

“What does the Lord require of you? To do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.”

Micah 6:8

From Genesis to Revelations, the Bible addresses God’s place, purpose and direction in our lives, and - in turn - proclaims this invitation to share the “good news” of His never-wavering hope and desire that each of us be named His beloved child.

But, Instead of accepting God’s invitation; and from the beginning of creation, we all have made “Adam and Eve choices” as to what we believe is our place, purpose, and direction in “our world”.

Obviously, it hasn’t gone well - but, along with God’s disappointment, anger and sadness with our faithless wanderings, He continues to reclaim His people with love, mercy, and forgiveness.

Thankfully, God also provided a framework for his children to build a right relationship with God and with others - the Ten Commandments - given to Moses at Mount Sinai. Generations later, Jesus was questioned by religious elders of his time (and to trap him) by asking, “Teacher, what is the “Greatest Commandment”; to which Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind. This is the greatest and most important Commandment.” Then Jesus continued, “the second Commandment is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Wow!! Too Simple? Too complicated? Yes and Yes? But God doesn’t just leave us struggling without providing a direction, a path, and fellow travelers - and best of all - His Son, Jesus, our Guide and Savior.

When trail riding in Missouri, I was with a number of my friends enjoying the scenery, the weather and the natural rhythm of horseback riding. At one point, we decided to head back to camp, confident that someone would be able to use their cellphone tracking app. Frustratingly, no one had a cellphone signal; and after a few attempts to ride to the highest point of the trail and hope for cellphone coverage, we all aimlessly circled around, trying to find a recognizable tree or path that we could use to find out way back. Thankfully, the horse I was riding, an elderly gelding by name of “Blackie” (and yes, he was beautifully midnight black with a white star on his forehead), turned from the other horses and with a “deliberate” pace, walked away. Everyone else followed. It didn’t take more than five minutes to find the trail that led to a gravel road and, thankfully, back to the camp.

At some time, or maybe many times, in our “wanderings”, we all need a leader who is able to guide us to a safe place. In our faith walk, our life journey, and our own personal search for meaning, Jesus is that leader, torchbearer, our True North - the same yesterday, today and forever.

Jesus invites His followers to join Him and send forth His light and His truth; as in the words of the Prophet Micah, “to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God”.

My prayer is the chorus of a hymn that I have sung in the little Norwegian Lutheran church where I was baptized; a somewhat larger Lutheran church where I confirmed; and as a member of Bethel for 54 years.

HE LEADETH ME (chorus):

He leadeth me, He leadeth me.

By His own hand, He leadeth me.

His faithful follower I would be,

For by His hand, He leadeth me. Amen.

Matthew 4:19 "Come follow me", Jesus said.

There must be a reason Jesus says "Follow Me" over twenty times in Bible. He says it to fishermen, he says it to a tax collector, he says it to his disciples, and I know he's saying it to me. Unfortunately, I am guilty too often of losing sight of following. I get going on my own, but then I feel a nudge. It may come from a loved one, a sermon at church, a kind word from friends, and even the news of the day.

Watching and reading about the goings on in the Twin Cities over the past many weeks has saddened me and left me with a feeling of helplessness for all those involved. Then I got my nudge. It came in the form of a text from a loved one who said she and her husband felt they needed to do something about what was going on and ended up helping deliver food to a family who is afraid to leave their house.

I found Jesus speaking to me in that text saying you can help as well - "follow me". Help from me may be in the form of prayer, being sensitive to the sadness others, seeking out volunteering opportunities, contributing to those in need. I've felt the nudge - time to do something.

Prayer: Thank You Jesus for the reminder - "Follow Me". Amen.

John Clymer

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4: 6-7

I tend to be a worrier and sometimes anxiety can get the best of me. At times, anxiety and worry may cause sleepless nights as I try to figure out a solution or how I can ‘fix’ things. Sometimes there is a solution, but many times I worry about things that I have no control over. I’m sure some of you at some point in your lives, have had a similar experience. A lot of times, the actual act of worry is the real problem. God presents us with struggles and problems throughout our life to make us stronger people. But worrying over things out of our control is pointless. I’ve learned to turn my worries and anxiety over to God. To trust that He has a plan for me (or whoever I am worrying about) and that the answer or outcome is in His hands and not my own. Presenting my anxieties to God, as suggested in Philippians 4: 6-7, truly does give me peace of mind and a sense of calm that I have not always had. I pray that it can work for you too.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I come to You with a grateful heart, thankful for the many blessings You have given me. I trust in Your plan for me and my family, and ask You to guide me throughout the day, reminding me to be calm, caring and kind to others. In Jesus name, Amen.

Lori Swenson

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” Hebrews 13:8

Change never comes easily, and I have had to learn to adapt to changes in life with grace and not push back, but embrace the new challenge.

With change comes lessons, I have learned I can do hard things. I can survive the hardships and understand that the lessons may take a long time to understand, but they are there. I keep vigilant to understand what God is teaching me.

With change comes blessings, the blessings are the best! They are so unexpected, so subtle sometimes, and other times outright, bold and amazing! Many times, the blessings come in the form of understanding, and appreciation for the people in my life that have given me their perspectives.

With change comes disappointment, that in my case, led to growth and resilience. Disappointment taught me to keep moving forward, which led to healing, and deepened my faith. God revealed to me that through my trust in him, my courage was boundless.

All of these changes challenged me to remember that the Creator is my True North, always present to guide me through the next adventure life has in store for me. And to learn the lessons, embrace the blessings, and to heal with courage.

Prayer: Dear God, You have taught me that life is ever changing. We have seasons of comfort, and seasons of tumult, but through it all You are never changing, always there to guide. My gratitude is endless, as is my love. Amen.

Tammy Huberty

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.” Proverbs 3:5-6

Our son had just started sixth grade at Hudson Middle School when he was diagnosed with leukemia on September 1, 2023. At that moment, our beautifully imagined future fractured in an instant. Life divided into *before* and *after*, and the path we thought we were walking simply disappeared.

At first, while I prayed with every ounce of my being, my faith did not feel strong or confident. It felt fragile...held together by hospital hallways, beeping machines, the ups and downs of bloodwork and procedures, and long nights filled with fear and unanswered questions. I prayed for healing, but also for guidance in making hard decisions when the outcome felt uncertain.

Over the past two and a half years, we have seen that God was not restoring the path we had planned. Instead, He was redirecting us entirely. Lent teaches us that grief and love often travel together. On this journey, God stripped away our illusion of self-sufficiency and replaced it with a deeper dependence on Him and on one another. We learned that faith does not always look like clarity; sometimes it looks like staying, trusting, and breathing through the next hard moment.

I treasure the friendships that have deepened on this journey and feel incredibly blessed to know what it feels like to be held in love by community. Our son's deepened faith and incredible courage revealed God's strength and compassion in immeasurable ways. We discovered that hope does not always arrive as a miracle. Sometimes it comes as enough grace for today, enough strength for this hour, enough peace to rest, even briefly, in God's care.

Lent reminds us that God's redirection is not abandonment. The road through suffering is not the end of the story. Our family continues to walk forward believing that God is present in the waiting, faithful in the uncertainty, and gentle with our fear. None of us knows what the path ahead will bring but can only trust the One who walks it with us.

Prayer: Gracious God, in this Lenten season, teach us to trust You when our paths change in hard and unexpected ways. Meet us in our fear and remind us that You are with us in every step. Help us to let go of what we cannot control and trust in Your faithful love. Amen.

Cayte Anderson

“Do not fear, for I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you...For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”

Isaiah 43:1, 3

On July 11, 2024, I was supposed to be on a Mississippi River cruise with my dad. Instead, we found ourselves in a hospital room. My two sisters and I had given my parents the three-day cruise as a gift the previous Christmas. My dad had wanted to take a trip on the Mississippi for a long time. But when the time for the adventure arrived, his treatment for prostate cancer took a turn for the worse. The cancer had spread and his pain was increasing.

So, on that day in July, instead of enjoying the view from the deck of a boat, we sat with dad in a hospital room. Blood work was done. More tests were taken. All this was happening just before dad was scheduled to begin a new round of chemotherapy.

When the doctor came to deliver test results, she had bad news. Dad had a decision to make about treatment plans. He knew they were not a cure, but a way to add some days to his life. At the same time, he was sick and tired of countless visits to doctor offices. He was sick and tired of being poked and prodded. He was sick and tired of not eating the food that brought him joy. He was sick and tired of being sick and tired.

So that day, surrounded by his family, dad decided to stop treatment and start hospice care. He was ready to put his trust in the resurrection promises of God. Dad leaned into his faith and with courage put his life into the hands of his Savior. Our sense was this decision brought him great relief. While it brought tears to us who sat with him, we assured him of our love and support no matter his decision. We too were confident that his future was secure in the grace of Jesus, dad's True North.

On a day that we were supposed to be in the middle of a river, our family gave thanks for the life-giving water that washed over dad in his baptism. He was named and claimed as a beloved Child of God. God said to him, “You are mine.” I will love you today, tomorrow and forever.

The same promise is made to us! We are beloved Children of God! Jesus is our True North.

Prayer: Loving God, no matter what turbulent waters we might pass through, we can trust that You will be with us. This Lenten season point us again to the cross and to Jesus, our True North. Assure us that we are Yours, no matter what we face in life. In the loving name of Jesus, Amen.

Pastor Keith

“He replied, Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, Move from here to there, and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” Matthew 17:20.

As an avid gardener, and someone who grows all of our vegetables for the year on our property, the winter is an exciting time to begin planning the garden that will be planted in the spring. Notebooks, pencils, seeds and seed catalogs cover my table as my husband and I plan what we need to focus on in the coming year to ensure we have a well-stocked pantry and freezers going into each fall. The seeds are purchased, a plan is made, the seeds are planted and then comes the big wait. Will the seeds germinate?

Last year, I found a few older seed packets for slicing cucumbers. We were coming off of a bumper crop the year before, and with the seeds being a few years old I figured the chances weren't as good for a good germination rate, so I sowed the packets and much to my surprise they all germinated. They continued to grow, each surviving until the time came to transplant them into the garden. Once again, I figured the odds of them all surviving with the weird weather we were having wasn't great, so I planted them all in truly a let go, and let God moment. We ended up with hundreds of pounds of cucumbers that not only provided for our family, but our extended family and even neighbors.

It started with one tiny seed and a little bit of faith, which turned into the most bountiful harvest season we had had to date. Seeing what one tiny seed can give inspires me to think about how our faith can grow, even if it starts small.

Prayer: God, instill in us the faith of the tiny mustard seed, so we may go and reap the blessing it is to have you by our side. Take us forth in our faith, so we can continue to grow as we tend to land you have given us. Amen.

Kisa Bartie

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." Proverbs 3:5-6

Right now, I am a junior in high school, so almost everyday someone asks me, "Where do you want to go to school?" or "What do you want to do when you're older?" And my answer is always the same. I don't know. And even when I think I've figured out my path and what my life is going to look like, I change my mind or realize it's not going to work. All these worries of the future whirl in my brain and cause me to doubt God's plan. I don't know what my life is going to look like and I don't know what the right decisions are. And every day those decisions get closer and closer and I feel like giving up. But then I remember this verse.

This verse says to trust in the lord with all your heart and to not lean on your own understanding which is easier said than done. But I know that without God, I would forever spiral in my own worries and I would be unable to pull myself out of it. This verse reminds me that the Lord is my compass and he has a purpose for me. God knows exactly what my path looks like and he knows my accomplishments and failures. Life will always have uncertainties, and I will have to make decisions even when I don't know what the right choice is. That is the way it goes. But if I look to God and remember his everlasting love for me, I remember that he will never lead me astray and he will always guide me even when it feels like I'm alone.

God has taught me to trust in him which helps me to find the bright side. Figuring out where I want to go to school is such a blessing and an exciting time because I know a new chapter of my life is ahead of me. I will give my worries to God so instead of doubt, I will feel excitement. So, remember that God always has a plan for you and to not worry about the future, because God has it covered.

Prayer: Dear God, help me to remember that You always have a plan for me, and that Your plan is great and exciting. Help me to trust you even when I don't know your plan. Thank You for taking my worries and filling me with hope and guidance. Amen.

Alyssa Carlson (Student)

“For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”

Matthew 18:20

When I was 12 years old, my father was dying from cancer. The disease had progressed, and it was not easy for him to make it down the two-story flight of stairs for dinner. Instead, my siblings and I took turns eating upstairs with him. I vividly remember the conversation I had with him during the very first meal we shared during that time.

Let me preface by sharing that my dad was not a church goer. My mom was in charge of our spiritual upbringing. She ensured that my siblings and I learned our prayers and said them each night, attended weekly CCD classes, and went to Sunday morning Mass each week. It amazes me that she could get four kids—often fighting with each other *and* the idea of going to church—up, ready, and out the door early on a Sunday morning. I’m sure she would have preferred to enjoy a peaceful hour at church alone!

That first dinner with just my dad and me stretched long past regular dinner time. Of all the topics we discussed, the only one I remember is his thoughts on spending time with God. He told me that he felt closer to God in nature; he didn’t need to be in a church to have a relationship with Him.

As an adult, I reflect back on that conversation. I agree with him that I feel close to God outdoors. My walks with my dog—and now grand dog—are often my prayer time, when I have full conversations with God. Individual time with God is certainly important, but as I’ve grown older, I’ve come to recognize the additional blessing that comes from communal worship.

For me, attending church is praying, singing, worshiping, and learning in community with others. It’s celebrating, sharing, and socializing. It’s meeting people that I likely wouldn’t have met otherwise and finding opportunities to get involved in meaningful ways. Church also challenges me to grow in my relationship with God and holds me accountable—to that relationship and to live my faith in my community. Through attending church and church activities, my faith has been encouraged, nurtured, uplifted, and supported through community.

I’m thankful that my dad found his way to build a relationship with God. I do wish, though, he had experienced God through a church community. I am incredibly grateful for my mom’s passion and persistence—and sheer will power!—in ensuring that her children did. Although going to church was a forced ritual when I was younger, I now understand the power of God’s community within the walls of a church building. Wouldn’t my grade school self be surprised!

Prayer: Loving God, You meet us in quiet places and in gathered communities. You walk with us in nature, in our routines, and in the people who help shape our faith. We thank You for those who planted seeds of faith in us—for parents, mentors, and communities who showed up faithfully. Amen.

Cindy Nelson

**“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!”
Philippians 4:13**

As I have reached “the golden years” of my life I find I am not able to do some of the things that I enjoyed doing in my younger days. This scripture verse has always helped me keep focused on the positives, rather than the negatives. Accentuate the Positives! Sometimes I choose not to do something because I think I will not do a perfect job, but I don't think Christ asks us to be perfect.

The following is a chorus I learned as a teenager attending Youth Camp: “Got any rivers you think are uncrossable? Got any mountains you can't tunnel through? God specializes in things thought impossible. He will do things others cannot do!” I have recalled this verse MANY times when facing difficulties.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, remind us that You are always with us to listen and guide. May we always remember: There is a God and that God loves you and me and is with you and me in that love Now and Forevermore...World without end! Amen.

Sue Caldwell

“Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with Him is full redemption. He Himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.”

Psalm 130: 7-8

I think it is hard to be a Christian in our world because we are pulled in so many different directions. Family, friends, education, work, travel, sports, entertainment, hobbies, and social causes are all good things, but at times they can take center stage over God in my life. At times in my life, I have put my hopes in things other than in God only to lose my sense of “True North” and be disappointed with the outcomes.

I believe the Bible can be an anchor in our lives and that God’s Word is living and speaks to us today. I like to start each day by reading from the book of Psalms because it centers me and reminds me that the loving presence of God is unfailing, even at times when I may feel I don’t deserve it. The Psalms cover a wide range of emotions as they help us cry out to God in anger, sorrow, joy, repentance, and praise. The Psalms given us human words for prayer to God. The Psalms help us find our “True North” in God’s creation and in Jesus Christ.

I also choose to be grounded in our faith community because I believe we experience the presence of Christ most powerfully with others as the broken and redeemed “Body of Christ”. I have grown and been grateful for the ministry opportunities I have at Bethel serving youth and parents. Their faith has helped nurture my faith. Their questions have led me to deeper understandings. Their service and hope in God have inspired and reminded me to serve others and place my hope in God.

Prayer: Dear Loving God, Help us place all our hopes in You knowing that You are forever faithful and will give us what we need to get through today, tomorrow, and whatever comes after. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Paul Deziel (Staff)

“And let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works, not neglecting to gather together but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day of worship approaching.”

Hebrews 10:24-25

I was raised by a stoic Norwegian family in a time when First Lutheran Church, it's congregation and activities were a large part of our family's social life. From faithful attendance at church services, to accompanying my mom to ladies aid when very young, church meals shared, Sunday School, Bible School, Choir, Confirmation, and Luther League. Church was like extended family, gathering with a community of believers, the center of our family's social life and a passed along tradition.

Fast forward to young adults, building and raising our own family. While noticing that now there were more directional outreaches pulling at our time and lives, we still continued to make attendance at worship and church activities a nonnegotiable decision, not always a desire but an ingrained continuation of tradition~tradition (as Tevya sang in Fiddler on the Roof).

Moving on to empty nesters and our eventual move to Hudson we found getting involved in Bethel Lutheran was a good way to meet people and we continued our “tradition” involvement. As our faith has grown through the seasons of our lives, it is our DESIRE to spend time in fellowship with a community of faith. Darrel and I gain more than we probably give from the support we receive from our faith community, the learning from others, the prayers shared, the songs raised together, the hugs, the handshakes, the conversations, the laughs, the genuine caring for one another, the strength and hope received together in a physical presence. Being in church speaks volumes. When you come to church, you witness to those outside the church and encourage those inside the church. Community keeps you from drifting into isolation. You need people who remind you that God is faithful. For us attending church is not because we have to, but because part of growing up in the church is showing up for the Lord. Going to church doesn't make me a Christian but being a Christian makes me want to go to church.

We are living in a time where many of the younger generation (our own children included) do not feel the need to belong to a physical church of believers and do not need organized religion, a building and people in attendance together worshipping God. They can be spiritual, have faith and believe without organization. When Covid required Bethel as well as other churches to choose only online worship, something we took for granted suddenly disappeared. We were thankful for the online option, and it became a comfortable habit, hard to break. But for Darrel and I something huge was missing in our spiritual journey. That, of course, was the absence of a physical gathering of believers. It is a desire of our human nature to be-long! There is something so affirming about people present together.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for the church, which is Your idea! Make us faithful to show up, not because we have to, but because we want to be where Your family gathers. We come together in your name, knowing that you have promised to be in the midst of us. We claim this promise today and ask that you would be present with us whenever we gather together. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Becky Schoeberlein

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” Proverbs 3:5–6

Senior year feels like I’m standing at the edge of something big. It’s exciting to think about graduation, new opportunities, and stepping into adulthood. But if I’m honest, it can also feel overwhelming. There are decisions about college, careers, friendships, and my future. Sometimes I catch myself overthinking everything, trying to map out every detail so I don’t make the “wrong” choice.

That’s why Proverbs 3:5–6 speaks so clearly to me in this season: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” I realize that I often lean on my own understanding. I compare myself to others. I calculate outcomes. I try to predict what will happen next. I tell myself that if I can just plan well enough, I’ll be okay. But this verse reminds me that my perspective is limited. I can’t see the full picture, but God can. Trusting God with all my heart means giving Him more than just my Sunday prayers. It means trusting Him with my applications, my goals, my fears, and even my disappointments. It means believing that if one door closes, another will open, and He’s still guiding me. It means understanding that my worth is not tied to acceptance letters, awards, or other people’s expectations.

When I lean only on myself, I feel pressure. I feel like everything depends on me. But when I submit my plans to God, I feel peace. I remember that I’m not walking into the future alone. God is already there. He’s preparing the way, even when I can’t see how everything will work out. “He will make your paths straight.” That promise doesn’t mean my life will be perfect or easy. It doesn’t mean there won’t be challenges. But it does mean that when I choose to trust Him, He directs my steps with purpose. Even detours can become part of His plan.

As I move through senior year, I want to choose trust over fear. I want to pray before I panic. I want to seek God before I stress. Instead of trying to control every outcome, I want to surrender my future to the One who already knows it. This year isn’t just about finishing high school, it’s about growing in faith. And as I step into whatever comes next, I choose to trust the Lord with all my heart, believing that He will lead me exactly where I’m meant to be.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help me choose trust over fear and seek You in every step I take. Guide my future according to Your perfect plan. Amen.

Macie Oian (Student/Council)

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” Galatians 6:9

When the Chicago Bears season started it looked like another bad season, even though the Bears went 3 and 14 last year, I kept faith in them. This year turned out to be the start of an era for the Chicago Bears. The Bears got all the way to the Divisional playoff game, but ended up losing to the Rams 20-17. Even though we lost, the season brought our whole family together. My family and I are strong Bears fans even through seasons like last year. When things were looking dark for the Bears, we always had hope for them. Just like when the Bears were losing by 18 points against the Packers in the first round of the playoffs, we still had hope. The Bears ended up winning that game 31-27!

I think the best message I can give is; when things seem hard or are looking down for you, always remember that if you stay strong and positive you WILL get through it. Don't give up! Bear's rookie running back Kyle Monangai was drafted in the 7th round of last year's draft. I didn't think too much of it at the time, but now I realize he is a perfect example of not giving up. Even though he was drafted in the last round, he showed people he could be just as good as some of the other running backs. When he was held back, he didn't think anything of it, he just put his head down and got through it with persistence. I think that we can do the same when we are held back. We all need to remember that there is hope for everyone. Everyone can get through their own challenges if they don't give up.

I think we can all learn from this. Know that there is always a brighter side after the dark side. This can truly impact all our lives. When we are feeling down or defeated, remember the positive things in our lives and that we can always get through the hard times in life. Like the quote says, if we do not give up, good will come back to us and we will be able to move on from any of those hard times. Just like the Bears, if we never give up hope we will get through any obstacle that comes our way.

Prayer: Dear God, please help us get through all the obstacles that come our way. Please help us to remember that we can get through anything if we stay positive and persist even when things get hard. Let us remember that You have plans for us, but sometimes we need to remember that if we face something blocking our path of a fulfilling life, we can and will get through it. Amen.

Parker Wilt (Student)

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Romans 1:16

One of the things I love about being a pastor's wife is the doors it opens to sharing the gospel with others. I recently started a new job in marketing and business development with a law firm, and one part of my job is visiting with chiropractors and nurturing relationships with the firm so that our mutual clients get the legal and medical assistance they need after being injured in an accident. While I was visiting with a chiropractor over lunch, I told him I was a pastor's wife and that opened the door for him to start asking me questions. He asked me about our church, my role, how Ladd and I work together in ministry, and what we see as the role of our kids in the church. He shared that he has been church-shopping lately and felt the desire to find a place of worship, but had not yet found somewhere that feels comfortable. He also shared about the challenges of raising teens and their reluctance to attend church. I acknowledged that finding a church that meets the needs of the parents and kids is challenging. I invited him to Bethel and encouraged him to keep trying with his family to find the right fit for them. Our one-hour lunch ended up being more like two hours. Although in some ways I wondered whether our long discussion about Christianity and Jesus and finding a church while at a work lunch was appropriate, given that my goal was to share about the lawyers and their ability to serve his injury clients, I felt like God placed me in that moment intentionally. While my work 'hat' might be saying: "stick to work topics," my heart was saying: lean into the questions and help this man see that God wants him to find a place of worship for his family. The Holy Spirit said I could be the spark that encourages him to keep looking for a church and reconnecting to God.

I think we all get stymied by our roles and functions in life and what seem like restrictions to sharing the gospel because it's 'off topic' or might make others uncomfortable. But regardless of the circumstances or what the world says, the Holy Spirit empowers us through his words and scripture to speak truth to those who need to hear it. We have to respond though to God's nudging and lean into the work of the Holy Spirit and not be ashamed of the gospel or sharing His love with others. My challenge to you is to lean into the Spirit's calling and share when a door is opened.

Prayer: Empowering God, we thank You for leaving Your Holy Spirit here on earth to guide our words and give us strength to share about You with others. We ask that when the Spirit prompts us to share about Your love and sacrifice for us that Your Spirit moves in us and gives us the words and confidence to speak. Remove our fear and self-judgment, and help us see that sharing is compassionate and loving. It's Your name we pray, amen.

Sara Sonnenberg

“Blessed are those that”...(King James Version)

“Happy are those that”....(Good News Version)

“Are Spiritually Poor, Mourn, Are Humble, Act as God Requires, Are Merciful, Are Pure in Heart, Work For Peace, Are Persecuted. For theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

BEATTITUDES: Matthew 5: 3-10

The BEATTITUDES; “Living Life Simplified”

In addition to the Ten Commandments, the Bible has 300-1,000 pages written to help us understand and follow God’s word. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave us the Beatitudes. While the Old Testament existed in that time the overall population couldn’t read and had to rely on a very few others to interpret God’s word. There wasn’t a bible in everyone’s household, etc. To me, Jesus seemed to be saying: Listen everyone, here is God’s advise, he kept it simple in 10 easy steps. That works for me!

I didn’t do internet research on these verses to be advised on other people’s thoughts. But now, it’s something I want to research more. Seems simple and self-explanatory to me. It is interesting that the Beatitudes are focused on us as individuals, is introspective and does cast judgement on others who may or may not be acting as Jesus advised. Today, I think of the Beatitudes when I see silent peaceful protesters acting in light of Jesus’ words in these simple verses.

The King James Version of the Bible starts each verse with; Blessed are those that..... while the Good News Version starts each verse with; Happy are those that.....It seems that one version conveys what God thinks of us, while the other version seems to convey what we think of ourselves.

People ask me; “Are you happy”? I ask myself if I have followed Jesus’s advice. Yes, I am happy. No, I have not even come close to following the Beatitudes as good as I should. I strive to take more steps to gain the happiness that Jesus expects for me. Living and acting by the Beatitudes makes me happy and makes me want to improve. Pretty simple!

Prayer: Dear God, Help us to live and act as Jesus instructed us during His Sermon on the Mount so that we may see the Kingdom of Heaven. Amen.

David Cahoy

“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13

As an individual approaching 60, I feel that I have finally acquired a good understanding of my personality, and the behaviors and emotions experienced throughout my lifetime. I have come to the conclusion that much of my life has been defined or “directed” by anxiety and fear over what other people might think of me, including God. Fear and anxiety became the “north” of my compass-always trying to ensure that I didn’t disappoint anyone.

As a child it manifested in being a “good kid”. I didn’t get into trouble (I watched my older siblings do that!). I even confessed to my mom and took my bike away from myself when I rode on a street that was too busy. As a teen, I followed the straight and narrow line of not doing anything “wrong”.

When I started my career as a Speech/Language Pathologist there was constant fear of not doing paperwork or therapy sessions adequately, potentially disappointing administration, parents or co-workers. My job became my obsession as I worked countless hours to ensure that I didn’t disappoint.

With my husband and children there was the fear/anxiety of not being a good enough homemaker, spouse, mother.

Looking back, many potentially pleasurable events and experiences were not fully enjoyed as there was always some sort of fear/anxiety that was nagging me in my thoughts. My “true north” was a distorted, negative view of myself and constant anxiety, fear and worry about how I appeared to others.

In September 2010 my mom died, rocking my world. She and my husband were my confidants and cheerleaders, reassuring me that I was a good human. This loss was the catalyst that ultimately led to my participation in mission trips to Haiti, becoming a confirmation guide at Bethel, and reading the Bible. Within a few years, I gained more understanding of the Christian faith than in all my previous years of church attendance. The verse above has given me reminders and direction in those times when my anxiety/fears/worry have caused my compass to spin uncontrollably. It helps redirect me back to “true north”.

Do I still have frequent anxiety and fear? Yes. Do I know that I have God and Jesus (and my loving family) to lean on in those times? Yes. Does it usually get better? Yes. (Did I agree to write a devotional so that I wouldn’t disappoint Tammy Huberty and Pastor Ladd? Yes. Some habits die hard).

Prayer: Dear Lord, When I am losing sight of the fact that You love me for who I am, remind me that I am perfect in Your eyes and give me the strength to refrain from worry and fear. Amen.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.”

Psalm 51:10

I wasn't sure that I would have time to write a devotional for Lent this year as I am still trying to catch my breath and find my feet again from arriving home from my Luther travel course. Being away from the busyness and family life for approximately ten days has left me yearning for a vacation. But I felt a tug to carve out some time and write.

The trip was amazing! I walked where Luther walked. I stood before thick stone walls that once carried the weight of a troubled conscience and the daring hope that God's grace is enough. I worshiped in churches older than our country—all carrying a story; some shaped by reform, all testifying that faith is not abstract. It is lived, argued over, confessed, and continually renewed. Standing before the door Luther nailed his thesis to in order to create dialog, it struck me the richness each place I traveled had to offer. (One particular fact that I found to be rich was that the Christian faith is so small due to their history, Catholics and Lutherans share the same worship space in some cities.) It is not about differences, but about the faith in Christ and how they can be neighborly. Dialog and communication are so important.

Now I have returned home—and Lent meets me here and all the tasks that come along with it. But I will hold this time to reflect on the past, and my past and see my failings, confess them, and repent. Communication particularly weighs on me these days. This is why I pray Psalm 51:10 for the following season.

The study tour was full of voices, lectures, and movement. We put on miles on our shoes. Somehow as Lent begins, it feels different. Quieter. Slower. There are no guides pointing to history now. Instead, Lent turns my attention inward. Silence replaces discussion. Yet the same God who met me in Wittenberg, Eisenach, and the Wartburg, just to name a few places, meets me here—in the ordinary rhythms of daily life.

Luther claims that the whole life of a Christian is one of repentance. Lent does not ask me to relive Germany, but to let what I learned there transform me. I am called to tell the truth about my sin, to release my grip on self-justification, and to trust again that grace carries me.

Like the stones I touched while there, being shaped slowly, over centuries, our hearts, too, are shaped slowly. Lent is not about rushing change but about remaining—remaining in community, remaining in confession, remaining in the Word, remaining in prayer, and remaining beneath the cross long enough to understand what grace cost-- yet what was so freely given. **God's love. God's claim on us.**

Prayer: Gracious God, You met me in distant places, and You meet me now. Transform what is disordered in me, renew what is weary, and shape my life by Your mercy and love. Help me to remember that my life is not my own, but Yours to be used in any way that You see fit. Help me to relinquish worldly fears and trust Your guiding spirit. Through Jesus Christ, who walked the road of the cross for me. Amen.

Matt Aubart (Staff)

“Then Samuel, with the horn of oil in hand, anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and from that day on, the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David.” (1 Samuel 16:13)

I have to admit that as I read this verse, I was a bit jealous of David. What did that moment feel like? Not a trickle of Grace, but a RUSH. Wow! Bring it on! But as I reflected further on this scene, I began to wonder: What happened next? What DID it feel like? What were the next few moments like? How did the unchosen brothers treat him? Did they even realize what was going on? Did DAVID even realize what was going on?

The Bible doesn't answer my modern need-to-know-now questions. It simply goes on to tell how David entered Saul's service. Wait, what? Wasn't DAVID anointed king? Samuel certainly knew that David was destined to be king, but the Bible does not tell us that David knew. He only knew he was called to ... something. He opened himself to God's subtle, ongoing guidance. He became God's servant, patiently doing what he felt was right each step of the way. David went on to fight Goliath and then run for his life from Saul before finally, eventually, accepting the role of King of Israel.

We are all anointed. We are all called. Each one called to our own unique role in this wonderful, challenging, evolving Kingdom. We aren't given a crisp roadmap, but simply asked to Trust, every step of the way.

This verse resonates with me because my own faith journey recently took a very unexpected turn. After over 60 years in the Catholic church (20 of them working for it), last year, my husband and I discerned that God was calling us to leave that church. We had no idea where that decision would lead us, but we knew that we had to take that leap of faith. It was difficult, but we are so thankful that God eventually led us to Bethel!

Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, rush upon us! Give us the courage to become what You are inviting us to be. Give us patience to accept each turn along the way, and to allow each experience to mold us and prepare us for what is to come. Amen.

Diane Wengelski

**“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that they may exalt you in due time.
Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”**

1 Peter 5:6-7

**“For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to weep and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn and a time to dance.”**

Ecclesiastes 3:4

This is not based on a true story. This *IS* a true story.

Good Friday, April 7, 2023, a time that I will always remember as being, “A Day of Discomfort.” The three worship services that day at Bethel featured four scripture readers. In addition to myself, there was also Barbara, Karen, and Linda, all friends, and very capable readers as well.

The first service is always at the Bethel DT campus. This is where I first noticed that I wasn’t bringing my “A-game” that day. Without going into gory detail, I messed up worse than I have ever done before in all my 30+ years of scripture reading. I was mortified and angry at myself, and Karen did the best she could to comfort me. I must have had a nasty look on my face, because our beloved recently departed pastor took one look at me and practically recoiled in horror.

Back at my place afterwards, I kept looking at myself in the mirror, pondering as to what could possibly be “wrong” with me. I decided (wrongly, of course) that it must be that “dorky-looking shirt I was wearing.” I changed it, and although my perception was that I looked better, it certainly did nothing to lower my level of angst and anxiety.

Fortunately, at the two services that evening at Bethel HL, there were no major hiccups, and I felt better because of that. Still, there was this type of black cloud hanging over me the whole time, indicating that something was still not quite right.

When I got home afterwards, I started undressing to go to bed. Then and there I discovered the reason for my all-day uneasiness: ***I had my underpants on backwards!!!*** Now, it would be perfectly logical and practical, and potentially the most embarrassing, to pose the following question: “Sean, you were in this state of “dress” for nine consecutive hours, you must have least needed to go to the restroom 2-3 times during that period. How come you never noticed it then?” I have two mostly truthful answers. The first is, “I don’t have the slightest idea.” The second one, having more of a spiritual undertone would be, “It’s a mystery.”

Now, me being me, I couldn’t let a “delicious” moment like this go to waste. So, whenever I catch myself climbing on my “high horse,” I could run the following scenario through my mind: “For nine consecutive hours, you read scripture for three Good Friday worship services with your underpants on backwards...you can climb down now.”

Prayer: Lord, please help us to learn to laugh at ourselves and our imperfections. Remind us that You created us to be “perfectly imperfect,” meaning that even when we make mistakes, we are still worthy of love and respect. Let us not forget the immortal words of that great philosopher Bugs Bunny, “You can’t take life too seriously, because you will never get out of it alive.” Amen.

Sean Hanner

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” Philippians 4:6

Life is full of constant things that can bring on anxiety or nervousness. Whether it's school, work, relationships, friendships, sports or any other part of our daily lives, anxiety can come out of nowhere and the stress can really add up. In these times of anxiety, it is especially important to remember to turn to God because He is with us and reminds us that we are never alone.

God is always there to listen no matter how small our stresses or anxieties are. When we feel overwhelmed it can feel easier to handle everything on our own, but this verse reminds us that we don't have to carry these stresses on our own. The idea of turning to God should not be a last resort and is a powerful act of faith.

Going to God with our worries can bring comfort and guidance. This verse also encourages gratitude, even in tough times. When we can focus on what we are thankful for it helps shift our perspective to be more positive. God is always working in our lives, even if we can't see it. No matter what we are going through, God is there to walk through it with us.

Prayer: Dear Lord, as we go throughout our lives and encounter endless stresses and anxieties, remind us to turn to You because we know that You are always there for us and can help guide us through anything. Remind us that even in dark times to focus on the things that we are thankful for as it can switch our perspective on life. In Your name we pray, Amen.

Emily McCarthy (Student)

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." Galatians 5:22-23

"Significance of the Fruits" (copied from Bible Gateway)

The fruits of the Spirit represent the qualities that should be evident in the lives of believers who are guided by the Holy Spirit. Each fruit reflects a characteristic of God's nature and serves as a guide for how Christians are called to live and interact with others.

Love: The foundation of all virtues, reflecting God's selfless love for humanity.

Joy: A deep-seated gladness rooted in a relationship with God, not dependent on circumstances.

Peace: Inner tranquility and harmonious relationships, stemming from faith in God.

Forbearance (Patience): The ability to endure difficult situations and the shortcomings of others.

Kindness: A disposition to be friendly, generous, and considerate.

Goodness: Moral excellence and a desire to do good.

Faithfulness: Reliability and trustworthiness in relationships and commitments.

Gentleness: A humble and meek attitude towards others.

Self-control: The ability to control one's emotions and desires.

These qualities are not just personal attributes but are seen as the result of the Holy Spirit's work in a believer's life, enabling them to reflect God's character in their daily interactions."

In today's world we are being torn apart by choices and misled by untruths. In many instances we avoid talking with neighbors or friends as we have let these choices and untruths become the foundation for how we believe others should be viewed and treated. It's not healthy for our spiritual walk nor is it healthy for us as individuals. The bitterness and lack of trusting is becoming very apparent in our society.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I pray for all who would read this that they would step back and truly think about these 9 Fruits the Holy Spirit has given to all who believe in the Holy Trinity. To think about our current choices with regards to others, does it align or mirror with what the Fruit is supposed to be or do they conflict? In Jesus name I pray for all to realize we all fall short in one manner or another, but that we ask for discernment from the Holy Spirit to guide us. Amen.

Tim Reams

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law? Jesus replied: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Matthew 22:36 – 39

I’ve been thinking about what these words from Jesus mean, ever since Pastor Ladd challenged us with them in his reflections on the recent situation in Minneapolis.

I’m to love God with all my heart, soul and mind. How do I do this? By learning to know God better and better, through prayer, listening, studying his word. Through worship and gratitude. By trusting in his presence and love.

And, at the same time, I’m to love my neighbor as myself. Who is my neighbor and how do I love them? When an expert in the law asked Jesus this question, Jesus told the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25 – 37). My neighbor is anyone who needs help, even if they are different, a stranger to me, someone from another religion, race, political affiliation, city or country. And, I show love by acting, not walking by on the other side of the road. I love by showing mercy, extending care, providing practical help, giving of my resources.

Paul says, in his letter to the Philippians (1:27), “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

So, no matter what happens, whatever the circumstances, I’m to love my God with my whole being and love my neighbor as myself. Even if I have my own problems, even if I’m in a hurry or it’s inconvenient, even if I’m on vacation, even if I’m afraid.

Through this reflection, I realized I can’t walk by on the other side of the road in this moment. I need to act. How can I help people who are vulnerable right now? As I was pondering this very question, I walked by an elderly woman who was trying to lay out a large rug on her front patio. There were lumps and bumps in the rug, and she seemed precarious on her feet. I worried she might trip and fall. And, I was in a hurry – late for something important. I almost walked by. Then I turned around and offered to help her flatten out the rug. It took minutes, and she was so appreciative. How can I help people who are vulnerable right now? If I start looking, God will show me.

As I think about our neighbors – immigrants to the U.S. with legal status or without, even citizens – who are afraid to go to work or school or the grocery store right now, I realize that I can’t walk by on the other side of the road. How can I honor Christ’s commandment to love these neighbors? I’m finding some ways, and trusting God will continue to show me.

Prayer: Please guide us Lord, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, to love You and our neighbor, no matter what.

Kateri Topitzhofer

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. For we are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building.” I Corinthians 3:6-7, 9

God works through unexpected ways, through ordinary conversations and unplanned encounters. I will share three of my experiences.

I was on the phone with insurance and had several questions. The agent said, “I am here to go through things, take your time.” I stopped and said, “Thank you for your kindness,” and the agent responded that they really needed to hear those words after several difficult calls that made them question their work.

Several years ago, my husband and I hosted a dinner for an organization connected to a church. We decorated tables, bought special desserts, and brought our dishes to make it a special evening. 35 people filled the room with conversation and laughter. The next year only 5 came. I wondered what happened. This year on Epiphany, I saw a couple who came both years. I had not seen them in some time. Unexpectedly, she told me that the first year had led them to join that church.

Parenting can be hard. I was struggling. I made an unexpected stop at Costco. A woman in scrubs came up to me and asked if I was my son’s mom. I had only met her a few times. She asked some questions that opened the door for an encouraging conversation. She too had not planned to shop there. Later she texted, “I love how God brought us together today!”

Each story reflects an unexpected encounter of encouragement, hope and connection. God shows his presence in the world through one another. When we pause to offer kindness or step into a conversation, we may be tending to God’s seeds. Be open to the moments when God nudges you to pause, to listen, or to speak. You may never fully know how powerfully God is working.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we come to You with deep gratitude for the ways You have brought others to offer needed hope. Help us to be open to moments when You are guiding us to be signs of Your love to others. Thank You for allowing us all to be Your servants, called to connect with Your beloved children to offer Your hope in the world. Amen.

Amy M. Fondroy Eich

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on 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 29:11-13

This is a passage many people return to in times of trouble—times that feel uncertain, frightening, or overwhelming. These are words we cling to when life takes a turn we did not anticipate, when the ground beneath us feels less stable than it once did.

I originally encountered this passage during one of those seasons in my own life. My husband and I were in the early years of our marriage. We had three small children and plans and responsibilities that required a certain kind of stability. Then his position at work was restructured, and suddenly he found himself without a job. What we thought was secure was gone, and the future felt unclear.

Jeremiah’s words were originally spoken to people living in exile—people who had lost familiarity, security, and control. God does not promise them a quick fix or an easy resolution. Instead, God promises presence and purpose. He promises a future that is still held in love, even when the present feels broken or uncertain.

Looking back now, I can see countless examples of how this has played out not just in our own household, but across our extended family. There have been moments that looked, at the time, like “bad things”—painful disruptions that caused doubt, fear, and deep questioning. Moments that made us wonder if life would ever feel the same again. And yet, time and again, those moments became turning points.

From layoffs and restructures came new beginnings. We’ve watched people lean into their God-given gifts and launch successful businesses. We’ve seen confidence grow, callings clarified, and opportunities open that never would have existed otherwise. We’ve seen promotions, new paths, and even a marriage that began because of a job loss and a change in direction.

This is not to say that the hard parts didn’t matter, or that the pain wasn’t real. Faith does not erase suffering. But faith does remind us that God is faithful—especially when we cannot yet see where the road is leading.

In Jeremiah 29, God promises that when the people seek the Lord, they will find God. Not because they searched correctly, but because God desires to be found. This is grace. God is already at work, already present, already holding our future—before we ask for his help and even when we are unsure how to trust it.

As we place our faith not in outcomes, but in God’s faithfulness, we begin to see that God is doing something deeper than we imagined. God is shaping us, calling us, and leading us into lives rooted in hope—not shallow optimism, but hope grounded in God’s promises.

Whatever season you are in today—whether you are waiting, grieving, starting over, or stepping into something new—hear this promise anew: God knows the plans he has for you.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for the blessings known and unknown You have granted us. Help us to remain close to You and steadfast in our faith as we walk through both the good events and the trials of this life. Thank You for always having our best interests at heart. Give us patience and understanding to know that You have always, and will continue to be here for us as we walk through this life. Give us discernment to recognize and follow Your lead in our lives. Thank You for being a faithful and loving father. Amen.

“The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer, my God my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and my horn of salvation, my stronghold.” Psalm 18:2

When my late wife, Vivian Hart, was planning her memorial service, during her second and final hospice, she chose Psalm 18:2 for printing on cards to be placed in a bowl of rocks near the exit from the memorial. Vivian wanted those leaving the event to take a rock and a card to possibly encourage them in their walk of life.

On the Harts cancer journey, we prayed daily for strength and acceptance of the inevitable outcome. We often each held a rock, which came from various locations in the U.S. and Canada, as we prayed.

Growing up in Duluth, MN, my family home bordered Chester Park. In walking on an unpaved access road to the ski jumps and ski area, I passed a six-foot tall, rounded black rock, obscured by underbrush. I climbed the rock as a small child and was surprised by the rough textures and crevasses of the surface. From a distance this rock looked smooth and uniform. But, like our lives, the calm surface is not what is under the surface and in our hearts.

As I become chronologically rewarded, I have experiences that are uneven and rough. In my times of troubles, I turn to God as a stable and solid anchor in seas of instability.

The foundation of the compass in ancient times was lodestone, a naturally magnetized piece of mineral, magnetite. They are naturally occurring magnets which can attract iron. When suspended, pieces of lodestone would turn, and they became the first magnetic compass. For the ancient mariners, a rock was a guide for the journey.

For me, The Lord is my compass, pointing a true direction on my earthly passage through calm and stormy seas.

Deuteronomy 32:4 He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.

Prayer: Lord be with me in my life and the lives of others. Guide us like a compass and a rock, to a destination of love and joy that is free of turmoil. Please give me knowledge of Your will and the power to carry it out. Amen.

Aethan Hart

“I remember the days of old; I think about all your deeds; I meditate on the works of your hands”

Psalm 143:5

While attending a conference in Arizona, my wife and I decided to spend some time hiking. On our first day, we tackled Camelback Mountain in Phoenix. We had climbed it about 17 years ago but had forgotten its steep climbs, loose rock, moments where you stop and wonder if this is really the trail. With an elevation of 2,706 feet, it rose quickly, and there were stretches where the climb felt relentless. My legs burned, my breathing shortened, and more than once I questioned whether I had overestimated my ability.

But we kept going. Slowly. Carefully. Step by step. And eventually, we reached the top.

The next day, we set out to hike Cathedral Rock in Sedona with an elevation of 4,967 feet. As we stood at the base, looking up at the red rock formations, I realized something: I wasn't nearly as intimidated as I thought I would be. Cathedral was still challenging. It still required effort, balance, and trust in each step. But because I had already done Camelback—the steeper climb, the harder ascent—I knew I could handle what was in front of me. Yesterday's struggle gave me confidence for today's journey.

That experience made me think of Psalm 143:5: “I remember the days of old; I think about all your deeds; I meditate on the works of your hands”. Remembering is not nostalgia; it is an act of faith. Looking back on where God has been faithful allows us to face what lies ahead with courage and trust.

Throughout Scripture, God's people are invited to remember. Remember the wilderness. Remember the manna. Remember the deliverance. These memories become anchors when the path ahead feels steep or uncertain. They remind us that we do not walk alone.

So, whatever mountain you are facing right now—grief, uncertainty, change, or doubt—you do not approach it empty-handed. You carry with you the memory of God's faithfulness. The same God who was with you then walks with you now.

Step by step. Day by day. God moves forward with you.

Prayer: God, give us time each day to reflect on Your faithfulness through the challenges of life, so that as we journey ahead, knowing that no matter what mountain we face in life, You will be present to help us overcome them just as You always have. Amen.

Pastor Ladd Sonnenberg

“Samuel replied, ‘Yes, I’ve come in peace. I’ve come to offer sacrifice to the Lord. Set yourselves apart to him and come to the sacrifice with me.’ Then he set Jesse and his sons apart to the Lord. He invited them to the sacrifice.” 1 Samuel 16:5

It says people judge by their outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

The reason I chose this verse is because it shows that true character and how you are on the inside matters more than your appearance. This verse can apply to everyone as some people can seem mean or ugly on the outside but be an amazing person on the inside. This can mean the opposite as well, showing that your appearance could be amazing, and you seem like a great person but really, you’re not. Truly in the end the way you act, talk, and think over-shines your outward appearance. Because when you actually interact with that person, you see them for how good they are on the inside, not their outward appearance.

Lots of characters in the Bible show this. Such as this verse from 1 Samuel 16 talking about David overcoming Goliath even though David was just a boy. But his love and trust for God helped him beat Goliath. Noah who people thought was crazy for building a giant arc is another example. But Noah wasn’t a random pick; Noah was a kind man and a first believer in God.

To sum it all up: Be a good person and love God. The condition of your heart matters way more in the long run than how you look.

Prayer: Dear God, please help us to be better people and to focus on walking in Your footsteps. Teach us that what really matters is on the inside and the way You treat and interact with people. Teach us to join together as people and work together to better ourselves. In Your name we pray, amen.

Ethan Sonnenberg (Student)

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.” Epistle to the Philippians 2:3–5

Many years ago, I was confirmed in the Swedish Lutheran state church. We were a large group, and most of the confirmands were my classmates. During the confirmation period, we attended several Bible camps.

It was at one of these camps that I learned an important lesson about sharing and making sure everyone gets their fair share. The camp was held on a remote island in the Swedish archipelago. During one of our classes, the pastor brought out a bag of candy to share with the group. The first person opened the bag, took one piece, and passed it to the next person.

When the bag had made its way about halfway around the table, one student said, “I hope there’s enough left for me.” At that moment, the pastor stopped the distribution and explained that this comment itself was an important lesson for everyone.

We are often taught in today’s society to focus on ourselves—to think that as long as I get something, it doesn’t matter whether others do. But Jesus taught us to care for the group as a whole and to share with others, rather than letting individual greed be guided by the thought, “I hope there is enough for me.”

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, thank You for reminding us that life is not about what we can secure for ourselves, but about how we care for one another. Help us to let go of fear and selfishness, and instead trust that there is enough when we share with open hearts. Teach us to look beyond “*what about me*” and to live with generosity, compassion, and responsibility for the whole community. Amen.

Martin Bertilsson

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.” Matthew 25:35

In the last few years, I have worked with the Hudson Food Cupboard. I was excited to see that the Food Cupboard was run by 10 Christian churches working together in the community - with Bethel just one of the churches. Our congregation has always stepped up, donating food and volunteering to work when asked.

I grew up in a small town in Northern Minnesota where most incomes were very low. Many people had trouble making ends meet. Most were hard-working people and spent their money wisely, yet had to cut out major necessities. I still see the same needs today in our community in the St. Croix Valley.

Every day I work at the Food Cupboard, many people thank us for donating our time. But this past Christmas the needs were even greater than usual. One young single mother who came in had just had to fix up her car so she could get to work. The money she had for food went to her car. She was so thankful for the food from the Cupboard, but I was the thankful one. Helping her fill up the grocery cart with food for her kids made me feel grateful that I could follow Jesus' words to “feed the hungry”.

Prayer: God, we remember all those who are hungry today. Open our hearts and hands to share and let our actions reflect Your love. Amen.

Ron Johnson

“I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith.” 2 Timothy 4: 7

On January 24th, we celebrated the life of my dear uncle. My Dad and uncle owned a dairy farm together on the same land their grandparents established when they emigrated from Norway in the late 1800's. Family and friends flew in from all over the United States for the service, even though the temperature was well below zero and the media warned against travel.

Over and over again I heard *“I wouldn't miss this for anything. He was such a good man- so giving, so generous, the hardest worker I knew.”*

These were the same testimonies shared at my dad's funeral just over a year ago.

My dad and uncle were best friends. They rarely fought or argued, even though they worked diligently side by side for many years. They lived out their faith through their actions-rising early, giving their best in everything they did, and treating people with kindness, respect, and humility.

Their legacy reminds us that living well is one of the greatest testimonies we can leave behind.

My uncle brought the fun, and my dad brought the steady leadership-together forming a balanced team that shaped and mentored our family.

After my dad passed, my uncle's health declined quickly. I truly believe they were meant to do life together on earth and life together in heaven. They were less than a year apart in age and passed within a year of each other.

They now have a higher purpose, and when we meet again, I know they will both be there- 2nd only to Jesus. I can only hope to hear the same words they heard from Him.

“Well done good and faithful servant.”

Because one day I will stand before Christ too, and I plan to live with intent and purpose until we meet again.

Prayer: God, thank You for placing these hard working, caring, and loving men in my life as role models for those who follow after them. Amen.

Mary Kochendorfer

**“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.”
Ecclesiastes 3:1**

When I was a new mom, I visited a friend and former colleague who also had small children a little older than my baby and we discussed the drastic changes in her career since having children. We were both from the Twin Cities but had met at a client site in Chicago and throughout the following years had worked together in cities around the country. Our careers were going places, and it was exciting! Then came children and she gave up that career for a role she could do remotely from home. While trying to figure how my own life and career would morph, I asked her if she missed her previous career to which she offered, “Sure, I miss it, but this is just a season of life. This too will pass, so I’m enjoying this time, and growing my life and career in different ways.”

That really stayed with me. The newborn baby and career changes were just a season of life to savor and build upon as life unfolded. And it’s been so true. Each stage of raising kids, navigating a career and life, has been a season. Some are easier and some are harder, but they all pass and evolve to the next one.

It always reminds me of this Ecclesiastes verse about seasons. Life is full of them, and God is with us through every one, guiding us to enjoy or simply survive one season, knowing that another is coming. Trusting in God and knowing he is guiding my way has helped me navigate these seasons.

Now my oldest is nearing high school graduation and my youngest isn’t far behind. One season is evolving into another, and I don’t know what it will be, but knowing God is guiding my path, gives me the strength to enjoy today and look forward to tomorrow.

Dear God: Please be with us as we navigate the seasons of life, guiding us to understand & appreciate each season as we prepare for the next season of life. Amen.

Marcie Andrews (Staff)

“Do not fear the road ahead, for God walks with you. His hand will guide you, and His grace will sustain you through every trial.” Deuteronomy 31:6

We never know what a new day will bring. But through the power of prayer God will guide us on our journey to a better life.

It was early October; my family and I were doing an eight-hour road trip to Missouri to attend our nephew’s wedding. It was a beautiful fall day for traveling. We would stop every couple of hours to walk, stretch and grab something to eat and drink. Keeping hydrated is very important when sitting for any length of time.

We would soon be arriving at our destination and checking into our hotel for our three-day stay. But low and behold, I never made it to the hotel, as I ended up in the ER at a local hospital. I was experiencing an episode where I could not find my words or speak clearly. My family was with me as I was being thoroughly examined. It was determined I was having a mini stroke.

I was admitted to the hospital and several tests performed over the next three days. The nurse admitting me to my room at one point looked at me and said: “There are angels here with you.” I asked what do you mean and she said: “you are at the number one stroke hospital in the United States.”

At that moment, I could feel the angels’ presence near me. Through the power of prayer, I turned to God knowing I needed His ongoing love, support, strength and guidance to better health. He heard my prayers and granted me complete recovery. I know God is with me and my family at all times to walk with us in the time of need and to show us the path to life.

Prayer: Dear God, thank You for always being there for us through the power of prayer. For all the many blessings You have bestowed upon us as we journey through life. May Your never-ending love and strength guide us each and every day. Amen.

Sherry Lamb

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

While this verse is often shared in joyful seasons, I have learned it often speaks most clearly when life does not go according to your plan. Lent has a way of slowing us down. It invites us to notice what we cling to and to release what we cannot control. For me, one of the hardest things to surrender has always been my plans. When my husband and I were ready to start a family, we faced fertility struggles. After asking questions, seeking wisdom, and considering options, we chose adoption. I quickly learned adoption is not something you can control. You can prepare and hope, but much of it is out of your hands.

That was difficult for me. I like timelines and knowing what comes next. But God kept inviting me into something different: trust without guarantees.

After months of paperwork and waiting, we received a call in the summer of 2019. A birth mother had chosen us to parent her newborn. We got on a plane full of hope, only to learn when we arrived that she had changed her mind.

It was heartbreaking. I grieved the loss of a baby I never met. We returned home with an empty infant car seat and wondered, “what’s next?”

What surprised me was that even under the sadness, I felt an unexpected sense of peace. Not because it didn’t hurt, but because something about that situation didn’t feel quite right. Maybe God was closing a door for me.

The waiting continued. Over the next months we received countless “not this time” messages from our agency as other families were chosen. Each one felt like another reminder that my plans and my timing were not in charge. I listened to Jeremy Camp’s song, “Out of My Hands” more times than I could count.

Then one day in February 2020, I received another call. A baby had been born the day before (on my husband’s birthday!). We were chosen to be his parents. Within hours, we were on a plane, walking into a hospital, and meeting our beautiful baby boy.

Three years and one week later, we received another phone call and another blessing, our beautiful baby girl.

Looking back, I see what I couldn’t then. God wasn’t absent in the waiting. He was guiding us and making room for the children meant to be ours.

This Lent, the invitation is simple. Trust that waiting can be purposeful and God’s plans are so much better than we can imagine.

Prayer: God, teach me to trust You with my hopes, my timing, and my plans. Amen.

Amanda Linehan (Council)

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning.” Lamentations 3:22-23

The connectivity of the modern world has many great benefits, but the negatives outweigh these benefits heavily. It is easy to go down the rabbit hole of our phones, especially with social media and the countless streaming platforms. It is not as easy, however, to keep up our relationship with God. We have so much connection with others around the world, people that know nothing about us, but we don't have this same connection with the one who knows everything about us.

I myself have spent countless hours scrolling through social media each day, losing track of time. I usually forget to spend at least some of this time talking with God. Even when I am on social media, I see videos taking a moment for God, or pages that offer daily prayers and devotionals. Seeing these videos signals my subconscious that I should take this moment to relax and open myself up to God, but in all honesty, I find myself scrolling past these videos, telling myself “I'll get back to that later”. Later never actually comes and I miss another opportunity in my faith journey.

The book of Revelations, and many other books, describe God's love and never-ending outreach for us. Revelation 3:20 reads, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me”. This verse is just one example of God's desire to have a relationship with His creation, but this relationship cannot be one sided, with the common saying “it's a two-way street.”

During Lent, I encourage you to take just a moment each day to connect with God, as a simple practice of this can turn into a lifelong healthy habit, and will only strengthen your own personal faith relationship.

Prayer: Dear God, help me to create space each day to listen, pray, and grow closer to You. Guide me during this Lenten season to choose You first. Amen.

Tate Magnuson (Student)

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9

Since I was young, this has been one of my favorite verses. It reminds me that we can get through life’s tough stuff because God IS with us, we are not alone. When we are scared or discouraged, we can be courageous knowing God is with us. In these first verses of Joshua, God is commissioning Joshua to lead God’s chosen people, the Israelites, into the promised land and into the battle of Jericho. God concludes this pregame pep talk in verse 9; telling Joshua, to go be strong and courageous, don’t be afraid or discouraged... I WILL be with you. The same God who walked with Joshua walks each day with you right now!

God reminds us through Joshua that he will give us HIS strength and HIS courage in all situations! How can we know? Watch for God at work around you. God brings encouragement in many ways, bringing people to walk alongside us and circumstances to encourage us.

Watch for God at work through people around you. Like when, I was in the grocery store checkout line; 8 ½ months pregnant, 1- and 4-year-olds in tow, a full grocery cart, and meltdowns began. A woman could see we needed help, she said “you just take care of your kids I’ll take care of everything else”. She bagged our groceries, pushed the cart to our car, loaded our groceries and off she went. She gave me a lifeline. I’m not even sure I properly thanked her, but I’ve shared this God story frequently. She said yes to God when He nudged her to help me. Through her God showed me in a very tangible way there He was with us! Watch for God shining through others.

Watch for God in circumstances around you. We moved to Hudson 23 years ago, we didn’t know anyone, but we knew this was God’s plan for us. We just didn’t know why. That first winter was a long one. We were deep into a big home remodel, I stayed home with our 3 young children, and Todd worked long days in Minneapolis. One day as I was on the phone with a friend. She asked for our address. I doodled as I gave it to her. We live on Golden Oaks Drive - G. O. D. This still gives me chills. We were right where God wanted us to be. God was reminding us that He is with us – always!

I pray you will lean into God for strength and encouragement through life’s tough stuff. Watch for God at work around you, how is He finding ways to give you hope? He loves you and is with you always and forever no matter what!

**Prayer: Father God, thank You for reminding us we can be strong and courageous in all things because You are always with us. We can lean into You. Please wrap your big strong arms around each of us, giving us Your hope for each new day! Thank You for blessing us with this wonderful place - our Bethel home!
Amen.**

Cindy Halunen

“Jesus wept.”

John 11:35

This Bible verse has always been powerful for me. Two words describe very deep compassion and sorrow from Jesus, and his shared suffering, in the most human way.

There is so much civil unrest in our world and country that I can't imagine how our Lord and Savior isn't constantly brought to tears. I have to wonder how we, his people, can be so thoughtless when it comes to being a follower of Christ.

There seems to be a new definition of Christianity, and many of God's children have gotten lost, all for the sake of man. And to follow the ways of man has no discernible direction. Christian Nationalism is a relatively new brand of belief that has made its way to the forefront. Understanding the baseline of its preachings is off the beaten track of what God ever intended for us. The Bible is the instruction manual for our lives, but people have sculpted the sacred words to shape around their own thoughts and agenda. In large part, political. This is not how God created the world for us to live in.

As a child, every year my family watched the movie, “The Ten Commandments”. One impression on me was the part where Moses climbs the Mount to sit with God, and while he was away the Israelites became unruly, disregarding the instructions left for them because they grew impatient. Moses returned to a rebellious sight of them idolizing a gold calf, dancing, feasting and completely out of control.

I liken this scene a bit to how our country appears today, at least to me. People are reactive and treating anger with anger. Maybe we should, instead, be weeping with God or feeling compassion in our hearts for others. But some people have placed politicians next to God or above. We aren't holding close the acronym W.W.J.D. (what would Jesus do) as our compass to be the kind of Christian God would love us to be.

It appears there is a path of destruction created by man. There is chaos, discord, violence and demands from people who have lost their way. I believe followers of Jesus would not engage in such hate and anger because God is love. To follow Jesus means to love and encourage and plant seeds of hope, to find ways to help others. We have a Bible that should hold us in line with what God has designed for our life. One that doesn't cause Jesus to weep.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, let us pray for unity in our country and in our world. Please help and guide us on how to understand Your words and instructions that shepherd us in following You, and being compassionate to Your children. Amen.

Linda James

“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”

1 John 3:1

I love the word, “lavish”. I looked it up in a dictionary and the root is Latin and refers to “wash” (lavare). In Old French it’s a “deluge of rain” (lavasse). In English, “bestow something in generous or extravagant quantities”. An additional definition includes, “overflowing generosity, like a downpour, not in limited measure but in abundant, superabundant quantities”.

God is not stingy in His love for us! He doesn’t give us just a little bit. We are washed in it. It comes to us like a deluge - overflowing, abundant, more than we can imagine or comprehend – the love of a Father for His children.

His children. Spread around the world. Different races, ethnicities, languages, color of eyes, hair, skin, yet all brothers and sisters – children of God. You are not alone; your family tree is larger than you thought. What could be more abundant!

A spectacular sunrise or sunset or the rainbow at the end of a summer storm. The scent of an apple tree in full bloom or freshly mown hay. The taste of that first morning cup of coffee or your favorite meal. The song of a red-winged blackbird or the musical improvisation of Skip James on the piano, or New Song leading worship. A warm embrace or a hearty handshake sharing peace. What could be more extravagant or generous!

Gifts from a Father to His children. God is not stingy in His love for us! Look around, you’ll experience it everywhere.

The love of the Father who gave his only begotten Son, that we might have life and have it abundantly and eternally. Lavish!

Prayer: Father God, thank You for the love You so lavishly pour out on Your children. Guide us in ways we can share that love with the world so all may come to know You. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Mary Gerzmehle

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can it be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled under foot.” Matthew 5:13

When I remembered this verse, two statements immediately came to mind. “They will know we are Christians by our love,” a well-known hymn line, and “there’s no hate like Christian love,” something I often hear online. I don’t think Christians are known for their love anymore, at least not by people my age. If anything, sometimes I feel like I must make excuses for my faith, that while I’m a Christian, I’m not like *those* Christians. Too many people have experienced Christians who use their faith as a weapon instead of a bridge. Too many Christians are too comfortable with hurting people and taking pride in the fact that it was in the name of their faith. Yes, we are called to share our faith, but too much salt overpowers and ruins food. More than anything else in the Bible, we are called to love and uplift each other, not to judge or tear down.

One compliment that will always stick with me is when I worked at Luther Point and another counselor said that when they think of how Jesus acted, they think of me. Not because I quoted scripture the best or always did the right thing, because I didn’t do either of those. They said that because I was kind. Because I did my best to make people smile or be there for them when they needed a shoulder to cry on. Because I tried to involve as many people as I could in our crazy games, skits, or songs. I wasn’t Christlike because I was perfect, and I’m pretty far from it. I’m Christlike because I try to treat others with compassion, respect, and love.

Prayer: Hey God, thank You for loving us and being patient with us, no matter what. Please help us as we try to live out that same love and patience here in Your creation. In Your name we pray, amen.

Jacob Benoy

"He who was seated on the throne said, I am making everything new."

Revelation 21:5

We deal every day with death and deterioration all around us. It's the feeling that seizes us if we look to the side and see a dead fawn on the road. The lack of beauty and perfection leaves us wanting. Life is a mixture of joy and sorrow, of right and wrong.

As a Christian we suffer sadness and pain as do all those around us. Into this picture comes the great message of newness. The sin and personal failure is resolved in forgiveness and acceptance by the King of the Universe. We are compelled to move beyond the darkness and sadness to the promised newness and brilliance of our blessed relationship with our Savior - - His cleansing, redeeming and restoring love.

God gives us a foretaste of this newness as the birds try out their Spring songs after a long Winter; as the water trickles down the storm sewers; as sprigs of green grass emerge; as Spring bulbs push up through dark earth; as the sun warms our faces and the sun-roasted spruce exudes its lovely scent.

We are immersed in God's annual restoration and renewal. We know that we can trust His reconciling, grace-filled Spirit to fill us with His newness.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, thank you for the wonder of your work within us. Help us claim the newness that You so freely give. Amen.

Ann Martinson