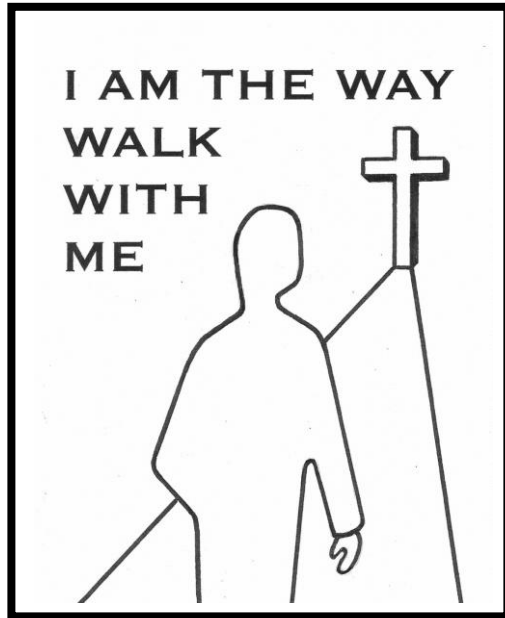


THE 2015 LENTEN DEVOTIONS

REFORMATION LUTHERAN CHURCH



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The Devotional Prayers of Martin Luther

A Morning Blessing

In the morning, as soon as you get out of bed, you are to make the sign of the holy cross and say:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

An Evening Blessing

When you go to bed, you are to make the sign of the holy cross and say:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

I AM THE WAY: WALK WITH ME

The earliest term used for those who follow Jesus is recorded in the ninth chapter of Acts where they are referred to as “followers of the Way.” That term for the early Christians is used several times in later chapters of Acts. This designation was used because those first Christians followed the Way of God as revealed by Jesus.

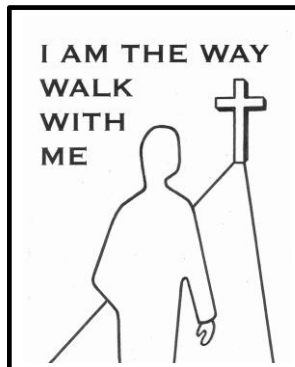
Jesus not only revealed the way of God, but he declared, “I am the way.” Through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus has shown us the way of God.

As we walk with Jesus on our Lenten journey from *Ashes to Alleluia*, let us remember that our relationship with God was established when we were baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus. Let us reflect on the meaning of that baptismal relationship, and recognize that every day is an *Ashes to Alleluia* journey as we live in God’s grace. Let us give thanks for the love and mercy of God which we encounter along the way.

We pray that these daily devotions give you strength and support as you walk with Jesus, for he is the way, the truth, and the life.

Pastor Wayne Matthias-Long

Pastor Alina Gayeuski



The Playground Draft

I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice; so that the Lord may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him. (Genesis 18:19)

When I was a teenager and played a ball game with my friends, the two who were generally regarded as the “best” at that sport would be designated as the “captains.” They would take turns choosing from among the rest of us to make up the teams. I call that the “playground draft.” Genesis 18:19 reminds us that God chose Abraham not on the basis of skill, merit, or popularity (like the playground draft) but solely on the basis of the grace of God.

As we embark again on this Lenten journey we are reminded that God has chosen each one of us and announced that choice in Holy Baptism. Our relationship with God – just like Abraham’s relationship with God – began with God’s action, God’s promise. Life for Abraham, for his household, and for us, is about responding to God’s promise by seeking to live as best we can according to “the way of the Lord,” doing righteousness and justice.

The refrain of Ash Wednesday, “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return,” tells us that it is not humanly possible to perfectly follow “the way of the Lord.” But it also reminds us that God, who abounds in steadfast love, never tires of forgiving us. “The way of the Lord” is a way of grace, mercy, and peace, a way which never ends.

Loving Lord, you are the way, you show us the way, you help us along the way. Renew us this day that we may continue in your way, working for the fairness, equality, and mercy you desire for all people through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Are We There Yet?

By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.

(Exodus 13:21)

Back in 2012, some of Reformation's youth group went down to New Orleans for the ELCA National Youth Gathering. One evening we were all in the Superdome when a massive storm broke out. After waiting several hours to see if it would pass, everyone decided to walk all the way back from the dome to our hotels, in the rain, at night, with no raincoats or umbrellas. We couldn't exactly call a cab or hop on a bus since there were tens of thousands of us all trying to get home..

So we wrapped up our electronics as best we could in our clothes to keep them dry, and set out into the downpour. I could barely see through my glasses, the rain was coming down so hard. We followed people ahead of us. Curiously, not many people seemed concerned about where they were going. They just followed those in front of them who kept splitting off to head for their particular hotel. This worked out well, until our group got lost and missed our street by several blocks.

It wasn't too hard to make the leap from Exodus to a mass exodus of my peers: we walked for what felt like miles, but the Israelites walked for a lifetime. But 40 blocks or 40 years, we all put our trust in our "chaperones" and in God to get us back to where we belonged.

Lord, walk with us and guide us. Show us the proper road and lead us back when we stray. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grace Brooks

Count Your Blessings

The people grew impatient along the way. They spoke against God and against Moses. "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food."

(Numbers 21:4)

This verse reminded me of an incident in my childhood. We were poor, living in a rented house in South Philadelphia. One day when I came home from school, I said to my mother, "All my friends have dolls and bicycles. I don't have anything." My mother asked me, "What is your last name?" I answered, "Mother, you know my last name. It is the same as yours!" My mother persisted, "Please say it." I said, "My last name is Mayo." My mother said, "Well, in the Mayo house we do not need dolls and bicycles. If you go outside and play tag with your friends, it will be healthy for you."

No matter what happened, my mother said, "Things could always be worse." My Dad said, "Count your blessings." When troubles came our way, both my parents advised me to "Trust God." That phrase came from Proverbs 3:5-6:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Throughout my life, I have been comforted by these words, even when faced with challenges such as loss of vision and a heart attack. I am strengthened and better able to carry on with my life.

Heavenly Father, thank you for parents who brought me to you and, with your help, provided me with a lifelong philosophy of faith and courage. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Margaret Gibson

Choices

By which way shall we march? (II Kings 3:8a)

He was not one of my most productive employees, but Ed was one of the most committed. He paid attention to the staff's needs and advocated for people with disabilities in our care. But a big mistake occurred on his watch. In the end, no harm was done and there was an easy solution to prevent another accident from occurring. But my boss was angry; she said I should fire him.

It made little sense to me. When I looked into the situation I found what I expected: Ed was well liked by his staff. But they thought he could be better at holding higher standards. He could raise the bar; expect more, do more, and work smarter.

In that moment, I chose to give Ed another change. Ed did not disappoint. He rose to the occasion. It is often true that we must make tough choices, and at that crossroads, we can try to discern the path or jump to conclusions. I chose mercy, forgiveness and hope. I chose to issue the challenge and expected him to do great things. And in this way, I followed Christ.

Lord, when the crossroad appears, help me to choose your way. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Marian Baldini

Paths Of Life

But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I shall come out like gold. My foot has held fast to his steps; I have kept his way and have not turned aside. (Job 23:10-11)

In life, there are many paths you can take, but everyone has a few bumps. It's not a paved path, it's a stony one. This quote from the bible shows that sometimes you want to do things that are wrong. But after all that thinking and deciding, God knows that you will pick the right path.

It's hard to choose what path you want to take. But it helps if you have a really good role model that you look up to. Like your parents or someone that has the same goal as you in life. My parents are really good role models, and I look up to them a lot. I look up to them just like I do to Jesus and God. Every time I'm in a pickle, I look up to them.

Dear God, promise me that you will be by my side and never leave my side. Please help the people that are having a tough time deciding what path to take; help them pick the best one for them. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Lindsay Gamlin, Confirmation Student, Grade 7

Faith and Service

For it is the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; and the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God. (Joshua 24:17-19)

Following a successful flight from bondage and slavery that was made possible by following the will of the Lord, Joshua implored his people to obey and serve the Lord their God and to forsake all other gods and forms of idolatry. (Commandments I and II)

In today's world, just as it was in the days of the Israelites, this obedience and service requires focus, courage, resolution and swimming against the tide in our troubled country within a troubled world. We must forsake today's forms of idolatry (i.e., fame, fortune, personal successes) which includes avoiding an over-sized ego and the belief that we are solely responsible for our achievements.

Nothing has changed since the Israelites flight from Egypt; faith and service to God are still the words to live by each day.

Lord, give us the faith, the courage and the resolution that enables us to serve you and to walk in your way, leading us to a fruitful life on earth today and in your Heaven tomorrow. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Ron Bingeman

God is Light

Where is the way to the dwelling of light? (Job 38:19a)

I took my little Yorkie out for a walk around the neighborhood on December 14, 2014. It was late in the afternoon and the light was waning. I knew the light would not last, but plenty of people had their Christmas lights up and I figured they would illuminate my familiar route.

I did not count on not being able to see the pinecone, which lodged under my heel and precipitated a hard fall onto the street. In a split second my radius and ulna were broken and my arm was deformed under my jacket sleeve. There was nothing to do but get up. Luckily, my good neighbors lived right across the street. They answered my knock, drove me home, and stayed with my daughters, so that my husband could take me to the emergency room.

The first dwelling of light I found that night was in their home. We can find the dwelling of light in so many places. We can also provide light for others when we are needed.

Dear God, thank you for light. Thank you for the help we can offer each other. Thank you for the brightest light of all, our Lord Jesus. Amen.

Pat Hacik

Make Righteousness a Habit

Nevertheless, the righteous will hold to their ways, and those with clean hands will grow stronger. (Job 17:9)

A habit is a routine or behavior that you practice regularly. It becomes ingrained, often happening without thought as your mind naturally reaches for the comfort of familiarity. Some habits become treasured moments each day that we cling to, such as that first cup of coffee in the morning.

Let us make righteousness a habit. Dwell on the Lord, seek out the comfort of his word and make kindness a joyful act that we naturally revert to when we need to feel the comforting touches of routine and the familiar. God tells us that not only will the just man maintain his integrity, but, as time goes on, his goodness will be more and more firmly established. Those who keep their eyes upon heaven will keep their feet on the path of God, whatever difficulties and discouragements they may meet. We should seek out righteousness in our own lives so that our habits may reinforce the loving kindness that God has gifted each of us.

God, help me to be more mindful of my own actions. Help me to transform my daily habits into meaningful acts that reflect your glory and help to strengthen my faith in your unending love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Keith Bocian

Obstacles of Opportunity

Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies; make your way straight before me. (Psalms 5:8)

Life presents us with obstacles each and every day, Each obstacle can be viewed as an opportunity, or conversely, an “enemy” that requires combat to overcome. In both professional and family life, “enemies” and battling them can foster negative ways to deal with obstacles, provoking feelings of vengeance and one-upmanship, gained at the expense of others.

Such feelings may result in short-term gains and establishment of superior positions, but the longer-term effects can be devastating, with bad feelings setting up future battles to be won or lost in the future. This results in broken relationships between individuals, cultures, faiths and nations, It is not only destructive, but also counterproductive to what I believe God intends for us as we enjoy the gift of life he created for us.

Fortunately, as believers, we have a model for God’s intention for us as we reflect on the life and selfless death of Jesus Christ. While the times are different, relationship issues and dealing with them remain the same. Jesus dealt with such issues every day. There are so many opportunities for all of us to “turn the other cheek” and break the destructive cycle that is so easy for our sinful natures to assume.

Lord, grant us the vision and work within us to see, through the life and death of your son, Jesus Christ, the many ways we can live lives that support all your people by caring for and accepting all individuals, cultures, classes, and faiths, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

Tom Conroy

A Secure Life

This God – his way is perfect...the God who girded me with strength, and made my way safe, he made my feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights. (Psalms 18:30-33)

God has certainly girded me with strength and made my way safe. I continue to try to walk with Jesus along life's way. As I look back over my 87 years, there are only two negative events: *first*, the loss of my mother at age 12 and my father being unable to care for me. God guided me, through the help of others, to the Milton Hershey School, where I matured and received an excellent high school education. *Second*, I had a business failure in 1964, while trying to support a family of five. Again, the Lord came to my rescue through the help and understanding of my wife and family. By using my God-given talents, I was able to secure another job and the crisis was resolved.

I attribute meeting my wife and our subsequent marriage as God-sent. We were only teenagers when we met and dated for less than a year before I went into the army in WWII. What did we really know about each other? For a year and a half, I wrote nearly every day, and she did too. It seemed like we grew up together through our letter writing! Less than three months after returning home, we became engaged, and in four more months we were married. It has been a most happy union of 66 years. We are also blessed that all our children are doing well. God has secured our lives and our eternal gratitude.

**Dear God, though we hardly deserve it, we truly thank you for the bountiful goodness that we have experienced throughout our lives. We look forward to your continued care for us, through your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.**

Doc Schock

Trust In God For Grace

Our steps are made firm by the Lord, when he delights in our way; though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong, for the Lord holds us by the hand. (Psalm 37:23-24)

I am a sinner. I will stumble. I will suffer adversity. I am often discouraged by my failures. I sometimes feel overwhelmed by the small and large adversities of life. Why do I keep losing patience? When will my hip pain get better?

The good news is that if I have faith, God will help me find strength and grace. God will teach me to pray, not for results, but for grace. These prayers will be answered. It will not always be what I think I want, but it will be what I need. God holding me by the hand will show me how to find faith, hope and love when I stumble or face adversity. God loves me in spite of my failures. Faith and trust in God will carry me to my salvation.

Lord, teach me to trust in you and to pray for your grace when I stumble or face adversity. In Jesus' name, Amen.

I

Loren Hart

My Mentors

*Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth.
(Psalm 86;11a)*

When I think of this verse, I think of being mentored to success. A mentor could be a lot of people - a Guide, a leader, a teacher - but I think a mentor is your helper to achieve a goal. This goal could be tying your shoes or climbing Mt. Everest. This goal can always be achieved, but sometimes you don't know where to turn and these are the moments you need a mentor. God is probably the greatest mentor, and he himself was a mentor to Jesus. God guided Jesus through some of the tough parts in his life; he guided many others through the challenges of their lives; and he let them believe in a goal that they could achieve.

When I was a young scout just learning to tie my first knot, I needed the help of a mentor. I couldn't have done most of what I've done now without the help and guidance of a mentor. In scouting, merit badges are one of the greatest problems that scouts have ever faced. In order to complete a merit badge; tedious, exhausting packets have to be completed. The campouts are way more fun than the merit badge packets, but to complete and succeed and understand these packets, you need a mentor, someone teaching you all of these skills to help out the whole way.

God teaches us useful skills every day....we just need to pick up on them. Mentors help us grasp each skill that God gives us, and use it to our full potential. These mentors point us the right way. They show us how powerful we can be; not with just ourselves, but coupled with God.

Dear Lord, let us pray that every child receives a mentor that they can trust and learn from....someone to look up to in times of need and someone to encourage them along the way. If everyone had a mentor what could we all do? Thank you, Lord, for the mentors in my life. In your name we pray, Amen.

Finding the Way

*Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.
(Matthew 3:3)*

The meaning of the term prophecy has changed since the days of the early Christian church. Today we think of it as a way to see the future. To the early Christians it meant the communication of divine inspiration as a way to instruct the people of God. The warnings of the prophets were announced so that the people would return to the path of righteousness. Jonah foretold of the destruction of Nineveh but the prophecy did not come true because the people repented their sins and returned to God's path. More often, the prophets would instruct the people so they could clearly see the path God intended for them. As Abraham Lincoln told his cabinet in 1862, "The question is not whether God is on our side, but rather are we on God's side."

John the Baptist is telling us to "Prepare the way," not to declare the way. In this he is telling us that walking the walk is much more important than talking the talk. He is telling us to cultivate a prophetic vision to see the path and to lead others by example to find it. Prophecy imposes an obligation on individuals that requires them to follow the vision as God directed them; this is more important than announcing the vision. We see prophets today in the writings of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who did not threaten society, but rather, his prophetic vision clearly showed our nation the path of righteousness. For this, he gave his life.

**Lord, today I ask that you grant me the vision to see your
path clearly and the courage and strength to show others
that path in all my actions and words.**

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Early Light

*By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.
(Luke 1:78-79)*

The doe lay very still in the corner of the clearing. I had to look a few times through the pre-dawn darkness to convince myself she was really there. She had positioned herself so the first rays of the sun would warm her. As they did, she slowly opened her eyes as if she had been waiting for it all night. She lay very still and looked directly into the sun, almost as if she was talking to it. I saw her face change. It became very soft and peaceful. She closed her eyes and took her final breath.

A small fawn wiggled out from the doe's side. I hadn't seen it at first, being so well camouflaged, but it had been sleeping there through the night, enjoying her warmth, concealed and protected. The fawn rose on wobbly legs. It stood and looked at the new morning sun for a long time. Then it turned toward its mother, lowered its head, closed its eyes, and licked her one last time. The birds began to sing as the fawn walked slowly away into the journey of its life.

Lord, thank you for the warmth of the sun. Help us to remember that it is part of your creation and gives us life and hope as you have promised. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Bill Grauer

The Laborers Are Few

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way..." (Luke 10:1-3)

It is sometimes hard for me to be singled out, to be put in the spotlight, to be given a task that I secretly worry I cannot do well. Will I disappoint others? Will I embarrass myself?

When I have been challenged to serve within the church, I've been filled with self-doubt; Will I fail? Will I have the right approach?

I wonder if the 70 disciples chosen by Jesus to go out to every town and village equipped with just their faith ever questioned their own abilities and strength. They had been with Jesus for three years, and now he was not going with them. They were told not to take anything but the clothes on their backs. Jesus said their message might be rejected.

Could I do that today? Can I bring Jesus' message to today's world? Only through faith...only through faith.

Dear Lord, may I be broken bread and poured out wine for others, testifying to your greatness. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Susan Bell

Children of the Light

Walk while you have the light so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become the children of the light.

(John 12:35-36)

Jesus was talking to his disciples and the people to have them believe that he is the son of God, the light of the world. Jesus knew that he was about to die, that he would no longer be with them on earth, but that he would be raised from the dead to be in heaven with God.

If the disciples and the people would believe in him and his teachings, if they would follow God's commandments and serve him by serving others, they also would be his children and would be raised up to heaven when they die. Jesus wanted them to know he died to save them from living in darkness, saved them from their sins when they did not know where to go or what to do with their lives.

If we believe that Jesus is our light and our salvation and we follow his teachings, our sins will be forgiven. Sometimes in our lives we are in darkness, when we do not know how to handle a problem. If we talk to Jesus in prayer and listen to him, he will help us get our lives back into the light. We must follow in Jesus footsteps and help others to find the light of Jesus.

**Dear Lord, give us the strength and knowledge to follow
Jesus teachings and live our lives by his light. In
Jesus' name, Amen.**

Barbara Creighton

The Way, the Truth, and the Life

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6)

“This is Kristy! She will help you in your Vacation Bible School class this week!” Thus was I introduced to the most cheerful, energetic, and lively teenager I had ever known! Kristy pitched in with great gusto on the lessons, songs, games, and crafts of VBS, making it the most exciting one these eight-year olds - or I - had ever had!

The theme of VBS was. “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” and we *sang* this verse every night. Even now, after all these years, I can’t read this verse without also hearing the jazzy “Gospel Light” music with it.

Years have passed and I’ve grown old, and Kristy has grown up. She finished school and got married. She and her family remain an exuberant, vital part of Reformation. Just weeks ago, on Sunday morning as I with the choir watched the candles being lighted on the altar, I saw that same spark in the young colyte’s eye that her mother, Kristy, had so many years ago; I marveled at how fortunate we are at Reformation to have not only the three generations of *this* family, but other families as well, who have chosen for three and four generations to follow the way, to seek the truth, and live the life as Jesus taught, here in this place. May it always be so.

**Dear Jesus, be our guide as we endeavor to follow your way,
to seek the truth, and to live the life you taught us to live.
In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Edna Bogert

Free to Be Me

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. (Acts 9 1-2)

It was not right for Saul to do what he did. Jesus's followers were called "The Way," and they peacefully tried to share the teachings of Jesus.

I don't like how Saul was willing to go all the way to Damascus to take them as prisoners. It was also wrong for him to act like his thoughts and beliefs were the only ones that were right. Everyone should be able to be free to believe and think what they want to, and to not be pressured by other people to think a certain way, or to be in danger from someone.

Dear God, help people be free to think how they want without being put into danger, In Jesus' name, Amen.

Olivia Biordi, Confirmation Student, Grade 7

God-Given Gifts

But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. (1 Corinthians 12:31)

This verse is preceded by Paul's discussion of there being no one part of the human body, or church body, that is more important than any other, no one career or contribution that is less than, or more than, another. We should not compare ourselves with others, feeling less than or better than another person. We are called by God to do and be the person best suited to *our* natural talents, and each one of us is essential to God's kingdom.

Instead of being envious or wishful of the job or situation of someone else, we should trust in God (and be alert to the guidance God gives us) to do and become the best "self" we can be. Sometimes we are so busy "wanting" to be something (or gaining the recognition or importance that someone else has) that we miss the opportunities to take full advantage of the great talents *we* possess. Putting together our God-given talents and practicing and studying to make these talents even better is far more rewarding personally - and much more useful to God.

Dear Lord, thank you for the gifts and talents you have given me. Help me recognize those talents and listen prayerfully so that I may hear you when you call me to be an even better "me" in order to serve you. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Jennifer Breen

The Peace That Passes All Understanding

Therefore, my friends since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh)...let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith. (Hebrews 10:19-22)

I love receiving the Benediction at the end of the church service. I close my eyes and breathe in fully. “May the peace that surpasses all understanding guide your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” I feel washed in relief and smile with the awareness of God’s grace. Jesus taught us to dispense with the law and follow the heart, to be guided in daily life. He prayed and listened for the voice of God to guide him. I believe in the power of prayer and meditation as a means to unhook from the groove of destructive thought patterns and emotional turmoil.

Being at peace does not mean we feel peaceful all of the time. There are struggles and pain in my life. Peace means to live in harmony. I am human, and riddled with negative thoughts about myself and my fellow human beings. By the grace of God, I seek another perspective. Through prayer, meditation, and reasoning things out with others, I experience moments in my life of the peace that surpasses all understanding, the living water.

A Meditative Prayer: In Breath: “Holy Spirit, fill me;” Out Breath: “Holy Spirit, cleanse me.” Amen.

Karen Goren

Let God Be the Judge

But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness. (1 John 2:11)

This verse is very meaningful to me. I have tried to live by it for years, sometimes successfully, sometimes with quite a struggle. I confess I am not above anger, but I deal with it in this way.

Every night before sleep settles in, I pray to God and share the events of my day with him. I review the happy feelings I had and then examine those that were puzzling or hurtful to me. I also try to look at myself honestly. Have I hurt someone through thoughts or deeds known only to myself and God?

Was I insensitive or thoughtless? Do I need to make amends? If so, I take care of this as soon as possible. If I determine the problem rests on the other person, I turn it over to God and that relieves me of all worry; this is where love is important to me. I realize we are all individuals unique and different and who am I to judge? Leave that to God. It works for me!

Forgiving Father, lead me to see myself honestly, and to be forgiving of myself and of others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Marlyn Martinson

An Exciting Invitation

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” Let everyone who hears this say, “Come!” Let everyone who is thirsty come! Let anyone who wants the water of life take it as a gift!
(Revelation 22:17)

This verse reminds me that the Spirit (Holy Spirit), and the bride (the Church) say “come!” (Welcome). Let anyone who hears (maybe we, the believers) say “Come!” We can invite everyone to come to Jesus and hear the good news; we welcome whoever wishes to join in the faith and take the water of life as a free gift. Members of the church and also the people we invite can come to the table and receive the water of life for *free*.

When our friends from Israel visited us the first time, they came in a week where it was grey and rained a lot. We were apologetic (and maybe a bit cranky), but they were so excited. They said: “look, it is raining, that is fantastic, look at all the water you are getting, you are really blessed to live in a country where it rains so much!” Since they are coming from a country that is to a large extent desert, and most of the water for agriculture and otherwise has to be preserved or piped in with great effort, they had a much different appreciation for water than we had. For us, water was just “normal.”

Maybe we as church members are already taking this water of life too much for granted. Maybe we have lost a bit of the excitement about all this free water! We should invite people to church and to God’s table, and share in their excitement “to take the water of life for free.”

Dear Lord, we all thirst for your water of life. Help us bring others to your table where the living water is free.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Uli Neubert

“Here I am Lord”

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” He said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.” (Genesis 3: 8-10)

A women's lib speaker was addressing a large group and said, "Where would man be today if it were not for woman?" She paused a moment and looked around the room. "I repeat, where would man be today if it were not for woman?" From the back of the room came a voice, "He'd be in the Garden of Eden, eating strawberries."

In neglecting the tree of life, which was allowed, and desiring the tree of knowledge which was not, both Adam and Eve opted to disobey God. The serpent wasn't the problem or the sin - just the diversion from God's love and true knowledge or wisdom.

The free-will decision to procure what God said was not in their best interests created the "sin" which in Abrahamic context is "the act of violating God's will." St. Augustine said "the beginning of all sin is pride, the desire to live by the rule of self." The pride of Adam and Eve as a team caused their guilt, which made them hide out of fear.

Lord, always let me be reminded that the fear of you is the beginning of knowledge, and that fear is also reverential awe and respect. Let this trepidation guide my decisions, so if ever asked, I may respond like the hymn: "Here I am, Lord." In Jesus' name, Amen.

Bill Lafty

It Is Not Too Late

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you...(Genesis 17:1-2)*

What if you are old and tired of long waiting, or already living a dream life and settled in a comfortable routine, and the Lord appears to you or a circumstance arrives that calls for you to do something that seems impossible, or dreaming a different dream. What is your response? Are you going to be cynical and laugh about it like Abraham's wife Sarah? Do you have the imitate relationship with God and faith such as Abraham, and know what to do?

I remembered my pastor in Taiwan who was born in China. He went back to China to share the Good News with the brothers and sisters in China who were always in his prayers. In the late 80's when China opened the door for foreign missionaries, he was close to retirement age, but he responded to God's calling immediately; he aborted his retirement plans and became a missionary in mainland China. His response taught me a great deal about hope and faith, and that it is never too late to change plans that lead to the path of God's divine purposes.

Dear Lord, thank you for saving us through faith by believing in Jesus Christ. Please guide us and lead us to have an intimate relationship with you. Help us to be able to listen to you and adjust our behavior, our dreams, wishes, and plans, according to your will throughout our ever-changing circumstances of life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Janet Phillips

When I Feel That God Is With Me

And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be their slaves no more; I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.
(Leviticus 26:12-13)

Sometimes I just know that God is with me. It may be at school, at home, or just in general. At school, I feel that God is with me whenever I'm taking tests or quizzes. I feel as if he is there to watch over me and to get me through it. I also feel that God is with me when I go to chorus class. I feel as if he is there to make me sing the best that I possibly can.

When I'm at my house, I feel that God is with me whenever I am doing my homework. I feel as if he is there to help me with getting through my homework, no matter how short or long, written or typed. I also feel that God is with me whenever I am having a conversation with of my family members. I feel as if he is with me to make me feel compassionate towards that person.

I am God's child, as well as are many others. He shall keep us in his grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Kyle Korthaus, Confirmation Student, Grade 8

Important Lessons of God

“And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be their slaves no more; I have broken the bars of your yoke and make you walk erect.”
(Leviticus 20:12-13)

Some things in life might be important to society, but really they are just petty. The most important things are God’s lessons. The things God teaches us are the things that we should take and use through life. The things that God gave to us are the real things that are important in life.

Money, clothes, popularity and athleticism don’t matter when you go to heaven, or even when you’re alive. I have thought many times about how much money I have or about my athleticism, but they are not important. When I go to church. I learn the lessons of God and know how important these are in life. I will keep the lessons of God, because they are the most important things in my life.

**God, please help me learn more important things about you, and help those people who care about petty things; may they realize your lessons are very important.
In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Will Skarbek, Confirmation Student, Grade 7

Acknowledging That God Leads Us

But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians. (Exodus 14:29, 30a)

The Israelites were fleeing from Egypt and came to the Red Sea. They had no idea how they would be able to escape the Egyptians – God had Moses hold up his arms so the sea parted and was dry for the Israelites to cross over safely. After they crossed, the Egyptians were drowned in the water because God had the sea come together. God’s provision for their safety was perfect. The Israelites recognized that God had provided for their safety.

The same is true today. The Lord God provides many ways for us to achieve what he desires for us. Some ways are very common everyday events – like clearing our schedules to help others when we see no way that we can help. Have you ever had thoughts of needing to contact someone, and not having the time, and then finding that you have an appointment cancelled or a project goes smoother than you expected, freeing up some time? If you took the opportunity to contact the individual, you probably would find out it was the contact that was very much needed by that person. Thus you blessed their life and in return, you were blessed. We need to be sensitive to how the Lord leads us in our daily life. Know that even your words can be an encouragement to someone who is hurting in his life.

Lord, keep me sensitive to your leading me each day in my life. Use me, Lord, to be a blessing from you to others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Carol McAllister

A Gracious Invitation

So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord your God. (Deuteronomy 10:12-13a)

I love what this verse does **not** say:

- I am not required to understand the mysteries of the universe. That's definitely not do-able.
- I don't have to fully grasp the how and why of God's nature and His workings in our world – also over my head.
- I don't have to have perfect control over my emotions at all times. Anger and fear happen. A 24/7 happy face is not required.
- Unlike other religions of that time (about 1400 BCE) dreadful rituals and commands are missing and even forbidden.
- All the stated requirements are just, sensible and good for me.
- Above all, it is an amazingly gracious invitation to be a part of God's own people - a part of the "flock" of God.

Eighteen hundred years later, the Good Shepherd would lay down his life for foolish, wandering sheep like me.

Dear Lord, I have no words to express the thanks and praise that are your due. Please accept the gratitude and love that is in my heart and please help me to walk with you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Nancy Clark

Heart for God

For only you know the human heart. Thus may they fear you and walk in your ways all the days that they live in the land that you gave to our ancestors. (II Chronicles 6:30b-31)

God has commanded that we honor, respect, obey and love him. It is, however, an ongoing challenge to remain conscious of God with all the worldly temptations, deceptions and chaos that surround us. Several men with a heart for God have encouraged us with their examples and wise instructions.

David sought to follow God's law and spent much time meditating on it and trying to apply it to his own life. In Acts 13:22, God says, "I have found David, son of Jesse, to be a man after my heart, who will carry out all my wishes." Paul instructs us in I Thessalonians 5:16-18 to "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing and give thanks in all circumstances." In Philippians 4:8, Paul says, "Whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable - if there is excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

A contemporary pastor, David Jeremiah, advises that, "Against the backdrop of people who avoid work, cut corners, and do half-hearted jobs, a diligent man stands out. Practicing diligence is an excellent way to stand out for Christ at home, in the workplace, and even at church. Today, complete each one of your tasks, however big or small, with diligence."

Heavenly Father, guide us as we learn to make more time for you and bless us with the peace and contentment that comes from a close relationship with you.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dark Times

Oh, that I were as in the months of old, as in the day when God watched over me; when his lamp shone over my head, and by his light I walked though darkness. (Job 29:2-3)

From the beginning of 8th grade, I had been looking forward to going to high school. But, when I entered 9th grade this year, I was unprepared for all of the stress. High school was not what I had been led to expect from conversations in middle school. Finding all of my classes and getting there on time, learning how to use all of the required programs on the supplied laptop, and dealing with all of the homework ('way more than middle school!) was more difficult than I had expected.

God helped me through all of this, which was a dark time for me. He led me and helped me get through the initial stress and problems related to beginning high school. He also helped me to deal with a bad event that happened with one of my friends during homecoming weekend.

God helped me to realize that something good always comes out of something bad if you trust God. Whenever something bad happens to me, God is there to help me through it and I am so glad for that. Now, I love high school with all of its new opportunities and activities.

Dear God, please help everyone through the dark times in their lives and help them to realize that something good will always come out of the bad times if they trust and follow you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Alexis Bingaman

Walking Through the Darkness

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil,
for you are with me.(Psalms 23:4)*

When my husband died, I inherited the job of walking the dog. I found hiking to be really therapeutic, and on Fridays (my day off), that's what I did. My first long hike was on the rail trail at Leigh Gorge State Park. Johnny and I had done part of that trail, years before, but this time I started at a different spot. As I began, I thought to myself, "I am starting out on my new path in life." As I walked along, I came to a place where the hill had been cut away; there was water seeping out of the rock, the hill blocked the sun, and it was cold and dark. I felt that I was walking "through the shadow of death," but soon I was past that, and back in the sun and warmth.

Then I met some other hikers coming towards me, and they greeted me with a cheery "Hello!" As I was looking down at the river far below me, some canoeists came into sight. I was reminiscing about canoe trips Johnny and I had shared, when one canoeist looked up and saw me, waved, and called a greeting.

I realized that there would be some darkness (or sadness) in my new life, but I would come out into the sunshine again; I would meet new people and even strangers would be welcoming; and I would not be alone. Every Friday that spring was beautiful hiking weather, and the dog and I roamed all over eastern Pennsylvania, but that first hike made me realize that the dark moments would pass and were not to be feared.

Dear Heavenly Father, please give us courage and strength to see us through the darkest parts of life. Let us know that you are near, even when we forget to call on you in our distress. In Jesus' name, Amen.

A Walk Of Faith

Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. Prove me, O Lord and try me, test my heart and mind. For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to you.

(Psalm 26:1-3)

This psalm reveals the quality of the state of mind that should characterize every child of God. It reflects the humble, yet confident peace that resides within the honest soul who is attempting to walk with his Redeemer.

David is being judged. He knows he has a sincere heart in serving his master; his love for the Lord has always been within the fabric of his soul, yet he pleads for God to examine him. "Prove me; put me to the test." There is affirmation later in the psalm that God will do right for David.

Living a godly life, we should be able to see that we are faithful people; however, we should not be satisfied with our own judgment only. We should ask God to forgive our sins and to judge our character and conduct in our daily life. We affirm to God that we trust in his loving judgment and guidance.

Loving God, thank you for guiding me as I try to walk in faithfulness. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Madaline Heim

Trusting in the Lord

But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:31)

When I read this verse and reflected upon this passage it reminded me of a recent health issue I had. I was very scared and unsure of what was happening. I had a recurring rapid heartbeat diagnosed as *Supraventricular tachycardia (SVT)*.

My family and I were introduced to a team of doctors that educated us and guided us through a successful heart catheterization and ablation procedure. We prayed that God would guide us through the procedure, bless the doctors performing the procedure on my heart, and help me heal and be symptom-free.

After the procedure my doctor said, "Everything worked out well and now you should stay in normal heart rhythms." When reflecting upon the experience, I was reminded how wonderful our Lord is. I was reminded to put my faith and trust in the Lord, let God take control of my life, keep me safe and guide me throughout my life.

Thank you, Lord for bringing me through a successful surgery. Lord, help me remember to always have faith and trust that you will guide my life in the right path. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Miranda Polito, Confirmation Student, Grade 7

“Just Keep Swimming, Just Keep Swimming”

But for those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

(Isaiah 40:31)

Through many decades of war...Revolutionary, 1812, Civil, WWI, WWII, Korean, Vietnam, Iraq...no one knew what the outcome would be. They were fighting not only physically but also politically. There were many times of uncertainty and feelings of hopelessness. Our minds and bodies wanted to give up but our troops needed support and needed to know someone was looking over them. Through the prayers of the country and the cries of those in need of help, the soldiers kept going strong, putting up a long, hard fight to make a better life for all.

Which brings me to the title of my devotion: in the movie “Finding Nemo,” Marlin and Dory are searching for Nemo who had been captured by fishermen. Through the uncertainty of the journey they kept going, no matter the dangers, to find Nemo. Dory constantly told Marlin, “Just keep swimming, just keep swimming,” in order to keep his spirits up and not to give up the fight!

Dear God, please remind us to wait patiently, think positively, trudge ahead, look forward and know that Jesus gives us his promise that the present is secure, and that we have a bright future. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Brett Conley, Confirmation Student, Grade 8

You Are Not Alone

I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned. (Isaiah 43:1b-2))

We all face difficulties in our lives that can make us feel lonely and isolated. Sometimes we feel we are sinking under the weight of our troubles. Yet in this verse, God assures us that we are not alone. He will always be with us when loss or sadness or despair - or any of the daily challenges of life - threaten to overwhelm us.

He doesn't promise that life will be free of worry, trouble or pain. In fact, he tells us that we can expect trials to come our way, saying "When you pass through the waters" and "When you walk through the fire," not "if." But just as certain as the fact that trials will come is his promise that "I will be with you." He knows, has claimed, and is present for each one of us, individually and personally. What an incredible gift! His gracious love and presence are always with us, and will sustain us throughout our lives.

Dear Lord, please help me recognize your presence in my life and realize that your love will sustain me, no matter how life may challenge me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Debra Besch

T

His Promise to Us

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined. (Isaiah 9:2)

God was angry at the people, they had turned away from him. They were worshiping silver, gold and things made by human hands. God sent warning after warning but, the people didn't listen. God finally destroyed their vineyards, animals and lands.

God promises us that when we follow his ways, he will protect us, provide for us and guide us all the days of our lives. When we walk with God, we walk away from darkness and therefore we walk in everlasting light. When we walk with God we no longer dwell in the land of the shadow of death. We are living in everlasting life. God sent his only beloved son as a ransom ,to save the world. He is the almighty God and his love endures forever.

Father God, the world is desperate for you. Lord, we need your strength and power to sustain us when we are in situations where we feel weak and defeated. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Ester Mukasa

Be At Peace

For all His works are truth, and his ways are justice; and he is able to bring low those who walk in pride. (Daniel 4:37b)

This passage was spoken by King Nebuchadnezzar when he finally realized that there is only one true God. The message is clear; evil will not have the last word. It is very special to know there is one true God looking over your life.

At times in my life, things seem to be very difficult, but I always remembered the phrase, "Life is fragile handle, it with prayer." It is important not to lose hope in any way. What may not happen in your life today, will give you something to strive for tomorrow.

So pray and release any stresses and worries to God and his Son, Jesus Christ. *I give it all to you, Lord.* Be at peace; there are new and wonderful things for your future. Be at peace and continue with abiding faith.

Lord, Jesus, help us to walk in your way, and to remember, the Lord will give strength to his people and bless them with abiding peace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

John Kulp

Homo Proponit, Sed Deus Disponit

The human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps. (Proverbs 16:9)

The above theme is Latin for the now famous saying: “Man proposes, but God disposes.” It originally appeared in the 1425 publication, *Of the Imitation of Christ*, which has become the second most widely-read Christian text after the bible. This is a common biblical theme.

We all know that planning is good. After all, he who fails to plan, plans to fail. But as the poet Robert Burns noted, “The best laid schemes of mice and men / Often go awry.” Simply put, we should always remember that it is important to plan our lives. Those plans should be based on our Christian faith. But when our lives go in a different direction than our plans, then let us consider that this is God’s hand amending our plans.

Heavenly Father, help us to remember that when some of our plans don’t materialize, this is not necessarily a failure on our part, but a message from you as to the direction you wish us to go. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Walt Woerheide

Listen!

*Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but in the stubbornness of their evil will, they walked in their own counsels and looked backward rather than forward.
(Jeremiah 7:24)*

Don't we do this all the time? God says, "Love thy neighbor," but we hate people who are different from us. God says, "Honor thy father and mother," but we rebel and don't do as we are told.

It is hard to listen to reason when you are so sure that you know everything there is to know. We trudge on in our day to day lives, keeping score of who got the better promotion, who received the most attention, and how many times we were slighted. But that never moves us forward. That's not the way to feel happiness and love. God wants us simply to listen. Pay attention to all the small miracles around you.

We will truly feel God in our heart and move forward towards the best plan when we stop comparing ourselves to others, stop judging, and listen to God's plan.

**Dear God, thank you for having a plan for us. Help us to be still and listen, so that we may hear it.
In Jesus' name, Amen.**

Katie Cotter

Be A Disciple

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea – for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

(Matthew 4:18-20)

I never realized that Jesus was such a man of action! As Matthew reports it, Jesus decided it was time to begin recruiting his disciples, so as he strode along the Sea of Galilee, he observed two fishermen casting a net, and apparently he liked what he saw. “Follow me,” he strongly suggested, “and I will make you fishers of men.” Peter and Andrew quickly dropped the net, abandoned their boat, and Jesus had his first disciples.

I am often a “doubting Thomas.” I really wonder if getting those followers was as easy as Matthew makes it sound. At times today, it’s pretty difficult just to get volunteers to help with church chores. But of course, Jesus wasn’t and still isn’t, just anyone. He’s the son of God, our leader and our savior. His spirit still lives in each of us, and he is “*the Way*” to lead and guide us to earthly success and on to share in his eternal life.

So be prepared! We have all been called by Jesus and his teachings to be his disciple. It may at times be necessary to abandon our own nets and boats and follow Jesus because he is “*The Way*.”

Heavenly Father, help us to be your disciples by following your Son’s guidance and footsteps to our own heavenly reward. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Thomas Gibson

God

And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." (Matthew 14:25-27)

I have been thinking a lot about this quote these past days. It actually does not mean a lot to me right now -- I'm only 13 and have not yet experienced these things. When I have been in a sad situation, I did not go to God, I just kept it to myself.

But from now on, if I am ever in a bad situation, I would know what to do. I would ask God. Just like in the quote, God might come in unexpected ways. I would know in the back of my mind that it would all be okay. I would pray and hope it would end well. God might even walk on water to come to me.

Dear God, please be with all people as they are going through life. Even if they have a bad day, be with them and help them. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Maddie Niss, Confirmation Student, Grade 8

Faith and Fear

When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by.

But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." (Mark 6: 47b-50)

Sometimes when I read a passage of the bible, I wonder about the behavior of the disciples. Here are 12 men who spend a lot of time with Jesus. They are closer to him than most other people during the years of his ministry. And yet, there are instances when they react with fear, or amazement, or even deny that they know him. Don't they understand who he is? Don't they believe what he says? Why do they continue to be amazed by his miracles or respond to a situation with fear if they believe and have faith?

Upon further thought, I realize that I could ask those same questions about myself. I suppose most Christians could. When we find ourselves in a difficult situation, we are often filled with anxiety and fear. Even though we have witnessed the miracles of his creation all around us, we are surprised and amazed. It is true that, at times, we can identify with the disciples and their behavior more than we would like to admit.

Fortunately, the one who created us knows us well. God loves us and forgives us. We need only remember Jesus' words to the disciples. "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Almighty God, forgive me for the times when my faith is weak. Help me to grow stronger in my faith.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

The Supper at Emmaus

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road and while he was opening the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:28-32)

Whether or not we accept this Easter story as literal fact is less important than some truths it teaches us about ourselves. For example, in our church we can find comfort and hope in the weekly opportunity to participate in the Word and Sacrament, and to pray for the needs of ourselves, the whole Church, and the world.

Like the two disciples, we may often fail to recognize Jesus as being always present with us when we are blinded by our own grief, pain, anger, or despair. So we, for the same reason, feel challenged and confused. We do not feel strengthened or nourished by either the Word of God preached from the pulpit, or by the bread and wine of the Eucharist.

But, like the two disciples, we can see Jesus as the constant and living Word of God in our own lives when we reach out beyond ourselves to others, opening our hands to provide for the needs of a broken world, and open our eyes to new possibilities for its future.

Gracious Lord, we are thankful for your presence in our lives and our church community. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask your help and guidance to follow your will, as we invite all people, serve our neighbors, and build a living faith. Amen.

Skip Hoffman

Keep The Faith

*[Jesus said] "I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."
(John 8:12)*

Several years ago, I was diagnosed with dry macular degeneration. Recently, I was told it had progressed to wet macular degeneration. Injections in the eye have helped at times, but the prognosis is poor. I was told there is no cure and that my vision will keep diminishing.

At my last checkup, the retina specialist exclaimed, "'This is amazing! You have had macular degeneration for 20 years and you are in your 80s. I do not understand how you can see anything. You are writing books! What are you doing for your eyes?"

I answered, "Spinach and prayer." The doctor replied, "I am a scientist." My response was, "Doctor, you asked me a question and I gave you a truthful answer." "Well," said the doctor, "keep doing what you are doing." I said, "Doctor, I fully intend to!"

Dear Jesus, thank you for promising to always be with us. My inspiration to live a full life comes from you. Praise be to you, God the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Margaret Gibson

Life Goes On

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3-4)

When I reflect on the last year and all of the difficulties that we faced, I know that I would not have been able to get through them if I had not had Jesus by my side. Life is a cycle with births and deaths.

I could never imagine life without my dear mother. She was amazing and so full of life. She was not only a great mom and good friend, but an amazing wife, daughter, businesswoman, knitter, seamstress, furniture restorer, and much more. She had boundless energy even as her health was failing. When she passed away, it was quick and peaceful. As we all went through the grieving process, I began to realize how much she left with me. I have so many good memories as a child, young woman and adult. I realize that with her death she gave me newness of life. We will all die, but we never know what year, day or time that will be. But we carry newness of life within us. Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of God the Father, and so we too will walk in the newness of life. This realization has helped to comfort me.

Lord God, thank you for giving me my mother. Many people have never known their mother, or only had her for a short time. Help us make every day count and be thankful for your love. Help me take time every day to pray for those who are in need, so they may know that Christ died for them and they might walk in newness of life.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Debbie Ziegler

Walking In Faith

So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are always from the Lord – for we walk by faith, not by sight. (II Corinthians 5:6-7)

We know how it feels to lack confidence. We have all felt a little too comfortable in our own body and drifted from the Lord. We can all, at times, find it difficult to walk by faith, not by sight. These feelings separate us from the body of Christ. It is the body of the church that helps us overcome and keeps us on course in our walk.

One way the body of this church guides me on my walk is our yearly Appalachia Service Project trip. Coming together with others to help a deserving and grateful family reinforces the faith we need to be confident in. As a church body, Reformation workers receive back much more from Appalachia than we can ever give.

Lord, help us to remember that in order to receive your blessings and walk in faith, we must give freely of ourselves to others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dave Black

Walking in the Light

If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin. (I John 1:6-7)

In the way of the world, the darkness is ever present; but we cannot let this overcome the light that we have devoted ourselves to.

Jesus is our cleanser from sin, and we must remember that we carry him in our hearts through our baptism. By remembering our baptism, we will always walk in the light. We will never fall to the temptation of walking in darkness.

Nothing should stop any son or daughter of God from remembering where the light ends and the darkness, begins because we know through baptism that we are children of the light. It is our duty to never fall into temptation and darkness.

Dear Lord of Light, lead my steps away from the darkness of sin and into the light of love and fellowship with all your children. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Rebecca Alexander

Mind, Body and Soul

*And the city [of GOD] has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.
The nations will walk by its light... (Rev. 21:24)*

God is our “light” and the light of all mankind. His son, who died for our sins, is the “Lamb of God”. He will be our teacher, guiding light and represent all that is good. He helps and guides me in “mind, body and soul”. God wants me to do my best with my studies, in athletics and follow Christ’s teaching in everyday life. God helps me choose good over evil, light over dark. When I play sports I practice good sportsmanship play fair and not speak God’s name in vain.

While going to church and Sunday school I have become familiar with all of the ministries that our church has. Our church’s ministries visit the sick; help feed the hungry; and clothe the needy. I learn to be good to the earth by recycling and not to pollute the air and water. My church raises money for an Indian tribe out west and a town in Africa and helps to build schools.

Dear Lord, I hope and pray that I can be as good to others as my church is, and to be an example for others in my daily life. With God’s love and help I will continue to walk in God’s light. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Mathew Walter, Confirmation Student, Grade 8

What Will Your Heaven Look Like?

And the city [of God] has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light ... (Revelation 21:23-24a)

To me this means there will be no more darkness only light. I picture a lot of light and clouds in heaven and this light will be warm and comforting. This past year, I have read a couple of books with the theme of heaven or as described in this verse “the city [of God]”. I enjoyed reading the differences and even seeing similarities in what heaven may look like.

In the book, Heaven is for Real by Todd Burpo, Colton describes heaven as “where all the rainbow colors are.” I like this description because it’s an explanation of all the colors here on earth. Another book called Heaven Looks a lot like the Mall, the author Wendy Mass used words like “electricity” and “sparkling” to describe what happens when in heaven. Even though these books were very different, God is the source of this light.

Dear God, please help us to live in your light while we are here on earth and continue to guide us with your love so that we may reach you some day in heaven to walk with Jesus. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Madeline Walls, Confirmation Student, Grade 7

Easter Forever

And the city [of God] has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light ... (Revelation 21:23-24a)

One of my favorite Easter hymns includes this verse: “City of God, Easter forever, golden Jerusalem, Jesus the Lamb, river of life, saints and archangels, sing with creation to God the I AM! Jesus is risen and we shall arise. Give God the glory! Alleluia!” (*Alleluia! Jesus Is Risen!* ELW 377).

Singing these words reminds me each Easter of the great beauty that comes with rejoicing in the power of the resurrection and the promises of God for all of us. Through Christ’s triumph over the tomb, we are given new life and we live as Easter people forever. We live as people, who are, because of Christ, able to walk free from the power of death and into the light of God’s resurrection promises.

The joy of Easter is hearing again of God’s great, never-ending love for us. It leads us into each new day and gives us the hope and joy that comes in proclaiming that death is no more and that Jesus is risen! As we gather and celebrate the resurrection, we join our voices with all of creation to proclaim, “Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia! Alleluia!”

God of life, we rejoice in the great promises of Easter made real for us through the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus, our Savior. Empower us by your spirit to walk as people claimed forever in the gift of your never-ending love for all creation. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Pastor Alina Gayeuski

