



PEACE
IN GOD'S WORLD

2007–2008

**A devotional guide for
use by educators in
Lutheran settings**

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Devotion Guide project coordinator and editor,
Donna R. Braband, ELCA Director for Schools

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*The 2007-2008 Devotion Guide is
dedicated in loving memory of Carol Sutterfield*

Service and Courage Through Christ

The Learning Center at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Irving, Texas, was blessed by the caring and creative leadership of Carol Sutterfield, director. Carol established a sound

Christian curriculum and strove to improve teacher quality. Above all, Carol's calling was to nurture the children at our center. "Miss Carol" was loved by children and parents alike. Carol retired from her vocation as teacher and director in November of 2006.



In the summer of 2005 Carol began feeling exhausted and eventually the unfortunate diagnosis was made that she suffered from a very rare and untreatable cancer attributed to asbestos exposure during her youth.

Although Carol was given a prognosis of six months, she began to follow a diet aimed at retarding the cancer's growth and also became active in a healing-prayer group. Our congregation and many other friends and family prayed for Carol regularly. Her life was extended for over two years!

On Sunday May 27, Carol entered the heavenly kingdom. She was a woman of unusual strength and a witness to the hope and courage that Christ brings his followers. It is too small a thing to say that Carol will be missed!

Pastor Norma Cooper

Thought for the Week: Luke 12:13-21

Jesus was an extraordinary teacher, a great teacher. He perplexed, challenged, prodded, and questioned. He required that a student seek her own answers. When Jesus told parables he left the answer open-ended, wishing the student to discover the answer for herself. Many times the answer Jesus elicited from the student challenged the assumptions of the original statement or question posed by the student and moved the student to a new realization.

Before telling the Parable of the Rich Fool, “someone” in the crowd called out to Jesus, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” The assumption underlying the statement was that having an inheritance was highly valued and it was just to divide the inheritance among brothers. Jesus, however, questioned whether receiving an inheritance was at all morally preferred and that it might even be considered “greedy” to seek “an abundance of possessions” even if you were entitled to it.

One of the first things a child learns is the word “mine.” With such a word the child separates herself and her things from others. “Give me what is mine and what I deserve!” How many times do teachers have to settle disputes about an argument over “mine”?

Jesus went on to tell the Parable of the Rich Fool who, in receiving an abundance of crops, builds new barns to store the grain, becoming obsessed with his success, and planning a well-deserved retirement: “Take life easy, eat, drink and be merry.” But God, seeing the Rich Man, calls him a “fool” and says that he shall die, not being able to enjoy what he greedily hoarded for himself.

Jesus ended by saying that “so it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.” The unexpected answer for that “someone” was not to bring about the justice of dividing the entitled inheritance but saying to that “someone” that nothing belongs to him. All you have belongs to God. To be rich toward God is to never have to say “mine.”

Jesus did not claim “mine” for himself but gave his life up for “his friends,” us, so that we can give up our

August 5, 2007
Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
(Cont.)

burdensome claim to “mine.” We can, as Luther said, love others freely and unconditionally. Giving away everything we have to God and others is to be God-rich.

Question for the Week:

How do we change a child from saying “mine” to “Thine”?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear Jesus, help me to give away everything I have to you and others. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Hollis Thoms, educator and composer, who served for many years as a Lutheran teacher, school administrator and regional director.

Thought for the Week: Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Faith—it is the essence of our beliefs, the core of our identity as Christians, indeed “the conviction of things not seen.” Who practices “the conviction of things not seen” better than the little children we teach and nurture? The faith of a child is what enables us to be master storytellers in the classroom, as we weave the child, their toys, pets, and families into the stories we tell. They can see themselves in the picture; indeed, they often believe they were, or still are, really there.

The story of Abraham and Sarah is told no less than a dozen times in the Bible, I would suspect because it is such a perfect example of faith. They are old, past childbearing (and rearing!) years, and yet are standing on the promise of God that they will bear children who will bear children who will bear yet more children. Who of us today would buy that story? Even with the options of in vitro fertilization, surrogacy, adoption, and other choices, most of us know that there is a point at which having and/or raising children is just not in the cards. And for many of us, that's just the way we want it. I personally wouldn't even want to think about raising a child at this point in my life (past 50 is as much information as you're getting here). And yet, here is God telling you that not only will you have a son, but that your descendants will be as numerous as the stars. AND, you're going to be happy about it! Believe that story? That's faith!

Question for the Week:

How can we instill faith like that of Abraham and Sarah in the children we teach and nurture?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear Lord, I ask for guidance in my faith walk so that I may share my faith in you and your promises with the children I teach and guide. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Gayle M. Denny, executive director, Evangelical Lutheran Education Association, Goodyear, Arizona.

August 19, 2007
Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Hebrews 11:29-12:2

The greatest leap of faith I ever took was to resign my position as a Christian education director and agree to go to Berlin, Germany, for two years with the Mission Board. When I arrived in Berlin I could barely speak the language. I knew no one. Assigned to a German church to work with youth and college-age students, I spent the first months trying to communicate. One night I ordered pizza with pepperoni only to discover that the word pepperoni meant Jalapeno peppers. Imagine my surprise! Why did I go to Germany, I thought frequently? It was my faith.

In Hebrews the theme of faith is echoed over and over again. By faith this person did this. By faith this happened. All the people listed in this text did some action because of faith. Faith is taking an action because we believe it's what God wants us to do. When we act in faith God honors our action. For me the two years in Germany were where God spoke to me through a new found friend and told me to return and become ordained. Faith leads us into action for God.

Now I am working with sixty to seventy preschoolers. Each week we have chapel where we teach by faith some of the basic truths of Christianity. Had I not gone to Germany many years ago, I wonder if I'd be here today.

Questions for the Week:

What leap of faith is God asking of you this week?

How can children you are working with open your heart to hear what God wants you to be and do?

What can you learn from these children that God wants you to learn?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Ask God to show you how the children you work with are a place where God can speak to your heart.

This devotion was contributed by the Rev. Marcia M. Thompson, pastor, Zion Lutheran Church and Preschool, Flourtown, Pennsylvania.

Thought for the week: Isaiah 58:9b-14

In this chapter of Isaiah we are clearly told how to do true worship: "...if you remove the yoke (of oppression) from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted then your light shall rise in the darkness..."

The word of the Lord is indeed clear. I think, however, that we may all find it easier to vocally and by our vote speak against oppression. By our life style and joining mission projects such as Feed My Hungry Children we can act against hunger. I think it may be far more difficult to not point the finger, or to refrain from speaking evil of one another.

Thus, our unceasing prayer must not only be for justice for all, but also for God's unending grace. If, indeed, "our light shall rise in the darkness and our gloom be like the noonday," we must pray for God's guidance that we "shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail."

As teachers working with young children, we are called upon to treat our colleagues and the parents of our children with the greatest respect. Truthfully, all that we ask of the children, "speak kindly, touch softly, share and encourage one another," is what we must ask of ourselves! How shall we do this? We shall call on the Lord, "and the LORD will answer; [we] shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am."

Question for the week:

How can we help one another to be "like a watered garden" and how is this true worship?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for granting us the grace to grow in kindness to one another and to all those whom we encounter.

This devotion was contributed by Marilyn Stalheim, director, Westwood Early Childhood Center, St. Louis Park, Minnesota.

September 2, 2007
Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Hebrews 13:15

"...let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God."

I recently participated in a study of "worship." The group discussed ways we worship, (corporately, privately, through prayer, music, etc.) and I suddenly realized worship—praising God—could fill every moment of our lives, if only we could stay focused on God.

But how do we achieve that continuous focus? Practice? Solitude? Sticky-note reminders on the fridge? Is it something that will grow and thrive in us, if we begin to nurture it?

And what happens if we approach all situations in the context of worshiping God? Will an underlying current of praise change our perspectives? Will our interactions with others be more compassionate, more meaningful?

Last night at bedtime, my eight-year-old daughter said if she was ever really, really sick, and the doctors had to do a lot to try to save her life, she might choose dying instead. Startled, I struggled to respond, and told her that sometimes terminally ill people do choose to stop treatments and "let go" of this life. She quickly corrected me. "But, Mom, it's not letting go. It's latching on, you know, to the kingdom."

Tears pooling in my eyes, I told her I knew someone who might be making that decision in the weeks to come. A friend who has survived other cancers, is going through some extremely painful and difficult procedures in yet another battle against the disease. I explained that the woman and her family have a strong faith, but the woman is getting tired and I don't know how much longer she will live.

My daughter thought for a moment, and then replied, "Maybe she hasn't finished a very long prayer yet."

And her words opened my mind to the realization that this particular woman's life may very well be one of continuous prayer, sacrificing any complaints or self pity she might express—but hasn't—for the praise of her Creator that is so much a part of her conversation. And when her prayer is finished, she'll latch on to the

September 2, 2007
Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
(Cont.)

kingdom where continuous praise comes naturally. May it be so for each of us.

Question for the Week:

How can I grow into a life of continuous praise?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Lord, draw us to you in continuous songs and prayers of praise. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Julie M. Young of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Polson, Montana. Julie serves on the Education Ministry Team overseeing the GSLC Little Friends Preschool.

September 9, 2007
Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Philemon 1-6

“When I remember you in my prayers....” These words begin the letter from Paul and Timothy to Philemon, their dear friend and co-worker, to Apphia their sister, to Archippus a fellow soldier, and to the church in their house. “I always thank my God because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus.” What wonderful, encouraging and endearing words!

“Go and preach the Gospel...if necessary use words!” This quote by St. Francis of Assisi, speaks not only to the preacher—it also relates to the teacher. Yes, in our teaching, we use many words but just as important as the words is what we teach by who we are. Think back to the many educators and mentors who have touched your life over the years. What personal qualities and values come to mind when you think of them: joy, passion, love, encouragement, excitement, honesty, fairness? These qualities and values are not taught by words alone—they are taught by who the teacher is, and how they live as a person of faith!

This week reflect on the many educators and mentors who have influenced, encouraged, and loved you over the years. Reflect also on the cadre of educators and mentors whom you now consider colleagues. Name them and remember them in your prayers as Paul and Timothy did: “...I always thank my God because I hear of your love for all the saints [students] and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. Amen.”

Questions for the Week:

Do you teach with a love of learning that shows in your lessons and lectures? Do you teach and guide your students with encouragement and joy? Do you lift your colleagues and mentors in prayer daily?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for those who have taught and mentored you over the years. Thank God for the opportunity to share yourself with those students entrusted to you.

This devotion was contributed by the Rev. Dr. Jean A. Zietlow, senior pastor and supervisor of the Early Learning Center, First Lutheran, Tulsa, Oklahoma. She served on the task force for the development of the ELCA Social Statement on Education and is the current chaplain for Lutheran Association of Christian Educators.

Thought for the Week: Luke 15:1-10

Every year, there's at least one: the child who resists every strategy and turns away from our efforts to bring him into the fold. We want to educate, socialize, and love him along with the rest of our preschoolers, but he wants to go his own way.

One afternoon a teacher came into my office with this invitation: "Can you come here a moment? I want to show you a miracle!" We went into the darkened napping room, where she pointed out, with an amazed smile, a sleeping little boy, curled up contentedly on his cot. It may not seem like a miracle, but given that this little boy not only refused to nap but tried his best to annoy and keep all the other children awake, it was a miracle to us! Surely he deserves a sticker when he wakes up! But what about the fifteen others who took a nap every day? Shouldn't they get a sticker too?

In this passage from Luke, Jesus says, "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." There in the napping room it was played out: yes, our little boy deserves a sticker, while the other nappers do not need one.

Sometimes in preschool we worry about being fair to everyone, when, really, all that is needed is to give each child what they truly need. So we rejoiced with our little boy and he got a sticker. And the others? With the wisdom of children they knew he needed it and they didn't.

Questions for the Week:

For teachers: Do you try so hard to be fair to everyone in your class that it prevents you from giving individual children what they need? For instance, when one child needs an incentive for good behavior do you think you need to have an incentive chart for everyone? For students: How do you feel when someone else is rewarded for doing something you do all the time?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray that those who are spiritually lost may be found through God's grace. Also pray that those who stay with the flock may be welcoming and rejoice when lost sheep return to the fold.

This devotion was contributed by Barbara Krumm, director, St. John Lutheran School, Norfolk, Virginia.

September 23, 2007
Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: 1 Timothy 2:1-2

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.”

Whenever we face a tough situation or a problem in our lives that is very difficult, the first thing we do is decide how we are going to solve this problem. But notice that St. Paul tells us “first of all” we should turn to God. Why is it that we trust in our own resources and ourselves first, and then maybe eventually get around to involving God? It seems that we never learn that God is in control and we always need God in every situation.

Once I was not sure of my directions as I was leaving an airport in California. Naturally, being a typical man, I decided I could figure out myself how to get from the airport to the main highway. Finally, after getting totally turned around and confused, I asked someone who lived in that area. When I followed his directions I quickly got on the highway I was looking for. Didn't it make sense that someone who lived in that town would know more than I would about the directions?

Our God is all-knowing and has plans for every one of us. Turning our problems over to God is not a sign of weakness or a lack of intelligence. We will never go wrong whenever we give our lives over to God and ask for guidance and direction. God will never let us down.

Question for the Week:

Is God so much a part of your life that you turn to God in prayer before you start any important decision or action, or do you turn to God only after you've tried first?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Heavenly Father, may our trust in you be so strong that our prayer life constantly guides each and every minute of every hour of every day of our lives.

This devotion was contributed by Dr. Paul Buchheimer, headmaster, Advent Lutheran School, Boca Raton, Florida.

Thought for the Week: 1 Timothy 6:6-19

Most of us became teachers because we had a strong desire to do good. We went to school, earned the appropriate credentials, spent time with mentors, all with the vision of one day seeing the sparkle in a child's eye and knowing that we shared Christ's love with them. Then the vision was put into reality. Yes, the children are drawn to our creativity, joy, and enthusiasm. But we have additional factors. Children who come from an angry world. Defensive parents. A lack of resources. Our own human limitations. And weariness. Some days we are so tired our skin aches.

My first teaching assignment was in an urban classroom in a large elementary school that sat on the intersection of four gang territories. I had 48 non-English speaking preschool children, very few supplies, and even less experience. Each weekend new graffiti graced my window so I could only see through cracks to the outside world. One day I was missing several children at circle time, but could hear them giggling in our class bathroom. Ready to softly scold them for not following my directions, I heard little Jahaira said, "Maestra, mira!" ("Teacher, look!") A beautiful rainbow was shining through a cheap plastic prism I had hung in that graffiti window. What a miracle!

Fight the good fight of faith. These words to Timothy can pierce the disillusionment of any teacher on a hard day. Each day we are called to let go of the world's riches—financial success, esteem, power, and live out our passion for greater things—*righteousness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.* Try to remember that joy and hope you had before you ever stepped into the classroom. God will give you what you need and you will be blessed with a great contentment for your work.

Question for the Week:

Share with a friend or coworker a moment of inspiration a child provided you recently. How does this remind you of your greater vocation?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Heavenly Father, help me search for minor miracles in my classroom this day. When I am weary, help me remember the calling you have given me to do your holy work and trust you to give me the wisdom and resources to handle my struggles.

This devotion was contributed by Cori Berg, director, Christ Lutheran Child Development Center, Dallas, Texas.

October 7, 2007
Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Luke 17:5-6

Faith the size of a mustard seed!

Teachers are like gardeners; we plant seeds. Often—for many reasons—we aren't around to see the results. Our children move on. We move on. Our children drop out. We are tempted to give up. Planting seeds is indeed an act of faith. Jesus planted seeds with the children he blessed and the disciples he taught.

For a three-year-old, or even an 8th grader, the “teaching moments”—mustard seeds—are a huge part of their young lives. Our challenge is to remain faithful to the call to keep planting the seeds of love, compassion, concern for others, delight in learning, fairness, godliness, and generosity in the hearts and minds of our young ones.

One day your former student may say to a friend, “The most important influence on my life was my pre-school teacher,” or “I finally understood God’s grace in my 7th grade confirmation class.” Although you may never hear those words, do not doubt the power of the Holy Spirit using your planted seeds.

May God increase our faith and bless everything we do for our young ones!

Questions for the Week:

How are you planting seeds in young lives? How do you hope they will grow into an increase of faith in that life and in your own life?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Ask God to give you and all teachers the faith and faithfulness to keep planting seeds in young lives and ask God to grow those seeds to maturity.

This devotion was contributed by Beth Orling, Port Ludlow, Washington, who served as pastor of the congregation that hosts St. John Care, Westville, New Jersey.

Thought for the week: Luke 17:11-19

“One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.”

...and he was a Samaritan.
 ...half-breed
 ...despised by the Jews

The Samaritan leper in Luke 17 obviously had physical ailments from which Jesus healed him. However the text seems to suggest a greater healing in the life of this man. What could possibly enable this despicable half-breed to return to Jesus—a Jew—and throw himself at Jesus’ feet? After all, the man’s past experiences with the Jewish people had brought him hurt and pain, and undoubtedly bitterness and resentment.

Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan induced the healing described in Isaiah 61...*binding up the broken hearted... freeing the captives...rebuilding the ancient ruins...restoring places long devastated.* To rebuild and restore places long devastated inside the heart seems to be the inner healing this Samaritan experienced. He came back to Jesus...the most unlikely leper to return...praising God in a loud voice. Jesus healed him from the inside out.

The emotional healing needed from the wounds of the past permeate our school classrooms. The scars that smolder inside can cause deep pain and unrest. It is only through the miraculous power of Jesus that anyone can receive full release from the bondage of that pain; and Jesus’ touch was not limited to his own kind. Is yours?

...and he was a Samaritan.
 ...healed
 ...restored
 ...free!

Questions for the Week:

Think about the students that you encounter daily. Are there any comparable to the Samaritan in this reading? Despised, burdened, or shamed? Different, and hurting because of it? Do you as a teacher have prejudices against any of your students?

October 14, 2007
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
(Cont.)

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for the ability to minister to kids who have emotional scars, and also for an open heart toward those that seem difficult to reach. Ask God to reveal places in your own life that need restoration.

This devotion was contributed by Joyce Kortze, full-time home schooling mom. Her husband, Donald, is the principal of Lutheran High School, Rockford, Illinois.

Thought for the Week: 2 Timothy 3:14—4:5

Boy, if there was ever a scripture that was written especially for teachers, this is it! Take some time to read the above scripture reference as a part of your devotions.

Why do you work for a Lutheran school/ECE center? Is it for the money? (I don't THINK so!) I am thinking that most of you are working here because you are able to share your faith with the children in your class. When you look at your job in this light.... what an important job you have! Timothy says to *"continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."* (New King James Version) This is your job...to help the children in your class know the Holy Scriptures, because it will always stick with them, and when they grow up, it will still be within them.

Last year, a mom came to my center to enquire about enrolling her children. She told me that she had attended First Lutheran School and remembered the faith instruction that she had received and the chapel services. She did not have a church home, but she wanted her child to be raised in the faith, as she was. Since then, they have become involved with our congregation, and attend services regularly.

The teachers that shared their faith with her day after day during her years in our school had no idea if their teaching would take root in her heart. But they followed the instructions in 2 Timothy, trusting God would work in her: *"Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching....be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."*

Question and Challenge for the Week:

Take a close look at your attitude concerning your faith curriculum. Is it just one more discipline to be covered every week, like math, reading, or science? I challenge you to see it in a fresh light.

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for the charge that God has given you to teach his little ones. Pray for the strength and commitment to make those reenergized lessons stick inside each child's heart.

This devotion was contributed by Shirley Becker, director, First Lutheran Early Education Centers, Torrance and Lomita, California.

October 28, 2007
Reformation Day

Thought for the Week: Jeremiah 31:31-34

"I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they shall be my people." Jeremiah 31:33

RED – I SEE RED!!

Red is one of the first colors that a small child learns to recognize. The color of the altar cloths and the pastor's stole are red on Reformation Sunday. Red is also a reminder of the blood that Jesus shed to save us. Red is the color of the flames above the heads of the apostles on Pentecost when the gift of the Holy Spirit was received.

Red is also seen when emotions erupt into anger. Red is seen when there is violence and injury. Red is the color of fire that burns and destroys.

Red fire purifies and the red sun warms the earth and produces growth. Red is the color of love in the shape of a big heart. Red can be seen all around us as in the beauty of a red rose.

The scripture in Jeremiah 31:33 tells us that the Lord will write the law on our hearts. The Lord will be our God and we will be the Lord's people.

In the early childhood centers and schools across our country the love of Jesus is shared with all that enter the doors. The warmth of God's love is felt by the children and parents as they are welcomed into a warm, loving, caring, and Christ-centered environment.

As the red blood runs through our bodies may we feel its warmth and be enveloped by the love of the Lord that has entered into our hearts.

Questions for the Week:

How many other places do you see red? How do they remind you of God's love for you and all people?

Prayer for the Week:

Thank the Lord for giving you love and coming into your heart. Ask God to help you share that love and the color red with someone this week.

This devotion was contributed by Marge Robison, retired early childhood education center director and ELEA Network 5 representative, Austin, Texas.

Thought for the Week: Ephesians 1:11-23

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. Ephesians 1:15-16

In 1986 our oldest daughter started kindergarten at our church's school. The above verses reflect the feelings my husband and I had and continue to have for the school. We sent our four children to a place where the teachers modeled Christ's love. Our children were nurtured, cared for, and loved. They heard their favorite Bible stories, learned others, and prayed daily with their classmates.

Now that I am a teacher in the school, I continue to give thanks. I give thanks for the parents who recognize the need and value of a Christian education. I thank God for my colleagues and principal—dedicated and caring people who reflect Christ's love and servanthood. I am grateful for our congregation, which continues to sustain the school financially, as well as with their prayers.

Several years ago the ELCA published a song for Lutheran schools. How fitting that it was titled "An Amazing Place"! Our Lutheran schools truly are. Thanks be to God!

Questions for the Week:

How has your school been a blessing for you? How are you a blessing to your school?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for allowing you the opportunity to teach in a place where you can be a witness to so many.

This devotion was contributed by Jo A. Groth, fourth grade teacher, St. Paul's Lutheran School, Waverly, Iowa, where she has taught for ten years.

November 11, 2007

Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15

Many years ago as a young newly elected member of the council of my congregation, an assistant to our bishop reminded me that, while I may have been elected by members of the congregation, I had been chosen by God to be a member of the council. This is a thought that has stuck by me for many years. These verses remind us, either as administrators, teachers, daycare workers, or whatever position we hold in our schools or childhood centers that, while we were hired or elected by the appropriate people, we were chosen by God to be where we are, doing what we are doing for God's little ones. How much easier the difficult days become when we remember that God chose us to be in this situation! We are never alone in our tasks! Somehow I am always willing to give a little extra knowing that God expects that I will be able to handle the situation and that God will help me through it.

We remember that as we represent God to our students and their families, we must choose ways to handle situations that would be pleasing to God. Just as the theme of this year's devotions, "Peace in God's World," reminds us, we know that God would have us choose peaceful solutions to all of our "situations." Sometimes that is easier than others, but it should always be our goal.

Question for the Week:

Since God has chosen me to be in my current position, how will that affect the way I do my work?

Personal Prayers for the Week:

Thank God for the privilege of serving by working with God's children. Ask for guidance as you seek solutions to issues.

This devotion was contributed by Mary Ann Pollock, Pasadena, Maryland, who serves as President of the National Board of Directors of ELEA. Mary Ann also serves as an advisor to the program committee of the ELCA Vocation and Education unit.

Thought for the Week: Luke 21:5-19

At this time of year the church's lectionary turns its attention to the daunting issue of End Times. Jesus' disciples are concerned at his prediction of the Temple's destruction. As a dyed-in-the-wool New Yorker, I remember similar anxieties in the immediate aftermath of the Twin Towers attack, feelings which echoed and intensified with every subsequent "security alert" about subways, airports, and mad bombers. Jesus doesn't sugar-coat the obvious: tough times lie ahead. But his honesty about destruction, loss, and adversity are matched by the no-hold-barred assertion that these are times for worry-free witness. "Fear not!" he says to disciples then and now. He puts it simply: trust the Spirit for the right words to say at the right moment.

My guess is that the kids you serve have their worries as well. Maybe they're not worrying about geopolitics; sometimes their anxieties arise from broken homes, shattered self-image, peer pressure, and just being an authentic believer in a divided and dividing world. Our Lutheran insistence on *word alone*, *faith alone*, *grace alone* and *Christ alone* are more than theological assertions. They proclaim the twin reality of a broken world and the triumph of God's crossbound grace.

When towers and temples fall, the Cross is always at Ground Zero—the eternal truth that God is our sure refuge in every time of trouble.

Questions for the Week:

How often do the children you serve worry about the future, either through the lens of world events or the personal crises of their lives? How can you address children's fears and anxieties from the unique perspective of the Cross and Resurrection?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for the challenge and opportunity to help children rely on Christ for protection and hope, even in unsure and uneasy times.

This devotion was contributed by Bill Hurst, Torrance, California, senior pastor, First Lutheran Church and School.

November 25, 2007
Christ the King

Thought for the Day: Jeremiah 23:1-6

In the days of Jeremiah, the kings and leaders of Israel were thought of as shepherds. The shepherds were placed over God's flock and expected to TEND THE FLOCK. But instead they destroyed, scattered, and lost the flock of God's pasture.

These leaders were punished for their evil ways, and God lifted up new spiritual leaders to TEND THE FLOCK. The flock of God's green pastures were no longer afraid, terrified, or even missing.

God continues today to lift up new shepherds to TEND THE FLOCK. God gives us you—the teachers and pastors that provide the spiritual guidance to TEND THE FLOCK.

So, does God expect that teachers and pastors will all have good looks, be funny, have lifestyles that no one can question, or have all the answers? Of course not, God simply expects us to TEND THE FLOCK. God looks to the chosen shepherds to be more concerned about their sheep and lambs than they are about themselves. God wants someone who takes the same joy and excitement from seeing the seed of faith and love for Jesus planted and growing in the heart of each student as they do from seeing the student plant a bean seed in class and watching the awe on the child's face as it grows. This is the shepherd God is looking for to TEND THE FLOCK.

Are you shaking in your boots yet? Well, know that God knows that we are not perfect spiritual leaders. God knows that many times our personal schedules get in the way of our mission to TEND THE FLOCK. We often are too weak to work with the flock because we haven't been refreshed in those green pastures God offers each of us. We often are too readily distracted by other priorities and needs.

In verses 5 and 6, God gives us our help. The prophesy is of a RIGHTEOUS SHEPHERD who forgives the sins of spiritual leaders and strengthens those leaders to TEND THE FLOCKS.

Israel's kings looked to themselves, not to the RIGHTEOUS SHEPHERD. Pastors, preschool teachers, day school teachers, administrators, congregations, and

students and their families: God made all of you spiritual leaders.

TEND THE FLOCK and look to the RIGHTEOUS SHEPHERD.

Question for the Week:

How will you TEND THE FLOCK this week in your classroom?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Lord, as I TEND THE FLOCK, let me remember that if I stray from my calling, I need to look to the RIGHTEOUS SHEPHERD for guidance and God's green pastures to be refreshed. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Donna Braband, ELCA director for schools, ELCA Vocation & Education program unit, Chicago, Illinois.

December 2, 2007
First Sunday of Advent

Thought for the Week: Psalm 122

"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD!'... Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers."

While reading this Psalm an image of children in one of our poorest urban Lutheran schools in New York came immediately to mind. The school is located in a very old building in a community where kids roam the streets in noisy gangs, where the language on the streets is less than proper and where fitting in with one's peers is of prime importance. What has been happening in this school since the new pastor and school administrator came to the neighborhood has been nothing short of miraculous. The school and church have reconnected with their community. Where the church steps and school walls used to be a canvas for graffiti young men in do-rags are now helping the pastor keep the church clean.

So "whasup" as the kids are wont to say. I do believe that what has happened is that the students and children in this community have found peace and security within the towers of the Lutheran church and school. Both the church and school have opened their arms to the community, inviting them in, feeding them, praying with them, grieving with them, and accepting them. I have always known that our schools are great places for evangelism to the world. In them we offer not only academic excellence, but we offer security and peace to those who need it through our after school programs, full day cares, feeding programs, health programs, etc. We are towers built not to keep people out, but to invite them in and keep them safe.

The psalmist paints a beautiful picture of rest, peace, and security for all of those who enter into the house of the Lord. It is a good thing for us to reflect on the ministry of our schools and churches and to ask ourselves whether we are perceived by our community members as places they can seek out or whether we are places which close people out. I pray that each school and church offers their community a place of peace and security fully knowing there can be no peace or security without the love of Jesus at its center.

**December 2, 2007
First Sunday of Advent
(Cont.)**

Questions for the Week:

Is your church and school a tower of peace and security for your community? How do you encourage those families and children who have no church home to become part of your worshiping community? Do you open your towers to be welcoming to all?

Prayer for the Week:

We pray for all of the children and families who need the peace that can be found within our churches and schools. We ask that God would enable us to be places of welcome security and peace for all who enter.

This devotion was contributed by Marlene Lund, executive director, Lutheran Schools Association serving schools of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. She is an Associate in Ministry and has been a Lutheran educator for thirty-three years serving as teacher, guidance counselor, and principal.

December 9, 2007
Second Sunday of Advent

Thought for the Week: Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

During my childhood I remember watching the mowed grass turn from green to brown in the unrelenting August sun. The back yard seemed rendered broken and lifeless by the lawnmower, and what were once long, lush stems became dry clots of so many dead blades of grass.

I think on that scene while reading verse 6 from today's passage: *May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth.* How often do we as teachers feel like that mowed grass—frayed and dry, cut and parched? The behavior of our students, the challenge of their parents, or the politics of the workplace can mow us until we feel as though there's nothing left for tomorrow.

But God doesn't leave us to blow away in the wind or be raked and dumped in the trash. Instead God sent Christ to give new life, and sends the Spirit to bolster that new life. We go from cut straw in dust to lush flora in soil. We bloom. Because we are teachers, we go from grass to gardener and give those around us the guidance, love, and encouragement the Spirit has showered on us. We spread the Spirit's rain—to the students, their parents, and our colleagues—so that they might blossom, too.

Question for the Week:

Do you know anyone who is like that dry summer grass and is in need of the Spirit's rain?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for sending the Spirit to strengthen us and for giving opportunities to pass that strength to others.

This devotion was contributed by Benjamin Chandler, Chicago, Illinois. He teaches junior kindergarten and visual arts at Grace Lutheran School in River Forest.

Thought for the Week: James 5:7a, 8b

“Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord... Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.”

What better time of the year than now to be talking about patience and ministry to young children, not to mention the coming of the Lord!

Every classroom in the nation is buzzing with excitement and anticipation as Christmas approaches. In our Lutheran schools and centers, that excitement comes from the joy we have in remembering the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Our students are far from being patient, and the patience of their teachers is often tested to its limit.

A local Lutheran publication recently had a contest in which students were asked to write about patience. An excerpt from my third-grade son’s essay follows:

Patience is when you buy something on eBay and the person lives far away from you and it takes a long time to ship it and every day you check the mailbox and it’s still not there.

While it may seem inconsequential to an adult, the suffering of a nine-year-old in waiting for a package to arrive is immense. We, too, suffer in this sinful world, waiting for the Lord to return to make all things new. James urges us to be patient and to strengthen our hearts. We still have work to do, following the example of the prophets *“who spoke in the name of the Lord.”* (James 5:10)

May God grant you patience in suffering that you may do God’s work well!

Question for the Week:

What is trying *your* patience today? How can you strengthen your heart so that you can do the Lord’s work joyfully?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for patience in suffering for all students and teachers. Thank God for the strength we are given to endure suffering and for the joy we have because of Jesus’ birth and his promised return.

This devotion was contributed by Kyle B. Chuhran, principal, Messiah Lutheran School, Fairview Park, Ohio.

December 23, 2007
Fourth Sunday of Advent

Thought for the Week: Psalm 80

Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.
(This chorus appears three times in the psalm: verses 3, 7, 19.)

On the Fourth Sunday of Advent remembering this chorus is an important part of your duty for the holiday break. You are a helper and giver and server, but now most of the Christmas pageants have ended, school is out, and the holiday has come. When you meet the students again after this break, they need a refreshed and restored teacher, not one who is worn out from the pace of the continued plans that are necessary to make the holiday wonderful. And where will this restoration take place in the face of finally having time to attend to your own family, which may come with as many tasks as your school? It comes from God. Take time this holiday season to think on and see the face of God. Be restored by looking at the One who is really in charge and in whom you can trust. God is pleased with those who work for the kingdom and God wants to give you the restoration during this holiday that will make the New Year bright.

Questions for the Week:

When can I take time to quiet myself and be restored by the presence of the Lord? As I spend time this holiday with those who most restore me, what can I take back to my students to teach them how God works to restore us?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Oh God, you shine on all of us, all the time, we only need to look to see your face and be restored. Please help me to see in this blessed Christmas time all of your glory. Restore my soul and help me to help others see you so that they may also be restored.

This devotion was contributed by Theresa Ankenman, superintendent, Lutheran School of the Miami Valley, Dayton, Ohio.

Thought for the Week: Luke 2:1-20

Okay. You've read the Christmas story to the class. You've helped the children learn the story and act it out for their families and friends. You've taught and sung and listened to the carols over and over again. The craziness of the public pageant is over. Today, on this holy day, let the story be just for you.

Clear away the scattered wrapping paper. Find a translation of the Bible that is comfortable for you. Curl up in a quiet spot. Now open to the story. Read it. Savor the simplicity. Let the angels speak to you, and let their song flood through you. With Mary, smile at the wild-eyed shepherds, and treasure all these things in your heart.

Martin Luther wrote, "This child is sent to fill thine heart, and for no other reason is he born. No word can say nor understand that so small a thing should hold so great a treasure. Thus the great and wonderful sign is repeated, and the heart is made sweet and glad and fearless, for it is at peace with all the suffering that may befall it, for what should cause it woe? Where the Child is, all will be well. The heart and the Child cannot be parted."

Tomorrow, rise up and return to work glorifying and praising God for all you have heard and seen in this story. Today, enjoy the peace and quiet.

Question for the Week:

What peace you are seeking for your life and your world?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for the gift of the Christ Child! Name the places of your life and your world that need the presence of Christ for peace.

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Donna Herzfeldt-Kamprath who is one of the pastors at Hope Lutheran Church, Klamath Falls, Oregon, home of Tiny Hopefuls Daycare, Nursery School, and Kindergarten.

December 30, 2007
First Sunday of Christmas

Thought for the Week: Psalm 148

Less than a week ago we celebrated a very special birthday. Birthdays are days that children are very familiar with and get very excited about. They know particularly about the gifts.

At this time of year, young children are beginning to hear about and understand in their own ways the gift of Jesus. Even with grown children, we still light a candle in our morning coffee cake and sing Happy Birthday to Jesus. It's a wonderful tradition. Birthdays commemorate another year lived and a new one about to begin. Birthdays are special no matter how old one is. Like birthdays, a New Year offers another chance to

live, laugh, pray, grow, heal broken relationships, forgive, love, and praise Jesus. Because of him we can have birthdays. Because of him, we experience love and grace. Because of him, we have the privilege of seeing another day and basking in the beauty around us.

As sung when I was a little girl, "Praise him, Praise him all ye little children, God is Love, God is love." May we praise God this day and everyday.

Question for the Week:

How will I praise Jesus and share joy this week? What new opportunities are there for me this New Year to share the love of Jesus?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Give praise for all that God has done in your life and continues to do. Pray that God will lead you to those that need a smile, or a kind word so that they can see God in you.

This devotion was contributed by Sherri Bishop, director, Christ Lutheran Children's Center, Bexley, Ohio.

Thought for the Week: Ephesians 3:1-12

“that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” Ephesians 3:6

Peace in God’s world by inclusion! I am amazed by children. Their behavior can be quickly exclusionary. Best friends are formed to the exclusion of others. Hurt feelings are obvious in the child who stands alone. Exclusion occurs until the love of God, through Christ, is taught. Gentiles are one with Jews in the body of Christ. Boys and girls can be friends in Christ. A child untaught in the ways of God stands under as much love as the child brought up in the church family. God is welcoming to us all. God’s love is available to us all. We reach out with God’s love to the lonely child as well as the popular child bridging the gap between the two. Joint heirs with Christ—that includes teachers as well as students.

Questions for the Week:

How do I feel when I am forgotten? How do I feel when I am included? What message about God’s love can I teach my children to help them feel the sense of belonging to a loving family?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God that we are God’s children. Ask God to help us understand what it truly means to be a brother or sister to Christ Jesus.

This devotion was contributed by Nola Smith, director and teacher, Salem Lutheran Preschool, Dalbo, Minnesota.

January 13, 2008

Baptism of Our Lord

Thought for the Week: Acts 10:34-43

Peter talks to us in these verses about God's love for all people and that all can receive the Holy Spirit. He designates the responsibility to all believers to share the love and forgiveness that God has given to us. Teachers fall into the role of both leaders and servants. As leaders, our words and actions show others the light that shines through us. As servants, we follow the path that God has set forth and are used as God's instrument to touch lives. Opportunities to reach out to children, families and into the community are available to us on a daily basis.

A child, who was ill and waiting in my office for his mother, told me that he couldn't wait any longer, as he needed to be home now. I assured him that his mother was in her car on her way to pick him up and that she would be walking through the door any minute. He replied to me "I really need her to be here now! Is she doing the best she can?" Those words echo in my head as I ask myself if I am doing the best that I can.

Success should not be measured in how many students I teach or how much book knowledge my students obtain, but in how many lives are touched and changed by the love of Jesus. As we share knowledge and provide care for God's children, we are the instrument that God has chosen to touch the lives of the children and their families. The Lord guides our path when we give our lives to God so that we can set aside our burdens and share God's grace with all.

Question for the week:

Give an example of how you gave your best to God this week.

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for all people to know the love of God and to receive the Holy Spirit. Pray that you may be used as God's instrument to touch lives this week.

This devotion was contributed by Gail E. Holdbrook, director, Amazing Creations Preschool, St. Luke Lutheran Church, Sunnyvale, California.

Thought for the Week: Psalm 40:1-12

"I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; see, I have not restrained my lips."

Psalm 40:9

The joy and satisfaction gained from telling the "glad news" to students is nearly impossible to measure. Only those of us who have taught in places where that "glad news" is forbidden can begin to understand the difficulty of restraining our lips.

Hodding Carter Jr. wrote, "There are two lasting bequests we can give our children. One is roots. The other is wings." When we give our children roots in Christian beliefs and behavior, we can be assured that with God's grace they will soar to amazing heights. A strong educational foundation partnered with deeply rooted faith allows young people to go forth and delight in God's will. The peace of God will carry them through their most difficult trials and tribulations, and they will be disciples who can go and make disciples.

Question for the Week:

How will we know whether or not we are truly teaching our children the message of God's faithfulness and salvation?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

We thank God for the opportunity to teach our children academic excellence in a Christian context. We ask for the strength, tenacity, and heart to reach and teach each child God places before us.

This devotion was contributed by Sandy Ammentorp, principal, First Lutheran School, Torrance, California.

January 27, 2008

Third Sunday after Epiphany

Thought for the Week: Matthew 4:12-23

Jesus was an excellent teacher, preacher and healer. Everyday we should reflect on Jesus's life and teachings as we prepare ourselves for the many roles we take on daily—teacher, parent, nurse, counselor, and disciplinarian, just to name a few.

One role we have as a teacher is “fisher of men.” First and foremost, we need to spread the Good News to our students and their families. As they develop an understanding of God's and Jesus' love and the hope of everlasting life through Jesus, our children will be better prepared to learn. A good education is founded in love, respect and security—what better way to receive these gifts than through knowing Jesus?

When nothing else seems to be working in the classroom, we can always take our fisher's net and cast it around the children by sharing the Good News in the form of a Bible story or song. It is amazing how sharing the love we find in Jesus can turn a bad day into a wonderful day!

Questions for the Week:

Do you ever have to remind yourself that one of your roles as a teacher is a “fisher of men?” Is Jesus a role model for your teaching? How do you prepare yourself to be a “fisher of men” in your classroom?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear God, thank you for giving us Jesus as a role model for our teaching. Help us be “fishers of men” by reaching out and sharing the Good News with our students and their families. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Madelyn Speagle, principal and camp director, Shepherd of the Woods Lutheran School and Camp Lakeshore, Jacksonville, Florida.

Thought for the Day: Matthew 17:1-9

Fear Factor

When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them saying, "Get up, and do not be afraid."

Matthew 17:6-7

Isn't it reassuring to know that Jesus knows our fears? In the Transfiguration passage cited above, Jesus calmed the disciples' fears in two ways: first with touch, and second with words.

Sometimes human touch when done in an appropriate way (and when it is welcomed by the recipient), can be one of the most powerful things we can do to calm another's fears. A hand on the shoulder or a simple hug can communicate powerfully to another person, especially a child, that we are not alone. You and I are both here now, and God is with us also.

Likewise, a word of hope given to us when all seems lost can feel like rain on a dry and barren land. How often scripture uses those simple words, "Do not be afraid," to remind us that God is still in charge. How wonderful to know as someone has said that, "The will of God will never take us where the grace of God will not provide for us."

Questions for the Week:

What is something you are fearing right now? Are you sensing Christ's presence in touch or words?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Lord Jesus, Give us courage to face each day, remembering that you are with us. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Richard Ajer, pastor, Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church, La Mesa, California.

Thought for the Week: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

...Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming...Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart...the LORD, your God...is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him..."

We enter again into the solemn season of Lenten self-examination and hear the prophet Joel's comforting description of God and the welcome possibility of blessing. He is speaking to God's people in their great affliction of locusts and drought, probably in 5 BCE

And Joel speaks to us in our present day afflictions as we are also offered the incredible gift of relationship with our loving and forgiving God. And beyond this—the possibility of more blessing!

The demanding calling of teaching is also immersion in relationship with possibility of blessing. Constant tending is required in nurturing the possibility within each student who is also God's child. It is mid-way through this year's adventure and the future is unknown but in God there is love, forgiveness, and always the possibility of more blessing for all.

Question for the Week:

What opportunities does Lent summon forth from you, the staff, and your students?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Ask God to illumine the way of whole-hearted return to God.

This devotion was contributed by Cathy Hunt, former early childhood teacher now serving on the staff at the ELCA churchwide office. She has entered spiritual director training and the candidacy process for rostered lay ministry.

Thought for the Week: Matthew 4:1-11

"You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."

Lent is the perfect time to serve the Lord through penitence and fasting. It is the time to ask forgiveness for any wrong doings to others during the year. This is the time to resolve to change past transgressions to positive expressions. Realization of serving only the Lord, God, and Holy Spirit should be a part of each day.

Children and adults get caught up in the worship of things. I must have this. I cannot live without that. When can I get that? If you are good, I will buy you that. How many times have you heard these statements? What could we possibly do that would measure up to the Lord's gift for us? What can we do to show others our love of our Lord?

The Lord did not ask God to buy him material things. The Lord did not say I must have that. God did not say, I will buy you whatever you want. The Lord does promise to stay with us and give everything for us. The Lord knew what God was asking of Him, the sacrifice of everything. The devil's temptations did not move the Lord to give up. How should we respond to our students that God so loved us that he gave his life on the cross for us? We should never give up on them.

Questions for the Week:

How many times have you as a teacher or principal promised a material reward?

Are we truly serving our God when we do something only for ourselves and not for others without an expected intrinsic reward?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Lord, you gave yourself on the cross for us. May all our days start and end with you. Let us remember others who are in need so that we can serve. Remind us that we have you as our savior and guide, just as we guide our students to do your will.

This devotion was contributed by Sandy Kalin, principal, Bethel Lutheran School, St. Louis, Missouri.

February 17, 2008

Second Sunday in Lent

Thought for the Week: John 3:1-17

“Are you a teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?” (vs. 10b)

Keeping up with your own learning is among the difficult tasks of teaching. In the midst of many daily duties, it is easy to avoid continuing our learning, forgetting that continued learning is critical to the integrity of teaching.

Not that your teaching will be bad without continued study, but your work will become increasingly uninformed by new (and to you, as a non-learner, foreign and seemingly irrelevant) insights and knowledge. At some point, your teaching will become out-dated and increasingly less effective. Your students will begin considering you a boring teacher, and their parents and your colleagues will quietly say to one another, “She just doesn’t understand.”

In our callings as Christians and teachers, we are called to continued learning. Without it you will become like Nicodemus—a teacher unprepared to understand and respond to the new situations that life presents. Avoid the Nicodemus effect and engage in lifelong learning, for the sake of those you are called to serve.

Question for the Week:

What have you learned this week? About doing your job better? Being a student better? About how God sent Jesus to save, not condemn, the world? (vs. 17)

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Ask that God forgive your inclination to be comfortable with what you already know and your blindness to see the need for new learning.

This devotion was contributed by Mark Wilhelm, associate executive director for Educational Partnerships and Institutions and director for Theology in Daily Life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Vocation and Education unit.

**Thought for the Week: Exodus 17:1-7, Psalm 95,
Romans 5:1-11, John 4:5-42**

People are fickle, aren't they? There are other ways, less flattering ways, to say that. Think of Jim Morrison, the dark, brooding poet of *The Doors* fame who said "People are strange." Or think of Charles Schulz who put these words in the mouth of one of his *Peanuts* gang: "I love humankind. It's individual people I can't stand." Yep, people are fickle.

The Israelites whined up a storm on the east side of the Sea of Reeds as they faced the west side of the wilderness. "Weren't the graves in Egypt good enough for you, Moses? The thirst is killing us!" Which prompts Moses to get self-critical and, if you put a modern therapeutic spin on an ancient text, clinically depressed. Lacking any kind of pharmacological recourse, and engaging in the only talk-therapy available to him, Moses unloads on the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is not disappointed. "Give them a show they'll never forget, water from the rock and all that, show them who is Boss." Fickle people do well with demonstrations.

The Samaritans who watched over who was coming in and through their turf were fickle too. Certainly the presence of the Galilean Jesus and his band of followers did not go unnoticed by the elders of Sychar. It took a pointed conversation with a woman at Jacob's well and her telling testimony that "He told me everything I have ever done!" to get the Sycharian people to think well enough of Jesus to ask him to stick around for a few days. Like we said, fickle people . . .

The apostle Paul knows he is writing to some fickle Romans, skeptical by nature of abandoning the Pantheonic gods Mars and Jupiter for the crucified criminal Y'shua of Nazareth. Paul doesn't have a bag of tricks to draw from with which to fend off fickleness. No thunder or lightening, no marching armies to roll over enemies, nothing except the death of Jesus on the cross and the resurrection which reveals reconciliation between humankind and God. Yet, before the cross and resurrection, even fickleness folds and yields to faith and salvation.

Is that fickleness staring out at you from the bathroom

August 6, 2007
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
(Cont.)

mirror every morning? What the world needs from you is not reinforcement of its fickleness, but the witness of your faith, the confidence you have in your baptismal covenant that our God is the God who cannot love us more, and who will not love us less.

Then again, if you know how to get water from a rock by striking it with a stick, more power to you. There's a P. T. Barnum sucker born every minute.

Question for the Week:

What will you do in your classroom this week to witness your faith and not reinforce fickleness?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Empowering Lord, plant in my heart the bravery of faith, the fearlessness of knowing you, your cross, and your resurrection. Quench my thirst, and embolden my work done in your name. Amen.

*This devotion was contributed by the Rev. Robert Braband,
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Lombard, Illinois.*

Thought for the Week: Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters.

For a brief time in spring after the winter rains, the Holy Land is covered with green grass and wild flowers. After a month or two, however, water becomes scarce and the land returns to its normal dry and rocky state. The bus to the Lutheran schools in the West Bank stops at the Wall and military checkpoint that block the road between our church and school offices in Jerusalem and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Along the route, one can still see sheep and shepherds in the hills and sometimes even in the city streets of Bethlehem.

They are not the pretty lambs nestled in the arms of a clean and groomed Jesus that I remember from the painting in my childhood church. These dirty animals plod along, confused and perhaps afraid of the traffic, led by grim shepherds searching for sparse grass and a diminishing water supply, usurped by the illegal settlements that surround them.

When I compare this early image of the Good Shepherd with life around me, I realize that the scenes I now see are closer to the reality that inspired both the psalmist and Jesus. Despite poverty, military occupation, and walls that seek to divide and isolate, the quiet determination of my Palestinian colleagues reminds me to trust in the midst of distrust and to look to the light even in the shadow of hopelessness.

As sala'amu aleikum from the students and staff of the Lutheran Schools in Palestine! Peace be with you!

Question for the Week:

Few children today are sheltered from the harsh realities of today's world. How can we give them loving support and hope for the challenges they face without minimizing their fears or sugarcoating the Gospel's call for peace and justice? How can we teach them to wage peace in the face of violence and deprivation?

March 2, 2008
Fourth Sunday in Lent
(Cont.)

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for all those living in ignorance, fear, danger and despair. Ask God for the trust and courage to be both faithful sheep and courageous shepherds.

This devotion was contributed by Sister Sylvia Countess, Deaconess Community of the ELCA, serving with the ELCA Global Mission program unit as assistant to the director of education, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

Thought for the week: John 11:1-45

I smile a bit when professionals in secular fields comment on how “nice” it must be to work in a small Lutheran school—as if those involved in Christian educational ministries are some how immune to problems, failures, losses. Truth be told, Lutheran schools and centers have their share, and sometimes more, of tragedies. It is especially catastrophic when a student suffers the loss of a loved one.

I can recall a fragile, ten-year-old, Kyle, whose mother died very suddenly the summer before he entered fifth grade. The youngest of three and only child living at home with a grieving father, Kyle was an angry, lost, young boy.

Living out God’s calling by serving children in Lutheran schools and centers is what really makes me smile. Being able to minister to a child like Kyle is a privilege. Sharing the gospel news that Jesus came to offer life—literally and mightily to Lazarus to show the ultimate glory and power of God—everlasting to all believers—offers comfort and hope to all.

Focusing on Jesus as the resurrection and the life (vs. 25) is the cornerstone of our faith. Lutheran schools and centers have the opportunity to build on that glorious foundation every day. Thanks be to God!

Questions for the Week:

What teachings of Jesus offer comfort and hope to you, personally? How do you share the “resurrection and life” with those whom you serve?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Jesus, I believe you are the Messiah. In your resurrection and life I find comfort and hope. Help strengthen my faith, that I may share your glorious good news with all that I serve.

This devotion was contributed by Christine Hauge, principal, Leif Ericson Day School at Bethany Lutheran Church, Brooklyn, New York. She has served in Lutheran schools for 29 years and was selected as the 2005 ELCA Principal of the Year.

March 16, 2008

Sunday of the Passion, Palm Sunday

Thought for the week: Isaiah 50:4-9a

“The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word...It is the Lord God who helps me;” This passage begins by saying that our gift of teaching is God-given. Later in the passage the truth of the matter is stated. God is in charge and helps us.

As we reflect on Jesus’ passion, it is easy for us to get bogged down with worries of the world and problems in our own classrooms. We teach children who struggle with school. Some parents may feel distrustful when their child’s progress is not as complete as hoped for.

The good news is that the Lord God helps us. We can call upon the Lord to equip us with the necessary tools for the task. Isaiah tells me that God has given me the “tongue of a teacher that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word,” and the “Lord God has opened my ear,” so that I am fully aware of what is going on around me. “The Lord God helps me,” to handle the crises.

Isaiah’s message is like a cup of soothing tea to be taken in a quiet moment before taking on the task at hand. The really Good News is that God is there to help us when we ask.

Questions for the Week:

On your journey through Holy Week, does this passage in Isaiah offer peace and respite for you? How does this text speak to handling the day-to-day problems of the classroom?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Give God all of the burdens that you are feeling. Pray for God’s help to open your mind to have the words, and your heart to have the understanding that is needed to get you through.

Dottie Fergus serves as a preschool teacher, Westwood Early Childhood Center, St. Louis Park, Minnesota, and director of Christian education, Calvary Lutheran Church, Edina, Minnesota.

Thought for the Week: Matthew 28:1-10

But the angel said to the women, "do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. Jesus is not here; for Jesus has risen, as he said."

What a wonderful privilege we have as teachers to be able to tell the story of Christ's resurrection to children in our school that are hearing the story for the very first time. To see tears rolling down the faces of little five-year-olds, when hearing during circle time, that Jesus died on the cross, and then hearing them ask the teacher, "Why did they do that when Jesus didn't do anything wrong?" How exciting to see the same children's relief on the little faces, when hearing next, that Jesus was alive and still is. I truly see why God wants us to enter into the kingdom as little children. They do not doubt; they believe in Jesus with their whole hearts.

Several of our little ones are going through problems that many of the teachers have never experienced; such as divorce, poverty, abuse, and neglect. They have also never been fortunate enough to hear that they have a friend named Jesus that will help with those problems. How reassuring in their lives to hear that Jesus is alive and will not ever leave them, and will forgive them when they make wrong choices.

CHRIST IS RISEN! HALLELUJAH!

Questions for the Week:

How do you think the messages you're teaching your children about God will influence your students' lives?

Why do you think it's important for parents to bring their children to a Christian school, when they themselves have never attended any church or have never experienced being a part of a church family?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for allowing you the privilege of teaching children the marvelous story of Jesus.

This devotion was contributed by Gwen Quig, preschool teacher and childcare provider for over twenty years, Prince of Peace Lutheran Preschool, Casper, Wyoming.

March 30, 2008
Second Sunday of Easter

Thought for the Week: 1 Peter 1:3-9

“By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”
1 Peter 1:3

“Look, there are leaves poking up from the soil!” “Where did they come from?” “Who planted them?” “How will they grow?” Upon their discovery of the tulips, questions like this streamed out of the children’s mouths.

The wonder of witnessing new life in nature each spring always brings us joy and hope—it is a sign that the dreary days of winter are waning. In the same way, Easter too, brings us incredible happiness! The days before Easter can be dreary and we long for the new birth given through Christ’s death and resurrection. It’s always joyous to declare, “Christ is risen!”

Each precious child of God is entrusted to us for a time. Let us not pass up the chance to share God’s greatest gift with the children each day—the risen Christ, who loves us beyond measure.

Question for the Week:

How can the gift of our new life in Christ be illustrated in our daily lives?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear God, use us to share the joy of new birth through the resurrection of your son, Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Julie Peck, director of Our Redeemer’s Lutheran Preschool, Helena, Montana.

Thought for the Week: 2 Timothy 2:20-21

"...in a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to any good work."
2 Timothy 2:20-21 (NIV)

Throughout each of our lives we have been exposed to a great many "masters," of art, music, sculpture, architecture, literature, and so forth. These "masters" have been handed down to us through both written and oral traditions so that they are often remembered more so than their work. That's one of the ironies of human memory and the ways we were taught. We may easily remember the names Da Vinci, Rembrandt, Michelangelo, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and even Bob Dylan, but how many of their works can you list without having to "Google" the name? If indeed they're so great, isn't it their work that made them so? If so, should not the art surpass the artist and be remembered first? This is an interesting question and perhaps the beginning of the definition of "greatness."

The "masters" mentioned are considered among the best of the world (at least Western Civilization) has ever known. What makes these people so popular is that they've created something that is a unique expression of what is going on inside of each artist. They have taken what is inside of them and given it a life of its own, on canvas, on murals, in clay or stone, and on paper. Each piece of work is a direct reflection of what they believe to be truly important, beautiful, or a message they felt needs to be heard by varying audiences. Each piece of work has been accomplished by one person, who is then considered to be the master of that genre.

The word "master" is a fascinating word, in English. "Master" is defined by several different definitions, each having a multitude of specific applications. The most common is, "the dominant one, controlling or skilled ruler." Another is "teacher" as opposed to "teachee,"—in other words a "fount of knowledge" who imparts knowledge and models attitudes and values for others. Art includes pieces of work that come from a uniquely skilled individual. Art is collections of work made by a

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Third Sunday of Easter
(Cont.)

“dominant” force—designs that came from a dominant master of the trade. These collections are, in fact, a piece of the master that is left for all eternity to enjoy, appreciate and benefit.

As principal of a long-standing Lutheran high school, I am no different than any other Lutheran school principal. I like to think of my school as a “piece of art”—unique, magnificent, ongoing, enabled if not created, by the MASTER himself, reflected in the thousands who strove to provide this education since 1909 and the thousands of graduates who are products of this educational system and servant-leaders in their own right in church and society. But schools, even exceptional ones like Luther North, must change and adapt to new futures. As society changes, especially its expectations and number of societal, political, and sociological influences, schools must also change to meet arising new needs. As each of us was created in the image of our Father, God, we were created in God’s likeness from the beginning. Although flawed, we still have that spark of God within us, and God’s nature dwells within our hearts through the Son, Jesus Christ. As each of us is a unique expression of the Christ within us, so also is the work we’ve inherited as Christians, “masters” in our own right, in fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:20ff). Our lives were planned by God from the very beginning, as part of the “Master Plan,” in this position at this time, with this responsibility, which believe me, I take very seriously.

Our lives are an expression of what God wants done with the kingdom, specifically that part of the kingdom we call Luther North High School. As such we are a direct reflection of the beauty and majesty that is the heart of God, and a vehicle through which The Plan for others is carried out—a very serious responsibility, a wonderful opportunity, and a magnificent challenge. The one thing we aspiring artists and masters can never forget is that we can do nothing without the strength, guidance, and bounty given each of us by God the true Master. Even through the challenges and changes we face daily, we can never lose heart and must strive to gain trust that as long as we keep on striving, the Master will carry us through. The Masterpiece called Luther North (and other Lutheran educational institutions) will be the heritage that continues to trumpet the Master’s name, especially

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to those who don't know Christ, those who seem to have lost him, as well as those who continue to grow in him. Timothy was being told this by Paul in the letter, but the Master was doing the messaging. **PRAISE TO THE MASTER!**

Question for the Week:

How will your life this week express what God wants for your school, ECE center and classroom?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for the early childhood education centers, elementary schools, and junior and senior high schools of the ELCA.

This devotion was contributed by Dr. Jeff Daley, principal, Luther North High School, Chicago, Illinois.

April 13, 2008
Fourth Sunday of Easter

Thought for the Week: 1 Peter 2:19-25

The scripture for this week talks about Jesus and his reactions to those who treated him in a negative manner. As educators, we have all faced at least one parent, parishioner, school board member, or even fellow teacher who has told us we are failing somehow in our jobs. These can be demoralizing times, even when we know our accusers are completely wrong.

Reflect for a few moments as to how we need to respond to those people who react negatively to things we do. The old adage that we can't please everybody is ultimately true. There are many possible ways to respond to people attacking us: guilt, anger, shame, denial, acceptance, and dismissal. As educators committed to spreading the love of God, it is important that we act in a way that would make Jesus proud and instead of retaliating, we should entrust ourselves to Him who judges justly.

It is an interesting idea to consider how we would act if Jesus stood in every room we visited. Behaviors would be altered, attitudes adjusted, and tongues would get tamed. So the next time someone goes after you in a negative way, remember that the God who dwells in us can also act through us.

Question for the Week:

How do you demonstrate the peace and love of God during times of trouble?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank you, Lord, for your counsel and peace during times of trouble. Thank you for weathering the storms and seeing me through.

This devotion was contributed by Jake Morrow, principal of Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Kissimmee, Florida

Thought for the Week: 1 Peter 2:2-10

The Bible uses rocks and stones in a myriad of concrete as well as analogous ways. David got rid of Goliath with just one stone. Magnificent structures were built with stone and rock chiseled and shaped to perfection. Stephen was killed with stones. Peter was proclaimed “the rock.” Then there was the rock the wise man built his house on and the famous rock that sealed the grave of Jesus. Then in 1 Peter 2:4 (New International Version), Jesus is referred to as “the living stone...rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him”. Peter even goes further to say in verse 5, “...you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house.” Some might see that as a major remodeling project. For others, it’s just keeping up with your day-to-day spiritual care and maintenance. Nevertheless, “...you are being built.” We are, in part, spiritual.

As an educator in a Lutheran school or early childhood program, one cannot help but feel a sense of fulfillment as God uses you to teach children how to care for their spiritual growth...including time in prayer, Bible reading, worship, and time living and serving in Christian community. But let us not forget our own spiritual side when it needs attention. Sometimes we can feel that working within a church, as well as within society’s general fast pace, doesn’t allow us the time or space.

Comparing us to “living stone”, Peter suggests a spiritual structure always in process. Whether the builder finds it necessary to chisel and shape or gently redefine and alter the rock and stone over time, there is a strong spiritual home that is a part of us. We are called to care for it and live in it as a routine part of our everyday life.

Questions for the Week:

How many items scheduled on your calendar or agenda this week would come under the category of “taking care of myself spiritually”? What are you doing when you feel most in touch with God?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Ask God to help you make time and space to care for yourself spiritually and that it might become or remain a priority on your “to do” list.

This devotion was contributed by Sharon Koplinski, director, Celebration Children’s Center at Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church, Naperville, Illinois.

April 27, 2008
Sixth Sunday of Easter

Thought for the Week: 1 Peter 3:13-22

Some years ago I walked into the sixth grade classroom of a Lutheran school. Prominently displayed at the front of the classroom above the chalkboard in the center of the room was a sign:

JUST FOLLOW JESUS AND
YOU WILL NEVER GET INTO TROUBLE.

The longer I looked at the sign the more I admired the intent of the teacher—and the more deeply I knew that the sign got it all wrong.

Teachers in Lutheran schools who follow Jesus sometimes do get into trouble, just like the Master Teacher. He got in trouble for healing on the Sabbath, for caring for children, for forgiving sins, for reaching out to those whom others despised.

Our text today invites us to ask ourselves the question, “What gets me into trouble?” Is it because I advocate for the difficult parent or child? Is it because I want my school to be more Christocentric? Is it because I advocate walking the second mile? Is it because some think I pray too much or talk about Jesus too much?

The text reminds us that suffering (being in trouble) happens to us all. The key is to ask, “Am I in trouble because I did the wrong thing or because I did the right thing?”

Questions for the Week:

Can you recall (or imagine) a staff member or a student at your school getting into trouble for doing what is right?

Is there some Gospel imperative that you or someone at your school should push for more strongly, even if they get into trouble for doing so?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for Jesus, who “got into the trouble” of the cross for each of us. Ask God for the strength to avoid getting into trouble by doing what is wrong and for the courage to do what’s right even if there are negative consequences.

This devotion was contributed by Melvin M. Kieschnick, Carlsbad, California, who served Lutheran schools nationally and internationally for 50 years and in retirement serves as a staff associate for Wheat Ridge Ministries.

Thought for the Week: John 17:1-11

On any given weekday, the sound of children echoes through our cavernous building with an incredible liveliness and energy that I am convinced, if it could be harnessed, would power an entire small city. It's an amazing gift to be able to hear their sounds, even when mixed with the occasional mournful cry. The overwhelmingly beautiful "noise" of laughter and playtime is the resonance of children who know, trust, and love the adults who watch over them.

I suppose any one of us could say this about our teachers and care providers, but I am convinced that our staff is the best there is anywhere. What they do is incredibly exhausting and quite often stressful, and yet they have more patience in an hour than I have in a week. They are kind. They are giving. They are dedicated to what they do. They love our little ones as if each and every child were their own. Whether they realize it or not—whether they *feel* like it or not—each one of our staff is a little glimpse of God.

As those entrusted with the care and education of children, we are *all* tangible expressions of the Divine. We may be one of the few ways our little ones see God, *know* God, experience God. May we be able to see ourselves as windows to holiness that reveal a God who loves beyond all measure.

Question for the Week:

What are some of the tangible ways we act as windows to God's love?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for God's revealing presence in your life and in the lives of the children for whom you care.

This devotion was contributed by the Rev. Lisa Raylene Barnes, pastor of St. John, Westville, New Jersey, home of St. John Care.

May 11, 2008
Day of Pentecost

Thought for the Week: 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

When students first come into the classrooms, teachers work quickly to determine their individual strengths and weaknesses. That way, they will be able to tailor their teaching to help each child at his or her particular level. If a child needs help in a certain subject over another, the teacher will find ways to meet that learning need. The question is never, "Can all children learn?" The simple fact is that all children do learn. The question is, "What are we teaching them?"

When a child comes into a parochial classroom, children need to be reminded that God has a special purpose for each of them. All children have gifts. All children have unique characteristics about them that have been given to them by God. Not all children will be the class valedictorian or the next rocket scientist, but all children are gifted in one way or another.

The passage from 1 Corinthians 12 talks about the body of Christ and all of the gifts that God has given. These include faith, wisdom, healing, and prophesy. It is very clear in this passage that although there are many gifts, they all come from the same Spirit. Although the pastor is an integral part of the worship service, so are the individuals who take communion to homebound parishioners, those who pray for the congregation, and even those who watch the children in the nursery.

When children are put into our care, we must let them know they are gifted. In that way, they are encouraged to share their individual gifts and become an integral part in the body of Christ.

Question for the Week:

Have you identified how each of the children in your classroom is gifted?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear Lord,

Help me to use the gifts that you have given me to further your kingdom and show your love to the world around me.

This devotion was contributed by Jake Morrow, principal, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Kissimmee, Florida.

Thought for the Week: 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

The apostle Paul in his second letter to his brethren in the city of Corinth was writing to encourage and strengthen God's faithful. He knew how difficult it was to keep the faith while living in a challenging and worldly trade center such as Corinth. He wanted them to have the keys to a peaceful life amid their constant struggles.

Imagine this apostle Paul as a Christian school administrator, principal, or director writing or speaking to his staff, knowing how desperately these ever-giving people needed to know that they are not alone in their lives. As leaders and teachers aren't we compelled to do the same for those we guide!

As Paul closed his letter to the Corinthians, he said, "Finally brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace and the God of love and peace shall be with you." Paul summed up all that he had to say, saving the best for last. He said, "And finally, my friends, more than anything else, live in peace in your lives by being strong and supportive of each other, and you will not be alone in your struggles."

How comforting it is to know that we are not alone in our journey. What comfort and freedom we can take in the knowledge that we are supported and cared about by God and our fellow workers.

Question for the Week:

In our positions as leaders and teachers, what are we doing to convey our care and support for those around us? Are we giving and demonstrating the message of the apostle Paul and Christ himself: be at peace in the world, you are not alone. As God is with you in your struggles, so am I.

Personal Prayer of the Week:

While thanking God for the peace and comfort that comes from not only God's love and support in our lives but from those around us, ask God to help you demonstrate the reassuring words of the apostle Paul himself.

This devotion was contributed by Susan Lande, director, St. Luke's Christian Preschool, Long Beach, California.

May 25, 2008
Second Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Matthew 6:24-34

I am entrusted each day with these children who are gifts from God. They come to me for instruction in academic subjects, but what I teach about God and God's Word makes that work pale in comparison. If I teach them all the biology and writing in the world and never adequately share God's truths, then I have failed.

There are two lessons from Matthew that I think are important to share. The first is the idea that you cannot serve two masters. I have tried to walk in the world and I have tried to walk in God's light. I have been unable to serve both. My heart is always somewhere, but not committed to being in one place. I want to tell my students that it cannot be done. You must give your heart whole-heartedly to God; you cannot serve two masters.

The second lesson from Matthew that I would share with them is, "I tell you not to worry about your life." Oh, that I could share that scripture and that they would take it to heart. It would be a blessing to save them hours of fruitless, needless concern over things that are in God's hands.

I would share with them that I have not been perfect, but that I am still a beloved child of God and that I am forgiven when I ask God for forgiveness. The gift in sharing these things with students is that it helps me remember to cloak myself with these thoughts each day.

Questions for the Week:

What master do you serve? What master do you want your students to follow? What are you worrying about that is already in God's hands?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Lord, my awesome God, who has given me gifts my heart did not know it wanted, may you bless my work for you this day. May you bless each student and every person that I come in contact with today. May the smiles I share reflect your love and light. Amen.

This devotion was written by Beth Cash, teacher of science, writing, and physical education, St. Mark's Christian School, Middleburgh, New York.

Thought for the Week: Psalm 31:1-5

In Psalm 31:1-5 God is sought for refuge and deliverance. God is declared to be “my rock and my fortress.” Verse 5 continues with “Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.” The psalmist trusts God.

Our students come to school understanding trust from many different perspectives.

For my former third grade student, Andrew, trust was the predictability of school. He knew that everyday he would walk into the classroom, receive a cheerful welcome, encouraging words and many pats on the back. He knew that when anger from his home life boiled over, he wouldn't be judged. Instead, he knew that we would work together to resolve whatever the current issue might be. Andrew trusted that each day at school would be similar. Andrew knew all that until one day when I was absent due to illness. Then, he was angry. He was disrespectful to the substitute teacher and had a short fuse with his classmates. Andrew was miserable.

When I returned to school the next day, he walked up to me and said, angrily, “You weren't here. You are supposed to be here everyday. I'm mad at you.” Andrew thought I had abandoned him. I responded by telling him that I was there now and that I missed him. When he realized that he was as important to me as I was to him, his trust returned. Andrew learned that I could be trusted to care about him even in my absence. I learned that I needed to be more deliberate about teaching the concept and reliability of a trusting relationship.

Question for the Week:

Consider how your life reflects your own trust in God and overflows into your classroom.

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for guidance as you live your faith and enable your students to develop trusting relationships.

This devotion was contributed by Lynn Hess, director, The School of Grace, a parent participatory preschool, Grace Lutheran Church, Raleigh, North Carolina.

June 8, 2008

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Hosea 6:3, 6

Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord; For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

I want to make a case for the use of imagery in the classroom.

I believe images, more than ideas, have consequences. Censored artists of apartheid South Africa used paintings, posters, and murals as much as, if not more than, literature to effect radical change. The early church used imagery almost exclusively to communicate the doctrines of the church. And scripture paints some of the most vivid imagery ever created.

What kind of image are we drawing when we read the words from Hosea? How do we image “knowledge of God”?

In the Bible God is known through self-revelation. Humans know by acknowledging and accepting God. But knowledge for humans also requires commitment and involvement. In the book of Isaiah the prophet berates the Israelites because of their wicked ways: *Their works are works of iniquity, and deeds of violence are in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they rush to shed innocent blood...The way of peace they do not know* (Isaiah 59:6-8). In the gospel of John, Jesus commands us to *love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples* (John 13:34-35). If we love as Jesus does, the world will know us by that love; the world will know to whom we belong. That is a very powerful image—one with immeasurable consequences for peace in God’s world.

Questions for the Week:

How can we image the ways of peace in the classroom? How radical must our actions be before we are known for our knowledge of God?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for courage and strength to press on toward true knowledge. Pray for courage and strength to commit radical acts of love.

This devotion was contributed by Kathie Baker, support staff, ELCA Vocation and Education unit, Chicago, Illinois. Kathie has an intense interest in promoting the integration of theology and art.

Thought for the Week: Romans 5: 1-8

What a wonderful laundry list of up-lifting words: justified, peace, grace, hope, glory, and suffering. Oops! Where did that last word come from? How can suffering be a part of what God has in store for us? Isn't teaching supposed to be a pleasant experience, one that affirms our faith and strengthens us to share that faith?

But keep reading what St. Paul has to say: the suffering produces endurance, which produces character, which produces hope. As you begin to settle in to the casual days of summer, think ahead to the next school year. As we prepare the children for the celebration of Christmas, do we ever stop to think of the endurance of Mary and Joseph, what they endured in awaiting the birth of the Savior? As we prepare to teach the Passion story, what does that story say about endurance? What does the Easter story say about hope?

In these early days of summer, I do not ask you to focus on suffering, because then you might begin to focus on the fact that we are all sinners and you'll spend the entire summer depressed. That does not bode well for grace, peace, and hope. Once again, it is St. Paul to the rescue: "While we were still sinners Christ died for us." There's that hope again! There's what will carry us through the summer, and through the entire school year ahead. Hope!

Question for the Week:

On those days that are "terrible, no good, horrible, very bad" days (to borrow from Judith Viorst), to whom do you turn to renew your hope?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God that even on the darkest of days, we always have hope: hope in Christ, hope in the Holy Spirit, hope in the promises of resurrection. Pray that God will provide you with living "sounding boards" to help restore your hope.

This devotion was contributed by The Rev. Dr. David B. Jost, senior pastor, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Hainesport, New Jersey.

June 22, 2008
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the week: Matthew 10:30-31

“And even the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid.”

Jesus constantly reminds us that he came to earth to tell us about God’s love and to show us how to live. God’s love is so gigantic, we cannot even imagine it. And that love is for each and every one of us every day!

In this story, Jesus tells us that God loves us so much that God knows how many hairs are on our head! Have you ever even thought about counting the hairs on someone’s head? Look at the person next to you. Does that person have lots of hair, or not so much hair, or is that person bald? Try to count the hairs of just a small section on that person’s head. It’s not easy, is it? God is so awesome to know that number about each of us! And I am sure God also knows when we lose a hair or two.

Jesus then tells us that we never have to be afraid. God cares for us and loves us so much. Why would we ever be afraid knowing that God knows how many hairs we have on our head!

Question for the Week:

Ask yourself (guess) each morning when you look in the mirror how many hairs you have on your head. Be reminded that God knows!

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank you, God, for loving me so much that you know how many hairs I have on my head. When I am afraid, help me to remember the love you have for me. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Mary Fetter who worked from 1976-1998 in an early childhood center and now works for Lutheran Campus Ministry at the University of Texas, Austin, Texas. She is the director of the Children’s Outreach Ministry Board of Abiding Love Lutheran Church, Austin, Texas.

Thought for the Week: 2 Timothy 4:17-18

“But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed....”

In individual conversations with 8th grade confirmation students, I regularly asked, “Why is Jesus important to you?” The most frequent answer was, “Because he’s always there for me.” I wished for more. This response was so vague and untheological. Couldn’t they talk about justification, forgiveness, hope, salvation...?

Eventually I realized that “Jesus is always there for me” was, for those adolescents, a theological statement, a confession of faith shaped by their own experience. I give thanks for a youthful conviction that Jesus is important, no matter how it is phrased.

God creates trust in young hearts. As teachers we have the privilege of helping that trust find deeper words, stronger expression. We help fledgling trust connect with the accumulated wisdom of the faithful. Thus nurtured, a new generation will live in peace and someday, in some difficult challenge of life, be able to say as Paul did, “The Lord stood by me and gave me strength.” By such trust, God’s message of good news will continue to be proclaimed.

Questions for the Week:

Tell about a time when God’s presence was real to you. What difference did it make for you? What words did you use to describe the experience?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Gracious God, thank you for your daily presence in our lives. Give us helpful words to tell others about this trust and the peace that it brings. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Stanley N. Olson, executive director for the ELCA Vocation and Education Unit. This unit includes the ELCA’s churchwide relationship with schools and early childhood education centers.

July 6, 2008
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Zechariah 9:9-12; Psalm 145:8-15; Matthew 11:25-30

A humble king who rides a donkey, a servant king who commands peace—this is the king we worship and the counter-cultural king described in the passage from Zechariah this week. What a far cry from the self-absorbed monarchs and power-hungry rulers who have dotted the landscape of history, and what a far cry from what our popular culture worships: the pursuit of money, power, and pleasure. Our king proclaims peace, and as the psalmist reminds us, he “upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.”

And what is the right response to this king? In a word, surrender. The reading from Matthew elaborates: “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Are family matters troubling you? Are situations within your school community causing distress? Are particular students presenting a real challenge? Are you struggling with your own inner demons? Whatever the sources of stress and trouble in your life, bring them to the Lord, who is eager to share your load and provide rest for your soul. As St. Augustine reminds us, our heart will forever be restless until it rests in God. Let our humble king’s peace and solace wash over you and bring you abiding comfort. And then let your participation in the peace of the Lord be a means for spreading peace in God’s world.

Question for the Week:

What are the burdens you want to turn over to the Lord?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for the grace to partake in the Lord’s enduring peace and thereby be an instrument of peace in God’s world.

This devotion was contributed by Joe McTighe, executive director of CAPE, the Council for American Private Education, Germantown, Maryland.

Thought for the Week: Psalm 65

You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness Psalm 65:11

This psalm of thanksgiving confronts thinking that elevates modern human achievements to the highest pedestal. At a global level achievements over the past century have been incredible. Is there any limit to where science and technology will go? On a personal level we proudly review our year and we confidently plan for a new one with all sorts of expectations. However, the psalmist reminds us that any “crowning achievements” are from God.

The psalmist decisively points us to God as the source of all our good things in this world. What we receive is “awesome” (verse 5) and far out weighs anything that humanity has accomplished. Whilst God’s “wagon tracks overflow with richness.” our modern society is too often wasteful and too many people go without. God’s generous provision is not matched by wise human division of God’s gifts.

How will grateful humans respond to such generosity? We are called to thank God, aware of all the bounty for which we need to be grateful. We begin with thanks for all of God’s spiritual blessings. The marvels of creation are signs of all of God’s blessings, and God is active with and through us.

Psalm 65 is a challenge to reflect on what it means to live lives aware of the great bounty that is ours.

Questions for the Week:

What do we see overflowing in God’s “wagon tracks”?
What specifically would God have us do with all of the bounty that is ours?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for greater awareness of God’s bounty to us. Pray for a grateful and generous heart, and the discipline to live a life of thankfulness.

This devotion was contributed by Adrienne Jericho, executive director of Lutheran Education Australia. He guides and supports the 110 early childhood centres and schools of the Lutheran Church of Australia.

July 20, 2008
Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Isaiah 44:6-8

In this imperfect world, I struggle with fear at times—just as Israel did right before this text. You see, Israel had failed in service to God and was therefore justifiably fearful. At times, I have failed God and have known regret and fear over the resulting consequences. There are other things that cause me fear, like falling short at a task, illness, loneliness, disappointing those I love, and more.

I don't want to live in a fearful state, but rather in joy, confidence, and peace.

In Isaiah 44: 6, God firmly announces God's power. How reassuring to hear God speaking, "I am the first and I am the last." "Who {else} has announced from of old the things to come." Wow, God knows the future—my future!

In verse 8, God addresses my fear directly. "Fear not, nor be afraid...Is there a God beside me? There is no (other) rock."

That is how I live beyond fear—By depending on a God who is the first and last, a God who knows my future, and a God who is my Rock.

Question for the Week:

What fears do you have that need to be turned over to The Rock?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank you God, that even though you are all knowing and all powerful, you care about me, my struggles and fears. Bless me as I lead your children and, in turn, teach them to lean on an omnipotent God.

This devotion was contributed by Carol Zwernik, director, Calvary Pre-Kindergarten, Minneapolis, Minnesota. She has served as director for twenty-four years. Carol was named ELCA Director of the Year for 2006-2007.

Thought for the Week: 1 Kings 3:5-12

In the stillness of the night in a dream when Solomon is sleeping, God asks Solomon what he needs. Solomon responds eloquently although unconsciously. Solomon seems to rest in the knowledge of God's reign no matter who is king. He gathers his wits or perhaps it is the Holy Spirit who intercedes and asks for wisdom. "Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?"

We find ourselves in the classroom, hired to nurture and educate the youngest. Some of us have four-year degrees in education or other areas of study. Some of us have years of experience and return after exploring other areas of work. All of us participate in annual training to address the changing and diverse needs of children and families and review the many policies and procedures that govern our operations. Is this enough? Do we trust in God? Do we know how to pray?

Surely we share in Solomon's prayer for an understanding mind for we cannot work alone. Isn't it wonderful to be reminded that God wants to give each of us wisdom and discernment. The Holy Spirit will work in us even when we don't know how to pray. Nothing can keep us from the love and counsel of God.

Question for the Week:

What do you need to teach?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Ask God for what you need, even for what you may not know you need. Thank God for the generous love and counsel God offers to those who ask, and to those who trust in God's reign.

This devotion was contributed by Dawn Lees, early childhood education teacher for more than twenty years, Westwood Early Childhood Center, St. Louis Park, Minnesota.

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