

Daily Devotions

Lent 2023



Together

One body. One ministry. 40 days.

Lent 2023 - Southeastern Minnesota Synod ELCA



semnsynod.org/40together

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New for 2023!

If you used these devotions last year and are looking for something new, try this: read the scripture reference for the day, then ask yourself or your group the questions below. Capture your answers out loud or on paper, and close in a word of prayer.

1. As you read this scripture passage, what do you notice?
2. What might this passage mean for you?
3. What might this passage mean for your congregation? our communities? our world?
4. What might this passage tell you about God?

By Rev. Meg Sander

***Praise the LORD! O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever. -Psalms 106:1***

As I traveled around to different countries and met new people wherever I went, I realized how important it was to acknowledge others, to greet them in their own language, and thank them for sharing themselves with me. I often ended up saying the wrong thing, but people knew I cared and that I was trying to get to know them better. I tried to make a practice of listening to understand and not just listening to respond with my own story. That was very hard for me to do. But it made all the difference in the world. Every person I encountered taught me something valuable, and for that I will always be grateful.

I also used simple songs and sayings to help connect newfound friends together. One of their favorites was a call-and-response saying I learned at camp:

“God is Good!” Response: “All the time!”

“All the time!” Response: “God is good!”

To see the joy on their faces was priceless.

What can people from different cultures and traditions teach you? What can you share with our partners and companions around the world? What can you learn from each other? I encourage you to listen and seek to understand. I wrote this poem/song to accompany you on your journey:

We walk together side by side,
With Christ among us to be our guide.
We laugh, we cry, we listen and learn,
We help each other dream and discern.

What is God calling us to do and be?
Walking together holds opportunity.
HOPE and LIFE, and JOY abounds,
As we share our culture’s sights and sounds.
Thanksgiving and praise and the faith that we share,
Unites us together in mutual prayer.
So dance and pray as we march along.
Filled with God’s grace we sing the song.

Please pray with me:

*Gracious and loving God, Give us a sense of connectedness and community with you and each other.
Help us to share the joy of your presence with all we meet along the way. AMEN*

Pastor Meg Sander is a retired rostered leader who currently lives in the Twin Cities. Pastor Meg served as a member of Las Pastoras, a network of female pastors from the Lutheran Church in Colombia (IELCO), Synod of Alberta and the Territories (Canada), the South Carolina and Southeastern Minnesota Synods, ELCA.

By Bishop Regina Hassanally

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

-Matthew 3:7-10

When I was a girl, my mother taught me that to apologize meant I intended not to make the same mistake again. Perhaps, without realizing it, my mom instilled in me from a young age the meaning of repentance. To repent means to turn away from and walk in a new direction.

I spend a significant amount of time mediating conflict. I am always struck by the power of a genuine apology and the temptation of a false one. When we have harmed someone, we're often tempted to, even in our apology, place the blame on the other for *feeling* hurt rather than admitting we've done something hurtful.

A genuine apology, however, takes ownership and stops there. It admits a wrong without a need to justify, excuse, or share blame. Repentance admits we've made a mistake and states our intention to not make the same mistake again.

We bear fruit worthy of repentance when, in light of our acknowledgment of wrong, we live in transformed ways. Our lives reflect our repentance.

In this season of Lent, in which we are invited to consider what we have done and what we have left undone, I also invite you to pay attention to the ways you say *I'm sorry*. Are our apologies laden with justification and blame sharing? Or do they own that we too are capable of making mistakes for which we need, and receive, forgiveness?

In light of our repentance, do we bear fruit? Fruit that bursts forth from the freedom we find in forgiveness and the intention to live lives of grace both given and received? In these 40 days may the Spirit bring to mind opportunities for transformation and joy in the truth that in Christ we are freely forgiven.

Please pray with me:

Spirit of the living God, give us eyes to see our faults, the courage to say "I'm sorry," as needed, and the tenacity to live lives that bear fruit worthy of repentance.

Bishop Regina Hassanally serves as Bishop of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod, ELCA.

February 24
By Rev. Phil Ruud

After they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and said, “Herod will be looking for the child in order to kill him. So get up, take the child with his mother and escape to Egypt...” -Matthew 2:13

For several years in late summer, when the evenings start to turn colder, thousands of monarch butterflies have gathered in a field of wildflowers across from Cannon River Lutheran Church near Welch, MN.

The monarchs feed on the nectar of the wildflowers during the day and roost in a long row of pine trees in the evening. As monarchs have a hard time flying when the temperature falls below 60 degrees, they are in that area only for a few days. Suddenly, almost all at once, they leave and continue their migration to where they will spend the winter in the warmer climates of California and Mexico.

Somehow, nature tells them that they must leave before it gets any colder or they will die.

Whenever I see a monarch, it reminds me of a cloth bag I own that has a monarch embroidered on the side of it. I bought it from a woman named Reina, whom I met at a shelter in a settlement not far from Juarez, Mexico, near the U.S./México border. She has come on a very long journey from Honduras with her daughter, Kelin, to seek asylum. While Reina waits for her court hearing, she embroiders these bags as a way to earn a living.

Reina knows that if she and her daughter had stayed in Honduras, more than likely they would die amid so much social, political, and economic unrest in her native country.

Like the magi in the story of the Day of Epiphany, you and I are also on a journey following the light of a star. The light of Christ leads us to care for those who are strangers, such as Reina and her daughter, Kelin.

Please pray with me:

Dear Lord, help us remember your teaching that as we do onto others, such as Reina and Kelin, so we do also onto you. Amen.

Pastor Phil Ruud is currently serving at Bethel Lutheran Church in Northfield. Pastor Phil visited SEMN Synod's ministry partners at the U.S./México borderlands in January 2020.

February 25
By Georgia Holmes

Blessed are the Peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.
-Matthew 5:9

But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and faithfulness.
-Galatians 5:22

In January, I attended an online webinar premiering a new video produced by a group of Mankato educators commemorating the 1961 Mankato visit by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King. During this visit, Dr. King preached two sermons at Centenary Methodist Church and gave a community talk in the Mankato High School auditorium. At the time, an uncle of mine followed the civil rights movement in the United States and brought my brother and me to the 1961 event because he thought it was something we should attend. 1961 was relatively early in the movement and was several years before Dr. King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work. Although King was a national figure at the time, he had not yet reached the iconic saintly status that he has today. In his speech at the high school, King spoke of how the world had become a very small place where you can fly halfway around the globe in a day. Then he talked about how in the modern world, a “neighbor” is the person who lives next door, and a neighbor is also someone in another part of the country or the world.

The Southeastern Minnesota Synod ELCA’s Medical Ministry Team partners with our neighbors in Tanzania, South Sudan, and at the U.S. / Mexico border. It works with Global Health Ministries (a pan Lutheran organization) and various health ministries in the Central Diocese of the Tanzanian Lutheran Church to provide much-needed medical supplies (PPE, pharmaceuticals) as well as financial support for medical personnel (local physician, palliative care staff). This support has been particularly critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. Along with malaria and chronic disease, the coronavirus is just one of the many health challenges impacting rural areas of Tanzania. Thank you for your ongoing prayers and financial assistance for our neighbors – both local and global.

Please pray with me: From the Peace Prayer of Saint Francis
Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy;
Grant that I may not seek so much to be consoled, as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved, as to love.
Amen

Georgia Holmes is a member of Messiah Lutheran Church, North Mankato. Georgia currently serves on the SEMN Synod’s Medical Ministry Team and visited the Central Diocese of Tanzania in March 2017.

February 27

By Rev. Barb Streed

*Siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwenkhos',
 Siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwenkhos',
 Siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwenkhos',
 Siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwen-,
 Khanyen' kwenkhos'.*

*We are marching in the light of God,
 We are marching in the light of God,
 We are marching in the light of God,
 We are marching in the light of,
 The light of God.*

This song, *We Are Marching in the Light of God*, is being lifted up as the theme song for 40 Together: One Body. One Ministry. 40 Days. How appropriate when you consider the very act of marching.

My own experience with marching has been limited to the Jane Fonda exercise video that is now buried deep in a box somewhere in my basement never to see the light of day again. I remember following along to a sweat band-wearing, leg warmers-clad Jane as she encouraged me to “March and march and march and march!”

I really came to understand the beauty and strength of marching when my daughter, Amanda, became the quad drummer for the Owatonna marching band. I remember going to the first parade she was in where I settled my lawn chair along the side of the road so I could get a really good view of the band. As the band approached on the road, so did a swarm of adults coming up on both sides in the grass along the road. I soon discovered that these people were the crazy marching band parents who followed the marching band all along the parade route. Full disclosure: by the next parade, I became one of those crazy marching band parents and it was amazing!

What I learned by watching, listening, and paying attention to this marching band was the beauty and strength of marching when marching is done with intentionality and purpose and awareness of and care for the other. That’s what I think of when I sing, “We are marching in the light of God! We are marching in the light of God!” When we join ranks and live as the one body in Christ that we are, with the intentionality of mission and ministry, for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ for ALL creation, and we do so with the deep awareness and care for the other, our marching truly is done in the light of God. And it is beautiful. And in it there is strength through the grace of God.

Please pray with me:

Gracious God, may our marching be directed and choreographed by you that we may, in beauty and strength, bring your message of love and salvation into our world together as one body in Christ. Amen.

Pastor Barb Streed serves as Assistant to the Bishop for Call Process and Congregation Care.

February 28

By Joanne Heathman

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to God's purpose.

-Romans 8:28

When our church group did an accompaniment visit with our partners in Tanzania, we noticed many partially standing structures. As we rode, our driver explained that those were homes being built. The driver added, "In Tanzania, sometimes it takes a lifetime to build a house." Sometimes it takes a community. The building blocks that form the foundation are often red bricks made by many hands, formed from the red soil, then fired to dry. Building takes time. Building takes money. Money is often dependent upon harvests. During years of poor harvest, money is diverted toward basic needs. Education for children is a priority. It can take many people, working together for years to complete one house. There is great pride in the finished home. Great pride, working together for the good.

Congregational and synod accompaniment partnerships are like people building together for the good. Empowerment, inclusivity, vulnerability, and sustainability are the building blocks for the foundation. Constructing an accompaniment partnership is about giving, as well as receiving, the gifts that everyone has to offer. It's creating openness and giving up power so partners feel empowered. It's about assembling a relationship that creates a sense of feeling valued. Building such partnerships can take time when building for the good; for God's purpose. It takes commitment and attention to changing needs and priorities. There are setbacks, interruptions, loss of funding sources. It may take a lifetime of working together to finally be able to look in awe at what was created together. Then again, unlike that house in Tanzania, maybe that partnership is never finished. And there is good in that too.

Please pray with me:

Loving God, as we build with our partners in Christ, help us to build for the good, according to your purpose. Amen

Joanne Heathman is a member of Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Rochester. Joanne serves as a member of the Global Ministry Table and is the chairperson of the Medical Ministry Team. Joanne participated in a congregational visit to the Central Diocese of Tanzania.

March 1

By Rev. Mark Johnson

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

-Matthew 5:14-16

The municipality of El Cocuy lies in the rugged and remote hills and valleys of the Eastern range of the Colombian Andes. It is home to dairy farms and small villages and the *páramo* – a unique alpine tundra ecosystem. Before 1980, none of the nine rural townships of the El Cocuy municipality had electricity. Difficult terrain, sparse population, and political unrest were some of the factors that kept the government and electric companies from installing electricity in the region -until members of El Salvador Lutheran Church decided it was time to take action.

A group of congregation members, some who lived and farmed in these townships, came together with their neighbors, and developed a plan for installation of electricity in two of the municipality's townships. The project was endorsed by *Iglesia Evangélica Luterana de Colombia* (IELCO) -the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia - and financed by a partnership of local, regional, and national government agencies, local residents, and the Lutheran World Federation. The effort was a success, bringing electricity to 180 families. And not only that, but the project's success paved the way for the eventual electrification of all rural townships in the municipality.

From its beginnings IELCO – small as it is - has been a Church with a great sense of mission. It shines its light through vibrant worship, a focus on learning and education, care for creation, and a commitment to peace and the protection of human rights - accompanying the poor and suffering in the struggles and complexities of life. The light of Christ has the power to touch and transform all people and all dimensions of life – even through the construction of an electrical distribution system that brings actual light into homes, barns, and places of business.

Please pray with me:

Dear God, thank you for the ways our friends in Colombia join faith with action. Continue to help the Church reflect the light of Christ in every land, in all kinds of ways – giving glory to you. Amen.

Pastor Mark Johnson serves as pastor at First English Lutheran Church, Faribault. Pastor Mark is a member of the synod's Global Ministry Table and the chairperson of the Colombia Accompaniment Team. Pastor Mark has visited our global companions in Colombia and the Central Diocese of Tanzania.

March 2

By Rev. Allyson Bowman

There the angel of the Lord appeared to [Moses] in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.”

- Exodus 3:2-3

Curiosity is such an important part of life; it helps us learn and grow. So you can imagine my surprise when I Googled “curiosity in the Bible” and came up with lists of verses that discourage it. One website had headings like: *curiosity leads to sin*, *curiosity leads to death*, and *curiosity leads to compromise* (as if compromise is an inherently bad thing). But curiosity is also what led Moses to the burning bush, it’s what drew people to Jesus, and it’s what brought people to the Church.

Curiosity is what brought me to Japan as an ELCA missionary in 2010 – curiosity about the people and the culture, curiosity about what God was up to on that side of the world, curiosity about how we could all accompany one another on our faith journeys. It’s this same curiosity that inspires questions in confirmation classes, Bible studies, and conversations. This is a holy curiosity.

As we continue to journey through this Season of Lent, my hope and prayer is that we would get curious. May we be curious about the stories we hear during this season, the ones we hear *every single year*. May we be curious about what God is up to in our lives and in the lives of those around us as we journey to the cross together. May we ask questions and encourage others to do the same, so that we can grow deeper in relationship and faith with our Creator. May God bless us this day with holy curiosity.

Please pray with me:

God of curiosity, give us the gift of holy curiosity during this season. May we ask questions that draw us into deeper relationship with you and one another. And may this curiosity inspire us to love and serve one another. Amen.

Pastor Allyson Bowman serves at Zion Lutheran Church, Stewartville. Pastor Ally is a member of the Global Ministry Table.

March 3

By Sarah Jerde

Creador nuestro, que estas en el cielo, santificado sea tu nombre;

Our Creator who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;

Venga a nosotros tu reino,

Thy kingdom come,

Hagase tu voluntad, en la tierra como en el cielo.

Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

-Matthew 6:9-10

Lessons on Solidarity from Central America:

Solidaridad (solidarity) is a commonly used and well-understood word in Central America. Living and growing in faith with Salvadorans and Guatemalans during delegation travels in 2011 and 2013 gave me the opportunity to learn about solidarity from the perspective of my Central American hosts. In their paraphrased words, solidarity is about bringing people together on a common journey. It is a project of relationship building, and growing a community of people which extends beyond ourselves. Being together spiritually moves people from hopelessness to hope-filled. Solidarity is about building the Kingdom of God, here on earth.

Since my last delegation to Central America in 2013, my growing understanding of the meaning of solidarity has influenced my decisions on how and why to do mission work. I intentionally seek out organizations who have members from the communities they serve on their advisory or governing boards. This allows voices from marginalized communities to be heard and honored with dignity. I highly regard organizations who accompany, or walk alongside marginalized communities, so the hard work of change can be led by those who are facing adversity.

Practicing the art of solidarity has challenged me to recognize my privilege as a white cisgender woman, and compels me to advocate for just and humane public policy for migrants. Sharing stories of my experience in Central America with legislators and their staff is living out solidarity. To learn more about the ELCA's and Southeastern Minnesota Synod's commitment to advocacy for migrant minors, visit www.elca.org/ammparo and semnsynod.org/ammparo.

Please pray with me:

God of all creation and of all people, we yearn to live in harmony with those who speak different languages and follow different lifestyles than our own. Please help us learn the art of solidarity by walking beside marginalized communities. Allow us to discern when to step back and allow those who are oppressed lead the path towards change. Please give us courage when our privilege grants us the opportunity to speak on behalf of those whom voices are not listened to in our society. Amen.

Sarah Jerde is a member of People of Hope Lutheran Church, Rochester. Sarah serves on the Southeastern Minnesota Synod's AMMPARO Team.

March 4

By Kathy Chatelaine

Throughout these 40 days
May our Good and Gracious God –
 God of the refugee
 God of the afflicted
 God of abundance
 God of the hungry
 God of the faithful

Inspire us to live into our call
 to welcome the stranger
 to provide comfort to all who suffer
 to generously share our abundance
 to live a life of peace and justice
 to seek God's kingdom in all places with all people

Pour forth your Spirit so that we might truly
 see all people through your eyes
 hear the cries of all children through your ears
 praise you with all of our might
 bring wholeness and healing through your hands
 taste the sweetness of living as One Body

So together, with our siblings throughout the world, we will
 shine your amazing love
 so that all people
 may know you
 and praise you
 and love you
 forever.
 Amen.

40 Together – 2021 Prayer

March 6**By Susan Jenkins**

“My grace is sufficient for you.”
-2 Corinthians 12:9

To put it bluntly, it's been a terrible year. The days have felt like a slog, putting one foot in front of the other and avoiding looking forward because there doesn't seem to be an end in sight. The pandemic continues with the loss of contact with friends and neighbors and old ways of doing things. Friends and acquaintances have passed away without the sense of community grief and celebration of life that we expect. In our family, there have been permanent changes in the workplace with loss of collegiality and joy in day-to-day encounters that we once took for granted. Valued colleagues have left without customary celebration of their contributions. Our children are in school and out of school, missing the stability of seeing their friends and teachers every day. Political divisions have separated us from neighbors – and sometimes from friends and family. In our scattered and isolated lives, we feel as if we are alone.

Paul writes, “...we boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been giving to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.” (Romans 5:3-6)

Some days I want to say, “Okay, God. I've got enough character! You can ease up now!” But God answers, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor 12:9)

Jesus walks beside us in our weariness, fear, and grief. Jesus shows himself when we are weak through our endurance— and our breakdowns. The power of Jesus' love shines from the cross.

Please pray with me:

Lord, you know my ways. You know my going out and my coming in. Lord, you know me. You know my weaknesses. You know my broken places. Heal me—and if that's not your plan, use me as best you can. Lord, you are the carpenter, and I am like a warped and damaged board. I know you'll find the best use for me, just as I am. Your grace is sufficient for me. Amen.

Susan Jenkins is a member of Zumbro Lutheran, Rochester, where she serves as a member of Zumbro's Tanzania Medical Ministry.

March 7**By Yang Tut**

**“Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by
God, stricken by him, and afflicted.”**

- Isaiah 53:4

To Give a Life

When I was a young boy, living in South Sudan, there was an incident that I will never forget. In my village there was a fight between two men who were very angry with each other. People were watching it and wondering what would happen. It was at night and very crazy. One of the men took up a big stick to try to hit the other man. Then, a third man jumped in between the two fighting men with his hands high in the air, begging the men to stop their fighting. I don't know exactly how it happened, but as the man swung the big stick, he hit the man in the middle who was trying to make peace. He struck him on the head and the man died right in front of everyone. After that happened everyone stopped. The two men stopped fighting and began crying. Their anger was gone. The man who hit him did not stop crying for many days. He was very sad and guilty for a long time after that. It even changed him as a person. He was not as angry about so many things anymore.

I thought a lot about that after I saw it. It was a very powerful thing for me. I wasn't even a Christian then. When I finally learned about Jesus, I remembered that time. Sometimes people who ask a question like, “How can a person die for another person?” Sometimes people ask, “How can Jesus's death change another person?” When I hear a question like this, I see the man who hit the other man. I see the man who died. And, I see the change that happened. I know the answer. When people look at Jesus and see him dying on the cross and really know that he is completely innocent and still willing to die, it changes everything. Look at Jesus. Look at the Cross. You will see.

Yang Tut serves as a Synodically Authorized Minister in the Nuer Worshiping Community at Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Owatonna.

March 8

By Rev. Dean Aponte-Safe

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. Jesus said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you.

-Luke 10:1-6

For the past two years, since a Synod visit to the Central Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, I have been in a congregational partnership and personal relationship with Pastor David Kiula, pastor to the Mwangeza Lutheran Parish and the Hadzabe Tribal Area. A common perception, I think, of global ministry partnerships is that you need to be a church that has significant financial sway in order to do work that is meaningful. That your support needs to go towards the building of dining halls and support of palliative care facilities and so much more. Those ministries are indeed much needed, important, and worthwhile. However, they are only one expression of what it means to be a church connected around the globe.

When I think of the relationship that Pastor David and I have, and the work that we do to support one another across the globe, it reminds me of the story from Luke 10, where Jesus sends out his followers in pairs to places where he will be. It is done simply and without fanfare as he instructs them to go from town to town carrying no purse, bag, or sandals. Jesus gives them instructions to share peace where it is returned and to announce the kingdom of God to all whom they meet.

In a way, this is how I understand what it means to do the work of letter sharing, messaging, video conversations, and youth engagement across cultures: we are not involved together financially, but we are engaged in relationship building as we create the kingdom of God together in our own places and communities. It doesn't take a wealth of resources to do those things. Together, across the globe, we are committed to the heart of the Gospel: loving our neighbors and declaring peace wherever we go, knowing that we are in this work together as siblings in Christ.

Please pray with me:

Gracious God, you call your people together and send them out to proclaim the Good News of redemption, salvation, forgiveness, and love in all places and at all times. Help us to know that in our words and in our commitments, the Gospel is being shared, and that we are better when we are together sharing how Jesus is met in our midst. Be with our Church and with all of our partners, that our work might flourish and your love will be made known. We pray this in the name of Jesus this Christ, who is our life and our redeemer. Amen

Pastor Dean Aponte-Safe is a pastor in Ann Arbor, Michigan, who formerly served as pastor of Henrytown Lutheran Church, Canton, and Union Prairie Lutheran Church, Lanesboro. Pastor Dean was a member of the Global Ministry Table and visited the people of the Central Diocese of Tanzania in June 2019.

March 9

By Rev. Emily Carson

I give you a new commandment: that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. - John 13:34-35

Shortly before his earthly death, Jesus made his central guidance exceedingly clear: love each other. Jesus described that loving other people would become a key way that the disciples could be identified. They'd be known by their capacity to love.

Living each day in a spirit of accompaniment is a way of practicing the kind of love Jesus describes in the 13th chapter of John. Accompaniment is a word often used in relation to faithfully navigating global relationships, but a spirit of accompaniment isn't limited to our relationships with people in other parts of the world. It's a posture with which to navigate all relationships grounded in mutuality, inclusivity, vulnerability, empowerment and sustainability.

At its core, accompaniment is about walking alongside.

Interestingly, the meaning of the word "synod" is closely related to the concept of accompaniment. Synod means "walking together" and accompaniment is about walking together, too. As the people and congregations of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod, we have opportunities every day to show up with open, loving hearts.

In our work and in our play, in our generosity of finance and generosity of time, in our friendships and family relationships...these are all opportunities to practice living in the spirit of accompaniment. Just as the Holy Spirit walks with us every step of the way, we have the opportunity to walk with others ready to journey together being mutually transformed along the way.

A 2013 document of the *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* puts it this way: "Accompaniment bears fruit when we truly walk the road together." Let's keep walking together, and trust that God will guide the way.

Please pray with me:

God of the Journey, you invite us to spend our lives loving each other. We pray that you would reveal to us what love looks like, acts like and believes. Today we thank you for the spirit of accompaniment which can shape all of our global, glocal and local relationships. We also give you thanks for this synod which exists for the sake of walking together in such a way that our collective capacity to proclaim your good news is magnified exponentially. Amen.

Pastor Emily Carson serves as Assistant to the Bishop/ELCA Director for Evangelical Mission (DEM), Cultivator of a Culture of Generosity and Care in the Southeastern Minnesota Synod, ELCA. She participated in the synod's Border Immersion Experience in January of 2019.

March 10

By Paul Ramig

A couple of weeks ago I was asked to read at church. One of the lessons was from 1 Corinthians, Chapter 12. The story of one body, but many parts. As I read the lesson that day, there were a couple of verses that made me stop and think:

But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

My immediate thoughts of course were of my own body. Whenever I bruise a foot or hand or my back working outside on the farm, the rest of my body does indeed seem to suffer along with whatever is hurting at the moment. But I realized that is not what Paul was writing about. He was talking about the body of Christ, of which we are all a part. I started thinking about the tornadoes that we experienced in December, specifically one of record that started in Arkansas, cut across the corner of Missouri, and took a lengthy path into Kentucky, pretty much wiping out one small town. I remember seeing people standing next to foundations swept clean by the tornado, lamenting that they had lost everything, but glad to be alive and ready to rebuild. I also thought about the wildfires in Colorado that burned over one thousand homes. Again I saw people standing next to foundations with only ashes remaining, lamenting that they too had lost everything, but were glad to have made it out alive and were ready to rebuild. I then thought of how people throughout our country had responded with drives to collect food and clothing, supplies and money, anything to help those people rebuild. “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it.” Here we were, sharing the suffering and ready to help in any way possible.

Then I thought about my trip to the U.S./Mexico borderlands two years ago. I realized that the people I met at the border were in the exact same boat as those who had experienced the tornadoes and the fires. Some from Honduras and Mexico who had lost everything in hurricanes. Some from Mexico, Colombia or El Salvador who fled cartels or civil war with nothing, leaving everything behind. They too had lost everything, but were still extremely happy to be alive and ready to rebuild. And I found myself struggling at that point: Why were we treating these people differently? We are supposed to all be part of one body of Christ. The people I met are all in the same boat as the victims of the tornadoes and fires. Why are we so reluctant to help them? Why are we slamming the door in their face?

I thought of the other part of that verse, “If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” I looked at our divided nation, where half the country seems to declare themselves winners, rejoicing at the expense of the other half they consider losers. I struggled to think of any example where we have rejoiced as a whole when any one part is honored. We seem more focused on rejoicing at the suffering we cause others, just so we can call ourselves winners. As we journey through this Lenten season and think about the Passion story, I remember someone’s words that Jesus Christ’s incarnation, death and resurrection wasn’t so much about changing God’s view of us. It was meant to change our view of God. I can’t help but think we have a very long way to go.

Please pray with me:

Lord, help us open our hearts and minds this Easter season to see that Christ’s incarnation, death and resurrection were meant to bring us to the realization that we are all members of one body, regardless of race, language, religion or whatever borders we live within, and that we cannot move forward in a true relationship with you unless we include all members of that body, from the lowest to the highest, to the great benefit you wish for all through the grace and glory of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Paul Ramig is a member of Vang Lutheran Church. Paul visited the U.S./México borderlands in January 2020.

March 11**By Rev. Mike Walerius**

What's Love Got to Do with It?

What's love got to do with it? This is the question that Tina Turner asked in her 1984 hit song that rang over the airways for many years, and still plays today. What's love got to do with it?

In this song, Ms. Turner is asking why we need love. I understand her question, because when we open ourselves, and our hearts, to another person, we expose ourselves to the possibility of being hurt. This seems to be the question the song asks. Why do we need a "second hand emotion", as the song says, to be part of our relationships with others? What does love have to do with how we act, or feel, or interact with others?

I understand wanting to protect ourselves from hurt, especially if we have been hurt in the past, but love is a gift from God - ordained by God and given to us to experience God here on earth. 1 John 4:16b says, "*God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them*". God is love. So, what's love got to do with it? Love has everything to do with everything. Love is God and God is love. And God lives in us through our love for one another.

Our world, right now, seems to agree with the song. Many people are living in fear of exposing themselves to hurt, so out of self-protection, they leave love out of interaction with others. We love people close to us, people similar to us, but others who are different than us, whether they are different race, gender, religious tradition, sexual orientation, or different political affiliation, loving them can be much more difficult.

However, when we choose to leave love out of our interactions with people that differ from us, we leave God out of those interactions. And without God there is no hope of solving our differences and resolving our problems.

So although the song was a hit, I want to change the title to, "What DOESN'T Love got to do with it?"

Please pray with me:

Holy God, you live in us through Love. Bless our hearts that we can freely love all who are put in our lives today. Help us see you in everyone we interact with and fill us with your love! Amen.

Pastor Mike Walerius serves at First Lutheran in Blooming Prairie. Pastor Mike also serves as the chairperson of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod Global Ministry Table. In March of 2017, he visited our ministry partners in the Central Diocese of Tanzania.

March 13

By Sue Benson

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

-Hebrews 13:2

Who is My Neighbor?

A couple years ago, when assuming refugee stories weren't happening in our small Lake City community, a local refugee crisis was brought to the attention of our church. An outpouring of love was the response from our congregation. We clothed, fed and housed them. We raised \$6000 in the community toward their legal fees. They now live as our neighbors.

The story of this family's journey left me feeling naive and restless. I have reflected on those feelings as God's way of saying "WAKE UP!! There are places here and now, right in front of your nose to share the love of Jesus!" What a wonderful experience it is proving to be! What I am learning is I DO indeed have refugee and immigrant neighbors. What I am also learning through friendships and growing in cultural awareness, is we all have hopes, dreams and God's love no matter how diverse the circumstances.

I love a quote by author Rachel Held Evans "The church is not a group of people who believe all the same things, the church is a group of people caught up in the same story, with Jesus at the center." Martin Luther King, Jr, in the 1960s said, "11:00 Sunday mornings is the most segregated hour of the week." We still have opportunities in our lives today to change that wherever we live. May it be so!!!

Please pray with me:

Dear Lord,

Open our eyes and ears to ways of being caught up in sharing stories and friendship with our neighbors with Jesus at the center.

May it be so!!

Amen

Sue Benson is a member of First Lutheran Church, Lake City.

March 14

By Ron Knutson

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' The lawyer answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.' And Jesus said to him, 'You have the right answer; do this, and you will live.' But wanting to justify himself, the lawyer asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on this own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

- Luke 10: 25-37

A friend of mine attended a synod assembly where a very spiritual event happened. It was lunch time, and my friend was seated at a table with other delegates and pastors. As they shared conversation, an individual approached the table and asked for some money to help get some food. There was an uncomfortable moment of silence. Then one of the pastors reached into her wallet and gave the man some money. No one else did, and nothing was said as the man walked away. After everyone finished their lunch, my friend returned to the assembly hall and thought about what had just happened. My friend wondered why he was here, at this assembly. Wondered why we all could not help a person looking for help. My friend felt ashamed.

As this person was deep in thought, a young girl came up and asked, 'Would you like to make a donation to feed the hungry?' A second chance to help. Only God would give a person a second chance! My friend quickly took money from his wallet and added to the donations in the basket. He found a reason to be at assembly. That day God came as a man who needed food. God came as a young girl looking for a donation to feed the hungry. That day my friend committed to help people who hunger. You never know when and how God will speak to you. Listen. See. The Spirit comes in many ways.

Please pray with me:

God of Love - Help us to hear and see the people in need. Give us the compassion to help. This is why we are here. Amen

Ron Knutson is a member of Zion Lutheran Church, Ellendale. Ron serves as chairperson of the SEMN Synod's Hunger Team.

March 15

By Ann Peterson

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called,² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling,⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism,⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

-Ephesians 4:1-6

The book of Ephesians is considered by many to be a circulating letter that was not written specifically for the people of Ephesus, but was distributed to several churches in Asia Minor. The Oxford Bible Commentary describes the opening verses of Chapter 4 as instructions to the early church on how Christians should understand their dependence on one another. The commentary refers to our daily conduct as “walking about with others”, and reminds us that all of life should be lived as an expression of our response to God’s call to live for him.

Over the past several years it has been a blessing to journey in faith with members of the South Sudanese Dinka community in Rochester, our brothers and sisters in Christ at Zumbro Lutheran Congregation. We have accompanied each other as together we live into our mission of building bridges of understanding and peace; reaching out with compassion; and sharing the hope of Jesus. Sometimes this path has been bumpy, with misunderstandings, hurt feelings and disappointments — the same challenges that families and neighbors and communities face every day. But this journey of faith has been different because we are walking together with a purpose, as an expression of God’s call to live together in love for God and for each other — “making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” With God’s help we strive to walk with humility, gentleness and patience, holding one another in love despite our differences. Only with God’s help will we be able to extend these same fruits of the Spirit to all those we encounter. Let it be so, Lord. Let it be so.

Please pray with me:

God of all, give us courage to travel together as your children, walking side by side on the same road and in the same direction toward unity in you. Remind us that we have one Master, one faith, one baptism, one God working through us all and present in each one of us. Bind us together in love for you and for one another. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Ann Peterson is a member of Zumbro Lutheran Congregation, Rochester. Ann serves as a member of the Global Ministry Table.

March 16

By Rev. Jay Dahlvang

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink.”

-John 7:37-38a

“The rain is a blessing—a gift from God,” our hosts said as we visited Lambi Secondary School in Tanzania for the first time. In the rainy season, our friends counted on the moisture for their crops to provide sustenance for the students, and to have the funds to buy goods from the marketplace. The last time we were there, early in 2020, the problem was too much rain, eroding fields and washing out roads.

Each time we have traveled to Tanzania, the churches are full, and the people pray with urgency and intensity. In a place where potable water is precious and valued, and where the amount of rain makes a significant difference in the well-being of the people, we saw what it means to count on Jesus to provide living water—the Tanzanians’ faith gives us faith.

Isaiah the prophet said, “If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.”

Please pray with me:

Lord Jesus, give us living water, so that your Spirit might become in us a spring, bubbling up to eternal life. Amen

Pastor Jay Dahlvang serves at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Mankato. Pastor Jay has served on the Global Ministry Table and has led congregational visits to the Central Diocese of Tanzania.

March 17**By Kris Kincaid**

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.

-Genesis 1:26-27

Immigration has long been a political issue in the United States. Since our nation's beginning, laws have regulated what people are allowed to enter the country. Scripture directs us to view immigrants not as a political plus or minus, but as God's vulnerable people seeking shelter and sustenance. Through the ELCA AMMPARO ministry, we are called to boldly love and serve our neighbor. It reminds us we are all made in God's image.

The AMMPARO ministry supports unaccompanied children and families fleeing the Central American countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. What causes them to flee and undertake a dangerous journey to the United States? These are three of the most violent countries in the hemisphere, with gangs, impunity and corruption, lack of opportunities and environmental degradation forcing people to flee. The AMMPARO ministry calls us to learn why Central Americans are seeking asylum in the United States, to view immigrants as people who have endured trauma and need our help to heal and empower them as they to create a new life among us.

Heather McGhee in *The Sum of Us* illustrates ways zero-sum thinking, the belief that one group's gains result in another group's losses, is common in the United States. Studies show the opposite is true. Throughout rural America, low-paid farm and food processing work draws immigrants to a community. In time, these immigrants start businesses, gain an education, and participate in civic life, just as immigrants throughout the history of our country have done.

Jesus Christ came to us and made himself vulnerable so that we might live in God's grace. Jesus taught us that when we serve the most vulnerable, we serve God. I pray we might make ourselves vulnerable so others will know God's love and grace through us.

Kris Hertsgaard Kincaid currently serves as the Kenyon area intern pastor.

March 18

By Rev. Matt Larson

[The voice of the Lord] makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox.
-Psalm 29:6

Not long ago, a guest looking out my kitchen window asked, “Are those otters?!?”

I looked at what he was pointing towards, and sure enough - those were indeed otters that he was seeing. These two otters were having a blast sliding down the snowy bank, scooting on their bellies over the ice, launching themselves off the ice into the water. If you’ve ever seen wild otters at play, you know what a delight they are to watch. Not many species play just for the sake of play; the ones like otters that do are an absolute joy to behold.

My immediate reaction was to go fetch my daughter. She loves animals, and was giddy to have the chance to watch these otters. My next impulse, however, gave me pause. My mind immediately went to whether or not I could record these two jubilant goofballs. Would my phone have enough resolution? Should I go get my big camera? Which lens should I use? Do I need a tripod? Video or still pics? What am I going to do with either?

Photography is a great hobby. Capturing special moments through any kind of lens is a fine thing indeed. Taken too far, though, the impulse to capture, manipulate, and make use of the images captured can become a real impediment to experiencing the things you so urgently try to capture. I had this flash of clarity while watching these otters: you don’t need to capture this, you don’t need to share it for likes on social media, you need to be present to the moment and experience the delightful gift of this moment without the distraction of any mediating technology. So that’s what I did. It was delightful, and I’m glad I did it.

Lent is a season when we strip away the lenses and filters with which we regard ourselves and the world around us. It’s a time when we set aside the things which we are wont to hold up between us and the God whom we are to love, and the neighbor whom we are to serve. Rather than distracting ourselves by collecting and manipulating artificial (perhaps even idolatrous) images, we are invited to honestly and lovingly reassess our connection to God and to our neighbors.

How have you been distracted lately? What delight might you find if you set that distraction aside? Staying in the moment, what might you notice that you often miss?

Peace to you in Christ.

Please pray with me:

During this season, help us to strip away the lenses and filters that prevent us from being wholly connected with you. Help us to set aside the things that distract us from loving all people as we love ourselves. Amen.

Pastor Matt Larson serves as an Assistant to the Bishop for Candidacy, Leadership, and Congregation Care.

March 20

By Rev. Emmanuel Kaghondi

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

-Romans 12:3-8

There is a well-known parable of **The Blind Men and the Elephant**. It goes like this:

Five blind men had heard of an elephant but had never seen it (being blind). Then, one day, there was an elephant in their village, and they all went to ‘see’ it.

They got there joyfully.

The first man happened to come across the elephant’s trunk and shouted, “Oh my goodness, why did people used to say the elephant was a big beast? The elephant is just like a pipe!”

The second one who had been holding the elephant’s side, by listening to his friend shouted, “Oh for goodness’ sake! The elephant is like a wall - how blind you are!”

The third one who had been holding the tail wondered, “What are you all talking about? How can the elephant be like a pipe or a wall?! The elephant is like a snake.”

“A snake?!” marveled the fourth man. “Have you lost your mind? What kind of an elephant is that? The elephant is like a huge leaf!”

The fifth, who has been examining the elephant’s legs, was shaking his head. He finally said, “I did not realize that you all were more blind than me. I am here, holding the elephant. I have touched it and went around it. I can assure you, the elephant is like a tree’s trunk. I used to think it was like a big rock!”

After the elephant left, the five men were left to quarrel among themselves. Each person believed their understanding of the “elephant” was right.

Thinking about this proverb, these individuals were neither right nor wrong. Their experiences were “real” but not “complete.” Each of us live our own personal “reality.” That reality is our perspective; it is a partial story of our experience. Reality is not something that is stable, measurable, or out there to be observed. Reality is experienced and constructed, and each individual constructs their reality from their experience.

We often think of our “reality” as monolithic, universal, rigid, or a form of a complete “truth.” By doing so, we tend to ignore others, to not listen to others. And even when we pretend to listen, we

often confuse listening with being quiet. People often stay quiet to ignore other people's realities. Listening to others begins by acknowledging that 'reality', just like the elephant, is never rigid. Rather it is capable of taking many shapes and meanings depending on our position. Instead of validating another person's story, we often believe that ours is just a single story - emerging in a singular form of experience.

A story, however, does not have a singularity in it: it is complex and polymorphic. Each story requires another story to be complete. We are called to open our minds and listen to each story in order to transform our lived experience into wider knowledge. As a global church, we recognize the fact that we need each other, and proclaim that every individual story/reality is valid for our understanding of God.

Please pray with me:

God of all nations, help us to reach the fulfilment of your knowledge by opening our hearts and minds to learn from one another. Teach us to humbly listen to each other and embrace our differences and vulnerabilities. Amen!

Pastor Emmanuel Kaghondi is a rostered leader of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central Diocese of Tanzania (ELCT-CD). Pastor Emmanuel worships at Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Owatonna and serves as Director of Ministry with Youth and Families at St. John's Lutheran Church, Northfield. Pastor Emmanuel serves on the synod's Global Ministry Table and Tanzania Accompaniment Team.

March 21

By Helga Hammerschmidt (aka: Barb Streed)

About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." ¹⁴ But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

-Acts 10:9-16

To say, 'I love sauerkraut,' would be an understatement. I REALLY LOVE sauerkraut. My first encounter of this magnificent food was at the dining room table of Grandma Hammerschmidt. Potato dumplings, pork hocks, and homemade sauerkraut from the cabbage that grew in Grandma's garden and was perfectly fermented, just the words make my mouth water. When my grandma would make her sauerkraut, neighbors would come from every side, peek their heads (and noses) into the dining room and ask, 'Got room for one more?' Living in a German community, when Grandma would cook up her 'famous' sauerkraut, the fragrance would waft out of every crack in her house and spread throughout the neighborhood; folks would unabashedly show up with eager anticipation.

My parents both grew up in that German community and my dad learned cabbage growing, cabbage fermenting, and sauerkraut making from the best. When my parents moved and began their own home where they would raise their family, my dad took the family tradition of sauerkraut with him excited to share it with the new community. My parents made their home in a small town with neighbors named Johnson and Olson and Jenson and Engebretson. One of my dad's good friends once told him, 'Al, when you cook up that ungodly crap, it smells so bad I can't even walk through your front door without wanting to vomit,' (true story). Even so, Dad never stopped making his sauerkraut.

I'm so thankful my dad didn't give up on our family's cultural traditions because I'm the better for them.

Dr. Eric Barreto, one of my Luther Seminary professors and who now teaches at Princeton Theological Seminary, wrote of Acts 10:9-16, 'The communities God wishes to draw together are wildly diverse and widely inclusive. Gentiles and Greeks are welcome to join this community without leaving behind their cultural particularities just as Jews/Judeans are welcomed in the same way. God welcomes the peoples and nations of the world in the midst of, not despite their ethnic particularities. In essence, God is not composing a generic people devoid of cultural particularity but a community teeming with difference.'

To that I say, Lobe Gott!

May your Lenten journey be one of tradition and openness. In Jesus name. Amen.

And remember, what God has made clean, you must not call profane. So, PASS THE SAUERKRAUT!

March 22

By D.J. Chatelaine

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit...24b But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it..."

-1 Corinthians 12:12-31

In January 2019, I joined the AMMPARO ministry team's first visit to the U.S./Mexico borderland of El Paso, Texas and Las Cruces, New Mexico. On this visit, we accompanied migrant families, namely single parents and their children, as they prepared to travel to live with their respective sponsor family someplace in the U.S. This was the next step amidst a long and arduous journey to a new life. Our team's role centered on learning and listening first, then acting. During the first half of the week, we became acclimated to the borderland area—the people, culture, food, and history. We learned about U.S. immigration policy and its inconsistencies over the past century. We witnessed a federal court proceeding in which immigrants' fates were determined by a judge who heard their cases, one after the next. We reached through the towering and fortified fence that separates rural El Paso from the Mexican Colonia of Anapra. We heard stories from those who had risked everything to immigrate to the United States in search of a better life for their children. And, we communicated with broken Spanish, gestures, and expressions with those who had a brief sojourn at the Border Servant Corps overnight facilities.

Visiting the U.S./Mexico borderland and accompanying these migrants made tangible Paul's words to the church in Corinth: we are all members of the body of Christ, and we are to "have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it." Even more impactful is the assertion that God gives greater honor to the members of the body we would otherwise deem inferior – in the case of America, this is the immigrant, the refugee, the poor. What if we reoriented ourselves to these words (see also the Beatitudes) and lived in a way that honored those society casts down? How does this change the way we love our neighbor, near and far?

Please pray with me:

Gracious God, thank you for blessing the least among us. We praise you for every member of Christ's body, and we ask that you give us the courage to treat everyone we encounter on a daily basis with the understanding that they are beloved children, created in your image. In your name we pray, Amen.

D.J. Chatelaine serves as Director of Children and Youth Ministry at First English Lutheran Church, Faribault. D.J. is a member of the Global Ministry Table, co-chairperson of the synod's AMMPARO Team, and has participated in the synod's Border Immersion Experience. D.J. is in his second year of study at Luther Seminary.

March 23

By Mark Masbruch

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.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

-Matthew 22:37-40 NIV

Why am I here? Who am I? What is my value? If we step away from the busy world for a bit, these are life defining questions that we are all seeking answers to throughout our lives. How we live our lives and how we spend our time and resources can show us where we are looking to answer those questions. In our culture, we often define ourselves by our work, our title, what we have, or by how others perceive us.

I have been blessed in my life, through our ministry at Mt Olive and the ELCA SEMN Synod, to partner with our brothers and sisters in central Tanzania. Over the past fifteen years I've been part of three teams who traveled to schools in the Central Diocese of Tanzania to provide support for technology and education. These visits have helped lead me toward answers to my life-defining questions. Imagine how very eye opening it was for me - a Type A task-oriented person - to find answers from my Tanzanian siblings in Christ!

The first thing I observed when riding from Kilimanjaro Airport to our hotel was the large number of people walking hand in hand along the side of the road. And a few days later, I found myself hand in hand with the headmaster of the school at Ihanja as he walked with me to tell me about the people at his school. These friends know how to be in relationship! I especially noticed the importance of relationship in every one of the meetings and gatherings we attended. I have spent a career learning how to run a meeting: identify the purpose, set an agenda, stay on task, end the meeting promptly on time. Meetings in Tanzania are quite different. You get a clear sense that relationships are of primary importance, and the task at hand is secondary. The first half of every meeting is spent in introductions, for them to know us and for us to know them. And sure, they smiled when we told them about our technology credentials, but their real interest was more in who we are and how we are in relationship, rather than what we do or what we know.

I am still seeking and searching for answers to my life-defining questions. But as I step back and look at the picture that scripture paints for us, it becomes clear to me that my friends in Tanzania have a good handle on what is important. Our Father in heaven adopted us as his children. Just as God wants to be in relationship with us, God wants us to be in relationship with each other.

Please pray with me:

I thank you, Father, for guiding us in seeking you, and for creating the amazing relationship we have with you through your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mark Masbruch is a member of Mount Olive Lutheran Church, Rochester. Mark serves on the SEMN Synod's Tanzania Accompaniment Team and has participated in congregational visits to the Central Diocese of Tanzania.

March 24**By Rev. Jeff Franko**

A lawyer once asked Jesus what the legal requirements were for inheriting eternal life. Never mind that an inheritance is never earned but a generous gift, Jesus decides to play the lawyer's little game. Jesus asks, "What is written in the Torah, the Books of the Law?" And the lawyer knew the Torah well and didn't hesitate to answer, "Love God with everything that is in you and love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus applauds him for his answer. But the lawyer isn't satisfied, he wants to know who his neighbor is. And it is at this point that Jesus launches into what we call the parable of the Good Samaritan.

And I have a feeling that after the story was told, the lawyer wasn't happy with Jesus' ending. He wasn't happy that it is a Samaritan, a hated outsider, who proves to be the neighbor to a victim left to die by the side of the road. (Luke 10:25-37)

This past year in Winona, various groups with a common vision have sprung up to sponsor refugees and asylum seekers. Among them are "church" people, "mosque" people, and people with no particular interest in religion at all. Depending on your perspective, we all look like "outsiders" to each other. But what brings us together are the victims of war, violence, corruption, and injustice in the world; victims we look upon as our neighbors.

This past year we have welcomed seven people from Honduras, one person from Colombia, and twelve people from Afghanistan. And, among other things, this is what we are learning. We are learning that they bring as much healing to our community as we bring to the rebuilding of their lives. Some would say this is what "accompaniment" looks like.

Please pray with me:

*Open our eyes, O Holy One, to see those who are easy to pass by with the compassion of neighborly love and give us the determination to walk with them as one in this broken and hurting world.
Amen.*

Pastor Jeff Franko serves at Cedar Valley Lutheran Church, Winona, and is part of the Winona Immigration Network (WIN), a team from Winona's ELCA congregations welcoming people seeking refuge and safety.

March 25

By Susan Richardson

***The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
-John 1:5***

The image of light in scripture ebbs and flows. The light of Epiphany dims a bit as we now approach the season of Lent. Lent can be a dark time of repentance and contemplation, but its name reflects the “lengthening” of days as the light of spring and the promise of Easter begin to emerge.

Light in these pandemic years has often been feeble and flickering, but there have been moments of illumination. Last year, light arrived in the form of a poised and articulate young woman named Amanda Gorman, whose sparkling eyes, beautifully glowing brown skin, and brilliant yellow coat shone like a beacon as she delivered her poem, “The Hill We Climb”, at the presidential inauguration. She mesmerized a nation that was hungry for hope. Her words do not gloss over the mistakes in our past, nor the challenges of our present, but they lead us on to that hopeful light which we so desperately seek for our diverse nation. She ended her poem with these words:

“We will rebuild, reconcile and recover.
And every known nook of our nation and
every corner called our country,
our people diverse and beautiful will emerge,
battered and beautiful.
When day comes we step out of the shade,
aflame and unafraid,
the new dawn blooms as we free it.
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it.
If only we're brave enough to be it.”

May we all be brave enough to be the light, in this season of Lent and beyond.

Please pray with me:

Dear Lord, we thank you for the promise of your light as we walk slowly, carefully, but earnestly and diligently, towards the days that will shine with your grace. Amen.

Susan Richardson serves on the board of Hispanic Outreach of Goodhue County, a ministry partner of the SEMN Synod. Susan is a member of United Lutheran Church, Red Wing.

March 27**By Marcia Pedersen**

But whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be servant of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.

-Mark 10:43b-45

Remembering one of the first times I preached in my home congregation, the text was Mark 10:35-45. As a seminarian in a Biblical Preaching course, this was a great opportunity to preach - and fulfill a course requirement!

I read and researched, wrote and polished, carefully following the sermon preparation outlined by the professor (a solid outline that I appreciated then and now). I stepped into the pulpit, preached my sermon, and then afterward received thanks, affirmation and appreciation.

Congregational preaching commitments at that time included occasional Sunday afternoon leadership for an Anyuak (South Sudanese) community worship service. Being aware of this shift in context, I carefully adapted my morning sermon for a different audience, trying to find a common point of connection. Aware of potential barriers and possible roadblocks – including language! - I was feeling out of my element, and my nerves were getting the best of me.

But there was Olayi, an Anyuak leader who selflessly offered to translate...AND contextualize. We stood together: I spoke, he interpreted. He shared his gifts so that we could stumble through my sermon – together. Without him, I'm certain the sermon would've failed miserably. Hearing the community's laughter and seeing their smiles eased my tension. The best feedback though was the head nod and a slight smile from one of the elder women, after which I breathed an audible sigh of relief.

Moments later this elder and I would stand side by side, sharing bread and wine, me using my language and she using hers. In the sacredness of shared serving, I felt the words of my sermon take new life. This welcome into the sacred space of others filled me with what I imagine to be the fullness of God's Kingdom in our own community. NOT by leading or my awkward preaching, but through sharing the Eucharist. Together becoming the servant of all.

Please pray with me:

God, we give you thanks for your sacred spaces that become holy teaching moments. Remind us that by serving together with others, we embody the fullness of the Gospel all around us. Amen.

Marcia Pedersen serves as Bridge Pastor at Cross of Glory and West Freeborn Lutheran Churches in Hartland, Minnesota.

March 28

By Rev. Hannah Bergstrom de Leon

*⁵Thus says the Lord:
Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals
and make mere flesh their strength,
whose hearts turn away from the Lord.*

*⁶They shall be like a shrub in the desert,
and shall not see when relief comes.
They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land.*

*⁷Blessed are those who trust in the Lord,
whose trust is the Lord.*

*⁸They shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.
It shall not fear when heat comes,
and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious,
and it does not cease to bear fruit.*

-Jeremiah 17:5-8

It is always a good time to evaluate the health of our spirit, be it individual, communal or universal, but with a disconcerting road continuing before us, this Lent offers each of us time and structure to pause and take stock of our own and collective spirit. So...

Pause.

Take a couple deep breaths.

Consider the images of Jeremiah:

A shrub in the desert,

A tree planted by water.

Read Jeremiah 17:5-8 out loud.

Close your eyes.

Rest in your imagination.

Take a couple more deep breaths.

Pause.

In this scripture, we are provided two ends of a spiritual spectrum. Consider where do you, your community, and world land? Does your spirit reflect a dried up bush untethered and blown about by the slightest wind, or do you resonate more closely to a deeply rooted tree, weathering the storm? We travel this continuum all our life and we will live through every seasons, from desert to oasis, but for today...consider the health of your spirit.

In reflection remember, turn towards God; God of the fruiting tree and God of the wilting bush. Trust in the Lord and hold to the first commandment: **You shall have no other gods**, and Luther's

description: *What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.* In turning toward God, in holding fast to the first commandment, our roots, whether from a dried up bush or a flowering tree, will stretch to the river. The river of God's love, promises, and forgiveness. And when we touch that river, may we drink deep this water which sustains us and may we bear the fruit we cannot help but share. Amen.

Pastor Hannah Bergstrom de Leon serves at Minneola Lutheran Church, Goodhue. Pastor Hannah facilitates gatherings of the synod's AMMPARO Congregational Network.

March 29

By Ben Geer

And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

-Matthew 14:20-21

Since the start of the pandemic, the Holy Spirit has been guiding Grace in Mankato into new ventures, and we have been listening. While ministry during this time has been very difficult, we have continued to look for ways to expand. One big way we have been doing this is through feeding ministries. A lot of this new ministry has been made possible through a partnership with the South Central Minnesota Food Recovery (SCMNFR). SMCNFR is a newly formed non-profit in Mankato that collects abundant food such as fresh produce and lean protein and helps get the food distributed to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) and low-income families in South Central Minnesota. Through work being done at Grace we have been able to take many of those ingredients and make them into nutritious meals. In 2021, the people of Grace prepared and distributed over 1500 meals using recovered ingredients from SMCNFR.

When I look at the scripture in Matthew of the feeding of the 5000, I notice a couple of things:

1. When Jesus saw the great crowd, he had compassion.
2. All ate and were filled. There was enough.

The USDA website reports that between 30-40% of food in the United States is wasted each year. In 2010, that was 133 billion pounds of food worth approximately 161 billion dollars! I believe there is enough food for all people. World Hunger does not have to be solved by a miracle or the production of more food. Hunger in our communities is a problem of distribution: taking what is already out there and finding a way to get it to the people that need it. There is an abundance of food in the world. When we show compassion to those struggling with food insecurities by giving in abundance, we can help create abundance for others.

Please pray with me:

Dear God. You are a provider of our needs and you show compassion to us. Help us show compassion to others so that what we do for others can honor what you have already done for us. Amen

Ben Geer serves as Director of Spiritual Growth at Grace Lutheran Church, Mankato. Ben is a member of the SEMN Synod's Hunger Team. Ben recently participated in the synod's Border Immersion Experience. In addition to managing Grace's ELCA World Hunger Grant, Ben is a member of WELCOME, a team from Mankato's ELCA congregations welcoming people seeking refuge and safety.

March 30

By Rev. Nick Fisher-Broin

***Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness,
you that seek the LORD.***

***Look to the rock from which you were hewn,
and to the quarry from which you were dug.
Look to Abraham your father
and to Sarah who bore you;
for he was but one when I called him,
but I blessed him and made him many.***

-Isaiah 51:1-3

I recently read this Isaiah text and it brought me right back to Tanzania. Let me explain:

On a 2004 synod youth trip, before traveling to the Central Diocese, our group went on safari in the Serengeti. As we drove mile after mile on rutted roads, marveling at the wonders before us, I saw a sign with an arrow pointing to the right: *Olduvai Gorge*. I whispered under my breath, “Next time, I want to go there.” I love human anthropology and paleontology, and this site is one of the earliest sites where human bipedal walking is found in footprints fossilized in rock. It’s an extraordinary site! That night the driver called me over—he had heard my whisper. “We can stop there tomorrow,” he said.

I have experienced the extraordinary feeling in Africa and Tanzania that we are brothers and sisters in faith, children of Abraham and Sarah. Jesus is our brother and the root of the faith we share as we learn to accompany one another to live God’s purposes in the world. We are one family - and have been from the beginning of time! But anthropology also teaches us in the fossil and DNA record that East Africa was the cradle of humanity - our literal footprints in the rock tell us so. We belong to one another as brothers and sisters. Christ has made true in flesh and blood and baptismal waters what was also true in the rock from which we were hewn. Have a blessed Lent.

Please pray with me:

Lord God, as you created the human family out of the dust of the earth, so too, you redeem us through the precious blood of Christ. Bond your human family through the gift of his love, a love that bridges all time, and all place. Amén

Pastor Nick Fisher-Broin is now retired, but formerly served at Spring Garden, Cannon Falls. Pastor Nick is a member of the Global Ministry Table, serving as chairperson of the Tanzania Accompaniment Team. He co-lead the synod's 2019 *Imba Sifa-Sing Praise* intergenerational visit to the Central Diocese of Tanzania.

March 31

By Brian McDonald

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.” Then the righteous will answer him, saying, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?” And the King will answer them, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.

-Matthew 25: 35-40

In January 2020, I had the opportunity to participate in a Border Immersion Visit hosted by Border Servant Corps of Peace Lutheran Church, Las Cruces, New Mexico, as part of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod's AMMPARO ministry. The most memorable experience for me was the trip we made across the border into Mexico to see “The Wall” from the other side at the village of Colonia Anapra, just west of Juarez. There we met with women and children refugees from Central America at a facility sponsored by a U.S. charity. They were awaiting their day in U.S. Court for a ruling on their request for asylum. Their “sanctuary” was a single story, windowless, cinder block complex, surrounded by metal fences topped with concertina wire. There was a small dirt enclosure within the perimeter where the children played.

While the women were telling their stories to our group, a young boy wandered in from the play area. It was readily apparent that he had the features of dwarfism. We made silly faces at each other and seemed to connect. After the presentations, I strolled out into the courtyard where he and two other children were playing. In my limited Spanish I announced to them that I was the notorious “El Bandito Verde” and challenged them to engage me in a duel with pretend swords. The challenge was immediately answered, and they quickly converged on me! I called them “Los Ninos Peligrosos”, the “Dangerous Children”, and they laughed at that.

After a spirited duel, I sank to my knees begging for mercy. They howled with delight and circled around me, celebrating their victory. Hearing the commotion, a young girl wandered out to watch us. She didn’t speak. She just stared at me. I offered her the green bandana that I was wearing so she could be “El Bandito Verde”, and she snatched it up with a big smile. We bid farewell shortly thereafter with the little girl still clutching the green bandana.

I pray for those women and children daily. We were told that their chances for asylum were slim and most likely would be denied. After that, they will have to leave the safe house and somehow make their way back to the countries that they had fled. I wonder about the little boy with dwarfism. Imagine the challenges he would face if he was growing up in this country, subject to ridicule and prejudice because of his stature. Now, imagine his future in an impoverished, Third World country. I fear that his future is bleak.

I believe that Christ had women and children such as these in mind when he spoke to the Apostles in the verses above. Aiding those in need should be something that transcends borders and politics. In this Lenten season I hope to reflect upon how I can better embrace the calling to serve those who are less fortunate.

Please pray with me:

Heavenly Father, we earnestly pray that we may be instruments of thy will in our calling to befriend those in need. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we shall strive to do justice, love mercy, and walk with those who cry out for help. We ask thy blessing upon all those who seek a better life within our borders. May we be worthy brothers and sisters in Christ to the downtrodden and the vulnerable. Amen

Brian McDonald is a member of First English Lutheran Church, Cannon Falls. Brian serves on the Southeastern Minnesota Synod's AMMPARO Team. Brian visited the U.S./Mexico borderlands in January 2020.

April 1

By Rev. Dr. Glenn Monson

For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.

-2 Corinthians 2:15-16a

Aromas are powerful and memorable. Once, years after our relationship had ended, I suddenly got a whiff of my high school sweetheart's perfume from a woman who walked by me, and I was immediately transported to my high school days of dating. Aromas also have the ability to warn us of things. Think of the rotten eggs' smell that is put into natural gas so that if there's a gas leak in your house you will be alerted. Aromas can operate in so many different ways. St. Paul said that *we*, the followers of Jesus, are the aroma of Jesus. That sounds pretty good until we learn the mysterious thing about this Jesus smell. To some people it smells sweet, like the aroma of an old girlfriend's perfume, and to others it smells like rotten eggs. In other words, the same words, the same witness, the same walk with Jesus, will draw some people towards God, while repelling others. In thinking about my pre-pandemic trips to both Colombia and Tanzania, I remember only the sweet smell of the witness I encountered there. In Tanzania, the enthusiasm for evangelism was so sweet. In Colombia, the resiliency in the face of challenges to ministry was equally sweet. We pray that the aroma of Christ will continue to go forth.

Please pray with me:

Gracious God of all, give us courage in our witness. Help us to go forth boldly into the world, knowing that to some we are a fragrance from death to death, and to others a fragrance from life to life. Bless our companions in ministry as they too boldly proclaim your good news. Keep us all in your grace and peace. In the Name of Christ, we pray. AMEN.

Rev. Dr. Glenn Monson serves at Mount Olive Lutheran Church, Rochester. Pastor Glenn is a member of the Colombia Accompaniment Team and has visited congregational partners in both Colombia and the Central Diocese of Tanzania.

April 3

By Rev. Paul Graham

*"And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice,
love mercy, and walk humbly with God?"*

-Micah 6:8

A Migrant's Journey

Recently, the Spirit moved as confirmation families from four churches took a journey together. We remembered Moses, Abraham, Ruth and Naomi, and Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, who all left their homes to live in another country. We learned about people who have to leave their homes today due to danger or natural disaster. And then we asked, what might that experience be like? What if we had to leave our homes and travel to another country and a different culture? Through interactive learning, we tried to walk in the shoes of unaccompanied minors from Central America who, due to threats of physical harm or threats to their lives, have had to leave their homes and families. In addition to learning new information, and it was also a powerful exercise in empathy. Thanks to Assistant to the Bishop Kathy Chatelaine for leading this learning experience.

Please pray with me:

God of the journey, be with those who have had to leave their homes due to danger or natural disaster. May they find protection, safety, and compassion. And we ask that you be with us on our journey. Lead us out of our comfort zones, and help us to see you in the world and in the people around us as we seek to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with you. Amen.

Pastor Paul Graham serves at Vang and Dennison Lutheran Churches. Pastor Paul visited the U.S./México borderlands in January 2020.

April 4

By Steve Garness-Holmes

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;
and there are varieties of services, but the same Conductor;
and there are varieties of activities,
but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.
-I Corinthians 12:4-6*

One Body

We think we are separate individuals
but we are one organism,
separate fingers of the same hand,
like aspen trees in a grove,
one tree with many trunks.

But we are not the same.
We are all different instruments
in the one divine orchestra.

Seek the wisdom to delight in both
our differences and our unity.
Seek the grace to both listen and sing.

Steve Garness-Holmes
Unfolding Light
www.unfoldinglight.net

April 5

By Rev. John Weisenburger

From Every People

“You brought in human beings for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”
-Revelation 5:9

I believe this is the greatest dream of God for our planet. It is clearest here in Revelation and Isaiah chapter 2. All peoples and languages and nations standing together as one. We know we are not there yet.

It is not hard to see the places where this dream is not yet realized. We see global conflicts. We hear the people of our country wrestle with what this vision means for our nation. We know the difficulty of a church that struggles with diversity. In the face of all of this, I pray that God would refresh this vision for God’s people. May the church hear the call to make this a reality. In this season of Lent, we do well to raise our sight to this amazing vision. May it be a guide for us to seek the place where the dream is breaking through into our ‘real’ world.

I am so very thankful for the partners we walk with in Colombia, Tanzania and South Sudan. Together we see that we are the living symbols of God’s vision. Let us all see that we have the seeds of this dream right in our backyard. In our Synod we have Nuer, Dinka and Anyuak communities. Emmanuel Kaghondi and Deborah Lyanga from Tanzania work in ministry with churches of the Southeastern MN Synod. Spanish is spoken in every agricultural town in Minnesota. May we move forward into relationships that reflect this beautiful dream of God. May we reach out each day with a hand extended to neighbors who can make this vision a reality. May you hear the words of thanks spoken by all God’s people.

“Ci lœdä teeth”(shaloida teth) in Nuer, “asante” in Swahili and “gracias” in Spanish. Thank you, Lord!

Please pray with me:

God of Love – Fill us with your love so that we can reach out in relationship to all neighbors so your vision of ‘all peoples and languages and nations standing together as one’ becomes reality within our backyard. Thank you, Lord! Amen

Pastor John Weisenburger serves at St. John’s Lutheran Church, Kasson. Pastor John is a member of the Synod Council.

April 6

By Kathy Chatelaine

One day, Jesus told his followers about God's dream of a world where all the children of God are loved and cared for, and no one is left out.

Blessed are you who are poor, for all God's world is yours.

Blessed are you who are hungry, for God will feed you.

Blessed are you who are sad, for God will comfort you and you will laugh again.

Blessed are you who feed the poor, for you are the hands of God.

Blessed are you who comfort the sad, for you are the arms of God.

Blessed are you who work for peace, for you are the voice of God.

Blessed are you who are loving and kind, for you are the heart of God.

You are the light of the world. Shine! Let the world see your goodness and therefore give glory to your Father in heaven.

-Luke 6 (translated by Archbishop Desmond Tutu: 'God's dream for his children,' found in Children of God Storybook Bible)

What is one thing you can do during this Lenten season to partner with God to make God's dream a reality?

Please pray with me:

Light of the World – Give me the lens to embrace all people as your children so that the world will see your goodness. Empower us to love and care for all of God's children through our actions and in our prayers so that God is glorified. Amen.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu served as the Archbishop of Cape Town (Anglican Church of South Africa) from 1986-1996. Archbishop Tutu was a powerful voice of nonviolence within South Africa's anti-apartheid movement for which he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984. In the 1990s, Tutu served as chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and was widely regarded as the 'moral conscience' of a nation.

April 7

By Kathy Chatelaine

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.
-Hebrews 12: 1-2

My suburban Twin Cities high school graduating class consisted of 805 students. As our nationally known music program went year-round (Concert, Marching, and Pep Band), including summers, there was no room in my day to participate in a sport. So, in January of my sophomore year of college, when a friend who lived across the hall wagered that I could not last six weeks on the college's division 3 track team, my competitive spirit kicked in – and the bet was on! Always up for a challenge, I diligently trained for my first meet over the next five and a half weeks. In addition to the unique smell of a field house, I will never forget the daily treatment for shin splints: submerging my legs in a vat of ice water. Finally, meet day arrived. In my heat of the 300-meter run, I placed second! With increased confidence, I looked forward to completing the entire season. The following practice, six weeks to the day into the wager, intense pain shot up from my right foot while rounding a tight corner. Hobbling to the trainer's office, I eventually found out that a stress fracture in my foot caused the pain. I completed the remainder of the season on crutches, cheering my teammates on during every practice and at every meet.

Over the past two years, four people who made a significant impact in ministry within their local and global communities have died: Pastor Craig Breimhorst, Pastor Fred Rengstorf, Pastor Al Girtz, and Dr. Mark Jacobson, ELCA missionary. With their spouses and communities, these leaders created a way where there was no way: in education for girls, in compassionate community-based health care for all people, and in faithful response to Jesus' command to 'Love God. Love all people.' Each of these humble leaders impacted my – and so many other leaders' – ministry in remarkable ways. I profoundly miss each of them.

However, their ministry continues – through you, me, and our beloved siblings throughout Christ's global congregation. For we are on a team – God's Team! - called to use our gifts in service to God's vision – a vision of welcome, grace, and love for all people, including marginalized communities in the Southeastern Minnesota Synod. Are you ready to pick up their race? Do you hear them cheering us on?

And, as for the wager: As the stress fracture occurred six weeks to the day, I won! What was my prize? Well, a soft-serve ice cream cone, of course.

Please pray with me:

God of Love – Thank you for inviting me to run on your team! Thank you for our siblings in Christ that have gone before us and continue to inspire us to be your faithful servants as we joyfully and steadfastly respond to your command to 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind,' and to 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' We love you, Lord! Amen

Kathy Chatelaine serves as Assistant to the Bishop for Global Ministry.

April 8

A Sending

God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.

-Micah 6:8

A Sending Into Your Day

As we begin this day, in walking with all God's children that we encounter, let us commit ourselves to partner in God's life-giving work.

We commit ourselves to follow God's call to do justice: to give up our personal power and privilege in seeking the empowerment of all people.

We commit ourselves to follow God's call to love kindness: to deeply listen to the stories of all people we encounter - as they share their stories through words, expressions and actions - so that we may truly hear.

We commit ourselves to follow God's call to walk humbly with our God: to embrace the Holy Spirit as she flows through our lives so that everything we say, do, and think shines the light and love of Jesus - in our homes, communities, congregations, and world.

Receive this Blessing:

*May God go above you to bless you,
May God go before you to guide you,
May God go behind you to protect you,
May God go beneath you to support you,
May God go beside you to befriend you,
May you be filled with peace, for God is with you!
Amen.*