

found **faithful**
in **little**
with **much**
with **all**

1 Corinthians 4:1-2

Devotions

Lent & Stewardship

2021

Sharing stories of what God is doing in our lives
and through Immanuel Lutheran Church.

*During the 40 days of Lent, we focus on Christ
giving himself to us on the cross. As his disciples,
we respond in gratitude with our own
charity, service, devotion, and prayer.*

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Reflection – Found Faithful



“Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy”.

(1 Corinthians 4:1-2)

Found faithful. What a powerful way to reflect upon the past year. As we have gone through the confusion, fear, anger, and loss of pandemic, how have we been “found faithful” to God and to each other as the church?

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

What are they among so many? Perhaps this is how it’s been for you the past year. Isolated and unable to really go anywhere or see much of anyone, this past year has been unsatisfactory, lonely and blah.

Who am I to be faithful, when I am so limited? Perhaps, the economic crisis has created financial instability.

Who am I to be faithful, when our income is insecure and diminished? Perhaps, you have been on an emotional roller coaster feeling anxious, depressed, caged, unproductive, or restless.

Who am I to be faithful when I feel so unsteady and disinterested? Perhaps in these days of no in-person worship you have felt disconnected from church and from God.

Who am I when I don’t gather, sing, worship, pray, receive Holy Communion? Who am I among so much fear and loss?

In the midst of crowds and hunger, with only a few loaves and a couple fish, the little boy was found faithful. Where did this little boy learn generosity with what little he had? Little is always much in the hands of Christ.

+ Pastor Molly Sasser-Goehner

Chalk It Up



Near the beginning of the pandemic, we invited folks to decorate our empty parking lot with sidewalk chalk, signs of spring and new life. Over 35 people shared their creativity and artistic skills. People walking by the church stopped to view the art and read the messages.

*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."
Isaiah 52:7*

"Not only does it look beautiful, but it was a fun and inspiring experience!! We had the opportunity to see church family members we had been missing. So much fun!" (Shirley Wanberg)

"I love my church! We did the coolest activity to brighten the empty parking lot!" (Jamie Long)

"Is every church as kid-friendly as ours?" (Luke Sasser-Goehner)

- How has your world become more beautiful lately?
- How could you be "found faithful" by making someone else's world more beautiful this week?

Pandemic and Planning

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life...But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:25-33)

I am a planner. Not a what is on the agenda for today planner more, long term planning – here is where I/we want to be in three months. I start talking about Halloween costumes in May and Birthday Parties months before the great Garrett Birthday season (all five of our birthdays and our anniversary are in a 30-day window). The pandemic has made this impossible. We do not know what lies ahead of us. My kids have had so many questions about what will happen next and it is so very difficult to not be able to give them an answer.

In the good moments of the quarantine, when I have been able to step back and take a breath, I know that I have never really been in charge, never really known what is coming next.



Mark, Joan, Lola, John & Moses Garret at Outdoor Worship

This time has forced me to admit that I am not in control – that my only real ability is to decide how to handle what is happening right now. I have been forced day after day to remember I only know what is happening in this moment and I must live where I am at. Am I always found faithful? No, but more and more I am remembering to turn to my faith and settle into the right now and whatever I find there.

Prayer from Compline Worship - ELW

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

By Joan Garret

Pandemic and Patience

As we eclipse the first anniversary of COVID-19 impacting our local community, faith seems a particularly apt tool for navigating these times. In many ways, living through a global pandemic is a microcosm of our greater faith journey. It requires us to maintain faith there is something greater waiting on the other side and at the same time demands us to be faithful in our actions towards others. During difficult and stressful times, our actions, both negative and positive, are amplified.

Pastor Molly recommended reflecting on 1 Peter 4:10 as a prompt for this devotional. As I perused my bible to understand this verse's context, the preceding two verses struck me as particularly relevant to practicing faith during a time of amplified emotions.

Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. (1 Peter 4:8-10)

Spending a bit more time with my wife and children than usual has been a gentle reminder that understanding others' perspectives and forgiving them for perceived slights (both large and small) is one of the best ways we can love them. During the last year, it has become apparent to me the smallest gifts that we can share: patience, understanding, attention, and forgiveness are often the most impactful. I am hopeful we can all share these small "gifts" not only with our families, but with everyone we interact with, to be "found faithful" in our actions.



Kevin, Julie, Hailey, Sydney Papp

By Kevin Papp

Prayer from ELW: *Triune God, bless family life everywhere and fill all homes with respect, joy, laughter, and prayer. Strengthen the commitment of spouses to one another, and pour out your Spirit on parents, that through them their children may taste your unconditional love. Empower all family members to live in your grace and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Found Trustworthy

There are some advantages to growing older, like a good vantage point from which you can see how your life's journey has evolved. It has become apparent to me which relationships with some family members and friends as well as with spiritual mentors have been faithful, trustworthy and steadfast throughout my life.

"Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy".
(1 Corinthians 4:1-2)

Building confidence and trust takes time. I have been most grateful for the "staying power" of many of these individuals over the course of my life in both times of delight and despair. What sustains an enduring relationship is reciprocity-accepting, giving, receiving. In verse above, some translations use the word **faithful as trustworthy**, which in fact signifies devotion.

I cherish and value the human relationships that have blessed my life, but the One who knows me best, knows me completely, is God. It is **"in him we live and move and have our being"** (Acts 17:28); it is that relationship that I most deeply trust. The assurance that I am loved unconditionally is the motivation for me to be a "faithful steward", a way to devote myself to sustaining a relationship with the One who knows me best.

During this time of pandemic (the "great pause") I have seen the witness of Immanuel through the work of so many faithful stewards who use their gifts of time, energy, resources and expertise for the good of the whole. Where possible I try to do my part, but as my energy wanes I find myself more and more as a faithful steward of prayer, offering daily prayers of gratitude and blessing, hope and healing.

By my kitchen window I have one of my favorite Scripture verses which I see each morning as a prompt to morning prayers and meditation. ***"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."***

(see hymn "Great is Thy Faithfulness") Two very simple yet powerful words **never** and **every** point to the wonderment and mystery of God. **HOW DOES HE DO IT?!** Faithfulness, steadfastness, and trustworthiness give us each the fortitude and the courage to be faithful committed stewards, whenever and wherever the Spirit leads us.



Written by Toni Johnson

Generous Hearts and Hands

"And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work." (2 Corinthians 9:8)

God has already inscribed in my heart to be a giver. It's my permanent tattoo from Christ. No one can see it, but my heart can feel it. It is the wonderful grace of God shown through me. ***Generosity isn't just about money. My generosity comes from heart, my hands and my feet.*** Generosity comes from my emotions and my yearning to be like my heavenly father.



My love for Jesus inspires me to be an ambassador he can be proud of. As Immanuel, we build Christian community through Family Promise. I enjoy sharing my blessings by assisting with setup, overnight hosting and providing meals for the day center.

Covid changed the dynamics of how to volunteer with my church family so we had to get creative. I was able to volunteer my time and enjoy fellowship through sharing my garden landscaping around the church and taking pictures to share on our socially distant walks with others who could not join us.

My contribution to the church has brought Jazzy and me endless amounts of joy and we are grateful to be a part of such a loving community.

Val McNair

From ELW Morning Prayer: *Mighty God of mercy, we thank you for the resurrection dawn, bringing the glory of our risen Lord who makes every day new. We thank you—for the sustaining goodness of your creation, for the new creation in Christ and all gifts of healing and forgiveness, for the gifts of relationship with others, for the communion of faith in your church in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Feeding Bodies & Spirits

Jesus answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4)

When the devil was trying to tempt Jesus, He responded quickly with scripture and demonstrated that He knew the Word. Although He was hungry for food, He knew the truth was that God's Word would protect Him.

The past year has brought many challenges and has forced us all to adapt to our changing environment. While our bodies have hopefully stayed strong with plenty of food, it is important to also feed and nourish our spirits and our faith by remembering to consider God's Word regularly. If we do not hesitate in this, and can quickly remember God's Word when faced with challenging decisions, we are more likely to respond in a way that is truly in our best interest.

While it has been difficult for the past year to congregate as a church community, we need to remember to strive to be "found faithful" in our lives at home. As our lives change, the Word is eternal and consistent in guiding us. For me, personally, this has been true as my husband and I have sought to make decisions this year that would best keep our community safe and healthy while opening a new dental business in the midst of a pandemic.

Prayer: Lord God, I confess that at times during these challenging months I have been distracted and tempted by things less important and less nourishing for my soul. I promise to consider your Word often in order to feed my spirit as I navigate my daily life. Amen.



*Written by Kate Diggs
Son-Everett Diggs*

Fleeting to Faithful

Jesus said, “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?” So the last will be first, and the first will be last.” (Matthew 20:15-16)

This is from the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) in which a landowner pays each laborer a full day's wages. The pay annoyed some because they had worked longer than others. His generosity sparked grumbling and envy.

In a world where injustice is too common, watching what others receive can become a preoccupation, an obsession even; generosity can be mistaken for unfairness.

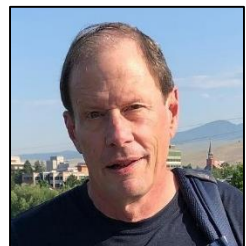
I enjoy my electronic devices. They are useful and can be signals of accomplishment. Truth be told, I can do without most of them. At times they have been “look what I have” things, but they inevitably fail me.

I enjoy knowing things. It's useful and can be a signal of belonging within communities of knowledge. Truth be told, much of it now seems useful only in trivia contests. What others can teach me seems more interesting and important than what I already know.

The parable ends, “The last will be first, and the first will be last.”

It's a reminder that being first or last is as fleeting as devices and trivia. In dark times of trial and in the light of faithfulness, what's fleeting gives way to what's enduring and important.

Prayer: *Gracious God, giver of life, you know our frailties and our failures. You know how we can love our possessions more than people. Give us your grace that we may let go of what is fleeting, see your face in the faces of those around us, and hold on to your faithful presence and promises, now and forever. Amen.*



By Pastor John Brock

Faithfully We Sing

*O sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
tell of God's salvation from day to day.
Declare God's glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples.
(Psalm 96:1-3)*

Psalm 96 is David's response to a world in great turmoil – much like ours is today. His words profess unfailing belief in and faithfulness to God, despite the despair that was his 'every day'. David exhorts us to 'sing God's praises and declare God's glory and marvelous works to all the earth'. David is one who is 'found faithful'.

During the past difficult year, I have been blessed to help create, along with other worship leaders, Immanuel's worship response to our world's current brokenness. I perceive so many similarities between David's and Immanuel's responses – most notably in the word and song of our worship that begets a feeling of hope and comfort and praise and blessing -- rather than fear and trembling. I pray that we, too, will be 'found faithful'.

Prayer: *Most Gracious God, we pray for Your enduring presence with us. We are comforted knowing You will never abandon us. We praise You and we thank You. Amen.*



Written by Jim Bendickson

Non-Food Essentials Warehouse

Thanks to the members of Immanuel who generously donated items for the Non-food Essentials Warehouse during May 2020.

Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. (John 6:11)



I had the opportunity to take a shift at the Warehouse. I was surprised how many working men came in to get items for their families. The organizers are very careful with the amounts they give out to each family.

For example, if a family asks for paper towels, they are given one roll of towels. If they need laundry detergent, bleach, or Lysol cleaner, they are given about 2 cups of what they ask for. If they need diapers, they get about 20 diapers. I also noticed that most clients are careful to not ask for more than they need. Immanuel's donations were definitely needed and appreciated!



*Written by
Judy Wellert*

Offering Prayer from ELW

God of mercy and grace, the eyes of all wait upon you, and you open your hand in blessing. Fill us with good things at your table, that we may come to the help of all in need, through Jesus Christ. Amen

I Love to Tell the Story

*I love to tell the story
of unseen things above,
of Jesus and his glory,
of Jesus and his love.
I love to tell the story,
because I know it's true;*

*it satisfies my longings
as nothing else would do.
I love to tell the story;
I'll sing this theme in glory
and tell the old, old story
of Jesus and his love.
By Katherine Hankey 1834-1911*

Humans are story tellers. The indigenous people told stories to keep their history alive. When families gather stories are told of the past - growing up - and how each life is being lived. The Bible is full of stories of ancient peoples interacting with God and those who were lucky enough to hear Jesus in person.

What stories will we tell about the pandemic? It seems it will depend on our age. My granddaughters at ages 5 and 7 probably won't remember much. My grandsons at ages 12 and 16 will remember virtual school and lots of video gaming. Our sons and daughters-in-law will remember juggling working from home and school schedules -- and no visits from the Montana grandparents.

I will remember being isolated from everyone but my neighbors, many virtual meetings and webinars, attending church in my home and in the parking lot, both better than no church at all.

Have I been faithful? I study and pray and appreciate all the support from the church. I have been able to help by making masks and quilts and giving our stimulus checks to the charities who were working hard to keep families fed and in their homes. My story ends in the hope that I have been faithful enough.



By Gaynelle Stamm

Prayer: *Almighty God, you have made us who are many, one in Christ. In these days of separation and worry, strengthen our foundation in your grace and purpose, that we may be a faithful rock for one another. Help us to see and use the unique gifts you have given us for the building up of the church for the sake of the world in the unity of the Spirit. Amen.*

in little

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

It's hard to imagine in our time and culture allowing our child to go on an adventure like the boy in the account of the feeding of the five thousand. Actually, the scripture does not tell us if he was alone or not. But we do know that he generously gave the little he had. And we wonder, how did he learn this lesson about generosity?

There are no guarantees that generous parents will raise generous children. Nevertheless, Kathy Haueisen, Stewardship Key Leader for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, encourages practices that clearly show the importance of generous giving and faithful stewardship in our discipleship journey. Her suggestions include shopping for the food pantry as well as for the family, reading and watching stories about generous people, and teaching children the difference between needs and wants.



Sumer & Riley Pellet at Thanksgiving Food Pac

God is pleased with gifts great and small when they are given with joy, gratitude, and praise. As you worship today, and throughout this week, remember that children- and adults- are learning lessons about generous giving and faithful stewardship from your example.

*Excerpt from "Will Our Children Be Generous?" by Kathy Haueisen in *Giving: Growing Joyful Stewards in Your Congregation* © 2013 Ecumenical Stewardship Center.

Prayer: *Abundant God, we give you thanks for the fruitful earth, which produces what is needed for life. Bless those who work in the fields; grant favorable weather to all engaged in agriculture; and help us to ensure that all people share the fruits of the earth, rejoicing in your goodness; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Prayer Copyright © 2021 Augsburg Fortress.

Endowment Fund

In Jesus's parable of the talents, when a master returns from a long absence, he acknowledges as "good and faithful" the servants who invested the talents left in their care to create more wealth. In the same way, Immanuel's Endowment Fund is a great example of a faithful congregation multiplying God's blessings and sharing them with those in need.

The Endowment Fund Committee gives thanks for the foresight of the congregation members who created the fund and the generosity of the faithful people who have given to the Endowment Fund over the years.

We have the honor and pleasure of sharing the proceeds of the fund with those in need. Also, by reinvesting a portion of the yearly dividends, the fund continues to grow to allow those gifts to be given in perpetuity.

2 Corinthians 9:11 says, "When we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God." When recipients of the fund's gifts write to the Committee, we gladly accept their thanks on behalf of the congregation. It is a pleasure to be on the committee and do our small part in sharing God's abundance.

For example, Immanuel's Service Committee helped connect the Endowment Fund and the Montana Synod to give \$1000 to the Covid-19 Relief Fund for Congregations. The fund helps churches and people who are struggling during the pandemic to pay for necessities.

*Curtis Thompson
Endowment Committee*



Curtis & Laura - Food Bank
Thanksgiving Pack

Prayer from ELW: *God of abundance, you have poured out a large measure of earthly blessings: our table is richly furnished, our cup overflows, and we live in safety and security. Teach us to set our hearts on you and not these material blessings. Keep us from becoming captivated by prosperity, and grant us in wisdom to use your blessings to your glory and to the service of humankind; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Washington Middle School's Flagship

"Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful." (1 Corinthians 4:1-2)

"Please put the cell phone away," she gave me an exasperated sigh and eye roll. It had been ten weeks, and she still didn't know my name. That 1st semester of Flagship, 3 years ago, was a bit of a trial. However, the next semester of Flagship that same student, not only knew my name, but would talk to me about all sorts of things going on in her life. I asked one of our Immanuel team members, Linda Redfern, what had changed. Linda's answer changed me. "You showed up again this semester," she said.

The Flagship students need to know that we will be back. That we are faithful. Being faithful this past year has been a bit of challenge. We started the year out great. Our Flagship Program, Cooking and Crafting, was very popular. Unfortunately, it was cut short by Covid. School shut down for the rest of the spring semester. We had big plans for holding Flagship cooking summer camp at Immanuel with all three middle schools. That, too, was cancelled. Were we done participating in the program?



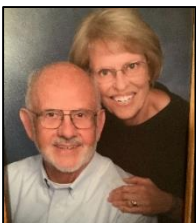
Tudi Smith giving Kristian Sipes Foreman Grills for Flagship Kids.

Flagship contacted us in the fall. Would we be willing to find a way to do Cooking and Crafting? As a Flagship partner, could we figure out a way to do it safely? Wow! We weren't just volunteers; we were partners with the local community. Being Faithful may take work, but it is also having an impact.

Even though we were separated from the students, our team found ways to be flexible and continue to sponsor and participate in Cooking and Crafting. We came up with lesson plans, assembled supplies, and learned how to "zoom". Our team got to know each other better, and plan to continue as partners with Flagship this year. *Tudi Smith*

Welcome New Members

So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:41-42)



Ron & Nancy Lechelt

Church has always been an important part of our life. We have enjoyed our worshiping at Immanuel. Pastor Molly has been a big help to us, and we love the music. Having always been Presbyterian's, the order of worship is different, but we all believe in the same God; we are becoming more familiar with new music and communion each Sunday. We look forward to getting to know and have closer fellowship with everyone when the pandemic is over. Thank you for offering us your Church Home as ours too.

We wanted to join Immanuel because we enjoy music and wanted to join the choir. Before the pandemic we were able to sing a couple times and felt welcomed and needed and really were impressed with the director, Nita Smith. Immanuel has been a welcoming and friendly community and we look forward to knowing more people as the pandemic allows. We feel that God's work, our hands is truly lived out in this family of believers and we hope to do our part as well.



Tom & Linda Rosenbaum



Rob & Carolee Stuberger

We appreciate the worship, the family-friendly atmosphere, and a congregation culture that desires to make a difference in the community and world. We also like the congregation's involvement in community ministries such as Family Promise and Habitat for Humanity.

Prayer: *Almighty God, your Holy Spirit equips our church with a rich variety of gifts. Keep us in your Spirit through the breaking of bread, the prayers, and in service to others, that we may follow the example of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen*

Food and Fellowship

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!

All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

They feast on the abundance of your house,

and you give them drink from the river of your delights.

For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light. (Psalm 36:7-9)

Growing up Lutheran, Food and Fellowship have always been a part of church and faith life. Looking back through the years, events like the annual Mother/Daughter banquet (served by the Fathers/sons), church potlucks and picnics, my parents hosting their annual summer BBQ for church members in their backyard or delivering a meal to someone in need are all ways the generations of a congregation are woven together to share their faith.

Our youngest son, Joel as a toddler would wait until the sermon was over and then start whispering “Is it time for cookies?” He loved running downstairs to be the first to get a cookie during coffee hour. We loved the connection he made with his church family...especially the older members. They shared with Joel and his brother Jayce the food, stories, traditions and their shared faith. One individual shared a special bond with Joel that became a yearly ritual of bringing him lefse. That connection continued into his adult years and until she passed.

The decision to move to a new church in our 60's was difficult. The welcome given us by Immanuel members we did not yet know and reconnecting with old friends during that shared experience of food and fellowship known to all Lutherans as “The Coffee Hour” strengthened our faith and helped us to move forward and hopefully share the good news of God's Grace with those we meet in our everyday lives.



By Deb & Jay Getz

Everlasting God, you are our dwelling place in all generations. We give thanks for our elders: their wisdom, knowledge and faith. Bless them, O God, as they are a blessing to us. Pour out your Spirit upon them that they may continue to dream dreams and testify to the Light of their salvation, Jesus Christ. Inspire us by their example that we may serve you with steadfastness of heart; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

GROW

(Growing Relationships on Wednesdays)

In September 2020, we partnered with St. Paul Lutheran Church to offer our K-5 kids an opportunity for Bible stories and community building through an on-line zoom group called “GROW”.

Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it. (Proverbs 22:6)



“GROW has been important to our family during the pandemic because the kids still feel connected to their church family and friends even though we can’t be there together.

The kids are not only growing in faith with their online family but they are growing in faith with each other as siblings. Spencer and Kinsley said “we like GROW because we can still learn about God when we can’t go to church and be with friends. The stories and activities are fun and meaningful”. They look forward to it every week!”

Randy, Jamie, Spencer and Kinsley Long

Prayer from Evangelical Lutheran Worship

Almighty God, with a mother’s love and a father’s care you have blessed us with the joy and responsibility of children. As we bring them up, give us gracious love, calm strength, and patient wisdom, that we may teach them to love whatever is just and true and good, following the example of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Front Sign



“O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own.” (1 Chronicles 29:16)

Immanuel's South Avenue sign surround was painted to coordinate with the remodel exterior colors. Thank you, Ron Marks! The Plexiglas was replaced and the surround painted a copper color, giving the sign more brightness and clarity. Thank you, Jay & Debbie Getz! Swede previously arranged for the interior lights to be replaced with efficient LED lighting, making it well-lit at night. Thank you, Swede! Thanks to these volunteers and to the Arts & Decorating Team for taking on this project!

- What “signs” of God have you seen in the world lately?
- How will you be a sign of God’s presence and help in someone’s life this week?



God's Work, Our Hands

Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." (Matthew 11:4-6)

In verse 3, John the Baptist is asking Jesus "are you the promised one?" Jesus answers John's question with an amazing list of work he was doing on earth, healing, preaching, and blessing.

"God's work. Our hands."

We each try to be "Found Faithful" in our time on earth. During this pandemic summer of 2020, I found myself with the overwhelming task of replacing and repairing Immanuel's front yards and gardens. I made a long list and prayed for help to do this huge undertaking. Of course, the gardeners of our congregation came to work but it was more than the 6-8 people could manage.

Through connections with Missoula Interfaith Collaborative (MIC), we found a group of Church of Jesus Christ LDS missionaries in need of a COVID safe activity to fulfill their mission goals. Every week throughout the summer 6-10 young men and women came to our church and did the hard, hot, dirty work of pulling weeds, moving rocks, and planting grass. Two of the young women remarked after seeding grass in a weed free area, "When I drive by your church I'm going to say, 'I planted that beautiful grass'."



Ron Marks & LDS Missionaries



Dear God, thanks and praise that our church has been alive and improving during this difficult year. We worked, laughed and sweated every week together. Renewal and cooperation is alive in our newly landscaped church. "God's work, our hands." Amen

By Ron Marks

Reconciling in Christ

Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' ⁸This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:37-39)

Loving God and loving our neighbors, wow can that be hard sometimes! Being a part of the Reconciling in Christ (RIC) team has been a wonderful experience that has really helped me be “found faithful” this past year. Being a part of this team has helped me dive deeper into scripture, to dive deeper into learning and knowing God. I have spent many a night with the lamp on, being so enthralled by scripture or an interpretation of scripture that I hadn’t heard before. With these interpretations of scripture, I was finding I was inspired to make it all the way through the Bible and I actually listened to the entire Bible al la podcast! (Don’t worry, I have a hard time believing it too!)

As for loving my neighbor as myself, this team has given me new lenses and perspectives to see the world through. Through these perspectives, I am able to connect to people and quickly learn the best ways to love and care for them. Trust me, it makes loving your neighbor so much



easier when you are doing it in a way they are thrilled to receive! This year has been tough, but through my connection with the RIC team I have been able to lean in to loving God and my neighbor in new and exciting ways.

Hanna Nagy (she/her/hers)



ReconcilingWorks
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The Pearl

*Jesus says, "Again, the kingdom of heaven **is like a merchant** in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:45-46).*

In this parable of the fine pearl, **the kingdom of heaven is the merchant**. This merchant is looking for fine pearls. When he finds one of great value, he gives up everything he has to obtain this pearl.

In this parable *is* Jesus saying that He, as the representative of the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth, is the merchant looking for fine pearls? And that he is willing to give up everything, even his life, for these pearls? If so, what pearls is He looking for; what is God looking for? Are we the pearls he is seeking? I hardly think that I am a fine pearl in the eyes of God.



Tudi and Ray Smith Landscaping

But since Jesus gave up everything for me (John 3:16), then as a good and faithful steward of all that God has given to me, shouldn't I faithfully give of myself to others? No matter what quality of pearl I might be.



Prayer: *Jesus, you gave all that You had to buy us. In gratitude for your great gift, help us to be found faithful in giving of ourselves each day. Amen.*

Ray Smith

Faithful Connections

In March of 2020 we learned the true meaning of some words that then became common place in our speech: pandemic, Coronavirus, Covid 19, social distancing, sanitize, isolate, quarantine, shut down, virtual (learning-appointments-worship), Zoom, livestream... It has been and still is hard to be physically apart from family and friends. But we have learned how to feel the love of God in different ways.

I was blessed to be able to get to know several members of our church through texting and phone calls set up by our church. I felt the love of Christ through them as the months passed and we got to know each other better. We have felt incredibly blessed to live in Missoula where there are plenty of close hiking trails. We have seen God in nature as we hiked daily enjoying spring and summer wildflowers, the colors of fall that faded into winter snow.

We look forward to the days when we can gather together for worship in one place but we love the ability to worship with many over our Sunday morning livestream. Because of God's deep, wide, long and tall love for us we have been able to continue in His love in the midst of this pandemic.



Sam & Linda Redfern

As Paul wrote, from jail, to the Ephesians –

I pray that you may have the power comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3: 14-19)

Prayer: *Come, O long-expected one. In these days of separation, anxiety and loss, awaken us and your whole church throughout the world to be alert for signs of your coming. Gather us together in faith and courage that we may shine the light hope into our weary world through Christ Jesus, our Light and our Salvation. Amen.*

Gratitude

“For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by God’s word and by prayer.” (1 Timothy 4:4-5)

How can I thank God for everything!? What about all the disappointing things and hurtful things that have happened, especially this past year? Some days start out that way, on the wrong side of the bed so to speak...There’s a bit of anger, sadness, disappointment, confusion in all of this...How do I step away from this? How do I process it?

Feelings are just feelings, and they can overwhelm us and we can become hyper-focused on them.... *“For everything created by God is good”*...that means me too...and I’m not rejected, even with my feelings; so we answer with prayer. How do we do prayer with thanksgiving?

Focus plays a **huge** part in how our emotions effect our lives.

Our brains focus on what we **pay attention** to.

Focus on irritants—miss good

Focus on good—miss irritants

Gratitude helps us focus on the good...thanksgiving for what we do have...each day is a gift from God with all that is in that day. What are you grateful for?

There is so much to be grateful for...the clean air we breathe, the ability to walk outside, seeing all the wonders of creation that God has placed before us, plants, birds, squirrels, and mighty trees, the clouds, winds and stars at night.

So, what are you grateful for? Bring your thank-yous; God’s word to us is **“Your welcome.”**



Marilyn Hall

Prayer: *Gracious God, we thank you for giving us all that we need each day: food, family, and friends, clean water, clothing, education, good government, peace and health. Guard our hearts and minds against all kinds of greed and selfishness. Fill us with contentment and joy that we may gladly give away our money and possessions for the help and care of those in need. Amen*

Apples for Tanzania

From Ron & Nancy Marks:

In 2020, we supported the Mwika Lutheran Bible and Theological College in Tanzania where our members, Rob and Carolee Stuberg, serve as ELCA Global Missionaries.



We turned 100 half gallons of juice and many pounds of apples into five guitars for Rob's guitar class and an oven for the Parish Worker Program. The women from the Parish Worker program are so excited.

From Rob & Carolee Stuberg:

Our teachers and our principal are so very excited for all you have done on behalf of our students! No longer will Parish Workers have to stay up until 10:00 at night to do their cooking and baking projects!

No longer will guitar students have to share a guitar during class. They can literally learn TWICE as fast! And no longer will students not be able to practice on their own because all the guitars are being used. And the icing on the cake is that the Hai Lutheran Vocational Training School received money for the guitars they built, to be invested in their college where they teach textiles, woodworking, electrical, masonry, and carpentry. In fact, we couldn't buy the 5th guitar because we bought all the guitars they had made. Since they are currently working on a big pipe organ, they won't have another guitar built until after Easter.



Prayer: *Gracious God, we hold in prayer the Lutheran Church in Tanzania and their ministries of church, education and health. Pour out your Spirit upon Rob and Carolee and all ELCA missionaries throughout the world, that they may show your love to all people and be strengthened in their own faith and calling through Christ our Savior and Lord. Amen.*

found **faithful**
in **little**
with **much**
with **all**

1 Corinthians 4:1-2

"[T]he kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all he had and bought it." (Matthew 13:45)

In a modern illustration of this parable, a woman finds a valuable pearl in an obscure shop. The merchant says he will give it to the woman in exchange for everything she has. Wanting badly to own the pearl, she writes a check for several thousand dollars, emptying her savings and checking accounts. The merchant asks, "What about your house?" The woman signs over the deed. "What about your two cars?" She signs them both over to him. "What about your boat and your vacation home? Your stocks and bonds, retirement funds, and life insurance?" The woman transfers all of these to the merchant.

Then the merchant says, "Now the pearl is yours." The woman is elated! She turns to leave, but the merchant stops her, saying, "Here is all that you have given me to purchase the pearl; I am giving all these things to you. They still belong to me, but I will let you have full use of them for as long as you live. The only thing I ask is, whenever possible, share my houses, my cars, and my other wealth with those I send your way."

The woman is overcome with joy. "Of course, thank you!" "Remember," says the merchant, "you may use these things as if they are your own, but on occasion, I will ask you to share them or even give them away to others." All we have is a gift from God.

- ❖ How might we recommit to be wise, generous stewards of all that we have been given—of the gift of time, of the gift of talents, and of the gift of money and material goods.
- ❖ Is my generous and faithful stewardship a vibrant and visible part of my Christian witness?
- ❖ Am I sharing unselfishly from the abundance God has given me?
- ❖ How can I improve my giving, loving, and serving to be faithful with all and in all?

Prayer: *Loving God, help us not be so attached to material things that we forget your spiritual gifts. Send us the Spirit of Christ, that we willingly give away ourselves for the life and well-being of all others and all you have made. Amen.*



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