

# September 1

*Kjersti Aagaard and Jim Versalovic*

*Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.*  
~Ephesians 4:2

How can we keep from singing on such a momentous occasion for Christ the King as a church and as a faith community? May this healing place remain strong and resilient beyond this pandemic, as we look forward to the next 75 years. No pandemic, no storm can shake our inmost calm. We vow to keep the faith in Christ.



**How can I keep from singing?** (Robert Wadsworth Lowry, 1869)

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

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

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

*No storm can shake my inmost calm  
While to that refuge clinging  
Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth  
How can I keep from singing?*

*I lift my eyes, the cloud grows thin  
I see the blue above it  
And day by day this pathway smooths,  
Since first I learned to love it,  
The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart  
A fountain ever springing  
For all things are mine since I am his  
How can I keep from singing?*

*No storm can shake my inmost calm  
While to that refuge clinging  
Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth  
How can I keep from singing?*

Christ the King Lutheran Church reflects the people of Houston's truth: nearly everyone is from somewhere else, but all are welcome. A Lutheran all her life, Kjersti attended Christ the King during one of her recruitment visits in 2006 and found immediate comfort in the familiarity of the liturgy and song

(it is no exaggeration that she found her “church home” before her “home home”). Jim came to Christ the King as Kjersti’s betrothed in 2011. Having been raised Roman Catholic, Jim had forayed into several faith beliefs, from Episcopalian to Unitarian Universalist. Now as a Lutheran at Christ the King formally since February 2017, Jim has found the peace of Christ that makes fresh his heart, and a fountain ever springing. It was the interwoven tapestry of the liturgy and music that has made Christ the King our faith home.

We were married at Christ the King on December 27, 2013. Surrounded by our children, parents, extended family and friends and colleagues from over the years, it was a service of reflection in word and song. Kjersti has been a member of the Holden Village community in the North Cascades for 40 years, and our service wove scripture and our marriage vows with the Holden Evening Prayer liturgy of Marty Haugen.

**Magnificat** (Marty Haugen, based on Luke 1:46-55)

My soul proclaims Your greatness,  
O God, and my spirit rejoices in You.  
You have looked with love on Your servant here,  
And blessed me all my life through.

Great and mighty are You, O Holy One,  
strong is Your kindness evermore.  
How you favor the weak and lowly one,  
humbling the proud of heart!  
You have cast the mighty down from their thrones,  
and uplifted the humble of heart.  
You have filled the hungry with wondrous things,  
and left the wealthy no part.  
Great and mighty are You, O Faithful One, strong is Your justice, strong Your love,  
as You promised to Sarah and Abraham,  
kindness forevermore.

My soul proclaims Your greatness,  
O God, and my spirit rejoices in You.  
You have looked with love on Your servant here,  
And blessed me all my life through.

Our marriage is rooted in the spoken and sung liturgy of love and humility. Our pledge to each other has been to prioritize kindness, mercy, humility and love in our actions and deeds-both at home and in our chosen professions. We have found that the musical liturgy at Christ the King enables us to reaffirm our vows every week, and carries us through the week. Although neither of us are blessed with the gift of voice, we lift our prayers in song with a conviction and joy that is disproportionate to any semblance of “on key” talent. These collective voices raised in song at Christ the King hold us in love and joy, and these blessings carry our lives forward as we continuously strive to give more to our world than we take.

## September 2

Linda Alexander

*Truly, truly, I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a seed; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ~ John 12:24*



When I was a child between first and sixth grades, except for one year in Pecan Park, Houston, our family lived in the country in Perry, a village in northern Ohio, named in honor of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry to commemorate his victory over the British fleet at the Battle of Lake Erie in September 1813. We could see Lake Erie from my sister's and my upstairs bedroom window and swam in it each summer. We had seven acres of land. It was truly a land of plenty, bounty and a child's wonderland for play. Our daddy was a civil engineer during the day but was always working diligently in our huge garden year-round when he was off work, as his own father had done having grown up on a family farm in Kansas. We had apples, pears, avocados, peaches, white and purple grapes, raspberries, blueberries, blackberries, rhubarb, strawberries, gooseberries, sour cherries, dark red cherries.

Annually, Daddy planted each year: corn, beans, peas, tomatoes, green peppers, onions, green onions, lettuce, cabbage, various greens, etc. Mother would always be busy canning and freezing all the produce. The six large apple trees in the front yard provided us with apple cider each year. Our daddy said he thought Johnny Appleseed had planted those trees. We climbed them for tree houses and loved our rope swing. There was a very large farmer's field of asparagus next to our property, from which the farmer invited my mother to cut as much as she wanted, even though we had our own asparagus patch (and I was not so keen on asparagus at that time). But I loved walking through that field when the asparagus had grown into five or six-foot ferns and looking up at the sky and thinking about God in the very blue heaven. However, what fascinated me the most was when we planted peanuts. We hulled the peanuts from the nursery and planted the individual raw nut and from that one nut grew a whole root system of many more nuts! Amazingly wonderful.

I always think of those peanuts when reading the verse from John 12. During the Covid-19 pandemic and the renewed civil rights movement of the Summer of 2020, we are learning many lessons and hopefully with God's grace and help, looking to find new ways of living and caring and relating to one another. In a way, the tragic death of George Floyd is not unlike the lone peanut that, once planted, grew and spread and generated abundance. In dying to old ways, we can look forward to bearing much fruit, according to Christ's good promise.

**Celtic Blessing** – *(Sunday service at Christ Lutheran Church, Santa Fe, NM)*

**May the Christ who walks on wounded feet walk with you on the road.**

**May the Christ who serves with wounded hands stretch out your hands to serve.**

**May the Christ who loves with a wounded heart open your hearts to love.  
May you see the face of Christ in everyone you meet,  
and may everyone you meet see the face of Christ in you. Amen.**

## September 3

Mary Ayala

*...He arose and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. ~Mark 4:39*

God, when I am surrounded by Life's storms and I feel life closing in on me, please let me remember Christ's example to slip away and find a place to pray. When I am pushed beyond my limits and feel that I can't pray, I know you listen to my heart and with your command "Peace, be still" you send me the Holy Spirit to relax my mind, calm my fears, and humble my heart so that I can again focus on Jesus Christ. His mercy makes the fearsome situations less threatening and helps me to have the faith to give it all into his hands and pray "Thy will be done."



Sometimes, when we ask for relief, the storms seem to remain and still rage about us. At these times God hears us and his answer to our prayers is to bring us the strength to pass through the storms, and as he accompanies us on life's journey we grow stronger and our faith grows deeper.

"If finding God's way in the suddenness of storms makes our faith grow broad, then trusting God's wisdom in the dailyness of living makes it grow deep. And strong. Whatever may be your circumstances, however long it may have lasted, wherever you may be today, I bring you this reminder: The stronger the winds, the deeper the roots, and the longer the winds, the more beautiful the tree." Author Unknown.

## September 4

Jill Bailer

*...but they who wait for the Lord will renew their strength,  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and  
not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. ~Isaiah 40:30*



At a time in my earlier life when I was unhappy with my employment situation, this verse from Isaiah, which we sang almost monthly during the Guitar Service back in the '80s, kept me going. As I would run up the stairs to fetch another costume to rent to the overflow of customers at Halloween, I could picture myself with wings soaring over a mountain peak. With that picture in my mind, I would find myself feeling less weary and faint from the 12-15 hours workday associated with this time of year.

This verse from the Bible and the song written from it gave me the strength to persevere until better times, just as it did the people of God who were exiled in Babylonia during Isaiah's time.

What Bible verse or verses come to your heart and mind when you are tired and faint in body and spirit? During this COVID-19 time of the year of our Lord 2020, we need to keep those encouraging words close at hand.

**Dear Lord, thank you for the wonderful poets of your written word and the talented musicians that set those words to music for us to sing. Keep your words close to us during these trying and dangerous times. Amen.**

## September 5

Mary Ann Beseda

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.*

~Psalm 23



I think of this psalm each morning as I walk my two shepherds (of the Australian variety). One of my dogs, who is a rescue, is highly reactive to other dogs so we are out the door by 4:30 a.m. We are all alone in the world it seems, except for the occasional cat or possum. I find this daily ritual both comforting and spiritual. I take deep breaths and thank God for lungs that are healthy. I pray for those who are walking through the valley of the shadow of death, including patients fighting the virus and the essential workers we depend on for health and sustenance. I thank God for the worship prepared each week by the ministry staff every Sunday at 11:00 a.m.

And I connect with the natural world, saying hello to the moon and stars. Observing the phases of the moon restores my soul as I feel a part of the universe. I pray for the planet and express hope for its inhabitants. May we all find wisdom and courage and love for our neighbors during these challenging times. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow.

## September 6

John Boles

These opening words from Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* have been playing in my mind lately like a musical earworm:

*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.*

Especially the negative phrases. How do we discover the courage to persevere in such times as these? We must turn to our faith, our trust that God is in control and will bring us through the dilemmas we face.

Certainly that gives us hope, an expectation that in time all will be well. Fearful of Covid 19, worrying about the plight of our nation, I find myself often turning to those familiar words of Psalms 23:

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,  
for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

I have no solutions to fall back on, only trust that God is with me, and all of us. Watching our grandchildren, I see them exuding optimism, joy, confidence, trust. They seem immune from the worry and even cynicism that mark our age. Their fresh faces reinforce my belief that God is walking with us through these perilous times and will lead us to deliverance. I give thanks for that promise.

**Heavenly Father: We ask for your comfort, your strength, and your mercy to help us navigate our personal journeys during these strange and worrisome days; protect us, help us protect others by our behavior, and enable us at all times to remember that in dark times you are the light of the world. Amen.**

