



# Rise and Shine Levántate y Brilla

2022-2023 Devotional Guide  
ELCA Schools and Learning Centers

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ELCA Schools and Learning Centers

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Devotions are based on the Revised Common Lectionary for  
2022-2023. In accordance with the ELCA's guidelines for  
inclusive language, our devotional seeks to illustrate the  
expansive nature of God.

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# 2022-2023 EDITION ELCA SCHOOLS AND LEARNING CENTERS DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

## RISE AND SHINE / LEVÁNTATE Y BRILLA

ISAIAH 60:1-5

*<sup>1</sup>ARISE, SHINE; FOR YOUR LIGHT HAS COME, AND THE GLORY  
OF THE LORD HAS RISEN UPON YOU.*

As we begin a new academic year, I pray you are inspired by this year's theme reflected in Isaiah 60, *'Get out of bed, Jerusalem! Wake up. Put your face in the sunlight. God's bright glory has risen for you.* (The Message)

This verse reminds me of you; called to be a light in the world, shining forth the love, glory, and grace of God. As pastors, leaders, and staff of our schools and early learning centers, you have done an amazing job of supporting and educating our students. Together we have endured hard times, we have overcome adversity, and we have innovated new ways for our Church and Schools to be together in mission.

We are reminded that even in the midst of darkness, God is with us and will guide us through this new season. As you continue your year-round ministry or open up schools and centers for this coming year — do so with the intention of being a beacon of hope and healing for your staff, students, their families, and surrounding community.

The ELEA board and staff are grateful for the support of our members and the ELCA Churchwide network. We know that you are making a difference in the lives of children through education, care, and formation of faith. We are proud of the work you are doing and we celebrate and pray for you each day.

May this coming academic year be one in which you not only rise up and shine brightly, but also feel the warm and gentle touch of God on your face. In God's service,

*Cory Newman,*  
Executive Director  
Evangelical Lutheran Education Association

**AUGUST 7, 2022**  
**NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

HEBREWS 11:13

*ALL OF THESE DIED IN FAITH WITHOUT HAVING RECEIVED THE  
PROMISES, BUT FROM A DISTANCE THEY SAW AND GREETED  
THEM.*

If you ever want a play-by-play of Old Testament characters and their faith, read Hebrews 11. The author points to Abraham, Moses, Noah, and more ... and records how they reacted to God's promises by demonstrating, through their actions, "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." These life stories are remarkable, since they did not fully receive God's promises in their lifetime, yet they had faith. Faith-filled leaders have the advantage of seeing God's promise "from a distance," working in the lives of the children they serve. Often we do not know what happens to our students once they move on. Still, it is fun to wonder, "What will become of them?" Will one become famous for curing cancer, or perhaps be voted president? Or, in more desperate moments, we may wonder whether a particularly difficult student will (God forbid!) get in trouble with the law.

The gift of faith allows leaders in education to see God's promise for each child and greet that promise in present time. But what is the promise? The promise is of freedom and salvation through Jesus. Through faith in this promise, we can view our students as children of a loving God, knowing that God's freedom and salvation is for everyone, today and tomorrow, until the end of time. May we continue to live as people of faith, greeting God's promises with open arms, and sharing our faith, even if from a distance.

**Reflect:** Consider the lyrics of the song "From a Distance" by Bette Midler. How does this song relate to your own ideas about God and faith? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LN4AcFzxtdE>

**Pray:** Dear Lord, God of Salvation, let us be open to your promises of salvation today and every day, when we rise, and when we rest. Let your vision for us shine through all we do. Amen.

*Jenny James is the daughter of a Lutheran School Principal and the current Director of First Lutheran Preschool, Ellicott City, MD.*

**AUGUST 14, 2022**  
**TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

ISAIAH 5:7

*THE NATION OF ISRAEL IS THE VINEYARD OF THE LORD OF HEAVEN'S ARMIES. THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH ARE HIS PLEASANT GARDEN. HE EXPECTED A CROP OF JUSTICE, BUT INSTEAD HE FOUND OPPRESSION. HE EXPECTED TO FIND RIGHTEOUSNESS, BUT INSTEAD HE HEARD CRIES OF VIOLENCE. (NLT)*

God is the ultimate gardener/farmer. God has planted us with all the intentions for us to grow and produce good fruit so to continue to spread good fruit to others. I was a nontraditional student, not getting my education degree until my children were out of high school. I have always been drawn to the analogy of planting seeds and nurturing the crop.

Each fall we receive our new crop of seeds. Some seeds will need a lot of water and fertilizer, yet other seeds will land on their feet and take off running and spreading their wings. There are times when things do not go the way we want them to go. Some things will go wrong, naturally, but then there are times humans are what make things go awry.

With Gods help we are the nurturers of all the new seeds that walk thru our doors, to help them to see and be the light in times of oppression and violence. God helps us through these times.

**Reflect:** How will you nurture someone today?

**Pray:** Gracious God, thank you for being the ultimate gardener. You have planted us with care, and continue to nurturer us even when we go through times of oppression and violence. Helps us to hold onto the light of hope and let it shine for others. Amen.

*Michelle Schaffer, Christian Day Nursery School Director at  
St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church in Norwalk, OH.*

**AUGUST 21, 2022**  
**ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
JEREMIAH 1:4-10

As we work with students we often share with them that it is our responsibility as Christians to share God's word and spread it throughout our world. The passage from Jeremiah reminds us of what our students may be thinking, "but I'm only a child."

What we ask of our students isn't to overthrow and raise nations; however, each and every day we encounter students, inside our schools and centers, to whom we can teach and share the word of God. God has provided the words to each of us as we work together with our students. God has chosen our students as God's own to go into the world and share the good news with others.

Over my time in our schools I have found myself growing, along with our students. These young minds who are making decisions to follow Jesus, are examples to us all. One of my greatest joys is to hear from parents how their student chose to take a chapel lesson and share it at home with friends, family, neighbors or even someone seated next to them in a restaurant. Our students throughout the ELCA Schools and Learning Centers are shining examples of how God chooses each of us to spread the Good News and expand the kingdom of God.

Our teachers, staff, students and their families "Rise and Shine" sharing this Good News, just as God has instructed. This is what makes our work so incredibly rewarding — the students in our buildings going out and allowing God to provide the words to share the Good News!

**Reflect:** What stories do you recall of your students going out, unashamed, sharing the Good News they learned in chapel?

**Pray:** Lord God, we pray that you continue to provide the words for us to teach our students. Allow those words to flow from us into our students. Provide our students with the courage to share your Good News with all those around them. Amen

*Scott Dabson, Director, Alpine Academy of Rockford in  
Rockford IL, a Pre-K thru 6th Grade Elementary School.*

**AUGUST 28, 2022**  
**TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

PSALM 112:7

*HE WILL HAVE NO FEAR OF BAD NEWS; HIS HEART IS  
STEADFAST, TRUSTING IN THE LORD. (NIV)*

When I read in the Bible "I am steadfast trusting in the Lord," I wonder, "What does this really mean?" Some days have been extremely hard to trust in the Lord while watching the daily news about the covid pandemic, crime, prejudices and increasing homeless population in our local neighborhoods and now ... seeing the heartbreaking news about Ukrainian people fighting for their lives and loss of land, a place that Ukrainians use to call home. Where is God in all of this?

But then, as I ponder, pray, and meditate on the scripture, I know that God's steadfast love is always with us. God gave us the Holy Spirit to help give us courage and hope to get through challenging times in our lives.

When I think about ELCA Schools and Learning Centers, I have witnessed God's steadfast love flowing daily throughout our local ELCA preschools. I admire the passion of hardworking administrators, directors, teachers, and assistants who have kept their centers open during the past few years. Dedicated staffs have provided senses of stability in the lives of families, helping our children feel safe and loved in a nurturing environment. Our staffs, putting their heart and faith in the Lord, helped our schools and centers survive challenging times.

**Reflect:** How do you feel when you let go of your concerns and fears and trust fully in God?

**Pray:** Lord, help us learn how to breathe deep, release our worries and fears unto you, knowing your steadfast love will always be with us. Thank you, God, for your unconditional love. Amen.

*Debbie Cooper, Retired Director from Our Savior's Lutheran  
Preschool  
Everett, WA*



**SEPTEMBER 4, 2022**  
**THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
LUKE 14:25-33

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks frankly about the cost of discipleship. Jesus asks the disciples to carefully consider their call to discipleship as they follow him. Many Christians, in remembrance of their baptism, make the sign of the cross in worship. We are God's people marked with Jesus' cross. But that cross is costly, and those who bear it must be prepared to let go of everything to take up the new life of the crucified and risen Christ.

One of the books that was assigned reading for my college Doctrine I class was "The Cost of Discipleship," by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. For me, the book was eye-opening and life-changing. Growing up Lutheran, I learned that we are saved by God's Grace. There is nothing that we can do to be saved. Salvation is a gift from God. It is a free gift! While that is true, Bonhoeffer warns us not to think of grace as "cheap."

In the book, Bonhoeffer deals with the distinction between "cheap" grace and "costly" grace. According to Bonhoeffer, cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, and baptism without church discipline. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer goes on to explain that costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus — it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. It is costly because it compels a person to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him.

Whatever the cost, follow Jesus!

**Reflect:** What costs have you experienced in following Jesus?

**Prayer Prompt:** Pray that God helps us to follow Jesus, no matter the cost.

*Deacon Robert Federwitz is the former ELCA Director for Schools, retired, living in Dover, DE.*

**SEPTEMBER 11, 2022**  
**FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
LUKE 15:1-10

As a young adult I had the opportunity to go on a canoe trip at Wilderness Canoe Base, a Lutheran outdoor ministry in northern Minnesota. Well into our trip, we stumbled upon a boy huddled under a tree in a remote area. He had wandered from another group's campsite the previous day and was left behind.

Our guides gathered him into a canoe, then paddled out into the lake where we waved down a ranger patrolling the area in a float plane. The pilot landed and took the boy with him to try to locate his group and reunite them.

Later that day, we arrived at our campsite where a float plane was tied up. It was the same ranger. His emotions stirred as he told us about reuniting the lost boy with his group — the leaders had not bothered to search for him or seek help, and upon his return, greeted him with anger. The one who was lost was of no value to them, he was an inconvenience they would rather forget.

In today's gospel, Jesus tells two parables to the people who are complaining and unhappy with Jesus' unrestrained, unbiased love and concern. Why would Jesus bother with people whom they judged to be flawed, lost, and irritating? Jesus' response was clear, God loves and cares for everyone, especially those who are lost, rejected, and suffering. This is great news! When it comes to God's life-giving grace and attention, no one is overlooked or left behind.

**Reflect:** Who are the students in your classroom or school that you sense are forgotten, left behind, feel rejected by their peers or yearn to be noticed or found?

**Prayer Prompt:** Pray for God to help us be attentive to students who are alone, overlooked or are in the shadows, and to respond with the light of God's wisdom, grace, affirmation and patience. Amen.

*Rod Boriack, Des Plaines, IL has served as a Lutheran Camp Director and on ELCA churchwide staff. He is joyfully retired and writes Prayer Ventures for the Lutheran Outdoor Ministry Board.*

**SEPTEMBER 18, 2022**  
**FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

JEREMIAH 8:21

*21<sup>A</sup> FOR THE HURT OF MY POOR PEOPLE I AM HURT,*

It makes Jesus sad that people are poor. Everyone deserves the basics like food, shelter, water, and a good education like the one you are providing/receiving.

God sent prophets like Jeremiah to keep God's feelings in front of people, so when Jeremiah says, "For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt," he is speaking on behalf of a God who is hurting because the poor are not having their needs met. They are hurting and God is hurting.

When our kids are hurting what do we do? We listen, assess, love and take action. The same goes for us who follow Christ, when it comes to the poor. We are called to listen, assess, love and take action.

The prophet Isaiah reminds us that no one should have to stay down and live without. We are all called to "Arise, for the light of love, the light of Christ has come!" This good news changes everything.

When we rise up and respond to God's love with love for those who are hurting, we are also helping to relieve God's feelings of sadness. What a gift that children and adults can listen, assess, love, and take action to help God and God's people.

**Reflect:** How can the school/early learning center where you are share God's feelings of hurt for the poor and take action about it?

**Pray:** Holy Spirit, we don't want anyone to hurt. Help us care for your people with love. Amen.

*Pastor Janelle Rozek Hooper serves on the ELEA board as Churchwide liason where she is the Program Manager for Ministry with Children.*

**SEPTEMBER 25, 2022**  
**SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

1 TIMOTHY 6:17

Have you seen it? I have. I have seen it during story circle when all eyes are glued on the mystery reader. I have seen it when children are laughing and running so fast that they crash into the pads on the wall. I have seen it when the butterflies are ready for release after weeks of waiting, and all their faces are looking up into the sky, and suddenly the fluttering wings have disappeared.

Children, especially young children, live in the present. Nothing is more exciting or inspiring than a child fully absorbed in play, fully absorbed in learning! Their focus seemingly lasts for hours when they are engaged in discovery. Our art as teachers and early childhood educators is curating child wonder and curiosity and our students' innate love of life; while we also help our kids navigate the rigors of learning standards, benchmarks, and a myriad of life's pitfalls.

We walk the tension of preserving and growing their faith in a good and loving God with the expectations of a world that values money, status, and power over all. We cannot stop the inevitable worry about who has the most stuff or the most influence — instead, everyday that we model our own joy as a child of God, we are doing the good that leads our students and their families to their own joy. We are helping our students build the treasure of a foundation for the life that God wants us to have.

Shalom aleichem! Peace be with you!

**Reflect:** What treasure does my classroom, my school, my ministry store up? How does my work enrich life?

**Pray:** Good and gracious God, open my mind, my heart and my soul to the blessings of the present, the age of grace you have so freely given me. Help me share the wealth of your Word and grace with the students whose lives and families I touch. Amen.

*Chris Comella, retired Principal at Pilgrim Lutheran School,  
Chicago, consults for Lutheran schools served by the  
Chicagoland Lutheran Education Foundation. He is current  
President of the ELEA Board.*

**OCTOBER 2, 2022**  
**SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

LAMENTATIONS 3:25

*THE LORD IS GOOD TO THOSE WHO WAIT FOR HIM, TO THE  
SOUL THAT SEEKS GOD.*

Waiting is never easy whether you are a child or an adult. Waiting is especially challenging in the 21st century when with a push of a button you can instantly have a hot cup of coffee or a hot meal.

For the past couple of years all of us have had to wait more — wait for family and friends who are sick with COVID to be well again; for vaccines to be available; for churches and schools to open again; and for mandates to be lifted. In that waiting time, what have we as educators learned? What have our students learned?

Psalms 37: 7a says, “Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for God.” Patiently waiting could mean spending more time with the Lord in prayer, reading God’s Word, loving and serving our neighbors. With our students, patiently waiting could mean active listening as a child speaks, making eye contact with children as they arrive in the morning, and taking a deep breath when a challenging behavior interrupts the planned lesson.

As our school staff and congregations in Christ continue this year to light the way for the children, their families and communities, and to wait patiently for God’s plan to unfold in God’s time — let us continue to support them by showering them with our gratefulness and our prayers for God’s love to strengthen them with the peace that passes understanding.

**Reflect:** How do you wait patiently for the Lord?

**Pray:** Lord our God, give us patience to listen and wait to hear you speak. Amen.

*Gaye Rodriguey is an assistant PreK Readiness teacher and a  
Stephen Minister Leader at Oak Harbor Lutheran Church in WA.*

**OCTOBER 9, 2022**  
**EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
PSALM 66:1-12; 111 (MSG)

When I entered “Rise and Shine” into my computer search engine, I was delightfully surprised with the results — the first five entries were names for preschools. Following those was a muddle of services and businesses: a hotel, car wash, breakfast place with best pancakes ever, and a not so highly rated 1941 movie.

When I entered “Rise and Shine” SONG into the search engine, it was the familiar words and tune for the “Arky-Arky” song that appeared. My spouse and I recalled our Sunday school days, as we laughingly attempted to sing as many verses as possible.

This fun-to-sing song that exuberantly tells the story of Noah’s Ark, also reflects the words in the Psalms appointed for this week — Psalms of praise, celebrating God’s glorious and magnificent deeds. However, the song’s last verse gave me cause for pause:

*Now that is the end, the end of my story, story.  
That is the end, the end of my story, story. Everything is (clap  
once) hunky dory, dory. Children of the Lord.*

Ever so faithful teachers, administrators, pastors, and staff — there is NO end to your story or that of your students’! God’s Story in Jesus lives in and through you, each and every day as you Rise and Shine — as you wake up and get out of bed to model God’s loving, never-stopping grace and forgiveness with all those you encounter at school, church, home and in the world around you.

I love how Sally Lloyd-Jones writes in the last pages of *The Jesus Storybook Bible* that God’s Story is not over, it is not “the end,” instead, “continuará ... To be continued!”

**Reflect:** Click on the link to enjoy an enthusiastic welcome for the day! Rise & Shine <https://youtu.be/jyAD2OoFuoY>

**Pray:** Dear God, let your Story rise up in me and Christ’s light shine through me, each and every day. Amen.

*As her sons describe her, Linda Staats, AZ, is a “free-lancer for God.”*

**OCTOBER 16, 2022**  
**NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
LUKE 18:1-8

Dear friends,

It has been a long couple of years for all of us, years unlike any others that we have experienced. How have you coped? What have you done to survive personally, professionally, and faithfully?

I hope that you have discovered the strength-giving nature of prayer ... and a faith-fueled hope. We are people of promise and possibilities. Our continuing ministry of care and education has given us the confidence to continue to serve under the most difficult of circumstances.

I am sure that there were times that you were pressed almost to the breaking point. But here you are ... unbroken, unbowed, ready to continue this precious ministry. Even in your most powerless moment, you have had at your disposal the unlimited power of prayer.

Continue to pray — daily, hourly, minute-by-minute — for those entrusted to you, their families, each other, your family, and the congregation that hosts and supports your ministry. Pray for strength, patience, hope, and wisdom. You and yours will be blessed and strengthened through this ministry of prayer.

Thank-you for all you have done, are doing, and will do!

**Reflect:** How does knowing of God's persistent love help encourage you in your prayer life?

**Pray:** Persistent God, Thank-you for not giving up on us and for walking with us through these past years. Fill us with your grace and courage to continue and grow this ministry you have placed in our hands. In Jesus' name, Amen.

*Josef Aalhue is an ELCA parish pastor who retired for the fifth time. Preschool and day care were an essential part of his ministry in the past two congregations he served — the preschool even had a position on the Church Council in one of the congregations.*

**OCTOBER 23, 2022**  
**TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
2 TIMOTHY 4:6-8

Have you ever run in a marathon? If you have, then you know that you must train and eat healthy in order to prepare. You must also have the proper gear, specifically shoes, to help make sure that you are ready for the race and all that it brings. We are in a race everyday of our lives as we walk alongside our Lord, strengthening our faith. Just as we prepare for races, we must also prepare for our journey in life and walk of faith. Throughout this journey we will not only need the right tools, but friends to help us when we fall. Our friends will help us get back up, lift us up, carry us, and even sometimes push us as we grow.

Running in a race is not easy and the preparation can be more burdensome than expected. As we continue to run the race of life, not only do we have friends alongside us, but a loving God who cares for us, listens to us as we pray, and makes sure that we have all we need to grow — and share. Our task is to also share with others, so they too may hear God's word and grow in their walk of faith with their Lord. The journey we are on is not easy, but we know that when it all ends we will be reunited with God in our heavenly home — what a great joy that will bring!

**Reflect:** How do you continue to grow in your walk of faith? In what ways can you share the good news with others? What does it mean to humbly serve? How does your school/center reach beyond its four walls to share the gospel? How can you encourage your students and families to do what Matthew 28 is inviting them to do?

**Prayer Prompt:** Ask the Lord to help you serve and give back, because God has given you so much. Pray for patience and strength as you take on the task to show others what it means to share the gospel. Pray that through the opportunities at your school and center, that others may see what it means to be a child of God, and in return, share what that means with others.

*Michael Rottmann is Principal, Grace Lutheran School, Winter Haven, FL. He served on the ELEA National Board of Directors for 8 years, most recently as president.*



**OCTOBER 30, 2022**  
**TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
LUKE 19:1-10

“Zacchaeus was a wee little man, a wee little man was he.”

As a person of less than average height — I prefer to say, "vertically challenged" — Zacchaeus has had a special place in my life's story. In fact, at my wedding in 1980, the pastor thought it would be a good idea to make this our wedding text (groan). But, actually, wee little Zacchaeus is a pretty good example for any of us, short or tall. And particularly for the wee ones we teach and embrace in our classrooms and our hearts.

Zacchaeus was unacceptable to his neighbors, for a host of reasons. As the chief tax collector of Jericho, he was seen as having made his fortune on the backs of his fellow citizens — not to mention being in the employ of the hated Romans. Jesus however, sees him as a "son of Abraham," a Child of God.

How many "Zachs" are in your classroom? Regardless of how we may see them, warts and all, it helps to view them through the eyes of Jesus, who sees past our rash judgments. With the eyes of Jesus, we can see each and every wee one as worthy of our time, our compassion, our ministry of love and acceptance.

"Zacchaeus, I'm coming to your house today." May we do no less in our own contexts. For the Christ who loves and accepts every wee one calls us to do the very same in his name.

**Reflect:** Who is the "Zacchaeus" in your setting? What factors push such wee ones to margins of your group's circle of inclusion? How could Jesus' acceptance of such a despised soul change our way of dealing with the outsiders in your setting?

**Pray:** Dear Jesus, you opened your arms and your heart to someone despised and excluded by others. Help me accept and embrace the wee ones in my life, that no one stand outside of your love, or mine. Amen.

*Bill Hurst is Senior Pastor of First Lutheran Church and School in Torrance, CA. He served on the ELEA Board of Directors and as an advocate for Lutheran weekday education ministries.*

**NOVEMBER 6, 2022**  
**TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
LUKE 20:27-38

The Sadducees were setting Jesus up, most likely to embarrass him and undercut his authority as a teacher, since the beliefs of the day among the Sadducees included "no resurrection;" but the Pharisees believed there was resurrection. He was bound to alienate half of the crowd no matter what he said.

Jesus highlights the fact that the question asked by the Sadducees considers resurrection as an extension of life, as we know it. He then outlines the radical gap between earthly life ("this age") and resurrection life ("that age"). Procreation is necessary to sustain the human race in "this age"—a world where people die. It is not necessary in "that age" where spirits are like angels — no longer subject to death.

From a practical standpoint, the question that comes to my mind is, "How would you like to be brothers No. 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7?" To me it would seem a bit like suicide given the fact that every brother died while married to this "black widow." I happen to be one of those people who have had two husbands die, and trust me, sometimes people raise their eyebrows a bit. But seven?

What a comfort to know that we will not have to "choose" among former spouses when we die. There is no marriage in Heaven! What a comfort for children to know that if one of their parents dies and the remaining parent marries someone else, they are not betraying the deceased parent! God's love abounds.

**Reflect:** No one knows what the afterlife is like. We only have Jesus' metaphorical descriptions to rely on. How does what you may have been taught jive or conflict with what we learn in Luke?

**Pray:** Gracious God, thank you for your abounding love. While we cannot grasp what eternity will be like, help us to trust your word and spread it to the children and families we serve. Amen.

*Gayle Denny is a lifelong educator, former ELEA Executive Director, recipient of the Donald A. Vetter Award, and happily retired in AZ.*

**NOVEMBER 13, 2022**  
**TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
ISAIAH 65:17-25

In this text, I hear HOPE! The season of Advent is drawing near, we know hope is coming. Advent can be seen as a season of waiting, but, what are we waiting for? Christmas, yes ... we are waiting for December 25. We are waiting for presents and special food and seeing family. But we all know it's bigger than these things. What are we really waiting for? We know Christ was born. We're not really waiting for baby Jesus — that happened long ago. What if we're waiting for the end of the story? The Prophet Isaiah explains that it is only by letting go (and not clinging on to) the old things that we're able to find out what new things God has in store for us TODAY.

Rise and SHINE! Life is not about the past. Our God is constantly creating. Today is the only time in which we exist. This day, this moment, these children are in our care — NOW. We can't ignore the very real pain and suffering each one of us experiences. Isaiah wrote these words to a group of people who'd been exiled to Babylon from their home in Israel after a long and bloody war. He is encouraging them not to be stuck there, in their pain and suffering. He wanted them to be open to possibility, to believe in a God of opportunity; a God of transformation. So, what is the end of this story? It's NOW. It's what we are doing in this world — today, in this moment. We know how the story ends. We know where it's going — it's beautiful.

**Reflect:** Who are you in this story? How can you help others be open to possibility, opportunity, and transformation?

**Pray:** Transforming Lord, we thank you for the opportunity to RISE AND SHINE! Help us to move in to this new day knowing that things can change, that we can change. Help us to let go of the old things so that we're able to find out what new things God has in store for us TODAY. Amen.

*Linda Chambers is Director of Memorial Lutheran Chapel School and the congregation's Family Ministry, St. Augustine, FL. She celebrates 30 years in ministry. Linda served on the ELEA Bd 2006-2015 and was selected ELCA Early Childhood Director of the Year, 2015.*

**NOVEMBER 20, 2022**  
**TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
PSALM 46

I was raised knowing that God is with us in times of trouble. Remembering back, it seemed the focus was more on larger “troubles” that appeared in life — the overwhelming things, the life changing things. We found God to be a safe place to turn. I remember having long conversations with God during troubled times. I could feel God with me.

As I’ve matured in my faith, I’ve realized that God is present in every aspect of our daily lives, with us all the time. God sees and cares continuously about us in all that we do, including all the little things. God is near and God is accessible, we just may not “feel” God’s presence every time. God’s protective power is available to us all the time, we just need to trust.

To know that God is near removes fear. Knowing this helps me to let go of any doubts I may have, and any anxiety of daily decisions and outcomes. I know God is in control of my life and whatever the outcome, it will be in my best interest. There’s the popular saying, “Let go and let God;” give God control as we stand empty in ourselves, on our own, but strong in the Lord.

To be still in the Lord is to rest in trust in the truth of who God is. Give God time and space to work deeply in your heart and feel the Lord’s presence.

**Reflect:** What is one trouble that you have been struggling with that you can give to God and rest in trust for the answer?

**Pray:** Lord God, please guide us into the confidence of knowing that you are always near whether we may feel your presence or not. Please help us to rest in the faith that you see all, know everything, and care continuously in our daily lives with, or without, trouble. Amen.

*Kimberly Morse Julian is Office Manager and Ministries  
Coordinator at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Ephrata WA. She  
is also a freelance Christian writer.*

**Nov. 27, 2022**

**FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

ISAIAH 2:4-9 & PSALM 122:1-9

*<sup>4</sup>THEY SHALL BEAT THEIR SWORDS INTO PLOWSHARES —  
NEITHER SHALL THEY LEARN WAR ANYMORE. ISAIAH 2*

*<sup>6,7</sup>PRAY FOR THE PEACE OF JERUSALEM. PEACE BE WITHIN  
YOUR WALLS. PSALM 122*

“Seek peace. Really work at it.” That’s the clear message of the Old Testament readings for this week. The call for peace is a very loud call to all in ELCA Schools and Learning Centers.

The absence of peace is so obvious. Kids get into fights. Parents stir up trouble. Co-workers can be hard to get along with. In each of these situations the Lord’s call is clear, “Seek peace.”

It is hard work. It requires specific peace-making skills when there is a conflict of values (not behaviors). We listen to and repeat back the values we hear expressed by others. We each agree to re-examine our values and live by our convictions.

When the conflict is over behaviors, we call for clear description of the unacceptable behavior and their negative consequences. We actively listen to each other. We use “I” language. We remain steadfast in our commitment to “win-win” solutions. When we assist others who are in conflict, we assist in identifying the unacceptable behaviors and the unacceptable results. We seek a halt to that behavior. All agree on positive, alternative responses.

We pray for peace as we pray for ourselves, for those with whom we are in disagreement, or for the third parties that are in conflict.

**Reflect:** Who on your staff do you identify as the best at “seeking peace?” What role does prayer play in the peace-making process?

**Pray:** Lord, make all of us instruments of your peace, especially bless those who do it in our ELCA Schools and Learning Centers. In the name of Jesus, Prince of Peace. Amen.

*Mel Kieschnick, now living in retirement in San Diego, has spent more than 70 years as a colleague to all in Lutheran education who seek peace and growth.*

**DECEMBER 4, 2022**  
**SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

ISAIAH 11:6

*<sup>6B</sup>AND A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM.*

The classroom is filled with Christmas decorations. Paper loops or an Advent calendar help count the days. Red and green glitter covers the floor and tables. Bless the one who vacuums.

Kids are eager. Parents arrive late, apologizing for making a quick stop for a secret gift. It's exciting and challenging for you — at home and at school.

You may take the children to the church sanctuary to light a candle on the Advent wreath. Each wants to be the first in line to lead the others there. (Pre-schoolers will want this, not 8th graders!)

You share about the angels telling Mary and Joseph what to expect, to not be afraid, and to have faith that the child to be born would be God's child. Little kids' eyes are wide; older kids roll their eyes. One young one says, "I know baby Jesus came so we could know God's love." You are surprised to hear these words from a child who sometimes causes trouble. You remember the lovely verse hidden in today's reading from Isaiah, "and a little child shall lead them."

You listen more carefully to your kids as Christmas draws near. You hear profound things. When you leave for Christmas break, you remember ... the little child born in Bethlehem will lead us to love, hope, and faith. God bless your work, your Christmas, and your New Year with gratitude and peace.

**Reflect:** What profound words have you heard from a student? When and why did other students possibly roll their eyes? How can one hold these two thoughts in balance?

**Prayer Prompt:** Ask God for strength, wisdom, and patience in these wonderful and hectic days. Pray for the kids to ask important questions and for those who roll their eyes.

*Rev. Beth Orling, now living in the Pacific Northwest, remembers enjoying Advent with the kids at St. John Care, Westville, NJ.*

**DECEMBER 11, 2022**  
**THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT**  
ISAIAH 35:6-7

Just before the pandemic began our family welcomed our third child, a child born with Trisomy 21, a chromosomal abnormality that is created when the 21st chromosome replicates three times rather than the typical two. This genetic difference is also known as Down Syndrome. As parents, my husband and I have learned to practice waiting with expectant patience. Because of her intellectual and physical disabilities, our third child's development has not been as lightning fast as our two older children. We have learned to wait for the sign for "Mom" (an open palm touching the chin) to be joined by the "m" sound and then a "ma" sound and then with more cheerleading and modeling, a joy-filled "MAMA!"

Often our waiting feels like the wilderness Isaiah describes — dry, desolate, without a clear path forward. Yet, miraculously, God moves in the wilderness and the unexpected happens — a new sound is made, a skill emerges. We have learned to wait patiently for the ways God is present and forging a path. Sometimes God shows up in the voice of a therapist, a teacher, or a parent whose keen eyes discern something we've missed. It's as if a spring of water bursts forth to quench our thirst and worry.

As educators, you know well the spiritual discipline of expectant waiting. You wait for the student who has repeatedly struggled to finally master the skill, for the idea to click, for the sounds of speech to emerge. You point the way towards a path students might not yet discern is possible for themselves. Your voices serve as springs of water giving hope to students and families in the midst of their own deserts. Even as the pandemic lingers, we wait, expectant, hopeful, patient, trusting God is faithful.

**Reflect:** What is something for which you are waiting? What are the joys in the midst of your waiting? How is waiting challenging?

**Pray:** Holy God, use our lives, our voices, our vocations to point others toward the abundant life in you. In Jesus name, Amen.

*Rev. Sarah Lang lives in Richmond, VA where she serves Epiphany Lutheran Church in Faith Formation Ministry.*

**DECEMBER 18, 2022**  
**FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

PSALM 80:17-19

There are different types of Psalms. This Psalm is one of prayer, not just from an individual but from the community, the nation of Israel. After Solomon died, Israel was divided into two nations. This prayer for help was from the nation of Israel during a time of conflict and revolt. Psalm 80 is a prayer for help. Prayer is how we communicate with God. Three times in this Psalm the people ask to be restored and that God's face shine upon them, so that they may be saved.

When we think of our own communities, we know there is suffering and despair. For many, this time of year is not a joyful one. As a result of building relationships with parents, grandparents, and guardians of children and youth during the school year, we become aware of those in need and those who are suffering. We know of friends and colleagues who also may be going through difficult times. There are times when we, ourselves, are hurting. Often times, we hide the pain and feel embarrassed or unwilling to reach out for help.

Advent is a good time to communicate with God in prayer as we await the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, the one at God's right hand. Jesus is the human face of God. It is through Jesus that we have seen and continue to see God's face shine upon us.

**Reflect:** How do you respond in times of trouble, need, or conflict? How might you ask in prayer that God's face shine upon you and those in your school?

**Pray:** Dear God, you promised to save the Israelites from suffering. We, in our schools, communities, and homes join in this plea and ask that you save us from times of suffering and despair. We ask that your face shine upon us with grace, peace, and love. Restore us O Lord, God of hosts. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

*Debbie Streicher is Co-Director at Milestones Ministry, former president of the Christian Education Network of the ELCA, and a certified ACC Level coach for the ELCA.*



**DECEMBER 24 & 25, 2022**  
**NATIVITY OF THE LORD - CHRISTMAS EVE/DAY**

ISAIAH 9:2-7

*v2 THE PEOPLE WHO WALKED IN DARKNESS HAVE SEEN A  
GREAT LIGHT; THOSE WHO LIVED IN A LAND OF DEEP  
DARKNESS ON THEM LIGHT HAS SHINED.*

Merry Christmas! Hopefully, this is a week of rest for most of us professional teachers, school staff, and our students (pastors eventually!). Breaks from the school year may be a little different for the routines of families; yet I pray that there is time for rest and renewal during this time of year when we pause, in awe and wonder, before the manger that bears God's light. We exit the flow of our typical routines to read and hear, contemplate and be inspired by the good news of Jesus birth.

So this week, maybe don't worry about the need to rise and shine. Perhaps this week you can rest and shine knowing that the light of the glory of God breaks into our world in a profound way in the story of Christmas. Jesus is the light that shines on us all for our increased joy, hope and strength for the journey.

Whether you're recovering from a challenging semester and needing to renew the strength to persevere in faith, basking in the glow of an amazing year so far, or wherever in between — may you rest this week, letting the light of Jesus shine on you. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us ... Wonderful Counselor, Might God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. May this gift of light hold you for the continued journey and light your way.

**Reflect:** Where do see God's light breaking through? Where do you long to see God's light break through?

**Pray:** Prince of Peace, shine down your divine love on us and inspire us to be your light and peace in the world to reveal your love and grace. Give us rest and renew our spirit for the work to which you call us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

*R. Adam Berndt is pastor of Cross of Hope Lutheran Church and School in Albuquerque, NM where he is blessed to continue to learn and grow in life and faith with this Spirit-filled community.*

**JANUARY 1, 2023**  
**FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS DAY**  
HEBREWS 2:10-18

This time of year it is wonderful to curl up with a fuzzy blanket and a cup of coffee in front of a warm fire, or by a window watching the snow fall, while taking pause for everything the year has brought. I enjoy taking time to thank God for the many children God has brought into my life each year. I love how this verse reminds us that all children are children of God. God created each to be different from the other and that each one is loved by God.

There are many new terms today that people use to express and share their identity with others. There is relief for many to no longer be bound by traditional gendered terms — and joy in finding a new term that fits the way God made them.

Let us be thankful to God, not only for new language, but for people naming themselves and living their best lives the way God intended. Jesus was tested and suffered, similar to how God's people have suffered. We strive to create loving spaces in the world for all people.

God has blessed all God's children with all kinds of similarities and differences. God knows each one of us and loves us — unconditionally! Be God-like in your thankfulness. Celebrate all things about all children and grown-ups in your life and who God made them to be.

**Reflect:** Have you had a title that didn't fit quite right?

**Pray:** Dear God in Heaven, thank you for bringing me into the lives of your children. I strive to love each one the way that you love them — and me. Thank you for making the world such a wonderful place with such a vast array of peoples. I am blessed. Amen.

*Heather Charmoli is a former ELEA Program Director and now works as the Program Administrator at the Minnesota Association for the Education of Young Children. She strives to be loving and inclusive to all of God's children and grown-ups.*

**JANUARY 8, 2023**  
**FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY**  
**BAPTISM OF THE LORD**  
MATTHEW 3:13-17

I will never forget learning the song “Arky, Arky” (or “Rise and Shine” as it is sometimes known). I was in third grade and our Sunday school music teacher added it to our repertoire of songs that we sang during openings. From the first time I heard it, I loved the song. I memorized it quickly and I looked forward to singing it every week. Over the years I have introduced hundreds of children to the “Arky, Arky” song. It is one of my go-to standards whenever I’m called upon to lead children’s singing.

Although the verses to “Arky, Arky” are about Noah building the ark, the chorus is more multi-purpose, reminding us to “rise and shine and give God the glory.” In this week’s Gospel, Jesus rises from the waters of baptism and God’s Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove. Jesus rises from his baptism and begins his earthly ministry. As the embodiment of God here on earth, Jesus shines God’s love wherever he goes, giving God the glory.

Over the last three years, in spite of many difficulties and challenges, Lutheran educators have continued to rise, shine, and give God the glory. We have risen to the occasion as we switched to remote learning, lived with mask mandates, and worked through staff shortages, all the while maintaining strict health and safety protocols. God’s love has continued to shine through each teacher making a difference for the students in their classroom. We could not have made it through all of these challenges without God. Let’s give God the glory for sustaining us through this difficult season.

**Reflect:** What is a favorite children’s song that is still relevant to your ministry? Sing it with your students this week!

**Pray:** Dear God, thank you for sustaining us during the difficult times. Help us to be a reflection of your love to all those we meet. To you be the glory, Amen.

*Melissa Roselle, a lifelong Lutheran, is celebrating 10 years as Director of St. John’s Lutheran Preschool in Springfield, IL.*

**JANUARY 15, 2023**  
**SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY**  
JOHN 1:29-42

Pointing is something that teachers do a lot. We point to the blackboard or the calendar. We point where to sit down. We point to where we are going next. In the John text for today, John the Baptist sees Jesus walking across the street and points to him, “Look!! There’s the lamb of God!” Because of that pointing, some other people get interested in the guy who is walking by.

Eventually, two disciples of John go and talk to Jesus and then they follow him. John, you see, is pointing out what is important in the world as it goes by. In a sense, John is an icon – you know, like one on your computer screen. John is an icon who says, “Don’t look at me. Look at that one – that one over there.” John is an icon that opens up a world bigger than just himself and invites people into a bigger world.

Teaching is like that, isn’t it? Teaching is about pointing beyond yourself and becoming an icon, a window, that your students can look through to see more. And as disciples of Christ who work in Lutheran schools, well, a big part of that “more” is seeing God active in the world. It is you, standing and pointing out saying, “Look! Look over there! Do you see Jesus? I see him! And he has a great invitation just for you.”

**Reflect:** How have you been an icon in the past? How might you in the future?

**Pray:** Lamb of God! You invite us to see the world in a bigger way. Help us to see and then point others towards your vision of the world. Amen.

*The Rev. Dr. Laura Barbins, bishop of the Northeastern Ohio  
Synod of the ELCA.*

**JANUARY 22, 2023**  
**THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY**  
MATTHEW 4:12-19

Peter and Andrew didn't fish with bait. They didn't use hooks. These brothers fished with nets, casting them down into the dark depths to gently come alongside the fish, lifting them up into the light.

Their technique is important to note, because it shapes how we hear Jesus' invitation to fish for people. We are not called to lure people in with bait. We certainly aren't called to hook them and drag them in by the lip. Instead, we are called to fish for people by coming alongside them, meeting them where they are, especially when they are in the dark depths, to lift them up into the light of Christ.

Our preschools are prime fishing spots as we come alongside families in a wonderful but emotionally fraught time in their lives. It is a time of joy and wonder, no doubt, but it is also often a time of exhaustion for parents and separation anxiety for children. We sometimes hear of dark times they are enduring.

Thank you for the ways you come alongside these precious families to lift them towards the light.

**Reflect:** How can I lift someone up towards the light of Christ today?

**Pray:** Lord Jesus, in dark seasons and dark times I need your light. Lift me up into your boat and renew me in your love, and then put me to work fishing for people, so they will know your light and your love too. Amen.

*Rev. Jeffrey R. Spencer delights in leading Chapel at His Kids Preschool, a ministry of Oak Harbor Lutheran Church, WA.*

**JANUARY 29, 2023**  
**FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY**  
MICAH 6:8

Walk. Love. Do. Those are the three things God “requires” of us. We are called to walk each day as God’s children by staying committed to love, kindness, and justice. This is our calling every day as we care for the most precious gifts in our communities — children.

As you welcome each child with a smile, a hug, and your reassuring presence, they learn about loving kindness. As you remain committed to showing up for them day after day, they learn about walking humbly with God. As you love them without judgment, teach them to share, to respect others, to listen, and to use words, you are planting the seeds of justice.

Just because it is truly God’s work, doesn’t mean it is easy. The days get long. The crying just keeps coming. They find new ways to press your buttons. And yet, laughter fills the room, families are grateful, and the children learn from you some of the most important lessons in life ... to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God!

**Reflect:** How will you embrace this important mission in your life and work?

**Pray:** God of grace and mercy, give me the strength to walk with you every day, showing love, kindness, and justice in my words and actions. Amen.

*Rev. Felix Javier Malpica, bishop of the La Crosse Area Synod of  
the ELCA.*

**FEBRUARY 5, 2023**  
**FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY**

MATTHEW 5:16

*IN THE SAME WAY, LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE BEFORE OTHERS, SO  
THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS AND GIVE GLORY TO  
YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN.*

When I think of these words of Jesus, I cannot help but think of our children singing in chapel:

*This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.  
Hide it under a bushel? NO, I'm gonna let it shine.  
Jesus gave it to me, I'm gonna let it shine.*

What is this light? I believe that it is the essence of our being, the purpose for which God created us. When we serve others according to the purpose for which God created us, we shine! We are a light for others and give glory to God.

The light that we have been given is so wonderful! When we let it shine, and let God guide us according to our purpose, we experience a calm, inner peace, even when chaos is all around. How wonderful is this gift, to know that God is our loving Father who provides for all our needs, Jesus is our Savior and loves us completely, just as we are, and the Spirit has been given to us to guide us in our work each day!

Being aware of this knowledge fills me with so much joy that I can't help but feel peace and contentment. The more I think of how much our Triune God blesses me, it lights up my day no matter what is going on, and allows me to shine in my thoughts, words and actions, giving glory to God through the work that I have been called to do!

**Reflect:** What are ways that your light can shine before others?

**Prayer Prompt:** Thank God for the light that has been placed within you! Ask God for help to shine your light in the midst of any darkness that may be around you as you go throughout your day, doing the work God has given you to do.

*Joanne Osterland has been blessed to serve as the Executive Director of Christ Lutheran Preschool, Dallas, TX, for 7 years.*

**FEBRUARY 12, 2023**  
**SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY**

PSALM 119:1-8

*Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who live with spiritual integrity! Blessed are those who honor the Inner Being, who follow You with their whole heart, Who enfold the world with love and walk on peaceful paths! You have shown us the way of Truth, the way that leads to freedom. O, that I might ever reflect the Light! Then I shall know inner peace, as I surrender myself into your Hands. I will praise you with a grateful heart, as I lean on your great kindness. As I forsake the path of darkness, O have mercy on me!*

Psalms for Praying: An invitation to Wholeness by Nan Merrill

It can be hard for us Lutherans, whose theology foundation is grace, to find comfort with the idea of law. Rules are hard when they're put upon us or when we have to implement them. Yet, we know how healthy our lives can be when boundaries are instilled around things like time, finances, and relationships.

Nan Merrill's translation of Psalm 119 helps us see the goodness we can find from the guidelines of God. Following rules and law is not about the reward at the end for being "good." Embracing boundaries helps us live out God's love. Living with spiritual integrity is a gift that gives us inner peace which allows us to participate in bringing God's kingdom to our here and now. It's not something we have to wait for or do, just because we are rewarded on the other side. We live each day in grace, while doing our best to work within God's guidance, so we can rise and shine and live out love, light, and truth.

**Reflect:** How do you bring peace, love and light to God's kingdom here on Earth?

**Pray:** Lord God, allow us to embrace boundaries and rules with grace so we may reflect your light through the world. Amen.

*Kate Elkins is the Director of Midtown Lutheran Preschool in Atlanta, GA and currently serves on the ELEA Board.*



**FEBRUARY 19, 2023**  
**TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY**  
MATTHEW 17:1-9

“Transformers: Robots in Disguise” was a popular television show among my friends, as I was growing up. Animation, music, and sound effects helped our young minds better understand the plot, as a battle between good and evil. The original series theme song includes the words, “Transformers- more than meets the eye.”

This Sunday we get a glimpse into the transfiguration of Jesus. The setting matters (mountaintop). The people matter (Peter, James, and John accompany Jesus). The sound matters (God’s voice proclaims Jesus as the beloved Son). As Jesus changes before the disciples, the disciples, too, are changed

Faith communities provide gathering space and time to glimpse into God’s redeeming work in the world. Churches and schools depend on teachers, administrators, congregation members, and pastors to invite neighbors into experiencing the love of God in Christ Jesus. Often, these transformations happen in small, nearly undetectable ways. These changes are a part of God’s will for the world; that all may know the love of God, through Christ Jesus, by the Holy Spirit. In our churches and schools, we proclaim the Savior who has come, and who will come again. God’s work in you, and through you, is certainly more transformative than meets the eye. Within our schools the setting matters, the people matter, and what is heard matters. Our lives are transformed not because of what we say or do (or don’t), but because the Creator of the universe makes a claim on each of us, and all of us. We are invited each day to experience the transformative act of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, where there is certainly more than meets the eye.

**Reflect:** Where have you seen God transforming the world today?

**Pray:** God of new life, root us in the transformed nature of life, gifted by you through Jesus Christ in word and sacrament. Send us into the world as agents of justice and peace. Amen.

*Pastor Paul Waterman serves the people of Elim Lutheran  
Church and the greater Marshalltown, IA community.*

**FEBRUARY 22, 2023**

**ASH WEDNESDAY**

**MATTHEW 6:19-21**

Uri Shulevitz adapted a folk tale called, The Treasure. In the story a poor old man, named Isaac, dreamed that he should go to the capital city and find a treasure buried under the royal bridge. When he got there, he found the bridge guarded day and night. He stayed by the bridge all day for many days until finally the royal guard asked him what he was doing there. Isaac sheepishly told the guard about his dream. The guard laughed and said to old Isaac, "Too bad you wore out your shoes to get here. If I believed in the dream I had, I'd go to the city where you come from and dig for a treasure under the stove of some fellow named Isaac!"

At that, Isaac left the capital city, journeyed home and found the treasure buried beneath his very own stove. In thankfulness, he built a house of prayer and in one of the corners put an inscription, "Someone must travel far to discover what is near."

Marty Haugen has written a song based on Matthew 6:21, entitled, "Where Your Treasure Is," reminding us that God has graced our lives with treasures that fulfill our every need. God also calls us to scatter those lasting treasures to others. The lyrics of the song, remind us to ask, "Are the treasures we hold dear reflective of the God who lives in us?" If so, we needn't look for those treasures but instead simply live them.

**Reflect:** Can people tell by your actions or the words you speak what your treasure is and how you live it?

**Pray:** Gracious God, you are the ultimate treasure. For you are buried within us and throughout the world around us. Please make us wise, reflecting the treasure of your love. Amen.

*Dr. Kris Meyer is a retired principal of St. Paul's Lutheran School in Waverly, IA. She is hopelessly curious.*

**FEBRUARY 26, 2023**  
**FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT**

MATTHEW 4: 1-11

In today's world, advertisements seem to focus on "ME, ME, ME" and what we want (or think we need.) The media tells me that I need a bigger car, the latest clothing styles, a more prestigious job, etc. Children are sucked into this cycle as well, wanting the toys and electronics they see in advertisements, and desiring to be a part of the "cool" group, with the current "hot" styles.

Jesus faced similar pressure. In the gospel lesson, Jesus is tempted in the wilderness ... to make stones into bread, to jump off the pinnacle of the temple expecting God to rescue him, and to worship Satan in exchange for all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. These temptations were meant to make Jesus think about "ME, ME, ME," rather than about God and those called to serve.

Thinking about the children we teach and love and care for each day, how can we help them understand that "it isn't all about ME," instead, help them learn how to put God first in their lives? We bring God's word to them in our chapel and faith curriculum. We share God's love with them by our actions of love and modeling how to think of others first by sharing, taking care of others, and reassuring them they are loved by God. As they learn to love God, they truly become followers of Jesus.

**Reflect:** How can I help the children in my class to love and care for others instead of "ME, ME, ME?"

**Pray:** Gracious and loving God, daily use me to bring Christ's love into the lives of the children in my classroom. Use me to model for the children how to think of others before their own wants and desires. Amen.

*Shirley Becker serves as the Director of Westchester Lutheran Early Learning Center in Los Angeles, CA. As a former ELEE Board Member and President, Shirley believes strongly in the mission of the ELEE, and volunteers to help other directors in their calling.*

**MARCH 5, 2023**  
**SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT**  
JOHN 3: 1-17

When I read this text, two things happen:

First, I hear the spiritual 'witness,' likely because I have sung it so many times, but also just as likely because it is a reminder that we all come to God at some point in our lives desiring to know what we must do.

Jesus' answer to Nicodemus is no different than the answer we each hear. The "do" is so easy, we think it couldn't be real. Teasing out the idea of the power of the Spirit at Pentecost in verse 8, "the wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

We often think of the Holy Spirit as this gentle thing that blows through our lives; when we ought to consider the Holy Spirit as a powerful wind that brings about change to our spiritual lives, in the same way wind blows in new and powerful weather systems. Change that may seem scary, but is actually cleansing and necessary.

Second, John 3:16 is one of the most well known verses of the Bible. But we do a disservice to this message if we don't follow it with verse 17. Tied with the story of Nicodemus' desire, is Jesus assurance that Jesus came to earth as an act of love for all people, as an act of love and save us.

**Reflect:** What do you desire to know?

**Pray:** As Nicodemus came to Jesus desiring to know, help me to desire to know more about my relationship with God and to be able hear the answer through the Holy Spirit. Amen

*Pastor Elizabeth Clothier, Senior Pastor, Trinity Lutheran  
Church and School, Marysville, OH. Preschool - 6th grade.*

**MARCH 12, 2023**  
**THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT**  
ROMANS 5:1-11

God empowered us to grow, learn, build our minds and souls with the glory of God. We are able to do this through all of our trials, our errors, our wins and our losses. When we get discouraged, remember God purposely gave us HOPE, instilled in our hearts by allowing Jesus to be crucified to have him rise again.

As we go about our day, we run across children who are faced with what might seem trivial issues. But, these issues are equal to the issues in our adult lives. Helping a child to realize there is a way to resolve an issue and reminding them there is HOPE in every situation, is sharing God's words and vision for this world. It reminds us that God's love is not conditional and that God has given us love unconditionally.

In our varied roles, we are able to help children learn of the love God has and continues to give to us. Working together with parents, grandparents and other important people in their lives, helps build confidence in everything our children do. Building confidence, brings peace and love to the forefront of life.

**Reflect:** How can we help instill HOPE in the people we encounter?

**Pray:** Lord, you gave us new life by giving us your own. Help us to see goodness everyday and share the HOPE you gave us on the cross, with everyone we come in contact with. Amen.

*Mary Adams, Director of Ahwatukee Preschool in Phoenix AZ  
and a member of ELEA for 8 years*

**MARCH 19, 2023**  
**FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT**  
PSALM 23

The 23rd Psalm feels like home to me. It takes me back to my beginning, learning it as a girl in Sunday school and reciting it to my beloved grandmother. Later I stitched it into a beautiful, embroidered piece, now hanging in my living room for 25 years.

My family tells me they don't even notice it being there, but everyone knows the words well. They seep into us. The words are safe, loving, known and predictable. They emanate calm. The rhythm of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm draws us in and makes us want to join, connecting us. Different sections catch our attention in the various moments of our lives.

All these qualities remind me of our preschools: safe, love, being known, predictability, order, rhythm, meeting you where you are and drawing you in. Children and their families come to us each day seeking a place they are seen, heard, loved, and treasured. Something here is home. Something here is God.

May we think on these things and strive to embody the 23rd Psalm for our students, hoping the words will seep in, and that they will say, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long."

**Reflect:** What rhythms and rituals settle you and help center you as a teacher, parent, child of God? What restores your soul?

**Pray:** Shepherd Lord, thank you for your presence all around us and within us. May the rhythms of our days always center us in Christ and remind us we dwell in your safe, loving home forever. Amen.

*Janean Moriarty, Director of Vinland Lutheran Preschool,  
Poulsbo, WA*

**MARCH 26, 2023**  
**FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT**  
JOHN 11:1-45

*Jesus wept.* The shortest verse in the Bible is the most commonly selected verse that the children in my congregation choose for a summer memorization program every year. It's so easy, right?! Only two words and the memorization requirement seems quickly met. Ah, but not so fast. I ask children who choose this brief verse to also memorize its context and citation, the raising of Lazarus from John 11.

More than quickly memorizing, children (and adults!) can slowly engage in this precious story that includes both hurry and pace. We picture the scene ... the sight of a rushing Mary and the sound of a patient Jesus (yes, even the smells invite our imagination). We feel the tears and the grief. We relate to the conversations and the questions. It's not all pretty, but it is pretty powerful.

That these two words, *Jesus wept*, so quickly memorized lead us into a text meant for slow & patient reflection — is worth the change of pace. *Jesus wept* because *Jesus loves* and *Jesus knows* and *Jesus saves*. Count this as one of the Bible verses you've memorized! And then journey through the story slowly and imaginatively on this Lenten day.

**Reflect:** What Bible verses or stories or songs do you have memorized?

**Pray:** Lord, may your words be in secured in my mind, in my voice, and in my heart. May I know when to hurry, and when to slow down, for the sake of your resurrection power. Amen.

*Deacon Emily Myallis is Children's Minister at St. Paul Lutheran Church, Lititz, PA. She leads St. Paul Christian Early Learning Center, a member of ELEA, in weekly Chapel Worship.*

**APRIL 2, 2023**  
**SIXTH SUNDAY IN LENT**

PSALM 118:1

*O GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD, FOR HE IS GOOD; HIS  
STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER!*

This text speaks to me in a different way now that we have been through two years of Covid. Even in the middle of the fear and devastation of the Covid pandemic we could thank our Lord for his goodness. There have been so many children and family members in our preschools and church families affected by this pandemic. There has been loss of health and loss of life.

Even as we pray for healing this text reminds us that God is good. In the midst of our troubles and sadness God is working all things for good. We see the health issues and struggles of those who come into our lives, yet we know that God is good to surround us with helpers and fellow Christians to care for us and lift us up. Let us give thanks to God for God's goodness and unfailing love.

None of our suffering, even through the pandemic, can compare to the suffering of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He suffered pain and death on the cross for our sin. Whenever we feel alone, let us remember to give thanks to the Lord for all that he has done for us. His steadfast love endures forever.

As we lead the children in our schools, let us be an example to them and their care-givers in teaching and modeling how to love each other. Take a moment to stop and pray with others when they have troubles or worries. God is good and will hear our prayers.

**Reflect:** What healing needs to happen in your body or soul? Lay it at the feet of Jesus. Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for his love and goodness never fails.

**Pray:** Good and gracious God, thank you for your goodness and steadfast, enduring love. Send us out into the world to be your hands and feet, to love and serve others. Amen.

*Kelly Gilligan is Director of Celebration Children's Center of Our  
Saviour's Lutheran Church in Naperville, IL. Kelly was the 2019  
ELEA Early Childhood Director of the Year.*



**APRIL 7, 2023**  
**GOOD FRIDAY**

HEBREWS 10:16-25

*<sup>16</sup>THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS IN THEIR HEARTS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR MINDS.*

Do you recall what it is like to be the new person in school or at work? I remember the first time I walked into my junior high school when entering 7th grade. Thankfully the school hosted a back-to-school day where new students could come and walk their class schedule, open their lockers, and meet some of the teachers.

Life is full of encountering new spaces and places. In our reading today from Hebrews we are invited into what to most is an unfamiliar space, and enter into the holy of holies, the Sanctuary. Because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the curtain has been opened and God becomes accessible to all.

As we gather to remember Good Friday and the death of Jesus on the cross, we acknowledge that nothing can separate us from God — nothing in life or death or spaces unknown. I invite you as you hear the words which lead to the cross, to remember God has been with God's people from generation to generation. This is a promise of God that we can carry with us in all times and in all spaces. God's words will be in our hearts and in our minds forever, no matter what is happening now in our lives or what is to come. And with this promise I give thanks to God.

**Reflect:** When have you experienced entering a new school or unfamiliar place(s)? Consider how God goes with you into these unfamiliar spaces.

**Pray:** God of hope and encouragement, as we walk with Jesus to the cross today, remind us that you are always with us even in the unknown spaces and places of our lives. You are a God of promise, a God of love and a God who continues even today to write your words on our hearts and in our minds. Amen.

*Deacon Ingelaurie A Lisher is Director of Children, Youth and Family Faith Formation at St. Mark's Lutheran Church by The Narrows and Preschool in Tacoma WA.*

**APRIL 9, 2023**  
**RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD**  
JOHN 20:1-18

Just as there are four Gospels, each written for a specific audience, there are four unique stories of the Resurrection. The message of God's great love for us flows through all four Easter stories.

In John's account of the Resurrection, Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb alone, finds the stone moved and runs to Peter and John in a panic, thinking Jesus' body had been moved or stolen. As the disciples race to the tomb, John arrives first and looks inside, followed by Peter who boldly steps inside. As they observed the empty linens that had wrapped Jesus' body, it was enough evidence for their fledgling faith, though neither could yet connect these events to Jesus words or with the scriptures foretelling his crucifixion and resurrection. The disciples return home with this mystery on their minds.

Still despairing, Mary looks into the tomb and sees two angels sitting where Jesus' body had been. They ask why she's crying. As she tells her story, a man appears, asking the same question. She does not recognize him until he calls her by name. In that moment she recognizes Jesus as her beloved teacher, "Rabbouni". After Jesus counsels her that he will ascend to the Father, it's her joyful privilege to tell the disciples, "I have seen the Lord."

**Reflect:** Imagine that someone you love dearly has died. After the funeral and burial rites, you go to the cemetery and discover the grave has been dug up with nothing remaining except the hole in the ground. How would you react and feel? If someone then tells you they saw your loved one alive that very day, would you believe it? The Easter story is a mystery that is central to our faith. How can we help the children we teach to understand this story of God's love in age appropriate ways?

**Pray:** God of surprises, give us grace to believe what we don't understand. Give us the words to teach our children how much you love them. Let it be so. Amen.

*Karen Kress, Waupaca, WI, lifelong learner and teacher of God's children of all ages.*

**APRIL 16, 2023**  
**SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER**

JOHN 20:21

*JESUS SAID TO THEM AGAIN, "PEACE BE WITH YOU. AS THE  
FATHER HAS SENT ME, SO I SEND YOU."*

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you." So, how did God the Father send Jesus? The Gospel of John gives us at least three answers:

1. The Father sent Jesus out of love for the world. John 3:16: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son."
2. Jesus was sent to do the will of the God the Father. John 6:38: "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me."
3. The Father sent Jesus to show people who God is. John 12:45: "Whoever sees me sees the one who sent me."

Please take a few moments to pause and consider that Jesus is saying this to you: "As the Father sent me, so I send you — out of love for the world, to do God's will, and to let people see me through you." Jesus gifts you, as Jesus gifted those first disciples, with peace. In Jesus' day, "Peace be with you" was used as a general way of saying hello or goodbye. In its broader biblical sense, "shalom" is the gift from God of wholeness and wellbeing, safety and goodness, based on the assurance that God is with you and that God's love, grace, forgiveness, and mercy sustain you along the way. With this shalom from Jesus, we have joy, strength, and compassion, out of love for the world, to do God's will and to show others Jesus.

**Reflect:** What difference does it make for your work in Christian education to frame your work in the context of being sent as Jesus was sent?

**Pray:** Thank you, risen Jesus, for making me your own and trusting me enough to send me as you were sent. I pray for ever-deepening faith, so that I may glorify you in all that I do. Amen.

*Rev., Dr. S. John Roth is a grateful recipient of kindergarten,  
grade school, and high school education and formation in  
Lutheran schools.*

*He currently serves as bishop of the Central/Southern Illinois  
Synod of the ELCA.*

**APRIL 23, 2023**  
**THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER**  
LUKE 24:33

Having just walked the long dusty road from Jerusalem and witnessed Jesus breaking bread, the group walks back. They do not walk in day's light upon return. They walk as the sun sets no longer revealing the way. Yet Jesus has just revealed himself and his resurrection from the dead to this group. Yes, they are amazed. Yes, Jesus leaves them again. But without fully understanding why God brings Jesus back, they find their way in the dark to Jerusalem and to the eleven.

What happened when they said, "stay with us ... the day is now nearly over," to the stranger on the road remains beyond comprehension. Yet what happened seems to hold hope for something greater than the torture and murder of their beloved Jesus. What, they do not know. But together with other believers, they wish to make sense of this time. So, they hurry back no longer weary from the journey. Full of hope, possibility, and love.

How often in our own preoccupation with the events of the world, combined with additional roles outside of the school, children, and families we serve, that we do not see what is nearby? And when we do become curious, notice, and wake up — we fill with new energy, joy, and even delight. So much so that we too can, in the same hour, get up and return to a problem needing solving, work needing doing, and connections ready to be made?

**Reflect:** When do you feel a sense of urgency in regards to your work with children?

**Pray:** God of vision, open our eyes to the wonders before us. Help us to recognize who is with us. Amen.

*Jennifer Ohman-Rodriguez first answered God's call by becoming a teacher at Resurrection Lutheran Preschool in Chicago, Illinois. Since then she has written faith formation curricula for 1517 Media, gone to seminary and authored her first book, *A Time to Mourn & A Time to Dance: A Love Story of Grief, Trauma, Healing, & Faith (Chalice)*.*

**APRIL 30, 2023**  
**FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**  
**GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY**  
ACTS 2:42-47, JOHN 10:1-10

Thinking about Jesus as a shepherd, I usually imagine him with a single sheep. Passages like Psalm 23 and the Parable of the Lost Sheep remind us how we have a shepherd who loves and cares for us and knows each of us individually. But after we're found, where do we go? We go back to the flock, while being led and cared for by Jesus, as a group. Acts 2 and our Gospel for the week, John 10, show those following Jesus and the shepherd in groups, together.

Being with a flock is meant to be a safe space for sheep. It's also a social space. Of course God provides and comforts, but we also find this within a community of people God created. Being in community can be hard, yet when we keep our eyes on the leadership of our Good Shepherd, we can find deep meaning and purpose as individuals when we participate and support one another through joys and hardships.

Many of us have personal flocks we can tap into — families, our congregation, friend groups from various places. I am grateful ELEA has become a professional flock. It has been a blessing being engaged in a group that enthusiastically supports and encourages our Lutheran schools. If you've been a part of ELEA, but maybe wandered from the flock, we hope you return to the fold so we can continue to grow and learn together.

**Reflect:** Where do you find your flock? How do you engage meaningfully in community?

**Pray:** Gracious God, thank you for our flocks. Thank you for being our Good Shepherd. Guide us to reflect your care and love to one another within our communities. Amen.

*Kate Elkins is the director of Midtown Lutheran Preschool in Atlanta, GA and currently serves on the ELEA Board.*

**MAY 7, 2023**  
**FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**  
PSALMS 31:14-16

“Those who leave everything in God’s hands will eventually see  
God’s hand in everything.” (unknown)

Admittedly, I am guilty of overthinking situations, fretting over needless issues that never materialize, and most definitely not putting my full trust in God to work out what I have determined as impossible and without hope of restoration. However, I have found that when I fully put my trust in God — placing my fears and insecurities in God’s hand, an amazing transformation begins to happen. Calm assurance and stability that only comes from the steadfast love of God begins to wash over my soul.

In Psalms 31:14-16, “But I trust in you, O Lord, I say ‘You are my God.’ My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.” Simply, Psalmist David acknowledges he trusts God, has put his life in God’s hand, asking God to deliver him from his enemies and persecutors. He then asks for God’s face to shine upon him and to save him in God’s love that is steadfast.

Young children look to us as role models, with eyes full of trust and wonderment. It is an honor to be trusted by God’s precious little ones with their innocence and curiosity of the world around them. They come to our schools/centers knowing they will be immersed in a stable atmosphere that will allow them to grow.

Likewise, I can imagine the joy that God has when we put our trust and life fully into God’s hand asking for protection from those who might hurt or disappoint us. Oh, the joy God must feel when we desire to bask in God’s presence and steadfast love, despite the times of turmoil that may be lurking.

**Reflect:** What is a situation you need to put in God’s hands?

**Pray:** Dear Lord, we are so grateful that we can come to you just as we are, where we are. Help us to continue to always want to put our life in your hand. Thank you for your steadfast love. Amen

*Melanie Bicket, ELEA Membership Director*

**MAY 14, 2023**  
**SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**

ACTS 17:22-31

*<sup>22</sup>ATHENIANS, I SEE HOW EXTREMELY RELIGIOUS YOU ARE ...*

"Know your audience." Paul understood that if he wanted to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ, he needed to know how familiar the people of Athens already were with the Judeo-Christian message. So when he arrived in Athens, he took the time to get to know the place and the people. He observed what was going on, surveyed their objects of worship, and only then did he address the Athenians.

Even then, Paul did not immediately launch into a discourse about Jesus being the promised one of God or that Jesus' death and resurrection brings about the forgiveness of sins. Instead Paul began with something more basic, when asked by those who wanted to know what it was that he was teaching.

In our classroom settings, there are students from different walks of life, with varying levels of knowledge. As educators we are called to build on what they know. We do not presume they are familiar with or are incapable of learning something new. Like Paul, we take time to learn about our students, their lives, and their surroundings, attentive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

**Reflect:** How might you become better acquainted with the background and lives of your students?

**Pray:** O God, grant that I allow my students to teach me about their lives and for me to impart knowledge in return, so that we all enter the joy of your wisdom together. Amen.

*The Rev. S. Kim Lee-Brown is pastor of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Marion, IL. She worked as an early childhood educator while pursuing her M.Div.*

**MAY 21, 2023**  
**SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**

PSALM 68:1-10, 32-35

<sup>32</sup> SING TO GOD, O KINGDOMS OF THE EARTH;  
SING PRAISES TO THE LORD, SELAH  
<sup>33</sup> O RIDER IN THE HEAVENS, THE ANCIENT HEAVENS;  
LISTEN, HE SENDS OUT HIS VOICE, HIS MIGHTY VOICE.  
<sup>34</sup> ASCRIBE POWER TO GOD,  
WHOSE MAJESTY IS OVER ISRAEL;  
AND WHOSE POWER IS IN THE SKIES.  
<sup>35</sup> AWESOME IS GOD IN HIS[A] SANCTUARY,  
THE GOD OF ISRAEL;  
HE GIVES POWER AND STRENGTH TO HIS PEOPLE.  
BLESSED BE GOD!

The writer of this Psalm uses imagery of strength. Three times in this selection the writer uses the word “power.” Power, not only God’s power but God giving power to the people of Israel. A God that shares — what an amazing thought. God isn’t concerned about reserving power, God gives that and strength to the people.

I can’t help but feel fortified when I read this passage. Knowing I serve a powerful God, but also a God that gives people power and strength. The kind of power that lifts us up in times of turmoil, the power to overcome adversities and enemies, the strength to rise above conflicts and to unashamedly praise God.

We, as God’s people, share in God’s strength, God’s love and God’s pain for all his people. What a deep and beautiful connection we have with our God.

**Reflect:** How do you feel knowing God shares strength and power with all? Can you tell of a time that you felt God's power with you?

**Pray:** God in heaven, we thank you for your love, you love us so much, you share your strength and power with us. We pray we are able to use our power to better serve your will. Amen.

*Laura Mumme has served Triumphant Love Lutheran Child Development Center for over 22 years as a teacher, Assistant Director and Director.*



**MAY 28, 2023**  
**DAY OF PENTECOST**  
MICAH 6:8

*When in Doubt, Some Humility and Kindness*

My class was getting ready for the first night of our midweek program. My lesson was planned and ready. We were all excited. Then two students came to get me and warn me about "Edward." Always troubled, Edward was sitting under the table, tuning everything else out. My rational invitations to sit in a chair weren't working and the rest of the class was frozen in fear. So, how was I going to communicate the gospel to this frightened, angry child?

I answered that question by picking him up, holding him close with my arm around his shoulders as he sat next to me. I ended up teaching the entire course that way, week after week. For Edward, one alienated and angry kid, this was the gospel! For me, one frightened teacher, out of ideas, this was the gospel — Jesus holding onto us to teach us his love, when nothing else works.

The prophet Micah advises a troubled people that the only way home is to "do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God." Micah could well have been thinking of me giving Edward a reassuring arm to lean on when fear took over, and making last minute adjustments to my "brilliant" lesson plan! At the very same time, God's arm was assuringly around me, reminding me that kindness and humility are sometimes as effective as a good lesson plan. I've relied on that same arm around my shoulders many times.

**Reflect:** Sometimes I believe that authentic teaching is simply walking humbly with God ... and my students. When have you been called to do the same, and how did you respond in faith?

**Pray:** God, gracious and wise, walk humbly with us as we guide our students. Place the gifts of humility and kindness in our hearts so our students may know our loving Lord through us. Amen.

*Richard Dow is an ELCA pastor with four decades of teaching experience serving a congregation with a thriving chapel school for pre-K children. I cherish my time with them and their families!*

**MAY 31, 2023**  
**VISITATION OF MARY TO ELIZABETH**  
ROMANS 12:9-16B

The month of May is full of transitional moments in the school year. Many schools will host end of the year gatherings where graduation ceremonies and speeches are celebrated and students of every age look forward to summer break and what comes next.

For many, the transitions hit home hard. Parents of graduating seniors struggle to articulate how eighteen years “just happened.” Teachers attempt to say “good-bye” to one class as they begin to say “hello” to a new class. Early childhood centers prepare for school-age kids to take up full time residency for the summer. Transitions happen all the time, but this time of year tends to be overwhelming for many.

In this week’s Romans text, we receive from the apostle Paul a message that aligns with many graduation speeches. Paul describes what following Christ looks like IRL (in real life)! Part acknowledgment of human temptation, part holding in tension the curves of life (love, hate, joy, grief, etc.), we receive specific examples of what more faithfully following Jesus Christ looks like.

As a partner in ministry in a Lutheran school, you have ample opportunities to live into these realities: patience in suffering, perseverance in prayer, rejoicing, weeping, and living in harmony with others. In this season of graduation and milestone moments, there will be much joy, and there will be much grief — often all at the same time! May you feel led by the Holy Spirit as you walk alongside those who are rejoicing, weeping, or feeling inbetween.

**Reflect:** Who, in your life would benefit from your perseverance in prayer? With whom are you rejoicing or grieving today?

**Pray:** Holy God, root us in your word, empower us with your Spirit, and send us into the world as an instrument of love and peace today. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

*Pastor Paul, Elim Lutheran Church Marshalltown, IA, enjoys spending time with his spouse and three children, along with reading, drinking coffee, and baking.*

**JUNE 4, 2023**  
**FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
2 CORINTHIANS 13:11-13

Paul closes out the letter to the people of Corinth with a powerful benediction in three parts, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”

The month of June is often a transition month, saying goodbye to a group of children and their families and laying the groundwork for those yet to come. This trinity of God’s blessings is the foundation for providing Gospel-centered care for children and families.

*Grace* — to be able to welcome all with their challenges and their needs, freely and without judgement.

*Love* — to look deeply into the their hearts and minds and know, understand and appreciate each individual as a Child of God.

*Communion* — to live in and with the people of your ministry site as partners, dedicated to providing learning and growth experiences for children.

As you take time to rest, reflect, and recharge ... bask in the warmth of the Lord’s promises to walk with you in all your endeavors, professionally and personally.

Peace be with you.

**Reflect:** What is the area or areas of greatest need for your ministry support in the coming days and months?

**Pray:** Lord, there are so many challenges in ministry to children. Help me take time to celebrate the successes of the past year. Prepare me to be a blessing in the years to come. Amen.

*Hugh Kress has served Lutheran schools and early childhood centers in many capacities over many decades — as teacher, administrator and leader in the ELEA. He continues to explore ways to connect people to the natural world and Native American communities of faith.*

**JUNE 11, 2023,  
SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

ROMANS 4:13-25

*<sup>17B</sup>[GOD] WHO GIVES LIFE TO THE DEAD AND CALLS INTO  
EXISTENCE THE THINGS THAT DO NOT EXIST. <sup>18</sup>HOPING  
AGAINST HOPE, [ABRAHAM] BELIEVED ...*

There are so many things in our lives that make us pause and wonder if anything could ever really change. It's often amazing to me how often it seems that I can have the same conversations year after year after year, and yet it seems that nothing moves.

That can be true with family relationship, dynamics at work, or organizational structures that simply aren't working. It's also true for the struggles that we see kids dealing with day in and day out – bullying, varied learning styles, anxiety – struggles that educators see up close and personal, but aren't often given appropriate resources for them to be addressed.

There are surprises along the way though that give us glimmers of what can be. The child who has a major breakthrough. The administrator who listens to your experiences in the classroom and makes a seemingly minor change that makes all the difference. The unexpected hug from a student who finally feels seen and respected. These glimmers keep us going.

As we lean in and follow God's loving lead, we get to be witnesses to things coming into existence that did not exist before. As people of faith, we continue forward and hope against hope for change, because we follow a God who promises us that change is possible, despite the odds, and it is worth it.

**Reflect:** What glimmers of hope for meaningful change are keeping you going right now?

**Pray:** Loving God, help us to hope against hope that you continue to call into existence new things. Guide us by the glimmers of your active presence all around us each day. Amen.

*Rev. Dione Stepanek serves as Director for Evangelical Mission  
and Assistant to the Bishop in the La Crosse Area Synod.*

**JUNE 18, 2023**  
**THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
ROMANS 5: 1-8

Paul provides a tour de force of faith and grace here. He repeatedly hammers out the message that Christ died for us and bookends these proclamations with the assurances that we therefore have God's peace and love. His "we" embraces the Apostles and all believers. But, how often have you actually boasted in your own sufferings? Complained and shown bitterness, more likely. How often have any of us achieved hope and then actually traced it back through character, to endurance, to suffering? It is probably a worthy exercise we could all practice more often.

We experience the major sufferings of our world — pandemic, war, global warming, etc. and readily adopt them as our own. But we also have our own secret sufferings, unshared, unadmitted, unconfessed, unresolved, unrelieved and sometimes unchanging. We know and accept that we are justified, that we have God's peace and love. But it can be difficult for us to connect the depth of our sufferings with the height of hope that does not disappoint. Kierkegaard's phrase, "The Gospel of Our Sufferings," directly relates these two.

It behooves us as Christians to apply our faith with sure confidence during those challenging times of pain that offer us despair rather than hope. It is then that we must live by these words, that our suffering can and will make us stronger as individuals and ultimately lead us to hope. May we each have strength for the journey, to rise and shine, day by day, every day.

**Reflect:** How can we step back from our sufferings long enough to appreciate the greater perspective that it will build endurance, then character, and finally arrive at hope?

**Pray:** Good and gracious God, empower us through our sufferings to acquire endurance, build character, and achieve hope in your name. Shower upon us your love and your peace. Amen.

*Alan Feddersen, a retired Lutheran school educator, has served in positions as teacher, principal, and Director of Schools in Elgin, IL, Hong Kong, San Francisco, Sacramento, Cleveland, and Los Angeles.*

**JUNE 25, 2023**  
**FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
MATTHEW 10:24-39

In going through one of my closets recently, I came across my now college-age son's second-grade journal. In one of his entries he writes about his green teddy bear named Clover. "Clover is my green teddy bear. I used to sleep with him every night, but now he is dirty. He has peanut butter stains and his fur is all stuck together. I still sleep with him every night, though." Nothing, not even sticky peanut butter stains, could keep my son from holding onto Clover.

In today's reading from Matthew, Jesus warns his disciples that following him will be hard. Their relationships with loved ones will become strained. The way of discipleship will lead to the cross. The life of discipleship to Jesus will be messy, to say the least. At times it might feel like we, with our own peanut butter stains and matted-together fur, are unlovable, without any value or worth.

Still, Jesus assures us in the text for today, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows".

Even when everyone else seems to be against us, God is still for us. Just as nothing could stop my son from loving Clover, nothing can ever stop God from loving us. Knowing that God's love for us never fails gives us courage to face the challenges that come our way, trusting God's promise to hold onto us and never let us go.

**Reflect:** How are you being tempted to give up in your life of following Jesus? How does knowing that God is holding you give you courage to face the current challenges in your life? Stick with it. Jesus is holding onto you.

**Pray:** Lord Jesus, following you is hard. At times, I feel like giving up. Thank you for your promise to keep holding onto me and to never ever let me go. Amen.

*Pastor Greg Busboom serves as Lead Pastor at St. John's  
Evangelical Lutheran Church and Preschool in Springfield, IL.*

**JULY 2, 2023**  
**FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
MATTHEW 10:40-42

When Alayna and her three-year-old daughter Rose got kicked out of her abusive boyfriend's apartment, she had nowhere to live. They entered a 90-day program at a homeless shelter sponsored by our congregation. The caseworker helped her find a job, and then asked if our preschool would offer a discount to Rose until Alayna got on her feet. Without skipping a beat, the director said Rose could attend school for free — breakfast and lunch included.

Small acts of kindness and love are multiplied by a thousand schools across the country every day. Lives are restored, families are built up, children receive physical and spiritual sustenance. "Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple — truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

Jesus' missionary discourse in Matthew 10 presumed a missionary church. A sent church. A servant church sent to heal and cast out evil spirits in Jesus' name. Jesus' disciples are encouraged to travel lightly. They will need to rely on the kindness of strangers and the support of the community. The bottom line is not profit, but ministry. It won't be easy. They should expect pushback, but also the subsentence of the Holy Spirit.

I know no teachers who went into the profession for financial gain. Teachers I know love God and love kids. Everything else flows from this. Lutheran schools are about caring for the whole person, body, mind, and spirit. The work is challenging, but the rewards are out of this world. If you don't believe me, ask Alayna and Rose.

**Reflect:** What and who led you to serve as a teacher or staff at your school? What sustains you for this important work?

**Pray:** Gracious God, you see the needs of your children in the world. Send us into the world to be a healing presence. Amen.

*Michael Rinehart is bishop of the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, home to 100 congregations and 20 schools.*

**JULY 9, 2023**  
**SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
MATTHEW 11:28-30

Are you Soul-Tired? Recently, a niece dealing with a load of stress cried to me, “My soul is so tired.” She was tired of everything. She was tired of being strong. As her auntie, that broke my heart. I would do anything to take her burdens from her shoulders.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest ...” While there are ways I can help my niece, nothing I offer can restore her soul. I’m not built for that work, but Jesus is.

Dear educators — you bear incredible burdens: testing, the demands of parents, the well-being of students, budgets, teacher shortages, enrollment, etc. You might feel soul-tired. You might feel an exhaustion that a month of sleep can’t fix.

Stop what you’re doing. Take a deep breath. Hold it for a few seconds. Now, exhale slowly. Do this again, until you feel your neck and shoulders relax. Hear Jesus calling to you, “Come to me.” Hear Jesus saying, “Beloved, give me your stress, task lists and worries.” Hear the Savior calling, “Sit for a moment. Take a breath. Be restored.” Hear the Savior reminding you of the important things.

Jesus’ yoke — the mantle to pursue justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly (Isaiah 6:8) — take this on for a while. May Jesus restore you for your work in God’s reign.

**Reflect:** Name an activity you can do to set down your burdens in order to focus on Jesus. (e.g., quiet time every morning/night; a creative prayer; talk to God while baking, coloring, writing ... )

**Pray:** Holy Jesus, help me to let go, to listen for you, and to allow you to be my strength and my hope. Amen.

*The Rev. Kimberly A. Vaughn serves as Senior Director of Christian Community & Leadership Mission (CCLM) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the ministry team that includes ministry with children and Lutheran church schools.*



**JULY 16, 2023**  
**SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
PSALM 65:9-13 (CEV)

This past spring a friend and I took a road trip around the Olympic Peninsula in western Washington. Within just 30 minutes we experienced sunshine, rain, snow, and hail! While this area is known for having a wide diversity of ecosystems, it was amazing to experience them all within a short amount of time. The trees at the top of the mountains needed the sunshine that was beaming through, just as much as the grass at the bottom needed the cool mountain runoff.

As God perfectly created each blade of grass, section of moss, evergreen tree or roaming creature, God perfectly created each one of us. And the best part about it is that God knows how to care for each of us. In Psalm 9-13 CEV, we see just how much God cares for the growth of our earth. God knows when the soil needs a little rain so that we can grow crops.

Just as God cares for our boundless creation, you're called to care for the young people of our world. Those who have curious minds, limitless energy, and a deep sense of love and acceptance. God is with you as you do this work — guiding you along the way, sharing the sunshine, and maybe the areas that need a little rain to help it grow.

**Reflect:** Where do you see new life in your classroom, school or ministry setting?

**Pray:** Creator God, you breathe life into each of us. You created the mountains, the birds, the bears, and the whales. As you continue to care for each of your creations, guide us to see the new life and to care for one another. Amen.

*Justin Wilson serves on staff for the ELCA Youth Gathering doing communications. He loves to travel and spend time outside hiking, camping and kayaking.*

**JULY 23, 2023**  
**EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
MATTHEW 13:24-30

As I reflect on this parable, I am reminded that educators are an integral part of building a world of peace as they model Jesus' teaching in their daily lives. In today's complex world it may seem at times that the weeds have covered the field and that the good seeds are lost and choked by the depth of chaos we experience. At times, it can feel discouraging that we face so many obstacles.

My peace and strength come from knowing that as a child of the kingdom, I am not abandoned by God. At the time of harvest, the weeds and good seeds will be separated and God will determine our place in the kingdom. God's angels will guide the children of the kingdom, then and now, to stay hopeful and trust in God's mercy and justice. In my daily prayers I continue to express gratitude to God for being chosen to live as a servant in our world.

Whenever I feel overwhelmed by the obstacles of daily life, I know that God will not abandon me even in my times of trial. That knowledge gives me strength to model a godly life even when the world seems to devalue those attributes. As we grow in the faith and teach our children that God is true and loving, we are reassured that our loving God will lead the way.

**Reflect:** How has God used you to be a servant to children in your roles as a leader in a congregation and school — to fulfill your promise to guide young people toward their place in God's kingdom?

**Pray:** Dear Lord, I pray that you use my gifts as your servant to lead others to the unending joy of being your child. Amen

*Janet Stry, LCSW, is a life long Lutheran, blessed to serve as a teacher of God's love for God's children. She served as a preschool and elementary teacher before becoming a clinical social worker at Lutheran Counseling Center in Mineola, NY. She continues to teach others about the importance of service in social ministries and how to face the challenges of addiction and mental illness in our world.*

**JULY 30, 2023**  
**NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
MATTHEW 13:31-33, 44-52

One night after bedtime prayers, when my son was 4 years old, he asked out of the blue, “Dad. What’s ‘grace’?” I hadn’t used the word in our prayers, so his question seemed strange.

“Well, it’s when you get something good that you don’t deserve. So, let’s say you don’t clean up your room like we ask (a timely example!) and we tell you that if you don’t clean up you can’t have any ice cream, but we’re all having ice cream, and we give you some anyway. That’s grace.”

Samuel replies, “So (really thinking it through) ... you say that I can only have ice cream ... if I clean up, but I don’t ... and you’re having ice cream ... and you give me some? ... Dad, it’s that last part I don’t understand.”

It occurs to me that a child’s gifts are planted deep within and are lovingly uncovered with guidance. Likewise, most of what we teach children is planted like a seed that takes a lifetime to grow. Children hear words, see examples, receive the gift of relationship in ways that don’t disclose the impact until much later.

All of Jesus’ examples of the Kingdom are things which are present but unseen, working in secret, through God’s hidden power — from yeast in bread to fish underwater. How good to know that God’s word is at work in the children we care for, and through us, for the sake of a world in need of the treasure God gives us to share.

**Reflect:** What is a lesson that someone tried to teach you that didn’t compute at the time, but later made a significant difference?

**Pray:** Help us to see as you see and inspire us to share the gifts you have given us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Joseph Bolick is Associate Pastor to Epiphany Lutheran Church in Richmond, VA, where he leads ministry to and with youth, young adults, and college students. He and his wife, Sarah Lang, have three children.*

## MY REFLECTION NOTES

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## **PRAYER NOTES AND REFLECTIONS**





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