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January 2020

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE NEW YEAR

As we have been living the first few days in the new year and decade does it seem like a lot has changed? I mean I thought in 2020 we were supposed to have flying cars and live life like the Jetsons. Unfortunately, robot assistants do not fully exist yet. And on a more serious note we look at the headlines in the news with rumors of wars, threats to our safety, and destruction of creation and things don't look super encouraging.



- The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Psalm 9:9
- Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you. Deuteronomy 31:6
- “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

As you read these verses how did they make you feel considering the current events of this world. My prayer is that the Word of God encouraged you in the power of the Holy Spirit to be strong in the Lord. It is my prayer that no matter what happens this year that you will go back to the Word of God again and again to be encouraged by our Living Hope. As you do this and are encouraged, I hope you also go forth to encourage others with the power of Christ.

- Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. Hebrews 10:23-25
- Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:11

As we read these Bible verses encouraging us to encourage others, I want to close with a powerful reminder of what encouragement is as Dr. Julie J. Exline writes in an article from Psychology Today entitled [The Quiet Power of Encouragement](#). “What an amazing gift we can offer to others through encouragement! When we “en-courage,” it’s as though we actually infuse courage into another person. Encouragement can provide people with strength to look ahead, move forward, and reach for the next goal. The whole emotional tone of a tough situation can be transformed through encouragement. Somehow things seem a little brighter.”

So, I challenge you to make a resolution to make 2020 a year where, with the Light and Encouragement of Jesus Christ, you make things a little brighter. Help people see what true 2020 vision is when they have the image and courage of Jesus before them. Go forth holding and opening hands with words of encouragement and love by having an uplifting conversation, writing notes or emails, placing a call, going to visit someone, or even using our “part-way there” robot assistant Siri to send someone a text!

In the Encouragement of Jesus,
Pastor Matt

LCMS STEWARDSHIP MINISTRY January 2020 Newsletter Article



Our God is a God who works through means. He can and has worked immediately without agency, as the Bible testifies, but primarily, on the whole and for the most part, our God works through means. He does this not only for all of our earthly needs but also for all of our spiritual needs. And He does this for our benefit.

He provides for all our needs of this body and life through means. He gives us fathers and mothers to care for us when we are young. Through them, God provides house and home, food and clothing, education and training in the arts and work of this world.

He gives us good government to protect us from harm and danger; He gives us faithful neighbors and good friends to help in times of need and lack. He gives us employers who trade our work for income so that we may acquire the needs of the body. He gives us brains and brawn so that we will have something to trade with those employers for that needed income. This work, which we are able to do only because of what God has provided to us, redounds to the benefit of others. And so, the cycle of God giving through means continues.

He provides for all our needs of our souls. He sent His Son into the flesh to be our Savior. In that body, our Lord Jesus Christ lived the life that God demands of us all – a life we have failed to live because of our sins – and, in that body, He made payment for those sins on the cross, once and for all.

God delivers this forgiveness through the means of His Word and Sacraments. He calls pastors to proclaim, in His stead and by His command, that our sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake. Through these same pastors, God Himself claims us as His own in Holy Baptism, placing His own name on us in water and Word, igniting faith by the gift of the Holy Spirit. And He gives us His life-giving body and blood to nourish us in this same faith until the end. Our God is a God who works through means.

This is true also of stewardship. This is what St. Paul wrote in Philippians:

“I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:18–19).

The gift St. Paul received from the Philippian church is a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. They gave to God. God provided for St. Paul through the Philippians. And the God who loves both Paul and the Philippians will supply their every need according to the riches in Christ Jesus. Our God is a God who works through means.

“For all the promises of God find their Yes in [Jesus Christ],” St. Paul tells us in 2 Cor. 1:20. This is true also of you. Trust in the God who provides for all that we need in body and soul through means. And not only will you find His “yes” to you, but others will find it, too, through you. “But as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you – see that you excel in this act of grace also” (2 Cor. 8:7).

NEW SERMON SERIES

January 12—February 23



2020
a perfect vision into the future

January 12 – My Chosen, My Son - **OT: Isaiah 42:1-9** NT: Acts 10:34-43 Gospel: Matthew 3:13-17

January 19 – Look, here is the Lamb of God! - OT: Psalm 40:1-11 **Gospel: John 1:29-42**

January 26 – We Have Seen A Great Light - OT 1: Isaiah 9:1-4 OT 2: Psalm 27:1, 4-9
Gospel: Matthew 4:12-23

February 2 – Jesus Saw the Crowds – OT: Psalm 15 NT: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31
Gospel: Matthew 5:1-12

February 9 – Let Your Light Shine! - OT: Psalm 112:1-9 NT: 1 Corinthians 2:1-12
Gospel: Matthew 5:13-20

February 16 – 9:30 am Combined Service – Pastor Out of Town – Pastor Ken Wyneken Will Fill In

February 23 – Transfiguration Sunday – Shone Like the Sun! OT: Exodus 24:12-18 NT: 2 Peter 1:16-21
Gospel: Matthew 17:1-9

IT'S LUNCHTIME by Better Health Editor Steve Gruenwald



I've never met a sandwich I didn't like. That's not to say some haven't taken some time to get used to the flavor. The sandwich I've been chewing on lately is more of the analogous kind: being sandwiched between aging parents and adult children. I had always heard of the phrase "sandwich generation" and now I understand its meaning. I've also learned that similar phrases exist depending upon the circumstances. For example, "club sandwich generation" describes adults wedged between their parents, adult children and grandchildren, and "open-faced sandwich generation" describes anyone involved in elder care.

Being in the midst of a sandwich can often mess with your brain. On the one side you're witnessing your kids who were so dependent upon you for everything (feeding, staying safe, learning, etc.) becoming independent adults navigating the adventures of marriage, starting families and building homes and careers. On the other side you're also witnessing your parents — who always seemed so strong, confident and independent — now counting on you for major life and healthcare decisions.

You can insert a joke here about being in a pickle when it comes to living within the sometimes messy sandwich, but what I've come to realize is this: it's what we do, and it's not a burden. No, it's not always easy putting on and off the different parent/child hats, but life this side of heaven will always have its challenges. Call it love, obligation or duty, but God placed me into a family, and families care for one another. I wasn't able at the age of 5, 15 or even 25 to care for my mom, but then again, I didn't need to be. Now I am able, and now my mom needs me.

I also bit into this sandwich when God blessed us with children. Being a parent is the toughest job I'll ever have — and love. Even though my kids are married and out of the nest, parenting doesn't end when a certain age is reached by the child, or when a particular life-event happens. Lord willing, I want to be a part of my children and spouses' lives finding ways to encourage and support them throughout their life adventures.

Maybe "sandwich" isn't the best way to describe the stage we're in currently. A better expression and analogy would be that we're in a "wrap." Because of our family relationships, we are rolled up and intermingled in the lives of our parents and our children, and with our good Lord holding us tightly, that's a good place to be.

WALK BESIDE ME; BE MY FRIEND by Ed Arle, D. Min., retired pastor and pastoral counselor from <https://blogs.lcms.org/tag/church-worker-wellness/>

A chaplain serving in a state hospital in Kansas shared this story of a remarkable young woman: One very special girl was hydrocephalic. The water on her brain had caused her head to swell to the size of a basketball, making it impossible for her to hold her head up without the aid of special cables attached to her wheelchair. In spite of her medical condition, whenever it came time for morning chapel, this girl was there. And when the request for a favorite song was made, her request was always the same: "Everything is Beautiful in Its Own Way."

Ray Stevens wrote that song and may have been thinking God's thoughts after Him. That girl was beautiful in the eyes of God, as are we all. He even calls us His beloved children and the cross of Jesus is there to prove it. "He has made everything beautiful in its time" (Eccl. 3:11a). "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9 NIV).

Bethesda Lutheran Home in Appleton, Wis., has a motto for the work they do with special needs children and adults. "Don't walk before me, I cannot follow; don't walk behind me, I cannot lead; walk beside me and be my friend." When I first heard those words years ago, they reminded me of these words from a well-known hymn by Joseph Scriven titled "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!
(public domain)

There are times in the lives of all of us when the heart buckles, along with the knees, under the burdens we carry. It matters not how successful, how intelligent, how gifted a person may be, the heaviness of living can weigh anyone down. Jesus is a friend who offers these words of promise and hope: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:29).



Dear Lord Jesus, You have called me "friend." I cherish that word, especially in those times when I feel so alone I wonder if anyone cares. Help me in those times to cling to the Cross and give me the strength to lift it high so others can see it. In Your name I pray. Amen.

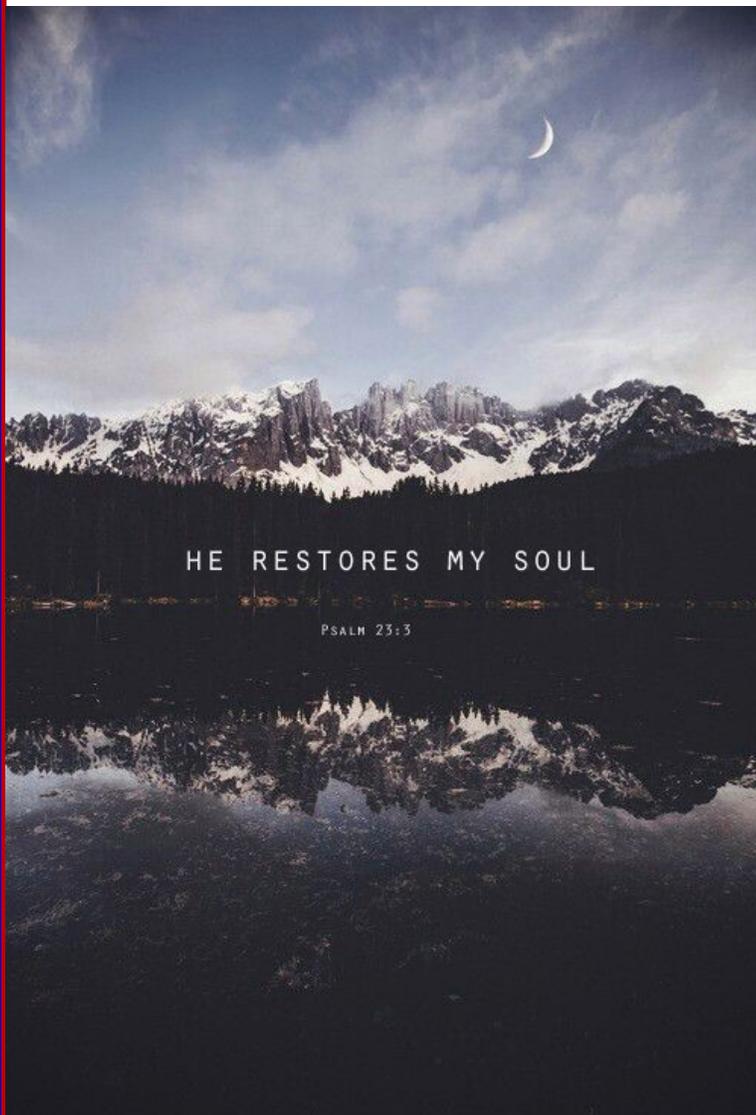
Rest for our souls ... what a friend we have in Jesus.

REST FOR THE SOUL by Catherine Downing from sparksofredemptivegrace.com/

I love the 23rd Psalm. When I read it, I picture myself drinking deeply from still waters and munching contentedly on delightful treats. Somehow in the first few words I find physical refreshment. My muscles begin to relax, and tension starts to slip away. Though I experience a prompt relief in body, I admit my response to verse 3, “He restores my soul,” isn’t quite as immediate. As one who, along with the responsibilities of work, family and life, helps to provide emotional and practical support for a loved one living with a mental health disorder, the thought of a refreshed soul sounds like an unattainable luxury. My soul is weary from worry and haggard from heartache. It is weighed down with impossible decisions and discouraged from setbacks. Yes, my body needs nourishment and sleep and I know, basically, how to do that.

But where and when and how does soul-restoration happen?

THE FIRST CLUE COMES IN THE VERSE BEFORE THIS ONE, IN WORDS ABOUT STREAMS AND MEADOWS.



The physical needs of food and water and rest come first. It is hard to rest your spirit when your body is bone tired and hungry. When our hearts are weary, the first, most refreshing help to our souls may be to take a nap or go for a walk.

OUR SECOND INSIGHT REMINDS US WHOSE JOB IT IS TO BRING HEALTH TO OUR SOULS.

“HE restores my soul.” If ever there was a “let go and let God” moment, this is it. We entrust our frayed souls with all the fears and insecurities to the One who beckons: “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:28,29 NLT)

A THIRD POINT IS TO ACCEPT THE TRADE JESUS OFFERS.

He invites us to swap our heavy burden for His light yoke. I remember years ago traveling with a heavy computer bag through a large crowded foreign urban city. After struggling for a number of blocks and lagging farther and farther behind my colleagues, one of the young men dropped back and offered to swap briefcases. He'd not brought his laptop that day, so his load was so very easy for me to carry. What a relief and what a great exchange. Jesus says, "Give me that baggage; it's mine to haul. Instead, you carry my peace and joy."

"You will find rest for your souls," Jesus promises. Rest from fretting if the new medications for your loved one will be effective. Rest from trying to figure out if you are empowering their recovery or enabling their dependency. Rest from grieving the "should have beens" and "if onlys." Under His yoke we find a haven, a respite, a sanctuary for our troubled, tired, trodden souls.

Lastly, I think of Newton's law of motion that says, "A body at rest will stay at rest until some external force is applied." Once Jesus gives rest to our souls, we need to resist the forces that come to "steal, kill and destroy" that peace. We let His peace stand like a sentry guard outside our hearts and minds, so our souls stay restored. A restored soul has strength and fortitude and joy. A restored soul is able to give again, laugh again, hope again. A restored soul finds rest under the light yoke of a gentle shepherd.



"Our family and I want to express our appreciation and thanks to all of you that attended our memorial service for our son, Tim Griffith. Also thanks to all of you that expressed condolences, sympathy and love and sent cards. We are so appreciative and grateful for our body of Christ. Your support has helped us as we go through this very difficult time. "

With Christian Love,
Eleanor Griffith





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