

# *Blessed Trinity Lutheran Church\**

DAILY MEDITATIONS - April, 2023

April 1, 2023

**Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.**

Acts 2:36

Jerusalem—the city toward which Jesus had set his face long ago, and toward which he now walked—is set on Mount Moriah, surrounded by the ancient Land of Moriah. Today, Jerusalem is home to the three Abrahamic (dating to Abraham) faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The earliest Biblical mention of Moriah is in Genesis. That would mean that the land was known by that name at least 3,300 - 3,400 years ago. Various people, in various languages, had their own versions of the name for that land. For the Hebrews, it was Moriah. Long ago, I read a description of how that name was created. The first part of the name is the Hebrew word ra'ah, meaning to be seen, to be visible, even to be revealed. The second root word is Yah, “meaning the name of God. Combined, the words mean ‘the “seen” of God, the “visible” of God, the “revealed of God’. That’s a natural name for an area in which the ancient Israelites, including Abraham, lived. But more than 1,000 years after Abraham’s time, perhaps the name fulfilled its meaning, fulfilled a prophecy: God made visible, God made discernable, God revealed. What happened after Jesus arrived in Jerusalem – his praise-filled welcome, his last meal with his disciples, his arrest, his crucifixion death, and his resurrection – did nothing less than reveal God: God with us, God visible, God made real. God revealed. Moriah.

April 2, 2023 – Palm Sunday

**The next day, the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the king of Israel!”**

John 12: 12-13

Palm Sunday-- the day when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, with his followers walking beside him; buoyed, no doubt, by the crowds that gathered to see Jesus, to welcome him, to strew branches from palm trees before him, as his donkey ambled along the dusty roads leading to the mighty city on the hill. On this day, I often think of another event, which occurred almost 1,500 years later. In Florence, Italy, during the Renaissance, a Dominican friar named Girolamo Savonarola, won the support of thousands of followers. They cheered him on as he prophesied, as he denounced the Medicis, as he decried corruption in the church and proclaimed that Florence would be reborn as the New Jerusalem. With the church already opposing him, public opinion turned against him. In May of 1498, Savonarola and two of his allies were condemned, hanged, and burned in the central square of Florence. Almost immediately, there were cries to venerate him as a Saint. This confounding change – from adulation to condemnation and back to veneration – was not only experienced by Jesus, and later by Savonarola, but it has been the fate of countless human beings. Perhaps Jesus knew, as he looked at the crowds and at the palm branches on the road, that human beings are erratic, unreliable, unpredictable. Perhaps, even as he heard the cheers, he knew, in his heart, that he could trust only God.

April 3, 2023

**His branches shall spread; his beauty shall be like an olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon.**

Hosea 14:6

Can a compost heap trigger thoughts of heaven? Yes. When I went to the compost center last Fall, to discard garden clippings, I saw sun-splashed, multi-green piles of leaves, branches, plants, and clippings. It was beautiful! I saw mounds of orange and yellow marigolds, chrysanthemums in every color, branches from rose

bushes, limbs from many kinds of trees and shrubs. A prickly cactus had been tossed down in front of a delicate, fuchsia Mandeville vine, its blossoms still fragrant and lovely. “This must be what heaven is like,” I thought. The prickly ones come to the same place as the delicate and sensitive ones. Some are strong and have lived a long time. Others have shorter seasons. It was a mix of colors and textures and types. Seen all together, the image was simply beautiful. The fragrance in the air was a combination of sweet roses, crisp pine, and pungent citrus. All of this greenery, I thought, is useful and beautiful even at the end of its earthly life. Can we be any less so? When we transition to our next life, our beauty will go on, and so will our usefulness ... perhaps because we will be with so many others, like us and not like us, but all of us God’s creation.

#### April 4, 2023

**Noah did all that God commanded him.**

Genesis 6:22

Every time I think of the story of Noah, I smile. I can’t imagine how outlandish it must have seemed to Noah’s wife when he announced that God had told him to build an ark and to gather two of all – or all available – living things to be placed on this ship. ‘And by the way, honey, we’ll be getting on the boat, too.’ The whole story seems beyond belief. But this isn’t really a story about building an ark or gathering animals. It’s a story about an ordinary man’s openness to God’s voice; his willingness to hear and obey, and his faith in God’s plans and purposes, even those that were invisible to him. It is a story that can guide us to openness, obedience, and faith today. *“Lord, I’m not sure I’d be able to build an ark, but help me to hear and obey when you tell me to build friendships, bridges, awareness, and awe. Help me to always hear you.”*

#### April 5, 2023

**Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.**

Matthew 10:16

The tall, grey-haired man who walked into my office in Silicon Valley was, like me, a member of the company’s senior staff. He was also a retired Marine colonel. He exuded strength and authority. But that day, he seemed nervous. He closed the door, sat down, and spoke to me in a low voice. “I’ve been told to lease and purchase more buildings-- a lot more. Millions of dollars’ worth of property.” He pushed a sheet of paper across my desk. It was a signed authorization, typical for expenditures in excess of a million dollars. “It seems in order,” I said. “What’s the problem?” He replied, “When X signed it, he said, ‘You know, I suspect that sometimes people have forged my signature.’ Then he just stared at me. I think I’m being set up. He must want me out and he’s setting me up. What do I do?” I’m sure my colleague wasn’t expecting my first response: “Read the psalms.” My second response – “We can do some things to make sure he doesn’t trap you” – was one that he understood, but I was serious about both responses. What do you do when you’re outmatched, feel trapped, and don’t know how to fight? When someone is plotting against you? The Bible gives us two tools: asking God to fight for us, as the psalmists did, when we cannot fight for ourselves, and being as wise as we can be in the ways of the world. Two tools. Both necessary, both understood by God.

#### April 6, 2023 - Maundy Thursday

**Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.**

John 16:22

Jesus understood. He knew that he was facing death, and he knew that his family and disciples would mourn his death. They would grieve, indeed. It was important to him that they should hear his promises now, while he was still with them. They would see him again. He promised. They would rejoice. He promised. No one would take away their joy. He promised. Grief is one of the most painful things we experience. But God knows what it is to grieve, and that’s why he gives us the promise of new life, reunion, and rejoicing. His promises are as real today as they were on that night of the Last Supper, when Jesus told his followers so many things that they had to know. He tells these things to us, now.

### April 7, 2023 - Good Friday

**“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”**

Matthew 27:46

In doing research for last November’s Meditation series on ‘Jesus and Politics’, I read accounts from first-century historians about the practice of crucifixion. The descriptions were sickening. Even our religious depictions of Christ on the cross don’t convey the pain and suffering that were undeniable. Perhaps it’s good that artists and sculptors have softened that image of Jesus’s last hours. We almost can’t bear to look at, to think about, to face up to what he endured. Jesus’s pain wasn’t only physical, it was surely mental, emotional, and spiritual as well. He may have known that his condemnation and death were inevitable, but he could not have foreseen the pain that seared through him, or the doubt that pierced his soul. Just as he could not imagine what he would suffer on that cross, we can’t imagine ... can’t really understand ... the sacrifice he made-- for you, for me, for all of humanity. All we can do is to watch and wait with him, to be there for him, at the cross, while his love for us pours out in sweat, blood, and tears. *“Oh, my Jesus, oh, my Jesus, that you would do this for me! That you would love me so much that you would die to link me to God! That you would never forsake or abandon me! Oh, my Jesus!”*

### April 8, 2023 - Easter Saturday

**Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.** Psalm 23:4 (NIV)

There are so many words we could use to describe what the disciples – and what Jesus’s friends, family, and followers – were feeling on this day after the crucifixion: fear, confusion, disbelief, betrayal, emptiness, mistrust, torment, and bottomless, paralyzing grief. All of us – every single one of us – has had a time in our lives when we’ve had one or more of those feelings. At such times, we’re lost, just lost. We can’t get our bearings. We don’t know what hope looks like. We can’t think about today, much less tomorrow. Like the disciples, we find ourselves in a ‘desolate Saturday’, a place of lostness. The disciples had to live through that Saturday, through the darkness, the emptiness, and the sorrow of it. No heavenly, smiling messenger descended to give them instant relief, to make everything better, to say, “Hey-- cheer up! Tomorrow you’ll see something amazing!” The disciples had to live through their time of lostness and agony. So do we. But in the midst of our fears and sorrows, whatever they may be, we know that God is with us, that there will be a sunrise, there will be tomorrow, and there will always be God with us, even in our Saturdays of desolation.

### April 9, 2023 – Easter Sunday

**There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel. Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God, saying, “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation.”**

Luke 2:25, 28-30

On this Easter Sunday, the vision of Simeon is fulfilled, for him and for us. When Simeon saw the baby Jesus, he could not have known how this child would grow up, how Satan would tempt him in the wilderness, how Jesus’s ministry would unfold, how his miracles and teachings would affect thousands and radiate out into the world and into centuries yet to come. Certainly, Simeon could not have foreseen the procession into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the Last Supper on Thursday, the crucifixion on Friday, or even the empty tomb on Sunday. But when he saw the baby Jesus, Simeon knew that he was seeing the salvation of God in human form. That is what we can see on this Easter Sunday; nothing less than the salvation of God. May we, too, be dismissed in peace, praising God for what we have seen, able to walk into the future as Simeon did, with the certainty of salvation in our hearts.

### April 10, 2023 - Easter Monday

**Do not be afraid, for I am with you to bless you.**

Genesis 26:24

There they are again, those blessed four words: “Do not be afraid.” Surely, after Jesus’ crucifixion, and even after his resurrection, his disciples and followers were still afraid. Who wouldn’t be afraid after so many changes, so much turmoil, so much anguish? For Jesus’s disciples, even the calling which Jesus gave to them – to go out into the world – must have had a tinge a fear within it, along with the joy of having heard the words from their living Savior. We have fears, too, even after the great joy of Easter, even in this season of new life and new promise. Whatever our fears or anxieties, we have an arc of reassurances, going from today’s words in Genesis – “Do not be afraid” – to Jesus’s own words to his disciples after his resurrection: “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:2) Today’s verse highlight’s another reality: God is with us *when* we need him. God will be with us and strengthen us in the midst of our distress, not after it has passed. God is with us in our troubles, within us, through his Spirit, to guide as well as comfort us. As the disciples learned in their ministry, God does not promise us an absence of trouble or suffering, he simply says that he will be with us in our troubles. The work which the disciples began after their Lord ascended was sometimes hard, often punishing, but they knew that their Lord was with them, and that assurance enabled them to persist and to triumph even in the midst of fear and tribulation. May it be so with us. *“Lord, my living Savior, when I am troubled, help me to know – beyond all doubt – that you are with me. Help me to not be afraid, and bless me with your peace.”*

### April 11, 2023

**God raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at his right hand, in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named.** Ephesians 1:20-21

We almost can’t imagine how high the ‘heavenly places’ are, but it isn’t a physical height or distance. More likely, it is a distance of perspective; a perspective that allows Jesus – and us – to rise above rule and authority, power and dominion; to see that the drama, troubles, and even the triumphs of this world are all temporary—passing scenes in the ongoing human story. Even now, while we are in our earthly lives, it is good for us to picture those more distant, heavenly places, knowing that because Christ is with us now ... here ... we can share his lofty view, and can know that rulers, powers, and dominions ultimately cannot touch us. And, if we name all of the people, griefs, and miseries that burden us now, if we name all those who intimidate, awe, or threaten us now, we can know that the heavenly places are “above every name that can be named.” Yes, even while we live in this world, we can refresh our hearts and souls by seeing that world from Jesus’s view in the heavenly places, far above any people, situations, or fears we can name.

### April 12, 2023

**If you wait at wisdom’s doorway, longing to hear a word for every day, joy will break forth within you as you listen for what I’ll say. For the foundation of life pours into you every time that you find me, and this is the secret of growing in the delight and favor of the Lord.** Proverbs 8:34-35

Every morning, after I’m awake enough to read and think, I begin my devotional readings. I lift the books and booklets from the adjacent loveseat onto my bed. While I lounge and plump my pillows, I read. There are three booklets, two of them from the Lutheran Church and one that’s non-denominational. There is Daily Guideposts, which I’ve been reading for at least 40 years; a book of teachings by a rabbi; and the Moravian Daily Texts, the oldest continuously published daily devotional in the world, dating back to 1731. The two verses in the Daily Texts are often my guidelines for the day. Before I dress or go downstairs for breakfast, these readings feed my soul. Sometimes they answer questions. Sometimes they point to a truth or provide a new insight. Often, they challenge me, sometimes in ways that are uncomfortable. As I age, my days often seem to have requirements for which my physical energy isn’t sufficient, and my to-do list can seem overwhelming. But if I focus on God before I worry about my chores, the day simply goes better. I have a strength and a focus that are clearly not my own, they’re a gift. *“What an exchange, Lord! I give you a few moments of my morning and you give me a whole day of your guidance and strength, your presence and companionship. No wonder I talk to you all day--- and sense you talking to me. You’re with me. Always be with me. Keep me steadfast in this connection, especially when we meet each morning.”*

### April 13, 2023

**Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.**

Isaiah 5:21

There is a huge difference between confidence, which is a good and positive thing, and arrogance, which is not. We've all met people who are so self-centered, so filled with their own importance, that they're almost comical. They think they're the smartest, strongest, best-looking ... and on and on. Their very presence seems to suck the air out of the room, and they can't imagine that anyone else has any worth or importance. When God asks us to be humble, he isn't only thinking of how humility makes for peace and cooperation, he's also thinking of us. After all, how many arrogant people are truly liked or respected? God wants us to live amicably and pleasantly with others, and humility is required for such sociability.

### April 14, 2023

**O Lord, let your ear be attentive to hear the prayer of your servant that now I pray before you day and night.**

Nehemiah 1:6

When we pray, we are in good company. People have prayed – to whomever their concept of God is – ever since they had needs or troubles or causes to rejoice. Christ prayed for others, for his own needs, and for us—the people of his time and those born in generations to come. Perhaps today is a good day to spend extra time in prayer—telling God what is in our hearts or just listening for his inner words to us; just being with him. We know that he will be there. He will hear us. His ear will be attentive to us as it was to Nehemiah.

### April 15, 2023

**And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither, and whatever he does shall prosper.**

Psalms 3:1

It's springtime, and those of us who love to work in gardens are enjoying the first growth from the seeds and bulbs we planted last year. We're also planning the new additions we'll make to the garden this year. I've always thought of these Meditations as seeds—seeds of scripture, of hope, of encouragement, of comfort, even of challenge. Some seeds are in the form of ideas or observations. Others are in the form of stories and experiences, from history or from my life or the lives of others. I have no idea where or when these Meditation seeds will take root, how they might grow, or what fruit or flowering they might produce. That's all in God's hands. I'm simply called to plant seeds. You're a seed planter, too, whether you know it or not. Every day, every week, you plant seeds in the lives of others, through your words, your actions, even your attitude and demeanor. Each time you express affection, you plant a seed of love. Every time you listen and allow others to express their thoughts and needs, you're planting a seed of self-worth in the person to whom you're giving your time and attention: a hug for a child, a smile for an elderly person, a kiss for a loved one. All of these are seeds which the Master Gardener calls us to scatter among his people. Growth, blossoming, and coming to fruition are processes that aren't limited to gardens, fields, and orchards. Our lives also reflect these processes. As these days and weeks of spring and summer unfold, may they remind us that we are seed planters, helping to grow beauty, bounty, and blessings in the lives of others.

### April 16, 2023

**And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.**

John 17:3

Truth. It is as powerful a word as love. It is a word that is often in the news; a word that is the focus of conversations in classrooms, roadside diners, and around breakfast tables. In our time, 'truth' has taken a beating from all corners. Many today laugh at the very idea of truth and feel no shame in perverting or denying truth. But truth is a word – a concept, a reality – that matters mightily to God. This week, we'll look at truth

from several directions, beginning with **What is God's truth?** Who is God? Today's verse tells us that the Creator God, and Jesus and the Holy Spirit, are truth—the true God. In what God has created – all of life, countless universes, the miracle of humanity – our Father/Mother/Creator God shows the truth of God's power. In God's interactions with us, he shows the truth of his love. In his dwelling within each of us, he shows the truth of his identity. God is love. God is also truth. That alone should tell us how important truth is ... or should be ...  
to us. *“Open my mind, heart, and soul to truth, Lord; your truth, and the truth in me and in the world.”*

### April 17, 2023

**So God created humans in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.** Genesis 1:27

**What is the truth of who we are as human beings?** Today's verse tells us the most important thing we have to know about ourselves: we were created in God's image. We are made for truth – to know it, speak it, honor it – because God is truth and we are created in God's image. However we view creation and evolution, one thing can be affirmed: we have the essence of God within us-- a God-spark, a God-light, a God-life-force that enables us to conceive of God in the first place. We are made for truth because God *is* truth, just as we are made for love because God *is* love. Part of our truth as human beings is that we are amazingly diverse. We each have strengths, weaknesses, talents, limitations. We're capable of feeling love and hate. We laugh, cry, hope, and fear. Like crystal prisms reflecting the sunlight, there are thousands of dimensions to our physical natures, to our personalities, and to God's spirit within us. Our truth is that we are God's creation-- we in him and he in us; and God's creation – each of us – is wonderful in his sight. Because truth is embedded in us, falsehood is poisonous to us. It puts a distance between God and us, between the 'better angels' of our own natures and us. The need for truth is as much a part of us as our bodies, minds, and souls.

### April 18, 2023

**Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far off; for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter.** Isaiah 59:18

**What is true and what is not true?** Truth is having a rough time in an age of fake news, internet false-hoods, and political and business leaders who tell lies with ease and pleasure. When I read the book “All the President's Men,” more than 40 years after Watergate, I was astonished by the depth of lies and deceptions it revealed: tens of thousands of phony telegrams sent to the White House, supposedly supporting the President's positions; fake letterheads printed to look like the stationery of his opponents, and then used to send fake letters to people to make them angry with those opponents. The list of deceptions was endless. Four decades later, it seems we have become even more skilled at lying and deceiving across the whole spectrum of national life. Software has been developed that will display a warning label on websites known to disseminate fake news, but even that can't stem the tide of deceptions and deceptions. Perhaps what we can do – must do – is to demand the truth; to state loudly and clearly that truth matters, that lying is not just 'business as usual' or 'everybody does it.' We should not surrender to those who lie and deceive, and we should make truthfulness a non-negotiable standard for our willingness to do business with, elect, or support any persons or organizations. And we can always ask God to guide us in discerning what is true and what is not true. Because God values truth, he will lead us toward it, if we are willing to do the work of thinking, listening, and searching for what is true.

### April 19, 2023

**Lord, who may dwell in your holy tabernacle? Who may dwell in your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart.** Psalm 15:1-2

**What is my personal truth?** There is no one on earth like you. There never has been, never will be. Even if

it is true that we can have multiple lives – as the ancients and the early Christians believed, and as many current-day thinkers believe – it is our spirits, our unique souls, that grow and change and live, in one life or many, one identity or several. The person confined to a wheelchair in this life might be an Olympic runner in another life. The person who feels unloved in one life might bask in human love in the next life. Whether the possibility of multiple lives resonates with you or not, your personal truth means embracing – loving, liking, respecting – yourself just as God made you. Speaking the truth in our hearts, as in today’s verse, begins with a truthful acceptance of who we really are, with all of our glitches and our glories. *“I am, now and forever, a unique child of God, of you—Creator, Father/Mother God, Force of Life and Love and Intention. I am loved by you, O God, and I am a part of your will, your work, your creation, and your very being. I am precious in your eyes. And that’s the truth.”*

### April 20, 2023

**In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.** John 14:2

Jesus was very specific about **the truth of eternal life**. When he spoke the words in today’s verse, he knew that his life was coming to an end. He was certainly not going to be evasive or make his disciples guess at what he meant. He said it plainly: life goes on. There are many mansions – many places, perhaps many dimensions – to the life that follows earthly life. What matters is that life goes on. This is one subject on which our instinctive human desires come together in agreement with the words of Christ. Something deep within us wants life to go on. We don’t want to dissolve into nothingness. If our lives have been blessed, we naturally want more of life. If life has been difficult, we want it to be different, we want another chance at peace, joy, and love. When the truth of that desire, deep within our hearts and souls, matches the truth of Christ’s words, we know it is truth indeed. We live eternally. *“Oh, God! It is almost incomprehensible. Thank you. Thank you for all of life, here and now, there and then, whenever. Thank you for the miracle of life.”*

### April 21, 2023

**Truth shall spring out of the earth and righteousness shall look down from heaven.** Psalm 85:11

The natural, physical world – the earth and everything on it, including us – reveals its own truth, if only we will see it. If you were told that a speck of matter that can barely be seen by the human eye – about 0.12 mm in diameter – can be touched by a cell that is far, far smaller – 5 microns in diameter, visible only under a microscope – and these two almost-invisible dots would eventually produce a concert violinist, a mathematician, or you ... you wouldn’t believe it. But that’s what happens when the largest cell in the human body, a female egg, is found by a male sperm, the smallest cell in the human body. Thus, begins a truly miraculous process of evolution within the human body. The two miniscule dots begin to change and evolve. About 40 weeks later, a baby is born, and we rejoice. That baby continues to change and evolve over decades, becoming a baseball player, a teacher, our neighbor down the street, or the King of England. Evolution isn’t a contradiction to creation, it is the process of creation, and it happens in us as well as around us. Evolution is God’s tool and his instrument for creation. We see that in canyons and coral reefs, in oak trees and in ourselves. “Truth springs out of the earth” and out of us: **the truth of creation**.

### April 22, 2023

**Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me. And I will pray the father, and he will give you another helper, that he may abide with you forever—the Spirit of Truth ... you know him for he dwells in you and will be in you.”** John 14:6, 16-17

Our time is far removed from the days when Jesus walked in Galilee, teaching, touching, and healing. In the centuries since Christ’s time, many teachers, pastors, theologians, and philosophers have deepened and expanded our knowledge of God. But our greatest helper is the one Christ spoke of in today’s verse—the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit may be the aspect of God about whom we know the least, but it is the Spirit who is the living God among us, in us, and with us. **The truth of the Spirit** is our link to life in, and with, God. It is the Spirit we ask to be with us when we pray. It is the Spirit who speaks to us when we hear words and messages in our hearts that we know are coming from God. Truth is the essence of the Spirit, and is part of us, in our very being. The Spirit guides us in all ways, and allows us to know the miracle of this life, and life everlasting, as it lives within us. Truth is, and always will be, one of the central pillars of our faith ... and our lives.

### April 23, 2023

**Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race that is marked out for us.** Hebrews 12:1

Today's worship service at St. John's Windish Lutheran Church is the final service for our congregation in this setting, in the sanctuary that has been a spiritual home to thousands. When St. John's was established, in 1910, women still wore long dresses, men wore spats, and kids wore knickers and knee socks. In England, the Titanic was under construction. In Russia, Czar Nicholas still ruled. World War I was four years away. Few people at that time, even among scientists, could visualize computers, the world-wide web, or space travel. South Bethlehem was a busy and bustling place, dominated by industry, commerce, and a burgeoning immigrant population needed for the work to be done. St. John's and its people have seen a lot of history, a lot of changes ... and a lot that doesn't change. People still fall in love in 2023 as they did in 1910. We form families and celebrate milestones. We grieve the deaths of those we love, and we have a very human assortment of fears and hopes, needs and desires, that are not very different from those of our ancestors. We seek God in our joys and in our sorrows. In the midst of change – over decades, over centuries – there is much that remains common to people in all communities, countries, and cultures. For Christians, the constancy of God's love, as shown in the life and teachings of Jesus, is a never-changing foundation for a life of peace and fulfillment. None of us has a crystal ball. We can't see into the future. We don't even know what joys or challenges we'll encounter today, much less tomorrow. But the "cloud of witnesses" to which today's verse refers may ... if we picture them and listen to them ... give us some perspective. If I picture my parents and grandparents, and all the other people I've known in more than seven decades of membership in this church, I think I know what they would say. They would echo Christ's own words: "I am with you." They would say, as God says incessantly, "Do not be afraid." And they would affirm Paul's words: "...nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow, not even the power of hell can separate us from God's love." (Romans 8:38) With such an assurance, and with the living presence of God's Spirit, with us always, wherever we are, we can walk into the future knowing that God's blessings already await us. *"Thank you, Father, Son, and Spirit. Thank you for yesterday, today, and tomorrow."*

### April 24, 2023

**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.** Matthew 11:28

In February, when Pennsylvania Senator John Fetterman experienced depression after having had a stroke last year, my mind and memory went back to a scene at our family kitchen table, in the late 1970s. My Dad sat at that table and seemed to be in his own world. He answered questions with a nod or shake of the head. He spoke in half-sentences or with very few words. This wasn't the Dad I knew, wasn't the husband Mom knew. Even during the months preceding that kitchen table malaise, when he had gotten the shattering diagnosis of Stage IV throat cancer, he'd been the positive, upbeat, 'we-can-do-this!' person he'd always been. When he learned that he would need laryngectomy surgery – would lose his voice box and his voice – his strength and optimism never wavered. On the day that we received that frightening diagnosis, I trembled in the back seat of the car while Mom sobbed in the front seat, as Dad drove us home from the doctor's office. When he parked the car and turned off the ignition, he reached over to pat Mom's shoulder and he said, grinning, "Think of it this way, kiddo. In 38 years of marriage, you haven't listened to much I've had to say, so I don't see what difference losing my voice is going to make." That did it. That was vintage Dad! Mom and I dissolved into laughter,



and we were back to being our usual, positive selves. Dad sailed through his surgery at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York, and he began his speech therapy, in Bethlehem, with enthusiasm. But now, about a month after he'd come home, he was quiet and withdrawn. We talked to his speech therapist. "Good!" she said, shocking us. "He has been so brave, so strong, so positive through this whole thing, that this letdown had to happen. It would be scary if it *didn't* happen." She explained that, courageous or not, Dad had been through a life-altering experience, one that traumatized his body and soul, his very sense of identity and being. "No one smiles their way through trauma," she said, "and if they do, they're just delaying the inevitable internal reckoning with what has happened to them." It took a month or so, but soon Dad was himself again, learning to make guttural sounds that could turn into words. He even counseled other laryngectomy patients, something that gave him great satisfaction. Most of all, he was back to laughing, making jokes, encouraging others, and being the positive, 'glass-half-full' person he'd always been. Tough times are part of life. It's okay to cry, to hurt, to fall down, and to need help. We must allow ourselves to be human, to feel pain, and to bend under the weight of trauma. And we must allow others to be human, frail, and frightened as well. "*Lord, be with those who have been deeply wounded or traumatized in any way, and help us to be with them as well, with compassion and caring.*"

### April 25, 2023

**By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.** Psalm 33:6  
In 2017, in Mongolia, the fossil of a strange little dinosaur was discovered. Scientists had never seen anything like it, and its anatomy was carefully analyzed and tested by a powerful x-generator at the European Synchrotron in Grenoble, France. About 18 inches tall, it had a bill like a duck, teeth like a crocodile, a neck like a swan, and claws that could kill prey. It could run and hunt on the ground and swim and fish in water. It lived 75 million years ago. This little marvel should remind us of the infinite variety of God's creation. Anyone who has seen a sunset knows that God is an artist. Anyone who has seen a duck waddle knows that God has a sense of humor. And anyone who contemplates this new little dinosaur, 'Halszka', knows that it's pointless to define how God creates or why or when or for how long. "*It is enough, Lord, for me to see the beauty and variety of your world. Thank you for all of the host of your creation.*"

### April 26, 2023

**Rejoice that your names are written in Heaven.**

Luke 10:20

It feels so good to head home at the end of a long day at work, at school, or doing errands. Even when we've been on a wonderful vacation, it usually feels good to come home. We have a natural, human love for 'home', wherever that is, and our souls have a longing for a home that awaits us when our earthly lives end. We have a deep desire to know that that home is there-- that is it prepared and waiting for us, and that we will be welcome there. Today's verse assures us that our names are already written in heaven. We're expected there, and we will be welcome. In a world that can generate so much stress in our lives, so much uncertainty and fear, it is comforting to know that our journey will end in joy, and that we will be home at last.

### April 27, 2023

**I will cleanse them from the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive.**

Jeremiah 33:8

Today's verse is humbling: "I will cleanse them from the guilt of their sin against me ...." God is wiping away guilt. He knows the damage guilt can do, and he doesn't want his people to suffer from guilt. He is acting to relieve them. How merciful! And he is doing this in the face of a sin they have committed against him; against *him*. It is a personal offence, but he forgives them. If we were to do as God does, to forgive as he does – as he asks – then we should not only forgive, but do so in a way that helps to relieve the guilt of those who've sinned against us. Our attitude should be "I not only forgive, I want you to forget, to put this behind you and not let guilt have a corrosive effect on your heart or soul." That's a breathtaking way to forgive. Is it difficult? Oh my, yes. Is it necessary? Just ask any person whose spouse or parent or friend has never really let them forget the wrong that they've done. Yes, it's difficult. But it is God's way. Can it be ours?

### April 28, 2023

**Thus says the Lord, “I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.”**

Jeremiah 2:2

When I was growing up, our family had some very serious problems. As an only child, I had no one to talk to about our troubles. So, at night, in the darkness of my bedroom, I talked to God. Sometimes, I’d talk to the Jesus I was learning about in Sunday School. I thought I was just talking. At age six or so, I didn’t realize I was praying. I would tell “Jesus . . . whoever you are,” about my fears and hurts. I’d ask him to help us, to make things better. For more than a decade, my solace and strength came from those conversations with a God I couldn’t really understand, but one I was certain was real. In my early twenties, with the troubles long behind me, I decided to make a commitment to God as an adult. In a special prayer, I offered God my love, my trust, and my life. I expected to feel lightning or fireworks; goosebumps, at least. Nothing. I felt the same as I had ten minutes before. “That’s it?” I wondered. “That’s it?” I asked God. In my heart, I heard the voice I’d always known; the one I would hear for decades to come: “I have been with you always. You’ve been with me all along. I took your word as a child.” Then, the goosebumps came. God had accepted me as a child. He took me seriously when I was six. My relationship with God had begun the first time I turned to him, in my tears, as a little one. He has been with you all along, too.

### April 29, 2023

**Paul wrote: “The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the foremost.”**

1 Timothy 1:15

Paul never lost the awareness of his sins. Even when he traveled across lands to tell people about Jesus, when he endured hardships and dangers, when he visited, wrote to, and encouraged the early Christian communities—he always remembered that he had persecuted Christians and denounced Jesus. There is always a balance to be reached when we are aware of our guilt. We must own it – admit, be responsible for what we’ve done – but we must also let it go when we have asked for and accepted forgiveness, from God or from others. God used Paul’s awareness of his sins to make him aware that God’s love and forgiveness are available to all, especially to sinners; to us.

### April 30, 2023

**Go, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.**

Matthew 28:19

Today marks the final worship service at St. Peter’s Lutheran Church. Founded in 1863, St. Peter’s congregants were primarily German immigrants. Its first pastors, and its first members, assisted other churches to become established in Bethlehem, and extended a welcoming hand to new residents and new churches alike. Situated as it is, at the edge of the campus of Lehigh University, and close to residential areas, areas of commerce, and areas of industry, St. Peter’s physical presence seems to symbolize the necessary unity, the coming together, the inter-relatedness of many parts of a community. Never isolated – in attitude or action – from the place in which it lived, St. Peter’s, for many years, defined itself as “In the city for Good.” Understanding, intuitively, that we are all connected, that good for one depends on good for all, St. Peter’s lived Christ’s Great Commission. Even in its final service, this venerable church continues with its heritage of welcome, and with its symbolic reaching out and linking— connecting people to God, to each other, to their community, and to a God-ordained future of service, the effects of which can never be measured, only blessed. *“Thank you, Lord, for those who serve in your name, who reflect your love, who reach out to others, and who fulfill your Great Commission.”*