

# **Daily Devotions**

**December 4 - 10, 2022**

By Pastor Kelly Ylitalo

Mission United Lutheran Church, Pelkie, MI

## **Sunday, December 4, 2022**

Text: Luke 24:32

**They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”**

I have a friend who, over the course of several years, has successfully managed to catch me off guard – good naturedly, of course! – on several occasions, usually while I’ve been shopping at Walmart.

When I’m searching for the items on my shopping list, I can become rather singular-minded, focusing solely upon the immediate task at hand. So much so, in fact, that I have often failed to notice the scenes of the broader world unfolding around me. I’ve been so hyper-focused on my work that even the sound of my friend speaking my name to capture my attention has gone unheeded until he has stood directly in my path and stared me in the face. Even then, it has often taken me a few moments before facial recognition and the sound of his familiar laugh completely sink in, much to my friend’s great delight. Having repeatedly experienced these humorous moments, it’s not hard for me to empathize with Cleopas and his companion at their failure to recognize Jesus as he accompanies them to Emmaus.

The recent trial, torture, execution, and death of Jesus is still fresh in these travelers’ minds. Imagine the shock, awe, and horror of it all! The innocent Messiah had been brutally crucified, the very messiah who was supposed to save them – defeat their enemies, liberate them from oppression, reign as king with justice and equity – was now dead. This had to have crushed their hopes and dreams of seeing God’s promise fulfilled, compounding their grief and anguish. Who would now deliver them from the tyranny of Rome and the suffering of this world?

When Jesus joins them on their journey from Jerusalem, they remain hyper-focused on the tragedy, attempting to process all that has occurred, and wrestle with what the future might hold. They fail to recognize the one who has entered into their midst and come alongside them. It is only in the familiar act of the breaking of the bread that recognition finally takes place.

Scripture proclaims Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us, but how often are we distracted by the things of this world, our day to day worries and tribulations, that we fail to recognize God with us? Just like Cleopas and his companion, we become hyper-focused on the things at hand and can fail to see the larger picture, even when God stares us in the face.

The good news is God always accompanies us whether we are able to recognize it or not, and when we fail to do so, God doesn’t then abandon us. Instead, God continues to daily come to us

and to reveal Godself in a variety of ways – perhaps in a smile or phone call, maybe a card or someone lending us a hand, even a hug or a glimpse of beauty in the world around, or in someone else needing to know and experience God in the midst of their suffering.

What has made your heart burn with the knowledge of God's presence?

**Let's pray:** *Gracious God, forgive us when we become distracted and fail to recognize your presence in our lives, and teach us to be attentive to those moments and places where you are breaking into the world with your kingdom and love. Amen.*

A Song for Your Day: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rYYd6nRurg>

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**Monday, December 5, 2022**

Text: Genesis 1:1-2

**When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.**

In early November, my former college roommate, Katie, who is also an ordained minister in the ELCA, and I travelled to Two Harbors, MN to spend some time in theological study and reflection with fellow pastor and theologian Anna Madsen at the Spent Dandelion Retreat (read shameless plug for Anna's sacred space for those in ministry – you really should visit!). Our entire stay was filled with gray, rainy, oorlich days, at times accompanied by thunder and lightning, near the western shores of Lake Superior, who did not fail to fully display her might, gray waters pitching and churning in all their fury and glory, a scene which called to mind the auspicious sinking of the Edmund Fitzgerald ore freighter some forty-seven years previous. The gales of November did not fail to put on a majestic display, one filled with both beauty and danger, life and death in all of their fullness on "the big lake they call Gitche Gumee." As Katie and I roamed the rocky shoreline one evening in search of Yooperlite, I was reminded of the many times the crashing waters appear in God's story.

- The story of creation in which we read about the Spirit of God hovering over the water as God speaks creation into being, calling forth all that exists out of the chaos.
- The story of God calling Noah to build an ark and how it rained for forty days and nights flooding the earth, cleansing it and making it new.
- The story of the Israelites fleeing Egypt and the Pharaoh's army of chariot warriors and the need to cross the Red Sea. God commanded Moses to stretch out his rod and the waters parted, creating a path of dry land allowing the people to escape.

- The story in John's Gospel and about the pool around which those who were gathered were ill or suffering in body, mind, or spirit, each hoping to be the first to enter when the angel of the Lord came to stir the water and grant healing. The healing that Jesus accomplishes there.
- The story of Jesus being baptized in the waters of the Jordan and the Spirit of God in the form of a dove descending and proclaiming him, "Beloved."
- The story of the Samaritan woman at the well from whom Jesus asks a drink and then offers living water.

And more.

Water is necessary for life. Without it, human beings cannot survive beyond a few days.

And then I think of my own connection to the waters to God – to my baptism. In those waters, I was drowned, and from those waters I was raised to new life, marked by the cross of Christ, and sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit forever.

God has stirred the waters over me and over all whom God has claimed as God's own, Beloved. Without God, we have nothing. We ARE nothing. We need the water God provides for life.

May our daily encounters with water remind us of the one who commands the waters and pours them upon us, refreshing us and claiming us as God's own.

**Let's pray:** *Let your waters rain down over us, O God, drowning out our sin and suffering and overflowing us with life. Slake our thirst, and part the path for us to boldly enter into the life and Kingdom to which we have been called. Amen.*

A song for your day: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHp6QquWdhk>

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**Tuesday, December 6, 2022**

Text: Job 38:22

**Have you entered the storehouses of the snow?**

The snow was swirling through the air just the other day, at times sending my small part of the world into whiteout conditions. The weather alerts, one after another, began popping up on my phone, warning me of hazardous conditions involving ice, especially if one needed to travel.

However the total snowfall, at least in Pelkie, didn't amount to very much. In places, due to the wind, the yards and roads were bare and dry. At least it wasn't Buffalo, NY where a whopping seventy-two-plus inches recently piled up, burying the city.

When the snows of winter come flying, I have often heard people wonder from whence it comes. How could there be so much snow, and how is it able to continue piling up? How many more times must we layer up in our winter gear and scrape, shovel, blow, and plow before it ceases and spring at last arrives to melt the frozen flakes of white away?

As Job laments his woes to God, one of the things he mentions is the storehouses of snow belonging to God. Imagine God having a stockpile of snow, all of it waiting for God to dump it upon us in its due season. Unlike Job, I don't believe God literally plans to unleash the snow upon us in time of trouble and war, but I do believe God, at times, blankets the world in snow because the water, even in its crystalized form, is necessary for life.

As inconvenient as the piling, drifting snow may sometimes be, especially hating having to shovel, God grants us the gift of snow as yet one more reminder of the marvelous ways in which God works and sustains life. And how much more than snow has God stored-up other good things with which to sustain all that God has created? Grace, forgiveness, mercy, love, blessing, peace. All of these things which sustain life, God has prepared in abundance, freely gifting them to us.

**Let's pray:** *God of snow, all the elements of winter, and wind, you have prepared and stored your blessings for all creation to be granted in their proper seasons. Thank you for these most precious gifts. Amen.*

A song for your day: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8FIIchSJoOA>

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## Wednesday, December 7, 2002

Thunderstorms terrified me when I was young. Their cacophony would abruptly rouse me in the middle of the night with a force that rattled the entire house and leave me paralyzed in my bed, too afraid to move so much as an inch for fear the terrible storm would somehow "get" me. I never wanted to be alone when it was thundering.

To assuage my fears, my mom would often tell me that the sound of thunder was nothing to fear for God was merely bowling or rearranging his furniture. Although her explanation didn't seem entirely plausible to me – surely God could find a less noisy activity in which to participate that wouldn't scare the living daylights out of me – what did bring me comfort and relief from my fears surrounding the storm was my mother's presence.

When I reflect upon these things, I recall a song my country-music-loving mom would play from her vinyl record collection on the stereo while cleaning our family home. It's called "Storms Never Last" and was written by Waylon Jennings and sung by his wife, Jessi Colter.

*Storms never last, do they baby?  
Bad times all pass with the wind.  
Your hand in mine stills the thunder.  
You make the sun want to shine.*

As an adult, I now know that thunder, itself, is nothing to fear, however deafening it may be. In fact, adult me has often enjoyed watching and listening to an oncoming storm as it rolls in. I know that storms, however fierce they may be in the moment, never last. Fairer weather is always sure to follow sooner or later, and should the clouds break and the sun appear once the storm has passed, there is often a rainbow to gild the sky in its wake. However, what always makes a storm more enjoyable – or tolerable, if that's your situation – is the presence of another with whom to weather the storm, whether they be the literal or figurative storms of life.

The best presence in all our storms is God, the one whose voice calms the storms, the one who promises to be with us always, the one who will hold our hands – hold us – when life and the things of this world become frightening. God never promises that the storms won't come, or that life will be without fear and suffering, but God does promise that we never have to face the storms alone. And one day, when Christ returns and the Kingdom of God arrives in all its fullness and glory, the storms of life will cease forever, and the Son of God will eternally shine upon us.

**Let's pray:** *Thunderous God, author of the storm that brings rain to nourish your creation, calm our fears when we are afraid and speak peace into our trembling spirits. Flood us with your abiding presence and hold our hands until we are able to once again walk forth into the sunlight. Amen.*

Two songs for your day:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1biC9WE-rg>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NM14VZVu0og&t=3s>

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**Thursday, December 8, 2022**

Text: Mark 4:30

**Jesus also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it?"**

We recently enjoyed an unexpected warm spell over the Thanksgiving holiday, which melted nearly all of the snow that had fallen in little ol' Pelkie, MI where I reside. Taking advantage of the unseasonable fifty-degree weather, I decided to tend to the task of moving my picnic table to its winter storage location when what to my wondering eyes should appear but the unmistakable gold of a dandelion popping up from my lawn. It was such an unusual and unexpected sight so late in November that I decided it warranted closer examination – I do enjoy dandelions. As I wandered closer to the bold little bloom, I noticed another a few feet away. And then another and another and another. These dandelions were popping up everywhere. In November, almost December! This may not seem strange at this time of year in warmer climates, but here in the Western UP, this is not, at least in my experience, a typical occurrence. I half wondered if my eyes were deceiving me, but I have photos to prove the marvelous little sight I beheld was a reality.

Dandelions, for me, have always been a symbol of the Kingdom of God. They are hardy little plants, every part of which is edible and able to sustain life, and no matter how hard you might try to remove them from your yard and other places around your home, they just keep popping up everywhere, often in those environments we might think inhospitable or near impossible.

The Kingdom of God is like that. It just breaks in, right in the middle of everything, drawing near. You can attempt to deny or ignore it, and it still comes. You can attempt to destroy and annihilate it, and it still comes, even stronger than before. You can try to run away from it, moving elsewhere, and it still comes. You can refuse it, and it still comes. You can do everything within your power to prevent it, and it just keeps coming.

Just like the dandelions.

How was it possible that they were blooming in my yard, popping up their little golden heads, from the frozen ground and melted snows of my yard? Truly, it is nothing short of God and the Kingdom continuing to unfold in this world.

You cannot stop the dandelions! They grow where they will and multiply by the thousands. And you cannot stop God! The Kingdom has come near and is ever widening.

**Let's pray:** *Creator and tender of the dandelions, take root in our hearts and bloom in every season. Remind us that you come to bring life and abundance, and teach us to scatter the seeds of your love far and wide, particularly in places that seem the most forsaken and impossible. Amen.*

A song for your day: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YfzXHU0HOWI>

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**Friday, December 9, 2022**

Text: Psalm 143:8

**Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning,  
for in you I put my trust.  
Teach me the way I should go,  
for to you I lift up my soul**

I am not a morning person by any stretch of imagination and prefer to sleep in and wake slowly to greet each new day, but every once in a great while, rousing while it is still dark to catch the sunrise is worth rolling out of bed early.

I can remember one such occasion when I was still in high school. Our ecumenical youth group had been invited to a lock-in at a camp in Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula on the eastern shores of Lake Superior. We laughed, sang, ate, and played cards and other games long into the night, only managing to snag a few zzzs before our wake-call to view the dawn of the new day.

Garbed in sweatshirts, hats, and mittens, we left the warmth of the cozy A-frame and meandered upon the beach to fallen logs turned benches around a campfire, our eyes cast to the distant horizon and the great lake's seeming end.

I can still see the vivid masterpiece which God painted for us to gaze upon. Brilliant gold and striking pink. Fiery orange and rich crimson. Majestic purple and deep indigo. All of it stretching from one side of the sky's vast canvas to the other, flooding our field of vision. It was awesome! What a morning!

Having sustained us through the night, God grants to us the gift of each new day, whether we are a morning person or otherwise. May we be reminded with each rising of the sun how marvelous and wonderful all that God has created is, including you and me. Creation is nothing short of being God's masterpiece borne out of God's love.

**Let's pray:** *God of the sunrise and all of our days, you reveal yourself to us in the beauty and wonder of the natural world. Teach us to walk in the newness of life that comes with each new day. To see beauty in all whom we encounter, knowing they too have been created by you and bear your artistry, and to care for them accordingly. We rejoice for you give us all our mornings! Amen.*

A song for your day: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6iQhyVJIUg>

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**Saturday, December 10, 2022**

Text: Psalm 150:6a

**Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!**

One of my favorite places in all the world is the Palace dock at Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp. I love stealing down to the lakeside, sheltered by a canopy of trees, and winding the dirt path that leads to this rustic sanctuary. There I'm drawn to dwell in that most sacred space beneath a velvet sky studded brilliantly with stars to listen to the orchestra warming up and preparing for its symphony under the fall of night.

The pips and chirrups of the spring peepers from their cattail and lily pad perches. The deep, dropping base of the bullfrog. The drone and buzz of the annoying mosquito in my ear. The splash and splash of the trout now surfacing and snaring that same mosquito. The whiz of the playful dragonflies. The thrilling trill of the loons swimming upon the mirror-glass waters. The “who cooks, who cooks, who cooks for yoooooooo,” cry of the barred owl, and sometimes, even the childlike scream of a bobcat. As this small corner of the world begins to drift toward slumber and rest from the previous day, the living creatures of the world bid the creator and the creation good night in song, praise, and thanksgiving for all that is, the marvel and wonder of it all.

Wherever you are, whatever is occurring in your world, may there be time to pause, to listen, to reflect, and to sing God's praise for all that God has done and continues to do.

Grace and Peace.

**Let's pray:** *Lord of all creation, God of wonders, we thank you for all that you are and all that you have made. We praise you for your unconditional grace and the peace which surpasses all our understanding. We are able to sing because of your love and Kingdom come near to us.*  
*Amen.*

A song for your day (or night): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSFK7UiH5Us>

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