesus into the mix. Thus, if there was a lost sheep or a lost coin or a lost child to be found, Walter could always manage not only to find them but to bring them center stage and ask the community of faith what we were going to do about it.

In the end we were all so much the better for it. The journey was never easy, but there was always love and life and hope to be found along the way.

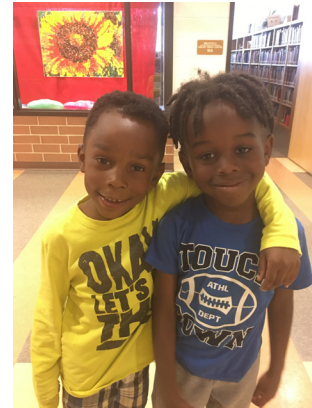
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Prayer: God, thank you for people like Walter Hermanns who remind the rest of us how blessed we are and for showing us how to live in your grace with hope and love. Amen.

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

The Open Door Free Clinic is staffed with volunteer nurses and doctors three times per month and provides free medical services to uninsured patients in the neighborhood surrounding Unity Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, where it is housed.

Wednesday, April 10, 2019



God of Hope

Pastor Mary Martha Kannass, Hephatha Lutheran Church

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the holy spirit you may abound in hope." (Romans 15:13)

"Over my head, I hear music in the air. . ."

A woman of the congregation stood before us with Sunday School children and leaders behind her. Our musician played and the woman sang from the depths of her soul: ". . .there must be a God somewhere. . ."

We were locked soul to soul with her as she sang from her faith, from her recovery, from the goodness of God within her.

"Over my head, I see love in the air. . . ." A child of the congregation took the microphone and sang from her soul. She was Mary on Christmas Eve. She is an acolyte. She wears her robe weekly, taking a turn to serve at every possible moment, a living Mary in our midst. "I see love in the air. . ." Her foster mother is a member here, and has fostered some 35 children in her years. "There must be a God somewhere." This child "Mary" will be adopted in April by this woman of faith, who stood with her at our baptismal font Christmas morning as the girl was baptized.

Then a boy took the microphone. "Over my head, I hear God in the air. . . ." He is a motherless child, suffering the death of his mother in a tragic auto accident a year ago. "There must be a heaven," he sings.

Our souls are locked together in the January warmth of hope in the air.

* * *

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: How does the description of this scene from Hephatha Lutheran Church touch you with hope of your own? What songs inspire you as this one does?

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Hephatha Lutheran Church in Milwaukee makes worship, holy communion and holy baptism the starting place to care for their members and the special needs of young people, while putting a strong emphasis on life-giving partnerships in the church's neighborhood.

Thursday, April 11, 2019



Be Like a Child

Rev Tracy Polzin

Education Pastor, Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Oconomowoc

"But Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.'" (Matthew 19:14)

To go on a walk with a child means that you won't get there as fast you might otherwise. It often means taking several detours. To walk with a child also means that you will see things that you would have otherwise blown by. You will notice that the clouds look like dinosaurs. You will discover that there are flowers blooming alongside the path. You will find caterpillars, frogs, butterflies, and an unusual leaf.

To take a walk with a child means that it is not about getting to the destination as quickly as possible, but finding joy and hope in the journey. Jesus tells us that the kingdom of heaven belongs to children, and my guess is that, in part, it's because children can see the kingdom around us in ways that we often overlook in our rush to get things done.

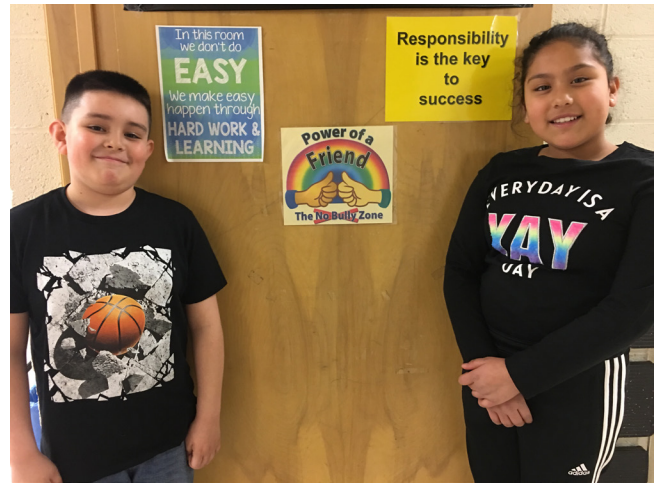
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Prayer: Dear God, we give you thanks for children. We thank you for the joy that they bring to the world. We pray that each of us would take time to see your creation with childlike wonder. Amen.

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Reformation Lutheran Church has distinguished itself as a neighborhood-based ministry in the poorest area of Milwaukee. Through its many ministries, including Neighborhood Store & Coffee Shop, S.A.L.T. (Serving And Learning Together) year-round youth work ministry, Angel Community Garden, Strong Women Strong Babies for young parents, and more, Reformation walks in solidarity with its neighbors, giving voice to the community. Reformation is also committed to African American leadership development and anti-racism training.

Friday, April 12, 2019



Where Hope Lies

Kevin Kretzmann Farrar
Associate Pastor, Atonement Lutheran Church, Muskego

"The key to rebirth of our hope lies in the place where we buried it: in the exploited and the oppressed."
(Jurgen Moltmann, *Experiences of God*)

I was recently having a conversation with the high schoolers at my church about what it means for them to be a part of the church. I was struck by how central participation in mission trips was to all of their Christian identities. When I heard this, I was reminded of the many voices I've heard lamenting how younger generations are less connected to religious institutions. Part of me wanted to ask them, "That's the fun stuff! What about the commitment? What about Sunday morning? Receiving communion? My sermons?" But when I heard my students speaking, I did not hear a rejection of organized Christianity.

I heard them saying that they more vividly see God when they are with people who feel hurting, forgotten, and suffering. What if, like this quote from German theologian Jurgen Moltmann, my high schoolers were telling me that they find God among those who have been wronged, forgotten, and let down by society? What if hope is more easily born among those hurting, the oppressed, those who don't actually believe they can pick themselves up by their bootstraps? If God's hope tends to be birthed in such people and places, what would happen if we went looking for hope there more often? This has caused me to wonder: Where do I look for hope?

* * *

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: Where do you look for hope? Where might hope be springing forth in places you do not expect?

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Emaus Lutheran Church in Racine offers intentional Latino ministry including a Spanish language Sunday worship followed by a meal. Midweek opportunities include an after-school and music program, Bible studies and a kid-friendly worship service.

Saturday, April 13, 2019



What Does Love Look Like?

Vicar Isabelle Barry, Cross Lutheran Church

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-39)

Every Wednesday at Cross Lutheran Church, with the help of our Partner churches, we serve 200 people a hot meal before they shop at our food pantry. These people are those our society has made invisible: the homeless, addicted, marginalized. Oftentimes their eyes are devoid of hope.

Lent is a time for introspection and soul-searching, a time to reflect on what Jesus asks from us. A good place to start is the great commandment. We often talk about "love" in church, but we might want to dig deeper and ask ourselves "What does love look like?"

Jesus' words lay it out clearly. We are expected to love both God and our neighbor. The two are inseparable. And yet, we are often guilty of claiming to "love God" while forgetting the poor, refusing to open doors to the refugee, building walls, being suspicious of those who do not look like us, and worshiping in insular and segregated "sacred" spaces.

As Christians we believe all human beings are created in the image of God, not just the faithful, not just our friends and people who worship with us on Sundays. How then can we come before God with our prayers when we ignore or reject the one image we have of the divine: human beings?

Love is not a feeling. Love is something we act upon. What if our congregations became places where people attend to the sorrow and pain of the image of the crucified Christ on the streets of our city? Inspired by our love for God, we are called to love our neighbor and bring back hope to their eyes.

* * *

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: How do you see God in your neighbor? How can you act on your faith, with love and compassion, in your community?

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Bread of Healing Empowerment Ministry of Cross Lutheran Church was built on the idea of cooperative efforts. It brings together community resources for counseling, food through partnership congregations, health care from volunteer professionals and agencies, and other neighborhood partnerships.

Monday, April 15, 2019

See next page for today's companion Cross-Gen Corner.

Cross-Gen Corner

"What Does Love Look Like" Cross-Gen Corner

An Invitation for Families and Disciples of All Ages to Dig Deeper into the Devotion
Pastor Adam Moreno, Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Kenosha

In today's devotion, we are asked, "What does love look like?" Now that is a big question! Before discussing it with your family or reflecting on your own, find some paper and something to draw with: a pencil, a pen, colored pencils, some markers, or a box of crayons. Take some time to draw a picture of what love looks like to you. Go ahead...really do it. It's OK if you're not the best artist in the world, or even in your family. We talk about love a lot...let's spend time imagining what those words can look like in a picture. There is no right or wrong answer...after all, there are many different ways love is expressed, so there can be many different pictures drawn. Ready...GO!

Are you done? When everyone is done drawing, share your picture with others and take the time to explain what you drew and why you believe it is what love looks like. Remember to show love in this time of sharing... try not to offer criticism on others drawing or ideas. In fact, celebrate the differences in one another's drawings and lift up each person's unique and original vision of love.

As you go throughout the week, seek to show love, not just in words, but in actions. When we act in Love, we reveal our God who IS Love living within us! So, what can love look like...well, go and take a look in the mirror! Just like you created a drawing of love, God created you in love to be love in our world!

Prayer: God of Love, let us see the face of love in every person and let us be love in the lives of everyone we meet. You are Love and we love you! Amen.





Hope in the Wilderness

Pastor Gary Erickson, Pastor Emeritus

"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness. . . ." (Matthew 4:1)

As a boy in Sunday school, I was fascinated by the story about short Zacchaeus who climbed that Sycamore tree to see Jesus passing by and hearing His call to "come on down!" Perhaps, in part, that's why I was attracted to the photograph on a dating website of two women up in a tree, reminiscing about their childhood days of tree climbing. I responded to her "dating profile" photo. Not to draw too many parallels with Zacchaeus, she saw me, and I called her down. We met and talked, dated, and in 2017 we were married. This had followed a personal "wilderness experience" for me.

It is no coincidence that the first Sunday in Lent always begins with Jesus in the wilderness, struggling with his identity and with his faithfulness to God's way. Though I was functioning as a parish pastor, I was wandering in a kind of personal wilderness following the death of my wife, Sue, in 2007. Most of us know well that personal wilderness: that lost feeling, that feeling of knowing love but not feeling love. In my own way I grieved; I felt lonely but not alone! I felt an emptiness, yet a fullness through the church in serving the people of God at St. Matthew's. In caring for the needs of others, I was caring for myself.

Many times I had proclaimed, "Life is found in giving!" and "God will provide." Even in my personal wilderness, hope was always there, like a vision from a tree limb, of Jesus passing by, calling me to "come on down." Hope was always present, like Jesus being ministered water in the wilderness. I knew my place: God's loving care through the people of my faith community.

Each year Lent begins with Jesus' wilderness experience. Lent is about seeing Jesus passing by, hearing Him call: "Come on down; I want to dwell with you today." It is God's HOPE for our personal journey.

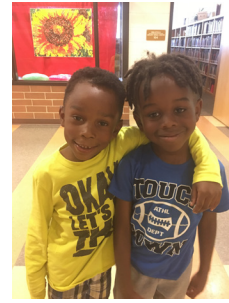
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Questions for Reflection and Discussion: Have you experienced a "personal wilderness" in your life? Where did you find hope during that time?

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Milwaukee offers a Wednesday Noon Prayer Service and lunch each week, providing an opportunity for persons living in poverty to be fed spiritually and enjoy a warm, nourishing meal, experiencing the love and support that comes from being part of a community of faith.

Tuesday, April 16, 2019



In God's House

Pastor Mary Martha Kannass, Hephatha Lutheran Church

"Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; They will still be praising You. How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty." (Psalm 84)

He is a 16-year-old young man unlike any other. He never misses worship. Never.

He has perfect attendance in Monday teen confirmation class – four years in a row. Yes, he continues to attend weekly confirmation class with perfect attendance two years beyond being confirmed. That's four years of perfect confirmation class attendance.

He likes to clean the church and cut the church yard. He works at church. When he cleans the glass in the narthex doors he uses the paper towels that don't leave lint behind on the glass.

He has studied mindfulness and is the keeper and ringer of our prayer bowl in our children's group.

He borrowed a purple tie to wear with his black dress shirt and pants when he was a prayer leader at the funeral for a young girl of Hephatha who died following a kidney transplant. Her favorite color was purple. He knew this. He was always the first to raise his hand when we needed someone to walk to her house with food and small gift items during her illness. He served her with quiet care in Christ.

When you look for him, you know where to find him: in God's house. He finds hope here. He gives hope here. He is the reason we work to end mass incarceration of African Americans. He is the reason we chant Black Lives Matter. He is the reason we walk in the Dr. King All-A-Thon for scholarship funds. He is the reason we lift sobriety and education as values of our faith community. He is the reason we are the church on 18th and Locust.

Well – he and all the other young people who, when we look for them, can be found in the house of the Lord, sharing hope and faith and love.

* * *

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: Who are the young people in your faith community who give you hope for the future? What can you and others learn from them? How can you and your church community nurture the faith life of these youth?

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Twelve of the ministries that receive funding from Outreach for Hope provide a summer youth program for the children of the community where they learn life and leadership skills, how to serve others and the love of God.

Wednesday, April 17, 2019

See next page for today's companion Cross-Gen Corner.

Cross-Gen Corner

"In God's House" Cross-Gen Corner

An Invitation for Families and Disciples of All Ages to Dig Deeper into the Devotion
Pastor Adam Moreno, Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Kenosha

What a beautiful and powerful devotion. What do you and your family need to take away from it today?

- Is it the power that prioritizing faith can have on one's life and the lives of others?
- Is it a picture of one's church truly being a place of sanctuary and community?
- Is it the image of a selfless person, making his world a better place the only way he knows how...by showing up and showing love?

Or maybe...is it the needed and difficult conversation about race?

Parents, don't simply disregard this devotion because a challenging issue has been raised. How can this devotion challenge you to speak to your children about race, within our city and within our church?

The beginning of this devotion offers much to explore and take away. Pastor Mary Martha paints a picture of a teen whom we all would welcome within our congregation, we all hope our children will grow to be: mindful, faithful, and committed to the church.

And then, Pastor Mary Martha challenges us with her last paragraph. Reminding us of the brokenness within our society, the reality of racism that would oppress, imprison, and possibly take the life of such an amazing, young black man. It is a fearful reality most of us do not face, a reality that many of our children do not know and may not initially understand. So, talk, teach, explore, and learn.

With 97% of the ELCA identifying as white, how can we all truly include our siblings of color? In age-appropriate ways, how can white families address, rather than ignore, topics like mass incarceration, Black Lives Matter, addiction, and equity in education? Parents, you don't need all the answers. Model for your children curiosity, exploring and learning together. Model compassion, seeking empathy and understanding together. Dr. Erin Winkler from UW-Milwaukee, warns us that "adults often think they should avoid talking with young children about race or racism because doing so would cause them to notice race or make them racist. In fact, the opposite is true."

Prayer: God of all, let us confess our sin of racism and through the power of your love, let us seek reconciliation within our community and within your church. Amen.





The Lion of Judah

Pastor Michael Fazio
Whitnall Park Lutheran Church

"Be strong, and let us show ourselves courageous for the sake of our people and for the cities of our God; and may the LORD do what is good in His sight." (2 Samuel 10:12)

Matthew Rittner. This is a name that all of us should remember. At the time I'm writing this devotion, it has been just a week since Matthew was killed. A young man and member of the Milwaukee Police Department, Matthew was fulfilling his duties to protect and serve the community (that is – you and me) when his life was taken.

I never met Officer Rittner, but I know he was a decorated Marine as well as a decorated police officer and from what I've read, he was a man of courage and conviction, committed to whatever tasks he was given, no matter how difficult. Ultimately he paid the highest price one can pay, giving his life in service to others. When I reflect on the type of man Matthew was, I am filled with hope that in this day and age, we still have men and women willing to take on incredible and unthinkable circumstances and stand bravely and strongly in the path of danger.

When we think of Jesus Christ, I believe that our minds typically drift towards the calming, compassionate God: the Prince of Peace. However, in Christ also exists the Lion of Judah; the Christ who stood up to the hypocrisy of his day and flipped over tables when God's will was being perverted. This is the Christ who calls us to stand up strong, to fear not in the face of adversity, and to approach it with faith and confidence in God's promise to uphold us.

David knew this faith when he faced Goliath, and we must know it when we face the trials of life. As Martin Luther reminds us: "Though hordes of devils fill the land, all threatening to devour us, we tremble not, unmoved we stand, they cannot overpower us."

* * *

Question for reflection and discussion: Can you recall a time that God stood by you in the face of adversity? How might you encourage others to be brave and stand strong in their faith when they are hurting or conflicted?

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Located in a bar/party district north of downtown Milwaukee, Village Church has created outreach programs that provide word and sacrament with patrons, servers and managers in the restaurants and bars surrounding the church.

Maundy Thursday, April 18, 2019



The Journeys That Take Us Deeper

Rev. Jim Bickel
Former Executive Director, Outreach for Hope

It was Good Friday and we were walking through the neighborhood surrounding Reformation Lutheran Church in Milwaukee. It's an annual journey, taken every Good Friday by Reformation members and anyone else who wishes to join them. I spent a few minutes talking to a man from Oconomowoc who was feeling the joy of the connection he had with the people of Reformation.

I asked him how the connection had started. He told me it began by a Mission Partner trip to the Mt. Meru Lutheran Diocese of Tanzania. There he discovered the remarkable faith and witness of brothers and sisters in Christ, in a country on the other side of the world. And it made his own faith grow deeper.

It got him thinking, "Can I have that same joy and deep blessing through connecting with my brothers and sisters in the central city of Milwaukee, where I know no one?" And so, he made a commitment to get involved in the Partnership his congregation has with Reformation. To his delight, he made the same faith-expanding discovery.

The journey that takes us deeper into our Christian discipleship comes about by journeys that take us deeper into the body of Christ. Not going deeper is to rob ourselves of the joy our faith is meant to help us experience. It is why the Greater Milwaukee Synod has an Outreach for Hope – so that we can continue to nourish the gift of diverse connections in our Synod, and deepen the joy of our faith.

We are most connected to God when we allow ourselves to be connected to our brothers and sisters on the other side of the world, in the next county, and in our own cities.

* * *

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, give us the courage to step out of our comfort zone and reach out to others we do not yet know, in order to form strong bonds, such as the Partnership between congregations in our Greater Milwaukee Synod. Amen.

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Fourteen of the ministries receiving support from Outreach for Hope are committed to one or more Partnerships with other churches around the Greater Milwaukee Synod. While Partnership members join together in service and provide financial support, members of both churches also grow in cross-cultural understanding. Together, they face issues of racism, gain spiritual benefits and learn to overcome barriers of stereotypes and fear.

Good Friday, April 19, 2019



Hope in the Darkness

Mike Naumann, Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Menomonee Falls

"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope." (Psalm 130:5)

Hope. Is it serendipitous that as I pen this Lenten devotion it's actually the season of Advent? Three weeks ago, we lit the candle of HOPE on the Advent wreath at church. We're preparing for the coming of our Lord and our hope is grounded in God's promise of a Messiah.

Hope. Lent's season of prayer and repentance is about our hope in Jesus' victory (and, hence, our victory) over sin and death by His resurrection.

Hope. Sometimes, it's all we've got and all we cling to when everything else seems to be going in the wrong direction in our lives. Sickness, death, poverty, addiction, depression, disability, loneliness, fear, rejection, job loss...the weight of our human condition sucks us relentlessly into the vortex of the dark abyss.

My daughter and I once took a guided tour of Mammoth Cave in Kentucky. When we were hundreds of feet below ground in a large, cavernous room, the park ranger turned out the lights...and everything was pitch black. I couldn't see my hand front of my face. We were in absolute and complete darkness.

Then, the ranger lit a match. Such a small light, in the utter darkness of the cave, lit up the entire chamber. I could see the people standing across the room from me, so bright was the tiny light in the intense darkness.

I think HOPE is kind of like that. In the absence of light, in our debilitating darkness, hope may seem illusive. Yet, when we remember that Jesus faced the darkness and defeated it, our hope is rekindled. Hope brightens our world, helps us endure the present circumstances, and, ultimately, accompanies us to the end of our days.

Prayer: Lord, help me remember that your sometimes dark journey ended in glorious resurrection and ascension. I ask for your presence and guidance during my journey's darkest struggles, and know I will emerge into the light, stronger and with greater awareness of your love. Amen.

OUTREACH FOR HOPE MINISTRY HIGHLIGHT

Three Outreach for Hope-funded churches - Hephatha, Cross and Reformation - worked together to begin the prison congregation in the Greater Milwaukee Synod, Breaking the Chains. All of these churches work with those incarcerated, and their families, to support their journey.

Holy Saturday, April 20, 2019

Thank you for making the **OUTREACH FOR HOPE** devotions part of your Lenten experience!

We hope that through this 40-day pilgrimage you have experienced renewed faith and **Hope for the Journey**.

The work and ministries of Outreach for Hope support the vision: That strong, vibrant ministries will be centers of hope in the midst of every community challenged by poverty within the Greater Milwaukee Synod. Outreach for Hope ministries are a treasure to the whole church as they inspire our congregations and members with the gifts of creative engagement, mutual support, deep faith, and an expanding capacity to share the love of Christ with our neighbors.

You are part of these ministries when you donate to Outreach for Hope. Consider what might be your sacrificial offering to remind you of the great sacrifice that Christ made for us. The ministries that your gift supports are a great gift to the Synod church body and to each of us.

To **make a donation today** in support of Outreach for Hope, complete the pledge form (see next page) and send with your contribution to:

Outreach for Hope
1212 S. Layton Blvd.
Milwaukee, WI
53215

OR

Donate online at outreachforhope.org
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Learn more about Outreach for Hope at our website, outreachforhope.org.

Reach out to Outreach for Hope to arrange for a special gift, a planned gift, or to get involved in some way:

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**Making a Donation to
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