

**Devotions – July 9-15, 2017**

By Donna Ahlberg

First Lutheran Church, Iron River, MI

**Sunday, July 9, 2017**

Text: Acts 2:1-2:

**“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.<sup>2</sup> And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.”**

How does the Holy Spirit speak to us? Having just taught a week of VBS to 6<sup>th</sup> graders, I had to explain Jesus’ gift of the Holy Spirit, a concept that I had difficulty understanding, if not conceptualizing, back in my own youth. It was Bible study time but we had combined the Bible lesson with a continuation of a missions project because there was a lot left to squeeze in. We had 18 minutes to read and review Acts 2 about the day of Pentecost, a dozen 6<sup>th</sup> graders seated on cushions on the linoleum floor of a small stuffy choir room. They were busily sewing flannel panels together to make comfort pillows for Syrian children, refugees who had arrived recently in Sweden as exiles. My 6<sup>th</sup> graders were quietly listening. It was hot but someone had opened the windows for fresh air. *“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.<sup>2</sup> And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.”* As I spoke the lesson, the door behind me slammed with a loud bang, startling the kids, all of whom had been attentive to the pillows in their laps. “What was that?” one of them laughed, “It scared me.” The consensus was that it had startled most everyone. Offering comfort, the woman standing next to me said, “It was only the wind.” But as I slowly turned to her, our eyes met, and I said, “Maybe that wasn’t just the wind. Maybe that was the Holy Spirit.” What better way to introduce the sudden and unexpected sound of a rush like a violent wind to a dozen 6<sup>th</sup> graders as they sat quietly together in one place?

Let us pray: *Lord, thank you for preparing us to teach about you, for preparing the hearts of children to listen, and for such perfect timing in sharing your comforting presence. Thank you for children here who would have concern for the needs of others so far away. Help us each to discern the words and actions of the Holy Spirit in our own busy lives. Amen.*



**Monday, July 10, 2017**

Text: Luke 24:41

**“While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?”**

Doubt is an expression of the mind while joy is an expression of the spirit. When the two come together at one time, you have joyful doubt, a feeling caused by the collision of the Holy Spirit with our own limited human reasoning. Christ had died. Christ was buried. The illogic of his fleshly return. But there he stood amongst them. He really is what he said he was. “Great joy! He is here!” shouts the Spirit. But the mind arguing that this just can’t be true because it’s never happened like this before. It just doesn’t make any earthly sense.

Have you ever experienced such a contradiction in terms like joyful doubt in your own life? The unboxed power of the Holy Spirit arriving unannounced to mend a struggling relationship or repair a painfully bad back. The fusion of wonder with disbelief in the power of forgiveness. The realization that you had little to do with the outcome and the Holy Spirit had everything to do with it. A realization of the enormity of God’s love.

I wonder if heaven will offer my newly arrived soul both disbelief and wonder. Will I feel the joyful doubt that the eleven disciples experienced upon seeing the risen Christ? A feeling of this-just-can’t-be-true because it’s-just-too-wonderful-and-more-than- anything-I-could-have-imagined.

Let us pray: *Lord, thank you for the gift of the resurrected Christ, for the breadth of the Holy Spirit, for feelings of wonder and joy, and for our imagination and other gifts of the mind. Amen.*



**Tuesday, July 11, 2017**

Text: Psalm 23:5 “...my cup runneth over.”

The Holy Spirit speaks to us in ordinary daily events. I learned this lesson ten years ago. My kids were in high school then. I was cranky over a work issue that had nothing to do with my sons. I was agitated and deflated. Preparing to go to work, I put some oatmeal in the microwave to cook for two minutes on high. When I opened the door, the very hot oatmeal had puffed up and over - spilled, creeping down the outer sides of the bowl. Gobs of gluey oatmeal clung to the floor of the microwave. I quickly cleaned it up while my boys gawked at the gloppy mess. Minutes later, I opened the refrigerator door and grabbed a container by the lid, spilling green beans onto the dog-haired floor of the kitchen. My older son, age 15, asked if there was anything he could do to help, to which I exploded, “I don’t need any help!” With this explosion of emotion, I realized I was inappropriately angry over something that wasn’t happening in the room. I was thinking about the work situation. I washed off the green beans and packed them for lunch. Minutes after that, I was ladling soup into a container and as I pushed down the fine-fitting lid, the pressure pushed the soup out of the full container and onto the counter top as I heard a squishing sound. This finally caught my attention as it was another incident in a chain of domestic clean-up events. As I cleaned up the soupy mess, I thought it’s time to go out the door if I am to get to work on time. I grabbed my coffee cup which was  $\frac{3}{4}$  full and realized this particular mug did not fit into the cup holder in my van. Finding a different mug, I transferred

the coffee until the smaller mug was over filled and coffee was flowing onto the counter top. My cup was running over, and I knew it, and I laughed out loud. It took four overflows but I finally got it. *My cup runneth over.*

Let us pray: *Lord, you sometimes show us the literal meaning of a phrase so that we will contemplate the figurative meaning. Thank you for offering your wisdom in the daily activities of life, for your persistence and insistence that we see it. Help us to live out of our abundance, opening to the Holy Spirit's wisdom at all times. Amen.*



**Wednesday, July 12, 2017**

Text: Romans 8: 24-25

**“For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”**

“Hope,” in the poetry of Emily Dickinson, “is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul, and sings the tune without the words, and never stops at all.”

Hope arrives each morning at daylight. Through the open upstairs window, I hear it in the melodies of bird songs on these June mornings. “Sweet, sweet,” the lilt of the black-capped chickadee, his pleadings seem to be louder and more desperate as the dawns stretch into summer. Hope for a successful breeding season. Hope that his species will continue for another season. Hope for future survival and not extinction. Hope to be saved.

As I lie in bed and awaken, each and every day offers the hope of a new beginning; if not in new surroundings, at the least, in new perspectives. Each day should be recognized as a gift, the recognition of new meaning in old familiar stories, or maybe hearing new tunes from the same old notes. Each day chirps a promise of expectation and opportunity to experience God's love in the world. Hope. Can you hear it?

Let us pray: *Lord, thank you for the wisdom of birds. Give us patience as we await hope in our lives, for the revelation of things not yet seen, for the fulfillment and truth of scripture. Amen.*



**Thursday, July 13, 2017**

Text: Psalm 22:10

**“From birth I was cast on you, from my mother's womb you have been my God.”**

Life is full of choices and free will. But, God is clear that He was cast on us, that He chose us from the start of life. “From birth I was cast on you.” That we really didn't choose Him is such

a paradox. Earthly logic is a mere drop in life's bucket when compared to God's sovereign ways. Regardless of the directions we move in, we operate under His mighty shadow, wrapped in a blanket of grace. He covered our sin with his Son even before we knew we could make choices to separate from His abiding peace and indwelling love. In other words, He covered our sin even before we knew we could sin.

I don't remember my birth or earliest years. But I do know that there was never a time in my memory that I didn't believe in the presence of God. *"From my mother's womb you have been my God."*

Let us pray: *Let us rejoice that God is in our lives, that He was cast on us through no effort of our own, that God is life itself. Lord, thank you for your grace. Amen.*



**Friday, July 14, 2017**

Text: Ephesians 2:8

**"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."**

Saved through faith by grace and this is not your own doing. I attended the recent NGL Synod Assembly held in May in Marquette, one of two reps from my congregation. I wasn't raised as a Lutheran so, when Bishop Bill Gohl from the East Coast instructed the attendees to pull out Luther's Small Catechism and turn to page 16, I knew I would be clueless. Martin Luther's interpretation of the Third Article of the Creed: *"I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel."* So there again is the notion of gift, God's gift, this thing called grace that is delivered by the Holy Spirit. Without grace, it would not be possible to come to God.

Grace. Writer Anne Lamott calls it spiritual WD-40. Grace can fix anything, lubricating us when we come to a grinding halt. She describes the movement of grace as what changes us, heals us, and heals the world. Simply cry "help," she advised in a recent TED talk, "grace will meet you wherever you are at but never leave you where it found you."

Let us pray: *Thank you God for the spiritual lifelines you bestow on us, especially today, the gift of grace. And, thank you for the Holy Spirit, who calms, protects, and soothes as God weaves this auspiciously fine thread into the tapestry of our lives. Amen.*



**Saturday, July 15, 2017**

Text: Matthew 23:12

**“Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”**

In our faith walk, there are times when we think we are doing so well and getting it all right when, in fact, we have missed the mark of who Jesus really wants us to be. Jesus the humble servant wants us as followers to be humble servants.

A pastor I know recently told me a story about her experience with pride. She was filling in at a rural church deep in the heart of the western U.P. which is to say, she was in Watersmeet. Eleven people showed up that Sunday morning to hear her sermon, and she was proud of herself for giving a really good sermon that these people probably didn't get to hear very often. “Wasn't that great of me?” she thought, as the congregants greeted her with handshakes after the service. As the treasurer handed her a check for her efforts, she reached under her tunic to stow the check in her pocket. But, surprisingly, there was no pocket. As it dawned on her that she had put her pants on backwards that morning, she heard a voice inside her head say, “You put your pants on backwards.”

As followers, we are all tempted to gloat over how well we have served. But, God has that gentle and loving way of telling us we got it all wrong, our pants are on backwards. *Do you have your faith pants on backwards?* No one but God knows.

Let us pray: *Lord, open our minds to hear your corrective voice inside our heads. Help us to see when we need to get it right in your perfect vision instead of our own short-sightedness. Teach us to walk humbly with you and to be your humble servants. Amen.*

