

**Devotions – October 12-18, 2014**

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**Sunday, October 12**

Text: Psalm 42: 1-2.

**As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?**

For us, we use the word “soul” to mean the eternal, spiritual part of ourselves. In this Psalm, soul comes from the Hebrew word nephesh (NE-fesh), meaning “most essential being, “inner self”, or the “real me.” In the psalmist’s deepest, transparent, naked center, there is this intense desire for a connection, a relationship, for an intimacy with a life giving God.

The story of the temptation of Jesus teaches us that we cannot live a holy life with bread alone. Science tells us that without water, our bodies will die. Here the psalmist eloquently compares the desire of the deer for flowing streams to our inner being’s thirst for God, for the holy life.

Here in northern Wisconsin and the U.P. we have water all around us. There are the Great Lakes, Superior and Michigan, the Wisconsin, Peshtigo, Whitefish, and Tahquamenon Rivers; little lakes abound, a thousand alone in Oneida County where we live. Isn’t it wonderful to have these reminders that God’s love is even more present all around us?

Let us pray: Thank you, God, for giving us such an intense desire for You, the source of life. Amen.



**Monday, October 13**

Text: Psalm 8:1,3

**O Lord, Our Sovereign,  
How majestic is your name in all the earth!...  
When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
The moon and the stars that you have established;  
What are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
Mortals that you care for them?**

In O. Henry’s story, The Gift of the Magi, Jim and Della are a poor couple struggling to survive. At Christmas, Jim resolves to sell a watch inherited from his grandfather and father to buy his

beloved 3 beautiful tortoise shell combs for her lustrous hair. Unbeknownst to Jim, Della resolves to sell her long tresses to buy Jim a platinum fob chain for his watch. What love Jim and Della have for each other that they each sacrificed what they treasured most to give gifts to one another.

How much more than a watch or hair has God sacrificed to remind us of how much we are loved? God has sacrificed Jesus, the Son who was so pleasing. How blessed we are with that Christmas gift, just the right size, just what we needed, just what we longed for: a continuous reminder that the God of all creation is mindful of each of us all the time. Even though we are so miniscule compared to the vastness of the universe, we are cared for by a creating God who gave us the world.

Let us pray: Thank you, God, for your care and presence in our lives. Amen.



**Tuesday, October 14**

Text: Psalm 23

**<sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.**

**<sup>2</sup> He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.**

**<sup>3</sup> He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.**

**<sup>4</sup> Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.**

**<sup>5</sup> Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.**

**<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.**

In the Old Testament, sheep were an essential source of life for pastoral people. Sheep provided food to eat, milk to drink, wool for cloth, tent material, a medium of exchange (i.e. money), and sacrificial offerings. Their nature was and is affectionate, docile, and defenseless. Thus, they needed constant care and supervision, and the bond between the sheep and the shepherd became close and strong.

Here, the psalmist eloquently captures the depth of that bond in describing our relationship to God, the Shepherd who is our still water to drink, the provider of green pastures (food) for our bodies, the restorer of our souls, our safe haven for rest, our comfort, and our eternal companion.

Let us pray: Thank you, Jesus, for being our Good Shepherd and laying your life down for us, your sheep. Amen.



**Wednesday, October 15**

Text: Psalm 118:22-23

**The Stone that the builders rejected  
has become the chief cornerstone.  
This is the Lord's doing;  
it is marvelous in our eyes.**

A cornerstone is a large stone placed at the junction of two walls of a building to hold them together at their base. Here, what the builders rejected, through God's power, becomes the "chief" cornerstone, the one at the top of the structure. What is the cornerstone of our lives that hold us together?

For Martin Luther, who faced many trials and temptations, this psalm was a source of support. He said, "...this psalm is nearest my heart, and I have a familiar right to call it mine. It has saved me from many a pressing danger, from which emperor, nor kings, nor sages, nor saints could have saved me. It is my friend/ dearer to me than all the honors and power of earth." Prothero, *Psalms in Human Life*, p. 94.

Facing death within days after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus, like Martin Luther, turns to this psalm, saying "Have you never read in the scriptures:

'The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone;  
this was the Lord's doing,  
and it is amazing in our eyes?' (Matthew 21:42)

It is indeed amazing that God can take whatever threatens us, whatever rejects us, whatever circumstances we face and turn it from rejection into acceptance and from despair into a day of rejoicing!

Let us pray: Thank you, Lord, for turning water into wine, death into life, and all the marvelous transformations every day of our lives. Amen



**Thursday, October 16**

Text: Psalm 46:1-3

**God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.  
Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth should change,  
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;  
though it waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.**

Great nations rise and fall. There are times of war and times of peace. Natural disasters alter the face of the land as we were recently reminded by the eruption of Mt. Ontake in Japan that covered hikers with ash. Nothing is forever stable except God, the Lord of hosts [who] is with us (Psalm 46:7).

When Martin Luther encountered stressful times, he would say to co-worker, Melancthon, “Come, Phillip, let us sing the 46<sup>th</sup> Psalm.” (The Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal, Concordia Publishing House, 1942, p. 193.) God as refuge and strength was the inspiration for Luther’s hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” During his time there were many impregnable castles in Germany, like Neuschwanstein, the model for the Disney castle. With their sheer, vertical rock faces, they were impossible to breach. Nothing could dislodge such a mighty fortress, a place of refuge and strength.

While the Disney castle is a magical place, a fortress is a graphic representation of the limitless strength provided by the presence of God. With the certainty of that support in the midst of the uncertainties in our world, we, like the psalmist, can have unshakable faith.

Let us pray: Thank you, God, that in you we can always find refuge and strength. Amen.



## Friday, October 17

Text: Psalm 51: 1-2.

**Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions.  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.**

Psalm 51, the greatest of the “penitential Psalms”, begins with a very deep consciousness of having messed up a relationship with God. Tradition connects this psalm with King David asking forgiveness for his affair with Bathsheba and for having her husband killed. What’s useful to us is the intense language and the idea that if God can forgive David’s great and public sins, our more private sins can also be forgiven.

The word translated “transgression” refers to rebellion against God and God’s ways; “iniquity” means intentionally going astray; “sin” alludes to willfully “missing the mark.”

The three words are not meant to describe different types of sin but to encompass **all** the ways we fail in our relationship with God. It’s similar to our common confession of things that we have done and left undone in failing to love God and our neighbor. We are left standing before God without an excuse.

But it’s not hopeless! Even in the act of confessing the brokenness of the relationship, we come trusting in the “abundant mercy” and “steadfast love” of the Lord, mercy shown so clearly in the

death and resurrection of Jesus for us. Because of that mercy, we can count on God to act on our lives to straighten us out, to do the “blotting”, “washing”, and “cleansing” needed to free us from guilt and shame so that we can live joyful lives that show love for this gracious God and for the people in our lives.

Let us pray: Relying on God’s promises in Christ, we can pray those familiar words found later in this psalm:

“Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and put a new and right spirit within me.” Amen.



**Saturday, October 18**

Text: Psalm 118:24

**This is the day the Lord has made,;**

**Let us rejoice and be glad in it...**

We have many reasons to rejoice:

- the gift of another day of life
- the gift of the Sabbath, a day of rest and reflection
- the gift of Christ-centered leadership of Bishop Tom and Luanne Skrenes
- the gift of skilled, dedicated Synod Staff and Officers
- the gift of a church home where we can grow in faith
- the gift of the beauty of northern Wisconsin and the U.P.
- the gift of responsibility to care for such beauty
- the gift of warm homes and clothes for winter
- the gift of resources to share with those in need here
- the gift of opportunities to give to ELCA World Hunger Appeal and Natural Disaster Relief
- the gift of a God of power, grace, glory, forgiveness and love
- the gift of Jesus, fully human and fully divine
- the gift of Holy Spirit, our advocate, comforter, and guide.

Let us pray: Thank you, God, for giving us the gift of life and so many causes for going on our way rejoicing! Amen.



