

2026-27 Devotion Guide



IMAGINE
more

Ephesians 3:20



ELEA

ELCA Schools & Learning Centers



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Devotions are based on the Revised Common Lectionary for 2026-2027. In accordance with the ELCA's guidelines for inclusive language, our devotional seeks to illustrate the expansive nature of God.

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Printing by Tri-M Graphics, Owatonna, MN.

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Serving ELCA Schools and Learning Centers

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2026-2027 ELEA Devotion Guide

"Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20 NRSVue).

This year's theme, *Imagine More*, is borrowed with gratitude from the 2027 ELCA Youth Gathering. It is a theme especially fitting for the work we do every day in our ELCA schools and learning centers.

Think about what the verse actually claims—not just more than we ask, not just more than we hope, but more than we can even *imagine!* It happens not through our own striving, but through the power already at work within us—within our leaders, teachers, staff, students, and communities.

ELCA schools and centers are extraordinary places. In our classrooms and hallways God is at work in ways we may not notice: in the patience of a teacher on a difficult day; in the kindness of one child toward another; in the moment a struggling student finally breaks through. These are not small things. These are glimpses of a God who is always doing more than we ask or imagine.

The devotions in this guide are written by the dedicated educators and leaders of our ELEA and ELCA community. My prayer is that the reflections encourage you, challenge you, and remind you that your work is holy—and that the God who calls you to this important ministry is always with you—and doing more.

Imagine More

Cory Newman, ELEA Executive Director

August 02, 2026
Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
John 6:35

I grew up as a teacher's kid, married a teacher, and for a short time tried teaching. Growing up on a teacher's salary in the 1980s, with a terminally ill father, I was only vaguely aware that my mother prayed for literal food on the table and spiritual food to sustain her as a caregiver, special ed teacher, and mother.

Genesis 16:12 tells us that God hears our prayers. God's answers showed up in so many ways for our family...donated firewood so we could be warm, with enough wood we could share with others. There was food shared from churches, always just when needed. There were people who offered a shoulder, a prayer, or free babysitting. A random piece of art work gifted from a student. And those times in classrooms and hospitals when God's peace would break through the chaos.

It does not begin with prayer but with the gift of manna from God who breathed life into us. It is God's love for us even to the cross, the grave and resurrection. The gift of daily bread is a one way, eternal promise. As the new year begins, draw that deep breath in. The manna you need will be there. Jesus said to them, "I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me shall never be hungry" (John 6:35).

Reflect: How does God provide me the daily bread I need for the day I am about to have?

Pray: God, you have provided what I needed for my yesterdays—fill my basket again today. Thank you for our daily bread. Amen.

Mike Eisenman is a pastor, pre-school chaplain, and teacher spouse. Casper, WY

August 09, 2026
Time after Pentecost
Matthew 14:22-33

How do we face our fears? How do we embrace adventures? How do we stay focused on God when God is calling us to something new? How do we get out of the boat with God, like Peter does in today's gospel?

Peter is quick to act. Peter is brave. Peter steps out of the boat even though he is afraid. One of my mantras in life is “feel the fear and do it anyway.” I’m afraid to drive in very large cities, but I want to go on adventures—so I feel the fear and do it anyway. I remind myself when I set out to drive somewhere new: “I did this before. I have confidence in myself and in God. I can do it again.”

“Take heart, have no fear,” Jesus says. Take heart. Be encouraged by Jesus’ presence because Jesus loves us and wants us to feel empowered by God’s presence next to us and in us. Jesus is all-powerful and Jesus will help us through our fears. Jesus calms my fears. I know God and know I can trust in God. We can trust in the Lord.

Reflect: How do I face my fears? How do I embrace adventures?

Pray: Dear God, calm our fears. Help us to get out of the boat when we are afraid. Show us your love. Amen.

*Amy Oehlschlaeger, a pastor serving Hope Lutheran Church
and Preschool. St. Charles, MO*

August 16, 2026
Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
Psalm 139:14
Ephesians 2:10
Romans 11:29

You Are Equipped To Do All Christ Wants You To Do!

God is a good parent who gives us all the abilities and skills we need to accomplish God's work. God uniquely gifted each of us. There is something special God gave you. Are you a great artist or a creative and organized dancer? Do you easily make friends, identify with others' pain, or love to read the Bible? These are all gifts which can be used for the glory of God.

We are daily reminded of the gifts and special talents we each are given to glorify God. No gift is unimportant. No gift is too small. You are known, loved, and important to God. Believe that today and every day.

Reflect: What are the "above and beyond" gifts, talents, and special abilities God has given you?

Pray: Lord, please help me to see all the wonderful gifts, talents and abilities you have given me. Lord, help me to follow your will and live boldly for you. Thank you, Lord, for making me and giving me so many wonderful things. Amen.

*Brenda Sterling, Preschool Director at St. John's Christian Preschool,
connected to St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church. Rockville, MD*

August 23, 2026
Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost
Romans 12:1-8

Paul writes about embracing our gifts and recognizing and appreciating the gifts of others. He stresses the importance of understanding how our gifts work together in the body of Christ's church. This is never more true than in an educational setting. Educating young people requires many hands, each doing different jobs that are necessary and equally valuable. Educators use their gift to stretch young minds. Administrators use their gift to manage staff and students so that everyone benefits from the learning environment. Policymakers use their gift of discernment for what is needed to keep facilities running smoothly. Aides, custodians, bookkeepers, office assistants, technicians ... the list goes on and on of people within the educational setting whose gifts are important for making sure things run smoothly for the betterment of those in our care. As a newly retired teacher, I remember fondly this time of year when everyone involved in educating young minds is pondering the possibilities and praying for guidance in planning and implementing new lessons, policies, and procedures that will make the year successful for our students. This time of reflection provides opportunities beyond what one's own gifts can achieve. As you consider all the potential for this school year, remember those in your setting whose gifts may be different than yours. Reach out to them about your ideas for the year. God will bring gifts together to create something even greater than you dreamed possible. Imagine more!

Reflect: What new idea will you implement this year? What resources do you have? What do you need? Who can help? How can you assist them?

Pray: God of infinite possibilities, help me remember to share my gifts and be open to others' gifts. Open my mind to greater accomplishments. Help me imagine more. Amen.

Dea Jones is a recently retired middle school educator who has written for The Word in Season quarterly devotional as well as Upper Room Disciplines. She directs the Living Nativity at her church, Living Springs Lutheran, and sings joyfully in the choir. Columbia, SC

August 30, 2026
Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Matthew 16:21-28

In this week's gospel Jesus begins to tell the disciples about the suffering he will endure. In an utterly relatable moment, Peter takes Jesus aside and says, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you."

When we are in ministry with children, we will inevitably encounter the painful realities that even the youngest among us endure suffering and that part of growing up is wrestling with life's difficulties. Often, our prayers sound an awful lot like Peter's, "God, forbid it!"

We may wish we could prevent the suffering of God's precious children in our care. We do our best to make their places of learning safe, healthy, and vibrant. We put our time and energy into creating the nourishing settings in which they can grow and thrive.

This week our gospel reminds us that for Jesus, and for all of us, suffering comes. In our most difficult moments the Holy One walks with us through it and is the one "...who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine..." (Ephesians 3:20).

When life gets hard for us, or "God forbid it," for the little ones in our care, we are not alone. For God walks with us, bringing life from death, time and again. And we walk together as God's beloved children.

Reflect: How have you walked with one of God's beloved children during a time of difficulty? How has someone walked with you?

Pray: Holy One, you know what it is to endure suffering. When we encounter others in pain or difficulty, help us to accompany them with the grace, patience, and care we first receive from you. Amen.

*Marsha Anderson serves a vibrant congregation that for 9 years
has actively supported its beloved preschool. Raleigh, NC*

September 06, 2026

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Exodus 12:1-14

“If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats” (Exodus 12:4-5).

Today’s reminder from God to God’s people, called Passover in the Hebrew Bible, emphasizes celebration, repetition and choice—don’t our kids love all three? Celebrating Passover yearly renews God’s people’s connection to a God who “makes a way out of no way.” (based on Isaiah 43:16-19) Too often we internalize society’s expectation of self-sufficiency beyond our true capabilities. We honestly can’t celebrate enough the many ways God comes through for us. The repetition of celebrating Passover year after year keeps God’s promise of liberation in our minds — it is not just something we read about that happened to God’s people long ago. As adults who work with children we can appreciate the gift of how repetition keeps song, stories and even handwashing at the forefront of our minds. In addition, this text from Exodus shares several examples of agency. If your house can’t afford a whole lamb, share with a neighbor. Sheep all sold out? No worries, use a goat! God isn’t about rituals for rituals sake; God doesn’t need their ego stroked. God gives us a recipe we so sorely need in order to trust we aren’t alone in a world full of suffering. God frees us, again and again, using us to choose how we carry out that liberation with our siblings.

Reflect: How does celebration, repetition or choice, engage children’s spirituality?

Pray: Liberator God, teach us to trust you, celebrate you and choose you again and again because you have first and always chosen us. Amen.

Pastor Janelle Rozek Hooper, Program Manager for Ministry with Children, ELCA; and Grant Director for Curious Christian Children: Reimagining Kids in Worship, ELCA. Six year member of the ELEA board. Houston, TX

September 13, 2026
Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Exodus 14:19-31

Pharaoh is clutching his pearls. He has built obscenely expensive monuments to his own glory—his economy built on forced labor, exploitation, authoritarianism, and domination. As Anatheia Portier-Young notes, "In refusing to let God's people go, Pharaoh leads his own people to their grave." Oppression enslaves both the oppressed and the oppressor. The "waters of the new creation dismantle his chariots and drown the machinery of war and abduction." When all hope seems lost — when we find ourselves in bondage to sin, addiction, fear, selfishness, and brokenness—the gospel breaks in and sets us free. Just when we think things are beyond repair, a cool breeze of hope surprises and revives us. Jesus' message points us to the future in God's hands. The road from slavery to freedom requires us to pass through chaotic waters. The road to Easter passes through Good Friday, but there is new life on the other side.

Our world is at a watershed moment. Will we capture the vision of freedom? Will we seek the common good or cave into "me first" mentalities? Will we brave the chaotic waters, or settle for leeks and onions by the Nile? The God who frees invites us to more than we can imagine—life beyond the fleshpots of Egypt, life where everyone has enough to eat, fishes and loaves for the multitude. May the vision of the reign of God fill you with hope and joy this day.

Reflect: Where do you see signs of hope and new life in those around you today? How are you a living sign of hope to others?

Pray: God and gracious God, free us from all that enslaves us, that we might be released into the world as signs of hope, Amen.

Michael Rinehart is passionate about thriving faith communities. He envisions a world where hungry people are fed, strangers are welcomed, and people find faith, hope, and love in Christian community. He is devoted to growing and supporting Christ-centered, mission-focused, well-funded faith communities. Mike lives in the Houston area with his wife Susan.

September 20, 2026

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

"So the last will be first, and the first will be last"

(Matthew 20:16).

Perplexed faces stared at me from around the table, not an uncommon sight for many a staff meeting. I had posed a question to the group, "Is it really necessary for preschoolers to stand in line?" Was I crazy? I was sensing there was too much time wasted in the whole line-up endeavor. Wasn't it the teacher's job to watch the children move from point A to point B? Couldn't that be accomplished if they all walked in a group? Does anyone like standing in line? Who prefers to be first in line? (everyone). Who can be first? (one person). Who likes to be last? (almost no one).

The teachers responded with valid points about safety and kindergarten expectations, so we continued using the line method for transitions. However, after our conversation, less attention and time was given to the perfect line. I took it as a win.

Jesus's followers were also concerned with order. He shared the parable of the vineyard owner to show how God's sense of order is different than ours. The last will be first and the first will be last. And while the first are last, they are still receiving the same everlasting goodness and mercy of our Lord as everyone else in line. It is a parable of fairness and abundance for everyone. It prompts us to imagine God's kingdom as just and fair no matter where you are in line, or who is in line with you. It is a perfect line.

Reflect: Read the parable of the vineyard owner and share your thoughts. Is the description of God's kingdom more or less than you imagined?

Pray: Pray for whoever God puts on your heart today, wherever they are in line.

*Jenny James is enjoying retirement after twenty years of service
as director of First Lutheran Preschool, Ellicott City, MD*

September 27, 2026
Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Matthew 21:28-32

Actions speak louder than words. This theme comes to mind when reading Matthew 21:28-32. In this parable, the father tells his sons to go work in the vineyard. The first says “no” but works anyway. The second says, “yes” but decides not to. Both children say one thing yet do the opposite. Anyone who has ever been in a classroom knows this happens daily, especially when it comes to discipline. Students learn about rules and expectations, and commit to following them. However, rules will inevitably get broken, even under the best of circumstances. Like the brothers in the parable, they say one thing yet do the opposite.

When Jesus asks the chief priests and elders which son acted according to the father’s instructions, they reply that it was the first. Why? Because even though he disobeyed initially, he recognized his error and changed his mind accordingly. This is also the next step we hope our students will take, imagining the impact of their words or actions, and then choosing to seek forgiveness instead of justification; a response grounded in God’s grace. Actions speak louder than words. When it comes to how God meets us, both speak volumes. It is in Jesus, the Word Incarnate, that God chooses to love this world. And it is only through God’s grace in Christ, active through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we can recognize our shortcomings, humbly seek forgiveness, and commit to doing our best to follow God’s lead in the future.

Reflect: How might our willingness to be humble and claim our own faults help others to do the same? How might we model this in our vocations?

Pray: Lord, I pray that the grace you have shared with me in Jesus may overflow into the lives of those around me, through my words and deeds. I pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

*Rev. Dave Efflandt is Lead Pastor at St. Paul's Lutheran Church
and School. Waverly, IA*

October 04, 2026

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

“I will sing for my beloved my love song concerning my beloved’s vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill” (Isaiah 5:1).

Here in Northwest PA we know something about vineyards. Just outside of Erie, PA (known as the Gem City) is the borough of North East, PA (it’s confusing, yes!) In addition to being the location for Welch’s, we are also home to some of Pennsylvania’s finest regional wineries and grape vines. Today the prophet sings of a vineyard. It takes a little imagination to hear what Isaiah’s singing. First, we must imagine ourselves as the vineyard. Second, we need to imagine just what the vineyard looks like. While there are certainly orderly rows of vines in a vineyard, you have to look for the order. The vines are gnarly, they twist, they tangle. Grapes are everywhere—they hang down, they get nibbled, many get squished underfoot having already fallen off. To someone who isn’t the actual vintner, they look a mess. BUT—God looks at the gnarly, twisted, tangled mess of vines competing with each other for space; and the grapes that hang heavy or get squished because they’ve already fallen off the vine; and the manure and the dry spots; and even the dead branches, and says, “You know what, it’s beautiful.” On this the day of St. Francis let us remember that even amid the gnarly branches of our vineyard, God still looks at us and calls us beautiful and beloved.

Reflect: How often do we allow ourselves to step back from what seems at the time too gnarly, too twisted, or too tangled, or covered in manure ... to see the beauty?

Pray: God, our beloved, tend your vineyard. Remind us always of the beauty you see in our vines and to tend them with you. Amen.

Jay Mitchell is pastor of Luther Memorial Church & Academy.

Celebrating 50 years of academic excellence in 2026.

LMA grows with children in grades K through 8.

*Pastor Jay is the 2024 recipient of the ELEA Rostered Minister of the Year award.
Erie, PA*

October 11, 2026
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
Philippians 4:4-7

This text from Philippians offers a word of deep encouragement. Paul writes, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.” This does not mean that every day is easy, or that joy ignores the real challenges of teaching, guiding, feeding, comforting, protecting, and nurturing children. Rather, Christian joy is rooted in the nearness of God. “The Lord is near,” Paul says, and that promise matters deeply in the daily life of those entrusted with children. Those who work with children carry many concerns: the needs of students, the worries of families, the pressures of schedules, the weight of safety, and the desire to create spaces where every child is known and loved. Philippians reminds us not to carry these things alone. “Do not worry about anything,” Paul writes, “but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” This is not a dismissal of responsibility, but an invitation to place our work, our children, our staff, and our families into God’s faithful care. For teachers, caregivers, administrators, and support staff, this passage is a reminder that our gentleness is part of our witness. The peace of God shapes the way we speak, listen, respond, and lead. In classrooms and centers, where children are formed not only by lessons but by love, patience, and presence—God’s peace guards our hearts and minds, helping us become steady signs of grace for the children entrusted to us.

Reflect: How might the peace of God help us respond to children, families, and coworkers with gentleness when the day feels stressful, uncertain, or overwhelming?

Pray: Lord, remind us that you are near when the work before us feels joyful, heavy, ordinary, or overwhelming. Guard our hearts and minds with your peace, and help us care for every child, family, and coworker with gentleness, patience, and love.

Marcus Bigott serves a vibrant congregation with a formidable day school, where young minds and hearts have been prepared, shaped, and sent in love for nearly 80 years. Seguin, Texas

October 18, 2026
Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost
1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

St. Paul writes to a fledgling Christian community learning to live faithfully. He gives thanks for their “work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope.” They were not perfect people in perfect circumstances. Yet the gospel had taken root among them so deeply that their lives became a witness for Christ to others. That sounds a lot like a Lutheran church school. Most days in a school are filled with ordinary things: grading papers, students shuffling into classrooms, answering questions, lunch lines, comforting anxious students, and repeating directions for the tenth time. Yet, St. Paul reminds us that God works through ordinary people and ordinary acts of faithfulness. This year’s theme, *Imagine More*, invites us to trust that God is always doing more than we can see. A teacher’s encouragement may echo in a child’s heart for years. A prayer before class may shape a student’s faith more deeply than we realize. A community marked by faith, love, and hope becomes a living witness to Christ. St. Paul says the gospel came “not in word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit.” In our schools, students do not simply hear about Jesus. They experience Christ’s love through the people who guide them each day. Even when the work feels small or unnoticed, God is using us to shape lives and proclaim hope.

Reflect: Where might God be working through your daily faithfulness in ways you cannot yet see?

Pray: Gracious God, thank you for calling us to serve in this community of faith and learning. Strengthen our work of faith, our labor of love, and our steadfast hope in Christ. Help us trust that through even the smallest acts of care and teaching, you are doing more than we can imagine. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Alan Brown serves as pastor and superintendent of Solomon Lutheran Church and School in Woodville, Ohio. Founded in 1862, Solomon Lutheran School is the oldest continually operating parochial school affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

October 25, 2026

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost

Ephesians 3:20

Deuteronomy 34:1-12; Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17;

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8; Matthew 22:34-46

This year's theme is *Imagine More*, inspired by Ephesians 3:20, where it says God is able to do far more than all we can ask or imagine. Immediately, that's a problem for me—because I can imagine quite a bit! I can imagine a parking space opening right in front of the restaurant. I can imagine a church meeting ending early. I can imagine someone bringing donuts and not cutting them into insulting little halves. But Paul says God can do more than that. More than we ask. More than we imagine. More than the committee imagined after three meetings, two emails, and one person saying, "Let's circle back," which, by the way, is never good news.

Imagine More reminds us that God is working beyond the visible surface of things. We see a meal delivered, a prayer spoken, a child welcomed, a lonely person noticed, a ministry barely holding together with tape, coffee, and one saint named Carol who knows where everything is. God sees more. God is building community, healing wounds, stirring faith, and opening doors we didn't even know were doors.

This theme is not about pretending everything is easy. Please. We are adults. We have church calendars. We know suffering exists. But it is about trusting that God is not finished with us.

So imagine more—not because we are clever, optimistic, or properly caffeinated, but because God is already doing more. And honestly, that's pretty good!

Reflect: How do we see God doing more in our lives this week?

Pray: Dear God, help us see more and grow in our love for you, Amen.

*Rev. Kenneth R. Johnson, pastor of a church, preschool & K-8 for 12 years.
Learning from doing*

November 01 2026

All Saints

Matthew 5:1-12

The theme for this year's ELEA Devotion Guide of *Imagine More* fits perfectly with the Beatitudes of Matthew's Gospel. In a week when many congregations celebrate All Saints Sunday as a time of remembrance for the faithful who have died in the last year, we need to imagine more what blessing means to those who experience loss and grief of any kind. Jesus declares blessings to many for whom the world does not see as being blessed. Those seen as the opposite of blessed, really. Yet, our hope and faith in Jesus who indeed conquers death in the Resurrection, bears witness to the kingdom that God is building here and now. Not one of power and wealth, but of love and service.

Reflect: Who might Jesus name as blessed in our world today?

Pray: Blessed are the patient, for they shall answer the same question seventeen times with grace.

Blessed are the early risers, for coffee and chaos await them each morning.

Blessed are those who tie tiny shoes, wipe tears, and search for missing mittens, for they are doing holy work.

Blessed are the storytellers, for they plant faith in hearts imagining a world bigger than our own.

Blessed are the teachers who feel exhausted, for they have poured themselves out in love.

Blessed are those who comfort anxious parents, for they minister not only to children, but to whole families.

Blessed are the teachers who wonder whether they make a difference, for the kingdom is built through small daily acts of care.

Blessed are the educators who remind children: "You are loved by God exactly as you are," for that truth changes lives forever. Amen.

Jonathan Vehar serves as the Director of Evangelical Mission and Associate to the Bishop for the South Dakota Synod. He serves on the ELEA Board of Directors.

Previously pastored congregations with ELEA early childhood centers.

Sioux Falls, SD

November 08, 2026
Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Psalm 78:1-7

As followers of Christ, we have the best job ever—to share the amazing news of God’s endless love to everyone. We know the sacrifice that Jesus made to gift us forgiveness, love, and eternal life ... and we are then sent to share it so others may rejoice in the promises as well. As educators of the littlest ones, we get to share this gift to some of the most excitable humans ever! And we get to do so in creative and fun ways.

Our psalm for today tells us, “... he commanded ... rise up and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments,” Psalm 78:5-7.

We get to pass on to our students our wisdom and our knowledge of the goodness of God. We may be the only people in their lives who are sharing stories of God with them. We are the bearers of God’s stories, God’s light, and God’s love with our students. What an honor, what a joy! We are called by God to share in the richness of God’s love, making sure our children understand that they are LOVED by God, just as they are, no matter what. Let us share with boldness the love we receive as God’s beloved children, so that others may embrace that identity and know that they are always welcome and accepted by God.

Reflect: Who shared stories of God and God’s love with you? How did you receive them? How do you reflect God’s stories in your own life and in your teaching?

Pray: Lord God, thank you for your transformative love and the ways you surround us, nurture us, and welcome us. Help us as we share your love with all those in our lives and with the children in our care, that they may feel and know that they are loved always. Amen.

*Pastor Amanda Dahlseng-Monroe serving at Grace Lutheran Church and Preschool,
who’s preschool has been thriving for 82 years! Loves Park, IL*

November 15 2026

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost

“Well done, good and trustworthy servant...” (Matthew 25:21).

Growing up in the Midwest there was usually one child in every classroom who was “a lot.” In my class, that child was me. I was forever getting corrected for something: giggling too loudly, blurting out answers before others had a chance, or whispering during church when silence was expected. I spent my fair share of time sitting, or rather wiggling around in time-out, wondering how things had gone sideways ... again.

But I was also the first to welcome the new kid. I noticed when someone was alone. I could make people laugh when they were nervous. Looking back, I realize my gifts were always trying to burst through, even if they needed some honing and shaping first. And honestly, loudly whispering correct letters during spelling bees probably did need refining.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of the talents, reminding us that God places gifts within every person. Sometimes those gifts appear polished and obvious. Other times they arrive wrapped in extra energy, endless questions, or behavior that many adults struggle to understand. As leaders, we are called to look beyond behavior and see possibility. The child who talks nonstop may become a compassionate leader. The child who struggles to sit still may one day use that energy to change the world.

Our work is holy because we help shape gifts with patience, wisdom, and grace. Thank goodness God sees more in us than our time-out records.

Reflect: How can we, as leaders, look beyond challenging behaviors to recognize and nurture the God-given gifts trying to emerge in the lives entrusted to our care?

Pray: Gracious God, help us see the gifts within every child and every adult. Give us wisdom to guide with patience and love. Amen.

Melanie Bicket, ELEA Membership Director

November 22, 2026

Christ the King

John 18:33-37

Think about a time when you were the recipient of a big surprise. It could be a wonderful memory as a child; or in adulthood when you received an unexpected raise or promotion at work. Or it could be a surprise that doesn't necessarily invoke happy thoughts, as not every surprise is a happy one ... the surprise may have been a difficult diagnosis, or you suddenly lost a friend or loved one. What surprise comes to mind?

Think about what surprises do to us and for us. Surprises shock, amaze, startle or possibly stun us. Sometimes they stop us in our tracks or cause us to change.

In today's story Jesus is facing the battle of the reigns: earthly kingdom or Christ's own reign that is mysterious and not at all understood. 2,000 years later we know the end of the story and yet, we often forget the truth with which Jesus faces Pilate; because, it sure looks like Christ the King is losing the battle and evil is winning. But then truth happens. At this most critical juncture in human history, the most powerful, unexpected surprise comes to us in God's ultimate sacrifice—Christ's reign changes the course of history and our reality, because it brings wholeness, forgiveness and love.

Reflect: How have you been surprised by God's love, truth, movement or presence? How has it changed you?

Pray: Holy God, please never stop surprising me. I need the transformation that Christ's reign brings through your love, presence, forgiveness and movement. I need you. Amen

*Deacon Sherry Krieger is the Assistant to the Bishop for Strengthening Parishes
& Synod Development for the Northwestern Ohio Synod.*

November 29, 2026
First Sunday of Advent
1 Corinthians 1:3-9 and Isaiah 64.8

We all need people who believe in us.

I've always been drawn to the openings of Paul's letters which were written to affirm and encourage early Christian communities as they figured out how to live together faithfully. As we read further into his letters, Paul offers correctives on the communities' theology and practices in their attempt to find ways to live faithfully. Yet first, he tells them that he believes in them—seeing their power and potential, even as they struggle to find their way.

We all need people who believe in us. For me, people have come in the form of teachers, professors, pastors and colleagues. They are people who saw certain gifts and characteristics in me, sometimes before I could see them myself. When my imagination about what was possible faltered, they continued to carry those visions and used them to encourage me to keep dreaming and wondering.

I doubt the Corinthians felt full of the grace, knowledge and speech of Christ, but Paul took time to affirm all the ways he saw these gifts in them. He helped them to *imagine more* of what was possible as a community of faith, and to imagine how God was at work in ways far bigger than they could even ask. Thanks be to God for the people in our lives who inspire us to imagine and see within us more potential than we may believe is possible.

Reflect: Who was a teacher or mentor who believed in you?

Pray: God our Potter, all creation is the clay from which you mold goodness, grace and justice. Draw forth each one of us, to participate in and celebrate the fullness of life you have imagined. Amen.

Pastor Bri Merkle serves at St. Mark's Lutheran Church by the Narrows. A vibrant Preschool creating a refuge for many families in our neighborhood. Tacoma, WA

December 6, 2026
Second Sunday of Advent
Mark 1: 4-8

The people who traveled to the wilderness to be baptized by John were body weary and soul weary. They were poor and struggled under the heavy oppression of the Roman Empire. John was a prophet with a powerful voice, and the people longed for a transformed world and transformed lives. Yet, John pointed the people to the coming of Christ. For as powerful as John was, Jesus would be that much more powerful.

We too may feel body and soul weary. We carry heavy burdens. We may struggle with health problems or family tensions. We struggle to make ends meet. In the current political climate, we may worry for the safety of our families or loved ones. We long for transformation. In this time of Advent, we long for Christ to draw near to our weary world and make all things new. The good news is that the living Christ draws near us in solidarity each day. In our fear, confusion, and uncertainty Christ comes to us and baptizes us with the Holy Spirit—with glad tidings of love, peace, justice, and mercy. Christ reveals to us our dignity, the image of God which is imprinted on the soul of every person. In Christ's kingdom, we are all equally valued, and gathered under the broad wings of God's magnificent love.

Reflect: How might we ask a trusted friend or colleague to pray for us when we are weary? Where do we see Christ and the kingdom of love today? How might we connect others to the joy of Christ?

Pray: Come to us quickly, O Christ. Baptize us with your Spirit that we feel your peace and love and newness. Turn our weariness into joy. Reveal your kingdom of merciful justice where everyone's dignity is recognized and no one lacks for food or shelter. Remind us that we are wonderfully created in your image, and that nothing can separate us from God's love. Amen.

Pastor Rick Fry serves Ascension Evangelical Lutheran Church and Montessori Children's Center, an educational outreach ministry in San Diego CA.

December 13, 2026
Third Sunday of Advent
John 1:6-9

Vehicles of the Light

Birthdays carry their own kind of magic. I'll admit it—I chose this week to write a devotion because it's closest to my birthday. I love birthdays, maybe not my birthday as much as I used to, but they remain a small festival of gratitude and hope. We celebrate what has been and we lean toward what might yet be.

Kids feel this most clearly. "I'm five and a half!" "I'm almost eight!" And reaching double digits practically deserves a national holiday. And then there's the cake. Let's be honest—cake is mostly a delivery system for frosting and ice cream. But the candles matter. They don't give much light, yet they light up a child's face with joy and expectation. They mark a moment. They point toward something more.

John the Baptizer was also a vehicle for light—not the flicker of a candle, but the Light of Christ. He was not the Light. He did not hold the Light. But he cleared a path for it. He helped others lift their eyes so they would recognize the Light when it came.

Like John, we are called to be vehicles of the Light—not the source, but the ones who help others see. Whether we serve children or parents or grandparents, our calling is the same: to carry hope, to point toward Christ, and to make room for the Light that changes everything.

Reflect: When you look at those you serve, what brings light to their eyes?

Pray: Creator of all that is, you called for light and there it was. Illumine us and those we serve with the light of your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Greg DeBoer serves as pastor to First Lutheran Church and the Early Learning Center, a ministry of First Lutheran. Fremont, NE

December 20, 2026
Fourth Sunday of Advent
Luke 1:26-38

With Christmas just a few days away and the excitement of children all around us, this scripture invites us to pause, ponder, and pray. This week take a few minutes to pause and unplug from the noise, distractions, and to-do lists, and simply be present in the moment. As you pause, what jumps out to you about this story from Luke's Gospel? For me it is the promise that "nothing will be impossible with God." Every day we serve our students and families—and with God, all things are possible. God is at work in and through each and every child who is part of our school or center.

During this week, what does it look like to ponder that the Divine has called you by name in this season and that God's Spirit is upon you just as the Spirit was upon Mary?

Finally, ask God to be with us during this holy season and for the Spirit to help us be servants in our roles with the children God has placed in our schools and centers. Just as it was for Mary, so it is with you—the work and ministry you have been called to matters. You matter. God is with you.

Reflect: When God calls us to something unexpected or challenging, what can we learn from Mary's response, 'I am the Lord's servant' and how might that apply to our own lives today?

Pray: Loving and Holy God, we give thanks for our students, teachers and staff, for our schools, and for our centers. Be with us during this holy season and help us to remember that we are your servants, called by your name, and that you have promised to be with us forever. Help us during this Christmas season to look to you and never forget that in you all things are possible. Amen.

Pastor Fritz Fowler serves as the Lead Pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in Lansdale, PA. Trinity has served students in the community for 55+ years and currently serves students ages 2, 3, 4, and 5.

December 27, 2026
First Sunday after Christmas
Galatians 4:4-7

In Galatians, Paul explains that through Christ we have become children of God, freed from slavery, and heirs of eternal life. As parents and educators, we regularly experience the beauty of a child's mental and physical exploration, the expansion of their world with no prejudgments. I think of my own two-year-old granddaughter and the delight she provides when I see her reach out to learn and grow as she is nurtured by her parents. Our responsibility, challenge, and joy is to assist our children, guiding them in broadening their horizons, their possibilities, and their futures. For them there is always something more, even beyond imagining. We celebrate the birth of Christ and in that moment become children, inheriting the promise of something more, so much more. In this way, God calls us to praise and service beyond our boundaries, to imagine and do more in Christ's name. No longer slaves, we are free to risk, to dare, to challenge, nurturing our own faith horizons for the sake of others, reflecting and projecting God's glory. As Simeon lifts up the Christ, his hands are steady and sure, knowing there is more to come and that Christ will light the way. Even as we lead our children into new learning adventures, we are also called to imagine the wonder of something more, so much more, as we respond to our Lord's love for all people, for all of God's children.

Reflect: We might limit our children's progress with rules for their welfare. Do we do the same in our personal life? Or do we embrace the promise that in the Lord, all is possible, and more is within reach during our Christmas-redeemed lives? Imagine the possibilities!

Pray: Jesus of Bethlehem, guide us, your servants, to be childlike and instrumental in lifting you up in steady hands—unashamed, unyielding, offering to all the world more than they can now imagine, but for which we have your promise. Amen.

*Alan Feddersen is a career Lutheran educator who has held many positions.
With my children and grandchildren I am still imagining more. Oro Valley, AZ*

January 3, 2027
Second Sunday after Christmas

John 1:1-9,10-18

**"From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace"
(John 1:16).**

Merry Christmas!

I imagine most of us reading this are only now getting back to school after a much-needed break. Perhaps some of us have even taken down all our classroom Christmas decorations in preparation for the second part of our school year. Thanks be to God that God works through us more than we could ask or imagine! We can still embody Christmas joy while preparing well for the new semester. We can still abound in the hope of the incarnation of God's word made flesh in Jesus, even as we reset our alarm clocks and center ourselves with mindful breath, in order to meet the returning students with grace.

The fullness of God is hard to imagine, isn't it? And yet, the truth of the fullness of God that turns our mourning into joy; gathers up all things in heaven and on earth; and is the very life which is the light of all people—is the source from which we receive the grace that gives us the strength to imagine more. God gives us eyes to see God's wonderful grace that works through our teaching and leading even in ways we didn't plan, anticipate, nor expect—and yet will mark the lives of our students, families and one another with the great joy, love and hope of Christ!

Reflect: Where is one place in your ministry that you would like to experience God working more than you can even imagine today?

Pray: Fill us, O God, with the grace of imagination. Help us to see with your eyes of compassion and love. Amen.

*R. Adam Berndt serves as pastor of the faith community at Cross of Hope.
He is grateful to continue to learn and grow alongside the pre-k through 5th grade
school ministry. Albuquerque, NM*

January 10, 2027

Baptism of Our Lord

"I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8).

The "whole Judean region and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to" John the baptizer. We have some information about what the people were expecting. They were participating in a ritual cleansing by a prophet. They may, or may not, have been expecting more from the experience than simply another way to express their faithfulness to God and God's covenant. They didn't imagine it to be anything new.

John gave them something new to imagine. He foretold the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. He promised them that one "more powerful" would be coming so that the world would be reborn in the waters of not just the Jordan River, but the waters of baptism that would flow throughout time and place and become a new covenant. This covenant was an adoption into the family of God through the life, death, and the resurrection of Jesus. Those waters still flow today.

We imagine more for our lives as disciples because we have been claimed in those living waters. We imagine a life filled with God's promised abundance, because we too have been adopted and called beloved.

Reflect: What does your baptism allow you to imagine about your life? What more could it be?

Pray: Loving Creator, you claim us in water for life and for life everlasting. Remind us daily of that promise and allow us to imagine a life filled with hope through it. Amen.

Cris Frigm serves as pastor to St. Paul's Lutheran Church & School where we help our community grow in faith with our newly revived preschool. Newark, DE

January 17, 2027

Second Sunday after Epiphany

1 Samuel 3:1-20

"Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him ... And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD" (1 Samuel 3:7; 3:20).

If you teach or assist or coordinate, or do anything else in a church school setting, the reality is that sometimes you work with a child for a year, and then never see them again. You may not know what a difference you made in a child's life, or their family's life. But you do, even if you don't realize it. We invest in others because God calls us to this ministry. We are the recipients of small joys & surprising warm hugs, sudden smiles from students who previously only frowned every time we called on them, or asked them to do something. You are making a difference, not unlike the difference in Samuel's life in our text for today.

I worked as a parent educator in Minnesota's public Early Childhood Family Education program for 37 years. Most parents were amazed by what one class a week achieved for their child & their family over time. One parent I worked with is now studying parent education to do what I did. In God's story for today, God was continuously present with Samuel, helping, calling & encouraging. God is doing the same for you!

Reflect: Where do you hear God calling? What encouragement is God showing you?

Pray: Gracious God, help us see what you want us to do to make a difference in the lives of children we teach. Let us also learn that we can trust in your presence. Let us faithfully do the small things that help us deepen & grow. God, help us trust what miracles you can do in our lives & others. Amen.

*Pastor Mary Kaye Ashley volunteers with Summer Stretch at
Oak Grove Lutheran, Richfield, MN*

January 24, 2027
Third Sunday after Epiphany
Jonah 3:1

Jonah did not get it right the first time. He ran. He resisted. He tried to avoid the call of God altogether. And yet Jonah 3 begins with one of the most grace-filled lines in Scripture: "The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time." God is a God of second chances. That matters deeply in a Lutheran school—because our schools are holy places filled with imperfect people. Backpacks drag through hallways before the coffee is finished. Papers pile high on desks. A teacher repeats the same direction five times before lunch. A child slams a Chromebook shut in frustration. One kid cries in the bathroom. Another quietly carries burdens no one can see. Some days the classroom hums with joy. Other days feel heavy and brittle. Lessons fall flat. Tempers flare. Patience wears thin by lunchtime. Words come out sharper than intended. The bell rings, but the tension lingers. Many teachers and staff quietly wonder: "Was it enough?" Yet this is exactly where God keeps showing up—not in perfection, but in the middle of ordinary, messy, chaotic, grace-filled days. The same Lord who came to Jonah a second time continues to come to us again and again—with mercy, forgiveness, and renewed purpose. Each morning is another opportunity to serve Christ in the lives of children. So when you feel discouraged, remember Jonah. The story does not begin with success. It begins with grace. And grace is where God continues to begin with us, too.

Reflect: Where do you see God's grace coming to you a second, third or ninth time?

Pray: Gracious God, you are the God of second chances. When we run, you call again. When we fall short, you begin again with grace. Meet us in our classrooms and our work. Renew our patience, strengthen our love, and remind us you are present in every ordinary moment. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Alan Brown serves as Pastor and Superintendent of Solomon Lutheran Church and School in Woodville, Ohio. Founded in 1862, Solomon Lutheran School is the oldest continually operating parochial school affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

January 31, 2027
Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
Mark 1:21-28

Fred Rogers, made famous by his children's television program Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood, always imagined more for children, and, in turn, for the whole world. Rogers himself had an unhappy, isolated childhood, so he spent a great deal of time in his imaginary world playing with puppets.

A gentle, kind man of deep faith, Rogers worked to provide a space in which children would feel safe, loved, and cared for...and included. He pushed back on the norms of the day by including people of color and people with disabilities in his programs. In this way, Rogers gently, yet authoritatively, used his platform to proclaim hope and offer healing to young souls.

In today's reading from Mark, we find an "outsider," a man with an unclean spirit. This unclean spirit recognizes Jesus for who he is, the Holy One of God. Jesus certainly had the power to subdue the unclean spirit with a mighty and spectacular act, using all kinds of special effects. Instead, he chose to speak the truth with authority, "Be silent, and come out of him!"

Reflect: As those who have been entrusted with authority to teach and lead children, how might we help children to *imagine more* for themselves and for others? How might we gently and lovingly use the authority we have been given to teach them well?

Pray: Lord Jesus, your authority is rooted in love. Thank you for loving us well; teach us also to love well. Amen.

*Linda Strader is Pastor of Outreach and Discipleship at St. John's Lutheran Church.
She is a wife, mom, stepmom, and "Grams" to seven children.
Springfield, IL*

February 07, 2027
Transfiguration Sunday
Mark 9:2-9

Imagine how you would feel if you were right there with Jesus, Peter, James and John, on that Transfiguration Day. Suddenly, you see Jesus dazzling bright, and then Elijah, and Moses—men you’ve only heard about in scripture are now standing in front of you talking with Jesus. That encounter was definitely more than the disciples imagined they’d experience that day.

Don’t we all have days like that? Days when you imagine things going one way, and yet you find yourself in circumstances you never planned? There are situations you hoped for and those you never wished for: the moment when a concept finally clicks for a struggling student; when a student shares with you struggles they are having at home, seeking your advice and support; when a child asks a question completely out of context, yet so profound you are compelled to answer.

The disciples couldn’t have imagined what happened on that mountain, but it’s exactly what they needed to be reminded exactly who Jesus is, and who they are because of him. “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Mark 9:7. Jesus is the Son of God and through the waters of baptism we are named and claimed as his children. So whatever unimagined circumstance you find yourself in, remember you and the children you lead are beloved children of God, always and forever. God will be with you every step of the journey.

Reflect: What was one unexpected way God showed up for you this week?

Pray: God, you show up for us each day in more ways than we can ever imagine. Help us to see ourselves and the children we lead as your children first, loved, forgiven, and grace filled by you. Amen.

Pastor Liz Dieseth Pearl has served an engaging congregation for seven years that supports a childcare center and preschool. Elkhorn, NE

February 10, 2027

Ash Wednesday

**"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"
(Matthew 6:21).**

Paul Harvey had a radio show for many years entitled, The Rest of the Story. He ended his interesting commentaries with that same line, by saying, "And that's the rest of the story." As we enter the Lenten season, a time of somber reflection and worship, we know it will culminate on Easter Sunday, celebrating the resurrection of Jesus. See? We already know "the rest of the story," but we still walk the journey, examining the darker parts of our human existence, knowing it will bring us to the sunrise of grace and new life through the resurrection, the ultimate treasure. Nearly a year ago, my sister, Freda, died suddenly while on a trip to Ireland. She was an amazing person, dear sister and confidant. She modeled a deep faith through her music and leadership in her church. Freda loved her "stuff." Now, as we sort through those beloved "treasures" in her home, it is not hard for me to let them go because she didn't take anything with her when she died. At death, she entered into the glory of God and now she lives "the rest of the story," needing nothing from this life on earth. As we journey through Lent, let us reflect on where we have our focus ... not on the earthly things that often weigh us down, but the knowledge that our treasure is our faith in God and we live, knowing "the rest of the story."

Reflect: This Lenten season, ask yourself, "Where is my focus, my treasure?" "What can I let go of in my way of living, that lightens my journey, because I know "the rest of the story?"

Pray: Gracious God, guide my reflection through this season of Lent, that I may sharpen my focus, place my treasure in you, and live the story you showed us through the life of Jesus.

*Dr. Kris Meyer was the principal at St. Paul's Lutheran School in Waverly, IA.
In her retirement she lives in Rochester, MN and works part-time as a
mental health counselor for the University of Minnesota Rochester.*

February 14, 2027
First Sunday in Lent
Mark 1:9-15

Throughout the Bible God has used water as a sign of salvation for those who believe. Whether it was saving Noah from the flood waters, Moses from the river, the Israelites through the dry ground with water on each side, or as a baptized believer. In baptism, we are called to put away our old life and follow Jesus. We are called to be more and do more. We are invited to live a life that is worthy of our Savior.

At St. Paul's Lutheran Church and School we have a monthly baptismal remembrance service. Water is poured into the baptismal font. Children and staff who were baptized that month come forward for a baptismal blessing. Our pastor dips his finger in the water and makes a sign of the cross on their forehead as he says their name and the words, "Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever."

As each recipient receives the sign of the cross and the physical and verbal reminder that they have been chosen by God for a special purpose, one can only imagine what wonderful things God has in store for them.

Reflect: What does it mean to you to be a child of God and marked with the cross of Christ forever?

Pray: Dear God, thank you for the gift of baptism when you made us your children and heirs to your kingdom. Amen.

Jo Groth taught 4th grade for several years at St. Paul's Lutheran Church and School in Waverly, Iowa. She now works as an interventionist at the school.

February 21, 2027
Second Sunday of Lent
Mark 9:2-8

As soon as the disciples begin to understand the gravity of what is happening around them on this mountaintop—it's all over. The voice from the cloud has stopped thundering. The most famous prophets in all of history have finished their casual conversation with their Rabbi. Peter has stopped babbling about making them houses to live in. They finally look around, and there is “only Jesus.”

“Only Jesus” might sound like “just Jesus,” as there were all these cool people present and a voice from the clouds—but now all that is gone. In Mark's Greek gospel all of these things culminate in “Jesus only.” Jesus singular. Jesus completing and fulfilling the prophets' words and their work. Jesus alone—the I AM.

Can you imagine the awe and wonder that the disciples felt? They were terrified at everything happening, up there, but now Jesus is perhaps even more terrifying because he is at the center, encapsulating it all. Now they're headed back down the mountain. Maybe it feels as if in their leaving, nothing happened up there—but they are changed. Jesus is more to them, and they are more because of Jesus.

Reflect: If you imagine everyone and everything around you encapsulating Christ, how would you be changed?

Pray: Holy God, help us to keep a sense of awe and wonder not only at the wild things around us but also the ordinary, for you are always present, and you are always more. Amen.

Pastor Chavaleh Forgey serves Mount Cross Lutheran Church in University Place, Washington State. It is a place that loves kids in ways they can grab on to, whether that's messy or silly children's messages in worship or D&D games on the weekends—or everything in between!

February 28, 2027
Third Sunday in Lent
Psalm 19

“Look up!”

A simple phrase that delivers a big impact. It seems no matter what the circumstance, this phrase always provides me with a joyful surprise. It might help locate something (often right in front of me), a reminder to be positive, or guidance to seek God. As teachers and administrators we may have uttered these words ourselves attempting to lighten a student’s challenge, or to support parents, or our colleagues.

This week's reading, Psalm 19:1-4, encourages us to “look up” toward the skies, pausing to see and celebrate the gift of God’s creation and glory ... day after day, night after night. There is no end. In these verses, there is great hope to be found by looking up.

The Psalm continues telling of God’s great gifts describing the guidance and direction provided. Through God we are given all that we need to serve those in our midst. We are given a new start each day. What comfort to know God is here!

These words provide not only support of others but also the reassurance of God’s presence in our daily work. A reassurance that leaves room for us to *Imagine More* for our year and our schools. Look up and see where God is at work today. Imagine your surprise.

Reflect: Where could God be leading you in this season? How can you rely on God to Imagine More?

Pray: Creator and Giver God, thank you for the gifts of creation and guidance freely shared each day. “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.” (verse 14) Amen.

Amy Cauble serves ELCA Early Childhood Education in the ELCA as developer, director, curriculum writer and educator for over twenty years. Sioux Falls, SD

March 7, 2027
Fourth Sunday of Lent
Numbers 21:4-9

The story about serpents in the wilderness is wonderfully weird! There's something compelling about the mysterious—a blend of fascination, fear, curiosity, and anxiety pulls us like magnets to strangeness. For many ancient civilizations snakes were associated with the mystical and esoteric. Paul Essah and Dr. Rosy Kandathil (FirstReadingPodcast.com) describe a pharaonic talisman, “an Egyptian cobra, an upright winged snake imagined in a protective posture, protecting the Pharaoh.” This imagery and other apotropaic items—objects “believed to have the power to turn away illness or sickness,” were known throughout the ancient region. These talismans transform very real, frightening, and powerful dangers (like venomous snakes) into human-made sources of healing (like the bronze serpent). As we near the cross maybe this transformation sounds familiar? Roman crosses and death will be lifted high, just as that bronze serpent was, transforming a very real, frightening danger into an object of hope, promise, and life. Teachers, school staff, students, and families—everyone is feeling the weight of the world, exhausted from a year of learning, disruptions, and difficulties. Yet through all the hardness we have found a way to transform fatigue, anxiety, confusion, and curiosity into fodder for faithful growth. With God's help, these ministries can create spaces of safety, love, compassion, healing, and connection.

Reflect: Reflecting on the year so far, how have you seen difficulty transform into growth?

Pray: God, the work of learning and teaching is exhaustive and fraught with difficulty; it is also plentiful with blessings. We pray for our teachers and staff, students, and families who are running on empty. Give us the grace to support one another and the wisdom to build spaces of safety, connection, and compassion. Amen.

Rev. Nikoli Falenschek serves as the Associate Pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church and School in Waverly, IA. The congregation and school have been serving their neighbors for over 150 years!

March 14, 2027
Fifth Sunday in Lent
Psalm 119:9-16

"How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word" (Psalm 119:9).

Every generation worries that the younger generation is improperly equipped to survive and prosper in the world in its current state, let alone what may lie ahead. Human beings are always certain that the world will go to "hell in a hand basket," particularly as it relates to young people keeping their way pure. Morals, values, and behaviors are "not what they were when we were kids." It is also true that the evil forces in the world work to replace respect with entitlement, accompanied with erosion of productivity, commitment, and a host of other character traits. Life does seem challenging for each new generation.

We aren't sure exactly when this Psalm was written, but 3,000 years ago is probably a good guess. As much as things change, so they stay the same. Society has always worried and pondered the question "How can young people keep their way pure?" Nowhere does this question come to light as much as in our schools and early education centers where you see children and the challenges they face every day.

But the answer found in this Psalm is clear—they can keep their way pure by guarding it with God's word. How important are our faith-based schools and centers? Vital! It is indeed where many children will learn God's word, God's promises and God's forgiveness. And in many cases, it may be the only exposure they have to the Word, at least on a regular basis. May the Lord guide us in continuing this important work.

Reflect: What can we as educators do to help children as they face the many challenges in keeping their way pure in God's sight?

Pray: Gracious God, show us the way as we teach and nurture children as they face the many challenges of this world. Help us be beacons of light and pureness. Amen.

Gayle Denny is a retired lifelong educator & former ELEA Executive Director.

March 21, 2027
Liturgy of the Palms
Matthew 21:1-11

In Matthew 21:1–11 Jesus triumphantly entered Jerusalem as a large crowd gathered to meet him, spreading their cloaks on the road and cutting branches from nearby trees to lay before him. Each year, many congregations seek to recreate this moment by purchasing palm branches for worshipers to wave while shouting, “Hosanna!” Unfortunately, this practice can have a significant environmental impact and differs from what originally took place. The palms used in our worship services are often grown on large plantations, sometimes on land that was once rainforest or jungle. Workers are not always fairly compensated and the branches are frequently transported thousands of miles only to be used for a single worship service. The crowds that welcomed Jesus did not preplan their celebration. They used what was readily available, even laying down the cloaks off their backs. Rather than purchasing imported palms, congregations can honor the spirit of the story by using plants that are abundant in their own communities for Palm Sunday. My own congregation has used pine branches gathered from trees near the church. A wonderful example of this alternative appears in Kim Ki-Chang’s painting of Palm Sunday. He depicts Jesus entering a Korean city and the crowds wave bamboo shoots rather than palm branches. If your congregation prefers to continue using palms, consider ordering from EcoPalms (<https://ecopalms.org/>), which provides sustainably harvested palms from fairly compensated workers.

Reflect: Imagine more ways that your worshiping community, school, or organization can live in better harmony with God’s Creation.

Pray: God of Creation, teach us to cultivate a better community between us and our natural world. Open our eyes to practices in our worship that do more harm than good. Help us to change so that we can be prepared to welcome you into our lives. Amen.

Rev. Aaron Baughman serves as board president of Lutherans Restoring Creation and lead pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Toledo, OH. A church with an active food and clothing pantry and an afterschool program for in-city youth.

March 26, 2027

Good Friday

Ephesians 3:20

In my work as a coach I often ask clients to imagine—imagine different outcomes, alternative plans, freedom from fear, anxiety, and doubt. Imagining engages the portion of our brain that can produce mental images or solutions that currently do not exist. Humans are gifted with the ability to imagine—for example, an animal with a turtle’s body and a head like a giraffe. That animal doesn’t exist, but you can see it in your mind’s eye. While children have this innate ability to imagine, the older we get the less we utilize this powerful skill.

On this day in the church calendar, Good Friday, we recount the events leading to Jesus’ crucifixion. Not one of his disciples could imagine a world without him or that anyone could exist after death, even after Jesus told them he would rise from the dead. For us, we know the outcome. Unlike the disciples, we do not have to descend into fear or doubts about Jesus being the Son of God. But where do you need to stretch yourself and *imagine more*? What fears or negative thoughts do you need to release to move into your best imagined space? Ephesians 3:20 clearly reminds us that we can achieve much more than we ever felt possible, for us and for the children in our care by using the “power at work within us.”

Reflect: What can you imagine more that will make the biggest impact on your students?

Pray: God of amazement and surprising new endings, help us stir up our powers of imagination so that we can see a rainbow of possibilities and solutions that will advance your kingdom work. This we ask in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Barbara Huffman de Belon is an ICF-credentialed coach serving the ELCA and North Carolina Synod Coaching Ministries. New Bern, NC

March 28, 2027

Easter

John 20:1-18

Early on that first Easter morning Mary Magdalene arrives at the tomb in grief and confusion. The stone is moved, the tomb is empty, and nothing makes sense. When Jesus stands before her, she does not recognize him. Only when he speaks her name does her world open into something beyond her imagination.

To *imagine more* is not wishful thinking—it is the heart of resurrection faith. In John 20:1–18, God is working beyond Mary’s understanding, beyond her plans, beyond the possible. Death did not have the final word. Loss was not the end of the story. What looked like absence became presence; what felt like despair became calling.

In education, in ministry, in daily life, we often stand where Mary stood—facing uncertainty, carrying questions, working with limited vision. Yet Easter reminds us that God is continually at work beyond what we can see. New life is unfolding even when we cannot yet recognize it. The Risen Christ still speaks our names. And when we hear him, we are sent, like Mary, to share life-changing good news that is bigger than our fears and fuller than our expectations.

Reflect: Where is God inviting you to imagine more in a place in need of resurrection power?

Pray: Risen Christ, you meet us in places of confusion and call us by name. Open our eyes to see your work beyond what we can imagine. Give us courage to trust your promises and to share the hope of your resurrection in all we do. Amen.

The Rev. Leland Armbricht serves as Lead Pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Circle Pines, MN. For nearly 80 years this congregation has looked for ways to accompany families in raising faith-filled children who care for one another and the world God created. Over 50 years ago we reached further into our community through the establishment of Noah's Ark Preschool, enabling us to walk side-by-side with diverse families from across our community.

April 04, 2027
Second Sunday of Easter
John 20:19-31

Thomas is commonly known as Doubting Thomas; the one who wouldn't believe the other disciples, proclaiming, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." It seems Thomas could not imagine more. We too are often like Thomas. How can we *imagine more* when everything we have been taught and conditioned to believe says the opposite? How can we imagine more for a student when all that we have experienced says more is not possible? How can we imagine more for our school, when everything we have seen says more is not possible? Even when Thomas was unable to imagine more, Jesus offered welcome and invitation, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side." Sometimes we, like Thomas, need another invitation or a different viewpoint. Sometimes we need to look at a situation from a different perspective. Or perhaps we need to imagine the most improbable possibility—that it may just be possible.

May we each be open to imagining more, even the seemingly impossible. And when we imagine more, may we continue to be open to the surprise that more is possible. We don't know if Thomas ever touched Jesus in order to believe. We only know that the invitation from Jesus was enough. Thomas responds in belief, "My Lord, and my God!"

Reflect: Where in our life or work does it feel impossible to imagine more? How might imagining more, even when it seems impossible, unlock possibilities?

Pray: God of the impossible, may you open our hearts to imagine more—more of you, more of your way of being in our lives and in our work. Where it seems impossible, may we be open to new possibilities. Help us imagine more today and everyday. Amen.

Rev. Melissa Anderson Trust attended a Lutheran early childhood education center and now serves in the SWWA Synod Office, next door to the same early childhood education center she (and her son) attended. Tacoma, WA

April 11, 2027
Third Sunday of Easter
Luke 24:36b-48 NRSVue

If you've ever seen something so remarkable that it's almost unbelievable, then you understand the disciples in this reading towards the end of the Gospel of Luke. The passage begins with the two followers of Jesus, who had been on the road to (and from) Emmaus, when they encountered the risen Christ walking alongside them. Jesus became real to them in the breaking of the bread. In racing back to tell their friends, they were met with skepticism and dismissal; but, Jesus once again shows up in their midst. Even as he's talking and eating with them, "...for all of their joy they were still disbelieving and wondering..." Jesus being alive was both too good to be true and totally unbelievable at the same time.

But it was, and is, true—Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! It is the heart of the Gospel that God so loves us, you and me, that Jesus was given to die for us. But what the disciples thought was the end of the story on Good Friday was just the beginning of what God was up to—raising Jesus from the dead so that not even death has control when God is in the mix. It's almost unbelievable, and yet it's the most true thing ever. It's what the disciples witnessed in their fellowship with Jesus, and it's what you and I get to be witnesses to in the here and now.

Reflect: What is an incredible thing that you have experienced? How did you share your experience with someone else? How could that be a way we think about sharing the Good News of Jesus?

Pray: Gracious God, thank you for the incredible gift of Jesus—his life, his death, and his new life in the resurrection. By your Spirit, help us to be witnesses of your great love for all people in our own time and place. Amen.

Ed Kay serves in the ELCA Churchwide Organization as the Senior Director for Discipleship & Inclusive Communities. Baltimore, MD

April 18, 2027
Fourth Sunday of Easter
John 10:11-18

Today is known as Good Shepherd Sunday. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He tells us that he will take care of the sheep. In this reading Jesus uses sheep as a metaphor for talking about people. He is talking about us. Jesus is our shepherd. He laid down his life for us.

A shepherd takes care of the sheep, guides them to pastures, protects them, and manages their well-being. The sheep recognize the voice of the shepherd and form a bond of trust with the shepherd. We hear so many different voices every day on the news, on our computers, and on all types of social media. What voice are we to listen to? Which is most important? For Christians, the voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, matters the most to our body, mind, and soul.

This year's theme, *Imagine More*, reminds us that God is always at work in our lives and moving us beyond anything we could imagine. Think about your role as a teacher or leader like that of a shepherd that helps shape, guide, and manage the well-being of children and youth. As the shepherd for children and youth, building trusting relationships can move them beyond anything they could imagine.

Reflect: Jesus is the Good Shepherd. When have you recognized Jesus voice among all the voices that surround you?

Pray: Good Shepherd, thank you for laying down your life for us. Help us to listen to your trusting and caring voice in all that we do. Amen.

Debbie Streicher is Director and Owner at Milestones Ministry. She is a certified life and grief coach, a writer, speaker, and consultant for congregations. Ridgeley WV

April 25, 2027

Fifth Sunday of Easter

**“Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine”
(Ephesians 3:20).**

Have you ever closed your eyes to imagine what you thought you needed to make your life “perfect?” The place you wanted to live, the job you wanted, the things you wanted, or even the people you needed—all to ensure your life is “perfect.” It can be frightening to discover that one, two, or maybe all of the things one imagined did not make life perfect. And sometime the things one wanted only brought grief!

Our all-knowing God has a purpose for all of us. God is not a “puppet-master” that makes the moves for us. We have “free will.” God knew we would make some choices that would break our relationship with God. God sent his son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins—even before we were born. Why? Because God loves us so much and wants to be in relationship with us that God sends the Holy Spirit to help us *Imagine More!*

Accept God’s calling and step out in faith. Your calling may disrupt your comfort and send you into the unknown—but sometimes our faith needs to be stretched. God knows your gifts and has a plan for your life. God leads with a grace that protects, supports, and forgives. God knows what you need. God’s plan for your life is bigger and more than you can ever imagine! Trust God!

Reflect: Are there times when you feel like God is silent in your life? How do you thank God for your life and for help in Imagining More?

Pray: Thank you, God, for your love, guidance and protection. Help me grow in wisdom, stature, and in favor with you and my neighbor. Amen.

Sandra F. Nelson is the Bursar/Business Administrator for Holy Family School in Chicago (9 years). She has served for over 28 years as a Youth Leader at United Baptist Church, Director for God's Precious Children (Bible Study) and Vacation Bible School ministries as well as a teacher for Children's Church. Broadview, IL

May 02, 2027

Sixth Sunday of Easter

"You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last..." (John 15:16).

Being chosen is a meaningful sentiment of those who work in ministry and education. In 2007 I felt chosen to join the staff of the newly established preschool on our church campus. Now, as the retired director of that preschool, I fondly reflect on the lasting fruit of this remarkable weekday ministry. I think of the first board of directors and staff who were called to build this ministry. They worked tirelessly to meet state licensing regulations, comply with fire codes, and transform new spaces into welcoming classrooms. They imagined and *imagined more* ... Children of Hope Preschool is today a 5-Star Quality First school, the highest honor the state of Arizona awards to preschools.

Lasting fruit. I reflect on the people who bore fruit during my years as director. Chapel lessons nurtured the Fruit of the Spirit. I saw that most clearly when one of our preschoolers was diagnosed with leukemia. Words cannot describe the love, kindness, patience, and gentleness the children showed him. They instinctively held his hand as he went down the slide, sat with him on the bench at recess when he grew tired and needed a break, and made sure he felt included, comfortable, and cared for. Years later, as a high school senior, this child's brother returned as an Eagle Scout to bear fruit once again. His service project helped beautify the very campus where he and his brother had first received such care. It was yet another sign of fruit shared, multiplied, and lasting.

Reflect: Who are the bearers of fruit in your school community? How do they bear fruit that will last?

Pray: Thank you, Lord, for choosing these educators as bearers of good fruit to their students, families, and to one another. May the Fruit of the Spirit, your love and grace be abundant in their classrooms and in their personal lives. Amen.

Lynn Hockenberger is a retired Preschool Director, Children of Hope Preschool, Esperanza Lutheran Church. She serves as Secretary of the ELEA. Phoenix, AZ

May 9, 2027
Seventh Sunday of Easter
John 17:6-19

Jesus is preparing us for a moment of great change. He isn't leaving the disciples or the world alone, instead he says, "All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one" (John 17:10-11).

I mean wow! Jesus implores God to continue the great covenant and relationship with his disciples and people, knowing that their work has been to the glory and honor of God's kin-dom. It could feel really daunting to hear those final commissioning words. Jesus is entrusting the disciples, entrusting us here in our communities and schools to continue being Jesus's presence into the world. Those are big shoes to fill!

I am confident that we already take the Ascension very seriously. It has been evident this entire school year. Because, to take the Ascension seriously is to be Jesus people—to know that we have a part and role to play in the ushering in of God's kin-dom. To take the Ascension seriously means we must act in love towards all our students and their families. We are tasked with showing and demonstrating God's grace. This is what happens every day throughout our learning centers and schools. The love of Jesus is showing up in each of you!

Reflect: How are you empowered by Christ to be a source of love in your community?

Pray: Dear God, we celebrate your everlasting covenant with us. We are sustained and energized by your love and connection. We are so grateful for our relationship with Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Deacon Andrew Larsen, former ELEA Board Member and Lutheran Schools
Week content contributor. Southwest WA*

May 16, 2027
Day of Pentecost
Acts 2:1-21

On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit enlivened a gathered community of early Christ-followers, connecting them beyond barriers of language and place of origin. At first, the onlookers treat them with scorn, attributing their events to pure drunkenness. Then Peter stands up to defend what he knows to be true and quotes the prophet Joel, proclaiming that the Holy Spirit is poured out on ALL people, including the young who “will see visions.”

The visions from the Divine call us into new ways of being that are led by the young ones among us. When working with children and youth, there is an opportunity for us to see a vision of the Kingdom of God come to life. Through honest reflections, unashamed questions, silly revelations, and joyful curiosity, young people teach us to encounter God’s vision for the world in our everyday lives. The story of Pentecost reminds us of the amazing things we can do with the help of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost shows us that despite the many barriers that try to get in our way, there is no stopping the reign of Christ. A reign that is filled with community, peace, justice, hope, love, joy, and appreciation for every child of God. From the young who dream visions, to the elders who dream dreams, the Holy Spirit calls and equips them all. So, let us be open to the work of the Holy Spirit, just as on the Day of Pentecost.

Reflect: How do you uplift the visions of the young people you encounter?

Pray: God of wind and fire, embolden us to seek your movement in the world beyond whatever tries to divide us. Pour out the Holy Spirit on us as to those on Pentecost. Guide us in dreaming, visioning, and creating your Kingdom of grace. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

Rev. Ashley Rosa-Ruggieri serves as Pastor alongside the people of Trinity Lutheran Church and Child Care Center in Wauseon, OH

May 23, 2027

Trinity Sunday

"May the Lord give strength to God's people! May the Lord bless God's people with peace!" (Ps.29:11).

"Trinity? In the Trinity family there's a Dad, his son, and their bird. It's like my family, except we got a dog," shared a second grader in explaining the Trinity. A teacher friend expressed her frustration teaching the Trinity—a difficult concept for children at a concrete level of development. Last year I led school devotions every Monday. I emphasized how we are all connected through rules, rituals, and traditions. Using a dramatic voice with good use of pause and pitch, I had the children's attention. They formed a circle and gently blew the breath of the Spirit behind the ear of the child next to them. I felt a truly awesome vibe in the room. We sang our closing song, blew out the candle, and returned to our classrooms. We had followed the rules—God of the Law. We felt the love—Jesus, God Incarnate. We felt the wind—God the Spirit. I thought we had captured it. Two days later a parent stopped me, "Were you teaching the kids about demons? My son told me they learned about demons in Devotions." This year Trinity Sunday offers many images of the Spirit—but I probably will not choose to tell young children about Isaiah's cherubim burning sin off his lips with hot tongues. Or Nicodemus struggling to understand rebirth in the Spirit. Maybe I'll stick with Psalm 29, "May the Lord give strength to God's people! May the Lord bless the people of God with peace!" The Trinity gives us strength and peace—concepts that early childhood kids can understand. But, we shall see ...

Reflect: Does the Spirit manifest itself for you in times of meditation? Prayer? Do moments of inspiration and strength appear unexpectedly?

Pray: Good and gracious God, open our eyes and hearts to the rush of the Holy Spirit, whether as a gentle breath or a whoosh of wind. May the Spirit ignite in us as we spread the good news of Jesus with grace. Amen.

*Chris Comella is the Principal of Saint Luke Academy, an early childhood center that has spread the good news of Jesus in the Lakeview neighborhood for 144 years.
Chicago, IL*

May 30, 2027

Second Sunday after Pentecost

"Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, 'Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening."' So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.' Then the LORD said to Samuel, 'See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle' " (1 Samuel 3:7-11).

At one time or another we have all heard a voice calling our name, only to find out it was someone from another room or across the hall. For Samuel it was someone with a higher power. (Samuel had not yet come to believe in God.) Eli told Samuel what to do when he heard the voice again. And Samuel did reply, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

We are servants of God. We are here to do what God directs us to do. Parents have entrusted their children to us to plant the seeds of faith and nurture their growth so that they too will answer the call to be God's servants and care for those around them.

With every Bible story, with every prayer, we are teaching our students to listen and engage with God, letting God know we are here to serve and share God's will and promise with others. "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Reflect: Have you heard God speak to you today? How did you answer?

Pray: Dear Lord, speak for your servant is listening. Amen.

Michelle Schaffer has been serving as Christian Day Nursery School Director for 20 years. Norwalk, Ohio

June 6, 2027
Third Sunday after Pentecost
Mark 3:20-35

Jesus goes home and although he has drawn crowds, there are those in his hometown who aren't so sure about him. There are those who say he has gone out of his mind, questioning if he might even be possessed by a demon. His own family wants to restrain him either with questions of their own or a desire of protection, perhaps a combination of the two.

But, Jesus isn't willing to be restrained or dismissed. Instead he uses the opportunity to teach. Jesus knows where his power comes from and he knows the message he is to proclaim. Jesus continues his mission regardless of location or circumstances and he invites us to do the same. We too are God's people; we too have been gifted with the power of the Holy Spirit; we too have been gifted with the opportunity to share God's love through our words and actions.

Jesus is proclaiming the power of the Body of Christ, the body in which we are a part of. No matter our own location or circumstance, we are recipients of God's good news and equipped and empowered to share the good news. We live in a world that still wonders about the sin of the world, still questions where God might be in the midst of it all, and might even wonder if brokenness is our destiny. But, Jesus reminds us that we are God's family, we are God's kin-dom bearers, we are God's love at work in the world.

Reflect: How might God be calling you? Where is God's love made tangible for you? How might God be calling you to spread God's love with friends and foes alike?

Pray: Gracious and loving God, a house divided cannot stand. Help unite us in your love and your mercy. Open our hearts to see your power in our midst and show us the way to be your love made known to another. Amen.

The Rev. Sara Cogsil serves as the Assistant to the Bishop and Director of Evangelical Mission for the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod.

June 13, 2027
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Mark 4: 26-34

Jesus describes the kingdom as a seed that grows “night and day... though they do not know how” (v. 27). Growth happens beyond our control, beneath the surface, in ways we cannot fully see or explain. For educators, this is both humbling and hopeful. We prepare lessons, offer care, nurture curiosity—but God animates the growth.

To *imagine more* is to trust that the Spirit is already at work within every student, classroom, and limited resource. What looks small—a brief conversation, a creative adjustment, a moment of patience—may carry the beginnings of something far greater. When we view our circumstances through the lens of the Spirit, scarcity can become seedbed, and routine can become holy ground. Centered in the call to love God and neighbor, we are invited to reimagine what is possible, honoring what we have and watching for God’s generative movement within it.

Educators are sowers who may not see the harvest, yet are called to faithful imagination. God makes more of what we offer than we can foresee.

Reflect: Where might God be growing something unseen in your teaching context? How might you “imagine more” with what you already have?

Pray: God of hidden growth, open our eyes to your work unfolding around us and within us. Deepen our trust when we cannot see results. Renew our imagination to notice possibility in small beginnings. Help us love you and our neighbors faithfully, using every resource for your healing work in the world. Amen.

Jill Beverlin serves as the Program Director for ELCA's Coaching Ministry and has collaborated with the ELEA to provide coaching accompaniment for educators on a journey of leadership and formation in the classroom. Appleton, WI

June 20, 2027

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 4:35-41

**"Jesus said to them, 'Why are you afraid?
Have you still no faith?' " (Mark 4:40).**

Why are you afraid? Why am I afraid? Fear can grab hold of us, but it is not something that needs to keep us from living and being a light for love in the world.

There are so many things we can be fearful of, but if we have faith then nothing is impossible. Jesus told us he would always be with us. Faith does not make everything easy; it does allow us to have peace, even in the midst of turmoil.

Faith gives us the support we need to face the things that make us fearful. Do not live in fear, live in faith. Help others see the love God has for them, and all creation. Demonstrate faith in and through your life of love.

Reflect: What fears keep you from living in faith?

Pray: Gracious God, help us to live in your love and trust the promises we have been given so we may rest in faith. Help us to walk in the world letting go of the things things we fear, knowing you are always with us. Amen.

*Pastor Jerry Wirtley is Director of Evangelical Mission for the
Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod of the ELCA. Tulsa, OK*

June 27, 2027

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Wisdom of Solomon 1:13-15; 2:23-24

God is the author of life. God created all living things to exist and to flourish; we were made to be a direct reflection of God. In God's image, the external, but also God's nature, the internal world. God authors our consciousness. * In today's times, I relate this to the mental battles that have become so prominent—the battle between internal life and internal death. Death is the destructive narratives that take root within our thoughts, that separate us from our innate worth, resilience, and goodness and allows envy, social comparisons, and destructive self-talk to enter. * The “adversary's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience it” (vs 24) is the unfavorable self-talk. It's the death of joy, self-esteem, and peace being replaced with anxiety and depression. “God did not make death, and God does not delight in the destruction of the living” (vs 13) encourages us to be aware of our environment. * We are emboldened to build a healthy, compassionate inner voice; to reclaim ownership of our God-given core values which can't be removed by mistakes, failures or by the opinions of others. * The Wisdom of Solomon reminds us that while destructive self-talk and narratives entered the world through the adversary's envy, we are not bound to remain with those thoughts. By choosing our God-authored life and actively engaging in a healthy, compassionate internal voice, we will continue to align ourselves with the power of God's truth as it was meant to be. It's a choice.

Reflect: Awareness is the first step to returning to a compassionate internal voice. What reoccurring negative self-talk are you aware of? Why do you engage with it?

Pray: Lord, by your power at work within us, help us to remain in you, to live with a compassionate inner voice, and to align ourselves with your truth to have peace and calm in our minds. Amen.

Kimberly Morse Julian serves as office manager plus adult and youth ministry support for Holy Trinity Lutheran Church. She is also a Christian author. Ephrata WA

July 4, 2027
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
2 Corinthians 12:9-10

When we enter our classrooms for the first time, whether it's as a new teacher or a new school year, we might wonder if our teaching skills are strong and effective enough to reach our students and hold their attention. Will they learn the objectives we intend for each lesson?

For every teacher there are times of doubt in one's own abilities or our enthusiasm to meet a student's needs, especially those children we find most challenging. Often, they're the ones who need us the most.

In recognizing our limitations, we can take comfort in knowing that God doesn't leave us to figure it out on our own. The Spirit within us will guide our way as we do God's work for our students, their families, and co-workers.

God's strength makes up for whatever we lack in any given moment. By faith, we can *imagine more* than we could hope to accomplish on our own.

Reflect: Who are the children in past or present classes who tested you the most? How would/did believing in them and helping them succeed change your relationship with them?

Pray: God of Grace, help us to see our students as you see us—worthy of love and in need of grace. We humbly ask that as you love us more than we deserve, through us our students will also know your unending love for them.

Let it be so. Amen.

*Karen Kress, a lover of children, lifelong learner and teacher.
Waupaca, WI*

July 11, 2027
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
Mark 6:14-29

Herod remembered John the Baptist. Even after John's voice had been silenced, Herod could not stop thinking about him. John had made a mark.

As I read this text, I find myself thinking about the people who made a mark on me. I can still remember my fourth-grade teacher, Miss Hilton. She knew I came to school hungry, so she would often bring me a snack. She also knew there was no one at home to read with me. Many days, she would sit on the floor beside me and listen as I practiced reading. Page after page, she encouraged me and helped me believe I could do it. I wonder if Miss Hilton could have imagined the mark she was making on me? Could she have imagined that her kindness, patience, and belief in a struggling student would later shape the way I cared for people as a social worker and, years later, as a pastor?

Probably not. But God could.

As you prepare for a new school year, remember that God is doing more through your daily work than you can see. Like Miss Hilton, you may never know all the ways your faithfulness shapes another person's future. God is already at work through your daily acts of care, accomplishing more than you can imagine.

Reflect: Who made a mark on your life? How might God use you to make a mark on a student this year?

Pray: Gracious God, thank you for the teachers, mentors, and caregivers who have shaped our lives. Help us to see each student as a gift and each day as an opportunity to encourage, support, and love. Use our words and actions to leave marks of hope, faith, and kindness that point others to you. Amen.

*Pr. Rebel Hurd currently serves as a local Lutheran school board member.
She cares about all ages of learners. Moorhead, MN*

July 18, 2027
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
Ephesians 2:13

There are moments when we feel distant—from God, from one another, and sometimes even from the person God created us to be. We carry regrets, wounds, fears, and failures that convince us we are somehow beyond reach. Yet Paul reminds us of a remarkable truth: in Christ, distance does not have the final word.

The story of faith is not about our ability to find our way back to God. It is about God coming near to us. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, those who were once far away have been brought near. We are welcomed, loved, and claimed by God, as God's own.

As we embrace the theme of this devotional, we are invited to *imagine more* than reconciliation as a possibility—we are called to live as educators and faithful disciples who have already been reconciled. You are the beacon of hope and pillar of faith that is breaking down barriers and offering grace freely. The Lord Almighty is using you to ensure every person knows they belong and to work diligently to share the message that Christ is drawing each of us near to him.

The good news is that God's love reaches further than we can imagine. As you passionately push through the difficult work that you do every day, remember that our God is drawn closer to you through each moment of perseverance and discipleship.

Reflect: Where in your life, or in your school or center, might Christ be inviting you to help bridge a distance and bring someone closer to God's love?

Pray: Jesus, thank you for drawing us near when we feel far away. Help us to live as people of reconciliation, sharing your grace and welcoming love with everyone we meet. Amen.

Dana Engstrom is blessed to serve as Director of New Covenant Lutheran School, a mission of New Covenant Lutheran Church for nearly 15 years. Scottsdale, AZ

July 25, 2027

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

John 6:1-21

**"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish.
But what are they among so many people?" (John 6:9).**

Imagine more! Imagine what becomes possible when we allow God to work through us. I can imagine the young person in John's Gospel reading, perhaps about the age of some of your students, seeing hungry people and simply trusting that they will be fed. Surely, five loaves and two fish will be enough? I can imagine others who are gathered and seeing the young person's generosity, respond by sharing the food they may have well been hiding. God's Spirit sweeps the crowd and Jesus ends up celebrating the surplus with the young person and all those gathered. Picture the possibilities when we focus on serving others with the open faith of a young person. Imagine more!

Reflect: The boy in today's reading certainly seems to have seen the possibilities in the loaves and fish. What possibilities might the young people in our lives be pointing to? How might we support them in exploring those possibilities?

Pray: Generous and all-seeing God, you work within us through Jesus' selfless example and the inviting, encouraging power of your Holy Spirit. Spark our imagination, that we remain open to your work with the fresh and enthusiastic vision of the young people you have entrusted to our care. Amen.

Pastor Karl Biermann helps individuals and congregations imagine and fulfill their charitable impact as a generosity advisor with the ELCA Foundation in IN, KY, OH, and Lower Michigan. Previously serving as a bishop's assistant and parish pastor, Pastor Karl appreciates that these roles all involve supporting ministries to and with young people!



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