

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Below is a worship devotional for our community to share during this time when our face-to-face worship services must be paused. Included in this devotional are prayers, two readings for this Sunday, and a short reflection on the readings from me. Although we must worship remote from one another at this time, please remember to support the continuing ministries of Peace Lutheran Church, the Central States Synod, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America through your gifts and offerings.

As a reminder to the announcements shared yesterday via email, our synod is also providing pre-recorded, online worship through the synod's web site at <https://www.css-elca.org/worship>. Living streaming of worship services by some sister congregations in our synod is also being made available. The list of those services is available here: <https://www.css-elca.org/worship-streams>.

Please contact the church office or me if you have any prayer requests or pastoral care needs during this time.

Peace,

Rich

Gathering

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

Let us pray.

Bend your ear to our prayers, Lord Christ, and come among us.

By your gracious life and death for us, bring light into the darkness of our hearts,
and anoint us with your Spirit, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen.

Word

A reading from the Psalms:

¹The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not be in want.

²The Lord makes me lie down in green pastures
and leads me beside still waters.

³You restore my soul, O Lord,
and guide me along right pathways for your name's sake.

⁴Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil;
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is running over.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23)

The Holy Gospel according to John:

As [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." ¹²They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

¹⁸The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷He answered them, "I have

told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" ²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. ³⁹Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" ⁴¹Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains." (John 9:1-41)

Reflection on the Readings

A lot has happened this week. The new virus, COVID-19, continues to spread around the world. People everywhere (and their governments) struggle to find ways to support life and health for all. Businesses – including the one for which I work during the week – are relocating employees to home offices and experimenting with new and different tools to accomplish their work. Other businesses are temporarily closing, or limiting the number of hours or the number of patrons they serve. Hospitals are limiting visitors, nursing homes are on lock-down, and people are being asked or required to remain in their homes.

On top of those happenings, the regular experiences of life continue as well. Those experiences are unique for each of us. For me, that experience has included the death of my father-in-law. Moments of remembering, laughing, and crying have been part of that experience. Exhaustion, needing to do something, not knowing what to do, being frustrated, and snapping when things don't go right are exhibited within the rhythm of the week. But not always. Praying, singing, sharing meals, and giving thanks have been essential to the week as well.

And somewhere along the way, I don't remember whether it was before or after my father-in-law's death, someone recalled that Psalm 23 was a favorite of his. And then there it was among the readings for this day – the Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 22, 2020.

Psalm 23 has been described as one of the “cannot-miss texts” of the Bible – one of a small set essential texts for the daily living-out of the Christian faith. Psalm 23 is scripture that speaks to God’s people in difficult, troubled times. It doesn’t matter whether it death or virus or plague or recession or unemployment or limited supplies of food or stressed climate or flooding rains, Psalm 23 is there. It is there when we are in crisis. It is there to support our faith. It is there to help us build trust.

I don’t know with certainty, but perhaps that – the building of trust in a world that is filled with shadows and risk and unknown outcomes – was the core appeal of Psalm 23 to my father-in-law. Trust always arises from a promise. And the only possible responses to a promise are to believe it or not to believe it. To trust it or not to trust to it. To live as if the promise is real and trustworthy or to live as if the promise isn’t real or trustworthy.

God’s promise to the ancient psalmist was simple. “I am with you.” In response, the psalmist confesses, “I fear no evil, for you are with me.” I may be surrounded by enemies, but “you prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies.”

In the days and weeks ahead, there are many uncertainties. We do know what governments will do. We do not know when things will return to “normal.” We do not know who will suffer hunger, loss, isolation, illness, disease, or death. Risky solutions will need to be tried. Creative approaches will need testing and experimentation. And through the turmoil, we will need to find an anchor of trust.

Let that trust be this: that we know God is still with us, that we may see God’s presence with confidence and belief, and that God will continue to guide us through every valley, past every shadow, and beyond every death. Amen.

Hymn of the Day: If You But Trust in God to Guide You

(you may listen to accompanying music for the hymn by clicking here:
https://youtu.be/o5_XG2rLjP0)

- 1 If you but trust in God to guide you
with gentle hand through all your ways,
you’ll find that God is there beside you
when crosses come, in trying days.
Trust then in God’s unchanging love;
build on the rock that will not move.

- 2 What gain is there in anxious weeping,
in helpless anger and distress?
If you are in your Savior’s keeping,

in sorrow will he love you less?
For Christ who took for you a cross
will bring you safe through ev'ry loss.

- 3 The Lord our restless hearts is holding,
in peace and quietness content.
We rest in God's good will unfolding,
what wisdom from on high has sent.
God, who has chosen us by grace,
knows very well the fears we face.

- 4 Sing, pray, and keep God's ways unswerving,
offer your service faithfully.
Trust heaven's word; though undeserving,
you'll find this promise true to be.
This is our confidence indeed:
God never fails in time of need.

Prayers of Intercession

Turning our hearts to God who is gracious and merciful, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

God of insight, open the hearts of the church and the world to all who testify to your deeds of power. Raise up voices in your church that are often silenced or overlooked due to age, gender expression, race, or economic status. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

God of insight, empower us to care for the land and all living things that dwell in it and beneath it. Provide rich soil for crops to grow. Bring rain to lands suffering drought. Protect hills and shorelines from damage caused by erosion. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

God of insight, bring peace to all people and nations. Anoint leaders who seek goodness, righteousness, and truth on behalf of all. Frustrate the efforts of those who would seek to cause violence or terror. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

God of insight, you care for our needs even before we ask. Come quickly to all who seek prayer this day, especially Vallie, LaVaune, Patty, Kathy, Frank, Lisa, Rita, April, Bev, Bob, Beth, Marlene, and all those we name. Accomplish healing through the work of doctors, nurses, physical therapists, nutritionists, and all who tend to human bodies. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

God of insight, help this assembly lift up the unique gifts of each person who enters, no matter their physical capacity, cognitive ability, or sensory need. Help us to be creative and brave in making our facilities and our ministries accessible to all. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

God of insight, you call out to those who are asleep and awaken them to new life with you. We give thanks for your saints, especially Woody Cheesman. Join us together with them as your children in this world and the next. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

According to your steadfast love, O God, hear these and all our prayers as we commend them to you; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sending

Now is the acceptable time.

Now is the day of salvation.

Holy God, speaking, spoken, and inspiring,

✠ bless you, unbind you, and send you in love and in peace. Amen.