

Devotions – December 26, 2021 – January 1, 2022

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Sunday, December 26, 2021

Text: Matthew 28:20b

“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Where were you when . . .

Where were you when the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred? Where were you when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated? Where were you when the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded? Where were you when the school shooting in Columbine happened? Where were you when the twin towers of the former World Trade Center toppled?

I am too young to have experienced Pearl Harbor and the death of JFK in my lifetime. I was in fifth grade, Mrs. Lewandowski’s class, working on an art project while we watched teacher Christa McAuliffe board the Challenger with the rest of the shuttle crew. I was the teacher, teaching Environmental Education to middle schoolers, in Fulton, OH when chaos erupted in Columbine. I had just gone into the office of Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp, new in my position as Program Assistant, on the morning of 9-11.

Where were you on Tuesday, November 30, 2021?

Me? I was there.

I was there in Oxford, MI when a fifteen-year-old boy walked into the local high school and shot and killed four fellow students and wounded seven others. I was there when my friends who live, work, and attend school in this community received the text message that an active shooter had been reported and that all area schools were in lockdown. I was there as one emergency vehicle after another raced to a scene that was unfolding all too slowly for some and all too swiftly for others. I was there as breaths were held, lives were shattered, cries rang out.

And so was God.

In all of these things, and in every moment of our lives, God is present. God promises to never leave or forsake us. Not even in times of fear, chaos, tragedy, and death. Not even when it feels like the world is heavy. Not ever.

Emmanuel, God with us.

Always! To the end of the age and then forever.

Let's pray: *Be present with those who need you today, Lord. Amen.*

Song for your Day: [Zach Williams, Dolly Parton - There Was Jesus \(Official Music Video\) - YouTube](#)



Monday, December 27, 2020

Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4b

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: . . . a time to mourn, and a time to dance.

Have you ever had a bad day? One where nothing seems to go right? One where everything you do and say comes out wrong and seems to upset or irritate someone else?

What do you do when that happens? How does it make you feel? Do you ever stop and wish you had never even gotten out of bed or that you could do it all over again?

When I've had a bad day, sometimes I need to cry with a good friend. Sometimes, I need a nice long nap, something to refresh me and ease the emotional drain. And sometimes, I just need to dance it out.

That's when I cue up a good tune, crank up the volume and the bass, and let it all go to the beat of the music. I dance like no one is watching, uninhibited and carefree. I simply let the music move through me and heal my weary soul.

If I've had a bad day, I need to release that which burdens me and turn it over to God. If I try to "hang on to it," it becomes too heavy, too much for me alone. If I try to work it all out without God, I can easily get caught up in what my friend, Adele, calls "stinkin' thinkin'," the pitty party of "woe is me," the "coulda, shoulda, wouldas," and it is seldom helpful or productive. The only thing that eases my worry and anxious feelings is giving it over to God in prayer. And sometimes, I have to go to God and give it over multiple times a day, because there is often the temptation to take back that which I've given to God to "fix" it myself. I confess this to God as I pray.

And then I dance. Just me and Jesus on the dance floor of my living room. The rhythm of the Spirit in my soul. God inviting me into God's song.

Let's pray: *Dance with us, O Lord, all the days of our lives, good and bad, and everything in between. Amen.*

Song for your day: [Holy Time - Performed by Cross Roads Campers and Staff - YouTube](#)



Tuesday, December 28, 2021

Text: Jeremiah 31:3b

"I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.

My family has always included pets, dogs and cats (and sometimes other critters) who have shared life, made a house a home, loved, and have been loved in return. Over the years, the feline companions have been Mitzy, Daisy, Buttons, Teah, Munchkin, Baby, Kia, Bangs, Jasmine, Chloe, Hoolu, Dazzle, Sterling, and Savu. The faithful dogs were Aubrey, Cinder, Jodie, Mimi, Katie, Max, and Jack.

And Cheza.

I'm thinking about getting a dog.

Those were the words I shared with Sarah, my neighbor, and the wife of my co-worker, Ben. Sarah was thrilled. She and Ben were fellow dog lovers and the proud parents of Carly, a friendly giant of a yellow Labrador. Sarah was thrilled at the prospect of me getting a dog. Carly would have a friend and playmate, and before I could utter another word, Sarah was already dreaming about all the adventures Carly and her new companion would enjoy.

I tried to put the brakes on the topic, but once the idea of a dog took hold in Sarah's mind, there was no stopping the train. Every day, when Sarah got home from work, she would rush over to my house to tell me about someone who was looking for a home for a dog or a puppy. Each time, I politely thanked her but stated I wasn't sure if I wanted to make the commitment a dog would require.

Then, one sunny, autumn afternoon, Sarah came running to the door, nearly out of breath with excitement. "Marilyn has a bunch of puppies that need good homes. I gave her your phone number and told her you would come and look at the puppies after supper tonight."

Whoa! Wait a minute! What happened to "thinking about a dog?" How could I disappoint this woman who believed I was interested in one of her pups after Sarah had talked me up? How was

I ever going to go to Marilyn's and see those fluffy, cute, little faces and not bring a puppy home?

The truth was I wasn't. I knew right then and there, I was soon going to be a dog owner.

That night, Cheza, a cream and red Siberian Husky and Pekingese mix, became the newest member of my family. One look in her brown eyes, and I was smitten.

Cheza and I dwelled together for eleven years. We loved going for rides in the car and exploring the shores of Lakes Sakakawea and Superior. We roamed Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, North and South Dakota, Minnesota, and Michigan. She was my best girl, the sweetest dog for whom anyone could ever ask, and I don't just say that figuratively. She loved everyone and was ever so gentle. I couldn't have asked for a more perfect dog.

Cheza died three weeks after her eleventh birthday, napping at my feet. Who knew so much life and love could come from a little dog about whom I had only been thinking? The love and devotion she gave me was unconditional, not unlike the love and devotion of God, who loves us beyond all measure.

When I think about Cheza and the memories we made, I think about her as a beautiful example of God's unfailing love.

Let's pray: *Jesus, fill us with your love. Unconditional. Unfailing. Forever. Amen.*

Song for your day: [I Have Loved You - YouTube](#)



Wednesday, December 29, 2021

Text: Lamentations 3:22-23

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

The summer before fifth grade, the Vacation Bible School theme at my church was "Jesus is My Answer." There was even a fun song to sing to which I can still recall most of the tune and lyrics. It was the sort of "campy" song and theme for which such programs are well-known.

Many years later, I sat in a circle of camp professionals from various ELCA camps in Region 5, sipping hot cranberry apple tea with honey, and listened intently as Rev. Herb Brokering wove

tales of God, faith, and people. Herb was an expert storyteller, among many other things, and he had a knack of connecting these three things into the warp and weft of every-day life.

I recall one story in particular, the story of a southern black woman named Emma. Whenever Emma introduced herself, she told people, “When I come, you see ‘de Lady of the Lord,’” for Emma was rooted deep in her baptismal identity. She was a beloved child of God.

Emma walked with the Lord everywhere she journeyed. Jesus was her constant companion. On her frequent bus rides to Detroit, she told people that Jesus always sat beside her.

Whenever Emma was faced with a situation, especially one in which she didn’t know what to say or do, she never said, “Umm” Instead, she prayed, “Give me Jesus.” For Emma, Jesus was her answer, and her whole life was lived in this manner through that simple prayer.

As Herb shared more stories about Emma and Jesus, I found myself humming that old VBS tune once more as each of us were woven together in the fabric of God.

Let’s pray: *Give me Jesus today and every day, when I rise, when I sleep, each moment of my life, and at my death. Amen.*

Song for your day: [Give Me Jesus - YouTube](#)



Thursday, December 30, 2021

Text: John 16:33

I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!”

The chorus to Pete Seeger’s “My Rainbow Race” hang from eight, hand-stitched banners on the balcony rail of the dining hall at Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp and has been sung by generations of campers, forwards, backwards, with numbers, and everything in between. This simple song encourages us to steward all of creation, caring for this world and each other, a message that resonates with the Biblical narrative, in which God commands us to do the same, although I don’t know that Seeger intended it to do so.

What stands out from this song for me of late is the phrase “Rainbow Race.” Yes, God created us in our vast diversity, not only in the colors of our skin but also in the myriad of ways in which we come to identify, too numerous to count. And it grieves me to think how many times those various ways of identifying have been used against people, to single them out for all the wrong

reasons, to tell them their manner of being is sin. To shame, demean, destroy, and declare these people as sin. Evil.

For far too long the world has labelled people as different, less than, and despicable. Unacceptable. Unworthy. Unlovable.

“That which isn’t me,” an attitude held by those with power, has always been a risk and a potential danger to those who have historically been the powerless.

And the powerless have cried out, kicking and screaming, “Enough is enough! We are unwilling to accept the world’s version of the ‘truth!’ The world doesn’t get to define us!”

It’s true; the world doesn’t get to define us – no matter who we are. No matter what identity we claim and live into.

In baptism, we are claimed by God as God’s own, children of the Lord. We read in the book of Genesis that when God created humans, God created them in God’s own image and began weaving them into the story of God. We discover in Romans that because of what God does in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit there is nothing that can separate us from God’s love, from God. We delight in Ephesians to learn that God’s plan has always been to draw all things, including human beings – including you and me – unto Godself.

The world tries to leave us out, but the labels of this world don’t ultimately matter! The only identity that truly matters is that we are God’s. We are “Beloved!” God has prepared a place for each of us in God’s Kingdom and Reign. And nothing can stop or derail God from what God has done and continues to do.

My dear Rainbow Race, let not the world define you. Let not the world steal from you what is inherently yours through the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Rejoice, for you belong to the one who has fashioned and claimed you, labeling you Beloved forever.

Hear God singing over you, “And because I love you, I’ll give it one more try, to show my rainbow race, that it’s too soon to die.”

Let’s pray: *Lord, be with those whose spirits have been crushed by the world. Rest your Spirit upon them. Grant them hope and peace in the unwavering knowledge that they are loved and that their identity rests in you alone. Amen.*

Song for your day: [Pete Seeger - My Rainbow Race - YouTube](#)



Friday, December 31, 2021

Text: Luke 18:13-16

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

I spent a week at Fortune Lake with my niece, Kaylynn, who was three-and-a-half at the time. We played, danced, sang, swam, kayaked, ate, laughed, swung, worshipped, and prayed for five wonderful days. It was delightful to watch her grow and explore the world and God.

I have always loved children and have always wanted children of my own, but a bout with ovarian cancer when I was a senior in high school crushed part of that dream. I would never carry a child in my womb. But there was always adoption as a viable and excellent option; after all, I am, myself, an adopted child. However, it seems adoption wasn't in the cards for me either. I didn't want to be a single parent whose child spent more time in the care and company of others while I worked to provide for the family. Not that single parenting is impossible; it just comes with a different set of challenges I wasn't sure I wanted to meet.

Still, God has blessed me with many children over the years, children whom I have been blessed to teach and love in my roles as an educator, minister, aunt, and friend, children I have helped nurture. Children with whom I have shared the love of God.

In the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), we read about Jesus caring for the children, showering God's love upon them, and teaching them that God has prepared a place for them within the Kingdom and Reign of God. I think I prefer Luke's version the best, because it speaks of Jesus gathering the children into his arms. What joy he must have felt in their presence!

I know how I feel every time I have gathered a child into my arms, hugged them close, and told them I loved them. How much more does God gather and love each and every one of us, who regardless of age, have been declared children of God?

Let's pray: *Bless and love all the children, O Lord, for they belong to you. Amen.*

Song for your day: [Let the little children come - YouTube](#)



Saturday, January 1, 2021

Text: Psalm 1:1-3

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.

A few years ago, I took a small cutting from a plant with beautiful orange flowers that I thought was particularly lovely. I knew cuttings could often be rooted by placing them in a small cup of water and setting them upon a windowsill, so I wrapped my little cutting in damp paper towels and a Ziplock bag and brought it home, hoping for the best.

After a few months, there were enough roots to attempt placing the cutting in soil. I found a little ceramic pot at a local thrift store and added some soil, placed the cutting in the dirt, gave it a drink, and returned it to the windowsill. And then I waited. Would it grow? Would this new start thrive under my care?

Half a year later, my little cutting had turned into a small plant with a half dozen leaves and the beginnings of what appeared to be a flower. I was thrilled when it finally bloomed, and just last month, it bloomed again, this time with a whole cluster of beautiful flowers.

It occurs to me that there are times in life when we are like that small cutting. When God redirects us, cuts and removes us from the larger plant so that we might start over and be rooted elsewhere, given new opportunities to flourish and thrive, to bloom and flower.

To bear fruit.

Let's pray: *May we be open to your Spirit's leading that we may continue to grow in you and bear fruit in love and service to neighbors. Amen.*

Song for your day: [Lord, Let My Heart Be Good Soil - YouTube](#)

