

Blessed Trinity Lutheran Church at Rosemont

MEDITATIONS — JANUARY, 2025

January 1, 2025

I came that you might have life, and have that more abundantly.

John 10:10

Imagine this scene: you're in a beautiful banquet hall. Tall, draped windows surround the room. Crystal chandeliers sparkle overhead, and hundreds of candles flicker all over the room. All this light falls on elegantly decorated tables laden with irresistible food. There are roasted turkeys, baked hams, and rounds of beef on silver platters. Shrimp, lobster, and crabmeat abound. The colors of the vegetables – red, orange, yellow, purple, ochre, and a dozen shades of green – rival the variety of ways in which the veggies are prepared. Salads, fruits, cheeses, and baskets of breads add to the feast and to the beauty of all this bounty. You're near the tables, and you keep saying, "I'm hungry! I'm so hungry I hurt!" but you don't reach for any of the food in front of you. On another table is a dazzling array of post-dinner treats: cakes, pies, puddings, crepes, and so much more ... in flavors that are exotic as well as familiar— vanilla, chocolate, mocha, strawberry, peppermint, mango, peach, hazelnut, apricot, pineapple. But you don't reach for any of this, and you begin to weep because you're so hungry. You're in real distress, even fear, but you don't seem to see all that is in front of you, and you don't reach to take what is there. That's how many people, including many who are Christians, move through life. We either don't remember or don't believe God's promises ... or we don't believe that we're worthy of receiving those promises. Think of what the Creator and Jesus Christ have promised us: *"I am with you always, even to the end of the age"*, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you ... Let not your heart be troubled nor let it be afraid"*, *"... the peace that passes all understanding"*, *"As a mother comforts her son, so I will comfort you"*, *"I will never leave you or forsake you"*, *"... you will be my sons and my daughters"*, *"You will be my people, and I will be your God"*, *"... my presence will go with you and I will give you rest"*, *"I give them eternal life and they will not perish"*, *"... all things are possible to him who believes"*, *"Do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows"*, *"The one who lives by believing in me will never die"*, *"If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, nothing will be impossible for you"*, *"My grace is sufficient for you ..."* *"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you."* The promises are as abundant as the food on our imaginary tables. The God of love and abundance, and Jesus himself, have given us promises to guide, strengthen, comfort, and provide for us in every moment and circumstance of life. Let us be hungry no more. Let us enter the new year nourished and strengthened by the presence and promises of God the Creator, Son, and Spirit. Come. The tables are set, the banquet awaits, and we will be well, no matter what happens in our lives, our world, or the wider world. The promises are ours, now and forever.

January 2, 2025

There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel. Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation."

Luke 2:25, 28-30

Like Simeon, we, too, have seen the birth of Jesus and have celebrated his coming into the world. Let us, too, like Simeon, praise God for the gift of Jesus, and, with Simeon, feel a special peace that comes from knowing that a Savior is now with us and among us. We do not enter this new year alone or afraid. Jesus – a baby who would become a man, a human being who would be God incarnate – has been born for us and among us once again. Simeon had the great privilege of seeing the baby Jesus in person. We must see him with the eyes of faith. Nevertheless, we can say, with Simeon, "My eyes have seen your salvation."

January 3, 2025

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." And he laid his hands on them.

Matthew 19:14-15

Jesus – God – has a special place in his heart for children, for little ones, innocent ones, helpless ones. They are, in their unsullied and open-hearted state, so very close to his own heart. But in God’s view and in Jesus’s own words, we are all children of God. We may be adults, middle-age, or even elderly, but we’re still his children. We always have been, always will be. Perhaps a good way to begin this new year is to start it by seeing ourselves as children of God. That would be a big change for many people. Some are accustomed to being bosses, supervisors, givers of orders, even commanders; people whose orders are obeyed. For others, who are far from their childhood years, thinking of themselves as children might be a stretch. And yet.... thinking of ourselves as God’s children might be the most liberating, strengthening, and comforting thing we can do as we begin a new year. Jesus loved children, and he welcomed them wherever he went. He welcomes young people today— welcomes them to come to him, to hear his words, to tell him what is on their minds, to walk the walk of faith with him. And he welcomes you and me, all of us, today and every day. Wherever you are, whatever age you are, he welcomes you. “It is to such that the kingdom of heaven belongs.” It is to you that the kingdom belongs. What an empowering and humbling way to begin the new year: knowing that we are children of God.

January 4, 2025

The devil took Jesus up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

Matthew 4:8

Picture the scene in today’s verse. For many days, Jesus has been in the wilderness; in barren, desolate areas of Judea, with only shrubs, trees, rocks, and desert creatures for company. Then, Satan comes to him. Satan takes Jesus to “an exceedingly high mountain” – a geographic mountain? a mystical mountain? – a place so high that it offers views in all directions. Now, imagine that it is you standing there with Satan. Jesus isn’t there; you are. Satan extends an arm and moves it in a wide circle, showing you all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. To the far east are the riches and mysteries of China; silks and spices then, technology and armaments today. To the southeast, the oil-rich sands of Saudi Arabia. To the northeast, the mineral-rich expanses of Russia. To the southwest, the vastly greater mineral deposits – as well as gemstones: diamonds, rubies, sapphires, tanzanite – in Africa. To the northwest, different riches: intellectual capital, arts, sciences, finance and commerce centers in the cities and countries of Europe. Across the Atlantic, the arable lands and resources of South America and the power and incalculable wealth of North America. All of this, this world-wide panorama of riches, is visible to you in all its glory and grandeur. And Satan says to you, as he said to Jesus, “All these things I will give you if you will fall down and worship me.” All these things— the earth’s oil, minerals, gems; the produce of all farm lands; the value of all currencies; the worth of all the world’s art and architecture; the value of all science and technology; all of the world’s human capital as well as power over the whole planet and its people. Think about that for a moment. “All these things” could be yours. We know how Jesus responded to Satan’s offer. How would you respond? If, after thinking about this question, about such an offer from Satan, you decide that you would reject Satan’s offer ... you would give up ‘all things’ ... rather than bow down to evil, then you have aligned yourself with the presence and power of the living God. You have chosen life over death, love over hate, good over evil. There are many who would choose differently, who would choose Satan in order to have riches or power. But you have chosen the highest and best life possible. You have a wisdom of the mind, heart, and soul that is rare, and you are among God’s chosen. Ponder that truth, and take its blessing into the new year.

January 5, 2025

All things work together for good to those who love God.

Romans 8:28

God’s expectations, God’s hopes and promises for us, have a way of upping our game spiritually, of stretching our capacity for real belief. It becomes a matter of ‘either I believe this or I don’t.’ As this new year begins, it would be safe to say that all of us ... *all* of us ... have at least one life situation about which we are doubtful, perhaps even fearful. Maybe it’s the outcome of a health matter. Perhaps we have doubts about how far our income will stretch. Many look at our nation and our world and see dark days ahead. To all of this, Paul says, “All things work together for good to those who love the Lord.” We can either choose to believe that assurance or to not believe it. If we don’t believe it ... if we don’t open ourselves to the extraordinary possibility of good coming even out of troubles ... we are depriving ourselves not only of hope, but also of power, a God-given power, that we need in times of trouble. Hope is a choice. Faith is a choice. Belief is a choice. Love is a choice. Let us choose wisely, now and always.

January 6, 2025

In everything do to others as you would have them do to you.

Matthew 7:12

Most of us have heard of the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” That wisdom dates back to the time of Christ, and it is found in other religious traditions and in ancient cultures as well. We could accurately say that these words reflect a universal belief or truth. While the Golden Rule is easy to understand, it is not always easy to follow. But treating others with the respect, kindness, and love with which we wish to be treated can bless them – and us – in countless ways, today and in days to come. In these first days and weeks of a new year, it might be a good time to remind ourselves of the deep truth and blessing in these words, and to recommit ourselves to ‘do unto others as we would have them do unto us.’

January 7, 2025

So let us not tire in doing what is good. At the right time, we will reap a harvest of blessings if we do not give up.

Galatians 6:9

Conflicts seem to still be hurting relationships among family and friends after November’s elections. Some people have told me about their unfortunate experiences with others – including spouses, parents, siblings – whose views differ from theirs. Such conflicts add to the trauma. We can understand this. Things seem different today. Years ago, political candidates had differing views about things like farm subsidies or where to focus military spending; important issues, but they didn’t rip people apart. In fact, they seemed almost dull. Today, the hate between people seems almost palpable. How do we, as Christians, find our way through these minefields? How do we stay true to our core beliefs, rooted in Christ’s teachings, while respecting the right of others to have different views? We each have to work our way through such decisions. As a new year and a new political landscape unfold, I’ve decided to anchor my thoughts to three pillars. First, I’ll remember that, beyond all human posturing and provocation, even beyond human power, God is still holding you, me, and everyone else in his hands. God was not voted into or out of office. God is who God has always been: the Creator of the universe; the source of life, love, and peace; the Alpha and the Omega. All things are in God’s hands, especially if we trustingly place them there. Second, hate helps nothing and no one. Hating only adds to the fires of dissension and destruction. I will not add hatred to the explosive mix of attitudes and actions that are already poisoning our civic life. If Christ could forgive from the cross, I can surely temper my aversion to some politicians. Third, I’ll keep my core beliefs, especially those rooted in Christ’s teaching – kindness, justice, mercy, love – even if it seems that these fragile flames are flickering in the winds of change. Maintaining those core beliefs, and living according to them, will not only anchor me in peace, it may actually help to bring peace.

January 8, 2025

The Lord said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

Jonah 4:4

The story of Jonah tells us that he went on a mission from God – to chastise and warn the people of Ninevah – but then God did not do what Jonah expected. God did not punish Ninevah, he forgave. Jonah threw a fit and stubbornly sat under a broom tree to die, preferring death to the embarrassment of being wrong. We can picture Jonah, throwing his hissy-ego fit, angry that his words of doom didn’t come true, blind to the fact that God did a good and gracious thing. We can also picture God, bemused by Jonah’s anger. Today, as in Jonah’s time, anger seldom serves any purpose. We may have good reasons to be angry, but we can’t let anger overcome us or stay with us. Our anger hurts us more than it does others. Anger doesn’t solve anything. It doesn’t help. It can even prevent us, as it did Jonah, from seeing God’s blessings and deliverance in a situation. When something bad happens in our lives, we can acknowledge that we’ve been hurt or wronged, but then we have to move past anger and deal with the situation with wisdom and love. God can give us these gifts, even when we’re still trying to let go of our anger ... or our egotistical wounds. Life is too precious to waste it pouting under a broom tree.

January 9, 2025

If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea.

Isaiah 48:18

“If only.” How many times have we said or thought those words? “If only I hadn’t done this....” “If only I hadn’t said that....” Saying ‘if only’ is natural, but it isn’t really helpful. When we say or do something we regret ... or fail to say or do something we should have said or done ... the only helpful thing to do is to forgive ourselves, ask those we have harmed or offended to forgive us, and then move on, trying our best to be more kind, more thoughtful, and more like the persons we want to be. Then, the peace in our hearts will be “like a river,” and our righteousness “like the waves of the sea.” This, too, is a good way to start the year— with the peace of self-forgiveness in our hearts, and with God’s assurance that every day is a new beginning.

January 10, 2025

... you do not have because you do not ask.

James 4:2

In my senior year in college, I was responsible for planning and overseeing the ‘Washington Seminar’, in which students, especially political science and history majors, spent time in Washington, D.C. each January. In addition to planning our meetings with senators, representatives, Cabinet members, and other officials, I thought it would be interesting to tour the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) and learn more about that important organization. I wrote to Richard Helms, then Director of Central Intelligence, and I described our January program. I asked if we could visit the CIA and meet with officials there. A member of Mr. Helms’s senior staff, Mr. B., wrote to me to say “We’re thinking about it.” Then he phoned me and we talked about how we could make this visit happen. “You know,” Mr. B. said, “yours would be the first non-military, non-government group to visit the CIA.” “How could that be?” I asked, surprised. “No one ever asked before,” he replied. Mr. B. was a joy to work with, and we talked regularly, before and after our visit. Once we students were settled in Washington, Mr. B. gave me directions to CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. “If you get lost,” he said, laughing, “just phone the Soviet embassy. Even if you’re not lost, call them. Tell them I said Hi. We have a good relationship with the staff there, and they love to give directions to the CIA. They think we’re crazy to have the CIA in an open area where it can be seen.” (No, I didn’t phone the Soviet embassy.) Our visit to the CIA was fascinating. CIA staff and officials went to great lengths to make our half-day there informative, useful, and enjoyable. Within the limits of what they could share, they described the interface of military and intelligence operations, the underpinnings of political and foreign relations strategies, and their work to build long-term relationships with key people in other nations. They even gave us a look at some obviously not-secret James Bond-type items actually used by intelligence agents. It was a memorable visit. A side note: one of my classmates from that time went on to work for the CIA for decades. Her role: senior analyst for Middle Eastern and Persian Gulf issues. She was awarded the Intelligence Medal of Commendation by President George H. W. Bush for her work on the Gulf War, and she was the CIA’s expert on efforts to track and identify Saddam Hussein. Amazing. You never know what will happen – what will be set into motion – if you just ask, just try. I always remembered Mr. B.’s statement: “No one ever asked before.” In later years, I walked through many doors which opened just because I asked, I tried. How much do we miss, how much never happens, because we do not ask? “You do not have because you do not ask.” Tomorrow: If God knows everything, why do we have to ask?

January 11, 2025

Jesus asked, “What do you want me to do for you?”

Luke 18:41

Jesus was a very intelligent man. He was observant and insightful. Jesus certainly knew, he could see, that the man at the side of the road near Jericho was blind. When told that Jesus was passing by, the man wailed, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” When the man was brought to Jesus, Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” Why would Jesus ask that? He could see that the man was blind. Perhaps Jesus understood that even those with serious ailments and limitations have other aspects to their lives – a need for peace, a need for forgiveness – that are more important to them than physical needs. More likely, Jesus, in his deep wisdom, was making the blind man name his problem, his trouble, his truth. He was making the man state what mattered most to him – what he most wanted – so that there would be no doubt about it. Our lives today are infinitely more complicated than lives in Jesus’s time. Beyond the basic human needs for food, water, shelter, and safety, we have hundreds of demands and distractions to deal with. It’s possible for us to have dozens of needs that seem to have equal importance. But in moments when we feel deep need, when we speak to God – the Creator, Son, and Spirit – we have to state our needs very clearly, and most importantly, we have to ask. The very act of asking aligns us correctly with God: we are the petitioner, God is the provider. Asking ... stating our need ...

does one more thing: it sets actions into motion. Some people are comfortable with their needs and troubles. They enjoy being victims. Being burdened becomes part of their identity. They want pity, not help. But when we tell Jesus our needs, when we ask him to help us, we're saying that we're ready for change, for new life; ready to have our needs met, to be free of our troubles. Whatever our needs, ills, worries, or hopes, God asks us, "What do you want me to do for you?" God waits to hear what we will ask of him.

January 12, 2025

"I am the way, the truth, and the life ..."

John 14:6

When we read the words written by poet Sylvia Plath – "Is there no way out of the mind?" – we can almost feel the inner turmoil that troubled her for most of her brief life. A sensitive woman, she likely suffered from depression, and some think that during her marriage, she may have suffered from abuse. She committed suicide at age 30. She dealt with her fears and anxieties in the way she knew how— by thinking, analyzing, reasoning, assessing. All of these functions of the mind are wonderful and God-given. But we humans were created as multi-dimensional beings. We have physical bodies of diverse strengths, skills, and shapes. We have minds that can contemplate, create, and wonder, and our souls – our spirits – search, yearn, love, long, and reach for something beyond what we can touch and measure. All of these aspects of being human matter, to us and to God. To nurture and live in only one part of our being is to deprive ourselves of the wholeness and richness of life, its purposes and its pleasures. To focus only on the body, as some athletes do, is to miss what our minds and souls have to give us. To focus on the mind, as Sylvia Plath may have done, is to be imprisoned, to be trapped in an endless loop of thinking, analyzing, worrying; never finding a way out, and never knowing the sheer freedom of not having to have all the answers, to be able to simply 'be', trust, and believe. Jesus's words rescue us from that fearful self-centeredness: "I am the way, the truth, and the life ...". Christ knows us and loves us in the totality of who we are, and in that love and linkage to Christ ... to the way ... we find wholeness, healing, and peace.

January 13, 2025

My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings.

Isaiah 32:18

A peaceful home is something all of us want. Peace does not mean the absence of activity or lack of the normal hustle and bustle of life. It doesn't even mean the absence of stresses, strains, and challenges. Those are simply part of life. It means the absence of fear and tension. Most of us have such peaceful homes, but some do not. Some are homeless or do not know where they will sleep tonight. Some are in families under extreme stress or threat. They do not have the 'secure dwellings' that God wants us to have. Let us try to help – and to remember in our prayers – those who do not have peaceful habitations or secure dwellings. If we are the ones who do not have such peace or security, may God give us the courage to reach out for help in a world that sometimes simply doesn't know who is in need. And let us always remember to reach out to God, who always knows when we are in need, and who will ... in his way ... provide us with secure dwellings.

January 14, 2025

Whoever fears the Lord has a secure fortress.

Proverbs 14:26

Yesterday we thought about the physical haven of a peaceful and secure home. Today's reading can mean something beyond the place where we live. This proverb tells us that if we fear (honor and obey) God and his teachings, we will have a 'secure fortress' in our lives, minds, and hearts. We will have a security that can withstand whatever challenges the world can bring to us. With God, we can reside in a true fortress: a place to which we can turn for safety at any time, at any age. It is easy to understand why Martin Luther – in trying to describe the strong and protective love of our Creator God – chose to write "A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing ...". Luther could see the massive, unassailable, fortress-like strength of God our protector. May we see God that way as well.

January 15, 2025

You are wearied with your many consultations.

Isaiah 47:13

Did you ever go from friend to friend, acquaintance to acquaintance, family member to family member, asking for advice or opinions? Usually, this kind of search for help only leads to more confusion. Soon, we don't know where to turn or what to do. Today's reading from Isaiah tells us to not make ourselves frustrated or wearied with asking too many things of too many people. Instead, let us take our questions and needs to God, sit quietly with him, with the source of all wisdom and help, and wait for his 'still, small voice' to guide us. *"Lord, guide me to seek your comfort and counsel when I am troubled or need guidance. You know me as no one else does, you know the world and the future in ways that I can't. Keep me close to you, and show me the way. Amen."*

January 16, 2025

Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding. Job 28:28

We sometimes think that smart people are those who are at the top of the class, who lead companies or organizations, who invent or discover things, or who accumulate great wealth. Many of those people are smart. But there is a special kind of 'smart' that has nothing to do with grades or positions. It is called 'wisdom', and throughout the centuries, many people who never went to college or never became famous or wealthy had the gift of having wisdom. Wisdom comes when you know what is right and what is true; when you know the right thing to do, the good thing, deep within your mind and heart. Recognizing that God has a special place in our lives and our world is part of that wisdom, and following God's ways – living lives that are loving and positive ('departing from evil') – helps us to understand and obey that inner wisdom. *"Help us to focus on you, Lord, and to find our wisdom in you: the true wisdom, that can serve us and your world."*

January 17, 2025

I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Psalm 27:13

It is one thing to believe in the peace and beauty of heaven and of eternal life with God. But this verse from Psalm 27 says that we will see God's goodness here and now, in our earthly lives, in what the psalmist called 'the land of the living.' This is a goodness that we can see only if we look for it, if we are aware of everyday blessings; blessings and graces such as a flower pushing its way through the earth in the cold days of January, a call from a friend, the smile of a child who waves at us from a passing car, the comfort of a blanket on a cold night, the peace that settles over us as a pure gift from God. There are dozens of such 'touches of goodness' in our everyday lives. Let's look for them and be grateful for them wherever they are.

January 18, 2025

God reveals deep and hidden things.... Daniel 2:22

Captivated as I'd always been with scuba diving, there was one form of diving I insisted I'd never try: night diving. It seemed scary to go miles out to sea – with a black sky above you, no land-lights around you, and a black ocean beneath you – and then just flip backward over the side of the boat and descend into that darkness. But in a three-week diving/marine biology course in the West Indies, night diving was one of the requirements. I wasn't the only one who looked scared that first night, but the divemaster assured us that he'd be close by and we'd be fine. Brushing off whatever fears we felt, we put our regulators in our mouths, sat on the edge of the boat, and flipped over into wet darkness. But we didn't just descend to various depths, we entered an entirely different world, one far different from the ocean in daylight. At night, our scuba lights revealed corals in bloom, in flower-like shapes and colors, making the sea look like an endless garden. Octopuses and other creatures that are grey or tan during the day turn day-glo colors at night: lime green with deep blue, purple with fuchsia, yellow, orange. Magnificent! Many sea creatures that are hidden or resting in the day emerge at night, especially to hunt. As I looked at this brand-new version of a familiar world, I thought of heaven. "This must be a bit of what it is like," I thought: unimaginable beauty, unreal colors, familiar things looking extraordinarily different, a whole new world, where we expected only the familiar to appear. A world transformed. That was it; that's what prompted my thoughts of heaven— the visible, touchable, undeniable reality that life can be transformed, even in this world, even in this life. Soon, night diving became my favorite form of diving, and every time I've done it, I thought of heaven. *"Lord, thank you for the glories and miracles we've seen, and those we've yet to see, but which are there, waiting for us, on earth and in heaven, like the hidden world of the sea at night."*

January 19, 2025

Jonathan went to David and helped him to find strength in God.

1 Samuel 23:16

Friendship is one of the greatest joys and privileges in our lives. Most of us have many friends and some of us even have a few 'best friends.' David and Jonathan had a sincere and caring friendship that each of them valued. They understood each other, valued each other, and helped each other. Do we need help or comfort from a friend today? Let's not be afraid to reach out and ask for that help. Is one of our friends in need? Let's not hesitate to offer our help to that person, even if it is simply to listen and to be with that friend as he or she talks about whatever the problem is. Friendship is not a vague concept or a casual greeting card theme. It is a very real blessing and a powerful force for good in the world as well as in our lives. Let us nurture our friendships – our special relationships – and let us always look for ways to show God's love to those who are, or who could be, our friends.

January 20, 2025

Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.

1 Peter 5:7

We often hear people say that they wish a cure would be found for one disease or another. That kind of discovery would be welcome, indeed. But most of us also wish there could be a way of getting rid of anxiety—that terrible, heart-pounding, suffocating feeling that comes when we are very, very afraid or worried. Well, we don't have to wait for science to find a cure for that. Peter tells us to "cast all your anxiety on Him because God cares about you." What a welcome promise! To know that there is someone to whom we can turn, to whom we can go with the burdens of worry and fear and leave them there; leave them in God's hands because he cares about us ... and because God can handle the worries that we can't. Peter was wise enough to know that people have many causes for anxiety. God is loving enough to take those anxieties from us and give us his peace. *"Take my worries, Lord, take them."*

January 21, 2025

I will save you from all your uncleanness.

Ezekiel 36:29

We usually think that the Bible refers to 'uncleanness' as sinfulness, as being disconnected from God and his will for us. But in Biblical times, people with illnesses such as leprosy were also thought to be unclean. Women, during their monthly menstrual cycles, were seen as unclean and often forced to remove themselves and live apart from their families and others. How terrible for someone to be shunned because of an illness or a natural body function. But in our world, such absurdity still persists. A friend of mine told me that, on the day of her baptism, in the late 1940s, her mother was told by family members that she had to remain at home. She could not attend the ceremony at church because she was unclean; the baby was proof that she had done something 'dirty' with her husband. (My friend always wondered why her father was allowed to go to church for the baptism, since he had obviously been part of the 'dirty work.') Today, people are often shunned, often thought of as 'unclean' or untouchable because of illnesses that they have, especially mental or emotional illnesses. Thousands of years after Ezekiel's time, we still make the mistake of turning away from those who are ill. Whether it is a problem of the body or the spirit, God's promise is that he will save us ... all of us ... from whatever is unclean in us or with us. That promise, too, is thousands of years old, and it is as important today as it was in Ezekiel's time. And while God does his loving work of saving and restoring, it is our responsibility to accept and to help ... to not shun or deride ... those children of God who are afflicted in any way.

January 22, 2025

... God knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him.

Daniel 2:22

God knows where all the dark places in the world are: the places where crimes are committed, places where people are tormented or mistreated, places of cruelty and abuse, and places where hunger and hopelessness exist. And he knows where the dark places are inside each of us: the places where we harbor greed or arrogance, selfishness or hatred. To all of these places, inside us and around us, God brings his light, the light of

forgiveness, love, guidance, and new life. Let us pray always for that light to come, that light that shines into all of the corners and penetrates the darkness, especially the darkness within. *“Bring your Light to me, Lord. Let it shine in me, for me, through me ... for you.”*

January 23, 2025

Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.

Psalm 105:3

Rejoice! How often do we actually get the chance to rejoice? Not often. If our favorite team wins a big game, there is rejoicing; and if we win an award or a scholarship, or if we get a job or a promotion, there is rejoicing. But the causes for rejoicing need not be spectacular or even visible or tangible. If peace settles into our hearts, that's a reason to rejoice. If we take the time to see and appreciate the beauty around us, the feeling of rejoicing rises as well. And if we give or receive love, rejoicing comes right along with it. We often look for the 'big' things in life. But joy often comes in little, soft, and silent ways. The good news is that every day is a day for rejoicing. We can rejoice that when we seek the Lord, he is always there, willing and waiting to be found. Rejoice! Such rejoicing is good for our bodies, our minds, and our souls. Rejoice!

January 24, 2025

But whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure, without fear of evil. Proverbs 1:33

I had been busy with many important and unavoidable things: physical therapy, appointments with doctors, holiday preparations, household necessities, and church commitments. For weeks, I not only felt the need and desire to spend time with God, I felt God beckoning to me as well. But chores and obligations filled up hour after hour, day after day, often leaving me, late at night, with only enough energy to say, “Good night, Lord, I love you” as I nestled into my pillows. At last, on an evening when the wind was howling furiously outside the windows, and when my energy tank was empty, I finally sat down in my recliner and let everything else – everything that had been commanding my time and attention – fall away. *“I’m finally here, Lord. I’m so sorry it took so long. So sorry that you have been last on my list and not first. I know better. Come, Lord, be with me. Tell me whatever it is you want me to hear ... whatever I need to know or remember. Hold me, speak to me, lead me. Restore my strength and my spirit, and help me to refocus on you.”* In the quiet that had been too long delayed, God came, as he always does, as he always will, when we finally still ourselves in his presence. Perhaps today is a day to be still in God's presence, to listen, and to let God's love and comfort come to us.

January 25, 2025

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 1 Timothy 6:6-8

I'm a night person. The hours between midnight and 2:00 or 3:00 a.m. are often when I get ideas and do my writing. Lately, I've been trying to turn off the bedside lamp by 1:30 or 2:00. But when I do, I almost always hear ... after I've closed my eyes ... the unmistakable sound of airplanes overhead, going to the nearby airport. The first few times I heard that sound it seemed unreal to me, it made no sense. For almost 30 years, I lived in an apartment complex that was less than a mile away from the airport, and was actually on the flight path for incoming planes. In summer, people lounging at the apartment pool could look up at small planes coming in and see passengers waving to them from the plane windows. Even in those days, I rarely heard a plane come in after midnight, and when I flew frequently, I seldom came in to the airport at that hour. So, I wondered what this new, nocturnal flight activity could be. Then, someone explained it to me. “It's the Amazon planes coming in,” he said. “Less air traffic at night, and goods brought in in time for morning deliveries.” Then I remembered an outdoor, summer worship service at a church near the airport. In the middle of the service, I saw delivery vans for an online shopping company pour out of a nearby parking lot. I counted 58 vans, and at least a dozen or so had rolled by before I started counting. Product-laden planes landing in the wee hours, scores of delivery vans hitting the roads. Could there be a clearer reflection of how materialistic we are as a society, of why we accumulate so much 'stuff' and seem to be in an endless cycle of collecting and decluttering? Our nation is obsessed with selling. Advertisements surround us 24/7, in newspapers and magazines, on billboards, internet, and TV. “Buy! Buy! Buy!” is constantly hammered at us. In all of this “getting and spending”, as Wordsworth wrote,

we lose more than money and time; we can lose a sense of what really matters in life. We lose our sensitivity to waste and even to greed and excess. People discard \$800 smart phones after six months because a fancier phone has come out. We no longer blink at a \$45,000 price tag for a car, but we fixate on \$4.00 for eggs. \$300 for sneakers? No problem. \$3.00 for organic celery? No way! A great deal of our learning and growing in our relationship with God involves examining our other relationships: with people, with our inner selves, with the natural world. Perhaps we need to also look at our relationship with money, at what it can buy, what it can do, and what it can cause us to do: acquire, share, accumulate, waste. I'm writing this Meditation at 1:40 a.m., and I can hear the planes coming in. I'm glad that Santa, at least, uses a non-polluting sleigh. But I must confess: my dismay about the planes is balanced by my hope that the humidifier I ordered online is on one of those planes. Like everyone else, I'm a work in progress, and I, too, need to come to terms with money, spending, and 'stuff'. *"Help me in this, too, Lord."*

January 26, 2025

Keep far from a false charge.

Exodus 23:7

Most of us know how important the truth is. It is important to know the truth, tell the truth, and seek the truth. Today's Bible verse also cautions us to stay away from false (untruthful) charges or statements. We should make no such statements, and we should turn away from conversations, such as gossip, that could create such false statements. The truth is what we should hold on to, even if we sometimes don't like hearing it or wish it could be different. But the truth is a powerful, positive thing, and we should value it always. That can be difficult in today's world; a world in which everything being said seems to be challenged by someone; a world in which people throw accusations at each other constantly, and where even those who should be examples of integrity and truthfulness can choose, instead, to lie with impunity. But the old adage has it right: the only behavior we can control is our own. Even if we live in a world filled with deceptions and deceivers, it is our task – asked of us by God – to tell the truth and honor it, and to "keep far from a false charge."

January 27, 2025

...the Lord our God is righteous in everything He does...

Daniel 9:14

Most of us know what it means to be reliable. It means we can count on something or someone to be what they say they are, to do what they promise to do. God's ways and actions are reliably right and good – what the Bible calls 'righteous' – whether we can see it that way or not. Often, God's ways can seem strange to us, even contradictory. When we experience pain or loss, when we see others suffer, God and his righteousness can seem far way or even non-existent. It is in those times that we are called to have a faith that is grounded in God's word rather than in what we can see or touch. Such faith is possible, even when we are going through hurtful times. God can help us to have such faith, and we can count on God's goodness and righteousness, in everything he does, even if we can't see that goodness at the time. God is righteous; God is reliable. We have his word on it.

January 28, 2025

You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything.

Deuteronomy 5:8

The ancient Israelites made idols and worshipped them, as did many peoples and tribes. But the Israelites were God's people, and their worship of idols was a betrayal of what they said was their faith in their God, the faith God expected them to have in him and him alone. ('You shall have no other gods before me.') Today's verse does not mean that we can't make pictures, drawings, sculptures, or photographs that represent God the Father or Jesus or the Holy Spirit. It means that we can't take earthly things and worship them as if they were God. Only God is worthy of our worship. In an age when celebrities and 'influencers' are everywhere – when we're urged to follow certain fashions, trends, and opinions – it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that something should be worshipped, someone should be idolized, a statement should be believed without questioning. It's fine to admire people or styles or ideas, but only God is worthy of worship. The difference is clear, and God expects us to know that.

January 29, 2025

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation.

2 Corinthians 6:2

When we think of ‘big’ things like God or Heaven or miracles, it can seem that they have nothing to do with our everyday lives, that they’re unapproachable by mere mortals like us. Heaven itself can seem as if it is something related only to eternal life or to God’s final coming into the world. But God tells us the opposite. God says that he is part of every day, every action, and every thought of ours. God wants to be with us. Every day. And every day is a day in which we can choose to be with God, to welcome him into our lives and to know that he is, in his triune divinity, our Creator, our Lord and Savior, and the Spirit of the living God who is with us always. Now is the acceptable time to open our hearts and our lives to God. “Now is the day of salvation.”

January 30, 2025

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” Proverbs 22:6

Mom told this story many times through the years— When I was a few months old, she began the practice of placing my hands together, when I was being put to sleep for the night, and then she’d fold her hands over mine and say the Lord’s Prayer. Over time, after I was one year old or so, I’d repeat some of the words as she prayed. On the day I turned two, 76 years ago today, Mom began the bedtime prayer, but after the first three words she noticed that I was saying the words in exact order. She let her voice trail off, and from the word ‘hallowed’ on, I said the complete prayer. Mom was so excited that she began to cry. She calmly asked me to say the prayer again. She stayed silent. I kept my hands folded and said the entire prayer. She always said it was a moment she’d never forget. Her only regret was that Dad – who then worked middle shift at the steel company – was not there to share in that moment. Of course, as a toddler, I had little actual understanding of what I was saying ... but God heard, and God understood. Over the years, I’ve come to understand that God and I are connected. I believe that God and I go back a long way, prior to that night of my second birthday, perhaps prior to my birth, perhaps to time spent in heaven before I was sent to a specific place and specific parents in January of 1947. I won’t be at all surprised if I learn, when I return to heaven, that other lives preceded this one, all of them in companionship with a Creator who is as eternal as his love. *“Thank you, Creator God, for life, for love, for all things being possible ... for all that was, that is, and that is yet to come. Thank you!”*

January 31, 2025

You shall rise up before the gray-headed and honor the aged.

Leviticus 19:32

Most of us have or had older relatives, grandparents, and even great-grandparents. We also know other older people: neighbors, friends, people in our churches, teachers, and people who work in stores, restaurants, and the community. One of the great themes of the Bible is that we should honor those who are older, who have reached their seventies, eighties, and nineties. In many cultures, for many centuries, elders were honored and respected, not only for their wisdom, but also for the work they had done to sustain and extend the life and security of the tribe, village, or community. Unfortunately, much of that regard and respect has been lost, as we focus instead on those who are famous or beautiful or powerful. But we should remember that those who have reached an older age often have wisdom to share with us. They have lived through many experiences in life and have often been through difficult times. They deserve our respect and attention. We have much to learn from them, and much to give to them, including our love and appreciation and our help when they need it. Even the act of paying attention to them – listening to them, talking to them – will mean a lot to them. And as with so much else in life, sometimes it simply takes some thoughtfulness and planning to reach out, to deliberately spend time with an older person. When we do so, we will discover that such contact means a lot to us as well.