

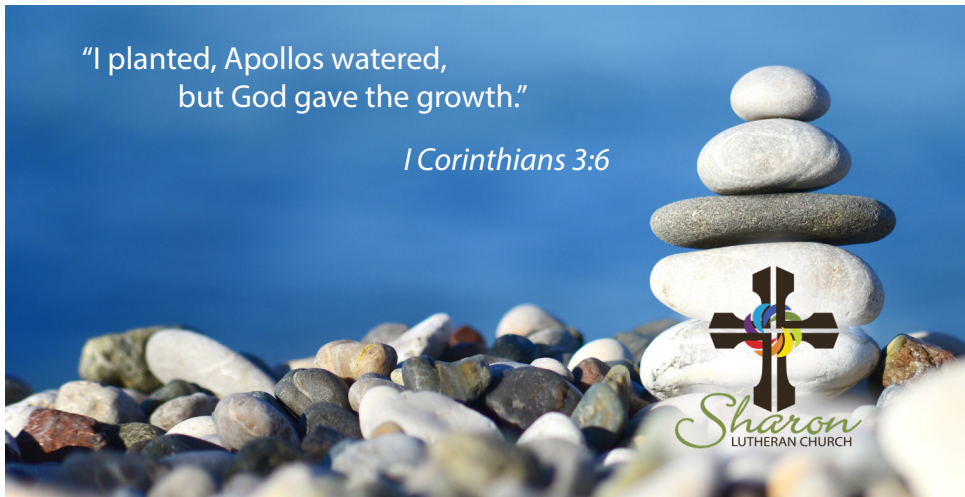


Sharon Lutheran Church Devotional

September - October 2019

"I planted, Apollos watered,
but God gave the growth."

1 Corinthians 3:6





WHO ARE WE

Sharon Lutheran Church is...people

We are people who share a common faith in God and God's promises. We are a unique people, a people called to life through God's promises in baptism. By God's Grace, we are freed from all that oppresses us to be the people God has created us to be. We are freed to be servants of God's kingdom in the work of humanization and liberation. Because God raised Jesus from the dead, we have hope for the future. We are in God's care now and forever.

Sharon Lutheran Church is...a caring people

As Christ's Body in the world, we are constantly striving to be a caring community, responding to the needs of hurting people within our congregation, the larger community and the world. Sharon's building is regularly used for a variety of community support groups and organizations. Through programs and benevolences, we assist locally and beyond through the efforts of the E.L.C.A.

Sharon Lutheran Church is...a worshipping people

Because of who we are and what God has created us to be, worship is central to our Christian lives. To regularly hear God's Word and share in the sacraments is key to our vitality in the Christian faith.

Sharon Lutheran church is...an active people

As part of Christ's church, we are called to use the gifts and resources with which we have been blessed. We also discover that as we become actively involved in the church, it takes on a greater personal meaning for each of us. A complete listing of all the opportunities in which you can serve is available.

To coordinate the overall activities of the church, a Parish Planning Council functions. The Council is made up of nine board directors, an executive director, two assistant directors, the pastors and a treasurer. The nine boards carry out the work of the church. They include: Lay Ministry, Public Relations, Youth, Church in Society, Christian Education, Stewardship, Parish Fellowship, church Properties, and Evangelism.

Giving In Faith for Tomorrow (GIFT)

The theme for Sharon Lutheran's capital appeal is "Giving in Faith for Tomorrow" (GIFT). Through the Kairos survey and conversations that followed, people shared their desires and wishes for Sharon to "Do more, to Give more and Be more." God has been with each of us through the ups and downs, the good times and bad. He calls us as Sharon Lutheran to do the same and to share His word to the community today.

Sharon has been sharing God's Word and Love in Grand Forks and around the country for 100 years! We should all be proud of that small group that had the courage and tenacity to put this congregation together 100 years ago and proud to be part of who we are today, a large congregation that not only ministers to its members but to many throughout the community!

The following devotions were written and compiled by Sharon members for the purpose of sharing biblical and personal insights about the ministry we, God's people in this time and place, are called to do, both now and in the years to come. It is Sharon's hope that you will reflect on your commitment to this ministry as you pray for and about GIFT. Pray not only what you can do, but what WE, as Sharon Lutheran, a beautiful congregation, can do to share the love of Jesus among our fellow members and our greater community.

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth."
1 Corinthians 3:6





“FAITH5” Suggestion for Devotions

FAITH5 (Faith Acts in the Home) is a simple, easy-to-implement faith practice, perfect for incorporating into your daily routine and takes about five to fifteen minutes per day. When done over time, FAITH5 carries the power to enrich communication, deepen understanding, aid sleep, and promote mental, physical and spiritual health. Here are the five steps of the FAITH5:



SHARE your highs and lows from the day.



READ a bible verse or story.



TALK about how the bible reading might relate to your highs and lows.



PRAY for one another's highs and lows.



BLESS one another.

Simply use the “READ” step as a time to read your GIFT Devotional during the capital campaign, and continue this FAITH5 practice in the months and years to come by inserting a Bible story of your choice, a devotion, or the readings from our weekly worship.

Learn more at www.faith5.org & www.faithink.com

Sunday, September 22, 2019

“He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples. And he said to them, When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread; and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us; and lead us not into temptation.”

“So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish?”

“Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Luke 11: 1-4, 9-13

Ten years ago, in January, I got my first tattoo. No, it's not a Mom, a creature, a mural and no, I didn't have to worry if all the names were spelled correctly.

It was four little blue dots. I was about to start my series of 33 radiation treatments after my breast cancer diagnosis.

For each of these treatments, you lay down on a bed, the nurses position the machine, connecting the dots. They leave, zap you and then return to reposition the machine. There you are just laying there, looking up at ceiling tile that is made to look like a flower garden. Where does your mind go? Each day you think, is this really going to work? Is it going to make it worse?

Hard to imagine, but I talked the whole time they were with me. As the nurses left the room, I never felt so alone. What to do? Pray!! When they left, they would let me know to stay still (another thing, I am not too good at), I started the Lord's Prayer. When I finished, they were back to readjust and then left again saying, "Mary, stay still," and I started the Lord's Prayer.

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Sunday, September 22, 2019 continued

End of second prayer, end of treatment. This few minutes each day gave me courage, strength and the faith that God was with me and will get me through no matter the outcome.

This year marked the tenth anniversary of my last treatment. But each time I say the Lord's Prayer I am thankful for Him being with me at the time and realize He was with me through all the other peaks and valleys through my life.

Gracious and loving God, thank you for being with us. Knowing you are there is the strength we rely on throughout our lives. Knowing your love and the peace it brings is the most wonderful gift we can receive. Amen.

Mary Adams

Monday, September 23, 2019

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

Hebrews 13:2

“He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives the One who sent Me.”

Matthew 10:40

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Galatians 3:28

We have been taught to be good stewards through our time, talents, and treasures. I believe all are important.

One way in which I believe I give of my talents and time are through the partnership Sharon Lutheran and Global Friends Coalition have shared for several years. New Americans from our community are welcomed at Sharon to learn sewing skills, sew items to keep, and gain some new friends. Volunteers from the community and Sharon provide helpful teaching techniques in an environment of acceptance and humor. Through Thrivent Action Team grants, sewing kits, sewing notions, and fabric have been purchased.

My heart is filled when I see the smiles on the faces of my New American friends and hear the numerous “thank you’s” when they complete a project. Even though sometimes there exists a language barrier, there certainly is no barrier when it comes to smiles and hugs. I am very thankful our church and community are embracing our New American friends.

Dear Jesus, thank you for the opportunity to make new friends and to enrich our lives and others. Help us to be a welcoming church and to give freely of our time, talents, and treasures. Amen.

Karen Axvig

Tuesday, September 24, 2019

**How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.**

Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote this for her lover but how much is it like what God has done for us? This could be me talking to God as well as God's comments to me on a personal basis. Let me count the ways... Food, shelter, family, friends, health, labor, meaningful activity, church, and on and on. All things I have received and thank God for, even when I tend to take it all for granted.

Then on the other hand God loves us so much He sent His Son to set an example and make things right for us. God doesn't demand anything in return except to believe in Him and through His Grace respond with love for one another. It should then come naturally to respond with praise and thanksgiving.

Lord, help us as individuals and a congregation of your followers to accept your gifts with thanksgiving and praise and to respond by reaching out to others who need you in any way we can. Amen.

David Braaten

Wednesday, September 25, 2019

**Luke 19:8-10 8 Zacchaeus said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” 9 Then Jesus said, “Today salvation has come to this house... 10 For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”
(For the whole story, read Luke 19:1-10)**

How would you describe your relationship with money? As a working college and seminary student, words like stressful and tight budget would have come to mind. The call to stewardship, at least when it came to financial resources, did not seem like it could possibly apply to me; sort of like when your college calls and asks you to donate while you are still paying them interest on your loans. God’s work in my heart on this subject reminds me of the story of Zacchaeus.

I carried some guilt about not practicing what I was preaching in seminary when it came to stewardship and tithing; so, I started to peek at what Jesus had to say like Zacchaeus did as he climbed the sycamore tree to peer over the crowd and get a look at Jesus. I read books, Scripture, and had conversations with fellow people of faith. I was still trying to keep my distance, though, just looking and not doing.

Jesus did not keep his distance, though. As Zacchaeus peered over the crowd, Jesus looked up, called his name, and told Zacchaeus to climb down because Jesus was going to stay at his house that day and the experience changed Zacchaeus’ life. Just as Jesus followed Zacchaeus home, Jesus followed me out of those books, Scripture, and conversations. He followed me into one particular conversation where Max and I were discussing what to do for our Lenten practice. In a clearly Holy Spirit moment, we decided to give back to those who had been generous towards us when we needed it most.

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Wednesday, September 25, 2019 continued

One of my favorite ways we gave back was sending my sister and her husband, who had opened their home to us, on date nights. This practice changed our hearts and our life. Now when I think of our relationship with money, stress can come up, but words and phrases like opportunity to make change, joining in God's work, and taking care of what God gave us are what come to mind. Jesus taught us that this call to stewardship is not about giving because God said so, it's about God gifting us with the life-giving opportunity to join in the work that God is up to.

God is up to something through this capital campaign. Your participation shows that when we prayerfully envisioned the ministry God could call us to without the burden of debt, we peered at what Jesus had to say and Jesus followed you home just like he did Zaccheaus.

Gracious God, we give thanks for all you have provided and for the call to look to the future ministry of faith at Sharon Lutheran Church. Guide our stewardship of all the gifts you provide in our individual lives, as well as our shared gifts as a community. Make clear the ways you are inviting us to be your hands and feet. Amen.

Pastor Dominique Buchholz

Thursday, September 26, 2019

**“May the Lord watch over you and me while we are
absent from one another.”**

Genesis 31:49

Many of my childhood memories are associated with Elk Valley Lutheran Church in rural McCanna, ND, where my family and I were members. I love everything about Elk Valley; it was where I was baptized as an infant, confirmed as a teenager, and where I elected to be married years later. Most importantly, that little country church nestled in trees near “Bachelors Grove” was where I first learned about the gift of faith.

As with most Lutheran churches, we had weekly Sunday School where all the classes gathered together in the sanctuary for a time to sing and share offerings. One of our Sunday School leaders would end our time together with Genesis 31:49: “May the Lord watch over you and me while we are absent from one another.” I liked hearing that verse, probably because it was short and to the point which made it easy to recognize and memorize! I also liked hearing it because it was said with conviction and a warm smile from our leader who had a way of making eye contact with all of us rambunctious kids in that beautiful sanctuary.

As confirmation students we were asked to talk about our favorite scripture and explore what those verses meant to us. I remember talking about Genesis 31:49 and how it was given as a blessing before we left to join our Sunday School class. Our Pastor leading confirmation class explained that this blessing and words of that scripture were to be carried with us throughout the week, no matter what was happening at school or home. That brought me a measure of comfort then, and still does today, as I think about loved ones who are no longer with us, those who are struggling with illness and despair, and with my family and friends who I am absent from more often than what I would like.

Just as I am blessed to be a member of Sharon today, I am grateful for that little church in the country, the people who gave of their time and talents to share that scripture and teachings with me, the pastors who helped lead me on a faith journey, and my parents who lived out their faith by bringing me to church and living a life of faithfulness and compassion. Those gifts given to me at a young age are with me always and are

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Thursday, September 26, 2019 continued

confirmed and nourished by our gracious pastors and congregation at Sharon where we strive to be a caring community united by our faith and called to "Give in Faith for Tomorrow."

Dear God, thank you for the gift of Sharon Lutheran and all that it has been for the past 100 years and all that it will be in the years to come. As we contemplate how we share in this capital campaign, help us remember that "Generosity doesn't come from abundance; abundance comes from generosity." Amen.

Linda Butler

Friday, September 27, 2019

“We Give Thee But Thine Own”

1. We give thee but thine own,
whate'er the gift may be;
all that we have is thine alone,
a trust, O Lord, from thee.
2. May we thy bounties thus
as stewards true receive,
and gladly, as thou blessest us,
to thee our first fruits give.
3. To comfort and to bless,
to find a balm for woe,
to tend the lonely in distress
is angels' work below.
4. The captive to release,
to God the lost to bring,
to teach the way of life and peace,
it is a Christlike thing,
5. and we believe thy word,
though dim our faith may be:
whate'er for thine we do, O Lord,
we do it unto thee.

Dear God, May the words of this hymn guide us through the days ahead as we work to share our gifts and live out the mission of Sharon Lutheran. We are blessed and seek to be a blessing to others. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Saturday, September 28, 2019

“Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

II Corinthians 9:7

I grew up on a farm just a mile from our beloved small country church that was such a large part of my growing-up life. Twenty to twenty-five people in the congregation on a Sunday morning was a pretty good turnout. We all loved our church and worked together to take care of it.

We each had different gifts to use. There were gifts of music, carpentry, teaching, leading, cleaning, cooking, baking, organizing, planting trees, mowing and trimming, etc. When it came to the gift of money to support the financial needs of our church like paying the minister, electrical bill, utilities, giving to the poor, fixing the roof, installing a bathroom, that was when we would have a “meeting.” The meetings were held in the entryway with everyone standing in a circle talking about how much we needed to take care of our church. The meetings didn’t last more than five to ten minutes. Then the money would appear in the offering plate. Our little congregation was made up of different people with different resources and we all gave, cheerfully. We were happy to take care of our church home and our financial commitments.

This is how I feel about Sharon Lutheran Church. Sharon has been my church home for over 30 years, and I cherish it. I am happy to help care for its needs. I love working with other congregation members and I can see they feel the same way about our church. Cheerfully giving of myself and my resources remains the best part of me in this adult part of my life. I am grateful for the lessons learned in my little country church. Although we all can’t fit into the entryway to have our budget meetings, Sharon needs each of us to care for it, just like my small country church of the past.

Lord, commission our hearts, our hands and our resources to cheerfully do your work. Amen.

Kaye Carlson

Sunday, September 29, 2019

“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

II Corinthians 9:7

As a child growing up with four siblings, my parents had always given their time and limited money to the church. With that in mind, my husband and I followed that example in our marriage and tried to instill the importance of generous giving to our children.

My mother lived alone for over 40 years after my Dad died at age 42. She had five children at the time of his death, and I was the oldest and just heading off to college in a few months. My mother died at the age of 94 in her sleep two years ago on a Sunday morning.

Sometime later, my husband and I were discussing what to do with the inheritance she left us. I was thinking of the usual earthly ways to use the money, (home repair, trips, grandchildren’s college account) when Scott suggested we use it for our monthly Simply Giving commitment to Sharon. It made total sense to both of us, and I wondered why it hadn’t been me that thought of the idea!

I think I am too often a reluctant giver. I think of myself, and what else I might do with my time or money, as if it was only me that provided it in the first place. Now I had the opportunity to be a cheerful giver for Christ and to honor my mother and her legacy of giving.

Gracious God, you give us much more than we deserve. Holy Spirit, work in our hearts so we can be cheerful givers of our time, talents and money. Amen.

Pat Carter

Monday, September 30, 2019

**But Moses protested to God, “Who am I to appear before Pharaoh?
Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?”
Exodus 3:11**

Who am I? That’s the question Moses asks God after he is called to service.

It’s likely a question that most of us who feel called to service in the faith community have asked at one time or another.

It certainly applies to me. I spent a long time in my life doing everything I could to avoid the call.

I spent too much time being angry with God when my daughter was fighting for her life in the hospital. I became bitter, and resentful.

Sharon Lutheran changed all that. The people of Sharon helped change me. My wife made me start coming regularly, and then I met our Faith Formation team, and then I heard God’s call.

I was being pulled towards working with the young people of this church, and through teaching church school, and being a confirmation guide, I found a place and a purpose. I found role models, and I found friends. I found a home.

So who am I? At one time, I thought it meant I was unqualified. I never suspected a person like myself would become involved in the ways I have, but here I am. God calls unlikely people, to do good works and be a light for others.

Who are you? God doesn’t judge you for the person you’ve been. God cares about the person you can become. Listen for the call. God has a purpose for you at Sharon. God has a plan for all of us.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the many ways you call us to serve you. Continue to be with us all as we grow in faith and community with each other. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Steve DeKrey

Tuesday, October 1, 2019

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

John 3:16

I grew up in a Christian home. We attended church each week, we consistently attended Sunday School and confirmation. I liked going to church and being a part of a bigger family.

My dad worked for the Corps of Engineers when they were building missiles in the late 50's and 60's. I attended 11 different schools, so this entailed moving frequently. We had many different church families.

One of my most favorite memories in the church was the Bible verse John 3:16. I memorized it as a child, believed it throughout confirmation and knew it in my soul as an adult.

I married and our life as a couple also involved church as an important part. When I became pregnant, we were thrilled and very excited. Our son was born in May and we said prayers of thanks to God for a healthy baby.

One of my most powerful memories in the church came in the Spring of the next year. We were getting ready for Easter, preparing throughout lent for Easter Sunday. On Good Friday we attended the service. As I sat there, holding my healthy baby, I became overwhelmed thinking about God and his Son. The Bible verse I have loved and held in my heart for so long, had a whole new meaning. The sense of what God had done for me was unfathomable. The love He has for all of us is so powerful that it takes my breath away.

When I say God gave us the greatest gift when He gave us His son, I think sometimes I have not really recognized the magnitude of His gift. He loves us so unconditionally that it is difficult to comprehend what it cost Him. He gave something so precious to us, I try and remember this when I am giving to the church.

Lord, help me not to lean on my own understanding but in everything acknowledge You so that You can direct my words, thoughts and actions. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Gayla Drenghson

Wednesday, October 2, 2019

My earliest memories of my faith in God are the importance of prayer and the Bible in my parents' home, setting the standard for all of us as adults. We would start and end all meals with prayers of thanksgiving, we also read scripture at the end of every meal and discussed Bible passages. Before going to bed at night we would kneel in prayer (including my parents kneeling). It makes me remember how humble they were and depended on God's presence in our daily lives, as did we.

As immigrants from the Netherlands my father taught me how to read at age six by using the Dutch Bible (none of us spoke English). Although Dad had only a seventh-grade education, he was a wonderful teacher. As a Pastry Chef he had great penmanship and taught me how to write; we would write to our relatives in the Netherlands every Sunday after church praising God about our new home in America.

Even though we were a family of ten my parents sent us to the local Christian School (I think there was a discount for sending eight children). My Dad would ride his bicycle to work at 3 a.m. each day and my Mom would clean offices at night and wash dishes in restaurants during the noon hour to help pay the bills. We all thought we had it made and thanked God each day for our blessings.

Then, when I was in my 20's, my older sister died in an airplane crash in Hawaii. My faith stumbled. I returned to regular church attendance when I moved to Grand Forks and ended up at Sharon Lutheran Church after Kathy Fick and Laurie Natwick gave me Lutheran lessons during the lunch hour at Christus Rex.

The Sharon Lutheran Senior Choir is one of my many blessings in the church. Talented conductors and pianists, along with positive and humorous choir members, helped me through stressful times; they are truly my mental health fix each week. In addition, I love working with the funeral committee and the lefse committee where I met new people who are generous and loving in their commitment to Sharon. One of my pleasures is to read scriptures during the church services, it reminds me of reading scripture to my family around the dinner table so long, long ago.

Gracious Lord, thank you for the gift of Sharon and those who minister to us through their presence in our lives. Help us to continue to serve you and be good stewards of the blessings we share. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Thursday, October 3, 2019

**“And when two or three of you are together because of me,
you can be sure be there.”**

Matthew 18:20

There are so many ways to worship, praise and honor God. Lifting a heartfelt plea for help in the midst of despair, voicing a grateful prayer of thanks for blessings received, or expressing delight for the beauty of God’s creation are just a few that come to mind.

Remembering Jesus’ promise to be with us whenever two or three are together gives us the freedom to ask questions as we learn, study, and grow in faith.

Corporate worship - coming together as the body of Christ on earth engaging in prayer, praise, song, contemplation and action as a group feeds us on our journey.

Wherever you are on your faith journey, come to worship to experience the power of God’s love and grace.

Lord, thank you for the opportunities we have at Sharon to worship together and for leading us on our journey of faith. Help us to continue to find joy in our abundant blessings and in sharing God’s love with each other. In your heavenly name we pray. Amen.

Cassel Everson

Friday, October 4, 2019

**“Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name;
give to him glorious praise.”**

Psalm 66:1

From my earliest memories of attending church and Sunday School as a child, I remember with great fondness, the joy of singing together with my Mom and Dad, sister and brother in First Lutheran Church in Bottineau, ND. Not attending Sunday worship EVERY Sunday wasn't an option in our home. (I was a freshman attending Pacific Lutheran University when my roommate suggested we skipped church one Sunday morning, and I said, “Can we actually MISS church?”)

My best memories of church and church activities always involved the singing of hymns and Sunday School songs. Our yearly Sunday School Christmas program was the BEST... (and we each got a bag of hard candy and an orange after!) We got to start singing in Children's Choirs when we started school. It was even more fun when we learned to read, and we got to hold our own music. Our earliest choir directors impressed upon our young minds that “singing to Jesus” was a way we can give back to God all the gifts He gives to us daily. I have come to realize that being involved in the worship experience through music set my course for my life and life's work.

Through the years I have found that my worship experience must “feed my soul.” Corporate worship has always been an important part of my life. The Christian life was never meant to be solitary. Biblical metaphors indicate a plurality, not a singularity; we are a flock, a body, a holy nation. The purpose of worshipping together is “to encourage each other.” In my experience, the best way we can encourage each other is sharing the strength and fervor of our faith through the music of our church. We are encouraged to “make a joyful noise to God and worship him with praise and thanksgiving.” Our faith is strengthened and our hearts are blessed when we come together to worship God with our songs and thanksgiving. I am so thankful for the worship experience here at Sharon Lutheran. My “cup” has been filled by the relationships that I have nurtured through the joy of making music together in this place and with the fellowship of worshipping together with this loving congregation.

Lord, I pray this congregation continues to grow in love and fervor to your Word. Make us ever mindful of the joy of worshipping you together through a welcoming and encouraging spirit. May we ever praise you through music from a grateful and loving heart.

Saturday, October 5, 2019

I grew up on a farm north of Bismarck where we did not regularly attend church as it was nearly 20 miles to the nearest Lutheran church. We did go to vacation bible school which was a week in the summer from around 8am-4pm Monday through Friday with a program on the following Sunday. I grew up loving the hymns “Beautiful Savior” and “Stand Up for Jesus.”

I always believed in God but didn't fully accept Jesus as my Savior until I was in high school. I got my “Living” Bible from the Billy Graham program called “Time to Run” at a movie theater in Bismarck in 1974. Friends and I went together, and after the movie, the evangelists asked if anyone wanted to accept Christ as their Savior. I could hardly say no to such a request, and even though my heart was racing to go down in front of so many people, I did because I knew that I wanted that grace and acceptance to be mine.

I have read that Bible front to back several times over the years, although I was most dedicated reading it while serving my time in the U.S. Army and then college. I have gotten away from it over the years, but I still have it, though now it is in a plastic bag so that I don't lose the pages that have fallen off from use and age.

I still don't consider myself a great Christian. I have so many failings and doubts about this world. I think we all have doubts when we see the horrible things that happen. But our hope is still in Christ and knowing that He can overcome anything that this world puts in our way and He did so with humility and confidence that God would be there for Him. We are loved and blessed by God and we are blessed to be in a community that is so caring and generous with their time and talents and their finances.

My wish for all during this year of looking back on the history of Sharon Lutheran Church and the vision for the future of our church is that we all can realize the “dream” of knowing Christ as our Brother and God as our Father and love all our neighbors as our brothers and sisters no matter their religion, ancestry or heritage.

Gracious Lord, thank you for being with us as we dream for the future of Sharon and in helping us celebrate our good fortune and fellowship with each other. Thank for your continued blessing on our congregation and the community that we may enrich the lives of others. In your name we pray. Amen.

Sunday, October 6, 2019

“In my Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it weren’t so, would I have prepared a place for you?”

John 14:2

One of the highlights of teaching middle school was the opportunity to take students to Wolf Ridge Environmental Resource Center for a week. Not only did we learn about conserving energy and responsible stewardship of our resources, but students had the chance to improve their social skills by sharing space, resolving conflicts, and being away from TV and computers. (This was before smart phones were omni-present!) This was the first time many of our seventh-graders had been away from their families for that length of time.

One morning before our first learning session of the day, I noticed that one of my students was near tears. I’ll call her Lisa; she was a bright and confident girl. I asked her to step out into the hallway to ask her what was wrong.

She said that she missed her family and was homesick.

“Do you know how lucky you are to have such a loving and caring family? Some people spend their whole lives wishing they had that.”

Lisa perked right up. “I never thought of it that way before.” She appeared to be back to her cheerful self. For me, it was a case of God giving me the right words at the right time. If only more “teachable moments” could show more instant results as in this case! They say that most teachers aren’t in our careers for the income; we’re here for the outcome, which is often unseen and immeasurable.

Now that I’m retired, I don’t feel homesick often, but I do miss loved ones who are no longer here. I grieve for them, but I try to remember the gifts they brought to my life, thanking God for putting people in our lives when we need each other. Whatever longing or suffering we feel now will be transformed into great joy someday.

Dear God, thank you for your love and support. I’ve learned that to love is to risk and be vulnerable. There’s comfort in knowing that You have prepared a place for us and that we will meet again! In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Monday, October 7, 2019

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Matthew 6:21

I don't know about you, but it sure seems clear that God's ways are so often counter-intuitive. And nowhere, perhaps, is that more persistently evident than in Scripture - in God's Word. In fact, these words from Jesus are such words for me. I would have said it differently. I think I would have made a statement about giving, about generosity, about treasure, exactly the opposite: "For where your heart is, there will your treasure be also." You know, whatever are the things of your heart, surely your resources, support and treasure will follow. Makes sense, right? But that's not what Jesus says. He says that our hearts follow our treasure.

I remember being at a faith conference once when the presenter was speaking on money - on giving. He asked us to take out our checkbooks (shows you how long-ago it was!) and to hold on to them as he was speaking with us about a very personal matter - our own giving of treasure. He said that our checkbook registers told the truth about what was important to us. He said that many of us said that God's Kingdom, the ways of Christ, the work of the church, were all important to us. Or that the Lord's work was where our heart was. Yet he said the truth was that it was likely not as accurate as we would like to believe. And he said that the problem was that too many of us were waiting to feel moved, to have something touch our hearts, before we would be generous. And that's when he suggested that we had it all backward. Give, he said, and your heart will follow. That's how it works.

The church is the Body of Christ, and each one of us are members of that Body - members of the church (1st Cor. 12:27). We're a motley crew, in some ways. We're most certainly imperfect, challenged, seemingly without much that we might need, struggling to be "up to the task." And yet, we are exactly who God says we are - God's holy people (Deut. 7:6), His light - a city on a hill (Matt. 5:14), chosen (Deut. 14:2), and part of God's household (Eph. 2:19). Being generous, giving of our treasure, all demonstrate that we trust God's ways and power. And that the church - our church - is exactly where it is that God intends to work faith, miracles and new life! So, our treasures, for the work of Christ's church, will lead our hearts, as well.

Lord, help me to more deeply trust you. Everything that I have has come from you. You have provided for me all along; you will continue to do so. May my treasure reflect my faith in you. And may my heart follow into the joy of your love. Amen.

Tuesday, October 8, 2019

Then Peter began to speak ..."I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism... but accepts from every nation the one who fears Him and does what is right."

Acts 10: 34-35

Many of our recent favorite vacations have been on cruise ships. We like the open air on the sea, enjoy the wonderful entertainment, and of course the food is fantastic.

One of our favorite things is to dine every night with people from all over the United States and from around the world. You start to realize that in general, people are basically all the same. One thing we have come to look forward to are the Interdenominational church services. You look around the room and realize these people are from all nations and cultures, yet we stand together as Christians, singing Amazing Grace and saying the Lord's Prayer. It is an emotional time.

On our most recent cruise to Hawaii, it happened to be an Ash Wednesday service with three Pastors and a Priest administering the ashes. We received the Cross of ashes on our forehead just as we would have at Sharon. We left the service and started walking around the ship. I'm rather tall and stand out in a crowd. I was surprised at the number of people coming up to ask..."Where did you get the ashes...we want them too." We directed them to the venue where the Pastors were still there to place ashes on their foreheads.

It made us realize how we Christians are alike no matter where we live... longing for Gods mercy and forgiveness. God loves people from all nations.

What a great God we have!!

Gracious Father, thank you for the opportunity for time away from our daily lives to rest and for showing us new ways to come together with others who follow you. Help us remember that our God is a loving God and is with us always. In your name we pray. Amen.

Bob Kerr

Wednesday, October 9, 2019

**“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God
for salvation to everyone who believes.”**

Romans 1:16

Have you ever been asked to share Christ? I have been. I remember the first time I was asked. I tried thinking of reasons why I could not. For example, I don't know what to say or I am not a good Christian or I don't know where to start or how will my friends accept me? But my attempt to rationalize did not work. The Spirit helped me remember the scripture passage chosen for me by my pastor for my confirmation certificate. It is from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. He stated in Romans 1:16 "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for it is the power of God to salvation." Paul was not eloquent, but God used him to share the Gospel. He used him because he depended on the Holy Spirit to guide him.

My faith life involves faith sharing Bible study. The small group studies at Sharon offer me an opportunity to explore my faith and to open my heart to a deeper relationship with Christ. Small groups study offers opportunity for personal study and reflection. The small group discussion can link our challenges and struggles of life with the solutions given to us through the teachings of Christ.

I have found small group Bible study ministry an incredible opportunity to grow. Small group Bible study has the potential to transform Sharon Lutheran through education that fosters discipleship. I also know God does not call the equipped. He equips the called and as a Christian I am called to share my faith and what God has done for me. Some of Jesus's last words were "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 29:19). Thus, sharing my faith is not just a suggestion, it's a command!

***Lord, we ask for the Spirit to guide us as we study your word. Help us
share your word and live the faith. Amen.***

Milt Kinzler

Thursday, October 10, 2019

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

John 13:34

To acknowledge and to visit with people making them feel welcome is truly a valuable gift. Sharon Lutheran Church is a good place to experience that. Whatever activity one takes part in gives one the opportunity to greet new people and to make them feel welcome.

I had the opportunity to serve as Ombudsman in a local nursing home for ten years. My responsibility was to visit and to listen to any concerns the resident may have and to help resolve them. The smiles and the welcoming I received when entering their room made me realize that the little effort I put out to visit was so rewarding.

For the past several years I have had the privilege to visit shut-ins, members of Sharon Lutheran. Their “thank you’s” for having a member of their “Sharon family” visit made me realize how much they care about our congregation. A community visitation that I enjoyed for many years was when I delivered Meals on Wheels. I was often the only person these folks would see during the day, and even though it was a brief visit, I was thankful I could be that person.

I, too, have been the person visited when encountering numerous health issues and I thank God for each and every one of these folks who brightened my day.

Thank you, Father, for the opportunity we are given to show care and love to our fellow family members. Amen.

Lyle Nelson

Friday, October 11, 2019

I had the extreme blessing of going to the ELCA Gathering in Houston, TX, last year with our youth from Sharon. What an amazing time full of blessings and many memories that I will never forget!

One of the memories from that trip happened as we were driving by Minute Maid Park to leave Houston and begin our trip home. There is a tent city in that area when people who are homeless live. Off to the side in an area all by himself was an older gentleman. His clothing was torn, and his back was hunched over. The memory of this man burned into my mind as we drove by. It would have been great to have stopped to get him and have him join us for a meal, but the distance and time made that not possible.

I wanted so badly to tell this man that he is loved and cared for--and that he matters. He is in fact loved and cared for by our loving God. God loves us; he loves all of us just as we are. We don't have to be perfect; we can be messy.

To the gentleman in Houston, know that I think of you and pray for you every day. I am thankful for the way that you changed my life for the better.

Dear God: Thank you for loving us all, just as we are. Amen.

Natalie Rohloff

Saturday, October 12, 2019

“He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Mark 12:41-44

When my nephew Tyler was three years old he attended pre-school. One day the teacher gave the students pictures, but there weren't enough and one little boy didn't get one. Sitting on his Mother's lap, he began to cry. Though she tried to console him, he was more than disappointed and the tears kept coming.

Tyler was sitting on his Dad's lap across from this little boy. He saw the tears and went over and gave his picture to that little boy. Then Tyler ran back to his Dad, with tears in his eyes. He wanted a picture, but he saw the need and gave what he had to the other boy though it was not easy. He was only three years old, but he knew the importance of caring for others and sharing what you have even when you would rather keep it for yourself.

Giving isn't always easy. It is natural to keep what you have for yourself, or to give our "leftovers" to others. To give to others first isn't always easy.

The widow in the text above didn't have much, but she knew the need to give and she responded, trusting that God would provide. Tyler gave his picture to one who was without. He, too, knew the importance of giving. Giving. Sharing. We do it because we have been given and because we know that we can trust God to provide for our needs.

Thank you, Lord, for giving me all that I need and more. Open my hands to not only receive your gifts, but to share even the first part of what I have with others. Amen.

Pastor Lynn Ronsberg

Sunday, October 13, 2019

“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

John 10:10

For almost one hundred years, God’s abundance has surrounded Sharon Lutheran Church – gifted and dedicated pastors and staff, talented members sharing their time and ideas, programs supporting members and guests to grow in faith, a great building from which to do ministry. God’s abundant grace continues to bless the ministries of Sharon.

During the time I have been a part of Sharon, God’s abundance has allowed me to grow in so many ways. I have grown through worship and Bible studies, through fellowship and friendships, through music, through working on service projects, through serving on boards and committees. By God’s abundant grace, Sharon offers all of us opportunities to grow, both as individuals and as a community of faith.

God of abundance, thank you for your gifts to Sharon Lutheran Church. Guide us as we move forward into the challenges of our second century, just as you guided the first members of our congregation to meet the challenges of 1920. Let us live and grow in your abundance. Amen.

Alice Senechal

Monday, October 14, 2019

“Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

Hebrews 11:1

What would we be without faith? Faith in God, faith in ourselves, faith in those closest to us...

Thirty-two years ago, I lost faith in everything. Feeling lost and helpless, I turned to alcohol. I thought that maybe I would be able to find sense in my life at the bottom of a bottle. I found no such thing, rather things only got worse.

When I reached my breaking point and hit rock bottom, I came to the realization that I could not get better and heal without help. It was at this time that I accepted God back into my life. His grace and love came into my life through the AA group I attended here at Sharon and through the wonderful pastors that helped guide me through my 12-step journey.

With God's help I began to make choices I could live with. God has blessed me with a wonderful life. I have faith that God gave me a second chance and saved me from myself and alcoholism so that I may do His will to the best of my ability, whether it is through my time, my talents, or my offerings. Being here at Sharon, I have endless opportunities to do God's work. I am so blessed to have this church and congregation in my life. Being a part of this church reaffirms my faith each and every day.

Dear Lord: We come to you in prayer to ask for your guidance in our lives. Give us the faith we need to do what's right in your eyes and the courage to carry on in the midst of trouble. Our lives are not always smooth-running but just knowing you are by our side will be enough to see us through. In your name we pray. Amen.

Yvonne Welsh

Tuesday, October 15, 2019

“God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending”

1

God, whose giving knows no ending,
From Your rich and endless store:
Nature’s wonder, Jesus’ wisdom,
Costly cross, grave’s shattered door.
Gifted by You, we turn to You,
Off’ring up ourselves in praise:
Thankful song shall rise forever,
Gracious donor of our days.

2

Skills and time are ours for pressing
Toward the goals of Christ, Your Son:
All at peace in health and freedom,
Races joined, the church made one.
Now direct our daily labor,
Lest we strive for self alone:
Born with talents, make us servants
Fit to answer at Your throne.

3

Treasure, too, You have entrusted,
Gain through pow’rs Your grace conferred:
Ours to use for home and kindred,
And to spread the Gospel Word.
Open wide our hands in sharing,
As we heed Christ’s ageless call.
Healing, teaching, and reclaiming,
Serving You by loving all.

Thank you, Lord, for the words of this hymn. We pray it may forever remind us of our call to share our gifts and grow in faith as we serve you. In your holy name we pray. Amen.



Bless us, Lord, with your
continued guidance and
inspiration as we seek to
follow you.

Guide our mission.

Broaden our welcome.

Strengthen our confidence.

Deepen our love.

Increase our hope.

And help us to experience
the joy of your immeasurable
grace for such a time as this.

In Jesus name,

Amen.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

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