

Servant Stories:

**Doing Justice, Loving Mercy,
Walking Humbly with God**



Devotions for Groups and Committees

Lutheran Diaconal Association
Valparaiso, Indiana

About this booklet

Devotions have been written by members of the Lutheran Deaconess Conference and Community of Lutheran Deacons. Hymnals referred to are as follows: "ELW" - Evangelical Lutheran Worship; "LSB" - Lutheran Service Book. The reflection questions and hymn suggestions have been provided as suggestions only. If a reflection question or hymn seems inappropriate for your group, please feel free to make up your own question/questions and hymn selection.

While the devotions have been organized according to month, please use as seems best for your setting. We've intentionally begun with September, as that is traditionally the time when committees and groups resume meeting after a summer break.

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About the artist

Deaconess Judi Tyler currently lives in Phoenix, AZ with her beloved spouse and their two dogs, Bess and Biscuit. After serving as a teacher and missionary in Mexico, she lived out her diaconal call as an eldercare social worker and pediatric medical social worker. As another articulation of that call, Judi is studying for an MDIV at Luther Seminary. They will be moving to Southgate, Michigan to intern at Unity Lutheran Church. In her free time, she loves visiting museums, singing in the Spanish choir, writing songs, watching movies and everything Star Trek. One of her favorite activities is changing the joke board at the children's clinic where she worked. The punnier the better. She is grateful for the LDA community and the opportunity to encourage others in living out their various vocational calls.

Many thanks to Karl Reinhardt for his editing assistance!

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For more information about diaconal ministry and resources for the whole people of God, visit our website, thelda.org or send an email to deacserv@valpo.edu.

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A Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Hearing a story always draws me in. I can picture the sights and sounds, and sometimes even the smells. If you are like me, you can picture yourself in the midst of the story.

Storytelling is one of the images of *diakonia* that I use on a daily basis. I can tell you the stories of hundreds of LDA deaconesses and deacons. Stories of them living out the call of Micah 6:8 "*And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God*"

Those stories help us see how God's servants live their lives. Those stories remind me that God calls me too, to live out the Micah command. Those stories encourage me to look for hurting people, to serve them with that merciful love of God.

Telling the story is also about encouraging others to tell their stories. An opportunity for them to give voice to places where injustice, pain and hurts are, to express the myriad of ways that God's mercy enriches their lives, and how they walk humbly with God, day-after-day.

These devotions will help you tell stories throughout the year. You can use them to begin your council or committee meeting, your small group, or for personal reflection. Most importantly, they are an invitation to sit and listen to God's "stories" - stories that Jesus told, the stories of God's people throughout the Bible, and stories of diaconal people like you and me and how they are "acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God".

For over 100 years, the LDA has been about telling the story of the diaconate serving in a world that needs to hear about God's love. Following Christ, we have served those across the street and around the world. Thank you for serving with us!

Faith and service in Christ,



Deaconess Lisa S. Polito, Executive Director
Lutheran Diaconal Association

SEPTEMBER

“Encounters with Wisdom” by Deaconess Katrina Martich

Hymn Suggestion

“Touch the Earth Lightly” (ELW #739) or “All You Works of God, Bless the Lord” (LSB #930)

Scripture

“When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.” Proverbs 8:27-31

Devotion

The more I've seen, the more I've rediscovered what I knew as a child.

I spent much of my childhood playing outdoors. On Summer days I laid in the grass and imagined creatures in the clouds. In Autumn I pulled apart birch tree seed and cattail pods to laugh with joy as the wind took them away. Winter meant playing in the snow and watching birds at Mom's feeders. Spring brought the excitement of seeing the first patch of grass through the melting snow. When life got difficult, my escape was sitting in a maple tree and observing the world. If I really needed to get away, I explored the abandoned farmland behind our house.

As I engaged the natural world with wonder, I encountered Wisdom, the feminine Sophia. In Proverbs 8:27 we hear she is present with God and active in creation from “when he established the heavens.” Depending on the translation, Wisdom is the “master worker” (Proverbs 8:30), God's helper in creation, or at play in creation with child-like delight. Either way, she is active and fully engaged with both Creator and creation. When outside, I learned my well-being depended on understanding and adapting to her ways.



As I grew older, the demands of school and life limited the time I spent outside. My love of nature turned into courses studied in school. First there, and then in my early years as a water resources engineer, I was taught the ways of civilization and the ethos of “conquering” the land for our benefit. Knowledge and technology meant we could put water where we wanted it. We could live and generate wealth from land that used to flood, and we could live and farm in areas that used to be too dry for large-scale habitation.

Eventually, I returned to spending time outside. As I once again delighted in the natural world, I started to notice the conflict between the ways I was taught and the ways of Wisdom. Knowledge and technology without Wisdom yielded quick benefits for some, but long-term harm for many. Ecosystems were destroyed. I saw people in peril when projects enticed them to live in places with insufficient, long-term supplies of water or on land prone to flooding. Droughts and storms revealed the limits of projects.

My well-being on this planet depends on understanding and adapting to the ways of Wisdom. It starts by walking humbly within creation, acknowledging that it belongs to the Creator, not me, and is intended for more than just my benefit. Walking humbly means noticing and delighting in creation with child-like wonder, so that I might see Wisdom at work within it and come alongside her cooperatively with knowledge and technology, instead of fighting her for dominance.

With this newly found humility, I changed jobs and started working on holistic watershed projects. These consider how we might conserve, adapt to, and restore natural waterways for the flourishing of all life, while also providing drinking water and flood protection for people. I’ve learned to delight in Wisdom’s ways in my own backyard, where I look for and nurture native plants that sprout naturally, instead of pulling them as weeds.

Each day is now a continuing journey of acknowledging the limits of my ways and learning to walk humbly within creation. I’ve discovered each step is an act of justice, drawing me closer to right relationship with God my creator and all inhabitants of God’s creation. It’s a journey that leads to “rejoicing in this inhabited world and delighting in the human race” (Proverbs 8:31).

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- How do you delight in creation and encounter Wisdom within it?
- What step might you take to walk more humbly within creation?

Prayer

God our Creator, source of all life, open my eyes to see the way of Wisdom in your creation and delight in it as you do. Amen

About the Author

Katrina Martich is a deaconess and a professional engineer in Texas. Read more by her at www.katrinamartich.com or by following her on Facebook.

OCTOBER

“Welcoming the Stranger “ by Deaconess Student Almuth Koby

Hymn Suggestion

“All Are Welcome” (ELW #641) or “All People That on Earth Do Dwell” (LSB #791)

Scripture

“Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” Hebrews 13:1-2

“You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Deuteronomy 10:19

Devotion

When I arrived in the USA as a young bride, I learned first-hand what it is like to be the stranger in a new land. Eager to get to know my new country, and a bit lonely for a circle of friends, I would peek into windows on my walks, wondering how the families inside these homes lived, what their thoughts might be, and what they might do.

Imagining that other newcomers to this country might be similarly curious, my husband and I started reaching out to foreign college students, inviting them into our lives by sharing outings and meals. Sometimes, the unexpected blessing to us was their gift of deep friendships, some lasting a long time. One of these students became the godfather of one of our children, and our connection lasts to this day.

A young man, freshly arrived from India, who had driven around town trying to find a church that celebrated Christmas Day, as was the custom in his country, found our church open. A friendship bloomed after we invited him to join us for dinner that day. Two years later, when he earned his Master’s degree, his mother came to the US for several weeks. She, too, joined us for Christmas and our friendship expanded to include his family, too.



Not all of my contacts with international visitors are planned and organized, but they all contain a form of blessing. One Sunday, two Chinese women and their young children visited our church. I learned that they were visiting scholars at the university and wanted to learn all they could about American culture -- including going to church. They asked many questions, among them the meaning of three large paintings in our narthex. I told them the story of Jesus' birth depicted in the first painting, moved to the one with the crucifixion scene, and finally the one with the empty tomb.

Suddenly I realized that I was in the middle of a holy moment: the paintings were the conduit that allowed me to share, in a simple and yet deep way, the main points of the Good News: Jesus came to us as a human, died for us on the cross, and for all people overcame death. I do not know what that moment meant to the women, but it was a blessing to me.

One of my favorite sayings is: "If I cannot travel the world, I can invite the world into my home." I've watched my children learn to see friendships with people from anywhere around the world as natural. They've soaked up stories about different cultures and listened carefully to different accents. We've all learned to laugh at the inevitable miscommunication and to adjust our way of speaking so others may understand. Wondering who is the true beneficiary of showing hospitality to strangers, I am often astounded that by offering hospitality to "the stranger" how much more I am receiving than I am giving.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- Who is the stranger in your area?
- What gifts do you have to make the stranger feel welcome?

Prayer

Loving and protecting God, you created all of humankind. Give us the courage to reach out to the strangers in our midst, knowing they are also your beloved children. We ask that you bless us all with your surprises in each new friendship. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

About the Author

Almuth Koby is a second-career deaconess student after raising and homeschooling her five children. She lives in Kent, OH.

NOVEMBER

"Crossing the Road" by Deaconess Kristin Lewis

Hymn Suggestion

"Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love" (ELW #708) or "Where Charity and Love Prevail" (LSB #845)

Scripture

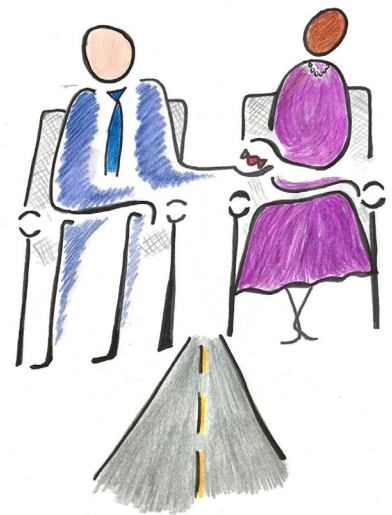
"Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.' And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.' But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' "

[Jesus then tells the Parable of the Good Samaritan.] [Jesus asks] "Which of these...do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'" Luke 10:25-29; 36-37

Devotion

Following the Memorial Service for Senator John McCain, a clip showing former President George W. Bush slipping First Lady Michelle Obama a piece of candy began to go viral on social media. During a time when political, social, and ideological divisions seem to be growing, this moment illustrated a truth - that of the basic humanity in one another no matter our political affiliation or other identities. After all, don't we all enjoy a piece of candy sometimes?

Challenges arise from divisions as we are often drawn into silos within our communities that primarily engage people who are similar to us. The silos can be comfortable spaces where we aren't challenged to think deeply or question why we think or act a certain way. But the concern is that, in so doing, we miss much of our calling to be a part of the world God created.



In Henri Nouwen's book, *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith*, he writes, "*We become neighbors when we are willing to cross the road for one another.*" He then points to separation and segregation between races, young and old, gay and straight, sick and healthy, prisoners and free, Jews, Gentiles, Muslims, and between Christians - Protestant and Catholic. Nouwen concludes, "*There is a lot of road crossing to do. We are all very busy in our own circles. We have our own people to go to and our own affairs to take care of. But if we could cross the street once in a while and pay attention to what is happening on the other side, we might become neighbors.*"

Throughout his ministry, Jesus crossed many roads to listen deeply and reconcile people to community. He walked across the road and reached out to those considered unworthy - tax collectors, widows, orphans, and the diseased. He saw their full humanity - who it is that God created them to be. Calling us to love God, Jesus also commanded us to love our neighbor as ourselves.

By creating and using community crosswalks to listen deeply and hear the stories and experiences of our neighbors, we meet the image of God they bare for us. We are called to create space to hear the fullness of our neighbors' experience and to share ours - including stories that reveal our world's brokenness. In that holy space, God's Spirit can connect us and guide us to a place of healing to live in community as children of God. It can be as sweet as sharing a piece of candy.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- Have you been impacted by a relationship with someone that seemed very different from you?
- How might we open ourselves to make space for and listen to our neighbors even if their experiences challenge and make us feel uncomfortable?

Prayer

God of Love, guide us and give us courage to cross the road to meet you in our neighbor. May Your Spirit break down our silos and weave us into the community you call us to be. Amen.

About the Author

Deaconess Kristin Lewis is from Valparaiso, Indiana. She serves at Purdue University Northwest as an academic and student success advisor.

DECEMBER

"God's Presence"

by Deacon Steve Arnold

Hymn Suggestion

"Abide with Me" (ELW #629, LSB #878)

Scripture

"In you, O Lord, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me. Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength is spent. O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and grey hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come. You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will revive me again; from the depths of the earth you will bring me up again. You will increase my honor, and comfort me once again." Psalm 71:1-2, 9, 17-18, 20-21

Devotion

Martha is 87 and has lived in a senior care center for five years. She was a farm wife, so while raising 11 children she butchered, planted, cleaned, cooked and baked pies for the church's fall bazaar. She talks of loving her life, but now, she sits. She talks, laughs and can beat anyone at her favorite card game. But now she sits. She says she used to be active but now she cannot even walk. On many days she becomes overwhelmed by loss and wonders whether she has any worth at all.

Henry, 93, was the leading salesperson for his company and traveled extensively. He coached his son's football team. He loved to fish and hunt, and now he sits and stares out the window. His dementia is slowly taking over his body, so he doesn't spend much time engaging in conversation. He sits. He stares out the window.

In Psalm 71, the psalmist cries out for those who are in old age. Paraphrased, the psalmist says on behalf of the elderly, "please don't



forget me." The psalmist then declares, "You, who have made me see many troubles and calamities, will revive me again" -- claiming the promise of God to be faithful and present in each step of life's journey.

Thoughtful reflection helps one recall the times God has been present throughout life. It is a helpful prayer practice to spend time at each day's end, looking back, recognizing and celebrating where God has been present that day. As we age, it is helpful to have those around us who can help us recall God's presence throughout our lives. Some days, life has been overwhelming, but support from others helps one see God's faithfulness. To sit and hold the hand of the lonely one brings the assurance of God's love to that person.

God keeps the promise to be present by working through the hands and feet of those who serve the neighbor. Martha, Henry and others are revived through the visits of friends and family, and through the care of the staff. Sometimes the most valuable gift is to sit with someone and say nothing. To be present to someone is -- in itself -- the presence of God.

Any of us can feel overwhelmed by life's issues. There are days we cry out, "God where are you?" and when, through the lives of our senior friends, we can hear the stories of God's faithfulness. We know that we can take refuge in the arms of God who loves us and, through God's own Son, brings us abundant and eternal life. Martha and Henry can know God's love and presence -- and so can we. Thanks be to God.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- Where have I seen the presence of God in my life?
- How might I be the presence of God in the life of another?

Prayer

God of love, you embrace us and comfort us throughout life's journey. Help us to know we have not been forgotten and that you are with us in each moment of life. Grant us the grace and the power to be your hands and feet in service to our neighbors. Amen.

About the Author

Steve Arnold, a Deacon in the Community of Lutheran Deacons within the Lutheran Diaconal Association, is a rostered Deacon of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Steve is an Oblate of the St. John's Abbey Benedictine Community in Collegeville, MN, a retired University professor, and is semi-retired as a Chaplain with Crest View Senior Communities in Columbia Heights, MN.

JANUARY

"Seeing Clearly"

by Deaconess Karen Burgess-Cassler

Hymn Suggestion

"Be Thou My Vision" (ELW #793 or available online)

Scripture

"As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, 'Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.' Then he shouted, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' Jesus stood still and ordered the man to be brought to him; and when he came near, he asked him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' He said, 'Lord, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw it, praised God." Luke 18:25-43

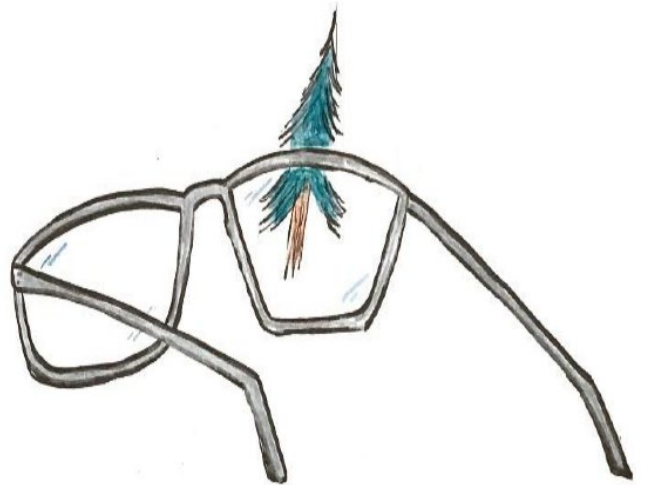
Devotion

Seeing clearly is a gift. That realization was underlined for me when I developed cataracts several years ago. For a while, after surgery, I saw better. Then something changed for the worse -- my vision became cloudy again.

At first this was irritating, then scary as I wondered if I was going to lose my eyesight. I kept cleaning my glasses, thinking there was something on them. But then I discovered that the cataracts had returned.

This time, with fast and painless laser surgery, even with dilated eyes, I could see clearly right away. Colors were cleaner and brighter. The day after the surgery, I nearly cried when I noticed that I could see the fir needles at the tops of the trees and I felt like I was seeing the world more like it really is.

I found unexpected joy in now being able to see things that were not previously clear: details in pictures of my grandchildren, a bridge now visible in the distance, a smile from



a stranger across the street. I also discovered that I needed to clean some places in my house, corners I'd overlooked before because I wasn't seeing them fully.

Seeing clearly can bring us joy, for not only the creation around us, but all of life. Seeing clearly can also tug us toward tasks that we hadn't noticed needed doing -- asking ourselves how our sight becomes clouded without our really noticing until the "cataracts" are removed.

I try to think about this every day so I remember to be grateful and to pay attention and enjoy the gift of seeing clearly - a gift God offers us, just as was offered to the beggar whose faith opened his eyes.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- The way God sees us—how does that affect the work we do as a congregation, council, or committee?
- Where does our eyesight become clouded, even without our noticing?
- Where do we want to see more as God sees us and the world?

Prayer

We thank you, God, for your light in our lives. Help us see you and your world more clearly, and serve as you lead us. Amen.

About the Author

Deaconess Karen Burgess-Cassler is a retired public-school teacher living in Vancouver, Washington.

FEBRUARY

"Rivers of Living Water" by Deaconess Adrainne Gray

Hymn Suggestion

"When Pain of the World Surrounds Us" (ELW #704) or "When in the Hour of Deepest Need" (LSB #615)

Scripture

"On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" John 7:37-38

Devotion

Rivers of living water - this is what my family watched for in Jerusalem, a place that is internationally known as a place of conflict.

My family - two teens, my husband and myself - saw that few freely sought the living water -- especially when it seemed that all that remained was a stony, dry riverbed. When people say, "there is no peace in the Middle East" we are reminded that there is peace available to all in the City of Resurrection if we are willing to be witnesses to the quiet, subtle examples of peace among God's people.

Living where they had daily access to biblical places such as the River Jordan, Jacob's Well, the Pools of Bethesda and the Sea of Galilee, my children found them seemingly meaningless as they saw young men and women their age denied dignity in and around these very sites because of their ethnicity. Many of these holy sites are cut off to some Palestinian Christians by a separation wall.

The pressures, injustices, tensions, and militarization made our children weary at times, and incredulous that peace will ever come for their friends and church members. How then did we keep our children hopeful in our Lutheran values to follow our Gospel lessons to love one another; especially extended to those who they



saw harming the other? How did we help our children find balance and love in the unstable surroundings of Jerusalem?

We began by actively looking for peaceful interactions among the ethnic groups –Rivers of Living Water. I encouraged my children to look critically at our neighbor's difficult reality, but I also asked them to keep their eyes open for Rivers of Living Water. When we spotted acts of kindness and humanity, we would stop and drink in the moment.

Those moments sustained and reminded us that Jesus had not abandoned Jerusalem, nor any other place.

Question for Reflection & Discussion

- Where are you being called to find rivers of living water?

Prayer

God of peace, flow through us, calling us to listen, watch, and go to the river's edge and our thirsts will be quenched. Amen.

About the Author

Deaconess Adrainne Gray lives in Atlanta, GA and is the Communications Officer for Communion Relations at the Lutheran World Federation. She also serves the LDA as Director of Recruitment. She served four years as an ELCA missionary to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land in Jerusalem.

MARCH

"A Fair Balance "

by Deaconess Student Karen Davidson

Hymn suggestion

"For the Fruit of All Creation" (ELW #679, LSB #894)

Scripture

"I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, 'The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.'" 2 Corinthians 8:13-15

Devotion

Often, the jobs they perform are dead end, keeping them working well into advanced age. They are men and women I worked alongside for six months as I completed my diaconal fieldwork assignment. Together we accepted, sorted and priced donations that were set out for sale in the thrift store. After a few weeks, I realized that my work friends are what society classifies as the "working poor."

Laboring with these people whose income falls below the poverty level, I learned how low wages and the high cost-of-living makes it difficult to rise above the poverty line. I listened to their lament about common business practices that involve fees and deposits that make accomplishing things such as cashing a paycheck, paying rent and utilities, or owning a car difficult -- all things I take for granted. I learned about shady business practices that rob them of employee benefits such as social security. Pension/retirement plans meant to support us in our retirement years instead keep them working well into advanced age. They have little to no opportunity of increasing their income in order to help overcome these obstacles.



In the midst of their laments, however, I perceived their resilience and their strong desire to earn a living. I listened as they raised awareness to management about the needs of people who cannot afford even thrift store prices. I observed how they cared for each other by cooking meals, sharing rides, and a "got your back" attitude that helps them prevail.

Their sense of community reminds me of Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church in which he instructs them about the benefits of sharing. He says that out of our plenty we should give -- so that if we are found lacking, we will receive what is needed. This exchange of resources creates a supply balanced on compassion, generosity and kindness -- the things I observed in my work friends. As Paul says that "a fair balance" is the goal, I ponder on the beauty of a society where no one -- in a land of plenty -- goes without.

Question for Reflection & Discussion

- In what ways do we selfishly hold on to resources that might create a deficit for others?
- How can we practice releasing them for the benefit of my neighbor?

Prayer

*"Father, providing food for your children,
by your wise guiding teach us to share
one with another, so that, rejoicing
with us, all others may know your care. "*

Praise and Thanksgiving (LSB #789)

About the Author

Karen Davidson is a deaconess student who is learning the deep humility of the call to diakonia. She lives in Huntsville, AL and is a grateful member of Grace Lutheran Church.

APRIL

“Living Documents” by Deacon Matthew Petersen

Hymn Suggestion

“Light Dawns on a Weary World” (ELW #726) or “Forth in Thy Name, O Lord, I Go” (LSB #854)

Scripture

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Micah 6:8

Devotion

Considered to be the father of Clinical Pastoral Education, Anton Boisen described patients as “living documents” to be read by chaplains and other spiritual caregivers. While this may seem a bit impersonal to our diaconal ears, Boisen rightly directs our attention to the patient in need of spiritual care. The patient is the subject of the encounter, not an object to be analyzed or taught. In many contexts, but especially in hospice or hospital care, the patient is most often the object of tests, therapies (and sadly) often spoken about in the third person -- objectified within earshot.

Micah 6:8 has been written on my heart since I was a child. I often sang the verse in morning chapel at camp or around the evening campfire. Much of our baptismal call, our response to grace, is contained in this short passage. It is difficult to imagine a context where we cannot be guided by these ancient words. Justice, mercy, and humility have been the touchstones that I reach for not only in my ministry as a chaplain, but in every area of my life.



While justice and mercy are critical to spiritual care, humility is a way of living and doing ministry that must be cultivated by a chaplain or any faith leader. Without a spirit of humility, one cannot effectively “read” the “living document” or hear the story of the patient. Humility allows us to enter the story of the patient, to get out of the way and “give space... unleash imagination and memory, and open the possibility for healing, for challenge, for transformation. (Boisen)”

People often wonder what I “do” as a hospital chaplain resident. There seems to be an expectation or an assumption that I come to the ministry encounter with the “right” words to say, or “say” something to allow the patient to be more at peace -- or even lead death-bed conversions. These notions couldn't be further from the truth. In fact, I often feel that the most holy encounters happen when I “do” nothing. As a diaconal caregiver, I see myself as less of a storyteller, but more of a story hearer.

My role as hearer is to create a space for patients and the Holy Spirit to tell the story of the patient's life and experience of this season of their journey on earth. In order to create that space, as a chaplain I must also be intentionally present to the patient and the Holy Spirit as their story is shared. Both are ways of “being” rather than “doing” and take disciplined humility on my part, of which I sometimes fail.

“Living documents” are all around us, not only in the hospital bed. There are holy stories yet to be shared and heard. Are we listening?

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- In what ways do you “read living documents” in your ministry context or daily life?
- How can you strive “act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly” in your call?

Prayer

Listening God, we thank you for stories and storytellers. Open our ears to hear more deeply the stories of others and the voice of your Spirit. Amen.

About the Author

Deacon Matthew Petersen is a chaplain in Cincinnati currently serving at Cincinnati Children's Hospital. He is also a volunteer “chaplain” to dogs at the Interfaith Hospitality Network Pet Support Program. Matthew and his wife have two dogs of their own and four backyard chickens. Matthew spends his time reading, swimming, hiking, and trying to be more like Ted Lasso.

MAY

"The Light of Christ" by Deaconess Brenda Bauer

Hymn Suggestion

"O God of Light" (ELW #507, LSB #836)

Scripture

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Psalm 119:105

"By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." Luke 1:78-79

Devotion

Florence Nightingale is thought to be the founder of nursing. In truth, there were *krankenschwestern* (sisters of the sick or ill) prior to Florence. These were deaconesses -- women who chose not to marry, entered a motherhouse and there provided services of charity. In 1851, Florence Nightingale took training at *Kaiserswerther Diakonie* in Germany, one of the original deaconess motherhouses. There she learned the basics of caring for the sick, dedicated her life to being a nurse and expanded this vocation into the secular world, including field service during the Crimean War.

Florence Nightingale was known as "the lady with the lamp". Nightly, she quietly checked on the patients. Her face and silhouette were illuminated by the lamp as she made her rounds. It provided assurance and comfort for those on their beds or cots who felt the darkness of fear, pain, isolation, and death surrounding them.

As a deaconess nurse, I have walked with persons who were caught and trapped in darkness -- sometimes physically or mentally, sometimes in deepest spiritual despair. I've also worked as a hospice nurse.



A dying person sometimes becomes agitated by the room's overhead lighting or cannot rest with a switched-on room light. A small lamp brought just enough light to assure them of my presence and that they were not alone. It allowed me to perform the

nursing functions and care needed. At times, hope and light are brought not visually, but through touch, words, music, or gentle nursing care. With light adapted to the unique needs of each person, my goal was to demonstrate Christ's love and light in ways to bring hope, peace, and mercy.

Amazingly, sometimes I was the one who experienced the light. One such time, I was with a mentally-challenged dying young woman. Her mother had told us that if she spoke of seeing angels, we should tell her that she could go with them. Caring for her, I noticed her staring off to the corner of the room and asked what she was seeing. She said, "Oh, just the angels." I relayed her mother's message and, very matter-of-factly, she replied, "I will wait until mom is here." I knew this was a holy moment.

Another came when an elderly woman, dying from unsuccessful surgery was being disconnected from the respirator. As the machines were turned off, she suddenly opened her eyes, lifted herself ever so softly off the bed and pillows, and gave a huge smile. When she rested her body back on the bed, she no longer breathed. I knew she had seen heaven or our Lord. She now was following the light of Christ on a new path. And I thought, Amen.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- Have you experienced a time when you felt held in darkness?
- Was there a person who was the light of Christ to you? How was it shown?
- How do you demonstrate being the light of Christ to others?

Prayer

Oh Lord, Jesus. Come into our lives with your light of redemption and healing. May this light shine through us bringing guidance for those who are trapped and held in darkness of their mind, body, or spirit. May your spirit give us the gifts to discern how to be the Light of Christ. Amen.

About the Author

Deaconess Brenda Bauer, RN, served as a nurse, faith community nurse, and chaplain/spiritual care provider throughout her 40+ years of ministry. She is now retired.

National Nurses Week begins each year May 6 and ends May 12, Florence Nightingale's birthdate.

JUNE

“Walking in the Garden” by Deaconess Kat Peters

Hymn Suggestion

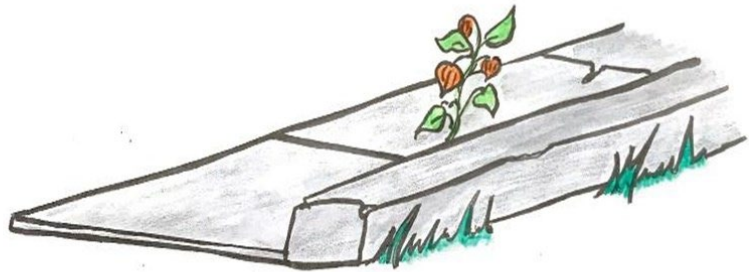
“Built on the Rock” (ELW #652, LSB #645)

Scripture

“As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!’ Then Jesus asked him, ‘Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.’ When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ‘Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?’ Then Jesus began to say to them, ‘Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, “I am he!” and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.” Mark 13:1-8

Devotion

In September 2021, I had the great privilege of taking a walking tour to learn about history and resilience in Gary, Indiana, in a part of the city called Midtown. This is where VJ Records was located, where the Gary music scene was nurtured and led to some of the most famous and important recording artists of all time. This is where mayor Richard Hatcher was elected the first African American mayor in the history of the United States and where architect William Wilson Cook built some of the most iconic buildings of his time.



On that day, our footsteps traversed cracked sidewalks, overgrown empty lots where these iconic buildings used to stand but whose stones have since been cast down. And we visited four community gardens on our two-hour walking tour, where we walked humbly through squash patches, tomato vines, sunflower forests, fruit and nut tree groves. Walking among beds of herbs and collards and chiles, we heard stories such as the that of the founder of the Episcopal church garden. She related how, when she saw she had \$2.10 left to her name,

she heard God tell her to go buy seeds. And how the children at her church now have a "seed ministry," where they save seeds so that others can also start gardens.

Midtown Gary, despite being the epicenter of the industrial age, is now a food desert. Many of its residents suffer from diet-related illnesses such as diabetes. Driving down Broadway in Midtown, the boarded-up buildings are interspersed with empty lots, not a supermarket in sight. But when you look closer, you also see food growing through the cracks, through the gravel. After visiting one of the gardens, where I got to sample heirloom tomatoes that tasted like candy, I looked down and saw ground cherries growing out the cracks in the curb next to the road. I learned to eat these in Costa Rica, where I lived for nine years, and where the small fruits are called uchucas --- little orange cherries wrapped in their own individual "leaf papers," like a tomatillo.

The neighborhood around the garden is home to multi-generational black families, but also to burned-out houses, boarded up and used now for drug sales. In an economy where simple small homes in a white community are valued at \$300,000, homes in this Gary neighborhood are valued at around \$43,000. The social divisions and lack of food that Jesus talks about in Mark are painfully evident here.

As we look around, walking humbly, listening, we see stones cast down from great buildings. Leaders come to lead us astray, people turning on other people. It is a stressful and uncertain time, and we can imagine how the disciples might have felt listening to Jesus talk about social upheaval. In the text, we can see that Jesus does not tell them that the world is ending, but rather that something new is being born.

As Christians, we know that God, in Jesus, is making all things new. We get to participate in this transformation. We pay attention for the inbreaking of God's reign of justice, abundance, and peace for all. We yearn for green gardens in food deserts while witnessing fruits growing up through the sidewalk cracks. We may be frightened when we see beloved landmarks removed or our own privileges curtailed. Yet, Jesus reminds us not to be alarmed. We can pay attention for signs of new birth, and we can participate by planting seeds and watching them grow into food and into well-being, especially for the most vulnerable among us.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- How can your family or congregation choose transformation over despair in a tumultuous time?
- What does the call to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly look like today in your community?

- What does the image of a community garden mean to you in light of the text from Mark?

Prayer

Lord, help us to see the world as you see it -- beyond the stone buildings that exist, to your reign. Let us not be distracted by those who would lead us astray, away from your vision of justice, mercy, and humility. When stones fall, or weeds grow, or things break, give us the courage to know that you are making all things new. Give us strength to be part of the transformation. Help us to see your blessings in the cracks in the sidewalk, and let those blessings be a gift to us and to all, especially to the oppressed or marginalized. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

About the Author

Deaconess Kat Peters has her Master's in Education and Master's in Rural Development from San José, Costa Rica, where she lived for nine years working in study-abroad, and as a Deaconess in the Central American Lutheran Church. She now teaches Spanish at Indiana University Northwest and does various community and intercultural projects as part of her New Backwater website and blog project (www.newbackwater.com). She lives in Valparaiso, Indiana, with her husband, their two sons and their cat.

JULY

"Keep Doing That" by Deaconess Student Hannah Koby

Hymn Suggestion

"When in Our Music God Is Glorified" (ELW #850, LSB #796)

Scripture

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God... Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words." Romans 8:14-16, 26

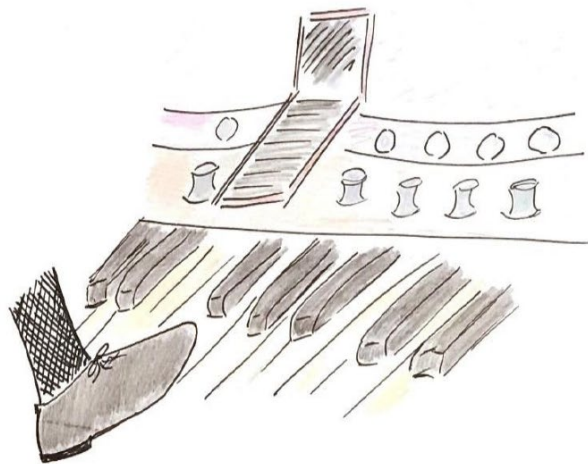
Devotion

Have you ever heard music or viewed art that strikes you in the depth of your being? Have you ever thought of that moment as being at prayer?

When I sit on the organ bench to share music with others, I hope to touch and connect with my listeners on that deep level. But for this to happen, I need to be deeply engaged myself. When I lose myself in what I am doing musically, it is a marvelous feeling. Some call this being engaged on every level of our being - emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual - "flow". I call it a Holy Moment.

In my college organ recital, it happened to me while performing Felix Mendelssohn's Sixth Sonata in which he used the melody "Vater unser im Himmelreich", the Lord's Prayer in German. Perhaps I played it more musically than the other pieces, but I

discovered that I'd not only connected especially deeply with myself, but the listeners, too. I think that in such moments, we are sharing a story beyond words. Afterwards, a mentor asked me, "What was different for you about playing that piece?" I hesitated, then finally said, "I was praying through the music". Looking at me intently, she said, "Keep doing that."



We each have stories. Some are too painful to share. At other times, we just don't know how to put our experiences into words, especially our encounters with the Holy One. Then sometimes, through listening to or playing music, our spirits call out, and we trust that God's Spirit of God cries out with us and we are heard in Heaven -- God with us.

Simone Weil wrote that *"prayer consists of attention. It is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable toward God."* There is a reason why the Christian community is -- and always has been -- a singing and praying community. We make music because the story of our relationship with God is deeper than words, so we must pray and proclaim beyond words, too. Through praying and singing, we are connected with Christians across time and space, sharing the story of God's work in our world.

During the isolation of recent years, praying and singing – in our own spaces and yet together at 'Virtual worship' – we've been reminded that time and space cannot separate us from God's love which calls and re-forms us in every age anew. However you pray – with or without words – "keep doing that".

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- In what ways does your community pray?
- How does it connect you with God and with one another?
- What do you do with all your being? Could that be prayer?

Prayer

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for calling us to be your children and to be part of your story. Teach us to use our unique gifts to pray to you and to connect and share your story with those around us – even when words fail. Amen.

About the Author

Hannah Koby is a deaconess student and a church musician currently on internship with the ELCA Wittenberg Center in partnership with the LWF Center Wittenberg (Lutheran World Federation) in Lutherstadt Wittenberg, Germany.

AUGUST

"Sharing Food"

by Deaconess Jean Wildgrube

Hymn Suggestion

"Take My Life, that I May Be" (ELW #583, LSB #784)

Scripture

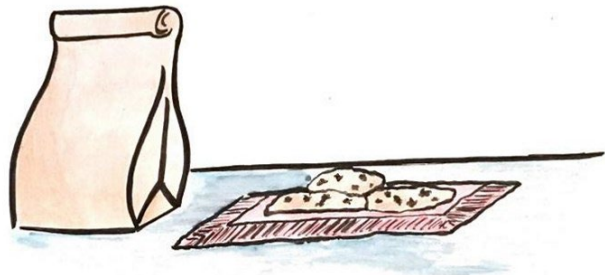
Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children. Matthew 14:19-21

Devotion

About two years ago our congregation began partnering with "The Street Soldiers" to serve Sunday afternoon meals to people in need. About 120 gather in our parking lot for food each week. I love to bake, and began thinking how I might help supply something for those meals. I began contributing 10 dozen cookies weekly.

Once a month, our Deacon of Outreach purchases ingredients for sandwiches. I decided that here was another way I could help The Street Soldiers feed the hungry. Living in a retirement community, I now collect food from our residents as a monthly food donation for several communities providing food for the hungry.

We marvel at the story of Jesus taking two fish and five loaves of bread to provide "lunch" for 5,000 people. It is a story that seems miraculous, yet it tells us that Jesus reaches out to give the blessings of home, clothing and food – and he does that through us. He calls on us to share with those in need by giving food, money, resources, time and help to humankind. Jesus reminds us that in-as-much as we serve others, we do it for him. Let us all "soldier on" with outstretched hands of service.



Question for Reflection & Discussion

- What can you give to others? Your time? A visit? Some food?

Prayer

Lord, you give us our daily bread. Help us to share with others what you have abundantly given us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

About the Author

Deaconess Jean Wildgrube is the Deacon of Stewardship and the co-chair of the 150th Anniversary celebration at Zion Lutheran Church in Schenectady, NY. Jean also leads a Bible class at Coburg Village.

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