

Devotions – April 4-10, 2021

By Ken Raisanen

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Sunday April 4, 2021

Text: Psalm 100:1

Make a joyful sound to the Lord, all ye lands!

Today is our daughter's birthday. Falling on Easter Sunday this year, my wife and I will no doubt recall some of Elizabeth's greatest hits, church edition. As the husband of a church organist, it was always my job to keep her (and later, her little brother Daniel) occupied so mom could concentrate on her role in the Sunday service. We normally would sit in the balcony, where our organ is located, giving her plenty of room to ramble a bit if she was antsy. Like any parents whose youngster(s) 'disrupt' the proceedings, we were somewhat mortified by some of her antics. We also knew that age and familiarity gained by attending church services would work things out. The knowing smiles of the older church members assured us that no harm comes from kids being kids. For example, she was no more than three when she got away from me and dashed up the aisle, wrapped an arm around the altar rail and waved at the congregation. No doubt she just wanted to show off her dress. Another time, she mistook a choir member who looked a lot like her grandma Irene. She was trying to climb up on her lap when she suddenly realized it wasn't her grandma and came scurrying back to the other side of the balcony. Looking back more than thirty-five years, however, we pretty much agree on our favorite moment. Pastor Donald Reichers was wrapping up his sermon when a voice addressed him from the balcony: "Hey man, stop talking and start singing!" Pastor Don chuckled along with the congregation before concluding his sermon. And yes, Elizabeth got her wish as the singing soon resumed. Happy Birthday, Elizabeth.

Let us pray: *God bless the children, their parents for guiding their faith formation, and letting them make a joyful noise in their own way.*



Monday, April 5, 2021

Text: John 16: 33

I have talked over these things you so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have trouble: but have courage! I have overcome the world.

Thinking back to a year ago, we were all wondering exactly how we would be able to adapt to the ever-worsening COVID-19 pandemic. At the time our ecumenical mid-week Lenten services had to be discontinued, we had only gathered together twice. We began mulling over what would happen if the case numbers were still climbing when Holy Week arrived. Little did we realize that we would still be making adjustments as we neared Ash Wednesday in 2021. Our parish is fortunate because our association with the local FM station (WUPY Y101) meant we could still ‘meet’ in ‘radio only’ services available to anyone within the Western U.P. listening area or on the internet. To take up the slack caused by the cancellation of our normal mid-week services, Pastor Jay began posting video Lenten services on our parish website and Facebook page (www.northernlights-up.org). Posting these services allowed our congregations (and anyone else who wished) to view them any time that worked for them. Everyone agreed that when we were able to begin meeting again face to face in the summer, it was better . . . yet all agreed we were fortunate to have still ‘been together’ during the weeks when we could not physically meet. When the numbers began to spike again in November, there was much less of a ‘panic’ feel to the latest pandemic induced hiatus from in-person worship - we had been here before and found a way to make it work. Pastor Jay again went to work to post on-line versions of our Longest Night and Christmas Eve services. Added to the Christmas service the synod produced along with WLUC-TV 6, no one was denied the opportunity to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Returning to in-person worship again in mid-January was a blessing, but until things are more under control, we have, with the Lord’s guidance, found ways to keep worshipping with our church family and anyone else who has discovered the radio or on-line services.

Let us pray: *Yes, Lord, we hear your words - “In the world you will have trouble: but have courage!” Remind us to lean on you, have courage, and find ways to be together in these troubled times.*



Tuesday, April 6, 2021

Text: Matthew 6:34

Do not worry, therefore, in view of tomorrow, for tomorrow will have its own anxieties. Each day’s peculiar troubles are sufficient for it.

Nearing midnight on Election Day, 2020, I found myself sitting in the lobby of the Aurora Hospital in Green Bay while surgeons reattached a torn retina in our son Daniel’s left eye. The day had begun early with a 9 am call to our normal eye care provider in Calumet who, when told of his symptoms, said, “Get him here right away.” When the retinal tear was diagnosed, the immediacy of the problem was summed up in stark terms: “Get him to this clinic in Green Bay - Now! Plan on spending the night.” We went home, packed a bag, assessed the COVID-19 situation in Green Bay (their numbers were surging) and hit the road. To make a long story short, his surgery was a success and on the four hour drive home the day after his procedure, my

mind kept wandering to what the trip would be like when we returned for follow up appointments a week and then a month later. I resolved that there was no point in worrying about something I could not control (the weather) and concentrated instead on asking God to help us. I did not ask him for nice traveling weather, but to help me not be anxious about the upcoming trips. With the unusually mild weather we experienced in the early winter, all three trips to Green Bay were snowless. While our prayers for Daniel's healing were also answered, I thank God for easing my anxiety for things that would happen with or without me worrying about them.

Let us pray: *Dear Lord, when anxiety threatens to overwhelm us, help us to feel at peace.*



Wednesday, April 7, 2021

Text: Luke 10:27

The teacher of the Law answered, “You must love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole soul, your whole strength and whole mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”

Eight years ago, my wife Christine answered the call. The Sunday School program at St. Paul's had ceased to exist for a variety of reasons. The congregation was trending in a negative direction as the local economy struggled. As with many aging congregations, we were not seeing a lot of youngsters on Sundays, yet when we revived our Vacation Bible School (VBS) fifteen years ago, we were drawing in an average of thirty kids per summer session. Only about one third of the VBS participants had a family connection to St. Paul's, but we were happy to provide an opportunity for kids in the local communities.

My wife decided that the same sort of effort was needed and the first year, she began Wednesday Bible Adventures with a multi-age group of kids ranging from preschool (age 3) to middle elementary. There had only been one student pre-registered the first year, but the group has now grown to close to thirty. Some of the older WBA students have now graduated into Pastor Jay's Faith Formation classes. When in-person activities were suspended in March of 2020, my wife began to research how to do the program in the fall. Even if schools returned to in-person sessions, the multi-age WBA program was going to be all but impossible to run as it had in the previous seven years. Using a hybrid of packets mailed home (with a lesson outline, crafts, and instructions), Christine began recording the lessons to post on our parish website. For a person who does not like to hear her own voice on the answering machine, this was a big step but as I write this, she has just finished recording Lesson 9 and is working on Lesson 10. Pastor Jay does the post-production work adding titles, text references, and some intro-outro music before posting them on the website (www.northernlights-up.org) where they can be viewed at anyone's convenience. The program began using Pastor Jay's overworked laptop and when the synod sent

out information about assistance grants, my wife applied for one. By the second recording session, we had converted the old Sunday School office into a small studio replete with a green screen background, laptop, microphone, camera, and lights. Yes, COVID could have ended the WBA program but in this case, it has actually spurred an increase in numbers. Another Ontonagon church asked if they could get a copy of the mailed materials to duplicate so they could have their own Wednesday School students tune in. Word of mouth and helpful grandparents has added other kids from Ontonagon to Marquette to Nebraska to the mailing list. It is a lot of work and both my wife and Pastor Jay are looking forward to the day when in person sessions return. We have faith that the Lord will give us strength to carry on until then. In the meantime, I will leave you with the prayer song they use to start every session.

Let us pray: *Lord, listen to your children praying, Lord, send your Spirit in this place.
Lord, listen to your children praying, Send us love, send us power, send us grace.*



Thursday, April 8, 2021

Text: John 9:4

As long as daytime lasts we must do the works of the One who sent me.

Both my parents lived through the deprivations of the Great Depression and World War II. My mother was a farm girl and my dad was the son of a woodsman. Although I was not around during those two pivotal eras, the effect they had on my parents was not lost on me at a young age. Maybe I did not understand the big picture until I was a little older, but I certainly lived with and benefited from mom and dad's work ethic. From gardening to handyman projects, there were lessons to be learned and numerous opportunities to learn by doing. Many of my earliest church memories came from my folk's using these same skills at St. Mark's in Marquette. Mom was involved in choir, quilting, and various kitchen related activities. My dad was one of the 'we need someone to . . .' guys. When the original St. Mark's church was still being used as the 'Sunday School chapel', the church council decided to construct an enclosed walkway/entry way between it and the new church building. Whether we were laying block for the foundation or shingling the roof, I remember hearing many stories about my dad's younger days and particularly one's with church connections. There are many different types of church work. The jobs that require physical labor always remind me of my parents and how their 'make do with what you have' attitude connected me to church, then and now.

Let us pray: *Thank you Lord for those who labor for churches and communities in your name.*

Friday, April 9,

Text: Psalm 32:8
***I will instruct
in the way you
counsel you with***



2021

***you and train you
shall go; I will
my Eye on you.***

When my dad was a State Trooper, he was called out to help find a lost hunter. The man's truck had been found in an area dad had also hunted over the years, so he volunteered to search one of the backroads that paralleled the main road where the man's truck was parked. There had been fresh snow overnight, so dad drove down the road looking for any fresh tracks or other signs. Rounding a bend, he looked up and noticed a red clad figure crossing the road from north to south. The man didn't respond to dad honking the horn so when he drove up to the spot where the hunter had re-entered the woods, dad went after him. It didn't take long to catch up because the hunter was obviously tired and disoriented as his path kept zig-zagging and he was frequently tripping on snow covered obstacles. Dad caught up to him in time to help him after another fall and said his name a couple of times before the now wild-eyed hunter recognized him. "Eddie, what are you doing here?" the man asked. When dad told him that there were a bunch of people out looking for him, the man replied, "Why? Hey, I gotta go. I have to go and find my truck." It took some convincing to get him back to the road because the hunter had completely lost track of where he was and how long he had been out in the woods. He was determined to go on his way again until dad got him back to his car.

A few weeks later, the hunter stopped by the State Police Post to thank everyone for looking for him. He told dad, "Man, I was lucky you found me because the direction I was headed, I might never have been found." Dad told this story around the table during hunting season. He always attributed 'luck' to the little voice in his head that suggested where he should look for the lost hunter: "Who do you think gave me the idea of where to look?"

Let us pray: *Help us when we are lost. Help us listen for your voice and guidance.*



Saturday, April 10, 2021

Text: Mark 11:23

For I assure you, whoever says to this mountain, 'be taken up and thrown into the sea' and entertains no inner doubt but believes that what he says will happen, it shall be so for him.

When the late Pastor Henry Kangas retired from the ministry and returned to St. Paul's in Mass City, he became one of the regular presenters on WLUC-TV's popular *Suomi Kutsuu (Finland Calling)* show. After one Sunday service, he approached my wife and me with a request. Pastor Henry asked, "Would it be possible for you to film my *Suomi Kutsuu* segments here at the church? Christine could play the organ for a hymn and you can video tape it. It is getting difficult for me to drive to Marquette once a month to record at the TV station." As a long time church organist, my wife would have no trouble as she had accompanied Pastor Henry singing hymns in Finnish before. The kicker here was me. I told Pastor Henry, "Gee, I would like to help, but I do not have a video camera and I have never operated one in my life." Pastor Henry had no such doubts: "I have faith that you will figure it out." I was able to borrow a VHS camera from the school drama department and took a crash course to learn how to use it. My wife would pick out a colorful seasonal banner to hang as a backdrop behind Pastor Henry. My job was to set up the video camera, give Pastor Henry time cues to make sure he had time to do his hymn, and then mail the tape to TV 6. We got the routine down pretty quickly and ended up having to reshoot one session when we discovered the camera had failed to record the audio for that session. I do not speak Finn, but the tone and 'feel' of Pastor Henry's sermons were still moving. It is an experience my wife and I still talk about many years after Pastor Henry and *Finland Calling* are no longer with us. His faith in us and his calling to share the Gospel have provided us with cherished memories, ones that we would not have experienced if I had taken the easy way out and said, "No, I can't help you."

Let us pray: *Help us to see you in the faith that others see in us.*

