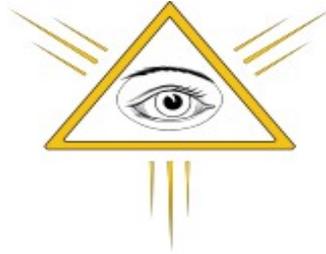


Devotions – December 13-19, 2015
By Rev. Robert Langseth
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Sunday, December 13, 2015

LISTEN UP! + I'M COMING DOWN! = Advent!



Moses, "I have SEEN how cruelly my people are treated. I have HEARD their cry. I KNOW their suffering. And I have COME DOWN in order to deliver and RESCUE them from their bondage."
Exodus 3:7-8

What's the amazing news this third week of Advent? Our God is alive! God sees, hears, knows and comes down to our messes! We have a God who comes to deliver us!

I'm 82 and experienced God crashing into my daily life during each decade. The God I know keeps coming to confront, guide, instruct, strengthen, rescue and enlist us for mission. So.....

- *What does God see in your life that needs rescue? Lift it up.
- * What groans in your community does God hear today that need rescue? Lift it up.
- * What suffering in the world is known to God and needs rescue? Lift it up.

- *What rescues have you experienced by God's coming? Celebrate them with thanksgiving.
- *What sufferings have been relieved by God's coming amidst caring people? Give thanks.
- * In what mission is God enlisting your fresh participation?

Let us pray: Majestic Emanuel, thank you for hearing and acting upon our Advent petitions, for enlisting us in your mission and for rejoicing with us in our celebrations. Amen!



Monday, December 14, 2015



"I have seen your affliction and I have come to deliver you." Exodus 3: 7-8

God has seen a lot of trouble in my life. Grasshoppers destroyed our oat crop one year as they ate the paint off the west wall of my boyhood bedroom. Ten gallon cream cans held up a 2 x 4 at the end of our driveway with the sign **CONTAGIOUS FEVER: KEEP OUT**. My oldest brother contacted T.B. at age 14, spent most of his life in the sanitarium and died at age 21. My Dad and younger brother were laid up with T.B. for months. Deloris and I buried our 17 year old daughter from a staph infection and our 46 year old son from cancer.

I'm thankful for a tough God who sees me through tough times. The above journey of crisis after crisis has strengthened me and made me who I am.

God has also seen a lot of celebrations in my life.

- + My 4-H calf was grand champion at the fair and sold for \$1,000. It paid my tuition for school.
- + Our basket ball team was state Runner-Up my senior year of high school
- + The woman I love agrees to have me as her husband and has blessed me through 62 years of thick and thin.
- + The Church surrounded us in our sorrows and supported us in our grieving.
- + Trips to our Companion Synod in Tanzania, East Africa have greatly grown my faith.

What trials are being faced that seek to undermine your faith? Who are the people pulling you down? What circumstances are depressing you? Lift 'em up right now.

What trials have nourished your faith? Who are the people who have supported you in your trials? Use this moment to utter a prayer of appreciation.

What crisis in your family, congregation, neighborhood, nation or world is now causing you to lift up your hands in supplication to the God who sees?

Let us pray: Lord Emmanuel, receive our thanks for seeing, coming and acting in your amazing grace.



Tuesday, December 15, 2015



Ephphatha! Be opened!
"I have heard your cry... BE OPENED!" (Exodus 3:7 and Mark 7:34)

During my stay with Mom during her hospitalization with cancer she told me about my childhood deafness.

They thought I was just a slow learner. But at age three my parents took three dozen eggs and two chickens to a doctor in Fargo, N.D. He found my tonsils and adenoids had overgrown the tubes to my ears. He accepted the eggs and chickens as payment and operated on me. God heard my parents' cry and I experienced God's command of "Be Opened!"

My folks then hired a tutor for 25 cents a month, plus board and room, to teach me how to talk. No wonder the seminary would not ordain me until speech therapy included three months of talking with a long pencil across my mouth so that I would enunciate more clearly and be a pastor who could be understood by the parishioners.

Isaiah 50:4-5 is my favorite text to begin the day. "Morning by morning God opens my ears to hear as one who is taught... in order that I may sustain with a word one who is weary."

God we long for caring parents, medical professionals, tutors and leaders who confront our weaknesses in order to make us better persons.

Let us pray: Dear Lord, thank you for coming and placing heroes into our lives. Here are 10 people I ask you to bless because they have assisted me in maturing.



Wednesday, December 16, 2015

Feeling miserable this season?

God says: "I am aware of your suffering. So I have come..." Exodus 3:7

God saw the cruelty slaves in Egypt were receiving. God knew their anguish. So God came. That is the God I need. That is the God I worship. That is the God to whom I pray. That is the God who deserves my stewardship of money and life. Yes! God's brain feels our hurts and with compassion enters our situations.



I've seen and experienced two kinds of cruelty and bondage. The first is inside me. That is why I enter the worship hour on Sunday with "Hello God. This is Bob. I'm a sinner. I've broken every one of your commandments by what I've thought, said, or done. I am in bondage. I can't free myself. But I've experienced your deliverance over and over. I'm sorry, but I need your deliverance anew today. O Come, Emmanuel, and ransom me, a captive to sin."

The second type of bondage is external. T.V. ads tempt me and I consume too much stuff. I've seen bullying at the school grounds and heard racial slurs at the grocery store but said nothing to correct the stupidity. I'm aware that weather patterns are changing but have a hard time adjusting my patterns of buying and conserving. I need your continued Advent in my heart Lord. O Come, Emmanuel, and ransom me anew.

With what recurring bondage are you struggling? Who around you is depressed?

Is it parents whose parenting skills are in bondage? Is it kids who need guidance, boundaries and belief in themselves? Is it a friend who wants out of addiction? Is it a child or adult who appears to be receiving abuse? Is there a sex slave who wants deliverance? Are wild fires still making families homeless in the west? Are suffering refugees pouring across borders and governments suffering to assist?

Let us pray: Dear Emmanuel, I pray for those in depression and different forms of slavery. Please help them know You are only a prayer away and strengthen them to find release. Amen



Thursday, December 17, 2015

Advent vs. Abandonment

“What’s been the most powerful learning of your 82 years, Pastor?” I’m not sure it is the most but it certainly is among the top three learning’s: namely, the power of feeling abandoned. Even Jesus expressed it in Matthew 27:46:

“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”



(Photo by dreamstimes.com)

I cried in the dime store at Fargo, N.D. when I turned around and discovered my mother was no longer by my side. I not only cried I screamed bloody murder, “Mama! Mama!” I was devastated by thinking I was all alone. I was comforted only when she ran back and picked me up in her arms.

During my eight decades I’ve experienced over and over and over the joy of a God who hears my cries and comes down from heaven to be with me in my times of loneliness and fright.

Today, let’s pray for: - prisoners in solitary confinement; - those who are cut off from their family and isolated; - Those shunned by society and who have no support group; - The little ones in day care and the older ones isolated in nursing homes. – For care givers, teachers, nurses, administrators, police and social workers who help overcome the fear of abandonment; - For our legislators who feel abandoned because they vote their conscience which doesn’t always agree with their donors. – For those being bullied and isolated by their peers.

And let’s give thanks for God’s promises: “I will never fail you. I will never forsake you.” Hebrews 13:5. Let us cling to Matthew 18:20, “Be sure of this, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Let us pray: Father, we shout Alleluia because You come to us even when we are orphans, abandoned on the street or in the valley of death. Come anew, Lord Jesus. Keep your Advent to all who mourn in lonely circumstances. Amen.



Friday, December 18, 2015

Advent's Leaving...Receiving...Blessing



(Photo by dreamstime.com)

God came to Abram saying, **“Leave your country and relatives... receive my blessing... and, all of the families of the earth shall be blessed through you.”**

Genesis 12:1-4

God's advent often involves changing our situation and behavior. Abraham had to change his residence and leave buddies if he was to follow God's leading. I don't always like change. But my spiritual growth has required such.

I've had to leave my childhood reading of Scripture and let God open my heart to the context. I thought creation took six 24 hour days. But I had to leave that behind when I read that the sun was not created until "day" four (Genesis 1:4). I then received the reality that the word "day" can be longer and evolution can be one of God's methods of creation.

"No women clergy." (I Timothy 2) was another concept I left behind upon further reading. Deborah, for example, was a prophet, a mediator, an advisor, a counselor, commander in chief of the army, and worship leader (Judges 4-5). Further, in the New Testament Priscilla, and her husband Aquilla, were team missionaries and deacons in the church (Acts 18). Priscilla instructed the learned Apollos. Lois and Eunice taught Timothy, and Phoebe is named as an overseer and a deacon in the church at Cenchrea. The Church of today is not the Church of my childhood, and I am glad!

Growing up my two best buddies taught me "everything I never needed to know." To grow up I needed to leave them and find better models.

What in your life needs to be put behind? What's God calling you to leave? Lift it to the Lord in prayer!

What newness is God calling you to undertake? What journey lies ahead in order to receive God's blessing? Lift it to the Lord in prayer!

You have been gifted with unique and precious blessings. Pray for wisdom to pour out a proper portion of yourself into your family....your community ... your local and world -wide church....and into conservation of God's creation.

Let us pray: Today I thank you Lord for my growth! And I pray for wisdom to be the blessing You intend.



Saturday, December 19, 2015

Eternal Truths For Our Time

“This is God’s Time: exciting and full of hope, confusing and plagued with anxiety.

The Church is God’s people: the new humanity in Christ, called into being, sustained and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

As His people we confess that we are hesitant in our faith, timid in our ventures, and halting in our obedience: Yet, the church continues to be God’s own people, the community of love and servant hood. Centered in Jesus Christ, this community is continually renewed as it relives His life, death, and resurrection, in worship and witness.

Faithfulness in our day requires that the congregation come to a clearer understanding of what it means to be the church in each place and welcome today’s world as the given setting for its mission. “

- **Manifesto**

Of The Lutheran Church in America, 1976

The above was written a half century ago. But these truths are indeed eternal. We now live amidst terrorism threats, bullying by the powerful and economic downturns, but Luke calls us Christians to be patient! Stand up! Raise your heads! Christ is drawing near amidst the birth pains of the world.

Let us pray:

“Come, Jesus glorious, heavenly Guest,
and keep your Advent in our breast.
Then David’s harp string hushed so long,
will swell a jubilee of song.”

