



'Till We Meet Again!

Week of February 6 and 7, 2020



REFLECTION FOR THURSDAY, JANUARY 28, 2020

Psalm 111

¹*Praise the Lord!*

I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart,

in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

²*Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them.*

¹⁰*The fear (or "reverence" for) of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;*

all those who practice it have a good understanding.

His praise endures forever.

Greetings all my friends!

During all the sufferings and trials of this pandemic, I would like to share a little story with you.

Imagine for a moment that your family was forcibly removed from your home by a foreign power when you were but a child. Imagine being moved to the nation of that same foreign power to serve in positions of servitude for those who conquered your land. Imagine seeing violence inflicted upon those who might stand against the foreign power and being

"kept in your place" within this new and foreign country that you are living in. You no longer have any kind of national pride in your heritage, you no longer can freely choose your vocation, where you live, or truly most of the decisions which effect your lives. Yet, there are some within your midst who continue to talk about how you are part of the "chosen people."

This is the situation most scholars believe was in place when the 5th book of psalms (psalms 107-150) was authored. This section of the psalter reflects the experiences of the Jewish people in their very long exile in Babylon and the hope instilled in God's people at the possible return to their homeland.

Now, imagine that one day you are walking from the cramped housing quarters that you have been forced to live in out to the fields to begin the harvest. You are walking through a wooded area. The sky is not yet bright, the sounds of the animals in the dark woods seems somehow "soothing" to you. You walk around a bend in the road that you have walked around hundreds of times to get to your fields, only this time, the dawn of the morning sun is appearing on the horizon. The sky turns colors as the sun begins to rise on a new day. You stop in the middle of the road and witness the beauty and glory of God's creation. In this moment, you share the heart of the psalter: "I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart!"

During this pandemic, I have found a personal renewed interest in the words and the wisdom shared in the book of psalms. Within this particular psalm (psalm 111) the psalter suggests in verse 10 that the faithful person who allows themselves to be open to something greater than their current situation in life,

something better than the condition they currently find themselves in can “see”, “experience”, “know”, that God is found within the many very ordinary moments and experiences of life. Like witnessing a beautiful sunrise, being part of a “pay it forward” moment or seeing an act of kindness amid chaos.

When our eyes are overly focused on the problems of our living. When our hearts are hardened by the varied voices of this world seeking to “divide and conquer”, the psalmist would argue that these conditions have been given power to make the world a much “smaller” place than it is.

Yet, when we allow our minds to be open to God’s continued presence in the world and allow our lives to be shaped by taking God’s love into our hearts, God’s majesty and glory can be revealed in the darkest moments of life and our natural state becomes one of awe and splendor at the glory of God.

As Thomas Parker observes. Faith in Christ means letting our lives be shaped by taking God’s love into our heart. We receive this love by becoming more loving, just as we receive greater grace by becoming more gracious.

So, on this day I declare; “Hallelujah! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart in the assembly of the upright, in the community of faith. Great are Your works, O Lord, pondered by all who delight in them!”

Until next time,

Keep trusting God, washing your hands, and give thanks to the Lord for the bounty of God’s love.

PJ

WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER VACCINATION

Where to begin????? Let’s begin with some information on the 2 vaccines currently approved by the FDA for use in the US.

Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines require an initial injection and a booster. At the moment, with the research currently available, it is imperative that we receive BOTH injections

in order to be effectively protected against COVID-19. In clinical trials both vaccines have been shown to be 95% effective in preventing COVID-19 and 100% effective in preventing severe infections if one becomes ill with the disease. These vaccines have been said to be among the best ever created. Dr. Paul Offit, Director of the Vaccine Education Center at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia is quoted as saying, “It’s ridiculously encouraging!”

Vaccines are designed to kick start the immune system to recognize an invading disease causing organism. No matter which vaccine form (refer to the previous article “It’s Vaccine Time, Vaccine Time, Vac, Vac, Vaccine Time”) we receive the body’s reaction will be similar. The immune system begins to produce T-lymphocytes (T-cells or memory cells), one of the important white blood cells of the immune system, and antibodies. During this time we may experience: fatigue, body aches, elevated temperature, headache, etc. That is considered a physiologic reaction which is the result of the immune system kicking into gear. As a result of the T-lymphocytes and antibodies developed the immune system will remember how to fight off the disease causing organism in the future. This is no different than what happens after receiving vaccinations for influenza or shingles. Or any other vaccination we have received during our lifetime.

Do you remember the now ancient, 1978 Atari video game Space Invaders? It started out with a few space invaders marching down the screen. Our job as players was to fire



light beams at the invaders in order to kill them. As the game progressed the invaders became more numerous and we had to fire faster. If we were really good (which I wasn't!) we killed off the invaders and won the game. That is, in a tiny nut shell, how the immune system works. When it "sees" an invading disease causing organism it goes to work firing antibodies at it in order to kill off the invaders.

It typically takes several weeks after vaccination, or even after recovering from a disease, for the immune system to complete the training process. Should we come in contact with COVID just prior to, or shortly after receiving the vaccine, it is still possible to get the actual disease. That being said, it will continue to be important to follow the current guidelines:

S – social distancing

M – mask up

A – avoid crowds

R – remind others

T – travel wisely (Many thanks to St.

Luke's University Health Network for the acronym!)

What about herd immunity? Herd immunity is when a significant portion of a population is immune to a disease through vaccination and/or prior illness, making the spread of disease from one person to another unlikely. The term came to us from the world of animal husbandry as it related to diseases in the herd. The percentage of the population that needs to be immune varies from disease to disease. The more contagious the disease is the greater the number of people with immunity to stop the spread is. Using measles as an example it is estimated that 94% of a population needs to be immune in order to interrupt the chain of transmission of that disease.

The goal of vaccination is two-fold: to protect against the disease itself and to protect those who are not, or cannot be, vaccinated. Examples of why some people may not be vaccinated include: age (newborns or children who have not yet completed vaccinations), people

who have compromised immune systems, and people who have vaccine reluctance (those with religious objections, those who fear perceived risks from vaccines, those who are skeptical of the benefits of vaccines). When a population falls below the necessary herd immunity a resurgence of a disease often ensues. And again I will use measles as an example. Over the past several years there have been measles outbreaks in the United States due to the number of people who have not been vaccinated against that disease.

We don't yet know the actual number of immune people needed before herd immunity is reached for COVID-19. However, if I use the working average of 70% the numbers look like this:

- Global population = 8 billion – herd immunity = 5 billion
- US population = 328 million – herd immunity = 231 million
- UPG and St. John's Windish = 1100 people – herd immunity = 770 people

What that means is that we still have a long way to go.

I can't speak for anyone but myself here. I am so very tired of COVID-19! It dominates the air waves and conversations with others. It has put a huge crimp in what we used to know as everyday life. It has changed the way we do, seemingly, everything! So many celebrations have been cancelled or scaled down: birthdays, weddings, retirements, this past holiday season, and even remembrances of lives well lived. It has forced us to change how we receive health care: who can, or more accurately can't, visit us if we are hospitalized. It has changed how many people work. It has caused us to pivot to on-line worship services. And stay that way! I, for one, want this to be over! That being said, I do have every confidence it will end.

There are 2 vaccines on the market now. We need to be patient and allow the time necessary to work through the process: round-the-clock manufacture of the vaccines, packaging,

shipping, distribution (around the globe), set up of vaccination clinics, the glut of people attempting to schedule appointments to receive the vaccine, the time span to obtain BOTH injections, and the time needed post injection to develop a level of immunity.

In the meantime we need to continue to be kind to ourselves and our neighbors. We need to continue to wear face masks, wash hands, and avoid crowded places.

PS....Another bright spot....Johnson and Johnson seems ready to request emergency use authorization of its COVID vaccine in the next week or two. That vaccine is a single injection, and it does not require super cold storage, thereby making shipping, storage and handling much easier. It will also provide an increased number of available vaccine doses, enabling more people to be vaccinated.

Information gleaned from:

- The Mayo Clinic
- APIC (Association for Professional Infection Control and Epidemiology)
- CDC (Centers for Disease Control)
- St. Luke's University Health Network
- Vaccination Center at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
- APHA (American Public Health Association)

Donna Musselman, Parish Nurse

ON THE PANDEMIC: A RENEWED CALL TO PERSEVERE AND PREVAIL FROM BISHOP CHRISTOPHER DEFOREST, JANUARY 26, 2021

As the Covid-19 pandemic rages on, I have been asked by congregations and leaders across the synod to give my perspective as the new bishop and provide updated direction.



First, let us be clear: this crisis is not over. People are still suffering and dying at a devastating rate; and it looks increasingly likely that the worst may be yet to come over the next several weeks. Add to this, the fact that it is winter, so gathering and worshiping outside is very difficult. We are all exhausted and lonely

from almost a year of this. And now, we have new threats coming from what appear to be more contagious, and perhaps more deadly, new mutant strains of the virus. Many businesses, large and especially small, are stretched to and beyond the breaking point. And political divisions are not only driving us apart; in our frustration and despair, they can lead us to give up on the very practices and attitudes we need to stay alive, and to love our neighbors by safeguarding their health and lives as well.

And yet, we know there is hope on the horizon. Vaccines exist, they really work, and they are getting out, however imperfectly. Wearing masks, washing hands, social distancing, avoiding groups and crowds – these simple behaviors still make a big difference. Some of our congregations have worked out detailed plans for limited, safe gathering. And many are still using technology as the best alternative. I applaud and give thanks for all who are working so hard and holding on so well, even now.

Considering all this, my direction is simple: **please stay the course.** As it is written in Hebrews 12:1-2: *1 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, 2 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.*

In our case, “running with perseverance the race” at this moment means:

- If you are still gathering online or by means of technology, continue to do so.
- If you have already implemented a process for safely meeting in-person, continue to be vigilant in following your own guidelines.
- If our state and local authorities give new directives, let's do our best to comply.
- On a personal level, let us continue to love our neighbor by wearing our masks,

washing our hands, keeping social distance, and avoiding mixed indoor gatherings.

For how long? This is always the hard question. But in God I trust. And God has put in our midst good authorities of science and government, for whom we are called to trust and follow (Romans 13:1-7). In the synod office, as we receive new information, we will pass that on to you. The current information on our website concerning the pandemic still contains valuable direction and links to other reliable sources.

As a sign of hope that we will be in a better place in four months, we are moving forward now with plans for an in-person Synod Assembly for June 3-5 – but we will also work on back-up plans to meet online if that is ultimately the wisest course. Look for more information on this coming out in February and March.

For now, please know that I pray for you each day, and I invite prayers for all of us, as we endure these difficult days. I believe we will look back on all this, in a similar way that we recall the great national and global tribulations of our past, such as the World Wars. We admire how our ancestors endured shortages, sacrifices, were forced to be apart for long periods, and had to deal with the real threats of injury, despair, death, loss and horrible grief. May God give us strength to persevere as they did – and to bring us over to new days of renewed peace, health, strength, purpose, and “joy set before us”; along with a deeper appreciation of all the gifts we have been given, of life and love and mutual care in Christ Jesus our Lord.

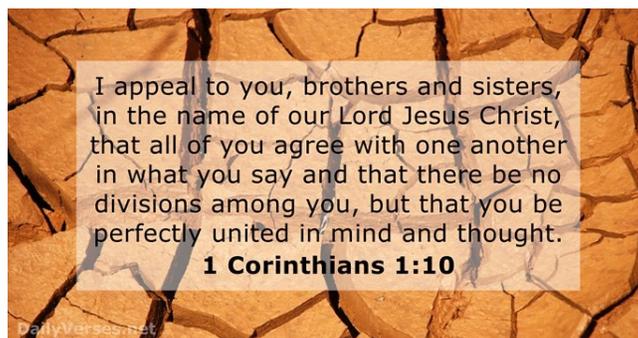
Peace,

Christopher deForest, Bishop
Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod

**REFLECTION FOR TUESDAY
FEBRUARY 2, 2021
TOGETHER!**

1 Corinthians 1:10

**Now I appeal to you,
brothers and sisters, by
the name of one Lord**



Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.

Writing this reflection during a snowstorm and just heard that the groundhog is predicting six more weeks of winter. Ugh! Makes me want to just go back to bed and put my head under the covers until spring comes. But alas, we must shovel all this snow and keep moving forward. As we approach the season of Lent, I am taking time to reflect on my relationship with God and I invite you to do the same.

Last week I talked about the future directions for Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and specifically looked at the congregational vitality data. The first thing that vital congregations do is strengthen their relationship with God.

The three objectives within this goal, center around being able to articulate how God shows up in our daily lives and what God is calling us to do both individually and corporately. Can you identify ways that you see God acting in your daily life? In the biweekly staff meeting we refer to these moments as God sightings. When you are intentional in looking for ways that God acts in our lives daily, you will be surprised as how often you can see that God is present and active in every moment of life. Think about the past week, what examples have you seen? Perhaps it was a phone call from someone checking in or perhaps you made the phone call. Could be neighbors helping each other get sidewalks and driveways shoveled. Maybe you have children or grandchildren that have been frolicking in the snow

enjoying God’s creation.

So many ways to see God at work in our lives. The next objective is to have a clear understanding of God’s larger mission and our purpose for this time and place.

What is God calling us to do as a congregation in Bethlehem? Can you see what your role is in our mission? Everyone will have different roles, some will help to organize ministries, some will do the actual work, others will pray for those who work and those who receive. Each one of us has God-given gifts and abilities and as we use them in cooperation with each other we achieve the mission God has for us.

The final objective is that as a community of faith we can articulate our purpose and create a plan for implementation. I think this is the hardest objective because it involves communicating the plan well and implementing the plan. As we work with the Transitional Team to develop what it would look like if our three congregations came together, we are starting to see what might be possible if we join all our gifts and resources. We can already see some things happening. We have worked jointly to do the sleeping mat ministry. We are working jointly to support the Bethlehem Emergency Shelter. Together we have been assisting various food banks in Bethlehem. Wonderful ministries are happening within our community of faith.

I am looking forward to the reports of the Transitional Team as the subgroups are developed and report back. The reports of each subgroup are available after the council has reviewed them and when we can gather, these reports will be the subject of town hall meetings. Each member of our three congregations will be given an opportunity to comment and eventually to vote to come together as one congregation. This is a process, and the pandemic has made it more difficult and yet we are moving forward. We are working together to articulate our purpose and create a plan to implement what God is calling us to do in this time and place.

I pray that working together we can strengthen our individual relationships with God and our corporate relationship with God. Together we can be God's hands and feet for

each other and for our community. Stay safe and be careful shoveling all the snow!

In Peace,
Pastor Suzanne

KNITTED SCARVES/HATS

Clients of local agencies have been blessed this winter by Ingrid Bengston Eberle's warm hand-knitted scarves and hats. A total of sixty-three were blessed by Pastor Jerry at a recent worship service and donated to Calvary Templo, the Cay Galgon Life House, the Hispanic Community Center, New Bethany Ministries, and Northeast Community Center. Thank you to Ingrid for being a blessing to others.



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

The Hispanic Community Center on 4th Street, Bethlehem, is in need of volunteers to help distribute food on the 3rd Thursday and 3rd Friday of the month. If you can help, please contact Pastor Suzanne at St. John's Windish (610-868-3282). Thank you for sharing your time.

CLOTHING DRIVE RESULTS

On behalf of Jordan Lutheran and the UPG, Camp Noah will receive a donation of \$1,416.16! The total weight for the clothing donation was 7,008 lbs!

A huge thank you goes out to the members of the UPG for the contributions made to Jordan's clothing drive. Together we will help Camp Noah change the lives of children affected by the devastating effects of natural disasters and tragedies.

PRAYERS OF THANKS FOR GRANT RECEIVED

The UPG would like to thank Susan Vitez acting on behalf of the Technology Team and the NEPA Synod Witness and Service Team for a \$5,000 grant for the Bringing It Home ministry.



FEBRUARY

THIS WEEK IN THE UPG FEBRUARY 6—FEBRUARY 14

Saturday February 6

4:45 PM Worship (“LiveStream” Facebook from LoC)

Sunday February 7

Worship available on YouTube
10:30 AM 46ers Zoom

Monday February 8

7:00 PM Coffee and Conversation (Zoom)

Tuesday February 9

Wednesday February 10

7:00 AM Fellowship Meeting

Thursday February 11

6:30 PM Bible Study (Zoom)

Friday February 12

Saturday February 13

4:45 PM Transfiguration
 (“Livestream” Facebook from St. JW)

Sunday February 14

Worship available on YouTube
10:30 AM 46ers Zoom

