

Devotions – July 14-20, 2019

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Sunday, July 14, 2019

Text: Luke 10:29

... He asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

We heard the parable of the Good Samaritan during worship this morning at church. Though it's a familiar story, there's always something new to be learned, it seems, as we listen to our pastors illuminate these stories in their sermons. Such as, pairing the word GOOD with SAMARITAN would NEVER have happened in biblical times. Samaritans just weren't thought of in those terms then.

Neighbors can be far away, or nearby. On the nearby end of the spectrum, there are our neighbors, the ones who live on our block. They are wonderful, and they proved it again this past winter when the snows came, and piled up, and came again, and again. There they were, shoveling our driveway and sidewalk leading to the porch, faithfully, willingly.

We do have someone to plow us out, but there were times before or even after when extra work was needed, or the snow was not enough for the truck to come by. That's when the neighbors pitched in. I would have been out there myself, except for being on a limited lifting regime following early winter surgery. Our neighbors were a special blessing this winter.

A Prayer: *God bless the neighbors who help when needed. They are golden. Amen.*



Monday, July 15, 2019

Text: Proverbs 16:31a

Gray hair is a crown of glory.

My brother has lived in the Midwest, on the West Coast and the East Coast where he is now, and abroad in Japan and Turkey. He studied engineering and spent his career in the NSA. Or, as he says with a smile, No Such Agency! We heard very little about his job. His wife of over 50 years died in early 2017 after vying with cancer for over 25 years. Their two children have provided him with grand-daughters and -sons, 2 of each. My brother's birthday is today, and he is now 80 years old.

Eighty years - that used to seem so far away. And so old! But, suddenly, there it is, my brother starting his ninth decade on earth. It will be happening to me in a few years. And now I think that that's not that old!

It is interesting to contemplate where our lives have taken us, to even write down what has happened over the years - call it a journal, a diary or an autobiography. How has God interacted in our lives? How have we invited him into our lives?

A Prayer: *Thank you, Lord, for each and every day of our lives. Amen.*



Tuesday, July 16, 2019

Text: I Corinthians 15:54

When this perishable body puts on imperishability ... then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

Death can come in so many ways:

Quickly, as for a friend whose heart malfunction probably ended her life in a minute.

Tragically, as for a family who lost a son in a car accident.

Perhaps thankfully, as for a friend who died after a long and debilitating illness.

And quietly, as it was for my mother. She had been slowing down at the rest home, mingling less, talking less, eating less. When we arrived, she was resting in bed, eyes closed, only partially aware of her surroundings. Her last hours were quite peaceful. Her breathing became slower, lighter. Finally, there was a last soft puff of breath out, and then ... nothing.

The time that we spent with her that day was precious. We kept watch, a vigil, as she passed from this life to the next, moving from mortality to eternity.

A Prayer: *In the midst of mourning, help us to cherish the awesomeness of the moment of change, from life on earth to life eternal. Amen.*



Wednesday, July 17, 2019

Text: Ephesians 4:11-12

The gifts he (*Christ*) gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry ...

Today we commemorate BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS, a Spanish colonist, historian and social reformer before becoming a Catholic priest and missionary to the Caribbean and Central America in the 1500s.

He served in the Spanish military and was granted a large estate in the Americas by the government, an "encomienda" which gave him the right to demand tribute from the indigenous peoples and to use them as slaves.

Ordained in 1513, he found himself profoundly opposed to the idea of slavery, and in 1515 he granted freedom to his slaves. He advocated for the establishment of rights for Native Americans before King Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor.

He returned to Spain to recruit more missionaries for the New World to bring the Christian message of freedom and justice to the colonies. He ran into problems with the Spanish colonists because of his pro-Indian stance.

He spent the last years of his life in the Spanish court, promoting a more humane colonization policy, speaking against the process of "encomienda", focusing on the ethics of colonization.

A Prayer: *Thank you, Lord, for the brave and wise leaders who have preached your life-giving word in our despair-filled world. Amen.*



Thursday, July 18, 2019

Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1,3b

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: ... A time to break down, and a time to build up ...

If you have ever been part of the decline and death of a congregation, you know how heart-wrenching, how difficult this can be. Friendships break down, faith is tested hard, and normal activities like Sunday worship and council meetings undergo crucial and devastating changes.

Having another congregation to attend after the closing is like having a safe haven in a storm. Feeling welcome there helps so much in the healing of spirits.

On the other hand, being involved in an effort to ecumenically spread God's word of peace, acceptance and joy to the world is a mighty antidote to the sadness of closing.

Recently we have had the chance to support and be active in promoting some of the activities of a group called the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians (ALCM). This is a group, established in 1986, which provides publications and conferences, a platform for gathering and sharing ideas about the church's song. Look for an ALCM Workshop for Church Musicians to be happening sometime next year at Messiah (Marquette).

The times to break down, and to build up, happen in our lives. We need to be strong and resilient in our faith, trusting that God will be there to guide and keep us in his loving embrace.

A Prayer: *Be with us, Lord, hold us close and sustain us in our lives. Amen.*



Friday, July 19, 2019

Text: Ecclesiastes 3:6b

... A time to keep, and a time to throw away ...

The Bible describes my life, in many ways!

Coming back home several days after the torrential rains of May 18 and 19 this year, we discovered water puddles in our basement, and then wetness along the outside walls, and then many, many storage boxes and bags that had gotten soaked. What a mess! Was this a sign from God, telling us to start majorly downsizing?!

We have accumulated and saved many things. Some are gifts, some are purchases. They evoke good memories; they have been a wonderful part of our lives. They are useful from time to time, and if not now, they may be useful in the future.

I can remember our sabbatical year in Finland, the three of us living out of a footlocker and a few suitcases. It worked, we were happy, and did not have the burden of lugging our life around with us.

This summer, we are starting to go through all the stuff in our basement, after it dries out. Some things will be kept, some will be tossed, and some will have new lives elsewhere. All done judiciously, I hope! And to remember, to memorialize some things, I am taking occasional photos along the way.

A Prayer: *O Lord, guide our thoughts in determining the important things in our lives. Amen.*



Saturday, July 20, 2019

Text: Ecclesiastes 3:7a

... a time to tear, and a time to sew ...

Once upon a time, sewing was a passion of mine. Sewing for our young son, for myself, for our home, even for my husband John. Now, my interests are more in the areas of knitting and making music.

In going through boxes downstairs (post-deluge) with labels like "Crafts" and "Sewing" this summer, I have discovered an abundance of fabric pieces that bring back memories of clothing, curtains, draperies, and tablecloths and napkins that I have made. Such a trip down memory lane!

There are currently two places I have found for these pieces of my life. One, with my sister in Illinois, who has been sewing and tailoring for years, and who has a special love for the *Marimekko* fabrics I bought but never used. And two, with the Messiah Quilters.

Now there, in Magnuson Hall at Messiah Church on Thursdays, is a great group of women, and sometimes men, putting together many pieces of cloth to make quilts that will be used in all kinds of places around the world for shelter, warmth and more, by all kinds of people who need them. What a worthy end for these fabric pieces which otherwise would just sit in a box, beautiful but pretty useless.

A Prayer: *God bless the Quilters, and all those who minister to those in need! Amen.*

