

*This is My Story  
This is My Song*



*Lenten Devotional † 2014*

# Music: The glory of God and the refreshment of the soul.

Be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

-Ephesians 5:19-20

Martin Luther wrote, “Beautiful music is the art of the prophets that can calm the agitations of the soul; it is one of the most magnificent and delightful presents God has given us.”

Music has a way of calming the agitations of the soul. Music can bring us to tears, make us laugh, warm our hearts, and help us heal. Music truly is one of the most magnificent and delightful presents God has given us!

This year, as a part of our Lenten journey, we are going to share the gift of music and how it speaks to our heart. The theme of our journey is “This is my Story, This is my Song”. We have asked members of our community to share their favorite song and why. We have discovered that behind every favorite song, there is a story!

What is your story? What is your song? How has God worked in your life through song?

This devotional book is a few of your stories and songs. Thank you to all of you who wrote a devotional and shared with us a part of your story!

May our Lenten journey be filled with the Spirit, as we sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Blessings,  
Pastor Joe

## Ash Wednesday, March 5

Pastor Joe Johnson

Both Sides Now -Joni Mitchel

It was the summer of 1998. I was driving the church van filled with Jr. High youth heading to Itasca State Park for a bike riding retreat. The 14 youth in the van were talking and making their normal amount of noise. Then, I heard a girl's voice start singing a song I had never heard before. The girl, Anna, was a great singer and I'll never forget the words she sang;

*I've looked at life from both sides now  
From up and down and still somehow  
It's life's illusions I recall  
I really don't know life at all*

After Anna finished the song, I asked her about the song. The song is titled "Both Sides Now" by Joni Mitchel.

"Both Sides Now" names a reality of who we are as humans, and who we are as "church". We experience the ups and the downs, the joys and the sorrows. This is one of the things I love about being "church". We walk together through the joys and the sorrows of life. We comfort and console each other in the sorrows, and we celebrate with each other in the joys. Even when life doesn't make any sense at all, I find comfort in knowing that it's not about understanding...it's about faith!

Anna continued to stay active in youth group. She sang "Both Sides Now" on missions trips to Pine Ridge South Dakota (Lutheran Outdoors), Florida (Habitat for Humanity), and Tecate Mexico (Mission Discovery) and countless other trips, retreats, and events.

Anna recently earned her PhD from Aalborg University in Denmark and is now "Dr. Carlson".

As "church", we continue to walk together in this journey of Lent, this journey of life, through the ups and the downs, the joys and the sorrows!

## Thursday, March 6

Rita Fandrich  
Christ Arose

*Low in the grave he lay,  
Jesus my savior,  
Waiting the coming day,  
Jesus my Lord.*

*Refrain:*

*Up from the grave he arose,  
with a might triumph o'er his foes,  
He arose a victor from the dark domain,  
And lives forever with the saints to reign,  
He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!*

*Vainly they watch his bed,  
Jesus my savior,  
Vainly they seal the dead,  
Jesus my Lord.*

*Death cannot keep his prey, Jesus my Savior,  
He tore the bar away,  
Jesus my Lord.*

This song is my all time favorite song. It's a song of victory and a song of hope. Because of Jesus' triumph I have hope for a better life, a more peaceful life. A meeting of loved ones who have gone to the grave before me, a joyous reunion.

It is a song of victory, a song of love that no matter how hopeless life may seem, God always overcomes the obstacles and triumphs over everything, even the grave. Because of His triumph I have peace, forgiveness, eternal love, and most of all, a life after death.

As Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you. If it wasn't so would I have told you?"

- John 14

Friday, March 7

Terri Lee

Rest - Phill McHugh & Greg Nelson

Rest, relax, breathe...ahhhh...who doesn't like to hear those words in our busy, hurried lifestyles? About a year ago I was at a funeral and heard a song sung by the son of the man who suffered from the ravages of dementia for the last few years. The melody and words resonated within me then, as it does every time I hum the tune. The title of the song is "Rest" and was written by Phill McHugh and Greg Nelson:

*Rest the Lord is near.  
Refuse to fear, enjoy his love.  
Trust, his mighty power;  
fills every hour, of all your days.*

*There is no need for needless worry.  
With such a Savior  
You have no cause to ever doubt,  
His perfect word still reassures in any trial.*

The tune is almost like a lullaby and the soloist's voice was so smooth and mellow. I know the son sang the song as a last tribute to honor his father and he knows his father is finally at peace and resting in the arms of Jesus. But the words in the following verses also offered such a balm to the hearts and souls of family and friends:

*Rest, the Lord is here.  
Lift up your prayer for He is strong.  
Trust, He'll bring release and perfect peace,  
will calm your mind.*

*Call Him if you grow frightened.  
Call Him—with loving care.  
He'll lift your burden and you'll rest...*

Once again I was reminded how mighty our God is; how devoted he is to our well-being, so full of grace and compassion. God is love - I see that every day in my life. But oh, what a relief it is when something dark and full of worry enters in that I can call on him. We have a God who wants us to bask in the light of his love, to connect with his voice of love; to seep in the peace that an uplifted prayer will bring.

*Rest the Lord is near. Refuse to fear, enjoy His love.*

Yet in the light of day, the Eternal shows me His love. When night settles in and all is dark, He keeps me company—His soothing song, a prayerful melody to the True God of my life.

-Psalm 42:8 (The Voice)

## Saturday, March 8

Phyllis Leraas

On the Wings of a Dove - Ferlin Husky

*When Noah had drifted on the flood many days,  
he searched for land in various ways.  
Troubles he had some, but he wasn't forgotten,  
God sent down his love on the wings of a dove.*

*Refrain:*

*On the wings of a snow white dove, God sent his pure, sweet love;  
a sign from above, on the wings of a dove.*

*When troubles surround you and evil may come,  
your body grows weak and your spirit grows numb.  
When these things beset you, God will not forget you,  
he'll send down his love on the wings of a dove.  
(Refrain)*

*When Jesus went down to the river that day,  
he was baptized in the usual way.  
And when it was done, then God blessed his Son,  
and he sent down his love on the wings of a dove.  
(Refrain)*

I grew up singing this song. My Dad would put on his Stetson cowboy hat, pull out his Gibson guitar and my family would gather around him and the music filled our home. Looking back on these times, it wasn't just music filling the room, but the love of family. This song has been sung by my family at family reunions, holiday gatherings, funerals, and at nursing home visits.

The time I cherish the most was in 1999 at my Dad's prayer service. My sister pulled out Dad's guitar and my siblings, sister-in-law, and all of our children joined together and sang this song as a tribute to Dad and Grandpa. With tears streaming down our faces, the healing began as we felt his presence still with us and knew that we would be reunited again in Heaven one day. A new generation of my family has now started and I sing this song to my grandchildren as we snuggle together in the rocking chair; once again feeling the love of family.

Each time I gaze at the stained glass dove hanging on the window just outside of our sanctuary, I am reminded of this song and its message of hope and God's love. I am reminded of my Dad and I once again feel the love of family, my family and the family of God!

**Sunday, March 9**

Matthew 6:1-18

### **Concerning Almsgiving**

‘Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

‘So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

### **Concerning Prayer**

‘And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

‘When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

‘Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come,

Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not bring us to the time of trial,

but rescue us from the evil one.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

### **Concerning Fasting**

`And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

## Monday, March 10

Pastor Dale Emery, United Parish

There's a Wideness in God's Mercy - ELW #588

*There's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea;  
there's a kindness in God's justice which is more than liberty.  
There is no place where earth's sorrows are more felt than up in heav'n.  
There is no place where earth's failings have such kindly judgment giv'n.*

*There is welcome for the sinner, and a promised grace made good;  
there is mercy with the Savior; there is healing in his blood.  
There is grace enough for thousands of new worlds as great as this;  
there is room for fresh creations in that upper home of bliss.*

*For the love of God is broader than the measures of our mind;  
and the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.  
But we make this love too narrow by false limits of our own;  
and we magnify its strictness with a zeal God will not own.*

*'Tis not all we owe to Jesus; it is something more than all;  
greater good because of evil, larger mercy through the fall.  
Make our love O God, more faithful; let us take you at your word,  
and our lives will be thanksgiving for the goodness of the Lord.*

Frederick William Faber, who wrote the words for this hymn, was raised as a Huguenot, but went to Oxford University and was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1837. He then came to know John Henry Newman, the famous Catholic priest (and later Cardinal). Under Newman's influence, Faber was ordained a Catholic priest.

Knowing the importance of hymns in the Protestant tradition, Faber wanted to make hymn-singing more important in the Catholic Church. He wrote a number of hymns, of which this and Faith of Our Fathers are best known by many of us today.

There's a Wideness in God's Mercy celebrates the wideness of God's mercy--"like the wideness of the sea." It celebrates God's welcome for the sinner and the "good" person alike. It reminds us that "the love of God is broader than the measure of our mind" - and therefore encourages us to broaden the measure of our own love so that it might be more like God's love. And, finally, it calls us to "rest upon God's word" so that "our lives (might be) illumined by the presence of our Lord."

In my life, the mercy of God has been especially important for me. "God be merciful to me, a sinner," was not left unanswered. That mercy came with an abundance of grace and love. May God help me to be merciful to all others.

**Tuesday, March 11**

Pastor Joe Johnson

Why Me Lord - Kris Kristopherson

*Why me Lord, what have I ever done  
To deserve even one  
Of the blessings I've known  
Tell me Lord, what did I ever do  
That was worth loving you  
Or the kindness you've shown.*

*Tell me Lord, if you think there's a way  
I can try to repay  
All I've taken from you  
Maybe Lord, I can show someone else  
What I've been through myself  
On my way back to you.*

*Lord help me Jesus, I've wasted it so  
Help me Jesus I know what I am  
Now that I know that I've needed you so  
Help me Jesus, my soul's in your hands.*

“Why Me Lord” written by Kris Kristofferson has been a favorite in my family for a long time. My uncles (who taught me to play guitar), the rest of the family, and I sing it at nearly every family get-together, and nearly every family funeral. The song connects me to my family, and connects me to my faith.

Here are a few of the lines that stand out:

“Why me Lord, what have I ever done to deserve even one of the blessings I've known?”

Of course there is nothing we can do to deserve God's love and blessing. God's grace is freely given as a gift. But I do like the question, “Why me?” There is a humble-ness in the question similar to Moses' response when God calls him to lead the Israelites. Moses says, “Why me Lord? Don't take me! Take my brother Aaron!” So what does God do? He sends Moses and Aaron!

“Maybe Lord, I can show someone else what I've been through myself”

This verse has helped shape and define my life and call into ordained ministry. We receive faith as a gift. The question is... what are we going to do with it? Do we keep it as a private reserve and keep it to ourselves? Or does it become a public wellspring as we share it with others?

“My soul's in your hands”

We place our lives, our vocations, our time, our talent, our treasure into God's hands. Not my will, but yours be done!

## Wednesday, March 12

Pastor Terry Brandt

Children of the Heav'nly Father - ELW #781

*Children of the heav'nly Father  
Safely in His bosom gather  
Nestling bird nor star in Heaven  
Such a refuge e'er was given*

*Neither life nor death shall ever  
From the Lord, His children sever  
Unto them His grace He showeth  
And their sorrows all He knoweth*

*God, His own doth tend and nourish  
In His holy courts they flourish  
From all evil things He spares them  
In His mighty arms He bears them*

*Though He giveth or He taketh  
God His children ne'er forsaketh  
His, the loving purpose solely  
To preserve them, pure and holy*

One of my earliest memories is that of being rocked by my grandmother, Alma. While rocking, she would sing "Children of the Heavenly Father". Through the years, I heard and watched each Brandt baby/toddler who followed me being sung the same hymn and being rocked in the same chair. Grandma Alma rocked and sang, rocked and sang. In her rocking and singing, she was passing on the faith. Whenever I hear or sing this hymn, I am reminded of the faith of my grandmother, the gift of faith being passed from one generation to another and most importantly, the faithfulness of God.

The hymn was written by Lina Sandell. Lina was a Lutheran pastor's daughter in Froderyd, Sweden. She was a "daddy's girl" – very close to her father. As a child, she enjoyed playing quietly in her father's study as he worked.

Lina began writing hymns at an early age. Then, when she was 26 years old, tragedy struck. She and her father were passengers in a boat crossing Lake Vattern when the boat lurched and her father fell overboard. As Lina watched in horror, her father drowned before anyone could mount a rescue effort. It was a painful time for Lina, but it was Lina's faith that saw her through the tragedy. She knew that in the midst of all that had come her way, God was faithful.

I believe Lina's words offered my grandmother Alma a kind of quiet assurance throughout her not-so-easy life. I also believe my grandmother sang this hymn to her grandchildren wanting them to have this assurance, too. I am fairly certain as my grandmother rocked and sang, she wondered what grief and pain might come to this child in her arms, yet at the same time, took great comfort in the promise of our God to tend, nourish and protect.

In 1988, my grandmother died as a result from Lou Gehrig's disease. I was a junior in high school. At my grandmother's funeral, it was fitting that those gathered would join in singing this hymn. The words assured us God would care for Grandma Alma throughout eternity, invited us trust in the Gospel and commissioned us to be the ones to continue to proclaim "God is in the midst of it all". So, from the pen of Lina, to the mouth of Alma, to the typing hands of mine, I invite you to bask in the promise that you are a child of God and nothing will ever separate you from that love. Amen!

Thursday, March 13

Pastor Siri Strommen Campbell

My Song Is Love Unknown - ELW #343

*My song is love unknown, my Savior's love to me,  
Love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be.*

Here is a hymn I have honestly never paid attention to before a few years ago. The text comes from the 1600's and it has been set to music by various composers over the years. Now I know why; the words are beautiful.

I am reminded of countless stories I have read or true stories I have heard about women, children, men who had such traumatic, neglectful, or abusive childhoods that they buried within themselves the shame that they were unworthy of being loved. Even for those of us with good childhoods, we are at some point confronted with a person or group of people who dislike us, call us names, and tease us. It's amazing how such things affect your self-esteem. When you feel unloved and unworthy, you tend to act in ways that are not healthy for yourself and other people.

Our world is filled with the "loveless" who carry guilt, shame, self-hatred, and doubt around every single day. They believe that to be loved they must be someone else, must achieve this, must be like that because they cannot accept that somehow they are worth being loved just as they are. That being loved will actually make them worthy of love.

It's a beautiful image that Jesus put in a song in our hearts, a love song. By loving us, he makes us lovely. Jesus is God's kiss to a bruised and broken world, love to the loveless shown, that they might lovely be.

Friday, March 14

Pastor Siri Strommen Campbell  
Shepherd Me, O God - ELW #780

*Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants,  
beyond my fears, from death into life.  
God is my shepherd, so nothing shall I want,  
I rest in the meadows of faithfulness and love,  
I walk by the quiet waters of peace.  
Gently you raise me and heal my weary soul,  
you lead me in pathways of righteousness and truth,  
my spirit shall sing the music of your name.  
Though I should wander the valley of death,  
I fear no evil for you are at my side,  
Your rod and your staff, my comfort and my hope.  
Surely your kindness and mercy follow me all the days of my life,  
I will dwell in the house of the Lord forevermore.  
Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants,  
beyond my fears, from death into life"*

When the new Lutheran hymnal came out in 2006, my husband Jon and I dove in like the good church nerds we were. We have at least one hymnal at home to this day and have sung through most of the songs. You know, for fun.

In the past eight years we have discovered new hymns that we find absolutely beautiful. The above is one of them. Marty Haugen is a well respected composer who has given us Holden Evening Prayer and many other lyrical hymns. This song is no exception to his talent.

Based on Psalm 23, the melody is haunting and beautiful, a plea asking for God's guidance through life. It is both a testimony of life but also a prayer asking that what God has done, may God continue to do.

Sometimes music is just so beautiful, it lifts familiar or ordinary words up to a new plane of meaning. I think this is true of this particular hymn. It may be new, but it is already an all time favorite of mine.

## Saturday, March 15

Bishop Bill Rindy

The Church's One Foundation - ELW #369

### *1. The Church's one foundation*

*Is Jesus Christ her Lord;  
She is His new creation  
By water and the Word:  
From heav'n He came and sought her  
To be His holy Bride;  
With His own blood He bought her,  
And for her life He died.*

### *2. Elect from every nation,*

*Yet one o'er all the earth,  
Her charter of salvation,  
One Lord, one faith, one birth;  
One holy Name she blesses,  
Partakes one holy food,  
And to one hope she presses,  
With every grace endued.*

### *3. Though with a scornful wonder*

*This world sees her oppressed,  
By schisms rent asunder,  
By heresies distressed,*

*Yet saints their watch are keeping;  
Their cry goes up: "How long?"  
And soon the night of weeping  
Shall be the morn of song.*

### *4. Through toil and tribulation,*

*And tumult of her war,  
She waits the consummation  
Of peace for evermore;  
Till, with the vision glorious,  
Her longing eyes are blest,  
And the great Church victorious  
Shall be the Church at rest.*

### *5. Yet she on earth has union*

*With God, the Three in One,  
And mystic sweet communion  
With those whose rest is won.  
O blessed heav'nly chorus!  
Lord, save us by your grace,  
That we, like saints before us,  
May see you face to face.*

This hymn becomes more dear to me each year. Over the years it has taught me the faith (1-2). The lyrics of stanza five touched a nerve deep in my heart at my uncle's funeral in 1978 in a powerful way that caught me off guard. As I have walked with numerous congregations through various challenges over the past six years, the lyrics once again remind me of the very realities that challenge the church (3-4), while at the same time pointing me to the ultimate victory that is ours in Christ. I need to hear these words and I need to share them with you. May God richly bless you on your Lenten journey!

Your brother in Christ,

Pr. Bill Rindy, serving as Bishop of the Eastern North Dakota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

**Sunday, March 16**

**Matthew 6:19-34**

### **Concerning Treasures**

‘Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

### **The Sound Eye**

‘The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

### **Serving Two Masters**

‘No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

### **Do Not Worry**

‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

‘So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

**Monday, March 17**

Keith Meyer

The Easter Song - 2nd Chapter of Acts

*Hear the bells ringing  
They're singing that we can be born again  
Hear the bells ringing  
They're singing Christ is risen from the  
dead*

*Joy to the world  
He has risen, Hallelujah  
He's risen, Hallelujah  
He's risen, Hallelujah, Hallelujah*

*The angel up on the tombstone  
Said, "He has risen, just as He said  
Quickly now, go tell His disciples  
That Jesus Christ is no longer dead"*

My favorite song is The Easter Song by the 2nd Chapter of Acts. It was written and debuted in the mid-70's. The song has full orchestration behind the vocals and a good bass line underneath it. The timbre of the song is joyful and uplifting from beginning to end. The words are also uplifting and shouting from the mountain tops: "Hear the bells ringing! They're singing Christ is risen from the dead! Hear the bells ringing, they're singing that we can be born again! The angel upon the tombstone said Jesus Christ is no longer dead. Joy to the World! He is Risen! Alleluia!"

Now just try to stay still in a chair when you are hearing those lyrics backed by driving 6/8 accompaniment. If the lyrics don't automatically make you smile the music will.

This song will forever be etched in my memory because it showed up on Christian radio at a time when I needed a connection between earthly things, in this case music, and spiritual things. My life was in an upheaval (one of many more as I was to find out through the years): dating, marriage, leaving a school that had incubated my faith while introducing me to the bigger question of the world, the end of my college sports career, divorce. This song and the rest of the music on this album was a warm place I could always turn to when I was feeling disconnected from my faith. It helped to ground me when not much around me seemed grounded anymore.

I am always thankful to the Lord for the gift of music and all that it can do to raise one's spirits and comfort one's soul.

**Tuesday, March 18**

Theodore Strommen Campbell

Nearer My God to Thee

*Nearer, my God, to thee, Nearer to thee.  
Even though it be a cross that raiseth me,  
Still all my song shall be, nearer, my God, to thee,  
Nearer, my God, to thee, Nearer to thee.*

*Though like a wanderer, the sun gone down,  
Darkness be over me, my rest a stone,  
Yet in my dreams I'd be nearer, my God, to thee,  
Nearer, my God, to thee, Nearer to thee.*

*Then let my way appear, steps unto heaven,  
All that thou sendest me in mercy given.  
Angels to beckon me nearer, my God, to thee,  
Nearer, my God, to thee, Nearer to thee.*

This is my favorite hymn because it was one of the songs that the band played while the Titanic was sinking in 1912. When the Titanic hit an iceberg, the people rushed to lifeboats. There were not enough life boats and everyone was scared. But the band (a string quartet) sat on the deck and played song after song to calm the people down. Survivors recall the story, remembering that this was one of the hymns they played. The musicians did not survive, but gave their lives to play music for the people.

Not only is this a beautiful song, but the words are appropriate to what was happening. Many people would perish that night in the cold Atlantic waters. It was a tragedy. Many people died and went to heaven that night. They went to be near to God.

## Wednesday, March 19

Randy Lemm

Amarillo by Morning - George Strait

*Amarillo by morning,  
up from San Antone.  
Everything that I've got  
is just what I've got on.  
When that sun is high in that Texas sky  
I'll be bucking at the county fair.  
Amarillo by morning, Amarillo I'll be there.*

*They took my saddle in Houston,  
broke my leg in Santa Fe.  
Lost my wife and a girlfriend  
somewhere along the way.  
Well I'll be looking for eight  
when they pull that gate,  
And I'm hoping that judge ain't blind.  
Amarillo by morning,  
Amarillo's on my mind.*

*Amarillo by morning,  
up from San Antone.  
Everything that I've got  
is just what I've got on.  
I ain't got a dime, but what I got is mine.  
I ain't rich, but Lord I'm free.  
Amarillo by morning,  
Amarillo's where I'll be.  
Amarillo by morning,  
Amarillo's where I'll be.*

“Amarillo by Morning”, a song made popular by George Strait, is the first song that comes to mind when I think favorite song. It would seem to be a bit of a stretch to write a devotional based on this song, but on second thought, maybe not.

“Everything that I’ve got is just what I’ve got on”. When you stop and think about it, what do we have that has come to us without God’s help? He gives us the tools we need to get through life, it is up to us to utilize those tools.

The second verse talks about loss and injury “along the way”. Life is that way, we lose things and loved ones and sometimes get hurt but God gives us the opportunity to show strength and courage in dealing with these trials. “I hope that judge ain’t blind”. I know God isn’t blind. Even if we don’t handle these challenges the best way that we should, He is there to help us through, if we only ask. We need to make sure we aren’t blind to what God can and does do for us and through us.

Our ultimate goal is to ride the trail that leads through the gates of Heaven. “Amarillo by morning, Amarillo’s where I’ll be”.

## Wednesday, March 19

Barb Hultin

### Children of the Heav'nly Father - ELW #781

*Children of the heav'nly Father  
Safely in His bosom gather;  
Nestling bird nor star in Heaven  
Such a refuge ne'er was given.*

*Neither life nor death shall ever  
From the Lord His children sever;  
Unto them His grace He showeth,  
For their sorrows all He knoweth.*

*God His own doth tend and nourish;  
In His holy courts they flourish;  
From all evil things He spares them;  
In His mighty arms He bears them.*

*Though He giveth or He taketh,  
God His children ne'er forsaketh;  
His the loving purpose solely  
To preserve them pure and holy.*

There are thousands of beautiful hymns to choose from, making it almost impossible to narrow it down to pick one favorite hymn. From old traditional songs that have been sung by generations of Christians, to carols that invoke Christmas memories from our childhood, to exciting modern Christian rock songs that inspire and invigorate the soul, there are many hymns that I really love. But there is one hymn that does have special meaning to me for several different reasons and that hymn is “Children of the Heavenly Father”.

Some of my earliest yet very vague memories are of my mother rocking my baby sister and singing “Children of the Heavenly Father” to her as a lullaby. This is a tradition, which continues with my grandchildren. I’m sure her mother sang it to her children, and the generation before, as long as the hymn had been known to us since its early Swedish roots. Many of the words in the verses make it a very fitting lullaby; “safely in His bosom gather”, “such a refuge ne'er was given”, “God His own doth tend and nourish”, “from all evil things He spares them, in His mighty arms He bears them”. All these phrases paint a visual image of God holding His children tenderly in His arms and keeping them safe from harm, a warm and beautiful image with which to put a child to sleep.

As well as a fitting lullaby, this song has also become one of our traditional songs for baptism. The meaning of the song goes even deeper than a mere bedtime lullaby and signifies the presence of our Lord God throughout our lives. His love, refuge and strength are with us from beginning to end. “Children of the Heavenly Father” has become a hymn that has provided hope and comfort to our family in times of great happiness and in times of great loss and grief. The hymn has been sung at many of our past loved

one's funerals, especially of a child or young person, but elderly as well. "Neither life nor death shall ever, from the Lord, His children sever. Unto them His grace He showeth, for their sorrows all He knoweth," "God His children ne'er forsaketh," "His the loving purpose solely to preserve them pure and holy." Not only do we hear about how God keeps us in His heart and safe in His arms in this life, but we hear about His promise to us forever, even after death. Every time I hear it, or sing it to my grandchildren, I think about all of these things, the baptisms, the loved ones passed, my mother singing lullaby's, and generations before doing the same. And I hope, that someday, my grandchildren will think of the same things when they are singing it to their grandchildren and rocking them to sleep...



Thursday, March 20

Sylvia Hanson

This is My Song - ELW #887

"It was late that Sunday evening and the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors, because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. Then Jesus came and stood among them. 'Peace be with you,' he said. After saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you.'"

John 20:19-21 (Today's English Version)

One of my favorite hymns is 'This is My song'. It was the "theme song" of the IFYE Program (International 4-H Youth Exchange) through which I lived in the Philippines for six months in 1965. I was unaware of the third verse and that it was an acknowledged hymn until the latest hymnal was published. I think of this song every Sunday when we "pass the peace" to one another. IFYE was one of the "Peace Programs" started after World War II. It was believed that if young people lived in another culture and country and got to know the people, they would be more likely to work together and less likely to wage war. I believe that is a good idea and program and has forged many multi country friendships, yet humankind continues to wage wars. I especially think of the people in the Holy Land and CAR (Central African Republic), who we are assigned by the ELCA as a "sister synod". In the Bible Reading, Jesus sends his disciples out into the world and I believe he also sends all of us, His followers, to spread the word and look after his flock.

*This is my song, O God of all the nations,  
A song of peace for lands afar and mine.  
This is my home, the country where my heart is;  
Here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine.  
But other hearts in other lands are beating with hopes and  
dreams as true and high as mine.*

*My country's skies are bluer than the ocean,  
And sunlight beams on cloverleaf and pine.  
But other lands have sunlight too, and clover,  
And skies are everywhere as blue as mine.*

*So hear my song, O God of all the nations,  
a song of peace for their land and for mine.*

We and the citizens of other countries tend to think of our country as the best one. I often think how desperate people must be when they flee their country and culture for the complete unknown. We who have much are expected to look after those with less, yet need to respect their customs and ideas. We are often privileged to learn new things and ways, by exposure to others, with new ideas and customs.

*This is my prayer, O God of all earth's kingdoms,  
Your kingdom come, on earth your will be done.  
O God be lifted up till all shall serve you,  
And hearts united learn to live as one.  
So hear my prayer, O God of all the nations.  
Myself I give you, let your will be done.*

Friday, March 21

Bruce Bowersox

My Hope is Built on Nothing Less - ELW #596

*My hope is built on nothing less  
than Jesus' blood and righteousness.  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
but wholly lean on Jesus' name.*

*Refrain:*

*On Christ the solid rock I stand,  
all other ground is sinking sand;  
all other ground is sinking sand.*

*When darkness veils His lovely face,  
I rest on His unchanging grace.  
In every high and stormy gale,  
my anchor holds within the veil. (Refrain)*

*His oath, his covenant, his blood  
supports me in the whelming flood.  
When all around my soul gives way,  
He then is all my hope and stay. (Refrain)*

*When He shall come with trumpet sound,  
O may I then in Him be found!  
Dressed in His righteousness alone,  
faultless to stand before the throne!  
(Refrain)*

*My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. No merit of my  
own I claim but wholly lean on Jesus name.*

I was claimed for Christ through baptism and reared in a Christian home. My faith was affirmed through confirmation. Still I felt my salvation was somehow dependent on my own action. During college I heard a speaker talk about Ephesians 2: 8-9. "For it is by grace through faith that you are saved; and this is not of your own doing: it is the free gift of God through Christ Jesus." I finally learned the essence of faith.

*His oath, His covenant, His blood, support me in the raging flood. When all supports are  
washed away, He then is all my hope and stay.*

Jumping from the raft, onto the air mattress was not a good idea. As you might expect, it shot out, from under me, and I sank like a rock. I floundered for a few seconds and then Bobby dragged me to shore. Thinking back on this experience, I learned the importance God as our 'hope and stay' because my supports were washed away.

Adversity can teach us many lessons. During one difficult time in life I learned Isaiah 40:31. "But, they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their

strength. They shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not be faint.“ The author of this hymn says, “When darkness veils His lovely face, I rest on His unchanging grace. In every high and stormy gale my anchor holds within the veil.” Here we are reminded to anchor our faith in Christ. One proverb suggests that during a time of adversity, the Lord is nearer. We need to remember this and bring God along on the difficult journeys.

Gold Bond stamps and S & H Green stamps were popular giveaways at stores in the sixties. My parents and I would collect the stamps in small books. Catalogues provided neat things we could use stamps to purchase. When you had enough stamps you could redeem them for the items you selected from the catalogue. That is how I learned the meaning of the word ‘redeem.’

*When Christ shall come with trumpet sound, oh may I then in Him be found. Clothed in his righteousness alone, redeemed to stand before the throne.*

Now I know that I have been redeemed or purchased through the blood of Christ.

*On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.” The refrain is a quick reminder of all this hymn has to say.*

I must stand on the solid rock.

## Saturday, March 22

Brad Ydstie

Here I Am, Lord - ELW #574

*I, the Lord of sea and sky,  
I have heard My people cry.  
All who dwell in dark and sin,  
My hand will save.  
I who made the stars of night,  
I will make their darkness bright.  
Who will bear My light to them?  
Whom shall I send?*

*Refrain*

*Here I am Lord, is it I Lord?  
I have heard You calling in the night.  
I will go Lord, if You lead me.  
I will hold Your people in my heart.*

*I, the Lord of snow and rain,  
I have born my peoples pain.  
I have wept for love of them,*

*They turn away.  
I will break their hearts of stone,  
Give them hearts for love alone.  
I will speak My word to them,  
Whom shall I send? (Refrain)*

*I, the Lord of wind and flame,  
I will tend the poor and lame.  
I will set a feast for them,  
My hand will save  
Finest bread I will provide,  
Till their hearts be satisfied.  
I will give My life to them,  
Whom shall I send?*

*Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord?  
I have heard You calling in the night.*

“Here I am Lord” became my favorite hymn while I was still living in Grand Forks and a member of United Lutheran Church. During the flood of ‘97, our congregation was forced to move worship to a new location, because our church was too close to the river and considered unsafe. Another member, who owned Amundsen’s funeral home, opened their doors and allowed us to hold worship at their location. Amundsen’s was close to the interstate and considered safe from the river. At this time, many were still battling the rising Red River, as some had already lost the battle, and some were considered outside the flood plain and safe. During the first service, at the new location, our Senior Pastor, Tim Johnson, chose “Here I am Lord” as our opening hymn. I remember the tears in everyone’s eyes as this hymn was sung. You could see the pain everyone had been enduring. Everyone was weary, tired, and hurting. I remember the personal affect it had on me, as I sang along and listened closely to the lyrics. I could hear the Lord calling to me as we sang this hymn. Not at night, as in the lyrics, but he was calling to me during this morning worship service. I prayed to the Lord to let Him know that I was here and willing to help, if He would just lead me and show me the way. In

my prayer, I expressed that I would hold His people, those who were hurting so bad, in my heart. I as well as many others in our community came together and helped those who were in the most urgent need. Even though we lived in threatened areas as well, many of us helped others that were in the worst shape, before deciding to tend to our own. As a matter of fact, a mandatory evacuation was announced, while we were still sandbagging our neighbor's homes and before we were able to get started on our own. We were forced to leave, so just decided to move up whatever we could from the basement, and prepare for the worst. It just so happens, that when we returned, after the mandatory evacuation was lifted, and expecting to find a full basement of water, there was only a few patches of water on the floor. The coulee water was right up to the foundation of our house, but never came in. We never lost electricity, so our sump pumps kept running. What a miracle! I really do believe that, as we kept God's people in our hearts, He also was keeping us in His heart. I felt guilty right away, being there were so many homes that were completely lost. However, I knew there was a plan for us, to come together and have the time to help those not so fortunate.

I still get tears when I sing this hymn. However, the tears now are more tears of joy, than tears of sadness. It reminds me of how God's people came together, back in the Grand Forks flood of 1997 to get an entire city back on its feet, after such devastation by water and fire. With great emotion, this hymn will forever be considered my favorite.

**Sunday, March 23**

**Matthew 7:1-6**

### **Judging Others**

'Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgement you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbour, "Let me take the speck out of your eye", while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour's eye.

### **Profaning the Holy**

'Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you.

Monday, March 24

Sarah Lovas

Music has always been an important part of my relationship with Christ. There have been many songs where God and I have shared conversations and precious moments together. Some of these moments happened when it was just Him and I playing the piano and/or singing. Sometimes these moments have involved playing and/or singing with another musician or a group of musicians. Sometimes these moments have been when I have played or sang for someone else. I think this is true of other musicians as well. For example, it is rumored that Heaven opened and Handel saw angels when he wrote the “Hallelujah Chorus.” I have not been lucky enough to actually see angels when playing piano. However, I have felt the presence of Christ when playing piano, singing in a choir, singing duets or small ensembles, and when playing and/or singing for someone else. Picking one song or a single “musical moment” when I have felt His presence is too difficult and can’t be done.

Not every person in this world plays a musical instrument or sings. Some people don’t care for music that much. A pastor who has had a lot of influence on my relationship with God once served as a minister at a deaf church. Music was limited-to-non-existent at that church service. How do non-musical people find this same feeling of “closeness” and peace with God that I feel when I play piano? I do not know the answer. However, I do know that we all face daily challenges; God has given us talents to express ourselves as well as to be used for His glory; and God provides us the peace which surpasses all understanding. I hope that all talents, be they musical or not, are used for the glory of God and also provide a place of solace and peace for us all.

**Tuesday, March 25**

Clarice Satrom

This Little Light of Mine/Climb Up Sunshine Mountain

*This little light of mine,  
I'm gonna let it shine,  
This little light of mine,  
I'm gonna let it shine,  
let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.*

*Climb, climb up sunshine mountain  
Heavenly breezes blow;  
Climb, climb up sunshine mountain  
Faces all aglow.  
Turn, turn from sin and doubting,  
Look to God on high,  
Climb, climb up sunshine mountain  
You and I.*

In the 70's and 80's I was asked to be a Sunday school teacher for Our Savior's Lutheran Church; that led to being Sunday School Superintendent for the next 25 years or more.

These were the most important Sundays to me. It taught me as much or more than I taught the children. I taught children age three through first grade. This made me feel like I was God's helper with these dear little children in ways I will never forget. We always ended our morning devotions with "fold your hands, close your eyes and bow your head in prayer". I would then say, "when you leave, make little kitty steps," as you never would hear them walk.

This Little Light of Mine lit up my life and the children's lives as we all climbed the mountain to God's love. Now I try to light up the life and eyes of others, especially people in the nursing home and help them climb to the highest mountain.

## Wednesday, March 26

Pastor Joe Johnson

It is Well With My Soul - ELW #785

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,  
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.*

In the 1870's, Horatio and Anna Spafford had been living a nice life in Chicago with their four daughters and one son. When Anna's health had begun to fail, and after the tragic death of their son, the Spafford family decided to seek a fresh start in Europe. Just before leaving, a business emergency prevented Horatio from traveling. Not wanting to disappoint his family, he sent his wife and four daughters ahead as planned, and he was to follow a few days later.

On November 22, 1873 the ship with Anna Spafford and her daughters aboard, was struck by a British iron sailing ship and sank within minutes into the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Only 81 of the 307 passengers survived.

Horatio received a brief and heartbreaking telegraph from his wife Anna reading, "Saved alone. What shall I do..."

Horatio, leaving immediately to join his wife in Wales, sailed across the Atlantic. The captain of the ship called Horatio to the bridge and informed him that he believed this to be the place where the ship carrying his daughters had wrecked. That night, in that place, Horatio penned the words to his famous hymn, "It is well with my soul".

Even in the midst of unthinkable sorrow, Horatio remained faithful to God. I think about this story every time we sing "It is well with my soul". The song reminds us to remain faithful when we experience peace like a river, and when sorrows like sea billows roll.

**Thursday, March 27**

Glen Hultin

Blessings - Laura Story

*We pray for blessings, We pray for peace  
Comfort for family,  
protection while we sleep  
We pray for healing, for prosperity  
We pray for Your mighty hand  
to ease our suffering  
All the while, You hear each spoken need  
Yet love us way too much  
to give us lesser things*

*Refrain:*

*'Cause what if Your blessings come  
through raindrops  
What if Your healing comes through tears  
What if a thousand sleepless nights  
Are what it takes to know You're near  
What if trials of this life  
are Your mercies in disguise*

*We pray for wisdom  
Your voice to hear  
And we cry out in anger when we cannot  
feel  
You near  
We doubt Your goodness,  
we doubt Your love*

*As if every promise from Your Word  
is not enough  
All the while, You hear each desperate plea  
And long that we have faith to believe  
(Refrain)*

*When friends betray us  
When darkness seems to win  
We know that pain reminds this heart  
That this is not, this is not our home  
It's not our home*

*'Cause what if Your blessings come  
through raindrops  
What if Your healing comes through tears  
And what if a thousand sleepless nights  
Are what it takes to know You're near  
What if my greatest disappointments  
Or the aching of this life  
Is the revealing of a greater thirst this  
world can't satisfy  
And what if trials of this life  
The rain, the storms, the hardest nights  
Are Your mercies in disguise*

I like listening to contemporary Christian music on the radio and one of the songs that I have heard that stimulates my thoughts is the song "Blessings" by Laura Story. God always knows how to answer our prayers. This song shows us that His answers are not always what we are asking for and sometimes, through our pain, we will also find our greatest blessings. I remember the day my Mom was diagnosed with liver cancer. Everyone was praying for healing and recovery and for things to be like they always were. Eventually, the chemotherapy failed and a year and a half later, I lost my

mother. But now, I look back on that year and a half, and I think about how blessed we were to have that time together. We did not take life for granted and all of our moments together were special. God used my mother and our relationship to strengthen my faith. She was not afraid of dying, knew that because of Jesus Christ and His love, there was never a question that this was the end, but only the beginning of eternal life with Jesus. In that time, my prayers changed from asking for healing and recovery, to comfort for pain, and finally for asking Him to take her into His loving arms to bring her home to be free from pain and suffering and be with Him in heaven. “We pray for healing, for prosperity. We pray for Your mighty hand to ease our suffering. All the while, You hear each spoken need. Yet love us way too much to give us lesser things”. God’s blessings come to us in many different ways, through relationships, births, deaths, illness, recovery, good times, bad times, and in everyday life. We just have to open our eyes to see His blessings at work.



**Friday, March 28**

Beth Christianson-Melby

Higher Ways - Steven Curtis Chapman

*If I could only fly  
I'd go up and look down from the sky  
So I could see the bigger picture  
And Lord if I could sit with You  
At Your feet for an hour or two  
I'm sure I'd ask too many questions  
'Cause there's so much going on down  
here  
That I must confess I just don't understand*

*But I have prayed  
And at your feet  
my whole life has been laid  
So I won't worry I won't be afraid  
'Cause my soul is resting on  
Your higher ways*

*Let the road ahead become unclear  
I am Yours so what have I to fear  
If my soul is resting on Your higher ways*

*Your higher ways teach me to trust You  
Your higher ways are not like mine  
Your higher ways are the ways of a Father  
Hiding His children in His love*

*So let it rain  
And if my eyes grow dim with tears of pain  
This hope I have will not be washed away  
'Cause my soul is resting on  
Your higher ways*

*Someday I will fly and  
Maybe then You will take me aside  
And show me the bigger picture  
But until I'm with You  
I'll be here with a heart that is true  
And a soul that's resting on  
Your higher ways*

I first heard this song in college. It has stuck with me because it speaks to the very heart of my faith. I've often thought about who God is. What is he like? My simple human mind has tried to figure out something to compare him to. I've always had an image of my father. Someone to talk to, be strong when I'm weak, a comfort during hard and trying times. And even through those difficult times, it is a father who makes you feel strong and shows you why things are the way they are.

When life seems too much, I ask God to show me the way. Sometimes we are not meant to know why. When you consider that Jesus knew why and how much he suffered, maybe God is protecting us. The why is just too hard for this earthly life...physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Dear Lord, Please help me to accept that your higher ways have my best interests in mind always. Give me patience, understanding, and love. Amen.

**Saturday, March 29**

Elli Lemm

Sigh No More - Mumford & Sons

*Serve God, love me and mend*

*This is not the end*

*Live unbruised, we are friends*

*And I'm sorry*

*I'm sorry*

*Sigh no more, no more*

*One foot in sea and one on shore*

*My heart was never pure*

*And you know me*

*You know me*

*But man is a giddy thing*

*Oh man is a giddy thing*

*Oh man is a giddy thing*

*Oh man is a giddy thing*

*Love it will not betray you*

*Dismay or enslave you, it will set you free*

*Be more like the man you were made to be*

*There is a design, an alignment, a cry*

*Of my heart to see*

*The beauty of love as it was made to be*

*Songs and finding God in each of them.*

*Even though we all sin, God knows who we are and still accepts us.*

“My heart was never pure, but you know me.” As individuals we sin on a daily basis, but our GOD knows us and loves each and every one of us unconditionally. One of my favorite songs is Sigh No More by the band Mumford and Sons, a band that started in Ireland and has now grown in popularity here in the United States. Music has always been an extremely large part of my faith and my life in general. Even though Sigh No More isn't what most would consider to be a religious song, I still find peace and comfort when listening to the song. There are many lines that remind me of God's endless love and forgiveness in this song. “Love, it will not betray you, dismay or enslave you, it will set you free.” GOD sets us free of our sins by forgiving us, an incredible thing when you really sit down and think about it. God is still willing to accept us and call us his children even though we may not be deserving of it. Since I started college this past fall my faith has grown even more than before. It was difficult at first but I found myself listening to more songs and finding God in each of them. Even though we all sin, God knows who we are and still accepts us.

**Sunday, March 30**

**Matthew 7:7-20**

### **Ask, Search, Knock**

'Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

### **The Golden Rule**

'In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

### **The Narrow Gate**

'Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

### **A Tree and Its Fruit**

'Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.

## Monday, March 31

Jon Strommen Campbell

All Creatures of Our God and King - ELW #835

A Mighty Fortress - ELW #503

*All creatures of our God and King,*

*Lift up your voice with us and sing, Alleluia! Alleluia!*

*O burning sun with golden beam and silver moon with softer gleam,*

*Oh, Praise him! Oh, praise him! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!*

*A Mighty Fortress is our God, a sword and shield victorious.*

*He breaks the cruel oppressor's rod and wins salvation glorious.*

*The old satanic foe, has sworn to work us woe,*

*With craft and dreadful might he arms himself to fight.*

*On earth he has no equal.*

Choosing a favorite hymn is like asking about a favorite flower - it depends on your mood, the season, and even your stage of life. I grew up in a Presbyterian church where we seemed to sing All Creatures of Our God and King every Sunday. I can't say that is my favorite hymn, but it has become burned into my mind - whenever I sing it I am transported back to First Presbyterian Church in Salem, Oregon. I suppose many of you have similar hymns. As Lutherans, "A Mighty Fortress" has been our creed for 500 years! Hymns such as these form a tissue which connects the memories of generations of Christians. We often forget how profound it is to sing a hymn sung by countless previous generations. The same words and tunes which nourish us have nourished our ancestors. There is something ultimately really cool about that. I hope this Lenten season, as we sing familiar hymns like "Beneath the Cross of Jesus," you might think about how hymns can not only serve your prayer in the present, but also connect you with those in the past, and those who will follow after.

**Tuesday, April 1**

Victoria Dahlstrom

Jesus Loves Me - ELW #595

*Jesus loves me! this I know, for the Bible tells me so;  
little ones to him belong, they are weak, but he is strong.*

*Refrain*

*Yes, Jesus loves me, yes, Jesus loves me  
Yes, Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so.*

*Jesus loves me! he who died heaven's gates to open wide;  
he will wash away my sin, let his little child come in. (Refrain)*

*Jesus loves me! he will stay close beside me all the way;  
when at last I come to die, he will take me home on high. (Refrain)*

I started working at the Hillsboro Medical Center Nursing Home at age fifty-five. I had retired from teaching high school English at age thirty, had been a busy farmer's wife for more than twenty-five years, and had seen our daughter off to college. With my husband's encouragement, I started looking for part-time employment, something which would "make a difference". God led me, I believe, to the HMC Activities Department.

So, for twelve years, I had the privilege of working with the residents socially: leading chair exercises; assisting with interactive games such as trivia, table-top bowling, bean bag toss, and Bingo; giving wheelchair rides outside; running errands for them; and having one-to-one visits.

My favorite area was the music activities. We had a percussion "band", guest vocal and instrumental performances, and church services. At least several times per month there would be a sing-a-long, Karaoke, "Name that Tune", or simply a half hour of piano music.

Music is very powerful; it can affect people in many ways. It speaks especially to emotion, and to memory. One of the songs almost everyone knew words and melody to was "Jesus Loves Me" (ELW #595). I call it "the gospel in three verses". When we sang this song at one of the music events, even people who did not readily respond to any other part of the activity would be moved - to open their eyes, to mouth the words, to cry, to smile.

As I age, I realize how completely my own faith is distilled in these beloved lyrics: "Jesus loves me... He will wash away my sins... He will take me home on high".

Wednesday April 2

Pastor Joe Johnson

Christian Identity: "Night Riders Lament"

*Why do you ride for your money?  
Why do your rope for short pay?  
You ain't getting nowhere and your losing your share  
Lord, they all must have gone crazy out there*

This song, "Night Rider's Lament", is about a cowboy sitting on his horse reading a letter from an old friend. The friend (and seemingly the rest of world) doesn't understand why he continues to live the cowboy life. After the cowboy reads the letter he sings;

*But they've never seen the northern lights  
They've never seen a hawk on its wing  
They've never seen the spring hit the great divide  
And they've never heard ol' camp Cookie sing*

I don't think identity is about other people understanding us... Identity is about understanding ourselves.

1 Corinthians 12: 4 says, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of working, but the same God. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."

As children of God, we all have different gifts. We have different experiences. We have different vocations and interests. We have different ways that we are spiritually fed as individuals.

Although I don't ride and rope as often as I did when I was younger, I guess I still can relate to that cowboy sitting on that horse. I can appreciate the witness of God's creation... the northern lights, a hawk on its wing, and the spring hitting the great divide!

tGbtg

## Thursday, April 3

Joel Thorsrud

### Now the Day is Over - ELW #570

*Now the day is over,  
Night is drawing nigh;  
Shadows of the evening  
Steal across the sky.*

*Now the darkness gathers,  
Stars begin to peep,  
Birds and beasts and flowers  
Soon will be asleep.*

*Jesus, give the weary  
Calm and sweet repose;  
With Thy tend'rest blessing  
May mine eyelids close.*

*Grant to little children  
Visions bright of Thee;  
Guard the sailors tossing  
On the deep-blue sea.*

*Comfort every sufferer  
Watching late in pain;  
Those who plan some evil  
From their sin restrain.*

*Through the long night-watches  
May Thine angels spread  
Their white wings above me,  
Watching round my bed.*

*When the morning wakens,  
Then may I arise  
Pure and fresh and sinless  
In Thy holy eyes.*

*Glory to the Father,  
Glory to the Son,  
And to Thee, blest Spirit,  
While all ages run.*

One of my favorite songs is Now The Day Is Over which I learned to sing in the second grade. We would often sing this Friday afternoon at the end of the day. Part of the reason I like this song is from an experience I had some years ago when Garrison Keillor was at Concordia College to do a Prairie Home Companion radio show. Before the radio show there were many workshops to take part in. At the end of the day there was one on quartet singing which I went to. Because I was late getting to the workshop, I did not get a good seat in back but sat in front next to Rob Williams of the Hopeful Gospel Quartet. It was a wonderful experience as we sang many great songs in four part harmony.

At the end of the session, Mr. Keillor asked for a song to finish with. As it was in the songbook, I volunteered "Now The Day Is Over." Keillor did not respond to my request so, unlike my normal self, I repeated louder, Now The Day Is Over. Rob Williams echoed, yes that is appropriate here at the end of the day. Keillor responded he would prefer another but we would

sing my request and then the one he wanted. As we were leaving the workshop I noticed there were reporters waiting to interview Keillor.

Driving home that night after the radio show and the time after the show, I thought it was a great day singing with that large group but it did not really matter if I was there. The next day, when I began to read the newspaper, I was surprised to see the reporter from the Forum use the words from Now The Day Is Over to begin his story to tell about the show. It was as if God took the newspaper to hit me and say, “You see, everyone is important and everyone does make a difference”.



Friday, April 4

Liz Lemm

The Church's One Foundation - ELW #654

*The Church's one foundation  
Is Jesus Christ her Lord.  
She is his new creation  
By water and the word.  
From heaven he came and sought her  
To be his only bride:  
With his own blood he bought her  
And for her life he died.*

The question of choosing my favorite hymn is not easily answered. At different times in a person's life the favorite changes to fit whatever stage you are experiencing. The earliest choice was "Jesus Loves Me". As a teenager at church camp it was probably some long forgotten folk tune. With growth and maturing "Be Now My Vision" became a favorite and still is.

At this stage of my life, hymns (golden oldies) from Grandma Jones hymnal, which she gifted to me in her spidery handwriting, remind me of happy times.

The hymn that stayed a favorite through all these years is, "The Church's One Foundation". On many Sunday mornings I processed into the sanctuary singing it with the church choir.

**Saturday, April 5**

Alvhild Olson

As a child, when I needed comfort and my mother was ill, the song I loved was "What a Friend We Have in Jesus". It took some of the fear I had of losing her.

Here are a list of other favorites:

Baptism- the song that brings one to tears is "I Was There to Hear Your Morning Cry"

Marriage- The Lord's Prayer as it says it all for our lives together.

Communion- Let us Break Bread Together on our Knees is very meaningful to me.

Funerals- Just as I am Without One Plea and Rock of Ages

Guidance- Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us

Lent- Beneath The Cross of Jesus

Easter- Christ the Lord is Risen Today Alleluia!

Christmas- I Am So Glad Each Christmas Eve in Norwegian as Mom and Dad taught me.

As we gather as Christians I love "Blest Be the Tie That Binds". It always makes me realize how important it is to get together to worship.

So many hymns I love- May I remember to "let go" and "let God"!

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for all you do for me daily, for our wonderful family and for our dear friends. We are so blessed with having great Pastors and leaders of our church, guide and help them. Please help me to rid myself of complacency and make me concerned enough to help where I can. Amen.

**Sunday, April 6**

**Matthew 7:21-28**

### **Concerning Self-Deception**

‘Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord”, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?” Then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.”’

### **Hearers and Doers**

‘Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!’

Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching,

**Monday, April 7**

Joy McSparron

Give Me Jesus - ELW #770

*In the morning, when I rise*

*In the morning, when I rise*

*In the morning, when I rise, give me Jesus*

*When I am alone*

*When I am alone*

*When I am alone, give me Jesus (Refrain)*

*Refrain:*

*Give me Jesus,*

*Give me Jesus,*

*You can have all this world,*

*But give me Jesus*

*When I come to die*

*When I come to die*

*When I come to die, give me Jesus*

*(Refrain)*

Music is the words that your soul wants to sing but your mind can't find a way to put them together. I don't understand how musicians can find the words that my heart is feeling. Anne Graham Lotz came to the FargoDome over ten years ago. Her retreat was called "Just Give Me Jesus" and that spring I started a bible study on the upcoming event. My dad hadn't been feeling well and he ended up in the hospital with pneumonia. He loved music too and so I got a CD player and headphones we could share and we would listen to music together in the nursing home whether he was asleep or awake. I got the CD to "Just Give me Jesus" by Fernando Ortega and we would listen to the music as we sat together.

I would cry thinking how I wanted my Dad to hear these words and know that when he died Jesus would be right there for him and he would have Jesus forever. How can we ask for anything more than this out of life. God gave us Jesus. Dad didn't recover from the pneumonia and at his funeral Rod Brekken sang "Just Give Me Jesus". I had never heard this song before but somehow it meant the world to me, just in those few short months.

Tuesday, April 8

Anna Lemm

Flowers in Your Hair - The Lumineers

*'When we were younger we thought everyone was on our side then we grew a little and romanticized the time I saw flowers in your hair. Because it takes a boy to live but it takes a man to pretend he was there'.*

This is the first line of my very favorite song "Flowers in Your Hair" by The Lumineers. When I hear these lyrics I kind of connect this to how when you are young you are just kind of going through the motions of your faith you are just kind of doing it because your parents are.

*'So then we grew a little and knew a lot and now we demonstrated it to the cops and all the things we said we were self assured, because it's a long road to wisdom but it's a short one to being ignored'.*

I associate this line with my faith in that when you grow a little more in your faith and you think that you know everything but you still have a long road ahead in your faith journey.

*'Be in my eye be in my heart be in my eye aye aye aye be in my heart'.*

Then when you grow older you realize that God's way is the right way for a reason and we have to let go and let God in.

*So now I think that I can love you back but I hope it's not too late because you're so attractive and the way you move I won't close my eyes, because it takes a man to live but it takes a woman to make him compromise. So be in my eye be in my heart, be in my heart be in my eye aye aye aye oh be in my heart.*

Wednesday, April 9

Pastor Siri Strommen Campbell

Abide With Me - ELW #629

*Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;  
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide;  
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,  
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me.*

*Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;  
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;  
Change and decay in all around I see—  
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.*

*I need Thy presence every passing hour;  
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's pow'r?*

*Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?  
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.*

*I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless;  
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness;  
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?  
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.*

*Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;  
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies;  
Heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;  
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.*

This famous hymn was written in 1847 by a pastor named Henry Lyte who served a poor church in the fishing village of Devonshire, England. He was inspired by the words of the two disciples who asked Jesus to stay with them while walking to Emmaus. In Luke 24:29, they ask Jesus to “stay with us, since it is getting late.”

At this point in the story of Luke, Jesus was recently crucified and the disciples are in terrible grief. It is Sunday, Easter Sunday, and the disciples have heard from Mary and the other women that Jesus is alive, but they struggle to believe it. Two of the disciples are now going home to Emmaus,

maybe because they just don't know what else to do. It is on this road that Jesus meets them and begins to talk to them. But they don't recognize him for some reason. He tells them that the messiah had to suffer death but that the death is not the end of the story. The disciples listen and ask question, but they don't get it.

Then, it is late, dinnertime, and they reach Emmaus. The disciples invite Jesus to stay without knowing who he is. I love this song and I love this story. We all have days where we are reeling from some bad news. It is hard to believe or get excited about any story of hope. We are just stuck. This hymn is a plea to God to stay with us, abide with us through that dark night. Somehow God is constant and safe and close, a companion walking beside us, opening our eyes to a larger and more beautiful truth.



Thursday, April 10

Sandra Bertsch

Battle Hymn of the Republic

“Battle Hymn of the Republic” is one of my favorite patriotic hymns. My father was a veteran of WWII and he loved the way this song was performed by George Beverly Shea in the Billy Graham crusades. My dad requested that it be sung at my mother’s funeral. Since my dad died a week later, we of course, used this song again. Just listening and thinking about the lyrics is personally so overwhelming, that it sometimes brings tears. “Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.” This is indeed my eternal hope.

*In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea.  
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me:  
As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,  
While God is marching on.*

*Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!  
His truth is marching on.*

Dear Lord, Make us mindful that our hearts and souls answer him that his truth marches on. Make us humble and filled with praise knowing he died to make us holy and he died to make us free. Our God is marching on for you and for me. Amen.

Friday, April 11

Brenda Stallman

Strength in Numbers

It is too difficult to identify one hymn as my favorite. Certain hymns become my favorite at different times for different reasons. “The Old Rugged Cross” is my favorite because it was my grandmother, Emma’s, favorite. I was raised on the same farm that she and my grandfather lived on and they were so special to me. Anything that was dear to them is close to my heart. My mother’s favorite hymn is the “Battle Hymn of the Republic.” I cannot not love that hymn as I played it many times on the piano and doing so made her happy. She would say she likes the way I played it on the piano; “with pep.”

My favorite childhood hymns are still favorites today. “Jesus Loves Me” must be a favorite of just about everyone, and when the right words don’t come while sitting at the bedside of someone living their final moments, it will bring comfort to the family and patient to join hands and sing together this familiar song. I can’t remember things that happened yesterday, but the words to the song “Zacheus,” are forever on my heart and is a favorite among kids and parents alike. It is the most viewed song on a website that features popular kids’ Bible songs.

“Here I am Lord” will always hold a special place in my heart as it was sung at my installation service as a parish nurse at OSLC. It is a strong reminder to me what my life’s calling is and asks for God’s help to keep me on His path.

Finally, “How Great the Art” is the most powerful hymn to me and resonates through me in all kinds of instances. I learned this hymn as a child when a copy was pasted to the back of each red hymnal as it was not originally included. It quickly became popular with our entire congregation. The words are inspirational, powerful, and memorable. It is a beautiful hymn in lyrics and tune. It is sung well by countless artists and will be permanently fixed as a tool of comfort and praise in my number of inspiring hymns.

Oh, and did I mention “The Lord’s Prayer” sung by Keith Meyer? . . . The Strength in Numbers!

**Saturday, April 12**

Andrew Thompson

Awesome God

*When He rolls up His sleeves  
He ain't just puttin' on the Ritz  
(our God is an Awesome God)  
There is thunder in His footsteps  
And lightning in His fists  
(our God is an Awesome God)  
Well the Lord He wasn't jokin'  
when He kicked 'em out of Eden  
It wasn't for no reason that He shed His  
blood  
His return is very close and so you better  
be believin'  
That our God is an Awesome God*

*Refrain*

*Our God (our god) is an Awesome God*

*He Reigns (he reigns) from heaven above  
With Wisdom (with wisdom) pow'r and love  
Our God is an Awesome God*

*When the sky was starless in the void of  
the night*

*(our god is an awesome god)*

*He spoke into the darkness and created  
the light*

*(our god is an awesome god)*

*Judgement and wrath He poured out the  
Sodom*

*Mercy and grace He gave us at the cross  
I hope that we have not too quickly forgot-  
ten that*

*Our God is an Awesome God*

My favorite song by far is “Awesome God”. This has been a very meaningful song for a long time. Every time I hear it it brings me back to the times I spent in my hometown church. I cannot sing it or hear it without feeling the presence of God.

This song for me makes me think of how AWESOME God really is, and how He in all His power and glory still has time every day to listen to me whenever I call on Him. I was talking to my kids recently about the power of prayer and how God hears them when they pray. One of them asked me, “What if everybody in whole world is praying at the same time?” A simple question, yes, but it shows the awesome power of God. I told them yes even if everybody is praying at once God still hears each and everyone of us. The look of amazement in their eyes was priceless. Seeing their excitement really hit home for me. So many times I fail to realize just how hard it must have been for God to send His only Son to die for us. That in and of itself is awesome to think that even as Jesus hung and died on that cross, both Jesus and God were thinking about me. My dad used to sing a song call “When He was on the Cross I was on His Mind”. If that is not the true definition of AWESOME I don't know what is.

**Sunday, April 13**

**Matthew 27:11-54**

### **Pilate Questions Jesus**

Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus said, 'You say so.' But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. Then Pilate said to him, 'Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?' But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

### **Barabbas or Jesus?**

Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, 'Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?' For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. While he was sitting on the judgement seat, his wife sent word to him, 'Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him.' Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor again said to them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' And they said, 'Barabbas.' Pilate said to them, 'Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?' All of them said, 'Let him be crucified!' Then he asked, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Let him be crucified!'

### **Pilate Hands Jesus over to Be Crucified**

So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.' Then the people as a whole answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!' So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

### **The Soldiers Mock Jesus**

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying,

'Hail, King of the Jews!' They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

### **The Crucifixion of Jesus**

As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.'

Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, 'You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, "I am God's Son." ' The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

### **The Death of Jesus**

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'This man is calling for Elijah.' At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.' Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'

Monday, April 14

Pastor Siri Strommen Campbell

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence - ELW #490

*“Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and with fear and trembling stand.*

*Ponder nothing earthly minded, for with blessing in his hand.*

*Christ our God to earth descending come full homage to demand.*

*Rank on rank the hosts of heaven spreads its vanguard on the way.*

*As the Light of light descending from the realms of endless day.*

*Comes the powers of hell to vanquish, as the darkness clears away.*

*At his feet the six winged seraph, cherubim with sleepless eye,*

*Veil their faces to the presence as with ceaseless voice they cry,*

*Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia, Lord Most High!”*

My freshman year at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa brought me deep into the majesty of Lutheran choral music. I sang in Pike Kor, the freshman girls' choir with at least sixty other female voices. That December we joined all the other choirs for Juletide, the Christmas concert. Luther was good at putting on a Christmas concert that had both beautiful music but a bit of drama to it as well. I remember well how the concert began:

The lights were dimmed and the concert hall was packed. In silence two of the choirs got on risers in the front while the rest of us waited outside the doors. The orchestra was ready to go. Our conductor got up and started the orchestra with the low, quiet, haunting music. Then, over one hundred of us freshman students began processing down the aisles singing the above song. Just the women on verse one. Men on the second. A canon on the third and by the fourth verse all four hundred voices were singing full voiced in surround sound with the orchestra at forte! By the time we sang “Alleluia! Lord Most High” the sound was so full you could almost feel your ears buzzing, your inside quivering.

It was awesome.

I had never sung this hymn before but that was the way I learned it. How could I not love it? This is certainly a dramatic text. It shows us the holiness, the awesomeness of God who chose to come down in human flesh. It shows us a glimpse of heaven and reminds us that we do not fully understand nor can we comprehend God. Yet, this holy and amazing God wants to be with us, connected to us, a part of us. Jesus came to show us that we are connected to this God. God has come to be with us. Amen.

**Tuesday, April 15**

Teran Harmon

Light the Fire - Bill Maxwell

*I stand to praise you  
But I fall on my knees  
My spirit is willing  
But my flesh is so weak*

*Refrain*

*So light the fire (light the fire)  
In my soul (in my weary soul)  
Fan the flame (fan the flame)  
Make me whole (make my spirit whole)  
Lord you know (Lord you know)  
Just where I've been (where I've been)  
So light the fire in my heart again*

*I feel Your arms around me  
As the power of Your healing begins  
You breathe new life through me  
Like a mighty, rushing wind (Refrain)*

“Light The Fire” is by far my favorite Christian song experience. I say experience because as a junior in high school I attended Young Life Youth Camp in the mountains of Colorado. Complete with a ropes course to test your faith and trust in yourself, awesome music, and beautiful surroundings, camp was the first time I was able to express my acceptance of and love for God and actually enjoy Christian fun!

As I've gotten more involved at Our Savior's, I'm reminded of these early faith experiences. Just as it did when I was a junior in high school, “Light The Fire” still speaks to me. It is the perfect song for a Sunday morning when you are tired and need to rejuvenate for the upcoming week. It is also a great song for reflection. God knows where you are and where you have been and he warms your life and your soul for the battle of life.

Wednesday, April 16

Laura Grinde

Open the Eyes of My Heart Lord - Michael W. Smith

When thinking back on my confirmation journey I recall three pieces that stand out. There is a song that to this day brings me peace. There was a person who through their kindness and thoughtfulness brought me security, and there is a simple way of reflecting on daily life. These small pieces of my journey helped me through an awkward time and continue to be meaningful to me today.

I always felt as though I was an outsider of sorts in our confirmation class. I went to an out-of-town school while everyone else attended the larger schools close by. During those inherently awkward years, it felt like a big deal. Sharing a demographic, age, and general community didn't seem to bridge that gap. Though sometimes uncomfortable, I have a positive feeling when I think about the experience. Looking back, being out of my comfort zone may have allowed me to better soak in some of the lessons learned.

"Open the Eyes of My Heart Lord" is a song that I've found particularly moving since my confirmation experience began. It's distinctly prayerful, straightforward, and just feels like a conversation I might have with God. I developed the strong connection to the song during the first few months of classes. We would sing it with guitar accompaniment at every confirmation class. It was intended to quiet the group down and bring us together. It felt like a moment to clear one's head and focus on the reason for being there. It made me feel at ease even out of my normal comfort zone.

The second piece of my confirmation experience was my small group leader. During confirmation, our large class would break into groups of 5-7 people, each led by an adult. I had a small group leader who traveled with my group for the entire four years. I was blessed; my leader was wonderful. She was attentive and genuinely interested in our group. She always had a smile on her face and greeted me personally, asking about school, activities, family, and my day. Her enthusiasm changed my outlook and gave me confidence. She went above and beyond to make me feel special and engaged.

The third piece of my experience is incredibly basic. Each class we were required to say aloud our high point and low point of the week. I became hooked on this practice over the four years and practice this reflection daily now. It is such an effective way of putting a time period in perspective; of admitting failures or disappointments and acknowledging successes. I will remember the highlights of the bible verses taught, but I have realized that these basic parts of my confirmation experience have shaped my life the most since then. Take time to open your heart and clear your head. Take time to make someone know they are special. Take time to reflect.

## Maundy Thursday, April 17

Pastor Siri Strommen Campbell

Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est - ELW #642

Where true charity and love abide, God is dwelling there.

*We are gathered in the one love of Christ  
Jesus,*

*Let us lift our voices to God and be joyful.*

*In holy wonder let us love the living God.*

*And my our hearts ever be one in faithful  
love.*

*Since we are all one in the Lord, as we  
gather,*

*Let us be watchful that no strife still divide  
us.*

*Contention, envy, ill will, spite-may these*

*all cease;*

*With us, abiding in our midst, is Christ our  
God.*

*All surrounded by the blest saints,  
we shall see you*

*Face to face in glory and light, O Christ  
Jesus.*

*With holy joy far beyond thought we shall  
be full,*

*From age to age, world without even,  
forevermore.*

There is a beautiful choir anthem entitled “Ubi Caritas” based off of the ancient chant from the 9th century. I first learned this in college choir and it quickly became one of my favorite pieces to sing.

There is something hauntingly beautiful about chant that is hard for us to understand in modern churches today. For one, chant carried in large Cathedrals where the spoken voice did not, so much of the liturgy was chanted for that reason. It is also easier to learn prayers and other passages when they are chanted rather than simply spoken. Chant was meant to be sung at a walking pace, at a speaking pace, and it echoed through stone walls as voices sung in unison together.

We still do chant in worship today, although it can feel rather foreign. We have a few hymns in our hymnal (such as the one above) that are still in chant form. I guarantee that if we heard a choir chanting some of those hymns in a large, reverberant space, it would be gorgeous.

Beyond that, these ancient words are beautiful. They are often sung for Maundy Thursday, the day when Jesus washes the feet of his disciples and talks about love in great depth. They remind us that Jesus’ sacrifice was built on love, that the church is built on love, that God’s very essence is love. But this isn’t a saccharine, sweet, mushy love. It is a strong, courageous, creative, and sacrificial love that transforms those who are touched by it.

## Good Friday, April 18

Pastor Joe Johnson

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross - ELW #803

*When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

*See from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” written by Isaac Watts is one of my favorite hymns because I think it perfectly epitomizes the complexity of our Theology of the Cross. This song exemplifies the complexity of faith, and particularly the complexity of Lent and Easter: the somberness of Lent, the celebration of Easter; the sorrow of the cross; the victory of the resurrection.

This song names the ugliness of the cross, and yet the beauty of the cross. The ugliness of murder and death, the ugliness of blood stains, the ugliness of the crown of thorns piercing Jesus’ head. Yet this song also names the beauty of love, the beauty of life, the beauty of victory over death.

The Theology of the Cross is: Out of despair comes hope. Out of sorrow comes love. Out of death comes life. This song so wonderfully names this theology:

“My richest gain I count but loss”

“Sorrow and love flow mingled down”

“Did e'er such love and sorrow meet?”

“or thorns compose so rich a crown?”

**Saturday, April 19**

Pastor Joe Johnson

In Christ Alone

*In Christ alone! who took on flesh  
Fulness of God in helpless babel!  
This gift of love and righteousness  
Scorned by the ones he came to save:  
Till on that cross as Jesus died,  
The wrath of God was satisfied -  
For every sin on Him was laid;  
Here in the death of Christ I live.*

In Christ alone we have life.

“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.” (John 1:3-4)

In Christ alone we have light.

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome”

(John 1:5)

In Christ alone we have truth.

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

In Christ alone we have blessing.

“From the fullness of his grace we have all received blessing upon blessing” (John 1:16)

In Christ alone we have grace.

“The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (John 1:17)

In Christ alone God is revealed.

“No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.” (John 1:18)

**Easter Sunday, April 20**

**Matthew 28:1-10**

### **The Resurrection of Jesus**

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, "He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him." This is my message for you.' So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'

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"*This is My Story, This is My Song*" is a publication of Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Hillsboro, North Dakota



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