



Weekly Devotion for the week of May 18 – May 24, 2020  
By Leigh LeGare, Director, Business Development  
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### Jesus Calms the Storm (Mark 4:35-41)

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the storm, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other. "Who is this? Even the wind and waves obey him!"

As we maneuver what I have been referencing as the "COVID-19 wave" and its uncertainty, I'm constantly reminded of this parable. That when it seems all is lost, to include staying within my own bubble of control, I have to remember that Jesus is in my boat. As long as I have Him, He can calm the storm and help me get to the other side.

However, leaning on and trusting in Him is half the battle. I have to commit to something actionable and meet Him halfway during these unprecedented times. Taped on my bathroom mirror is an index card with this:

I will be better at remaining grounded, focused, and content with the present day. To remain humble and grateful for where I am, what I have, and who I have in my life. My 2020 mantra (Proverbs 31:25), "She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future," will further my desire to focus on the present day. I will smile and laugh. Through the good and adverse. I will serve, be kind, and relay compassion. Even when I may be the one who needs those things most. I will embrace each day. Even when rainbows aren't always present.

We're in this storm together, yet each of us are on altered boats with unique situations and experiences causing us to maneuver the storm differently. However, I do believe He has a plan even if,

for many of us, this is the most unclear it's been. I encourage you to remember that if we let go of our fear of the future, focus on the present day, Jesus will meet us halfway and rebuke those things that cause us doubt and anxiety. If we can shift our perspective, we can help others do the same. So that one day, the waves feel less choppy and we can forge ahead to smoother waters.

Thoughts, prayers, and support to all.



Weekly Devotion for the week of May 11 – May 17, 2020

By Caitlyn Gudmundsen, Senior Manager, Program Development and Outreach  
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John 14: 15-21: The Promise of the Holy Spirit

<sup>15</sup> “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. <sup>17</sup> This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

<sup>18</sup> “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. <sup>19</sup> In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup> On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup> They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

This passage in John has always brought me immense comfort. John 14 is part of the larger Farwell Discourse that Jesus gives at the Last Supper, before his impending betrayal and crucifixion. Jesus tells the disciples that he is going away, but the good news is that he is preparing a place for them, and will send an Advocate to be with them in his absence.

This Advocate, also interpreted as “the Paraclete,” is what we would call the Holy Spirit. Jesus promises the Holy Spirit will provide comfort and guidance to the disciples, and to the entire Christian community. Jesus continues to abide with us today through the Holy Spirit. That message sure comforts me on a regular day, but is especially reassuring in the midst of a global pandemic.

I have to confess, that at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, I found myself a bit irritated by the term “the new normal.” It felt to me like people were constantly using this term, and it meant that life would never go back to the way it was pre-COVID-19. I found that upsetting. I can endure social isolation to prevent the virus from spreading further, but never going back to life-as-it-was? That’s hard to fathom.

In recent weeks, I have chosen to change the way I think about “the new normal.” Maybe we will never go back to the way things were before COVID-19 wreaked havoc on our communities, and maybe that’s a good thing. Maybe “the new normal” is an opportunity to reset, and reexamine our society. Our pre-COVID-19 society was far from perfect, so how can our “new normal” be an improvement? This reset may just be an opportunity to strive for greater equity, and rebuild a society that looks a bit more like the Kingdom of God.

Although there is a lot of uncertainty in this COVID-19 world, there is one thing I am sure of: Christ is present with us through the Holy Spirit. That means we can rely on the Holy Spirit to guide us as we endure this crisis, rebuild a more equitable society, and continue the work of Christ in caring for the vulnerable and the oppressed. As the great Reverend William Barber said, “Prophets believe that what they proclaim on any day can be transformed into real action.” May we be hopeful about what our future will look like, use this opportunity to take real action to transform our society, and be guided by the Holy Spirit in doing so. I pray that the Holy Spirit would be at work in each of us as we strive toward a post-COVID-19 society that incorporates the teachings of Christ. Amen.



Weekly Devotion for the week of May 4 – May 10, 2020  
By Paula Loewen, Pastoral Care  
Lutheran Home of the Good Shepherd  
New Rockford, ND

I confess that I haven't always experienced "the peace that passes understanding." As a young woman starting out on my own, peace was illusive and fleeting. My mind swam with thoughts of who, what, how, when, where or why? Then as a young bride, new voices began whispering "You aren't good enough. What were you thinking?" Then as a new mother a whole new level of self-doubt flooded my brain. It has literally been a battle for peace.

I have read and prayed...read and prayed...spoken with others of wisdom...searched and researched peace. Isaiah 43:1-7 (actually the whole chapter, but in particular those first seven verses) became my go-to scripture (text below). I have clung to it, placed my name in it, sung it, and shared it. God has seen me through every trial and tribulation and He will continue.

Then Psalm 105:1-5 (text below) jumped out at me. "This," I said to myself. "This is the key to holding on to His peace!" Praise Him...make known what He has done...Sing to Him...Glory in His name...Look to the Lord...Remember what He has done!

Be intentional about seeking His peace. Be intentional about holding on to His peace. Moment by moment He fortifies us when we ask for it.

Those thoughts and whisperings of self-doubt that I mentioned before have to be not only stopped but replaced. Replaced with truths that we eagerly share with others, but somehow neglect to share with ourselves. Replace the whirling ricocheting thoughts of unworthiness, fear, anxiety, confusion and doubt with praise, gratitude, song, time spent in His glory, remembrances of His goodness, and intentionally looking to the Lord and receiving His strength.

Refuse to give away the peace He gives. Don't give it to fear of COVID-19, frustration with social distancing, money issues, family issues, nor health issues of any kind. Instead practice intentionally seeking, claiming and holding on to that peace...that marvelous peace that passes all understanding.

Isaiah 43:1-7 (New Revised Standard Version)

1 But now thus says the LORD,  
he who created you, O Jacob,  
he who formed you, O Israel:  
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name, you are mine.  
2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.

3 For I am the LORD your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

I give Egypt as your ransom,  
Ethiopia[a] and Seba in exchange for you.

4 Because you are precious in my sight,  
and honored, and I love you,  
I give people in return for you,  
nations in exchange for your life.

5 Do not fear, for I am with you;  
I will bring your offspring from the east,  
and from the west I will gather you;

6 I will say to the north, "Give them up,"  
and to the south, "Do not withhold;  
bring my sons from far away  
and my daughters from the end of the earth—

7 everyone who is called by my name,  
whom I created for my glory,  
whom I formed and made."

Psalm 105:1-5 (New Revised Standard Version)

O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name,  
make known his deeds among the peoples.

2 Sing to him, sing praises to him;  
tell of all his wonderful works.

3 Glory in his holy name;  
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.

4 Seek the LORD and his strength;  
seek his presence continually.

5 Remember the wonderful works he has done,  
his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered



Weekly Devotion for the week of April 27 – May 3, 2020

By Dan Connors, President and CEO

St. Joseph Home

Cincinnati, OH

John McGee, founder of the Gentle Teaching movement, was a psychologist who worked alongside people who were marginalized his entire career. Through these experiences, he developed Gentle Teaching based on the principles that all individuals need 3 things present in their lives in order to be healthy, both physically and emotionally. He identified these needs as to feel Safe, Loved, and Engaged.

It's important to say that these are needs we all have, not just people who are marginalized; they are just the ones who are so often missing it. For this reason, St. Joseph Home has made Gentle Teaching (which we call Gentle Presence) the foundation of our approach to the individuals we serve and to the way we relate to each other as staff. These needs exist both at the macro level and the micro level and McGee taught that we are constantly communicating to each other the realities of these dynamics by our words, our eyes (a euphemism for our body language), our hands and our presence. At St. Joseph Home, we have repurposed his words a bit and express these needs as the need to be

1. Safe (both physically and emotionally)
2. Connected (to benefit from, and bring benefit to a community)
3. Engaged (to have a say and be the primary author of our lives)

What McGee taught is that people who are marginalized often are missing these three things, and as such they break down in ways that we mistakenly attribute to their disability, when in fact it is the absence of feeling safe, connected and loved.

Right now in the midst of a pandemic, we are all finding that we are also experiencing an absence of the feelings of being safe, connected and engaged. We have a dangerous virus among us and it is impossible to feel safe or to feel that the people we love are safe. We are certainly disconnected from each other in ways that we are not used to. Finally, we are denied the freedoms we are used to and cannot go about our day to day lives as we normally do. As I watch protests in my state and see a number of people in our communities reacting so strongly against this after just 5 weeks, I couldn't help but reflect on the realities of McGee's work and the fact that this is a normal existence for so many people in our community. Just one example...what if many of the "behaviors" we label in our system (prompting us to create plans of intervention, etc.) have little to do with one's developmental disability, and far more to do with the fact that we don't truly understand the extent to which they often don't feel safe; that they don't feel connected to their community; or that they don't feel the freedom to make decisions as they see fit. One of the reasons that I love the LSA-DN so much is that I know every one of you works so hard

every day to change this reality for the individuals we serve, but if we are honest we know that when they go into their communities, they often encounter a world that often doesn't foster feelings of safety, connectedness and respect of their choices.

We have an opportunity to build something different on the other side of this pandemic. None of us would choose a pandemic to bring change, but the pandemic is here nonetheless and our obligation is to use the way it makes us feel to build a different, better world for people who feel that way with or without a global pandemic. I came across this quote from Sonya Renee Taylor that captured what I want to say beautifully. She said:

"We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature."

I think we have an opportunity, for reasons we never would have chosen, to craft a new future for the individuals we serve. As Taylor said so beautifully, to stitch a new garment that fits everyone.

We have two choices. We can either write the next chapter of our story, shaping it even as we encounter these unprecedented challenges out of our control, or we can passively let it be written for us. But if we choose the latter we must not act as if we are victims because it will have been us that missed the opportunity.





Weekly Devotion for the week of April 20 – 26, 2020

By Sandra Combs, Executive Assistant to the President & CEO

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Dayton, OH

Psalm 136:2-3 (The Living Bible)

2 Give thanks to the God of gods, for his loving-kindness continues forever. 3 Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his loving-kindness continues forever. 4 Praise Him who alone does mighty miracles, for his loving-kindness continues forever.

As this pandemic continues, more and more we are hearing the term “new normal.” We are told to prepare for the new normal when we don’t even know what that normal is. What restrictions will be longer-term? What societal practices will remain after orders are lifted? What effect will this pandemic have on our relationships, on our mental health? The “new normal,” in my mind, raises more questions than it does anything else.

By my count, in Psalm 136, the author uses the phrase “his loving-kindness continues forever” in differing forms 24 times. The Psalmist recounts the mighty works of God and he reminds us over and over that God acted in love. God acts not just once, not just 24 times, but forever. God’s loving-kindness is consistent, day in and day out.

We may be facing a new societal norm, but we can always count on God’s norm. No matter our questions, no matter our circumstances, we can always proclaim: “26 Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven, for his loving-kindness continues forever.”



Weekly Devotion for the week of April 13-19, 2020

By David deFreese, Vice President of Church Relations and International Programming  
Mosaic

Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." John 12:24

"This is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself... For our sake He made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." II Corinthians 5:18

In this unprecedented somber season, a recurring question I have heard is: "Do you think God is trying to tell us something?" Although Jesus was incredibly kind and patient, and I have no idea what he looked like; my best guess is that he had a flat forehead from slapping it so often as people asked evident questions.

God says something marvelously profound each time a baby is born; every morning the sun rises, each time a seed sprouts or a bud blossoms; and in the beauty of all rainbows. God has revealed God's heart in the rhythms of nature, in the gift of music, in the gorgeous variety of colors and creatures that compose the world God created. God communicates hope and love time and again.

This past Holy Week, we journeyed one more time through the reality of our faith. No story has more significance than this: the death and resurrection of Jesus. Sadly, this oft-repeated story of Christ's Passion can become too familiar, too formalized for us to experience the wonder and gravity of what God's grace means. But maybe not this year. Maybe we are listening differently.

God is saying to us in crystal clear terms, our lives matter. While evil and darkness are prevalent, gracious love and the light of hope are more powerful. God has entered our deepest suffering and our most horrific fears. Good Friday confronts us with the fact of evil and human selfishness and death. The cruelty and abandonment of the Cross astounds us. But God transforms that weapon of tragedy into a symbol of triumph; an emblem of love beyond our greatest imagination.

Our God EASTERS! Easters in us and for us. Easter is the celebration that God's love is thoroughly victorious, that love defeats death and darkness, and that God is God over both sides of the grave. Resurrection is real, and reality is revisited. As our Mosaic campus pastors say: "God turns our ow into wow!"

"Do you think God is trying to tell us something?" Theologian Soren Kierkegaard wisely stated: "Life can only be understood backwards; but must be lived forwards." We live today and understand it better looking back from tomorrow. What do we know? What does Holy Week teach us? God's love is victorious. Faith in God is faith in love and life. Life is still a gift. God still abides. "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!"

Gracious, gracious God, you give us the joy of celebrating the power and wonder of our Lord's resurrection. Give us also the joy of life in your love and in your service. Make us die every day to sin, so that we can live abundantly now and forever. In the risen Christ's name we pray. Amen.



Weekly Devotional for the week of April 6 – 10  
By Mark Wimmer, VP for Church Relations  
Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries

Supporting each other: Exodus 17:12

“But Moses’ hands grew weary; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. . .”

The people of Israel were moving into the land promised them. They met opposition. Moses their leader had become physically taxed. Aaron and Hur physically held up his arms so the people would be encouraged by his presence.

The Covid 19 pandemic is taxing us physically, mentally, financially and spiritually. There comes a time when we need help holding up our arms and need to help others hold up theirs. We cannot really do this physically—social distancing and all, but the supportive comment, the uplifting phone call, the helpful words of thanks, the reassuring note, email or message; the gift, the offered prayer—are all ways to uplift each other.

Let us pray to God that we will not grow weary lifting up each other’s arms.