

APRIL 29 – May 20, 2018 DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET

From Ashes to Fire

*A Lent-to-Pentecost Devotional Collaboration between
Ascension, First, Grace, Prince of Peace, Christ the King, and Mt.
Calvary Lutheran Churches – ELCA*



Grace Lutheran Church

Pastor Michael Tassler

1128 E. Boulder St.

Colorado Springs, CO 80903

719-634-2478

www.gracelutherancos.org

In the Neighborhood for Good

The following devotional is a collaborative effort among six ELCA congregations in Colorado Springs including; Ascension, Grace, First, Prince of Peace, Christ the King and Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church. We are grateful to be brothers and sisters in Christ and able to connect in efforts such as this Lent-to-Pentecost Devotional.

Sincerely,
Deacon Mary Stoneback
Ascension Lutheran Church

FIFTH WEEK OF EASTER

April 29-May 5

Hebrews 12:1-14

We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses

¹Therefore, 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,²looking 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.

³Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. ⁴In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children —

“My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; ⁶for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts.”

⁷Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? ⁸If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children. ⁹Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness. ¹¹Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

¹²Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, ¹³and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. ¹⁴Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

I have this vision of God spending a lot of time with his head in his hands, saying “I can’t believe he’s doing it again...the same stupid thing that got him into trouble last time.” Pretty much the same way we see 2-year olds when they try to climb on the bookcase. We correct their behavior (for the moment), because we don’t want them to get hurt. And ten minutes later, they’re doing it again <facepalm>. More correction. And, so we know how God feels.

Yes, to God we’re a bunch of 2 year olds climbing on bookcases. How frustrating that must be. At least 2 year olds grow up, but God’s children seem to make the same stupid mistakes over and over. Okay, this one does, anyway. So, maybe we need to stop every once in a while and pay attention to God’s attempts to discipline us. Couldn’t hurt any more than falling off a bookcase...

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help us to listen to your attempts to protect us from our own foolish behaviors. We know you love us and want to keep us safe from sin. Thank you for your infinite patience. Amen.*

~Dennis Bagenstos
Ascension Lutheran Church

As I type this, the pilot informs us that we have reached an elevation of 39,000 feet. I look out the window of the airplane and see an endless field of clouds far below me. They look like the tops of cinnamon rolls, swirled with icing.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,” begins our text from Hebrews. The “therefore” suggests we pay attention to what has come before. Indeed, in the previous chapter, we hear about these witnesses. They “conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight...Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword.”

Yikes. These are the witnesses in the cloud.

Science tells us a cloud is an aerosol consisting of minute, uncountable liquid droplets and frozen crystals. We Christians are surrounded by such an aerosol of faithful witnesses. Perhaps what is most remarkable about these ancient faithful is this: "Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect."

Hebrews tells us that we *have* received what was promised: Jesus Christ. And so, I wonder: if those who did *not* receive the fulfillment of God's promises could do what they did, what about us who have? *How much more*, I wonder, can we who live in the light of Christ, in the Easter joy of the promises of God fulfilled, do and be?

Prayer: *Loving and faithful God, you surround us with witnesses - from ancient times and in our daily lives - who remind us that by trusting in your promises, we can be and do more than we could ever imagine. Amen.*

~Pastor Michael Tassler
Grace Lutheran Church

SIXTH WEEK OF EASTER

May 6-12

Matthew 6:25-34

Do not be anxious about your life

²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you — you of little faith? ³¹Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³²For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴“So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life...” Who doesn’t worry? From the small worries (Did I remember to close the garage door? How am I ever going to get all this laundry done?) to the larger, severe anxiety-producing worries (What if I lose my job? How do I carry on after the loss of a loved one?), our days are often filled with worry — almost ingrained in our very souls. To worry is to be human!

What do we gain by worrying? Worrying does not add length to our life, health to our body, or hours to our day. Fear, anxiety, and distress distract us. What if instead we give our cares to God, trust him, and use wasted time and energy spent on worrying to seek his kingdom and righteousness.

I resonate most with: “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” Isn’t that the truth? My days have plenty troubles of their own without heaping on future concerns. Let’s be present to TODAY—God knows what awaits us tomorrow. Let’s turn our focus to God, reject our worries, and trust in Him.

Prayer: *Lord, may we cast aside our daily worries and anxiety about the future, and instead turn to you. You know what we need - we trust in you. May your wisdom and love guide us as we seek your kingdom. Amen.*

~Hanna Silver
Christ the King Lutheran Church

In 1979, while in the Air Force, I was diagnosed with cancer, and spent a few months in the hospital with tests, surgeries, and chemotherapy. My wife and I were engaged at this time, and I don’t know what I would have done without her love and support. There were times we talked about our future, and there were times where we were anxious about what would happen. Since then I have found that it does no good to worry, but I also have to admit that worry is a common temptation in life, even though it’s a self-defeating waste of time.

We worry about the things in our lives we cannot see and about things we cannot control, and sometimes we worry about not being able to just be in control. Many times, we worry just for the sake of worrying. But how much time do we spend worrying about things that never happen?

Worrying paralyzes you, making you too upset to accomplish anything productive. It will seek to do that to you by taking you mentally into tomorrow until you find something to worry about. Refuse to go along for the ride. The Lord says you have enough to deal with today, so live in the light and full joy of that day, using the resources God supplies us. Don't push yourself into the future and forfeit the day's joy over an anticipated tomorrow that may never happen. Today is all you really have, for God permits none of us to live in tomorrow until it turns into today. If you

are worrying about the problems of tomorrow, you will miss out on the blessings, joy and gifts of today.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, I thank you for today and for every moment that we have. Each day is a gift from you that we must use to its very best. Help us to seek you now, today, and to fill our lives with you so that every today and every tomorrow is better because our today has been lived well. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

~Tom Tindell
Grace Lutheran Church

An unfortunate and awkward condition of humanity is that we tend to live in the past or the future rather than the sacredness of the now. I've had many friends whose attachment to the past haunts them and tends to color the perceptions they have of others and of life's events and challenges. I tend to have the opposite problem - an anxiety and urgency to get on to the next phase of my life, a yearning for making things better, more satisfying, more complete. There are disadvantages to both points of view, and a kind of selfishness which comes with either perspective.

Jesus seems to call us to a much simpler, less worrisome attitude, and he draws our attention to the beautiful living creations around us, the "birds and lilies of the field" (Matthew 6:26-28) who accept life the way it is for them without excessive thought, worry or concern. They live in the now, without anxiety, focused on the precious gifts of life. They truly seem to never know nor care that their lives may not be perfect.

One such beautiful creature blessed our family this past summer. Our daughter and her twin 9-year-old daughters moved in with us for a few months while transitioning from another town, another job and school to new ones here. Along with them came a wonderful, loving 13-year-old dog, a German Shepherd, Rottweiler mix. Daisy had a way of welcoming each day with a tender attitude and a kind presence. In spite of increasing weakness in her joints and muscles, she accepted her circumstances without complaint, always wagging her tail and greeting each of us with deep tenderness in her beautiful eyes. As the summer went on, she became unable to make it upstairs. She welcomed sweet moments as we took turns sleeping with her on the main level of our home each night. Before our daughter and granddaughters resettled into their own to

home, Daisy passed into eternity... quietly, simply, without apparent suffering or complaint.

We learned a lot about how God intends us to accept death, that of others and ultimately our own, from the way Daisy simply made the best of her condition, still enjoying the God-given gift and provisions of each day. More importantly, we learned much from Daisy about how to live our lives without looking forward or back, simply accepting the sacredness of the now.

Prayer: *Dearest Jesus, thank you for the abundant examples of simplicity and acceptance you provide us through your creation of the animals and plants which graciously surround us. Help us to be more like them, accepting all life as gift, all the blessings of living in the now. Amen.*

~Dan Joslin
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

Worrying is something I'm trying to become less good at. Complete trust in a God who loves me is my heart's desire. As I get older, the things I worry about have changed. When I was young, I worried about my career, my love life, what people thought of me. Now I get a little scared thinking about health issues, the prospect of outliving my savings and losing my independence. Looking forward to the unknown still causes me some angst. But I've learned that worrying about tomorrow steals your today.

At 60, I have the perspective of looking to the past and seeing how God has been with me. I survived all the stuff I worried about that never happened. God loves me in spite of myself and he has taken good care of me. Unexpected things happened to me that I never thought to worry about; things that were not easy to go through. In hindsight, I understand the passage that "each day has enough of its own trouble". Worry conjures up imaginary trouble and life is too short for trouble that isn't real.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, I thank you for my many blessings and ask you to continue to teach me to trust you. Worrying is a waste of my time, a sin against you and a hindrance to my relationship with you. Please forgive me for worrying. I love you too. Amen.*

~Arlayne McKee

Ascension Lutheran Church

SEVENTH WEEK OF EASTER

May 13-19

Ephesians 1:15-23

God put this power to work in Christ

¹⁵I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²²And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Try this. Ask any child questions like these: Can your arms sing songs? Your fingers smell flowers? Your toes talk to a friend? They, rightfully so, would think you were being silly. But when Vickie and I read and discussed our assigned passage we both immediately responded to the line: “*So that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which He has called you.*” The eyes of our hearts enlightened. What did those words mean to us today? Perhaps that when we see—*with our eyes*—a group of homeless individuals gathered in tents or on street corners, we only see a group of individuals gathered together. We might even look the other way. But, when we see the same thing with the *eyes of our heart*, we see a group of God’s children as beautiful and important in His eyes as our friends and next-door neighbors.

Is the hope to which he has called us compassion? Is the hope to which he has called to see and respond to His world not only with our eyes alone, but with the eyes of our hearts?

Prayer: *Dearest Lord, enlighten, daily, the eyes of our hearts. Guide us in our response to what our hearts see. Let us never look the other way, but in our responses be better witnesses of the Christian walk. In Jesus's name, we pray Amen.*

~Greg and Vickie Denman,
Christ the King Lutheran Church

I don't usually feel as though I have a spirit of wisdom, much less of revelation, in me. Daily life is harried and demanding, to the point of pushing aside everything except my most immediate and pressing commitments. As a young professional, I focused my energy on deadlines and career paths. Once I had children, my attention shifted to nursing and changing diapers, then to dealing with potty training and refereeing sibling conflicts, and finally to attending teacher conferences and marching-band competitions. Now that the kids are grown and (almost) gone from home, I'm back to the pressure of professional commitments and trying to keep my house reasonably clean.

Through it all, I've prayed for God to open my eyes so I can see the right path in front of me, asking to receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation. But now I think I was going about it all wrong. Maybe God has already given me that spirit. Maybe the wisdom is knowing that God is already part of everything I do, and the revelation is simply recognizing God's spirit within myself. Amid all the stress, I've already received the gift.

Prayer: *God of grace and giving, enlighten the eyes of my heart to help me see that your spirit is already at work within me, and all I have to do is acknowledge it to let it flow forth into the world. Amen.*

~Ginny Ruths
Grace Lutheran Church

DAY OF PENTECOST

May 20

Acts 4:18-21, 23-33

They were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness

¹⁸So they called them and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge;²⁰for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard." ²¹After threatening them again, they let them go, finding no way to punish them because of the people, for all of them praised God for what had happened.

²³After they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴When they heard it, they raised their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and everything in them, ²⁵it is you who said by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant: 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? ²⁶The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers have gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah.' ²⁷For in this city, in fact, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed,²⁸to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.²⁹And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." ³¹When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.

³²Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. ³³With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

In my second year of seminary I served as a Resident's Assistant. I enjoyed welcoming colleagues and helping them get settled into the dorms. As I read through this passage from Acts, one of the first people I got to help as an RA came to mind: Christopher. Having served in the Swedish Army playing drums, Christopher was always drumming. On books, on walls and tables and of course, on trap sets. I remember one professor asking him to stop drumming, which he did, only to quietly tap and move his feet. He was full of energy and zeal for sharing God's Word with anyone who would listen. Christopher was not afraid to share the truth of God's love and grace with anyone and anywhere.

Today, Christopher continues his bold sharing of the Gospel on a Swedish Christian television station. He and I also ended up doing a presentation on this Acts passage. What I remember most of our preparation of the text was Christopher's unwavering belief and experience in the gift of the Holy Spirit. Years later Christopher called out of the blue and shared that he felt led to invite me to look at Zechariah 4:6, which reads, "He said to me, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but my spirit, says the Lord of hosts."

This text has been a continual reminder for me that we're not in this life alone, nor left to just 'power through' on our own strength, intellect, and effort. Just as God gifted the disciples with the Holy Spirit then, we too, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This same Spirit boldens us to live as witnesses of Christ's death and resurrection in our places of work, our homes, our schools, and wherever we reside and in our relationships with friends, family, neighbors and those we come into contact throughout the week. May we be encouraged that we are a community of Pentecost.

May God's breath stream within you.

May God's breath renew you.

May God's breath invigorate you.

Walk with confidence into this day.

Amen.

—Traditional Jewish blessing

~Deacon Mary Stoneback, Ascension Lutheran Church



Grace Lutheran Church

Pastor Michael Tassler

1128 E. Boulder St.

Colorado Springs, CO 80903

719-634-2478

www.gracelutherancos.org

In the Neighborhood for Good