

..... Daily Devotions
Devotions – May 9-15, 2021
Synod Assembly Week
By Synod Conference Presidents and Representatives

Sunday, May 9, 2021

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/M4NL5TbabKA>



H O P E

A Devotional for the Northern Great Lakes Synod Assembly

Pastor Melinda VanderSys:

Greetings from the Three Lakes Conference of the Northern Great Lakes Synod.

Our scripture for this time together is from Ephesians chapter 1, verse 18:

“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people,”

I have asked some of my colleagues of the Three Lakes Conference to share in this devotion, each using a word from the letters H O P E.

“**H**” for Holy from Pastor Matt Deames who serves St. James Lutheran Church in Rudyard;

“**O**” for Ordinary from Pastor Renee Macleod who serves Zion Lutheran Church in Allenville and Bethel Lutheran Church in Cedarville;

“**P**” for People from myself, Pastor Melinda VanderSys, who serves Our Redeemer Lutheran Church and First Presbyterian Church in Newberry;

“**E**” for Enlightened from Pastor David Tielbar who serves Trinity Lutheran Church in Brevort and Zion Lutheran Church in St. Ignace.

Pastor Matt Deames:

Ephesians 1:18 speaks about God’s holy people. So, just what makes a person holy? What does it mean to be holy?

One of the greatest confrontations that we find in the Bible in Galatians 3 happened between Peter and Paul in the city of Antioch. However, this disagreement between these two men did not lead to any further conflict or division in the church. So, was Paul, by calling Peter out, suggesting that Peter was less than holy? Was Paul being less than holy by confronting Peter’s behavior in the way that he did?

I think that we tend to take this gift of being discontent at times for granted. This is what extremist groups of all stripes can’t seem to fathom. It’s why they think the opposite side has no moral center. But accepting failures of ideas, dreams, and ambitions, and yet continuing to look forward to future possibilities; that’s what holy people do. That’s who holy people are.

Pastor Renee Macleod:

“**O**” is for ordinary. God came to earth as an ordinary person. He was born in a stable with ordinary people and He lived among ordinary people.

Jesus wasn't born like a king. He wasn't born in a mansion. He was born in a stable with donkeys and cattle.

Jesus walked among the people and He did ordinary things. He performed miracles with normal everyday things. His first miracle was to turn water into wine. And then He took some bread from a young man who happened to be fishing in the area. He used the bread and the fish to feed 5,000 people. Jesus turned ordinary things into extraordinary miracles. A miracle in itself. God in human flesh. God becoming “**Ordinary**”. Amen

Pastor Melinda VanderSys:

“**P**” is for People. Dear people of God, we are called to proclaim God's Word to all the world. We do not do this on our own. We cannot do this on our own.

We are claimed, gathered, and sent as God's chosen People. We profess this belief in the Apostles' Creed. We join together with the communion of saints. We share with one another the hope of our true calling.

Martin Luther gives voice to this in the meaning of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed:

I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers. On the last day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.

Pastor David Tielbar:

And finally, we come to, in our theme word, HOPE, we come to the letter “**E**” and the word chosen for that is enlightened.

We find Paul praying in Ephesians 1:18 that their hearts may be enlightened. And that's not necessarily an intellectual thing either. Because when we think about an enlightened heart, we kind of go back to the Beatitudes: Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

Now, the darkness in our heart is sin and when we open our heart to God, our center, to God, it gets enlightened. And that is what Paul is praying for, that their hearts be enlightened to the gospel, to the hope that is within the gospel.

Pastor Melinda VanderSys:

As we go forth from this time of devotion and gather with our friends in Christ, may we be filled with the hope of what was, what is, and what is to come, remembering the words from Ephesians 1:18:

“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people,” Amen.



Monday, May 10, 2021

By: Pastor Tammy Barthels, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Rhinelander, WI and President of the Headwater Conference, Conference 3 which includes,
Pioneer Lake Lutheran in Conover, WI
Prince of Peace Lutheran in Eagle River, WI
Ascension Lutheran and Calvary Lutheran in Minocqua, WI
Trinity Lutheran and Immanuel Lutheran in Rhinelander, WI
Shepherd of the Lakes in Sayner, WI
Faith Lutheran in Three Lakes, WI

YouTube Link: https://youtu.be/376_hEpC4LA

Text: Romans 5:5

“and hope does not disappoint us because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”

The verse on Hope that I chose is Romans 5:5.

I thought of this verse immediately when Bishop Katherine asked if we would do a devotion on a Bible verse that has to do with HOPE.

This is the verse that I use at each funeral or memorial service that I preside at. It is a verse that reminds us that Hope, that God, is always with us. That God’s promise of eternal life is true, this gives us hope when we feel hopeless. No one can take this hope from us because the Holy Spirit has poured it into our hearts; it is with us forever.

Even though I knew this is the verse I would probably do a devotional on, it didn’t stop me from looking up other verses on HOPE through BibleGateway, my bible app.

I entered the word HOPE into the search engine and 180 verses came up! Ninety-seven (97) verses in the Hebrew Scriptures, and 83 in the New Testament

The Book of Psalms had the most with 34, with the book of Job running in second with 18 verses. This surprised me. The book of Job doesn’t strike me necessarily as a book of hope. But as I re-read Job’s story, Job does not lose hope in his Lord. The journey for Job was not easy. The book of Job explores the story of a good, innocent man who suffers terrible loss. Everything he has is destroyed, his wealth, his beloved children, and his health.

The book of Job explores questions such as: “Why do the innocent suffer?” “Where is God in my suffering?” “What kind of world is this?”

I am sure we have asked many of these questions during this past year, with the pandemic, the election, civil unrest, and much more.

Throughout the book of Job, Job holds his innocence, even when his friends accuse him of sin and call him to repent. His suffering is not the result of sin, and his friend’s accusations only add to his suffering.

What the book of Job does for me is remind me it is ok to lament! Lament over all we have lost. But it also teaches me about the power of prayer. Job continues to pray to God. Job, in his anger, his suffering, in his anguish continually calls out to God. He still knows that God is with him.

And here is the other thing that I remember about the Book of Job. At the end, God takes Job on a grand tour of the cosmos. God does not speak of Job’s suffering, but instead takes Job’s focus off himself and helps him see the world around him.

The world as God describes it, is a good, ordered creation, but it is also given a certain freedom. God takes delight in the creatures – the sea, the wild animals. God cares for them as God also cares for Job.

In the face of his suffering, Job is invited to see and delight in the world God has created. Job is invited to live in it with the same freedom God gives all God’s creatures. In spite of his great suffering, Job accepts that invitation and chooses to live and love again.

I believe that we too are invited to see and delight in the world God has created, and to choose to live and love again. To plant ourselves in God’s HOPE.

Yes, 2020 was a trying year. We had our time of anger and anguish, our time to lament. But now is the time to focus on the HOPE that God has given us in Christ Jesus. Remembering *that HOPE does not disappoint us because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit*. And it is this HOPE in which we stand. Thanks be to God!



Tuesday, May 11, 2021

By: Lori Ward, Calvary Lutheran Church Quinnesec, Conference 4 and Synod Missioner

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/Q77HKfFK1EA>

Text: Isaiah 40:31

**“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. (NRSV)**

The words “wait” and “hope” are intertwined in Hebrew scripture, according to Jewish scholar Cherice Bock. In fact, the same verse in the *New International Version* reads,

but those who **hope** in the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will **soar** on wings like eagles;

We wait on the Lord and we hope in the Lord. Doesn't that describe the time of waiting and hoping that we know today?

One of the great joys of living in the Northern Great Lakes Synod, is that we dwell among the eagles ... and the deer, rabbits, wolves, bears, and moose, along with the abundant wildlife of all kinds. The golden eagle and the great bald eagle are two of my favorite neighbors. Both are magnificent and majestic. When I see the eagles in the sky, I stop. I watch how they soar and rise, just like one of our favorite hymns expresses: God will raise us up on eagles' wings and make us to shine like the sun.

I can remember times when my heart soared with hope, but children might have trouble understanding that concept.

What does it mean to say, “Our hearts soar?”

To a child, I would say: “Look to the eagle or the hawk. Watch how they glide high and swoop in the sky. That is soaring. So also, to soar is to fly high on a swing ... to race downhill on skis.... Or to leap off the end of the dock into the lake next to the sauna.

So, too, with hope in the Lord, we fly, we rise up, and we soar.

Let us pray: *Good and gracious God, make us to shine like the sun as we share your light and love with others. Take us to new heights in our daily walk with you. And when we are weary, oh Lord, we give you thanks for holding us in the palm of your hand. Amen.*

Wednesday, May 12, 2021



By: Pastor David Murphy, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Peshtigo, WI
Conference 5

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/obyhWP-hkic>

Text: Romans 8:38-39

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

When we consider the idea of hope, especially in the midst of a time of such loss, such grief, such disruption to what was normal, it can seem difficult. In fact, searching for hope when the only things that seem to surround us are darkness, and the brokenness of a sinful world, can feel hopeless. Which is why I find Paul’s words so very hopeful. Paul wrote this letter to the Romans at a time when the Church was struggling. Paul himself had faced persecution and imprisonment an untold number of times. While the young Church struggled to survive, and wrestled with questions of faith and practice.

It would have been both an exciting and terrifying time to be the Church. It would have been exhilarating to proclaim such good news of great joy and hope, yet terribly distressing with the real fear of alienation, imprisonment, or death. It is a holy thing to proclaim faith in Jesus Christ. It is a hopeful thing to proclaim the forgiveness of sins and the defeat of death’s power. But that doesn’t mean it is an easy thing.

As faithful followers of Christ, in the pursuit of hope, we can find many obstacles along our path. We know that it is by God’s grace through our faith in Jesus Christ that this promised hope of resurrected new life eternal is freely given. But, the brokenness of human life makes it easier to see the stumbling blocks than to see God’s loving gifts.

Which is likely why Paul wrote such a comprehensive list of what doesn’t get in the way of God’s love and the hope we seek in Christ. Not death, not even life, can get in the way of God’s love. No heavenly beings can stand in the way. No earthly leaders, nothing now, nor anything in the future can cause us to stumble. No obstacle of any size or power, nor anything else that exists can keep God’s love away from US. Therefore, NOTHING can impede our HOPE found in *“the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Truly, are there more hopeful words, in all of scripture, than to hear that NOTHING can get between God’s love and YOU? God’s love is the hope and joy we seek and share as the body of Christ. Such that, when it seems like all hope is lost, we can turn to Paul’s words of reassurance and know that even the darkness we feel around us at that moment, is covered on the list of what can’t stop God’s love from getting to us. Meaning that there is HOPE for ALL, even when it feels like only despair.

Sisters and brothers, the promised hope we have in Jesus Christ is what holds our faith together. That faith is built upon God’s love and our belief that it is for each and every one of us. It is

from this hope and love that the joy of our lives come. Thanks be to God that absolutely nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Peace and blessings to you all.



Thursday, May 13, 2021

By: Pastor Diane Srutowski, Bethany Lutheran Church, Perkins and
Trinity Lutheran Church, Stonington – Conference 6

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/1209UDXrOJg>

Text: Romans 5:3-5 (NRSV)

³ And not only that, but we¹ also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Hello, my name is Diane Cloutier Srutowski and I am blessed to be called to serve in a shared ministry at Trinity Lutheran Church in Stonington and Bethany Lutheran Church in Perkins. I am currently the president of Conference 6. I was asked by Bishop Katherine to write a devotion on hope for Prayfaithfully during the week of Synod Assembly, I knew immediately what scripture text I would use. There are a lot of texts that talk about hope, but this scripture holds a special place in my heart.

We all have times of darkness in our lives, times when it is difficult to see the light at the end of the tunnel. I believe that God often provides us with angels that walk along side of us, through thick and thin, good times and bad. When I was struggling with a particularly difficult situation, a wise young woman, Amanda, gave me a silver round bracelet with the inscription: “Tribulation~Endurance~Character~Hope. Hope does not disappoint.” And on the inside of the bracelet, she had inscribed a little heart with the words, “To the moon and back.” This kindness and compassion was exactly what I needed to hold on a little longer, to not give up hope, to see a glimmer of light when the darkness threatened to overtake me. I still have that bracelet from many years ago, and every time I look at it, it reminds me of this special young lady’s love that she so generously shared with me.

Another delightful angel amongst us delivered a poignant, inspiring poem for the 2021 inauguration of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. Amanda Gorman, the youngest inaugural poet in the history of our country, wrote and delivered “The Hill We Climb”

in which she writes about hope and the promise that “there is always light, if only we’re brave enough to see it. If only we’re brave enough to be it.”

It does indeed take courage and strength to be a light in the darkness for those going through tribulation and suffering, as they try to build endurance which strengthens their character that finally turns into hope, a hope that does not disappoint. I encourage you to be like these two beautiful, wise young women named “Amanda.”

Marty Haugen, in his new CD called “Choose to Hope Songs of Reconciliation, Renewal & Promise,” writes: “Hope is born when we choose to believe that love is stronger than hatred. Love is born when our hearts learn to see that every person is sacred. In times of darkness, in times of fear, choose to hope, choose to love and know that God is near.”

Let’s pray: God of hope, help us to choose to hope in these times of pandemic darkness. Help us to be a light in the world that reveals your love. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen

I encourage you to listen to both: “The Hill We Climb” by Amanda Gorman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZ055iIiN4> and

“Choose to Hope” by Marty Haugen <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzMGaAd4Js4>



Friday, May 14, 2021

By: Pastor Soren Schmidt, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Chassell, MI
Conference 2

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/Kv-c9vgl8WE>



Saturday, May 15, 2021

By: Pastor Stacy Pethke, Faith and Trinity Lutheran Churches, Ishpeming, MI
Conference 8

Text: Psalm 23

23 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Psalm 23 is probably one of the most known six verses in the Psalms and the Bible. Many of you could probably recite it by heart. Many of you may reflect on it and not have “fond” memories but may have it wrapped around grief, it was read at a funeral you have attended. Being a pastor, when I see faces of people, as this Psalm is read, I see a sense of sadness often come over them. It perplexes me as I so appreciate the book of Psalms. I have come to love this Psalm and hope that my listeners hear the love and hope as I share it with them.

There is great love in this Psalm beginning with verse 1, “The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.” For Christians, the Psalm immediately starts off reminding of a Lord who is always beside us and if we allow God to walk with us, we will never be in this journey alone in life. We are led by green pastures and still waters when we trust in our Father.

We know that we will be challenged in our lives and this is of our own doing, our own choice which God has allowed us to do. Our choices can take us into those deep valleys that can sometimes feel like death. If we continue to follow the one who gives us life we will come out of the depths of grief and sadness. We have a God who wants the best for his people but just like the Israelites, we have a choice to make. When our faith and hope are in Christ, we have nothing to fear, even death itself.

As a Shepherd of sheep, God will always guide and protect us. God will provide all that is needed, food for the journey and protection from those who mean to hurt us. In our human nature, we will no doubt be hurt by someone we know and/or by someone who is a stranger. If we lean into God, put our trust in God, there is nothing we cannot overcome. It is not always easy, but we are reminded of our worth as we are called in the waters of baptism as well as when we come together at the Lord’s Supper.

The Psalm also reassures, that no matter where we are or where we go, the Lord is with us. And really, that is what this Psalm is ultimately all about. Think about how many times the Bible tells us, *Do not fear!* We are reminded 365 times, which really is not coincidence. From the beginning in Genesis, the Lord calls to Isaac in the night and says, “Do not be afraid for I am with you” (Genesis 26:24). No matter where we wander or stray, the Shepherd will find us and bring us back to the fold, whether that be in this earthly kingdom or the next. We are being pursued by the Lord, no matter where we go, so yes, *mercy and goodness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord all forever!*

What a guarantee and what hope we have been given through the life, death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Our eternal journey started the day we came upon this earth; we were claimed by God as God's children and we will walk with our Shepherd into the next life, light perpetual, life eternal!

So I invite you the next time you read this Psalm, do not hang on the words of the valley of shadow of death. Yes, we will walk that valley, but we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. That is our sure and certain hope as disciple and followers of Christ. Amen.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, we often feel like we walk in dark valleys alone. May we seek out your presence as our Shepherd who will never leave us. You are a loving and merciful God who will pursue us even when we stray. Thank you for never giving up on us and for giving your children your mercy and your love. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

