

**Devotions – July 5-11, 2015**  
**Pastor John Kuziej**  
**Pioneer Lake Lutheran Church, Conover, WI**

**Sunday, July 5, 2015**

Text: Psalm 104

Verse: **“How manifold are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you have made them all.”**

Eagles are frequently spotted at Pioneer Lake Lutheran Church. They are seen flying low over the lake looking for a fish to catch. On the hill near the church they find a perch and survey their domain. The eagles are magnificent to watch, unmistakable with their white heads and large wing spans.

I was watering the garden the other day and another bird flew in close—on the lower end of the size scale. A hummingbird buzzed by attracted to the water pooling on the soil. He hovered close for a drink. The bird even enjoyed the spray from the hose, preferring the shower instead of a bath. Not far from me the bird perched on the fence. I have never seen a hummingbird sitting still. After his shower he was preening his feathers. I have never seen a humming-bird so close before; the bird did not seem to mind my presence. His colors were brilliant and astonishingly beautiful—incandescent green body with a bright red ring around the neck. I began to imagine what this tiny bird was doing: was he enjoying a morning bathing ritual, was he getting ready for a big date, was he enjoying a little down time before the demands of his busy schedule of searching for food, was he about his morning devotion, thanking the Creator for the gift of water?

For me it was all a wonderful gift: whether the sight of a soaring eagle or a tiny hummingbird having a drink, I thanked the Lord, our Creator, for this devotion from nature. Indeed the Psalm provides excellent commentary, “How manifold are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.” There is a commonality between hummingbird, eagle, and us: we are products of God’s creative goodness and wisdom. God made us and all creatures; creation belongs to God. The gracious Creator enjoys it, I suppose, when human beings take the time to see and praise God for his good work. God enjoys it to be sure when we, the church, commit ourselves to looking after God’s beautiful creation. As the Psalm says, “May the glory of the Lord endure forever; O Lord, rejoice in all your works.”

PRAYER: *Thank you, gracious God, for the wonders in nature to enjoy. All creation bears witness to your wisdom, and we pray that you give us the wisdom to practice wise dominion over this bountiful and beautiful earth. We pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.*



**Monday, July 6, 2015**

Text: Psalm 5

**Verses: “Give ear to my words, O Lord; give heed to my sighing.**

**Listen to my cry for help, my king and my God, for I plead to you....For you are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, and evil cannot dwell with you....But all who take refuge in you will be glad; they will sing out their joy forever.**

**You will shelter them, so that those who love your name may exult in you.”**

According to the “New Book of Festivals and Commemorations” this is the day to remember the Czech reformer Jan Hus. Hus (the name means “goose” in Czech) was born in 1373 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1400. He also served as a professor of theology. During his professional life there was growing disillusionment with the Church due to corruption. In his sermons and writings Hus began to speak out against the greed practiced by the higher clergy and opposed the secular power coveted by bishops and popes. His desire for reform did not earn him any favors but only enemies. He was summoned to a Church Council with a promise of safe conduct. That promise did not mean anything for Hus was burned at the stake on July 6, 1415, praying the *Kyrie eleison* (Lord, have mercy) as he died.

Jan Hus died a martyr, his life and death a witness to faithfully following Jesus Christ. Hus, and Martin Luther following him a century later, reminds us of the vigilance and reform ever needed for the church. The Psalmist prayed, troubled by wickedness in the community. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we pray for the Holy Spirit’s work through the gift of repentance, asking forgiveness and faithfulness to listen to the Gospel, follow Jesus, and not be lured away from Jesus’ call to love as he loved and continues to love us. The Psalmist reminded us of the joy of knowing God’s sheltering love, grace, and mercy.

*PRAYER FROM THE WRITINGS OF JAN HUS: Most kind God, without you we can do nothing, and unless you draw us we cannot follow you: Give us, we pray, a courageous spirit, a fearless heart, a true faith, a sure hope, and perfect love, that with great patience and joy we may offer our lives to you; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*



**Tuesday, July 7, 2015**

Text: Isaiah 49:13-16

**“Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones. But Zion said, ‘The Lord has forsaken me.’ Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands.”**

Once a year, the Confirmation class at Pioneer Lake Lutheran Church prepares a meal for the residents living in the homeless shelter in Rhinelander. The three students in the class gathered in the church kitchen eager to put their culinary skills to work. A simple pasta-kind of meal was prepared along with a dessert from a box mix. Preparing the meal is one thing, but most importantly the class eats with the residents providing an opportunity to meet and talk with the people. A gregarious five-year-old happily dominated the conversation with her curiosity about the confirmation students. But her mother was able to talk with the class about her situation, and why she left an abusive home. On the ride home, the class asked further questions as to why people become homeless.

During Confirmation class the following week, I asked the students to write about their experience. One girl wrote, “Everyone there looked normal. There wasn’t one moment when I didn’t see someone smiling. It gave me a satisfied feeling to know that I actually might have put a smile on their faces.” People who are homeless can be judged in a negative light. They can be criticized in any of a number of ways by people who don’t mind judging by appearances. It was a surprise for a Middle School age student to find people in a homeless shelter “normal”. It was a lesson learned for her, the people she saw and met at the homeless shelter were people she could relate to, people who were polite, happy to meet her, and smile. In the Isaiah reading today the residents of Zion or Jerusalem felt God had shunned them. They faced struggles that appeared insurmountable, just like those struggling with homelessness. But the prophet assured them of God’s compassion. With a striking image the prophet even said God had gotten something like a tattoo, a tattoo picturing God’s suffering ones, God’s beloved he would never forget. When we are baptized into Christ Jesus, we receive a spiritual tattoo, we are “marked with the cross forever.” We become “Jesus-normal”, no matter our personality and life situation, we are not forgotten by our Lord and Savior, but surrounded by his compassion.

*PRAYER: Merciful God, it is good to be reminded that you have not forgotten us. In times of struggle you have compassion, and may we be open to your reach of mercy through prayer and the concern of others. You have made us “Jesus-normal” in our baptisms. Help us to shy away from cursory judgments and cruel comments, but instead look upon others as Jesus does. In his name we pray. Amen.*



**Wednesday, July 8, 2015**

Text: John 3:16-17

**“This is how much God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn’t go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again.”**

(MESSAGE Bible)

When I wake up in the middle of the night, I turn to the clock radio to check the time. Not long ago I woke up to time 3:16 on the digital screen. It was sixteen minutes after three in the morning, but that was not what came to mind. I thought of the Bible verse many of you have memorized, the Bible verse you can see printed on placards at pro-sports events, the text that has been called the “gospel in miniature.” The context is the cross for Jesus said the “Son of Man” must be lifted up; in the gospel of John “lifted up” refers both to Jesus on the cross and the victory of eternal life his death brings, along with his resurrection and ascension. Eternal life, life lived even now in the presence of God, is the ongoing gift of God’s love. According to the MESSAGE Bible translation, God did not send Jesus to tell just how sinful and corrupt the world is, ripe for rejection with no remedy in sight. Instead the mention of God’s Son is good news, sent to the world to help, save, forgive, and give rebirth from above and new life.

It was a comfort to wake up and see 3:16 on the clock. Whatever the time of day, John 3:16 applies. Faith is a precious gift because it comes from the faithfulness of Jesus, the cross-bearing servant, the risen Lord ever accompanying us with love. This love is what comes to mind when I read a Eucharistic Prayer, “You molded us in your image, and with mercy higher than the mountains, with grace deeper than the seas, you blessed Israel and cherished them as your own.” God’s love is for the world, meaning Jesus has plans to heal and renew this often troubling planet. In the mean time may we know now that we are ever God’s precious daughters and sons, cherished as God’s very own.

*PRAYER: Gracious God, we thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit, ever working on behalf of the church reminding us of God’s love for the world. In our busy lives, may the Holy Spirit have us pause to check the time: it is 3:16 time, time to enjoy eternal life, life in your gracious presence. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*



**Thursday, July 9, 2015**

Text: Matthew 18:10-14

**“Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven. What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.”**

I was visiting relatives not long ago in Maplewood, Minnesota. My wife and I were looking for a particular store when suddenly I slammed on the brakes. Thankfully it wasn’t too late, I was able to stop in time without wiping out a family—a family of ducks. We were engrossed in conversation and checking the GPS when this mother and her little ones crossed the roadway.

How important it is not to become so busy that we fail to watch out and care for our children. On the ELCA web page I read of a group watching over little ones, specifically unaccompanied

children from Central America who cross the U.S. border. Since 2013, more than 70,000 migrant children have crossed into the United States. Many of these children are deported without any counsel or legal help. This was noticed by the Southwest California Synod and the Guardian Angels program was developed. The Guardian Angels are volunteers who provide support for immigrant children and their families. The volunteers are recognized by their white t-shirts picturing an angel and two children. A card with this same logo is given to children. One volunteer said “The kids are familiar with that image and it comforts them because many Latino families have these images in their homes. Whenever I give it to them, they hold it to their heart. I let them know that God is with them and that whatever happens, angels are with them protecting them.” The volunteer said further, “I’ve seen volunteers with tears in their eyes as they pray with these children who often are so fragile and so unaware of what this system is to them. These children are gifts. We’ve been blessed by God in wonderful ways, and we can do nothing but show this love to people who need compassion and justice.”

The same thoughts of protection and compassion in the Southwest Californian Synod for children certainly apply to the Northern Great Lakes Synod. We are guardians of the children in our midst. When young children are baptized, the whole congregation serves as sponsors or guardians. The baptismal liturgy asks the whole congregation to support children with their new lives in Christ. We know Jesus welcomed children and blessed them. Jesus reminded us that vulnerable children in a dangerous world have their guardian angels. May we serve as angels here on earth, understanding children as gifts, and serving as messengers for them of the love and help of God.

*PRAYER: Gracious God, we pray for children throughout the world in crisis, the crisis of war, the crisis of refugee camps, the crisis of hostility and indifference. Lord, fill us with compassion for the little ones of this world, and equip your people, the church, to be guardian angels. Lord, it is your will that little ones not be abandoned or lost. Guide us in our congregations to cherish children, support them, teach them your love and the ways of Jesus, and may we ever give the message just how much they are wanted and welcomed in your church. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*



**Friday, July 10, 2015**

Text: John 8: 12

**“And Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.’”**

**ELW Hymn # 611: “I heard the voice of Jesus say, ‘I am this dark world’s light; look unto me, your morn shall rise, and all your day be bright;’ I looked to Jesus, and I found in him my star, my sun; and in that light of life I’ll walk till traveling days are done.”**

In the past month I have had the privilege and joy to lead two adult men for Holy Baptism. Ron was part of adult class of one for eight weeks. We went through the Gospel of Mark and Luther’s Small Catechism. Ron shared his worry and fear about the forces of wickedness in the

world. In the final session, discussing the baptismal liturgy, he pointed to the printed page of the hymnal and said “This is our hope, this is what we must pay attention to.” He pointed to Jesus’ words, “I am the light of the world.”

I met Larry several years ago in a local tavern owned by members of the church. Whenever I would visit he would offer me a beer, a very hospitable man. He told me about his life, a Vietnam veteran, working out West for many years before moving back to Wisconsin. He mentioned to me his wish to be baptized, but he would never commit to a time until last June. During one visit at his home, we had a good conversation and I rose from the chair to leave. Larry, who can be blunt, said to me, “You are not leaving yet, sit down!” He told me I had forgotten something. I was leaving his house without saying a prayer, and Larry reminded me of this neglect. Larry wished his baptism to be private. Several members of the congregation were present, plus his sponsors. His sponsors included a good friend and her three children. The children all had a part to read for Larry’s baptism. When I came to the part of the baptismal service that asked “Do you believe in Jesus Christ,” he replied simply “Always”. Whether baptism is for an infant, or an adult, this means of grace speaks powerfully of God’s presence, accompaniment, encouragement and the Holy Spirit’s reminder to us daily, ‘You are not a slave to fear, but a child of God. You belong to the Son of God, Jesus, who has proven his love for you by dying for you, rising for you, and being with you so that nothing scary in creation can ever separate you from this love.

*PRAYER: Gracious God, we need your grace to navigate through all the challenges of life. Daily may your Spirit guide us to remember our baptism and receive from Jesus the benefits of his promise to us, “I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will have the light of life.” Amen.*



**Saturday, July 11, 2015**

Text: Psalm 1

**“Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on this law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all they do, they prosper.”**

In the “New Book of Festivals and Commemorations” today honors the memory of Benedict of Nursia, Abbot of Monte Casino. Benedict is the author of the famous “Rule”, guiding communal life in a monastery. Little is known of Benedict; he was born around 480 and died in the year 547. He studied in Rome but became upset and offended by the immorality of society and withdrew to live as a hermit. However disciples were attracted to him and he decided to enter communal life and founded several monasteries. Benedict wrote in his “Rule” that if his communal life in the monastery seemed too austere, he counseled patience, writing, “As we advance in the practices of religion and in faith, the heart opens and enlarges through the wonderful sweetness of God’s love, and we run in the way of the commandments.” It makes sense to understand growth in faith to require perseverance and prayer. The Scriptures promise

“The Lord waits to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you.” (Isaiah 30: 18)

We probably do not have much experience with monasteries in the Lutheran Church. We know that Luther became a monk after he was scared to death in a thunderstorm. From Luther’s own testimony he “out-monked” the other monks with his service and devotion, but still feared the wrath and condemnation of God. Luther may have had some negative things to say about the monasteries of his time, but it was the Abbot of the monastery, Johann Von Staupitz, that guided Luther to study the Scriptures, and through this study was relieved to discover a gracious and forgiving God, assured through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Yet Luther learned from the monastery the benefits of communal life, and then applied those insights to the congregation. He took from the monastery the idea of “mutual brotherly consolation” and made this a mark of the Evangelical Church, the mutual conversation and consolation of the brothers and sisters in Christ. Luther made the comment every person is “created and born for the sake of the other.” Every church is a community “called and gathered by the Holy Spirit” to hear the Gospel, nourished by Word and Sacrament, supporting and praying for one another, and mutually sent out into the world under the authority of baptism as witnesses of the love of Christ.

PRAYER (from “New Book of Festivals and Commemorations”)

*“Almighty and everlasting God, you made your servant Benedict a worthy guide to teach us how to live in your service. Grant that by preferring your love to everything else and following the example of Benedict, we may ever walk in the way of your commandments, through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

