



WALKING WITH JESUS

**A Devotion Guide for those
who teach in Lutheran
Educational Settings**



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**
God's work. Our hands.



Dear Partners in Ministry,

The Vocation and Education unit of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is once again please to present this annual devotion guide to your school or early childhood education center. As we all know adults working in ELCA schools and centers are life long learners. They share the ability to learn with the children and youth that they teach each day. This devotion guide will help to strengthen their faith and to be prepared to share that faith with their students. It will provide opportunity to come together for a time of reflection, prayer, and celebration before heading to the classroom each week.

The theme for the 2008-2009 devotion guide is *Walking With Jesus*. We ask that you widely use this guide in your school or center and in your congregation. It is valuable for staff devotions, opening board or congregation meetings, and for personal reflection. It will remind you to take that step to walk with Jesus in all that you do.

We offer a special thank you to all who took time in their busy schedules to contributed devotions for use in our devotion guide. Your insights and reflections on the Gospel are an inspiration for all. Thanks to ELCA Communication Services and those who contributed to making this resource a reality; editor Connie Sletto, and designer Sharon Martin. Finally, we thank the ELCA and the Vocation and Education unit for their continued commitment to ELCA schools and early childhood education centers. Without their support this resource would not have been possible.

May walking each day with Jesus bring peace and blessings to your life and to the lives of the children and youth you reach out to each day.



Donna R. Braband
ELCA Director for Schools

For more information about the extensive ministry of the ELCA in education, please go to www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Education.aspx
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Devotion Guide project coordinator and editor,
Donna R. Braband, ELCA Director for Schools

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August 3, 2008: Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Isaiah 55:1–5

“Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”

In our present economy we sometimes identify with “you that have no money.” Even though in comparison with many people in our world we know we have great economic wealth, we can’t help feel the pinch of higher gas prices and falling stocks. We would like to buy a lot more than wine and milk without money and price!

But Isaiah is talking here about the blessings of salvation—they are free—Christ has paid. We have a thirst for these blessings, and when we come to Jesus, he pours out to us freely and abundantly that which we want and need.

Come to Jesus, drink of the “water” which flows to you freely, and live life more abundantly. Then go out and minister to the children in your care. They also are thirsty and in need. Share with them the blessings of salvation that they may also be filled. That is your calling.

Questions for the Week:

Are there areas of your life that need greater spiritual blessings? Come to Jesus—he will quench your thirst.

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray that God will shower you and your students with spiritual blessings. Also ask that God would guide you as you minister to the spiritual needs of those God has entrusted into your care.

This devotion was contributed by Sandra Wackenhuth, Chicago, Illinois, who served for 25 years at Ashburn Lutheran School in Chicago as teacher and principal. Currently she serves as the Educational Coordinator for the Chicagoland Lutheran Educational Foundation.

**August 10, 2008: Thirteenth Sunday
after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Matthew 14:22–23**

“Immediately (Jesus) made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side...” (v. 22) ... “But immediately Jesus spoke to them ...” (v. 27) ... “Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him ...” (v.31)
Matthew 14: 22, 27, 31

I’m always struck by the use of the word “immediately” in the Gospels. It denotes an incredible sense of urgency. Immediately ... right now ... this minute.

It seems like most, if not all of Jesus’ Gospel miracles carry the spirit of immediacy. The blind man instantaneously receives sight. The hemorrhaging woman encounters Jesus and at once stops bleeding. Peter immediately walks on water (and immediately sinks when he realizes what’s happening, but that’s another story!)

It makes me wonder: Where is the urgency in our ministry with children? Do we see our CARE of them as urgent? Or, maybe we look at it from the opposing angle—what happens when we don’t see immediate “results”?

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The Gospel IS urgent. It’s happening right now, this minute, immediately. In everything we say and do, we proclaim the Good News of the Risen Christ. When we help a child learn his ABCs or to tie her shoes, we’re proclaiming Christ. When we spend the extra time to encourage a child or wipe runny noses, we’re proclaiming Christ. When we show a little one that she is loved, that he is precious, that they are God’s beloved, we are proclaiming the Good News of the Divine.

The results may not be immediate, but the proclamation is—Jesus loves you right now and always. Take heart. Do not be afraid. Truly Jesus is the Son of God.

Question for the Week:

Where is the urgency in your ministry with children?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank you, God, for allowing me to communicate *immediately* how much you love your children. Amen

This devotion was contributed by The Rev. Lisa Raylene Barnes, pastor, St. John Lutheran Church, Westville, New Jersey, home of St. John Care.

**August 17, 2008: Fourteenth Sunday
after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32**

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom he foreknew.

...For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you they too may now receive mercy. For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

As a director, one of the most challenging aspects of training staff is classroom management. Each teacher has their own style of teaching; each has different levels of tolerance and each has different expectations. Children need a teacher who has clear, fair, age-appropriate expectations and demonstrates, clear, consistent consequences when those expectations are not lived up to. Children also need a teacher who will understand when they make poor choices and after their consequence has been administered will talk with them, help them make a better choice in the future, and forgive them for their behavior.

Isn't it amazing to think of ourselves as children, God as our teacher, and our everyday lives our classroom? God gives us clear, fair, age-appropriate expectations. Consistent consequences when we do not live up to those expectations and above all forgiveness. God shows us mercy and we in turn show mercy to those we are teaching. What better mentor for teachers than Jesus Christ our Teacher!

Questions for the Week:

Are your expectations clear, fair and age-appropriate? Do you show your children forgiveness?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Father God, thank you for being our teacher. Thank you for blessing us with the gift of teaching your children. Help us to follow your example of consistency and forgiveness. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Kris Martin, Rantoul, Illinois, teacher and director, American Lutheran Church Christian Preschool. Kris has been serving God through teaching God's children for 20 years.

August 24, 2008: Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Exodus 1:8–2:10;
Psalm 124

I am truly amazed at the wonders of God's timing and the depth of God's preparation for us as teachers in God's kingdom. We study for years at colleges and universities to obtain and maintain the proper credentials for teaching, and yet there are times when God uses the pain and agony of our own experiences to reach the children and families God places in our care.

Years ago, I was attending a woman's group and the discussion turned to hitchhiking and the dangers women face in today's society. I became sullen and introverted as the conversation continued. My friends commented on my unusual behavior and asked what was wrong. Not until that very day did I remember an event which 20 years earlier changed the course of my life and contributed to the choices I made from then on.

At 17 years old I had been raped by several members of my senior class. At the time I told no one and buried my secret deep within the recesses of my mind. I literally blacked out the event and all the feelings of guilt and shame associated with it. Not once during the next 20 years did I bring the memory of that day to the forefront of my mind. It wasn't until this particular winter day in the comfort of my friend's living room that the topic of conversation catapulted me back into my past, waking up the horrible reality I intuitively knew I now must face head on.

The next four months were a flurry of actions purposely chosen to help heal the brokenness. I was driven by a force from within, a force I can only describe as that coming from the Father. It was focused, steady, and definitely making up for time lost. I contacted the local Rape Crisis Center and began attending weekly meetings. I wrote the experience down from start to finish, purging every sight, sound and smell from my memory, and finally, I told the women of my family; my mother, sisters, sister-in-law and my adult daughter. My past was now a part of me, not buried deep within, but a part, I now could see, which had shaped and molded me all these years. Through this difficult period I kept Psalm 46 close to my heart. "Be still, and know that I am God." The secret was out, but God wasn't finished with me yet.

In August of the same year a mother and her five-year-old daughter were checking out my kindergarten class for the coming school year. While I allowed the girl to explore the room her mother and I talked. Somehow the mother felt comfortable enough to share with me that her

little girl had recently been molested by a family member and she was just beginning to go through the healing process. Inwardly I smiled. I understood then why God had laid a loving hand upon my shoulder and gently pushed me ever so firmly down my own path of healing. God was sending one of God's precious children my way, and I needed to get ready.

This little five-year-old did not need my college education or expertise regarding the latest math program, or whether phonics or whole language was the way to learn to read. She needed my compassion and understanding—and a teacher who had walked awhile in her shoes.

Eventually the family became members of our congregation. In fact, this very weekend I will be attending our congregation's annual women's retreat with both the mother and her daughter. Today my former student is a beautiful 22-year-old woman. She doesn't know the bond the two of us share, but her mother and I know that our heavenly Father healed two of God's children from the brokenness of this world the year her daughter entered kindergarten.

This devotion was contributed by Jean Bashi, Cross and Crown Lutheran School, Rohnert Park, California.

**August 31, 2008: Sixteenth Sunday
after Pentecost**
Thought for the Week: Jeremiah 15:15–21

“If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall serve as my mouth.” (v. 19b)

As we begin another school year and open our doors and our hearts to the families we serve, these words spoken to Jeremiah from God can center us. In the Jeremiah text, Jeremiah is basically “whining” to God about the many wrongs in his life. Jeremiah complains that he has done all the right things in his life and serves God faithfully and doesn’t deserve the sorrows and persecutions. God then replies, gently reminding Jeremiah that God is ever present in his life. God also instructs Jeremiah that living in God’s promise isn’t about him, it is about all those who will be influenced by his faith in God.

Serving in Christian education isn’t always the easiest, most financially secure or most glamorous career choice in our culture. We may often feel like Jeremiah, complaining that the chaos of life touches us even as we live out our faith. We may even feel like what we do doesn’t matter or make any difference to anyone. Yet, God assures us that we are important and we are God’s extension into the world. Jeremiah 15:19 says “It is they who will turn to you, not you who will turn to them.” God knows that God’s people in the world need a place to turn. God has called you to be that place.

Questions for the Week:

How can we show our community that we are a place to turn to in life’s chaos? How can we show the children who walk through our doors everyday? What does serving as God’s “mouth” look like to you?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Ever faithful God, I thank you for the people who are your mouth in my life. Allow me to be your presence in the lives of all those I come into contact with. Be with me and give me wisdom as I humbly serve the families in my care. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Bridgette Weier, former director, St. Matthew Lutheran Preschool. Bridgette is currently in ELCA candidacy for Consecrated Diaconal Minister. She is in masters programs for social work, University of Denver and pastoral care, Illif Seminary.

**September 7, 2008: Seventeenth Sunday
after Pentecost
Thoughts for the Week: Romans 13:8 and
Matthew 18:20**

...love one another. Romans 13:8

For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.
Matthew 18:20

What wonderful verses when referring to the children in our schools and centers! Several years ago, when I was a first grade teacher in an ELCA elementary school, I had a beautiful example of these verses in action. Krystina was excitedly awaiting the birth of a baby sister. Something went wrong in the delivery room and baby Amber died. Krystina would or could not talk about this to the great concern of her parents. Several days later, she came to me and said that she was ready to tell the class. We stopped working, and I held her hand as she told the class what had happened. The entire class cried along with Krystina. Without any prompting, everyone immediately went to her and we had a group hug. Again, without prompting a classmate announced that we needed to pray. As we sat in a circle holding hands, every child in the class added a petition to the prayer. I was later told by the child who suggested the prayer that “we had to do something, and we knew we could pray and Jesus would hear us and help Krystina and her family.” What pure and perfect love and trust in our Lord! Of course, the rest of the story is that the children made pictures of baby Amber as an angel. Krystina is a teenager now. I saw her recently. She still remembers the important part her classmates played in her acceptance of a tragic incident. She knows that God was among her classmates that day!

This story is all the more amazing because two-thirds of the class came from no faith background. Our school made a lasting and permanent difference in their lives as they continued their *Walk with Jesus*. We plant the seeds, knowing that when the time is ripe, just as in this case, our children will respond with what they have learned in our settings.

Questions for the Week:

How do you foster the love of Christ in your setting? What examples do you see that demonstrate that your students are *Walking with Jesus*?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for the opportunity to teach and to show by example the love of Christ to those children in your care.

This devotion was contributed by Mary Ann Pollock, National Board President, the Evangelical Lutheran Education Association (ELEA). She also serves as an advisor to the ELCA Vocation and Education unit's program committee, representing our schools and early childhood education centers.

**September 14, 2008: Eighteenth Sunday
after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Matthew 18:21–35**

You're in a hurry and there's a lot of traffic. You put on your blinker to change lanes and someone kindly lets you in. As you drive, another driver indicates that he wants you to let him in. Do you?

Today's story is kind of like that. A slave owes his master a lot of money. He begs for patience and the master has compassion and forgives him the loan. The slave then goes to another slave and demands he pay back the money owed him. Instead of showing mercy like he had been shown, he throws the man in prison.

God has shown all of us mercy and given us jobs with positions of authority. We all have choices. We could lord it over others, stating "this is the way it's going to be and that's that" or "I want to do it myself because then I'll know it's done right" or "It's just easier to do it myself."

The other choice is to teach or train someone else, that is, to "let people in" to your world.

I once heard that you should look at your job periodically and decide what tasks you absolutely need to do and what things could be delegated to someone else. Today's scripture encourages us to "let others in" by showing the same mercy we have been shown. When this happens, not only is our workload lightened, but others feel a part of the team.

Questions for the Week:

Why is it difficult to delegate?

What tasks are important for you to do? What tasks could you delegate to others?

What happens when we "let others in"?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank you, God, for all you have given us. Help us to be as kind and compassionate to others as you have been to us. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Cindy Decker, Des Plaines, Illinois. Cindy served seventeen years at St. Mark Preschool and is currently Youth and Family Coordinator, St. Mark Lutheran Church, Mount Prospect, Illinois.

**September 21, 2008: Nineteenth Sunday
after Pentecost
Thought for the week: Jonah 3:10–4:1**

“When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry.”
Jonah 3:10–4:1

How many times in the classroom or on the play yard have we observed children getting into squabbles and as we continue to watch them, we hope they can resolve their own conflicts and turn their play back into harmony. We, as teachers, consider stepping in when things seem to escalate, and like God using Jonah we wonder if we need to help guide them back in the right direction.

There are also times when the children are playing or working together and one of them decides to “tattle.” This too reminds us of Jonah becoming displeased and sharing his anger with God. He wanted God to step in and resolve the entire issue, giving Jonah his way and relieving his frustration. Don’t we all want our own way? Don’t we have feelings of anger when things don’t go how we thought they should?

Children are wonderful at sharing their feelings, and how comfortable Jonah was that he could go to God and share his anger. How blessed we are that God cares what happens with each one of us, and also with all of us.

Questions for the Week:

Has God put you in a place of challenge lately? Do you feel displeased and angry about a particular situation? Is God trying to allow you to be a part of something personally, and at the same time show you something greater outside yourself?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Lord, in our daily situations we ask that you remind us of your graciousness and that you continue to show us your mercy and love even in times of frustration and anger. We are grateful that you “are slow to anger and abound in steadfast love.” You not only care for each one of us, but you also care what happens to all of us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen

*This devotion was contributed by Kelly Catlett, preschool program director,
Lutheran Church of the Incarnation, Poway, California.*

**September 28, 2008: Twentieth Sunday
after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Psalm 25:1-8**

“To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation.”

Most of you have been in school for a few weeks now and the glow of a new school year is, I hope, still on your faces. I hope that you love what you do as it is, in my opinion, the most important job in the world. Sometimes, especially as the year progresses, loving the teaching profession can be somewhat more difficult. If you're like me, the time when I lift up my soul and communicate the most with my Lord is during times of stress and trial. I can't count the number of times I've prayed for patience with a child or parent when I've been close to the breaking point. All of that is great, but the gift of working in a Lutheran school is that we indeed can lift up our cares and petitions and praises all of the time. Some of the best memories I have from my tenure as principal of a Lutheran school centered around the faculty community. We met to share devotions on a regular basis and to lift up families and members of our community in prayer. In sickness, in health, in times of trial our good and gracious God was and is there to listen and to lift our souls. Giving children the opportunity to lead and participate in worship and prayer is a gift we leave with all of our children. To this day, *Jesus Loves Me*, the hymn I learned as a child, has gotten me through some trying times.

Jesus loved and prayed to his father for those he was with, asking for healing and wholeness and in thanksgiving for all he had. What an example he is for us as teachers and what an example we can be for our students and families.

Questions for the Week:

Do you regularly lift up the children and your colleagues in prayer? Does your staff engage in formal devotions and prayer? Do you pray with your children in the classroom, modeling what it is to trust in the care of the Lord?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Lord, we thank you for the gift of prayer and for being present during all of our life journey to hear those prayers. We ask that you would teach us and lead us on the path of truth as you are the God of our salvation.

This devotion was contributed by Marlene Lund, executive director, Lutheran Schools Association and director, Center for Urban Education Ministries, New York, New York. She is an Associate in Ministry and has been a Lutheran educator for thirty-four years serving as teacher, guidance counselor, and principal.

**October 5, 2008: Twenty-first Sunday
after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Matthew 21:33–46**

I remember a teacher who worked in our school but left after a few years because she felt the school was becoming “too religious.” I can only say, “Thank God, and may it continue!”

Obviously, when our school began some thirty years ago, it began with a Christian mission as a Lutheran school. Through changes in the community, competition, leadership and staff, by the time I came on board it was hanging on to its Christian identity through the “warmth and caring” of its teachers and a daily snack prayer. Don’t get me wrong—there were many, many boys and girls who came through our school—my own children included—and they turned out to be fine young men and women, by the grace of God and the teachers who took their calling seriously.

Like the tenants in Jesus’ parable, we are stewards of this school for Christ and we produce a good crop of students. But will we claim their success as our own or give the glory to God? We need to continue to grow in our identity as a Lutheran school and in our mission as a source of Christian education in the community.

Questions for the Week:

What practices can be incorporated into the curriculum that reflects the school’s mission as a Christian school? These could include opening and closing prayers, daily Bible lessons, special Bible classes, chapel services more often, service projects, and staff devotional time. Can you think of others? What ways can you think of to reach out to school families and help students bring the message of Christ home?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear Lord, you have called me to work and study here in your Christian school. Help me daily to find ways to bring your light into my classroom, so that it may go out into the world with the students and families I serve.

This devotion was contributed by Barbara Krumm, director, Saint John Lutheran School, Norfolk, Virginia.

**October 12, 2008: Twenty-second Sunday
after Pentecost**

Thought for the Week: Philippians 4:1-9

“Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.”

What reassuring words are these from Philippians! St. Paul admonishes us to rejoice in all things, not worry about anything, and to give everything to God in prayer. Furthermore, Paul tells us to think about whatever is good or just or pure or honorable, pleasing or commendable. He tells us to think about anything that is worthy of praise and then to keep on doing what we have learned, heard, and seen and we will receive God’s peace.

Whoa! Do you ever have days when you just want to throw up your hands and say, “God, what I have I gotten myself into?” Are there times when the children in your charge just don’t seem to “get it”? Are the parents you serve sometimes a bit more than trying on your good will? Do you have days when you think that nobody understands your situation? I would submit that every educator feels this way at one time or another. I have found myself turning to the fourth chapter of Philippians on more than one occasion. This passage tells me that I should focus on the smallest accomplishments in my classroom. Then I should continue in my work knowing that the God of peace will be with me.

Stop for a few moments and think about one or two things that have had positive outcomes or have been productive from your perspective. First, thank God for small steps in the right direction. Then think about what God has done for you and what God promised to do for you as you pursue your walk with Jesus. And remember, “Let your gentleness be known to everyone.”

Questions for the Week:

What, in your situation, can you look on as honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent or worthy of praise? Can you list just one example for each word? If you can, think how much you have accomplished already!

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for giving you the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of the children and families you serve. Pray for continued patience and optimism to see the small accomplishments as positive steps in your walk with Jesus.

This devotion was contributed by Dottie Fergus, teacher of four-year-olds, Westwood Early Childhood Center, St. Louis Park, Minnesota. Dottie is the former director, teacher and Early Childhood Facilitator for Lutheran Schools Association in New York.

**October 19, 2008: Twenty-third Sunday
after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Psalm 96:1–13**

“O sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD all the earth.”

How do we fill our mouth with praise? How do we invite our students to fill their mouths with praise?

We sing the songs of faith with our children in chapel. Let us sing with gusto. Let us sing with understanding. Let us sing often, not as a duty or under direction, but whenever we are able.

Wherever we are, is a good place to sing praises to God. The classroom is a great place to fill our mouths with God’s praise. The playground is a great place to sing to the Lord, too. Our teachers often listened to the radio as they were preparing for their day. Now I hear songs of praise, either over the radio or from CDs, in those classrooms.

The children under our care tend to learn the songs we sing—and then add their own chapter and verse. If we introduce them to Jesus, they will sing of love. If we sing the songs of blessings, glory, and wondrous deeds, they will sing them.

Question for the Week:

How can I sing out the blessings of the Lord?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Holy Spirit, come, fill my mouth with songs of praise. Help me be a joyful example to the children who walk with me. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Sharon Sarles, director, Butterfly Christian Preschool, a mission of Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, Austin, Texas.

October 26, 2008: Reformation Sunday

Thought for the Week: Psalm 46

Just this morning I heard the story. The elderly grandmother who lived alone had fallen. She was afraid she would be unable to get herself back up. Then she remembered years earlier when she was in a tragic automobile/pedestrian accident and her husband was killed. She lay mangled on the sidewalk. A stranger held her hand. “Please, don’t let go of my hand,” she pleaded. He didn’t. Now the memory of someone holding her hand sustained her again.

Psalm 46 reminds us, “God still holds our hand when we cry out.” The image of the psalmist was not specifically that of a hand, but of a “refuge and strength.” Martin Luther phrased it, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” the hymn of the week for many Lutherans in this Reformation Week.

Your students, too, will fall. They will want and need a sustaining hand. This week remind them again that in Jesus, God will always hold their hand. God will never let go. God is always there to save. God will always hold a child’s hand—and yours, too.

Question for the Week:

When was there a time in your life when you felt you were being held in God’s hand? In what circumstances may your students want to call out to Jesus, “Hold my hand”?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

God, you are indeed our refuge and strength, our Mighty Fortress. Remind us often to trust you to hold us in your mighty hands; the hands of the one pierced on the cross and present in resurrected reality. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Melvin M. Kieschnick, Carlsbad, California, who served Lutheran schools nationally and internationally for 50 years and in retirement on behalf of the Center for Urban Education Ministries.

November 2, 2008: All Saints Sunday
Thought for the Day: Psalm 34:1–10, 22 and
I John 3:1-3

When looking for wisdom for ourselves, as teachers and parents, we do well to look to the Psalms. In verse one of Psalm 34 we read, “I will bless the Lord at all times...Look to him, and be radiant...” It is wisdom indeed to be “radiant,” to be reflecting of God’s love.

During the summer months in Minnesota, we usually gather for our weekly chapel under the giant oak that shades our outdoor berm/classroom. Overlooking the sparkling lake waters, listening to the singing birds, raising our voices in song, the children are radiant reflections of God’s love.

As we read I John 3:1–3 we are reminded to “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God.” Our simple chapel traditions encourage the children to recognize symbols which help us to learn of God’s love. As a shell is placed on the rock altar, the children lustily proclaim, “A shell because we are baptized.” And as a cross is lifted high, they announce, “Jesus died on the cross and rose again on Easter morning.” Prayers of thanks for the beautiful world, for family, friends, and teachers are expressed recognition of the “love the Father has given us.” Open air chapel time is a blessing to everyone as infants and young toddlers join us in their wagons and strollers. Frequently parents tell us that children play chapel time at home and that their household is blessed by this reflection of God’s love.

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Questions for the Week:

What views of God’s world inspire you to recognition of God’s love? How might we express our gratitude “that we should be called children of God”?

Prayer for the Week:

Echo prayers with young children lead to joyful participation. Dear God, Thank you for the birds that are singing;

Thank you for the sunshine;
Thank you for my family;
Thank you for friends;
Thank you for loving me.
Amen, Amen, Amen

This devotion was contributed by Marilyn Stalheim, director, Westwood Early Childhood Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

**November 9, 2008: Twenty-sixth Sunday
after Pentecost**

**Thought for the Week: Matthew 25:1–13,
Amos 5:18–24, Psalm 70, 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18**

“This little light of mine—I’m gonna let it shine.” Standard equipment for many of our weekly chapels, and for many their first statement of faith: “Jesus gave it to me—I’m gonna let it shine.”

In this week’s lessons we hear this theme of letting our light shine. Amos warns those eager for the Day of the **LORD** that they may be on the grim end of that coming. That day will be one of “deep darkness, not light,” a surprise for those who grow cynical or selfish, or who fail to translate faith into doing justice and living right in daily life.

Jesus’ parable of the wise and foolish young bridesmaids presses this theme as well. Watch and be ready, keep your lamps trimmed and filled, burning bright for the promised Groom.

What does it mean to burn bright in the world, for our students and for ourselves? How do we stoke the flame, protect it from surging winds, set it high enough to brighten those around us? Some are kindled through daily prayer, reflection on God’s Word, regular worship and Communion, and fellowship within the baptismal community.

Whatever our particular practices, the world’s True Light assures us of his presence as we tread the sometimes stony paths of flickering flames and fast-blowing winds. Through it all, we can burn bright in speech and serving, because of the One who has provided the oil of healing, the fuel for our lamps, whose holy hand has traced forgiveness on our foreheads and hearts. We are baptized, marked with his cross and sealed with the Spirit: forever. In his name we can boldly say, “I’m gonna let it shine!”

Questions for the Week:

How does your light shine in daily life? What threatens to dampen the wick or quench the flame? How can you keep it strong and bright, and whose flame can you help to protect and kindle?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Ask God for protection and inspiration, to keep your light strong.

This devotion was contributed by Bill Hurst, senior pastor, First Lutheran Church and School, Torrance, California, which includes a 550-student early childhood, elementary, and middle school ministry in the South Bay community of Los Angeles County.

**November 16, 2008: Twenty-seventh Sunday
after Pentecost**

Thought for the Week: I Thessalonians 5:4, 8

“But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day;... since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.”

In the northern hemisphere, darkness grows during November. The sun sets early and rises late. We accept this as the natural order of things. We may even welcome the chilly nights as opportunities to hunker down indoors and hide from the world.

But, says Paul, as followers of Christ, we are children of the day, vigilant, sober, and responsible. We live in the light, where we can clearly see the things that threaten to harm us. Protected by the hope of salvation we have in Jesus Christ, we do not have to be afraid. We can face the world—even the end of the world—with faith and courage.

Questions for the Week:

How does remembering that you are a child of the light change your relationship with other people? Is there someone who needs you to be the light of Christ for them this week?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Ask God to help you walk in the light of Christ, even when the darkness of despair or discouragement is growing within you or around you.

This devotion was contributed by Gwen Gotsch, director of school music, Grace Lutheran Church, River Forest, Illinois. She blogs at perverselutheran.blogspot.com.

November 23, 2008: Christ the King Sunday

Thought for the Week: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

The days before Thanksgiving break are always an exciting time for students. Teachers often plan special activities for younger children, perhaps a Thanksgiving feast in the classroom, creative crafts or a small play. Many schools have food drives to help community food pantries or raise chapel funds for world hunger as a way of showing their thankfulness for God's many blessings in their lives. Students and staff look for a break in their regular routines with perhaps at least a small sense of relief that the first quarter of the school year has been completed.

That relief may be tempered in teachers by some of the family responsibilities that are inherited in Thanksgiving festivities. Those in charge of travel arrangements, the food preparation, entertaining guests or simply one's own children may feel more stress than thankfulness. That is why taking the time to let God's promise, "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down... I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak..." (v. 15) resonate within us is so important to Christian educators. God seeks us out.

As we claim that promise for ourselves, we are comforted in knowing that we are not alone in helping the children we are teaching. God will be there beside us as we seek to share the power and promise of God's grace with students.

Questions for the Week:

What are ways you could share with students the power of God's promise to seek God's sheep from your own experiences? Ask children if they can think of events or things from which they could need God's rescue.

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for allowing you to bring words of comfort and power to the children under your care.

This devotion was contributed by Barbara Clark, principal, St. Mark's Lutheran School, Hacienda Heights, California.

November 30, 2008: First Sunday of Advent

Thought for the Week: Mark 13:24–37

I remember the cold, snowy day that my son entered the world. After many months of waiting, the last 24 hours before his birth seemed to creep before he finally arrived. His cries were a welcome sound in the hospital room, and all of our hopes culminated in a joyous event that still seems like yesterday.

The message selected for this week discusses a time in the near future when Jesus will come back to claim his own. This week though, we celebrate the lead-up to the celebration of when Jesus came the first time. The time of Advent is designed for us to revel in the anticipation of Jesus' birth. Much in the same way my wife and I waited longingly for our son to arrive, early believers waited centuries before Jesus came in human form to save us all.

When we gear up for Christmas in our classrooms this year, what will we talk about with the students to pique their excitement? Will we talk about the new bike, doll, or video game that they want, or will we focus more on the main reason for the season? As the fervor builds toward the Christmas season, let's give our students the opportunity to find their joy in Jesus, and not just the presents that come with the season. Besides, the gift that Jesus brings will never get old, will never break, and will never fail.

Question for the Week:

As Christmas gets closer, what are we waiting on the most?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear Lord, help us all to look forward to the Christmas season because of the gift of your love. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Jake Morrow, principal, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Kissimmee, Florida. Trinity's school ministry program serves pre-kindergarten through eighth grade.

December 7, 2008: Second Sunday of Advent Thought for the Week: Isaiah 40:1-11

“Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly...”

We are called to teach, to minister to, to be present for the children entrusted to our care. We are also called to be aware of their lives. Aware of the whole of their lives if we are able. That can be a grand thing, and also sometimes a painful thing. In the end, most importantly, it is helpful to us. The reason it is helpful is found in the words of the prophet who calls us to comfort those who come to us. To know a life fully is to be able to offer comfort at the most needful of times. It offers special opportunities to comfort those who come to the places we inhabit and find in them a special refuge, a safe place in a world that may be more chaotic than we fully know.

And what is one of the ways that we may comfort most certainly? It is through the use of the words that we use. And so the prophet says, “speak tenderly.” May we indeed always pay attention to the words that we use, remembering always to ultimately build up, to edify.

Thinking of Walter Wangerin’s simple story of “Edification/ Demolition,” there are no worthless moments, only moments to be a witness, to “comfort and speak tenderly.”

Questions for the Week:

What gives you the greatest comfort? In what ways do you give comfort to others? (Keep it simple)

Personal Prayer for the Week:

May we be strengthened in our patience, be especially aware of the needs of those around us, and be ever mindful of the power of our words.

This devotion was contributed by Randy Schutt, pastor, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Albany, Oregon. Good Shepherd is home to a pre-school and kindergarten of over 80 vibrant young blessings.

December 14, 2008: Third Sunday of Advent

Thought for the Week: Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11

“They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.”

This chapter uses many pictures and images to depict the blessings that flow through the first coming of Christ. Such is the richness of grace that descriptive words and images abound. The chapter ends (verses 10 and 11) with a wonderful expression and outpouring of praise that calls to mind some of our great hymns such as Newton’s “Amazing Grace” or Wesley’s “And Can It Be?”

Because of God’s grace, believers become as mighty oaks. Trees are often taken for granted, but nothing is more desolate than an area that has been denuded of its trees or ravaged by drought. The oak tree will conjure up many images—beauty, strength, varied uses, shade, acorns. Because of grace believers become as oaks. They are planted by God through their baptism and, living in their baptism, are sustained for life’s journey, giving witness to the love and power that makes them “oaks of righteousness.”

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The rich and varied pictures in this chapter depict what Christ came to give people and is now offered through baptism. This chapter reminds us that among all of the gifts that advertisers want us to purchase this season, there is only one gift that counts and lasts.

Questions for the Week:

What does it mean to children that believers are called “oaks of righteousness”? What special fruit do you bring to your children?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God you have been made an oak of righteousness as a teacher. Pray for wisdom and sustenance that you may display God’s glory.

This devotion was contributed by Adrienne Jericho, executive director, Lutheran Education Australia, Adelaide.

December 21, 2008: Fourth Sunday of Advent

Thought for the Week: Luke 1:47–55

“(God) has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” Luke 1:54–55

I imagine that the thoughts in this song of praise were life-shaping for Mary. Think especially about the phrase, “according to the promise.” Mary lived in the promise of God—through her pregnancy, the birth, and child rearing in a poor and oppressed country, through Jesus’ ministry and its controversies. The promise carried her through his crucifixion and to the resurrection.

Our lives too are shaped by God’s promises. We share the promises, telling them to one another through the stories of God’s work and in the liturgies of the church. We also live according to the promises in the routines of our lives and work. Think how we use “promise” language and how we act on it:

- We speak of a child’s “promise,” calling to mind the future we believe God intends for that boy or girl.
- Comforting a hurting or troubled child, we say, “I’ll stay with you, I promise!” as God is present. We lift up the fallen with lived promises.
- Your Lutheran school or early childhood center makes explicit and implicit promises to students, parents, and congregation. The shape of that promise comes from your sense of God’s promises. For example, your school will appreciate and respect each individual and it will respect and value families and communities. You will have expectations and you will practice forgiveness.

Like Mary, we are people of God’s promise—hearing it and living it. Thanks be to God!

Questions for the Week:

How are God’s promises shaping your own life this week?

What do you do or think or say that is grounded in the promise?

How would you express the promise your school explicitly or implicitly makes to those it serves?

What’s your part in making that promise real?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Reflect quietly on the promises of God that seem most real to you right now. Thank God for the specific ways those promises shaped your life and thoughts in the past few days. Pray that God will continually sustain you by God's promises.

This devotion was contributed by Stanley N. Olson, executive director, ELCA Vocation and Education Unit at the churchwide office, Chicago, Illinois.

December 25, 2008: Nativity of Our Lord Thought for the Week: Luke 2:(1-7) 8-20

When I read this section in Luke, what comes to my mind every time is a children's Christmas pageant. You know...watching the shepherds and the little angels in their costumes made of old sheets, and Joseph and Mary walking up the aisle with a "donkey."

This scene is played out in our churches, schools, and preschools all over the country, and even around the world. These little children acting out the holy story bind us all together in a common faith. Last year, I observed the children at Hiroshima Lutheran Nursery School (one of our sister schools in Japan), practicing for their Christmas pageant at the same time that I knew the children in my early education center back home in California were rehearsing for our own Christmas program. It was a moment where I felt the strong tie that binds all Christians around our world.

The little baby Jesus, born over 2000 years ago, reaches out with the Gospel story to children everywhere, crossing cultural differences and language barriers. I didn't know any of the words the children in Hiroshima were saying, but the story was there in my heart. It comes down to the basic Gospel story—God sent the beloved Son to us as an infant, Jesus, to live and grow, teaching us how to live and love and care for others, and then to die in our place for our sins.

Let the children in your Sunday schools, day schools, and early childhood centers share this simple and powerful message with the families in your campus through their pageants and programs. And make sure you sing along with them, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward all!*"

Question for the Week:

Christmas Pageants are a great way to reach out to the families in your school that might otherwise not come to church. Use this moment to share the Gospel with them by making the event very friendly and welcoming! How else can we plan and promote other cool events to invite them to so they will want to return again?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

We pray this week for the families who have not yet heard the message of the manger.

This devotion was contributed by Shirley Becker, director, First Lutheran Early Education Center, First Lutheran Church, Torrance, California, and First Lutheran Infant and Toddler Center, St. Mark's Presbyterian Church, Torrance, California.

December 28, 2008: First Sunday of Christmas

Thought for the Week: Galatians 4:4-7

[Therefore] you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child, then also an heir, through God through Christ. Galatians 4:7

The air crackled with excitement. One hundred and fifty-two, three- and four-year-olds sat obediently in church pews expectantly looking up at the minister while some children whispered in hushed tones about new Barbie's, Game-Boys, Dora's, and Mac Trucks received for Christmas. Preschool chapel was ready to begin.

The brave pastor surveyed the wiggling audience and armed with a well prepared lesson on baptism, he queried, "Do you remember being born?" An immediate response followed: A babble of voices plus little heads shaking yes, some no. Then up goes a flutter of waving hands indicating a wish to describe individual experiences. "I was born in my mommy's tummy," offered Amanda. Daniel wanted us to know that he was "born in Russia." Then a persistent hand-waver, "Oh, Oh, Oh, (please call on me) I was born in a stable," exclaimed Nathan proudly.

The teachers did their best to contain their amusement as children hooted and snickered. The minister smiled broadly at Nathan. "My, that was just like Jesus." The towhead looked up and somberly nodded his head in agreement. The older, more knowledgeable four-year-olds however, confirmed that most children are born in the hospital with their moms and dads.

Chapel ended after the pastor expertly maneuvered a lesson about second birth through baptism, but it was hard not to reflect on Nathan's response about his birth place. While it is presumed Christmas prompted Nathan's reply, how far is it from the truth? In our scripture Paul reminds the Galatians that we are set free with the birth of Jesus. God adopts us as a child and then we are heirs through God. With the birth of Jesus, we too, are born in that stable as brothers and sisters of Christ our Savior. Through Christ's death we are made heirs to the kingdom of God. Perhaps Nathan said it just right.

Question for the Week:

When you look at baby Jesus lying in the manger, do you remember when you were born in Christ?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

We thank you, God, for loving us like your own Son. Help us to stay faithful to your word and to lead productive lives as your children.

This devotion was contributed by Susan K. Wallisa, director, the Learning Center at Living Word Church, Katy, Texas.

January 4, 2009: Second Sunday of Christmas Thought for the Week: Jeremiah 31:9–10, John 1:12, Ephesians 1:4–5

My sister and her husband have been actively seeking to adopt a child for a very long time. They have beautifully decorated a room in their home for the child that they anticipate will come to them at a moment's notice. They have opened their hearts in love to adopt this unknown child, whom they have not conceived and who does not come to them through the powerful bonding of biology. Through selfless love they have adopted a child to be chosen by God especially for them, who yearns for a parent's love.

Likewise, God has chosen us as God's children. God has prepared a room for us and loves us unconditionally. It is a bond that is stronger than conception or the biological bond of mother and child or father and child. God adopts us through Jesus Christ. It is a bond that transcends the limits of flesh and biology and is "of water (baptism) and the spirit." God is our father (or mother), we are God's children. Nothing can separate us from God, not even death itself. God puts arms around us, holds us, takes our hand and walks with us through our lives, just as a loving father or mother would. Through God's fathering or mothering role we are the first born. By believing, we possess the right to be God's children, and in love God adopts us as children through Jesus Christ. We are God's!

Questions for the Week:

Can you relate a powerful example of fatherly or motherly love that you have seen in one of the families you serve? Can you relate a powerful example of "adopted parental" love shown by one of the teachers to a student who needed "parenting love"? Can you relate from your own life the powerful "adopted" love of someone other than your parents who showed you "parenting" love?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for adopting you as a son or daughter through Jesus Christ.

This devotion was contributed by Hollis Thoms, educator and composer. He has served as a Lutheran teacher, principal and regional director of schools. As a full-time composer he has had numerous secular and sacred works performed.

January 11, 2009: Baptism of Our Lord Thought for the Week: Mark 1:9-11

Jesus...was baptized by John in the Jordan....And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Imagine yourself standing in the Jordan River, not far from where John stands with Jesus. Feel the water swirling around your legs, the sun's warmth on your face. What brought you here today to see John the Baptist? Had you heard about this man named Jesus and his promises of new life?

You see John speak to Jesus, and then Jesus dips under the water. As Jesus stands up, water dripping down his face, you experience something mysterious. You hear a voice that says, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased," yet as you look around, you don't see who is speaking. Then you see something that looks like a dove fly down toward Jesus. A deep sense of peace and joy fills you. You sense the presence of God in this place. You step forward to be baptized yourself.

Questions for the Week:

What do you treasure most about your baptism? Do you feel God's love for you as a beloved child through your own baptism into the Christian family? Why or why not?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Ask God to help you live out your baptismal promises this week in all you do. Give thanks for the gift of grace God granted you through your baptism.

This devotion was contributed by Alycia Erickson, director of Christian Growth, Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church. She also served as a board member for Butterfly Christian Preschool, Austin, Texas.

January 8, 2009: Second Sunday after Epiphany

Thought for the Week: Psalm 139:1–5, 12–17

When I read that this was one of the readings offered to me, I really rejoiced! For this Psalm became particularly relevant for me recently when I was determining readings for my mother's funeral. Please don't think this is going to be a sad commentary! Instead, this reading gave me a joy beyond words!

It is called, "The prayer of a believing heart!". In the lines of this prayer, we hear of the personal relationship between us and our God. It is a God that knew all of us before we were even born!

When I look on the faces of the students that come through our door each year, I think of the great plans God has in store for them! Here they are; some with smiles and some with tears, coming into a new phase of their lives that will impact them forever. This reading only emphasizes how intimately God knows each one of them. God lays a loving hand upon each of them and bestows on all of us a grace beyond our knowing!

Questions for the Week:

Can you see your students through God's eyes as they enter your door? How can you let them know how intimately God holds them in hands of grace?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for being such an intimate part of your life. Ask that God continually fills you with grace, hope, and love that thoroughly energizes you to care and teach the children that come into your life.

This devotion was contributed by Deacon Sharon Brennen, teacher and director, Christian Pre-School, Dobbs Ferry Lutheran Church, Dobbs Ferry, New York. She has served the preschool for the past thirty years. She has been a Deacon at her church for the past five years.

January 25, 2009: Third Sunday after Epiphany
Thought for the Week: Jonah 3:1–5, 10;
Psalm 62:6–12; I Corinthians 7:29–31;
Mark 1:14–20

Time is running out. That's a theme threaded through today's readings from Jonah, Corinthians, and Mark. And it is an underlying text in our own lives, though we sometimes suppress it and delude ourselves into thinking otherwise. We intuitively know "the appointed time has grown very short" (Corinthians) and "the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark), yet, like the people of Nin'evah, we tend to postpone the time of transformation. We put off to tomorrow the changes we know we should make today.

Our models for transformative action should be Simon and Andrew, who "immediately...left their nets and followed" Jesus. Or how about James and John? Without hesitation, they abandoned their father, gave up their livelihood, and became the Lord's disciples. Do we have the courage to be so captured by Jesus as to undergo a radical change of heart now, at this moment? Imagine what that conversion would mean for ourselves, our families, our students, our community, and the world? The decisions of Simon, Andrew, James, and John have inspired others to act for the past 2,000 years and continue to do so today. We never know how far the ripples of our actions will widen.

Radical change requires radical force. Can we do it on our own? Of course not. The psalmist points to the way. We need to let God be our rock, our salvation, our mighty fortress. If God is our refuge, if we trust in God at all times, if we base our lives on God, we will not be shaken. It is, after all, God's kingdom that is at hand, and to prepare for that kingdom, to help bring it about now, we need God's grace.

Questions for the Week:

In what specific way is God calling you to change at this moment? How might your transformation serve as an inspiration for others?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for the mighty help of God to overcome your resistance to change and to lead you to immediate conversion.

This devotion was contributed by Joe McTighe, executive director of CAPE, the Council for American Private Education.

February 1, 2009: Fourth Sunday after Epiphany Thought for the Week: 1 Corinthians 8:1–13

“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.”

We all have experienced people impacting us either positively or negatively. Reflect for a moment on those who have positively influenced your life. What was it that made their interaction with you so encouraging?

As people bearing the name of Christ, this is an important question for us to get a handle on. In 1 Corinthians chapter 8, Paul makes it clear that Christians can have a hard time having a positive influence on the people around them. Sad, but true.

It seems that the key to all relationships and interactions is wrapped up in the word “love.” When the more mature Corinthian Christians were not being sensitive to the needs of their brothers, Paul understood that the motivation for their behavior was rooted in pride, not love.

To bear the name of Christ in a way that we impact others for good would mean that love drives our actions. Not love for our students, our job, or even our church, but love for the God who created us and sustains us. Not an easy task, but one that Christ modeled beautifully. Jesus’ deep and intimate love for his Father gave him the strength to do the hard stuff in life: love those who hated him, reach out to those who betrayed him, forgive those who hurt him. Jesus did not wield his power or knowledge in the faces of his weaker brothers and sisters; instead he treated all people with love and compassion.

Which, do you suppose, was most effective?

Questions for the Week:

How do you impact the people to whom you minister? In what ways can you be an example of a follower of Christ motivated by love for Him?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Examine yourself and ask God to show you where pride has invaded your heart and is damaging your witness...and, in fact, your relationship with God.

This devotion was contributed by Joyce Kortze, full-time home-schooling mom. Her husband, Donald, is the principal of Lutheran High School, Rockford, Illinois.

February 8, 2009: Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Thought for the Week: Mark 1:29–39

Walking with Jesus is quite an adventure! Just ask the disciples whose walk with him is described in the first chapter of Mark. These verses find the disciples accompanying Jesus on a journey of healing. As they travel, Jesus heals the sick, drives out demons, and preaches throughout Galilee. Because of his touch, people experience healing of body, mind, and spirit.

The disciples who walked also learned from Jesus that healing journeys require self-care. They were surprised that Jesus sought, and found, a quiet place for prayer and renewal even though he knew everyone was looking for him!

The greatest thing about walking with Jesus is that he is walking with us! He frees us, guides us, and encourages us to be his healing hands to others. And, he reminds us to take time to rest and refresh as our healing journey continues.

Questions for the Week:

Who will be touched by the healing hands of Christ through you today? Where and when do you find rest and renewal when everyone is looking for you?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God for the opportunities you have daily to be the healing hands of Jesus among the students, parents, and colleagues through your service as a Lutheran educator. Thank God for the people and situations that bring you needed rest and renewal as you walk with Jesus in service to others.

This devotion was contributed by Rick Herman, president of Wheat Ridge Ministries, Itasca, Illinois. Wheat Ridge Ministries is an organization that seeds new ministries of health and hope in the name of the healing Christ throughout the world. Rick served in Lutheran schools for many years as a teacher, principal, and judicatory executive.

February 15, 2009: Sixth Sunday after Epiphany Thought for the Week: Mark 1:40–45

Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him...

Mark 1:41

Due to a car accident that left him partially paralyzed, the young child used a wheelchair. It was interesting to note how people responded initially...some completely avoided him like he was contagious...others sent stares and curious looks...whispering questions as to what must have happened.

Inevitably it was the children who were able to speak openly. Sometimes they asked directly, “What happened to you?” Other times they wanted to know how fast he could go with wheels. These questions provided an openness that embraced fully who he was, with no need to pretend or feel left out.

Jesus’ encounter with the disabled man with leprosy is like those times—he brings into the open the diseased man...even the leper who was sent away, shunned by others, even his family. Jesus did not have to broach the issue. The leper recognized Jesus by reputation, and approached him saying, “If you choose, you can make me clean.” And the Lord did choose, and healed him.

That touch has been emphasized from the days of the written scripture. We know the power of touch from a psychological and physiological standpoint today yet healing does not always require a touch. What is deeper in healing is the relationship encounter that penetrates the isolation which has kept one apart. When a person experiences recognition, acceptance, value, from another...healing takes place.

As teachers, educators, pastors/administrators, we are modeling that healing touch...the acceptance, the recognition, the value in every human being, young and not so young, that we encounter throughout the day.

May we be vulnerable enough to ask the questions that create an openness. May we reach out and touch those around us setting the standard of pure acceptance and recognition to those of all abilities and challenges.

Question for the Week:

How will you model the healing touch of Jesus for your students and colleagues this week?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

O God, be with me as I touch the lives of so many in the course of the day. Give me patience and understanding that I might reach out and touch lives as you did...open to embrace those who need to be embraced, open to give acceptance to those who need to feel accepted and open to give recognition of value to those who long to have their presence recognized. Thank you for sending your children of all ages to be ministered to...Amen

This devotion was contributed by the Rev. Dr. Jean A. Zietlow, senior pastor and supervisor of the Early Learning Center, First Lutheran Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

February 22, 2009: Transfiguration of Our Lord Thought for the Week: I Corinthians 1:3–9

Sometimes I suspect that parts of the New Testament are transcripts of a comic stand-up routine. St. Paul actually tells me that, through Christ “...you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Good one! Not lacking? On any given day, I’m likely to run out of milk for the kids’ breakfast, lose my patience with the students, and unjustly take out my frustrations on my spouse. To be honest, that’s the nice version. How on earth can the Bible tell me that I’m not lacking?

...Because it’s true. God empowers all of us, strengthening us in truth and grace, regardless of our flaws. The Bible tells us—no joking—that we are called and gifted, for the long haul! Whether it’s the work we do for the Lutheran schools or the work we do for our families, Christ’s presence in our lives strengthens us and lights our paths. There are times when we must choose to set aside our feelings of inadequacy and trust that God has us in these ministries for good reasons. The challenge is to practice living in that truth and sharing that liberating news with others.

Questions for the Week:

Can you remember a time when you were aware of Christ’s presence, in strength and/or spiritual gifts? How can you help your students and colleagues walk with Jesus by remembering their own giftedness?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank you for your grace through Christ Jesus, which strengthens and empowers me. Allow me to live a life of witness to your goodness as I wait for your Son’s return.

This devotion was contributed by Patricia Morrow who may forget to buy milk for the kids, but she never forgets that it is a blessing to serve in Christian Education. She is a member of Trinity Lutheran Church and School in Kissimmee, Florida.

March 1, 2009: First Sunday in Lent

Thought for the Week: Genesis 9:8–17

“I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth...and all flesh that is upon the earth.” (vs. 13, 17b)

Without signs we would be in big trouble. “It just came out of nowhere,” we say, whenever we experience a sudden, destructive storm or the swift onset of a serious disease that appears without any warning sign. In the absence of signs, we can be caught off-guard, unaware, and left catching our breath as we adjust to the impact of a new reality.

Even though signs are critical to our well-being (you truly are wise to obey the STOP sign at that intersection!), learning to read and interpret signs accurately is also critical, especially learning to distinguish between true and false signs. One of the most important aspects of schooling is to learn to “read” the world accurately so that children can be liberated from the fears created by false reading of signs. “Oh, you mean that being over-weight is not a sign that I am a bad person?”

Schooling in the gospel saves us from false reading of signs about God and from the resulting worry and despair. Looking for signs? Feeling uncertain about God? The gospel frees us from uncertainty and searching. In Christ we can see that the world is filled with all the signs we need, from rainbows to the cross, to know God truly.

Questions for the Week:

Who has helped you understand the signs that point you to God’s love for you? What did they say or do?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Give thanks for the people who point to the signs of God in your life. Repent for your failure to trust in the cross as the sign of God’s undying love for you.

This devotion was contributed by Mark Wilhelm, associate executive director for Educational Partnerships and Institutions and director for Theology in Daily Life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Vocation and Education unit, Chicago, Illinois.

March 8, 2009: Second Sunday in Lent
Thought for the Week: Romans 4:18a, 20–21

Hoping against hope, [Abraham] believed that he would become “the father of many nations.”...No distrust made him waver concerning the promises of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what God had promised. Romans 4:18a; 20–21

What does “hoping against hope” mean to you? To me, it is keeping hope when the situation seems impossible. As teachers, it may be keeping hope for students that we are tempted to write off. We may or may not know of their messed-up family situations or other challenges that account for their disruptive behavior. We have tried all our sure-fire behavior modification plans and nothing seems to work. Yet we’re still called, like Abraham, to be “hoping against hope” for these students.

How do we do this? We cling to the sure-fire promises of God. We are “fully convinced” that we are precious, holy and beloved children of God; worthy of forgiveness and whatever it takes. The passage from Romans reminds us to not give up on our “hopeless” students, or on what seems hopeless in our own lives.

Question for the Week:

What are you “hoping against hope” to have happen for you or one of your students?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

God of Grace and Glory, use me to be a beacon of hope and share your promises even in the midst of seemingly “hopeless” situations. Convince me again that you are able to do what you have promised. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Pastor Sarah Breckenridge Schwietz, Chaplain, St. Andrew’s Academy, Mahtomedi, Minnesota.

March 15, 2009: Third Sunday in Lent Thought for the Week: Exodus 20:1–20

In one of the displays in the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C., is a sweater. The sweater was worn by a man named Fred Rogers, a seminary-trained Presbyterian pastor better known to many of us as “Mister Rogers.” In 1968 he began a television program. “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood” was a simple program. It had no flashy graphics. It moved slowly. Mister Rogers took time to tell stories in a way that children (and often adults, too) felt as if he were speaking personally to them. Mister Rogers treated his young audience with respect. He spoke in a quiet and reassuring manner about both life’s joys and challenges.

Years later when he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, Mister Rogers said “Fame is a four letter word...and what ultimately matters is what we do with it. I feel those of us in television are chosen to be servants. It doesn’t matter what our particular job. We have only one life to live on earth, and through television we have the choice of encouraging others to demean life or to cherish it, in creative and imaginative ways.”

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Moses was given the Ten Commandments by God. They were a gift for people then and for people now. They remain for every generation a way by which God’s people might also make sure that life is cherished and not demeaned. The moral guidance teachers provide (like Mister Rogers and you, too) has a long and rich history, doesn’t it?

Question for the Week:

Do you experience the Ten Commandments as confining rules or freeing guidelines?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray for moral leaders that you know personally and that are exemplary models for young people.

This devotion was contributed by Pastor Rich Ajer, assistant to the bishop, Pacifica Synod, and board member, Lutheran Schools of Southern California and Hawaii.

March 22, 2009: Fourth Sunday in Lent

Thought for the Week: John 3:14–21

It is possible that John 3:16 is the most recognized scripture verse today. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” A reason for this has to do with televised sporting events. At every major game for years, there was someone in the crowd who held up a sign saying, “John 3:16.” Without fail, the camera focused on him and the commentator made some humorous remarks. Why? Because the sign-holder wore a rainbow-colored wig, acted silly, and went by the name “Rockin’ Rollin’.” While watching a game, I asked a friend if he knew what “John 3:16” stood for; he replied, “I don’t have a clue, but that dude looks cool, and he gets into all the big games!” “Rockin’ Rollin’” must have had faith to publicly advertise scripture. However, the substance of his message was lost due to the focus on his attention-grabbing style. Many, like my friend, never moved beyond fascination with the wig to the meaning of the message on the sign.

Questions for the Week:

If a student asked you how a Christian gets into heaven (has eternal life), what would your answer be? Would it focus on outward style or inward substance?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Dear Lord, let our Lenten focus be not on the style of our worship, but on the substance of our faith, which is belief in Jesus Christ, the only Son of God.

This devotion was contributed by Dan Markel, headmaster, Lafayette Lutheran School, a mission of First Lutheran Church, Lafayette, Louisiana.

March 29, 2009: Fifth Sunday in Lent

Thought for the Week: Psalm 51:1-13

“Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” When I asked several of our preschoolers what this meant to them, they replied, “It means you take a bath,” and “You get your skin clean.” Their comprehension of this phrase was wholly in the physical realm because of their innocent hearts. A child cannot fathom a “dirty” heart. As adults, we have an entirely different perception because of our life experiences. Navigating through the difficult passages in life, we make choices at times that we live to regret. Sin can scar our minds and stain our hearts and ultimately holds us back from the fullness of God. As the psalmist cries out:

“Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.”

Is it possible for the layers of guilt and remorse to be peeled away so that we can walk in the newness of a right spirit and a clean heart with God? Yes, our forgiving Lord provides restoration. As much as the psalmist yearns to be forgiven and restored, even more is God’s desire for communication with us.

Jesus declares, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3). Observe the young children in your care. Children believe our words and trust us as their care providers. There is no room for guile or malice in a young child’s heart. We are called to be as children, to have faith in our God and Father, and rest in God’s loving care.

Question for the Week:

How can I begin again to see things through the eyes of a child?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray that God will restore to you a heart without malice; a heart full of love, humility, and trust in God’s care and faith in God’s Word. Ask God to restore to you the heart of a child.

This devotion was contributed by Lauribeth Lommen Roemer, who serves as the director of South Table Mountain Preschool, a ministry of Faith Lutheran Church in Golden, Colorado.

April 5, 2009: Sunday of the Passion/Palm Sunday

Thought for the Week: Isaiah 50:4–9

The Lord has taught me what to say. He makes me want to listen like a good student. Isaiah 50:4 (New International Reader's Version)

At an early age, many children are baptized, taught the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed and are introduced to the Bible. The words are there to follow like a good student. Parents, teachers, and pastors bring these words to tell what God wants for all children to follow. These words teach about the grace of God and the laws.

Children want rules. They need to know what is expected of them. Even though children sometimes resist what adults try to teach them, they need to hear the ways of God again and again. Children need to realize that they represent the teaching of God in their Christian living. The community looks at them to be models of God's ways. Ask for God's blessing throughout the day.

There are times that feel like it is hard to follow in the footsteps of God. There are temptations all around. The media reports what should be part of our lives, but rarely is God there. There are no want ads or sales promoting God. The prophets tell the story.

Inspired listeners hear the word of God out of the nation's past and through current happenings. God's gift to Israel was a prophet's voice to speak to the future. Following the message through the ages reveals servants of God. Let us not allow the news of today to destroy the power of the words spoken from ages past. Remember that God is near and knows the future for all people.

Questions for the Week:

What makes a good student? Does each student do his/her own work? Are the rules followed in and out of school? Are respect and responsibility part of everyday living? How does this translate into following God?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

God is near, I will keep on serving. God is near, help me in all that I do. God is near, forgive me for all the wrongs that I knowingly or unknowingly commit. I ask for your blessing.

This devotion was contributed by Sandy Kalin, principal, Bethel Lutheran School, St. Louis, Missouri.

April 12, 2009: Resurrection of Our Lord Thought for the Week: Mark 16:1–8

Close your eyes and picture Jesus alone in the garden. His friends have fallen asleep. He is alone, preparing to face a painful crucifixion. He will die an innocent man, be separated from his heavenly Father, and bear the agony of taking upon himself the punishment for the sins of all people of the world.

He will go where he shouldn't have to go, into the darkest of nights, the deepest of sorrows, the depths of the most intense emotion—hopelessness—so that the worst any mortal will ever face will not be beyond the range of his experience. No matter how deeply anyone may suffer, Christ is met there, for he has been there before us, and shows the way to the Father's resurrection beyond the suffering.

Jesus' response to the Father's call to suffer so that others might know hope is agonizingly clear: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39).

Jesus has spoken the ultimate prayer of trusting confidence in the Father. He gives us a pattern for our lives during this Easter season. When facing burdens or tasks that seem impossibly difficult we must look at them with trusting confidence. Our Father God is both the Source of life and the Destiny of life. We will be safe in God.

May you know this trusting confidence through the risen Savior, and make every morning an Easter morning from now on!

Questions for the Week:

What pattern will you choose for your life during this season of Easter?

Will you take up the challenge and make every morning an Easter morning from this day on?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Read or sing "Baptized in Water" *ELW* # 456 as your prayer for the week.

This devotion was contributed by Donna Braband, Director for Schools, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Chicago, Illinois.

April 19, 2009: Second Sunday of Easter Thought for the Week: John 20:19–31

Yesterday, I held Bryan, one of my fourth graders, in my arms. His grandmother had just passed away and he was looking to me for comfort. I hugged him and he wouldn't let go. As I held him I could see in my mind's eye a perfect picture of comfort—Jesus holding Grandma in his arms just as I held Bryan. Grandma nuzzled in close, eyes closed, drinking in the comfort. What a beautiful vision of comfort!

Just as children climb up into the lap of a parent or grandparent, we will one day climb into the arms of Jesus. As I pulled away from Bryan and looked him in the eyes, I reminded him that we *know* where Grandma is. He nodded. We know she is with Jesus and she is having the time of her life. Her pain is no more and she will be waiting for us to get there, too. He smiled. With his childlike faith, he knew her walk in faith led her to her final victory in Christ. Bryan didn't need to "see" where Grandma is, he KNOWS! He knows his heavenly Father holds his Grandma now and will hold him later. He doesn't need to see to believe; he just believes.

Thomas, in our text, didn't quite grasp this fact. He needed to see to believe. Bryan, on the other hand, is the one who is spoken of when the text says: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

Praise be to God that we, like Bryan, are blessed to believe and yet have not seen. May we continue to walk in this faith as we serve him. And may we all one day say, as we climb into Jesus' arms, "Hold me, Jesus." Amen.

Questions for the Week:

Why do you suppose we are a society that holds fast to the phrase "seeing is believing"? What does the phrase "childlike faith" mean to you?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank God that we are given many opportunities to learn from our students. Thank God that our children are equipped by God to witness to us, and ask that we, in turn, are given the strength to continue to cultivate the gift of witnessing in them.

This devotion was contributed by Cheryl Chuhran, Lutheran school teacher, Messiah Lutheran School, Fairview Park, Ohio. She teaches fourth grade and is an aspiring author.

April 26, 2009: Third Sunday of Easter

Thought for the Week: Luke 24:36–48

It began in Jerusalem. Tradition places the site of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, a minute's walk from the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, where the Palestinian Arab congregation, along with Danish-, German-, and English-speaking worshippers at the church, refer to the area as "Resurrection neighborhood." It began in Jerusalem, and Christians living in the Holy City have continued to witness to the reign of God proclaimed by our Lord, despite the fears and doubts caused by the upheavals of their turbulent history.

Jerusalem is still troubled and divided, but its dwindling and endangered number of Christians, the living stones of the Holy Land, continues to hope and pray that all who love this contested and beleaguered city will come to live out the belief that we are all beloved children of God. Because we know him, Christ calls us all to witness, not only here in Jerusalem, but throughout the world. Christ calls us to pray and work for the reign of reconciliation, peace, and justice he proclaims, for we are all citizens of a Holy Land, the Body of Christ. *As sala'amu aleykkum!* Peace be with you!

Questions for the Week:

1. Many American visitors to the Holy Land are surprised to learn there are Christians, and especially Lutheran Christians living in Jerusalem and Palestine. How can you use the resources of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land at the Web site www.elcjh.org to inform your students and staff of the Christian presence in the Holy Land and its problems?
2. How can we who work in the educational ministry of the ELCJHL help you in this objective?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Please pray and work for the peace and freedom of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah, and the rest of Palestine and for justice for all God's children, for we are all beloved.

This devotion was contributed by Sister Sylvia Countess of the Deaconess Community of the ELCA, serving with the ELCA Global Mission unit as assistant to the director of education, ELCJHL.

May 3, 2009: Fourth Sunday of Easter Thought for the Week: John 10:14-15

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

A staff member came into my office. “I just need to talk to you about next month’s theme. It’s very near and dear to my heart, and it’s so important that it be developmentally appropriate for our preschoolers.” The theme was *our green earth and how to care for it*, and she was adamant we not teach endangered animals using polar bears. There was credibility and passion in this former program developer of Chicago’s Brookfield Zoo. She cited David Sobel, co-chair of the education department at Antioch New England Graduate School; “... *children must learn to love something before they can save it*. So you start with the animals that are a part of a child’s everyday world; their pets, backyard rabbits, squirrels, birds.”

You have to love something before you can save it...

...just like God so loved the world that God saved it!! And that’s what Jesus is all about; God loving the world, knowing you and me so well that we can know God’s voice when we are called. God calls us out, and we can choose to follow, as loved sheep follow the loving shepherd.

Questions for the Week:

In all the people you touch, both students and staff, can you think of those that were especially difficult until you decided to love them in some way? Is there presently a relationship with a student, parent, or colleague that needs God’s love expressed through you where your lives intersect in your ministry.

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Ask God for a shepherd’s heart in your day-to-day work and also that you be reminded every now and then that you are also one of God’s sheep and therefore are kept in constant love and care.

This devotion was contributed by Sharon Koplinski, early childhood director, Celebration Children’s Center, Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church, Naperville, Illinois.

May 10, 2009: Fifth Sunday of Easter

Thought for the Week: Psalm 22:24–30

In the text for this week we see God reaching out to people in many situations and conditions—and not just a few select people, but everyone all over the world.

For humankind to reach to God for help seems ordinary, but God meeting us wherever we are is amazing. One way the gospel travels globally is by radio. God gave the winds a mighty voice through radio broadcasting.

The Lutheran worldwide radio ministry has been on the air since 1947. Until 2005 that programming was called, *Lutheran Vespers*. Now it is titled, *Grace Matters*. Those radio announcers are trained to think about their audiences as one person. Then, the listeners feel the radio personalities are talking directly to them. Think about your group or class as “One Person.” That way nobody will be left out—each person will feel included.

Questions for the Week:

What one common characteristic does your entire group share?

What is the important essence of your lesson?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Ask God for perception to see your group sharing a common need.

This devotion was contributed by Dr. Dwight Robinson, Renton, Washington. He is a retired broadcaster, teacher-trainer, and a children’s author at Cross and Crown Lutheran Church and Preschool.

May 17, 2009: Sixth Sunday of Easter

Thought for the Week: I John 5:2-3

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome for whatever is born of God conquers the world.

I bet this passage is gratifying for children. Not that they would use *that* term. Hmmm, most likely it would be considered a “cool” passage! After all, here, even adults are called “children of God.” And all of us have been given the same, clear, and simple task to obey God’s commandments. In this case, not the Ten Commandments but instead a compelling call to a lifestyle modeled by the way Jesus loved God and all God’s children.

This call to faithful discipleship is defined by two simple words, believe and love!

Children might also find it “cool” to know that adults don’t always have their act together in the midst of trying to respond to Christ’s call. Our journey of faithfulness is often marked with stretching, risking, stumbling, questioning, learning, seeking, regretting, growing, and emptying ourselves of those things that stand in the way of loving God and those in our homes, neighborhoods, and across the globe.

Questions for the Week:

What is your first recollection of being named as a child of God? In what ways are you helping your students claim that same identity?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray that the way you treat others is a reflection of your love for God. Ask God to help you overcome the roadblocks that stand in your way of following Christ’s call to discipleship.

This devotion was contributed by Diane Monroe, director for Christian Education, ELCA Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission unit.

May 24, 2009: Seventh Sunday of Easter
Thought for the Week: Psalm 1, 1 John 5:9-13

“Happy are those” is how the collection of Psalms begins.

The psalms are the hymns of the worshiping community. Singing praises or singing prayers of lament reaches deep within our souls. Singing comes from a level deeper than the voice box past the heart. Singing gives the body a state of calm, euphoria, release.

When we combine singing with words of comfort, happiness is in our souls. Happy are the righteous who sing praises to God.

When we sing praises God rules. “Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, ...but their delight is in the law of the Lord.” Psalm 1 compares the attitude of the righteous versus the wicked. What choice shall you make? Our attitude controls our life.

We tend to measure the good life with the number of happy times we can recall. Even during times of sadness favorite hymns remind us of God’s love. Even in death God rules when we sing “How Great Thou Art.” This hymn is a testimony that God is greater than death. At death we hear the promises of eternal life. “God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.” (1 John 5:11) A testimony that brings us happiness.

When we accept the attitude of love for God and others, happy are our lives.

Questions for the Week:

What makes you happy? Does knowing that faith in Jesus comes with a promise of eternal life make you happy?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Lord God, thank you for your gift of eternal life given to us through Jesus. Forgive us when we forget the promise made to us. Continue to provide witnesses of the faith who share with us the good news to make our hearts, minds, and souls happy. Hear our joyous prayer in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Marlane Druckenmiller, Associate in Ministry, Christian Education coordinator, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Douglassville, Pennsylvania. Ms. Marlane oversees the congregation's Child Development Center which includes Day Care, Pre-School, and Kindergarten Preparation programs.

May 31, 2009: Pentecost
Thought for the Week: John 16:7 and
Psalm 104:33

It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. John 16:7
I will sing to the Lord as long as I live. I will sing praises to my God while I have being. Psalm 104:33

We often observe our school children experiencing separation from home, their parents leaving them at school for the first time. No matter our knowledge of what is developmentally appropriate, those little children continue to miss their parents and their parents certainly think all day of how their children are doing at school.

This separation is necessary to allow something more to happen, a new maturity, a new learning, a new direction in life. So it is in our text and for us. Those that were walking with Jesus were told that they were to take a new path, that Jesus would leave and he would send the Holy Spirit to them.

Our Lord's departure should not cause anxiety. He leaves his disciples with the assurance that parents leave with their children. "I will still be with you. You will be in my thoughts and heart." It is a new way of walking. We continue to walk with Jesus connected by the Holy Spirit. He didn't leave but instead has empowered us to walk better on our own, the Holy Spirit guiding our steps and leading us to the right paths. With this fire in our hearts and on our tongues we fulfill the words of Psalm 104, singing to the Lord as long as we live.

Questions for the Week:

Do you walk with Jesus in a relationship fortified by the presence of the Holy Spirit? Have you given serious thought to what gifts of the Spirit you possess? Do you actively recognize and utilize these gifts of the Spirit in your everyday life of responsibilities with children? Do you remember your baptism and forgiveness every morning and open yourself to the embrace of the Spirit's guidance in your daily activities?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Good and gracious God, help me this day to see the purpose of your steps diverging from my own for the purpose of allowing me, through the Holy Spirit, to walk with new confidence down new paths for your sake and in your name. I know you keep me in your heart until I come fully into your presence. Until then, I praise you while I have my being. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Alan Feddersen, executive director, Lutheran Schools of Southern California and Hawaii. Alan served Lutheran schools for forty years through teaching and administration in California, Hong Kong, Ohio, and Illinois.

**June 7, 2009: The Holy Trinity/First Sunday
after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Isaiah 6:1–8**

The spoken word is powerful! In the beginning, God's words brought forth life where previously only darkness existed. God's word has power and as people created in God's image, our words have power too. But the mouth that speaks a blessing can also destroy, because unlike God we struggle with "holiness." Before Isaiah was called to be a prophet to God's people, he had a life-altering encounter with the God he served. Isaiah was allowed to see God in all of God's glory and as he experienced the Lord's holiness, Isaiah's own sin was magnified! As he saw the Lord seated on the throne, Isaiah cried out "Woe is me! I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips." In that moment, Isaiah saw that his voice needed purification. As he confessed his need, God provided! After the fiery coal touched his lips, Isaiah humbly responded to God's call to serve.

Like Isaiah, we too have been called by God to use our voices to bless and guide others. So, how are you using your voice? Have your words blessed lives or have you allowed your words to destroy? Like Isaiah, we must recognize our need for holiness. But we can experience our cleansing through the blood that Jesus has already shed for us. With cleansed lips we too can bring forth life where previously there was darkness. Is there someone you know who longs to hear your powerful words speak a life-giving message of hope?

Questions for the Week:

Think of a time that someone used their voice to destroy something in you. Pray that they would know the power of their words and then ask God for help as you forgive them. Now think of a time your words may have hurt someone. Is God calling you to be cleansed like Isaiah and to seek forgiveness? Ask God to show you how so that you can serve with clean lips and a pure heart.

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Thank you, God, that you are holy and allow us to become holy through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Inspire us as we serve with our voices so our words bring forth life and share hope, in Jesus' name. We pray that you would show us when our voices do not reflect your heart and ask that you lead us to repentance so we can serve you with our whole lives.

This devotion was contributed by Muffie Namie, director, Sammamish Hills Lutheran Preschool, Sammamish, Washington.

June 14, 2009: Second Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Mark 4:26–34

Although it has been more than ten years since we worked together on a daily basis, I was recently invited to attend a retirement party for a dear friend. What a joyous occasion it was! In addition to her family, there were more than seventy current and former coworkers who attended the afternoon event filled with food, fun, stories, and lots of laughter. At some point during the afternoon, I realized there were people of all ages at the event. Her grandchildren and her colleagues' children (many under the age of ten) shared their stories about the candy jar on her desk and how she always remembered their birthdays. Current coworkers in their twenties and thirties asked her to visit them and bring her famous taco salad and rum cake for all to share. A group of us in our forties, fifties, and sixties discussed how we could always depend on her to get any job done with grace and a smile; we shared stories of what she had taught us when we worked together. Then there was the over seventy crowd who shared tales of when she first began working with them and what a difference she had made in their lives.

Several weeks before the party, she told me she would be thrilled if twenty people showed up. I guess this unassuming friend of mine didn't realize how many tiny seeds she had planted in so many lives and what a huge difference she makes to so many!

Questions for the Week:

Who planted seeds, especially the seeds of faith, in your life? What kind of seeds, especially the seeds of faith, have you planted recently?

Personal Prayers for the Week:

Thank God for the teachers, parents, and others who planted seeds in your life; praise God for the lives of the children you teach each day and ask God to help you plant seeds of faith in each of their lives.

This devotion was contributed by Rebecca Pebbles Cloninger, Augsburg Fortress Publishers, Salisbury, North Carolina. She also serves on the Board of Directors, Hope Lutheran School, Gastonia, North Carolina.

June 21, 2009: Third Sunday after Pentecost Thought for the Week: Mark 4:35–41

...He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"...

When my son was little, he, like most little boys, loved dinosaurs. Our house was filled with dinosaur books, videos and the little plastic creatures were everywhere. Living in the Seattle area, I was thrilled to learn that the Pacific Science Center was bringing the Dinosaur Exhibit where one could get up close and personal with life-size replicas of T-Rex, Stegasaurus, Ankylosaur, Brontosaurus and the rest of the prehistoric gang. Of course, I played up our upcoming visit to the hilt. Being a single mom without a lot of financial resources, a trip to the Science Center was worth a lot of mileage with a three-year-old.

He was excited. He was ready. He wanted to see the dinosaurs. He wanted to hear them roar. So we arrived full of anticipation, and within 20 seconds Joshua had crawled up my entire body and was clinging to my neck screaming, "I'm scared!!!!!" (Only his three-year-old pronunciation was more like, "I'm squeered!")

Scared? The thought had not even occurred to me. And there was no calming this child down. The 30-mile drive and the over-priced entrance fees were in vain. We had to find the nearest exit and leave before the panic became epidemic with every other preschooler in the place.

When we finally reached the car and I got him to stop hyperventilating, he wanted answers. Trying to explain that the dinosaurs were just pretend didn't cut it. Joshua wanted to know why God made things that are so scary. Trying to explain that dinosaurs didn't live on earth at the same time that people did didn't cut it either. Finally, the only thing I could think to do was to pray. And pray we did. I was ready to leave and drive home when he decided he wanted to go back in and see the scary beasts—this time having faith that Jesus would be with him and would keep him safe.

In some ways the visit was a great success—my three-year-old (and his mother) learned the power of prayer. God is so mighty that even the dinosaurs...and the storm...can be tamed.

Questions for the Week:

What storms are the children in our classrooms afraid of? Are we helping them learn the power of prayer to calm the storms? What storms are we afraid of in our own lives?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

We thank God for calming our storms and being by our side through the scary times of life.

This devotion was contributed by Gayle Denny, executive director of the Evangelical Lutheran Education Association, Goodyear, Arizona.

June 28, 2009: Fourth Sunday after Pentecost Thought for the Week: Mark 5:21–43; Psalm 30

Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning. Psalm 30:5b

How many tears we see on our children's faces—old and young, at recess, after school, in the morning when Mom or Dad leaves, at night when not ready to leave school to go home! How many tears we feel in our hearts as teachers and administrators! “If only this child could have a better home life,” or “If only I could communicate better with the teacher in that room,” or “If only little ____ could learn to read/to share/to control her anger,” and on and on.

In the “whole story” from Mark's Gospel, there was weeping: weeping of parents for a twelve-year-old child's death and weeping of a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. Death and illness made these people lost to their community, to their families. Jesus healed the woman and restored the girl to life! The men in their lives were healed as well. The weeping had threatened to linger, but joy came from Jesus' intervention.

Each new morning and each new school day God gives us a new chance for joy and healing.

That's the mission of our schools and child-care centers! We may not print it on our letterheads. We have educational and social goals to proclaim. But God's work in our schools and centers is LIFE and HEALING. And God's Life and Healing restore students, teachers, and administrators to community and family.

God grant this for your school or center and for YOU. For Jesus' sake.

Questions for the Week:

How does your school/center restore life and heal? How can you facilitate God's work of healing? What brought you joy this morning?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Ask God to heal you and give you abundant life and joy so that you may share that life and wholeness with those with whom you work: both children and adults!

This devotion was contributed by Pastor Beth Orling, formerly of St. John Lutheran Church, Westville, New Jersey, home of St. John Child Care Center.

July 5, 2009: Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Mark 6:1–13

Hooray! It's a holiday weekend. School is out for the summer. Early Childhood Centers switch to a summer routine with teachers taking time for vacation. Summer is a time to rest, relax, and rejuvenate.

Yet our ministry to God's children is ongoing. In the Gospel for the day, Jesus sends out the disciples in mission. Their journeys are to be marked by simplicity and directness, proclaiming the message they themselves had heard Jesus preach (Mark 6:8–9).

When Jesus sends his disciples out to teach and to heal, he knows better than to send them out alone. Ministry is not without risk. After all, people from his own town, those who knew him from childhood, took offense at his teaching (Mark 6:3).

So Jesus wisely sends his disciples out in pairs, surely companionship for the journey, but just as importantly, for safety in numbers. As believers we see the world as it is, a place sorely in need of the transforming love of God, and we resolve to go wherever that love is needed. In your case, at the Lutheran school or center you are serving.

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You too are not sent out alone. Your fellow teachers and colleagues provide you with support, companionship, and an opportunity to share the joys and sorrows of ministry. What joy there is in sharing a teaching success—what comfort in knowing that you have someone to go to for comfort and understanding. As you feel blessed serving on a staff, know that you are a blessing to those you serve with.

As teachers and administrators in our Lutheran schools and centers, being anointed with the Spirit in baptism and affirming your priesthood during your journey of faith, you need to pledge to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed.

Question for the Week:

Who have been true companions and mentors in your teaching ministry?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

God of glory and love, peace comes from you alone. Send us as peacemakers and witnesses to your kingdom, and fill our hearts with joy in your promises of salvation; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

This devotion was contributed by Robert Federwitz, ELCA Director for Schools, 2002–2004. Bob has served Lutheran schools for 40 years and in retirement serves as manager of Palos Verdes Shores Mobile Home Estates in San Pedro, California.

July 12, 2009: Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the week: You are marked with the cross of Christ forever.

They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them. (Mark 6:13)

...the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword. (Amos 7:7)

God has made known to us...set forth in Christ, a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth... In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 1:9,13)

In Mark's Gospel Jesus has authorized his disciples to cast out demons and cure the sick. He has asked his disciples to walk in his shoes. They returned to him excited about their ministry. Amos is thrown out of Israel by the king's priest for prophesying that the king and Israel are doomed for lack of passionate commitment to God's initiatives. *God's work, our hands.*

As your walk with students, families, and colleagues leads you down paths that twist and turn, it is well to remember these bits of scripture; walking with Jesus is a journey into the unknown. But as the author of Ephesians gushes it is a journey flooded with spiritual blessings. Being marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit is a mark of inheritance – of a kind of protection that assures us through an unknown journey that in the end, we will be redeemed with all creation. Therefore, make no small plans. Fear no journey!

Question for the Week:

Can you walk with abandon?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Creator God, Redeeming God: we give you thanks for the breath of life that frees us to walk boldly with Jesus the Christ.

This devotion was contributed by Kathie Baker, support staff, ELCA Vocation & Education unit, Chicago, Illinois.

July 19, 2009: Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: Psalm 23

“He leads me in right paths for His name sake.” Ps. 23:4b

As we lead our children in our centers and schools we are leading them on the Lord’s path. Teaching them a way to walk with God for all of their lives.

As I reflect on the way the Lord was leading me in my life I feel like I’ve been taken by the hand and gently led each day by my Lord.

When my mother passed away I had just turned five. My dad asked the neighbor that had come over to help my mother if she would take care of me. I grew and was nourish in the faith through her Christ-like care until I went to college.

From her convincing my father to have me baptized at the age of six, to walking me to and from the Lutheran school (two miles) during my first grade, she was a sacrificing Christian walking with Jesus.

The eight years I spent in First Lutheran School was God leading me on the right paths. As I continued through school I always knew God was leading me.

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Sometimes our paths lead into temptation, grave danger and sin. The devil is always trying to get us to follow his path instead. No matter how many times we choose the wrong way Jesus is always there reaching out to lead us back on the right path.

Walking with Jesus on the right path will lead us home to live with Jesus forever.

Questions for the Week:

Where is the Lord leading you? Are you willing to follow God? Be assured that if you are walking with Jesus you are on the right path.

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Pray that the Lord will guide and direct you on the right path so that you can lead God’s children to know the right path also.

This devotion was contributed by Marge Robison, retired early childhood center director, elementary school principal, teacher and Evangelical Lutheran Education Association Region 4 representative, Austin, Texas.

July 26, 2009: Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Thought for the Week: John 6:1-21

Sometimes, there just doesn't seem to be enough, does there? Not enough time, enough energy, enough help, enough money.

In this week's scripture, there's not enough food. What were these people thinking, following Jesus out into the mountains with apparently no consideration for what they would eat later in the day? What was so compelling about Jesus that thousands of people would drop everything and, without planning for future needs, follow him far from their homes?

When the issue of hunger does arise, only one person—a child—is prepared. I have to wonder... if the person with a few loaves and fish had been an adult, would he or she have offered what little they had to the crowd? I imagine many adults would decide that, since they did not have nearly enough to feed the group, they might as well keep it for themselves. Even Jesus' disciple, Andrew, comments that five loaves and two fish are insignificant in this situation.

But the child comes forward and offers the meal to be used by Jesus. And when Jesus gives thanks for the food and distributes it, it becomes enough. Actually, it becomes more than enough, with leftovers to be collected!

What small amount of time, energy, help, or money do we have? Do we decide it's not enough to make a difference, and keep it to ourselves? Or do we thankfully offer it to God for blessing and use, and find that in God's hands it becomes more than enough?

Questions for the Week:

What do the children in our schools bring to share? How do we respond?

Personal Prayer for the Week:

Lord, bless what we offer to you and open our eyes to your desire to provide more than just enough.

This devotion was contributed by Julie M. Young, board member, Good Shepherd's Little Friends Preschool, Polson, Montana.

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