

Devotions – July 7-13, 2019

By Kelly Ylitalo, LLM
First Lutheran Church, Gladstone, MI

Sunday, July 7, 2019

Text: 2 Corinthians 2:14 (NRSV)

¹⁴*But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him.*

One of my favorite scents is not something the average person would typically name. In fact, it's probably not a scent **most** people would ever choose, and yet, because of the memories it invokes, one of my most favorite scents is . . . moth balls! Yes, you read that right, moth balls. The scent of moth balls reminds me of my maternal grandmother. Grandma was one of my favorite people, because Grandma shared God with me.

But my most favorite smell? Well, that's easy. Lilacs. Oh, to me there is no more delightful fragrance than lilacs blooming in late spring. How wonderful to take an evening stroll through the neighborhood when the lilacs are at their peak! It's as though the entire town has been delicately perfumed with their bouquet. You don't even have to see them to catch their amazing scent on the breeze. I could blissfully lie beneath a bush of lilacs all day, breathing in their scent.

On a recent trip to Mackinac Island, the wonderful smell of lilacs was one of the first to greet me at the docks. This was swiftly followed by the delectable odor of all that scrumptious fudge. And then came the scent of what? Something equally exciting? Perhaps for someone with a unique love of strange scents such as moth balls but not for most. If you've ever been to the island, I'll bet you can guess. This odor is in abundance there as well.

Did you guess correctly? If you're still wondering, it's the pungent smell of none other than horse dung.

Lilacs. Moth balls. Fudge. Dung.

If God is spreading the sweet fragrance of knowing God through Christ and those who spread the good news, what scent is surrounding you and filling your senses today? Furthermore, what aroma are you emitting to the world?

Pray: May the fragrance of Jesus fill all of creation that we might know and proclaim the good news of our Lord. Amen.

Song for the Day: May the Fragrance of Jesus

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iH6iK-Y_Np4



Monday, July 8, 2019

Text: Colossians 4:6 (NIV)

⁶Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

As Christians, it is important that we articulate our faith and the one in whom we believe. We do this through sharing stories, those found in the Biblical witness and those we experience in the daily events of our lives, and these stories must always contain one very important ingredient: God. If the story isn't about God, the most important element is missing.

Think of it this way. As a student in college, I frequently called my mom to ask her for a recipe from home that I could prepare for myself and my fellow dormmates. Cafeteria food often left much to be desired, and I was more than willing to offer up my culinary skills for anything more palatable. More than one recipe involved browning hamburger before adding it to the remaining ingredients, and who would struggle to brown hamburger? Certainly not me. I'd seen it done hundreds of times.

So, brown the hamburger I did. Then, carefully draining the grease, I would add the meat to the awaiting noodles or sauce or whatever items with which it was to be paired before placing the concoction in the oven or upon the stovetop.

The dishes weren't bad. They were edible. They were better than a good deal of the fair offered in the cafeteria, but something was missing. They didn't taste like mom's cooking.

How could this be? I had all the right ingredients and had followed the recipe. What had I missed?

Salt!

In telling me to brown the hamburger, my mother had not mentioned that I needed to add salt. She assumed I already knew from having watched her.

One little ingredient. Really? Who would miss the tiny dash of salt? What difference in taste could a little salt possibly make?

Only everything.

What difference does the presence of God in our stories make? Only everything! Like salt, Jesus is the key ingredient.

Pray: Jesus, you have seasoned the world with love. Help us invite all to taste and eat of you. Amen.

Song for the Day: I Love to Tell the Story

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Vegr3d6Eac



Tuesday, July 9, 2019

Text: Nehemiah 8:10b (NIV)

This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

There is a quote from the folktales of Br'er Rabbit found at Disneyland's Splash Mountain log flume ride which reads, "Everybody has a laughing place – trouble is most folks won't take the time to go look for it."

We live in a broken world filled with broken relationships, and we are all guilty of contributing to this brokenness. We break our relationship with God by failing to trust in God above all things. We break our relationships with one another by failing to honor each other for the person God has created each to be. We break our relationship with the creation by failing to be good stewards of all that God has created. And in this brokenness, we inevitably encounter loss, heartache, grief, loneliness, fear, despair, hatred, oppression, scarcity, selfishness, and the like.

The good news is that God is about the business of restoring that which has been broken and lost through the cross and resurrection of Christ. God does not desire that anyone should live in brokenness. God wants us to know what it is to be whole and to experience the joy that results God's salvation.

God has created all things, including this day. No matter how broken things may appear, God has not abandoned God's creation, including you and me. God, in Christ Jesus, has come to make God and God's love known to us, to wrap us in God's embrace, and to never let go. This is good news. This is cause for rejoicing, and in the joy we receive from God is the strength to endure.

So, let God be your laughing place, and bask in the joy of the Lord.

Pray: Merciful God, we cry out on behalf of a world in need of your joy. Strengthen us with the salvation you alone provide and enable us to laugh and proclaim the joy found in your love. Amen.

Song of the Day: Joy of the Lord

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3gLeCiMJqI>



Wednesday, July 10, 2019

Text: Psalm 84:10a (NIV)

*¹⁰ Better is one day in your courts
than a thousand elsewhere*

Given the choice, and if money and other obstacles were not considerations, and you could spend one day anywhere in the world, where would you spend it?

The answer that immediately comes to my mind is the western shores of Lake Superior in the Keweenaw Peninsula of Michigan – the U.P., the Copper Country. Or, as we natives like to say, God's country.

There is something utterly peaceful and serene about the beauty found there, a sanctuary created by a master artisan. I could spend hours meandering the shoreline, searching for agates, dipping my toes in the refreshing waters, resting in God.

For me, it is a sabbath experience and a sacred space. God and I have long conversations there. I often do most of the talking, and God listens. God hears. God understands. In ways only God can.

I've no desires to go jet setting across the globe. No longings for exotic places or extreme locales. No need to snap a thousand pictures and tag all my acquaintances. I wouldn't even bring a phone.

I just want to spend time in the beauty of creation dwelling with God.

Pray: Come dwell with me, Lord, for there is none better than you. You are alone are God, the creator and sustainer of all things. Amen.

Song of the Day: "Better is One Day"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4Fj9bbEmVk>



Thursday, July 11, 2019

Text: Galatians 4:4-7 (NRSV)

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. ⁶ And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

Who or what defines you? Or perhaps better asked, whom or what have you permitted to define you?

Your family of origin? Your job? Your spouse or significant other? Your successes? Your failures? Your income? Your political viewpoints? Your online/social media personas? Your past? Something else?

Now consider the following: who or what should define you?

Allow me to suggest that because we have been created by God and formed in God's image, God alone is the source of our definition.

And note, that because of Jesus, God's Son, God has declared and defined us children of God. Nothing the things of this world throw at us has the power to ultimately declare our identity. God alone does this, and in doing so, God names us God's children, God's own, God's beloved.

For if we are children of God, we are also brothers and sisters with Christ and heirs in God's kingdom. And that is better than anything else we could ever be.

Pray: Thank you, God, for naming me your child, for claiming me as your own, for loving me beyond all measure, especially when I am not capable of loving myself and allow the world to define as something other than that which you have created me to be. Amen.

Song of the Day: "Who You Say I Am"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IcC1Bp13n_4



Friday, July 12, 2019

Text: Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (NRSV)

⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. ⁶Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. ⁷Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. ⁸Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem¹⁰ on your forehead, ⁹and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Grandma taught me to sing "Jesus Loves Me" while being rocked upon her lap.

Mom and Dad taught me to pray and to love and serve neighbors.

Michelle, my third grade Sunday School teacher, helped me learn the Ten Commandments.

Pastor Schultz taught me about the unconditional love of God.

There were others too. From the day I was born, there have been people who have shared God and the importance of God's love, people who shared, with this child of God, what it means to be a person who loves God in return.

This love, this God, has been written – tattooed/engraved – upon my heart, ever present with me.

The lessons I learned as a child, still remembered. Cherished. As potent now as they were all those years ago.

Bibles, crosses, palm branches, music, photos, artwork, and scripture quotes are present in my home, visible reminders of God's love for me, tools to share God and God's love with others, with other children.

I keep them with me wherever I have lived.

I keep the things I have learned of God in my heart.

And God keeps all in God's love.

Pray: I love you God. Thank you for loving me and for keeping all your creation in your abundant love. Amen.

Song of the Day: "Love Round"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dli74lW7PqQ>



Saturday, July 13, 2019

Text: 2 Peter 3:18

¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

As this week draws to a close, this is my prayer for you.

There is no greater love in all creation than the love which is found in Christ Jesus, God come to us, that we might know the God who is love and whose love is transforming the world.

May the God of all bless and keep you in God's grace, now and ever more.

*Pray: O Lord, continue to nurture and nourish me in your grace and in the knowledge of you.
To you be the glory, now and forever. Amen.*

Song of the Day: “The Benediction”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZFanoYT7zT4>

