

Devotions – April 18-24, 2021

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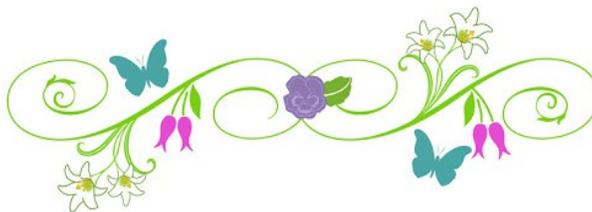
Sunday April 18, 2021

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:51-57

Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: “Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Never have I needed the good news of Easter more than this year. It has been a very difficult year for so many and that has been especially true for my family. There has been illness, and death. There has been separation and loss. And I was dismayed to learn that I wasn't as tough as I always thought I was. I didn't measure up to my Viking heritage. I thought I was made of sterner stuff. My Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish grandparents often would often remind me that in tough times you had to make yourself hard. And I knew they didn't mean cold and unfeeling, but rather that when you faced difficulties you persevered and worked through it all. But I wasn't so tough after all. I was at a loss for not only how to care for my family, but also how to care for myself. It has been a year like no other. I have hung on to the promise of Easter like never before. My daughter texted on Easter afternoon, “Easter is such a good reminder of how the happy news of today means so much more this year.”

Let us pray: *Abide with us, O Lord. Abide with us in your comfort and blessing. Abide with us in our dark times, in the night of doubt and when fear and worry overtake us. Abide with your church and all the faithful ones, O Lord. And keep us close in your love and mercy. AMEN*



Monday, April 19, 2021

Text: Psalm 119: 147-149

With my whole heart I cry; answer me, O Lord, I will keep your statutes. I cry to you; save me, that I may observe your decrees. I rise before dawn and cry for help; I put my hope in

your words. My eyes are awake before each watch of the night that I may meditate on your promise. In your steadfast love hear my voice; O Lord, in your justice preserve my life.

The church in my last congregation was about 100 yards from the Savannah River, and the members had built an amphitheater on the banks of that river. The benches faced east toward the river and every Easter the congregation and members of our surrounding community would rise before dawn to gather and face the place where the sun would appear over the trees. If the timing was right, folks wouldn't have long to sit in the darkness, fanning away the gnats with bulletins as they waited. And when the light from the sun would color the horizon the church bells would peal and we would shout, "Alleluia, Christ is Risen!" The memory of that joyful moment stays with me—it never got old, it brought us to our feet to sing the ancient Easter hymn of John Damascus, "Come ye faithful, raise the strain."

"Tis the spring of souls today; Christ has burst his prison; And from three days' sleep in death, as a sun has risen. All the winter of our sins, long and dark is flying, From his light to whom we give laud and praise undying."

Let us pray: God of Hope, we are joyful as we live through this most welcomed Easter season. Thank you for all the faithful saints who have gathered over the centuries to celebrate and share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Renew joy in our hearts this Easter season and always. Amen



Tuesday, April 20, 2021

Text: 2 Corinthians 4:6-12

It is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Ken, my neighbor behind my house, lost his wife to cancer last fall. There was no funeral or gathering of friends and neighbors. He had no family in the UP. We were in the height of the pandemic and cautious about the rapidly spreading virus. So neighbors would drop off a loaf of bread or a pan of muffins on the porch. I would see Ken taking his dog out at times during the

day and wave and say that that I was thinking of him, and glad to see him. But for the most part he kept to himself. And his health wasn't good either.

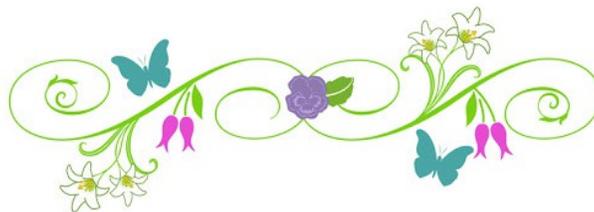
So this winter, after our bad snow storm, he called his sister down state and packed up a few things and Ken and his dog left town indefinitely.

The first week of April I called him to send Easter greetings and see how he was getting along. He was very unresponsive and said little. The conversation lagged and I was about to say goodbye, but then I remembered to mention that tulips were coming up all along the side of his house. "Really!" he said.

"My wife planted those tulips years ago. I can't tell you how happy it makes me to think about them coming up. Can you send me a picture when they bloom?" He told me about how his wife loved to be in the garden, how she loved to prepare home grown vegetables, how she loved spring flowers. With animation and excitement, we talked on for a long time.

I believe the joy of Easter comes to us in many ways, but it always brings possibilities for something new and surprising. From death springs life and a glimmer of hope. So many of us welcome Easter as we never have before. Grasping on to the Risen Christ with confidence that broken as we are life is at work in us.

Let us pray: God of surprises, teach us that your purposes for us are larger than our present disappointments and fears. Deepen our trust in your promise to restore life from death. Set our hearts on doing your will and resting in your care. Amen



Wednesday, April 21, 2021

Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

For some reason that I couldn't understand, my mother really dreaded the time of year when the days grew shorter and the nights grew longer. I loved the first snowfall, but she mostly fretted

about the cold nights, and long dark hours. But she also never failed to welcome the lengthening of days as spring wore on. This past year I can understand why my mother felt that way. As autumn came last year, with so many COVID deaths, and so many long and socially distanced days, and so much anxiety, I too longed for the sun to warm, and heal, and bring us together safely. I prayed for the sun to melt the grief of loss for loved ones.

Many times this winter, I have played the hymn “Canticle of the Turning,” and thought about how relevant the text is for our time. The refrain plays in my head this Easter Season, “My heart shall sing of the day you bring. Let the fires of your justice burn. Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near, and the world is about to turn.”

Let us pray: *Gracious and loving God, we give you thanks that as the seasons come and go, there will be a day when you will bring the peace and joy we long for in the return of your Son, Jesus. Bring the light of Christ to a world that walks in darkness. Renew and refresh your people with hope. Stand with us in our dark days so that we may face the future with confidence and trust in your abiding love. AMEN*



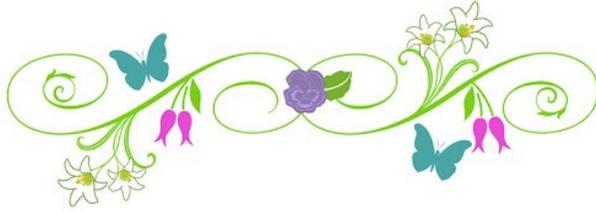
Thursday, April 22, 2021

Text: Matthew 11:28-30

Jesus said, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and by burden is light.”

For me, the most comforting and helpful of the offices is Compline. Especially these past months, when the words, “The Lord almighty grant us a quiet night and peace at the last” kept running through my head. I had taken sleeping most nights and getting adequate rest for granted but no longer. Sleep now eludes me many nights. I don’t know if it was the stress of having grandchildren living with me for several months, or concern for my daughters, or worrying about keeping my family safe, or just plain getting old, but whatever it was, I no longer am able to easily go to sleep anymore. But I have learned over these past months that sleep is a blessing and I have learned to be thankful for sleep. I am so grateful now for a peaceful night and a refreshed mind and body.

Prayer from the Compline service. *O Lord, support us all the day long of this troubled life, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes and the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then, Lord, in your mercy, grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*



Friday, April 23, 2021

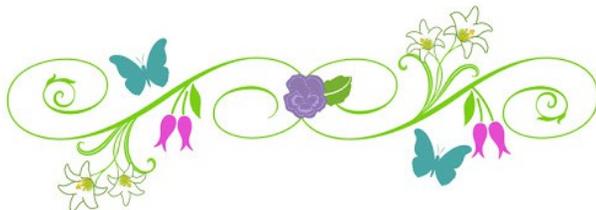
Text: Romans 5:6-8

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

Every Holy Saturday for many, many years, I would sit down with my family after Easter Vigil and watch the Cecil B. DeMille movie, “The Ten Commandments.” I used to make it through the whole movie but these days I usually turn it off before the parting of the Red Sea. However, I never miss the part where Moses walks into the desert not knowing if he will ever survive. The narrator tells the viewer that during this time of facing an unknown future, it is God who is fashioning Moses to be ready to hear God’s voice. When Moses was ready to give up, the time was right, and God gave Moses new direction and new hope.

For all the days of hopelessness, frustration, and isolating that many in our world have faced in the past months, I believe this Easter in particular God is giving us new direction and new hope. After a year or more of feeling like Lent would never end, Easter dawns and with it trust that even in the sad times, the right time is dawning to hear the Good News that God is giving strength and courage to those at their wit’s end. Of course, life continues to be complicated and hard and it is not going to get easy or be without difficulty, but what a glimmer of joy comes with this Easter.

Let us pray: *Pour out your Spirit on us, O God. Help us to move forward in confidence as you lead us out of whatever desert we find ourselves struggling in toward a place of safety. And hasten the time when your will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen*



Saturday, April 24, 2021

Text: Psalm 122

I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord!”

On April 11th I worshipped in my home congregation for the first time in over a year and it was wonderful. It was very different of course. The congregation was careful and followed all the guidelines to keep us safe from the virus, but even with masks and strange seating and lack of singing, it was wonderful.

I looked around to see the font where I was baptized, the altar rail where I affirmed that baptism, the chancel where I said my wedding vows, and in front of the steps to the chancel the place where so many of my family members laid in coffins for their funeral services, and where I will be, too, for my funeral, God willing. We didn't shout Alleluia of course. In fact, voices were muffled and faint, but in my head and heart I was living Easter morning again with joy that couldn't be suppressed. It was a time of healing and hope.

Let us pray: *God of grace and mercy, through these troubling times, we turn to you for help. Strengthen our faith and guide us this Easter Season to better serve your Kingdom. Teach us how to love each other and bring comfort to those who suffer and are lonely and afraid. Thank you for our pastors and all the faithful saints whose service points us to your Son, Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen*

