

# Daily Devotions

June 12-18, 2022

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**Sunday, June 12, 2022**

Text: Colossians 3:16

**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.**

Sometimes we are blessed to be able to step into holy moments, the kind of transcendent spaces where God seems to touch creation in the most tangible of manners and flood them with shalom. A funeral last winter was such a moment for me.

I had been contacted by a local funeral director to preside at a memorial service for a man whose life had been claimed in an accident at his place of employ. I knew neither this individual nor his family, and that always makes stepping into this sort of situation a little more challenging for me as I attempt to offer something meaningful, and of God, for the living.

I arrived at the funeral home, feeling I had done my best to prepare and having entrusted the remainder to God, to greet the family and check in with the funeral home director for any last-minute instructions. Hereupon, I was introduced to one of the deceased's lifelong friends, Ron, who wished to offer a song with acoustic guitar accompaniment. I am not as "strict," or perhaps "formal," as some clergy, who do not permit any music that is not sacred, but I do typically share that any music offered during a time of worship should give glory to God and not merely be a form of entertainment simply because someone enjoys a particular tune. There is a time and place for everything, and the context of worship, which is about our giving praise and glory to God, is not the venue for something that takes focus away from God and sets it elsewhere. Nonetheless, given the setting of the funeral home, I felt there would be a way to honor both God and the request of the musician, who wished to honor his friend.

When I had concluded the commendation and final blessing, I invited Ron forward. He nervously hauled his instrument out of its case, grabbed a chair, sat down before the assembly, and, after a brief introduction, began to strum. Immediately, I recognized the familiar chords and wondered if I would come to regret my consent to this musical offering.

The song chosen was Green Day's "Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)" – not a bad song but maybe not one I personally would have selected for this occasion. However, when Ron arrived at the chorus, the assembly gathered began to sing along without prompt or provocation. The deceased's widow, mother-in-law, and two grown sons had also raised their voices, tears in their eyes and mirth upon their faces. Soon, an abundance of toes and fingers were tapping. Heads nodded, keeping time. Smiles blossomed upon numerous visages. The room came alive as the Holy Spirit wove us together in the notes and lyrics that followed. We were on holy ground as we sang this unconventional hymn in solidarity, acknowledging the life and love shared with one another and with the one who had been gathered into God's forever embrace. Whether or not

anyone else could articulate it, our collective song was an offering to God in thanksgiving for the man we'd come to mourn, now with joy in our hearts.

*It's something unpredictable, but in the end it's right. I hope you have the time of your life.*  
~“Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)”

Let us pray: *Awesome God, Amazing Love, you grant us life and are present with us through all of our times. Tune our hearts to sing your grace, and continue to draw us ever more into the fullness of your presence and shalom. Amen.*

A song for your day: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKOoeTbjSel>

Link to Green Day's “Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)”  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_bTdLi0YUVM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_bTdLi0YUVM)

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## Monday, June 13, 2022

Text: Psalm 84:10a

**For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.**

I met Vi during my time as a seminary intern. Vi resided in one of the local nursing homes, and I had the pleasure of visiting with her on a number of occasions. During our visits, Vi loved to share stories about her family: her husband, David, and their children, and grandchildren. Many were the times she recounted how she and her husband, who had preceded her in death several years ago, had met, fell in love, and shared life and love, at the center of which was God and their faith.

David had been diagnosed with a terminal illness before his death, and he used his diagnosis as an opportunity to compose several letters to family. The last of his letters had been written to Vi. She kept this letter in a frame in her room and allowed me the privilege of reading it. Vi's favorite part of the letter was the closing paragraph. Here David had written for her not to be sad that he was dying. One day they would be reunited when God gathered them together before God's throne to live eternally.

One of our visits, after having shared communion together, Vi grew emotional. She was missing David greatly on this occasion and told me she deeply longed for the “one day” about which David had written. Although she was grieving, we talked and prayed, keeping in mind the promises of God and the hope we have of life eternal in and with Christ Jesus.

Later that evening, while I was at home, I couldn't stop thinking about Vi. The phrase “one day” from David's letter played over and over again in my mind, until it suddenly occurred to me, that “one day” had already arrived, at least in part.

As Lutheran Christians, we live in the “already/and not yet fully” of God’s kingdom. That is to say that God is already unfolding the kingdom around us. It is not merely some future reality in which we will be immersed once we have died. It is a reality now. However, we also believe that we will not fully experience all that the kingdom of God entails until God has fully revealed the kingdom to us.

One place we experience the kingdom is in Holy Communion. We are gathered at the table where Jesus is host, inviting us to come and dine. God is fully present – in, with, and under – the bread and the wine, which we consume. We are united with God in the Body of Christ, not merely with those physically present with us, but with the entire Body – the communion/community of saints – all the people throughout time and history. In this meal, “one day” is already unfolding around us.

I couldn’t wait to speak with Vi. “The mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won” about which we sing in my most favorite of all hymns, *The Church’s One Foundation*, is already becoming. One day, although not yet fully, is already present with us now, and we trust that God will bring it about in its fullness in due time. And oh, what a day it will be!

Let us pray: *Kingdom bringer, ever draw us nearer to you and into your eternal embrace with all those you have claimed as your own, your beloved. We long to see you face to face and know the joy of your full presence. Amen.*

A song for your day: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LIWAoT9aX78&t=81s>

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**Tuesday, June 14, 2022**

Text: 1 Peter 4:9-10

**Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.**

Last Sunday, I was invited to spend the afternoon at the home of two of my parishioners, Judy and Pete. Judy had asked if I would like some flowers from her garden to plant at the parsonage and if I would share with her and her husband a meal, and I readily accepted.

Among Judy’s flowers were roses, beebalm, thistle, dahlias, phlox, snowballs, and hostas. Together, we quickly filled four buckets worth. I hoped I would have enough of a green thumb to transplant these beauties and see them thrive in my own yard.

Our task complete, we headed indoors. As I washed the soil from my hands, Judy and Pete set about preparing supper. Judy had asked me what I like to eat, and rather than providing a list of foods I enjoy, I had shared that I do not like vegetables. As much as I know they are filled with nutrients, vegetables do not taste good to me no matter how they are prepared. My general rule

of thumb is that if a vegetable does not go in a “traditional Finnish” pasty (potato, onion, carrot, rutabaga), I do not want to have to try to choke it down.

When the time came to eat, I was treated to Spam burgers – chopped Spam, shredded cheese, and onions broiled atop homemade bread. As Pete placed the burgers on our plates, Judy offered an apology for this simple fair. I assured her no apology was necessary. Simple is often the best. And indeed it was.

I may not enjoy vegetables, but I have always enjoyed Spam. Many were the times my mother would open a can of Spam, slice it, fry it, and serve it with toast and eggs. As grace was shared, I was already anticipating the savory, salty taste of my first bite. I was not disappointed when the time to take that bite finally arrived. Spam burgers are delicious.

God does not call us to be fancy or elaborate in our sharing of the love of God. Each of us has been gifted as the Spirit has seen fit. The gifts of friendship, flowers, Spam burgers, and time shared in fellowship with one another and God, however simple it may have been, was better than anything else I could have imagined, and I savored every moment, thankful for God’s blessings in these simple gifts.

Let us pray: *Creator of all things, you have fashioned all that is with exquisite beauty and detail. Help us to pause and reflect upon each of life’s simple pleasures that we may be truly thankful. Amen.*

A song for your day: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0TnUNGGK8E>

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**Wednesday, June 15, 2022**

Text: Revelation 3:20

**Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.**

Knock. Knock. Knock.

That’s the sound Grandma Violet would hear whenever she was washing the dishes and her husband was out mowing the lawn. It always brought a smile to her face. Three knocks (or taps) were the special code she shared with Harlon for letting one another know how much they loved each other. One knock for each word: Knock (I), knock (love), knock (you).

For birthdays and anniversaries, Violet and Harlon would exchange greeting cards, and next to each of their signatures they would neatly print three dots, once again affirming their love for one another.

While I was serving as a seminary intern, I had the privilege of getting to know Violet and her extended family, including her grandson and his fiancée, whose upcoming wedding I would be officiating. As we worked on wedding plans, Violet's grandson proudly showed me the rings he and his fiancée had chosen for one another. Engraved inside of each band were three dots. Most fitting as Violet and Harlon had not only loved one another, but they also deeply loved their children and grandchildren. Their legacy of love was enduring.

When Violet died a few weeks before the wedding, we gathered for her funeral, where many more stories about life and love shared were conveyed, the most important of which was the unconditional love of God, in whom the lives of Violet, Harlon, and their family had been deeply rooted. As we commended Violet to God, I knew of no better manner in which to entrust her to God's keeping than to knock upon her casket three times.

*Let us pray: Love Divine, all loves excelling, in you we find the greatest example of love. Teach us to love with the same love with which you first loved us, and keep us ever in your steadfast embrace. Amen.*

A song for your day: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Q\\_oTru4-Ko](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Q_oTru4-Ko)

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**Thursday, June 16, 2022**

Text: Psalm 92:4

**For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy.**

One of the best jobs I ever had was working for Eric and Eva Szilagyi at PizzaWorks. I remember once asking Eric how he had come up with the name for the pizzeria, and he replied, "People always ask, 'What's for dinner tonight?' I often heard the reply, 'Pizza works.'"

If you have ever worked in a restaurant, you know it's not for the faint of heart. Most of the day is spent on your feet in a fast-paced environment. You have to constantly bring your A game when it comes to customer service. It's very demanding work, and the Szilagyi's rightly expected nothing less than our best. After all, we were representing their business and brand.

But working for – and with – Eric and Eva was about far more than pizzas, business, and earning a living. It was about the work of our hands – slapping dough and topping pizzas – was a shared labor of love with people who were more family than coworkers and employers, and I did not fail to notice how much of this work embodied the kingdom of God.

At PizzaWorks, everyone, customers included, was welcomed and treated with respect, regardless of race, sexual/gender identity, economic status, age, religion, and the like. Now I know this is supposed to be the standard in businesses that serve the general public, but we all know that the world often treats those who differ with far less dignity and respect. The world

frequently denies, and at times even seeks to destroy, that which it has deemed unworthy or unacceptable. The kingdom of God, however, proclaims a different reality: that all are beloved by God. At PizzaWorks, we daily endeavored to do no less.

Many were the times I heard Eva say to the staff and customers alike that not everyone would agree that PizzaWorks had the best pizza in town, but no other pizza makers were ensuring that each of their pizzas was being prepared and made with love in every slice.

Working at PizzaWorks wasn't one of the best jobs because the actual work. It was the best job because through it I experienced the profound works of God's hands: grace, mercy, peace, family, and love – the kingdom among us.

Let us pray: *Worker and Author of all good things, we give you thanks for the blessings earned from our labors. May all the works of our hands be pleasing and acceptable unto you. Amen.*

A song for your day: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gn5CMSSAx\\_c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gn5CMSSAx_c)

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**Friday, June 17, 2022**

Text: Deuteronomy 10:17-19

**For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.**

The Sunday my father died, I received a most unexpected phone call.

Fred, a Puerto Rican gentleman living in Niagara Falls, NY, whom I had met through a mutual friend, Adele, at the church where they regularly worshipped, was on the other end of the line. Although Fred and I had only met in passing, he shared that Adele had requested prayers for my family during church, and he wondered if he might get my number to express his condolences. I was touched that someone who was little more than a stranger would think to reach out to me in this manner.

In his broken English, Fred, told me how sorry he was to learn that my father had died and how he hoped it was okay that he wanted to pray with and for me and my family. I assured him it was, and while I do not remember any of the specific words we prayed together, my heart was filled to overflowing at the love Fred so freely shared. Our conversation lasted little more than five minutes, but in that brief moment, the presence of God abounded most fully.

I heard a pastor preach a sermon once in which was said that God often shows up in the places, events, and people we least expect. I never imagined God would use Fred, whom I'd encountered in a manner that seemed merely fleeting, to create such a lasting impact.

I had the opportunity to greet Fred in person a handful of times since that phone call, and now Fred himself rests fully in the arms of the Lord. Through our interactions, God brought together two strangers, showed up most profoundly, and united them in love and compassion for one another. Out of death, came new life and the kingdom of God among us.

*Let us pray: Resurrection and Life, you are more than we could ever hope or dream. Continue to reveal yourself and your kingdom to us through one another and this incredible life to which you have called us. Amen.*

A song for your day: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0UAszJCtPA>

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**Saturday, June 18, 2022**

Text: James 2:14-17

**What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Surely that faith cannot save, can it? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.**

One particular Sunday while pulpit supplying in Douglas, ND, I preached a sermon on the above text from James, tying it also to Jesus’ parable about the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) as well as the second greatest commandment to love neighbors. We cannot claim to love and serve God while our neighbors go wanting.

When worship had ended, and I was greeting people at the door, a man I had not seen at church before introduced himself to me and asked if I would spend a few minutes listening to his story. His name was José, a Mexican immigrant from Texas, who had come to rural Douglas after being promised work on a cattle farm. The owner of the farm had offer a fair wage as well as housing, and José had packed up all of his meager belongings, leaving family behind, and made the journey north.

But things had not panned out the way José had anticipated. The owner of the farm had forced José to work long hours, but had refused to pay any wages. José was living in small, run down trailer just outside town, but he no longer had money for food or laundry detergent. He’d come to church wearing the last of his clean clothes, and he didn’t know how he would obtain food for his next meal. He shared that sometimes one of the elderly women in the congregation invited him to her home to share her simple fair, but he’d received no such invitation on this day. He’d thought to search for other work, but his car had broken down. He no longer possessed the means to travel beyond the town to even get someone to apply for work elsewhere. Yet, José insisted that he was seeking nothing. He only wanted someone to listen to his story and to pray with him that God would provide.

In the moment, I did not know what to do. I was not the pastor of this congregation, merely a guest preacher. After praying with José, I promised to let the pastor know what had transpired, but didn't know what more I could do. In response, José assured me I had already done enough and met the need he'd had.

As I drove home and reflected upon all that had transpired, I found myself convicted by God in the very words I'd preached. My neighbor, my brother in faith, was in need. How could I simply go home to my own meal and not attend to the needs of José? The simple truth was I could not.

I'd saved a few hundred dollars for a rainy day. It was sitting in an envelope at home. I had no particular plans for it and was not dependent upon it for my daily needs. But after meeting José, I knew that money now had a very specific purpose.

I called a friend, and together we went shopping at the local super market, procuring food and other household items, including laundry detergent. We then drove to José's humble home and knocked upon his door. José was surprised to see us, and after he invited us in, I shared what had occurred since we had parted earlier that morning. José broke down in tears and gave me one of the biggest hugs I have ever received, so deep was his gratitude that God had answered his prayers.

That was the last time I ever saw José, but the lessons of faith, love, and neighbors he taught me will stay with me forever.

Let us pray: *Faithful One, you call us to live lives patterned after you. Help us to walk in your ways and live out your truths in our care and compassion for all that you have created, particularly the neighbors we have from you. Amen.*

A song for your day: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_TAdERlQ\\_mg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_TAdERlQ_mg)

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