

Good Shepherd  
LUTHERAN CHURCH

*the weary world*  
**Rejoices**

AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



Storyteller Anthony DeMello has written, “You have to understand, my dears, that the shortest distance between truth and a human being is a story.”

The following is a collection of stories, bravely shared by Good Shepherd members, about seasons of weariness and experiences of joy. May the stories we receive here grow our understanding of how God works in weariness and how joy both seeps in and surprises us along the way.

The experiences of this year have resulted in many of us feeling disconnected from others and isolated in our experiences. May these stories serve as vessels to connect us to one another in understanding, liberation, and compassion.

Our stories are deeply personal but in the sharing of them, we offer them up to the Holy Spirit to use in order to comfort, challenge, liberate, and nourish one another. May we, each of us, be brave with our stories in the year ahead – both in the telling of our own and the listening to others. In doing so, may we find our way more deeply into the story we share. The story of a love so abundant, disruptive, and enduring that it came to dwell among us. May we behold its glory in this season, and always.

**Hints for using this devotional:**

- Set aside a time or place each day – it could be a special place set aside, or simply a place you often find yourself.
- Each story ends with a bible verse. Take time to think how that verse connects to your life. You may want to highlight the verse in your own bible with a note about the story you read.
- Respond – keep a journal or write in the margins. If something awakens in you, keep track of it. You may not have time to unpack it right away, but you can revisit it later.
- These devotionals can be read alone and followed with prayer or shared with others and followed with conversation and prayer.
- Each Sunday you will find, in place of our story, a portion of the 40<sup>th</sup> chapter of Isaiah. The people of Israel knew something about collective weariness. In this chapter Isaiah speaks to them tenderly, hopefully, and expectantly. There are some prompts to help you read this text using Lexio Divina – or holy reading.
- There is no RIGHT or WRONG way to use this book – but we hope you will engage with it frequently and from the heart. Thank you again to all our brave writers.

November 29<sup>th</sup>

Isaiah 40:1 -9

Comfort, O comfort my people,  
says your God.

<sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that she has served her term,  
that her penalty is paid,  
that she has received from  
the LORD's hand  
double for all her sins.

<sup>3</sup> A voice cries out:  
"In the wilderness prepare the  
way of the LORD,  
make straight in the desert a  
highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be  
made low;  
the uneven ground shall become  
level,  
and the rough places a plain.

<sup>5</sup> Then the glory of the LORD shall  
be revealed,  
and all people shall see it  
together,

for the mouth of the LORD has  
spoken."

<sup>6</sup> A voice says, "Cry out!"  
And I said, "What shall I cry?"

All people are grass,  
their constancy is like the  
flower of the field.

<sup>7</sup> The grass withers, the flower  
fades,

when the breath of  
the LORD blows upon it;  
surely the people are grass.

<sup>8</sup> The grass withers, the flower  
fades;

but the word of our God will  
stand forever.

<sup>9</sup> Get you up to a high mountain,  
O Zion, herald of good  
tidings;<sup>[a]</sup>

lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, herald of good  
tidings,<sup>[b]</sup>

lift it up, do not fear;  
say to the cities of Judah,  
"Here is your God!"

**Consider encountering the scripture prayerfully using "Lexio Divina" or Holy Reading.**

**Read** - Read the text through once and see what word or phrase shimmers for you a bit. You do not need to know why, just sit for a bit with the word or phrase that captured you.

**Meditate** – Read the text through again and see what echoes. What word or phrase seems to draw you in or echo in your mind or heart? It may or may not be the same as before. You do not need to know why, just sit for a bit with this word or phrase.

**Respond** – Read the text through a third time and respond – out loud, in a journal, or in your heart. You may have a question, a gratitude, a complaint, a praise. Respond to God with all of it.

**Contemplate** – Read the text through a fourth time and then sit quietly. Simply rest with the text and with the Spirit so that it may take up space in you and root itself in you. You may find it unfolds in the day ahead.

## November 30th – Colin Grove

I have experienced the most spiritual growth during times of crisis. When I was a boy, my father lost his job, and our family drank powdered milk and ate sandwiches made from generic crackers, butter, and jelly. It was then that I first learned to rely on my faith for true nourishment and about what encourages spiritual growth.

Later, as I confronted a surgery during high school, I became overwhelmed with a fear of death. The night before the operation, I prayed in our backyard with one of my brothers and learned how to *not be anxious about anything*. A few years ago, during my mother's cancer treatment, I found myself bearing witness to *thanksgiving while suffering*.

Shortly after the beginning of the pandemic, I heard Dr. Barry Black, Chaplain of the United States Senate, preach that *we serve a Christ who never lets a good crisis go to waste*, Romans 8:28, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." Chaplain Black's powerful exhortation to *pray about everything with thanksgiving and expecting God's peace to guard my heart* sustained me as I led fellow Christ-followers through this unprecedented season of ministry with Team World Vision.

When we felt empty, God entered our void and filled us with His love. When we succumbed to our weaknesses, God supplied His strength. When we thought we were at the end of ourselves, God was beginning to reveal His plans for us. When we believed there was no way forward, God showed us how to put on our own race. When we were afraid to share our story and invite people to give during so much economic pain, God opened hearts and generosity overflowed. This was an *only-God* kind of season. While WE may be in crisis, GOD is never in crisis. He is LORD over it all.

**Romans 8:26–28**

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who I have been called according to his purpose.

## **December 1st - Karen Perzentka**

When the “shelter in place” was ordered in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I wondered how I would face the uncertainty of isolation and lack of activity in my life. I am a very social person who is active in many organizations. What would I do with all this time on my hands? What would it be like without an active schedule to keep my mind and spirit fulfilled? I turned to God for answers to these questions and He provided so many abundant blessings.

Without the distractions of my hectic life I can concentrate on the gifts that God has provided. I have connected with residents who are isolated in care centers, with old friends, neighbors, and my two children and their families more often than usual. There has been more time to exercise, enjoy the nature and environment God created as well as working long hours as a proofreader. But the greatest gift of all is the extra time I have spent in studying the Word and praying in groups or on my own. Through faith in Jesus Christ God has given me the strength, hope and joy through his grace and mercy. I have chosen to live my life not in fear but in faith for God is always with me. Through His truth and grace, I will live my life to the fullest praising him for His gifts.

### **Isaiah 41:10**

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

## **December 2<sup>nd</sup> – Liz Deterding**

I love words. I love examining them, researching their origins, translating them into other languages, taking them apart, rearranging them in different ways. Now that we can't be with each other physically, I've relied on words to connect. I've read them in books and poems, exchanged them with pen pals, shared them in countless Zoom calls, and laid them bare with trusted friends in Wine & Word and loneliness conversations.

It probably won't surprise anyone to learn that my favorite nativity story comes from the gospel of John. I love how both epic and intimate John can be. His story doesn't start in a barn in Bethlehem, but at the beginning of all things, with everything coming into being through the Word, who was "life, and that life was the light of all mankind."

As I'm writing this, we are approaching the darkest part of the year, and this one has already been full of anxiety, frustration, and loss. But so many words shared with me this year; stories, confessions, and encouragement; words from conversations, readings, and sermons; have been "thrills of hope" and have given me life (as the kids say). They've helped me find joy in weariness and light in darkness. If you are weary, my hope is that you can find joy in these words, and in each other, too.

### **John 1:1, 4-5**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

## **December 3<sup>rd</sup> – Joanne Berg**

The other day I stared idly out my window at the activity in the neighborhood. Seeing cars coming and going, people walking their dogs, and children chasing one another made me feel more and more isolated. I'd been contemplating spending the Thanksgiving holiday alone. Needing distraction, I tuned into the week's video of Good Shepherd's worship service, which provided the desired inspiration.

Then I discovered a YouTube snippet of 82-year-old Mary Maxwell delivering the invocation at a dinner for Home Instead patrons. She asked the Lord's blessing for seniors like her "who are sometimes not very likable, let alone lovable." With a straight face she continued, "You don't get to practice getting old—this is my first time!" And I had to laugh—my mood lightened. It is said that a laugh a day can keep the doctor away. Humor is one of the most precious gifts God provides for humans, and we need to use it often.

What this experience taught me is that there is hope for the future. Solitary holidays are just temporary inconveniences caused by the COVID-19 virus. They cannot erase the benefits of the life God has given us. If we have health, a safe place to live, food to eat, the love of friends and family, and have good memories, we're wealthy! I am content in the knowledge that in life there is always hope.

Thanks be to God.

### **Romans 5: 3-5 (Living Bible Translation)**

We can rejoice too when we run into problems and trials for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to be patient. And patience develops strength of character in us and helps us trust God more each time we use it until finally our hope and faith are strong and steady. Then, when that happens, we know that all is well, for we know how dearly God loves us and we feel this warm love everywhere within us because God has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.

## **December 4<sup>th</sup> – Tessa Poppen – 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Student**

Many times throughout this pandemic, I have found myself and others around me stressing a lot more. Whether it's work, school, thinking of others, or how this pandemic has affected us and people around us. I've experienced many times how when people are stressed, we begin to feel hopeless with everything around us. With this, my story is how I have learned to cope with all of this, and how I learned to always have hope.

I've noticed that in these past months, my mind keeps being brought back to worrying for people I love and care for, whether it involves the coronavirus or not. Towards the beginning of all this craziness, whenever I was worrying or thinking of someone, I care about I oftentimes felt scared and hopeless. I felt like there was nothing I could do to make things better. But as these situations went by, I realized that there was always one thing that made me feel better, and that was praying. As I prayed more, I felt less hopeless, because it really worked! Thinking back on this now, I'm beginning to realize how much more peace of mind praying gave me, and how much more hopeful I became.

### **Romans 15:13**

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the powers of the Holy Spirit.”

### **Kira Wagner – 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Student**

3 years ago, my grandma died, and it was very hard for everyone in my family. It was very unexpected, but right now it seems that everything is unexpected. That summer, my entire family went to Colorado for a little over a week to spread her ashes because that was a place that she and my grandpa loved. We did many things there, and I think I had forgotten how nice it was to spend time with everyone at once. We spread her ashes in a river right outside Boulder, Colorado.

When I got home, I was very sad, but I had to continue on with normal life. The next time we went to my grandpa's house, he gave me something. It was a rose ring that was my grandma's. He gave it to me because it was very special to her, and my middle name is Rose. So he thought that could be how I remembered her. Now, it used to sit in my room because I was afraid of losing it, and I'm not a big fan of rings. I had an idea to put it on a chain and wear it as a necklace, and so I did that. So now I wear it everyday. I also know that she is still watching over me and my sister everyday. And that was my devotion. My tough time and the light at the end of my tunnel.

### **Psalms 147: 3**

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”

## December 5<sup>th</sup> – Sadie Skibo

As an introvert, I am quite good at keeping myself busy and after buying a house this spring, I had lots of “to-do’s” that leant themselves to social distance. While I mowed the lawn, pulled carpet off the walls (yes, shag carpet on the walls), and weeded relentlessly, I felt like there was something lurking behind me; a to-do list item that I couldn’t cross off. For a while I just chalked it up to “new house sounds” and the stress of being a teacher in a pandemic.

But I realized that the work that was required had nothing to do with my house or my job. God *was* calling me to work alongside Him – but the project was me. To me, there is nothing scarier than the call for introspection without a good reason to put it off. After trying very hard to convince myself that the real problem was the ugly wallpaper and the unpacked boxes, I stopped. I sat. I cried. I wrote. I listened. I was.

I allowed the enforced space between myself and others to be filled by God. And in that space, I uncovered something new; a beloved, gay, child of God. Believe it or not, this was news to me but I knew it to be true because the peace that I felt certainly was beyond my understanding. Looking back, the effort to hold the Creator of the Universe at arms-length was far more draining than allowing Him to guide me through my heart’s work. So if you are tired of trying to fill your day so you don’t have to think about it, whatever it may be for you, let go. God’s got it. And you.

## Philippians 4

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

December 6<sup>th</sup>

Isaiah 40:10 - 17

<sup>10</sup> See, the Lord GOD comes with  
might,  
and his arm rules for him;  
his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.  
<sup>11</sup> He will feed his flock like a  
shepherd;  
he will gather the lambs in his  
arms,  
and carry them in his bosom,  
and gently lead the mother  
sheep.  
<sup>12</sup> Who has measured the waters  
in the hollow of his hand  
and marked off the heavens  
with a span,  
enclosed the dust of the earth in a  
measure,  
and weighed the mountains in  
scales  
and the hills in a balance?  
<sup>13</sup> Who has directed the spirit of  
the LORD,

or as his counselor has  
instructed him?  
<sup>14</sup> Whom did he consult for his  
enlightenment,  
and who taught him the path of  
justice?  
Who taught him knowledge,  
and showed him the way of  
understanding?  
<sup>15</sup> Even the nations are like a drop  
from a bucket,  
and are accounted as dust on  
the scales;  
see, he takes up the isles like  
fine dust.  
<sup>16</sup> Lebanon would not provide fuel  
enough,  
nor are its animals enough for a  
burnt offering.  
<sup>17</sup> All the nations are as nothing  
before him;  
they are accounted by him as  
less than nothing and emptiness.

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## December 7<sup>th</sup> – Barb Friberg

The year of great pain.

I was a computer programmer. I had worked on programs for about 10 years that I knew very well. My programs set up the shipping department for the warehouse. I worked in a language called COBOL. It was easy for me to make changes and I had many tests set up that would be used to make sure I coded correctly. I got a great salary, and I was living in the beautiful city of St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Then, the computer world changed significantly. My company moved the programmers to a new language and a new location. For years I was moving from position to position. It was tiring and destroyed my self-confidence. One day the boss told me that my position had been eliminated. My heart stopped. I had savings so I was not totally broke.

For weeks I struggled. It was hard to look for another job because there were no jobs that needed my skills. I met with a counselor. We discussed many things but one thing was important to me that day. Why not look for a new kind of job? Find and develop new skills. That advice was so important to me. I left there and began to think of other things that I would like to do. I needed groceries and so drove to the nearest shopping mall. There was a Barnes and Noble bookstore that I loved to visit. I walked toward it and saw the sign, “We are hiring.”

I got the job and spent years managing books and learning many new skills. I even learned to make coffee.

No greater miracle could have come my way right then. Praise the Lord for He is kind and His mercy is everywhere.

### **Luke 1:46-55**

And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.”

## December 8<sup>th</sup> - Lynne Kroger

During this pandemic I certainly have felt much weariness in my life. I am just retired and am used to being with and serving people. I discovered Jared Stellmacher's Monday presentation "Peaceful Reflections" and this music has lifted my spirits. A Weary World Rejoices thru this special music: "Morning Has Broken", "My Jesus I Love Thee" and "This Little Light of Mine"

"Morning Has Broken" reminds me of the joy of waking each morning to see what the Lord has waiting for me. I must remember to give my Lord thanks for the opportunity to serve Him and others. "My Jesus I Love Thee" I know thou art mine. For thee all the follies of sin I resign; My gracious Redeemer, my Savior art thou; If ever I loved thee My Jesus 'tis now.

"This Little Light of Mine" I'm going to let it shine; this little light of mine; I'm going to let it shine; Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine. Don't you try to blow it out, Hide it under a bushel NO; Hold it high, so all can see; these words remind me what I need to dwell on each day and lift my spirits high I received an email from a dear friend reminding me of one of joys, Singing with members of HeartSong. Not only the relationships of this group but bringing others the words of encouragement thru the message of song.

I am thankful for the blessings Zoom brings every evening with my family in South Dakota, Minnesota, Louisiana and Wisconsin to see one another and keep connected in God's love. I invite you to join PrimeTimers and "coffee Cup" zooms with Sarah Iverson.

Now God's Blessings to all in this Advent Season as we await the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

## Psalm 147: 1-9

Praise the Lord. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!

The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel.  
He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.  
He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.  
Great is our Lord and mighty in power, his understanding has no limit.  
The Lord sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground.  
Sing to the Lord with grateful praise; make music to our God on the harp.  
He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes  
grass grow on the hills.  
He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call.  
His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor his delight in the legs  
of the warrior;  
the Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his  
unfailing love.

## December 9<sup>th</sup> – Robyn Zimmerman

Worst Year Ever.

That phrase pretty much sums up my year in 2020. Everywhere you look you can hear people saying the same thing. “I can’t wait until this year is over!” “I’m so done with this pandemic!” “Can’t we just erase this year from the Calendar?” and “I can’t even.” My answer to these statements in order are as follows. “I understand how you feel.” “Yes, pandemics are the worst.” “No that is not really a viable option.” And “Yes, yes you can.”

I don’t want to devalue the amazing things that have happened this year while we push to the other side of this 100% yuckiness. I have a brand-new rainbow baby niece named Guthrie, she is beautiful, happy and filled with joy. I haven’t been able to meet her yet but because of technology I am able to “be there” for super cute moments in her brand-new life. So that’s a positive. She has a sister named Statler that is creative and a true free spirit, another positive. My nephew Alex started college this year, that’s exciting and I’m happy to see him grow in this way. My niece Emily graduated college and just got engaged. Those are positives. That is life continuing to move itself forward. My niece and nephew Norah and Eli sent me special handmade birthday cards on pretty purple paper so I’m definitely feeling positive about that.

What I am trying to say is let’s try to stay positive. I am no Pollyanna, and I don’t disagree with how awful or hard things have been. I just want to work – and sometimes it takes a bit of work – on rejoicing in the good while still acknowledging the complete and utter physical, emotional, and spiritual weariness that we are all feeling.

### **John1:1-4, 16**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was

life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given.

## December 10<sup>th</sup> – Ryan Panzer

In 2010, the Wisconsin Badgers won the Big Ten Championship and earned a trip to the Rose Bowl. As a member of the UW Marching Band, I was thrilled to have an opportunity to travel to Pasadena, CA for a New Year's Day showdown with the TCU Horned Frogs. With numerous pep rallies across Los Angeles, as well as the famous Rose Bowl Parade, the trip was far more than a football game.

After three days of non-stop, sun-splashed performances around Southern California, the big day arrived. The wake-up calls started at 3 AM (just three hours after our New Year's Eve Pep Rally) so the band could be in position for the start of the Rose Parade. The whistle sounded, the cameras rolled, the band stepped off. There we were, high-stepping our way down the streets of Pasadena, blasting "On, Wisconsin" and "You've Said it All" to hundreds of thousands of parade viewers. At the conclusion of the parade, we were filled with adrenaline, and thanks to the parade sponsors, some In-N-Out-Burger, in order to sustain us through the four-hour football game. We were elated, we were exhausted, we were overjoyed with the opportunity, we were beyond tired.

The game began. We played in the stands. We marched our halftime show. We cheered on the team. And then we lost. Some questionable play-calling combined with some uncharacteristic miscues led to an outcome none of us in the band expected, that continues to disappoint some of us to this day!

A Badger victory in the Rose Bowl would have been a happy culmination of years of grueling practice and days of non-stop performance. But in that weary moment, when the lights of the Rose Bowl dimmed and we boarded a redeye back to Madison winter, we looked back on the experience with something far greater than fleeting happiness. We looked back with gratitude for the years of friendship and camaraderie the band had offered. We looked back with an appreciation for the chance to represent the University on such a grand stage while escaping the Midwest winter. We looked back on that trip, and our experiences in the Badger band, with joy.

To follow Christ in this weary season has been a reminder that the life of faith is not a life of immediate happiness. The life of faith is a life of perseverance, a life where we can rest assured that even in our weariest moments, joy follows in the morning. Joy is rarely about exuberant celebration. It is instead about the quiet

moments, when the light of Christ subtly breaks into the world, filling our days with hope.

**Psalm 30:4-5**

Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people; praise his holy name.  
For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime;  
weeping may stay for the night; but rejoicing comes in the morning.

## **December 11<sup>th</sup> – Rick Thomas**

My mother died on Thanksgiving Day 2002 after a long struggle with brain cancer. The entire fall leading up to her death, I was becoming increasingly weary as I knew the inevitable was approaching. Everything seemed more difficult. I was struggling at my work as the business I owned at the time was having financial difficulties. I struggled to help care for my young son and to explain to him what was happening to his grandma. I struggled with guilt over not spending enough time with my mother who lived out of town. When she finally passed and we had her funeral, I remember hearing the song “Eagles Wings.” I also remember reading the 40<sup>th</sup> verse from Isaiah. Both of these things reminded me that trusting in the Lord will give me strength and get me through the hard times. Ever since then, even though Thanksgiving is the anniversary of her death, I feel an inner strength and my faith is renewed.

“And he will raise you up on eagle's wings,  
bear you on the breath of dawn,  
make you to shine like the sun,  
and hold you in the palm of his hand.”

### **Isaiah 40:31**

But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint.”

## **December 12<sup>th</sup> – Judy Liliensiek**

Weariness to joy brings to mind the Bible verse Psalm 30:1-5 “Weeping may tarry for the night but joy comes in morning.” I think of the birth of my children and the time before, during and after childbirth. What great joy to see a new life begin.

Today with the pandemic of COVID-19 my alone time does bring weariness and a feeling of isolation. My joy may come from a call from a grandchild, friend or family member. To be remembered by others is a wonderful thing. My prayer time can give me comfort and affirmation. Zoom time with different topics have given me things to ponder. I am thankful for new faces during Zoom. It is a joy to know them and I thankful for their sharing, insights and faith.

Music is also a way for me to lift up my spirit from weariness to joy. One of many hymns comes to mind for me, “To God be the Glory Great things he has done.” See if you can listen to it via YouTube. My hope for you is that the passage in Psalms or the hymn can give you comfort, hope and joy during this time as we prepare for Advent and the Christmas season which will be so different and perhaps difficult for each of us.

I would encourage you to reach out to a friend, neighbor or family member, have a conversation, join a Zoom meeting and don't miss the worship services. Peace in Christ.

### **Psalm 30:1-5**

I will exalt you, Lord, for you lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me.

Lord my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me.  
You, Lord, brought me up from the realm of the dead; you spared me from going down to the pit.

Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people; praise his holy name.

For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime;  
weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.

December 13<sup>th</sup>

Isaiah 40:18 - 24

<sup>18</sup>To whom then will you liken  
God,  
or what likeness compare with  
him?

<sup>19</sup>An idol? — A workman casts it,  
and a goldsmith overlays it  
with gold,  
and casts for it silver chains.

<sup>20</sup>As a gift one chooses mulberry  
wood<sup>[c]</sup>

—wood that will not rot—  
then seeks out a skilled artisan  
to set up an image that will not  
topple.

<sup>21</sup>Have you not known? Have you  
not heard?

Has it not been told you from  
the beginning?

Have you not understood from  
the foundations of the earth?

<sup>22</sup>It is he who sits above the circle  
of the earth,  
and its inhabitants are like  
grasshoppers;

who stretches out the heavens  
like a curtain,  
and spreads them like a tent to  
live in;

<sup>23</sup>who brings princes to naught,  
and makes the rulers of the  
earth as nothing.

<sup>24</sup>Scarcely are they planted,  
scarcely sown,  
scarcely has their stem taken  
root in the earth,  
when he blows upon them, and  
they wither,  
and the tempest carries them  
off like stubble.

**Consider encountering the scripture prayerfully using “Lexio Divina” or Holy Reading.**

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## **December 14<sup>th</sup> – Max Seeland**

During the past year has anxiety been an emotion anyone has experienced? Does going back to a normal everyday routine sound good? I would venture a guess it would be agreeable to most of us.

But what if the normal included no clean water to drink or no food to eat? Sadly, that is the normal for millions of people throughout the world.

Opportunities abound at Good Shepherd to help address these local and global problems. Although these ministries may look a little different with social distancing, mask wearing and group sizes, they are still very much alive, needed and appreciated. Specifically, the food pantry garden, Team World Vision and Feed my Starving Children have kept me involved throughout this difficult time.

The writer of 1 John 3:17-18 reminds us: “Now, suppose a person has enough to live on and notices another believer in need. How can God’s love be in that person if he doesn’t bother to help the other believer? Dear children, we must show love through actions that are sincere, not through empty words.”

We have all been out of our comfort zone the past few months, but what about the people that live that every day of their lives.

I pray that we are up for the challenge to give hope and help create a more “normal” lifestyle for the many people in need.

### **John 3:17-18**

“Now, suppose a person has enough to live on and notices another believer in need. How can God’s love be in that person if he doesn’t bother to help the other believer? Dear children, we must show love through actions that are sincere, not through empty words.

## **December 15<sup>th</sup> – Kristi Jones**

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

The pandemic has brought weariness. Weariness of methodically planning grocery store trips, of being on Zoom all day, of hearing the news, of worrying about this scary virus with many unknowns. It seems like all of us are pandemic-weary.

Amidst all of this, Good Shepherd is a source of light and hope. Virtual worship and other virtual activities provide some social connection at a time of disconnection. The food pantry, the clothes closet, the food pantry garden, the Thanksgiving to-go...these provide hope. Hope for those in the neighborhoods around our churches that they will be supported — with food, clothes, and love. Hope for us as church members that we can continue to love and serve our neighbors — that we will have enough to share and ways to share it.

Much has changed since March. Pandemic fear, racism anger, election anxiety and overall weariness exist in mass quantities. Good Shepherd as a church, and we as individuals, are called to do the hard work that needs to be done — despite our weariness. To be forces for good in the world, forces for social justice and racial justice and peace and love.

When we sing “All Are Welcome,” there's a line: “live the Word they've known.” During this pandemic and beyond, may we live the Word of God that we've known, and be ongoing sources of light and hope and joy and good news to others.

### **John 1:5**

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

## December 16<sup>th</sup> – Sarah Iverson

At least one week of my life for the past 10 years has consisted of an experience something like this. 12 hours riding on a bus, 5 days of leading 50 kids around a city, subsisting on granola bars and bad coffee, hauling around a 20-pound backpack, important late-night conversations, and ridiculous early morning wake-up calls. Trips taken with GS youth have exhausted me in mind, body, and spirit and I have come to find it holy and I cannot wait for those opportunities to come around again.

However, these trips—and youth ministry in general—have also introduced me to experiences of deep weariness. The weariness comes when you see young people trying so hard—to gain approval, to be a winner, to push away pain, to keep on their mask, to pretend they don't care, to figure themselves out, to bluff their confidence. And you want so much introduce them to their own belovedness and you work hard to do so—to speak the blessing into being, remind them of their true identity, to convince them of their worthiness.

All that sounds lovely and poetic—when really looked like constant re-directing, processing, and praying. Creating spaces for honesty, forgiveness, and spiritual growth. It involved watching a giant step forward followed by two steps back. It was seeing them grow brave and share their truth—only to quickly hide away. Sometimes it was seeing them, in their hurt, hurt others. And the teams on these trips are not fair. Me and a few chaperones against 50 of them. There is no tapping out once you have told a young person you care, and that your care is rooted in your faith in Christ. Those are high stakes and high stakes can result in deep weariness.

But gosh I would be lying if I said I don't miss it. Because in each of those weary travels, often when I least expected it, the Spirit would bring forth the fruit of joy. Joy in a mask coming down, joy in liberation, joy in healing, joy in friendship, joy in acceptance, joy in forgiveness. (I also learned joy is a bit of a night owl 😊)

Joy is noy slippery like happiness— it has traction. It leaves a mark on your soul. Some youth have wearied me for a day and some for years. Some have claimed their belovedness in the evening only to lose their grasp by the next morning. To love is to sometimes grow weary.

But my prayer is that joy has left its mark on these kids—as it has on me. The journey—literal and figurative—can be exhausting, and to agree to love folks along the way almost guarantees weariness. But we continue using these little interruptions of joy to find our way home together.

## **Romans 12**

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

## December 17<sup>th</sup> – Robin Kerl

I would like to start out my devotional with this Bible verse from 2nd Corinthians 4:8-12. It reads “we are hard pressed on every side but not crushed, perplexed but not in despair, persecuted, but not abandoned, stuck down, but not destroyed.”

There are times in our life when we must keep pressing forward in life even though we are in a trial that seems to us that in the natural looks to be impossible. Let me tell you all a little bit about my story and then you will see that I have actually lived what I am telling you all to do.

Back in 1999 my fiancé and I had just finished work, we both worked at Walmart as department managers. My fiancé and I decided to do a little shopping together after work. After doing so we walked out to his car and as we were about to get into my fiancé’s car we were blindsided by my ex-boyfriend who shot and murdered my fiancé and then shot me before he turned the gun on himself.

To this very day I am left with hardship and burdens most people can't even imagine, but in the midst of dealing with these burdens I still look for and find the positive things in a very awful situation. To this day I deal with the effects of this event. I don't have the best balance when I move, but I am aware that I am VERY fortunate to even be able to walk at all. I wear a hearing aid in one ear because my left ear was shot off, but the doctors repaired it with plastic surgery. There are so many bad things that have happened as a result of that awful day but there are so many positive things that I am grateful for. I guess for me that saying is true—when it says every cloud has a silver lining. I have, through the help of others, been able to maintain a positive attitude in the midst of this and so I want to encourage you also. Stay strong and keep trusting in God for your miracle that may be right around the corner. The most powerful work is believing that God is at work in our life. Don't put a limit on what you can overcome and by all means don't put any limits on what God can do in your life either.

## **2nd Corinthians 4:8-12**

We are hard pressed on every side but not crushed, perplexed but not in despair, persecuted, but not abandoned, stuck down, but not destroyed.

## **December 18<sup>th</sup> – Brittany Ballweg**

Weariness has taken on new meaning during this time as Brittany and Kyle Ballweg, GS members, watch Kyle's cousin's family experience something we hope no one ever has to. Kelsey, who is also a co-worker in Kyle's business, after battling COVID-19 at home for over one week, while 39 weeks pregnant with her and Derek's fourth child, Kelsey was taken to the ER on Wednesday, November 4 after she began having much difficulty breathing. Upon arrival at the hospital, she was found to have oxygen levels in the 40s (this number should be above 90, ideally above 95 in a healthy person). She was admitted to the ICU where she was sedated and put on a ventilator. Once her breathing was controlled, it was decided baby needed to be delivered via c-section. Kelsey remains intubated and in critical condition. Baby Lucy is home and doing well.

Even during this time of uncertainty, signs of hope are there. The community has come together to help financially support Kelsey and her family. Friends and family members are doing what they can to help care for them too. Through sharing one another's burdens we can walk through even the most weary time together. Please pray for Kelsey, Lucy and their family, so Kelsey can fight this virus and come home. It is in extreme times like this where we are putting our hope in the Lord to work his miracles.

## **Psalm 62:8**

Trust in Him at all times, pour out your heart to Him, for He is our refuge and strength.

## December 19<sup>th</sup> – Diane Kohrs

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money.” Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that.” – James 4:13-15

A year ago, Rick and I were starting to get used to being “empty-nesters” when our newly married son Mitchell asked if he and his wife Nina could move in with us for a little while. They were due to have a baby in February and Mitchell’s job was transferring to Madison. The plan was for them to live with us while they saved up for their own place. We agreed easily.

That’s not to say it was an easy transition. What would it be like to have the house full again? With a baby? It had been 23 years since we’d had a baby in the house! I imagine they had thoughts of their own. Are we imposing? Will we have privacy? What if the baby screams all night? (That one may have been a shared concern, LOL.)

To help, we talked over expectations and made some adjustments. Furniture was moved, sliding doors got put in, pantry and kitchen cabinets were rearranged. Rooms were claimed and repainted.

And just as we were settling in, baby Dean arrived (6 weeks early). Then the pandemic.

Mitchell was furloughed. Rick and I moved our offices into our now-full house. More furniture moving, upstairs fans doubled as white noise machines, and work breaks were less “talk with your colleagues” and more “rock the baby” time.

Did all the adjustments we had been making help to prepare us for so much more adjusting?

Cassie’s wedding was reduced in attendance but retained the love and joy. Now we see family and friends with masks and distanced, or via phone or video calls.

At some point, I started to lean into this skid, this new way of living. Not to say it's been all sunshine, there have been storms. But I keep looking for the rainbows, God's promises.

The saying, "We make plans, God laughs" is a short form of the verse above, and I can totally relate. You do not even know what tomorrow will bring. I have hopes and dreams for what is coming. And while I wait for what comes, I am enjoying the unexpected blessings of this time. And our God is with us through it all. Amen.

### **James 4:13-15**

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money." Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that."

December 20<sup>th</sup>

Isaiah 40: 25 - 31

<sup>25</sup>To whom then will you compare me,

or who is my equal? says the Holy One.

<sup>26</sup>Lift up your eyes on high and see:

Who created these?  
He who brings out their host and numbers them,

calling them all by name;  
because he is great in strength,  
mighty in power,  
not one is missing.

<sup>27</sup>Why do you say, O Jacob,  
and speak, O Israel,  
“My way is hidden from the LORD,  
and my right is disregarded by  
my God”?

<sup>28</sup>Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.

<sup>29</sup>He gives power to the faint,  
and strengthens the powerless.

<sup>30</sup>Even youths will faint and be weary,

and the young will fall exhausted;

<sup>31</sup>but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength,

they shall mount up with wings like eagles,

they shall run and not be weary,  
they shall walk and not faint.

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## December 21st – Eva Perez

In this world without live theatre, Verona Area Community Theatre offered an opportunity for a virtual play. So, naturally, I auditioned.

I wasn't expecting to get anything out of it. I expected a dumb little thing to fill up my time after school. I couldn't have been more wrong. My 10 castmates and student director were all *incredibly* talented. Everyone was putting in all we had, because this opportunity *was* all we had.

I also didn't expect to get an emotional experience out of it. Especially not from just talking. The show we performed was some monologues written by American Teens this Spring. We covered topics from boredom to death, to online school, watching X-men, and racism. Before this, I had never seriously talked to people my age about quarantine and COVID.

And it was so freeing! We were (and are) all feeling the same, thinking the same, and asking the same questions. It was liberating to talk about these issues that are so present in our lives, yet never deeply discussed. We'd been stuck for months not being able to do what we loved the most, and it showed. Because this opportunity went far beyond a virtual play. It became a way to lift our burdens through art and communication. I didn't really recognize the joy this play created for me until I finished it. And it only came because I had realized that everyone else was feeling the same way as me, and we just hadn't talked about it.

So, talk! It seems so simple, yet sometimes it's so hard. Talk to the people in your life about the things that make you squirm, the things that make you sad, or angry. Because I didn't realize how important *talking* is until I really did it.

## Hebrews 10: 23–25

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup>And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup>not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

## December 22<sup>nd</sup> – Sherri Swartz

I don't feel like writing a devotion. I'm not sure I even want to rejoice. I know I don't want to pretend I'm rejoicing. And I certainly don't want to add another "should" to my life and feel guilty I'm not rejoicing.

I've been weary of so many things for so long, I've become numb. Bad news just bounces off me. Sometimes I'm afraid to hope or try or care. I can't be the only one experiencing that.

I'd rather weep with those who weep. At least this year no one can pretend everything is OK. Finally, a year where suffering during the holidays isn't so lonely or hidden. But unfortunately, it is also a year when we're robbed of the opportunity to weep *with* each other. No Blue Christmas service where we can cry together, and no one will be shocked and ask, "What's wrong?"

Can't we just take a Sabbath this year from the expectation to rejoice that rubs salt into so many wounds? Instead of trying to explain suffering with our theology, can we just read all of Matthew's birth story without apology or embarrassment, and let those who are hopeless know *they are not alone*? "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great wailing. Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more." Matthew 2:18, quoting Jeremiah 31:15

And then, when Christ breaks through with the tiniest bit of light, we will see Him. The light will shine in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it.

### Matthew 1:18-24

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah[i] took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this,

an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel,”  
which means, “God is with us.”

## **December 23<sup>rd</sup> – Pastor Chris Enstad**

Human beings are not built for waiting. All of the parts that God has knit together into our bodies speak of movement and searching and doing, doing, doing. It is little surprise, then, that God needs to remind us more often to “be still” than to “move along.”

This pandemic year I have struggled to reconcile my own discomfort with the unknown with what it must have been like all of those years ago when Mary, Joseph, the earth and the heavens were all waiting for God to “show up.” I think of the politics of Jesus’ time and it makes ours look easy. I think of all of the worries and concerns that Mary and Joseph must have had, and they make mine look trivial.

And then I think of those in our church and our world that are waiting on a health diagnosis or a job. I think of those waiting to be allowed to see someone who is ill or to just see a parent or loved one for even just a moment.

I know that deep down all of us struggle with pain and brokenness in both large and small ways and I wait for that glorious reconciliation that only God can provide in the midst of worlds and relationships that all have taken for lost.

And then. Then, I am reminded in the sound of a hymn, the spoken Word or a glimpse of God at work in the world that the most amazing reconciliation has already happened in the birth of Jesus Christ!

So maybe, just maybe, what I’m really waiting for is to be re-minded, as only the Good News can do, that Jesus, that greatest gift, has already come to me, to you, to us.

## **2 Corinthians 5: 16 – 19**

So from now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know

him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

December 24<sup>th</sup>

Isaiah 9:2-7

The people walking in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of deep  
darkness

a light has dawned.

3 You have enlarged the nation  
and increased their joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as people rejoice at the harvest,  
as warriors rejoice  
when dividing the plunder.

4 For as in the day of Midian's  
defeat,  
you have shattered  
the yoke that burdens them,  
the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor.

5 Every warrior's boot used in  
battle  
and every garment rolled in  
blood

will be destined for burning,  
will be fuel for the fire.

6 For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on  
his shoulders.

And he will be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty  
God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of  
Peace.

7 Of the greatness of his  
government and peace  
there will be no end.  
He will reign on David's throne  
and over his kingdom,  
establishing and upholding it  
with justice and righteousness  
from that time on and forever.  
The zeal of the Lord Almighty  
will accomplish this.

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## **Christmas Eve Worship Schedule**

*Worship with us on YouTube & Facebook*

**10:30 a.m.**

**4:30 p.m.**

**6:00 p.m.**

**CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP**  
**Watch Good Shepherd's Christmas Eve service  
and Christmas Concert on Fox 47!**

In an untraditional year, let Good Shepherd help you celebrate Christmas in a traditional way at home. Enjoy familiar carols and an inspiring message from Good Shepherd, as *The Weary World Rejoices* on this Holy Night. Watch **A Candlelight Christmas at Good Shepherd**. Christmas Eve at 9 p.m. on Fox 47.

Start your Christmas celebration with holiday music - piano duets, traditional carols and classic choral pieces led by our own Jared Stellmacher and former director Ben Johnston-Urey. Watch **Rejoice! The music of Christmas at Good Shepherd**, Christmas Eve day and Christmas Day at 7 a.m. on Fox 47.



Here's where viewers can find Fox 47:

**Charter Spectrum** Channel 8 (SD) and Channel 617 (HD) | **ATT U-Verse** Channel 47 | **TDS** Channel 47 (and 1047 on **TDS fiber**) | **Dish Network** (Standard and HD) Channel 47 |  **DirecTV** (Standard and HD) Channel 47

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