

..... **Daily Devotions**

**Devotions – January 26 – February 1, 2020**

**By Ruth Warmanen**

**United Lutheran Church, Crystal Falls, MI**

**Sunday, January 26, 2020**

Text: John 8:12

***“Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”***

January is such a dark month. The colorful lights of Christmas have been packed away and shimmering decorations have been stripped from streetlights. If we see the sun at all, it sheds its light for only about nine hours a day. That makes for long, dark cold nights – unless you have escaped to warmer locations! (But it’s even dark where it’s warm!)

When early Christian church leaders decided to celebrate the birth of Jesus, they were probably influenced by winter solstice, the shortest time between the sun rising and the sun setting (Dec. 21<sup>st</sup> or 22<sup>nd</sup>). Because pagans believed that the winter was over and spring was coming, they celebrated and worshiped the sun for winning over the darkness of winter. So it made sense for Christians to celebrate Jesus as the Light of the world at this dark time.

Those of us who live in the north woods don’t expect that winter is waning in January and we know it’s way too early to think about spring. So what will get us through these dark times, which aren’t only defined by the weather?

It’s Jesus’ promise that John recorded in his gospel. Jesus is the Light of the world and we are to share and shed this Light on those around us. Remember the favorite church school and camp song, “This Little Light of Mine?” Remember lifting your pointer finger and showing how you’re “gonna let it shine?” If our attitudes and actions reflect what we promise in the song, we can shed some light on the darkness that surrounds us. We can “let it shine” with a simple smile or kind word, with a visit to someone who is lonely, with a gift to someone who needs help paying for heat and light and in hundreds of other ways. But don’t hide the light of Jesus’ love under a bushel. Let it shine – through you!

Let us Pray: *Light of life, help us to be living candles shining in a dark world.*



**Monday, January 27, 2020**

Text: Psalm 96:11-12

***“Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it. Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.”***

The earth is glad; the sea (lake) resounds: the fields and trees of the forest sing for joy! Can you hear it? Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp is celebrating its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year!

In 1930, a group of determined Luther Leaguers convinced hesitant church leaders to buy some land on Fortune Lake so they could have a place to gather for youth conferences. It was the beginning of The Great Depression, so it was a risky purchase! But faith, perseverance and generosity prevailed.

Over the years, campers of all ages have been inspired and transformed on the shores of Fortune Lake. Young campers have grown into adult campers; some have become moms and dads, aunts and uncles, grandpas and grandmas of new campers. Those who have worked on staff have applied the skills they learned at camp to become teachers, pastors, caregivers, and reliable workers in a host of occupations. All have been inspired to be “gentle, loving people” and encouraged to bring “joy to the world” wherever they live.

I thank God for those feisty Luther Leaguers who didn't give up. I give thanks for the directors, board members, summer and full-time staff who have guided the ministry over the years. I give thanks for the congregations who have worked together as an association to support it. I give thanks for the numerous volunteers who have created quilts, draw-knifed logs, built picnic tables and bed frames, washed windows and accomplished numerous projects to maintain it.

Make plans to celebrate this vibrant ministry Sat., August 8 with lots of rejoicing and singing for joy. We will be “Lighting the Way: 90 Years and Beyond!”

Let us Pray: “*Thank you, Lord for Fortune Lake, where faith and friendships grow, for music, joy and beauty, for love we've come to know. We gather in community, no matter where we're from. Oh, let this be a place of grace for years and years to come.*”  
(“Hymn for Fortune Lake” by Jonathan Rundman)



**Tuesday, January 28, 2020**

Text: Exodus 3:4-5

***“God called to him out of the bush, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then God said, ‘Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”***

For our mid-week Advent worship services this past December, my congregation used a readers' theatre series by Linda Allen called *Holy Grounds*. The sketches were set in a neighborhood coffee shop by the same name. Get it? A coffee shop named Holy Grounds! Similar to the bar in the old TV series *Cheers*, it was a place where “everyone knows your name,” and patrons felt accepted and comfortable to be themselves. Although there were sometimes disagreements and

problems thrown into the mix, the kind proprietor (almost God-like) helped to bring peace and resolution. The coffee shop was a holy ground.

A holy ground doesn't have to be in front of a burning bush like Moses experienced. It need not even be in a church sanctuary or around a communion rail. Although holy, sacred actions can certainly transpire inside the nave of a church building, some holy things can also occur in a fellowship hall or church basement where coffee is brewing. If we offer a cup of coffee (or juice) to every member, visitor, and stranger who comes through the line and invite them to fellowship with us without judging them, we may all experience a holy ground.

Let us pray: *God who made everything holy, remind us that wherever we recognize your presence, we are on holy ground.*



**Wednesday, January 29, 2020**

Text: Matthew 2:11-12

***“On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.”***

I've been teaching 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade confirmation classes in my congregation. When we met for the first time after the Christmas holidays, I was surprised (but shouldn't have been) to learn how many had received smart phones or other expensive gifts for Christmas.

To suit the season, I had planned a lesson explaining Epiphany and describing the visit of the travelers from the East. So, of course, there had to be gifts! I came prepared with a shoebox wrapped in gold foil and adorned with a big shiny bow. Then came the twist. I asked the kids to stop thinking about the things they GOT for Christmas and to instead think about what (beside things) they could GIVE.

The assignment baffled them at first but they soon started writing on slips of paper and stuffing them into the gold shoebox gift. To avoid embarrassment, they did not include their names. When everyone had run out of ideas, we opened the box and read the gifts. Smiling and hugging and making someone laugh were popular ideas; others ranged from washing dishes and shoveling snow (for free) to “being nice to someone who was having a bad day.” (I had written “patience” on one of mine!) Simple, but invaluable, profound gifts.

Let us pray: *Giver of all gifts, teach us to share our simple gifts freely with others.*



**Thursday, January 30, 2020**

Text: 1 Peter 4:10

***“Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.”***

Is your congregation one of the 17 congregations in our synod functioning without a pastor? Mine is. My congregation has entered year two of a pastoral vacancy. It was scary at first and the absence of the familiar figure in the pulpit was palpable. With the shortage of retired clergy in our neck of the woods, it wasn't easy for our administrative interim pastor to arrange for pulpit supply. Assigning the other pastoral duties was also challenging and we quickly appreciated in hindsight oodles of details that Pastor Mike had previously handled.

Did we panic? WE DID NOT! Thanks to the capable leadership of our church council and, with the guidance of the synod office and our part-time interim pastor, a call committee was established and the process to call a new pastor began. But here's the exciting part. The rest of the congregation didn't just sit back and expect the council to do everything. Volunteers came out of the woodwork (or woods) to pick up the slack!

I'm not kidding! People who had never taught church school or hadn't taught in years stepped forward. A retired English teacher (yours truly) and the parents of 13 middle-schoolers teamed up to continue confirmation instruction. Others were willing to take communion to members who are homebound or living in nursing homes. And when clergy couldn't be found to lead worship, certain lay persons moved out of the pews and stepped to the front, meaningful sermon messages in hand.

I trust that someone will eventually feel called to our congregation. In the meantime, with God's help, we are answering the call to serve one another in community. So we're more than just surviving. We might even be thriving! (But please don't tell Bishop Katherine or we might lose our place in line!)

This prayer is printed in our bulletin every week:

*Grant us patience during the call process. The path to accepting your will takes time. We understand that even as we pray, you are preparing our next pastor for our congregation and community. Help us to trust that you will provide answers and the way. Lord, hear our prayer.*



**Friday, January 31, 2020**

Text: 1 Samuel 3:8-9

***The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, ‘Here I am, for you called me.’ Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Eli said to***

***Samuel, ‘Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’***

This scripture is the focus of a Bible study session in the January/February issue of *Gather* magazine. I usually snicker at this Old Testament scene; it’s so believable and kind of funny! I can see little Samuel bounding out of bed when he thinks he hears his old mentor calling him. This action is repeated twice more until Eli guesses that it is God calling the boy.

My Bible study group had a good discussion about what it means to be called. None of us had ever experienced a literal Samuel scene, and since our congregation is currently “pastor-less,” it was natural to connect being called with calling a pastor. I assume that most clergy have sensed a calling that ultimately led them to the ordained ministry. The writer of the Bible study said that before the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the term “calling” was reserved for priests, monks or nuns. Martin Luther expanded the use of the word to include other kinds of work. Thanks, Dr. Luther!

My circle friends shared that they had also felt something that had turned them towards their careers. As women of a certain age and generation, we had felt called to become nurses, teachers, or secretaries. Thankfully, the list of “callings” today is much more extensive.

As Christians, we are called to more than our vocations. The refrain of one of my favorite hymns (#720) says it best. “We are called to act with justice, we are called to love tenderly; we are called to serve one another, to walk humbly with God.”

Let us pray: *Like Samuel, let us jump to answer your call to act, love, and serve.*



**Saturday, February 1, 2020**

Text: Matthew 28:20

**“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**

Today begins a new month, already the second month of the new decade. How time flies! Time actually seems to accelerate with age! When I was in grade school, the days before Christmas and summer vacation seemed to drag by – but now they fly!

As I write this, I’m thinking of a dear friend who is marking her 98<sup>th</sup> birthday today. She has experienced more than a thousand new months and countless changes in her lifetime. As a British subject during WWII, she survived the Nazi air raids on London, fell in love with an American soldier, and endured the long voyage on The Queen Mary so she could marry and raise three sons in Crystal Falls. Although she was proud to be sworn in as an American citizen at the majestic Iron County Courthouse, she clung to her Church of England roots and became an

active member and deacon of St. Mark's Episcopal Church. She was deeply committed to prison ministry, visiting trustees at the maximum- security facility in Marquette or at Camp Ottawa every week for over 20 years! Well into her 80s, she was still leading monthly chapel services at the medical care facility and serving individual communion to residents there.

Living in the nursing home herself for the past two years, she now has lots of time to reflect on her life. She marks the days when chapel meets so she won't miss it. She still smiles, reaches out from her wheelchair to those she passes in the hall and says, "God loves you." And she's a great friend to her roommate. They both lift my spirits when I visit them!

When I take her a lemon pie (her favorite) today to celebrate her birthday, I know she will tell me how thankful she is for being able to taste, see, and hear. She feels blessed! She has recognized God's presence throughout her life; God will be with her "to the end of the age."

Let us pray: *Ageless God, we give thanks for the wise and faithful elderly in our midst. Continue to bless their lives with grace and peace.*

