

WHAT IS WHOLENESS? Wednesday, February 17

“Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.” Joel 2:13

What exactly is wholeness? While the Lent intent is often personal, the result is often communal. We start Lent hearing the words, “remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” These words return us to our beginning, when God-breathed dust. What came next was God’s people. Beloved. Perhaps the question isn’t, “What IS wholeness?” But, “Wholeness for whom?” God, of course. The prophet Joel names our God’s love. As God’s people, we are whole and wholly God’s with all our flaws. And it is good. Not just as individuals, but as people of faith, the Body of Christ. Thanks be to God.

Gracious God, we think about ourselves. A lot. Challenge us, as we see the ashen cross on our own foreheads, to see the image of you, our God, in the face of our neighbors. Amen.

Pr. Josh Toufar, Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd

THE ULTIMATE TEACHER Thursday, February 18

“Lead me by your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation.” Psalm 25:5a

I loved being a teacher. While teaching young students can be stressful and exhausting at times, it is also a time of great joy and fulfillment. Most days, patience fell out of me like a gentle rain onto my students, but there were also times when it was sorely lacking. Fortunately, my students never gave up on me and I continued to respect and care for them as their primary source of guidance in their learning. If only we could all cherish our time as lifelong students in God’s classroom, continually seeking the wisdom, counsel, and truth that is offered. God has an abundance of patience, so even when we fail, we can forge ahead, knowing that God’s unending love and forgiveness will lead to the ultimate gift of grace.

Loving God, in our journey through life, open our hearts and minds to you as we seek your guidance and truth. Amen.

Lynn Fering, Spirit Lutheran Church

PARENTHOOD Friday, February 19

“The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Philippians 4:5,6

As an obstetrician I am honored to be present at the most joyful of all occasions, a child’s birth. God is at work in these moments and there is much joy all around. But with this joy inevitably comes some anxieties and as a parent I can attest that they remain well into the child’s teen years. The journey of parenthood is filled with many ups and downs. Here too God is at work as we usher our children towards a fulfilling life. Often in our parenting when the children have worries we say, “Let go and let God.” Upon looking back at many of these moments, they have been the times when we have experienced the comfort of being guided.

Dear God, may we turn to you in all times of joy, sorrow and anxiousness for you comfort us and make us whole. Amen

Dr. Frank LoRusso, Immanuel Lutheran Church

HOPE AND ACCEPTANCE Saturday, February 20

“... surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” Jeremiah 29:11

As a kid growing up, I always knew my feelings were not the same as most, though I wanted to fit in. As an adult, I took up running. I was running from myself. No matter how far I ran, I felt stuck. I honestly planned to end my life. I was exhausted deep down in my bones. Then, a person came into my life, quickly becoming my friend and it felt as if we had always known each other. This brave person has strong faith and a wonderful relationship with God. My friend opened my eyes, helping me understand that God loves me and accepts me the way I was created. God does not make mistakes. God wants me to love and be loved completely.

Thank you, God, for watching out for my welfare. Amen

Erica Kajer, Hope Lutheran Church

Journey Toward Wholeness—Eau Claire ELCA Lenten Devotions 2021

GRACE OF GOD: THE GIFT OF SALVATION Monday, February 22

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9

A gift is given because of the generosity of the giver. A gift becomes yours when you take it as your own. Our salvation is a gift of God’s grace through faith—not works. We are sinners who need a Savior and are only saved by the grace of God—not by the good we do. We put our faith in Jesus our Redeemer who brings us into relationship with our Creator.

However, Paul did not stop there, “We are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life” (v. 10). As God’s children we are transformed—in response to God’s gift of grace, we do God’s work in the world.

O God open our hearts that we might recognize your grace and love and respond to your Spirit’s prompts that your grace might shine through us this day. Amen.

Mary Toufar, Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd

EXTREME BLESSING Tuesday, February 23

“Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called, that you might inherit a blessing.” 1 Peter 3:9

Prayer, fasting, and caring for the poor are traditional Lenten practices, but putting our faith in action for the neighbor is not restricted to one season. Blessing is another spiritual practice that our world could use more of—not just the formal blessing at the end of worship, but everyday kindness that reminds us of God’s presence among us. Responding to evil with blessing is an extreme request—can we bring a word of grace even in the midst of danger? Blessing is one of those things that grows the more you give it away—as we give God’s goodness to others, we experience the goodness of God ourselves.

God of grace, teach us to be grace that blesses others. Amen.

Pr. Lori Ruge-Jones, University Lutheran Church

Journey Toward Wholeness—Eau Claire ELCA Lenten Devotions 2021

LEAD, KINDLY LIGHT Wednesday, February 24

Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also. Psalm 31:9

The disciples went from shouting "Hosanna" on Sunday to mourning the loss of their teacher and friend a few days later. Moments like these are a cornerstone of our humanity. Regardless of race, gender, or creed, we all experience them. As Christians, we are called to comfort the sick and afflicted. The world needs our love and grace now more than ever. Shine the light of Jesus; the world that needs a light in the darkness. Hear the words of John Henry Newman, "Lead, kindly Light, amid th'encircling gloom; Lead thou me on! The night is dark, and I am far from home; Lead thou me on! Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see the distant scene—one step enough for me."

Lord Christ, Light of the World, lead us on and grant us peace. Amen.

Mike Henry, Street Pastor, Chippewa Valley Street Ministry

BELONGING Thursday, February 25

“I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Jeremiah 31:33b

Belonging. . . During these COVID-19 times, with the need to practice social distancing, we may no longer feel a sense of belonging. That sense of belonging that is felt when we are in the physical presence of other human beings—family, friends, classmates, and co-workers is an important part of our well-being, our wholeness.

Through a new covenant that God made with God’s people, *you* belong to God. Belonging to God means *you* are unconditionally loved and forgiven by God. “. . . I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more” (Jeremiah 34:34b). God’s memory of your sins is wiped away! And, through this love and forgiveness, fulfilled by the death and resurrection of Jesus, *you* are made well; *you* are made whole.

Gracious God, we belong to you and to each other. Help me to be an example of your love and forgiveness in the world. Amen.

Geri Long, Grace Lutheran Church

NATURE'S GIFT

Friday, February 26

“The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork.” Psalm 19:1

Aren't we blessed to live on such a beautiful planet? Not a day goes by that I don't lift up deep thanks to God for the beauty of our earthly home. Nature plays a significant role in my Journey toward Wholeness. I marvel at nature's diversity and the interconnectedness of its various ecosystems. It's important to me to be outside at some point each and every day. Being in nature restores our souls and ties us together with all living things. It also bears witness to the imaginative wisdom of our creator who has brought and continues to bring all things into being.

Thank you, God, for this beautiful earth we call our home. Enliven within us an ardent desire to be faithful stewards of our planet and all its creatures and plants and ecosystems. May we protect and sustain all natural life so that generations to come may revel in your handiwork.

Pr. Mary Erickson, Hope Lutheran Church

WHOLENESS IN DIVISIVE TIMES Saturday, February 27

“Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your unfailing love.” Psalms 31:16

This year has been a test of emotional and mental strength. Many of us haven't felt whole in some time. Families and friendships have become fractured. We are increasingly detached from our own bodies and selves. While we account the online world for many of these problems, we also find benefits from new online platforms. I'm grateful for a group of women from Immanuel using ZOOM for a book study to reconnect with each other and ourselves. The book, *My Grandmother's Hands* by Resmaa Menaken, uses simple meditation and body practices to help us understand how our bodies store and manifest trauma (racial or otherwise). By reconnecting with our bodies, we can work to heal ourselves, leading to the rebuilding of families and friendships wounded during these trying times.

Dear Lord, help us to be role models of peace and kindness. Help create unity between people divided and help those most damaged to find resources to heal. Amen

Holli Jacobson, Immanuel Lutheran Church

GRACE AND GUILT

Monday, March 1

“Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity ... and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” Psalm 32:5

Dogs are great with admitting guilt and accepting grace. When my Luna was a puppy, she always knew when she had done something she wasn't supposed to. She would point out her misbehavior: a sheepish look, a lowered head, sitting right next to the destroyed shoe. After five minutes of complete guilt, Luna would come to me tail wagging and playful.

We could learn something from Luna about guilt and grace, especially grace. Grace is harder than we think because saying is not believing. Grace needs to be revealed over and over again. So, hear these words: God forgives you—through Jesus Christ who died to make forgiveness possible. God forgives *you*, whether you believe it today or not.

Prayer: God of grace, help me to know that I am forgiven, really forgiven, and that frees me to follow you. Amen.

Pr. Christine Emerson, St. John's Lutheran Church

INTERCONNECTED

Tuesday, March 2

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.” 1 Corinthians 12:12

Redwood trees are some of the tallest in the world and can withstand almost any weather condition. One might think their roots grow deep to survive, but not so. Interestingly, their roots are relatively shallow. They often only go down about five or six feet but can extend as far as one hundred feet from the trunk connecting themselves to other root systems to hold one another up. That is who we are called to be as the church—interconnected. We were created to be a people who exist in community, to help one another out, to use each of our gifts for the betterment of all. We are called to be the body of Christ; we are called to be the church together.

Grant us open hearts and minds, O God, to see that we are all members of equal value to your kin-dom. Amen.

Pr. Tom Westcott, Trinity Lutheran Church

Journey Toward Wholeness—Eau Claire ELCA Lenten Devotions 2021

GOD’S PRESENCE, HERE, NOW Wednesday, March 3

“Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.”
Matthew 4:11

How appropriate, as a teacher I have been assigned a passage about tests. The devil tests Jesus with savory food, high mountain settings, and indulgent riches. It’s a memorable story in the Bible with its chief protagonist. But tests are not always so overt; some of the tests we face every day remain surprisingly subtle. In our world where social distancing and isolation are now common, it’s tempting (and human) to feel worn out, a bit out of tune, and scarce of faith. However, this passage is more of a reassurance in how in trying times we are far from alone. Whether it be a revisitation of a cherished reading, a welcome conversation over Zoom, or the simple pleasure of watching the snow fall softly outside your window, God’s presence and glory is right here.

Dear Lord, thank you for the sound of your voice and the comfort of your company. Dr. Blake Westerlund, University Lutheran Church

LOOK UP CHILD Thursday, March 4

“... Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.” Psalm 121:1, 2

Look up, child! When life gets too much for ostriches, they place their head in the sand. They do this out of fear and hope that whatever is frightening will pass by. Not sure that works with lions when they come upon them. We too tend to do this. When things get to be too much, we find ways to deflect, or numb out our minds. We play on our phones, shop, or try to focus on something else. In Psalm 121 we hear from the psalmist that his help comes from God. We are to look up and keep our focus on God, this God who is the creator of the cosmos, our God who loves us so much. That God sent God’s Son, Jesus, so that you can know just how loved you are. If this God, our God, can speak light into being, then how much more will our God give you help? So, look up child, God’s got this!

God who has us all, help us to look up to you and not put our head in the sand when life is too much. Thank you for your love for us! Amen
Jennifer Hatleli, Seminarian at Luther Seminary

Journey Toward Wholeness—Eau Claire ELCA Lenten Devotions 2021

TREASURES Friday, March 5

“...where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6: 21

We worry much about our treasure: we save for college, for home down payment, for retirement, for a rainy day. We worry much about our security, even when Jesus goes on to tell us not worry about being fed, sheltered, clothed. I often see non-profit organizations and colleges using a wider definition of treasure. In those settings we are asked to use our wisdom, work, and wealth to accomplish the mission. All gifts are to be deployed. I recall seeing a young pastor borrow money to fulfill a pledge to accomplish the church’s mission. We hear of the good Samaritan helping the stranger. The righteous ask, “Lord when did we see you hungry or thirsty and give you food and drink?” Jesus’ responds, “When you did it to one of the least.”

Lord, we worry much about ourselves. Open us to use the gifts of our time, talent and treasure to love our neighbors and your creation. Amen
Mitch Piper, Grace Lutheran Church

WAITING Saturday, March 6

“The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.” (Leviticus 19:34, NIV)

All of us have been the outsider or foreigner at some time in our lives. Were you the new kid in school, the new employee, a new member of the congregation, the only person of color in a sea of white, the only person who couldn’t understand the language of the people around you? We currently have an opportunity to show love and support for those who have fled violence and poverty in search of a better future. We can welcome and accompany these outsiders, especially children, by providing protection, advocacy, representation and opportunities. How can we fulfill the command in Leviticus to love foreigners as we love ourselves? They are waiting.

Creator, help us to listen and respond as you would have us do to cries of injustice and suffering by our sisters and brothers in Christ. Amen
Debrah Adams, Hope Lutheran Church

WHAT KIND OF GOD DO YOU WANT? Monday, March 8

“I am the Lord your God... You shall have no other gods before Me.”
Exodus 20:2-3

When we reflect on our prayer life, the title’s question is answered. Too often, we regard God as our personal butler, using God as a means of obtaining things that we want. Carefully listen to your own prayers. What do you hear? Often, we pray for things like our health, wealth, happiness. We ask that our 401(k)s do not diminish in value and that our kids and grandkids are kept safe. Most often, our prayers are our way of telling God what to do to make us happy. Are you using God like Amazon, ordering things in prayer and expecting God to deliver overnight? Learn from Jesus’ prayer, “That they all may be one. As you, Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me.” (John 17:21)

Father in heaven, please help to restrain me from telling you what you should do and simply to report for duty. In your name. Amen.

Thomas Kent Guelzow, Spirit Lutheran Church

CONTINUOUS CREATION Tuesday, March 9

“For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth.” Isaiah 65:17

God kept creating after Genesis 2. God says to the exiled people, “I’m still creating.” Frustrated, shamed, remorseful, without hope, they wondered if this was true. In 12-step Recovery programs, many suffer from emotional frustration, shame, hurt, and are longing for a new life. We found ourselves hitting rock bottom and could not believe that new creation was possible. Yet our Higher Power began to restore our lives to sanity. As we turned our will and lives over to God, God did for us what we could not do for ourselves. God began new creation. Just as God brought the exiles home, so in Jesus’ death and resurrection God brings new creation to the world. God hit rock bottom for us, so that we might be a new creation.

God of new life and new beginnings, work in your people anew. Work in me anew. May we all experience your delight in our lives. Amen.

Rev. Eric Nielsen, St. John’s Lutheran Church

AM I ENOUGH? Wednesday, March 10

“My teaching is not mine but his who sent me.” John 7:16

Have you ever been volun-told that you were going to be a leader at church? Maybe you were semi-forced to teach a Vacation Bible School class or be a confirmation mentor. Maybe you were guilted into serving on your congregational council. Perhaps someone strongly suggested that you should lead a bible study. What was your reaction? I can imagine something like, “What!?! I’m not qualified for that!”

In this passage from John’s gospel, Jesus reminds the temple authorities that his authority doesn’t come from him, but from God. In the same way, we know that we can count on the Holy Spirit to assist us when we are in positions of leadership in the church. Being qualified doesn’t have to mean having an advanced degree. It might just mean being humble enough to ask God for help and guidance.

Guiding God, fill us with your Spirit and help us to seek for your counsel in all that we do. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Heather Day, Trinity Lutheran Church

WHERE THERE IS LOVE, THERE IS LIFE Thursday, March 11

“Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.” 1 John 4:11

What if we heard God’s call to love and truly met that challenge? What if when we say “all are welcome here”, we not only accept all people, but we celebrate their stories and missteps, their divine and precious flaws? As a Queer believer, I’ve had scripture weaponized against me and felt unwelcome in Christian spaces. I’ve also felt held and seen by my church community, and I’ve never doubted my Creator’s love for me. God is urging us towards radical love, and sometimes, amidst the toothy smiles, good intentions, and rainbow flags, we forget love is intentional. It requires acknowledging when we’ve failed, planning to do better, and meeting people where they’re at. The more love we infuse into our quest for understanding, the more God shows up *for* us and *in* us.

Dear Creator, when we are hungry for community care, please replenish us, for each ensuing moment of joy is a gift from you. Amen

Katy Hackworthy (she/hers), University Lutheran Church Alumna ‘17

Journey Toward Wholeness—Eau Claire ELCA Lenten Devotions 2021

LISTENING TO GOD

Friday, March 12

“For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. O that today you would listen to his voice!” Psalm 95:7

My wife turns from the television to me, “Are you listening?” My focus elsewhere, I’m not ready to listen to what she eagerly shares. God is eager for us to hear all God has to tell us. Often we are not ready to listen. Too many other voices drown out the voice of God. The loudest voice of all is our own shouting, “What about me?”

God wants for us what we want for ourselves: love, happiness, joy, meaning and purpose, adventure and peace. We work so hard to gain all these things for ourselves. If only we would listen to God! These are not rewards to be gained by our own striving, but rather, gifts from God, given and received by grace through faith.

Lord, help us to listen to your voice, for in your words are truth and life!
Rev. John Hosmann, The Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd

BE PRESENT

Saturday, March 13

“Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” Galatians 6:2

We get wrapped up in our own personal challenges, unaware of the suffering of our fellow human beings. Perhaps we do not understand the healing power of being present for one another during life’s hardships.

Relationship trouble, financial woes, poor health, and legal challenges are problems we have all faced. The opportunity to share our most trying experiences becomes a precious gift we give by being present during the suffering of others. God is calling us to be present and to lessen the suffering of the people in our lives, family, friends, community, and world. Our nonjudgmental companionship with another person during their hardship can result in the lessening of their despair. In this way we are following the Law of Christ, to love one another as God has loved us.

Thank you for opening our eyes and hearts to others’ suffering. Give us strength to bear their burdens without judgment. In Jesus’ name. Amen
Cindy Bowe, Member of Grace Lutheran

Journey Toward Wholeness—Eau Claire ELCA Lenten Devotions 2021

FINDING SOLACE IN PRAYER

Monday, March 15

But now more than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad; many crowds would gather to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray. Luke 5:15-16

This Lenten season, I am reminded of how loud the world has become since last season. Through a pandemic that has swept the globe, taking more lives quicker than anyone imagined, political campaigns that burned through television screens, and racial tension that rose to new heights of violence. The only way I was able to find God, was to physically go out and seek God. One place I have visited frequently in the past year was a small park in town that is filled with small hiking trails that twist and turn through deep forests. When the world became too loud, I slipped away into my own form of wilderness to pray.

Lord, When the world becomes loud and I feel overwhelmed, help me to find you in nature to pray. Amen.

Brittney Evergreen, Immanuel Lutheran Church

WHAT WE NEED NOW

Tuesday, March 16

“I appeal to you, brothers, and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.” 1 Corinthians 1:10

We, as individuals, as a church community, and as a nation, need to take the time to be compassionate, to respect one another, and to be understanding of others. I feel so often that we forget to put ourselves in the shoes of others. Whether it is the pandemic, our political views, or even if it is simply our personal preferences, if we all work together, and continue to respect the opinions of others, striving to find a consensus in our understandings of one another, we can overcome all challenges.

Dear God, we ask for your guidance to let us take the time and patience to listen to one another and work together for the common good of our church, our community, our nation. Amen

Dan Market, Spirit Lutheran Church

Journey Toward Wholeness—Eau Claire ELCA Lenten Devotions 2021

SPEAKING THE TRUTH

Wednesday, March 17

“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink.” John 7:37

Jesus and his people were celebrating the Festival of Tabernacles. It marked God's provision of water in the wilderness and the annual harvest. Throughout the eight day festival, Jesus kept a low profile because his teachings had become controversial, especially when he broke the law and healed on the Sabbath. However, on the festival's last day, Jesus loses constraint and speaks the truth quoted above. Jesus' bold claim of being the new provision of water from the new living God shocked many. I'd have looked skeptically at Jesus, thinking, “Well, we'll just have to see about that.” Yet, I want to witness like Jesus, moved by the Holy Spirit and crying out the truth loudly.

Heavenly Father, Help me to listen as the Holy Spirit guides my thoughts, words, and actions. May I feel the joy of your presence in my daily life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Rozanna Bejin, St. John's Lutheran Church

SOURCES OF HEALING

Thursday, March 18

“Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!” Psalm 130:2

Being a nurse, over the years I have witnessed patients and their families pray for understanding, a cure, and more time. Illness of the body, mind, and/or spirit can be overwhelming and hopeless. Providing a listening ear, a caring presence, and support often lessens the pain and promotes peace and health. Throughout my career I have had the honor and privilege to assist those who are hurting and am humbled by my colleagues who have done the same. Sometimes the healing we hoped for and worked towards came timely and other times it came in an unexpected way that brought a different outcome. All the same, we need and long for care from one another and God.

Listening God, help us to remember that you are always with us in good times and in bad. Provide a calmness and empathy to those in pain.

Judy Pielhop, Trinity Lutheran Church

Journey Toward Wholeness—Eau Claire ELCA Lenten Devotions 2021

GIVING GOD

Friday, March 19

“In him we have redemption...according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us.” Ephesians 1:7

The COVID pandemic has shown us our disobedience and indifference to our own wellbeing. We know how to prevent this illness: science, vaccine, masks, distancing, hand washing. However, we had decided to ignore them and risk our lives, our loved ones, and our caregivers.

This is like our way to redemption: God has given us all resources to be followed. God gave us Jesus to teach us the way, and the Holy Spirit to guide us, but we decided to ignore them and put our salvation at risk. It is time to analyze, self-reflect, and open our minds and our hearts to God and how God manifests in our lives. Only that way we will be healed and find the way to live for the praise of his glory.

Dear God, do not abandon us, do not get tired of showing us the way to you, protect us from ourselves. In Jesus' name. Amen

Intern Lidix Montoya, Neighbor to Neighbor

BE THE LIGHT

Saturday, March 20

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” John 1: 5

When you think of light, what first comes to mind? A light bulb, the sun, or God? We are the Light of God. Churches are a big influence in the life of a child and the next generation. We can do so much to influence a child's faith. However, the next generation needs another influence, the unconditional love of their family. Two influences will make a greater impact than just one. As followers of Jesus, we still live in a world where darkness is present. Consider today how the light of Christ may shine in the darkness around you. Who needs the light of Christ in their life today?

Jesus, Light of the world, Wherever there is darkness, lead us to be light. And help us see the Light that shines in us today. Amen

Anne Weber, Director of Faith Formation,
Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd

Journey Toward Wholeness—Eau Claire ELCA Lenten Devotions 2021

WHOLENESS

Monday, March 22

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Mark 12:31

The journey toward wholeness can only begin from where we are, within our own self. We look out at the endless diversity of creation’s wonders and see others as separate from ourselves, but wholeness does not recognize separation and the light of God has blessed us all. Christ’s words, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” are possible when we have found true oneness within and then recognized it as the same without.

My journey toward wholeness has begun with daily meditation. Transcendental meditation has provided the peace of God which passes all understanding. This inner silence, joy, and peace spills over, becoming a living reality during all parts of my day bringing me further on my journey towards wholeness. Jesus is known as the Prince of Peace with a core message of love. We as individuals and society can radiate these same qualities together on our journey toward wholeness.

Holy God, may we treat all your children as our neighbors with love.
David Lendle, Hope Lutheran Church

FORGIVENESS

Tuesday, March 23

“But I tell you, love your enemies ...” Matthew 5:44

Forgiveness is the root of Christianity. Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of sin. The Bible claims God’s forgiveness for you, but also your forgiveness towards your peers and enemies. Many times when we are stuck and can’t find a way out of our loop, we forget to look within ourselves. Hatred weighs heavily on our hearts. When you forgive someone who has wronged you, the burden of hatred is lifted creating more room for God. There also needs to be room for forgiveness within yourself, because everytime you make amity—externally or internally—you receive the grace of Jesus. Making peace with your past is the first step towards growth and spiritual fulfillment.

Heavenly Creator, thank you for your unconditional forgiveness and for helping me reflect that same forgiveness onto others, In Jesus’ Name.
Maija Balts, Immanuel Lutheran Church

Journey Toward Wholeness—Eau Claire ELCA Lenten Devotions 2021

WE SUFFER AND REJOICE TOGETHER Wednesday, March 24

“If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.” 1 Corinthians 12:26

I am frustrated reading something on social media that opposes my beliefs, especially when I care about the one posting it. How could they believe that? It’s all I can do not to respond emotionally, and point out how wrong they are. It’s easy to write someone off as ignorant, uninformed, or just plain wrong.

But God made us all with different gifts, experiences, and perspectives. How boring it would be if we were all the same! We are all part of the same body of Christ. We suffer and rejoice together—loving each other. Love becomes a choice, a verb, an action.

Spirit, lead me to listen to my neighbors, to feel their fear, pain, anxiety, and need. Help me to move toward them with love and kindness, to mend brokenness, while rejoicing in you. Amen
Michelle Pride, Mission and Outreach, Spirit Lutheran Church

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Thursday, March 25

“Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey.” Ezekiel 2:3

Ezekiel the prophet was asked to eat a word from God that included lamentation and mourning, a hard message he was called to bring to the people of God. He wondered how it would lay claim to his life. To his surprise it was sweet as honey! Could it be any other way since the word in God and in Christ always seeks to promote life? Ezekiel was charged with being a sentinel who keeps watch over God’s people. He brought a warning so that they would turn from the disaster that was coming and once again sing praise to God. We are called to attend to the words of Christ. Let the language sink in. Let the images percolate.

Dearest Jesus, give us your word that we might feed on it, and perceive it, and live. Amen.

Pr. Julie Brenden, St. John’s Lutheran Church

PEACEMAKERS

Friday, March 26

“Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” Hebrews 12:14

We are living in a time when so many of us yearn for peace in our souls, our family, our community, our nation, and our world. At our school we work to empower our young children to be God’s peacemakers. We use that term as they learn to listen and talk to one another; to compromise; and to care for themselves, each other, and their surroundings. In our classroom we have a peace stick. We use this peace stick in various ways including to reinforce the children’s spontaneous peacemaking throughout the day. When “caught” being a peacemaker they get to add a colorful bead to it. We find that as we pay attention to their peacemaker acts, their peacemaking acts grow! Perhaps in these weeks of Lent we can all focus on the opportunities we have to be God’s peacemakers through kind words, listening, and caring for one another.

Dear Lord, empower us to be peacemakers and share your love with those around us. Amen

Marlee Knickerbocker, Noah’s Ark Preschool, Trinity Lutheran Church

DISPLAYING GOD’S LOVE

Saturday, March 27

“The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.” John 12:3

Jesus may have many names such as the Son of God, King of Israel, Messiah, and others that people have spoken. John expresses that Jesus is God’s word and the glorious presence of God. Jesus comes to perform signs about himself which will reveal controversy and misunderstanding among the people. With commotion and judgment towards Jesus, in Jerusalem Jesus would seal his fate. Jesus displays his devotion and God’s love, despite knowing the outcome of his journey. The act of loving generosity will lead to wholeness.

Holy God, with every passing day your glory will remind us of the generosity and love within this world. Amen.

Sarah Thao and Mikayla Ripp, graduating seniors UWEC,
University Lutheran Church

CHOSEN SERVANTS FOR JUSTICE Monday, March 29

“Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; upon whom I have put my spirit; who will bring forth justice to the nations.” Isaiah 42:1.

“Mary took a pound of costly perfume, made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet...” John 12:3a

When God anoints leaders, God anoints servants for God’s people, servants with hearts for justice. It seems service and justice delight God’s soul. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, Mary no longer needed the costly perfumed nard for her brother’s burial. So she anointed the servant king Jesus in the most humble way imaginable, a servant’s soothing for a journeyer’s weary feet. Jesus knew the full meaning of her anointing, defended her heartfelt reciprocity. Mary justly returned a gift to the Lord who had delighted her soul by resurrecting Lazarus.

Holy God, you chose us, your children; anointed us with your spirit for service. Help us return the loving grace you have shown us, and use your gifts to restore justice in your world. Amen.

CJ Holistica, Grace Lutheran Church

SALVATION THROUGH GRACE

Tuesday, March 30

"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you’ll be saved." Romans 10:9

I once had a Sunday school workbook that showed God writing in a ledger. God tallied all the good and bad things we did. The point: God remembers everything; our entrance to heaven depends on that ledger. Guilt and fear haunted me; I’d never be good enough to earn eternal life. Finally I learned that God is a loving and forgiving Father. My salvation comes through grace and not good works. This week, remember Jesus died on that cross for us. We receive salvation through our Savior, not by being good. Focus on Christ’s love and hope rather than on our sins and guilt. Because of the cross, we are have a forgiving God.

Dear God, we give thanks to you for the gift of salvation through the suffering and death and resurrection of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Kenneth G. Anderson, Hope Lutheran Church

Journey Toward Wholeness—Eau Claire ELCA Lenten Devotions 2021

GRIEF AND LAMENT

Wednesday, March 31

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?” Psalm 22:1

I once visited a woman who had suffered with a lifelong, chronic condition. I asked if I could read her scripture; she requested her favorite, Psalm 22. “Don’t you mean Psalm 23, The Lord is My Shepherd?” She assured me that Psalm 22 was her favorite. It brought her comfort and strength to know that Jesus prayed this psalm on the cross. Knowing that Jesus was with her in her suffering brought her peace. In our grief and pain, sometimes we are not ready to hear a word of cheer. Instead, we need someone to sit with us in our pain and tell us that God is present. We may even need to cry out to God in frustration or anger. In Lent, we are given the space to lament so that in God’s time we can find healing.

Comforting God, you see my pain. Let your Holy Spirit be a healing balm for me and all those in need this Lenten season.

Pr. Jamie Brandt Brieske, Immanuel Lutheran Church

ONWARD AND UPWARD

Thursday, April 1

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.” Philippians 3:10-11

This time we spend in the church year causes us to participate in the culmination of Jesus’ ministry and purpose through his suffering, death, and resurrection. To know Christ is to share suffering. We are called to walk along side those who suffer, to pray for and help share the burdens of one another, to offer hope in the one who was faithful to God unto death, Jesus Christ. We forge onward knowing with confidence that we are loved by God. We too will suffer in this life and we too will die. But we know the story doesn’t end there. Good Friday causes us to look upward and to relish in the hope of God’s promise of everlasting life in the power of the resurrection.

Gracious God, give us eyes to see suffering and hearts to make a difference. In Jesus’ name. Amen

Jan Andresen, Spirit Lutheran Church

Journey Toward Wholeness—Eau Claire ELCA Lenten Devotions 2021

THE POINT OF NO RETURN

Friday, April 2

“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.” Luke 22:42

Sometimes a person can’t go back. I was driving in a blizzard on a highway I didn’t know. All alone I could barely see the next car’s taillight. I white-knuckled my way forward. This point of no return is before Jesus. His whole life is pointing to the crucifixion. He must go forward to the goal even when asking God to take it from him.

As we journey with Jesus, do we give up when it’s difficult to see the goodness of God ahead? Do we white-knuckle our way through? As we go with Jesus to the cross, we press ahead to the Resurrection off in the distance. We may not be able to see it, but we have the promise.

Lord Christ, help us in this path of faith, especially when we want to quit, Remind us that you are always leading us to resurrection joy. Amen.

Pastor Christine Emerson, St. John’s Lutheran Church

REST

Saturday, April 3

“On the Sabbath day they rested...” Luke 23:56b

The women were exhausted. The trauma of a turbulent arrest, trial, and crucifixion sent them into shock. They prepared spices and ointments expecting a burial, not a resurrection. The sabbath required rest. They were stuck in the Waiting Place. The Dr. Seuss book describes well both their experience and ours. We’re just waiting... exhausted by a year of pandemic, social upheaval and disruption of worship. The communal trauma we’ve experienced has left us in shock. We want things back to how they used to be. We wait.

Yet, we know how the story ended. Instead of death, there’s new life. Nothing went back normal; incredible transformation came through resurrection. It can be the same for us. Let go of that spot in the Waiting Place. Embrace the new life that’s possible for us with the resurrection of Christ Jesus. We wait, but new life is bursting forth! Can you feel it?

God of the resurrection, help us move from waiting to the new life you bring to all of creation. Amen.

Pr. Patrick Patterson, Trinity Lutheran Church