

**When you pray...**

**When you fast...**

**When you give alms...**

## **2010 Lenten Devotional: Prayers From Paul**

**Themes:**

**Call on the Name**

**Stand Firm**

**Testing**

**Reconciling**

**The Goal**

**Devotions by members of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Raleigh, NC**

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## Call on the Name

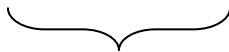
### **Romans 10:13**

<sup>13</sup>*For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”*

It is written in Romans 10:13 that “For, Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Yet, as Christians, and as Lutherans, we believe strongly in the notion of *divine grace*. Divine grace is defined in Christianity as “unmerited favor” from God. Grace from God means the receipt of a positive benefit that one does not deserve to receive. Theologian J. I. Packer describes grace as “God’s love in action towards men who merited the opposite of love. Grace means God moving heaven and earth to save sinners who could not lift a finger to save themselves.” So if we, as sinners, could do nothing (e.g., not lift a finger) and still receive the grace of God, then why, as per this verse from Romans, must we actually put forth effort (to “call on the name of the Lord”) in order to be saved?

Could there be conflict between this Bible verse, which requires one to act, to “call on the name of the Lord” in order to be saved, and our notion of divine grace? Possibly. And I’m certain that there are varying interpretations and opinions on this, but here is mine: Grace is our safety net. God gives us his grace, regardless of what we do, whether we deserve it or not, and even whether we ask for it or not. God provides us this ultimate gift of his grace. However, God prefers for each of us to live our lives in his holy Name, and that includes reaching out to him. It includes being baptized. It includes faithfully praying, and asking the Lord for forgiveness for our sins. We cannot take His grace for granted. We cannot merely *expect* to be saved. We need to act. We need to “call on the Name of the Lord”, because the purpose of calling on the Lord is to be saved. So don’t sit idly by. Do as God would have you do. Live as He would want you to live. Call on him. Be the recipient of His grace. And be saved.

**By Kevin Brimhall**

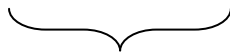


Romans 10:13 *“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”*

Theme: Call on the Name

We open our prayers by calling on the Name, be it the name of God or His son Jesus Christ our Lord. His name is so powerful that God created a commandment that we not use His name in vain. His name is hallowed in the Lord’s Prayer. We believe that by calling on His name, He will hear us and, we hope, will answer our prayers or lead us down the right pathway. We pray when we are thankful for what He has done for us, but we also pray when we need help – help and guidance through difficult times. We trust that when we call on His name he will not condemn us but will set us free by giving us eternal life. Just as the child calls out for Mommy or Daddy, we call out for our God to save us through the death and resurrection of His Son.

**By Joye Groff**



The movie Bruce Almighty portrays Jim Carey in the role of Bruce, a fledgling TV newscaster. Somehow Bruce becomes the presence of God, hence the title “Bruce Almighty.” As Bruce is discovering his new found powers he finds himself listening to all the prayers that come his way. It’s too much. He’s bombarded by an endless slew of names. Name after name after name seeks Bruce’s attention, such that it’s too, too much. He’s overwhelmed by the sheer volume of those who call on his name.

Thankfully, this is only a movie. God’s greatest delight is for us to call on his name.

Our Hebrew ancestors would not allow themselves to say the name of God. The closest they would come to are the letters YHWH, which in verb form means ‘To Be.’ God is being itself, life itself. Some go so far as to suggest that YHWH is breath itself. To breathe is to bear the name of God.

YHWH. We are to turn to God. We are made for this. Prayer is to center our whole being in this One. And we are to call on His name. When teaching his disciples to pray Jesus said, “Our Father.” He used intimate language. Jesus told us to call Him ‘Daddy.’ Such a name suggests familiarity, being known, holding hands, sitting close.

YHWH..... Our Daddy.

The God of all is personal. Being becomes parent. Call on the name of the Lord—almighty, shepherd, everlasting, loving, alpha and omega, lord, messiah, gracious, radiant, holy, eternal, sovereign, faithful, beloved----Jesus!

The apostle says it this way: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Romans 10:13

### **By Pastor David**



Very few things in life are simple. The old adage is that if things are too good to be true, then they probably are. Then we come across Romans 10:13-“For, Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Um...what’s the catch? Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord and...? Gives just enough money to help the people of Haiti? Serves on enough committees at Church? Generally do enough good things??

C’mon, there has to be more than that. I have to do something or give something more. What’s the catch? Nothing can be that easy, can it?

Actually, it is! We tend to view life through the jaded lenses of a broken humanity: A humanity that is filled with hidden agendas, broken promises and lies.

God is different. He isn’t a politician that offers the world hope just so we will believe in him or her and then does not or cannot deliver on their promises. God is different. He is the great I AM. This isn’t a campaign slogan or a promise. God doesn’t say “I am the way, the truth and the life”...provided congress approves my transportation, communication and health care budgets this year.

Romans 10:13 is one of the basic tenants of our faith. It says that EVERYONE who calls on the name of The Lord shall be saved. It doesn’t say that everyone that calls on the name of some random lord shall be saved. We must place our faith in the One True God.

One of the earliest arguments surrounding salvation was the thought that “The Church is necessary for salvation.” In other words, the early church was the depository of salvation since the Pope was the direct descendent of Peter, the disciple of Christ. This reminds me of a bucket. Water is poured into a bucket and when it is filled, it overflows thereby moistening the ground around it.

This is not what Romans 10:13 says. This passage instead says that there is no bucket. God freely fills each and every one of us with the life-saving waters of His grace. In the words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm, “He anoints my head with oil, my cup overflows.” This overflow is our joyful outpouring that we cannot help but experience as believers in Christ. We do help the poor, we do assist our neighbor, we serve our church family by working on committees and so much more not because we have to or because it is our entrance fee into the Kingdom of God, but because we are filled to overflowing with the grace of Christ.

However, to call on the name of the One True God, we must know who He is. We must read the Bible, we must pray and we must learn how God has affected the lives of his people throughout history and what His people have done in His Name. We must get to know God everyday and we must help others do the same.

So many times we talk about the unchurched. I am sure that some of these folks have never heard of Jesus Christ, but most probably have. They just don't know God. They haven't had that moment when Christ goes from acquaintance to friend. They haven't had that "AHH HAA" moment as one of my professors used to say where, by the power of the Holy Spirit, they know Christ.

It isn't important just to tell the story, but to show the story of who Jesus Christ is through both our words and our actions. Just like Jesus, we need to meet people where they are and offer the unfaltering truth of Jesus Christ so that they too may know the One True God and may find salvation in His Name. We need to help people see how this reality fits into their lives and help them as they begin their never-ending journey in Christ.

Only by knowing God can we call on Him by name and be saved; a salvation only possible by faith through grace apart from good works.

*Dear Lord, we give you thanks for Your truths are simple. We are a complicated broken people filled with trepidation that often look for the catch or wait for the other shoe to fall. Please help us to remember that you are always listening to the cries of your people. You never forget your own. Help us to know You and to walk filled with Your grace. All this we pray in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

By Charles White

### **Stand Firm**

#### **Philippians 4:1**

*Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.*

In Philippians 3:17 through 4:1, we are encouraged to choose a good example, to pattern ourselves after godly people. It is amazing to me that Paul wrote these words while sitting in jail, hoping to be freed. He encourages us to seek out those who are walking with the Lord, those who are further along in the journey than we are, perhaps, so that we can model them. A final encouragement is given in Philippians 4:1. "Therefore, stand firm," is the command, calling the Philippians "my beloved." Paul is ministering to people who may be discouraged, and he does so with tender compassion and hope.

These words hold true for us in 2010. Even if you learn the all the lessons of the Bible and know its principles well...they will not have very much impact unless you "stand fast

in them," meaning that you commit yourself to them and make them a part of your life. Often that requires incredible fortitude in the face of difficulties. Perhaps the road has been relatively smooth for you, but suddenly you are faced with a situation that has completely turned your life upside down. It is times like these when the command to "stand firm" takes on a whole new level of meaning. Sometimes, when we are in a crisis, we look around at so many happy faces and imagine that their lives must be perfect. In truth, our faith community is filled with friends who have faced difficulties that we cannot even imagine; who have been healed from brokenness that seems simply impossible. We do this with the help of God to guide us, and the support of wonderful friends who have walked these same roads before us. It is truly a blessing when someone is willing to share their own personal situation with another, and to see that person receive the emotional support that they needed for that day, that moment, to encourage them to "stand firm."

My favorite verse is found in Paul's letter to the Philippians ~ "Every time I think of you, I thank my God" (Phil 1:3). It is amazing how we can gain a renewed enthusiasm for the things God wants us to do because we know that we are on a journey and that God will teach us what we need to know when we need to know it, and that we have in the Scripture and in our fellow Christians, people who are worthy of modeling.

By Alice Boyce



Philippians 4:1

*Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.*

This is the first verse of the fourth chapter, but starting with "Therefore," sort of means to me that it is built on the third chapter. So I went back and looked at Paul's admonishments in chapter 3, and found these, some of which are comforting, and some of which are challenging:

Stand firm, rejoicing!

Stand firm, steering clear of legalism!

Stand firm, knowing that your righteousness is from God and is born of faith, not the law!

Stand firm, without expecting perfection from yourself or others!

Stand firm, steadily progressing in your spiritual walk!

Stand firm, knowing in your bones that your citizenship is in heaven!

What a wonderful God! He wants us to be joyful, he doesn't wish to burden us with rules, but wishes us to be ruled by love born of His immense love for us. He knows we can't be perfect, but that we are all on a very human spiritual journey towards Him. And as we sojourn, he wants us to be assured of His promise to us of His love and care in this world and citizenship in the next. Indeed, You are beloved. And again, I say, REJOICE!

**By Robin Kirk**



Standing firm is no big deal...in a perfect world. Unfortunately, we have not had that since our first days on this Earth. So, standing firm takes effort, at least in my world. There are days, maybe even years, when we question whether the immediate energy required is worth something as elusive, incomprehensible, or uncertain as eternal life.

There are other times when standing firm is the only viable option. In the past eight years, through a messy divorce, a complete about face in careers, bankruptcy, single motherhood struggles and the death of my mother, if I didn't stand firm, I would have been consumed by life itself. Standing firm means many things in modern times, but the phrase, with Paul as its reflector, means endurance to me. In Acts 9:16, Jesus tells how Saul is chosen by God and says, "**I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.**" These themes, in fact the acts themselves, are woven throughout Paul's life. There are times when he seems downright giddy about his suffering! But I digress.

**"Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved."** This verse, our focus verse from Philippians 4, reminds the new followers to stand firm in this yet untested faith. Continue reading Paul's letter to the Philippians, and you encounter one of my top five verses in the Bible. Indeed, these words were hand-written on an index card and stayed with me in my car, my computer...I held onto these words with all I had in my attempts to stand firm. From Chapter 4: 6-7: **"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving (emphasis mine) let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus."**

Not only does Paul remind us to stand firm, but tells us to be thankful for **everything** – our joy, sorrow, and pain. Could that make any sense? God will take my worries, but expects me to endure, suffer, AND be as thankful for those "unpleasantries" as I am my days of laughter, happiness, and love? Yes, because He knows us better than we will ever know ourselves.

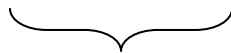
I think you and I are probably similar in how we handle the good and bad times. When life is normal with its ordinary stressors, when things are going swimmingly, I do not lean on my God as much as I do when life is just too much. It's not so much that I'm

taking credit for my current state of blessings as much as I have convinced myself I don't need God as much then because standing firm is easy. Oh, I remember to talk to him in the mornings, evenings, and at meal times, but He's not my constant companion like He should be. On the other hand, when I am mired in relationship, financial, or spiritual woes, I call on God for everything. During these times, standing firm is only possible with God's help. Enduring the suffering (and growth) of this type in life is painful, exhausting, and numbing. It's also during these times, when my Father feels closest; I am reminded of the billboard, "If you feel far away from God, guess who moved?" Indeed, He wants to share ALL of it with me.

Paul's companion verse, in my mind, on standing firm, suffering, and enduring, is from Romans 5:3-5, another of my top five verses. It reminds me that *because* of God's love for us through the birth, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus, we are justified through faith, claimed, tagged, and given admission to our Eternal Home. But as such, **"...we also boast in our suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."** These words assured me that God was using my struggles and dark days to mold me into someone who would have character and hope because my God helped me stand firm, enduring, suffering and yes, even learning to acknowledge the value of them all in life that abides with him...even if I don't quite enjoy it just yet.

So, stand firm! As we prepare for the season of Lent, as we focus more on what God *gave up* for us, rather than what He *gave* us, let us long for, yes, even love and give thanksgiving for, standing firm in this way. As we do these things, we are drawn closer to our Creator and Redeemer, both of whom never failed in standing firm.

**By Cindy Killian**



**Philippians 4:1.** *"Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, **stand firm** in the Lord in this way, my beloved."*

About 45 years ago while stationed on the island of Guam, our house was shook by a minor earthquake. We rushed into the street clutching our 2 year old daughter only to find no one else. Our neighbors were used to the earth moving, but, up until then, the ground for us was unmovable. Several years later in Japan, Mary and I experienced a major quake that did considerable property damage. In a physical sense, we could no longer trust or **stand firm** on the ground below our feet. Even experiencing 5 earthquakes in our life, we cannot imagine the fear, the mistrust, the anguish that Haitians are currently experiencing.

But, Paul in his letter to his friends in the city of Philippi is not talking physically but spiritually. In Ephesians (6:11) we read, *'Put on the whole armor of God, that you may*

*be able to **stand firm** against the schemes of the devil.'* Even today, Paul is asking us to **stand firm** against life's trials and temptations.

I've made a list of trials, temptations, schemes that have and could affect my spiritual well being. Wow! My list is overwhelming.

How is it possible for me to **stand firm** in the Lord?

The answer to this question is prayer.

In the 1941 Lutheran Hymnal (#454) the hymn *Prayer is the Soul's Sincere Desire* contains the following:

*Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, unuttered or expressed...  
Prayer is the burden of a sigh, the falling of a tear  
The upward glancing of an eye, when none but God is near.  
Prayer is the Christian's vital breath, the Christian's native air...  
Prayer is the contrite sinner's voice, returning from his ways,  
While angels in their songs rejoice, and cry, "Behold, he prays!"  
No prayer is made by man alone, the Holy Spirit pleads,  
And Jesus, on the eternal throne, for sinners intercedes.*

The second verse of the hymn *How Firm A Foundation* (ELW #796) based on Isaiah 41:10 speaks directly to the subject of **standing firm**.

*Fear not, I am with you, oh, be not dismayed,  
For I am your God, and will still give you aid;  
I'll strengthen you, help you and cause you to **stand**,  
Upheld by My gracious, omnipotent hand.*

**My prayer:** *Omnipotent God, please hear my prayer. I want to **stand firm** but, my list is overwhelming. I need your help. Please help me with my list. Also, Lord, at this time, I ask that you assist and comfort the people of Haiti that they might **stand firm** amid the chaos of their physical surroundings. I ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

**By Ken Anthony**



**Stand Firm but Not Alone**

<sup>20</sup>*But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>21</sup>He will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. <sup>1</sup>Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.—Philippians 3:20-4:1*

When my girls turned thirteen, they each received a plaque called “Teen Creed.” With proverbial folk wisdom, meant to equip the teens to withstand life’s challenges, the creed doled out advice, such as “Stand for something, or you’ll fall for anything.” What does “anything” imply? Could it be a warning not to fall prey to deceptive peer pressure? Will the “anythings” of our world—materialism, excessive busyness, popularity—will they stand when life crumbles around us? And what should a teen stand for? Does this mean standing alone, or does it mean standing in solidarity with others, who believe in what really matters?

In today’s Scripture reading, Paul says our heavenly citizenship really matters. He’s tapping into common knowledge of the Philippians: Philippi was a Roman colony; so, citizens of this city were also citizens of distant Rome.<sup>1</sup> We may be residents of the earth, but we are also citizens of heaven, so that we set our minds on heavenly matters. Our heavenly mindset longs for and expects our Lord Jesus Christ to come again.

Heavenly matters include what Jesus has the power to do: to transform our bodies so they may be conformed to the body of his glory. We stand firm in this resurrection hope! We need this hope in a world crumbling with inexplicable suffering. At this writing, Haiti has had another 6.1 earthquake. What hope is there? How do we stand when the ground has crumbled beneath us, and our world has been shaken? The only place to stand firm is in the promise of the resurrection. Earthquakes and death do not have the last word. God does.

We stand firm in *something*: a resurrection promise so strong that it brings us together as brothers and sisters in Christ. So, we can stand for this powerful *something* with joy because our crown is the eternal life and salvation made possible through Jesus Christ. United by this, we long for a beloved community, where we can “stand firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27). We stand not alone but together, facing the world’s deceptive “anythings” with Good News. “Stand for something, or you’ll fall for anything.” It’s wisdom not just for teens but for all ages.

*Prayer: Oh, Lord of Life, when our world is shaken and falling apart, guide us in our perspective. Focus us on our heavenly citizenship and the promise of our resurrection so that we aren’t overcome by life’s challenges and fall for anything. Help us to stand firm in your promises and trust in you. Help us to know that we are not alone, that we have brothers and sisters in Christ who joyfully share these promises with us. Bring us*

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<sup>1</sup> Morna D. Hooker, *The Letter to the Philippians, The New Interpreter’s Bible* 9:535.

*together as a people, who stand firm and sing, "On Christ the solid rock I stand. All other ground is sinking sand."<sup>2</sup> In Jesus' name, Amen.*

**By Denise Tilden**



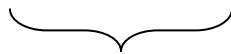
## **Testing**

### **I Corinthians 10:13**

*<sup>13</sup>No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it."*

Every day we are tested. Simple things: children testing patience, advertisers testing resolve, drivers testing us when they cut us off in traffic. Most of the things we don't give a second thought – we don't even think of them as "tests" at all. It's only in the big things do we see God at work: a prolonged or presumed-fatal illness, a birth of a child, accidents causing injury, the death of an elderly relative or of a child. These things test our faith, our soul, our being to its core. They remind us of our faith, pull us closer to one another in our family and our community, and strengthen our relationship to God. At least, they *can*. Many times we are led astray by these events, led down roads ending in isolation and depression, because in that place we put on blinders to the things that can help us. We forget what it is that gives us our strength. It's all too easy: we can't raise our eyes to God with our head hanging low. It takes friends, family, will power, and faith to lift our head again. When we accept the strength of our family, our community, we gain clarity on the situation. When we remember our faith in God, we remember the little tests that God uses to remind us that in Him we are strong enough to endure anything.

**By Todd C. Haugland**



## **TESTING**

We are tested in many ways throughout our lives. Some tests come in the form of things we cannot control, such as deaths of family members or friends, and others come in the form of things we can, such as temptations. A strong faith can help us deal with all types of testing and help us find God's peace.

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<sup>2</sup> ELW, 596.

First, I think, it is important to understand what type of tests we are facing and whether we can or cannot control them. I always have found comfort in the Serenity Prayer, which speaks to discerning life's trials:

"God...

Grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change,

The Courage to change the things I can,

And the Wisdom to know the difference."

The Serenity Prayer helps us acknowledge there are certain things that give us pain, sorrow, or discomfort over which we have no control. Turning those things over to God is the only way we can find peace.

However, there are temptations that exist for which we do have control. We can, with the help of God--and our community of faith--resist or overcome such testing.

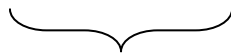
Paul is writing to the Corinthians, who live in a society where money and sexual activities are the center of worship. In this first letter, he warns them that God punished Israelites for turning away from Him to indulge in such self-pleasing activities and the worship of idols. Paul reminds them--and us--that, throughout history, humans have faced such temptations that distract us from what God calls on us to do.

We face the same issues today...we are bombarded with advertisements and other social pressures that tell us if we don't have certain things, look certain ways, or indulge in self-pleasuring activities, we are unworthy people. The societal message we are bombarded with is that we should be measured based on what we have, not what we give.

Such self-indulgence is also a slippery slope...you can never have enough. If having a lot of money or a really nice car is a focus, there always is someone else with more money or a better car. One also can never fully be satisfied if it takes food, drugs, sex, or other self-indulgences to feel fulfilled.

As Paul also says, God gives us the ability to resist and overcome such earthly testing and focus on living a Christian life by caring for and helping our brothers and sisters and living a life of faith. Every Sunday, several times during worship, we ask for God's peace for ourselves or for others. Paul reminds the Corinthians and us that true peace, pleasure, and fulfillment comes through living a Christ-centered life.

**By Andrew Ballard**



1 Corinthians 10:13

*"No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is Faithful and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it."*

Wow, when I was assigned this Bible verse to reflect my devotional on, it sure hit home!! My world turned around on October 24th when I was diagnosed with Stage 3 breast cancer; it came upon me with a vengeance and let me share that nothing can prepare a person sitting on a doctor's examining table and hearing the words, "you have cancer and will be needing chemo therapy." At that moment, I did indeed feel I was being tested beyond my strength but luckily that passed after a few days. I had to see myself as a survivor and not a victim. We have 2 choices when we get ill; we can either cling to suffering by asking "why me" or we can embrace the gift of life and fight the fight of our life (I have chosen the latter). Before I continue on with my devotional, I want to make one thing very clear; it is not my intention to be in any competition for the "suffering Olympics award." I just want to share my Lenten faith journey. I know there are many people here in our congregation who are suffering much more than I; both with physical disabilities as well as mental. I have also talked with several women in our congregation who are breast cancer survivors and they have been a great inspiration and support to me and for that I am very grateful. They have all assured me that there is a light at the end of this difficult long journey so please know that I am not looking for a sympathy award by writing this. Upon leaving the doctor's office on Oct. 24th I told my husband the very first place I wanted to go was to church and pray. Well, upon our arrival at noon the only person in the whole building was Vicar Nathaniel. We had never formally met before but by the look on my face and my tear stained eyes, he knew we were in distress. I just blurted out my latest news and told him I needed someone to pray with us. The 3 of us sat in the front pew and I can't begin to tell you the warmth and compassion and the everyday wording that came from his heart. He spoke such words of comfort and reassurance that God and this church community would carry me along. When he finished I felt such a weight lifted off of my chest. People have asked me if I was angry with God those first few days. I am quick to respond never once was I angry with Him, but I am certainly angry with the situation and certainly wish it weren't happening to me, but that is all. I strongly feel the God I believe in doesn't make bad things happen to people. He helps us deal with our problems and that is very comforting. He also has placed many little Angels or God Helpers as I am calling them, in my path and for that my burden to carry this disease has been lightened. Boy have I seen many cases of these in my past 4 months; cards being mailed constantly from as far away as across the country, phone calls from people I haven't talked with in years (thanks to the internet and Facebook news travels fast!!), meals being delivered, people sending me scarves and hats for my bald head etc.. I am truly amazed by the outpouring of love and concern I have received these past 3 1/2 months. My cancer journey certainly has had some ups and down emotionally and physically but I have to allow myself these moments of being scared, being angry and not liking the awful symptoms I feel after chemotherapy. This I am sure is normal. With this extreme fatigue that comes with chemo therapy, I have to rely on others to help with chores etc and that has been difficult to "let go" and to ask for help. However, I did make a promise to

myself and to my family that I would not allow myself to sit and dwell on these feelings of deep despair. I've always had a very strong faith; I don't go around wearing it on my sleeve or on my mouth but hopefully it is there in my heart and comes through in my actions. Through my cancer journey I have found strength I never knew I had and that certainly is with God's help. People have also asked me "how can you so openly talk about your breast cancer?" The question frankly floors me. This isn't a disease I got by abusing my body or neglecting it. I've always been very faithful with my yearly mammograms and the last one was only 4 months prior to my diagnosis. This disease just happened to me and I had nothing to say about it; I certainly didn't choose it or ask for it but it is here and I have to openly accept it and deal with it. By talking about it openly with everyone makes me feel so much better. I think by my openness and honesty with people, it makes it easier for those around me so that they don't avoid me. If there is anything I need more than ever now, it is people around me so I sure don't want to be a recluse stayed locked in my home. I have not cancelled one activity since I started my weekly chemo treatments on Nov.1st; some days I don't have much energy and move pretty slow, but I attend everything. I have also found that keeping my sense of humor has helped me with this "testing".....One Sunday a member of our church said to me "if I squeeze you really hard, will your wig pop off?" Well, that made me laugh so hard and that comment has stuck with me for all these weeks; I can just visualize that wig popping off; sure would be fun to try!! Another recommendation for people that have been given a tough blow is keep a positive attitude. It isn't going to totally cure a situation that may be incurable but going through the journey if you keep that positive smile and attitude that "I will indeed survive this if it is the last thing I do." I am sure it will have a very big impact on recovery.

People have asked my feelings about going to chemo therapy each week and looking up at all these hanging bags of IV fluid, which are very poisonous liquids flowing into my body and how do I feel about that. Yes, it is scary knowing that they are so destructive to all my good blood cells and bone marrow etc. But, let me tell you, if I sat in that chemo chair for week on end for these 4 months, hour after hour, only thinking of this as dangerous poisonous stuff I'd go nuts. I look up and think of this liquid as saving my life and drip by drip this is God's healing liquid flowing into my body, bringing me that much closer to recovery. One day at a grocery store a lady saw my cancer bracelet and asked if I was the patient and I said yes. She shared that she too was a cancer survivor (brain tumor) but had been told she only had a year to live; it is now 10 years later. Her advice to me was 3 fold: keep a positive attitude; those friends that you have that see life as a glass half empty, temporarily remove them from your life....you need to be around people who will be boosting you up; and lastly she said "you wake up each morning and you say, "thank you God for this new day and let me live it to the fullest and look and see all the goodness around me". Well, I am trying real hard to live up to her advice; so far it is working as I feel I am maintaining a pretty healthy, happy attitude.

In closing I have to say that having been diagnosed with breast cancer, it has brought my family closer together. My son in Ct. sends me very encouraging "keep up the good work Mom" emails which mean a great deal; my local daughter and son are of course by my side to support me on good days and bad days and are always there with

a ready hug. And last but by no means least, is my wonderful husband Carl who has been my rock and my tremendous support since my lump was discovered last Fall. He keeps telling me "you are not going through this alone; I am here with you every step of the way; good days and bad" and he certainly has. We pray together a lot to get us both through this journey as it is as much his as mine. God has truly given me strength I never knew I had and for that I am very grateful. On March 2nd I will be going in for my mastectomy; another situation where I have to rely on 1 Corinthians "God is faithful and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength ,but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it." Praise be to God that he has made that promise to me.

**By Barbara Kjellberg**



### **Reflection on 1 Corinthians 10:13**

Corinthian society was quite cosmopolitan. A thriving city, numerous nationalities and religious traditions were represented. At stake in chapter 10 is eating at the table of idol worshipers. In a society where everyone went freely between tables of different religious traditions, it would be an offense not to dine with a friend or business partner who worshiped idols, or even ate sacrificed meat. The Christians couldn't be expected to be so rude and countercultural as to refuse such accommodations, could they? Why would God test them this way?

While the United States is predominately Christian, for many this is true in name only. While many worry about the Church being forced out of our secular society, the opposite may be the true threat. Our secular society is constantly forcing its way into the Church and new adherents are being won every day to the Faith of the World.

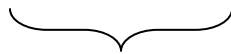
I often struggle with the appeal of the world when it comes to steward-ship. Sure, I want to give lots to the Church, but there are some really cool things that I want. I often think that if I could just get that iPhone, and that stereo, and that TV, I'll be happy.

One of the Lenten disciplines is giving alms to the poor. We are blessed to have a congregation that does an incredible amount of social ministry. We are also blessed to be a part of a Synod and national church that does incredible things for "the least of these." But there is so much more we could be doing. There is so much more we should be doing. We are called to give more, but this is a huge test. We live in a culture, in particular a community, which is quite affluent and appreciates the "best" things. It is indeed a test to put the Church's ministry beyond our own desires and the desires of the world.

As Christians we are *in* the world, but not *of* the world. This is an incredibly difficult test. It cannot be overemphasized how difficult it is to live as Christians in the world. There is stuff we really want to buy, and yet, we need to give more to the Church. There are things we really want to do, and yet, they are not compatible with our faith.

So what do we do? Do we run away and establish a Christian utopia? That would be the easy way out. And while we are not *of* the world, we are *in* it for a reason. We live and work for the *sake of* the world. We exist to be a “light to the nations,” to show the world what it means to follow Christ, that we might reach out to God’s children, wherever they may be found. This is a test. This is difficult. This is our calling as Christians in the world.

**By Vicar Nathaniel**



### **...Into the Wild and Back Out**

We are tested every day. Some of our days whisk by so effortlessly we don’t realize we are being tested. Other days you may feel as though you’ve been run over by a truck multiple times only to crawl back onto the path of life. The ways we are tested are subtle. Other “tests” are gut-wrenching and life changing – such as a medical emergency or loss of a loved one. And still others test our spiritual foundation when difficulties arise in our lives that we have no control over and we ask ourselves why me Lord?

Testing is healthy for our mind, body, and spirit. We may not think of testing as beneficial as we endure the pain or elate in the happiness of success but we can’t see the big picture as our daily lives are but a small grain of life’s canvas. God knows that we gain strength and endurance from tests. Each time we get challenged and sometimes knocked around or down, God gives us the strength and the willpower to pull ourselves up and get back on the path of life. It seems that God has set each of us onto a life path lined with confines. Occasionally we decide to test the confines of the path and hit a concrete wall only to be deflected back onto the path of life. From hitting that wall, we get bruised but we heal stronger. We brush ourselves off and venture out down the path once more. We are elastic!

It is easy to get overwhelmed when it seems as though the testing never stops or no solution is in sight. Time seems to drag on with each successive test setback. God gives us the strength to endure these tests. For myself, I have faith and the willpower to accept these tests as an opportunity to build my endurance– to pull myself up – to accept each test and strive to improve at each opportunity. I have ventured outside the path occasionally and I thank God for deflecting me back in the right direction. I will

figure out a way to make it across the roaring rivers and get to life's next side. I thank God for giving me the endurance and perseverance.

**By Ed Vitek**



## Reconciling

### **2 Corinthians 5:19**

*<sup>19</sup>“that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.”*

On a visit to my Grandma, she said to me I need to talk about the day you were born. I took her hand and looked into her eyes because my heart told me that this was very important to her.

She paused and tears filled her eyes. When Grandma finally spoke she said that the day I was born and she came to the hospital to see me she told my Dad, “that is the ugliest child and she will never amount to anything” and then said “can you ever forgive me?” My heart filled with sadness. I loved my Grandma more than anyone could ever imagine. She was and still is my inspiration in life. Amazingly my sadness was not because of the words she spoke. Let's face the fact, if you saw my baby picture, you would probably not be thinking cute or adorable and the words “never amount to anything” I knew she did not believe.

I was filled with such sadness because she had been carrying these hurtful words in her heart for over forty years. I wondered if they came to her mind when I was a child and she gave me a huge box of chocolates in the shape of a valentine. I kept that heart shaped boxed for years because I loved it so much and because my Grandma gave it to me. Or did the words come back when we would sit on the couch and she would show me how to embroider and how we laughed ourselves silly the time I embroidered the quilt to my pajamas. Maybe when Tim and I married she cringed at the words she had spoken so long ago. When she looked into my children's eyes and had such joy in her face, was it hindered by the memory of hurtful words?

In my life I know for certain, my Grandma loved me dearly. She would have laid down her life for mine. She was always proud of all the things I did in my life and even in difficult times she always supported and loved me. I had the rare opportunity to vacation with her for many years and when Tim and I married she always spent weeks with us every year. From a child to adult, we shared many times together and I have so many wonderful memories of this remarkable women.

After she told me what she had spoken, I said there is no need for forgiveness, I smiled and said that I was an ugly baby but that I did grow out of that and that I knew she didn't believe that I had not amounted to anything. She smiled and said that the words she

spoke that day were never farther from the truth. I then asked her if she thought that she said those things because you were in such deep pain, knowing that after this quick trip to the hospital to see your grandchild you left immediately to bury your husband. The man you loved so deeply and shared your life with. She didn't have to answer because I knew she finally felt forgiven.

In reading this Bible passage of 2 Corinthians 5:19 *that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.* Does God feel sadness when we carry the burden of our sins to ponder over and over again when He has already forgiven us? Do we miss out on the life He wants us to have because we can't overcome our guilt and truly believe that all is forgiven? Like my Grandma, I carry the guilt of spoken or unspoken words, actions and regrets. This Lenten season I am going to say every morning the Bible passage of 2 Corinthians 5:19 so I can be reminded daily that I am a forgiven child of God. I hope that you will do the same and we can truly lay our sins and worries at the Cross so we can live our life to what God wants us to be, not counting our trespasses or those who trespass against us but carrying the message of reconciliation to us all.

My Grandma passed away 4 months after our conversation and nothing could make me feel better than to know she felt at peace.

### **By Kim Sweet**

What does it mean to reconcile? It's not a word that we hear or use all that often today, but when we do hear about it, it is often used when we talk about restoring relationships that have become damaged. Often times our closest and most dear relationships with our friends and families are tested and at some point will involve some level of reconciliation. Being in intentional, caring relationships inevitably will have their moments of stress, challenges, and disagreements. There are times when we are called to be the reconciler in our relationships and at others times we are the ones who seek reconciliation.

In today's passage, we reflect on how Christ reconciled the world to himself. Through His gracious gift of reconciling the world, Christ had modeled for us how we are to engage others. Reconciliation isn't an easy thing for anyone to do but as a people of faith and followers of Christ we are called share and embody a spirit of reconciliation. Our journey through the season of Lent can help us to focus on how we've been given ultimate reconciliation through Christ's journey to the cross. We should reflect on ways we can share this gift with all we encounter. Each of us have people that we need to reconcile with as well as those who need to reconcile with us. May our prayer on this day include the courage and hope to be both the reconciler as well as the reconciled, as Christ is to all of us.

**By Dan Burris**



. . . *All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them.* 2

Corinthians 5:19 – The Message

*(Sometimes reading **The Message** – an 'up-dated', paraphrased version of the bible - can really help me hear God speaking in a personal way.)*

She was really hurting. People had shunned her and her heart stung with the pain. And most of us never knew because she hid it so well. How can this happen in the church? And more than that – how can this happen at Good Shepherd? We are called to be Christ's representatives to one another and yet sometimes we really fail.

When I look at this passage – either in The Message, or any translation – I hear first the words of what God in Christ has done for me. Jesus went to the cross to pay the price for my sin, that I might be reconciled in my relationship with God. I heard a story once that helped drive home this point for me.

Two men had gone to law school together and been close friends. After graduation, one went on to be a respected judge in a prominent court. The other struggled, had family failures, became an alcoholic and wasted his education. Some years later he was arrested for a crime, charged and brought before a judge. The judge was the old friend from law school. Many wondered what the judge would do – and how he might sentence his friend. Interestingly enough, he sentenced the man to the heaviest penalty the law would allow. People were amazed. They thought he would show mercy to his old friend. But the story didn't end there – after sentencing, the judge himself then paid **in full** the man's fine and set the man free from his debt.

God has done just that for you and me. He has paid the price, **in full**, when we were guilty of the worst ---- *in Christ; God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting our sin against us.* And He has given us the task of telling others what He has done! He has called us to be His representatives – sharing with others that 'fresh start' – that complete forgiveness that He offers each of us.

So let me encourage you. Today – 'Enter into God's work'. Be on the lookout for people around you who might need to hear that message of reconciliation. Be a part of helping others to 'drop their differences'. Look for the hurt and broken, that you might be a 'representative of Christ' for them. – And don't be surprised if you find the hurt and broken right here at Good Shepherd. ☺

*Lord – You have not only freed us from our sin, but have called us to share that message of hope with those around us. Work in each of us today, that we might be your representatives, reaching out and sharing your love and mercy with those who need it most. AMEN*

**By Pam Montgomery**



*“that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.”*

2 Corinthians 5:19

I have three dogs and I gladly admit I am in love with each of them. My oldest is Chipper, a Yorkie, who came to me when he was almost three. He was abused and abandoned and suffered from mange. My middle dog is also a Yorkie and his name is Acer or “the slug” as I call him because he chooses to lie around and let the other two dogs guard. He only gets up if their barks are interesting enough! My youngest joined our family almost two years ago. His name is Louie and he is a Lowchen. I chose to take him in because of my love for the Lowchen breed.

From the beginning since Louie joined us it was a challenge with Chipper. He was deeply angry and put out because he had to share Acer with Louie. Often times I found myself breaking up fights between Chipper and Louie where Chipper started the fight! A couple months after I got Louie, Chipper escaped the house without anyone knowing. In fact, we didn't know he was out until we heard a very painful yelp and then loud crying and whimpering. We ran out and saw Chipper standing, shaking and bleeding from several deep cuts. A woman stood to the side with her dog on a leash and said they must have bumped each other. After some choice words with her, I rushed Chipper into the house; made sure the other two dogs were settled and then took Chipper to Quail Corners Animal Hospital. The doctor said the wounds would heal and he sent us home with a heavily medicated Chipper.

When I arrived home I took Chipper into the house and gently laid him on the couch in the living room and placed a blanket near him. A few minutes later when I checked on him I was amazed by what I saw. I watched as Louie climbed up onto the couch and gently laid himself behind Chipper where his much bigger body touched and cushioned Chipper to him and then he placed his paws around Chipper! He proceeded to gently sniff and then lick Chipper, even whimpering over Chipper as he checked him over. Chipper then sighed and leaned back against Louie and went to sleep. They stayed that way for over two hours.

Reconciliation is an interesting word. Some associate this word with healing and forgiveness in broken relationships with friends and family. The original use of this word was “to alter” or “make otherwise”. God chose to reconcile us to himself which then altered our relationship to him through his son Jesus Christ. God was the initiator of this act and chose to do this, we didn't. His action of reconciliation with us was unsolicited and freely given from a deep abiding love that he has for each of us. Through this transformative action we are reconciled to God and given salvation and life through Christ Jesus. Our lives are altered and we are changed where we become the ambassadors of the same message of reconciliation to the world. We don't call for reconciliation; instead, we live it in our changed relationship with God through Christ.

I would like to say that Louie and Chipper get along so much better today. But I can't do that. Their reconciliation was one based on love but was short lived. They still fight and snap at each other today. However, we as children of God have a permanent reconciliation with God through our baptism into the life and death of Christ. We are permanently changed and transformed into that relationship so that we may share in that reconciliation through our own piety, study and action.

During Lent many of us give up something as a sacrifice in order to focus on the last days of Jesus Christ. I propose we look at what we have in our altered relationship with God, seeking to rejoice in this act of deep love from our Father through his son. We can reflect on our call in ministry to share this message of reconciliation with others; reconciliation with God based on the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We can thank God for his act of gracious love for we are the recipient of this love. We live our transformed lives as we view our fellow human beings through the lens of Christ, one of love for others and a deep desire to share the good news. Thanks be to God.

*Gracious Father, we thank you for this gift you have given to us. Your selfless act of reconciling us to you through your Son Jesus continues to transform us today into ambassadors for you. Equip us and give us what we need to go forth and spread the good news to others, the news of reconciliation based on a love so deep and freely given that we are forever changed and altered in you. Amen.*

**By Diane Bowker**



Reflection on 2 Corinthians 5:19

In his second Letter to the Church at Corinth, Paul is struggling to hold that community together. In his absence, challengers have risen up and sought to take the church in a different direction. People took sides, and each side felt they, and only they were right. Sound familiar? Conflict in the Church is nothing new. Soon after Jesus' ascension trouble ensued. The same thing happened with the Lutheran movement. Luther himself was able to hold together a wide range of views, but after his death this became more and more difficult for his followers.

Perhaps it is the nature of religion that makes conflict so inherent. This is important stuff! We have been raised to recognize the importance of the Church's ministry. Ultimately, it is at the heart of the Church's ministry where we find the answer to this conflict. At the heart of the Church's ministry is reconciliation.

Paul appeals to his sisters and brothers at Corinth to entrust themselves to Christ's message of reconciliation. Estranged from God, the whole world has been reconciled to its creator by the work of Jesus Christ. By virtue of this ultimate reconciliation, there is no reason why all cannot be reconciled to one another.

People may shout: But we don't agree! They are heretics! They are wrong!

To which Paul says: Stop that! You are a new creation! You are a baptized member of this community in Christ. Period.

Our debates about sexuality; our arguments over worship; our differing social views – are these differences really so great? We're talking about a God that reconciled a sinful *world* to its Creator. Don't we think that God can work out these differences within our holy family?

Reconciliation is ours in Christ. We need only be sincerely open to it, and ready for the strange and wonderful things the Spirit might work through us.

By Vicar Nathaniel



2 Corinthians 5:19: *“That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.”*

Have you ever had a relationship that went sour? Has there been someone in your life that has done you harm (physically, emotionally, psychologically) that still causes you pain when you think about it? I have. And, sometimes the pain or anger can run deep. I wanted that person to feel the pain they caused me. I have been angry at what they said or did. I have to admit I have wanted them to feel somewhat I felt as payment. Ouch! I see my heart can be pretty ugly. That person may have done wrong, but I also do wrong when I wish that person to suffer.

I am not talking about dismissing inappropriate behavior or saying that a person should not be held accountable for one's actions. It is appropriate and necessary to address issues and to try to resolve them. What I am talking about is reconciliation as it relates to issues of the heart.

It can be pretty easy to talk about reconciliation. It is entirely a different matter to *live* these words - to live as reconciling, and reconciled people. Yet, that is how we are to live as Christians. Through Christ, God reconciled us -- God took us at our worst and never stops loving us. We became a new creation. And the good news is that because we are a new creation in Christ, we no longer think or act in old ways, human ways. Living in Christ means we actively love all those around us. Not just those we already know or have as friends and family. My experience tells me that I need to work a bit harder to love those I consider strangers and enemies, those who may have caused me pain. It is harder because it means I need to change myself, soften my own heart so that I can be reconciled to forgive the other person.

I pray differently now for those with whom I have issues. I pray that they experience God's love in their life in ways that help them experience God's presence. I pray that they be blessed. I pray that my heart is softened toward them so that I can be an instrument of God's love to them. There may not be healed friendships or relationships with these people, but I can be reconciled that I am healed and that my heart intends for them to be reconciled too. I don't need to condone their behavior, but I can reconcile in my heart that God loves that person just as much as God loves me. I can reconcile that they are also a child of God just as I am and that if God chose to love them not counting their trespasses against them, I can do the same.

*Lord, you loved me and reconciled me to you through Christ before I even knew you. When I was still your enemy, you loved me. Help me, Lord, to forgive those who have hurt me, and forgive me for those whom I have hurt. Soften my heart so I can let go of my pain, resentment, and anger. Guide me how I can be your message of reconciliation to others. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

**By Carolyn Remaklus**



## The Goal

### Philippians 3:14

<sup>14</sup> *"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus."*

When I was young my brother and I use to love playing outside. We would build contraptions to fling our toys as far as possible, chase each other with water guns or play tag. We would play until our mother would come out on the porch and yell for us to come in. Sometimes we would be half a block away but we could always hear her voice and would immediately race back into the house. Sometimes we would wonder too far to be in her vocal range but we could sense when it was time to come inside. Very rarely we would be off at the park and would not make it home on time which worried her greatly because she was afraid that we might not come home. We always showed up though. She may have gotten angry but not for long because she loved us unconditionally and could not stay mad. God's love is like that. God sent us out from Eden into the world with free will to explore, discover, and create. God did not abandon us though. Every day God calls us to him. God says "Brian it's time to come in." Sometimes it's too hard to come in. I want to go but I cannot leave behind some things. God repeats "Brian it's time to come in." I say what about my Nintendo, can I bring that? "You have no Nintendo," God says. I look down and my Nintendo is gone. "Well what about the neighbor boy, we hurt each other once but we are friends now, and he is right here can't he come in?" I say. "There is no neighbor," the Lord says. I look to my right and the boy is gone. I am nervous now but I press on, "Well surely I can bring my brother?" "You have no brother," God says. I grab my brother's hand but I gasp as he disappears. Then God calls me a final time, "Come inside my house Brian." I run because God has loved me the most and outlasted everything. I enter the house and God explains "Because you have loved me I have brought you here. You could not bring your things with you because they were weighing you down and leading you astray. But now you are in my house and you are clean, and I have gathered and cleaned your things for you and put them here as well." I look around the room I see the neighbor boy, I see the Nintendo, and I see my brother. God is constantly calling us to his house, and we must race to get there. Along the way we get distracted by nearly everything. We forget to remind our brothers and sisters to keep pace. We squabble with neighbors who disadvantage us when we should provide for them as they cannot help themselves. God's call is constant; it is the goal for all Christians to follow that call into the house of God.

By Brian Grimes

Philippians 3:14 *"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus."*

When I read this verse I was immediately struck by the words "the goal". I thought to myself what 'is the goal that Paul is describing'. To find the answer I read a

few lines before this passage. In verse 10 Paul describes “the goal” when he claims “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection”. Wow, that is powerful. Christ through Paul invites us to the goal of knowing the power of Christ. Paul immediately follows his proclamation of his goal with the clarification that he has not obtained the goal. What is important though is that Paul is trying to reach that goal and is encouraged by the strength that God gives him.

The obvious question that jumps to my mind when I read this passage is, 'what goals do I have?' And do these goals align with what Christ would want me to do? I think it is easy for us to look at our lives and see all the places where we have failed in our goals. While I think it is important to recognize our failures I think it is even more important to recognize the times and places where we do meet “the goal” of Christ. The times when we are close to God and are able to share the joy and salvation of his resurrection are the times which we should treasure and seek to repeat. I challenge you to think of one area of your life where you feel that you are living the life that God wants for you to live. Once you have chosen this area think how you could expand what you are doing to more fully pursue “the goal” which we are called to strive for. I would like to close with a prayer that serves as a daily reminder for me of how I might strive to serve God and accomplish his will on earth.

God my father,  
Teach me to love  
Teach me to have an enlightened heart.  
Teach me to serve you as you deserve to be served  
Teach me to give without counting the cost.  
Give me the courage to enter the battle of life with no fear of being beaten, with no fear of being injured.  
Give me the courage to work until my strength fades away, to give you my heart with all that I have without asking anything in return for myself.  
My reward is to feel I am doing your will, you are the Holy One.  
You are the Master.  
Amen.  
**By Adam Buff**



When I was preparing to be fitted for braces on my teeth my dentist extracted several pearly whites. I saved those eight teeth in a jar. Only recently did they receive their final extraction, in the Wake County dump.

What I remember about this dentist was the way he talked me into allowing him to take out those teeth. Every time he deadened a tooth to prepare for an extraction he'd say, "David, this will not hurt, but if it does hurt tell me and I'll stop." "Okay, Dr. Pless," I'd gurgle. It worked. He assured me this would be painless. When it wasn't so, I'd endure the pain. How could I possibly squeal? He had no intention of hurting me. I knew that for certain. I kept my mouth shut, so to speak, and out came those large incisors.

It's been suggested that we perceive our futures in three possible ways: treadmill, adventure, or pilgrimage. The treadmill is a joyless future. It's filled with one extraction after the other. It's the same ole, same ole! Nothing new under the sun. Conversely, an adventure is filled with excitement, until the adventure ends. Then we must find another adventure. Just look at the time, energy and resources invested in vacations and new experiences. These adventures pave the way to the future. It won't hurt. A pilgrimage bends toward the future as the place where God will meet us. Yes, we may have treadmill times and adventure filled days, but a pilgrimage is invitation to follow. It's like Dr. Pless assuring us that it's not intended to hurt. It will. Even so, we go forward in the assurance that God in Christ is guiding us. We are called to be pilgrims.

Paul richly spoke about the Christian walk in pilgrim language. "This one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3: 13b-14. You don't strain forward unless you hold that in this future you will meet a living, loving God.

Press on! It may well be the supreme act of faith whether your teeth or your best tomorrows are extracted.

**By Pastor David**



When running a race, a runner sprints to the end as quickly as possible. The runner is focused on the finish line. If he trips on a root or a dip in the street in the middle of the race, a true runner would not give up. But instead, would forget their misfortune and continue to do his best for the rest of the race. Likewise, if the beginning of the race went well and the runner gains a large lead, he would not falter and walk the rest of the way. He would keep his mind on the finish line and his heart on the path and continue to run his best. The finish has many rewards waiting for him, such as rest, medals, and praise.

Philippians 3 alludes to a comparison between a race and the path to God's reward of heaven. It may seem strange to compare our Christian life to a race, because we do not want to fly through life without thinking, but this is not the part of the race that the comparison is making reference to. The important part of the comparison is that in a race, and in our faith life, we have to keep focus and keep our eye on the goal. In a race, that goal is to be the first one to cross the finish line, but in Philippians 3 the goal is to act with kindness and follow the example Jesus left for us. Philippians 3:14 says, "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Keeping our goal in mind will help us because, although we are forever

forgiven through Jesus Christ's sacrifice, we need to remember everything he has done for us and live for Him and abide in Him.

Looking earlier in Philippians 3:13 states, "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead." Think back to the runner who may have tripped or gained a lead in the beginning of the race. If he allows his thoughts to linger on the past, he risks messing up the future of the race. He may give up because he thinks he will not win, or he may lose because he is too confident. Similarly, when we as Christians do a good deed, whether it is participating in a service project, singing in the choir, helping a lost friend, or attending worship, we cannot dwell on it. Thinking about these good deeds may influence us to believe we have done well and therefore do not have to work to act Christ-like any more. If we sin, maybe by gossiping, acting with jealousy, or forgetting our faith, we have to repent and then forget it. Dwelling on these may cause a tainted view that we cannot live up to Christ's expectations and we may give up on our goals.

In Philippians 3, Paul also acknowledges that he has not yet obtained the goals. He is not perfect or in complete fellowship with God. We are human like Paul, and we will never be perfect or be able to act like Jesus all the time. With this realization, the best thing we can do is remain focused on our goal to act like and be in relationship with Christ. The reward that He offers, our place in heaven with Him, will come to us at the end of our race. "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

**By Lindsey Lewis**



"When you pray, when you fast, when you give alms"

*"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus."*

-Philippians 3:14

What is a call, or a "heavenly call?" God calls us to do his will, to carry out the purpose he gave us in our lives. We are called in many areas: to a career, to a church, to a service activity. Generally, God calls us to serve him, the Church, and others.

The "prize" in the verse is eternal life in Christ Jesus. In the Lutheran Church, though, we believe that "it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). If we do not earn salvation, then why serve? Our lives are so busy and we bear such large loads, why should we make time to serve God, the Church, and people in need. We serve because we want to live a faithful life; we want to emanate Jesus and live Christ-like lives. We should not worry about all the things we have going on in our

lives, how hectic our schedules are, but trust that God has not given us a load that we cannot carry. As stated in Philippians 4:13, "I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength." God will help us "press on" or persevere if we ask him for help.

Especially in this time of Lent, we need to be serving. Pray for others, give alms, and contemplate what God has called you to do in your life. Did He give you a purpose? Did he call you to serve through your vocation, through volunteering in the community, through helping the Church, or simply by praying for those in need? We serve to show our thanks and appreciation to God for all the blessings in our lives and to demonstrate to others the love of Christ, whatever our call may be.

**By Rebecca Klimek**

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