



**And
God
said...**

**Zoar Lutheran Church
2025
Advent Devotional**

Introduction

Dear Friends,

What an opportunity we have had this year to broaden our understanding and perceptions of Celtic spirituality: that all things are from God and God is in all things. Consequently, we should love, respect, and care for everything around us—people and nature. God is in it all.

There is a very ancient Irish poem which sees the Sacred Presence in all of creation in these wonderful words—

*I am the wind that breathes upon the sea, I am the wave
on the ocean, I am the murmur of leaves rustling, I
am the rays of the sun,*

*I am the beam of the moon and stars, I am the power
of trees growing, I am the bud breaking into blossom,
I am the movement of the salmon swimming, I am the
courage of the wild boar fighting, I am the speed of the
stag running,*

*I am the strength of the ox pulling the plough, I am
the size of the mighty oak tree, And I am the thoughts
of all people who praise my beauty and grace.*

(From “Sacred Living - Practical Inspirations”)

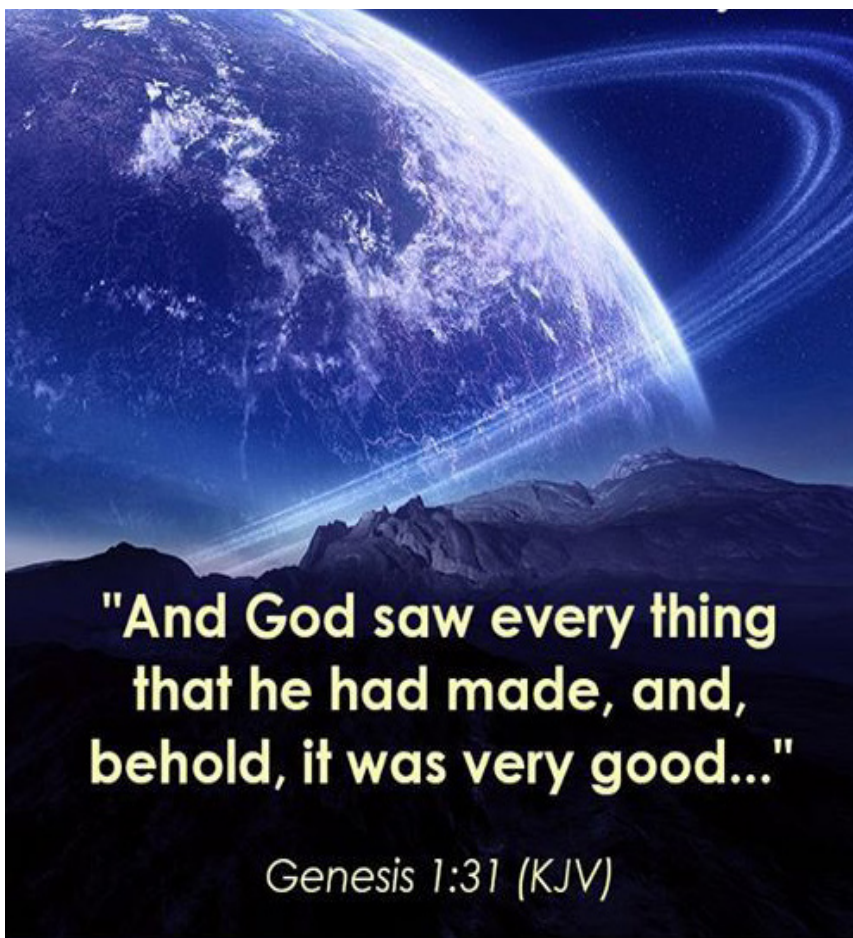
With love and prayer, your sisters and brothers in Christ share their thoughts and experiences in this booklet. May each day’s reading bring joy and encouragement to you and anyone with whom you share this devotional during our “waiting” this Advent season.

God bless you all.

Pat Parker and Donna Pottratz

Contributors

Di Bernklau	April Lambert
Jennifer Benz	Peggy Luckman
Karen Brennan	Betty Lundsten
Ashlie Carvajal	Robert Manicke
Jacque Corey	Renna Marcus
Valerie Coy	Donna Martz
Mary Eagle	Dan & Pam Ogborn
Scott Eagle	Dave & Gayle Schedler
Marilyn Halvor	Maggie Schroeder
Noel Hygelund	David Tate
Pam Hygelund	Daniel Tew
Suzi Kaveckis	Kelsey Tew
Mel Kubik	Mary Wintermantel



Editors:
Pat Parker
Donna Pottratz



Sunday, November 30

"Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing."

Isaiah 40:26

More than 40 years ago, Michelle and I met as college students in Munich during a junior year abroad. The program included the history of European art and architecture, taught by a dynamic older woman with a colorful past and an infectious zest for life. Often outwalking us, Frau Wuttig led us through so many churches, cathedrals, castles, and palaces, calling out features of the Romanesque, Gothic, and Baroque styles. At some point, she would abruptly halt, point upward, and sternly remind us: "Immer nach oben schauen!" (Always look up!)

That's when we would notice, finally, the breathtaking fresco, or the intricate ribwork arches, or the colors pouring through stained glass windows high above. These moments literally completed the picture. The artisans who crafted these structures meant us to stop in our tracks, look up, take in the larger pattern, the harmony, and remember that we are connected with, and surrounded by, an awesome power from above.

Isaiah's verse gives us the same admonition: look up and feel the power of God. Writing at the culmination of war some 500 years before Jesus, the author tells his people to draw military courage from this power, to

find hope in God as commander of a host as numerous as the stars.

This past summer, accompanying Michelle in Scotland, I learned about the Celtic tradition of worship in the “cathedral of earth and sky.” Long before grand structures were built, hardy worshipers gathered in the open air. I don’t know how often they gathered at night or how often the skies of northern Britain allowed a clear view of the heavens, but I’m sure that the power of God in the wind, the rain, and occasionally the stars gave them courage and hope to live out the Gospel in their time and place.

Today, reading Isaiah’s words through the lens of the Gospel, we can channel the power of God into courage to live and speak love for our neighbor and for God, in the hope of making our world a better place.

Prayer: God of the earth and sky, inspire us to stop and behold the power of your creation. May we draw courage and hope from your power, so that we may live our lives true to your Gospel. Amen

Robert Manicke



Fairy Glen

Monday, December 1

"And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus."

Philippians 4:19

It will be no surprise to anyone who knows me that one of my greatest pleasures is my yard. This is a place that puts me in touch with God's creation.

We need do so little, just a bit of care, to watch seeds and small plants burst forth in profusion - what a glorious sight! It brings joy to the heart, beauty to the eye, and calm to the soul.

The work can be hard, but the tiredness I feel after toiling away is a "good" tired. My body may ache but I am happy! The trees, shrubs, and particularly the flowers, are calming, beautiful, and life sustaining.

I'm a bit sad as the weather cools and the flowers go to seed, but even then, there is a plan. Those seeds are food for the birds, and the trees and shrubs provide shelter from the cold. The garden provides vegetables and fruit in abundance for us as well. The "cycle of life" on full display.

My little yard is a microcosm of what happens worldwide. God's creation provides plenty for all...if only humankind can work on the "sharing" part.

This Advent season may we all take a break from the pressure of trying to find the perfect gifts and planning the perfect gathering. Let us just take a walk in nature to see the beauty, breathe in the air, and feel the peace of God.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we thank you for the gift of your wondrous creation. Grant us the wisdom to watch over it and preserve it for future generations. Open our eyes to see the beauty, our minds to sense the wonder, and our souls to cherish the peace. Amen

Mary Wintermantel



Tuesday, December 2

*"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies
proclaim the work of his hands."*

Psalm 19:1

Being a military family, we moved every 3 years. We lived on the west coast, the east coast, and the middle of the United States as well as Japan and Hawaii. As a family we were able to see many of the wonders God has created: Niagara Falls, Grand Canyon, Mt. Fuji, the tropical beauty of Hawaii, the Painted Desert, and both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. While traveling across the country we passed through majestic trees, prairies, farmland, and deserts. All the things we saw reinforced our belief that this had to come from God; all that beauty could not be an accident.

After retirement Dave and I traveled in our motorhome. We continued to be in awe of the wonders of God's creation as we drove through a herd of bison in Custer State Park and looked at the north rim of the Grand Canyon from our campsite 50 feet from the canyon edge. We explored Zion, Bryce, Arches, Yosemite, White Sands, and Yellowstone National Parks. We toured Monument Valley, drove and then camped among the redwoods in Northern California and watched the giant Elephant Seals at Elephant Seal beach.

During this Advent season we remember that not only did God give us a beautiful place to live, he gave us his Son. Now we can enjoy the beauty of this earth while anticipating the beauty of Heaven.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for all the wonders you have created for us. Help us to do our part in keeping them beautiful. Thank you for sending your Son as our Savior. Amen

Gayle and Dave Schedler



Wednesday, December 3

"He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul."

Psalm 23:2-3

"I'll sleep when I'm dead." I just had an online conversation with some friends from college about this saying. They were talking about how, when they were young, there was so much to do and experience that they couldn't imagine taking the time for sleep, so they would sleep later. Now that they are older, they recognize the importance of sleep. I replied that I've always needed and loved sleep, but the expectation was that all the stuff had to get done and it was my job to do it, so I could sleep when I was dead.

Growing up, idleness was next to sinfulness and you either kept busy or someone would find something for you to do. You were allowed to rest in the evening when your chores were done and the sun was down. I've always loved fall and winter when it gets dark earlier and there is more permission to rest in my world. Throughout the year, I love going to Sunday service since it is also a time when I can just be in the moment and not be busy. It centers me and sets the tone for my week. It also reminds me that I am not alone in my busy. God is with me. They – Father, Son, Holy Spirit – travel through the busy with me. They highlight the quiet all around me. The whoosh of the wind, the chatter of the birds, the calmness found in words. I cling to that calmness to get through the week.

Advent is a time to center ourselves as we await the coming of Christ. We rest in the darkness. We can feel

God next to us guiding us to places of rest. It may be outdoors. It may be curled up with a book. Whatever your place of rest looks like, embrace it. Embrace sleep. Feel God's presence next to you and let it guide you to your quiet waters, your green pastures, and rest.

Prayer: Dear Lord, be with us as we travel through this busy time. Help us to find our center and grant us the rest we so desperately need. Amen

Karen Brennan



Thursday, December 4

“Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky.”

Genesis 1:26

To me, this Bible verse highlights our sacred connection to God. That said, I do not think this verse is asking us to dominate but rather be in communion with nature. We are interdependent!

I appreciate how Celtic Christian tradition extends Genesis 1:26 beyond humans to include the entire created order – humans, creatures, and our earth.

There is a deep spiritual connection between humanity, creation, and God. Each new day is an opportunity for gratitude, hope, and a renewed commitment to care for the world through reverence for nature, responsible stewardship, and loving hospitality to all. I prayerfully invite us all to participate in such practices.

I conclude with this beautiful prayer written by John Philip Newell excerpted from his book “Praying with the Earth: A Prayerbook for Peace”

Prayer For the Life of the World

For the freshness of this new day
thanks be to you, O God.

For morning's gift of clarity
its light like the first day's dawn
thanks be to you.

In this newborn light
let us see afresh.

In this gateway onto what has never been before
let our soul breathe hope
for the earth
for the creatures
for the human family.

Let our soul breathe hope.

Jacque Corey



Friday, December 5

"God saw all that he made, and it was very good."

Genesis 1:13

This time of year has me reflecting on all the beautiful creations that God has made and the humans he made to care for all of it. I enjoy watching people come together to celebrate the holidays and especially the day of Jesus' birth, Christmas. But the happiest and most joyous times for many can be the exact opposite for others. As a person of faith and spirituality, I try to see the beauty in all existence. However, for some such as the LGBTQ+ community, those struggling with addictions, the homeless, immigrants, and those who endure abuse, daily life may be difficult and this time of year even more challenging. Can we find it in ourselves to provide more kindness, love, understanding, and forgiveness for them?

I have seen the beauty of humanity at its finest. Working in healthcare since the age of 16, I have witnessed the raw grief of losing a loved one and celebrated with a patient discharging from a skilled rehabilitation center after healing from a traumatic car accident. I have humbly sat with loved ones to discuss the challenges of dementia and its progression and held the hands of those in physical, emotional, or spiritual pain. As we navigate all the complexities of our world, we can still bear witness to those striving to make the world a better place. This is demonstrated by small and big actions of people from all over the world and in our community. For example, nurses and doctors providing the best care possible, parades supporting a

great cause, the church community dinners, the food pantries, and churches providing sanctuary to those in need.

As we come back to the Bible verse, I feel a sense of longing to accept this as true as God does. We are human and imperfect, each and every one of us, but we can still see the injustices in this world and do our best to find ways to help every day.

It is natural to seek acceptance and understanding for ourselves, but do we seek the same for others? To love and accept people where they are now is important. If we can love, as God has so greatly loved us, we can spread love instead of judging. We can acknowledge that life can be difficult and try to lessen the burdens of others. We have to work on being and holding one another accountable. By making informed decisions while voting and having difficult conversations with those who may think differently...listening to their stories for understanding...we may change minds and make a difference.

During this wonderful time of the year, may we reflect on another Bible verse that is especially important in our world today, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me". (Matthew 25:40) God's creation is "good" and we are to be stewards of all of it, striving to help those who are less fortunate in any way we are able, living out God's words.

Just like seasons change so do our individual journeys. We go through the transformations which include birth, love, and loss in order to grow and bear beautiful fruit. May we continue to transform into the individuals that God intended and care for all of his beautiful creations.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, please be with us all during this beautiful season. Guide us to love one another as you have loved us and to comfort all those in need. Thank you for always being there through the good times and difficult times. Help us to have eyes that see one other as you see each one of us. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen

Ashlie Carvajal



In caring for others, we are really
caring for ourselves, for we all nurture
one another in the garden of the heart.

Laurence Overmire

quotealancy

Saturday, December 6

“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.”

Isaiah 40:28

We're eating dinner and Simon has decided he doesn't like his green beans. Instead of leaving them on his plate, he chews them up and spits them onto the floor. Stella has kindergarten homework due tomorrow which we forgot so now she needs to practice tracing numbers before bedtime. Meanwhile, the dog has decided to jump on the table to help himself to food left out on the table. After all of these activities there are still dishes to clean, a bedtime routine that includes a bath (Simon sometimes splashes water out of the tub), brushing teeth, and reading books. This is a snapshot of many evenings in our household. When you factor in the extra stresses and activities the holidays add, it feels like it's the most tiresome time of the year! I'm sure everyone can relate because life can be exhausting.

How remarkable is it and how blessed are we that unlike us, the Lord does not grow tired or weary! When I think of the needs of myself, my children, my students, my community, and the world, there are many. Yet Scripture reminds us that God's energy is everlasting, His care is unending, and His patience never runs dry. While we may collapse at the end of a long day, He remains steadfast, constantly watching

over us and carrying burdens we could never manage on our own.

This truth gives me peace and even joy in the middle of those chaotic evenings. Though the days are full of messes, noise, and endless tasks, I can rest knowing that God is there. More than that, He gives me strength to get up tomorrow and do it all again. In my weakness, He shows His strength, and in my tiredness, He offers me rest.

Prayer: Lord, may we lean on you daily, trusting that your power is enough for every moment of our busy, beautiful lives. Amen

Daniel Tew





Sunday, December 7

"But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?"

Job 12:7-10

Teach, tell, inform...The natural world is God's greatest classroom. However, no lesson is complete without the listening component. In all our efforts to conquer the world, we have become numbed to the ability to truly "listen". We are quick to ask and have no problem speaking, but how well do we really listen? We have much to learn from the ways of our Native American brothers and sisters whose primary mode of communication and learning is through listening — to each other yes, but listening specifically to what all of nature has to say to us.

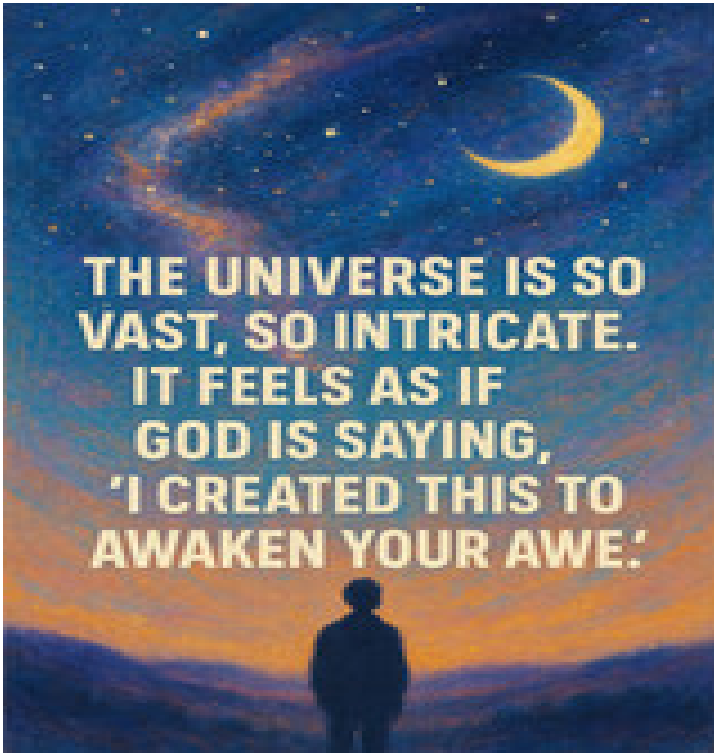
In today's world, we may shy away from listening to nature because all too often we may not want to hear what nature is telling us. It is heartbreaking to hear the truth about what is happening to the natural world due to our not listening to and mistreating Mother Earth and all her inhabitants. And do we really want to listen and learn what nature may reveal about us personally? Pointing out how our actions, or inactions, impact this world, and all those we live with?

Whether the lesson be good, or not so good, one thing for certain is our assurance that a loving Creator God is in all this. Whatever the lesson the animals and

all of creation offer us, if we truly listen, their answers will give us the opportunity to face life in new and more effective ways for the benefit of all creation given to our care.

Prayer: Loving Creator God, help us to be open, mindful, and truly listen to the lessons all of your creation continues to teach us. We are richly blessed by all you have given us to learn to be good stewards of your gifts. Amen

Mary Eagle



Monday, December 8

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

Isaiah 41:10

I guess from an early age, I knew that God loved me. I can't, in fact, remember a time when I didn't believe that God was with me. I have my loving parents to thank for that. All those Sunday mornings growing up when they corralled all six of us kids into our Sunday best and packed all eight of us in the family car to go to Sunday School & church. Dad must have stayed up late Saturday evening because our slightly beat-up shoes were polished/spiffed and waiting outside our bedroom doors.

Maybe it was all the songs we sang about “Jesus Loves Me, this I Know” and “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” that really sank into my young psyche. As years went on and my faith matured, I truly leaned on this foundation of faith to call on my Savior to always have my back. There have been many times when I have asked Him to “stay by me,” especially in times of loss or disappointment. And, when I have been fearful or sad, I've known His presence to calm me and help me to move on.

I can't imagine a life without God's lifeline — His never-ending safety net of love. My wish for Advent and for every season is for all humankind to know this kind of forever love.

Let's greet our Savior, as this Christmas-time approaches, remembering the promise that He will stir in us a "New Thing" to happen for each of us...not only for this Advent but for the year to come.

Prayer: We thank you, Lord of all, for your consistent and grace-giving love for your people. Help us to live up to your plans for us. In Jesus name, Amen

Suzi Kaveckis



Tuesday, December 9

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Deuteronomy 31:6

An example of this verse coming into action in my life was in 2023 when I experienced a crime. Now, I realize the Bible verse says “do not be afraid”, but truthfully, I was terrified! I cried out to Him to protect me, and He did! He took care of me during that dreadful moment and has continued to after. He, in His faithfulness, has even drawn me closer to Him in the process.

Part of this healing journey and His drawing me closer, interestingly enough, happened a few months later that year during a cruise I took to Hawaii. The ship I sailed on happened to have self-led Bible studies for passengers who wanted to come and worship God together.

One of the lessons that we had was on what happened in the Garden of Eden with the fall of man. We talked about how part of what happened there was Adam being so focused on his love for his wife, and Eve was so focused on her desire for knowledge and what she could gain from creation, that they both forgot about God, The Creator, the one who had given them each other and everything in creation. They were distracted and forgot about their first love – God.

I realized in that moment that I have done the same thing in my own life. I have also been so distracted by relationships and the things in this world that

I too have forgotten about my Heavenly Father. I was saddened by this realization. God is amazing! I realized how much I really wanted to get to know Him! I repented and asked God, "How can I get to know You better?" What He said in response to me was, "Talk to my kids."

It truly is a beautiful way to get to know God! We are all His children and siblings in Christ. The fact is, that even if we had all grown up in the same household, how one sibling knows our Dad versus how another sibling knows our Dad is, of course, slightly different because each have their own unique experiences. And part of getting to know our parent more completely is by hearing those stories.

That is what I've started doing...talking to my brothers and sisters in Christ to get to know more about our Heavenly Father through their stories. I invite all of you to join me in getting to know Him better by sharing your stories with others and listening to theirs. It's been such a beautiful journey so far!

Ultimately, it turned out that I didn't need to be afraid that night back in 2023 because no matter what direction things went, God was with me and therefore, I was okay. Thankfully, we can always trust and choose, the light of heaven!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you that you love and watch over all of your kids, that you are present and faithful in all circumstances, and that you draw us closer to you. Thank you that you go with us and go before us. That we can cry out to you, Abba Father. Thank you that you heal our hearts and restore our minds. We pray for all of these things, and we praise you for them! We pray to get to know you even more deeply and completely, our great Creator! Amen

April Lambert



Wednesday, December 10

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.”

Matthew 6: 28-29

The definition of ‘worry’ is to feel anxious, troubled, or to be in a state of anxiety and uncertainty over actual or potential problems. Jesus asks simply “Why do you worry about clothes? Flowers neither labor or spin.”

After I graduated from the University of Oregon, we returned to Portland from Eugene with our two bedroom mobile home. After a couple of years and a baby on the way, we decided the mobile home was too small, and we decided to look for a house. Our home buying journey left us anxious and uncertain, and the worry set in. We knew that we had to just step back, take a deep breath, let the worry go, and let God be in control. We raised two beautiful girls in our new house.

In the Advent of Jesus’ birth, we need to shift our concerns from fleeting material things and instead pray for the hungry, the houseless, and those in need of healing, trusting that God is our provider.

Prayer: Gracious God, release us from all our anxiety and needless worry. Help us remember to be like the flowers in the field trusting that you provide all that we need. Amen

Pam and Dan Ogborn

Thursday, December 11

"Do not despise the words of the prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good."

1 Thessalonians 5:20-21

I prayerfully considered the two Bible verses that were given in tandem with the Celtic Christian journey we have joined as a congregation. Invited to share the love and joy in appreciation of all God created, it made me think about all the aspects of my life that I can relate to while also dealing with the heaviness of chronic illness in a season of celebration.

God created all that is good, including the gifts he gave to us. Through prayer, the limitations, and burdens we carry in our lives, he shows us not to despair but recognize the gifts we DO have and cling to those. Celtic spirituality's teachings of "fostering community, offering healing, finding meaning, and connecting with nature" show me how to 'hold fast to what is good'.

Prioritizing giving back with the talents I have when I can't do it monetarily, allows me to foster community and offer healing. By not only contributing to our outreaches (prayers, quilts, health kits) but engaging with people, I can encourage and teach them whatever skills I can pass on. This in turn I hope will help them heal themselves by expressing themselves through arts and crafts. I find meaning in holding fast to the idea that I can use what I am capable of accomplishing and not compare myself to the "standard" of what other people consider normal or accepted. God gave me these gifts and it brings me joy to use and share

them. Even if you can't physically or mentally do everything, don't dwell on the limitations but rejoice in what you are able to do, finding meaning in your accomplishments however small.

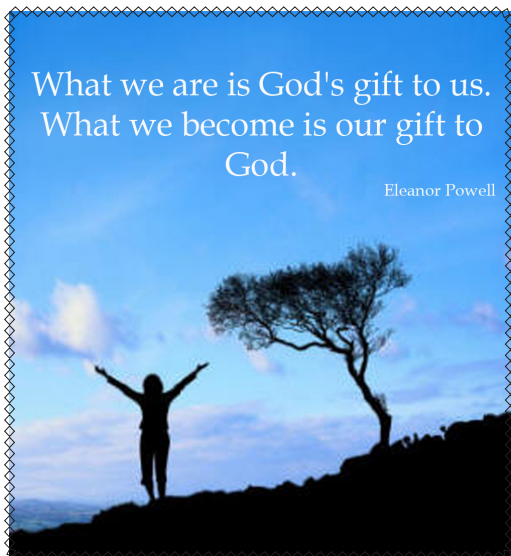
Just look outside and see what God has made. I can no longer spend hours working in the yard and garden. So on the days I can get out and do something, I don't chide myself for not doing enough. I do what I can and take the time to look around and feel my surroundings. I grew these plants. I feed these birds. I watch the bunnies play in the field. I watch the eagles, ospreys, herons, ducks, egrets, turkey vultures, and hawks soar above me. I see the bees go from flower to flower. I watch the seasons change in awe of what God has created. Look to the skies, take a breath, and feel that you are a part of this amazing world... And it is very good.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please help us to understand and accept our limitations, release our burdens, and open our hearts to hold fast to what is good in this season of celebration and throughout the year. Amen

Jennifer Benz

What we are is God's gift to us.
What we become is our gift to
God.

Eleanor Powell



Friday, December 12

"He made the moon to mark the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down."

Psalms 104:19

From my window I see
Western sky of color and clouds
Sunset a bright fiery glow
Dissolving to calm muted shades
Silhouettes of hills, trees, mountains
Sun slowly disappears below the horizon.
God's intentional order in the midst of chaos.

Breathe in the moment
Feel the awe
His divine presence
His goodness and glory.

Behind me, I see
Full and bright in the dark starry sky
Harvest moon arises
A stunning heavenly appointment
Cyclical renewal, for nature and soul
To come again in God's faithfulness.



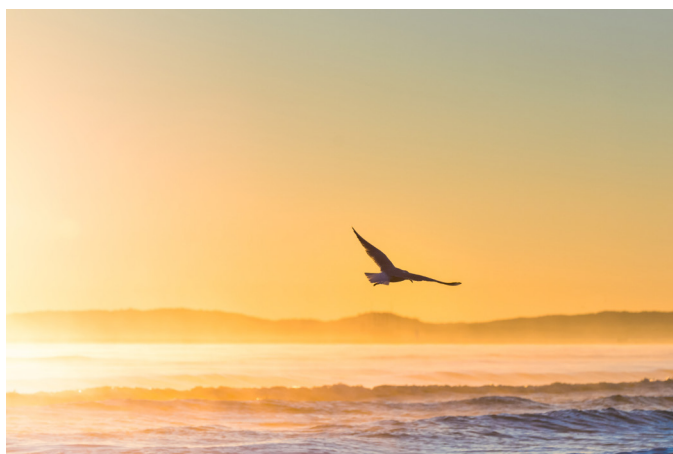
Breathe in the moment
Feel the awe
His divine presence
His goodness and glory.

For tomorrow, I see
When the sun comes up
Dawning light of the morning
An advent of hope

Strength for what lies ahead
His presence forever reassuring
Once again and again
The start of a new day.

Prayer: God of divine presence, of sun and moon and stars, I pray for your reassurance. Reassurance in the midst of disorder and turmoil. Reassurance of salvation. Reassurance through nature. And in this time of Advent, reassurance through your son Jesus. Amen and amen.

Valerie Coy



Saturday, December 13

“Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice! Let the sea and everything in it shout his praise! Let the fields and their crops bust out with joy! Let the trees of the forest sing for joy!”

Psalm 96:11-12

One of the things I’ve always loved best about traveling is the scenery. Whether it was the “big skies” of Montana, the sunflowers in North Dakota, the long open roads and spectacular mountains in Alaska, the ocean along Highway 101—there has always been something in every place I have ever visited that exhibited God’s richly created beauty which was cause for praising God and rejoicing.

I’ve come to appreciate that the presence of God can be found in everything and everyone as I’ve learned more about Celtic Christianity. I also find myself paying more attention to the sound of the wind, the songs of birds, the presence of God in all of nature but also in community and the variety of people who make up community.

This Advent season, I think of how, ever since God created the earth and said, “It was very good”, we human beings have not done a very good job of appreciating and caring for it and each other. God in his grace sent Jesus to show us how we should be living and caring for this awesome creation and one another. However, in our sinful and selfish ways, we continue to disregard the things we should be doing. How fortunate we are to have a gracious God who continues to reach out to restore and renew us.

Prayer: Gracious God, may we look with renewed eyes at the world and the people around us. May we live, as Jesus showed us, in ways that are loving, liberating, and life giving to our fellow human beings and the world we live in. Amen

Marilyn Halvor





Sunday, December 14

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."

1 Peter 5:7

Do you feel anxious about the suffering throughout the world, the future of our beloved country, families being torn apart, illness, and challenges affecting our loved ones or ourselves? Naming situations that can cause anxiety today could go on and on.

What do we do with that anxiety? We like seeing ourselves as strong, and it can be humbling to admit we are overcome. When anxiety recently had a strong hold on me, I kept pushing through, trying to be strong, but finally had to admit it had me. I had to reach out for help. Family, physicians, prayer, changing focus—these all led to some healing. Being with others who embody the love of God and sharing directly with God helped. Reconnecting to the Source of my being, the One who is my Creator, gave me comfort. Remembering God's will for the healing of the world and each one in it gave me hope. John Phillip Newell writes, we are "Made for love. Made of love. Made to love." Love is our purpose, our essence, our reason for being. Using the resources I have listed above and returning to a focus of love can help us when we are anxious about situations in life.

This Advent season gives us the opportunity to see how God acted in another time of great anxiety in the world. God placed a tiny, newborn baby, the incarnation of Love, in the arms of Mary and Joseph.

That baby became God's great invitation to deepen our relationship with the source of our own creation. Like Jesus, we are "Made for Love. Made of Love. Made to Love."

Our prayer today is from the book Celtic Daily Prayer, The Song of Simeon, referencing Psalm 107:10-14, Isaiah 49:6, and John 1:9.

And now You're here—the light is shining where the darkness used to be—and all the world is a different place...and every single day a fresh beginning. Amen

Peggy Luckman



Monday, December 15

"You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the fields will clap their hands."

Isaiah 55:12

This time of year for me seems to highlight God's creation in dramatic form. The vibrant colors, rain showers which give life, and gentle winds which toss the leaves in an unorganized but deliberate path. I think to myself, "That is where you were suppose to land during this date and time." God's creation symbolizes the ups and downs as our lives take a journey through unknown paths. It is as beautiful as it is unpredictable.

Everyone has experienced some kind of pain in their lifetime, be it physical, mental, or emotional. It can be excruciating to bear; especially if we are unable to accept our pain and move forward. I have found myself begging God for relief and/or justice. The outcome has not always been what I had hoped or prayed for.

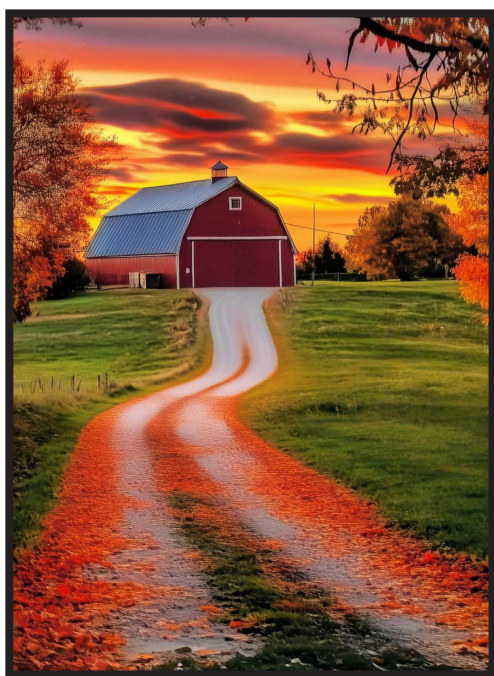
I turned to family, friends, and then, of course, my last resort and the one I should have turned to all along... God. So when I finally stop and listen, I hear God in the wind say, "I am here; focus on me". I realize his presence and am so ashamed yet so grateful. I hear him in the trees as the wind rushes through nimble, sturdy branches, and I in-vision him in the clouds holding out his hands, as I in-visioned God as a child. This is what this scripture means to me "you will go out in joy and be led forth in peace." My heart lightens, and I can see and feel his brightness again. "The mountains and hills will burst into song before you." I feel God's

forgiveness as I finally realize just how much I need and love him. "And all the trees of the fields will clap their hands." His creation celebrates for what was lost, (my heart) and is found. Praise be to God!

When I walk on the farm, I have peace knowing I am where I am supposed to be and any burden that I am carrying, God carries with me. I know my Savior is beside me with encouraging words to walk with him. I praise him for his beautiful creation which fills me with his presence.

Prayer: Loving Father, thank you for your presence in your creation. You are in everything we see, hear, and feel. Help us to acknowledge and share your love for us all. Amen

Pam Hygelund



Tuesday, December 16

“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? “

Matthew 6:26

Having read this verse many times and heard this verse many times, I must admit that I have taken this message for granted. Well, of course, God takes care of us. However, it is much more than our basic needs of food or clothing or shelter. So do we just expect help? That sounds like an entitlement and again, taking God for granted. Then, when tragedies come—and they will—how many times do we get angry and say, “How could God let this happen?”

I read a story about two men, one a patient and the other his doctor. The patient had just received a cancer diagnosis. His wife had cancer and died a few years before. In their history, they also had a baby die and he felt that he had lost God.

So when he and his wife decided to try chemotherapy she told him that that they “couldn’t wait for the outcome to see if they trusted God.” She wanted her husband not to be mad at God about her outcome as she believed that was when he would need God the most. The man concluded that she was right and that he did indeed need God and that was how he “found” God.

Because of a tragedy in his life, the doctor felt despair and hadn’t found God because he “had stopped

looking.” Both men concluded that trusting God was essential to moving forward and getting through bad times.

We have to trust that we can lay our sorrows and cares at Jesus feet, truly believing that he cares for us because we are valuable, loved beyond all measure. Putting our trust in God is not automatic. We have to practice and not turn away when life goes sideways and hurts come. We are called to trust and believe.

Prayerfully using words Paul wrote to the church in Rome (Romans 15:13):

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” In Christ may you believe, trust, and pray. Amen

Donna Martz



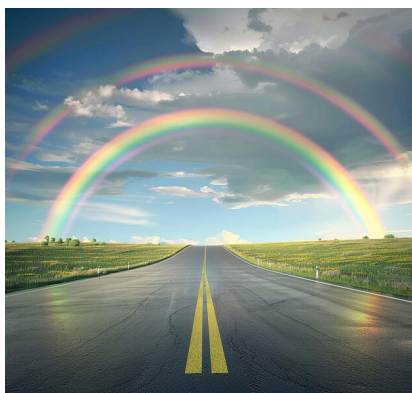
Wednesday, December 17

"Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights above. Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his heavenly hosts. Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for at his command they were created."

Psalms 148:1-5

I will never look at the sky in the same way again.

As I left Zoar, I was full of buzzing energy at the end of a day of meetings and exuberant piano students. Due to heavier than usual traffic, I changed my habitual trajectory toward 99E and left on Township, heading toward Redwood, to get back to 99. There was zero traffic on Township which allowed me to not only notice but to stop my car at the intersection at Redwood and hang there for a moment as my jaw fell open. Before my eyes was a perfectly clear, immense, and complete RAINBOW!!! And...while I



was sitting there...it turned into a DOUBLE RAINBOW which remained intact and in clear view...ALL THE WAY TO MY HOME IN PORTLAND!! All around it, the sky was exploding with dramatic clouds and "God rays" that, to be honest, I often notice but, well, today I got it!

I mean, it's not like I don't notice the sky nearly every day. I actually DO. Not gonna lie — it's a "thing" I do. As a "created" creator (small "c"), I've been (quite literally) applauding the magnificent sunrises and sunsets all my life...even as a child. As long as I'm divulging secrets...I'm also a connoisseur of the absolutely amazing sky-scapes that are available pretty much every single time I just take a moment and look up...I mean, take that moment and really look up at the sky...day or night. During those times, I've always experienced awe...and I've thrown up a heartfelt and very loud, "Bravo, God!! Another masterpiece!! You're amazing AGAIN!!" But I never once considered that I might be witnessing the actual heavens throwing their all into praising their Creator. What? What I've been witnessing all these years is actually "The highest heavens, the waters above the skies, the sun and moon, the shining stars" doing exactly that!! ALL THE TIME, WITH ALL THEY HAVE, AND ALL THEY ARE, IN EVERY MOMENT!!

Okay!!! Today, I got it! And get this! They're literally showing us how to do it. All the time. If you ever wonder how, just look up...at any given moment...from anywhere on earth, from this infinitely small "grain of sand" in an infinite universe, and watch for a moment...or more if you dare. Allow yourself to witness it...really feel it. Join them. Join the "Bravo, God!!! Your creation truly is GOOD! THANK YOU for loving, creating, and sharing all of this with us!"

As for the angels and heavenly hosts... I'm pretty sure THAT SOUNDS AMAZING, given what the heavens that I can see are up to every single day and night! I'm actually waiting for that moment...that sound. Sometimes I get glimmers of it. At least I think I do. And sometimes I feel like it might be moving through me.

In the meantime, taking my cue from the heavens — Make a joyful noise, y'all!! Creation sings. It paints. It dances. It loves. We ARE a part of that creation. And it is “good.” (Personally, I think we need a better word than “good”, because God’s creation is WAY BEYOND “good.”)

Prayer: Creator, every moment of every day you open my eyes, my ears, my heart, and all my senses to experience more than I could ever imagine. Praise You!! Remind me to look up and feel my heart responding to the truth of You, the love of YOU with awe and praise. In the silence, let me hear the sounds of the angels and the heavenly hosts praising You... and in the meantime, add my voice to that joyous sound if it pleases You. In Jesus name, Amen

Mel Kubik



Thursday, December 18

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens."

Ecclesiastes 3:1

"All is vanity" under the sun. ("I observed everything going on under the sun, and really, it is all meaningless – like chasing the wind." Ecclesiastes 1:14, New Living Translation)

Life can feel like torture sometimes with no hope in sight. How can someone change their despair when life seems futile and pointless? Through faith.

Faith that, even though life is filled with unfavorable changes and challenges, God provides, and His love for you endures forever. And faith because, even though "All is vanity" under the sun, Jesus came and promised life "abundantly" for all (John 10:10).

Prayer: Thank you Heavenly Father for sending your Son to show meaning to life and show that your love endures forever and never changes. Amen

Maggie Schroeder



Friday, December 19

"How many are your works, Lord! In Wisdom you made them all, the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number living things both large and small."

Psalm 104:24-25

In the beginning, on the fifth day, God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures." And so God created the great creatures of the sea and all the fish and other marine animals and sea life.

We have all heard the story of Jonah and the whale, and we know that God parted the waters of the Red Sea for the Israelites to cross. God works in his own way and his own time. We have taken the great seas of the ocean for granted, and we have despoiled their waters with our oil tankers and barges as well as all the naval ships that sank during our many wars.

Are we able to undo all the harm that we created so the great sea world will once again increase? Can we stop using nets that are entrapping all the fish and mammals? Are we able to remove all the plastic and other garbage that is floating on the sea as well as sinking to the depths? Would that be a beautiful and glorious Christmas gift to God from all of us?

All of the earth, sea and sky is sacred and it all belongs to the Lord. God created these places for all humans, animals, birds, and all the creatures of the sea. Throughout history, there have been men and women who have recognized this sacred world and have written, spoken, and advocated for us to reach

deep within our hearts, souls, and minds to also know this truth and to share it with each other and with all humankind.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I pray that during this Advent season we will awaken all the people of the world to acknowledge that the whole world is sacred and that, once again, we will have "Peace on Earth and Goodwill to all." In Jesus name, Amen

Betty Lundsten



Saturday, December 20

"The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."

Genesis 2:15

Where is your favorite garden or maybe a favorite park? Have you ever stopped to think about who takes care of it? Unlike these parks and gardens, when God created the Garden of Eden, there wasn't anyone to take care of it until he created man and woman. It must have been a beautiful, peaceful, and perfect place! I can't imagine how awesome Adam and Eve felt to be there. A perfect life with God. Nothing to worry about, no fears; all they had to do was to take care of it and follow God's commands.

My father loved growing flowers. He had many different beds, each with its own species. There were phlox and Sweet William in one bed. He had a spot for gladiolas, his mother's favorite, in a bed she could see from her kitchen window. Tulips and iris bloomed in the spring all around the lawn in beds shared with vinca minor and rose bushes. And my favorite was the 50 foot row of petunias along the path to Grandma's house. Of course he had bushes and trees also, but the flowers were special. He even planted forget-me-nots around our house after Mary and I got married.

Sure, it took a lot of work. And I would be untruthful if I said I always enjoyed helping him keep the gardens free of weeds and grass. But he gave me the gift of knowing how to grow a garden...although I enjoy working in a vegetable garden more than the flowers...and he taught me that skill as well. Sitting in the evening next to your garden is one of life's

blessings. I thank my father for giving me this gift and look forward to next year when I can again work and take care of it.

Advent comes after all the flowers have quit blooming and all the gardens have been harvested. It is a time of reflection and anticipation leading to the celebration of the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. And it is also the time we can begin planning for our next garden. My father would read the latest Ferry-Morse or Burpee catalogs and start ordering seeds and seedlings for the next year. The remembrance of the flowers and gardens bring light to the dreary days during winter. Hope for renewal. Hope for new life.

Prayer: Lord, help us to always be good stewards of your earth. You have given us the beauty of creation. We praise you for what we have received from your hands. Amen

Scott Eagle





Sunday, December 21

"All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you, they sing the praises of your Name."

Psalm 66:4

There are certain things we humans see that stop us in our tracks—an enormous glowing moon, a waterfall cascading from great heights, an ember orange sun plunging into the serene ocean below. People can't help but be transfixed by the baby elephant holding onto her mother's tail at the zoo, the lively, beautiful music being played on the street corner in the city, a painting that grabs you as you see it in a museum. And then there are the everyday wonders...looking into the eyes of your child or grandchild as they learn something new, being swept up in a compelling book, or the first bite of a really, really good cinnamon roll.

We are these heavenly beings. We are these enchanting animals. We are these bodies of water. We are these works of art. We, too, can't help but praise God just by our existence and our enjoyment of all the good things God has created. Our very being reflects God's goodness, just like these captivating experiences. When we get swept away in these moments, we are dwelling in the richness of God's goodness. As we observe the waters, heavenly bodies, and all creation proclaiming God's goodness, we are proclaiming it too.

In the stress and busyness of day to day life, especially during the holidays, I find it can be easy to get caught up in the grind and not see this everyday

magic. Sometimes I start to see my gatherings, events, and all the sparkle of the season more as to-dos than joys. Finding a way to slow down, take a breath, and recognize that the Lord we celebrate this season has surrounded us with his glory and takes care of us, allows me to feel the ease of singing his praises again.

This season, let your heart find these enchanting moments and linger there. See. Taste. Smell. Feel. Hear. Let your senses indulge in these beautiful pictures of the God of love. This richness of life is a reflection of God's love for his creation and his love for us. He wants us to experience it; when we sink into it, we glorify Him.

Prayer: Creator God, thank you for all that you have created and your kindness for allowing us to enjoy it. Thank you for creating us. We want to sing praises to you with our whole hearts. Help us see, smell, taste, feel, and hear your richness all around us today. In Jesus' name, Amen

Kelsey Tew



Monday, December 22

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

Lamentations 3:22-23

From these verses comes one of my favorite old hymns, "Great is Thy Faithfulness":

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided,
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.

Faithfulness involves keeping one's word, being trustworthy, and honoring commitments, even when things are difficult. God is faithful to us, and we are called to be faithful to Him. His mercies include compassion and kindness, virtues that we need to exercise in our lives.

Our theme verse, "God saw all that he had made, and it was good." Genesis 1:31, makes me think of the Bible studies we have done this year using John Philip Newell's books "Sacred Earth, Sacred Soul" and "The Great Search." I've always enjoyed the out-of-doors. I grew up on a farm and was surrounded by nature and animals and, as an adult, I've enjoyed hiking, backpacking, and camping - all ways to be amazed by God's creation. I've always had concern for the environment and tried to do my part in such things as recycling, knowing God expects us to be good stewards of what He created. But our study of Newell's books has opened my eyes to a wider understanding of the connection between humans and the earth and

between earth and spirituality. The terrible situation we are in can be summed up by Newell's comment, "Earth and humanity need healing. The way we have lived on this planet is unsustainable. And the way our societies are plagued by racism, injustice, and violence is wrong. We need change." I believe when God looks down today on the wonderful world He created, there are tears in His eyes.

At this time in my life, we walk almost every day. The things I see are different from what I saw living on the farm, but it is still God's creation of plants and trees and people walking their dogs.

Prayer: Loving and compassionate God, in this Advent season, as we look forward to celebrating the birth of the Baby Jesus, may we show compassion and kindness to all whom You put in our lives. And may we be involved in the actions that need to happen to create the changes that are needed in our world. Amen

Di Bernklau



Tuesday, December 23

"...for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him."

Colossians 1:16

"This verse from Colossians is part of an early type of hymn celebrating who Jesus is and what God has done through Jesus. Here Christ is called the image of the invisible God, the one through whom God created everything, the one who holds the universe together, and the one whose death brings peace throughout the universe."

(Lutheran Study Bible, NRSV, Augsburg Fortress, 2009)

As many of you know, I enjoy Legos. When I was young, Legos were just starting to sell 'kits' with specific pieces and instructions on how to build them. I really loved following the instructions and completing the car or boat or whatever.

As the kits became more complex, it became harder to visualize the final product. I found myself having more and more doubts about the accuracy of the instruction book. But so far, everything has come together in the end, and the final project is just like the picture on the box.

In times of trouble, it is easy to doubt that God had a plan to create all things "through him and for him." This Advent season, it feels like we are at one of those points where I just can't see how this fits into the plan. I can't imagine the perfect completion. I find myself doubting and scared.

But I find comfort in the idea from this scripture that God's creation includes "things visible and invisible." This is not Legos with a pretty picture on the box. Times like this require faith – parts of God's plan and creation are beyond my ability to see; beyond my ability to understand. My task is to add a few more blocks every day. If I follow God's instructions, everything will come out just as God promises.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as we move toward the celebration of the birth of your Son, strengthen my faith in your plan for creation. Give me peace when I am frustrated with the distractions of this world. Give me comfort when I question how this fits into your plan. Gently, but firmly, reminds me that I only have two things to do: love you with all my soul, all my heart, and all my might; and to love my neighbor as myself. Amen

David Tate

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF FAITH



Wednesday, December 24

“You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things, and they exist because you created what you pleased.”

Revelations 4:11 (NLT)

I love this time of year...cooler weather, cozy evenings...and as we get closer to the end of another year I always go back to my calendar and review the year, very thankful for all of the memories. I must say, not every year has the warm and cozy feeling. We receive news that stops us in our tracks – a friend, family member, or even ourselves receive news that we have a bridge ahead to cross.

When I read the verse from Revelations above, I thought of how I review my year and look back... the good and the not so good that I went through and knowing God is always beside me. God can re-direct us, having our path crossed by someone that we need to meet or help. When this happens my thoughts are always the same; “Thank you God.” I realize at that very moment I was listening, I’m where I should be, and it was God making this happen.

This verse reminds us that life is not just a series of happenstance events but part of a grand divine narrative. Our loving God looks past our mistakes and failures. He knows our potential. He offers encouragement and grace for us to see those moments and to act on them.

Prayer: May this Advent season and year ahead bring encouragement and grace so we can rise above our flaws and be better versions of ourselves, and that our lives, achievements, and existence will reflect God's glory. "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good". Amen

Renna Marcus



Thursday, December 25

"For every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the insects in the fields are mine."

Psalm 50:10-11

As I write this, birds are flying South, bears are building their fat store in preparation for the cold, salmon and steelhead have begun their mass migrations up stream in our rivers, and smaller homebodies – like squirrels and chipmunks – are collecting nuts and seeds, storing what they need for Winter in every spot that can be imagined. Even in our very small streams, freshwater clams are hunkering deep down into the silt and mud and rocks, anchoring their shells, preparing themselves for the higher flows of our coming rainy season. Oh, bees and bugs, they're busy as well. Yellow jackets are devouring fallen apples and pears in the fading sunny periods of the day, and honey bees are capturing the last month of nectar, some struggling to make flight as they are weighed down with their load and the cooling evenings. The dog, intolerant of any nut or seed gathering creature, makes her protestations loud and insistent.

What a very busy moment I have found.

This moment, like Jesus' birth, is busy with God's gift of wonder and life. This moment asks for attention to be paid. This moment reveals how God's gift of life is wrapped up in all moments. We have only to look, and listen, and feel, and pay attention. God's gift of wonder and life is not just revealed on Christmas day – it is a revelation every day.

Prayer: God, give me the wisdom to pay attention to your gift of wonder and life every day. Help me sense every day, like Christmas Day, as a gift of wonder and life. Amen

Noel Hygelund

