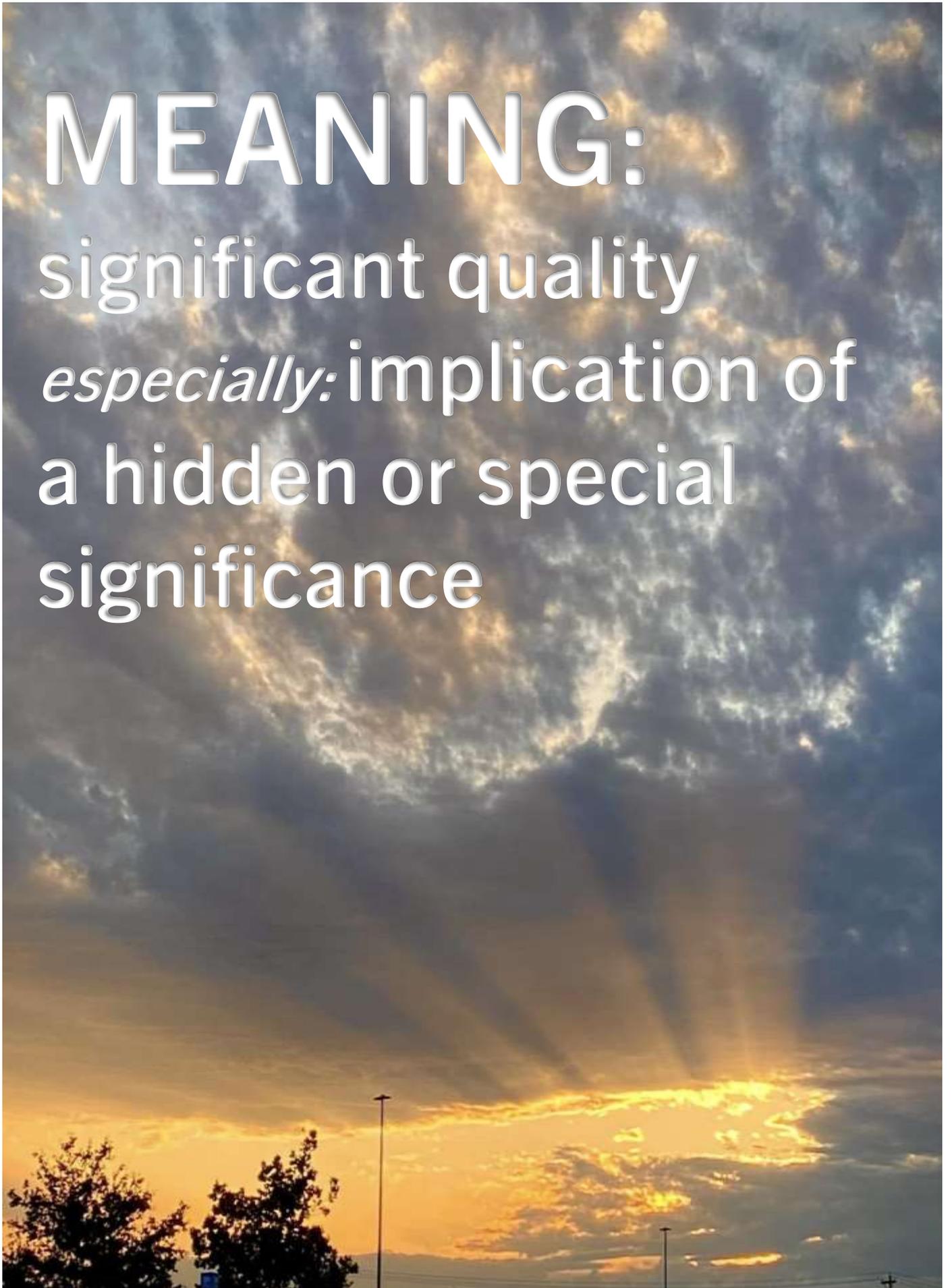


# MEANING:

significant quality

*especially:* implication of  
a hidden or special  
significance



“We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone - we find it with another.”

— Thomas Merton, *Love and Living*

Dear Holy Trinity community members,

I recently attended a conference at St. John’s University in Collegeville, Minnesota. It was the final gathering for a grant that the congregation was awarded five years ago on the theme of vocation and calling. Each of the fourteen congregations from the United States and Canada was given an opportunity to tell their story from these past five years – years filled with hardships and celebrations as deep as the ocean and as high as the sky.

As the stories poured forth, the room took on a sacred quality. As I listened to two pastors from rural Missouri recount their experiences during COVID-time, I realized that we were engaged in the practice of testimony – public recounting of significant, meaningful experiences. Though the stories and experiences were unique to each congregation and to specific people, there was something about the exchange that allowed all of us to recognize deeper truths about ourselves, the world, and the divine.

I am so excited about this booklet! It’s filled to the brim with stories – testimonies, really – of meaning. One of our 2023 congregational goals is to nurture community care and connection. This booklet is one way of forming new relationships and strengthening existing relationships. This booklet also helps us to articulate some of the meaningful parts of who we are – both individually and as a community of faith. No two stories are the same, but they are all empowered by the same God who wants abundant life for the whole creation.

So, let’s read! If a story really resonates with you, I encourage you to seek out the writer in worship or send them an email. May these stories be bread for our meaningful journey together this fall.

Peace and love,



*Traditional Worship – Contemporary Message – A Call to Social Justice*  
2730 East 31<sup>st</sup> Street, Minneapolis, MN 55406 ▪ (612)729-8358 ▪ [www.htlcmpls.org](http://www.htlcmpls.org)

*We acknowledge that we gather on the Dakota Homeland.*

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## September 10

In my 20s, in that period of constant exploration and seeking, I started a collection of poetry, images, quotes, and videos that felt beautiful and holy to me (<https://holybook.tumblr.com/>). These were things that brought God to life, and helped me tap back into the sacred whenever I felt distant. Now in the thick of motherhood and living, it's sweet to return to the collection every so often as a quick way to feed my spirit and and remember that which ultimately gives meaning to my life. Here's an ee cummings poem that's currently the first thing that shows up on the page for a quick taste:

### [i thank You God for most this amazing](#)

i thank You God for most this amazing  
day:for the leaping greenly spirits of trees  
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything  
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,  
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth  
day of life and of love and wings: and of the gay  
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing  
breathing any—lifted from the no  
of all nothing—human merely being  
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and  
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

~Jess Daniel Hart



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## September 11

### 2 BAPTISMS

Our son Cedar was baptized at Holy Trinity in December 2020 to an empty sanctuary in the throes of the Covid-19 pandemic. My wife Jess, and Cedar and I were the only ones physically present with Pastor Ingrid, donning masks as we Zoomed in our families. It felt surreal and a bit lonely, but also intimate and precious. At the end of the baptism, we cobbled together a post-baptism song, with the bandwidth-induced syncopation creating an unintentional round of Zoom voices. After months spent at home alone adjusting to life as new parents and the pandemic, the ceremony felt life-giving; sharing a cherished familiar ritual, the sacrament and liturgy and transcending the circumstances.

In April of this year, 2023, our second son, Julian was baptized at Holy Trinity, in an equally beautiful and very different experience. This time the congregation filled the pews, with a host of smiling faces looking back as we lit the baptismal candle with Julu's godparents, Allison and Kevin, and watched Pastor Ingrid pour the water. Scanning the room, I made eye contact with my parents who had traveled in from Michigan and two of my best friends from college who were also in attendance. As Jess and I listened to the choir sing a beautiful rendition of Canticle of the Sun and walked up the aisle, I felt a wave of gratitude to share that moment with people across eras of my life.

I cherish the memory of both baptisms, with the contrast between them helping remind me of God's blessings, the resilience of community, and the way friends and family lift us up, near and far.

~Donny Hart



September 12



~Frances Olsen Biebighauser

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## September 13

### A GIFT OF CHANCEL CANDLELIGHT

My father, Jack Hanson, was a master carpenter by trade. He first learned his craft in the Army Corps of Engineers in World War II. He was always happiest when he was creating something: a new or remodeled room in our home, a backyard skating pond, a checkerboard from various kinds and colors of wood, bookcases for my first apartment, a rocking chair that needed caning, mixing up a batch of his delicious chocolate marshmallow fudge, and always, building wonderful Christmas gifts for his three children. I always loved visiting his home workshop, seeing his projects, breathing in the fragrance of freshly cut wood, and collecting the shaved “curls” that came off the planer. Our home today is still filled with a great variety of wooden treasures made by my father.

Earlier in his career, Dad worked both indoors and outdoors, in all kinds of weather, primarily, building homes, and later on, working on major buildings in the downtown Twin Cities. He eagerly worked with many apprentice carpenters and enjoyed teaching them his trade. I was always proud to say my father was a carpenter. I think of him every Sunday when I view the six tall candleholders in Holy Trinity’s chancel. Dad crafted and gifted them to our church. So how did that all come about?

In 1974-75, a major renovation was taking place in the Holy Trinity sanctuary. Archival records from Holy Trinity member Carol Johnson indicate that the renovation included, among other things, a “. . .new free-standing altar, made from the wood of the previous altar, by members, Wayne Siewert and Eric Fors, as well as the tall faceted glass window.” The free-standing altar allowed the worship participants to face the congregation.

According to Pastor Ron Johnson, “. . .the renovation in the chancel area was driven by the desire to have a free-standing altar. Once the altar was placed forward, the wall and window behind it looked. . .rather high and ill-proportioned and the wall, uninteresting. Thus, it was decided to install a large (tall window) using a different kind of glass, but picking up the colors of the other windows.” The artist was told the new window should suggest a resurrection theme. The finished cost was \$3,000 and a member, Stanley Nelson, asked to pay for the window as a memorial to his wife, Helen, who had recently died.

The spaces on the sides of that new window now looked bare, and tall candleholders seemed to be the answer. Pastor Ron asked my dad to use his wood-turning lathe skills to create six tall candleholders “that would be consistent with the elegant woodwork and design of the worship area.” My father was humbled by that request and considered it a great honor to be the chosen artisan. Dad purchased the needed wood, the two of them shared ideas and designs and in time, there were six beautiful tall candleholders that are still lit in the Holy Trinity chancel every church service.

Carol’s archival records reveal that the renovation was dedicated in worship on November 30, 1975, the first Sunday in Advent and the beginning of a new church year.

It is noteworthy to remember that Jesus’ father Joseph was a carpenter, and Jesus worked as a carpenter for nearly 20 years, carving and shaping wood as he would one day reshape lives.

~Sandy Hoverson



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## September 14

### THE VALUE OF A PENCIL

My last 5 years of teaching in Minneapolis Public Schools I was teaching 6th grade math at Ramsey International Fine Arts Center. I had already taught for 20 years in this program: 10 years in 4th grade and 10 years in 5th grade. It was an incredible program—kindergarten through 8th grade. Every student learned Spanish and a string instrument. We infused the arts in all our teaching. We were also a center for autism students and for Latino students who were learning English. The program began at Longfellow school then moved to 50th and Nicollet.

Now for my story. As a middle school teacher, part of my job was to help students navigate through the transition from elementary school to middle school, which included skills of being organized and prepared in order to be ready for class. It was a challenge for students to have a pencil for math class. So as the teacher, should I just give them a pencil? Well, you can just imagine how much that would cost when I have about 100 students a day. I devised many different methods to get them to bring a pencil to class. As the year progressed most students rose to the expectation.

But there was this one student who never had a pencil when he arrived at class. He was new to the school, so I was patient and just quietly would slip him a pencil when he came to class. He was a proud and angry kid that got into trouble a lot, so his attendance was sporadic. He was a smart kid and really excelled in math. I tried to capitalize this enthusiasm for learning and math. The joy of teaching! One day I asked him how come it was so difficult to bring a pencil to class. He shared with me that he was staying in a shelter. He said his pencils were always stolen, and he just did not have money to keep buying pencils. So I told him when he arrived at school each day, just stop by my classroom and I would give him two pencils each day. As the year progressed his attendance improved as did his grades. By spring quarter, he was on the honor roll.

That was my challenge each year to try to meet the needs of each student so they could discover that joy in learning.

As school supplies go on sale, I always stock up so I can donate those to students and teachers. These school supplies make a big difference so students can learn.

~Zoe Martinez



September 15



~Ida Bauck

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## September 16

*A light shines in the darkness.* This particular line of Holden Evening Prayer has long had a particular resonance for me, not only because it is poetic and scriptural but also because it describes in a very literal sense how a photograph is made. As an artist I am ever aware that photography, at its core, is about light entering darkness and the transformation that happens in that moment.

It is really no wonder that I felt a spiritual connection when I began to work in historic-process photography, a medium based on chemical reactions rather than solely digital technology. To make these prints requires time in sacred darkness, watching the small amounts of light dance across the surfaces, and feeling the ritual and rhythm of putting prints through the chemical washes, gently rocking the trays so the print moves back and forth in the watery abyss, an image suddenly emerging. In those quiet spaces I think of the narratives of creation, those opening lines of John's gospel, and I think of stained glass windows – illuminations at the meeting point of light and material.

These reflections continued and took on more layers of meaning as I spent a six-week art residency at Holden Village making images inside hollow eggshells that I made into pinhole cameras. It was striking to make images with immensely fragile and organic material in a process filled with uncertainty but ultimately made by light entering in and leaving a trace in this held internal and liminal space – a hollow chamber of new life, breaking in and breaking open. And it was particularly meaningful to use this process in making photographs of a valley that had just burned intensely in a forest fire only months before, with ashes still smoldering under the six feet of snowpack.

These images, after all, speak from the perspective of the forest about the cycles and seasons of the land and about its relationship with humanity, at its best marked by respect and rhythm, at its worst fraught by extraction and control. Intriguingly, they are images etched in light, *photo-graphed*, through a sort of burning. Not one of combustion and carbon, but of photons reacting to silver halide crystals, leaving a blackened trace of metallic silver specks.

Creating photographs in ash-like traces is not only an aesthetic choice but also a theological one. For as much as I love the imagery of light in our sacred texts, I think we have lost its ashy-ness. In his work *Cinders*, postmodern philosopher Jacques Derrida dares to “run the risk of the poem of the cinder” because it runs counter to how light is most often understood: associated with clarity, knowing, and power, understandings rooted in the Enlightenment. This is our typical Western lens for reading scripture. Yet it is exactly this obsession with control, certainty, and force that sets us at odds with the fragility and flux of creation. These tensions emerge in the event of forest fire itself: in the challenge of being a settled community in a valley that rejuvenates through burning, in the history of mining extraction in that place, and in the way human intervention has led to bigger and hotter fires. How we understand light both speaks to our understanding of God and our relationship with the landscape.

My hope as both an artist and theologian is that creating photographs stirs these questions and becomes an invitation of light, a willingness to be broken open, a call to wander in the woods, to listen to the story of place, to lament the suffering of our planet, to find beauty in ash, and to embrace transformation.

*A version of this article first appeared in the Holden Village Voice Spring 2016 issue.*

~Emilie Bouvier



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## September 17

“The varied shapes and color patterns of wild flowers, some of which, like the ladyslippers, are marvelously complex, are stratagems by which cross-pollination is made more certain. By cross-pollination the genetic inheritance of a plant is maintained, reshuffled, and renewed. Over their long history, plants and insects have developed together to their mutual benefit.”

–from *Northland Wild Flowers: A Guide for the Minnesota Region*, by John B. Moyle and Evelyn W. Moyle

Four years ago, my family abandoned the monoculture of carefully cultivated grass in our front lawn and instead planted an urban meadow of native wildflowers. It took a few years for the perennials to establish themselves, but now during the summers our house is decorated by a tall waving mass of purple and yellow flowers humming with bees. In late winter, I search for the first green shoots appearing through the mulch of hacked-off plants from the summer before. Through the summer, I mark the progression of time by the wildflowers that appear. One week I look out to see the front yard dotted with flowering lupines. Another week the bergamot blooms, or the wild strawberries produce their tiny red fruits. When an unfamiliar plant starts to take off, I pull out my book on local plants and study pictures and descriptions until I find a match, then try to decide whether I would consider it a weed or a welcome addition. In the fall, we let the flowers fade to brown and dry on their stalks until, just before the first snowfall, we chop down the meadow and leave the plants there as mulch to enrich the soil and protect the community of wild critters that calls our yard home.

My husband and I both came from families for whom traditional lawn care was an act of love and responsibility. For his suburban family, a neat lawn signaled a well-tended household in the same way as carefully scrubbed floors or children with nicely trimmed hair. For my rural family, a large short-mowed area around each house and outbuilding was a necessity for keeping structures safe from forest fires, and in fact saved several buildings on my parents' ranch when a massive fire swept through. My husband and I are both rule-followers by nature; we like to fit in with those around us. Given this background, we agonized over the decision to convert the lawn of our home in Saint Paul. We wondered whether the neighbors would consider it an eyesore, and we worried it might attract rats or snakes. We were convinced there must be some reason that Americans love their uniform green lawns.

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When we finally worked up the gumption to kill our grass and start the slow process of re-growing prairie, the support from our neighbors amazed us. People out for walks would pause at our yard to look more closely at an interesting flower or insect. Neighborhood plant enthusiasts asked about our project and gave us encouragement. Our next-door neighbors, who keep an immaculate lawn and garden, commented on how green our front yard remained even during dry periods. That first summer, when our lawn looked truly terrible – dead brown grass with a grid of isolated native transplants struggling to survive – a high point came when someone left an anonymous note in our mailbox thanking us for thinking of the bees and butterflies and birds.

Our wildflower meadow, now thriving with color and sound, is one small way that we can invite nature into our ever more mechanized and lifeless surroundings. Looking at a meadow of wildflowers, how can you help but worship the god who made so many colors and shapes, who made evolution and genetics and natural selection, so that flowers and insects would develop to have this amazing variety and complexity. Let us give thanks for soil and sunshine and rain, mulch and photosynthesis and pollination and seeds, and our own power to steward the pieces of earth entrusted to our care.

~Erin Henry



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## September 18

### MY SO-CALLED LIFE AND WHAT AM I TO MAKE OF IT, NOW THAT I'M A SENIOR CITIZEN

I was blest enough to have been asked to write a story for the Weaving booklet and asked again to do so for this project. I admit that it's been a struggle to know what to write and put down on paper. In my previous writing, I alluded to my most recent surgeries and noted that I have had a succession of hospitalizations throughout my life. Now, I know I'm not the only individual that has gone through multiple issues. My dearly departed wife Pamela used to exclaim to others of how many surgeries I went through, but I often reminded her that there are many children and adults that have gone through a lot more than I. This article is not to gander sympathies of all that I have endured, but how it shaped me to my calling (my work history) of reaching out to individuals with developmentally disabled, mentally ill, physically disabled, the alcoholics and those that suffered some form of physical abuse. I want to emphasize I am no expert in any of these domains, but I had the ability to connect with and make a difference in some of their lives.

Let me explain, without going into too much detail, how, especially early on, these medical events have made me the person I am today. I was born without a complete rectal system. Emergency surgery saved my life and many surgeries were attempted to rectify the situation without success, which led to having a colostomy. When I was 4 years old, I contracted Polio. More surgeries and many trips for rehabilitation. I was a lucky one. I didn't end up in an iron lung or have to wear braces. When I was 8 years old, I had surgery to lengthen my right leg so I didn't have to walk on my "tippy toes." With these two issues, I was often shunned by the kids in school. I never had the opportunities a normal kid would have like birthday parties or sleepovers. When I was to graduate from high school, during a routine physical, they discovered a hole in the neck of my bladder that was infecting my body. I was given a 20% chance for survival. A sphincter device was implanted but eroded through my skin every year for four years, and I finally told them to take it out as I just couldn't take it anymore. I had two more surgeries because of ruptures in my intestines, in which I lost complete hearing in my left ear and my right ear is compromised as well. And, of course, my last serious surgery a little of two years ago. I promise that's the last I will share about my health history.

So growing up was hard. Going away to college gave me an opportunity to start a new life, even though I still needed to deal with my issues. I still felt "sorry" for myself that I would never have a life. To never have a circle of friends, a date, or even have a girlfriend. But as I stayed in my college dorm, I realized that I needed to change my attitude and quit being sorry for myself. It seems like Jesus was standing nearby and I told myself that I was lovable and that if people didn't accept me for who I was that it was their problem, nor mine. My worries and situations didn't always go away, but it was a beginning.

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After college, I was planning on going to grad school to work towards being a Rehabilitation Counselor. I never made it. I had gone to Rockford, Illinois, for summer work at the urging of my brother and older sister who were already living there. While there, they encouraged me to apply for several county positions. To have them stop bugging me, I took several tests at the Mental Health Center. They called me in for an interview and I was hired on the spot because of how at-ease I was in interacting with one of the residents. I worked on the Developmental Disabilities Unit in a rather large complex. This was back in the early '70's. I felt that they were segregated and asked for permission to take a van full to a public park. My, did I learn a life lesson on acceptance, where parents herded their children away as we approached the playground swings.

I eventually moved back to Minnesota with my first wife. She was one of the nurses I had when I had my bladder issue. I had to rehab in Minnesota for a while after the surgery and I decided to ask her out since I was stuck there. We were a good fit as she knew of my physical history, and I eventually helped her with some mental health symptoms. We eventually grew apart, although we loved each other, but our foundation was not strong. I even approached my pastor, in a different Lutheran Synod, who would not help us, as my spouse was a Methodist when we met and even had converted to become a Lutheran. Couple's therapy didn't pan out, and I take half the blame. I then worked in a nursing home which primarily served the poor and mentally ill. I saw the loneliness of many men and women. I remember a woman who sat in her room a lot and never said much. One day, I was walking by her room and she was soaking her foot. Without saying a word, I grabbed a chair, took off my shoe and sock, and put my foot in the water. I played tootsies with her, and she just laughed and laughed. Eventually, new management took over and I was out the door. I found my next calling at two different drop-in centers that served persons with severe and persistent developmental disabilities. I primarily worked with the population that were physically disabled as well. Eight years later, I worked for an agency in the community composed mostly of higher functioning mentally ill, of which a small portion were chemically dependent and were referred by Human Services. This agency had an alcoholic support group to which Hennepin County referred chemically dependent clients as there were no such treatment programs for this population. A proud moment in my time there was when we were published by the U of Minnesota in a sociology booklet as one of the few programs in the United States to work with the mentally ill at that time. And for my final 18 1/2 years, I worked with the mentally ill and Chemically Dependent clients associated with the Anoka County Court system—probably one of the most difficult jobs and often, thankless. Even though the clients were held accountable by the court system, when they violated the conditions of the court orders, we, as the social workers, took the blunt of their fury. Last, but certainly not least, while working at the community-based program in Minneapolis, I met my future wife, Pamela. She was working with disabled adults in Hopkins. She saw a need to develop an ACA (Adult Children of Alcoholics) and was gathering information in the community, which eventually led to a meeting with me. We found that we had so much in common working in this field, and we formulated a friendship that turned into a nearly 25-year marriage before dementia took her away from me. She had been in an abusive marriage for 25 years and finally found the courage and support of others to ask for a divorce and the road blocks her husband put her through. Encouraged, she wrote a book called *Loving Yourself Home*, before her

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symptoms became more apparent. I believe HTLC still has a copy in the Library. If not, Barnes and Noble and Amazon had it in stock.

In wrapping this up, all these experiences of survival must have meaning that has guided me throughout my life. I guess one might perceive me as an introvert as I rarely stay after the church service, primarily because of my hearing issues. Background noise often makes conversations impossible. But in a quiet setting, I'm more at ease. I need more courage and someday I'll find that.

What I hope you take from all of this, is that if you, your child, a friend or anyone else you may know have squelched past pains of physical or mental abuse, no matter what the cause (being bullied, taunted because of race, sexual identity, loss of loved one, or whatever the cause might be), to search out to trusted family, friends, therapists and/or the Pastors of HTLC or compassionate individuals or agencies that can help you focus on your needs and to promote your wellbeing. Know that with God, you are not alone.



44  
**DON'T FORGET,**  
that even when  
life gets hard  
and you feel like  
giving up, there  
is a future that  
you haven't  
seen yet. Stay  
strong, believe  
in yourself and  
never stop  
moving forward.



~David Rediger

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## September 19

### MOM

My mom, Bertha Sophia Bertsch, was born May 13, 1912. This momentous occasion took place at the Bertsch family farm located in western North Dakota, equidistant between the desolate prairie communities of Hebron, New Leipzig, and Mott. When Mom told us stories about growing up there, she always said, "Mott's the spot that God forgot"!

Mom was the third of seven children. Her mother Theresa was a victim of the 1918 flu epidemic. Soon thereafter her father Michael remarried and eventually the total number of children grew to twenty two!

Growing up on that farm meant much hard work at a very young age. In the spring, we used horses to plow and seed the land and helping plant a gigantic garden.

Summer meant helping with the harvesting, haying, and canning those fresh veggies.

Year-round chores included keeping animals fed, milking cows, and ongoing care of the many children. But mom, in spite of everything, enjoyed life, laughter, and became a wonderful story teller.

She met my father, Jake Schmitt, at a wedding. He was the best man when his brother Henry married Sophie, mom's cousin. You could say it was love at first sight, but the Schmitt family lived far away in southeast North Dakota. They wrote letters to each other and the second time they saw each other was the day they were married, November 20, 1932.

Mom's dowry was five cows who traveled with them to the Schmitt family farm. They lived with the family, which consisted of Grandpa, Grandma, Dad, Mom, and ten of Dad's siblings, for just over a year. Then they moved to a small farm of their own, three miles south of the family farm. No electricity or indoor plumbing and the hard work continued.

They had six children, the first son was born and died at his birth which took place on that farm. The other five of us, Loretta, Mary Ann, Larry, David, and Glenn were born in hospitals. Mom became pregnant with Glenn ten years after David was born. Mom told us that the night she told dad that she was pregnant, he tossed and turned, tossed and turned. She asked him what in the world was the matter? He said, "What will my friends say when they learn we're going to have a baby at our age?" She said, "You aren't the one having the baby, I am."

Fast forward many, many years. It was after I was married and had two children that Mom and Dad left North Dakota and moved to La Habra, California. These became the years when Mom and I were not only mother and daughter but also best friends and soul mates. Mom never lost her sense of humor and love of life. We always purchased lotto tickets together and Mom enjoyed playing the slot machines. One time she won a \$2,000 jackpot which she used to purchase new offering plates for their church, St. Paul Lutheran in Lodi, California. As she was leaving church the Sunday those plates were dedicated, the pastor shook her hand and whispered in her ear, "Bertha, the next time you go to Reno, take me with you!"

Another time she called to tell me she was traveling to Wishek, North Dakota, for a visit and could she borrow my sweatshirt? She had many friends there and wanted to wear it to the local bank. When she returned, I asked how the girls liked that sweatshirt? Mom said they laughed and laughed and said, "Bertha you haven't changed!" What words were written on the back of that shirt? "Life's too short to drink cheap beer"!

Attending and being active in their church wherever they lived was very important to Mom and Dad. Dad taught Sunday school, took many leadership positions, and sang in church choirs for 65 years. Mom was

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artistic and when her pastor son-in-law was ordained at Newport Harbor Lutheran, she knit and crafted his stole and the altar paraments. She did the same for the dedication of the new sanctuary at their church Emanuel Lutheran in La Habra, California.

Mom was very active in Ladies Aid which in later years became Women of The Lutheran Church in America. She told me that when the monthly Ladies Aid meetings were held, roll call was answered by reciting a memorized Bible verse. She never forgot those verses and encouraged me to memorize Bible verses and poetry.

Mom enjoyed traveling. She accompanied me several times to Lutheran Brotherhood/Thrivent Financial conferences. She never met a stranger and soon became everyone's favorite storyteller. One year I took her and her sister Genie to New York City. We left the hotel early each morning to take in that amazing city. We visited Tiffany's, St. Patrick's Cathedral, Rockefeller Center, had lunch at the top of the World Trade Center, stopped at the trading floor on Wall Street, took bus tours etc. Their favorite place was the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island where we used the computers to find their Bertsch great grandparents' names telling the year they emigrated to the U.S. from Russia. When those names came on the screen, there were many tears of joy and feelings of awe. All our ancestors are Germans from Russia, a story for another time.

Mom celebrated her 97th. birthday at her then favorite Mexican restaurant in Santa Ana, California, surrounded by family and friends. When the three guitar players came to our table, the waiters asked all the restaurant patrons to join in and sing Happy Birthday to Bertha. She was delighted!

Just a few days later mom fell and experienced a serious back injury. She died May 29, 2009. At her funeral I recited her favorite poem, *L' Envoi* by Rudyard Kipling:

When Earth's last picture is painted, and the tubes are twisted and dried  
When the oldest colors have faded, and the youngest critic has died,  
We shall rest, and faith, we shall need it - lie down for an aeon or two,  
Til the Master of All Good Workmen shall set us to work anew!  
And those that were good will be happy: they shall sit on a golden chair;  
They shall splash at a ten-league canvas with brushes of comet's hair:  
They shall find real saints to draw from - Magdalene, Peter and Paul:  
They shall work for an age at a sitting and never be tired at all!  
And only the Master shall praise us, and only the Master shall blame:  
And no one shall work for money, and no one shall work for fame;  
But each for the joy of the working, and each on her separate star,  
Shall draw the Thing as she sees it for the God of Things as They Are!

I miss her still!

~Mary Ann Sheets



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## September 20

I saw you, loving parent, as you guided your toddler along the sidewalk. You let *her* hold *your* hand.

Dear neighbor, I heard how tactfully and respectfully you spoke with the new resident about their teen's music booming through our yards on a quiet July evening.



Caring pastor, I saw how you reverently served Eucharist to waiting hands.

You, Friend, shook my hand...it was welcoming, strong but also warm and inviting.

In these days of environmental change and stress to our precious planet, it is more crucial than ever for all of us, to “be gentle with our earth”!

And, if we can request people to be gentle with mechanical things like door openers, it should be easy to ask for gentleness with each other. I find that's easy with friends and family but harder with people in the queue at the bank, on the freeway, in the “get your free sample” line.

So, gentle reader, in this time of hurry, utilizing every minute, rushing through the to-do list, here's a heartfelt reminder for you and for me: “Please Be Gentle”!!

~Joyce Peterson



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September 21



## REFLECTIONS from the LABYRINTH

ONE YEAR AFTER CANCER SURGERY –

The Eve of All Saints  
October 31, 1998

“The mind can go in a thousand directions  
But on this beautiful path, I walk in peace  
With each step, a gentle wind blows  
With each step a flower blooms.”

Thich Nhat Hanh

And so I walked  
A labyrinth in the midst of the city.  
Cars, airplanes, mechanical sounds.  
In peace - slow down.  
See - at your feet fall's offering of oak and maple leaves.  
In peace - I begin to slow.  
In peace - I feel the tension in my shoulders begin to ease  
and the pain in my neck go away.  
In peace.  
It comes to me how like life a labyrinth is.  
A path  
coming close to God and going away.  
Close and away.  
In peace I walk.  
I walk on All Hallow's Eve  
remembering the saints. . . . .  
among them grandparents, parents.  
I think of my own mortality.  
**CANCER**  
In peace I walk.

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In the presence of God who leads if I will follow.

Present moment.

In peace I walk.

Sometimes anxious to get to the center,  
sometimes still.

In peace I walk.

To the center. . . . .  
filled with the presence of God.  
I feel WHOLE. I feel God's presence.  
I walk in peace.  
Present moment.

I leave in quiet joy,  
Going forward in the light of God.  
I walk in peace.

As I leave, another comes.  
May her walk be blessed.

## ELEVEN YEARS LATER

The Labyrinth  
In the Desert  
March 2009

A path of pebbles - ordinary,  
like most of life.  
An occasional glitter -  
highlights,  
times of extraordinary joy.  
A large rock across the path and part way into the next  
CANCER.

On to new life,  
Now aging - less sure balance,  
Needing to more carefully watch  
where I go.  
A green stone in the center - GROW!  
Left a multihued brown and rust stone  
of a life settled into sameness.

The way out is lighter.  
THANKS BE TO GOD!

Fourteen years more - still here!

~Joyce Besser



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## September 22

What is it that gives life meaning? Value? Worth? I confess I have a Holy Trinity favorite—it's the Holy Spirit. The thought of God putting part of God's self in me is so wonderful—it's magnificent—it's humbling. I am so grateful! I am worth that much to God.

When we were living in southern Minnesota, near the beginning of my teaching career, we were asked to join a community Bible study. Many of the participants were local farmers of land so rich it could yield two crops each season. Most were Baptist congregants.

One evening, the subject of Creation was central and the literal interpretation of the Bible account seemed assumed. I could hardly contain myself so when it was my turn to speak, I said:

“How many of you (farmers) would be content to plant the same corn seed your fathers used? Corn scientists have created seed your fathers would hardly recognize—and you help the evolution of seed by planting alternate rows to create hybrid corn seed. You enjoy the success of your efforts. It makes you happy and fulfilled. You are grateful. You benefit and so does the whole world. Creation is not a one-time thing. It is not static.”

I am an art teacher and artist. Every time I make a work of art I use the creativity inside of me to transform a variety of things God has put at my disposal into something new. I get to experience a glimpse of the joy God must feel when God creates anything—everything. God put that creative talent in me to use and enjoy. It gives meaning to my life. And, hopefully, through me to others.

The Holy Spirit—that part of God in me—is my guide, my protector, my champion. I cannot separate the Holy Spirit from my creative spirit or any of the other aspects of my being. I think God loves for me to be creative. I think it makes God as happy as it does me. I think God feels fulfillment through me.

~Paul Chindvall



September 23



~Sam Espinosa

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## September 24

### THE CHECKOUT

Now that I've had time to reflect upon this, what struck me was how similar they appeared. Both in their 60s? 70s? I'm a terrible judge of age. Both were a little pudgy around the middle. Both were a little slow moving. Both were White with long silver hair that went down to their middle back. If you were to put them in a police lineup, the only distinguishing physical feature you would ascertain is that that one was female and one was male, and from a distance, even that would be hard to make out. Our bodies do funny things as we age.

I was at the local Walmart picking up items for mom and dad. It was already after 5:00, so I was in a bit of a hurry as I needed them for dinner. Dinner needs to be served at 6:00 or the entire schedule of watching *Wheel of Fortune* at 6:30 with a dish of ice cream would be thrown off course, which would upturn the proverbial apple cart of the evenings' activities and leave my elderly parents unnerved. Our bodies do funny things as we age.

I had only a few items in my basket, but a couple of them needed to be weighed, so I thought the express lane might be better. I spotted the clerk ringing up the items of a gentleman in the express lane line, perfect! See the description above for how they appeared.

The clerk waved at me as if to say "go away," and it dawned upon me that her light was not on. I began to turn and she said, "No, wait, stop," as she made a visual inventory of the items in my basket. "Hang on, I can get you here, just hang on, you don't have much," and she turned her attention to the gentleman she was ringing up.

I thanked her profusely and proceeded to put my items on the belt behind the gentleman's items and then I stood and waited. Now, it's not like I always eavesdrop on the conversations taking place in front of me, but this one was intriguing, and my mind was really having a time observing just how similar they looked standing opposite one another.

He suddenly erupted with, "The whole world is going to hell in a handbasket!"

She scanned an object, raised an eyebrow and said, "I couldn't agree more, why do you say that?"

"Well," he huffed, "Look who's running for president!" To this, both of her eyebrows raised, scanning of items ceased, and she asked, "Who are you talking about, Biden or Trump?"

"Trump of course! That lying idiot!" He blurted, becoming visibly agitated.

"Ah," She said, "I can see you're not a Trump fan."

"Well, hell no, I'm tired of being lied to!" He stated emphatically as he struggled to get his credit card out of his wallet.

"If you want to talk about who's the bigger liar, I have all kinds of information about Biden! Biden is the liar and his whole family is too!" she stated with an air of authority which made me wonder where she got the confidence in her information.

"Ahh," he grunted, "They're all rotten, they all lie."

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“Well,” she said with sudden assurance, “The economy was rocking and rolling under Trump and that’s who we need back.”

Which surprised me because I remember her telling me on a separate occasion about how she was so frustrated that Walmart employees were never able to get a union organized. She enjoys talking with her customers.

She finally began ringing more of his items up, and he began putting them in his cart. They came to a conclusion that they would have to agree to disagree and they wished one another a good day.

Finally, my turn, although I was NOT going to mention anything about politics. I thanked her for her time and patience and helping me get checked out when I noticed the large bag of meat on the checkout carousel. I picked it up and handed it to her asking, “Does this belong to the gentleman who just left?”

“It’s not yours?” She asked with a hint of panic in her voice.

“No, just these items here are mine.” I motioned to what was on the belt.

“Oh dear,” she fretted, “that’s all his meat! And that’s a lot!”

Then she leaned in closer to me and whispered in a conspiratorial tone, “Well, it shouldn’t be too hard to find him, he can’t move very fast.” Our little secret.

She called another staff person to help her, handed off the bag to her, and we both gave her a description of what he looked like and what direction he’d gone in.

“There, I think she’ll find him. I’d hate for him to leave without what he’d purchased!”

I thanked her profusely for her time, compassion, and willingness to help.

She smiled at me, her orange lipstick a bit askew and wished me a very happy day, to which I wished her the same.

And the entire encounter just made me think about so many things and the small actions that so affect others and ourselves and our own outlooks on life. Here they were, two people who look alarmingly similar with such opposite outlooks on life, and yet, were they so different from one another? Both are convinced that this world, this way of life that we love is threatened and no one in leadership tells us the truth. We all sense the changes taking place that feel so big and out of our control and we desperately want someone to come in and fix it.

But maybe it’s not the big people who can fix things. Maybe it’s just us, doing little acts of kindness and compassion who can fix things: the attending to one another’s needs and making sure we all have what we need; the recognition that we may have very different views, but we still can look out for one another.

~Sandra Hisakuni



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## September 25

Our marriage has been a juggling of planning and disruption, of intentionality and serendipity. Our first child was born just a year-and-a-half after we were married, a genuine surprise. At that point neither of us had our graduate degrees; we lived in cramped seminary housing far from our families; our car was a worn-out wreck; and virtually none of our peers were having kids yet. We had none of the sensible conditions for starting a family! The pregnancy flabbergasted us!

Our second child, four-and-a-half years later, intentionally came at a time when we met many of those prerequisites for sensible family planning: both employed with a livable income; a good apartment; a reliable car; family nearby; friends who were beginning to think about starting families in the distant future.

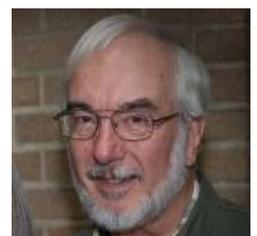
Planning for a third child in a world where overpopulation was of increasing concern nudged us into considering adoption. Our first two kids were boys. Adoption gave us a chance to have a daughter. Because we were both committed to our work lives, we adopted a girl from South Korea who was also four-and-a-half years younger than our second son, saving us from the sleepless nights of parenting an infant. Deceptively, she made our whole family seem much more planned.

We sought to share our parenting much the way we shared much of our work life. We travelled often, though mostly regionally. We encouraged our kids' social lives, and we connected often with our extended family. We quite intentionally built many family memories.

But as our kids grew into adulthood and began to live independently, as they developed their careers, found partners, had children, I began to wonder whether the four-and-a-half years between them was an unfortunately broad separation. I found myself surprised by how infrequently our kids communicated with each other, how seldom they “leaned” on each other. They seemed content to live quite independently, with relatively little interaction. We no longer seemed to be the closely knit family I thought we had become during their formative years.

Recently I called our older son for a reason no longer significant. Our daughter and her partner were staying with our older son for a short while during a transition period in their housing. They had our second son and his partner on the phone as well. The six of them – our kids with their partners – were playing an online game, chortling, shouting suggestions, calling out options – it was a chaotic atmosphere of teasing, wit, and energy. I listened to the frivolity, and my heart swelled. I heard our hoped-for family life encapsulated in a dining room filled with love, playfulness, and competition. I listened from my end of the phone line, and I was simply overjoyed.

~Keith Olstad



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## September 26

### OLD TO NEW AND NEW TO OLD

On a recent hike in coastal Oregon, I came across a nurse log that was just lovely. A nurse log is a fallen tree which, as it decays, offers seedlings shade, nutrients, water and protection from disease and pathogens, thus making way for a new generation. A passing from old to new.

That verdant log gave me opportunity to think about meaning in my life. The passing of time, generational handoff, and how support systems nurture each other were all there in the log. I'm increasingly aware of my limited time on this planet and what I might leave behind. When I fall like that log, I hope I've nurtured at least a few qualities in my children and grandchildren. What will those be? Memories of cooking family recipes, picking edibles from the garden, enjoying nature and awe that comes with it, reading good books or caring for others. Or perhaps they've picked up remnants of values like kindness, patience, frugality, fairness, with some silliness thrown in? I'm not always good at activating these values, but I hold them near and dear and maybe a few have rubbed off on my offspring. They have likely inherited negative attributes as well, but I hope the good outshines the bad.

In addition to meaning as old passes to new, like with the log, the reverse is also true. New growth on that log nurtures the forest and new generations have much to teach those of us who are older. My children and grandchildren "give back" and provide rich meaning to my life. Technology expertise and coaching (of course!) as well as views of the world from younger eyes. They also offer super hugs, good laughs (virtual or face-to-face), invitations to play, a willingness to share their everchanging personal and professional development and lots of energy (especially the little ones). They are also pretty good at practicing awe and wonder. And, yes, there are challenges from the young, but again the positives speak loudest.

That nurse log gave me opportunity to reflect. Change is not always easy, but generational handoffs from old to new and new to old are natural and provide meaning to life. For that I am grateful.



~Libby Olstad



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## September 27

*I'm looking through you. Where did you go?*

*I thought I knew you. What did I know?*

*You don't look different. But you have changed*

*I'm looking through you. You're not the same*

The Beatles, I'm Looking Through You 1965

The Beatles were writing about love, or the lack of it—yet these lyrics fit for many of us for many reasons. Did the other person change, or did you? What makes us open and flexible? Being open to change may mean that you won't miss out on some of the yummy moments in life.

Meaning can be found in unexpected people and places. For me, it is largely found in relationships with other people. I loved my mother very much; we had an intense bond, but it was my dad that was the most meaningful relationship I (we) had while raising girls.

I had a prickly relationship with my dad for a long time. Some of you may be surprised to know that my dad was a very cranky father. I knew he loved me, but we were very much alike, and constantly butting heads.

As I grew into adulthood, we reached a detente and enjoyed each other's company. When I had babies, however, change was a-comin'!

Dad was not too interested in newborns, but come some sturdy little limbs—he fell head over heels in LOVE with my children! For me this was a redemptive experience and one for which I was profoundly grateful. It was a joy to see Gramps relish his newfound adoration from small girls. And he loved them back as hard as he could.

I remember the pretend racing, with both Lauren and Danielle, to Grandpa's chair in the family room—he always lost—and they got to find M&M's hidden there.

I remember him lifting up a 2-year-old Lauren so that she could very carefully observe the tiny chickadees that had hatched in a moss filled bird house.

I remember his delight as Lauren ran to him in the driveway to his house yelling "Grandpa!!" as if she hadn't seen him in forever.

I remember his delight in Danie's baby face making baby faces - she could do sad baby, happy baby, mad baby, frustrated baby all over the course of a few seconds time making us laugh.

I remember him taking special care of Lauren when I was too preoccupied with new baby Danielle. This was a somewhat astonishing development from an older man who had never done much childcare in his life! But what a relief I felt to have someone step in to shepherd my 3-year-old!

I remember him regaling anyone who would listen at church about his most wonderful granddaughters. (Maybe some of you heard these stories?)

So I want to tell my dad still, and I DID tell him when he was alive: "Moments watching you with my children were a gift! You were such a part of my 'village' in raising children."

Meaning can be found in the ordinariness of life: while sharing in the pleasure of seeing tiny baby birds, while playing Legos with Grandpa, while whole-heartedly singing, thereby entertaining Grandpa, and while eating, especially ice cream and root beer floats.

Such a gift. They were so loved! Thanks, Dad!

~Stephanie Cole



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## September 28

### LIVING A MEANINGFUL LIFE

My favorite teacher at Thiel College was Chaplain George Reese. And my favorite class was his class on Christian Ethics.

Our class was discussing what Jesus meant (Matt. 12:30 & Luke 11:23) when he said, “He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.” Behind those words is the truth that God expects our **unconditional allegiance**. God’s love is love that seeks not its own – is totally unselfish. God expects the same from us. Another way of thinking about this is that selfishness is sin.

That led to the class trying to come up with examples of total unselfishness. One example was, if someone jumped into a lake to save someone who might be drowning. If the drowning person was pulled out alive, the rescuer might view him/herself as a hero. Similar examples were saving someone from a fire, or a car crash, and the like. These are not examples of selflessness if one’s motivation is to be honored as a hero. Other class members came up with other examples, and all of them seemed to end with a person being proud of what they had done. Self-centered.

So, squirming in my seat, I asked, “If God expects us to be totally unselfish in allegiance to him, and that seems impossible, how can we be saved?”

His reply was that **we must lean on God’s love and forgiveness for us**. It was like a light went off in my head: suddenly I realized what being a Christian is all about. My outlook changed. As it says in Micah 6:8, “Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.” Chaplain Reese said that if one student a year would come to the realization I did, he would feel that he was doing his job.

After years of thinking about it, I’ve decided that we are only totally unselfish in our actions when we are unaware of it. Being proud of being good is like throwing dirt on clean laundry. Only God is **truly good**. The secret is just to BE right with God and God will take care of the rest.

~Robert Wetzler



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## September 29

My life had been relatively painless. Then In 2008, I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, an auto-immune condition. I was in severe pain for multiple years, not knowing if I would ever get better.

While I wouldn't wish that experience on anybody, God created something new out of the ashes of that suffering. I had been a representational watercolorist. As I got better and was able to paint again, I felt that watercolors couldn't truly capture what I had been through. I took a workshop with Twin Cities artist Lana Grow, an abstract expressionist in acrylics, who said, "I find painting to be a spiritual practice." I knew I had landed in the right place. Abstract expressionism aims at subjective, emotional expression and that was exactly what I needed.

In 2012, I created a body of work I called "The Suffering of Becoming" which exhibited in the late Nina Bliese Gallery in Minneapolis. In it I wrestled with suffering and leaned into hope. I thought about what I had learned from that experience and translated that into paintings. Cathartic for me, I hoped that others could see their own stories while viewing my work.

Painting with vibrant color, movement and texture allowed me to express those things that words could not. I attribute the beauty of that color, the creaminess of the paint, the movement of the brush over canvas and the music that inspired it to be a true healer for me. I believe God heard my cries those days and nights, early in my diagnosis and said, "Here, I have this gift for you. Use it to heal."

Painting in acrylic as an abstract expressionist has truly been a gift to me. After working through four exhibits on the subject of suffering, I've moved on to interpreting music with paint as I noticed that I see color and movement when listening to music and have been interpreting various composers ever since. The combination of music and art is a powerful testament to the beauty of being human.

Out of my darkest moments, God created something new, and I am so grateful.

~Robyn Sand Anderson



September 30



Francis Kelly

~Francis Kelly

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## October 1

“Dr. Becker, you have kids, right?”

I had just opened the door to her hospital room and it was the first thing she said. Her voice sounded small yet bright, not quite matching the gaunt 39-year-old woman neatly tucked into the bed before me.

“I do - my daughter is 3 years old, and another is on the way in a few months.” I answered.

“Oh, that is fantastic! Congratulations!” She said, “Then take two - obviously, the baby won’t need it right away, but you need to take two.”

She pushed a colorful basket filled with various Pez candy dispensers toward me. I carefully selected a duck and a bunny dispenser out of the basket.

“Thank you,” I replied.

She was back in the hospital after a reaction to her last chemotherapy. This was one of many weeks she had to endure in and out of the hospital as breast cancer continued to spread despite the best efforts of her medical team with various surgeries and treatments. Each admission she remained steadfast and strong, hopeful and spirited - but she was frailer and suffering more each time. I liked her and her young family, they were warm and pleasant. Each admission I got to know her a little more and I worried more at her bleakening situation.

“Did your children help pick these out?” I asked.

She had 2 young children herself and evidence of their presence was everywhere in the room in the form of crayon drawn figures and ‘get well soon’ cards they had made for their mom.

“Oh, yes. They came to visit last night. It was their idea for the type of candy. I had asked them how to thank everyone and they chose Pez and insisted it be for everyone’s kids. You have all been so wonderful!”

At this my eyes welled up and my words halted. She gracefully matched that moment with a knowing smile and warm silence, giving me a minute to collect myself. I usually am calm and reassuring in these situations. Today though, I was a mess. Standing there with two Pez dispensers in my hands, about to give news she and I dreaded. She knew why I was there, and yet she was the cool and collected one. Her oncologist had already spoken to her earlier and laid bare that we lacked any further options to treat her cancer. She knew I was there to discuss plans for hospice care. To ask impossibly hard questions, like, ‘If you have a choice, where would choose to die: at home or elsewhere?’

She chose an inpatient hospice so her family didn’t associate their home with her loss. She made videos for each child’s birthday for years to come. She wrote letters for her husband to read after she was gone. She had been thinking through all these terrible decisions that were forced on her, and she focused on taking care of everyone else. She met it all with a quiet calm, exuding control over the only things she had control over anymore.

Within a few weeks she passed away with her partner at her bedside at an inpatient hospice, as she had wanted.

Six years have since passed. I gave my children those Pez dispensers as promised. The candies were eaten and the dispensers themselves were later lost as young children tend to do. I don’t think she would have minded though. She was a mom after all.

Still, I can’t see a Pez dispenser without a pang of loss. For me those cartoonish candy dispensers forever instill an urge to hug my children tight. They remind me of God’s grace manifested as a mother’s strength at a time of utmost loss.



~Josh Becker

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## October 2

### INTERFAITH TRUST

It was springtime, 1989, and I was just completing a two-year Master's in Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations at Hartford Seminary in Connecticut. I was approached by the NCC to prepare a four-lecture series *"A Window on the World of Islam"* for a conference in the Adirondacks. At the same time, I was supporting my full-time graduate studies with a half-time pastoral ministry gig at a congregation in Cromwell, Connecticut. The lead pastor asked if I would consider presenting the same lecture series for adult education, and if I would be okay with publicizing it in the local newspaper as open to everyone. I agreed, of course.

As could be expected, most those who attended were from the congregation, but at the first lecture I noticed one man who wasn't familiar and appeared to be of South Asian background. After the lecture he was very eager to talk to me and tell me his story. I will call him Kareem. Kareem explained that he was originally from Pakistan but had married an American and moved to New England where he worked as a water engineer for the City of Hartford. When he first came to Hartford with his wife, there were no mosques in the area where he could go to pray. He decided that his best option was to go to church with his wife because, after all, Christians, Jews, and Muslims were all "people of the book."

Kareem's wife was a Baptist, and on the way out of the building after worship his first Sunday he introduced himself to the pastor and explained why he was there. The pastor appeared surprised and pleased, said he was glad that Kareem had come and hoped that he would return. Then the pastor paused, perhaps realizing that he might NOT see Kareem again, and this might be the last chance for the pastor to do what was necessary. The pastor then told him, "I hope you know that unless you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, you will go to hell."

Kareem said he was so deeply hurt that for ten years he had not dared to enter a Christian church again—until he saw the notice in the newspaper about lectures on Islam at a local church. He said that he had struggled within himself about whether to go so that he could satisfy his curiosity, or whether he should stay away in order to avoid being hurt again. Kareem expressed amazement and gratitude that someone who is not Muslim could describe his faith so accurately and positively. He said that he had wanted to bring his young teenage daughters but didn't want to risk them being hurt in the same way that he had been hurt. Kareem did bring his two daughters to the next three lectures.

My time had come to depart Connecticut for a stint in ELCA Global Missions, so I don't know if he ever returned to that particular congregation. I was convinced, however, that a small step had been accomplished toward more healthy and positive interfaith trust.

~Steven Benson



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## October 3

### DEEP BONDS OF A LONG FRIENDSHIP

Kathy had been my friend since second or third grade at Robbinsdale Elementary– it’s hard to remember exactly when we first met up and enjoyed playing together. We kept up the friendship through elementary, junior high, and senior high school, doing all the things that girls do as friends: playing together, meals at each other’s homes, overnights, outings to nearby parks. We often would go on the bus for a Saturday outing in downtown Minneapolis. We giggled and cried together, and shared stories about boyfriends and other intimate secrets. As we got older, we tried our hand at being mature sophisticates, spending occasional evenings at the Scholar or the Extemp in Dinkytown, sipping espresso and listening to poetry.

As college and careers and marriages and children put more distance between us, we maintained our bond of friendship through phone calls and time together when our paths would cross. Kathy visited us at our Montana mountain home several times, and when we were in the Twin Cities, we often shared time in each other’s homes or out at a restaurant or event. When distance separated us, we would frequently spend a long hour on the telephone, sometimes less often than at other times, but the bond was never broken.

Then, in the summer of 2022, Kathy told me of a terminal cancer diagnosis. She was in Minnesota, I was in Montana, and circumstances made it impossible to travel, so the phone calls became more regular. Even after she entered hospice at a care center in Saint Paul, we kept up by telephone. One day, our phone rang, and a nurse from the care center introduced herself. In the background I could hear my dear friend Kathy shouting, *“I want to talk to Barbara Benson! I want to talk to Barbara Benson!”* The nurse told her that Barbara Benson was on the phone and handed it to her. She said to me, *“I’m dying, and I want you to know that I love you.”* The next day, she died. But that bond will never be broken.

~Barbara Benson



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## October 4

While growing up my family would take many weekend trips to Madison, Wisconsin, where I was born and where my grandfather lived until he was 99. We would leave on a Friday after school had wrapped up, the cooler would be packed with goodies to keep us going with space to bring things home (like, cheese and—well, more cheese). It's a Wisconsin thing. My parents held season tickets to the University of Wisconsin football games, so the trips were frequent. Weekends consisted of a visit to the farmer's market, a game-day brat (with sauerkraut and onions), the game itself, walking on old, condemned railroad tracks to and from the stadium, and a trip to our former church home.

These were fun weekends, I never so much cared for the football games themselves, but I suppose the environment was entertaining to be immersed in. I always looked forward to these weekends, but for different reasons than most would expect. The first thing I would do upon arriving to my grandfather's house was to fire up the Hammond organ he had in his living room. I did this for years before I started taking piano and organ lessons and continued to do so years after. My grandfather would often sit and listen, sometimes in curiosity of where I was getting all the notes from and how I was making my hands and feet do the things they were doing. I sometimes wonder the same thing today after I play certain improvisations. His way of listening seemed to push me on to play something more and keep going. To this day I think of that when I hear students make music which might not be “by the books” or anywhere near perfection. There is a time to let the mind wander in music making; I encourage that curiosity.

Another pastime I would find myself doing a lot on these weekend trips was spending time in the basement. When you're a kid, sometimes you think that adults talk a lot. I know that my mom's side of the family talks a lot. They have all admitted it and my escape from all the stories, old, new, told, retold, and told again was to go to the basement to the workroom. This was my grandfather's spot where all the tools were with machines I knew about and those I learned about. I would tinker down there, and I could do so for hours. I still have a couple of crosses that my grandfather helped me make. He would come down from time to time and check in, explaining a few things and encouraging me to keep going. I'm sure there were plenty of times neither he nor I had any idea what I was doing or making, but he still left me with encouragement.

It's timeless moments like this that I cherished and always looked forward to in a what seemed to always be a fast-paced weekend visit. For part of those weekends, I got to escape, putting my mind elsewhere, enjoying the freedom of creativity and spurred on by the encouragement and curiosity of my grandfather looking on every step of the way.

~Phil Radtke



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## October 5

The author of the book of Hebrews in the New Testament talks about being surrounded by a “great cloud of witnesses.” When I think about meaning-making, I think first of the cloud of witnesses that has shaped me and my sense of place and purpose in this complex world. One of the important witnesses in my particular cloud was a woman named Hazel I met early in my work as a garment union organizer in the South. When I met her, Hazel had been working in a garment factory in Crystal Springs, Mississippi for something in the neighborhood of 40 years. She had a family, including one daughter and a grandson working in the plant, and she seemed to know everyone in the town. She was active in her Missionary Baptist church. As a black woman in Mississippi born around 1940, she had lived through profound challenges in the Jim Crow South and had been shaped by the Civil Rights movement of which she was a part.

I met her late one evening in her living room after driving in from Columbus, MS in response to a phone call that 17 women had walked out of the plant over a labor dispute. While the room was full and many were talking, it became clear very quickly that Hazel was the leader of this little group, that she was held in high regard by everyone present. As we talked far into the night, I learned of the working conditions that prompted this walk out and heard Hazel and others talk about their commitment to fight for change. Hazel and some of the other older workers talked especially about not wanting their children and grandchildren to endure the same exploitative conditions they had lived with for so long. I also found out that Hazel had been around for many previous attempts to unionize the plant, dating back several decades at least. She was not naïve about how difficult this would be, and she and her crew stood firm as I tried to lay out how difficult a road they had ahead of them if they decided to try to organize this plant of 550 workers.

What inspired Hazel to trust this 24-year-old privileged white kid from rural Minnesota to guide her and her colleagues in this fight, I’ll never know. But we worked together almost every day for the next 6 months and she shaped and mentored me in profound ways. Her courage and resilience, her commitment to her community, the ways she lived out her faith as a call into the world not out of it, her unwavering belief that things could be better, all these and more enabled me to deepen my own sense of call into the work and provided a clearer picture of what living a good life was all about. They won their fight and I was blessed to work with Hazel for several more years. But even all these years later, her memory inspires me to hold on a bit more firmly to what matters and to work for change even when it seems impossible.

~Doug Mork



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## October 6

For over fifty-five years I have had a strong love for movies. It doesn't matter which genre: I can enjoy musicals as much as Westerns as much as science fiction thrillers. All of this can be laid at the doorstep of my dad, who loved movies as much as me. He might have been more inclined to choose a war movie or crime drama, but he was just as happy sitting back and chuckling with the latest comedy.

This brings us to those great Biblical epics Dad and I loved that were made in the '50s and '60s. Of course, these films are overly dramatic and old-fashioned, but that, to my mind, is what makes them so endearing. Dad saw *The Ten Commandments* when it was first released, yet he still never missed watching it every time it was aired on tv, despite the fact that the commercials caused an almost four-hour movie to become five-and-a-half hours. I have fond memories of watching it too, though I recall I was falling to sleep by the time the golden calf was made. My friends at church and I used to joke, as twelve-year-olds tend to do, that when Charlton Heston came on the screen, his chest arrived two minutes before the rest of him. Now there was a manly Moses!

And then there was *Ben-Hur: The Tale of the Christ*. And once again there is Charlton Heston, still very earnest, like Moses, but now we add Roman slave ships, amazing battles, and spectacular chariot races. If you were twelve years old, what could be greater? I think I recall that they had to show *Ben-Hur* on tv over two nights because it was so long. But there we were, drinking in every minute of it. I still watch *Ben-Hur* annually, as it was meant to be seen, without commercial breaks and in one sitting, and there is always something new to discover with each viewing.

I feel fortunate to have seen these movies when I was at an age when they made a big and lasting impression on me. There was something comforting about them, and inspiring too. And though both films have moments that might be laughable by today's standards, you can't help loving them anyway. Who knew that the women of those days had such great-looking lipstick?

There were other Hollywood epics we watched too: *Samson and Delilah*, *Spartacus*, *The Robe*, *King of Kings*, and the other film that made a big impression on me at the time: *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. This was another life-of-Jesus film, seen through Hollywood's eyes, with a staggering international cast. Of course, this film is notorious for casting John Wayne as the Roman Centurion who utters: Truly, this is the Son of God. All one can say is: Yikes, but, for some bizarre reason, it works for me. I think this film, looking at it with more mature eyes, is a bit too reverent even by the standards of the '60s when it was made, but does it matter? Perhaps my view is influenced as much by when I saw it and who I saw it with that provides such a happy memory.

I believe we all have outlets that we turn to when we need to put aside the stresses of our lives. Movies have been that outlet for me, and looking back, I would not change a thing. While I mostly enjoy new films as well, I much prefer the days when stars like Gregory Peck, Jimmy Stewart, and Doris Day were working. That Doris! Yes, she sure is a wondrous blast from the past. Can you imagine casting Doris Day in *The Greatest Story Ever Told*? Maybe as Mary, the mother of Jesus? Well, perhaps I won't start a new career as a casting director. I never claimed to be *The Man Who Knew Too Much*.

~Rick Liedholm



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## October 7

I spent much of my young life, I think, believing I could derive meaning from imposing order on the chaos of the universe, the world, life. I've always been very organized. My family would probably *kindly* tell you I am organized to an annoying degree.

I also believed meaning could emerge from doing some BIG or IMPORTANT thing with my life. I wanted to leave the proverbial mark.

During my junior year of college, I took a Myers-Briggs personality evaluation in an effort to learn more about myself and what sort of career path I might want to take. Its results – and every result from subsequent tests – indicated I'm type INFJ. Introverted. Intuitive. Feeling. Judging.

It's an interesting personality type. I care deeply about others and the world at large but also sometimes have difficulty interacting with people directly. Social situations, particularly ones with a lot of people, and especially ones where I feel some particular social expectation (real or imagined) imposed upon me, are stressful and exhausting.

I definitely need alone time to recharge.

Sometimes Andrea will ask what I'm doing when I'm stopped in my tracks, staring at something for a long stretch. "Thinking," I'll say. Because I need those quiet, still moments to process, to plan, to figure something out. Especially because my body is almost constantly in motion from the time I wake to the time I sleep.

But I also crave connection – and *deep* connection – with others. And I always want to help, to contribute to the fulfillment of some great need.

So the pandemic was – as it was for everyone in just about as many ways as there are people on the planet – a *challenge*. I was neither able to be fully alone to recharge (because I was with the kids 24/7 for two years) nor venture out into the world to make those in-person interpersonal connections with others. And I felt stretched too thinly to even think about BIG or IMPORTANT.

Now that the world feels "back to normal" and there is a little distance between my present self and the one living those two years, it's easier to see light peeking out of that darkness.

Order has its place, as do BIG and IMPORTANT.

But for me – as cliché as it sounds – it's increasingly the *small* that brings meaning.

It's synching up a movie to watch and chat about via text a couple times a week with an old friend in Pennsylvania.

It's playing Uno with my kids – the *ONE* game they'll agree to play together! Ha!

It's camping. It's reading. It's listening to and playing music with Soren. It's building a computer and watching movies with Anders. It's training for races and building a backyard sauna with Andrea. It's asking for or lending a hand to neighbors. It's joining a band with two other dads and swapping records to share music. It's quiet, mindful moments with myself and with God.

*And* it's being organized and doing work: cooking meals and doing laundry and washing dishes and picking up toys. But now those parts are less for the sake of *order* and more for the sake of *care*. Doing those things *matters*. Service to others, however big or small, *means* something.

More than anything, for *me*, meaning comes from being a husband and dad and neighbor and friend, from creating and being expressive, and from appreciating the universe in all its glorious chaos.

~Riley Conway



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**October 8**

**THE GOOD MEMORY CHANNEL**

“You must do the thing you think you cannot do.”

–Eleanor Roosevelt

The first time I heard these words I felt an instant connection – so I placed them in the part of my mind I call “The Good Memory Channel.” Here I carry the experiences I can lean on by “clicking” on the remote control in my mind’s eye: my grandma baking bread in Milwaukee; my Father singing; my first cat, Blueberry; characters met on busses, in waiting rooms, dollar stores; writing my first poem; seeing a Broadway play – on Broadway; flying at night and seeing the Northern Lights surrounding the airplane; singing alto in the choir; wearing my white robe with my name sewn in.

The walls of my bedroom are covered with sayings and quotations: by strong women – Eleanor, of course, and Mary Oliver, Cheryl Strayed, and Oprah Winfrey. And my bookcase is loaded down with the stories and quotations of the women who came before me and whose words will bring power long after I am gone. I am reminded daily of their tenacity, which I borrow and am grateful for, every single day.

~Anne Curtin



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## October 9

It changed the way I come to the Communion Table.

I'm one of those retired clergy sprinkled throughout Holy Trinity's membership. After serving a congregation and a college I was called to serve in the area of ministerial formation – think internships and the accompanying courses.

While doing this work at a Divinity School in North Carolina, I volunteered as a parish associate in the Presbyterian Church where we were members. I wanted to be active in congregational ministry, and I liked the idea of having my own current stories to tell when teaching or working with seminarians in small groups.

One week the senior minister, Katie, asked me if I could help her out. "Sure," I responded. As it turned out, she had a wedding to officiate that Saturday and a family from another city, but with deep ties to the church, had called and was hoping one of the pastors would officiate at a committal service for a loved one who had died.

That Saturday I met with the family before the service to learn a bit more about their story and soon friends arrived. I led the service but departed from the liturgy by incorporating a Jewish tradition that I have found meaningful. I invite those who would like to receive a handful of sand and offer their personal goodbye and drop the sand in the grave – "dust to dust, ashes to ashes."

After each had said their goodbye, I completed the committal liturgy, "In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to almighty God \_\_\_\_\_ and we commend \_\_\_\_\_ their body to the earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes."

Now as it turned out, I would be presiding at the Table the next day.

It was the custom of this church for the pastor to say a few words of teaching before starting the prayer of Great Thanksgiving, "The Lord be with you...;" sort of a liturgical catechesis.

I was prepared with my words, but as I stepped in front of the Communion Table, I was transported back to the grave and I simply started, "Yesterday I stood before a grave and said these words, *In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ*, and friends, it is the risen Jesus who waits to meet you at this Table..." The risen Jesus met me and each person there that morning with compassion, grace, and encouragement.

I look for the risen Jesus each Sunday at the Table. I know that he waits for you and for me.

~Matt Floding



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## October 10

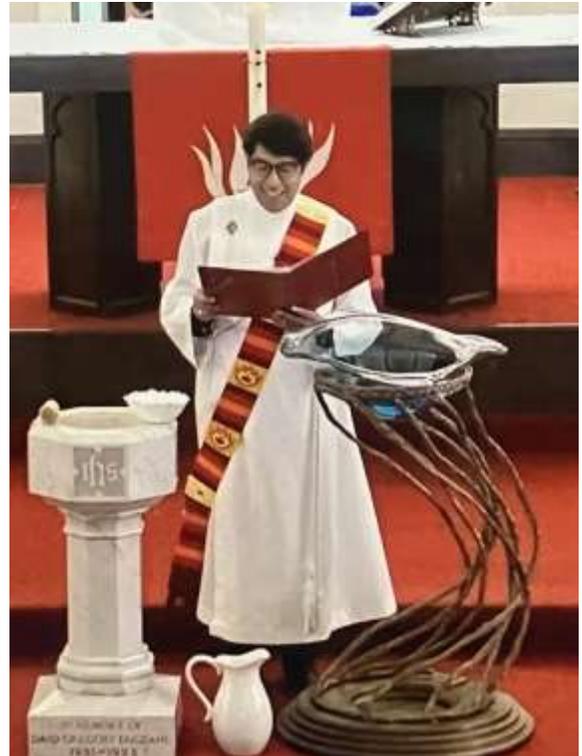
### FONT DECOMMISSIONING AND DEDICATION

After five years of careful work, the congregation has a new font crafted by John Sterner and Alan Honn. The blue waters of the bowl meet prairie sweet grass, a symbol chosen by Sterner (Lakota) because of its spiritual significance to Indigenous peoples in this region. We are grateful that this font—and the baptismal waters that will flow from it—will be central to our lives for many years to come. The old font will be decommissioned on Sunday and the new font will be dedicated. Both artists of the new font will be with us! *The Community Church*, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, May 28, 2023

Interesting to see the old and the new fonts side by side. One hundred years old and well used and one brand new. The old one was substantial, strong and solid looking and had served well for the hundred years — but now it was starting to crumble and could be unsafe for curious kiddos who might try to hang on the edge. A hundred years is a respectable time to have served and now it is time to retire.

The word “staid” comes to mind when I see the old font. The dictionary defines staid as “sedate respectable, unadventurous, calm, dignified.” The new font could be described in different terms — more daring and less staid. Its beautiful, handblown bowl is transparent. The sweet grass is firmly rooted, but the grass itself is responsive to the wind that blows it. It is flexible in relation to its environment, but always deeply grounded.

All this thinking about fonts made me wonder what all the people who will be baptized using this beautiful, new font will be like and what they will contribute to this church and the world. And what changes will be seen in the next 100 years? I thought about all the people who had been baptized at the old font. Then it occurred to me: I was baptized at that old font! My parents stood with me along with my sponsors when I was about 2 months old. Funny, I hadn't thought much about that before. Further, it occurred to me that my older brothers, Al Heitkamp and John Heitkamp (both recently deceased) were also baptized at the old font when it was very new (1934 and 1935). These thoughts gave me goosebumps as well as a warm feeling. I don't know what all this means or how to describe what was so very moving for me. I will continue to ponder, thinking about baptism, the new and old fonts, and how the Holy Spirit accompanies me on this life journey.



~Liz Blood



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## October 11

The past few years have been hard for so many of us – ups and downs and twists and turns. I have been fully on that emotional roller coaster. In addition to the turmoil in the broader community, I have been fielding all sorts of hard things with the ones I love most – dementia, cancer, unemployment, a critical child illness. At times it feels staggering. But during this same season, I have experienced breathtaking happiness, safety, comfort, generosity, and community.

I look around Holy Trinity's community, and I am deeply aware how each person I see is carrying multitudes of experiences, often simultaneously. Grief and joy. Anxiety and hope. A mentor told me recently, "It's so complicated. It's the bothness. It's holding these opposing truths at the same time. That, I think, is what it means to have a meaningful, awake, purposeful life. And it isn't for the faint of heart."

I am so grateful for this Holy Trinity community, and for all of the individuals who have poured love into me and my family over the last few years. We have been held as we've navigated complicated months of bothness. In our most broken moments, the Holy Trinity community was here for us – loving us hard.

It's impossible for any one of us individually to fully know the needs of everyone around us at any given time. It can feel overwhelming to try and meet the tangible and emotional needs of everyone – in our community and beyond. But that's the gift of community, right? Our strength as a collective, as a body of faith, is that we have impact beyond our individual abilities. It is the ability to love others as hard as we've been loved, even if we don't know how they need it.

This is one of the reasons I give financially to the work of Holy Trinity. I have such gratitude for the people of Holy Trinity and the work of this community. I know that when I give, my resources are combined with all of yours to become vastly more impactful than my dollars on their own. I know that together with your gifts, I'm able to impact people and issues that I never would have even thought to impact on my own. I give because I will never even know the lives that are touched through my generosity, and that's okay, because so many people will never know how much their generosity has touched my life.

I am so glad to be doing this messy, complicated work of community alongside all of you. As you navigate the bothness of life, I am glad our community is here for you, as we do our best to live a meaningful, awake, and purposeful life.

~Katie Schroeder



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## October 12

### A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF HOLY TRINITY

Monday morning, I arrive in the staff parking lot about 7 a.m. I like to start my day early and take advantage of the quiet before the day gets going. Mondays aren't too busy in terms of building use, but lots of busy work to "recharge" the building after Sunday and prepare for the week ahead. I grab laundry from the sacristy, offerings and attendance from the counters room, do a quick scan of the Community Room and Sanctuary to see if anything urgent needs attending. By this time some of the Mero Work Center staff are arriving, we share greetings and catch up for a few minutes on weekend happenings. Nolan pops in the office with his smile and a "good morning". We banter a bit about who's going to make coffee today, chat about the weekend, sports, William (Nolan's grandson). Time to get down to business. Nolan and I have our morning meeting, checking the calendar for the week and setting a plan for managing the week's activities and building needs. Around 9 a.m. the Metro Mobility bus rodeo starts, drivers navigating their way in and out of the parking lot, dropping off Metro Work Center clients, it's quite a thing to watch, synchronized and efficient. MWC staff gather with clients in the hallway outside the office, until the final bus arrives. It becomes a festive social scene. Lots of laughter and chatter, it puts a smile on my face. Then the MWC staff and more than 40 clients disperse to their rooms on the first and third floors, for activities, learning and more. The hallway is silent, allowing the faint sounds of children from the second floor Bright Prospects Pre-School to be heard. By mid-morning the building is full of life from our building partners. Meanwhile in the office, Pastor Doug has emerged from his Building Dignity & Respect office, where he's already been on a couple of zoom calls, to grab coffee and check in. While catching up in the work room, David arrives, and Nolan comes in from cleaning the church grounds. We all joke a bit after Nolan reports some of his findings. Phil walks in, David affectionately calls out "PHILLIP!" Phil, chuckles and says, "yep, I'm here". This is a daily routine for the two. By Noon, Ingrid has made it to the office after some offsite morning meetings. The staff spends some time catching up, bantering, and laughing. The doorbell rings, it's the mail man (Hobtom). The staff disperses. You can hear Phil practicing the piano in the Community Room, preparing for adult choir rehearsal, that happens on Monday evenings. The sound of Metro Work Center clients gathering in the hall indicates it's already almost 3 p.m. The day wraps up with a few phone calls. Dennis arrives around 4:30 to clean and prepare the building for the next day.

Tuesday, the week starts to pick up. By 8 a.m. Nolan is resetting the Library for Spanish class that meets every Tuesday. By 9 a.m. HTLC member Keith Olstad and the half dozen or so others arrive to start their Spanish lesson. Nolan has moved on to setting up the Community Room for Healthy Seniors that host their monthly social and other classes in our building. By 10:30 a.m. the seniors are playing games, having refreshments and socializing. In the meantime, Ingrid and I have had our weekly check in, a Thai Chi class has taken place in the Bartsch room and Nolan has put out the recycling bins for pick up. Just before 11 a.m. the phone rings, it's a member that's having trouble logging into Zoom for the weekly text study. We get them connected with the group. It's a staff meeting Tuesday, so Roberta Shaw arrives a little before 1 p.m. to cover the office while the staff gathers in the library for our meeting. Kaia, Sue, and Dennis join via zoom. We cover business for the week, have some laughs and adjourn. It's the first Tuesday of the month, so by the time our meeting is done, it's 2 p.m. and the knitting group has gathered in the office conference room. I relieve Roberta of her duties; she heads to the library to do some work. The bell rings, it's Deb Anderson dropping off treats for the staff. She brings her dog

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in to say hello. David, Nolan, and Phil dive right into the treats. We have to remind David not to eat them all. David sighs, everyone laughs. Chris Amundson arrives around 2:30 p.m. for his weekly volunteer shift of cleaning the Sanctuary and Community Room. He and Nolan give each other a hard time before getting started. Chris stops back in the office after he's done, we catch up while having sparkling water together. He is a joy to have in the building. The phone rings, Chris goes about his day. Rachel from Longfellow Community Council called to confirm they are meeting in our Library this evening.

Wednesday, one of our busiest days. Nolan is again resetting rooms. Healthy Seniors arrive around 9:30 a.m. for their Chair Yoga class in the Bartsch room. I'm busy working on the newsletter while Sue is working on the bulletin from home. Pastor Andrea comes into the office; we greet each other with "Jambo" (Swahili for hello). Nolan is in the work room; he and Pastor Andrea have a brief conversation in Swahili. Pastor Andrea sends me their Sunday bulletin to print, 30 copies coming right up. The doorbell rings, it's a Turkish friend from Trinity Apartments, who asks to meet with Pastor Ingrid, they go into the office conference room. Just before noon Upstream Arts arrives to host an art class in the basement lunchroom with our building partners, Metro Work Center. Shortly after that, someone calls from the third floor to report a plumbing problem, I call Nolan, he's on it. By 2 p.m. David arrives with a cart full of Pizzas and treats for Chior Family Meal. He teams up with Nolan to reset the lunchroom for the evening meal and prepare the gym for supervised play time. Nolan makes sure the ovens are on and working. Phil starts setting out signs directing members where to go for the family meal, play time, children's choir rehearsal, Gloria Ringers rehearsal, and Trinity Singers rehearsal, all happening this evening. Just before I leave for the day, a former Bright Prospects parent calls looking for a place to hold Girl Scout meetings, "sure you can use our space, starting in 2 weeks on Wednesday nights, no problem". One more activity to add to the list.

Thursday, a busy office day. Sue comes in, we grab coffee and review what needs to be done for the weekly publications and any other tasks we need to cover. She prints a copy of the bulleting for Pastor Ingrid to proof. I add some last-minute items to the Community Church. At 10 a.m. then teacher Laura from Bright Prospects stops in the office, it's raining outside, they need to move recess time to the gym. Pastor Andrea arrives, the Swahili Congregation would like to use the Community Room on Saturday to host a memorial service. Nolan quickly goes to work resetting the space for this to happen. Meanwhile, Healthy Seniors is holding a laughing yoga class in the Bartsch room. Nolan moves to setting up the library for a Healthy Senior tech class that takes place at 3 p.m. before he heads to his Thursday lunchtime basketball league. Ingrid has proofed the bulletin, has a few changes, Sue has proofed the newsletter, a few changes. Just before I finish the newsletter changes, a member calls and would like to be added to the prayers, she's having surgery the following week. Sue starts to print the bulletin and the copier is not working properly. We call for service, they'll be out first thing Friday morning. Bulletin printing is on hold. Sue moves on to ironing alter linens. The bell rings, one of our unhoused neighbors is looking for some assistance and to speak to a pastor. Pastor Doug meets with them. He gets them a cup of coffee and offers a respite from the elements. He sends them on their way with a care package of treats and water, put together by the Vacation Bible School youth. Nolan returns and gives an update on how basketball went. He tells Sue and me about a great play he made. Ingrid joins us in the work room and exchanges a few basketball stories with Nolan. We all meet for a few minutes about the upcoming weekend activities. Pangea Theatre will be hosting the Angela Two Stars art exhibit and activities Saturday morning at the former MIGIZI lot. They are storing some items in our building, so we need to coordinate some things for Saturday morning. It's a Music in the Garden Sunday, extra planning is needed. Do we have enough

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compostables, has HTLC member Chuck Jordan dropped of the pizza crusts (he volunteers to do this). Check in with Member Jeff OB who coordinates these events. Healthy Seniors tech class is done, Nolan heads to the library to reset the space for the Bright Prospects board meeting that will be happening this evening.

Friday morning, first thing, our copier tech (Marty) is here to get us up and running. By 8:45 bulletins are printing. Fridays are typically a little quieter, Pastor Ingrid and Deacon David take that as their day off. Phil comes in to prep for Sunday. Pastor Doug is in and out of meetings. Our friends from CTUL pop in to use the library for a meeting around 11 a.m. Our librarian, Roberta, comes in around 1 p.m. to do some work in the library. Annie Hines stops in to help Roberta. Nolan and I start working down the “to do list” to prepare for Music in the Garden. Staging table, chairs, garbage bins, etc. in the hallway. In the afternoon, Metro Work Center clients that occupy the first floor have a dance party that spills into the hall. Nolan busts a move or two with them. I walk through on my way to the laundry room like it’s a “Soul Train” dance line. Smiles, laughs and fun for all! Our friends from Inquilinx call to reserve the library for the following week, for a staff retreat that will take place for 4 days. I copy checks and prep deposits before heading to the bank at 3:30 p.m. Nolan and I check in one more time and finish up a few tasks in preparation for Sunday before calling it a day.

Saturday, I meet our new weekend custodian, Dana Simms, at 8 a.m. at the church to start training. We walk through all the things that need to happen during the weekend cleaning to keep the building looking good. The Swahili congregation is having a memorial service in the Sanctuary and Community Room, so we work around that. The Pangea Theatre folks pop in to grab supplies for the art installation and activities happening on the former MIGIZI lot. Dana and I work together for about 4 hours, feeling the confident the building was properly ready for Sunday.

Sunday, Dennis arrives 2 hours before the service to open rooms, turn lights on, start coffee brewing, check the grounds for garbage, and assist the pastors with anything needed. The worship staff arrives an hour or so before church begins. They connect with the volunteers, prepare and make any last-minute adjustments needed. Phil does a quick rehearsal with the cantor. Altar guild prepares the communion bread and wine. The ushers welcome members to the pews. Chris Engen fires up the pizza oven, volunteers help set up tables and chairs for Music in the Garden. After service, eager congregants and neighbors gather in the garden for music and food. Jeff OB, Tom and Kathy Skold and others help with assembling and cooking pizza. Treats, coffee, and lemonade are served. Dancing, laughter, community, what a way to rejoice on a Sunday afternoon.

During the pandemic, we collectively found new ways to worship and gather from a distance. We learned that worship and fellowship can still happen, even when we are in separate spaces. A space not being used is just a space. But oh, how meaningful that space becomes when it is full. Full of worshipers, choirs singing, children playing, groups meeting; what a wonderful space, an important space, a much-needed space. While we navigated and made worship work when we needed to be separated, isn’t it so wonderful to be together again, celebrating, worshipping, gathering in so many meaningful ways in this meaningful space.

~Kathy Ekwall



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## October 13

### MUSIC IN THE GARDEN

One of the best things that happened at Holy Trinity last year (I'm frankly astonished that it wasn't the first photo in the Annual Meeting slideshow) was when we put Margaret Kelly in charge of shopping for pizza toppings for a Music in the Garden event. She embraced the task with gusto: "How often do you get the chance to make a hundred people happy with an hour's work?"

A partial list of Music in the Garden memories that are making me happy: Chris Engen teaching me (again and again, with infinite patience) how to set up the tents for shade. Various families, with kids as little as three, taking turns leading the pizza creation station. Tom and Kathy Skold working genuine wizardry in packing leftovers. The Swahili Congregation's in-house worship band riffing on a vibe that got every toddler, and more than one retiree, dancing. My kid and her friends inventing the Holy Trinity Signature pizza (pesto, mozzarella, sweet Italian sausage). A timely Beyoncé cover.

This year's series is off to a great start, and I hope you'll join in the fun. (We all know it's even more fun if you're volunteering, right?). Who knows what small and marvelous moments will become our memories for next year? Is someone going to follow through on Bob Hulteen's dream of quadruple green olives? Will Nabisco put out a new flavor of Oreos that I'll buy an imprudent amount of for the congregation's kids to wolf down while their parents pretend not to notice? Will you be inspired by the mariachi band to bring in your favorite hot sauce? Will I at long last remember how those tents work?

The opportunity to make a hundred (or more!) people happy, to feed ourselves and our passing-by neighbors, to bring our talents and appreciation of music outside—it's all a deeply good tradition. I invite you to show up with a friend or two. And I invite you to tell me (in person or via email, [jbiebigh@gmail.com](mailto:jbiebigh@gmail.com)) what toppings you would love to see next time around. And if you know of someone in a band, I invite you to give me their name so I can invite them to play next year.

And if you really want to burn the memories into your synapses — like burn them with all of the five-hundred-fifty degrees of a wood-fired oven that Danya Werth and his dad made as an Eagle Scout project — you really should consider helping out. We could always use more people who'll cook, or serve, or set up, or clean up, or (if you want to have the most fun of all) be in charge of picking out and picking up the ingredients that are going to be the highlight of someone's day.

~Jeff Olsen Biebighauser



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## October 14

### CONFIRMATION TRIP TO NYC

This past week, I said yes to accompanying six confirmation students and two adults I did not know on a trip to New York City. I was ready to say no, especially given the past three plus years of saying no to most things because of pandemic-related concerns. I haven't been in the habit of saying yes. But I'm so glad I did. I tried my best to say yes to both little and big things throughout the trip. I said yes to requests for ice cream, pizza, Kleenexes, screen time (sorry parents), churros on the Brooklyn Bridge, time at the park, and much more. I said yes to our hosts at Trinity Lower East Side as we served in their food distribution program, including sitting on the floor organizing canned food mere feet from a mouse trap with a dead mouse in it because...New York? I also said yes to a request to see Stonewall, a sacred place for some of our confirmands, and yes to a last-minute venture in the rain to visit the famous NYC Public Library on 5th Avenue. I tried to say yes whenever I could and I have to say, it felt really good, especially after a long time of saying no.

But the most magical part of the adventure for me was seeing the kids also say yes. They said yes to the needed flexibility to pull off this kind of "urban camping" trip and yes to most of what the adults suggested. They said yes to our hosts at the church as well; these six teens said yes to organizing donated food, breaking down boxes, cutting onions until their eyes burned, sorting through molding vegetables to salvage what they could, and most importantly, they said yes to serving food to folks in the Lower East Side neighborhood where we stayed. I watched in awe as the teenage boys who, moments before took silly photos for Snapchat, personally greeted over 200 people, and served them food without the judgment or ridicule I feared they might express, leaving every single one with a "Have a good day" or "Take care" or even "Take it easy, man!" Those yeses blew me away.

The kids said yes to service and learning, and we adults said yes to fun. As we were leaving, one of the employees of the food program told me she was impressed with our kids and I was able to absolutely, wholeheartedly, agree. More than anything, this trip reminded me of the joy of saying yes and my hope is that the confirmands look back on the trip and feel the same.

~Carlye Proescholdt



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## VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

It was a joy to gather for Vacation Bible School (VBS) from Monday August 14 through Thursday August 17. We had four jam-packed days of learning, singing, playing, and serving. We gathered under the theme of *Fires of Justice* because this is the first VBS since pre-pandemic and pre-Uprising times. It was eye-opening to have children who were only 3-6 years of age when the world was changed immensely in 2020. They shared their memories and insights of what they remembered as the world shut down from a virus, and as our neighborhood burned.

On our first day, we walked around our streets and alleyways in pilgrimage visiting the sites that were impacted by the fires of the Uprising. I was impressed by the level of maturity and thoughtfulness exhibited by all our participants. They all brought memories, feelings, and thoughts concerning what they remembered, what they hoped for, and how they could be a part of what comes next. As we continued through the week, we learned a very truncated version of 1 Corinthians 3:13: “The work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it; revealing it with fire . . .” which reminds us that Truth will show the kind of things we build (and where they fail), including our societies.

It was important to be reminded that meaning can be found even in rubble of what once seemed like immovable structures. This may take longer for those of us who are older to accept since we have spent longer periods of time relying on these structures. However, the adaptability of our youngest is to be admired! They teach us that we can (and do!) find meaning in that which has been destroyed by fire and is awaiting rebuilding from the ashes. In fact, the destruction left behind reveals the things that need change.

As we took note of those things which need mending, we participated in a variety of small actions with a big impact. We created fifty-five to-go bags for unhoused neighbors. We learned about the importance of noticing skin color and speaking up when different skin tones are overlooked. We helped to clean up trash around the church grounds. We also chalked the sidewalks with positive, welcoming messages for our neighbors to encounter. Each time that we switched to a new activity I was encouraged by the enthusiasm, openness, and maturity displayed by all the participants. They were willing to ask difficult questions and engage with topics that some adults eschew. Not only that, but they taught me things I am still learning: the fluidity of pronouns, the joy of rainbow colors, and the opportunity to laugh through difficult conversations. We had a lot of fun during our time together.

I remember a parent commenting that he had never seen so many beach balls flying around in a church sanctuary before. In making the building accessible to the youngest, we spent lots of time playing hide-and-go-seek, Battleship, and other games in the sanctuary space. Our youngest enjoyed using the pews as ships, the altar as a hiding space, and the place where we encounter God as a sacred yet fun space. Cantor Phil added to the joy by teaching our participants a variety of songs. One of the many memories I will treasure from this VBS is observing all the young folks gathered around Phil and the piano singing about standing beside each other and never letting anyone stand alone.

As the population around us continues to deflect from the Church (for a host of valid reasons), we can find meaning in the building and symbols that have been important to us. As we navigate a world that is revealing places that need mending, we can invite the youngest among us to tell us what meaning they can find in a century-old structure. It is my hope that the church building itself will be a place wherein the God who loves laughter and play as well as prayer and worship is encountered. I know that She certainly was during VBS!

~David Larson-Martinez



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## October 15

### FINDING MEANING THROUGH HUMAN CONNECTION

For many of us, it was hard during the COVID-19 pandemic to find meaning. You may have found yourself asking: “What is my purpose when my job/schooling/volunteering/hobby has ended or no longer looks the same?” “How can I find meaning when every day feels like Groundhog Day?” Or perhaps, more than anything, you found yourself asking, “Where is the meaning in a life where my world and social interactions have suddenly become so small?”

For others among us, the pandemic was a time saturated with meaning. For those in professions suddenly deemed "critical," simply going to work each day became an act of bravery and self-sacrifice. The loss of our wider community during the pandemic drove many of us to superhuman feats in order to care for our families or pandemic pods, as we took on roles for which we had previously relied on our community. Some of us were thrown into a space where every minor act became heavy with meaning. Being forced into isolation and months without contact with those we love and care about gave us all a renewed appreciation and realization of the importance of connection with our larger community. While we learned Zoom and got creative about how to do outdoor, low-risk gatherings, we can all agree it just wasn't the same. Whether our experience of “meaning” through the pandemic was a desert or a flood, our journey out of that time must include rebuilding our connections with others.

As we continue to emerge from the COVID years, Holy Trinity recognizes just how vital human connections are—both to us as individuals and to us as a congregation. We see and hear a desire to connect/reconnect in-person with one another. The cottage gatherings held throughout the summer were an intentional effort to build community and facilitate opportunities for members to gather and spend time connecting in small groups. Members hosted gatherings in their homes, parks, patios, and party rooms. From breakfasts to dinners, from coffee to desserts. . .there was something for everyone. Additionally, gatherings were arranged by neighborhood. Holy Trinity attracts members from all over the metro area and often members are unaware of their proximity to one another. By focusing on regional meet-ups, we were able to learn more about our friends as neighbors.

My husband Ben and I (Karen) hosted a gathering at our home in Roseville. We were delighted to have seven guests and surprised to learn so many other members also lived in Roseville, including some just down the street from us! We knew some of our guests and met some new friends. Unfortunately, our outdoor gathering was interrupted by some pesky rain clouds, but we moved inside and made the most of it.

Holy Trinity is fortunate to be a multi-generational and growing congregation, and that was reflected in the cottage gathering we hosted. Among our guests were young adults, growing families, and retirees. We had guests who have been members for decades, guests who just joined during the pandemic, and some who fall somewhere in-between. We really enjoyed learning about each other and finding more in common than we perhaps anticipated. For example, we had three retired ministers in attendance, a retired University professor and a current University staff member, and most importantly, a universal

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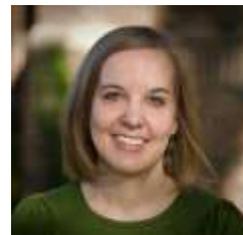
appreciation for PIE! These connections wouldn't have come as easily, or maybe not at all, just in a quick fellowship conversation after church or through an online worship service. Having the opportunity to break bread together, in-person, offered good conversation about college football, Stockholm, Wisconsin, and a new addition to our TV watchlist, *The Great American Recipe*.

My family and I (Erin) hosted a gathering at a playground near our neighborhood in Saint Paul. A similarly introverted friend described the pandemic as, "the time people like me could finally shine." Part of my pandemic recovery has involved facing up to my own social anxieties and pushing myself to engage with others even when it makes me uncomfortable. This is so much harder after a long stretch without much practice! In particular, it has been a very long time since I have hosted a gathering with people outside family or close friends.

With this in mind, I set up our cottage meeting to be very informal: we met in our outdoor "cottage" built of trees, sunshine, and fresh air, gathering around a few park benches located in a spot with easy access to the playground where my kids were safely engaged. Even so, leading up to the event I found myself agonizing about back-up plans in case of rain or smoke, wondering which dietary needs to anticipate, worrying about how to handle it when my kids inevitably broke down or wandered off, kicking myself for hosting a morning gathering without providing coffee, etc.

As it turned out, we were blessed with a perfectly beautiful day shared with perfectly beautiful company. Our small group included people of all ages, familiar faces and others we had never met, longtime church members and some newer to Holy Trinity, active attendees and others who had not made it back to church post pandemic. I met church members whose names were familiar but whose faces I did not know. I saw dear old friends who I had not seen in years. I chatted with people who I had only encountered in more formal settings. We talked a little about church, but also about travel, schools, food, the neighborhood, child rearing, and life. If anyone was bothered by the lack of coffee, they didn't say so. This is a season of rediscovering the joy of connection with one another and the meaning that comes from engaging with a wider community. We can hope that the connections that were born or refreshed at our cottage meetings through the summer will plant the seeds to grow our connections with one another in the future. While the summer of official cottage meetings has ended, Holy Trinity will continue to seek ways to build opportunities for connection. We encourage all of you to do the same!

~Karen Kunze and Erin Henry



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## October 16

### A CALL TO ACTION: REPARATIONS AS STEWARDSHIP

Reparations are a form of financial stewardship, and a way to look at our personal and collective resources through a lens of racial and economic justice. At Holy Trinity, many of us have been in conversations about what it means to lean into reparations as a way of approaching our collective financial decisions and external giving. In this article, I invite you to learn more about what it means to “do” reparations as a church and to consider how our faith and reparative action are tied together.

#### What are reparations?

*“Reparations – by which I mean the full acceptance of our collective biography and its consequences – is the price we must pay to see ourselves squarely... What I’m talking about is more than recompense for past injustices – more than a handout, a payoff, hush money, or a reluctant bribe. What I’m talking about is a national reckoning that would lead to spiritual renewal.” Ta-Nehisi Coates*

Reparations are a call for financial compensation to individuals and communities for past and present harms related to policies and practices that denied opportunity, whether through enslavement, deprivation of land. In the context of faith communities, I believe reparations is a call in three parts: a call to truthful examination of our own denominational past and harms; a call to repentance and accepting responsibility; and a call to collective action toward repair.

Engaging in reparations is a spiritual journey toward redemption and belonging. This work is integral to our witness on racial justice. Now more than ever, churches are taking responsibility for the way their institutions have failed and harmed. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America offered an apology to people of African descent at its most recent churchwide assembly “for its historical complicity in slavery and its enduring legacy of racism in the United States and globally.” It is encouraging its congregations to undertake a study of reparations.

#### Reparations and Repentance

Theologian Keri Day offers an analysis of how Jesus may have approached reparations through his encounter with a tax collector in Luke 19. Zaccheus was a well-known sinner who routinely took advantage of the system and the poor for his own financial gain. When Jesus saw him perched in a tree, he called to him. Surely, Jesus would have known this man’s past transgressions. His outreach was a controversial act. And yet, Jesus knew and called Zaccheus by name, commanding him to come down and receive him at his home. In response, Zaccheus scurried down the tree and announced: “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much” (Luke 19:9). Jesus then declared that salvation had come to Zaccheus’ house. According to Day, when Zaccheus gave back what he stole, he could be reconciled with others and God. Central to God’s view of a just economy is “restitution and repair as grounds for God’s salvific work in history... not merely in the existential but it is also in the material.” The story reminds us that Jesus recognized and honored Zaccheus’ act of repentance, both the words and deeds, which included redistributing wealth and making amends fourfold.

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Repentance and reparations are appropriate responses to social sin. The New York Times columnist and writer David Brooks wrote a column called “The Case for Reparations” on his conversion experience from critic to proponent of reparations by naming sin as the source of racial division, and that sin is anything that assaults the moral order. “Slavery doesn’t merely cause pain and suffering to the slave. It is a corruption that infects the whole society,” says Brooks. He also names that unaddressed sin, not unlike trauma, travels down through time and generations. Consequently, those who are living today and benefitting from a racist society must bear some responsibility for the moral injury caused by the actions or inactions of our ancestors. Brooks closes his piece with a plea to a fractured nation, to address the “original sin that hardens the heart, separates Americans from one another and serves as model and fuel for other injustices.” In other words, racial injustice is *the* central issue in this country, placing responsibility on white American Christians to repent by turning away and choosing another direction.

### **Taking Action**

People of faith have an important role to play in the movement toward reparations and healing in the US. History shows us that progress on reparations is unlikely to occur in a top-down, politically-driven way. Indeed, social change almost always comes from the bottom-up when organized groups of people begin to act their way into new possibilities that influence those in power to do the same. Given the current racial divide on the issue of reparations, **I believe it is incumbent on non-Black and non-Indigenous people of faith to get things started and begin to practice reparations in voluntary and localized ways.** Our leadership is necessary to create a space for dialogue and engagement with folks who are uninformed, skeptical, or even hostile to the idea of reparations. Our privilege can be leveraged to create space for the desires and visions of people most directly affected by the injustice to be heard. We have a moral obligation to not leave the process of reparations to policymakers and political winds but to pursue justice now, at a level where it is possible to make substantial change happen.

### **How are we practicing this within our congregation?**

I see many ways in which Holy Trinity is taking collective action to repair harm and reallocate resources to Black and Indigenous communities. Here are a few current examples:

Our Stepping Out in Faith: Our Shared Community Task Force has allocated \$1.6 million to individuals and organizations with a focus on housing and wealth- building. This group has approached reparations as a project and practice of building relationships and funding needs in ways that dignify and humanize. We know that racial justice and land access are vital to closing economic gaps. Housing is the primary way to build wealth in the US, and Minnesota has some of the worst home ownership inequality in the nation between white people and people of color.

The Indigenous Justice Task Force (formerly known as the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force) is actively working on a legislative proposal for a fee to be attached to each land sale transaction in Minnesota. The proceeds would go to the support of Native programs, as determined by Native people. This legislation is a means for land transactions to give a sustainable financial resource back to Native people today.

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The Racial Justice and Financial Stewardship Committees collaborated on a plan to increase the Reparations line item in our ongoing church budget. These funds would be used for educational grants to BIPOC students through partnership with Mother St. James AME and Tiwahe Foundation.

**What are some possibilities for the future?**

Holy Trinity continues to move forward on the path of racial justice. We have much to learn and much to do. We are a congregation blessed with abundance in terms of financial resources and human capital. We can continue to ask ourselves and one another, “What might a reparative approach to finances look like inside of our congregation?” and “What might a faithful response to reparations look like?” The answers aren’t always easy, but we can hold these questions together as a community.

~Allison Johnson Heist



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# October 17

## PERSONNEL COMMITTEE, FALL 2023 STEWARDSHIP

A number of years ago one of our interim pastors commented that Holy Trinity loves committees. That comment is a reminder that groups of members working on various topics is part of our culture at Holy Trinity, it's how we get things done.

The Personnel Committee is different than other committees in that membership is prescriptive. According to our charter, membership consists of the current and past two Council presidents and three at large members who serve three-year terms and is staffed by the Lead Pastor. (To provide consistency during the staff transition in 2023, my tenure on the committee as past, past Council president was extended for one year.)

This structure was implemented a number of years ago to ensure that the committee has the appropriate lay leadership and skill set to best support and collaborate with our valuable staff. Ministry work can be challenging in the best of times. Throw in a pandemic and racial reckoning and the personnel aspect of our life together has taken on greater importance, especially in the last few years.

The Personnel Committee works in partnership with the pastors and staff, and given the intense global and local circumstances over the last few years, we have been particularly attentive to the needs of our staff. We have responded with changes to our policies and practices that provide additional support, clarity, and resources. We believe these changes allow staff to thrive and institutionalize a responsive, caring, and whole person approach to personnel issues. On behalf of the committee, I want to highlight some of the things that we've done in the last few years.

### **Sabbaticals for all staff**

While sabbaticals have been available for clergy and staff for a number of years, we did not have a strong practice of planning for and using that benefit. We now proactively offer sabbaticals for eligible employees (every five years for clergy and every six for full- and part-time staff) and incorporate them into our personnel planning. We also expanded the purpose of the sabbatical to include "personal renewal and growth," noting that giving leaders time away to rest is just as valuable to a congregation as doing a formal study or project. Pastor Ingrid and employees Dennis Nordholm and Nolan Gusdal all took sabbaticals this year.

### **More Sundays for personal use for worship staff**

This year we are piloting a practice of offering more Sundays off for worship staff to help prevent burnout. For years our policy has been four to five Sundays for vacation, and two for "public church," which means things like preaching at other churches. We also offered two Sundays for continuing education, but in reality continuing education rarely happens on Sundays. In 2023, worship staff has been granted up to eight Sundays for vacation and two for public church.

### **Professional development funds**

We expanded the use of professional development funds to support a broad definition of wellness. Conferences and classes are still an option, but now staff can also use funds to support activities and items that support personal renewal and growth. We believe that self-care will benefit the staff and congregation just as much as new skills and knowledge.

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### **Personnel Policies viewed through an equity lens**

In 2021, the Personnel Committee worked with a staff equity group to review our Personnel Policies through a justice and equity lens. This led to several changes to the Personnel Policies Handbook that were approved by the Council, including:

- Adding statements about our values and practices around justice and diversity.
- Simplifying language about how paid time off (PTO) is accrued.
- Rewriting the employee conduct section to change the tone to one of collaboration, trust, and respect versus authoritarian and overbearing.
- Making Juneteenth (June 19) and Indigenous People’s Day (October 12) paid holidays.
- Revising the harassment policy, noting that harassment includes verbal, non-verbal, and physical conduct and that it is prohibited by employees, lay leaders, members, and volunteers.

### **Annual Pastor Review**

Pastors, like all employees, can benefit from regular reflection and feedback on their professional work. The committee has partnered with the Church Council and pastors to create a meaningful annual review process for clergy. This process provides an opportunity for the pastors to reflect on their ministry over the previous year and consider the future. The discussion centers around accomplishments, goals, concerns, and roles. We learn what they’re most energized to do and what they’d like to do less of, and most importantly, how the Council, Personnel Committee, and other lay leaders can best support them and our ministry together.

### **Gifts of appreciation**

We seek to recognize the amazing work of our staff and clergy. The committee often celebrates our staff with special year-end gifts. Additionally, this year, inspired by generous congregation members, the committee gave special gifts of gratitude for the leadership of Pastors Ingrid, Doug, and Deacon David. Each chose to use their gift in a way that was meaningful to them. As a conversation starter, next time you see Pastor Doug, ask how he combines fire and art. Next time you see Deacon David, ask him about kolrosing. And next time you see Pastor Ingrid, ask about her new home exercise routine.

~Nicki Hines/Personnel Committee



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## October 18

### ADULT CHOIR

Music has always been the way I have connected with God and my faith community, but up until recently I was never asked to do the work to seek it out and make it a part of my life. As a teenager I was volunteered (perhaps under protest) to join the First Lutheran Church Youth Band in my hometown. I sang and played the keyboard with a ragtag group of kids that had already been a part of my life. This was on account of our parents being friends, shared classes, and that small town phenomenon where everybody knows everybody. The space I needed to grow as a Christian and as a musician was already there for me and I took that for granted.

Participating in music and worship in college presented its own challenges but by and large it came to pass with a similar fluidity. My friends, roommates, and professors were nearly all involved in music in some way and for that reason I never needed to seek out a community of similar-minded individuals – they were already around me!

When I left college and entered the “real world” I was confronted quite suddenly with the reality that if I wanted to make music in my adult life and join a community of worship, I would need to choose for myself what that would look like and where I would go. Unfamiliar with the Twin Cities, I searched for a whole summer for a place to land until my good friend Logan introduced me to Holy Trinity Lutheran Church. Filled with trepidation I took a chance and attended a choir rehearsal with the Adult Choir before looking into the group, worship at HTLC, or meeting any members of the congregation. In hindsight it was certainly not the most informed decision I have ever made but I could not have made a better choice. To my great joy I was met with bright smiles and kind hearts. Each and every member of the choir was so excited to meet me, without judgement or pretense, exactly where I was and to celebrate me for who I am. It felt like home. Over the last year I have had the distinct privilege to continue to build connections and community with my fellow choir members and congregants. I choose to stay because of the kindness and joy I found at my first rehearsal and the open hearts I have encountered ever since. I am grateful to be a part of a community that seeks justice, makes music, and loves God.

~James Nysse

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My love for music was nurtured by the church. I started singing in a children's church choir when I was in first grade. The music directors at my church were esteemed collegiate choral conductors that had such a profound love for their community that they blessed everyone with their love of music—from the babies baptized at the church to the folks that would sing holding their walkers with one hand and their binders in the other. I also had a truly exceptional youth director who nurtured my curiosity and shaped me into a fully participating adult in the church. Even though my home church had (and still has) its fair share of problems, they instilled in me the desire to give back to community and share in my joy for the Lord.

I was 22 years old when I moved out of my Iowan hometown of 8,000 people to Minneapolis. I went to college in my hometown because it coincided with my desires and ambitions. Very rarely does one find a college where students can major in accounting and music while excelling in both. I was active in campus ministries, worked at a Christian summer camp, and served on the Council for Faith and Life. I ultimately made the right decision for me by going to college less than three miles from my parents' house. However, as one may anticipate, this made my move to a major metropolitan area even more daunting. I needed to find a sense of community. It was never a question of "if" I would join a church choir but always "which one."

I don't know if it was coincidental, serendipitous, or even intercessional, but my friend Logan invited James and me to join his bell choir at Holy Trinity. We were quickly introduced to the wonderful Phil Radtke and the Holy Trinity Adult Choir. We had only lived in Minneapolis about a week before we were at the church three times a week for rehearsals and worship. I loved being in an environment with people who loved to sing and welcomed the opportunity to sing with someone new. I was surprised to find out that many of these folks were once new to the congregation. It was really wonderful to be in a group that welcomed my presence so immediately. I was a stranger, but they showed me kindness. That is the love of God active in this church choir.

~Abs Trewin

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# October 19

## THE MEANING OF WORSHIP

Church is sometimes described as a ‘third space,’ an alternative to home and work that is necessary for our wellbeing. That’s helpful, especially as far too many folks seem to lack such a space. But it might also be said that church is a ‘parallel universe’ that exists alongside, apart from, much of our daily experience. And further, it can be argued that we need such a parallel universe for our nourishment and to have perspective on that universe where we spend most of our time and energy.

To be human is to try to make meaning of existence and experience, to discern what values and behaviors make for a life worth living. In the parallel universe that is church, we do that through what is an increasingly rare experience for many people; it is called worship, an odd practice when seen from the ‘regular’ universe. In worship, we affirm that meaning comes from two essential relationships: with God and with one another. These are the subjects of our love, as Jesus and scripture make clear. We are made to love God and others. Worship is where we gather with others to remember and to deepen in—week by week, season by season—this foundational belief which is so often being eroded, even assaulted, in the other universe.

In worship, we are in a time and place where creating—art, music, language—frees us from a universe where economic production and consumption are assumed to define us. Worship is the very antithesis of destruction—whether through violence or bullying or lies—which is all too often given credence as the way things must be, in the other universe. At its essence, worship ever affirms the triumph of life over death, a truth of which we need to be regularly reminded.

In worship, we are in a time and place that is intergenerational as a balance to so much time otherwise spent segregated by age. Cherished babies, exuberant children, questioning youth, growing families, folks single and coupled, beautiful elders are all together in one place. And never more so than at the communion rail.

In worship, we are in a time and place where an ‘everyone on the same page’ mentality is superseded by delight in a variety—of not only spiritual gifts, but experience, color, ethnicity, sexuality and gender, class—that is seen not as a problem, but as a blessing overflowing with possibility because we are committed to being in relationship over being right.

In worship, we are in a time shaped by a calendar that is other than that of school, sports, or the political cycle. We move through the week sustained by a visit to our parallel universe, and through the year sustained by a rhythm and flow that tells us who and whose we are. We are grounded in a great, unfolding— and ever new— sacred story.

In worship, we are in a space unlike any other. The very sanctuary is shaped by all the prayers, the baptisms, the confirmations, the weddings, and the funerals that have happened there. This is where life’s sacred moments are ritualized with old traditions and new forms.

In worship, we are in a time and space where we are grounded in the eternal love of God amidst the swirling change of our lives and times that we might respond to those changes with energy, imagination, intelligence, creativity, and love. And maybe even a sense of humor. We are marked as God’s beloved in Christ who seek to embody that identity in the other universe as we seek to do what we can to upbuild the kingdom of God.

In worship, we are in a time and space where silence is cherished, where listening to God and others is normative, where learning is valued, where forgiveness is sought, where passion for justice is ignited, where hope is ever nourished, where grief can be honored, where joys can be multiplied through sharing.

And through all of this is born the meaning for which we hunger, for which we are made, by which we are formed and strengthened. And for all this, we say, “Thanks be to God.” Amen +

~Larry and Pat Farris



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## October 20

### THANK YOU, HOLY TRINITY!

I am thrilled to have you as our neighbors here in the Longfellow neighborhood! I love being witness to the work that you do in our neighborhood—and our larger community. Specifically, I'm honored that you have chosen The Lift Garage as one of the many ways you live out your faith. I am so grateful!

Your gifts have helped The Lift Garage move people out of poverty and homelessness through low-cost car repair. Your support has provided affordable auto repair for all Minnesotans who meet 150% of Federal Poverty Guidelines, over half of our customers report living within 10 miles from us.

Funds from Holy Trinity help us keep costs for customers to just \$15/hour and parts sold without a markup. There are various additional discounts, those are determined by the repairs that are needed.

This year, our 10<sup>th</sup> year of operation, The Lift Garage is beginning an exciting new **partnership with Exodus Lending!** We are not ready to publicly announce this partnership, but since Exodus Lending is a project born out of Holy Trinity, I wanted you to be among the first to know about this formal partnership!

**How are we partnering?** The vehicles we see at The Lift are old. Above average old. The average age of a vehicle we see is 16 years old and that means that sometimes when these cars come into The Lift they cannot be repaired and are deemed as “Do Not Invest” or DNI. This can be a stressful situation for anyone, let alone individuals on a fixed income.

To find a meaningful way to connect customers who have just heard their vehicle cannot be repaired we began piecing together resources to help these customers replace their retired vehicle with another vehicle—specifically a vehicle that is both affordable and reliable. In these efforts, The Lift has started a new program in partnership with American Family Insurance Dreams Foundation, Luther Automotive, and Exodus Lending.

- American Family Insurance: Retires out their Fleet Vehicles by selling them, at a price The Lift named, to Luther Automotive.
- Luther Automotive holds those vehicles exclusively for The Lift Garage customers who have been referred from The Lift and sells these vehicles for around \$2,500!
- Exodus Lending offers \$2,500 micro-loans with 0% interest in order to make these purchases possible for our customers.

Customers can now purchase a new, reliable vehicle at a more affordable price. Exodus lending gets these vehicles into our customers' hands sooner and removes the need for predatory lenders. We are so excited to launch this partnership with Exodus Lending! We are hoping to have our first vehicle purchased with an Exodus Lending loan in late 2023.

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**How you can help:** We need more donated fleet vehicles! Do you work for a company that has fleet vehicles? Do you have a connection to a company that has them? If so, please reach out to Karissa at [karissa@theliftgarage.org](mailto:karissa@theliftgarage.org) to have a conversation about how to participate in this exciting, unique program!

Thank you again for being such warm and generous neighbors. Your gifts are not only helping customers have safe, reliable transportation, you're also helping us think big about how we can connect customers to needed resources, including no-interest loans!

Before approaching Exodus Lending, we had many conversations with various lenders around town and were having very little success on moving any of the conversations forward. After reaching out to Exodus the conversation moved quickly and thoughtfully. Thank you for making this much needed resource available. It is truly a blessing to have a lending service like Exodus in our community, and it's because of you at Holy Trinity that we're able to combine our work to support low-cost car repair—and low-cost car purchases!

I will be excited to report back after we have our first car purchased with an Exodus Lending loan!

With gratitude, hope, and anticipation,

Becca Tumm, Development Director

[becca@theliftgarage.org](mailto:becca@theliftgarage.org)

612-447-6160

~Becca Tumm/the Lift Garage



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# October 21

## MEANING IN CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

A congregation's meaning and purpose is to tell the story of God's love as demonstrated and embodied above all in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. How the story gets told/lived out is shaped by the storyteller (the congregation), the context, and the audience that is the intended recipient of the story. For Holy Trinity, the audience has always included not only the worshiping community, but the larger community that lives, works, and plays in its shadow.

It begins with Word and Sacrament that is celebrated weekly as we gather around font, table, and Word. Meaning is found in the liturgy through which the story of God's love is regularly rehearsed, spoken, heard, embodied, acted out, sung, and prayed.

But it is also true that Holy Trinity has never been content to keep the story captive within its walls. For the majority of the worshiping community, the meaning of the story is found in service. Service whether embodied in the liturgy or expressed in care, compassion, and seeking justice is what gives Holy Trinity its reason for being. Meaning has meant bringing the story to bear on those situations in which the story needed to be heard. This dimension of the congregation's ministry can be illustrated through some examples.

As long as I can remember, Holy Trinity has opened its doors to welcome physically and mentally challenged men and women by providing a home for Metro Mobility. For almost as long, Holy Trinity has opened its doors to young children, initially providing a pre-school program staffed and managed by the congregation and then most recently offering space to an external organization to conduct its own program.

Then the need for housing for elderly persons in the community engaged the congregation. In response, a partnership with several other organizations spawned a 501c3 organization and some 40+ years ago an 8-story apartment building was erected on property across from the congregation's educational unit.

Roughly 35 years ago it became clear that welcoming, acceptance, and justice was lacking for LGBTQ persons. In response Holy Trinity became a Reconciled in Christ congregation confessing its own failings before making the congregation a welcoming place.

Thirty years ago, a Theater Circle was established that had as its mission telling the story in non-traditional ways and with non-traditional religious language. For every *Amahl and the Night Visitors* and *Godspell* there were *The Dining Room*, *The Crucible*, and *The Sound of Music*.

When the excesses of the Pay Day lending industry became obvious, Exodus Lending was born out of the congregation to provide a more humane alternative for those needing short-term loans to navigate a sudden crisis.

The growing challenge of climate change led to the development of a rain garden to capture rainwater runoff and an outdoor performing space that provided an opportunity to host congregational and

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community gatherings following the construction of a pizza oven as an Eagle Scout project by one of the youth of the congregation.

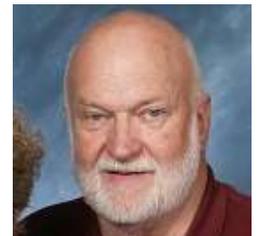
Necessary facility modifications were made that both increased accessibility for physically challenged persons and awareness of security needs for staff members and more vulnerable persons who were part of the congregation's ministry.

Meanwhile injustices faced by persons of color, especially but not exclusively, African Americans and Indigenous persons, continued to challenge the congregation. Symposiums, workshops, consultations, book studies, and actions became vehicles through which the meaning of the Gospel was focused on those dimensions of the community's life that stood in opposition to God's intentions for the world: white supremacy and racism. Unexpected financial resources from the earlier effort to provide needed housing made substantial funds available to give to particular groups in the community who were in a better position to address community needs than the congregation was.

Three years ago, the neighborhood around the congregation exploded when an unarmed Black man was murdered while under police custody. Then the congregation found its ministry in demonstrating the love of God for all people in non-stop service to a community that needed advocacy, understanding, resources, compassion, and accompaniment.

It was only the latest, if, perhaps, the most graphic, illustration of the fact that for Holy Trinity its purpose for being and the meaning of its service may begin around the font, the table, and the pulpit, but finds its fullest expression when it takes the needs of the neighbor as seriously as it takes its own.

~Randy Nelson



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## October 22

Spirit of Money and How We Might Reframe our Thinking Around Money & Investing in our Community  
Chances are high that we all have a slightly different relationship with money, depending on our upbringing, life experience, and circumstances. Despite whatever our differences in perspectives are about money, chances are also high that most think of money itself as a simple store of value, in whatever its form (i.e. currency, or sums on paper held in a bank account). And *using* our money as merely a means to complete a transaction. That said, have you ever stopped to think about the origin of money? Money, as in currency, is a relatively new invention in the grand scheme of human existence.

The true nature of money is rooted in the relationships and transactions that occurred between people *before* there was a thing called “currency” (the thing we now generically call money). Before the invention of currency, people had to work out between themselves how they would value the goods and services each needed to get along in the world. Every single transaction was filled with the need to “know thy neighbor”, founded on trust, appreciation, gratitude, understanding, empathy, and so on. It all added up to “good faith.”

Often these exchanges were initially out of balance—the farmer might supply the cobbler several weeks’ worth of eggs before the farmer got new shoes. And if for some reason the cobbler didn’t, or couldn’t deliver, the farmer had already delivered their goods, requiring agreements to be adjusted. So that “good faith” was based on many things, not the least of which was an individual’s reputation for keeping one’s promises. With every exchange and transaction taking on this level of human connection, they were truly infused with the “spirit” or human intention of each party to the transaction.

That spirit energy emanated outward and lived strongly in the community because of the high level of dependency each person had on the other for this system to work. Interestingly, there are vestiges of this idea still present today in law. Whether or not you're a real lawyer (or just “play one on TV” like me :) we each have probably heard the expression **“the spirit of the agreement.”** Written words in contracts try to capture the full intent of the parties to a contract, but lawyers (and judges) will still talk about what stands behind those words—the “spirit” of the agreement, or human intent. It is this “spirit” aspect that we have largely lost in our relationship and understanding of money, especially nowadays when we rarely use currency, and can pay or purchase everything electronically (I made my first purchase at the grocery store recently using just my phone because I’d forgotten my wallet!).

I suspect that most of us, unless we’ve explicitly studied the “spirit of money” operate with a conventional understanding of money—that money is merely a medium of exchange that we don’t give a moment's thought to (other than perhaps what we believe we have in our accounts :) We get paid for work (past or present) and we pay/gift others with our earnings/savings. If we are prudent/fortunate/lucky enough, we have enough to meet our needs and then some. And in times of need, we hope there’s some kind of ‘backstop’ to help us (family, friends, government).

As stewards of the gifts given to our church, the Finance and Stewardship committee in service to the council and broader congregation, aims to elevate and deepen our understanding and relationship to the spirit nature of the funds entrusted to us. To the extent we can reconnect to the historical “spirit” origins of money, we can better appreciate our duty and obligation as people of privilege to continue to transform our approach to our use of money.

For those with an interest in learning more about the spirit energy that accompanies our relationship to and decisions around money, I would invite you to explore the following resources:

[The Slow Money Movement](#)

[Associative Economics](#)

[The Soul of Money Institute](#)

[The Energy of Money](#)

~Scott Cole



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## October 23

I moved to Minnesota from Ohio when I was in my early thirties. I did not know anyone here but chose this area for many reasons. I wanted to learn about a state new to me and I expected to stay a few years and then move on. Now, many years later, I never considered going anywhere else.

My first friend, with whom I worked, introduced me to many things. She took me to the southwestern part of the state, including to their family farm, to Pipestone, to Blue Mounds. Then I had my first lutefisk dinner and lefse, pastries, and other foods I had never even heard of. Over the years, Dorothy told me about things I must do and places I must go, concerts I would enjoy, museums, local events. It was a never-ending list which I finally completed after she died.

In retirement, Dorothy moved to Rochester. I visited her there many times and saw her just three days before she died. It was almost as though she waited until we could say good-bye.

Dorothy was almost old enough to be my mother. Her family became my Minnesota family. I was with them often for special events, including some raucous card games. She helped me plan my wedding.

Her husband Bill was an active member of the church which I also attended. I saw him most Sundays. Dorothy was not as regular an attendee. We were birders and went to Sogn Valley for that activity.

Not too long ago I was included at one of their family gatherings. I felt sad that Dorothy was not there to see her wonderful great-grandchildren. I hope to maintain contact with this family.

~Mary Heltsley



October 24

GOD has power

KIDS has power

We learned to dance

sk in colors

how to sing

We learned

new games

We learned

to love the

earth

We learned to love the people of the world

We learned to love the world

~Theo Bauck

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## October 25

It was an impromptu conversation with another traveler. We talked about the work we did and being so far away from home for extended periods. He asked, “So what does ‘*home*’ mean to you now?”

At first glance it is an easy definition. We have it on our doormats, wooden plaques in the family room, and needlepointed or cross-stitched on a pillow.

*Home is where the heart is.  
Home is family.  
Love makes a house a home.*

*Home* is easily defined in our childhood. For most of us it is the house, the town, the state where we grew up. If we move away, we establish a new *home*, but we also keep *home* as the place from where we came. When we go back for a visit it is easy to say, “Oh, I’m going home for the weekend.”

*“Home is where we start from.” T. S. Elliot*

But as time passes, children and extended families may move away from that home of origin, parents pass away. Our heart no longer resides in one place. The house, city, state where we raised our families may no longer be where we live. Our new home never feels like *home* to our families. For some of us, we may be the only occupant, our house void of family.

In my case, my work involved global travel. I was out of the country over 50% of the time. My mother passed away when I was in Africa. My daughter finished college, married, and moved to another state while I made trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific flights too numerous to count. My house sat empty while I lived out of a suitcase. What did “home” come to mean to me? None of the past definitions worked anymore.

I pondered the fellow traveler’s question because I thought it to be important. What did *home* mean to me? I saw myself settling into my hotel room wherever I was staying, be it one night, two weeks, or three months. I realized that each time I created my own space. I felt more “*at home*” in some places than others, but I made each place mine in some small way. I realized that “*home*” was wherever I was, and now, wherever I am.

*“Where thou art, that is home.” Emily Dickinson*

Today, “home” is less a specific place, but it has come to mean a way of being, to feel “at home”.

~Connie Lien Adams



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## October 26

Autumn, the season of transition, holds a special place in my heart. As the days grow shorter and the air becomes crisp, I am reminded of the profound beauty and significance that this time of year holds for me. The arrival of autumn is like a gentle awakening after the languid days of summer.

The first sign is the subtle change in the quality of light, as if the sun has mellowed, casting a warm, golden hue over everything it touches. This transformation of light imparts a sense of nostalgia and reflection, inviting me to slow down and appreciate the world around me.

One of the most enchanting aspects of autumn, for me, is the changing foliage. Trees that were once lush and green begin their gradual transformation into a breathtaking display of reds, oranges, and yellows. Each leaf seems to be a painter's stroke, creating a masterpiece that covers the landscape. It's as if nature itself is bidding farewell to the vibrancy of summer with a grand finale of color. I find solace in taking long walks through parks and forests, crunching leaves beneath my feet, and marveling at this magnificent tapestry.

Autumn brings with it a sense of coziness that I cherish. It's a time for wrapping myself in warm sweaters, sipping on steaming mugs of hot cider, and relishing in the comfort of hearty, homemade soups. The aroma of cinnamon and nutmeg wafts through the air, and the simple act of baking an apple pie can fill a home with a sense of warmth and contentment.

The harvest season is another aspect of autumn that deeply resonates with me. It's a time when the fruits of hard labor are reaped, and the bounty of the earth is celebrated. Farmers' markets burst with fresh produce, and the air is filled with the earthy scent of pumpkins, squashes, and ripe apples. I am reminded of the importance of gratitude and the cyclical nature of life as I witness the fruits of nature's labor. Perhaps what makes autumn truly special for me is the sense of change and transformation it embodies. It's a season that teaches us that change can be beautiful, that letting go of the old can pave the way for new beginnings. As the leaves fall and create a carpet of memories underfoot, I am reminded of the impermanence of life and the importance of embracing change with grace.

Autumn also holds a personal significance for me because it marks a season of reflection and self-discovery. It's a time when I often find myself turning inward, contemplating the passage of time, and setting intentions for the year ahead. There's a sense of renewal in the air, and I use this time to evaluate my goals and aspirations, much like the trees shedding their leaves in preparation for a period of rest and rejuvenation.

Autumn is not just a season; it's a feeling, a state of mind. It's a reminder of the beauty of change, the importance of gratitude, and the joy of simple pleasures. To me, autumn means embracing the ebb and flow of life, finding warmth in the midst of change, and celebrating the exquisite beauty of nature's transformation. It's a season that speaks to my soul and reminds me to cherish every moment as if it were a falling leaf, drifting gracefully towards a new beginning.

~Michael Douglas



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## October 27

### FAITH ACTIVE IN LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR

*From David:*

My maternal grandparents played a significant role in the early years of my life. They were dairy farmers in southern Wisconsin. They owned 80 acres of land which they farmed with a team of horses. All of the farm work was done with “armstrong power”. We milked the cows by hand. They worked hard to make a living. They were Norwegian Americans, lifelong Lutherans, and had a strong Christian faith. Following World War II, although they lived very simply on a limited income, they decided to make an apartment in the upstairs attic of their farmhouse. One bedroom was converted to a kitchen and a small closet became a bathroom. Stairs were built on the back porch. This apartment was intended to welcome a displaced family (WW II refugees) from Eastern Europe.

About this same time my father was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s disease and died six months later. The farmhouse apartment my grandparents had built became the home for their youngest daughter and her three children. Eight months later my mother was hospitalized with rheumatic fever. My grandparents not only provided us with housing, but they became our surrogate parents.

I have lived my entire life grateful for the generosity and hospitality of my grandparents. I learned so much from them about core values in life. From childhood I learned the importance of loving your neighbor, both near and far. I learned the importance of caring for refugees, immigrants, and displaced persons. Without my grandparents’ preparation to welcome refugees into their farmhouse, my life would have been quite different. From childhood I have been aware that my faith calls me to love our neighbors, near and far.

*From Carol:*

I am named after my paternal grandmother, Carrie (Fadness) Halverson, who died when I was very young, but I remember her as a woman of constant prayer. Even now her prayers seem to reach across time and space for me and countless others. She was deeply committed to welcoming others from all parts of the world, which included her founding and operating the first University of Minnesota International Student Home in 1944. My father was her only child, and I am sure her passion for global mission influenced his readiness to accept a call to serve in Madagascar after he married my mother and graduated from Luther Seminary. After serving in that country for over 7 years, my father was asked to work for the ELC church headquarters in Minneapolis to help tell the stories of global mission through producing films and arranging for missionaries on home leave to speak in churches about the love of Jesus Christ manifesting in myriad ways in the countries they worked in.

I believe my grandmother’s spirit, and growing up in a home focused on welcoming visitors from all over the world, prepared my heart to say yes to a call from the ALC as a nurse in a Lutheran Hospital in Madagascar after I graduated from nursing school in 1977. When I was getting ready to leave for my first term of service, a neighbor reminded me that at age 5 I declared I was going to work in Madagascar like my parents. I have no recollection of saying that, but in looking back, I believe my grandmother and the Holy Spirit planted the seeds in my heart early in life that shaped my desire to work in global health in Madagascar and then with refugees here in Minnesota upon my return to the U.S. We have been eternally blessed with a rich heritage of faith from our ancestors!

~David and Carol Berg



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## October 28

*Happiness is letting go of what  
you think your life is supposed to look like  
and celebrating it for everything that it is.*

*-Mandy Hale*

These insightful words by Mandy Hale became my computer screensaver upon my retirement in 2019, after a lifetime dedicated to educational leadership. This quote became my guiding star, especially as my retirement journey unfolded quite differently from my initial imaginings.

Anticipating serene days in a lakeside cabin in northern Wisconsin alongside my partner of three decades, reality took an unexpected turn. I found myself traversing the path of divorce, relocating to a vibrant urban landscape, and becoming the owner of a century-old bungalow. The familiar faces of friends and surroundings were left behind, yet this transition drew me closer to my daughter, son-in-law, and cherished grandchildren. The mere eight blocks separating my bungalow from their home initially seemed too close for comfort. Yet, as fate would have it, the emergence of a global pandemic transformed that distance into a perfect haven.

Amidst the lockdown and shuttering of schools, those eight blocks evolved into a lifeline. The role I assumed, caring for my grandchildren, became a wellspring of mutual happiness and fulfillment. The grandparent-grandchild bond that flourished during this unprecedented time defied comparison. My daughter and son-in-law found solace in their continued work, assured of their children's care. The shared appreciation and gratitude, mirrored by the radiant smiles of my grandchildren during our various adventures, nourished my spirit.

While navigating the complexities of homeownership, grappling with the absence of old companions, and seeking newfound purpose, Mandy Hale's wisdom remained a steadfast lighthouse. It urged me to relinquish predetermined notions and instead embrace unwavering trust in the present reality. In celebrating life as it is, I've unearthed an uncharted realm of contentment, purpose, and meaning—one that continuously unveils its splendors in unexpected ways.

~Margaret Kolden



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October 29

## WORDPOWER/POWERWORD

I've been thinking a lot about "meaning" these days—about meaning and words.

Words do not just have "meanings," but we all know they have great power as well.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident"...

"You are forgiven"...

"The test results were negative!"...

We are usually wise enough to avoid the words that offend and hurt.

I'm a white "old guy" and I've been a sort of "wordsmith" all my adult life, but it is only recently that I am awakening to a group of words that are so familiar and seemingly so harmless that they slip freely from my mouth. They are words that perpetuate a social and racial system that is wrong and hurtful. These words reinforce the idea that "white" is superior to "black or any shade of color."

I think about phrases such as:

"Its OK to tell a little "white" lie" (implication: white is OK, others not so)

"That's kind of a "grey" decision" (implication: on one end a decision is white, the other black...one good one bad and we instinctively know which is which)

"I like to see my doctor in a white coat!" (implication: white is cleaner, more pure)

And then questions like these:

Why does the most powerful and final arbitrator in football game wear a white hat and the rest of the officials wear black hats?

Why is white the traditional color at weddings?

Angel food cake...devil's food cake.

The power of these seemingly harmless words and ideas is that we have been raised with them our entire lives. They are built into our most vital form of communication and meaning...our language. We have, quite unconsciously and very subtly, built a bunker of whiteness around ourselves and called it reality!

I believe it is time to think carefully about the words, concepts, and assumptions that surround those of us who are white.

We can do better. We really can.

~John Buzza



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## October 30

### MY BROTHERS

Being the youngest child with only older brothers, I felt well protected.

My closest-in-age brother, Dennis, was a main playmate as kids – besides all our other little playmates. We played in our sand lot at our cabin making fanciful cities, race car tracks, and a big hole that was the giant’s mouth needing dental work. We worked together as the giant’s dentists filling cavities and pulling a big tooth. A lot of artwork was produced together as well. Later, we played games together like cribbage and dominoes. Dennis was the one to make sure boyfriends stayed their proper distance and was worried that I wouldn’t be “Sweet Sixteen and Never Been Kissed.” Not sure which way he worried about that. Dennis and I are EXACTLY four years apart ... to the minute. February 6<sup>th</sup> at 2:17 in the afternoon.

My older brother, Earl, is 8 years older than me. One time when I was about 3 years old, he saw my sadness when one of our baby kittens had died; he told me that the kitty was in “Happy Hunting Ground” and was having fun playing with other kitties. It helped. I dug that kitten up in the garden just to see if it was still there. He would bring library books home from school for me to look at and read before I was old enough to go to kindergarten. Later he taught me to love jazz. He was always a big tease and sometimes to the point of getting me mad at him—so mad one morning that I threw my half-eaten grapefruit at him across the table. He ducked and that juicy grapefruit hit the window.

I know Mom made them watch me often. I don’t think they were thrilled to do so but they did it anyway. We played outside all day long until the lights came on playing hide and seek games et al. Sometimes we had a trike and wagon parade around the block complete with crepe paper decorations, balloons, and a baton twirler.

Childhood was way different back then. A lot of imagination, art and games were a big part of our lives. Also interacting with our little friends. It was all good.

Now in our older years, I still feel loved and protected by my brothers. They continue to tease me, but Mom taught me to have “broad shoulders” and we laugh a lot. I just love my big brothers. Lucky me. They mean a lot to me.

~Sharon Englund



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# October 31

## IS THE WORLD ABOUT TO TURN? OR, HAS IT ALREADY?

During moments when I have searched for meaning, I have not often looked to poetry. I'm more of an editorial/commentary kind of guy. But my dad could write speeches for elected officials and also compose creatively. Some of his best theologizing came from poems. One of his poems, "The Least of These," really challenged me on issues of angle of vision, of finding the gospel story in the big and powerful, of re-visioning what empire wants me to see. It really doesn't fit with the fall season, with tendrils in both Christmas and Easter, but I share it now, hoping you also find beauty in the simple. Here is "The Least of These" by John Hulteen.

### The Least of These

Near Bethlehem, by a sprawling hill  
where sheep and shepherd trod,  
A grove of trees was growing  
in the hard and rocky sod.  
A lowly scrubby cedar grew  
on a rocky, hilly crest.  
Almost alone it struggled  
shunned, it seemed, by all the rest.  
Further down along the slope  
a majestic aspen grew.  
With trunk so straight and limb so strong  
and leaves with sunshine hue.  
The cedar's limbs were gnarled and bent  
in an ugly twisted way.  
The aspen, on the other hand,  
grew more beautiful each day.  
Was thus perchance a farmer came  
from Bethlehem nearby,  
to cut a pole to fix his barn;  
the cedar caught his eye.  
"Why cut a great magnificent tree  
to fix a broken manger,"  
The farmer said, as he swung his axe.  
The cedar fell to the stranger.  
Some time has passed, as time will do  
and then one winter's night,  
Mary and Joseph came to sleep  
in this stable void of light.  
The aspen, so the story goes,  
in spiteful hatred grew.  
"I am the greatest tree on earth,"  
it said, each day anew.  
The aspen grew and flourished  
for thirty years or more,  
And then it fell to Caesar's axe.  
From its boughs no eagles soar.  
Time in centuries soon would pass.  
The trees now gone – no loss.  
The lowly cedar became a crib.  
And the aspen became the cross.

~Bob Hulteen

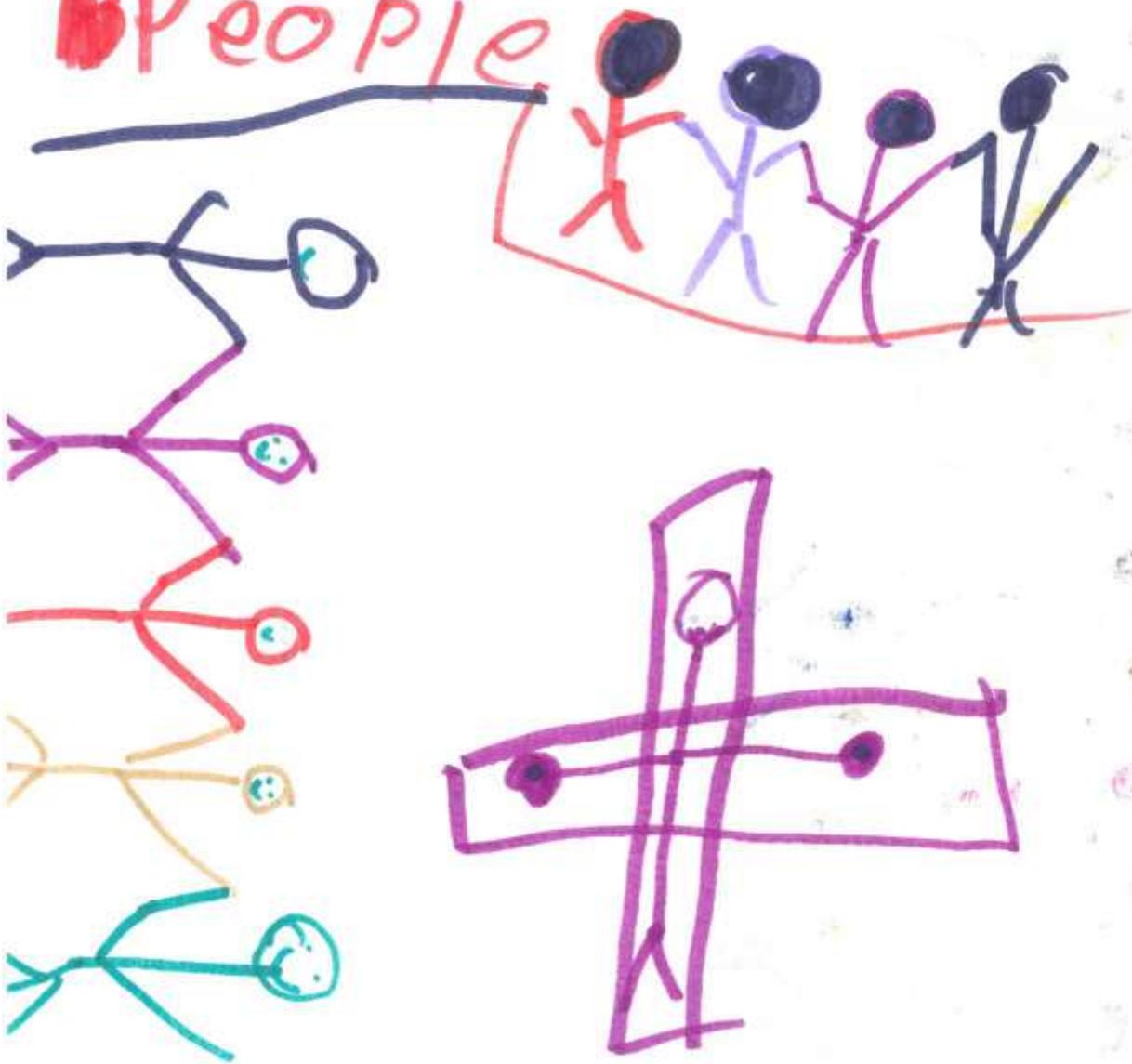


November 1

slime 

~~God~~ God +

People



~Kathleen Kirschbaum

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## November 2

### A Meaning Story

Growing up with asthma, I was an indoor kid each summer. Early on, I began to draw with a pencil what I saw outside: trees, people, animals; and I started to include some painting. In elementary school I could easily copy what the art teacher was showing us and enjoyed doing so. Since math was definitely not my subject, I was happy to earn some self-esteem as the “class artist.” I enjoyed hearing other kids saying to me “You did not do that!”

Leaving school, working, and being a mom, my artwork took a back seat to the needs of the moment. Within the last several years, a coworker told me I needed to use my art, which encouraged me to find ways to do so. I began sketching and painting, then having the thank you cards printed for the volunteer teachers at my church. It really was a joy to use this skill as a means to an end in a creative way.

As a new retiree, I have time to work on this skill to make it better. As my “old” art professor said, I needed to “study trees” and so I still do. Since we have a large window in our apartment that looks over a variety of them, I marvel at their diversity, their unique color, and their ability to provide needed shade for us. But mostly, I am daily reminded that I am unable to fathom God’s creative power and intelligent design in all that lives on our planet!

~Marcia Floding



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## November 3

I know the title of this booklet refers to the upcoming season of autumn, but when I read the words, “Meaning of Fall”, my mind gravitated to failure. So, I am referring to the definition of fall as a downward movement as in failure—not the season. Failure can easily be the result of taking a risk. This made me think of many risks that I have taken in my life, but the one that makes me smile a lot is the completion of a YWCA triathlon. The thought of such a crazy idea originated from my daughter. And it came the year of my 70th birthday. In fact, she was so committed to the idea that her mother could do a triathlon at an “advanced age” that she paid for my registration before I even agreed to do it!!

I struggled with the commitment for a long time because I could only envision failure and humiliation. I refused to think about any positive outcomes from such a challenge. The thinking that finally changed my mind was that IF I started training early I MIGHT pull it off. The suggested training period is three months. So, starting in February of 2017 I committed to six months of increased physical training, a willingness to learn new things, and positive thoughts. I signed up with a YWCA trainer (who also did triathlons) for strength-training. She put me in touch with a swimming instructor so I could hone my underused swimming abilities. Then I put my nose to the grindstone and spent a lot of time at the Y. There were workshops to learn techniques and lots of talk about proper diet and endless encouragement from a great organization that supports women. A major outcome that I did not anticipate was the enjoyment of the mental challenge and the sense of physical well-being that resulted from training. And in my many moments of doubt there was so much encouragement from friends, family (three of them are runners), strangers at the Y, and Holy Trinity members.

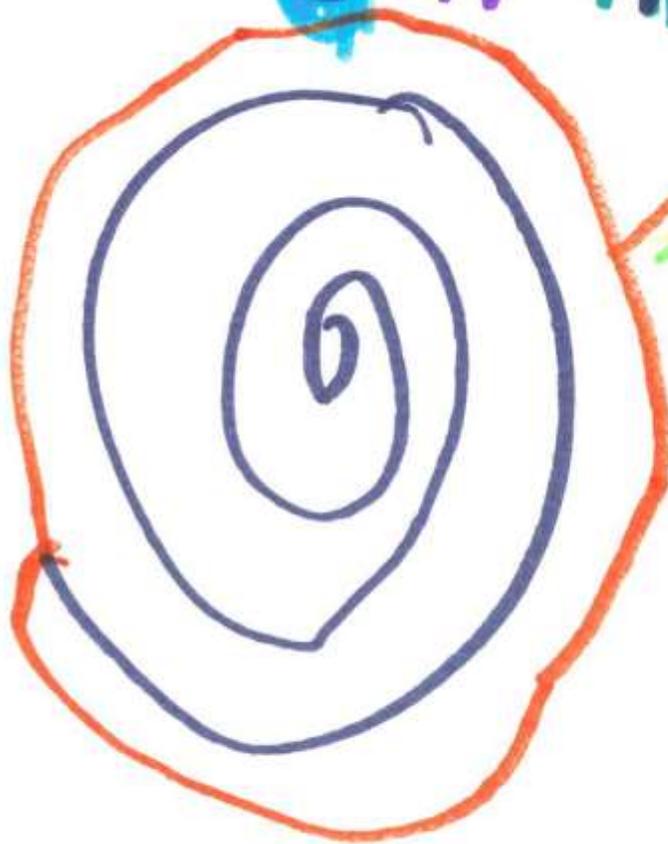
The fear of failure did not leave me until a week before the event when I realized that this fear stemmed from thinking this event was all about me!! I had lost sight of the greater good that was happening to hundreds of women. And we were all in it together to love and support and encourage each other. And my daughter stuck by me all the way and got me to the finish line.

~Arlene Helvig



November 4

We made slime  
we made Bag for  
homeless  
PEOPLE I made  
new friends



~Mabel Hendrickson

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## November 5

### DADDY, I FOUND A LEAF!

It's one of those gorgeous, late-summer Sunday afternoons.

Inspired by the music and words of worship, I now sit next to my favorite oak in my favorite park—

writing

feeling the breeze

reading words that inspire.

I look up to see a young dad with two little kids.

Girl and boy each picks up a stick, waves it around,

laughing and shouting the words that you shout when you're waving a stick.

Dad's eyes scour the landscape. He spies it—a big pile of sticks by a fire pit.

He announces the find to children who run to see this abundance.

For a long time, Dad watches the kids' imaginations go wild as they use the sticks for all kinds of adventures. Dad enters in with laughter and shouts of his own.

Then it's quiet.

Until the boy yells out, "Daddy, I found a leaf!" Dad joins in the excitement.

My *educated* adult mind jumps to, "Duh, of course you found a leaf, kid. You *are* in a forest."

But my *wise* adult mind knows to smile and enjoy the thrill of finding that one special leaf. Who knows why the boy notices that particular leaf? Who *cares* why this one gives him a thrill?

Had my mind been un-clogged of adult logical thinking, I too might have seen "a leaf" that made me yell out my joy.

Hundreds of times I've poured water through coffee grounds in my Melitta filter. I think only of the coffee to come or the treat to eat with it. But today I am stopped by the bubbles hovering over the grounds. Those bubbles, large and small, reflect the colors they find in my kitchen. They sparkle with red, blue, purple, green, yellow, orange—a gorgeous rainbow.

The tiny colored Christmas lights that dangle from the ceiling of the Blue Moon Coffee Cafe give the same thrill. I sit there at times, intent on my reading or writing, head bowed. Then I look up to see that cheerful sparkling display. My eyes stay on that beauty for long minutes, just as I've seen babies' eyes do. The light show is especially wonderful when I remove my glasses and see all the colors blurred together through my cataract-covered lenses.

OK.....so I often want to gag when I read stuff like this! It's all so cutesy and cliché. Yes, God is an all of nature, and yes, God is in the ordinary, and yes, God surprises us. But, the way people write about it sometimes makes me want to jump back into my intellect and analyze a tough Bible verse or a complex theological point. Yet, how often does *that* inspire me or calm me like a stick or a leaf or a bubble rainbow inspires and calms? When I have a leaf experience it's time to pay attention, to in-spire the calm. I don't have to gag on it. I can shout with the little boy, "Daddy, I found a leaf!"

~Roberta Shaw



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## November 6

### MEANING IN MY LIFE

There are certainly countless things that have had MEANING in my life over my 91 years and most are still important to me. However, family and friends are top on that list. Currently I would give top billing to FRIENDS, especially after a recent event.

Background: I spend my summers at our family cabin in northwestern Minnesota off the north shore of Ottertail Lake. There is a cluster of cabins there built over 100 years ago by pastors wanting a retreat place, incorporated as “Camp Nidaros.” It is like a very small town with most of the cabins still in the original families and thus everyone knows their neighbors as good friends. (I am a “newcomer” since I have been a resident for only 68 years since my marriage to Paul who grew up there.). 68 years of friendships make some of my neighbors closer than family and explains why FRIENDS have such meaning in my life.

Almost a week ago I was sitting in a hair stylist’s chair, having just enjoyed a shampoo and looking forward to the cut which would follow. Suddenly the room started to spin, and I became nauseated! I closed my eyes and tried to relax. That didn’t help as the spinning sensation continued each time, I opened my eyes.

Eventually I was able to hobble out to my car, using my fairly recent hip replacement as an excuse for needing to hold on to doorways and my car for stability. As I sat in my car I reviewed the symptoms of a stroke, but none seemed present. I started to panic.... how was I going to drive the 4 miles back to my cabin? I had no relatives in the area to call for help. I took deep breaths and prayed and eventually drove home at about 15 mph as the trees and road spun before me. I stopped on the shoulder so cars coming up behind me could pass. (This is a country road, so there wasn’t much traffic.)

Of course, it was foolish, but I did make it back to the parking area near my cabin.

I knew I could never reach my cabin unless I crawled on hands and knees, and I live alone so there was no one there to help....so what to do? Call 911 and have an ambulance come roaring into our little cabin area? NO.... I called my good FRIEND and neighbor, Helen Joy. She ignored her dinner and immediately drove over to pick me up. She tells me we drove over the speed limit hoping to attract the sheriff, but no one appeared, and she got me to the ER (20+ miles away) in record time. Then she sat with me for over two hours, helping to tell my “story” and relaying the happenings to my nurse daughter living in Illinois.

Hours later after numerous tests, my problem was diagnosed as VERTIGO!

Apparently the shampooing and resulting water in my ears had produced some sort of inner ear disturbance which I now know is frequently the cause of Vertigo.

Now I say a special “thank you” prayer daily for Helen Joy and how she has given blessings and new meaning to the word FRIENDSHIP.

~Lois Eid



November 7

We made bags<sup>of food</sup> for our  
neighbors who are experien  
cing homelessness



it made my feel good.

~Mari Hendrickson

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## November 8

As I gaze at the flame burning in front of me, I can hardly comprehend that its life began more than 40 months ago. And even though I know it to be true, it is still difficult to grasp that it began out of an uprising following the murder of the beloved human named George Floyd. This flame, so beautiful, so seemingly innocuous, began from the outcry of an incensed people - and it consumed the Migizi building. This flame has held its breath since Migizi asked their neighbor Holy Trinity to keep the flame alive. A single “yes” was our covenant with the Migizi community. From their hands to ours, neighbor to neighbor.

In the days of the uprising, those of us in the neighborhood were on edge, restless with the anxiety of what and where harm and fire would rear up next. We cleared our property of anything that could be used as a weapon, left lights on round the clock, slept off and on, guarded neighborhood businesses so that they would not be destroyed, connected with neighbors to be sure they were safe – even as the neighborhood around us was burned and looted. We showed up the next days to clean the detritus from the streets as a semblance of order, as an act of worship. The last thing I ever imagined during that time was intentionally burning anything in our home. But that was our charge. And so, out of Pastor Ingrid’s compassion and relationship, from the uprising that torched and burned down Migizi, the ask for help went out to the Holy Trinity community.

It was uncharted territory to figure out how to keep the flame safe in our homes. And so, we placed candles in fireplaces. We lit a new candle every 2-3 hours, much as tending a newborn. Then the discovery of a 7-day candle was a game changer, providing safety and security for burning 7 days. We took a collective sigh of relief. We began to feel release from the need for constant watch. We also kept the flame in two homes at the same time, to ensure that if by chance the flame went out in one home, it would still be alive in the other. After a while, the flame became part of our home – almost welcome like a neighbor visiting.

The flame was at the center of our day-to-day lives. I invited its flickering light with my morning coffee and devotions. It was on our table as we gathered for meals. I introduced the flame and its story to our family and neighbors as they came in and out of our home. And I read by its amber glow at night before falling asleep.

This flame has burned more than 1,200 days in more than a dozen homes. The flame has transferred from one candle to another more than 400 times, with great care not to extinguish it. And who would ever have guessed that, as we transitioned the flame from home to home, we would have to figure out how to drive with a flame as a passenger in our car? I, for one, always prayed that I would not be held up in traffic or stopped by police and have to explain the flame in my cup holder.

During these days and months, the story of Migizi grew also in our minds and hearts. We continued to learn more about the organization’s work to empower Indigenous youth. We heard about the numerous challenges; the shock and deep grief of losing their community center, the hardship of finding another location, rebuilding in a system structured by and for others, lack of financial resources, rebuilding staff, and staying connected with the youth over so much time. Migizi has overcome and overcome and overcome.

And now the day for which we have eagerly awaited is planned. Mike Miller heard from Kelly Drummer that she agrees the flame should be returned to Migizi at its Grand Opening on October 5th!

It has been a longer journey than any of us ever anticipated. We have a new understanding of what happens when we respond with “yes.” Yes, is not meant to be quick and easy. Yes, brings us into relationships with our neighbors. Yes, creates space for learning what it means to be a beloved community. Yes, shows up and builds anew so that neighbors are equipped to represent and have a voice in the shaping of community. Yes, is ever a story of new life arising out of death.

~Lynda Nordholm



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## November 9

I welcome each new day with this simple prayer:

Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me: melt me, mold me, fill me, use me. Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me.

I ask the Spirit who is fire to MELT, to burn away, all that is cold, and hard and dead in me: Imprisoning fears, hard-edged prejudices, cold apathy, tired excuses and deadly resentments.

I ask the Spirit to MOLD ME. shape me, like a potter's clay, into a new vessel, formed in the image of Jesus, whose heart was moved to compassion by every human need and hurt and whose life's passion was "not to be served but to serve, and to give his all as a ransom for many".

I ask God's Spirit to FILL me, to pour into me the gifts promised in Galatians, chapter 5: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control." I pray that these blessed and amazing qualities shape my attitude and interactions throughout the coming day..

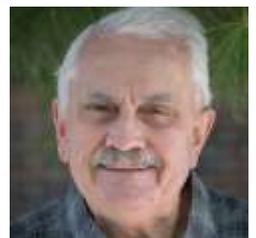
AND I ask the Spirit to USE me. I ask to live out the promise of Ephesians , chapter 2: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for a life of good works, which God has prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (to be our way of life)." What a joy to know that opportunities to bring help and hope and healing have been woven for me into each new day.

And I pray, "fall fresh on me." The gift of the Spirit is no "once and done" Pentecost event. It is an ever renewed and renewing gift, FRESH each day, each moment of life.

And so I conclude my prayer with the prophet Jeremiah's words to a people who were defeated, dismembered and despairing: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, God's mercies NEVER come to an end ; they are new (FRESH) every morning. Great is Your faithfulness."

May the Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on YOU!!!

~Dennis O'Brien



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## November 10

### MUSINGS ON A DUSTY SHELL

In one of my cupboards, I have a dusty, old clam shell that has an inscription on the pearly side of the shell. The words are carefully handwritten in that beautiful cursive that many people raised at the end of the 19th century were taught in school. It was written by fountain pen, the ink still clear and legible. It reads:

*"From a fishing trip on the Minnesota, in April 1905 W. Wiencke"*

William Wiencke was my grandfather, my mother's father. He would have been 18 years old in 1905. As a child, I thought of him as very serious, even stern. He was tall and thin with ram-rod posture. When I would visit my grandparents with my mother, he would usually be sitting, erect, in a straight back chair, silently listening to the two women chatting away, his bushy eyebrows quizzically moving up and down in the way that some dogs silently observe people. When he did say a few words, it was with a deep and gravelly voice. (And sometimes his dentures would slip, also unnerving to a child).

Later, in my early adult life, I confessed to my mother that as a child I found Grandpa to seem very stern and somewhat intimidating. Mom was shocked to hear this. She said he was the gentlest, kindest father a girl could have had. He was her protector from her three older brothers and her defender from a very stern mother.

When I come across the dusty shell, my thoughts often turn to how little we know about those who came before us. I knew young William as an old man, an inscrutable grandfather. My mother knew him as a loving father, in his family-rearing days. My grandmother would have known him in the days of his young manhood. They were married in 1909, when he was 22. (Could that be why he marked the fishing trip on a freshly shining clam shell? Was there a certain young woman in the boat that day? Did that shell really belong to my grandmother, a gift from a certain young man at the end of a romantic afternoon? I'll never know.) These are some of the thoughts that cross my mind when I come upon this dusty keepsake. I enjoy thinking about the people who came before me, who I thought I knew and whom I truly loved. But I only knew them for a brief time in their lives. I think too about my life with my children and my grandchildren and our short time together, in the greater scheme of things. All sweet and loving thoughts.

~Annie Hines



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## November 11

### RE-MEMBER: TO PUT BACK THAT WHICH HAS BEEN BROKEN, TO REMEMBER.

Nancy shot out of her chair and rushed up to the bingo caller in our memory care unit and said, “I think I’ve missed my family and I need to go find them.” She was apologetic for having interrupted the proceedings, but clearly distraught that she had somehow been separated from those she loved. She became even more physically upset and began to cry. I approached and offered to walk with her back to her apartment to find some comfort in more familiar and quiet surroundings. Once there, she sat in the chair and I on the stool in front of her. I held my hands out to her and she took them in hers. “I’m so scared. I don’t know what’s happening to me.” I reminded her that I met her son from North Carolina a few weeks ago when she moved in, and also her grandson. Her eyes locked with mine and she smiled. She said the names of her three grown children out loud and smiled with pride. She had children who were not present now, but recently had been to visit. She remembered their names. She had family who loved her, and she had someone sitting across from her in this moment who reminded her that she was safe, and she was loved by both her family and those surrounding her now. Nancy loves to walk and to be outside. I reminded her of this and suggested that we take a short stroll around the campus and her eyes sparkled again as she said, “I would really like that.”

I don’t need to be in Nancy’s same situation to recognize that I have moments in my life when I too, have been uncertain of my place in life. I may have wandered off the path or lost track of my people. I’m not always capable of returning on my own to my true self. Sometimes I may need to be reminded that I am not alone; that there are people who care about me, that I am known and loved. I realized in talking with Nancy that my message for her was also a message for me. I do not follow Jesus alone. There are others who walk alongside me, following in His footsteps. As members of the Body of Christ, we are taught to help others “re-member” that we belong to each other, that we are loved by the Creator, and that none of us travels on our own.

~Ann Schrooten





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## November 13

This fall is reminder of a sad period in my life. In August, I was riding back to Minneapolis with Alan Libra after the Boundary Waters trip, and we stopped at the Holiday gas station before leaving to meet the group at Gordy's High Top in Cloquet. I was reminded of the phone call from my brother in 2013 while at the same Holiday gas station at the beginning of an excursion into the Boundary Waters. My brother called to tell me our mother was diagnosed with cancer on her brain. She was getting terrible headaches which prompted the initial doctor visit. It was the beginning of the end. You know it, but you deny it at first.

My siblings are scattered around the country so it was fortunate that earlier in May we had a gathering with most of the family at my parent's house. I intended to bring Stephan (my husband) to meet my parents for the first time with my Easter visit in April, but my mother said she was not ready for that. Who could have known that was the last opportunity for that visit to occur? The cancer for my mother made her gradually lose her memory. Her memory would return briefly periodically. The last time with my mother was during Thanksgiving and I made a turkey dinner. She died January 17, 2014.

~Dennis Hauck



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## November 14

Parenting is a bittersweet mixture of sorrow, unknown, and deep, deep joy. As I reflect upon the gorgeous-yet-terrifying experience of raising my almost sixteen-year-old, I am filled with both wonder and wistfulness for when she had plump cheeks and needed snuggles several times a day. And so, an offering: a memory poem I wrote when she was in second grade and I was experiencing one of those nostalgic waves of equal parts loss and love. Whether a parent or not, I hope this captures one of those life moments highlighting the complicated emotions of letting go.

### *The Second Grade*

Watching her bouncy ponytail skip  
up the concrete stairs, chestnut  
against the three-story red brick  
building. I wonder how she grew  
so quickly. How she became the  
bouncy ponytail, embarrassed  
to have her mother clasp her hand  
and walk her up the stairs, into  
the cheerful crayon art hallways,  
through the brown door of Room 206.

As I watch the ponytail disappear I  
wonder if I've lost the little girl already or  
if she'll come skipping back to me,  
arms outstretched to fold her tiny  
bird body into mine resting her  
cheek against my belly where she  
once swam, where we were two  
in one, when she was mine alone.

~Marika Belusa



November 15



The work  
of each  
bilder will  
be level  
with fire

draw the cert  
wide

Peter Schroeder

~Peter Schroeder

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## November 16

### WHAT HOLY TRINITY MEANS TO ME

I've been going to Holy Trinity when I was a young boy. I loved to dress up for church. I still do. You need to look good for church. Being an usher on Sunday's and greeting members, it brings me joy. I particularly like when the pastors greet me after the service. I love everything about church.

I also volunteer once a week at the church, helping Nolan clean the Community Room and Sanctuary. I like having purpose and knowing I'm preparing the church for Sunday worship gives me purpose. We have to keep this place looking good. Nolan and I make a good team. We work together and get the job done right. We're like brothers. We like to have a little fun too and give each other a hard time. I enjoy working with the staff at Holy Trinity, we're all a team, a family. Together we keep the church clean and looking good for Sunday and that's important work. It makes me smile when someone comments on how good the church looks.

I'm very proud of the work I do at the church and it means a lot to me to be part of such a wonderful team and congregation.

~Chris Amundson



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## November 17

### STAND BACK & STAND BY

My people my people  
Stand back and stand by  
Stand back from your hatred  
Stand right by my side  
Stand back from your fear  
Stand back from your greed  
Stand by for all people  
    All people of need

My people my people  
Your power is DEATH  
Your power and privilege take away BREATH  
IT'S TIME TO STAND BACK  
IT'S TIME TO STAND BY  
STAND BY the LOVED ONES  
    standing up for their lives

*– Written by Nolan Gusdal, Holy Trinity Custodian,  
following the September 29, 2020, presidential debate, revised September, 2023*

~Nolan Gusdal



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## November 18

**“YOU ARE HERE FOR A REASON. THE CREATOR HAS GIVEN YOU A TASK.”**

That’s a quote from Dan Bald Eagle in Kent Nerburn’s book *Neither Wolf Nor Dog*. The quote is propped against the base of my desk lamp as a reminder to not quit.

Finding a task or a source of meaning can be hard for older people. But I have been blessed with such a task.

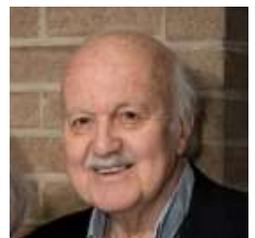
It began with an adult forum on the Doctrine of Discovery by Ron Duty, around the time we joined Holy Trinity. That session reignited a passion for Indigenous justice that went back 50 years and had been patiently looking for an outlet. But it isn’t just me. Without the Holy Trinity community and a group of people who are also passionate, this work wouldn’t be possible.

One day at breakfast Marilyn asked me why I need do this work? My answer was, “Because I won’t be liberated until they are liberated.” In this case, “they” is anyone who doesn’t have the benefits of being white that I have enjoyed all my life. Anyone who gets up each day and is valued as “less than” by others because of their race, color, sex, or ethnicity. Or has the knot of historical trauma in their gut that defies healing. And why Indigenous justice? Because it’s what I know best and in which I have a long history of involvement. As Deacon/Pastor David said in a sermon, “We can’t do it all, but we can do something.” So this is my “something.” Finally, our old friend Kathryn Beaulieu, Bear Clan, would never forgive me if I dropped the ball. Our legislation, the Indian Recovery Act, is carrying the dream of her uncle, Roger Jourdain, long-term Tribal Chairman of Red Lake. His dream was for “a Marshall Plan for Indian country” and this is it.

The research says that having a sense of meaning of purpose is a concern for older people that comes in ahead of others like health or finances. At some point we discover, sometimes with a shock, that our experience and abilities are no longer seen or valued as they once were. The French philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin said, “Growing old is like being increasingly penalized for a crime you haven’t committed.”

In Ojibwe culture an elder is *gichi ay'aa*, or “great being.” Children don’t have to be reminded to respect their elders as it’s already built into the language. My personal solution is to ignore obvious ageism and try to function as I always have. It generally works and sometimes surprises people. A granddaughter once asked me how old would I think I am if I didn’t know how old I really am. My answer was forty-three. Maybe it’s living in denial, but it works for me. And there’s so much to get done while there is still time.

~Mike Miller



November 19



Flower or weed, weed or wish...

the dandelion, seen through a child's eyes begins as a beautiful flower  
and ends as a wondering wish.

The first bouquet picked and given to show their love...  
as the dandelion grows, with a soft blow from their breath, it becomes a wish...  
seeds floating, planting imagination and hope for the next to enjoy.  
May you find beauty and meaning in the world around you every day.

~Kathy Ekwall

