

AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS
Reflections on Faith Inspired Hope

By members of Bethany Lutheran Church
Lent 2021

*My life is in You, Lord,
My strength is in You, Lord
My hope is in You, Lord
In You, it's in You.*

(*My Life Is In You, Lord* by Daniel Gardner)

This simple contemporary worship song, released about 20 years ago, came flooding back to me. A song that holds vague, far off memories of my youth. Memories of Synod-wide gatherings but also getting ready in the morning with my CD player blasting. A time when life seemed nearly perfect. I find myself longing for those days. Days before the stress of our current situation. But then I hear these words again: “My life, my strength, my hope, it’s in the Lord.”

As we near the one-year mark of pandemic living, I find it refreshing that our Lenten Devotional is focusing on “Faith Inspired Hope.” Where do we find our hope? Our hope is in you, Lord. As we move through these days of Lent, may you find solidarity, inspiration, and hope in the words and stories from our community.

Blessings to you, as we journey together to the foot of the cross.

Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.



My devotional reflection comes from Isaiah 12:22 , **“Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and no be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.”**

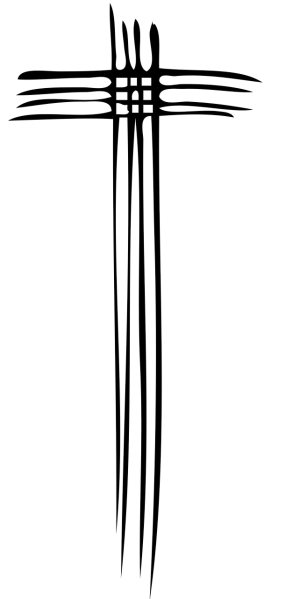
This is the first song of Isaiah—a hymn of thanksgiving.

Sing the praises of the Lord, for he has done great things.

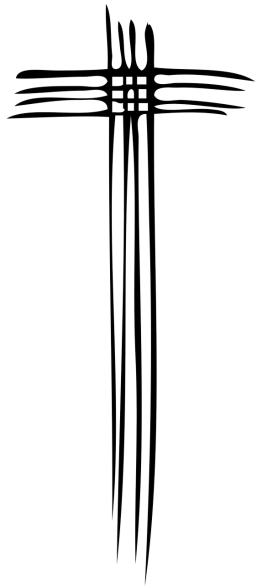
We can in spirit and in truth cry out and say, *“I have trusted Him, and I am not afraid, for nothing can separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.”*

This year has been a true testament of everyone’s faith, and we must trust someone and reach out to our Lord and Savior. We can either trust or live-in fear. We cannot be afraid of not knowing what might happen to us all. The only way I have made it through this past year is to pray and ask God to help me and to comfort me. The worth of the gift is the worthiness of the giver, and the value of a blessing is salvation to the unworthy sinner. It is beyond our human comprehension that the Lord has become my salvation through the sacrifice of his own life on the cross. We are drawn toward the future, ready to shout aloud and sing for joy for this time shall pass. This gives everyone reason to praise God!

With God’s blessings, thanksgiving and love.



Thursday, February 18, 2021



As a young man I became the proud lessee of a Standard Oil service station. Soon, I settled into meeting customers, filling the gas tanks, cleaning windshields, changing oil and washing their cars. It was an engaging enterprise.

But nine months later, I found myself on a Trailways bus en route to an Army induction center. I had been drafted by my nation into the Korean conflict. Thus, began a painful time of separation from wife and daughter, disruption of a life trajectory and wondering “what comes

next?” Unforeseen was a great blessing: the G.I. Bill. Two and a half years later I was enrolled in college that led to a B.A. degree and later, a seminary degree and ordination into Christian ministry.

The experiences of enlisted service, then pastoral ministry all were important in serving as an Army chaplain during the Vietnam war. I could empathize with young people having their plans or education disrupted to serve “in harm’s way.”

During Lent, we recall that Jesus, in the words of the Spiritual ‘had to walk this lonesome valley, had to walk it by himself.” Likewise, “we must walk this lonesome valley, must walk it by ourselves...” Yet, Jesus had, and we have One who sways the future, and behind the dim unknown, stands within the shadows keeping watch above his own.” - from “*Once to Every Man and Nation*” -James Russell Lowell

All praise for such providential grace that ever leads us, even when we’ve lost our way, toward home.

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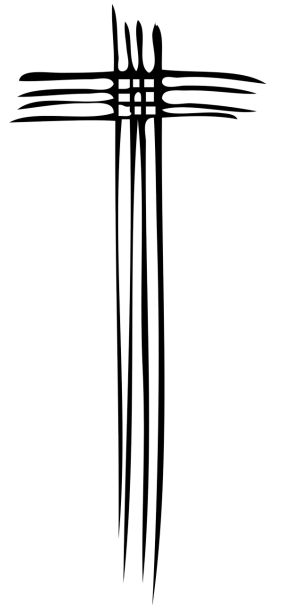
Friday, February 19, 2021

At the shelter where I work, I see the remnants of what trauma can do and the brokenness that can follow. Stories of molestation, abuse, suicide, abandonment, loss of a child, neglect...all stories that one wishes were not true. These stories are hard for me to comprehend as I was blessed with a wonderful and loving family and a privileged life growing up. The amount of pain one human can endure is overwhelming and sometimes unthinkable.

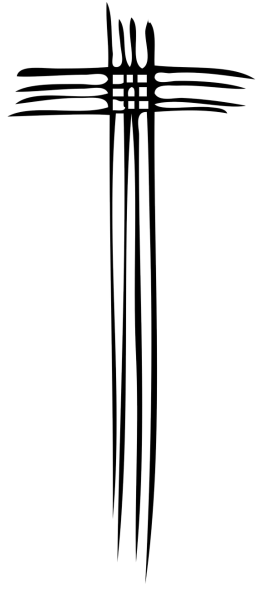
I often wonder, why do these horrible things happen to certain people? Why do some people have to suffer so greatly while others just go about their day? Why do some of us enjoy happy, healthy childhoods while others live in fear and chaos each day? It can seem like the world is a cruel and horrible place to live and it would be easier to give up.

But it is at these times that I often look to my faith. Relying on God to find the strength to continue to find hope in humanity and to help those in need. Hope that each day will allow for opportunity. Hope that those we work with will find care and love in our assistance. Hope that each act, no matter how small, will make a difference.

“Hope is important because it can make the present moment less difficult to bear. If we believe that tomorrow will be better, we can bear a hardship today.”
– Thich Nhat Hanh



Saturday, February 20, 2021



Today is my mom's 96th birthday. In the past, I would jokingly ask her on February 20, "How did you get to be so old?" I will pass on asking that question this year. She no longer understands jokes. She's stuck in a body dimmed by dementia.

Mom lives in a licensed family home where she receives one-on-one care from Bobbie and Dick. This couple has ministered to the elderly in this way for years. Over the past year or so, Mom's needs have grown. A couple of months ago, Bobbie began saying she was tired. I became fearful and prayed God would give Bobbie the strength needed to care for Mom.

Recognizing the impact this total physical and emotional dependency was having on Bobbie and Dick, my family successfully secured a short-term respite placement for Mom last month. Bill and I joined my brothers and sister in Milwaukee to support Mom at her home away from home.

My mother is completely bedridden. Someone needs to feed her. She sleeps a lot. When her eyes are open, there is a blankness to them. She says little and is often completely nonverbal.

Last month, though, Mom sometimes gazed into my eyes with such intensity as I shared a memory. It felt like she was looking into my soul. A soul that prays for her release. A soul that feels guilty forming such a prayer. A soul that wants to fully believe in faith inspired hope but knows I still have a way to go.

Reflection Authors



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First Sunday of Lent - February 21, 2021

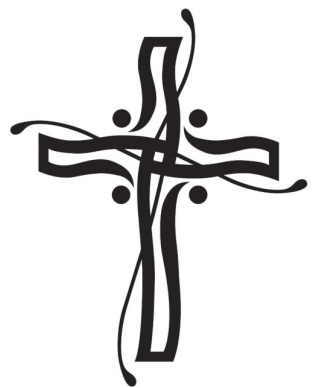
Reflections on Sunday Worship – Spiritual Practice-
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This year, the Sundays in Lent lead us to focus on five covenants God makes in the Hebrew Scriptures and to use them as lenses through which to view baptism. First Peter connects the way God saved Noah's family in the flood with the way God saves us through the water of baptism. The baptismal covenant is made with us individually, but the new life we are given in baptism is for the sake of the whole world.

As you listen to today's sermon, use the space below to write or draw something that is meaningful to you that you would like to carry into the week ahead.

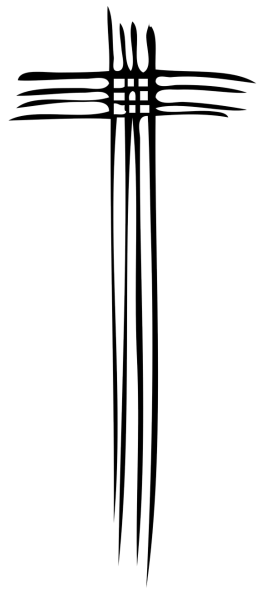
Holy God, heavenly Father, in the waters of the flood you saved the chosen, and in the wilderness of temptation you protected your Son from sin. Renew us in the gift of baptism. May your holy angels be with us, that the wicked foe may have no power over us, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.



I was born into a strong Lutheran family; I was baptized and attended church and Sunday School every week whether I wanted to or not. I was resentful of the seemingly forced attendance by my parents. I became a “check the box Christian” like when you are completing forms and they ask are you Jewish, Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, etc. I continued attending church occasionally until my forty’s. In my forty’s I suffered stress issues with my business and my family. A good handyman friend whose bumper sticker read “I work for a Jewish Carpenter,” had breakfast with me one day and asked: “What would you do if God put your family and business back together and made it even better?” My response was I’d tell everyone the key verse that we all have heard according to Matthew 6:10.

“Thy will be done” KJV



As you can see, these are words inserted directly into the Lord’s Prayer. My Evangelical friends taught me it was God’s will not my will. So, every time I prayed, I did not pray for my problems to be solved, I prayed for my problems be solved if it was God’s will. God heard my prayers and his will allowed both my family and my business to prosper. Today, when I have problems that I’d like solved, I always remember to pray “Thy will be done.”

When traveling, I connect with my family often via text. One day last May I landed in LA for a two-month Navy Covid mission: my texts went unanswered. I knew my wife had her annual review that day; another chance for her supervisor to sing her praises. Along with praises, she sang the sad song of the defunding of Katie’s program. No one replied because she and our children had been cleaning out her office.

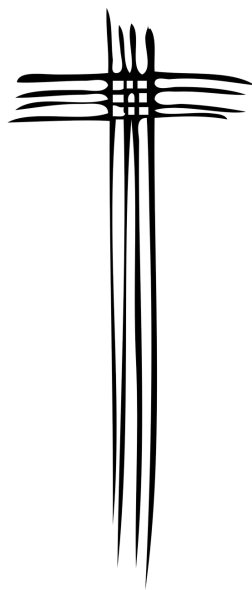
My interim, in Lutheran Campus ministry, had ended early since students did not return after spring break. The Board opted to save money for the coming ‘Settled Pastor,’ so students (those with prior religious connections) were remanded to their “home” faith communities. Pending completion of my chaplaincy mission, my wife and I were unemployed.

No specific bible verse came to mind. But when Katie accepted a job in the Rice Lake School District and I became aware of a potential interim pastorate in the area, I remembered our faith narrative: There was Abraham and Sarah, reportedly even older than me (!) and my wife, showing a certain “agility” to accept a late-life call to a future yet unseen. I thought of reports of prophets—including Jesus—who knew only that the journey ahead (including to their hometown), would face uncertainty and challenge. I remembered how there was laughter, merrymaking, celebrations too, and above all, a courage to step forth knowing (as one of my first Bishops said) “The Spirit will not call you where the grace and strength of God will not sustain you.”

Lent is over; our crossways journeys continue on CRT -- Central Resurrection Time.



Saturday, April 3, 2021



The Lenten season is a quiet, reflective time for me. In my memory, Lent meant Wednesday church services (when I was in confirmation, classes were held on Saturday mornings, not Wednesdays, so going to church mid-week was kind of a special event) and I would look for the lighted cross on the top of the church building as we drove down the street toward Bethany. Then, during the service, there would be another lighted cross—a large wooden cross with light bulbs along the front of it placed on the altar rail at the end of each service when the sanctuary lights were dimmed, and the glow of the cross grew brighter.

A soloist would sing from the balcony in the darkened space and I could feel the power of the message in song: “Were you there when they crucified my Lord...” or “On a hill far away stood an old, rugged cross...” or “Go to dark Gethsemane...” Because we had to take notes for confirmation, I learned to pay attention to what Pastor Stoltenberg was saying in his message, and how the readings and choir anthems and prayers all tied together in a theme.

These days, I still look forward to the slower, more somber melodies we sing, and the message of remembering Jesus suffered for us. When Easter is here, we celebrate with trumpets and bells and loud singing voices! But we need these quieter days of Lent to prepare for and appreciate the joy of Easter.

Tuesday, February 23, 2021

As if having a pandemic in 2020 wasn’t enough, our family suffered a great loss as well. My 38-year-old nephew, Bradley, died unexpectedly on July 2nd. This handsome daredevil, mountain climbing, outgoing, generous man, was taken from us due to sepsis and a thrombotic storm in his body.

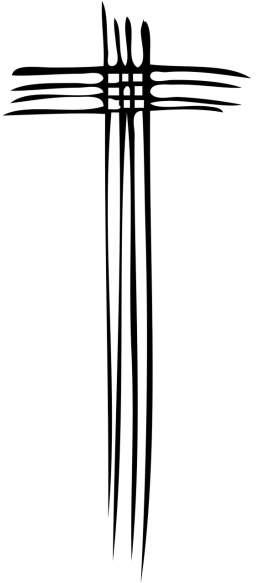
Why did this happen? Where was God as we prayed for Bradley’s recovery? Why didn’t he heal him? Yes, our faith was tested. It isn’t fair! Why him?

And then I remembered that God lost his 39-year-old son. God was crying with us. God was trying to comfort us in our grief with the many stories from the Bible about how others have survived tragedy.

I don’t know how I would have gotten through this without my faith. Yes, my faith was shaken, yet I know that God is with me and all others who have experienced the death of a loved one. I had faith we would get through our grief with prayer and hope for the future.

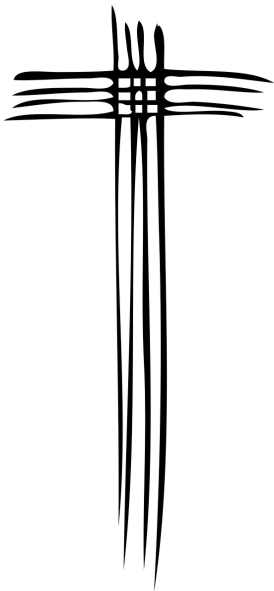
My faith helped me and continues to help me to be able to focus on my family and help them find some comfort in this senseless loss.

“Dear Lord Jesus, I know you cried with us at the loss of Bradley. You were there for us when we thought we couldn’t go on. Thank you for the comforting words through the ages. Bradley, until we meet again, Keep climbing!”



“I will be with you always, even until the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20).

Carol and I have been blessed in our lives with great families, wonderful friends and great work experiences. That’s not to say the road has always been smooth. Less than a year into our marriage, we found ourselves unemployed and wondering what was next. We had educations but our best skills were determination and spunk. Our faith was young and being tested. Where would God lead us? We accepted a job in Eau Claire as live-in house parents for troubled teens. What were we thinking? We were barely beyond teenage years ourselves! This experience revealed to us then (and countless times since) that God will always be with us and that our lives had purpose.



As we continued our journey, we were thankful for our faith guiding the way. We worked, we purchased a home, and we welcomed a son into our family. And then, some events in life have a way of stopping you in your tracks. In 1983, our daughter, Katie, was still born. As we held her little body close to ours, we questioned our God. We were angry and full of grief, but by some piece of Goodness we felt God’s presence and his words, “I will be with you always.” There have been other times when our faith has been challenged – but we continue to know that God is with us – always and forever.

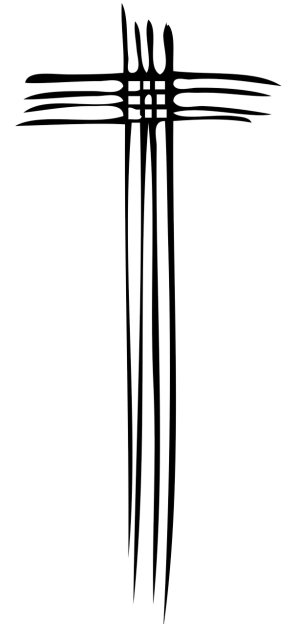
“When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he (Jesus) set his face to go to Jerusalem.” (Luke 9:51)

For me, Lent is a time for a journey. It is a journey to the cross and empty tomb; to the death and to the resurrection of our Lord. It is a journey of my baptism.

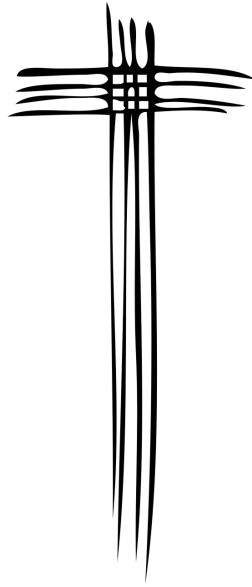
I have had a typical journey of faith in the Lutheran Church. My Mom always saw that I went to Sunday School, Confirmation and worship. In 1965, I went on a journey to Argyle Lutheran Church, meeting the Pastor and asking if I could look up my baptism in the Parish Records. I said, “Let’s start with 1943”. He opened the corresponding book, and I started to look for my name. When I came to February 28, 1943, there it was. I saw my name, Samuel Saalsaa Kochel, and the names of my parents and Godparents. I was flooded with emotion. This is the day that God was acting in my life. This is the day God gave me the gifts of faith, love, life and hope. This is the day God joined me to the death and resurrection of our Lord. This is the day that God began my journey to follow in the footsteps of our Lord and Savior.

And so, the 40 days of Lent for me is a baptismal experience of being joined with Christ and following him to the cross and the empty tomb.

Lord Jesus. Help us all to “walk wet” in our baptisms this Lenten season. Amen



“Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)

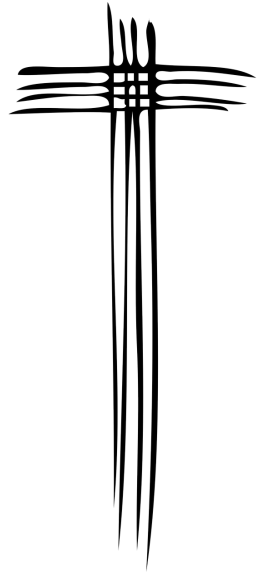


In early 2018 I was diagnosed with lung cancer caused by a rare genomic mutation. The cancer had spread to other major organs, bones and to the brain. There was no cure possible. The lifespan ahead was a few years at best. It was a life changing time nearly three years ago. The options I had were fear or faith.

Going back to my roots was a way to hold to faith over fear. I remembered my parents and many good Bethany people teaching me that God is good all the time. Faith is for the long-haul. “Stand firm” (I Corinthians 16:13) was the charge Pastor Stoltenberg gave to my confirmation class in the spring of 1974.

Throughout the past three years, fear has never had a chance because there have been countless reasons to be hopeful. My medical team is tops. My family, friends, and a large community of care have been ever present and encouraging. There are amazing treatments available for many cancers today. And underneath it all is the foundation of faith - the truth of the Word made flesh, the Christ of the cross and new creation. This is the God who strengthens, helps, and upholds us forever.

“We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).



On Thursday, Val was told it was only indigestion. The next day he worked as usual and then we went to stay at the Eastwold’s cabin while our daughter visited her grandmother in New Jersey. After supper, Val said, “Something is not right.”

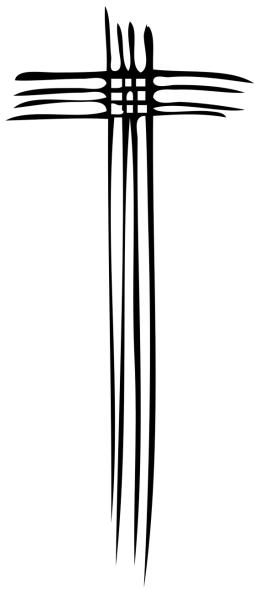
He had had chest pains again and the calls began. Since the local hospital was alerted, they prepared for a heart attack victim. Their life-saving efforts kept Val alive.

That horrible-evening I made many calls. My father called Val’s mother for me. She immediately arranged a flight with 6-year-old Marie and arrived on Saturday. As they drove to the hospital, Marie said, “I hope we find Daddy alive.”

Thankfully, we were given the gift of 14 more years together. On May 3, 2007, Val had a fatal heart attack when Marie was twenty years old. He was alive when he arrived due to Marie’s efforts. I used Romans 8:26-39 for his funeral.

Christ walked with me through those days. Thirteen years later, I remember that painful day when Christ held me just exactly like he still does today. God strengthens your faith as you walk daily with him. When God gives you a gift of time with your loved ones, remember to enjoy each moment and give thanks to God. In everything God works for good.

Friday, February 26, 2021

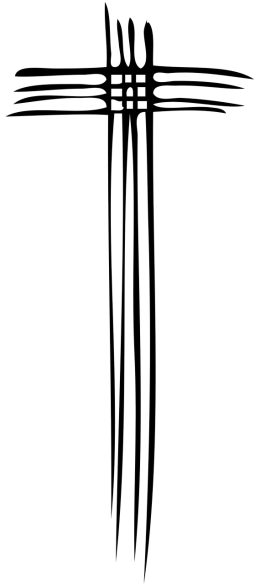


Lent comes to us this year amidst a time of sadness and grief. I remember another Lent which for me was also filled with grief. Right after Ash Wednesday my mother had a fall which set in motion a series of health issues from which she would never recover. The six weeks of Lent were filled with needing to make many hard decisions and adjusting to the awareness that her death was rapidly approaching.

In my sadness and exhaustion, I turned to Psalm 123, the one I think of as our “family psalm.” This was my father’s favorite psalm and his mother’s before him. “I will lift up my eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord who made heaven and earth.” I thought of all the times my family in despair had turned to the psalm. “He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.” Saying the words calmed me. With God ‘keeping me’ I can get through this. These words have brought me comfort and peace and helped me through this time of Covid.

As in Lent we see the hope of Easter ahead, we now see the hope of an ending pandemic ahead. Dear friends, may the Lord “preserve’ your going out and coming in from this time forth and even forevermore.” Amen

Wednesday, March 31, 2021



My faith has provided me strength and hope, and I often think of this at various times.

I grew up in a small town not too far from Rice Lake, but still in northern Wisconsin. Memories came flooding back this past year when hearing of my childhood grade-school pastor passing. His grandsons were my age and in my Sunday school class. I had a lot of respect for our pastor, his family and our church family—because of how we were raised.

When we were young during Lent, we always wondered why friends “had to give up something,” and I always wondered on Good Friday, why it was called “good” if someone had to give up things they liked, and someone died? The sadness and somber mood as everyone left church after Good Friday services was heads down and quiet. There was not a word until we were in the car, and even then, my brother and I often exchanged glances as to who was going to speak or ask a question first.

But I love the hymns like ‘The Old Rugged Cross’ and I love hearing the “Lord’s Prayer” sung in a deep masculine voice. It came from the darkness of the balcony—only for the special music--and sung with strong conviction. I still love it to this day. It stops me when I hear it and it gives me hope—there is a lot of love there.

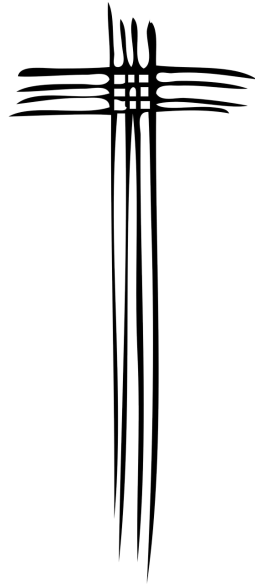
We all knew each other; our close-knit group of friends, and we knew each other’s families. We were ‘that church’ as a people, we respected ourselves as we would want and deserve. That gives me hope.

We were taught to respect the church, our pastors, adults, what it stood for, and the fact that someone died so that we could live and have hope—and it is good: Good Friday.

Tuesday, March 30, 2021

In November of 1985, I was pregnant (high risk) with our daughter. I was not feeling well and went in for a check-up. That day, I was hospitalized until a week before my daughter was born, on March 19, 1986.

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).



When others hear our story, they often ask : “How did you do it all those months?” We did it because with God, all things are possible. God sustained us through those months by giving us patience each day as Tony went to work and took care of our toddler; he provided caring friends and family that helped watch our son; and gave us parents who raised us in the Christian faith. We knew God and could draw upon his grace and courage to face separation, loneliness, and fear of our child dying at any moment. Our doctors and nurses were blessed with knowledge and skill to provide excellent medical

care; and we were sustained through gracious and generous family, friends and neighbors who made regular visits to our home and prayed continuously for a healthy child.

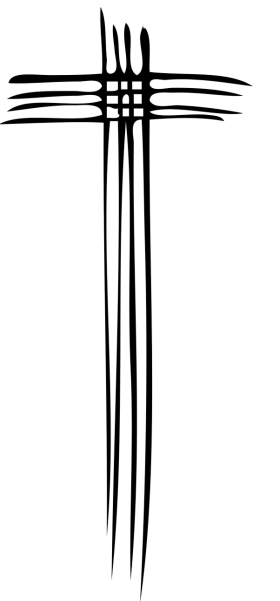
Time grants wisdom to better understand God’s presence. He sent angels to minister with kindness and compassion. Faith in his promise of grace sustained us, giving us hope to keep going, doing all we could to give our daughter a fighting chance. We are blessed and give thanks each day for our daughter, Hope.

Saturday, February 27, 2021

In my lifetime, I cannot recall a year so filled with trouble and turmoil as this past year. Oh, there have been years with episodes of troubles and crises, but I cannot recall a year with such a relentless drumbeat of day-to-day bad news. We started with the beginning of the pandemic in January and then added the divisiveness of politics. To top it off, safely social distancing made it difficult or impossible to fall back on our trusted reassurance of face-to-face social interaction and even usual in-person worship. Anxiety, depression, fear, and anger are the by-products of all of this.

Where can we go with these burdens and cares? For me, a most comforting message of reassurance comes from Jesus as he was addressing the crowd following his baptism by John as recorded in Matthew 11:28, **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”**

Oh Lord, in these difficult times, help us to know that we are not alone and that we can bring our burdens to you and can give up our heavy yoke of worry and exchange for your yoke that is easy and light. Amen

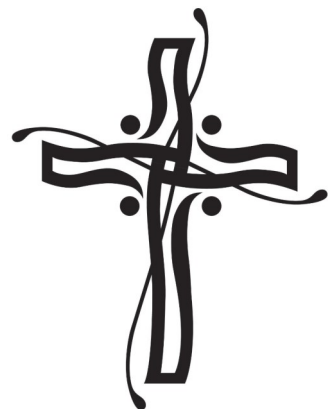
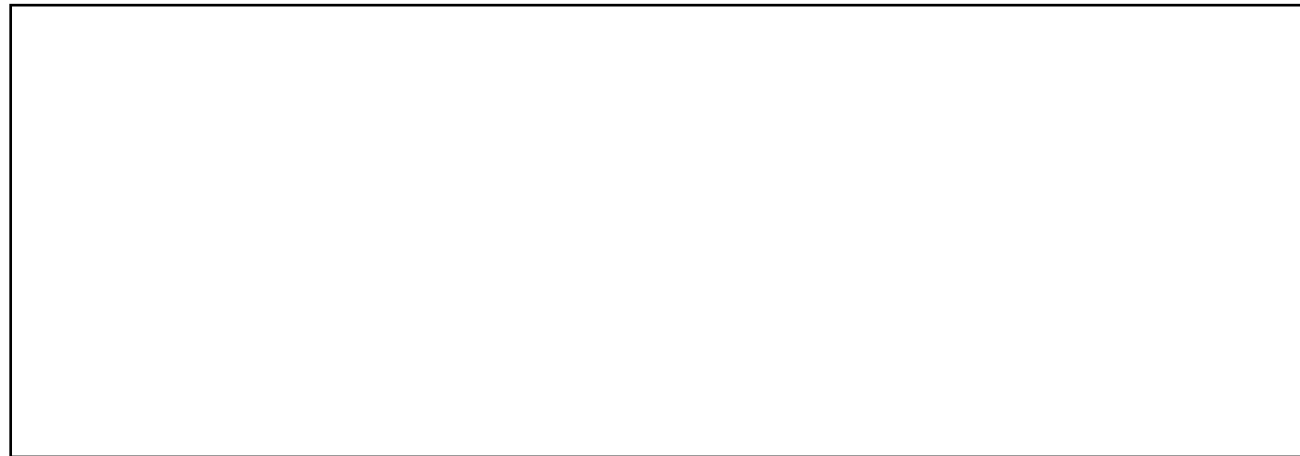


Reflections on Sunday Worship – A Spiritual Practice–

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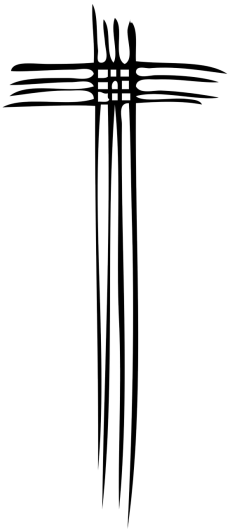
The second covenant in this year's Lenten readings is the one made with Abraham and Sarah: God's promise to make them the ancestors of many, with whom God will remain in everlasting covenant. Paul says this promise comes to all who share Abraham's faith in the God who brings life into being where there was no life. We receive this baptismal promise of resurrection life in faith. Sarah and Abraham receive new names as a sign of the covenant, and we too get new identities in baptism, as we put on Christ.

As you listen to today's sermon, use the space below to write or draw something that is meaningful to you that you would like to carry into the week ahead.



God, by the passion of your blessed Son you made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life. Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ that we may gladly suffer shame and loss for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:10-13)



I graduated from college in 1986 and accepted a job with the federal government. Yes, I was excited! I had worked hard to put myself through college and was given an opportunity to start a career in a job that I wanted. But in southwestern Minnesota where the nearest person I knew was over two hours away? I think reality hit when my parents pulled away from my one-bedroom apartment – leaving me with my meager possessions that did not include a stereo or a TV. Luckily, I only had one day before my first day of work. Fast forward a few weeks: I had started the process to join a church, joined a bowling league, and found my job to be both challenging and rewarding.

Did I call upon God? Yes, I did. I don't think he answered all my prayers and requests, but he put many wonderful people in front of me that helped me succeed. So many people worked to connect with me – my co-workers invited me to dinner at their homes, my bowling teammates gave me a social outlet, and a church that accepted me in the same way as my home church – Bethany Lutheran.

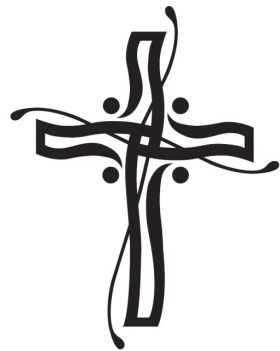
God asks us to come to him and pray with our full heart. As we prepare our hearts and minds this Lenten season, let us continue to seek God. He knows the plan he has for us, but we may need to go through a struggle to reap the rewards.

Reflections on Sunday Worship – A Spiritual Practice–

Join us on our webpage, Facebook, radio, or local television cable

This week, the center of the church's year, is one of striking contrasts: Jesus rides into Jerusalem surrounded by shouts of glory, only to be left alone to die on the cross, abandoned by even his closest friends. Mark's gospel presents Jesus in his complete human vulnerability: agitated, grieved, scared, forsaken. Though we lament Christ's suffering and all human suffering, we also expect God's salvation: in the wine and bread, Jesus promises that his death will mark a new covenant with all people. We enter this holy week thirsty for the completion of God's astonishing work.

As you listen to today's sermon, use the space below to write or draw something that is meaningful to you that you would like to carry into the week ahead.



O God of mercy and might, in the mystery of the passion of your Son you offer your infinite life to the world. Gather us around the cross of Christ, and preserve us until the resurrection, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

“By faith Abraham left his homeland and traveled to a foreign country because of a promise given to him by God” (Hebrews 10:8 paraphrased).

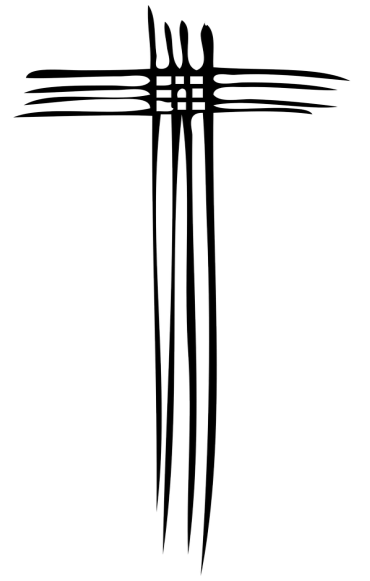
By faith, I left my home city of Rice Lake in 1945 and traveled to Madison, Wisconsin, to begin an education in nursing through the United States Cadet Nurse Corps.

A nursing career was not my first choice. My love was music, especially singing! God had other plans for me. A lack of finances and limited talent made an education in music extremely challenging. The three-year government sponsored nursing course was free because of the urgent need of nurses during World War II. By faith, I applied. I had not taken any high school classes in preparation for nursing, especially Latin. Much to the surprise of my future nursing superintendent, I passed the pre-entrance exam and was accepted.

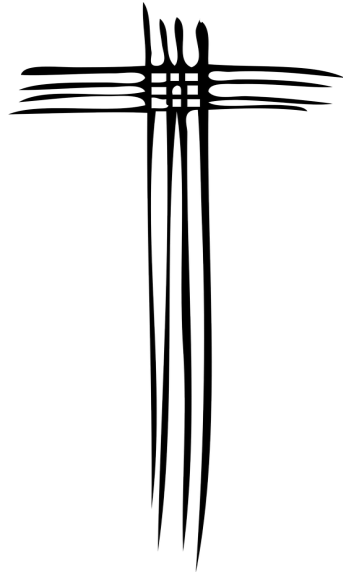
Only God knew the impact those three years and that nursing education would have on my life. I loved nursing, the continual learning process throughout my life, and the personal contact with people in all stages of life. On every twist and turn, God was there beside me, strengthening my faith and giving me hope.

At retirement age, God's greatest gift of my nursing career was to become a parish nurse at Bethany. For the next eleven years this was a true test of faith, a time of growth and humility for which I am forever grateful.

Thank you, Lord, for loving us and giving us faith in you. Amen



Tuesday, March 2, 2021



“Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10).

These past 10 months have been challenging for every one of us. We have all had to change our lifestyle. It has brought me to a routine that is quite different than I am used to. And how am I doing? Quite well, I have to say. Going out so much less has been an okay thing for me. Dave and I have talked about how we will try to keep our lifestyle a bit similar once things go back to normal.

The verse I have related to during this time is Psalm 46:10. “Be Still and know that I am God.” It is such a soothing verse and has stuck throughout the pandemic. In addition to this verse, I have been reminded of a song I loved back in college. (Google: Slow Down (Chuck Girard).mov-YouTube) Please check it out, the words and the chorus are so good.

SLOOOOOOOOOWWWWW DOWN.....SLOOOOOOWWW DOWN! Be still—and wait---on the Spirit of the Lord. Slow down and hear his voice—and know that he is God.

Saturday, March 27, 2021

“Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:8-9).

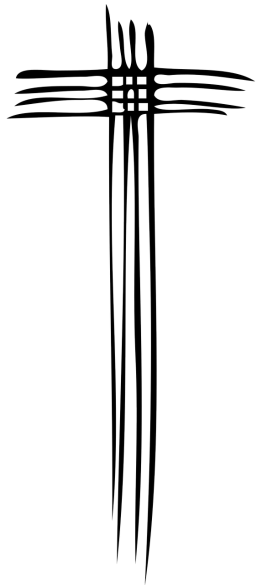
These verses have been my “go to” verses for comfort and hope this past year during the pandemic. I experienced fear of the unknown, worry and lack of sleep as we began to shelter in place. Focusing on positive thoughts has been helpful during isolation. Maintaining contact with family and friends and prayer gradually brought back peace of mind. I found that whenever I was feeling blue, a call or card to a loved one was good medicine.

Why is it that we forget so quickly how God has sustained us through the difficulties we face in these human lives? We have been loved, supported and guided by scripture and our Christian family as we face illness, death, misfortune, injustice and more. God is faithful and will not desert us when we need him the most.

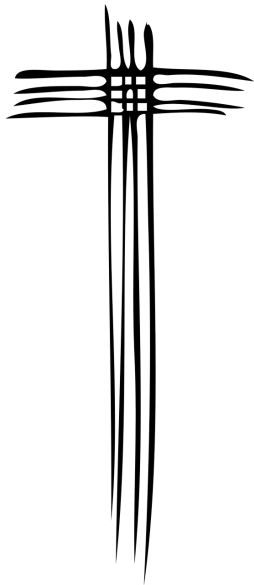
Heavenly Father,

Hold our hands as we journey through these difficult days together. Remind us once again that you will never leave or forsake us.

Amen



Friday, March 26, 2021



My husband had never missed a day of work in his life. You've heard stories like this more than once, but I hadn't expected it to play out in our family. It wasn't in the game plan.

Life was pretty-good 23 years ago: both of us had jobs we loved; the children were in high school, college and the oldest was married. Tom had a pain in his back—he said he had strained it moving a desk at work. It didn't seem too important at the time.

That pain eventually took us to the hospital late one night where he was scanned. The next day we were told he had cancer throughout his body. Twelve weeks later he died in my arms, surrounded by our children, our living room.

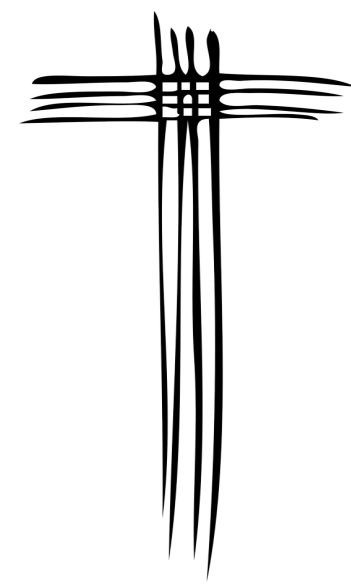
I will never forget the day a friend sent a note (exactly two weeks before Tom's death) that changed my life forever. "We have asked God to place you in his left shirt pocket over his heart tonight. We also asked that he cross his arms and hold you tightly and give you a good night's sleep."

That evening, I finally realized God had been beside us throughout our entire journey. It took a friend to remind me he was ever present, ever waiting to take on any burden we might carry. I have indeed stood at the foot of the cross and been blessed by giving my cares and concerns to God. He made my life whole as I recovered from loss; and he gave me courage to move forward as I began my own journey home.

Wednesday, March 3, 2021

"Do not be afraid-I am with you! I am your God let nothing terrify you! I will make you strong and help you" (Isaiah 41:10).

This verse addresses exactly the support I received from God during the 10 years I was a caregiver for my elderly aunt. Throughout those 10 years, I was at the "Foot of the Cross" many times as she transitioned from being totally independent to totally dependent. There were health and living decisions that needed to be made which were difficult. I often looked for support from family, doctor and ultimately God. I was at the "Foot of the Cross" many times not knowing exactly what to do. Was I making the right decisions? This verse from Isaiah gave me much needed support and reassurance. My aunt passed away and I am truly thankful to God for his support and caring. I have peace and comfort knowing that God guided me through this time of being a caregiver to one of his children.



I truly experienced what being "At the Foot of the Cross" was like when I cared for my aunt. God, through the gift of Jesus on the cross, gave me the gift of trust, strength, and reassurance that I needed to be his servant.

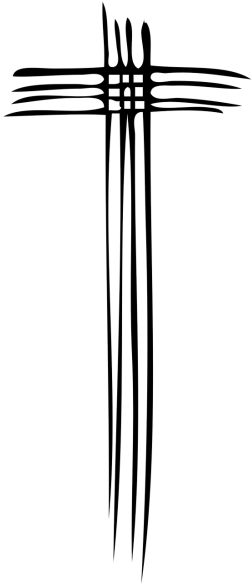
Heavenly Father, thank you for all the gifts and blessing you give us, especially the gift of how to be a good servant to you. In Jesus name, amen.

Thursday, March 4, 2021

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:43).

Over 40 years ago, I heard a sermon on this passage where the message was one of hope even in a time of despair and depression. I have reflected on this passage and that sermon more than any other passage; it is the only sermon that has captured me for most of my life.

Jesus revealed his true humanity by experiencing all human emotions through his life. As death approached, he experienced the depths of depression. I believe he did this for me, for us. I believe he died and arose for me so that my sorrow and times of depression are finite, not endless. As a family physician, I was blessed to care for many people in all stages of their lives: birth to death, in all emotional states, and from happiness and joy to depression.



I feel the Lord was always by my side, guiding my hands as I performed medical procedures, providing me the right words or touch to comfort others at the time of a death of a loved one. He also offered hope in times of depression.

I always felt a blessing, when almost always, following the death of a patient, I was involved in a delivery of a newborn within the next three days. Thank you, Jesus, for taking on my sorrows. What joy it brings to know you arose, and live-in heaven and my parents have joined you there.

Thursday, March 25, 2021

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say
It is well, it is well with my soul.

It is well, it is well,

With my soul, with my soul,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

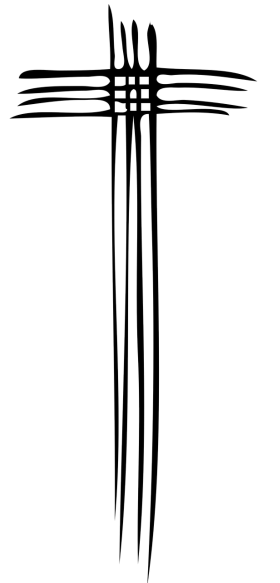
Many times, have I sought out the calm of water, water like a river, peace like a river. During these times I have been reminded of my baptism, which sealed me as a child of God. I am a child of him who promises, **“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you”** (Hebrews 13:1-6).

I trust this promise, that I, maybe like you, have had dark times—lasting even years. Those were times, in which I knew, I was able to carry on only through the prayers and strength of others. I felt the peace of trusting; I was well, despite all that was going on in life. And then, one day, to wake to the realization that prayers had been answered in a way that I could not have even imagined. Praise God.

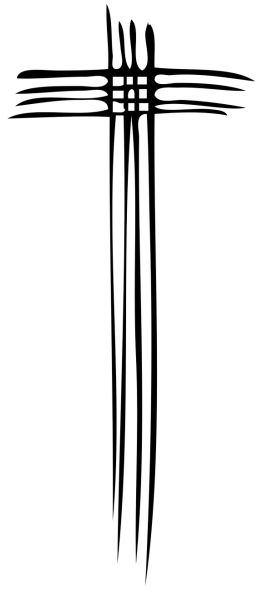
Experiencing such things in life brings with it: peace, confidence, and gratitude for the unconditional love of our gracious, forgiving, and ever-present God. For I can sing: **“It is well, IT IS WELL, with my soul.”**

Thank you, God for your promise to never let me go. I trust in that promise.

Amen



Wednesday, March 24, 2021



When reflecting on a time where my cross became more than I could bear, I think about our desire to become parents. Like most couples we had a plan, however, that journey was very difficult. As the months went by, it became a dark place where admittedly, I started to question my faith. I asked myself if I was praying the right prayer or praying enough for this child we so desired.

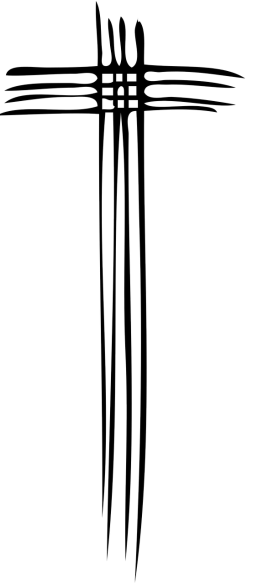
During a Christmas message, I felt Jesus' presence with me. I found myself at a place I could surrender, let go of the plan we had made, in order to accept God's plan for the life we had waiting for us as parents through adoption. While waiting to adopt, we were told that the wait could be long, but we would know when we adopted our child that this child was meant to be ours. This statement has held true and we were blessed with our daughter, Brooklynne. Her adoption journey was a roller coaster, but we called on God and Jesus to help guide us. Brooklynne knows she was chosen for us by God, and that she grew in our hearts. We also know she needed us more than we needed a biological child at that time.

I came across a Bible verse soon after we adopted that confirmed my prayers had been answered. It is 1 Samuel 1:27, **"I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him."**

Friday, March 5, 2021

During the years that I accompanied my wife Kris, as caregiver on her journey with dementia on top of her bipolar disorder, there were often days when we were hanging on by our fingernails to cope.

Living in the moment of each day and the minute-by-minute presence of God and being on the other end of a continuous prayer conversation is what got us through those years. While at the same time, we allowed the light of Christ to continue shining through Kris in her radiation of his love to all of those around her. This included both her Bethany church family and later her Brentwood memory care family.



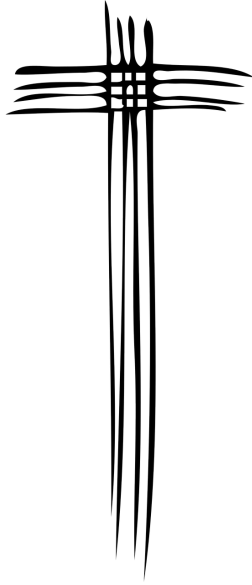
Each day began with the acknowledgement of it being a fresh day with unknown challenges, and the need for God's presence to get through it. Each day ended with a prayer of thanksgiving for having successfully navigated the day with God-given gifts of wisdom, patience, and discernment.

The following Bible verses carried me through these years:

"So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today" (Matthew 6:34).

"Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)

Saturday, March 6, 2021



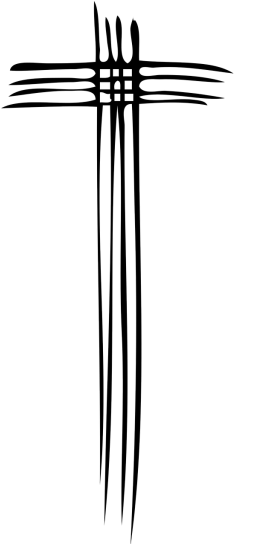
Our faith gets tested often as it does for everyone. No one gets a ‘free-ride,’ and this is how we think God strengthens us to face all situations. Sometimes the trials in our lives are mercies in disguise, and we must travel through the darkness to get to the light.

A difficult test for us presented itself four years ago when one of our daughters, a single mom with three grade schoolers, was diagnosed with an incurable disease. Initial testing did not give hope for surviving more than a year.

Our pain was beyond compare, except to those of you who have walked this dirt path with your child. We shared our pain with friends and the prayers and support snowballed to a point where we could finally turn this all over to God. He heard our desperate plea and answered through our tears.

Like Jesus’ plea in Gethsemane to “**take this cup from me, but not my will but thine be done,**” our prayers upon prayers were sent, and answered. Today, four years later, she is still with us. Her health issues relating to the disease are manageable. God sends raindrops to make the rainbow that reminds us we are never alone. Never, ever!

Tuesday, March 23, 2021



Over the years I have examined my faith often and tried to figure out what it really means to me. Is it just the fact that I am promised eternal life if I shape up? I try my best to follow the ten commandments and ask often for forgiveness when I fail so badly. Is it that I get comfort when I really need it during all the tough times of my life? Or that prayer is the only thing that I can do to help a friend who is sick?

I often wonder how those who have had a terrible time in life have faith. After all, I cannot begin to count all the ways I have been blessed. I have a great family, a wonderful wife, surprisingly good health for an old guy, great friends and ...maybe the less fortunate are simply better at realizing what a great gift we have in Christ .

I don’t always take the opportunity to share God’s love with others and I admit that my attendance at worship services isn’t all that stellar. If I really had faith wouldn’t I do better at this? Good thing forgiveness is available; I know that I can use it.

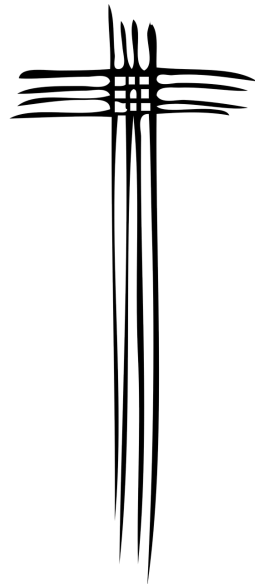
I see good in all people, some more than others, but if you examine the human body, you can’t help but realize what an amazing creation it is. Spend time in nature and observe how intricate it is. I have traveled to countless places that have shown me undeniable evidence of God’s existence. That is where I get my belief from—the rest truly depends on faith.

Monday, March 22, 2021

**"Ask, and it will be given to you,
Seek and you find,
Knock and it will be opened to you"**

(Matthew 7:7).

I recently talked with a young woman who had experienced a number of setbacks in her life. She lost her job, ended a long -term relationship, and was feeling the emotional drain of Covid isolation. Every time she turned around, it seemed like another obstacle had jumped into her path. She turned to her faith and prayed to God for help. She was hoping God would find her a new job and fix her broken relationship.



One day she noticed that something had changed. She no longer felt a pit in her stomach, like she had when she worked at a job that she disliked. She no longer had the anxious feelings present in her tumultuous relationship.

God's answer was to remove the obstacles. God **had** answered her prayers!

I smile when I look back on this conversation. I learned a valuable lesson that day.

I know that God **always** listens to my prayers. And I have faith that God will **always** respond. He may not answer in the way that I expect, but he will **always** answer in a way that is best for me. As long as my faith is strong, and I trust in the Lord, there will **always** be an answer. I just have to listen.

Third Sunday of Lent — March 7, 2021

Reflections on Sunday Worship – A Spiritual Practice–
Join us on our webpage, Facebook, radio, or local television cable

The third covenant in this year's Lente readings is the central one of Israel's history: the gift of the law to those God freed from slavery. The commandments begin with the statement that because God alone has freed us from the powers that oppressed us, we are to let nothing else claim first place in our lives. When Jesus throws the merchants out of the temple, he is defending the worship of God alone and rejecting the ways commerce and profit-making can become our gods. The Ten Commandments and essential to our baptismal call: centered first in God's liberating love, we strive to live out justice and mercy in our communities and the world.

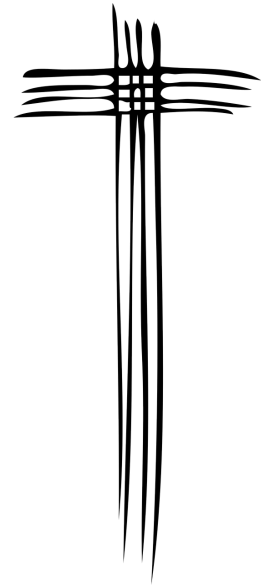
As you listen to today's sermon, use the space below to write or draw something that is meaningful to you that you would like to carry into the week ahead.

O God, through your Son you have called us to live faithfully and act courageously. Keep us steadfast in your covenant of grace, and teach us the wisdom that comes only through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.



Scripture is full of verses that could apply to joining with Mission Jamaica or with volatile politics here at home. We both jumped on John 20:31. These words Jesus spoke to His disciples, who were hiding in a locked room after His death and resurrection, were profound!



John 20: 19 begins, “On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” After this he showed them His hands and his side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said to them “Peace be with you!! **As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.**” When we thought of joining a mission team, such as Mission Jamaica, these words were very comforting and strengthening! It was reassuring to know that those disciples, facing possible death, needed reassurance. It’s intimidating to think of going to a Third World Country, like Jamaica, and spending time in an orphanage with handicapped young people. It’s intimidating to get on a plane and fly away from all that you know! It’s intimidating to feed young people who cannot feed themselves or to dress someone whose joints are immovable. Or try to understand Patois.

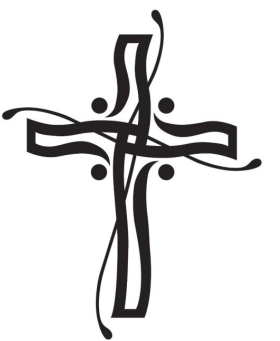
It was, and is, empowering in times like now, to think of those words: “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you. “

Reflections on Sunday Worship – A Spiritual Practice—
Join us on our webpage, Facebook, radio, or local television cable

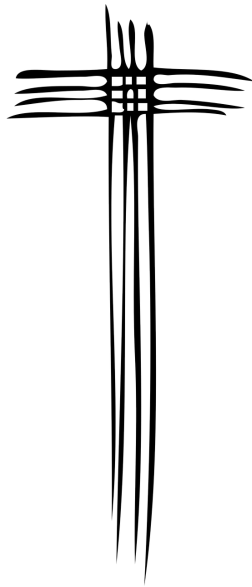
God promises Jeremiah that a “new covenant” will be made in the future: a covenant that will allow all the people to know God by heart. The church sees this promise fulfilled in Christ, who draws all people to himself when he is lifted up on the cross. Our baptismal covenant draws us to God’s heart through Christ and draws God’s love and truth into our hearts. We join together in worship, sharing in word, song, and meal, and leave strengthened to share God’s love with all the world.

As you listen to today’s sermon, use the space below to write or draw something that is meaningful to you that you would like to carry into the week ahead.

O God, with steadfast love you draw us to yourself, and in mercy you receive our prayers. Strengthen us to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, that through life and death we may live in your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.



Saturday, March 20, 2021

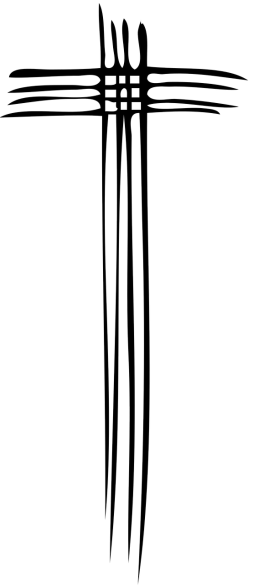


As for most, this past year has been filled with many trials and tribulations for my family. We have experienced the love and joy of a new baby; the excitement and fear of job changes; the sadness of missing our loved ones while social distancing; the struggles of unforeseen hardships; as well as the wonders of watching our children grow--which truly never ceases to amaze me.

While trying to navigate the past year and personal challenges, I have felt a sense of loss in my attempts at keeping things as normal as possible for my children. They do not yet understand this world we live in. 'Normal' has been impossible to recreate and often, I have turned to prayer simply get me through the day. Each time, I have been reminded to find my strengths. Even at my weakest points and most pleading of prayers, this has held true.

It is within this strength that I have found the ability to see things in a new way, to move forward with a sense of hope and purpose and be the best I can be for my family. HE has given us grace and shown us his light time and time again. Often, he guided us through the most unusual means and the greatest of people—always answering our prayers. It is this light that guides me within our next chapter as **“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”** (Philippians 4:13).

Tuesday, March 9, 2021



God understands our suffering no matter how great or small. **“So do not fear, for I am with you, do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; uphold you with my righteous right hand”** (Isaiah 41:10).

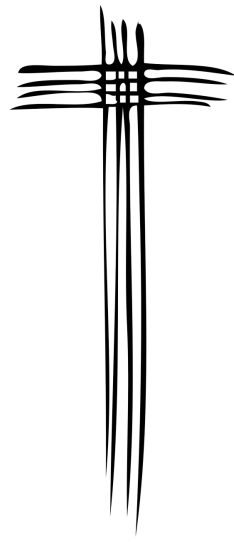
The 2020 pandemic entered my life suddenly and with full force. After several days of declining health and increasing symptoms, I was at the point of collapse. My prayer for help was simple, but God's help in return was great.

It started with my brother recognizing my condition and transporting me to the hospital. During my hospital stay, the nurses and doctors (already stretched to the maximum) cared for me with genuine compassion. I was able to receive two of the newly developed treatments.

At the same time, my siblings were virtually in touch with our mother, who was also in the hospital with COVID-19. They were able to have end-of-life conversations with her, while nurses compassionately cared for her in person. Within days after I returned home, our mother peacefully passed away.

Following her death, my siblings and I experienced tremendous support from many friends, relatives, church members and community members. Our “drive-thru” visitation had a wonderful turn out. Cards, letters, phone calls, delivered food and much more continued arriving at our homes for several weeks.

In the opening verse from Isaiah, God tells us: “I will strengthen you and help you; uphold you with my righteous right hand.” I believe God's right hand took the form of the many people who surrounded us with loving deeds and support when our mom died. My simple prayer asking God for help certainly proves that.



As I reached for the small, frail, hand beside me, I thought of all the beautiful piano pieces this hand had gifted us. I recalled the middle of the night cups of tea shared with a wisdom of listening comfort. I was not ready to say, “goodbye” to this cherished, inherited mother. (She)

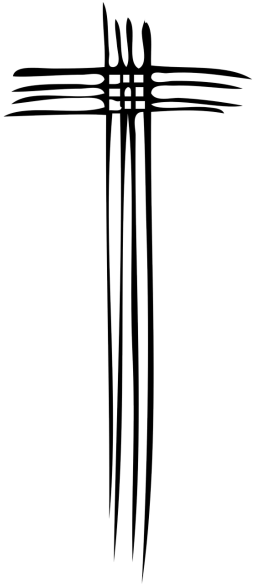
She had always been there; for skinned knees, bruised ego, dented car, and even the death of my father, when I was barely a teen. She knew me at my lowest low and celebrated with me in my greatest moments of joy. She was witness to my graduations, our marriage, and our four children. She had the famous “Irish Eyes” that smiled, just at the right time. Now, she had chosen hospice. (He)

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). This was our clearest prayer for Dorothy. A plea of mercy, rest, and freedom from her last struggle here on earth. Facing this death made both of us feel powerless. (She)

Throughout our hospice journey, we replayed our lives together. We cried sometimes from laughter, sometimes from fear of what we would lose. Somehow, those Irish eyes, never lost their smile. The prayers we offered for our mother seemed to be working for her, sometimes not so much for us. We soon realized that it was we, not she, who were weary. We knew then, it was okay to celebrate not where she had been, but where she was going. When our tearful eyes changed to “Irish eyes,” her prayers had also been answered. We all knew she was headed for our Savior’s loving embrace. (He & She)

“The Lord God alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken” (Psalm 62:6).

These words make so much sense to us because so often we find ourselves in need of strength that is greater than ourselves. Whether it be health issues, crop disasters or the stresses and trials of life; this verse reminds us that God truly is our rock and fortress. When we stumble and fall, we can fall away, or we can fall into the strength and Grace of our Father’s arms. Going to his word we are reminded that we can always trust in him. “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”



There is so much comfort and strength in knowing that the Holy Spirit will intercede for us when we hurt so much that we don’t know how to pray—depending on his strength is the only way.

The following paragraph from “Gracelaced” by Ruth Chou Simons, means a lot to us and again reminds us that the only one to turn to is our God and Father. “The cure for an anxious heart is not in building confidence in your own abilities to overcome today’s worries and concerns; it’s submitting your heart to an almighty and loving Father who will transform your greatest weaknesses into a display of his perfect provision.”

Thursday, March 18, 2021

My Footprints in the Sand

Christ Footprints Guide Reflection Faith Joy Pain Journey

What do these words mean? What do they mean to me? One of my favorite poems is *"Footprints in the Sand."* It tells a story of a man reflecting on his life and the presence of Christ throughout his journey.

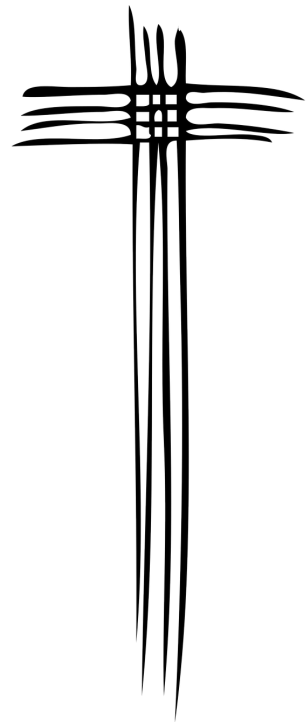
What about Christ's journey on earth? He left his footprints through his journey of pain and joy. Was he ever alone? No, just as the man in the poem, he had someone walking with him, guiding him, and at times carrying him. He had God, the Father.

Reflecting on my faith journey, I have had joy and pain. My parents divorced. I found a profession I love. My brother died at 14. I have been asked to be included in the faith journey of many youths. I have watched and read of terrible events. I have watched heartwarming events and read inspiring pas-

sages from the Bible. I was deployed to an area where people killed each other daily. I have watched people come together in times of need. Thousands have become sick and died. My goddaughter had a beautiful baby boy.

Have I ever been alone? No, just as the man in the poem, I have had someone walking with me, guiding me, and at times, carrying me. Through faith, I have had Jesus, the Christ.

Lord, thank you for walking with us. For being our guide and support as we walk our faith journey. Amen



Thursday, March 11, 2021

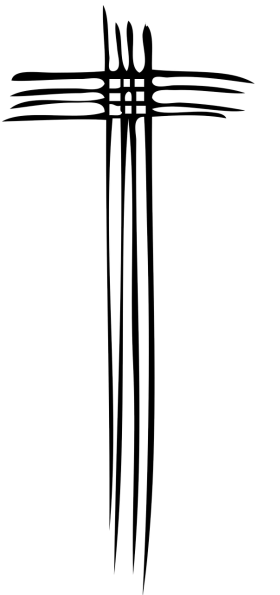
I am a person who hates to say "no." This is not a random choice, but one developed over a lifetime of self-discovery. Discovering that most of any regrets I've accumulated were as a result of "no," I've found that the safest, most curious and rewarding approach to living is "yes." And in this most difficult and challenging of years, I could never say "no" to our Amy.

This past year has been abundant with no's: no travel, no dinners together, no in-person church, meetings, funerals, weddings, – no's to elections, civility, norms of our governance and no's to communicating with one another.

My question often is, "Are any of these people reeking chaos and hate communicating with God?" Many wear the banner, but with behavior so un-Christ-like, I cannot understand, and I weep for humanity.

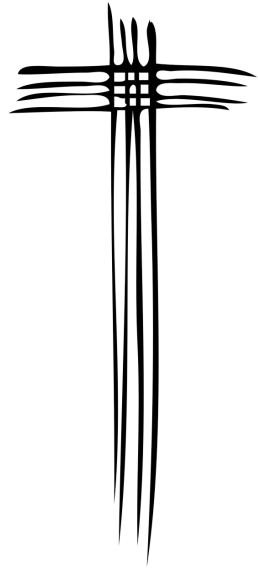
I realize that for me, through it all, it has become increasingly important to live and love my faith, to know that through Christ we/I may heal and be sustained by living a life connected to others and doing what I can for the "least of my brethren" (Matthew 25:40). Leading by example is the best we can do, words being very hollow when not accompanied by action, words being very hallowed when accompanied by action.

In the darkest of times, I've had the light of grandchildren and "embrace" of friends and loved ones to help understand eternal values and strengths. It is through unity, community and veracity that we can find our humanity and live in God's love.



Friday, March 12, 2021

As I look to begin a new Lenten season on Ash Wednesday, February 17, I believe I have another opportunity to begin anew. I sincerely want to be intentional with my thoughts and prayers.



Matthew 6:6 says: **“But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”**

I am at the stage of life where I have experienced youth, marriage, children, career, grandchildren and retirement. I have many quiet moments these days, as there are no loud activities around me, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I have nothing to distract me from being intentional as I reflect on what is the meaning of the next 40 days. Matthew tells us we shouldn't heap up empty phrases (Matthew 6:7). I need to be intentional with what I am reading or reciting. I need to think about the words and their meaning and not let them become repetitive. As I say the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9) I need to be intentional and interpret the message to me.

So, when I go into my room to pray, I won't just recite prayers or verses. I'll reflect on what I feel the meaning is and what the message to me. My Father knows what I need before I do. I will listen to the stillness to gain my inspiration as we begin this journey of 40 days. Blessings to all.

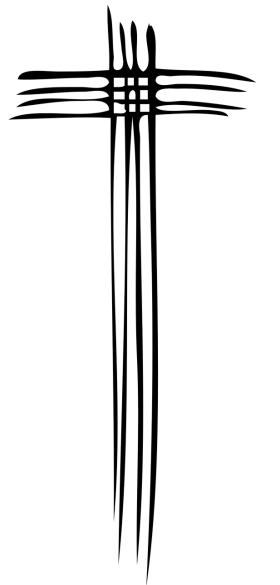
Wednesday, March 17, 2021

For nearly a year, we have faced the fact that we no longer venture out to see loved ones, attend church, eat in restaurants with friends, nor watch our grandchildren play sports or attend their concerts. There are so many other things we have taken for granted (for so very-long) that are no longer part of our lives.

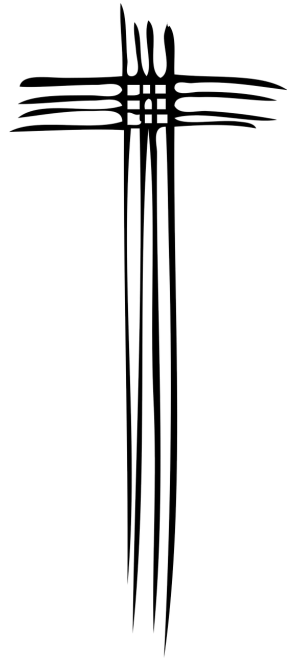
We listen to the news which gives so many different opinions depending on which “authorities” are on the airwaves. This only seems to make things harder for many of us. True, we have tried new hobbies, or renewed our interest in old ones. We have read books that have been lying around for years. Closets that were stuffed full have been emptied and donated -- which is a good thing. Some of our exercise programs have increased, and some have taken another path.

It has been a daily, soul-searching battle, to remember the teachings of our faith. We learned as young children that we need to have faith in order to have hope. And if one has hope, there is always a desire to make things better. I truly-believe this is what we have been searching for the last many months. I often think of Psalm 25:5 which says, **“Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God, my Savior and my hope is in you all day long.”**

HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL



Tuesday, March 16, 2021



“For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).

COVID-19 2020 was a time of great loss on so many levels; I joined the ranks with thousands of people who experienced personal loss of family members and friends, kinships of years were separated in moments. It was a period of mourning in our nation; a time when masses were unmoored by the suddenness of grief; the inabilities of goodbyes, racial/civil injustice raged as ground shifted beneath us; people yearned, prayed for hope and healing.

In March, of those days, I found an ‘Anchor’ in daily contemplative prayer while staying connected to the “Promises” of God. Within words of prayer and scripture is the space of comfort and hope.

“For I am convinced that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:38).

“The Spirit of truth, you know him for he dwells within you and will be in you” (John 12:17).

“Fear not, I have redeemed you, you are mine” (Isaiah 43:1).

“In my Father’s house there are many mansions, I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2).

In these promises we are known, accepted, loved and securely held by our good God, our hope.

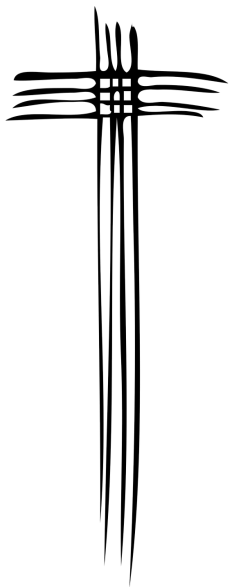
Saturday, March 13, 2021

“You take the Chaos from what is in me and create a beautiful symphony...” Unknown

I’ll never forget being asked the question: “How can you praise God with all that you have been through in your life?” Growing up, I felt I always fell short. I had a learning disability. I did not get the full life experience with my earthly father, and I always looked at myself with doubt and dismay. The many plans I outlined in life fell through as they were not God’s plans.

Don’t get me wrong. I have struggled and have had the “why” conversation with God more times than I can count. However, my answer to how can I praise God with all that I have been through is simple: God is good, God is love, and God is completely sovereign and utterly worthy of my worship and praise. I will sing his love forever! Even though I don’t always understand his ways, reason, or direction in my life, his plans are greater than my own, and I know he creates the chaos for a purpose.

As Lenten season is a time of reflection and preparation of Easter, I encourage you to remember Deuteronomy 31:6, **“Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”** No matter what you have been through or are going through, God will turn your chaos into a beautiful symphony.

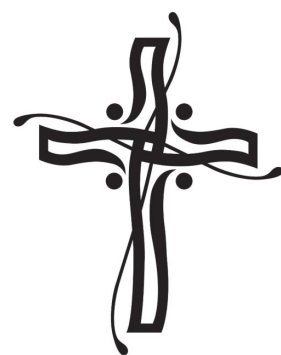


Reflections on Sunday Worship – A Spiritual Practice–

Join us on our webpage, Facebook, radio, or local television cable

The fourth of the Old Testament promises providing a baptismal lens this Lent is the promise God makes to Moses: those who look on the bronze serpent will live. In today's gospel Jesus says he will be lifted up on the cross like the serpent, so that those who look to him in faith will live. When we receive the sign of the cross in baptism, that cross becomes the sign we can look to in faith for healing, for restored relationship to God, for hope when we are dying.

As you listen to today's sermon, use the space below to write or draw something that is meaningful to you that you would like to carry into the week ahead.

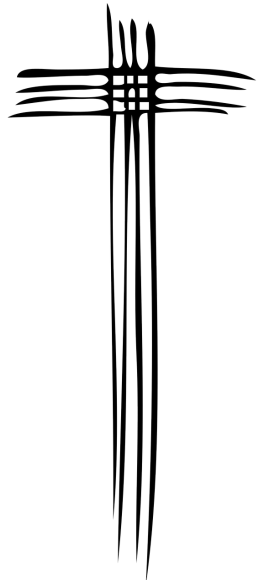


O God, rich in mercy, by the humiliation of your Son you lifted up this fallen world and rescued us from the hopelessness of death. Lead us into your light that all our deeds may reflect your love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

When I reflect on a personal time where faith was a crucial path to strength and hope, it is our journey of 30 plus years as parents and caregivers to our autistic son, Jordan. Its beginning is common—young parents welcoming a new life with all the hopes, anticipations, and goals, only to watch them fade as developmental behaviors reveal that all is not well.

While you remain energized to adapt with various interventions, therapies and techniques, the threat of exhaustion, mentally and physically, can be relentless. I've often reflected on a quote from Abraham Lincoln when he said, "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go." But what a gift to know, through faith, that our Savior is always there, that he hears our prayers, understands our heartache and will never abandon us. Through that, his love and the strength and hope that it reveals, is ours to carry on. It shows through the gift of stable days, simple accomplishments and a supply of support from family, friends and even strangers.



In a world of frequent change and fluctuation, I find personal stability in a bedrock of faith. I tend to save terms like "always, ever, and never" for my Lord, for only in him are the absolutes that will strengthen us for all challenges.

May we be vessels of faith that will glorify him, his people and his creation.