

*Devotionals
for
Advent 2020*



Written by and for
the members of
Hubbard United Methodist Church



Welcome

Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers

*"Our hope and expectation, O Jesus, now appear;
Arise, O Sun so longed for, o'er this benighted sphere.
With hearts and hands uplifted, we plead, O Lord, to see
the day of earth's redemption that sets your people free!"*

Our hope and expectation continue a centuries-old tradition of setting aside time to prepare for the celebration of Jesus' birth and to anticipate his return.

As you read each devotion this year, you will notice how this Advent and Christmas season will seem vastly different from what most of us are used to. Instead of our usual festivities, it will be a season of sheltering in place, Zoom gatherings, mask mandates, canceled family get-togethers, missing friends, missing hugs, missing singing, missing church ...

But what you will also find in each reflection, is though it is true that all these things are happening, God's love for us and for the world in Jesus Christ remains constant in us and through us.

I pray that this Advent season might open our eyes to who God truly is, to the meaning of the incarnation, to the significance of Christmas, and that we might hear God's call on our lives despite all that is happening around us, and that we might incarnate God's love to the world in such a time as this.

May the hope and joy of the long-awaited Christ child be with you during the Advent and Christmas seasons.

Pastor Lauren





O come, O come, Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.

O come, O Wisdom from on high, who ordered all things mightily;
to us the path of knowledge show and teach us in its ways to go. *Refrain*

O come, O come, great Lord of might, who to your tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times did give the law in cloud and majesty and awe. *Refrain*

O come, O Branch of Jesse's stem, unto your own and rescue them!
From depths of hell your people save, and give them victory
o'er the grave. *Refrain*

O come, O Key of David, come and open wide our heavenly home.
Make safe for us the heavenward road and bar the way to death's abode. *Refrain*

O come, O Bright and Morning Star, and bring us comfort from afar!
Dispel the shadows of the night and turn our darkness into light. *Refrain*

O come, O King of nations, bind in one the hearts of all mankind.
Bid all our sad divisions cease and be yourself our King of Peace. *Refrain*



Contents

1. How Can I Keep from Singing?	Marie Nordberg
2. How Can I Keep from Singing?	Robert Lowry
3. Jesus We Trust In You	Deb & Gary Korsgaden
4. Our Troubled Times	Neil Jordheim
5. Holy Alphabet for COVID Relief	Boo Groth
6. In This Season of Waiting	Pastor Lauren Hauger
7. My Hal, A Gift From God	Janell Saunders
8. The Unknown	Liz Stevens
9. Music – A Bridge to the World	Ed Poitras
10. Maya's Prayer for Peace	Maya Angelou
11. God's Precious Gifts	Cheryl Steinborn
12. Hope & Healing for a Broken World	Bishop Bruce R. Ough
13. Confessions of an Octogenarian	Gail Manlove
14. Finding Refuge in a Time of Trouble	Pat Beaumont
15. Lessons Learned from My Mother	Arlene Valentin
16. A Door Closes, Another Opens	David & Diane Thoeke
17. The Light Gives Warmth	Kaylyn Anderson
18. What it Means to Pick up the Cross	Jacob Taggart
19. We are Called to Trust	Emma Taggart
20. A Time for Everything	Ecclesiastes 3:1-14
21. Presents and God's Love	Oliver Manlove
22. My Christmas Eve Birthday	Elizabeth Derr Schultz
23. Joy to You and Me	Nancy Jordheim
24. For All That Is Our Life	Jennie Anderson
25. Finding Small Blessings	Julie Smith
26. The Times We Are Given	Tom Harmon

Merry Christmas

We Remember



How Can I Keep from Singing?

By Marie Nordberg

Bible Verse: "Sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord all the Earth."
Psalm 96:1

As a person who has been singing almost my entire life, being told I had to stop singing last March was like being told I had to stop breathing. How can you just stop doing something that you love? What would church be like without a choir, and how would December look without a Christmas concert by Classic Chorale?

Of course, music hasn't come to a complete halt. Sunday morning services are still being broadcast with music by Cheryl, Terry and Jennie, and we're invited to sing along with the hymns as we watch the service from home. But, it just isn't the same. Hearing the harmony as the entire congregation lifts its voices in praise has to be shared by all of us together – not just with a spouse or the pets who don't have a clue why you're making those strange noises.

So what can we do when the holidays are here and there is Christmas music begging to be sung? Listen to the radio; play old CDs; sing to yourself when you're alone in the car. I'll probably do all three, but, in my head, I'll be thinking the lyrics to one of our well-loved hymns:

*Through all the tumult and the strife,
I hear that music ringing.
It finds an echo in my soul.
How can I keep from singing?*



How Can I Keep From Singing?

*My life flows on in endless song,
Above earth's lamentation.
I hear the clear though far-off hymn
That hails a new creation.*

*Through all the tumult and the strife,
I hear that music ringing.
It finds an echo in my soul.
How can I keep from singing?*

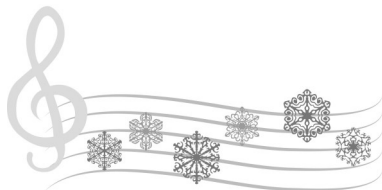
*What though my joys and comforts die?
I know my Saviour liveth.
What though the darkness gather round?
Songs in the night he giveth.*

*No storm can shake my inmost calm
While to that Rock I'm clinging.
Since love is Lord of heaven and earth,
How can I keep from singing?*

*The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart,
A fountain ever springing?
All things are mine since I am His!
How can I keep from singing?*

~Robert Lowry

My Life Flows On (How Can I Keep from Singing)
***The Faith We Sing*, page 2212**



DECEMBER 1



Jesus, We Trust In You

By Gary and Deb Korsgaden

Bible Verses: "Let not your hearts be troubled." John 14:1

"Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass.
Psalm 37:5

With the continuation of COVID-19, and uncertain times on the horizon, Deb and I find daily comfort and strength in John 14, verses 1 through 14, but especially verse 1.

Jesus makes it clear that we don't know the defined way we are supposed to travel in life. We are, through our faith, to simply know and trust that He will show us exactly the way to go.

Commitment means giving your whole life to God. Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him. Cease from anger and forsake wrath. Do not fret; it only causes harm. To fret or worry is to be concerned with things over which no one has control or ability to change. Worry and fret are the opposite of faith. That kind of worry, according to scriptures, is sin.

During these traumatic times, as we go through our limited day-to-day activities, it is easy to become anxious or angry. The holidays, which are usually a time of gathering with friends and family, are on the horizon. With no end in sight to this pandemic, it is certainly going to be a much different time this year for all of us.

Deb and I put our full trust in the Lord, for we know not what the next months will bring. We surely don't like the uncertainty, but we don't have the ability to change it. So we put our trust in God and simply go on, committed to the ways of the Lord.

Prayer: Dear God, We know that you will show us exactly the way to go. *Amen*

DECEMBER 2



Our Troubled Times

By Neil Jordheim

Bible Verse: *"We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts." Romans 5: 3-5*

Hymn: *My Hope is Built on Nothing Less*

Nancy and I have been sitting at home a lot during these past few months. We have tried to follow the rules of COVID-19 just like many of you. But we have reached out like never before. We have formed a couple of pods of people that we know are also following the rules. We do a Zoom with church friends every Saturday. We talk to our children in Denver and Stavanger, Norway, every Sunday and much more.

Staying connected during trying times is critical to one's mental health. I hope all of you are doing the same. We have found that reaching out is our way of taking care of ourselves. We are particularly proud of Pastor Lauren and her husband Jeff. They took the challenge of presenting a church service from their home with limited experience in producing an on-line service. We have seen their tech skills grow right along with the message. Who would have thought that *The Cat in the Hat* could come from their lake? Well, with the help of a friendly carpenter, some paint and a willingness to use entertainment to capture a viewing public, it all happened.

Life hands us lemons sometimes. It is our job to turn it into lemonade.

Prayer: Thank you God for helping us through this difficult time in our lives. Thank you for special people who have helped us cope with our loneliness. Many have shared their thoughts and feelings in a way that has made us feel included in life. Your inspiration has come to us through on-line church and from our everyday experiences. Help us to look for the good in life and not dwell on the bad or those things we can not control. We pray this in your name. *Amen.*

DECEMBER 3



Holy Alphabet for COVID Relief

By Boo Groth

Bible Verse: “You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in your word.” Psalm 119:114

Holy Alphabet

Although things are not perfect
Because of trial or pain
Continue in thanksgiving
Do not begin to blame
Even when the times are hard
Fierce winds are bound to blow
God is forever able
Hold on to what you know
Imagine life without His love
Joy would cease to be
Keep thanking Him for all the things
Love imparts to thee
Move out of “Camp Complaining”
No weapon that is known
On earth can yield the power
Praise can do alone
Quit looking at the future
Redeem the time at hand
Start every day with worship
To “thank” is a command
Until we see Him coming
Victorious in the sky
We'll run the race with gratitude
Xalting God most high
Yes, there'll be good times. and yes some will be bad, but
Zion waits in glory ... where none are ever sad!

~Author Unknown

Prayer: Dear God, I found this poem, tattered and worn, in my old Bible. It's advice is as good today as when I tucked it into my Bible years ago. Thank you for leading me to it so that I can share it with others. *Amen*

DECEMBER 4



In This Season of Waiting

By Pastor Lauren Hauger

Bible Verses: “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned.” Isaiah 9:2
“A child is born to us, a son is given to us, and authority will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6

The “great light” prophesied by Isaiah is echoed in the first strains of John’s Gospel good news: the light that brings peace—that saves the people from all that would extinguish it—has been there from the beginning. The Word is made flesh and dwells among us. This reign is now... even in this season of waiting. Will we believe it? Will we continue to put flesh on it, embodying the peace meant for all humanity?

In this season of waiting know this...
We wait for justice
but **we do not wait** to work for change;
We wait for restored health
but **we do not wait** to work to heal;
We wait for wholeness
but **we do not wait** to work at binding brokenness;
We wait for peace
but **we do not wait** to work to eliminate hatred.

And so, this Advent season my friends, like bells ringing out the news that the light has dawned and shines on all people, fill the night left by sadness with messages of hope and peace. Go into your lives humming the tunes that keep that peace alive in you and spur you on in your work of justice and reconciliation. Raise your voices and repeat after me:

“Do not be afraid!” **“Do not be afraid!”**

Prayer: Holy One, we thank you for the glimpses we catch of your gift of peace on earth. Even in the midst of fear, of challenge, of struggle— even when we aren’t sure that goodwill among us can be found, ignite the flame of peace within us, that we might glow with its brilliance from the inside out. *Amen.*



My Hal, A Gift From God

By Janell Saunders

Bible Verses: *"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."* 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

"You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

John 13:7

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."

Proverbs 3:5

What a year we have had: COVID-19 pandemic, riots, destruction, and turmoil within the government. It has all been very worrisome.

With our church closed, our worship services are now online and I have liked that. I also changed my place of worship from the church to the barn, where I find peace with the horses. While I miss my church and friends very much, it calms me to worship in the barn.

I recently experienced a big loss. My horse Hal suddenly became ill and while I prayed and prayed for him to get better, he continued to get worse. I had to have him put to sleep. I prayed so hard for him to get better and, when he didn't, I was so very angry with God. I kept asking WHY!!!! My anger continued until I realized how lucky I was that God had sent Hal to me, and how much I enjoyed him.

I am now remembering all the good times!

While I was trying to figure out why my prayers went unanswered, I remembered that in the Bible it says to give thanks in all circumstances, because God knows what he is doing. Another verse says that later I will understand. I am so thankful for the three verses listed above as they have helped me to cope with the turmoil around me and the death of my wonderful horse.

Prayer: Oh Lord, thank you for the gift of Hal and the good times we shared. Thank you for leading me to verses in the Bible that helped calm my anger. Thank you for bringing me peace while I worship in my barn, remembering that it was in a barn in Bethlehem that our Lord Jesus was born. *Amen*

DECEMBER 6



The Unknown

By Liz Stevens

Bible Verse: “A cheerful look brings joy to the heart, and good news gives health to the bones.” Proverbs 15:30

I have started writing this several times in the last month or so, only to put it down because it seemed too difficult with all the unknowns taking over my life. But, life is always an unknown.

A few thoughts about the last eight months:

- *Daily life is more simple and yet more difficult.*
- *Entertainment is going for a drive.*
- *Eating in a restaurant doesn't feel safe, so having lunch with friends is out.*
- *It is impossible to do anything on impulse right now because every move requires thought and planning.*
- *I miss hearing the choir's beautiful anthems, gathering with others to worship, and the face to face connection with friends.*

This year our Christmas celebration will not be as grand as in the past, but maybe that's a good thing. We will be forced to slow down and the true meaning of Advent and Christmas might be more evident to all of us.

Think of Mary and Joseph and their trip to Bethlehem to be counted, the worry about the upcoming birth, the fear of the unknown. That is what all of us are facing with this pandemic - the unknown. We rely on science and our faith to get us through this; science covers what is known by medical professionals, and our faith in God covers our fears and worries.

Time will not stop for a pandemic, so we *will* have Advent and Christmas. Our celebrations may not be as grand and glorious as in past years, but we will still celebrate the birth of Jesus in our hearts. Our Lord was born in a simple stable, and this year we will honor his birth with simplicity and the great love of Christ we have always had.

Prayer: "Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you." Amen Psalm 143:8



Music – A Bridge to the World

By Ed Poitras

Bible Verse: “O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Tell of His salvation from day to day.” Psalm 96:1

Early in November, 2008, I made my way to the sixth floor of a department store in Beijing, in search of long johns to help me get through the cold weather. I was on a few days’ respite from my work monitoring food distribution in North Korea, traveling to places of food insecurity where life was a hardscrabble struggle for survival.

To my surprise, American Christmas music was playing over the sound system in this store in China. It was Rudolph, and Frosty and Jingle Bells--not at all what I expected. That made me think about how the birth of Christ has inspired so much music, and how people everywhere, regardless of culture, have made it their own.

As long as I can remember, music has been one of my deepest sources of comfort and joy. Especially during COVID-19 days of isolation and distancing, music has been a rock, steady, secure, and reliable as personal nourishment, but also as a bridge to the wider world. The mammoth virtual choirs I have heard on the Internet have made all of humanity real and close.

As Christmas approaches, let us continue to repeat the sounding joy, celebrating in every possible way our gratitude that Christ has not left us alone and desolate, but instead has invited us into God’s very presence with the overflowing creativity of glorious music.

Prayer: Lord, open our ears that we may hear the message of saving love, borne on the wings of hymns of joy and praise. Come, Lord Jesus, into your suffering world and redeem us. *Amen*



DECEMBER 8



Maya's Prayer for Peace

*Father, Mother, God, thank you for your presence
during the hard and mean days.*

For then we have you to lean upon.

*Father, Mother, God, thank you for your presence
during the bright and sunny days,*

For then we can share that which we have with those who have less.

*Father, Mother, God, thank you for your presence during the holy days,
For then we are able to celebrate you and our families and our friends.*

Father, Mother, God, thank you.

For those who have no voice, we ask you to speak.

*For those who feel unworthy,
we ask you to pour out your love in waterfalls of tenderness.*

For those who live in pain, we ask you to bathe them in your river of healing.

For those who are lonely, we ask you to keep them company.

For those who are depressed, we ask you to shower upon them the light of hope.

Father, Mother, God, you the borderless sea of substance.

We ask you to give all the world that which we need the most: Peace.

Words by Maya Angelou, Music by Tom Trenney

Note: As a member of The Park Rapids Classic Chorale, I was privileged to sing *Maya's Prayer* at one of our concerts. Today, the words are even more fitting, and it seems appropriate to share them at this time of Advent, as we pray for hope and peace. *Marie Nordberg*



God's Precious Gifts

By Cheryl Steinborn

Bible Verse: *"I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."*

Ephesians 3:17-19.

What is important in your life?

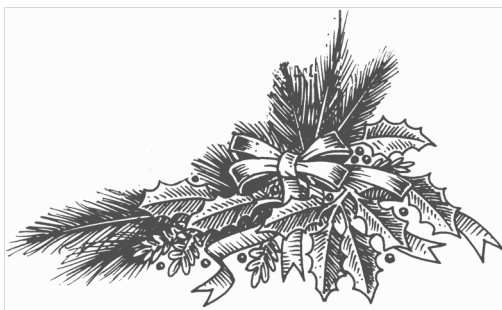
What is important in my life?

When I was younger I can remember playing outside. I loved to run (imagine that?), ride my bike, sunbathe, swim, ice skate, roller skate, etc. After college and marriage to my honey, Steve, we began our family of four children.

Then it became about them: taking care of each one the best we could and being involved in all of their activities. Ah——what a wonderful time that was.

Now, I feel blessed when I think about how God was guiding me in my life's journey. He was always by my side.

Prayer: Dear God, I am thankful for Steve, our family and all of our friends. Each and EVERY ONE is a precious gift. *Amen*





Hope and Healing for a Broken World

By Bishop Bruce R. Ough

Bible Verse: *"Then Mary said, 'I am the Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said.' Then the angel left her."* Luke 1:38

We are living in a season of multiple viruses – COVID, racism and economic dislocation. These viruses do not operate in isolation. They are intertwined. And, the real pandemic they are creating is a pandemic of unprecedented fear, anxiety and hopelessness. This is not unlike the pandemic of tyranny, slaughter, fear and hopelessness that dominated the time into which Jesus was born in occupied Bethlehem.

It helps me understand why so many people were disappointed and could not accept that Jesus did not come as a warrior king, but rather as a humble healer for a sick humanity. I believe even today – in the midst of our current multi-faceted pandemic – many are disappointed the God in Christ has not "called out the Marines" to conquer the evil, injustice, disease and pain in the world.

But, God chose another way to overcome evil in the world and redeem creation. He sent his son, Jesus, as a tiny, fragile baby fully dependent on human beings for his survival and nurture. God sent Jesus in a form in which all of humanity could relate.

What does the nativity teach us? That God operates with an entirely different understanding of what the conquest of evil looks like. That God operates with the idea that the redemption of the world – heaven and earth kissing, if you will – requires the receptivity, hospitality, obedience and servanthood of each of us. God's saving work looks like a crazy strategy.

Mary got it right when she said, "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said." We are called by God in this Advent season, beset by multiple evil and destructive viruses, to respond with the same openness to let God work through us to bring hope and healing to a broken, hurting, fearful world.

Prayer: Holy and gracious God, fill me with your very presence, such that I reflect your love, mercy and justice in these frightening and uncertain days.
Amen.



Confessions of an Octogenarian

By Gail Manlove

Bible Verse: “Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone.” Psalm 71:9

Some years ago, while listening to a Christian radio station, a motivational speaker who was addressing a large group of women slipped up on her “talk.” She giggled and confessed that she has, on occasion, had information go in one ear and out the other. But even worse, she said, is when information goes in, gets all mixed up in her head, and comes out of her mouth.

Been there, done that!

Because some of us have had so many birthdays, many of my senior friends and I are experiencing memory problems, and we laugh about our most embarrassing moments.

Prayer: Lord, I know that you love me despite my senior moments. As you guide me through each day, you might be laughing, too. *Amen*

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### ***Gailisms***

*It's so small you have to go outside to change your mind.*

*It's my birthday and I've never been this old before.*

*How are you this morning Gail? Well, I'm above the sod!*

*I'm off, like a dirty shirt.*

*Bloom where you are planted; brighten the corner where you are.*



### ***Finding Refuge in a Time of Trouble***

**By** Pat Beaumont

**Bible Verse:** *"They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven."* Psalms 107:30

When this year's pandemic developed, we were not prepared and confusion ensued. What would our part be to stem the spread? Government mandates controlling our personal lives were hard to accept, but they had to be followed. How could I cope and also help others?

The first way was to offer the cabin on Duck Lake as a safe haven. In March, my daughter and her husband, Holly and Brad Finer, fled Bloomington to seek refuge at the lake until early April. He taught on-line classes at the Chiropractor College using two computers while Holly house-cleaned the cabin.

Because of a cool spring, I didn't get to the lake until May. I so missed my church, choir and friends. No hugs! No Classic Chorale concert! No interesting board meetings or concerts for the Concert Association! No Northern Light Opera production! I left the lake only to get gas, groceries and plants.

In July, I welcomed my son Paul, who drove from California with his wife, Karen, and children Ian (18), Olivia (14) and Bella (12). They took possession of the 5th wheel guest trailer at the lake and enjoyed 15 days of freedom, after not leaving their house since March.

On July 26<sup>th</sup>, I celebrated my 92nd birthday by inviting 20 friends for a "come-and-go" party outside. My nephew and wife from Manassas, VA, dropped in for a quick visit. A cousin (recently retired from The National Forest service in Washington, DC), came for the day with masks and dog. And, I was so happy to see my only great-great-grandson (Hudson Reubin) and his family.

Finally, I had the pleasure of co-hosting (with the Boltons and Boyds) a birthday farewell party for Fred and Marj Nordstrom before they left Palmer Lake for good to live in Florida. Just seven old friends reminiscing and singing. A fitting "so long" to the lake this year.

**Prayer:** Dear God, my reaction to the pandemic (so far) has been that life is 10% what happens to me, 90% is how I react. We know not what these next months will bring, but with your help we will persevere and put our fears in your hands.

*Amen*



## *Lessons Learned from My Mother*

By Arlene Valentin

**Bible Verse:** *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”* Matthew 5:16

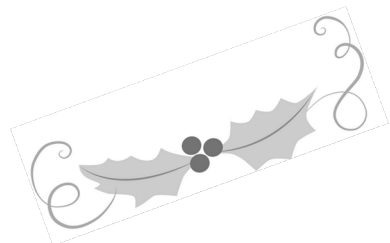
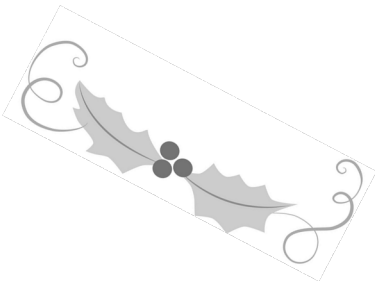
Today, as I look at COVID-19 and wonder when it will be done, I think about my parents and their struggles over the years. My mother missed her senior year because of rheumatic fever, but graduated a year later. My parents were married in 1932, during the Depression, and Mom said they were lucky that Dad’s sister and her husband had a large farm that allowed Mom and Dad to work with them.

In the fall of 1934, my parents moved to a farm that had been lost in the Depression. The Reclamation Law allowed a family to reclaim a farm by living on it, planting crops in the spring and harvesting them in the fall to make a mortgage payment. In January, my parents’ one-month-old baby died of pneumonia, and it was years before my mother could talk about it. Then, just at the beginning of harvest, a hail storm ruined all of the crops, and they lost the farm.

In 1935, Dad got a job in Pontiac, MI, where they lived for eight years. Life was good. They had a house, friends, and three kids, ages 11, five and one. But in 1943, Dad had a brain aneurysm and was paralyzed and not able to speak. He recovered, but was not able to go back to his job in the auto shop.

In May 1944, they moved to Minnesota to farm near relatives. Dad was weak, but with Mom and 12-year-old Bob they worked together to do the farming. Mom never complained, and as I look back at her life, I realize she let her “light shine to glorify her father in heaven.”

**Prayer:** Dear God, I learned many things from my mother, but her faith and love of God were the greatest. I learned to not complain, but to do the best each day with God’s help. That’s what I believe will get us through this pandemic. *Amen*







### ***A Door Closes, Another Opens***

**By** Diane and Dave Thaelke

**Bible Verse:** “God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.” I Corinthians 10:13

It has been said by many wise people that “when one door closes, another one opens.” Helen Keller added, “. . . but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us.”

Doors closed for all of us when COVID-19 arrived early in 2020: we can no longer see our families and friends as before; ordinary activities such as shopping, church, doctor visits and volunteering have become inconvenient or impossible; many have lost jobs or have had hours drastically cut; and school attendance for students has been severely affected. The closed doors cause financial hardship, tragic personal loss, stress, worry, heartache and impatience for all.

If we become depressed and discouraged, it is understandable. We have been dealing with these closed doors for too long, and we are all tired. Now, it's the Advent Season – the time for waiting and longing for the coming of the Messiah. More waiting and longing!

However, As Paul assured the Corinthians he assures us: God is faithful and will not let us be tested beyond our strength. We will have the strength to persevere in this crisis (and in future crises), aided by open doors that God provides for us to discover.

Reflecting, we now see open doors that enrich our lives: we are learning creative ways to worship; how to use new technologies; rediscovering the art of writing letters, talking on the telephone; appreciating walks and drives in nature; completing household projects; enjoying hobbies; and perhaps seeing in ourselves an increasing sense of empathy for others – especially those suffering as a result of this pandemic.

Can you think of newly discovered, or re-discovered, open doors that have arisen in your life this past year?

**Prayer:** Lord, thank you for assuring us that we will be able to endure this time of pandemic, and any future trials we may face, as you provide “the way out” through open doors which are here for us to discover and use. *Amen*



## ***The Light Gives Warmth***

*By* Kaylyn Anderson

***Bible Verse:*** “You, Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light.” Psalm 18:28

It was an early fall evening picnic on our porch with dear friends: Grilled hamburgers, chips, salad and ice water. A simple meal. We were surrounded in a glow from the porch lights.

We were at the state park with our horses, and I had invited friends and family for a picnic: bring your own food and chair. It was an interesting mix of riders, non-riders and those who used to ride. The sun warmed us.

An Oreo-tasting contest on the pontoon with kids and grandkids. After tasting, we couldn't call out our flavor guess until the time was up or we would not get to participate in the next round. Laughter made each face shine.

This summer, instead of gathering at restaurants following bike rides, our bike group circled our chairs with packed lunches in a circle of warmth, laughter and friendship.

“What can we bring?” asked my cousin. “Sweet corn” was the answer. Don't you love the ease and love of having cousins at your table?

How many campfires did you have this summer? Our grandson introduced us to Reese's Peanut Butter cups on our s'mores. What a delicious idea. The campfire warmed us.

Our granddaughter came for a visit and wanted to make whole wheat home-made noodles. They turned out great; her great-grandmothers would have been so proud.

Almost all of these gatherings were outside and well-spaced due to the COVID virus. We tried to be safe for each other. Looking back, each gathering has its own magical memory glow.

How many memories do you have from this summer, breaking bread with family and friends? Each and every experience becomes part of your 'good old days.'

***Prayer:*** Dear God, when the days are short and the weather is cold, help us to retrieve these warm memories and moments, and let us enjoy them again and again. *Amen*



### ***What it Means to Pick up the Cross***

**By** Jacob Taggart

**Bible Verse:** *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* Matthew 16:24

During my early childhood I always wondered what the cross was and why Christians had to carry it. I always thought it was a little odd that anyone who wanted to follow Jesus would have to pick up a cross and carry it around.

However, during my 14 years, I have learned much about hardship and what it really means for me as a Christian to pick up my cross and follow Christ. You must first deny sin, which is much like an actual cross that causes great suffering to the body. The suffering of sin, however, is experienced in the soul. Eradicating sin may seem hard because we are naturally drawn to it, but we must remember that through God's grace and providential will each and every one of us can overcome sin.

In Peter 4:1, Peter says, *"Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin."* And, in James 1:12, we read *"Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him."*

This is the reason why each of us must take up our cross. Through hardship, sorrow and suffering in mind and flesh, we can all defeat temptation and emerge triumphant over sin and evil.

**Prayer:** Dear God, let these verses be our guide while navigating the murky terrains of this pandemic. *Amen*





### ***We are Called to Trust***

**By** Emma Taggart

**Bible Verse:** *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

Jeremiah 29:11

As I was thinking about what I wanted to share with you, this Bible verse took on a special significance. It has always been one of my favorites, and I am constantly impressed by its simplicity and beauty.

It seems especially relevant to us today, living in a world fraught with disease, fear and chaos. This world, torn as it is, cries out for us to do so many things. We are told to be strong, to persevere; we are called on all sides to rise up, to stand up for what we believe, to take a stance, to vote, to fight and to make our voice heard, but rarely are we called to trust.

This is exactly what the Lord calls us to do in this verse. He calls us to Him, to rest in his embrace, to offer up our heavy burdens and lay them at His feet. He calls us to trust in Him with the trust of a child, innocent and carefree and light-hearted. He knows the plans He has for us, and though the way seems dark and thorny, He guides us with a firm hand.

This is an especially difficult thing for me to remember, since there is so much to fear in the world. So much is unknown to us, but even as we recognize this, we should always remember that all is known to God, and we are free to trust in his embrace as like a child.

**Prayer:** Dear God, as we prepare our minds and hearts for His coming this Advent, let us trust in Him and free ourselves from the burdens that weigh us down, so that we might greet Him with a lightened heart and soul at His birth on Christmas Day! *Amen*





## *A Time for Everything*

**Bible Verses:** “While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room at the inn.” Luke 2:6-7

### ***A Time for Everything***

*There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under the heavens:  
A time to be born and a time to die,  
A time to plant and a time to uproot,  
A time to kill and a time to heal,  
A time to tear down and a time to build,  
A time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance,  
A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,  
A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,  
A time to search and a time to give up,  
A time to keep and a time to throw away,  
A time to tear and a time to mend,  
A time to be silent and a time to speak,  
A time to love and a time to hate,  
A time for war and a time for peace.  
What do workers gain from their toil?*

*I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it.*

*~Ecclesiastes 3:1-14*



### ***Presents and God's Love***

**By** Oliver Manlove

**Bible Verses:** *"On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh."* Matthew 2:11

*"God so loved the world that he gave his only son and who ever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* John 3:16

When you get a present at Christmas, I believe unwrapping the present means two things.

First, getting the present represents Jesus getting the presents of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Second, unwrapping the gifts represents Jesus being born. That is what I think presents are about.

I also believe that no matter what you do, God will always love you. Once you are saved, you can not be unsaved. You do not have to earn it or trade it for your salvation. All you have to do is believe in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Have a Merry Christmas.

**Prayer:** Dear God, I pray that all may have a great day. *Amen*





### *My Christmas Eve Birthday*

By Elizabeth Derr Schultz

**Bible Verse:** *“I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David, A Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”* Luke 2:10-11

I was born on Christmas Eve and this has led to predictable comments..

“Christmas Eve! How terrible!” Rarely does someone respond, “How lovely! Being born at Christmastime must be very special.”

I get it. Our culture prizes celebrations and gifts. I was never in school or had a sleepover on my birthday. We had a family dinner, but then rushed to church for Christmas Eve services. Before church I opened my presents, but after church, everyone got to open “just one” gift from under the tree.

I am not complaining, because with the exception of a few teen years, I loved my Christmas Eve birthday. I still do, in part because of my Minnesota grandmother's guiding voice.

Grandma Reese's “voice” was a poem she sent me on my fifth birthday, *To a Granddaughter Born on Christmas Eve*. While the poem warned that some would say my birthday “would be overshadowed by Christmas,” it encouraged me to notice, “the hushed glow and goodwill towards others that descends upon the world at Christmas.” It urged me to “stay close to the Christ Child, whose birthday you will share.”

This framed poem has hung in every home I have lived in. It is a reminder of my connections to Christ, family and Christmas Eve. These connections are needed this year more than ever. Many of us have not been physically connected with family and friends for months. We feel the pain of a world in turmoil; we are anxious and afraid.

God enters this world of pain and fear to live with us in our brokenness, to guide us home to eternal life. Scripture tells us that in times of struggle and division, Christ embodied compassion, encouraging us to care for one another, and pointing us constantly to His upside-down kingdom where the lowly are lifted up and where justice will flow like a never-ending stream.

**Prayer:** Dear God, We know that you are with us wherever we are. May we all draw close to the Christ Child this year, and forever. *Amen*



## DECEMBER 21



### ***Joy to You and Me!***

**By** Nancy Jordheim

**Music:** “*Joy to the World, all the boys and girls. Joy to the fishes in the deep blue sea. Joy to you and me.*” Written by Hoyt Axton and made famous by the band, Three Dog Night

As Advent approaches, so do memories of Christmases past, especially our wedding, just a week before Christmas. There was all the planning, with flowers to be selected and a cake to be baked. Relatives were arriving, and there were tense moments as we waited for the groom to get from his airbase in Arizona to his home in North Dakota. All of that and the arrival of a blizzard to boot!

But, this story is about music's double meaning. After choosing our music selections, we chose *Joy to the World* for the recession. However, when we learned that the musicians had practiced Three Dog Night's version of *Joy to the World*, we laughed!

You may recall that the lyrics begin with, “*Jeremiah was a bull frog, was a good friend of mine.*” Some believe that this is a reference to Jeremiah, the prophet. Jeremiah is portrayed as a courageous and persistent man who suffered inner doubts and conflicts. Upon reading, we find he was sensitive, introspective and perhaps shy. He listened to God's voice, prophesied the future and wept for the people. Yet he said, “*Thy words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart.*” He believed in repentance and hope.

We too may become doubtful, conflicted, introspective, and sensitive. We too may need to sing songs of joy and repentance. May these songs, one from 1971 and one from 1719, give us JOY and HOPE:

“*Joy to the World, all the boys and girls.  
Joy to the fishes in the deep blue sea. Joy to you and me.*”

OR

“*Joy to the World, the Lord has come ...and Heaven and Nature Sing...*”

**Prayer:** Dear God, we pray today for PEACE, JOY, HOPE, and REPENTANCE for our world and for ourselves. YOU, LORD, are the source of these things. Thank you for the joy of today, tomorrow, and all days ahead. *Amen*





### ***For All That Is Our Life***

**By** Jennie Anderson

**Bible Verse:** *“Make a joyful noise unto the Lord all the earth: Make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise.”* Psalm 98:4

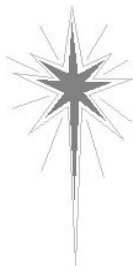
What a year! My latest “coin” when something doesn’t go well is, “Well that’s another 2020.” I’m sure many of you are feeling the same way. I guess I could say my resigning as Music Director was “another 2020!” Yet, I’ve been given an incredible opportunity to help more families in crisis during this pandemic and beyond.

I already miss participating in our on-line worship services by singing or playing flute. And when we are able to congregate again, I’m going to miss everything about being the choir director: the singing, creating and fellowship. One thing that hasn’t changed is my love for my HUMC friends.

I truly believe, despite all the illness and death that has and will come from this pandemic, that I have found good – that we all have. We have looked out for our neighbors (KIT Team), found the calming beauty of nature, learned how to worship on-line, and we have reached out to family and friends more by phone, email, Zoom or other means, just to see how they are doing and to reconnect.

We have slowed down; we are seeing the effects of less pollution for our planet; we realize staying at home with our loved ones isn’t such a bad thing. The go, go, go rat race isn’t all that it’s cracked up to be. We have faced challenges and overcome.

**Prayer:** Dear God, as we head into Advent and Christmas, let us continue to find kindness, joy and peace, and be thankful in all that we have, not what we don’t. Let us always find a song to sing that makes us happy! *Amen*





### ***Finding Small Blessings***

**By Julie Smith**

**Quote: *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas* by Dr. Seuss:** “No matter how different a Who may appear, he will always be welcomed with holiday cheer.”  
Cindy-Lou Who

Has 2020 been a Grinch year or a Cindy-Lou Who from Whoville year? For many, it's been more like a year of Stink, Stank, Stunk!

With the Coronavirus pandemic, stores and restaurants closed, riots in our cities, wildfires, hurricanes, non-stop political ads on TV, one could really get disheartened and bitter.

Or, we could find happiness in simple things like the two-year-old from the *Grinch Who Stole Christmas* cartoon who, after finding all of the trappings of the holiday stolen, still found joy in her heart and sang with joy.

I know that Bob and I found many small blessings this year, even through all the difficulties. We learned patience while waiting for his lung injury from the chemo drugs to clear up. We learned how to Zoom meetings and doctor appointments so we could continue to practice social distance. We learned how to order groceries online for curbside pickup, and found we could watch church services online and “see” our kids on the phone. We were able to do a lot more activities outside and enjoyed nature as we kept socially distant.

I've been making quilts for St. Jude Children's Hospital and have some ready for Hubbard members who are in need of comfort and happen to find themselves in the Cities. We have continued praying for loved ones, far and near, and those we have yet to meet.

**Prayer:** Dear God, this year has taught us we can choose our attitude, and we choose joyful patience! *Amen*

*“Now you listen to me, young lady!  
Even if we're horribly mangled, there'll be no sad faces on Christmas.”*  
The Grinch



## *The Times We Are Given*

By Tom Harmon

**Bible Verse:** “Christ is our peace. He made both Jews and Gentiles into one group. With his body, he broke down the barrier of hatred that divided us.”  
Ephesians 2:14

“I wish it need not have happened in my time”, said Frodo.

“So do I”, said Gandalf, “and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”

This quote from *Lord of the Rings* speaks to me in our times of the COVID-19 virus, the 2020 presidential, federal, state and local elections, and the season of Advent. For I have to decide what to do with these times that are given to us.

Like many of you in our time of COVID-19, I am more sensitive to wearing my mask, social distancing and hand washing. In election times, I choose to vote, and when the results come in (win or lose) I will choose to make the best of what we are given. During the season of Advent I choose to believe the story of Jesus' birth, even if some call it a myth, and that's ok.

For to me, myth is truth that cannot be explained by mere fact. Myth is in essence a greater truth than finite science can provide on any single question. For a fact is utilitarian and demands verification and replication. But a myth can, if used properly, emphasize the beauty of God's creation as well as the sacramental nature of life. Myth is transcendent truth.

Advent is a time of longing for God's transcending truth to come in the times we are given.

**Prayer:** One of the things I long for these days is best expressed in verse seven of the Advent hymn, “O Come, O Come, *Emmanuel*.” Amen

*O come, Desire of nations bind  
All peoples in one heart and mind.  
From dust thou brought us forth to life;  
Deliver us from earthly strife.*

DECEMBER 25





## ***We Remember***

*"When someone you love becomes a memory,  
the memory becomes a treasure." Anonymous*

We remember the following members of HUMC  
who died this past year,  
and we ask for God's comfort and grace  
for their families and loved ones.  
We also remember the families and loved ones  
of all those who have died  
during the pandemic of 2020 from COVID-19.

*Randy Bixby  
Lou Good  
Val Kimball  
Mark Larson  
Janine Merrick  
Linda Missling  
Jerry Munson  
Edith Pike  
Sam Porter*

## ***For All the Saints***

*For all the saints who from their labors rest,  
who Thee by faith before the world confessed;  
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!*

*But when there breaks a yet more glorious day;  
the saints triumphant rise in bright array;  
the King of glory passes on His way.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!*

*From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,  
through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,  
in praise of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!*

# YOUR OWN ADVENT MEMORIES

