

Monday, September 7

Nancy Boles

Jesus commanded: "Quiet! Be still.' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm." ~Mark 4:39

When I was a child growing up in Baltimore, my parents and I went to the beach—in Baltimore they said went to the shore—every summer to an old beach-side vacation town called Ocean Grove, originally founded shortly after the Civil War as a Methodist retreat. I grew to love the ocean, its immensity, the constant sound of the waves, the view of the morning sun coming up over the eastern horizon. When my husband and I moved to Houston forty years ago, I began to get my ocean fix in Galveston. True, the Gulf is not the Atlantic, but it looks and feels the same. Every summer, and several weekends during the year, I would walk along the Seawall, being refreshed by the smell of the salty air, the sound of the waves lapping onto the shore, and the blue-green immensity of the water stretching to the horizon. The ocean/ Gulf just seems to suggest infinity to me, and its everlasting wave action suggests eternity. I find it so peaceful and relaxing. I know that summer thunderstorms can rile the water, I've seen how powerful hurricanes can turn the peaceful lapping of the waves into terrible forces of chaos and destruction, but I know the wind and water will eventually quieten, and the ocean will again be calm, relaxing, eternal.



The ocean is to me a metaphor for life: normally calm and often filled with pleasure, but it can be disrupted by conflict, or illness, or fear of the unknown. But I like to think of Jesus confronting the waves on the Sea of Galilee. As it says in Mark 4:39, Jesus commanded: "Quiet! Be still.' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm." If when we are faced with buffeting wind and scary waves we turn to our faith, it is as if Jesus is there calling out the forces of adversity and calming them. This thought is especially comforting today as we confront a perfect storm of troubles in our nation: economic, racial, and then the pandemic. Yet through our faith we are confident that eventually calm will return to the ocean of life, and the eternal, comforting reality of the gentle lapping of the waves will bespeak the immensity of God's care for us.

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Our Heavenly Father, reach out your hand to us, your people, and give us comfort, give us strength, confirm our hope, and enable us to see your eternal light in these dark and stormy times. Quiet the winds and calm the waves of life. In you we find deliverance and peace. Amen.

Tuesday, September 8

Terri Bourne

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

~Genesis 1:31

Do you want to improve the world?

I don't think it can be done.

The world is sacred.

It can't be improved.

If you tamper with it, you'll ruin it.

If you treat it like an object, you'll lose it. ~Tao de Ching 29

Always remember you are braver than you believe,

smarter than you think,

and twice as beautiful as you'd ever imagined.

Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world.

Today I am wise, so I am changing myself. ~Rumi

Every creature is a glimmering, glistening mirror of divinity. ~Hildegard of Bingen

God of grace, bring me ever closer to a sense of oneness with you and with all of your creation. I pray that my words and actions this day will reflect your enduring love. Amen.



Wednesday, September 9

Lisa Brenskelle

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy? ~Job 38:4-7



This church was founded 75 years ago, and a building was built for worship. That building still stands today, because its foundation is good. What makes for a good foundation in life? We would likely say faith. So, what does the faith teach us? As God makes abundantly clear in the verses above where he is speaking to Job, He is the creator of all that is, was, and will be. We confess God the Father as Creator every Sunday. We also confess the Christ as Savior, and while we often selfishly think of our own redemption, the Bible is clear that the Christ came to “reconcile all things to himself” (Colossians 1:20) and that we, with the entire creation, long for redemption (Romans 8:22-23). We also confess the Holy Spirit as the giver of life, and state that we “look forward...to the life of the world to come”. What are we looking forward to? The Bible makes clear that God intends the restoration of all things (Acts 3:21). So, God made/makes all things, reconciles all things to Godself, and restores all things. This is the central and foundational message of the faith - the Good News.

What does this mean for us, for humanity? God created/creates us, reconciles us to Godself, and restores us - because we are part of the “all things” on behalf of which God acts, intricately bound up with all the rest of creation. Indeed, this is Good News. How then shall we live, in light of this Good News? John 10:10 states that the Christ came so that we might have life abundant. And, Genesis 8:17 makes clear that God wants all life to abound on Earth. What makes for an abundant life, and what part do we, humanity, play in that abundant life that God so desires? Genesis 2:15 indicates that our role is that of caretaker of all creation on God’s behalf and Mark 10:43 says we are to be servants. This makes sense. Life can only abound if the foundation is firm, so the Earth needs our care. A report from the United Nations states: Healthy Planet = Healthy People = Healthy Economy. This statement is a secular recognition of the firm foundation; of putting first things first. If the planet is not healthy, people will not be healthy, and unhealthy people result in an unhealthy economy. Our God-given role as caretakers is therefore critical to abundant life.

So, how are we doing? The myriad environmental crises that we face: climate change, pollution, loss of biodiversity and more, make plain that our sin has been holding sway. What does the faith, our foundation, indicate that we should do about sin? Repent (Acts 3:19-20). Repentance means to recognize our sin, our failure to care for all creation as God intends, to confess, receive God’s forgiveness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, to change our lives. Remember Psalm 85:9: *Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.*

God of compassion, our firm foundation, have mercy upon us; bring healing to our relationship with all your creation. Forgive us for our mistreatment and neglect of the creatures with whom we share your earth, for what we have done to harm them, and for what we have not done to help them. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. We ask you to fill us with your Spirit, that we may care for one another and for all your creatures, according to your will and in the fullness of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Thursday, September 10 *Anita Bryant*

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. ~Isaiah 41:10

Ever since the COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions were first put in place, it feels like we are more and more cut off from those things that renew and rejuvenate our spirit. The stress of restrictions on visiting friends and family, travel restrictions, a ban on group celebrations, and, of course, the end of in-person church services and meetings can all pile up and leave us feeling that we are cut off from the people and places we need to be near to feel completely at peace.



Native Americans have a concept of the necessity to regularly reconnect with one's homeland as a way to re-center your spirit and remind yourself of what is important. If you no longer are able to live in the place of your birth, you should strive to return regularly like a pilgrim seeking renewal. But how do you reconnect with your homeland when you can't or shouldn't travel?

Similarly, it can feel that we are cut off from our spiritual homeland as we are unable to experience the profound joy of singing and worshipping together. Can we fully experience the renewing spirit of worship if we are unable to gather together? Are we really connected with God and each other when we are so very much apart?

Thanks to the profound gift of the Holy Spirit, I've come to believe the answer is yes! The reassuring, constant presence of the Holy Spirit has become increasingly precious to me during these months. I have often heard the phrase, *God is always with you*, but have come to rely on and experience this as truth every day. We are not alone no matter how alone we may feel. We are constantly renewed and refilled by the Holy Spirit who gives us what we need.

Fear not, for I am with you...

I will strengthen you,

I will help you,

I will uphold you...

Thanks be to God!

Friday, September 11

Dan Butterbrodt

...the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. ~Genesis 11:9

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ~Galatians 3:28

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit... ~Matthew 28:19



During my thirty plus years in the *international* steel business I have been blessed with many exciting opportunities and challenges. I emphasize *international* as I've lived and worked abroad in four countries (Russia, Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Saudi Arabia), and traveled to approximately 60 others—although most of this travel was to view steel mills and warehouses to negotiate purchases and claims, with little time to take part in normal tourist activities.

Throughout my career my colleagues and supervisors have represented a United Nations of humanity. I've had bosses from Japan, the USA, Norway, Belgium, Denmark, India, France, and Lebanon. As far as my relationships with subordinates, I have hired and managed people from numerous ethnicities, religions, ages, and gender identities. What hits me the most when thinking about all these people are the things they sought, with the most universal being peace and security for their families—often in lieu of themselves.

So, it gives me pain and anxiety to see the current state of affairs in our country; and believe me, our situation worries people all over the world as they look to our country for strength, stability, and freedom. If we cannot get along in the USA, what chance does the world have? The recent events, particularly regarding race, have also caused me to take stock of my career and actions in treating all people as Christ would treat them:

Was I always positive and approachable? Did I mentor my team members as much as I could? Was I careful in my actions and language not to offend? Could I have been a better witness for Christ? My record on the above questions is mixed...sometimes excellent performance, and at other times abysmal.

In Galatians, Paul is not saying that differences do not exist between people but is saying that in Christ it does not matter. This teaching is not based on the current political climate of the culture in Paul's time or ours, is not a liberal vs. conservative issue, but it is the direct result of the Gospel. It is a statement about our equal value in the eyes of God, and how we should view each other. We each bring different talents and personalities, but the one constant is that all of us are one. The Gospel message has freed us to not only be civil, but to serve one another without hesitation.

Dear God, thank you for your great creation of all different types of people. Give us the thoughtfulness and strength to not only be mindful supervisors, colleagues, and workers— but give us the strength to be loving and purposeful witnesses for Christ. And please grant all people everywhere the peace that passes all understanding. Amen.

Saturday, September 12

John Cates

Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. ~Psalm 56:3

Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let not your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. ~John 14:27

You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. ~Psalm 91:5

The thing that has been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. ~Ecclesiastes 1:9

Be still and know that I am God. ~Psalm 46:10



My goodness how time flies! It has been 10 years since I wrote my previous devotional.

During that time our family has experienced a few trials. We have been shown that God's presence in our lives enabled us to conquer both the fear and the despair they occasioned. My wonderful loving and much more spiritual wife Diane always says that in crises I always go into my Captain Cates "General Quarters Mode" and rely on my library of casualty procedures. That is certainly true! But it is also true that our Lord and Savior, whom I do not always see and whose presence I do not always feel in my life, always stands next to us and fills us with the love and strength to bear life's sometimes unpleasant surprises. While I know that neither I nor my family are in any way unique and I know that many have suffered far more than we, there are two events that occurred over the past ten years that I regularly relive in my discussions with my God. They were and continue to be so revealing to me regarding God's love for me and for all of us that I hope that in sharing them, some of that love might flow out to others.

One dark early morning, deep in the bowels of MD Anderson Cancer Center, my beloved wife was about to undergo cancer surgery. My reserves were exhausted and I was completely out of casualty procedures! I simply did not know what to do next. I was lost and afraid. At that very moment, completely unannounced, Pastor Moore appeared in our small pre-op cubicle. He prayed with us and then anointed Diane with oil. I was suddenly and unexpectedly overcome by the feeling of God's love. I knew that we were filled with and surrounded by the Holy Spirit. We squeezed each other's hands and I gave her a kiss. As her consciousness faded. I knew that no matter what the future held, we would face it together with God, that we would move forward, and we would not be afraid. Through God's grace and love, we have.

Just a few years later our youngest son was the victim of a hit and run accident while he was on his bicycle. He suffered ghastly injuries. EMTs responding said that if they had arrived just a few minutes later he would have bled out and died. There were multiple skull fractures, traumatic brain injury, and deep gashes that narrowly missed arteries. The surgeons and doctors said that they could not predict what he would be like, if he woke up and if he lived. In that moment the cold breath of despair washed over me. I was drowning. But then God's peace quietly and unobtrusively surrounded me. My heart was

neither troubled nor afraid. I knew that no matter what the future held, we would face it together with God, that we would move forward, and we would not be afraid. Through God's grace and love, we have.

Now in the year 2020 CE, just when my hubris convinced me I had charted a safe course through our remaining years; pestilence stalks the darkness and a plague is destroying at midday. I have been very afraid. But God, one more time gently tapped me on the shoulder to make his presence known. How you might ask? Just when I had despaired of the world making any sense to me, our church asked me to write a devotional. Through that simple request, God reminded me that there is nothing new under the sun and that he is indeed our God. No matter what the future holds, we shall face it together with him, we shall move forward with him, and we will not be afraid!

Sunday, September 13

Trish Chapman

*Unexpected and mysterious is the gentle word of grace.
Everloving and sustaining is the peace of God's embrace.
If we falter in our courage and we doubt what we have known,
God is faithful to console us as a mother tends her own.*

*In a momentary meeting of eternity and time,
Mary learned that she would carry both the mortal and divine.
Then she learned of God's compassion,
of Elizabeth's great joy,
and she ran to greet the woman who would recognize her boy.*

*We are called to ponder myst'ry and await the coming Christ,
to embody God's compassion for each fragile human life.
God is with us in our longing to bring healing to the earth,
while we watch with joy and wonder for the promised Savior's birth.
~ ELW 258*



Unexpected and mysterious is the gentle word of grace. Everloving and sustaining is the peace of God's embrace. The text of Jeannette Lindholm's "Unexpected and Mysterious" sung to Calvin Hampton's tune "St. Helena" gives me chills every time I hear or sing it. I don't have the words to describe how moved I am by the haunting music and the joyful, reassuring words. While embracing the fact that we are unable to grasp the depth of God's love for us, these words inspire me to have hope, and remind me to trust, even though I can't fully understand.

In a momentary meeting of eternity and time, Mary learned that she would carry both the mortal and divine. Even though I carried only mortal children, when I was pregnant I felt closer to God than at any other time in my life. The joy and wonder at the miracle of life growing inside of me made God's presence in my life and in the world so much clearer. I remember wondering how any woman could carry a child and be an atheist, so completely and simply did I know His creative power and presence in those months.

We are called to ponder mystery...

At a time in history when science and technology are advancing at a feverish pace, I have to remind myself to slow down and embrace the unexpected, mysterious grace and love that are always with us. "If we falter in our courage and we doubt what we have known, God is faithful to console us as a mother tends her own."

Gracious God, help us to see you in everything we encounter. Surprise us with your beauty, joy and peace. Amen.