

(Photos by Halcyon Bjornstad and Lana Smith. Used by permission)

## FORTY DAYS OF WILDERNESS WONDER

*“Forty Days of Wilderness Wonder”* is a daily devotional to accompany you through the liturgical church season of Lent which begins on Ash Wednesday, February 22. Daily devotions are provided for each day except for Sundays, which are not counted in the “40 days”. Sundays are always considered the day of resurrection. Each “day” is dated for additional reference.

As our spring activities increase, we are tempted to neglect our need for personal devotion. This Lenten devotional invites you to take time to pause, read, reflect and pray as we journey again to the cross, remembering the promises of God’s presence and promise of the resurrection.

This resource is a combination of scripture, song texts, brief reflections, images and prayer. Multiple devotionals on the same scriptures or song texts are included for different perspectives. If you have never done a daily devotional before, Lent is the perfect time to begin this faith discipline. If possible, set aside a specific time each day for this devotional practice. If you miss a day, it’s easy to get back on track as you continue your journey to the cross. Daily devotions will also be posted on the *“Forty Days of Wilderness Wonder”* Facebook page. “Like” the page and share with others.

**“Lent begins in the wilderness. The Spirit guides Jesus into the wilderness where he comes face to face with temptation and struggle. Yet, in his forty days of fasting, resisting, and wandering, Jesus is shaped and formed for ministry. Similarly, through the wilderness of Lent, we are invited to surrender to the wild leadings of the Spirit. We rarely enter the wilderness willingly, but hopefully through our wandering we remember who we are and whose we are. The wilderness can become sacred even if it remains dangerous. There is no wilderness space too harsh or threatening for God’s love. This Lent, we welcome you to the journey.”** *(Theme developed by: lisle gwynn garrity | sanctifiedart.org)*

*“Forty Days of Wilderness Wonder”* is a collaborative project with original devotionals by clergy and members of Montana ELCA churches in Missoula, Bonner, Frenchtown, Hamilton, Sunburst, Glendive, Great Falls, Broadus, Livingston and Columbus. *Special “Thank You”* to Pastor Molly Sasser-Goehner for her support and guidance.

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Ash Wednesday, February 22, 2023



(Campers hiking to the cross at Badlands Ministries Bible Camp-Medora ND)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was known for was praying the Psalms. In his book, *Life Together*, p. 50 Bonhoeffer writes, "The more deeply we grow into the psalms and the more often we pray them as our own, the more simple and rich will our pray life become."

This is the traditional text for Ash Wednesday

***Psalm 51:1-2 is a prayer to God from the very beginning for mercy from God. "Have mercy on me, oh God." I really appreciate the next words, "According to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy." David has just sinned, and he knows that the only way he can be forgiven and be washed clean is because of God's steadfast love and God's abundant mercy.***

As we make our way to the cross on our Lenten journey, may we ruminate on this prayer, and as we make it our own, may we never lose sight of the faithfulness of God's steadfast love and abundant mercy for all. And may we add to this prayer the promise from **Lamentations 3:22-23, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, (God's) mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.**

*Prayer: "Have mercy on me, oh God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions."*

Pastor Paul M. Anderson  
Faith Lutheran Church  
Hamilton



Thursday, February 23, 2023

**Deuteronomy 1:30-32a.**

***The LORD your God, who goes before you, is the one who will fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your very eyes and in the wilderness, where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, just as one carries a child, all the way that you traveled until you reached this place.***

Traveling can sometimes be a stressful event even if it's along a well-worn and familiar path. Unexpected events can cause you to become lost or late arriving for your final destination or you lose faith that you'll ever arrive at all. Flight cancellations, bad weather, illness, and accidents can all cause us trouble.

Traveling through these forty days of the Lenten season is no different. For some of us, this is a new experience; for others, it may seem like a stroll along a well-maintained path. Regardless, our travel through Lent may be side-tracked by the simplest of events such as work stress, conflict with a spouse or relative, financial worries, and the like. Isn't it comforting to know that God has our back when unexpected and unwanted events arise? Not only will God "fight for you", God will carry you "just as one carries a child". With this level of guaranteed protection, you can take comfort that your protector and your caregiver is always looking out for you wherever you may go.



*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for your ever-watching eyes that keep us safe as we travel through this time of Lent.*

*In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



Patrick Dye  
Atonement Lutheran Church  
Missoula, Montana

Friday, February 24, 2023



**Exodus 3: 3-4**

**Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.” When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!”**

**And he said, “Here I am.”**

During the Lenten Season, the draw of the wildness of the desert is part of the Spirituality of God’s people. On the prairies, I have found, in the profound stillness, the sougning of the prairie wind, the expansive nature of the land, a place where the fire of God’s Spirit scours the soul clean. In his book. “The Solace of Fierce Landscapes”, Belden Lane talking about our deep longing for “the truth the desert teaches,” leaves the reader with a question, “How much can you leave behind?”

Moses, returning to Egypt and then following the God of Sinai, was called upon time and again to trust God’s grace as he and the people gave up more of themselves to the journey God was taking them on. Jesus retreated to the desert to find a place of rest and to sort out the grace of God’s message for him.

Our desert places are often full of grief and loneliness and, like Moses; we question the authority of God’s call. In Moses’ clear and certain answer, “Here I am”, we find the key to trusting the voice of God.

Yahweh, may we heed your call in the desert places of our lives. May your cleansing fire burn clean our doubt in your promises. Amen.

Pastor Avis Anderson  
Retired ELCA  
Zion Lutheran  
Glendive



Saturday, February 25, 2023



**(Hymn 326, vs. 2)**

***Bless sojourners and  
pilgrims who share  
this winding way;  
your hope burns  
through the  
terrors, your love  
sustains the day.***

***We yearn for holy freedom while often we are bound;  
together we are seeking the road where faith is found.***

Life is a journey, during Lent the journey seems to go through the wilderness. When we find ourselves alone in the unknown, we remember Jesus also journeyed in the wilderness. David walked the dark valley. The Children of Israel traversed the wilderness. But because God never sends us to a place or allows us to begin any journey without giving us instruction, we can have hope through endurance. Scripture is given to us so hope abounds while we wander.

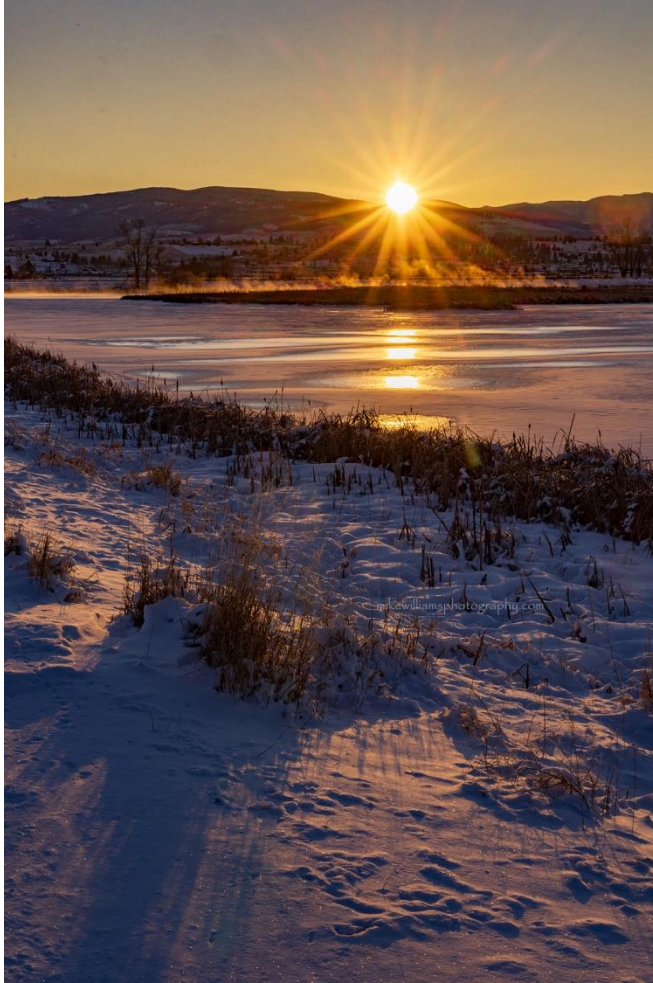
Here we are tempted, tried, strengthened and formed into the people God created us to be. We realize what we can, with God's help, accomplish. God's Spirit brings us to the realization of how we are created, with what we are gifted, how we are able to stand up to challenges. We realize we need each other, we are called to uplift and support one another for the work of God. We find we are not alone and nothing can hinder us from our goal of loving God and one another. We are able to reflect God's love through what we struggle to endure as well as what we skate through. In the wilderness the Spirit creates hope within us. And our hope burns through the terrors we face in life.

*Lord of the Journey: Thank You for giving to us hope, so we may endure the struggles and temptations of life. Your presence and Your love strengthen us to seek the road where faith is found. Amen*

Pastor Tonia Fischer  
St. James Lutheran  
Columbus, Montana



Monday, February 27, 2023



**PSALM 130:5-6**

**I wait for the LORD; my soul waits,  
and in his word I hope;  
6 my soul waits for the Lord  
more than those who watch for  
the morning,  
more than those who watch for  
the morning.**

Recently I've had my fair share of middle of the night wake-ups where I can't get back to sleep and my mind spirals into anxiety and despair about the state of the world, housing and finances, raising a kid in the midst of a changing climate, the thought of the family dog dying... and I find myself scanning the sky for any sign of light. How much longer until the sun rises? Until I can start the day and worry instead about how to drink my coffee and make silly faces at my baby daughter at the same time.

I long for the morning when the shadows in my mind and the room are swallowed up by the sunrise. The psalmist reminds me that it is not only the dawn of a new day that brings hope, but our God who dwells with us even when the shadows are all around. So I continue to wait, not just for all the things that bring me anxiety to be resolved, but for the true peace that comes from God, knowing that even in my waiting I am not alone.

*Abiding One,*

*When the anxieties of this world are pressing in, draw near to me. When I wait for the peace of the world, wait with me and help me set my hope in You, the One who gives true peace. Bless parents, grandparents, caregivers, teachers, and all those who work to make a beautiful world for children today and all the generations to come. Amen.*

Rebekah Cochrane  
Leader at Confluence, Missoula



Tuesday, February 28, 2023

**Matthew 3:3**

**<sup>3</sup> This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,  
“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
‘Prepare the way of the Lord;  
make his paths straight.’ ”**

John the Baptist tells us about a voice crying out in the wilderness. When I was a smokejumper I frequently travelled and fought fires in wilderness areas of the western United States. We would often jump on a ridge and hike to the fire. There were frequent trips back to the jump spot to get equipment and food and water. When we travel on foot with no path in the woods, we would get a bit “lost” or off track. As we got closer to each other, we would holler, whistle, or “hoot” to locate the other fire fighters. I would quote Mathew “it's a voice calling out in the wilderness” and I would shout “make straight the paths of the Lord” to help the person find their way. Hollering, hooting, and whistling probably worked better.



I now know that we have many kinds of “wilderness” to be lost in our lives. Troubles with health, addictions, relationships, money, children and politics are all a kind of wilderness. We all sometimes need to stop and call out for others in our life to help us. We also need to be that leading voice or “hoot”, to lead others to the “straight paths of the Lord.”

*Dear Lord, help us to listen and hear the voices in the wilderness. And when we are that voice, hear us and lead us to your paths of your knowledge and comfort. Bless those who hear us and call out for us in our need. We know that someday it will be our turn to support and comfort others in the wilderness of life. In Jesus name we pray, Amen*

Ron Marks  
Immanuel Lutheran  
Missoula





Wednesday, March 1, 2023

**Psalm 78:14-16**

**14 In the daytime he led them with a cloud and all night long with a fiery light.**

**15 He split rocks open in the wilderness and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep. 16 He made streams come out of the rock and caused waters to flow down like rivers.**

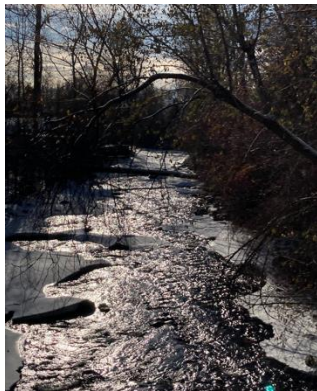


As an infant, I was baptized with water from the River Jordan, I was called by God early in life. Today we live in a tumultuous time with our day-to-day challenges. What are your challenges? Some folks in the world have too much water, some do not enough water. I was crossing the Gallatin River at the end of a 7 mile race. Besides God being with me, I had other help, the ones with the flags!



In your life, is the water flowing or is it frozen and not leading you anywhere? God says He will lead us.

Sometimes we are not sure where we will go, but if we have faith, God will lead us there safely. Let go and let God. Do you need a life jacket? God provides one! Can you float freely in the water? Let the water flow and take you there. Have faith in this troubled time, know God is by our side.



*Dear Lord, Thank you for always being there. Help me to understand and trust in you. Help me see you in the fires, behind the clouds and in the water. Help me to see the river flow gently with you by my side. Help me to grow with you and let me allow your goodness flow over me. In Jesus name. Amen.*

Georgia Cobbs and Alan Boren in the Rattlesnake Creek Wilderness. Smooth flow of the water was calming as we hiked.



Thursday, March 2, 2023

**Isaiah 43:18-19**

**Do not remember the former things  
or consider the things of old.  
I am about to do a new thing;  
now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness  
and rivers in the desert.**

If you're someone who collects photos of favorite events and memories, you understand nostalgia well. I find myself from time to time looking through old photos from years past: trips, concerts, events, times with loved ones. These are good times to remember, faces to reflect on in love, and landscapes to dwell with. Nostalgia is not inherently bad, it evokes the warm, sentimental emotions of the past.

However, expectations and anticipation can certainly inhibit our enjoyment of the present moment. If we find ourselves wrapped up in how things used to be, we are not fully ready to embrace how things are. Preparing to embrace the present moment requires we do as the prophet says: "Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old." With all our senses and all our awareness, we are called to readiness for the present.



I invite you to take on a physical, mental, and spiritual stance of readiness this Lent. Stand up and stretch your body toward the sky. Bend your knees slightly and breathe in deep. In preparing our body, we also prepare our spirit for new possibilities. What new thing springs forth?

What river in the desert flows where it was once dry?

*Creator, thank you for your presence in our life that continually makes all things new. Help us stand ready, now, for the newness unfolding around us. Amen*

Colter Murphy  
Children, Youth and Family Director  
St. Paul Lutheran-Missoula



Friday, March 3, 2023



**Psalm 51:10-12**

**Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
And put a new and right spirit within me.  
Do not cast me away from your presence,  
And do not take your Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
And sustain in me a willing spirit.**

When I was a child, the congregation where my family worshipped sang these verses every Sunday. I can't remember if it was as the offering was brought forward or if it was during communion, but it was sung with hope every Sunday. I would imagine a very clean heart being held in the hands of God, who was smiling as that heart was somehow inserted into my chest. I wasn't allowed to take communion at this time, and children weren't even allowed to go to the altar for a blessing. But I still felt clean because somehow, I knew God did the cleaning. It doesn't get much simpler than that.

*Loving God, we give thanks for the restoration not only of the joy of your salvation, but the restoration of our hearts, cleansed, forgiven and once again able to love because you first loved us. Amen.*

Pastor Brenda Frelsi  
Associate to the Bishop  
ELCA Montana Synod  
Great Falls



Saturday, March 4, 2023



***Bless now, O God, the  
journey that all your  
people make,  
the path through noise  
and silence, the way of  
give and take.  
The trail is found in  
desert and winds the  
mountain round,  
then leads beside still  
waters, the road where  
faith is found.  
(Hymn 326, vs. 1)***

Reading the words of this verse brought back my mother's final journey and her funeral service at Grace Lutheran Church in Fairfield, MT in May of 2004. The last 6 months of her life included the deserts, mountains, and still waters of end stage renal failure, visits from all her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, she and my father celebrating their 65<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, cognitive decline, my "gruff" brother tenderly painting her fingernails, being lovingly cared for by so many after so many years of being the giver of care.

She knew her greatest Caregiver, though. In her younger years she often struggled with excessive worry, but she told me after I had returned from a spring semester spent overseas that her worry did not help her; she recognized how a force much greater than her worry, God, had this situation covered and she held out her hand and let the Spirit lead her beside the stilled waters.

*Lord, open our hearts to your guidance and inspiration as we wind our way through this Lenten journey. Grant that our faith may be refreshed and strengthened by our exposure and response to the challenges, beauty, and blessings to be found each day. Amen.*

Elaine Ryan  
St. Paul Lutheran  
Missoula



Monday, March 6, 2023

**Isaiah 30:21**

**And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."**



(Badlands Ministries Bible Camp-Medora ND)

How many times in your life have you known what you wanted to do, knew the specific steps to take, people to talk to, training or education to seek?

Knowing when and where the exact time and place in which you needed to be in order to make all of these things possible?

For me, personally, it seems that my path in life, has been, in no uncertain terms, a continuous stumble into opportunities that have been placed in front of me by nothing I have done, but a blessing by those around me. By the grace of God, I have been able to find myself in my current call to ministry in the Montana Synod.

It is almost impossible for us to flawlessly plan our exact path in life; however, we are fortunate to have a Creator and Savior who will always be in our ear, showing us the way and how to walk and to catch us when we stumble and fall.

*Thanks be to God!*

Colter McCarty  
Director of Technology  
and Communication  
Montana Synod  
Deacon Candidate  
Great Falls



Tuesday, March 7, 2023

**Isaiah 43:18-19 NRSV**

**Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.**

I recently had the opportunity to go to the Pine Ridge Reservation for a January term at Wartburg Theological Center. We spent our time listening to and learning from Ogala Lakota people and their experience living on a reservation. It awoke an understanding in me of the long term failures that our country and the church has had in our treatment of indigenous people. Learning this legacy and experiencing life on the reservation felt somewhat like a wilderness experience. In this state of disorientation there is an opportunity for reorientation towards a future that heals the wounds that are present in our lives and society.



We are intertwined with one another. Waking up is about being able to see things as they are and how things are rooted in the past, lived in the present, and applied to the future. In God, we are invited into the hope for a future that provides more wholeness in community.

We are invited into a deeper connection with our creator, each other, and creation. This Lent I encourage you to listen to where God is calling you in your context. To listen for ways that draw you into deeper connection with yourself, God, and the world.

*Creator, you are the source of courageous love that frees us to confront humanity's violations of neighbor and nature. Enable us to stand together at this intersection of racism, inequality, and the environment as we begin to learn what it means to patiently plot resurrection. In the name of Jesus, whose liberating love is for all. Amen*

(Taken from Northeastern Minnesota Synod's Together Here Ministry's *Arise* series).



Lars Anderson  
Seminarian  
Valley of Christ  
Frenchtown

Wednesday, March 8, 2023

**Exodus 19:3-6**

**“Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.’”**

The people of Israel had been in the desert of Sinai for three new moons and had already complained about lack of food and water. The LORD had provided manna and quail and fresh water to reassure them of divine love, care, and provision. Now the LORD reaffirms the covenant (promise) that had been made with Abraham and Sarah to bless them and their descendants and to be a blessing for “all of the families of the earth” (Genesis 12:3). After suffering under the slavery of Pharaoh, the Israelites have been liberated and are on their way back to the land that the LORD had promised them. As God’s “priestly kingdom and holy nation” they are called to be royal servants and ambassadors for the LORD.

This same promise and call to service includes us as well.

*“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).*

May we rest assured that God is with us and will provide the power, the resources, and guidance needed to carry out this marvelous calling.

*Good and gracious God, by the Spirit of the crucified and risen Christ, help us to trust in you as we gratefully and lovingly carry out His ministry of hospitality, healing, forgiveness, and justice for all. Amen.*



Pastor Greg Karlsgodt,  
Retired  
Immanuel Lutheran  
Missoula

Thursday, March 9, 2023

LAMENTATIONS—such a perfect word for the Lenten season as we are drawn into the story of Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem and the cross. The prophets of the Old Testament were warning God's people of their sinfulness, but they chose to ignore the warnings. How surprising to find these verses amongst the dire predictions. Credited to Jeremiah, they offer love and hope to all of us.

**Lamentations 3:22-23**

**The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. (Lutheran Study Bible)**



(Sunrise over Our Savior's Lutheran-Broadus MT)

I see these words every morning on my mirror to remind me that I am never alone. I sent these words to my son and daughter when she was going through a tough time in her life. When I talk to my daughter in Texas and my voice may sound down, she recites these words to me, which reminds me how important to share the words of God to others.

*Thank you, Father, that you loved us enough to sacrifice Your Son. We have not learned much in all these years, but you continue to bless us and love us. Help us to show our love to you by loving all your children. Forgive us our trespasses. Amen.*

Hazel Sorensen  
St. Paul Lutheran  
Missoula





Friday, March 10, 2023



**Psalm 121: 1-2**

**I lift up my eyes to the hills---  
from where will my help  
come?**

**My help comes from the Lord,  
who made heaven and earth.**

This is an important Psalm for me. My husband Mike used this Psalm as the basis for the sermon he preached at my mom's funeral. Oh, to hear that help comes from the Lord!

On my walks in the hills of

Missoula, I pause at certain spots with the nearly 360-degree view of the mountains and recite these 2 verses and what can I do next but thank God!

When I was younger and grew up with the King James version of the Bible, I had a different understanding of this first verse. It reads "I will lift up mine eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help." It wasn't a question like most other translations. Do you see the question mark? You see, the "hills" or high places were where the baals, or fertility gods, were worshiped and was not where God hung out!

Instead, He is with His people, He is the Creator who made heaven and earth, He is with us and gives us help. He isn't hiding out on the mountain—He is with us!

Eugene Peterson translated these two verses this way in The Message:

***"I look up to the mountains; does my strength come from the mountains? No, my strength comes from God who made heaven, and earth, and the mountains."***

Thanks be to God!

***Prayer:*** *You are present, you are with us, you are our help. Thank you! Amen*

Dorothy Borge  
Immanuel Lutheran  
Missoula



Saturday, March 11, 2023

**Psalm 51:10-12**

- <sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and put a new and right spirit within me.  
<sup>11</sup> Do not cast me away from your presence,  
and do not take your holy spirit from me.  
<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and sustain in me a willing spirit.**



I was not happy. On sabbatical, I was hiking the Milford Track, a well-known backpacking trip in Fiordland National Park on the southwest corner of New Zealand's South Island. It was the most strenuous day of the hike where we pushed ourselves out of the Clinton River valley some 1,700 feet over Mackinnon Pass and descended towards Milford Sound on the other side. For the previous two days, we had perfect weather. This morning, however, was not perfect at all, but foggy with no hint of respite. I lumbered down the trail in an argument: Really God? You aren't going to let me see anything?!  Then, I saw them flying and calling in the clouds like ghosts: the New Zealand Kea bird, a magnificent endangered mountain parrot. At that moment, my heart was cleansed. As I continued my trudge up the hill, I wondered: "what if life was more about seizing opportunities than about having big expectations?" When I reached the top of the pass, I was at total peace and, even, acceptance for being in the clouds. Then, all of a sudden, the wind came up and the clouds suddenly parted. There in front of us stood the breathtaking Clinton Valley. Standing at the top, I started to cry. I was restored, cleansed, and majorly humbled. Moved from disappointment to peace to utter amazement. I'm still learning to not let my expectations get in the way of my journey, but to be open to the continuing act of the Divine, cleansing and restoring of my heart.

*Open our hearts, O God, to the wonders of your creation. May we be cleansed from our own expectations of what our journey "should be" and restored to a faith that sees new blessings. In your Savior's name, Amen.*

Pastor Eric Huseth  
Our Savior's Lutheran  
Bonner MT



Monday, March 13, 2023



**Psalm 121: 1 -2**

**<sup>1</sup> I lift my eyes to the hills  
– from where will my help  
come?**

**<sup>2</sup>My help comes from the  
Lord, who made heaven  
and earth.**

From a very young age, we are taught to take care of ourselves. Our parents feed us with a spoon, and eventually let us have the spoon to feed ourselves. Next our teachers expect us to take what we've learned in class and apply it by doing homework and taking exams. In a job, we are trained with the expectation that we will do the work autonomously, with minimal errors.

In all of this, there is very little surrender. The expectation is on us to be responsible. To surrender is to cease resistance to an enemy or an opponent. So why would we need to surrender to God? He is not our enemy. To the contrary, He is the one who saved us from ourselves. And to that extent, He doesn't need us to surrender. He is already all powerful.

But that is the answer. We surrender to Him because He is all knowing and all powerful. He knows every hair on our heads. He protects us and leads us. The only way we can be led, is to follow. If there is anyone to surrender to, why wouldn't it be to the One created us?

*Heavenly Father,*

*Please help me to understand that surrendering to you acknowledges that only you can lead me down the path I cannot see. It is a sweet surrender to you, who already knows all my flaws and still says that I'm perfectly made and loved unceasingly. Where will my help come? It will come from You. I need only ask. Amen.*

Sumer K. Pellett  
Immanuel Lutheran  
Missoula



Tuesday, March 14, 2023



### **Psalm 23:1-4**

**<sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.**

<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters;

<sup>3</sup> he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths:  
for his name's sake.

**<sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
I fear no evil,**

for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.

This psalm has always been one of my very favorite psalms because it is so comforting. We don't have to fear anything if we walk with Jesus. He is my shepherd. I rest in that. As LouAnne, my mother-in-law was dying, this psalm brought her comfort and peace, when we would say it together.

LouAnne was entering the wilderness as she was dying. But, she surrendered her life, her fear to Jesus; and remained secure in her faith even as she faced the fear of death.

As we walk through the darkest valleys, we know we do not have to fear. We have the opportunity to open our hearts and let the Lord enter and walk with us through temptation, fear, and all the things that make us afraid.

Edith Cranor-Buck  
Immanuel Lutheran  
Missoula



Wednesday, March 15, 2023



#### **Matthew 4:1-4**

**4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. <sup>2</sup> He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished. <sup>3</sup> The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." <sup>4</sup> But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by**

**bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "**

"Man does not live by bread alone, so eat your vegetables," my mother admonished. Mom usually was pretty astute theologically, but this time she completely missed the point: "Mankind does not live on bread alone *but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*" Eating sustains us for a time, but there is more to life than just physical day-to-day eating, making money, getting through the day. We truly live when we are listening to God. When we spend time with our Creator in Bible reading and prayer, we get to know a God who deeply loves us and wants us to love back. God wants relationship with us – friendship. When we have relationship with God, we don't just exist from one meal to the next. We live a fulfilling life, with perspective and purpose.

If our life's goal is to be happy by satisfying our desires for "bread" – a nice house, a great job, the right partner – we will always want more. However, if we find our joy and fulfillment in our friendship with God, we will find true contentment in this life. Then we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

*Loving God,*

*Reveal yourself to me. Let me catch a glimpse of how much you love me. Help me today to keep my eyes on you, and help me to love you with my whole being – heart, soul, mind and strength. Be my life-giving daily bread. Amen*

Janelda Barnett  
Director of Music, Choir and Organist  
St. Paul Lutheran-Missoula



Thursday, March 16, 2023



(HYMN 326, vs 2)

**Bless sojourners  
and pilgrims who  
share this winding  
way; your hope  
burns through the  
terrors, your love  
sustains the day.  
We yearn for holy  
freedom while often  
we are bound;  
together we are  
seeking the road  
where faith is found.**

I have a friend who walked the Camino De Santiago, the pilgrimage route covering 500 miles across northern Spain to end at the Cathedral in Santiago that is thought to be the place of the Apostle James' death. I confess that I have been intrigued about the possibility of a pilgrimage since she went. She journeyed alone, and yet was accompanied by many others who were also along the way, and in the thirty days of walking, experienced hospitality, wonder and the beauty of the journey that was inspirational.

All of life is a journey. The Christian walk can be a spiritual pilgrimage where one is reminded that we all journey amid challenges, rocky stretches, vistas that are beautifully stunning and times of travel along a path that closed in and surrounded by trees and undergrowth so that we are not sure about the way ahead. But our God journeys alongside of us.

*Bless O God, all of us as we sojourn along in this life. Train our eyes and heart to seek and sense that you are journeying beside us and give us your comfort and strength for the days. Amen.*

Pastor Peggy Paugh Leuzinger  
Director for Evangelical Mission  
ELCA Montana Synod, Livingston



Friday, March 17, 2023

### Isaiah 43

**18 Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old.**

**19 I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth;**

**do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.**

As I get older, I remember a lot of things I “*used to be able to do*”. I realized about 10 years ago, that if I dwelled on that too much, only sadness and a sense of loss would envelop me. So, I changed my focus to what I “*do have*”. Then I realized that there were things I’d taken for granted all my life; the ability to walk easily, the ability to climb ladders without fear or balance issues, the ability see what I want to see...without lots more light!



Now, I look for the new things that aging brings. It might be a sense of the importance of history, enjoying learning a new hobby (which I never had time for).

I realize life is slower, but it can be rich. I’m *looking* for how to bloom where God has planted me.

We can all actively look to see God’s way through our own wildernesses and come to the rivers in the desert.

*Guide our Steps Holy One beyond the wilderness in our lives, and bring us to your healing waters. Give us strength for our journey and hope for tomorrow. Amen*

Marilyn Hall  
Lay Pastoral Associate  
Immanuel Lutheran-Missoula



Saturday, March 18, 2023

**PSALM 139:7-12**

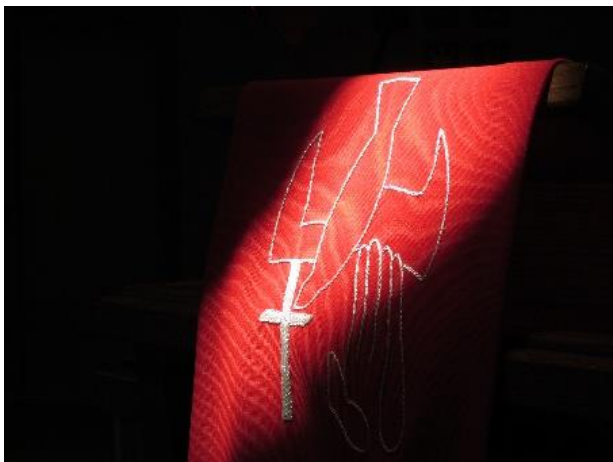
**<sup>7</sup>Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?  
<sup>8</sup>If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
<sup>9</sup>If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
<sup>10</sup>even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.  
<sup>11</sup>If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and night wraps itself around me,"  
<sup>12</sup>even the darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is as bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.**

In Psalm 139, Psalmist David ponders what his life might be like without God in it – “where can I flee from your presence?” Is David desiring to be free from God? Having God’s presence ‘on demand’ might have been preferable to David . . . a system where he could summon God when needed, so that his less righteous self might be hidden from God.

But in David’s heart, he knows this really isn’t God’s plan. David realizes that wherever he goes, God will be there – whether it be in heaven or in hell, at the bottom of the sea or in darkness or in light. I believe David is ultimately comforted knowing God is always with him – no matter what.

Centuries later, the Apostle Paul writes convincingly that *“neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 8:38-39)

During our Lenten journey, as we ponder God’s presence with us every day –  
*no matter what, let’s all pray . . .*



*Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me  
Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me  
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me  
Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me. Amen.*

(text by Daniel Iverson © Birdwing Music. Used by permission under CCLI 1150678)

(Sunlight shining on pulpit parament through center ceiling window at Atonement Lutheran-Missoula)

Jim Bendickson  
Immanuel Lutheran  
Missoula





Monday, March 20, 2023



**Psalm 32:6a**

**"Therefore let everyone who is godly PRAY."** (author interpretation from New American Standard)

You can pray without words

Pray with your strength. Through suffering you have gained strength that you didn't know you possessed.

Pray with this strength by standing up for what is wrong. Speak out with strength to make a change. Nothing can hurt you more than what you have already suffered.

Pray with love. You have loved, you are loved and if you have lost someone you have loved very much then you know love best.

Pray with that love by passing it on to someone who needs to learn of it.

Pray with beauty. It surrounds you in the air you breathe. From the mountain tops, to birds flying above you, to flowers blooming, to rivers flowing. Walk in this beauty and take it all in with a grateful heart.

Pray with laughter. Make someone laugh until happy tears fill their eyes.

So pray without words. Pray with your strength, your love, your beauty, your laughter. After all, that is truly God and God has written all of this on your heart.

Ann Halverson  
Our Savior's Lutheran  
Bonner



Tuesday, March 21, 2023

**John 6:30-33**

**<sup>30</sup> So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us, then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?" <sup>31</sup> Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' " <sup>32</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."**



Bread from Heaven would be a great name for a type or brand of bread. Should it be better than every other bread? Should it taste like manna, which people complained about? Should it fall a great distance and not damage something while staying intact?

Those that had been fed by Jesus are hungry for more. When found, Jesus asks why they are looking: because bellies had received, or because faith had awakened?

Jesus exhorts them to work for food that does not perish, which Jesus will give them. Confused about what sounds like wages, they ask for a job description. Jesus simply tells them: trust me, know me. If it was a job interview, they don't seem to be keeping up.

Like bread, Jesus bestows himself as gift. It isn't a transaction. He is giving himself to those seeking signs, and as God's bread for the world that have not seen.

In the wilderness places, we tend to take our lunch with us. Yet even in the wilderness, without tilling or reaping, he bestows himself on us – empty hands outstretched in trust to receive Christ himself.

*As warm bread with fresh butter, may we receive you as goodness, new life in our bodies. Amen.*

Pastor Daniel Disch  
Atonement Lutheran  
Missoula



Wednesday, March 22, 2023



***Psalm 121: 1-2***

***I lift up my eyes to the hills.***

***From where does my help come?***

***My help comes from the Lord,  
the maker of heaven and earth.***

Since childhood, I have sought comfort and surcease from mountains. Being up in the mountains or even just resting my eyes on the glory God provides in our mountain tops brings me joy and instant relief. What in nature brings you relief? Is your relief found somewhere other than nature? I know I have also always enjoyed the sounds of water, the surf, a creek or river or a lake gently lapping at its banks.

But maybe it's something else that brings you comfort. Everyone has something that is your "safe spot", your sanctuary from life's storms. It can be the company of a trusted

friend. It can be the company of a beloved pet like my good boy, Tuffy. It can be during prayer or meditation. No matter how you find your way to God, he will always be there waiting for you with open arms and listening ears. Our God is truly such an awesome God!

Let God's glorious creation that we are so blessed to be surrounded by bring you abundant comfort.

*Father God – thank you for the gift of your comfort in the mountains you have surrounded us with. May we always remember to turn to you when our eyes rest on your hills. AMEN*

Audrey Thornton (and Tuffy)  
Immanuel Lutheran  
Missoula

Thursday, March 23, 2023

**John 3:16-17**

**For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.**

**Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.**

As a parent, I know that the love for a child is limitless and unconditional, a bond that is never broken by distance or time. It is difficult for me to reflect on how much God loved us when he sent Jesus to preach a gospel of love and forgiveness for all people — and then to see his Son hung on a cross to die a criminal's death. That supreme sacrifice, that death on a cross, was an act of unconditional, boundless love given to each of us. My sins are nailed on that cross, freeing me to live in God's grace.



We are all benefactors of God's forgiveness and love, a love that spans generations of believers from the beginning of creation until 2023.

During Lent, I can ponder how Christ preached that love and admonished us to love one another as He loved us. Yes, God's perfect Son was obedient unto death, sinless and blameless, something I am not.

But because God so loved the world, we were given the gift of his Son.

Even though I may wander about lost and tangled in sin, that perfect love of God still finds me, holds me and lifts me up.

*In the name of my Risen Lord Jesus I pray!  
May your perfect love guide me always! And may grace bless my steps however imperfect they may be. Let me love others as You have loved me!  
Amen,*

Anne Holt  
Atonement Lutheran  
Missoula



Friday, March 24, 2023

**PSALM 139: 7-12**

**7**Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?  
**8** If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
**9** If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
**10** even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.  
**11** If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and night wraps itself around me,"  
**12** even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.

Why is darkness so ominous? Why does it make everyday problems seem more intense: The blowing snow, the pounding rain, the crying child, the noises of night time? I recall the summer of 2012. It was around July 1<sup>st</sup>. A forest fire had been burning for days far to the northwest of our ranch. On this night, my husband and I were awakened by the smell of smoke in our room. Instinctively, we responded. The red monster was coming our way. My husband encouraged me to spend the night at a friend's home in town 20 miles away and I agreed. I prayed as I traveled down our gravel road. How could this happen? There's a state highway between us and the fire lines! My dear friend welcomed me. We prayed together.



As the light of dawn arrived and I made my way home, the wind began to subside; prayers answered. Our yard was filled with neighbors prepared to save our home. The fire was turned back by the hard

work of firefighters and volunteers. Hundreds of power poles were burned, power was out. Over 250,000 acres were blackened, forest and grassland burned, fences destroyed. Even so, no human lives were lost. Thanks be to God! Throughout the night, Lord, your loving hand held us and led us.

*O ever-present God, as daylight fades and darkness overcomes, make us ever mind full of your constant presence. Amen.*

Carol Greenwood  
Our Savior's Lutheran  
Broadus



Saturday, March 25, 2023

**Matthew 11: 28-30**

**Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.**



Throughout all my antiquing adventures, I acquired a human yoke of sorts. It is a wooden board with a rounded part for your neck and it sits on your shoulders. It is used to carry buckets of water on each end. I tried it out and was instantly glad that I did not have to carry water in this manner.

Scripture says the burden is heavy. With the ways of the world these days, it is easy to become burdened down. Worries about wars and violence and hunger and poverty and homelessness can steal our joy. Unlike the Israelites, we no longer have to live by a myriad of laws.

Jesus will carry our load and give us rest. Imagine Christ wearing the yoke and carrying the heavy load for all of us. We can relinquish our heavy burden at the Communion rail, through prayer and by faith that God is in control and has us covered. Just like the Israelites, whom God was talking about, we need that safe spot to land. With Jesus the yoke is easy and the load is light. What a blessing that we do not have to carry the load of the world!

*Lord, receive all of my burdens. I know you are in control. So, help me to trust in your will and your timing. Equip me to be a catalyst of change in the world. Thank you for carrying my heavy load. Amen.*



Laura Lee Ullrich  
Synodically Authorized Minister  
Our Savior's, Broadus MT

Monday, March 27, 2023

Luke 4:18-19

At home in Nazareth for a weekend, Jesus read scripture in the synagogue and added some commentary. People said nice some nice things. Then asked for healing, revealing that they hadn't really been listening. Things got tense and Jesus was nearly thrown off a cliff.



**The text Jesus read was from Isaiah (61:1,2):  
“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he  
has anointed me to proclaim good news to the  
poor. He has sent me [Isaiah] to proclaim  
freedom for the prisoners and recovery of  
sight for the blind, to set the oppressed  
free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”**

**He added: “Today this scripture is fulfilled in  
your hearing.” Then he went on.**

Maybe people started out thinking, “Wonderful. He’s here to heal us. Just like he did in Capernaum,” But Jesus’s further teaching pointed to a new way of being—which is to say change—rather than a quick fix. Marianne Williamson, amplified by Nelson Mandela, has shared this thought,

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond

measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.”

Is this what happened in Nazareth that day, and so many other days? Jesus offered freedom, and people wanted magic. When we really listen to Jesus, we hear that “our light”, our strength and freedom, is already within us. If only we can shake the dust off and leave our comfortable darkness behind.

*Loving God of mercy, You send us prophets, teachers, and sages. You have come among in human form and as the sustaining Spirit. Help us to listen and believe when we hear, “You are the light.” And more, Help us to live in that light, sharing it as we walk in this world. Through your presence in this blessed creation, we pray. Amen*

Pastor John Brock (Retired, Disciples of Christ)  
Immanuel  
Missoula



Tuesday, March 28, 2023



**Matthew 4:1-4**

**4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. <sup>2</sup> He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished. <sup>3</sup> The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” <sup>4</sup> But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”**

“And afterward he was famished.” I should think so! Jesus hadn’t eaten for forty days.

Around our house if one of my two growing boys hasn’t eaten for forty minutes, I’m likely to hear the phrase, “I’m famished!” (Or something to that effect by dramatic starving children.) It seems fair to say that no one would have held it against Jesus had he conjured up some honey whole wheat with butter to ease the pangs of hunger.

After all, haven’t we been taught to think that we need to take care of our own needs first, in order to be able to then serve others? On airplanes they always say put your own oxygen mask on first and then help others. Jesus is choosing to trust that God will take care of him in this situation over meeting his own needs by himself. Satan says, “trust yourself.” Jesus’ response is something like, my physical needs are not as important as trusting the word of God. Perhaps we can help and serve others anytime, even if we, ourselves are in need. Maybe we could even be better able to help and serve others at times when we are most vulnerable. It is in those times when we find we may be more open to the word of God in our own lives. However, I have to say, I still get cranky when I feed my children first when I’m starving too 😊.

*Lord, help me to endure through short term physical suffering and be receptive to the word of God that is eternal. Help me to look to the needs of others, in the midst of my own needs. Amen.*

Allen Sasser-Goehner, Deacon ELCA  
Worship and Music Coordinator  
Immanuel Lutheran-Missoula





Wednesday, March 29, 2023

**Luke 9:23**

**Jesus said to his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."**

Lent is centered around the cross of Jesus Christ. With obedience and love Jesus takes up his cross for the redemption of the world. On the way to the cross he commanded his disciples to "take up their cross daily." He didn't say take up your cross weekly, or monthly, but daily. We know what Jesus' cross was about but what is our cross about?

Over the past ten years I have been practicing Centering Prayer. I have read many books on Centering Prayer and attended Centering Prayer retreats. Basically, this way of prayer is setting aside 20 minutes twice a day to pray. In this way of praying you choose a



(Zion Lutheran Church-Fairview MT)

prayer word, a sacred love word. Then sitting comfortably with your eyes closed, you "introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action" within you. When thoughts arise, and they will, you use the prayer word to gently return to the presence and action of God within you.

Perhaps making the time to pray is part of taking up our cross daily as we follow Jesus. Some days I have so many other things to do, or I feel tired. But it's worth the time and effort to pray daily in this way. There are many ways of praying. Prayer is God's gift to us. It helps us greatly to wonder as we wander through Lent and Life with each other.

*Holy God, we praise you for your Presence and Action within us, daily. Help and guide us to take up our cross, daily. Amen.*

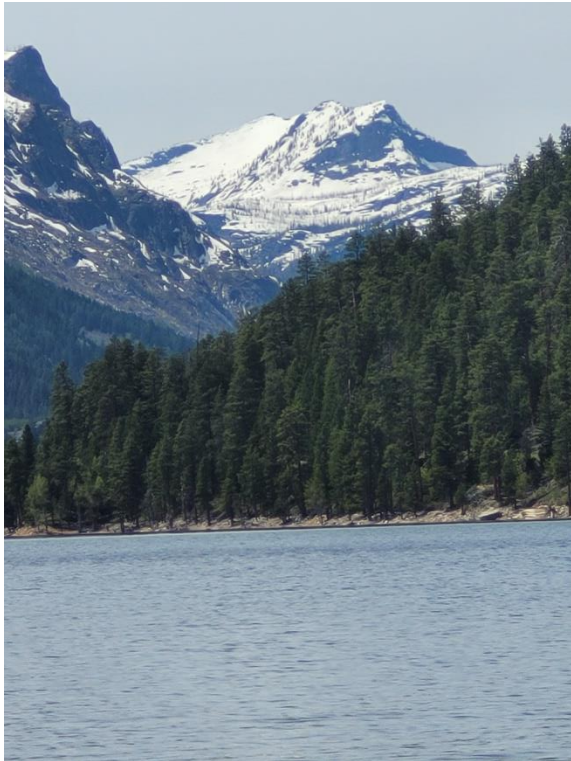
Pastor Aprille Jordan  
Valley of Christ Lutheran  
Frenchtown



Thursday, March 30, 2023

**(Hymn 326, vs. 1)**

**Bless now, O God, the journey that all your people make,  
the path through noise and silence, the way of give and take.  
The trail is found in desert and winds the mountain round,  
then leads beside still waters, the road where faith is found.**



As a middle school teacher, at least 180 of my days are spent on the path through noise! It makes me more grateful for the paths of silence. I seek it out even in the clang and hustle of a busy Science classroom.

I have a practice of mindful breathing with my students as a way of bringing some stillness when things get just a little too rowdy for learning. (And if I am being truthful, it is often that it's just really too boisterous for me to be embodied as their learning guide!) As we take those few moments to breathe in four counts, hold four counts, out four counts, and hold for four- I remember where I am.

I remember to Whom I belong. That I am capable of loving and guiding these siblings in a way that frees them to find their own path

to curiosity, their own understanding of the big questions in life, and their own approach to wonder. At the end of class, I tell them, "I love you. Be kind. Make choices." I pray for them all the time. Do you suppose this is the way of give and take?

Perhaps this is why I seek to quiet my mind and heart in the summer up in the mountains... We are beloved. Our goofy weirdness is inherently good.

Thanks be to God.

*Dear God,*

*You bless us in ways we can and cannot always sense amidst the clatter and rattle. You are holding our hand even when we feel most alone. Please allow us to see you in the mountains and feel you in the wind on our face. May we be faithful and open-hearted. And when we can't be that, help us to know that you are near. In the name of Your child, Jesus. Amen*

Susannah Murphy  
Immanuel Lutheran  
Missoula



Friday, March 31, 2023

**Psalm 139 verse 7 asks,  
“Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?”**



The following verses in this Psalm make it clear that God is everywhere, always with us, and no darkness is too dark for him. Which begs the question, why do I often stray from the Lord?

Why do I easily succumb to temptations and act in my own interest?  
Why do I go from your spirit? Why do I flee from your presence?

When we adopt our own standards for measuring success and not the Lord's, it is easy to wander into the Wilderness without recognizing it. In my life, the times I am experiencing "success" by society's standards are often the times I am furthest from the Lord. Arrogance, comfort, and security drive my behavior. At these times, it is challenging to acknowledge that I have wandered into the wilderness and require the spirit's guidance.

*Lord, let me surrender to your spirit. I pray I learn to always offer gratitude for the gifts and burdens you have bestowed on me. When you offer your hand, may I humbly accept it so that you can guide me through the wilderness.*

Kevin Papp  
Immanuel Lutheran  
Missoula



Saturday, April 1, 2023

**Luke 4:18-19**

**Jesus preaches in the Synagogue from the book of Isaiah.**

**“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”  
also Isaiah 61**



Jesus understood that he was the fulfillment of this scripture.

Through him, people would be freed.

The words of Isaiah are not some generic statement what everyone hopes will happen. We know that Jesus did exactly what he said he would do, because setting us free, is Jesus’ ministry to us.

By his death and resurrection, Jesus has set us free from our sin. Not only does sin no longer need to have any power over us, we are also forgiven, and we can walk in the newness of life that forgiveness provides us.

It also allows us, as followers of Christ, to go and do likewise, so we too can care for the oppressed and proclaim the Good News.

*Thank you, Jesus for blessing us with an abundant life. Not necessarily wealthy riches, or a comfortable life, but an abundant life – a life that is hopeful and full of God’s love. Amen*

Pastor Wendy McAlpine  
Lutheran Church of Sunburst  
Sunburst



Monday, April 3, 2023

Picture 5:00 P.M. in Galilee-Beautiful sunny day. But there are no groceries, no crops, no restaurants. The crowd is hungry. And there are no cups, no wells, only sea water. The crowd is thirsty. They know that yesterday Jesus fed them with loaves and fishes after giving thanks. They would like that happen over and over again.

Jesus answers with words. He got their attention with earthly food and now is ready to fee their souls

**“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” John 6:35 (New International Version)**

In the Amplified Bible the side notes further explain, “the one who believes in me [as Savior] will never be thirsty [for that one will be sustained spiritually].”The crowd was looking for miracles. Bread for their stomachs. Jesus promised that each soul that believes will be fed forever.

And the promise “whoever comes to me” is for all people; not just the disciples or just the leaders of the church, or just the right, or just the poor....WHOEVER.

I am “whoever”. You are “whoever”. Whoever comes, whoever believes. We can all receive Jesus’ bread and be fed spiritually.



I have learned through daily living that it doesn't matter what happens to me physical or mentally. I can feel Jesus with me. He feeds me His strength and His peace. When I look at the chalice and the plate, they are always full; filling me with hope and encouragement; feeding my spirit and my soul.

*Dear Lord, Thank you that your cup never runs out and the bread plate is always full. Keep my spirit fed so I can encourage others and bring you the glory. Amen.*

(Chalice and plate crafted by Bear)

Bear Bjornstad  
Atonement Lutheran  
Missoula



Tuesday, April 4, 2023



*(Banner by Pastor Melinda Halom, "Quilted with Prayer")*

**John 3:16-17**

**<sup>16</sup> "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.**

**<sup>17</sup> "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.**

Back in the 1980s and 90s, it was like a fad of sorts. At virtually every televised sporting event, be it football, baseball, basketball or tennis, there would invariably be at least one fan showing the cameras a homemade sign with the simple inscription: John 3:16. The sign always seemed to pop up behind the goal posts whenever a field goal was kicked.

The purpose behind this was obvious: the sign bearer was on a mission to get folks to grab their Bibles, look up John 3:16 and read the wonderful message about a loving God willing to sacrifice his Son for the salvation of all who believed.

It's Christianity 101, not to mention basic to our Lutheran belief in salvation through faith.

Not quite so well known, however, is the verse that immediately follows – John 3:17. Herein lies the important conclusion: God did NOT send his Son to condemn the world or anyone in it. God's sole purpose was our salvation. Can there be a stronger affirmation of our Lord's abiding love of everyone and the promise of eternal salvation?

*Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us. And thank you for sending us your divine Son – your word made flesh, your ultimate sacrifice. Amen.*

Don Spritzer  
St. Paul Lutheran  
Missoula



Wednesday, April 5, 2023

**John 6:30-33**

**<sup>30</sup> So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us, then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? <sup>31</sup> Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' " <sup>32</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."**



Our lives are often one long search for the things that will satisfy us. We try many delectables – money, power, greed, tradition, travel – but we are always restless, always moving on to the next item we hope will bring us a sense of completeness. In the search, we stumble against the stones which cross the path and we are scratched by the bushes which reach out to hold us back and snag our clothing. We do not recognize the good resting places, a green and watered camping ground and our stay does not last.

The Israelites were always crying out for the bread and the meat of the fleshpots of Egypt. They were never satisfied. Whatever God sent it was never enough. Jesus reminds their progeny, that God's people continue the search. It is when we find our true delight in God the Creator, and follow Jesus' teachings of love and justice, that our camp becomes a permanent resting place of deliverance and a release from the exhausting search for the food which never satisfies.

*Jesus, you are the true Bread come down from heaven. Satisfy us with your peace, and give us direction for the journey ahead. Amen.*

Pastor Avis Anderson  
Retired ELCA  
Zion Lutheran  
Glendive



Thursday, April 6, 2023

## ABOUT MAUNDY THURSDAY

The Thursday before Easter is known as “Maundy Thursday”. The name is believed to come from the Latin “mandatum”, the first word in the Latin text of John 13:34: “*Mandatum novum do vobis ut diligatis invicem sicut dilexi vos*”, that is, “*A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another, as I have loved you.*”

With Christians around the world, we now enter the celebration of the Three Days of Jesus’ death and resurrection. At the heart of Maundy Thursday is Jesus’ commandment to love one another.

### **John 13 (selected verses)**

Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So, if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so, now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Jesus eats with his disciples for the last time before his crucifixion. He gives a new command to love one another. “*Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*”. During the meal, Jesus does the unexpected. He takes a basin and a towel. He kneels down and quietly washes the dirty, stinky, tired feet of his disciples. He washed them all. Ordinary action with ordinary things: basin, water, towel. In this humble act, the master is now the servant. “This is how you care for each other. This is how you love and serve each other,” he said. Our feet are tired and stinky and dirty. Let us be humble and allow him to wash our feet, to get in between our toes; to wash away our pain and suffering, our fear and anxiety, our pride, our entitlement and our arrogance. Humble yourself and allow him to wash away all the dirt, all the grime and all the bad smells of life away. Then it’s our turn to go and wash the tired, stinky, tired feet of our neighbor, the stranger, our friends and even our enemies. Wash them with Christ’s promise of love and forgiveness. Show them grace. Show them compassion and mercy. Tell them and show them they are loved until the end. By our actions, they will see and know Jesus’ love for them.



Pastor Julie Long, Bridge Pastor, St. Paul Lutheran, Missoula



## GOOD FRIDAY, April 7, 2023



**"Beneath the Cross of Jesus" (text by Elizabeth C. Clephane)**

**"Beneath the cross of Jesus, I long to take my stand;  
the shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land,  
a home within a wilderness, a rest upon the way,  
from the burning of the noontide heat and burdens of  
the day."**

**(public domain)**

There is an interesting thing about Lenten hymns. They are personal, using first person pronouns: "Beneath the cross of Jesus **I** long to take **my** stand."; "In the cross of Christ **I** glory."; "Were you there when they crucified **my** Lord?" Because of this they are perfect to use for personal devotion. This hymn highlights the cross, the strong symbol of our faith. Throughout our lives and, specifically, during Lent, we find ourselves beneath the cross of Jesus. Switch the words around for a more direct statement: "I long to take my stand beneath the cross of Jesus".

As we travel our faith journey, we all long for an abiding place, a safe place. We long for a home in the wilderness of our wandering. We long for rest along the way. And, so, we find ourselves here, beneath the cross of Jesus. Look around.

*(Cross from "Camp Imlu")*

Who else is here? Those who love; those who betray; those who deny. We are all here. We are not alone. As Christians we live every day in the shadow of the cross. We try to live as faithful disciples but we know there are times when we fail. Through it all we have the promise that we are loved and forgiven by the very dying form of Jesus Christ, the one hanging on the cross.

We are here beneath the cross. Why? Because there is nowhere else to be. The cross, a symbol that previously meant torture and death is now a victory symbol of hope and life. The empty cross is Christ's own signature. Beneath that cross is where we stand.

*Living in the shadow of your cross, O Christ, we come as we are. Help us to remember your everlasting love for us whenever and wherever we see a cross. Amen.*

Pastor Julie Long  
Bridge Pastor  
St. Paul  
Missoula



HOLY SATURDAY, APRIL 8, 2023

In the bulb there is a flower; in the seed, an apple tree;  
In cocoons, a hidden promise: butterflies will soon be free!  
In the cold and snow of winter there's a spring that waits to be,  
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

There's a song in every silence, seeking word and melody;  
There's a dawn in every darkness, bringing hope to you and me.  
From the past will come the future; what it holds, a mystery,  
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

In our end is our beginning; in our time, infinity;  
In our doubt there is believing; in our life, eternity,  
In our death, a resurrection; at the last, a victory,  
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

("Hymn of Promise" by Natalie Sleeth. Reprinted by permission under OneLicense.net A-704375)



(Badlands Ministries Bible Camp-Medora ND)

Living on this side of the resurrection, we are Easter people. And yet, on this quiet "in-between" day, between the crucifixion and Christ's triumph over death, we wait in silence, in reverence and in peace. Be centered in God and in the hope of new life. As we experience the anxieties and burdens of this day, we remember God's promise:

**"Sunday's coming!"**.

Receive and share the blessing:

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord's face shine on you with grace and with mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace (+). Amen.