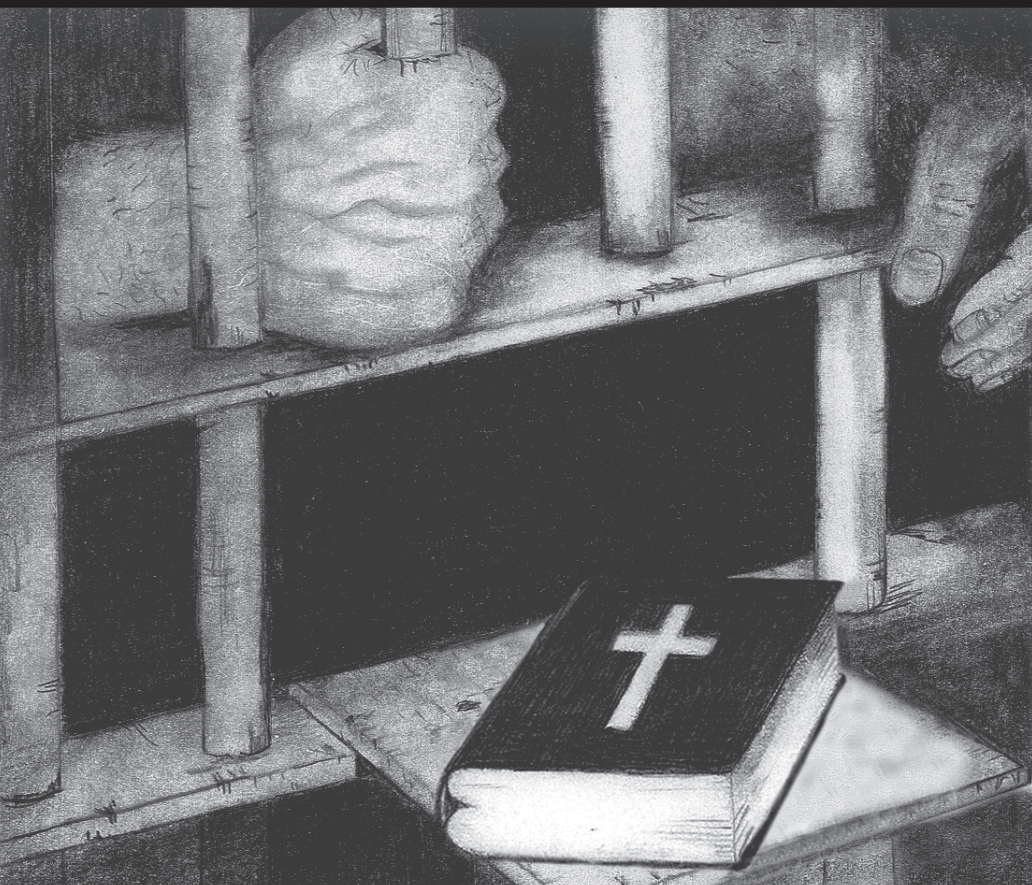


CHRIST'S KINGDOM – EVERY NATIVE AMERICAN NATION.



2012 | **Lenten
Devotions**



Lutheran Indian Ministries
Christ's Kingdom — Every Native American Nation.

A Ministry of Lutheran Association of Missionaries and Pilots U.S.



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Lutheran Indian Ministries Comes to PBS

Lutheran Indian Ministries is being profiled in the 17th season of *The Visionaries*, the award-winning public television series, hosted by acclaimed actor Sam Waterston of *Law & Order*. Distributed through National Educational Telecommunications Association (NETA), *The Visionaries* began airing the Lutheran Indian Ministries documentary, *Growing Native Leaders*, on January 6, 2012. Please check your local public television listing for the exact date and time our episode of *The Visionaries* will air in your area.

You may also view the documentary through our website, www.lutheranindianministries.org.

DVD copies are available for personal and congregational use. Please call our office (888) 783-5267 to order a copy.

Unless otherwise noted Scripture verses in this booklet are taken from The New International Version.



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Dear Friend in Christ,

I am honored to share with you our 2012 Lutheran Indian Ministries Lenten Devotion Booklet.

Lutheran Indian Ministries. This name may surprise you. In this day and age of political correctness, you may question our wording. But, we Natives refer to ourselves and to each other as Indians. Let me reassure you, as a Makah – as an American Indian – this name sends a positive message of its own: We are Indians ministering to Indians. This wording reflects one of the great things God has been doing among American Indian, Alaska Native and First Nations people. He's been raising up Christian leadership from within. After decades – centuries even – of misunderstanding Christianity as a white man's religion, Native men and women are working hard to share the message of Jesus Christ.

For the past 26 years of Lutheran Indian Ministries, *Lutheran Association of Missionaries and Pilots U.S.* has been sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the far reaches of the north, including Alaska, and more recently in remote Native communities in the lower 48 states. God has blessed this ministry with opportunities to identify, recruit, train, equip and empower American Indian, Alaska Native and First Nations people for service in the church and in their communities. I am particularly grateful to see Native people becoming pastors and deaconesses. Your prayers and your faithful support have made this possible.

This booklet is our thanks to you for your faithfulness to this ministry. It has been a joy and a privilege, throughout the years, to be able to share our ministry stories with you and how lives have been changed through a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Without your partnership this would not have been possible.

May you be encouraged in your own faith as you read and contemplate the message of these devotions.

God bless you!

Rev. Dr. Don Johnson
Executive Director



Psalm 98:1

A Cedar Flute and a New Song

“Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things;”

The beautiful deep tone of the cedar wooden flute echoed a haunting yet wonderful sweet sound through the majestic cathedral-like church, a sound possibly never heard there before. There was a hush across the auditorium as people heard the sound of a song, a new song, one so unfamiliar and yet somehow so longed for and wanted. A sound overdue and yet, so strangely welcome. As the simple Native flute song faded and drifted away, it gave way to another sound that again most likely had never been whispered or echoed there before. It was the sound of Linda praying softly yet so powerfully in her own poetic Cree mother tongue. Again people seemed to hang on to every word she uttered as if they knew exactly what she was saying even though they did not know Cree at all. The truth is that in a real sense they could understand every word because they could feel and hear her heart softly exploding outward and upward in her own God given heart language. The speaker then stood up and proclaimed, *“Jesus is in the room,”* and went on to deliver a powerful message of hope, a message of hope for the Native people of America and for people everywhere! A message on how we all long to hear God’s voice in our own heart language!

Several years ago someone handed me a cedar wooden flute. She said it was given to her as a gift but because she was not musical and had no idea how to play it, she wanted me to have it. I was amazed because it was so beautiful to even just look at. She could have just kept it as an interesting mantel piece. But I thanked her for the gift as I do love music and took it home. For some reason I did the same thing. For a year it just looked pretty lying on one of my book shelves. One day I picked it up and thought as I blew air through it, *“This instrument makes just beautiful sounds!”* And so I began to play it. Now the sounds of a Native North American flute go with me almost everywhere!

Lent can be a time of new hope and new life. It can be a time of deep reflection where we can get away from the busyness, the clutter and the self centered noise of life. It may also be a time when we notice something on the shelf. Is there a cedar flute on your book shelf? Is there something sitting right in front of you that you have put away and for a million reasons you simply will not pick it up. Is there a lie that keeps you from it? Or have you simply forgotten how beautiful it was to play it or how wonderful that gift is that you have stuffed away? The gift could be anything, anything that you know in your heart you were made for.

My challenge to you during this Lenten season is to ask God the question as you reflect. What new thing Lord do you want to do in my life? Or maybe the new thing is that the Lord wants to bring out the old thing and make it a new thing once again! That Sunday morning, in that huge church in the center of one of the largest cities in North America over a thousand miles from the northern community of Sioux Lookout where we live and minister, I realized again how God can take a little thing off the shelf and use it mightily again. God has used my own little flute tunes to touch the hearts of many as it did when it led my wife Linda to pray and my friend to preach that Sunday morning. During this Lenten season, ask God to show you what little “flute tunes” and gifts he has given you that you may use once again for Him. Or may it be that God is simply reminding you to not put down your gift and to keep on using what you have for Him? Your gift will be, or will continue to be, a powerful inspiration to many. Just pick up your gift. Don’t leave it on the shelf! Watch and feel the joy well up inside as you live your life with new hope, new love and new eternal meaning.

Dear Lord, thank you for this time of reflection. Show me Lord in a new way the gifts you have given me that I may serve you and love you with all my heart, my soul, my body and my strength and that I would find complete joy in you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Matthew 24:35

The Power of His Words

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”

Most Native American dialects have fewer words in their language to express what they need to say, than other languages do. Certain words mean more than one thing but carry the same meaning depending how the word is expressed. The English language has so many words and a proper way of using each word. There are also many different ways of expressing a point, using different words that mean the same or something similar. Sometimes we tend to use so many of those words to express something that we want to say that the meaning gets lost in the translation.

In the history of the United States our 16th President, Abraham Lincoln was known for his powerful speeches. People listened to what he had to say and understood because he was direct and got right to the point. He was eloquent in speech, but he was a man of few words, and the words he spoke had power in them.

Jesus spoke using many parables during his ministry here on earth that people related to and understood. He didn't make long speeches filled with words just to keep talking. Some might say Jesus was a man of few words, but those He spoke were so powerful that we still today hold on to each and everyone of them because they are filled with life changing power.

When I study the Bible and look at the things Jesus said, I find several recurring words that Christ spoke which are echoed through the New Testament. Some of them are; Come to me: (Matt. 11:28), trust me, love, believe, have faith: Follow Me: (Matt 4:19, 16:24) Few words, but the power within them changes lives forever.

Gracious Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus to speak words of life into each of us. Let those precious words reach each and every soul in your creation. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Cathy Benzler
Port Angeles, Washington

FRIDAY • FEBRUARY 24

Ephesians 4:32

True Forgiveness

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Located at the end of the land, at the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Makah Days is a big celebration that the Makah tribe has every year. In Neah Bay, home of the Makah tribe, are canoe races, a parade, and all kinds of entertainment, food and native art. It's a time where the people of Neah Bay celebrate their native culture. People come from all over to attend this event each year along with other Native tribes including those from Canada.

During this past summer, early in the morning in the beginning of Makah days, a native family from Vancouver Island, BC was driving to Neah Bay to celebrate this event. A car was coming towards them, crossed over onto their side of the road and crashed head on into them. The grandfather from the Native family was killed in the accident. The driver of the other car was arrested for drunk driving. This was a tragic loss of life of a man who was loved and respected not only by his family, but also by the native community. The man who died was also well known in Neah Bay, where he was on his way to speak about the importance of being alcohol free and to encourage other men to live clean and sober lives and serve in their community.

A trial date was set at the courthouse for the driver of the car. The man was subsequently charged with vehicular manslaughter. A relative of the deceased man, who was connected with the Lower Elwha tribe, stood beside the grieving family at the court hearing and spoke to the accused driver. He told him, “This family forgives you, and we are praying for you, and we are praying for a better life for you in the future and we hold no unforgiveness towards you.” The accused man hanging his head down had tears in his eyes, as did many of the people in the courthouse. How many people would offer forgiveness at a time such as this?

It is not very often that we are able to witness an act of forgiveness and love that this family gave. Many people from this community will remember the kind words from this First Nations family! It is a reminder of God's unconditional love for us. He so loved us, He sent Jesus to suffer and die on the cross that we might also experience forgiveness of our sins.

Dear Lord, I thank you for always loving us and giving us your gift of forgiveness, that we may share it with others freely. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Tom Benzler
Port Angeles, Washington

II Timothy 1:8-9

Testimony

“So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.”

Growing up in a Norwegian Lutheran Church in rural Southwestern Minnesota didn't provide me with a lot of experience in hearing testimonies...people testifying about our Lord and what He had done or was doing in their lives. That wasn't a natural part of our culture. There were some exceptions. I can remember some testimonies by teachers. My confirmation pastor, Pastor Ed Silrum, had us write a paper entitled “What Jesus Means to Me.” We read them during worship on the Sundays leading up to our confirmation Sunday. It was a good start, but still a little academic.

When Sharon and I gather in worship in Native villages, we hear many testimonies. The Lord is experienced as alive and moving. So they give testimony to how, in His purpose and grace, the Lord has moved in their lives. Sometimes it sounds like an AA meeting, with a number of people giving credit to the grace and mercy of God for their sobriety. And God gives them more power in the midst of their testimony. Stories are told, and God is given the credit for drawing them into a holy life. It is all God. Nothing to do with what the self has done other than surrender.

This testifying in Native Christianity is a natural thing. No shame – just sharing about the power and presence of a loving God. This is a great example and gift to the larger church, especially to those who struggle with testifying about our Lord.

Gracious God, bring the testimony of our heart to our lips. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Rev. Stan Berntson, Skipper
M/V CHRISTIAN
SE Alaska

SUNDAY • FEBRUARY 26

Psalm 136:1

A New Song

“Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever.” (ESV)

Toward the end of our Mentoring Program and Girls Club year, we were spending time in the Scriptures learning about King David’s early life. As promised to Abraham, he would become the line of kings from which the Savior of the world would come. While still a young man, he had been anointed by Samuel and called by God to be the next leader of his people. However, as we studied, the girls came to see that many years and adversities faced him before he was to rule on the throne.

I most wanted the girls to see that trusting takes faith: standing on the promises of God no matter what the circumstances. We read about the jealousies of his brothers, the unprovoked hatred of King Saul, and the loss in separation from his dear friend, Jonathan. More than once, the girls were crying on David’s behalf, “That’s not fair!” It was good for them to learn that whatever came his way, he put his trust in the Lord. We read many of the Psalms he wrote to encourage himself and his men. One of them in particular, Psalms 136, seemed special. The girls read responsively every other verse: “Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever.”

As we went through it, one of the older girls started clicking her fingers. “Hey,” she said, “if I put these verses to rap music, I think I can memorize some of them.” My instant knee-jerk reaction was to say “YOU CAN’T CALL THAT MUSIC!” But fortunately I caught myself as these Scriptures came to mind: “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” (Rom. 10:17) And also, “For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.” (1 Thess. 1:4-5)

This young woman is the only one of her immediate family that attends church. To do so, she needs to stay with a cousin or ask someone for a ride. She finds her own way to Mentoring Group as well. We have talked to her about baptism and she has expressed interest in that, but to do so without at least the blessing from her family would show great disrespect to them. In essence, it would be saying, “As white outsiders, we are here to steal your children away from you because we see you as inferior and incapable.”

So I tell this excited little lady that the Psalms were indeed sung during David’s time, and are still so today. I do not discourage her from trying to put them to music of another culture that has infiltrated her own. I pray for her instead and cling to the promises of God. I know the Lord has chosen to bring her to Himself in faith and He will continue His good work in her through His Word and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thank you Father for your grace. Thank you for your steadfast love that endures forever. Thank you for your son, Jesus, the Word made flesh, who died for us and is coming again. In His name we pray. Amen.

Rosemary Sternbeck
Olympic Peninsula

Isaiah 63:9

Let The Redeemed Of The Lord Say So

“In all their affliction He was afflicted. And the Angel of His presence saved them. In His love and in His pity He redeemed them and He bore them and carried them all the days of old.” (NKJV)

The band chief was preparing to pray. Silently he sat gathering his thoughts for the people. It is a humbling thing to hold responsibility for an entire people.

As he lifted his voice his first words were, “I call out to You, Grandfather. You pity no one, but I ask You to pity us.” He went on to ask for Creator’s protection and help for all the people. Yet, what kept going around in my head were the words, “You pity no one.”

These people know their whole existence depends on Creator whom they commonly call Grandfather. Their only hope is if He will help, but if He truly pitied no one, then such hope would only be wishful thinking, no assurance, no real comfort. “Amen” does not fit at the end of such a plea.

So God looks to most of the world. All that most people know of Him is what they see in the fickleness of this life. Is Creator for us or against us, or does He even care? It’s hard to tell from natural knowledge.

But in Christ Jesus, the Angel of His presence, we find the answer. Creator does pity us! His heart is good toward us. He is for us.

So He gave His Son to redeem all creation, all people. In His love and in His pity, He bought back the human race from death and darkness, from endless sorrow and shame. We may not know the mind of Creator, but in Christ we know His heart. So even in affliction and confusion, we can have peace. Creator does have pity upon you and still carries you in those nail-pierced hands all your days. So you can pray boldly and confidently saying, “Amen. Yes, yes, it shall be so.”

Dear Creator, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, your pity for us is more than we can understand. Bless us that we would always have confident hope in your love in Christ Jesus. Strengthen us to know that you are afflicted in all our affliction and will carry us safely through this life into eternity. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Rev. Dan Jacobs
Crow Agency, Montana

Revelation 7:9-10

Salvation Belongs to our God

“After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’”

Sadly many Christians are driven out of a sense of guilt and “obligation” rather than resting in the gracious gift of an absolutely finished work.

One of the joys of working with our Makah congregation in Neah Bay is that we get to host servant events throughout the year. I watch them come with joyful anticipation, often taking their vacation time to work for the Kingdom of God on our reservation. Never do I get from them this sense of “religious obligation.” I never hear something like this...“I guess I have to do something, after all if I don’t, who will?” They come; some do construction kinds of activities; others help with work in the yards of elders in the tribe who really can’t do it for themselves and have no money to be able to afford help; some work with our children doing VBS or kids camps. You would think they are going to a birthday party, not to work and serve in a distant place they know little about, their motivation is not guilt but joy-filled agape.

One of those who came to help with a servant event shared with me why she was a Lutheran, she said, “When I had gone to other churches, I heard the message from the pulpit of what I was to do for God. When I came to the Lutheran Church I heard what God had done for me.” I like that message, and love that is distinctive of Lutheran theology and practice, and not that it comes from a sectarian separatism, but a celebration of the fact that “salvation (*absolutely*) belongs to our God.” And we can absolutely add nothing to it. We simply respond with joyful worship and service.

Lord, forgive me for the times that I have gotten caught up in serving you and others out of a sense of guilt and obligation. Help me to face this day out of a position of total rest in the arms of my loving Eternal Father, in the embrace of the nail scarred hands of my Savior who died in my place, and in the empowering of your gracious Holy Spirit who will enable me to face all of the challenges this day will bring to me. Amen.

Winston Wilson
Neah Bay, Washington

“And the Gospel must first be preached to all Nations.”
Mark 13:10

CHRIST CAME TO SAVE ALL PEOPLE OF EVERY NATION, INCLUDING EVERY NATIVE AMERICAN NATION. AND THAT’S OUR MISSION.

Raising Up Native Americans to Reach Native Americans

At Lutheran Indian Ministries our focus is to identify, recruit, train, equip and empower native people for ministry in their communities. Thus our ministry of help, healing and sharing the hope of the Gospel to Native Americans can be carried out by an increasing number of clergy and lay leader field staff who are American Indian and Native Alaskan. They know what it’s like to be both Christian and Native American. They know what Native Americans face because they themselves have confronted the same brokenness and wounding that has resulted from many years of neglect, forced change and the isolating reservation system.

And these Native clergy and lay leaders often use traditional languages, music and stories to share Christ’s message of love, compassion and redemption.

Bible studies, workshops and leadership training are designed specifically to encourage, enable and equip Native believers to not only take ownership of their Christian faith, but to take it to the rest of the world, and especially to their own people.

Instability resulting from centuries of culture clashes and neglect now translates into alcohol and substance abuse, high rates of suicide, and generations of poverty — a curse passed on from generation to generation to individuals and entire communities.

Add to these the fact that our mission fields are



Continued on page 12

Christ's Kingdom—Every Native American Nation

typically hard to reach — both physically and spiritually.

And today it is estimated that less than 5% of Native American people know Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

You Lift the Bowl

In Matthew 5, Jesus tells us, “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.”

The generosity and faithful prayer support of caring Christians like you is what makes the ministry of the Lutheran Indian Ministries possible. You lift the bowl and uncover the Light of Life found only in Christ for all Native people to see. You help to put it on the stand to give light to all the “houses” of every Native American tribe and nation.

Please consider providing a generous gift of support today to help us continue shining the life-changing light of Christ's love into the hearts of Native Americans.



1st Peter 1:3 (ESV)

The Great Healer

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

Carl Gawboy, an Ojibwe artist and a Bois Forte Band member, put together a collection of accounts of American Indian boarding school experiences, in a Readers Theatre play entitled: **The Great Hurt: Understanding Historical Trauma of American Indians**. This presentation came to northeast Nebraska in October of 2011.

The consequences of the Indian Boarding School era were presented for all to hear: school teacher and administrator suspicion of Indian parents; the high Indian dropout rate; virtual destruction of Native languages; high rates of unemployment, suicide, and alcoholism. All of these dysfunctions can be traced to the efforts of boarding schools.

One of those quoted in *The Great Hurt* is Harold Napoleon, a Yup'ik Eskimo from Hooper Bay, Alaska. He attributes one of the effects of the Indian Boarding School era as likened to PTSD. Harold wrote, *“Post-traumatic stress disorder is not a physical illness, but an infection of the soul—of the spirit.”*

When the connection of PTSD is understood as an infection of the soul then we are in a better position to receive or to provide healing. When one denies the consequences of one's past, buries his or her emotional hurt and shame, then he or she carries these burdens alone. Even worse is if he or she takes his or her frustration, pain, and sorrow out on others. With the understanding of how damage has been done to the soul of the hurting, we are better able to introduce them to the One and only One, who can bring lasting healing.

This great hurt needs to be spoken aloud; first to one's Creator in a word of prayer; then to a trusted listener who can offer **words of hope** that point one to the Son of God, who Himself suffered at the hands of abusers. Jesus did so, taking on our wronging of others, so that we would not have to suffer any longer. Jesus rose again so that those who are hurting can have a living hope; **that living hope is found through faith in Jesus, the Great Healer!**

Dear gracious Father in Heaven, we praise and thank you for a living hope that brings healing and that comes to us by your mercy through faith in Jesus our Savior! In His Name we pray. Amen.

Pastor Ricky Jacob
Missionary to the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska
Winnebago, Nebraska

THURSDAY • MARCH 1

Galatians 5:1,13

Lawless

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery...You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”

Sometimes life on the reservation is described as lawless. It may not be literally lawless—but compared to other places it may be. Lawless is generally a bad word but it has two sides. The bad part is that people on the reservation often do bad things without the same consequences they would have elsewhere. The good part is the freedom we have in not living in fear of the law. We don't have as many laws as there are in other parts of the country so we have a greater freedom before the fear of the law kicks in.

Now this statement may strike you wrong, but as Christians we are lawless. What does the Bible say? “Now that faith has come we are no longer under the supervision of the law.” (Gal. 3:25) We have been freed from the law because of Christ's righteousness and now we live by grace. We really are free—free to do whatever we want in that grace. We are not slaves that worry about the law, doing things out of fear. We do what we want in grace. We are lawless. That truly is a freedom we underestimate and is a freedom we often give up in order to live under the law. It is similar to the freedom we have on the reservation to live without fear of the law.

Now the bad part of lawlessness is found in our sinful nature. The Bible says, “...do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature” (Gal. 5:13b). The law is needed to restrain our sinful nature and point us to the grace we have in our Lord Jesus. Otherwise, we become slaves again to sin. In that way, the law serves a good purpose. However, like the Pharisees, we can easily pass many laws and become slaves again to the law. Christ Jesus came to set us free from the slavery of sin, the slavery of the law, and to make us free in Him. So live lawlessly in the freedom we have in Jesus.

Our Heavenly Father, you have set us free from both sin and the law in our Lord Jesus. Fill us with your Holy Spirit that we may live in that freedom and so love you and our neighbor. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Rev. Andrew Utecht
Rosebud Sioux Reservation
Rosebud, South Dakota

I Corinthians 15:58

Life: Way More Than Just a “Bucket List”

“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”

Just this week I saw a large advertisement talking about the **“Bucket List.”** It was playing off the hit movie by that exact name, the **“Bucket List.”** I rather enjoyed the movie as it was encouraging those of us who are not exactly young to do the things we really want to do before we leave this world. And I also found that young people too have their **“Bucket Lists.”** My twenty-three year-old daughter mentioned that she too has a list of things she wants to do and accomplish before she gets to the point in her life where she is unable to do them. The truth is, life is short and none of us know how much time we really have here on earth. As Psalm 90:12 declares, *“Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”* Yet the important question is this. What are the things that God really wants on your **“List?”**

For the world and for those not seeing things from an eternal perspective, life is about selfishly getting as much out of it as you can before you die. But life is way more than, *“eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.”* It is much more than just doing as many fun things as you can and then dying. Life is much more wonderful than this and has much more profound meaning. What we do for His Kingdom now really does matter for now and eternity. Yes, there are things that I would love to see and places I would love to go but in the end it is all about knowing God, serving Him and bringing glory to His name alone. This is real joy. Our other rewards come later.

Lent is the perfect time to reflect on what really matters in your life and what it is that you really want to pour all your energy into here and now. Of course, God does long to bless you even now. In fact as Linda and I have served the Lord as “missionaries,” He truly has blessed us with many, many incredible experiences. The truth is that when we put Him first He often seems to bless us in surprising and amazing ways. But the key is to put God first, serve Him alone and let Him take care of the rest, including the **“List.”** The **“List”** is not the important thing but knowing and serving God is crucial! And God has all of eternity to reward you for service to Him now! (Luke 6:23) He will reward you in His Kingdom that is fully and truly coming. Put Him first now and He will take care of the rest!

Dear Father, thank you for the many blessings you pour out on me daily. Please help me put your Kingdom first and to know that serving you is not in vain. Please grant me your joy as I give my life completely to you. You know the desires of my heart, Lord. I leave them in your loving hands giving you all the glory as you lead and bless me in your own perfect way! In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Rick Martin
Sioux Lookout, Ontario

Romans 10:17

Hearing God's Word

“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”

There is a rather common idea among the churches on our reservation: Everyone has heard the Gospel, so now we should be preaching discipleship/Sanctification. There are two big problems with this thought. First, not everyone has heard the Gospel. Many people here never come to church or hear any Scripture except at funerals. And most funerals only speak of a “loving God” and praise the dead, telling the living what they must do if they hope to get to heaven with their loved one. Christ crucified is rarely mentioned and Christ risen and the hope of resurrection is basically never mentioned. The second problem is that discipleship/sanctification without the Gospel of forgiveness in Christ Jesus is simply pious legalism.

However, because of all of this, many people—those who have been connected to church and those who have not—don’t like preaching because they figure they’ve heard it all and it is really no different than what any moralist would teach. Frank is a good example of this. He lives at the care facility in Crow Agency where I lead church services Friday mornings. When he first arrived there, I invited him to join us. He said, “No thanks. I’ve heard enough church in my life already. My dad was a preacher. He traveled to many reservations preaching and I always went along to help. So I figure I’ve heard it all.”

Each Friday we’d greet each other and he’d tell me a little more of his story, being sure to tell me he had had enough church early in life. Yet, the facility is small and my voice carries—out of the chapel and down the halls into the rooms. So Frank could not avoid hearing.

Then, one day he sat at the door to the chapel. Periodically, after that he’d come by. One day he entered the chapel. Still he attended only sporadically. Slowly, he came more regularly. Now he is there every week in his favorite chair—Bible in hand. And he listens intently.

Whether Frank had heard the Gospel before, I don’t know. I do know that Christ is speaking to him now and he can’t get enough. Christ crucified and risen is an old story but it is the only one that matters. Here is forgiveness for not being perfect. Here is God’s peace. Here is His blessing of life.

Faith not only comes by hearing—faith is maintained by hearing. May we never grow tired of hearing that old, old story—the Word of Christ.

Dear Father, we confess that sometimes we long for something new—something that will tickle our ears. Have mercy upon us. You are so patient and continue to bring the Word of Christ to us. Fill us with your Spirit so that we will never tire of hearing this dear story of forgiveness and eternal life in Christ Jesus, your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Rev. Dan Jacobs
Crow Agency, Montana

SUNDAY • MARCH 4

St. John 1:29b (ESV)

The Lamb of God

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

We are blessed to teach the little children about the Lamb of God. We do so at our annual Vacation Bible School, our weekly Sunday school, as well as our Lutheran school. Over the years we have told the story of the Lamb of God. This school year marks the fifteenth year of our preschool and at the Winnebago Tribal Council’s request, the third year of our elementary school.

I took on the task this year to come up with a theme Bible verse and hymn. The Bible verse that I chose is printed above. These words are those of John the Baptist, who, led by the Holy Spirit, saw Jesus for who He is – the Lamb of God. He also stated the role of Jesus. He would take away the sin of the world.

This taking away of the sin of the world, much like the symbolic role of the Passover Lamb, would involve blood. Time after time we remind the children of the great sacrifice that Jesus made through the shedding of His precious blood. The writer of Hebrews reminds us: “Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” (Hebrews 9:22)

The preschool and elementary children of Jesus Our Savior Lutheran School, on the Winnebago reservation in northeast Nebraska, take to heart that Jesus suffered and died for each and every one of them. By the grace of God, through faith, they behold Jesus as the Lamb of God. They state their faith in the words of the Bible verse, the Apostles’ Creed and the hymn “Lamb of God.”

Here are the words of the first verse of that hymn and its refrain; you will note that Jesus was the perfect sacrifice and a bloody one at that:

Your only Son, no sin to hide, But You have sent Him from Your side
To walk upon this guilty sod, and to become the Lamb of God.

O Lamb of God, sweet Lamb of God, I love the holy Lamb of God!
O wash me in His precious blood, My Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God!
(Lutheran Service Book #550)

Dear Lamb of God, sweet Lamb of God, thank you for taking away my sin, all of my sin. May your Spirit move many more to behold you as John the Baptist did and rest in the blessed assurance of everlasting life, in your Holy Name I pray. Amen.

Pastor Ricky Jacob
Missionary to the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska
Winnebago, Nebraska

Isaiah 53:3-5

Open My Eyes Afresh to See Jesus

“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”

I love seeing Jesus in the Old Testament. It always gives me a sense of the beautiful interconnectedness of the whole of Scripture. Jerome’s insight into Isaiah, seeing this wonderful book as the “fifth Gospel” is something that excites my thirst for taking a fresh look at the book of Isaiah again, this wonderful evangelist/prophet revealing Jesus.

Isaiah 53, the fourth servant song is central to the powerful Gospel presentation that Isaiah makes. In this chapter it is as though Isaiah is an eye witness to the cross, and through his vantage point, we see Jesus the “servant” who comes on the scene in Israel’s history at a very spiritually dry time. Isaiah sees Jesus as being rejected by the religious establishment of His day. He sees our Lord “...pierced for our transgressions,...crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5) He truly sees Jesus on the cross and all the suffering Jesus experienced in Pilate’s judgment hall leading up to the cross, seeing Him marred beyond recognition. Isaiah even sees His burial in a garden tomb by Joseph of Arimathea, when he says that “...He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.” (vs 9)

I believe that Isaiah in poetic language sees the resurrection and our Lord’s eternal reign in Glory...“he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.” (vs 10)

Isaiah received this vision in a horribly depressing time in Israel’s history, the nation was crumbling and about to go into Babylonian captivity, yet he sees Jesus.

Lord as you opened Isaiah’s eyes to see so much of the suffering and work of our Risen Lord, open my eyes to see Jesus afresh this day. Lord I repent that often all I see are my failings and the failings of others around me. You are the Living Present Lord, right here, right now, with me. Like Mary, I wait at your feet. Amen.

Winston Wilson
Neah Bay, Washington

TUESDAY • MARCH 6

Matthew 26:59-60

Bearing God's Witness

“The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward.”

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was not hung on a tree as a result of false testimony, but by the will of God and the truth that Jesus is the Son of God. Nevertheless, bearing false witness brings incomprehensible damage.

In 1864 Governor John Evans of the Colorado Territory persuaded Washington officials to raise the 3rd Colorado Regiment under the pretense that it was needed for protection from hostile Indians in his territory. On November 29, 1864 Colonel John M. Chivington of the 3rd Colorado Cavalry and a force of over 700 men attacked a peace-seeking village of Cheyenne and Arapahoe on the banks of Sand Creek, killing between 150-200 old men, women, children, and infants. This massacre was partly the result of one man's pretense or false witness of the facts.

As we consider the devastation a false witness can bring it is imperative that we this day bear a true witness. In our current age there are still many false witnesses of our Lord Jesus. Some say, “he is a prophet; nothing but a man.” Some say, “Jesus hates sinners” and fail to forgive. Many Christians, and non-Christians alike, lead people astray by their false witness of our loving God.

Our privilege today is to bear true witness of the grace of God in His Son Jesus Christ by all that we say and do. Through living the Gospel by example – humbly seeking forgiveness for wrongs done to one another and forgiving each other's sins – we have the opportunity to bring new life to others.

Dear God, make us true witnesses of Jesus Christ in attitude, speech, and deeds. When we fail in our witness, turn our hearts to Him for forgiveness and new life. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.

Rev. Park Timber
Lame Deer, Montana

WEDNESDAY • MARCH 7

Philippians 4:14

Come By

...“it was good of you to share in my troubles”...

As we have spent time in the Native villages of Southeast Alaska, Stan and I have become accustomed to certain phrases our friends use in conversation. One that catches my ear is the expression, ‘to come by.’ This often describes what a friend does, when trying to support another friend. If someone is hurting, or loses a family member to an accident or illness, you would want to ‘come by them.’ You would want to spend time with that friend, hold their hand, pray with them, listen, stick around, run errands, cook food, or do whatever is necessary to support them. I love this phrase. I love the images that it paints in my mind. It’s helpful and it’s instructive.

I think Jesus was good at ‘coming by’ folk. He went to weddings. He ate with people. He paid attention to folk lying by pools. At the request of grieving parents, He went to a house to heal a little girl. Although His ministry was on the move, He would stop to let others in along the way, even when the disciples considered these people interruptions. He considered those in need along His path, an integral part of His ministry...to come by them, to give them hope and a healing touch.

As servants aboard the M/V CHRISTIAN, we have found that the best way to spread the hope and healing love of Jesus is also to walk alongside folk, notice them, ask them what they need, listen to their pain or worries, and hear how Jesus’ advocate, the Holy Spirit, is already at work in that person’s life. Then we ask that Spirit to help us be Jesus’ hands and feet, to carry out His particular ministry of presence to that person.

So many people in this world suffer from loneliness. They feel isolated, and wonder if anyone cares. Our Native brothers and sisters express Jesus’ solution beautifully, just come by them. It’s something we can all do.

Dear Lord, Give us eyes and ears to see and hear the pain of others, and notice those who are suffering and alone. Give us courage to come by them, walk alongside them, and to bring your healing presence through the power of your Holy Spirit. Through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sharon Geldaker RN
1st Mate, M/V CHRISTIAN
SE Alaska

Luke 23:46

Jesus, The Focus of All of History

“Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ When he had said this, he breathed his last.”

I recently read a fairly new book on the Cuban missile crisis. If you were born after the 1950’s you probably are unfamiliar with the near tragic events that came within a hairbreadth of causing nuclear war. Taking such an awful eventuality a step further; had the combined atomic arsenals of the U.S. and the Soviet Union been unleashed against one another, there is little likelihood that civilization as we know it would be around.

I remember the unfolding crisis as if it just happened. I was a student in a high school made up largely of kids from several large military bases nearby. The sense that war was imminent left everyone feeling afraid. None of us knew if there would be a tomorrow. Especially as we watched the nightly news showing American warships in a cat and mouse dance with Soviet warships. At one critical point, an American plane was shot down over Cuba. Another U.S. plane strayed 300 miles into Siberia, barely escaping pursuing Russian interceptors.

Fortunately, the Soviet Union and the leaders of our country came to an agreement that ended the crisis. The Soviets removed their missiles and nuclear warheads from Cuba and the U.S. agreed to dismantle nuclear tipped missiles from Turkey. Reading how close we came to destroying ourselves has stayed with me throughout the many years since. The unleashing of the horrific power of the atom against civilian and military targets is frightening even now to consider. It certainly would have led to the deaths of millions and the likely poisoning of the atmosphere for decades.

So what prevented this from happening? Was it the brilliance of the country’s leadership? Was it the wise counsel of military leaders? Some brilliant adviser? Actually, when you look closely at the realities of the events of the times it was none of these. Those closest to the situation concluded it was, “just plain luck” that we didn’t destroy the world. Actually, those of us who are believers know it was because of Jesus, the focal point of all of history and the One who sustains life. All of history revolves around Him and His purposes in the world. Nothing in life or death can intervene with His creative and sustaining power. Not even humankind’s dangerous reliance on his own technologies and wisdom.

Having suffered on the cross for our sins and then ascended to His rightful place on the throne of God means that all things past, present and future are under His dominion and control. In the midst of challenging times, Jesus is calling on the elect—men, women and children who from all eternity were chosen by God the Father to place our trust in Him. Nothing will prevent Him from accomplishing all that He has intended. History is His to determine in accord with His divine purposes and glory. In the meanwhile we will surely see more chaos and uncertainty in the world. However, because of what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross, we can have confidence and hope.

Heavenly Father, thank you for electing us to salvation. Grant that we may honor you and live in the confident assurance of our salvation through Jesus Christ. In His Name we pray. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Don Johnson
Executive Director

FRIDAY • MARCH 9

1 Peter 4:8

Ricky and the Iris

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”

One spring day years ago, my oldest son Rick, then five years old, was playing with “Bobby” who lived next door. They played hard, running back and forth from our yard to his in their make-believe adventures.

At one point, something caught their attention just a few feet from our gate. Neither Bobby’s mother nor I noticed, that is, until I heard her scream.

I rushed to the door. Ricky was running toward me when I noticed he came to a halt. By then I was outside and noticed Bobby was heading toward his back porch where his mother stood. I looked at Ricky who held a beautiful purple iris in his hands. I saw that Bobby held one in his hands too. Both boys were OK, but they stood frozen as condemnation and guilt pierced their hearts.

“You take that flower back where you got it!” yelled Bobby’s mother. “Shame on you for stealing! Where’d you get that? You took it from the neighbor’s yard, didn’t you? Take it right back!”

Immediately, I could see fear and disappointment come over the boys. It was obvious they meant only to demonstrate their love for their mothers. Yes, I agree that the flowers weren’t theirs, but I grieved for them nonetheless.

Ricky still hadn’t moved. He looked at Bobby’s mother. He glanced at his iris. He looked at me. I knelt beside him and asked, “Ricky, did you pick this flower for me from across the alley?” Reluctantly, he nodded. I took the iris from him. I could tell he was relieved, not so much that the flower was a gift anymore but because my taking it relieved him of his guilt.

These little ones demonstrate for us a profound truth about God’s Law. It is meant to show us what sin is and convict us of our wrongdoing. It also prepares our hearts for the sweet Gospel message that our beloved Savior bore our sins on the cross so we are relieved of our burden of guilt, forgiven and made right with God.

Dear Jesus, thank you for loving us so much that by your death on the cross, you took our sin and guilt and clothed us instead with your robe of righteousness. May we live out our days in gratitude for what you have done! In your name we pray. Amen.

Karen Higgins
Barnhart, Missouri

SATURDAY • MARCH 10

John 1:9-10

The True Light

“There was the true Light, which coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world did not know Him.” (NASB)

There is a saying “The eyes are a window to the soul.” Two years ago a little native lady in LaPush, directed by her doctor, started coming to me for massage therapy. She had recently been in the hospital for pancreatitis and diabetes. She said she had “just come off a ten-year drunk.” Her speech was slurred and rambling. She was not sure about being touched and she informed me she had a “mean left hook.” When she looked at me, I wasn’t sure she actually saw me. Everything about her seemed dark.

Slowly, after many sessions, she started telling me about her life. She always felt that her mother didn’t love her because of the dark spots that appeared on her face when she was young. She was sent to her grandmother to live part of the time. Her father taught her to box and her brothers loved to watch her fight. She and her husband started drinking which resulted in their divorce and the estrangement of her children. Now she knew she had to stop drinking or die. Painfully she started dealing with reality and all the destruction in her life.

I hadn’t seen her for several months when one day she came into the office smiling and told me she had made an appointment to see me. I was so taken back with her appearance, I had to stop and ask her about the things that were happening in her life. Looking right at me she said “I was in the hospital and they were going to take my toe off and I said to them, ‘I came into the world with ten toes and I’ll go out with ten toes.’ And then I started to pray like crazy.” She took off her sock and proudly showed me her healed toe. I told her, “You know this doesn’t usually happen., You know this is a miracle, right?” With a light in her eyes I had never seen before, she nodded her head and quietly whispered, “I KNOW!”

During our last session she talked about how her relationship with her children was improving. She talked about her responsibilities now as an elder in her tribe. As she drifted off to sleep on my table, I prayed that God would continue to do the good work He had started. I knew that I was witnessing another miracle. It was the light the Holy Spirit was bringing into her life. Jesus, the Light of the world, who died and rose again to set us free from sin, our flesh and the devil. Jesus who sits at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us. Jesus, who will come again in glory, that we might live with Him forever in heavenly places.

Heavenly Father, You have sent us your Son, the true Light, to take away the darkness of the world and the darkness of our hearts. Open our eyes so that we are able to see and know the wonderful things you are doing in our midst. Open our eyes so we can see Jesus walking among us even today. In His name we pray. Amen.

Rosemary Sternbeck
Olympic Peninsula

SUNDAY • MARCH 11

1 John 3:1 (ESV)

Children of God

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”

Recently Rosemary and I attended a gathering of local native poets. They shared issues close to their hearts. Some of them were light-hearted and funny. Most of them had an undercurrent of anger, pain and suffering in their messages of personal journey. Many of the pieces had to do with abuses from parents, others from a spouse, and some from both. A young woman shared one that particularly touched my heart.

She first of all gave this stat: “For various reasons, it will take a woman an average of seven tries to leave her abuser before she finally makes the break.” Then she shared how over the twenty years she was married, it took her ten times of leaving to finally end the nightmare relationship with her husband. Some of the details were quite graphic. She was very honest about her use of alcohol to numb the pain and her struggle to trust new relationships. There were times when feelings boiled close to the surface as she continued her reading. She also told us her father refused to speak to her for years during these trying times because she had chosen to marry this man. Then, suddenly, she broke down in tears. The with-held love of her father seemed to be as big a hurt as that of her abusive husband.

The words from confession and absolution in the Divine Service came to me: “...forgive me for those things I’ve done and those things I’ve left undone.” The father did not withhold from us His love. He loved us unconditionally in the gift of His Son. Jesus loved us so much He died for the sins of the world. He died for the abused and the abuser. He died for the daughter and estranged father. He died for the abused and neglected child and the alcoholic parent. He died to bring us back into relationship with the Father as His dear children. And because the grave could not hold Him, “we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.” (1 John 3:2)

Please join me in prayer that we “be about my Father’s business” in telling others of God’s love for them. There are so many that are struggling to survive each day when Jesus wants to give them abundant life.

Father, thank you for your Son, Jesus. He has paid the price for both our sins of commission and omission. We are therefore able to call ourselves your children. Help us in our vocation to reach out to others to share the wonderful story of your love. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Rev. David Sternbeck
Olympic Peninsula

MONDAY • MARCH 12

Romans 5:1-2

Amazing Grace

“We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.”

I was honored when Patsy called and asked if I would play guitar and sing a few songs with her at her niece’s memorial dinner. Patsy had been baptized a couple years ago and had mentioned several times her desire to sing the praises of Jesus to others. The occasion was a sad one—Patsy’s 27 year-old niece had died one year ago from a drug overdose. Now the extended family was meeting to remember their loved one who had died too young. But we both agreed that singing some Gospel songs together would be a good gift to the family at this gathering.

When I arrived, most of the people had already gotten their food and Patsy and I got up to sing while they ate. *I Saw The Light, How Great Thou Art, and Amazing Grace...* we did our best to sing over the din of children playing and scurrying around as they ate. When we finished *Amazing Grace*, a drum beat immediately started up. Several of Patsy’s relatives have a drum group and, while we sang, they had taken their seats around the drum. When we finished our last song, they began the drum-beat and chanted their own version of *Amazing Grace*. Their high voices called out: I ay, aye...I ay, aye...to the tune of the last line—“I once was lost but now am found.” I thought how many different ways there are to sing the praise of God’s amazing grace.

Though there are many ways to express the praise of God’s grace, there’s only one way to receive it—as a gift. Grace is “undeserved love” and none of us could ever be worthy of God’s love and forgiveness to us in Christ. But while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. We can never earn it or deserve it. We can only praise Him for this indescribable gift, and offer our lives as living sacrifices to Him who sacrificed His life for us, that we might step into the grace in which we now stand.

Dear Father, thank you for showing your amazing grace to us by sending Jesus to be our suffering Savior. Help us live our lives for your praise and in your service. Through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Rev. Mark Peske
Bemidji, Minnesota

TUESDAY • MARCH 13

1 John 1:9

Justified and Made Whole

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Joe, (not his real name), a young Native American man, sat across the table from me, glancing nervously about the room as he reached for a cup of coffee. We had not met before but as a new Christian, he wanted to meet me because he had heard our ministry took broken people and helped to equip them for God’s service. For a moment we just looked past each other before he finally said, “You know, I want to be real honest with you. I am a new Christian but my past life is not pretty.” He then proceeded to share a story of broken marriage, alienation from his children and alcoholism and drugs and time spent in jail. It was a story told too often in the world of Native American ministry. Too frequently, we find stories of people whose childhood is strewn with broken family systems, abuse, alienation and broken dreams. Life is not pretty when it is lived under such circumstances.

His story was so fractured by all of the losses he had endured from childhood forward, I felt compelled to ask him how he had become a believer in Jesus. He related that while he was in a jail cell, his cellmate used to witness to him. At the time, he was not open to the Christian faith but his cellmate’s testimony did cause him to begin a search to discover what religion best suited him. He knew once he got out of jail his life had to change or he might not live long.

After he had been released from jail, in what was clearly a miracle from God, the Holy Spirit led this young man to understand salvation in Jesus Christ and opened his heart to Christianity. The transformation was amazing. He immediately became immersed in studying God’s Word; he gave up alcohol and drugs. He determined to try and finish his high school degree. He was even wondering if somehow our ministry would be able to help him become part of a ministry to people who like him seemed beyond God’s reach. I of course offered we would do all that we could. Someone like him would likely have a real impact on the lives of people similarly caught in tragic circumstances.

My experience with this native man was a reminder to me how, what Jesus did on the cross, made it possible for our sins, no matter how bad, to be forgiven. *Justified* is the word Scripture uses to declare this blessed transaction. *Faith* is the means to apprehend this gracious gift of forgiveness. Then there is this promise: “Therefore since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1) What wonderful news!

Dear God, keep us mindful always that the willingness of your Son Jesus to go to the cross on our behalf is a reflection of your love. And that what He accomplished on the cross covers over all of our sins. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Don Johnson
Executive Director

Colossians 2:13-15

The Savior, Our Victor

“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.” (Vs 13-14)

Why does everyone need Jesus? Because Jesus is the One, the only One who can rescue us from sin, eternal death in hell and the coming wrath of God.

Jesus came on a mission of love and rescue; He came to be the Christ, the agent of God’s salvation. God’s good and gracious plan is that He wants people everywhere to come home and know Him as Father. Accordingly, God sent His Son to be the Savior for all. All, not just a few. All, not some special, select groups. If you are saved, it is because the Holy Spirit led you to the foot of the cross to see Jesus’ sacrifice for you, and the spirit prompted you to trust Him.

When our eldest son was a little boy, he was fascinated with a teardrop vase. His mother cautioned him not to touch it because it was so fragile. He did and it shattered. Tearfully he told his mother, “But, Momma, I only dropped it once.”

God’s law sees through and past our excuses and rationalizations. God’s law is like an X-ray or CATscan. It exposes stuff we’d like to keep hidden. It shows what is really going on under the surface. A teacher was helping a girl in her classroom with math problems. She noticed the pencil her student used. The pencil had the 10 Commandments printed on it, and the teacher admired it. The girl responded: “I really like it too. That’s why I stole it from my brother.”

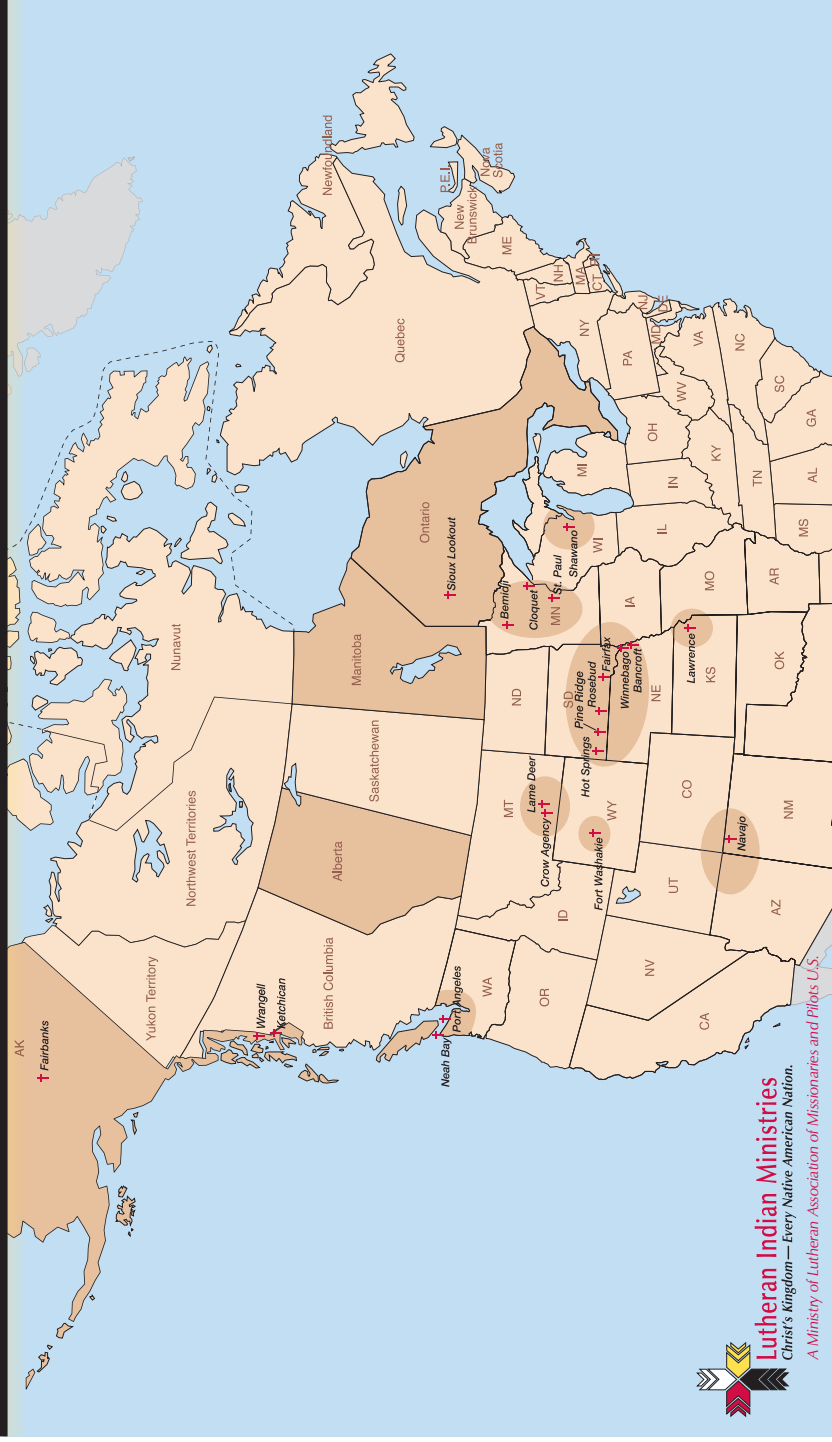
Thank God that Jesus your Savior came as a real man but also fully God. He came as true man. A descendant of David, a boy who grew through adolescence to adult manhood. As a real man, He kept God’s law fully for us. Jesus as real man was like the pinch-hitter in baseball who hits a walk-off homerun and wins the game for the whole team, us and the rest of humankind.

Thank God that Jesus your Savior was also true God. He is our conqueror who took on sin, death and hell and God’s wrath. The death of God’s Son on the cross provided adequate payment for the sins of all. His glorious resurrection gave a smashing victory over death and the devil. Thank God!

We give you thanks, Father God, for your Son, Jesus, for His victory over death and sin on our behalf. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Rev. Paul Biegner
Member, Board of Directors
Brainerd, Minnesota

Lutheran Indian Ministries



Lutheran Indian Ministries

Christ's Kingdom — Every Native American Nation.

A Ministry of Lutheran Association of Missionaries and Pilots U.S.



Rev. Stan Berntson & Sharon Geldaker
MV CHRISTIAN
Southeast, Alaska



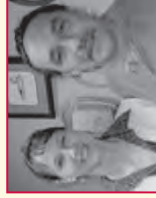
Will & Patricia Main
Sox/Cree
Haskell LIGHT Ministry
Lawrence, Kansas



Cathy & Tom Benzler
Cherokee/Ioway
Port Angeles, Washington



Rick & Linda Martin
Cree
Sioux Lookout, Ontario



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Rosebud
Reservation,
Rosebud,
South Dakota

THURSDAY • MARCH 15

John 11:25-26

Stickers

To Adam He [God] said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you...”

We live in a part of the country that has sandburs. They are nasty little stickers that are in the yard, at the ball fields, and just about everywhere. My youngest son just started walking and he seems to find them more than anyone. When he gets a sticker, he will either stop and cry or he will sit down and try to get it out—usually in a loud voice. After all they hurt. Our life is filled with stickers. From Genesis 3:14-19, we know that ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, the earth has been under the curse and we are afflicted with stickers. Some are small and troublesome like the sandburs. Some are worse like the “goat-heads”, a sticker we also have that will puncture bike tires. Sometimes those stickers are more like the “thorn in the flesh” that St. Paul experienced. Sometimes it is the sticker of sickness—sometimes the sticker of trouble at work or at home. Our life is filled with stickers. Sometimes we try to pull them out—sometimes we just sit and cry because we can’t. Stickers are bad—just as sin is bad. When St. Paul complained about his stickers—three times mind you—the Lord gave him this answer: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor. 12:9) The Lord used the sticker in Paul’s life to keep him humbly depending on the Lord’s grace. He does the same for us. When we find ourselves in the middle of a sticker patch, it is time to remember the grace of God. Jesus came and in Him we have that hope of the forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. That is a life without stickers. God’s grace is sufficient. Remember that the next time you pull a sticker from your flesh.

Heavenly Father, because of our sin we have stickers. Lead us to trust in your grace, given to us in our Lord Jesus. Keep us firm in that faith until we enter heaven with you where there are no more stickers. Amen.

Rev. Andrew Utecht
Rosebud Sioux Reservation
Rosebud, South Dakota

FRIDAY • MARCH 16

Luke 9:51

Relentless Resolve

“As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.”

In this text God would have us see that resolve or determination is a good thing. If we are determined to do something we can accomplish a great deal.

In 1877 my people, the Northern Cheyenne, were moved onto the Cheyenne-Arapahoe reservation in present day Oklahoma. After a year of starvation and disease, Little Wolf and Dull Knife led a band of 297 Cheyenne to return to their homeland on the Northern Plains. Dull Knife and about 150 Cheyenne were caught in Nebraska and taken to Ft. Robinson on October 25, 1878. When it became evident that the Cheyenne were going to be returned to the south, Dull Knife and his group escaped from Ft. Robinson on January 9, 1878 at 9:45 p.m. Only six out of Dull Knife’s 150 and Little Wolf’s band of about 134 made it north. Dull Knife and Little Wolf are remembered as two heroes who led our people home to our present day reservation in Montana.

Today God would have us recognize the resolve of those who have gone before us and the things they have accomplished. In this life, our resolve to follow Christ is challenged in many ways. We are challenged by Satan, by temptations, by our past, by sickness and death. God calls us today to look to the one who, in His resolve, did not give up in the garden of Gethsemane but instead went to the cross to secure for us a home with Him in heaven. So when we are set back by sin and those things that would keep us from our goal, we remember Christ’s resolve and His cross that we might receive forgiveness and new life. This day may we receive Christ’s forgiveness and resolutely pick up our crosses and follow Him.

Dear Father God, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, to be our Savior and for His relentless resolve, in spite of great pain and rejection, to go to the cross on our behalf. In His name and for His glory we pray. Amen.

Rev. Park Timber
Lame Deer, Montana

SATURDAY • MARCH 17

Mark 10:43-45

Be as a Frog

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first, must be slave of all. The Son of Man didn’t come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom to many.”

I love to hear about which moiety and clan folks in the SE Alaskan Native villages come from. These are more than classifications within their tribes, they explain a large part of their identity, and character. One woman recently identified herself as a member of the Frog clan. I told her I had heard that members of the Frog clan tended to be considered a kind of royalty in tribes, and often became chiefs and leaders. She looked at me quietly, and told me, “Yes, they often become leaders, but not in the way you might think. To be a Frog, you must be humble, and serve others in humility.”

What a wonderful description of what Jesus taught His disciples as well, when James and John sought greatness alongside Jesus. He instructs us in the Gospel of Mark that the human need for recognition or power is not what Christian leadership is about. You must be willing to be not only a servant, but a slave. An effective leader must serve others, even if it costs your very life.

Society today teaches us to take care of ourselves first, and care for others if it’s convenient. One should take on positions of power in order to get paid more, or to receive recognition. But these attitudes do not reflect humility, nor do they reflect a desire to serve.

If we pay attention to our identity as Christians first, and live by Christ’s example, we will not be drawn falsely into these unfruitful paths.

And although we can’t all claim to be from the Frog clan, we can fully rely on God to give us leadership opportunities to speak and care for those without a voice, serving in the spirit of humility.

Lord God, Help us to take on today, a humble spirit. When we are given opportunities to be leaders, empower us to serve with attitudes of humility, relying fully on your grace, attitude and power to do so. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Sharon Geldaker RN
First Mate, M/V CHRISTIAN
SE Alaska

SUNDAY • MARCH 18

Isaiah 35:1-2

Blooms

“The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for you.”

Blooms promise greater things to come. Blooms promise delicious apples. Flower blossoms promise fragrance, humming birds and honey bees. Isaiah saw early crocus bloom as a shout of spiritual joy.

Jesus Christ is the blossom of the Heavenly Father, promising new and eternal life for you and me. Native Americans taught later immigrants to read the signs of the Creator. American Indians know spring-time anticipation, appreciation and celebration that new life is bursting out all over.

The definition of “Easter” is thought to refer to an ancient spring-time celebration. This festival coincided with the Passover celebration of the early Hebrews. The word Easter became associated with the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Today we know this word means death to sin and life for us. As sure as blooms promise spring-time life, Easter’s celebrations assure us that we are given new life in Christ.

The miracle of new life in a parched land is a picture of the Body of Christ emerging that first Easter. He bloomed alive before the women at the grave and to the rest of the disciples in the Upper Room. Jesus “blooms” in our hearts and in our Easter services. The power of the quickening Holy Spirit is God’s breath in our parched and sin-dried souls. Native Americans teach an awe and wonder of these mighty acts of the Creator.

Great God of all life, show us the blossoming promise of the Resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. Hear our glad prayer for this gift of faith. Send your Spirit to lift our spirits in faith, hope and certainty. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Warren Schumacher, President Emeritus
Northwest District - LCMS
Member, Board of Directors

MONDAY • MARCH 19

Isaiah 60:3

“Me Jesus man now!”

“Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.”

After his conversion to Christianity in the late 1930's or early 40's, Douglas Billum, our Athabascan Indian ancestor, is reported to have said “With a beaming face, ‘Me Jesus man now – just like Vince Joy!’”^{*} Rev. Joy was a missionary who served and lived among Alaska Natives until his death in the 1960s.

What an honor to see here the love of Jesus in the hearts of our Native ancestors and to learn about the man who dedicated his life to sharing the Gospel with them. It brings to my mind verses in Scripture where we're told that Jesus, “Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame” (Heb. 12:2) so that “nations will come to Him, to the brightness of His dawn” (Is. 60:2).

These nations aren't necessarily unknown to us. They are also your Peoples and mine – some beginning with our own ancestors. Together, we have the privilege today to bear witness to Christ as we continue toward the “brightness of His dawn,” even for generations to come.

Beloved Savior, it is beautiful to see your Light shine at a particular point in time, whether in faces familiar to us or not. By your Holy Spirit, teach us to keep our eyes fixed on you so we, too, may rejoice in what you accomplished for us at the cross: making us a “Jesus man!” and granting us forgiveness and life eternal! In your name we pray. Amen.

Karen Higgins
Barnhart, Missouri

^{*}*Into the Copper River Valley*, edited by Faye E. Crandall, Faith Printing Company, Inc., 1994, p. 253.

TUESDAY • MARCH 20

Romans 15:13

Hope

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

We all go through trials and tribulations when our future doesn't look very bright and we have more bad days than good days. When we try to do things our own way, instead of putting our trust in God, it never seems to work. I have had some people tell me they believed that when they became Christians, life would become easier for them. When it didn't, they quit going to church and some went back to their old ways of living.

God never promised us an easy life when we came to faith. He did promise us that a Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would be given to us and that He would never leave us, through trials, tribulations, good times and bad. The law always condemns us and makes us feel unworthy, but the Gospel will save us and give us hope through Christ Jesus.

Years ago, I met a young man who told me the next day he was going to serve time on the county work farm for a traffic violation. I was surprised about how happy he was. He told me that it was just a matter of having a good attitude and he said that most of the guys going to serve time, would have a hard time because they were always looking at the negative side of life. He told me he always tried to look at life from a bright side and just live one day at a time. His words were “Every day is a new day.” In talking with him further, I learned that he had recently come to faith in Christ Jesus and knew he had been forgiven. He was happy because he knew Jesus paid the price for all of his sins on the cross. For us who believe in Him, knowing where our hope lies, “Every day **IS** a new day.”

Heavenly Father, we thank you always for the sacrifices you have made for us, in that we will have eternal hope. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Tom Benzler
Port Angeles, Washington

Ephesians 2:8-9

Salvation as a Free Gift

“For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. Not of works lest any man should boast.”

What Jesus did on the cross is so transformative. He brought salvation to mankind through the things He endured on the cross. The Greek word “soterion” or salvation conveys forgiveness, healing, restoration; the very things we so desperately need. Maybe more personal, it is what I need.

In my life and perhaps in yours as well, I have on occasion gotten away from God’s will for my life. It is a difficult place to be when that occurs. You feel out of relationship with God and that affects all of your other relationships. But what is so wonderful is that God is always there to encourage us to return to Him and then, once we confess what we have done in disobedience to Him, He freely offers to forgive our sins. In the words of 1 John 1:9, “to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

The disciple Peter knew this aspect of God’s grace better than most. Remember his pledge never to turn his back on Jesus. And then when faced with direct questioning by religious authorities who had arrested Jesus, he denied Jesus three times by saying, “I do not know the man.” When Peter realized the depth of his betrayal of his friend, he was heart-sick. He did not think he could ever have done such a thing to the One, Jesus, who had loved him so. But human nature is so deceptive. We so easily slip into complacency and places of betrayal of God’s purposes for our lives. But the good news is that God is so willing to receive us back and to restore us to full fellowship. Not because we are good and deserve His love and forgiveness but because of who He is and His love. Hence the words of Paul, salvation and restoration, “is the gift of God. Not of works lest any man should boast.”

Here is great comfort and assurance; to know that our Father’s heart is for us to possess the inheritance He has for us. May we live in the assurance of His love for us and may His gracious gift of forgiveness and restoration motivate all of our behaviors with friends and family and all of our other relationships.

Dear Father God, grant us a forgiving heart and a humble spirit that we might walk in your grace and so witness to the world around us of your love for all. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Patricia Main
Haskell LIGHT
Lawrence, Kansas

John 14:1

When Life Takes a Turn

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me.”

Years ago, my youngest son and I went shopping for a pet fish. In the process, we browsed tanks filled with all kinds of them. Since Jimmy wanted *the* perfect fish, we looked – *and* we looked. Finally, one caught his attention more than the others. He was sure that’s the one he wanted. At that point, we had to wait several more minutes for a clerk to help. Jimmy kept his eye on the prize fish all the while, even announcing, “I’m going to name him Lucky!”

The clerk finally arrived. She knew the routine and grabbed a plastic bag, filled it with water from the fish tank and placed it in a nearby sink. Next, she grabbed a net and asked Jimmy, “Which one do you want?”

“That one,” he said, pointing.

After several attempts, she caught Lucky in the net. Jimmy watched with anticipation. Then, the unthinkable happened. As she tipped the net over the bag of water, the fish plopped into the sink instead and slid down the drain! Poor little Lucky was gone!

No, we didn’t have the heart to select another one, but, yes, Jimmy *would* get a pair of fish later on.

There are many reasons we can feel disheartened over the way life takes a turn. Relationships fail. Illness takes its toll. Loved ones die. Money problems worsen. Hunger pangs hurt and frighten. Harsh words and tones wreak havoc. Really hard things really do hurt. And Jesus knows this better than anyone.

The Bible says that when Jesus prayed the night before He was hanged, His sweat was like great drops of blood that fell to the ground (Luke 23:44). He knew He would be betrayed, wrongly accused, beaten, scoffed at and tormented – all this before He died for us. Why, though, would Jesus go through such agony? In the same prayer the night before He was hanged, He also prayed for us, saying, “Father, I want those you have given Me to be with Me where I am, and to see My glory...” (John 17:24).

It’s as simple and as profound as that.

Our Father in heaven, by your grace, may those of us who can help others in need do so in love and concern for them. And when life forces us to look toward heaven in hope for things to come, remind us of the proclamation Jesus will make in heaven when He says, “Here I am, and the children God has given Me” (Heb. 2:13). In His name we pray. Amen.

Karen Higgins
Barnhart, Missouri

Romans 5:1

You Don't Belong Here

“Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

I have become acquainted with a Native American who in his earlier life had gotten into trouble with the law. He ended up being incarcerated for a time. He explained that in some ways to become a bit of a rebel, to end up drinking and then be put in jail was like a rite of passage for many young Native men from his community.

His behaviors that led to his being sent to jail were the norm, the expectation of many his age. It reminded me that very often in our fallen human state, depending on our circumstances such as family and community life, we so easily believe things about ourselves that are not true. I have earned a doctorate during the course of my life and you might think I really had it together. But the truth is, for much of my life I struggled with self-confidence and the belief that I was a little less than average, especially as a student. But then God came into my life and began changing the lies I was telling myself and to teach me new ways of understanding His purposes for my life. Over time, He dealt with my lack of self-esteem and taught me I was not only worth something in His eyes but that, if I submitted to Him, He could take and develop my talents so that I could serve Him.

The Native man I talked with had a similar story. He related how Jesus came into his life while in jail and how that changed his demeanor into positive hope and a joyful confidence. His changed life showed on his face. One day while cheerfully doing his chores in the jail, a guard noticed his happy, peaceful confidence and said, “What are you doing here (jail) You don’t belong here.” It was the first time this Native man realized that in Jesus we really do not need to be enslaved by sin or encumbered with beliefs about our own failed selves. He soon completed his jail time and continued to follow Jesus once he got out. He eventually started teaching others caught in bad behaviors to turn their lives around. In Jesus they could find a better way than to believe the lies they were telling themselves.

When Jesus hung on the cross at Calvary, He did not belong there either. But for very different reasons. He was the perfect Son of God, the Lamb of God who had been willingly sacrificed for us to take away the sins of the world. And by His willingness to give Himself for us by taking our place, He enabled us to experience forgiveness and renewal. By His wounds we are healed and empowered by His Holy Spirit to be something different than what we thought. He enables us to be His forgiven children through grace. “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1)

Gracious God, thank you for your mercy in loving us through your Son Jesus’ sacrifice for us. May we walk in the freedom that comes from walking in obedience to Him. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Don Johnson
Executive Director

SATURDAY • MARCH 24

Hebrews 9:27

Waiting on God

“And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ having been offered once to bear the sins of many will appear a second time...”

Life was coming to an end for her husband, when she said, “We did everything we could. They did everything they could. Now we wait.” Waiting is often hard to do, whether waiting for something good to occur or for something difficult to be over. Trusting in the Gospel, the power of God for our salvation, we can do the waiting. When there isn’t anything else to hang on to, having the Gospel of forgiveness, life and salvation through Jesus Christ, we can do the waiting.

There are lots of references to waiting in the Scriptures. Waiting on the Lord from day to day...waiting on the Lord for redemption and relief...waiting on the Lord for comfort and for peace...waiting on the Lord for forgiveness and salvation. Not only the **time** element of waiting, but also the element of **trust** is part of the waiting. “**Wait** on the Lord, be of good courage, and he **will** strengthen your heart.” (Ps 27:14) NKJV

And so we wait during many circumstances and situations trusting in the power of God for our salvation.

A verse from Hebrews about waiting (Heb. 9:27) “And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many (and we might reference Calvary here remembering the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin), so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin (because He already took care of sin on Calvary) BUT to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him.” Eagerly waiting for Him. Eager anticipation. Eager expectation. The Gospel sets the scene in time securing eternity for all who believe in Jesus Christ.

All of us have had experiences of eager anticipation waiting for guests, for gifts, for gatherings, for celebrations, for beginnings, for endings. Eagerly anticipating, eagerly looking forward with lots of excitement and joy.....On this side of eternity, Christ’s people are eagerly awaiting His arrival, and on the other side of eternity, Christ is eagerly awaiting the time to take His people home to heaven.

Because God has readied us through the Gospel, the power of God unto salvation, despite the circumstances surrounding us in life, the coming death of a loved one, or our own, we wait with peace in our hearts.

Dear Father God, we eagerly anticipate the coming of your Son, Jesus, when He will take us home to eternity. Thank you for sending Him to be our Savior and Lord. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Rev. Layton L. Lemke (Ret.)
Former Board Member & Volunteer
Norwood Young America, Minnesota

SUNDAY • MARCH 25

Luke 4:18-19 (ESV)

Proclaiming the Good News

“He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

He was dirty, smelling of alcohol and something worse. He sat in the front of our small gathering and babbled while Pastor Lovejoy tried to speak. Although we had set this service aside for those that might come in off the street, it was clear no one knew quite what to do about him. I sat beside him for a few minutes trying to calm him. Finally I decided to ask him to step outside of the room.

This is part of his story. He was homeless. He had broken the rules at the homeless shelter and had been asked to leave. Part of the smell was coming from a leaking colostomy bag that he could not afford to change. He first said he was ready to go to treatment for his alcohol addiction but later admitted he would rather have some money to catch the bus out of town. (He was scheduled to appear in court the following Monday for stealing the bottle of booze.)

This had not always been his life. He talked about a successful business he had owned. He spoke of his children that he loved very much, and he hoped they still loved him. He went back and forth between confessing his faith in Jesus and doubting that God could still care for him.

Sin always looks worse when we see it in someone else. We tend to shrink away in fear and distain at the smell and sight of it when it is so obvious. We would rather cover it up with a smile or perhaps a nice house, or a little perfume. The Pharisees were like that too. They didn’t realize their sin was just as repugnant as those of the woman caught in adultery.

Apart from Christ’s saving blood, we are all captives of sin and the devil. All sin is ugly. Except for the grace of God, we are all doomed in our trespasses be they “large or small,” hidden or blatant. It is only when we are fully aware of our own desperate circumstances that we are able to love the “untouchables” in this world.

Father, thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus. Give us wisdom and the leading of your Holy Spirit to help us know how to minister to others who are still struggling in bondage. Place in our hearts your love for the lost and help us walk in humility all our days. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Rev. David Sternbeck
Olympic Peninsula

Philippians 4:8-9

The Alaska Native Brotherhood and the Alaska Native Sisterhood

“Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure; whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

The Alaska Native Brotherhood along with the Alaska Native Sisterhood began in 1912. They began in prayer, as a Christian body, to address their situations in Alaska where things for them were not true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, or praiseworthy. Racism in Alaska ran deep. In some Southeast towns, some shop windows would advertise “NO DOGS OR NATIVES.”

Much has changed for Natives in Alaska in the past 99 years, resulting in truth and rightness. But it has been with hard fought battles with the powers of all levels of government, and the citizenry of the dominant culture from an occupying nation. However, there is a beauty in the way the ANB/ANS wage war for what is right.

One of the main rules of engagement of the ANB/ANS when fighting for what is right, is to always respect and listen to their opponents. Because their foundation is the Lord, to not respect their opponents would not be true and noble and right. It is a difficult thing to do when, for example, they were fighting for citizenship, the right to run for public office, and the right to vote. In many ways, they were trying to help the dominant culture see that The People, were really people. Yes, racism ran very deep...and it still raises its ugly head.

As the ANB/ANS has fought for truth and justice for Natives in Alaska, they have blessed the dominant culture by helping people see God’s truth: He sees no partiality in His people. We are all His children.

Sharon and I were welcomed into ANB/ANS Camp 11 from Kasaan. We are probably the smallest chapter in Southeast. But we hope to think together and work together in Christ for those things that are right and pure and lovely.

Gracious God, as we move across cultural lines in our lives, help us to see what is right, and true. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Rev. Stan Berntson, Skipper
M/V CHRISTIAN
SE Alaska

Isaiah 53:5

Healing of the Mind

“...and by his wounds we are healed.”

“I had the most amazing night last night!” reported Steve when I visited him at the halfway house. “Some of the staff here at the house told me yesterday that I might have to go back into my past experiences if I wanted to get things fixed up inside. So last night in my bedroom, I pulled an empty chair up next to me and invited Jesus to sit with me for a while. I told Him what the staff said, but also told Him I didn’t think I had any bad memories that still affected me, so if there was any stuff there, He’d need to show me.

Bam! It was like a movie started in my mind. I remembered a time when I was fourteen and someone in my family tried to commit suicide. For the next two or three hours, I went from one memory to the next—things I hadn’t thought about in years! “Often, when I remembered something, it was like, ‘Oh Jesus, I don’t want to go there!’ But He would reassure me and talk me through it. By the time Jesus was finished walking me through the memories, what had first looked like a monster to me, felt like a little kitten!”

As I sat on the retaining wall outside the house with Steve, we discussed how many other people are living as prisoners of their past. Steve continued, “I realized when Jesus showed me those scenes from my past, that those experiences had hard-wired me to respond to life the way I did—to not trust people, to think love and kindness were weird, to respond to anything that made me uncomfortable with violence. And most of the (Native) brothers are probably stuck right there. They’ve all been through stuff like I was, and now when they hear about God or Jesus and love, they can’t quite grab hold of it. And they don’t even know why!”

I nodded in agreement, “They may have heard about Jesus dying on the cross, but they don’t realize that His death meant not only that we can be forgiven of our sins, but that we can be healed from the wounds in our past—that He can set us free from all that!”

Steve leaned in toward me a little and looked me directly in the eyes, “We gotta let everybody know this!”

Lord Jesus, thank you that by your wounds, our wounds are healed. Fill every part of our lives – past, present, and future. And help us bring others to you for healing. Amen.

Rev. Mark Peske
Bemidji, Minnesota

WEDNESDAY • MARCH 28

John 16:33

Real Peace in Christ

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

This summer our daughter, son-in-law and two of our grandsons moved from Washington to Texas because the economy forced our son-in-law from his job and he was unable to find work here. When they left, it was one of the saddest and hardest days I had to experience. Our kids that we got to see all the time were now clear across the country. We were very close to our grandsons because we took care of them a lot while our daughter was working. Now, they were 2000 miles away, and the regular visits with them would become once a year, at best.

Through times of hard changes in our lives, I often think about how lonely and isolated I would be if I didn't have Jesus to turn to. He's also with me, directing my path, giving comfort and strength to move forward in those times. Some people have the idea that being a Christian means that we shouldn't have to suffer with painful trials, sickness or heartache. Some even have the idea that if they do have to deal with hardship, that they must be doing something wrong or that God is mad at them for some reason. Some even question His existence altogether.

Being a Christian does not exempt us from pain, sickness or suffering in life. Quite the contrary in fact! When we look at Scripture, no one followed Jesus without persecution. Take a look at Peter, one of Jesus' disciples. He vowed to stay by Jesus' side even when Jesus had told Peter that he would deny him three times on the night Christ was arrested. But, Peter was adamant that he would not, stating he would die with Christ if need be. But, we know that Peter did deny Christ that night. Why? Peter was scared and that strong emotion of fear overtook him. Did Peter want to deny Christ? No, I'm sure that it was something that just happened, as Jesus said it would. Christ forgave Peter and Peter became one of the great leaders of the early church. Was life easy for him? I don't think so. He was arrested, persecuted, and died a martyr's death, but he never denied Christ again.

We all will experience the loss of loved ones, we will experience sickness, sadness, betrayal, isolation and periods of unrest during our lifetime. But we will also experience times of gladness, happiness, joy, love and peace. That peace that passes all understanding is found only in Christ and what He did for each of us on that cross.

Heavenly Father, forgive me when hard times come and I don't put my trust in you completely. You know what I need and what I don't. Thank you for the gift of salvation you have given me, because that is all that any of us need. In Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Cathy Benzler
Port Angeles, Washington

THURSDAY • MARCH 29

Matthew 18:21, 22, 35 (NRSV)

Forgiving from the Heart

“Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. . . . So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

I have been ministering to a Winnebago man for years as he struggles with physical, emotional, mental and spiritual challenges brought on by diabetes. Bob is dealing with numerous foot infections, dialysis three times a week, the loss of his eye sight, and recently a stroke. He had grown up knowing Jesus.

One Sunday I went to visit Bob in the hospital. The nurse warned me that Bob had an upset stomach. I told him that I would not stay long. I settled in a chair across from Bob and he began to open up. He shared how his doctor from Egypt understood him. They both had been discriminated against. The Dr. spoke of how America always needed an enemy, someone to blame and attack. First it was the Native American or the American Indian; then blacks; now the Mexicans. Over the years they also attacked the Japanese and today it is the terrorists. Bob agreed with the doctor that America is no different and has no right to murder their so-called enemies.

While Bob spewed out these words of anger, I listened. The short visit turned into an hour. What should I say? Should I interrupt? Should I challenge or attempt to defend? Bob continued with a rant on how Christians were ignorant and arrogant as they condemned his people and their worship practices.

My thoughts included how much time and effort I had invested in Bob telling Him about Jesus. Now they appeared to go up in smoke. I did not mention that Bob’s doctor was a Muslim. What should I say?

I began with a point that Bob had made about God knowing all things. This led me to say that God knows each and every person’s sin. We all stand condemned before God. However, the God of the Bible is a God of love and forgiveness. His mercy extends to each and every one of us. No where in the Koran will you find a God of love. My message to Bob is one of forgiveness. It also calls us to forgive others who have sinned against us.

How are you doing on forgiving others from the heart?

Dear Heavenly Father, Creator God, thank you for your mercy that is new each and every day. In spite of you knowing us full well, you have had mercy on us through the sacrificial death of Jesus. Empower us to forgive others, as you have forgiven us—from the heart. Amen.

Pastor Ricky Jacob
Missionary to the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska
Winnebago, Nebraska

God's Workmanship

“Because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.”

Around 1916, a gold prospector went for supplies at a trading post in the Arctic. While there, he purchased a violin for his half-Inupiat Eskimo son. Initially, the boy was disappointed, but he taught himself to play the violin anyway and even came to appreciate it. Some years later, he also taught himself to make violins and became known as the Eskimo Violin Maker. He is our family's ancestor, Frank Hobson – my grandfather.

Not long ago, I found an old newspaper article about my grandfather. In it, he described the process of making his violins. He said that after a block of wood has time to cure, “it has a tone to it.” He added, “I rub my hands over it to see if it is alive. If it isn't, there's no point of going further with it.”*

Contrast this with God's redemptive work for us, a fallen human race. A violin maker discards wood that is dead, using only wood that is alive if he hopes to create a fine musical instrument. In today's verse, though, we learn that God “made us alive with Christ *even* when we were dead in transgressions.” He did this because of His great love for us, calling us “His workmanship” (Eph. 2:10).

By comparison, a violin maker builds his instrument so that it will bless those who hear it. God our Creator made us in Christ Jesus for this same purpose. He planned in advance to bless others through us by our good works (v. 10) ... not so we may be saved but because we are.

God, you could have discarded us while we were dead in our sins, but, as a Master Craftsman and by your mercy and grace, you cleansed us in Christ's shed blood, forgave us and made us anew in your Son, our Savior! By your Holy Spirit, direct our hearts and minds to know your will. Guide our steps according to your plan so we help others, all to your praise. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Karen Higgins
Barnhart, Missouri

**Boca Raton News*, Jan. 29, 1971.

Isaiah 43:2

The Name of the Game

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.”

Betrayal has been the name of the game ever since the events in the Garden of Eden. Leaders have betrayed followers. Followers have betrayed leaders. Governments have betrayed people. Countries have betrayed countries. And, like in the Garden wives have betrayed husbands and vice-versa. So it goes since sin entered the world.

As a result of that original sin, people have had it hard, not only to work by the sweat of one’s brow, but experiencing pain, sorrow and death. And, in this world some people have had it much harder than others because of the violence inflicted on them. These days we might think of Rwanda or some other countries that make the news with photos of genocide.

As I am writing this devotion in November, I am sitting at my desk looking at a photo by Brian Petersen of the Star Tribune (Minneapolis St. Paul) accompanied by an article written by columnist Nick Coleman. The photo features Native Americans walking in honor of the 1700 Dakota men, women and children who were forced to march 150 miles from the Lower Sioux Agency to a concentration camp at Fort Snelling in November 1862. Coleman states that “It’s not easy to talk about this kind of thing, but there was nothing easy about the way Minnesota was violently torn from its aboriginal tribes.”

Into this kind of bitter world torn from God, the Lord Jesus has come to provide hope for the desperately hopeless and helpless. And, that includes especially you and me. He came to take upon Himself all our sins and iniquities, and those of people groups and governments as well. On Calvary He made atonement between arch enemies, sinners and God. Suffering and dying with and for our sins and conquering death with His resurrection, so that there might be hope for us at the end of the march of our lives, which are traumatic and troubling even at the best of times. The concentration camps that we are sometimes in because of our own making or the actions of others are opened wide and Heaven becomes our home. There is eternal joy at the end of our march through life. There is a new ending to this game.

Thank you, Father God, for bringing us out of the hopelessness of our lives, through the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Rev. Layton L. Lemke, Ret.
Former Board Member & Volunteer
Norwood Young America, Minnesota

PALM SUNDAY • APRIL 1

Luke 19:37-38

Blessed is the King

“When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for the miracles they had seen; ‘Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.’”

The events of Palm Sunday bring into view the crucial hours of Christ’s life and confront our hearts and minds with the stuff from which our salvation comes. This is the very heart and core of the Gospel.

The occasion of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem occurred six days before the Passover celebration. That’s the reason for the arrival of so many pilgrims into the city. Some traveled long distances from other countries to keep the feast that was so central to their culture and religion. Already many people had arrived and more were coming every day.

As Jesus approached Jerusalem, there are those who recognized Him and spread the word of His arrival. The news spread that Jesus of Nazareth, the one who heals all manner of diseases—the worker of miracles is coming! Many go out to meet Him. Some spread their cloaks on the road—others cut palm branches and spread them on the road. In the midst of the commotion the cry goes out, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord.”

It is a bit difficult to think of Jesus’ looming death as He rides into Jerusalem. We really don’t want to hear about death. It’s better to have Jesus riding in triumph. It is better to hear the crowd shouting His praise. It is better to shut out the passion for another day. Who wants to think of death while a parade is going by?

We are living in the days after the cross and the resurrection. We know something of Jesus as the King of kings—we know Him as the Savior of the world. We know Him as our Lord. We are forgiven sinners because of Him and what He has done for us. We are now declared just by God and before God. We wear the robes of Christ’s righteousness. We know He died for us.

It is our joy to celebrate—to stand in remembrance and shout His praises. Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. And more than that! Blessed be the Son of God who came to redeem us. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest. Even more than that! Glory in heaven and peace on earth—in the hearts of men and women and children and between those whose faith rests in Him.

So cast your palm branches before Him. He has gone the way of death for you. Cast your palms before Him. Raise your hearts and voices in adoration and praise.

Blessed, indeed, is the King who comes in the name of the Lord.

Blessed be you, O King of kings. May you daily ride triumphantly into our hearts as we recall your passion and live in the assurance of forgiveness and eternal life you have given us, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Rev. Clark Gies
Fairfax, South Dakota

MONDAY • APRIL 2

John 17:20,21

New Beginnings

“I do not pray for these alone but those who will believe in me through their word. That they may all be one as You Father are in me and I in you; that they may also be one in Us, that the world may believe that you sent Me.”

If only there was peace and harmony among the people of the world. How Jesus longed to see that be the reality for His children. Sadly, our human nature and the things we do to one another often leave a history of broken relationships and with little motivation to achieve harmony.

But on Wednesday, November 16, 2011, an historical event, led by Governor Sam Brownback, occurred in Topeka, Kansas that helped to heal the ancient wounds of the Native Americans in Kansas. Governor Brownback had issued an invitation for tribal leaders (the Kickapoo, Prairie Band of the Potawatomi, the Iowa, the Kaw and the Sac and Fox) to come to the state capital where the Governor would ask the five tribes for forgiveness for all the injustices that had occurred in times past. It was an unusual event but one that marked the beginning of a new relationship between the state and the tribes.

The five tribal chiefs representing their respective tribes accepted the Governor’s plea for forgiveness. The governor then offered each tribe a buffalo as a symbol of goodwill and harmony. He also signed a proclamation recognizing the special legal and political relationship Indian tribes have with the state.

It was snowing when all of this happened. Native Americans attending this historic event thought it especially significant. For some of them, the pure white snowfall symbolized that God was happy with what had just taken place. Where once there had been a rift and painful past memories, peace and harmony and unity between people had been restored. The purity of freshly fallen snow symbolized new beginnings, a clean slate.

It is God’s desire that His people live in forgiveness and love for one another. It is what Jesus prayed would be the reality for all of His children. By His sufferings, death and resurrection, He offers to all of mankind a new beginning and a clean slate in which all of our sins are forgiven. His sacrifice achieves for all of mankind peace, harmony and forgiveness. During this Lent season, let us look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, for forgiveness and renewal with God and our neighbor.

Dear Father God, grant that we might be forgiving of the offenses of others as well as seeking forgiveness. For we are all forgiven sinners and daily need to repent and seek forgiveness. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Patricia Main
Haskell LIGHT
Lawrence, Kansas

TUESDAY • APRIL 3

Colossians 3:15-17

How Great Thou Art

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.” (vs 15)

Dr. Oswald Hoffmann told of Timmy, a 6 year old boy who had cancer. Timmy loved to sing “How Great Thou Art.” He would make up his own verses. Standing out on the back porch, Timmy would sing at the top of his voice, “When I see my sandbox, when I see my swing set, when I see the airplane flying overhead, my God, how great Thou art.”

Timmy knew where he was in God’s plan. Children know that Jesus Christ can be trusted. Children are not as smart and sophisticated as many adults who dismiss Jesus as Savior because they think they don’t need Him. Church-and-Jesus is just so much kid-stuff, not for them. We all need to hear the prophet Isaiah: “All our righteous acts are as filthy rags.” (Isaiah 64:6) Even our best efforts can be tainted with ego and lesser motives. I used to change the oil in my cars and rotate tires. When I got done, I’d have a dirty and oily rag. Was I that proud of my job that I’d hang it on the living room wall?

Hence, we repent and get a new mind because even our best deeds are stained. We trust Jesus Christ. We would be lost without Him. He lives for us. His perfect obedience took the place of our ragged efforts. He stooped under our guilt and blame. He carried our load. At the cross He paid the price we could never pay. God the Father accepted His sacrifice and by the Spirit raised His Son from the dead. He’s the One, so trust Him from the top of your head and the bottom of your heart.

Back to Timmy. We could all grow in the Word so we live in it richly. Like Timmy, we could make up our own verses. “I see my Bible, I see my prayer book, I see my devotional guide. How great Thou art.” Or salespersons: “I see my customers, my product line, my rolodex and cell phone.” Or clerical workers: “I see my computer, my word processor, my spreadsheet, How great Thou art.” Or truckers: “I see my 18-wheeler, my flowboy, my delivery truck.” Homemakers: “I see my stove, I see my microwave, I see my garden, How great Thou art.” Sports enthusiasts: “I see my softball mitt, I see my golf clubs, I see my tennis racket.” Outdoorsmen: “I see my fishing boat, I see my duck blind, I see my deer stand, How great Thou art.”

Our Father God, we pray, indeed, “whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” (vs 17)

Rev. Paul Biegner
Member, Board of Directors
Brainerd, Minnesota

WEDNESDAY • APRIL 4

Romans 1:9 (NKJV)

Pray Without Ceasing

“For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the Gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.”

What a comforting thought! Paul tells the Romans that he prays without ceasing, always, for the new Christians in Rome. In other Bible translations, it says Paul prays constantly, day and night, for them. Wouldn't you love to know that someone is praying all the time for you? When I have looked back on times in my life when I have been distant from God, I have found great peace in knowing that my mother-in-law was always praying for me and for my family. As we read through more of Paul's epistles, we see this theme repeatedly; Paul's thankfulness for all the people and his prayers on behalf of them. What wisdom, strength, or peace have we missed because we have not taken “everything to the Lord in prayer?”

How humbled I have been when I receive letters from a friend who is incarcerated as he shares and expresses his prayers and concerns for me. He prays for me and asks blessings for me! Have I been as faithful in my prayers for him living in the prison?

Do you know someone who needs prayer? Let's not make prayer a last resort, but instead make it the first priority of our days. Choose to pray without ceasing for those close to us, and especially for those who are lonely, those who do not know the Gospel, and yes, for our enemies. And give thanks for the people in our lives who have been faithful in prayer for us!

Dear Lord, help us to be mindful of our need for daily prayer for one another and to recognize that the prayer of a righteous man avails much with you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Rev. Will Main
Haskell LIGHT
Lawrence, Kansas

Mark 14:36

We Have a Savior Who Understands!

“Abba, Father ... Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

Jesus spent the last night before He died wrestling with the enormity of what was about to take place. It was so enormous that Jesus, in who He is as God, felt the overwhelming pain and the crushing weight of what was about to happen. As the time drew nearer He asked Peter, James, and John to go with Him to the area where He was going to pray. That night He began to be deeply distressed and troubled. *“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,”* he said to them (Mark 14:34). *“Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him”* (Mark 14:35).

Many times in our lives painful and difficult life experiences can often make us feel the same way. The sudden loss of a husband or a child, discovering that your spouse is having an affair, finding out that you have been let go from your job, or struggling with a severe depression that has forced some major changes in your life are these kind of experiences. These are some life experiences that can make us feel so overwhelmed and with so much emotional pain. It is at these times that we want to say, *“Take this cup from me.”* Jesus, God in human flesh, felt the same way as the hour of his death drew near. He asked his Father that *“the cup could be taken from Him”* but in the same breath said, *“Yet not what I will, but what you will”* (Mark 14:36)

I believe that Jesus set an example for us in how we need to approach our suffering while here on earth. Yes, I know that Jesus had to die for mankind. He and his Father had that covenant before He came to our world. *“Jesus knew why He came”* and yet when the fulfillment of His time came He still felt deeply distressed and very troubled. This fact that Jesus experienced deep distress and was troubled during this time, comforts me in a strange way. It comforts me because it lets me know that Jesus understands when I am deeply distressed and troubled. He knows what it is like. It helps me to know that I am not alone in how I am feeling. Feeling troubled and distressed does not mean that I do not have enough faith but that I am human.

Now it is not His original plan or will that we suffer so much. But we live in a fallen world where we experience the loss of loved ones and where other people hurt us. I also believe that God allows us to live through the consequences of our decisions that may not always be wise. So we do feel pain and we do feel distressed and troubled at times. Yet I believe that God our Father wants us to know that it is only with Him and through Him that we can go through the suffering that we encounter in this life. Ultimately, God’s purpose in our lives is that we would triumph in all these painful and difficult experiences. God has been victorious in suffering and this is what brings Him glory and us hope.

During this Lent season let us be encouraged that we have a Savior who understands what we are going through. Let us look to Him who understands how we feel because He has walked that path in His full humanness!

Dear Heavenly Father, Help us during this time to be reminded that you have walked the human journey fully and completely. Help us to find strength and comfort in this as we walk through our own difficult experiences in our lives. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Linda Martin
Sioux Lookout, Ontario

Matthew 27:46

When God Seems Absent

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Jesus, the Son of God cried out in a loud voice, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* in the last hour of his life as He hung on the cross. Jesus, the Son of God who knew who He was, where He came from, and where He was going was the one who made this heart wrenching cry! The pain must have been so excruciating and so terrifying that He the Son of God cried out like He did. I believe the degree of His suffering was so great that the presence of His Father seemed absent!

I often am reminded of this passage of Jesus' last moments on the cross before He died, and I liken it to what could be a similar experience to someone who is suffering from very painful life experiences and feels very alone with it. My husband Rick and I have listened to many stories of people who are in intense suffering from painful life experiences. Many of these people suffered in silence for many years and that made them feel very alone. They came to believe that no one could or would be able to understand the degree and the severity of their pain. It is a very lonely and scary place to be. This kind of suffering can make the Presence of God seem absent!

I believe that Jesus became fully human so that He could demonstrate to us that He understood what it is like to be a finite human where pain seems to be a good part of our lives. I also believe that Jesus had to experience this depth of suffering in order to have victory over it so that you and I can have victory over our painful experiences today. Just this past summer, I was talking to a young woman who had lost a grandmother the previous spring. She was struggling with herself because she was still feeling the intense pain from her loss. The pain at times had been overwhelming. I reassured her that she was still in the acute phases of her grief and that at these times her pain from her grief will seem more real than the presence of God. I reassured her that Jesus understood how she has been feeling because He has been there. I encouraged her that it is at these times that we must walk by faith in the Word and not by feelings. A few nights later, at a testimonial night, this is what she shared with everyone. She declared that night that our pain may sometimes seem more real than the Presence of God but this is when we, by faith, declare the presence of God in our lives!

As you read this devotional today, I want to remind you that our Savior Jesus has walked ahead of us in the road of suffering. He has been there and He knows what it is like to feel forsaken in our pain. Yet it was a part of the road that led to life.

Father, “Thank you” for sending your Son, Jesus, to come and face death in our world. Help us to understand in a new way that we are not alone in our pain nor have we been abandoned in our pain. Help us to understand that it is in His dying that we can have life, not only in this world but also in eternity. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Linda Martin
Sioux Lookout, Ontario

HOLY SATURDAY • APRIL 7

John 20:15 (NKJV)

Weep No More

“Jesus said to her (Mary Magdalene), ‘Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?’”

When there is death there is also despair, doubt and dismay. The sadness is overwhelming, even if the death is expected or comes at the end of a long life or protracted illness. Tears pouring from the corners of the eyes portray the emptying of the heart. People will sometimes ask/state: “Why are you weeping?” But none of them asks the question from the perspective of Jesus.

Mary Magdalene, with feelings much like ours, walked the lonely journey to the burial plot of her best friend that morning. We can relate to her sorrow at the loss of One so dear to her. We have all been there at some point in our lives. It may be the awful news of a young husband or wife killed in an accident, a son or daughter diagnosed with a “killer” disease, or that of a warrior slain in conflict. At these times we are confused, scared, sad, and emptied out.

One of the neat things about this Scripture section is that Jesus met Mary, and was present with her at her time of mourning. He came just to be personally present with her, meeting her emptiness, just as He also meets our emptiness: “Why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?” And by His presence says: “Look no further, I am the Resurrection and the Life.”

Jesus, who is the same yesterday, today and forever, comes to wipe away our sins and our tears and to fill our hearts with joy and peace in times of doubt or unbelief. We need weep no more. The One we are looking for in our times of sorrow and despair is here; promising to be present with us always to the close of the age. His resurrection victory validates His purpose and His presence.

“Jesus lives! The victory’s won! Death no longer can appall us!”

Rev. Layton L. Lemke (Ret.)
Former Board Member and Volunteer
Norwood Young America, Minnesota

EASTER SUNDAY • APRIL 8

Luke 24:13-14 (ESV)

The Same Old Story

“That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus,...and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened.”

Significant happenings of life are remembered and passed on in the context of story. Often, when we first meet someone, if we are curious, we will want to hear “their story.” We want to hear of adventures different than our own. Without being conscious of it, we are also looking for things we have in common. We are looking for ways to share—a way to bond in relationship. For those of us who have formed deep relationships, the telling and retelling of story can give us hope and reassurance during difficult times.

I talked to a young woman recently who told me of a painful time in her childhood. Her grandmother, who she was used to spending much time with, moved a distance away. Soon after that her mother lost custody of her and her sister. Instead of being placed with her grandmother, the girls went to live with her mother’s sister. She told me, “It was terrible there. Every night my sister and I would hold each other and cry. We kept our sanity by reminding each other of the love and good times we had experienced at our grandmother’s house.” These hard years have left their mark on these young lives, yet the telling and retelling of their shared story is what gave them hope for a better future.

It is difficult to imagine the utter heartbreak the followers of Jesus felt when they were separated from their Lord in such a devastating way. The one who had rescued them from their present plight, and held their hope for the future, was ripped away from them. Their teacher, provider, brother, confidant, protector, healer, and much more, was gone. How natural it must have been to gather in small groups, holding each other, and weeping over their loss.

And then to see and touch and even eat with their risen Lord! How could they HELP but tell the story!? For even though Jesus would leave them again as He ascended to the Father, He sent the Holy Spirit to always be with them. He also gave them the promise of eternal life, to be watching and interceding for them and all who believe.

It is common, I think, for tortured souls to wonder where God was when they were experiencing so much grief in their lives. I think it is also common for those heavy with life’s burdens to wonder if this simple Gospel can fill the deep hole inside. Does this story that has been told through the ages still give the new spark of hope? Oh yes! When we finally fall exhausted at the feet of our risen Savior, He is quick to gather each of us in His loving arms. We are welcomed into His loving family to tell others of His great love and forgiveness. We are privileged to tell again of His living, dying, rising, and coming again for all who have put their trust in Him.

Father, thank you for your servants who have been faithful to bring your wonderful story of Jesus to us. Help us to be faithful in repeating it to all who will listen. In your Son’s name we pray, Amen.

Rosemary Sternbeck
Olympic Peninsula

Northern Lights Fellowship

The *Northern Lights Fellowship* recognizes the men and women who have made a special commitment to the long-term ministry of Lutheran Indian Ministries through a bequest, charitable gift annuity, trust agreement, life insurance program or other estate gift.

If you are interested in learning more about making a planned gift, please contact our office. While estate plans remain anonymous, membership in the *Fellowship* encourages other friends to remember Lutheran Indian Ministries in their estate planning.

As a special expression of our gratitude to members of the *Northern Lights Fellowship*, we are pleased to offer a beautiful print of a watercolor painting by Mary Johnson, gifted artist and wife of our Executive Director, Reverend Dr. Don Johnson.

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Yes! I have already remembered Lutheran Indian Ministries in my Will or Estate Plans. Please enroll me in the *Northern Lights Fellowship*.

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