

Hope and Rememberance

For All the Saints

SOUTHWESTERN WASHINGTON SYNOD

October 2020 Devotions

Devotional Booklet, October 2020



Hope and Remembrance: Remembering what was lost, as we also lift-up hope for the future.

In this packet you will find resources to conduct a worship service on November 1 or November 8, along with information on a special ELCA World Hunger/Lutheran Disaster Response Offering.

2020 is the year no one saw coming; the pandemic and an economic crash/recession were not where we anticipated the year going. That so much of the country remains divided on the best way to respond to these twin crisis's has made things harder for many people who are simply struggling to keep their heads above water


To help congregations and communities around the country, ELCA World Hunger distributed small "Daily Bread" hunger matching grants; these funds were intended to help provide support for hot meal sites and church based food banks, to ensure that our neighbors would have access to the bread they needed in a difficult time.

Additional funding from Lutheran Disaster Response and ELCA COVID-19 Response Funds were distributed to local congregations in our synod. In all twenty-six congregations and programs received support through these funds; an additional twenty-two congregations will receive support to help via worship technology grants.

As all this was happening, congregations around our synod plunged forward, caring for their neighbor in a variety of ways. Food packs were distributed to children who could no longer access free lunches at school; food banks increased the number of people they served, even as they lost volunteers who might be at high risk to Covid-19; and hot meal sites found new ways to provide meals to those in need. The work of congregations throughout our region has been a blessing for their communities. They are truly heroes in a day and age with few heroes.

As well, too many of our members left us over the past year. Some died from Covid-19. Others passed away for other reasons at a time when we could not gather to say goodbye.

We are asking congregations around the Southwestern Washington Synod to use their service on November 1 or November 8 to honor those who were heroes, and those whom we lost. This packet contains materials to help you plan a service of **Hope and Remembrance**. In the coming weeks, you will be provided with additional information, including homilies using both the Common Lectionary and the Narrative Lectionary; these will be on video, so you can plug them into your online service in a similar way to the sermons provided by Synod staff.



ELCA WORLD HUNGER

More than 820 million people - that's about 11 percent of people in our world today - are hungry.

And that was before a global pandemic struck. Today we know that resources are stretched, support is limited, and more people are hungry than a year ago. National and international experts warn that parts of our world are in danger of experiencing extreme hunger and starvation in the coming months.

As members of the ELCA, we are called to respond. We are a church that rolls up our sleeves and gets to work.

Working with and through our **congregations**, in the United States, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands Lutheran churches overseas and other partners, **ELCA World Hunger** is uniquely positioned to reach communities in need. From health clinics to microloans, water wells to animal husbandry, community meals to advocacy, your gifts to ELCA World Hunger make it possible for the ELCA to respond, supporting sustainable solutions that get at the root causes of hunger and poverty.

You can learn more at the ELCA World Hunger Web Site: <https://www.elca.org/hunger>

Hunger facts

- 821 million people around the world - that's more than 1 in 10 - can't access the food they need to live active, healthy lives.
- According to the most recent estimates, 736 million people live in extreme poverty on less than \$1.90 per day. That's 10% of the world's population.
- At some point in 2017 (the most recent year available), more than 40 million people in the United States were unsure where their next meal might come from.
- 39.7 million Americans were living in poverty in 2017. For a family of four, this means their annual household income was below \$25,094.

Week One

Text: Psalm 144

*Lord, what are human beings that you care for them,
mere mortals that you think of them?*

It has been a long, hard year. A year in which it sometimes seems that God has stopped thinking about us. Some days it feels like you cannot turn on the news without getting another shock to the system: a virus, layoffs, racial unrest, natural disasters, anger and frustration boiling over and creating chaos. It is enough, some days, to make you believe that there will never be anything good in the world again.

It can be anxiety inducing and overwhelming. Counselors and pastors report an upswing in calls from people who are struggling not just with keeping food on the table or a roof over their head, but with depression. They simply don't know how to cope with what feels what an overwhelming amount of bad news.

Where is God? And does He still think of us?

Yes, God is still there. Even in the thunder and the lightning, God is there. In the hospital corridors, god is there. In the family who has lost a job, lost a business, lost a home or a family member, God is always there.

Sometimes the noise of the world makes it harder to hear His word. And these days—there is plenty of noise, coming at us from all directions, pulling on us for attention. Just turn on the news, and you will see cars lined up for blocks at food banks, or hear of parents struggling to cope with working from home while kids are go to school online. It feels like there is an un-ending stream of people in need of something.

So stop—turn off the noise. Turn off the television. The radio. The phone. The screen. For a few moments, turn it all off, and listen in the quiet. Listen. Do you hear it?

God whispering, “Do not be afraid, for I am with you.”

We are assured by the Psalmist that God will deliver us; that He will shield us and protect us; and that we will be blessed with abundance again. That abundance in fact is already around us—not necessarily in material goods. But in family, in friends, in the natural world that God has blessed each of us with. Breath deep, and feel that abundance all around you. Feel God holding you in the palm of his hand.

And as you reconnect with the world, hold on to that feeling; that knowledge that God is there.

God has not abandoned us, and we must not abandon each other. There is a time for us to take a break from the noise in our lives; but that break should not be permanent. The noise will return. The many voices pulling us different directions will return. And we are to answer the call. The call may feel overwhelming, it may induce anxiety and stress. But through it all, God is there.

*Blessed is the people of whom this is true;
blessed is the people whose God is the LORD.*

Week Two: World Food Day

Text: John 6:25-35

By Diane Armbrust

This week we join our brothers and sisters in countries around the world to celebrate World Food Day which falls on October 16. This date honors the founding of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations in 1945 at the end of World War II, a war that claimed the lives of more than 70 million people. Nearly one third of the victims died of starvation and disease. Food availability was both a casualty and a weapon of that war. It is not surprising, then, that the focus of the work of the FAO, now in existence for 75 years, has been food security. Despite the dedicated work of many, 800 million people remain hungry in our world today.

It is likely that in Palestine of Biblical times, there were also many poor and hungry people. The Roman occupation funneled wealth and resources to those at the top leaving everyday citizens struggling to get by.

This is the backdrop for today's Gospel reading, John 6:25-35. The story follows the feeding of the 5000, the disciples escaping by boat to "the other side," and Jesus walking on water to their boat. We remember that 5000 people had gathered to see Jesus, the miracle healer who had been working in the area. As they gathered, Jesus could see that they were hungry and asked his disciples to feed them. Evolving from this request is the story of how 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread fed them all with 12 baskets left over. While no one knows where all that food came from, it is quite possible that the people had brought provisions with them. Trusting in Jesus gave them the courage to share.

Not surprisingly, after the event at the hill, the crowd sought Jesus out on the other side of the lake. Jesus wasted no time in telling them that God did not send him to be a performer of magic, producing meals at the snap of his fingers. Jesus says, "Do not work for food that perishes, but for food that endures through life and beyond."

I don't think Jesus was rejecting the real hunger of his audience in favor of spiritual food. After all, Jesus' entire ministry was about bringing the outcast from the margins and meeting real needs, whether it was healing people suffering from leprosy, or mental illness, raising Lazarus from the dead, or feeding hungry people. I suspect that his message had more to do with showing that ordinary people working together can heal the sick, feed the hungry and welcome the stranger. His feeding of the 5000 illustrated concretely how when we work together, when we share, we are helping to bring God's abundant blessings on Earth. That there is, indeed enough for everyone. Thanks be to God!

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, we praise you for your loving care for your whole creation, and your particular concern for those who are most vulnerable; the sick, the poor, the migrant, the prisoner. Help us, as we face each new day, to share what we have, knowing that your gifts are abundant. Show us how to work justice and mercy that all might live in dignity. We ask this in the name of your son, Jesus. Amen

Diane Armbrust is a member of Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Olympia, WA. She has been a member of the Synod Hunger Committee since 1995. She joins ELCA World Hunger in working for a just world where all are fed!

Week 3: Sing for Joy

Text: Psalm 98

Let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the Lord, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity. Ps 98:8.9

It has been quite a year, hasn't it? First came the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, which originally seemed safely over there, in China, but has now spread worldwide. In this country alone it has infected more than 7.5 million people and claimed over 200,000 lives. Then, in late summer came the vengeance of mother nature with devastating wildfires in the west, and destructive hurricanes in the southeast intensified by our warming climate. The undercurrent to it all has been the steady drumbeat of rancorous politics. In order to protect ourselves and others from COVID-19 infection, we have not even been able to gather together for worship and mutual support. It has been hard! We have concern not only for our own lives and those we love, but the frightening events have shown us that the greatest burden is being borne by our poorest neighbors, who are experiencing increasing hunger, greater health consequences, and greater destruction than those living in wealthier circumstances.

One might be tempted to ask, "Where is God in all of this mayhem?"

Psalm 98 is a hymn of praise to God whose steadfast love extends not only the chosen people of Israel, but to the ends of the earth - all people. In fact, all of creation celebrates because, "[The Lord] is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity."

My dictionary cites righteousness and fairness as synonyms for justice. Let's explore the concept a bit. A few years ago, I heard Jim Wallis, head of *Sojourners*, speak at a hunger conference. He related a story that when he was in seminary, he and a friend went through the entire Bible and cut out every verse that made reference to the poor; wealth and poverty, and social justice. When they were finished the Bible was in shreds. Wallis says that "justice" is mentioned 2000 times, twice as often as "love" or "heaven," and seven times more often than "hell." Justice matters to God. It is a central theme throughout the entire Bible.

We see God's rule of justice at work when Daniel is thrown into the lion's den in chapter 6 of that book. Daniel is a righteous man who has been framed by unscrupulous, but powerful characters. In the end, he is saved from certain death by his unshakeable trust in God while his persecutors are killed by the lions.

Be not afraid, "Let the oceans roar." We take assurance from the promise that God is with us and that God's justice and equity will prevail. Amen, Come Lord Jesus!

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Week 4: Love Your Neighbor

Readings: Matthew 19:16-22, Psalm 119:41-48

"There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments . . . You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,¹⁰ and 'love your neighbor as yourself.' "

What good thing must I do to get eternal life? A rich young man asks Jesus the question that each of us have probably asked ourselves at some point in our life. It would be so much easier if there were a check list: get baptized? Check. Go to church? Check. Read the Bible? Check. Love the Lord with all your heart? Check. Bing! You get your ticket through the pearly gates.

But Jesus does not provide the young man with an easy answer. He gives him a difficult one: to sell all he has and give it to the poor. To love his neighbor as much as he loves himself. And the rich young man walks away, deeply troubled.

It is a struggle we all have. We are, by the standards of the world, very rich people. We have a kind of wealth and safety in our day to day lives that people in developing nations cannot fathom. And too often, we tell ourselves we have hit the checklist: we are baptized, confirmed, go to church—unless there is something better to do—and Love the Lord. Most of us, like the rich young man, do a fair, if imperfect, job of following the commandments.

But Jesus expands those commandments: love your neighbor as yourself. It sounds so easy, right? It's just an emotion. We can all muster some love of neighbor, right? How hard can that be? And in the past few months we have witnessed amazing demonstrations of love; this was particularly true in the early days of the pandemic, as people went out of their way to support our front line workers while supporting those who were suddenly missing a paycheck. We were "all in this together". Until we weren't.

Time wears on us. Many of us expected to be "back to normal" by now. Compassion and caring are easy to carry with us for a few weeks, even a couple of months. But for many of us, fatigue is setting in. And the "new normal" is settling in for the long haul. And some days it seems easier to simply walk away. The work is too hard, the price of "loving my neighbor" is too high.

Perhaps it is because in trying to love our neighbor, we recognize that love is not simply an emotion; it is being there, to help them as they struggle in the hard moments of life. And it requires sacrifice: giving up a bit of our time, a bit of our treasure, and in the process giving up a bit of ourselves. It is not easy. It is not meant to be easy. And yet, we must continue to try, even as we know, like the young man, we will never be totally comfortable or happy with having to give up something of ourselves.

*May your unfailing love come to me, Lord,
your salvation, according to your promise.*

Beth Ann Johnson is a member of Mountain View Lutheran Church, and has been a member of the SW Washington Synod Hunger Committee since 1999.