

Blessed Trinity Lutheran Church at Rosemont

DAILY MEDITATIONS — FEBRUARY, 2025

February 1, 2025

For by wisdom your days will be many, and years will be added to your life.

Proverbs 7:2

Most of us measure the passage of time with watches and calendars. We track our lives according to birthdays and the broad categories of childhood, teenage years, middle age, and senior citizen years. When I was in my fifties, I thought that life's passages – especially major stages, like turning 50 – should be viewed in a positive, inspirational way, not just marked by annual birthdays that added up the years. Around the same time, I learned that, based on my age and health, my life expectancy was at least 84 years. It occurred to me that 84 was divisible by 12— the number of months in a year. That meant that each month of the year, January to December, could represent seven years of life for me. The symbolism was as obvious as it was compelling. As I thought about my life in terms of seven-year segments – each segment represented by a month in the year – my concept of age and aging changed dramatically. I was no longer in my fifties, I was in the 'August' of my life ... a time of full blooms, early harvests, heat, blazing light ... with more wonderful 'months', more blessed times of life, to come. Thinking of my age in that way allowed me to see age as more than a number; to appreciate the full spectrum of life in all of its seasons. Now, in February, the shortest month of the year, let's think about the passage of time that is our life span. When I first thought of seeing life in terms of a calendar year, I used the ratio of one month equating to seven years of life because my life expectancy was 84 years, and the math was easy. But whether our lives are lengthy or not-so-lengthy, the symbolism is the same, with the growth, changes, and blessings that each 'month', each segment of life, brings to us. For the next two days, we'll look at the seasons of life as they unfold for us, with each month of the year representing seven years of our life. What age are you now? What 'month' of life's year are you in? What did past years, 'months', mean to you and bring to you? In thinking about our lives, most of us will see that all times of life have their beauty and their blessings, and all are part of a divine design for life.

February 2, 2025

He has made everything beautiful in its time.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

January..... representing our first seven years of life. From birth through age seven, we're in 'January', the month when the seeds of what is to come, in the earth and in us, are hidden, indeed. So much of our potential, our purpose, and our promise is still hidden in our 'January' years. Parents need a gardener's faith to believe that the little tykes who are deaf to their instructions will someday grow up to be doctors or teachers or parents themselves. The struggles of infancy and early childhood ... the often-undervalued efforts to grow, learn, adapt, and comprehend ... are often as severe as the struggle of tree limbs bent to breaking by the weight of winter ice. This is the season when too much coldness, too many brutal experiences, might hurt a child ... perhaps forever. Januaries aren't easy, and neither are our earliest years of life.

February.... when we are eight to fourteen. Our journey from childhood through adolescence is as unpredictable as February's weather. The journey isn't smooth. There are unexpected days of sunshine and sudden warmth, and days of unpredictable winds and storms. February is our briefest month, but it seems endless to us and to those around us as we change from children to teenagers. By the time we're fourteen, at the end of the February of our lives, we want spring to be here. We're ready for it.

March..... ages fifteen to 21. The earliest month of spring. The very first buds and blossoms appear in nature, and the first signs of what is to come, what we can be, surface in us. If we didn't call this month March, we'd want to call it Promise. As with the month itself, our lives during these years... these March years ... have periods of unaccountable joy and unexpected fears. The winds of March can blow in many directions, can be gentle or fierce. March is a rite of passage for us in our lives, as much as it is for nature's annual passage of winter into spring.

April..... the tenderness of crocuses and jonquils. The lime-green laciness of new leaves on trees. The scent of sweetness on a breeze. Willows turn yellow, then green. The earth is soft. We are age 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28. We are somehow younger now than we've ever been before or ever will be again. There are no jarring colors in April, no heat in our warmth. We're not yet thirty, and it is still only April.

May..... takes us from age 29 to age 35. This is the full flowering of spring, the first pulse of real warmth, real beauty in our gardens, in ourselves, and in our lives. Most of us have to be in this fourth decade of life to have that warmth, that capacity for caring, for commitment. May, too, is a month of promise, as are all the months of spring and all the years that make for the springtime of our life. And isn't it nice to think that, when we are in our early thirties, it is all part of an extended, varied, and lovely spring season of life.

June..... the June of our lives sees us from ages 36 to 42. It is a month, a time of life, when we can see many of our accomplishments and glory in them: children thriving; work which produces satisfaction and results as well as income; the many colors of our interests, concerns, and commitments. And it is still a fresh, young time that allows us to change course, explore different paths; to believe that all things are possible, as, indeed, they are. June years are dazzling, even dizzying, with busyness, choices, fullness ... but they are not overwhelming; not yet, no, not yet.

February 3, 2025

They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing.

Psalm 92:14

July..... heat. For many of us, for the first time, real heat in our lives. The heat of pressures in the workplace; pressures in families and relationships; for many, the first experiences of real loss, real fear. In the July of our lives, we are 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49. When it isn't too much, the heat of July can be as much of a celebration as 4th of July. In July, our lives, like our gardens, can be abundant and fruitful. In our forties we look around, savor, evaluate, appreciate. It is July. It is the mid-summer of our life, and we are not yet 50. How nice to think that summer isn't only for toddlers and teenagers.

August..... the harvest begins. When we are 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, and 56, we are in the August of our lives, lives burnished with golden, mellow colors. This is a time of fulfillment— the cresting of careers, the celebration of milestones in family life, enjoyment of life which, we hope, will not yet be hindered by problems or illnesses. This is a time to relax, lie back, and enjoy the remainder of our summer lives ... the summertime of life.

September... ages 57 through 63. Like March, this is a month of surprises. The warm days go on unexpectedly. In our lives, too, the heat continues. The heat of desire, of achievement, of longing, of striving. And we can be as surprised by this heat in ourselves as we are by the persistence of T-shirt days in early autumn. Cool nights and windy days tell us this season will not last, that there are other seasons coming. But to be in our late fifties and early sixties and be in the September of our lives is to taste a rich and satisfying nectar.

October..... the colors dazzle us. The crimsons, golds, and purples of autumn assail us with their beauty, in the same way that children and grandchildren and extended families and friends can startle us with their numbers and their diversity. We wonder: have I really done all that? Did we really come this far? In the October of our lives, we are 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70. The harvest of our work, our love, our sharing is ours to enjoy in this, the month that many say is the most beautiful. "Surely," John Donne wrote, "in Heaven, it is always October."

November... the harvest ends and the month is best known for its Thanksgiving. Just so, our lives begin to draw in when we reach the November of our lives— when we are 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77. Extraneous things matter less to us now. We know what is important and we are grateful for our blessings. It is no coincidence that we become more grateful for the blessing of good health as that health becomes, perhaps, more fragile. But even our occasional losses – in nature, the leaves that disappear so swiftly in November, and in us, the lapses of memory that appear so swiftly – remind us of what we have had, what we have enjoyed, and how we have been blessed. It has been a very good year...a very good life, indeed.

December.... whenever the last month of our life's many seasons comes, it comes when life itself is ready to close the door, just as December closes its door on the wintry weather outside. This is a time to look inward, to be near

those who are closest to us, and be close to the Creator who has been with us for our whole journey. When we are in our eighties, nineties, and beyond, the December of our life offers us choices: the splendor and celebrations of a holiday spirit if we are healthy, active, and inclined to celebrate, or the quietness and comfort of a chair by the fire and the richness of memories to warm us. When we think of December, we think of home. It is the season when we are called home. It is the month we have traveled toward all during the months and seasons of our life, a month painted glistening silver-white, with lapis blues and rich red and green holly tones. It is a time of the year ... a time of life ... that is triumphant in its closing. It is December, and it is all right.

Wherever we are in our life's journey, in our teen years or our nineties, let us always look at life as series of God-graced seasons, each with its purpose, its beauty, its blessings. May God be with you in all the seasons ahead.

February 4, 2025

My times are in your hand.

Psalm 31:15

When we think of power, most of us think of national rulers, people who command military troops or have the authority to order the launch of massive weapons. But sometimes power is a subtle thing. Take time, for example. Time yields to no one, not even to armies or world leaders. The dawn comes, the day begins, and no person, edict, or weapon can stop it. When the day ends, it closes and we can't get it back, even if we have compelling reasons—"Please, I want just one more day, one more hour with ...", "I didn't mean what I said, I want to take it back." Time moves on and yields to no one. No action of man or nature can stop, alter, or speed up time. Surely, that makes time one of the most powerful forces in life, one of the most important gifts God gives us. We seldom think about time as a force, or as a gift. But something that cannot be created, changed, or stopped – something that cannot be altered in any way – is certainly powerful. God gives us ... hands us ... this remarkable force of time each day. We hold it and decide what to do with it. We can waste it, ignore it, misuse it, or use it for joy, service, praise, peace, or many other life-affirming things. This month, the Meditations will look at time frequently.

February 5, 2025

Have you entered the treasury of snow, or have you seen the treasury of hail?

Job 38:22

If our inability to control time doesn't humble us, our vulnerability to weather should do it. In addition to last month's snow and below-freezing temperatures, parts of the country had wildfires, especially in southern California. The live film reporting and updates were terrifying: "Fires are consuming areas the size of five football fields every minute." Flames soared into the air and thick smoke obliterated the sky. The skill and courage of firefighters and responders – of everyone trying to help others – was beyond praise. With regularity, we are reminded of the limits of human control. That lack of complete control is something we don't want to admit. It bruises our human ego to think there is something we can't dominate. But wildfires – or hurricanes, tsunamis, or blizzards – arrive, and we learn, once again, the limits of our power, our authority. If we're lucky, we also learn humility. *"Creator of all, have mercy on those who have suffered in the extremes of weather, in our nation and all over the world. Where water and wind, flame and freeze have brought chaos, give your peace. Help those seeking shelter and safety. In the midst of all the destruction and loss, help these victims to know they have not lost you."*

February 6, 2025

... that you may tell it to the generation following.

Psalm 48:13

Last September, during services memorializing 9/11, a commentator noted that a whole generation of Americans has no living memory of what happened on that day. They were infants or toddlers, or were four or five years old at the time. They can't remember 9/11 in the way older Americans do. Most of us can recall where we were when those planes struck in New York, Washington, and Shanksville, Pennsylvania. When we take a generational view of time, the passing of the years takes on new meaning. There are two things we can do to 'give' time to others, especially to younger family and friends. We can share with them our life's experiences, our family's history, stories about grandparents and great-grandparents. We can tell them what life was like as we were growing up. It's wonderful if we can write these memories down to share, but conversations will do, and we can even talk into a tape recorder and create a permanent history in that way. Sadly, it is only after our older family members are gone

that we wish we had asked them more questions, asked them about their ancestors and their memories. Sharing our memories with family members is like giving them the gift of time ... a time they never knew. The other thing we can do is to share our faith with them in terms of time ... times when life was especially challenging for us or exceptionally blessed. To let others see into our most sacred life moments is to gift them with both time and insight. We let them see how faith has strengthened and sustained us, and how God has blessed us along life's way. We equip younger generations with so many things: education, opportunities, financial assistance. Let us also give them our histories and our faith stories. These, along with our love, may be the finest legacies we can give them.

February 7, 2025

My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness...

1 Corinthians 12:9

One of last month's Meditations spoke about seeing "the goodness of the Lord" – God's grace and blessings – here and now, in "the land of the living." I experienced that grace, that amazing goodness, several times at the end of last year. First, my cousin Sue, a nurse, told me that she was concerned about my cough. "The hospital is filled with people who sound like you," she said. I told her my cold was much better and I felt fine. Nevertheless, I went to the doctor. The x-rays and exam showed that the cold I thought was almost gone had lingered enough to cause "some bronchitis". The doctor said all would be well, but he was going to treat it aggressively, as early pneumonia, to make sure it would be gone. A follow-up x-ray two weeks later showed clear lungs. *"Thank you, Lord."* Then, on a rainy, foggy night, I drove over something large that jolted my car and made a loud, crunching sound. The car was drivable, but made a sickening, dragging noise. After I pulled into my garage, I sprawled on the floor and saw something large hanging down almost to the floor. I was beyond upset. It turned out to be the large cover that protects the underside of the car; easily replaced, and no other damage was done. Five days later, I heard and felt a thud as I was driving home from the nearby grocery store. I looked to the right and saw a deer with big brown eyes looking back at me. The deer must have darted from trees at the side of the road. It happened in seconds. When I pulled over, I looked at the car. No dents, no scratches, no damage. I couldn't believe it. I've felt a protective Hand around me before, but I really felt it that day. Friends later told me that deer often bump into the side of a car and just glance off and continue running. I still think it was God's hand at work. Lastly, as I was thinking about my most important goals for this year, the almost impossible task of finding a publisher for my second book was front and center. As I was praying and thinking about this near-impossibility, I picked up a devotional guide and read these words: "God will make a way where there is no way." Those words spoke to my heart and my hopes; another touch of God's goodness here and now, "in the land of the living." *"Thank you, Lord, for these and all the known and unknown touches of your grace, here and now ... for me, for all of us. Thank you."*

February 8, 2025

"... In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." John 16:33

Yesterday's Meditation triggers some natural questions: What if the second x-ray had shown no improvement, or a worsening condition? What if it hadn't been a protective cover that fell from under my car, but part of the engine? What if the deer had done major damage to my car, or even forced me into the opposite lane, perhaps causing a serious accident? What if? We all know that, even under the watchful eye of a loving God, bad things can happen. We pray and trust but we still hear, "I'm sorry. It's cancer." "I'm sorry. He's gone." Life is derailed in many ways: "I want a divorce." "Your job is being eliminated." Our life on earth, whoever we are, includes troubles, tears, and even tragedy. Look around you at church. You can be certain that every person you see has felt heartache. Look at the strangers around you at a restaurant. Every one of them has cried tears of grief or despair. (While you're at it, offer silent prayers for those around you. God will know what their needs are.) Think of the family and friends whose troubles are known to you. In this world, everyone has 'tribulations'. Faith in God never has been, never could be, a guarantee of a trouble-free life. But Jesus tells us that he has overcome the world. Perhaps our tears won't be dried or our hearts soothed on this side of heaven. So be it. God is with us nevertheless. Jesus speaks of a life beyond this one, a place of peace, of knowing what we don't know now, of oneness with the Intentional Force of Love and Creation we call God. "Be of good cheer. I have overcome the world."

February 9, 2025

In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.

Isaiah 1:22

A catalog arrived in the mail, offering a series of ‘olden times’ puzzles. One of them showed a General Store with a horse and cart out front. Another was of an old mill, with boys fishing in the river, from canoes and from the riverbank. Still another showed a large gazebo in the village square, with children in old-fashioned clothing playing nearby, and older folks sitting on benches among flower gardens. In our chaotic world, we can feel a longing for those olden times of peace and pleasantness. Of course, no time is without its stresses and problems. The ‘good old days’ shown in the puzzles were times when many illnesses had no treatments, no cures ... treatments and cures we take for granted today. A century or so ago, work at home and in the workplace was often tedious and back-breaking, with long hours and few of the tools, appliances, and conveniences we also take for granted. It would be wonderful if we could bring the simplicity and slower pace of those earlier times into our world. Perhaps there are ways to do so. For example: do we need to be involved in so many activities? Volunteerism is admirable, but it shouldn’t come at the cost of our physical or emotional health. Why do our phones have to be on all the time? Are we all surgeons waiting for a call to the ER? And if we think about what social media really does – connect us to scores, hundreds, even thousands of people and their opinions, complaints, and rantings – we’d know that we should use it in small doses. It might not be easy to change, to stop multi-tasking, and learn to focus on and savor one thing at a time. It would also be difficult to block out the fears, threats, lies, and ugliness often served up by politicians and their puppets. But having more peace and serenity, as some had in olden times, would be worth it.

February 10, 2025

For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish. Psalm 1:6

I hadn’t seen my friend in more than 30 years when she returned to the area for a class reunion. During her visit, we talked about how the world has changed. She told me about the now-unthinkable things that happened to her in her career. A phenomenally hard worker, and a single mom after her husband’s early death, she’d known poverty. Working two jobs, she put herself through college via seven years of night classes, and she developed a career in banking. After many years, she was named a vice president of the bank, but that title wasn’t a barrier to the harassment that was so blatant then. The first time she went to have lunch in the officers’ dining room, after her promotion, she was told to “go eat with the girls, the clerks, where you belong.” She refused. She was an officer of the bank and would eat in that dining room even if she had to eat alone. Her boss was furious with her for ‘not knowing her place’. Working with state government was part of her job. A high-ranking state official told her, “Yeah, we’ll do business with your bank, if you’ll do business with me,” and he went on to describe the sexual services he was expecting. She refused, and she reported the incident to her boss. Again, he yelled at her for her ‘uncooperative attitude’ and for not understanding ‘how the world works’. He was equally deaf and belligerent when she reported the smutty comments and the grabbing at her that were jokes to the men working at the bank. She knew it would be the same at most other workplaces, so she continued to rebuff the insults, report the physical grabs, and work to support her children. “My former boss is still alive,” she told me. “I wonder if, by now, he understands how wrong all those things were.” In the 19th century, Unitarian minister Theodore Parker said that, although he could not see the full arc of the moral universe, he was certain that it bent toward justice. Pastors, priests, rabbis, scholars, and presidents have quoted his words, in some form, many times since. Those words are related to today’s verse from Psalm 1, and they apply to my friend and her tormentors ... and to us. We rightfully abhor the injustices of the past, in all their forms. Let us be just as vigorous in opposing the injustices of the present. “For the Lord knows the way of the righteous ... and the ungodly,” and the moral arc of the universe will always bend toward justice.

February 11, 2025

Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

Psalm 34:14

Some passages in the Bible are very clear and very simple. This is one of them. It tells us to stay away from evil, from those things we know in our minds and hearts are wrong or harmful, and it tells us to do good and to actively seek peace. Perhaps, today, we’ll have the chance to help end a quarrel or a misunderstanding. Maybe we can offer words of encouragement to someone; offer a compliment to someone who needs that affirmation. Perhaps we will see someone in need or difficulty and have the chance to say, “Can I help you?” And it might be that we will be tempted to do or say something we know is wrong and we’ll have the strength to turn away from that temptation. In some ways, this verse makes the day an adventure. How will God invite us to turn from evil, to do good, and to seek peace? These words were not meant solely for the time of the psalmist. They were meant for us. You and me. Today and every day. How will God lead us to fulfill his words? Let the adventure begin!

February 12, 2025

Then God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

Deuteronomy 32:4

When we hear or read the word ‘nature’, most of us think of the natural world, and our thoughts are positive, even joyful. We picture iridescent snow on mountain tops, turquoise waters gliding onto pink sand beaches. We imagine 100-foot waterfalls, looking like tinsel and sounding like thunder, we picture pink flamingoes or monarch butterflies. We know that the natural world is varied in ways beyond creatures and colors. We know that nature can be as forbidding as it is beautiful, as destructive as it is life-giving. What if we applied that same understanding and acceptance to that other nature— human nature? Then, we might be more accepting of the varied aspects of being human. We’d understand that even easygoing people have breaking points and limits to their tolerance, and that the most timid among us can have courage, strength, and resourcefulness. We would understand – and accept – the fact that personalities vary widely. Some people are natured to be spontaneous, while others plan carefully; some are shy, others are gregarious; some are fearful, others are brave, and some, unfortunately, seem hard-wired for destructive behaviors. We’d understand that beauty can mask danger (an evil heart) and that delicacy (vulnerability) is not weakness. Human nature is complex, intricate, and sensitive, responding to both nurturing and mistreatment. If we gave human nature the same respect and acceptance that we give to Mother Nature, we might stop trying to control people, to mold them, to make them some version of who we think they should be. We could respect them for their individual, God-given characteristics ... even their weaknesses and failings. Spouses might accept each other as they are, and not try to change them. Parents would appreciate their children, and vice versa. We might see what is innately good and unique in our colleagues, friends, neighbors, and others. We would never expect an arid desert to produce a blizzard, or an azalea bush to produce apples. Let us stop trying to mold, manipulate, or control human nature in others. *“Creator God, help me to appreciate the complexity and sanctity of people ... just as they are, as you made them ... as much as I do the sanctity of the diversity in the natural world. Help me to see everything that comes from your hand as good, including people.”*

February 13, 2025

Christ says, “Ask and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.”

Matthew 7:7

Christ’s words in this verse are some of the most wonderful – and confusing – in the Bible. The words seem to promise us that anything we want will be ours for the asking. But most of us realize that God is not like an ATM machine from which we can make withdrawals, or like a waiter in a restaurant with whom we place an order. What Christ was referring to in this passage is the kind of wisdom, guidance, and blessing that comes when we ask for things that are in keeping with God’s will for us; when we look for and ask for those things that will help us to be the people he created us to be. Perhaps we need God in two ways: to grant us what we ask for, and to help us to know *what* to ask for. *“Lord, you created me. You know me better than I know myself, and you know the ways in which my life can best serve you and fulfill my desires and my destinies. Hear my prayers with the wisdom of your Creator’s heart. Place in me the desires and visions that are right for me, and lead me to the doors that are waiting to be opened in order to fulfill those callings. Hear me when I ask, and teach me what I am to ask for.”*

February 14, 2025

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

1 Corinthians 13:7

On this day, Valentine’s Day, many people focus on hearts and flowers and romantic love. Those things are wonderful and worthy of celebration. But we don’t often think about the awesome strength of love— its power, its resilience, its permanence, its indestructibility. People have persevered in loving against all odds, all challenges, all logic. Someone I know has an adult son who is, let’s say, difficult. The son can be combative, ungrateful, self-centered, unkind, demanding, and uncaring. Nevertheless, the father loves his son. He does not indulge or enable his son, but he is always there for him. He loves him. I’ve also seen love in the form of heroic caregiving: a wife who lovingly cared for her husband through long years of his dementia, even when he – no longer his real self – was verbally abusive. She lost patience with him at times, but she never lost the love that she felt for him. Love can certainly be sweet and playful and effervescent, especially when it is new and we are young. But love can also

be strong and sacrificial. Perhaps we should not be surprised. Love is the essence and gift of a Creator whose Son embodied love, strength, and sacrifice. Whatever forms of love we celebrate today, let's remember the Creator who formed love and gifted it to us ... the Creator who loves us now and always will. *"Lord God, we love you, too."*

February 15, 2025

Then our mouth was filled with laughter ...

Psalm 126:2

If time and love are two of the most powerful and important gifts God gives us, surely humor, though less monumental than time and love, is not far behind. As we age, humor often gives us perspective as well as ways to adapt to the changes that come with age. I recently told a friend that my dermatologist suggested that I begin to use a moisturizer. "But I've always had oily skin," I said to the doctor. "When I take a shower, water beads on my skin as if I was a just-waxed '54 Buick." "Nevertheless," replied the dermatologist, "when you're ... uh, a certain age ... your skin needs moisturizer even if it's oily. Your skin dries with age despite oiliness. That's why those wrinkles are beginning to appear on your forehead." I wondered if the doctor's next question would be "Where have you hidden your waistline?" My friend was sympathetic. She told me that she'd looked down at her knees and suddenly wondered what was hanging near them. Then she realized— it was her thighs. I laughed so hard I almost piddled. That kind of laugh is good for the body as well as the soul. We all confront the passage of time and the reality of change. Even people in their thirties and forties have jolts of realizing that they can't do what they did in their teens and twenties. It must be worse for celebrities and athletes who lose youth and looks, speed and strength as they age ... while the whole world watches. But a sense of humor is an important asset in life, at any age. Learning to laugh, to see the humor in people and situations, realizing that life itself should make us laugh loudly and often— these are lessons we should learn early in life and treasure always. Humor lightens life's load and lubricates the gears for going forward. It also helps us to appreciate life. Surely, Jesus smiled and laughed often, with a sense of humor that was both gentle and insightful. Anyone who has ever seen a blobfish or a proboscis monkey knows that the Creator has a sense of humor as well as an artist's eye. In every stage of life, we need humor— for relief, for perspective, for humility, for the sheer joy of it. *"Lord, let me always be able to laugh, especially at myself. Help me to see the humor in life that balances the tears. Thank you— for all of it."*

February 16, 2025

Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord.

Genesis 6:8

Most of us know the story of Noah. A simple man who lived thousands of years ago, he was going about his life when the Lord told him to build an ark and to fill it with living creatures from the earth. Even to a man of faith like Noah, this instruction from God must have seemed absurd. But Noah did what people of faith have always done: he obeyed God. According to Genesis, through Noah's obedience to God's instructions, many living creatures were saved when God brought a flood upon the earth. Many cultures and religious traditions have similar 'flood' stories, and the account of Noah and the ark is as much questioned as it is accepted. But there is certainly evidence of vast floods affecting the earth, and in the 20th century, explorations ranging from a US Air Force reconnaissance mission to the investigations of scientists and archaeologists, have reported ancient finds in the area of Mt. Ararat. Perhaps the lack of tangible evidence doesn't matter. Perhaps it is the meaning of the message, the story, and not the remnant of the ark that matters. We may never know the full truth of the story of Noah, and we may never be asked to do anything like build an ark. But we are asked to build loving lives, build communities, build relationships with others, and build our connection to God. We may not be asked to save entire species, but we are asked to protect the life of all living things. We may never be asked to sail across the face of the earth, but we are asked to visit those who are ill or in distress. Like Noah, we will do good and great things when we obey God's call, and we will find favor in the sight of the Lord, even if we have never sailed on a boat much less built one.

February 17, 2025

Wherever Jesus went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed. Mark 6:56

It is almost beyond our imaginations to think that Jesus could heal with a touch; that healing could come to those who simply touched the fringe or hem of his garments. But many people experience miracles of healing today,

often through the miracles of modern medicine; procedures and treatments we too often take for granted. When these miracles occur, we may not understand how they happen, but we are grateful for them, and we thank God that he is the ‘great physician’ today, as he was yesterday and will be tomorrow. God is with us. God can touch us, and in faith we can reach out to touch God, no matter what it is in our lives that needs healing.

February 18, 2025

Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart.

1 Peter 1:22

Our Christian lives are and always will be ‘a work in progress’. Even when we obey God’s word, even when God is our guide and companion every day, we are still learning and growing. This passage tells us that, after we have opened our hearts so that they can be loving hearts, we are to love others, as deeply and genuinely as we can. It is usually easy to love our family members and close friends; not so easy to love those who are unkind to us or hurtful to others. That kind of loving-from-the-heart might not be easy to do, but God will recognize – and will appreciate – our efforts to be loving, and we will continue to grow in God’s grace and love. We are, and always will be, ‘works in progress’, and that’s fine with God. May it be fine with us as well.

February 19, 2025

O Lord, be gracious to me; heal me, for I have sinned against you.

Psalms 41:4

In some ways, this verse relates to yesterday’s reading. We all do or think or say things that are wrong, intentionally or unintentionally. That’s part of being human and having human weaknesses. But we usually know, deep inside, when we’ve done something wrong. We know it, and it bothers us. Maybe we even feel sick about it; sick spiritually, emotionally, perhaps even physically; sick enough to need real healing. When this happens, the only thing to do is to turn to God, to tell God that we know we’ve done wrong and that we’re sorry. We can ask for his understanding and forgiveness. And when we confess our wrongdoing and receive God’s forgiveness, we’ll feel better; we’ll feel as though we’ve been healed, because that is exactly what God does for us. “*O Lord ... heal me ... for I have sinned*”

February 20, 2025

You have set all the borders of the earth; you have made summer and winter.

Psalms 74:17

In the midst of last month’s brutal cold, when high winds lowered the ‘real feel’ temperatures to below zero, I felt disquieted in ways that had nothing to do with my dislike of cold weather. Then I realized: I was separated from the earth— the soil, grass, plants, shrubs, and trees that bring me joy in three seasons of the year. I love to dig in the soil. I enjoy planting, weeding, pruning. I love to lie on the grass to read or just relax. I really believe that, in some mysterious way, contact with the earth helps and heals us physically as well as spiritually. Walking barefoot on the grass, or sitting bare-legged in the sun on the lawn, feels deeply renewing, like having an ancient connection to Mother Earth. Perhaps it’s good that we have these months of waiting for spring, for summer, for new growth, and new life. Our waiting invites us to trust, to believe, to know that the freezing temperatures will fade and the flowers will once again appear. Perhaps we strengthen our faith muscles in these times of waiting. As of today, it’s 28 days until the first day of spring. I began my countdown, as I always do, in mid-October, when there were 156 days until the first day of spring. The stems and buds are moving up through the soil right now. God gives us this promise of new life – in the garden and in us – even when it is hidden, even when we can’t see it.

February 21, 2025

God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but a spirit of power and of love and self-discipline. 2 Tim.1:7

All of us are afraid at times. Sometimes it’s sensible to be afraid. Fear can help us to be careful and to respond in the best way in specific circumstances. In a remarkable book titled ‘The Fear Cure,’ the author, Lissa Rankin, a physician, describes the ways in which our fears can even help us to grow and become strong. God wants us to have confidence in ourselves and in our abilities to manage even the difficult parts of life. God does not want us to

live in fear or to be prisoners of worry. We may not think that we have the ability to be courageous, but God has promised that he has given us a spirit of power, of love, and of self-control. With those, we can face anything, because we face all of life with God.

February 22, 2025

Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” Luke 19:4-5

Imagine being Zacchaeus. Imagine going to see a famous person ... watching from a distance ... and then that famous person looks at you and says that he must stay at your house today. Zacchaeus must have been shocked, elated, frightened, honored, and proud, all at the same time. This wasn't just a famous person in the way that we now think of celebrities. This was a great teacher, a healer, and, some said, the Messiah. And he even knew Zacchaeus by name! No wonder Zacchaeus was in a whirl. What would we do if Jesus passed by us today, looked at us, called us by name, and said that he wanted to stay at our homes and visit with us? What would we do? Well, today and every day Jesus sees us, knows us by name, and wants to be with us and stay with us. What will we do with this invitation?

February 23, 2025

You know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9

Seldom, when God is speaking, does 'rich' mean what it usually means to us: having a lot of money. In God's eyes, being rich means rich in spirit, in love, in relationship to him. But think for a moment of what Jesus might have done with the power that was obviously his. When Satan tempted Jesus in the desert, at the start of his ministry, Satan said something very true: Jesus could have turned stones into bread to feed himself. He could have thrown himself down and been borne up on angels' wings. Jesus could have become a famous and even a rich man simply by using his powers. But Jesus was God's son, and he knew what his mission and his ministry must be. He refused to be rich in the way that the world thinks of 'rich', and he accepted the life of a traveling preacher, teacher, and healer, in order that we might hear the message of God's love, learn about his acceptance of us, and be healed in whatever ways we need ... all in order that we might be truly rich in this life and in the life to come.

February 24, 2025

Pray then in this way: Give us this day our daily bread. Matthew 6:9-11

This part of the Lord's Prayer reminds us of two realities. First, we are dependent upon God for the most basic necessities of life, appropriately summed up by the word 'bread', and second, we need these necessities – these gifts of God – daily. It is so easy to think that we do everything on our own. We work to earn the money to pay for food, clothing, and housing, and we are expected to act responsibly in managing our lives. We're proud when we accomplish things, and we should be. We're glad when we discover and develop our skills, and we should be. But we should never forget the source of our life and all that is in it: God. Let us ask God, and thank God, every day, for everything.

February 25, 2025

Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. Revelation 15:4

There are many ways to sense God's holiness. Perhaps it happens when a new baby is born and we see the miracle of new life. Perhaps there has been a healing in answer to prayer. Sometimes, we marvel at the beauty and complexity of nature. Or we have a sure sense of knowing something and we believe that God has spoken to our hearts. Whatever the reason, it is good to have this sense of God's holiness. Today ... and often ... we should make room for holiness. Be still today, and let the holiness come to your heart. *“Speak to me, Lord. I am open and willing to listen and to hear.”*

February 26, 2025

I myself will search for my sheep and look after them.

Ezekiel 34:11

It is for good reason that Jesus is often referred to, and portrayed as, a shepherd. It takes courage and devotion to tend sheep, to search for the ones that stray, to be willing to risk your life to keep them safe. Shepherds do this task today in many lands, with love and commitment for the creatures in their care. In our complicated and industrialized world, it is hard to picture the places where shepherds still bravely and devotedly tend sheep, exactly as they did in Jesus's time. And just as the work of shepherds is timeless and ongoing, so is the shepherding of Jesus. He is willing to search and sacrifice, protect and defend, love and save those he calls his sheep. We all feel lost sometimes. How good to know that we have a shepherd who is searching for us ... sometimes before we even realize that we're lost.

February 27, 2025

Paul wrote: I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

1 Corinthians 3:6

We usually think of teamwork in terms of sports teams. But most of life – especially its successes and achievements – involves teamwork. Whether it is in school projects, community work, churches, local groups, government, or in the most important of international affairs, teamwork matters. We each have roles to play in our lives, families, work, and relationships. Rarely can one person 'do it all'. Could one person have built the pyramids? No. The great cathedrals? No. Fly to the moon? No. We each play our parts, even if we can't always see the results. And God plays a part. God gives the growth. *"Parent God, help me to always know that my life is not a solo act, even if it feels that way at times. Not only have others helped me and loved me, but you have been with me every step of the way. Whether I plant or water or enjoy the growth, I know that I do not function alone. Thank you for all you do for me ... for all of us ... always."*

February 28, 2025

The earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.

Psalms 33:5

As the very first signs of spring begin to pop up – tiny green tops of tulips and daffodils pushing through the softening earth, some crocuses blooming, robins returning – we are reminded that the earth is, indeed, the Lord's, and the Creator renews its life as he renews our lives. This is a time to look forward to the beauty of the flowers and trees and new life to come. It is also a good time to pause in all of our hurrying and busyness to simply enjoy God's earth, to see God's love and Creator's touch in nature, and to thank God for this and so many other blessings. *"For all that surrounds me, Father, whether in crowded cities or wilderness expanses, I thank you. In this season of new life, I am willing to have new life – your new life – come to me."*