

August 8 – 14, 2021

By Writers from Around the Synod

Sunday, August 8, 2021

By: Susan Anderson

Text: Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard you hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This passage is a mixture of seemingly unrelated commands and ideas--rejoice, let your gentleness be known, the Lord is near, don't worry, pray with thanksgiving. The unifying notion is God's presence in our everyday lives and the gifts that brings to us and the community of which we are a part. Overflowing joy stems from focusing on our Lord. That results in our gentleness being known to everyone. The Greek word translated gentleness includes a spirit of generosity, magnanimity, and consideration of others in the manner of Christ. There are no harsh words, no name calling, no catchy, derogatory nicknames, no belittlement of anyone or any group, no harshness or violence.... there is only... tenderness.

"The Lord is near" comes next. Five-year old Jeff visited a nursing home with his family. As it was time to leave, he could not find his socks, so wore only shoes, complaining mightily. A year later while the family reminisced about the visit, Jeff piped up saying, "I remember I was upset about not having any socks. Then I saw a man without any feet." Like God's engaging Jeff and his family, Jesus comes to us, too, in unexpected and surprising ways, born in a barn, taken by his family from the place of his birth for fear of violence, put to death by religious and civil authorities, then showing himself to Mary and the disciples. "The Lord is near", indeed. So near sometimes we are caught by surprise by the unexpected ways God enters our everyday lives.

In that nearness, we need not be anxious about anything. Most of us can't pull that off all the time, and perhaps Paul couldn't either, as he was in prison in Rome under a death sentence when he penned that line. There is another option--to share what concerns us in our hearts and minds with God, openly and without reservation. We can lift up anything and everything to God in prayer. There we find the confidence, trust, and peace that only God can provide.

Let us pray: *Dear God, may we rejoice in you as much as you do in our turning, returning, and coming back again, acknowledging our dependence on you as the source of everything true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, and excellent (Philippians 4:8).*

Monday, August 9,



2021

By: Melzee Jacobson

JOY: Christians Should Help Other Christians Grow

Text: Acts 14: 21-22

“After preaching the Good News in Derbe and making many disciples, Paul and Barnabas returned again to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch of Pisidia, where they strengthened the believers. They encouraged them to continue in the faith, reminding them that they must enter into the Kingdom of God through many tribulations.”

For nine years my husband and I participated in a Prison Ministry. It was located at a minimum-security facility, so both women and men could enter. We would hold two weekend renewal events over Friday through Sunday each year. Once a month we would worship with the inmates on a Sunday. There was room on the weekend for 100 inmates to attend. Usually we were filled to capacity. We shared stories, we had discussions about the talks that were presented. By the end of the weekend those inmates knew what unconditional love was like; they learned that their lives were valuable. Through that time, the return rate for inmates drastically reduced.

When the opportunity first arrived to work with the Group of JOY, my husband was invited by a phone call, and I thought okay, at least they did not ask me. WRONG, there was immediately another phone call and the leader asked if I would join in too. It was a different kind of experience, but God helped me grow through this experience. Father Greg told me one day that I could only love people for who they are at the time I am with them for I know nothing of their past and I will know nothing of their future, so make the time you are with them one that will be a memory for them.

My husband decided later in life to enter seminary and I had to discern if I could be a pastor's wife. After all, my past involved a lot of wrong choices. A couple friends of ours had already started seminary as a second career and his wife asked me what I was willing to give up to follow Jesus. She said I had to give up everything and she was right. I had to give up everything that I had been doing, I had to move away from my children, I had to move away from my friends after 20 years. My path had already been opened for leaving my family as I was the matriarch of my birth family, no grandparents, no parents, no siblings left, only nieces and nephews that had their own lives. When we told our children about the decision, the response was I don't know why not, you already have the children for it. They meant that they could fill the shoes of pastor's kids because they were not perfect, they were normal human beings too. I came to the acceptance that yes I could give up what I knew for Jesus and journey into what he had planned for me to do for him.

My life these past 20 years has had its valley and mountain top experiences, but overall my life is a JOY and I look forward each day to what is going to be. My encouragement to you is to live your life for Jesus and experience what JOY he has waiting for you.

Let us pray: *Dear Father, help us to live each day as you would have us to do. There is so much more to life when we travel the path that you walk before us. Help us to accept (not understand) all the details and to believe that you will keep us safe through all the valleys and mountain top*

events. Lord, I give my life to you, please continue to lead me to that glorious day when I will be called home.



Tuesday, August 10, 2021

By: Donna Ahlberg

Text: Romans 8: 24-25

“For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

“Hope,” in the poetry of Emily Dickinson, “is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul, and sings the tune without the words, and never stops at all.”

Hope arrives each morning at daylight. Through the open upstairs window, I hear it in the melodies of bird songs on these June mornings. “Sweetie, sweetie,” the lilt of the black-capped chickadee, his pleadings seem to be louder and more desperate as the dawns stretch into summer. Hope for a successful breeding season. Hope that his species will continue for another season. Hope for future survival and not extinction. Hope to be saved.

As I lie in bed and awaken, each and every day offers the hope of a new beginning; if not in new surroundings, at the least, in new perspectives. Each day should be recognized as a gift, the recognition of new meaning in old familiar stories, or maybe hearing new tunes from the same old notes. Each day chirps a promise of expectation and opportunity to experience God’s love in the world. Hope. Can you hear it?

Let us pray: *Lord, thank you for the wisdom of birds. Give us patience as we await hope in our lives, for the revelation of things not yet seen, for the fulfillment and truth of scripture. Amen.*



Wednesday, August 11, 2021

By: Pam Long

Text: Matthew 14:22-23

22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,

Right after being surrounded by crowds and feeding 5,000 men, plus women and children who were also there, with a few loaves of bread and two fish, Jesus needed some down time. So he sent away the crowds and sent the disciples back to the boat to go to the other side of the sea. Then he went up on the mountain to be by himself and to pray.

I think we can all identify with this human side of Jesus, needing to be alone. We might say we need to clear our heads or perhaps to center ourselves. We are, after all, individuals and no matter how close we are to our spouses, our children, or our parents, we are each separate beings. And it is when we are alone that we pray because we understand that even when no other person is with us, God is always there. We don't know what Jesus prayed to his father that evening, but perhaps like we sometimes do, he took some words from Psalm 46.

We pray: *God, you are my refuge and strength, and you are with me always, especially when I go through troubled times. Right now, it is enough to be still and know that you are God. Amen.*



Thursday, August 12, 2021

By: Pam Durbin

Text: Luke 17:5-6 (MSG)

The apostles came up and said to the Master, “Give us more faith.”

But the Master said, “You don’t need *more* faith. There is no ‘more’ or ‘less’ in faith. If you have a bare kernel of faith, say the size of a poppy seed, you could say to this sycamore tree, ‘Go jump in the lake,’ and it would do it.

A poppy seed is very small. Perhaps the smallest seed we see and eat! Maybe you remember seeing them in lemon muffins or on yeast rolls, but a single poppy seed is too small to pick up with your fingers unless your finger is wet. It shouldn’t be too hard to have a faith that size, one would think. But maybe the greater point Jesus makes here is that faith is not to be measured or compared to some arbitrary standard. Rather, our faith needs to be used. No need to test our faith by sending trees into the lake. Our faith is as big as we need to give others the hope we have been given in Christ.

Let us pray: *Lamb of God, my faith looks up to you. Help me share this gift with those near me today. Amen.*



Friday, August 13, 2021

By: Virginia Paulson

Text: Matthew 14:16

But Jesus says to the disciples, “They do not need to go away; you feed them...”

Every time we read scripture our thoughts can focus on a different part of the verses. We most often focus on the miracle of feeding the 5,000 with five loaves of bread and two fish. I kept going over this passage and verse 16 kept popping up. The disciples were wanting Jesus to do something about the crowd and maybe out of exhaustion, because he had been caring for his followers for some time, he said, “You feed them.” This short sentence can easily get skipped over.

Jesus blesses the bread and fish and first gives it to the disciples, and they in turn feed the people. God does the miracle, but he needs our cooperation. Jesus says you feed them. He calls us to action. This is not specifically about bread; it is about compassion for those who are lonely, those who are hungry for food, those who hunger for love. It is about love for neighbor.

Let us pray: *Suffering Servant, open our eyes that we could see the world as you see it. Help us to respond to the hurts around us. Amen.*



Saturday, August 14,

2021

By: Nancy Stank

Text: Philippians 1:6

“God is the one who began this good work in you, and I am certain that he won’t stop before it is complete on the day that Christ Jesus returns.” (CEV)

When I was a little girl one of my favorite places was my grandparents’ house. They lived in the country, rural Northeast Wisconsin, on the old family farm that was no longer operational. Even though the cows were long gone, you could be sure to find barn cats in the hay mow and kittens every spring. The memories of grandpa pushing me on the rope swing that hung amid the few bales of hay are ones I will forever hold dearly. It was the first place I learned to cut grass on a riding lawnmower, and I’ll never forget grandpa being anxious as I cut around his newly planted maple trees. They were tiny seedlings that he guarded with wire cages and mesh. He lovingly

tended to them and was expectant about the tall trees they would become. That was about 35 years ago, and as I drive by the old house, I look at those trees, now towering, and I can't help but think about how grandpa's hopes and have come full circle!

We plan for our future, we all do. Some of us start families, some of us make sure our 401K's are in line, and some of us plant trees. Even though he knew he'd probably never see it, my grandpa planned for those trees to one day grow taller than that old barn. We are hopeful and we trust that God's plan for our lives is greater than anything we could imagine, and so, we plant trees. We do our part to shape our lives and we lean on the promise that God will walk with us, hand in hand knowing that when plans don't turn out as we thought, we have his hand helping us up, on to bigger and better thing. None of us know what tomorrow holds but we come to God in hopeful anticipation, anticipation that he is going to take our hopes and our dreams (and our trees) and make them bigger than anything we could imagine.

Let us pray: *Lord today I pray that you bless the work of my hands and my mind. Let my work and my plan please you and when you change my course let us trust that you are bringing me to bigger and better places.*

