

Devotions – February 21-27, 2021

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Sunday, February 21, 2021

Text: Genesis 9:15

I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

Why is it that memory brings people together? For me, Lent is a time to remember my mortality. Ash Wednesday is a time for me to remember that I am dust, and to dust, I shall return. All other marginal things do not seem central at the time these words are spoken as ashes are applied to my forehead in remembrance. It brings us all together in the community of believers.

Memory brought people together during the period of time when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated and when 9/11 occurred. But how does memory bring us all together when we choose to let go of our false selves and give way to our true self? What were those turning points in our lives that we continue to reflect on during this Lenten period of time? I guess the best answer I can give at this time is rigorous honesty. I left behind a church that had become for me more law than Gospel. I wrestled with my heart and soul and was found with a new horizon of thinking and believing differently. I believed that God’s covenant of “I am your God and you are my people” became a mantra for my transition.

Let us pray: *During this time of Lent we pray, O Lord, that our memory of your covenant continues to bring us together. May the rainbow of promise be a sign of your everlasting presence. Amen.*



Monday, February 22, 2021

Text: Psalm 25:5

Lead me in your truth, and teach me for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

Perhaps, there are times in our lives when we have felt that the meaning of truth and its message has been held hostage. Lent is a reflective time. Lent is a good period of time for us to reflect on the meaning and message of truth. How do we ask God to lead us into his truth?

For me, it's the memory of my installation as Pastor in 2004 to the congregations of Beaver American Lutheran and Porterfield Lutheran. Bishop Skrenes was the presiding minister and the one who installed me. His sermon focused on the meaning and message of Gospel truth.

His message was an awakening for me when he said these words: "Pastor Johannes, be a living example of God's truth to the people of these congregations!" "Wow!" I thought, what a responsibility to live up to. I know that I fell short of the mark at times during my call to those congregations.

What was significant for me was to be true to the principles of my faith and not to the personalities of those who have the ability to influence and bend the meaning of the truth that God has blessed each of us with. I pray that we be faithful to the truth.

Let us pray: Awaken in us Lord, the knowledge of your majesty and splendor found in the truth of your Gospel. May we be ever present to you, who with a guiding light be the way, the truth, and the life forever and ever. Amen.



Tuesday, February 23, 2021

Text: 1 Peter 3:18

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit...

We find suffering all over today, especially in overwhelmed hospitals. When we need surgery, we go to the hospital. Over ten years ago, I needed hip surgery. I couldn't tolerate the pain any longer and decided to have surgery. The anxiety is suffering enough for some people. For me, it was an anxious time when the staff prepped me for surgery and the surgeon handed me a sharpie and said, "Put the word 'right' on your right leg." I was a bit more anxious after that transaction. The surgery was successful and for now the hip feels great.

Lent is a time for me to appreciate the body God gave me and to take good care of it. When there is a time to pray with others it is in the setting of a hospital visit. During my years as a minister, hospital visitations were one of my most meaningful experiences. I remember this particular visit with an elderly lady who knew she was dying. She asked me to pray Psalm 46. When it came to verse 10 "Be still and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth," she breathed her last breath. It is often in that stillness that we make that conscious contact with God for our last breath.

Let us pray: I often wonder Lord, why good people suffer through sickness and ill health. Yet, Lord, I know your grace is with them in their suffering. I place my trust in you knowing none of

us suffers alone. For through your death and resurrection, we hope for your eternal home. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.



Wednesday, February 24, 2021

Text: Mark 1:14-15

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe in the good news.”

How do we know that the person who took his or her own life didn't repent and believe in the good news? I specifically remember when the nuns in the parochial school I attended were very clear in their understanding of the church's teaching that at the time when a person has taken his or her life, he or she does not merit salvation.

Throughout time and the Vatican Council II, the Catholic church discontinued teaching that eternal damnation was no longer seen as required for the person who took their own life. There was an understanding of compassion and mercy for those who acted to end their life.

In my youth was I as immature as my religion and the forementioned conclusion by the nuns concerning suicide and religion?

According to author Henri J.M. Nouwen, “A mature religion is integral in nature—that means it is flexible enough to integrate all new knowledge within its frame of reference and keep pace with all the new discoveries of the human mind. It indeed takes the cross into the space craft. Going to school means starting on the road to science, and if religion does not follow the same road with an open and critical eye, the grown person who flies the ocean in super jets might be religiously still content with (her or) his tricycle. Essential for mature religion is the constant willingness to shift gears, to integrate new insights and to revise our positions.” *Intimacy: Pastoral Psychological Essays* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Fides Publishers Inc., 1969), pp. 12-13. Thus, we qualify our understanding to see religion as a tool of our faith to ever focus on God's saving grace for all those who are vulnerable and in need.

Let us pray: *Gracious God, I am grateful to all those who taught me to expand my horizons and to see you our God as not a God of judgement but a God of mercy and compassion. Be with all those who are vulnerable and in need of your divine mercy and grace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

**Thursday,
2021**



February 25,

Text: Deuteronomy 26:6-7

When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression.

This text offers encouragement for people beginning a journey to the promised land. Through every phase of Israel's journey, God was faithful. Through every phase of my journey as Catholic, as priest, as Lutheran, as a Lutheran Pastor, God has been faithful. Like the people of Israel, it has been painful at times. Nevertheless, God gave me the ability and assurance that comes from perseverance. Moses assured the people of Israel that God gave the people the ability to persevere and go on to the promised land.

Lent is a time to hear a word of God encouraging us to persevere in this time of a pandemic that brought our world to a standstill. Yet, like myself, like the people of Israel, we move forward to a place where God assures us that we will be present to each other's needs through his grace. God is not a distant God.

Let us pray: *Loving God through the ashes of Wednesday, let us know that the cross on our forehead from the ashes is not the end. Keep us focused on our journey leading us toward the cross that is not an end but a new beginning toward our resurrection with you. Amen.*



Friday, February 26, 2001

Text: Romans 10:9

"...because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

I wish life would be this easy: "confess with your lips, believe in your heart, call on the name of the Lord and you will be saved." Paul's letter to the Romans is not easy-peasy; it's not a letter meant to make life, let alone the Christian life, easy. It's written for a community trying to figure itself out, much like any community today.

Lent is a time to investigate through meditation the exact meaning of these verses. I don't always understand who I am. I need these verses to help me understand who I am to be.

What do I need to do to be saved? These verses are helpful: “Confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe with your heart that God raised him from the dead” {Romans 10:9}.

There are times in my life that I would rest on the proverbial easy-peasy-do-this-and-you’ll-be-saved reading of this passage.

Protestants took up the banner of justification by faith alone, to condemn those works-driven Catholics and today, Christians of all colors are happy to have a checklist to figure out if someone is “really saved.”

The words of St. Paul are not seen as weapons to cut and divide, and to leave some in and some out of the saved community. Paul’s words are gathering and nurturing words: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Everyone.

Let us pray: *Gracious all-inclusive God, we await our final journey with you when everyone will be in your presence and will be accountable for who we are to be and to become in your kingdom forever. Amen.*



Saturday, February 27, 2021

Text: Luke 4:1-2

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished.

At first glance, I am not Jesus. I cannot live up to Jesus. I find myself short of the mark. It is beyond me to fight every temptation that comes along in my life. I used to equate distractions in prayer as the devil’s temptation.

I think Jesus did not allow the devil to define who he is in the wilderness and what his purpose is in life. He defined himself as God’s Son. I define myself as one who is a sinner defined by God’s mercy. Jesus remained faithful to his identity.

We begin our Lenten journey asking Jesus that we be faithful to our identity as God’s children. So, we follow Jesus from the wilderness of temptation to the wilderness of the tomb. This is our season of preparation for Easter and the resurrection from the tomb.

Let us pray: *Gracious God, help me follow you into these forty days of the wilderness. Lord, I am not perfect in my Lenten abstinence. However, weak though I am, I seek your strength of mercy and grace. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.*

