

Devotions – September 12-18, 2021

By Christine Harkness

United Lutheran Church, Crystal Falls, MI

Sunday, September 12, 2021

Text: Philippians 4:6-7

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

When I last shared devotions, I was filled with optimism and anticipation as our branch of the Harkness family was going to take root within miles and even minutes of each other. We closed on our new home on Friday March 6th and within days the world seemed to stop turning. Covid 19 was here! My children all work in healthcare. We sought balance between work and home. We committed to seeing only those in our “bubble” and when someone coughed, sneezed or had a runny nose we immediately thought “OH NO!” It was scary and disruptive. My bedtime prayers shifted to include, “Please keep them safe from the virus.” There’s been an amendment which includes “and from all the variants.” My prayers of thanksgiving were of how blessed we were to have each other. We started getting together every Friday at our home. Continuing this fellowship became essential. We held each other accountable. We minimized risks and we found solace in sharing a meal and making new memories. Was the moving closer to each other a coincidence? Some may think so. I believe God brought us together so we could be of support to one another and to strengthen our relationships. He continues to bless our branch. Our son recently became engaged and next summer we will welcome our new daughter-in-law to our family.

Let’s pray: *Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of family. Keep us steadfast in your love and our love for each other. Amen.*



Monday, September 13, 2021

Text: John 16:33

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Today is my husband’s birthday. He is 66 years old. We met in college when he was 20 and I was 19. We married three years later and recently celebrated our 42nd anniversary. He is a wonderful husband, a fantastic father and a doting grandfather. He is also a worrier and can become easily frustrated. He’ll deny this of course, but I can always tell. He is a highly

organized person who makes lists each day. He is rarely behind on anything and is committed to being on time and prepared. When others don't match his standards, it throws off the balance he works hard to maintain. It's challenging for him to wait for someone else to work as hard as he does. I encourage patience and perspective. I paint the "big picture" when he struggles with details. In prayer I ask God to give Joe peace as we navigate the process. I point out what is going well and at times too enthusiastically say, "It will all work out." Life has taught me to slow down, stay the course and trust in God's plans for me and for us. Happy Birthday Joe. The best is yet to be.

Let's pray: *Dear God, when I am troubled and distracted, please show me the way to your presence and may your Spirit fill me with the peace my soul is seeking. Amen.*



Tuesday, September 14, 2021

Text: Psalm 29:11

“The Lord gives strength to His people; the Lord blesses His people with peace.”

I work in an extended care facility and Covid did not spare us. There were times when I was overwhelmed by all of the equipment, precaution, testing, etc. This went on for weeks and then months and one Monday I arrived to learn two of my favorite residents had passed away. It shook me to my core. I was sad and angry and frustrated and wanted to blame somebody. It's so hard to fight an enemy you can't see. It's equally hard to fight alone. At work, we all took the same precautions, but not everyone followed protocols on their "personal time." I struggled with this. It became harder and harder for me to go to work. I prayed for guidance and strength. AND I prayed for an end to this whole thing. And things got better. I started to enjoy going to work again. I re-discovered my joy, my passion and my purpose. But, as of this writing, we are back to where we were. A rise in cases, weekly testing and increased precautions. I'm not sure I can do this again. I know God wants me to continue my work. I know I make a difference in my patient's lives. I know I'm good at what I do and my work is important. Is this enough to keep me going? God will go before me to show me the way and he'll support me if I find that way is too tough. He'll go beside me to befriend me and will let me know "it's okay" to do what's best for me if I have to.

Let's pray: *Dear Lord, please give me the strength I need to keep going. Amen.*



Wednesday, September 15, 2021

Text: 2 Thessalonians 3:16

“Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.”

When I was a child, there was a program on TV called “Romper Room.” We only had 3 stations so I’m not sure where it originated. It was an educational program with songs and games. There were child-friendly lessons about a variety of topics. The producers were marketing geniuses. You could find “Romper Room” accessories at the local Woolworth’s. My favorite was the *Punch a Ball*. I can still remember the song! At the end of the show, the teacher would take her magic mirror, recite a quick rhyme, and then call out as if she could really see us. I waited and waited for her to call “Christine” and on a few occasions she did and then I knew she had truly seen me! Isaiah 43:1 tells us, *“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”* What a comfort it is to know that God sees me. He has been with me since I was born. The lessons I learned from my parents, family, teachers, mentors, friends, and colleagues taught me what to do and what not to do. God steered me toward the positive influences and guided me away from those I would not benefit from or be hurt by.

Let’s pray: *Dear God, thank you for seeing me and guiding me always toward you. Amen.*



Thursday, September 16, 2021

Text: Romans 15:13

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”

One definition of hope is, “a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen.” I once heard “Hope is not a strategy.” While that may be true, it’s an excellent jumping off point! We move forward in faith and hope and trust. If we didn’t expect or desire certain things to happen what would be the point of getting up each day? With the morning light comes the opportunity to start anew. When I’m challenged to make an important decision, I use a familiar outline from my college days. WHO will this decision impact? WHAT is my primary objective? WHEN do I need to make a final decision? WHERE will this decision take me? WHY is it necessary to make this decision? It essentially comes down to determining the pros and cons. We all make decisions every day! Not every one is life changing, but many are. By the time you are reading this, I will have informed my employer I am moving up my retirement date to mid-November. Believe me, I used the above outline when I decided to retire about 3 months earlier than originally planned. I’m excited for what happens next. I plan to continue

working as a speech pathologist on a very limited basis. This profession chose me and as long as I can make a difference in someone's life, I'm going to stay involved. One definition of peace is "freedom from disturbance; tranquility." That's my new retirement plan.

Let's pray: *Dear God, thank you for giving me the time and the support I need to make important decisions. My story continues with you to guide me. Amen.*



Friday, September 17, 2021

Text: Numbers 6:26

“The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.”

Sounds familiar, doesn't it? This was part of the first benediction I remember. “The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD makes his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.” I suspect when I was younger this signaled the END of church. Whoo Hoo! Time to go the basement fellowship hall and fill my coffee cup with milk and a splash of coffee and then take a couple large pieces of Nisu! Well, I stopped drinking coffee when I was 12 because one of the kitchen ladies told me I should start drinking it black. That was probably the same time I realized the benediction may signal the end of the service, but it also marked the beginning of what came next. I thrived in church. I was full on in church youth groups, Bible camps, VBS and started teaching Sunday School when I was 18. I prayed and gave thanks and didn't hide my love for God. My husband started going to church with me when we were dating. He was baptized and confirmed as an adult when our two oldest children were quite young. Together, we have grown in faith and found a variety of ways to be engaged in our church ministry. The LORD has blessed us and kept us ever mindful that through him all things are possible. Thanks be to God!

Let's pray: *Dear God, we are your servants. Use our time, talent and treasure for the good of others. Amen.*



Saturday, September 18, 2021

Text: 2 Corinthians 13:11

“Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.”

In August 2020, my brother died from cancer. A few weeks before, he asked if I would write his obituary. I was honored and promised him I would do my best. I asked if there was anything else I could do for him. "Please pray for me," he replied. "Anything in particular?" I asked. "Pray that I will have the courage to accept whatever the doctors are going to be telling me."

Less than two weeks before he died, he asked again for prayer, but this time for nothing specific. I told him I would pray he found peace. You see, my brother sought peace most of all. Unfortunately for 40 year he sought it through alcohol. He tried numerous times to get sober, but each time he struggled. In 2008, a miracle happened. He nearly died from this disease that was ravaging his body and very soul. This apparently was *his* bottom, and this time sobriety took. He was sober for 13 years before he died. He started attending church more regularly. He went to AA meetings every day. He proved to be an inspiration to others and spoke of acceptance versus regrets. He continued to give even when his health declined. He often wondered if he gave enough. He did. And through giving found a new source of peace.

Let's pray: *Dear Lord, show us we receive peace when we are committed to giving it to others. Amen.*

