

**Devotions – July 10-16, 2016**

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**Sunday, July 10, 2016**

Text: John 14: 1-10

**“Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”**

Some years ago an elderly woman asked me to drive her to the cemetery. She had been unable to attend the funeral of a recently deceased relative and now she wanted to visit the grave. There was no headstone but we found the grave marker. The woman bent over the grave as far as her aged back would allow. She spoke directly into the ground as if she wanted to be sure her dead relative would hear. With a clear voice she quoted from memory the first portion of today’s text, ending with “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

The first six verses of today’s gospel are often read at funerals. The bereaved are comforted knowing that Jesus has prepared a place in the Father’s house for the faithful. In time of death we hear of eternal life, being with our loving God permanently. Whatever our loss, whatever our grief, whenever our hearts are troubled and fearful, Jesus invites us to faith, knowing that trouble, fear, or loss cannot cancel his loving relationship with us.

I’ve always been attracted to Thomas’ question, “How can we know the way?” In time of trouble we can feel lost as to what to do and we may even wonder if God can help or even cares. Jesus assured us that we know what God is like by coming to him. Jesus revealed that God ever remains faithful, loving, and forgiving. We are encouraged by knowing Jesus came to this world to reveal the truth of God’s love.

It can be the case that a congregation can feel lost and worried about the future. Jesus again calls us to trust in him, saying “the one who believes me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.” Because Jesus died for us and rose again to complete our salvation, and to give the church the great message of his victory of life, we can indeed do great things. Such things are not for fame or recognition, but the Spirit of Jesus will guide us to people who are lost and don’t know the way. So with prayer we can tell people of Jesus’ way, his way of mercy, compassion, and grace all given to bring healing to troubled hearts.

PRAYER: Thank you Jesus for revealing the truth of God’s love for the world. Help us to do something great for you today, great not in the way understood by the world, but great in

caring for anyone who feels troubled and afraid. Thank you for your great gift of eternal life, fellowship with you now and forever. Amen.



**Monday, July 11, 2016**

Text: Matthew 24: 42-47

**“Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives.”**

If you have heard of Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury, raise your hand. If you have your hand raised, you deserve a gold medal in church history. Dunstan was born in around 909 and died on this date in 988. He was born with royal connections which meant he enjoyed the rare privilege of an education. He was ordained a priest but instead of serving a parish he decided to be a hermit. He supported himself by being a scribe, an embroiderer, and a silversmith. The guy had several talents! But he did not remain a hermit enjoying somewhat of a solitary life for long. He got busy restoring and reforming monasteries in England after the devastation of Viking raids (Norwegians were not congenial coffee drinkers in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, but fearsome raiders). Eventually Dunstan became Archbishop of Canterbury in 960. Not only was Dunstan reforming monasteries, he was busy building churches, encouraging lay people to have daily devotions, and preaching about the importance of justice. Apparently he was good at multi-tasking—he was reported to be a skilled metal worker who could cast bells and construct organs. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a pastor or bishop who could not only play the organ but make one as well? Dunstan held no grudges against the fearsome Vikings because he also was involved in sending missionaries to Scandinavia.

All this info came from a handy book titled “New Book of Festivals and Commemorations: A Proposed Common Calendar of Saints” by Phillip Pfatteicher. I save the best for last. In art, Dunstan is represented with a pair of tongs. There is a legend that Dunstan was in his shop fashioning a chalice when the devil appeared in the form a beautiful woman to tempt him. Dunstan knew what was up and he took the tongs, hot from the fire, and tweaked the devil's nose.

The lesson read today reminded us to be faithful servants since we do not know the time of Jesus' triumphant return. We are called in our baptisms to be faithful servants of Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit. In confidence of his grace and forgiveness, let us serve faithfully through care and compassion for members of our families. Let us serve faithfully through our vocations, that whatever our work we do so with the aim of following Jesus and being his representatives of healing, justice, and care. Legend says Dunstan tweaked the devil's nose with a pair of tongs; Martin Luther threw an inkwell at the devil, and what about us? Let us tweak the devil by faithfully using our callings to make the world a compassionate place.

Prayer: Gracious God we thank you for the example of Dunstan of Canterbury. He faithfully used the talents and abilities you gave him to build up your kingdom. Encourage and empower us to be faithful with the abilities you have given us, following Jesus to reveal your love for others. Thank you for the busy and faithful clergy and lay people who labor to make your love known in the Northern Great Lakes Synod. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



**Tuesday, July 12, 2016**

Text: Psalm 102: 1-17

**“For I eat ashes like bread, and mingle tears with my drink, because of your indignation and anger; for you have lifted me up and thrown me aside.”**

What did you feel when you read today's Psalm? You read of a person groaning, who felt abandoned and lonely, a person too troubled or sick to eat. With stark honesty the person praying felt he or she was the target of God's anger, thrown aside by God, or as another translation will put it, thrown away by God. The ancient cry of desperation and lament is also heard today. Perhaps you know of people who are so “withered and wasted” that despair has displaced hope. Maybe you can feel an affinity with this Psalm of lament.

The Psalms are very honest with vivid word-picture prayers of the full range of pain, physical, emotional, and spiritual. And as you have experienced life you appreciate such honesty before God. Our faith gives us full permission to vent and complain.

Such honesty in prayer opens one to trust in the Lord. In the Psalm today God is told not to delay or dawdle, but “answer speedily”. The petitioner is in no mood to be put on ‘hold’. God is told to hurry up and accused of throwing the person away. Such boldness! But yet there is the word of reassurance for which one longs—“God will regard the prayer of the destitute, and will not despise their prayer.”

This Psalm sounded a lot like Psalm 22 with the loud cry, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” But later in the Psalm one reads, “God does not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; God did not hide his face from me, but heard me when I cried to him.” Life is hard and faith can be challenging. Thankfully the Psalms give us prayers in times of pain. Thankfully in such difficult times the reassurance of God hearing heartfelt prayers for help is affirmed. Psalm 22 is followed by Psalm 23, “The Lord is my Shepherd”, and Psalm 102 is followed by Psalm 103, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits.” God, like a faithful shepherd, guides us and keeps us during trying times. One of God's greatest benefits to us is to hear our laments, even when they are quite angry and accusatory. God's response is not shock but assurance for “his steadfast love endures forever.”

Prayer—Gracious God there are times in our lives when we just do not know what to do but lament and honestly vent our complaint before you. May we be assured of your compassionate hearing as we wait for your healing and help. We pray especially today for people who feel forgotten and forsaken in their troubles. May they know the peace of your presence and have their hope restored. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.



**Wednesday, July 13, 2016**

Text: Proverbs 3: 13-26

**“Happy are they who find wisdom and those who get understanding”.**

For several years I have been asked by the local Middle School to participate in what is called the “Portfolio Program”. This is a year long project for students in the eighth grade. All year long they must keep a neat and up-to-date ‘portfolio’ that tracks academic performance, extra-curricular activities, community involvement, and cooperation with fellow students on various projects. I am one of various community volunteers who come in near the end of the school term and interview students. They answer questions by showing us various portions of their portfolios. Each volunteer interviews three students and the interviews last a half-hour.

After each interview I write up an evaluation. I am always impressed. I get to review the important 8<sup>th</sup> grade year with the students. They show me examples of their school work. I can ask about a favorite subject and the students open up and readily talk about what is interesting to them. I have interviewed students who both get good grades and are star athletes and I marvel at their work ethic and energy. I have interviewed students who have struggled, but yet they are happy if not proud to show me how they have improved as the year progressed. I hear them talk about their dreams for the future, what profession or career they are thinking of pursuing. They are confident and ready to enter high school in the coming fall. One is giddy with the potential observed in such young lives. One is thankful for parents and teachers who must continue to encourage their sons and daughters, their students and athletes.

I am sure I am not allowed to talk about issues of the Christian faith in this public school program. But taking my cue from today’s reading from Proverbs, I will say a silent prayer for wisdom for each student I have the privilege of meeting. For the book of Proverbs, wisdom is more than getting good grades, important as that is, a sign of one who knows the importance and joy of an education. Wisdom is also a matter of faith, to acknowledge the wisdom of the Creator who made such a marvelous world, and who gives talents to us human beings so we live a fulfilling life taking care of God’s good creation through the careers or vocations we seek. Wisdom knows that money is not the sole goal of life, but one’s greatest joy is found in serving and affirming life. The reading even said wisdom is the source of a good night’s sleep for wisdom calls us to cast our cares and fears upon the Lord and to rest in God’s peace. (I have a coffee cup that purportedly quotes Luther, “Pray, and let God worry”—good coffee and God

worrying for me, it doesn't get any better!). As school years end and students graduate, pray for them, pray that God's wisdom ever guide them and help them reach their potential.

Prayer: Creator God, your wisdom is indeed known in the beauty and wonder of this world and universe. In your wisdom you have given us inquiring minds, equipped to pursue a variety of subjects and careers. Bless all in our schools so that receiving a good education may be source of joy and fulfillment. May we all find comfort in your wisdom, wisdom that ever affirms our worth and enhances life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



**Thursday, July 14, 2016**

Text: Genesis 6: 5-22

**“And the Lord was sorry he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart....But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord.”**

We are impressed with the courage of the Pakistani young woman, Malala Yousafzai, who has spoken out for the right of girls to receive an education. She was targeted by the Taliban who arranged to have her school bus stopped one day. A gunman shot Malala in the head but she has miraculously survived. She has written a book about her young life, titled “I am Malala” and has continued to speak out on behalf of girls and women and their right to go to school. In her book she told of a children's program on TV that featured a child with a magic pencil. Whatever the child would draw with this pencil would come to life. Malala took one of her pencils and prayed that it become magic for her. She woke up the next morning to discover that the pencil remained just a pencil. Later she wrote she could use a pencil to erase what has been a scourge on her homeland, the extremist group known as the Taliban who believe it is wrong for girls to go to school. Malala has known evil first hand. She has seen school buildings blown up. When the Taliban were seeking to control her area of the country, she and her family had to flee. And then she herself, a young teenaged girl, was almost killed by a Taliban gunman. We are saddened by such cruelty in the world, especially violence perpetrated against the innocent by groups declaring they are acting on orders from God.

In today's reading we found one of the saddest verses in the Bible. God was sorry for the creation of humankind. God was broken-hearted and deeply grieved over the wickedness and violence on the earth. God decided to flood the earth and make a new start with Noah. Noah was a righteous man and in the context of the reading this meant he was not corrupted by greed or other reasons that can cause people to be cruel and violent. For his family to be rescued from the coming cataclysmic flood, Noah was given a gigantic assignment—build an ark. Your study Bible may give the dimensions of this boat: 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high.

The story of Noah revealed God who was not indifferent about creation. God grieved when the power of sin spread like wildfire, corrupting the hearts of human beings. God certainly isn't indifferent today. The world is still plagued by violence. Governments are corrupted by the power of money to influence elections. Evil that doesn't make the morning headlines is known locally in our communities through bullying at school, people hurting others with gossip, and indifference to the plight of others.

God certainly grieves over the cruelty and corruption that hurt human and all life on this earth today. But instead of a flood of destruction, God decided to flood the earth with love, love revealed in the sending of Jesus. Jesus taught the way of love for others, even enemies. On the cross Jesus did not breathe threats of revenge, but asked God the Father to forgive his torturers. Jesus was raised from the dead as the conqueror of all that negates life, and he invites us to know abundant life in and with him. May we seek to live like Noah, and not take part or take in that which encourages violence—greed and indifference to the suffering of others. May we seek to be courageous like Malala, who would not be intimidated by fear but determined to speak out to make life better for others. I like the words of a hymn in the Evangelical Lutheran hymnal:

“When pain of the world surrounds us with darkness and despair, when searching just confounds us with false hopes everywhere, when lives are starved for meaning and destiny is bare, we are called to follow Jesus and let God’s healing flow through us.” (ELW # 704)

Prayer—Merciful Father, this world is ever plagued with violence and wickedness. Grant us the peace of your steadfast presence that we not give up on faith. May we continue to hear our Lord Jesus’ call to follow him, for his healing love to be known in and through us. Amen.



**Friday, July 15, 2016**

Text: Genesis 7: 1-24

**“God blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, human beings and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark.”**

Recently I heard on the radio that the most common name given to baby boys these days is Noah. Perhaps popularity has been enhanced by a recent movie with the simple title of “Noah”. We associate Noah with the ark; we associate the ark with the flood. Someone wondered why Noah and the Ark is such a popular and remembered story especially with children when it is a story of judgment and world-wide death. All the waters of the deep and the heavens were released to drown the corrupt human race along with all other living creatures.

After the flood subsided we read of memorable images in chapters eight and nine of Genesis. In chapter eight you read of Noah sending out a dove to check if the flood had subsided sufficiently to expose land. The dove came back with an olive branch. This has become a picture and figure of speech for peace and making peace.

In chapter nine God made a covenant with Noah representing all humankind, and this covenant is for all living things, that God promised never to destroy the earth with a flood. The sign of the covenant is a rainbow, a reminder to all living things, and a reminder for God to keep the promise to never destroy the earth with a flood. Look in every church and you are bound to find a drawing of a rainbow. The actual word used in the Hebrew is “bow”, a weapon of war. God decided to put aside the weapons of divine destruction when dealing with the earth.

I once asked a Lay School class why many baptismal fonts are octagonal—eight sided—in shape. The answer goes back to the Noah story—how many people were in the ark and saved from the flood: the answer is eight, Noah and his wife, and their three sons and their wives. In the third chapter of 1 Peter, mention is made of Noah “in which a few, that is eight persons, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Water invites a comparison with Holy Baptism. The water of baptism is a destructive flood for the powers of sin, death, and the devil. The water of baptism is a flood of grace and salvation for us since we are baptized into Jesus Christ and we receive the power of his resurrection, the power of life and new creation that begins now and will be completed when Jesus indeed returns and makes all things new without sin, death, and the devil.

Prayer-Gracious God we remember our baptisms today. In this flood of grace and new life you give us more than an olive branch of peace and the rainbow in the sky. You give to us the cross of Jesus which means your love for us is never broken; and you give us the dove of the Holy Spirit who ever encourages our spirits that we are children of God. So blessed by your gifts, empower us to your people of peace for one another and the earth. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.



**Saturday, July 16, 2016**

Text: John 14: 27-29

**“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”**

In all my life I have never received an athletic award simply because I never went out for sports in school or community. But I did receive two awards in high school: an award for perfect

attendance, and a science award for a student most likely to find a career in one of the sciences. It was my intention to major in biology and become a teacher. But after reading Bonhoeffer in a religion class at Wartburg College, I changed course and courses. Instead of further science classes I signed up for Greek in preparation for seminary.

It was just the opposite for Johannes Kepler who was born in Germany in 1571. It was his original intent to study to become a Lutheran pastor. But when he studied mathematics and astronomy he was hooked: he devoted his life to science. He devoted his study to that of astronomy and wrote about planets and their orbits around the sun.

If you were born in 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe, years of religious strife and war awaited you. Kepler was uprooted from communities and universities several times due to the out break of wars. Throughout his life he remained devoutly Lutheran, often writing prayers and theological reflections in his scientific works. His mathematical work did not leave him to doubt the Creator but to praise the Creator for the beautiful complexity of the universe.

Johannes Kepler was influenced by the work of Nicolaus Copernicus who published works challenging the idea that the earth was the center of the universe. As we know today the sun is the center of our solar system, with planets that orbit around the sun. Copernicus' writings were not appreciated and were placed on the Index of Prohibited Books from 1616 to 1758.

The "New Book of Festivals and Commemorations: A Proposed Common Calendar of Saints" marks May 24 as the day to remember the lives of Copernicus and Kepler. The author of the book, Philip Pfatteicher wrote "Copernicus taught Christians a new kind of humility before the cosmos." The earth is not the center of our universe, and the power and grace of God is much bigger than we can imagine. Jesus came down from heaven to reveal the grace of God, and the peace of God. Jesus gives us this peace. It is not like peace the world gives, a peace that puts "me" and 'my wants' at the center. This peace is the guardian presence of Jesus. With him ever with us, we have grace for every challenge, guidance through any storm, and the gift of knowing peace when the center of our faith is Jesus, and his call to follow him to love and serve.

PRAYER- Merciful Creator, you spoke and creation came into being. We thank you for continuing to renew and bless what you have made. We thank you for the minds you have given people who work in the sciences, blessing the world with discoveries that teach us new things and heal us and creation. Whenever we admire your creation, may we stand with a renewed humility that leads us to praise you for your marvelous works. May this praise also lead us to care for what your have made. Thank you for your gift of peace, peace which surpasses all human understanding. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

