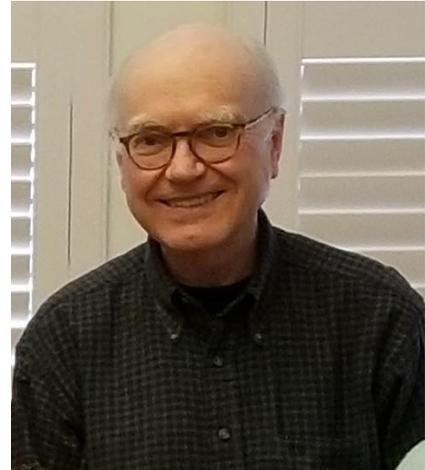


Monday, September 21 *Kirk Hanson*

He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. ~Isaiah 40:11



I have had the good fortune to spend four years living and working in India, a transformative experience. The land rises from the coastal plains of the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean, and Bay of Bengal towards the Western and Eastern Ghats; the central Deccan Plateau and the Himalayan Mountains of the north are crisscrossed by the great valleys of the Indus, Ganga, Narmada, Godavari, and Kaveri Rivers. The climate ranges from tropical in the south, to the deserts of Rajasthan, to the continental extremes of summer heat and piercing winters in the interior north. The land provides mangos and guavas, oranges and onions, coconuts and papaya, jackfruit and star fruit. (The old star fruit tree behind our house brought shade to our son's bedroom and to our neighbor's kitchen; on some afternoons I would make a star fruit sandwich.) There are elephants, tigers, and leopards, monkeys, mongooses, and pangolin. There are cobras and kraits. Bird songs, the hum of lowing cattle, temple chants, and morning calls to prayer are intermingled with the sounds of city traffic and military aircraft rumbling overhead. Extreme wealth and comfort exist side-by-side with extreme poverty and suffering: migrant workers and their families were living in shacks and tents just beyond the walls of the gated community where I lived.

Though living in a city of more than eleven million people, trips to the international airport outside the city, or daily commutes to my workplace located in a modern industrial park near the airport, took me through countryside covered by farms, vineyards, and orchards interrupted occasionally by a small town or village. From the air-conditioned comfort of my car or bus, I often saw shepherds and shepherdesses leading their flocks to pasture in the early morning, tending their flocks by day, or leading them to the safety of their farms or villages at day's end. At summer's end, the shepherds would bring their flocks to the fields of spent sugar cane for the pleasure of foraging on stubble leftover from the harvest. Although most villages no longer have gates that are closed at night, the shepherd's traditional role as gatekeeper lives on through colorful locale names such as "Jyothipura Gate" and "Hancharahalli Gate". Like our Father in heaven, the shepherds watch over and care for their flocks continuously.

My memories of India continue to remind me of the richness and abundance of God's creation, to be thankful for my many blessings and daily bread, and to love all neighbors as myself.

*The King of love my shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his And he is mine forever.
Thou spreadst a table in my sight;
Thine unction grace bestoweth;
And, oh, what transport of delight from thy pure chalice floweth!
And so, through all the length of days,
Thy goodness faileth never.
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise within thy house forever. ELW 502
Amen.*

Tuesday, September 22 *Cliff Helmcamp*

It was Saturday, June 10, 1944, at St. Joseph's Infirmary in Houston that a young doctor delivered a bouncing, six-pound, baby boy, the first child of very excited parents. The doctor probably gave little thought to the event as this was one of hundreds of deliveries he was to make in a long career. He was a man of faith and at the time was perhaps thinking of his church home. Indeed, in just 379 days he was to be part of an exciting new venture, attending the first worship service of a new mission church. His name was C. J. Ivan Ekman, one of 43 charter members of the newly named Christ the King Lutheran Church. I was the newborn baby.



While our paths never again crossed, they did intersect at Christ the King. My journey to the corner of Rice Blvd. and Greenbriar came during the most stressful time in my life. I left my previous church home and seemed adrift. A friend suggested that Christ the King might be a good fit for me. I scheduled an appointment with Pastor Edwin Peterman who put me at ease and assured me that I would be welcomed into the congregation.

What I was soon to find was a diverse family of faith — people from all walks of life willing to accept each other as children of God and working to share gospel through word, sacrament and deed. Indeed, “The Village Church with a Global Mission.” We all have stories of our journey to Christ the King, different paths, but arriving safely to our new home, our church home. May God continue to guide those in search of a new church home to our doorsteps where they will find loving acceptance in this “Healing Place” especially in this time of Covid pandemic as we celebrate 75 years of continued faithful ministry.

We pray with the hymn writers:

Guide me ever great Redeemer, pilgrim through this barren land. I am weak, but you are mighty; hold me with your powerful hand. Bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me now and evermore. Open now the crystal fountain where the healing waters flow; let the fire and cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through. Strong deliverer, strong deliverer, shield me with your mighty arm. ELW 618

Wednesday, September 23

Judy and Bert Hungerford

*I must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day;
night cometh and no man can work. ~John 9:4*

Dennis had made up his mind to die rather than to have the surgery. Our wonderfully talented, next-door neighbor on the mountain suffered from a cardiac disease that had robbed him of the majority of needed oxygen in his blood. A crusty electrical engineer and licensed electrician who prided himself on the electrical work he did in our homes, in our cabin alone he had installed four fans and a new heavy duty electrical line, he could no longer stand the exertion required to install the lines and appliances. His pride suffered.



Bert and I knew something was amiss because Dennis wore a heavy winter vest in 80 degree summer weather when the rest of us wore shorts and shirt sleeves. All Dennis said was that he was cold plus a few details about the cardiac condition.

I finally learned more from his wife Marty, one morning over coffee. Usually reticent about personal issues, the words came tumbling out. She had tried to reason with him “too many times,” she said, about a surgical procedure that could help him. She had finally given up talking to him about the surgery to which he was adamantly opposed because they had argued about the topic to the point where it was harming their marriage. He did have medical insurance, she offered, although I knew they were short on ready cash. His decision was to keep walking until he keeled over. Period.

Later as Bert and I talked about the situation, two questions became clear: Did Dennis realize how much his neighbors loved him? Was this a question of inadequate insurance and money? Our answers were “no” and “yes,” respectively, but there was only one way to find out.

With the help of another neighbor, we compiled a list of fourteen friends, close enough to Dennis to pitch in the several hundreds of dollars each necessary for the surgery. George, Dennis’s closest friend, happily handed over the bills, while insisting that he knew Dennis would never agree to the surgery. Most everyone else felt the same way, too, but the wallets continued to open and the money came in. We converted all the contributions to cash so that cashing a check was not an excuse, found an all-inclusive card that we donors could independently sign, and designated a couple to bring the gift to Dennis. Bert and I “won.” No one else wanted to approach him.

So, with Marty’s help we arranged for an informal morning coffee at their home. We arrived, the conversations started, and somehow over the subsequent cups of coffee we were discussing how much the neighbors cared for Dennis and wanted him to get well. We handed over the card in its bulging envelope. Dennis opened it; his expression was unreadable as he read the opening words, “We love you and want you to be with us. Please have the surgery.” The bills spilled into his hands. Bert and I were

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frozen, wondering if we had lost a friendship. Dennis looked up and asked, "All these people?" Yes, we nodded. Suddenly he broke into a great smile, nearly shouting, "I'll do it." And he did. And the surgery was successful. And he was grateful, but no more grateful than those of us who had the opportunity to help. It was, and still is, a Christlike moment for all fourteen of us. I believe for Dennis and Marty, too.

Dear Lord, please help us to live in the daylight and always be observant enough to see who is in trouble and needs help so that we can become a helper, rather than living in nighttime when we have missed the opportunity to aid someone who never asked for that help. Amen.

P.S. Dennis is alive and well, and he and Marty have been living a fruitful life, although at a lower altitude, for a decade.

Thursday, September 24 *Dennis Hutchison*

There are two Psalms that, when combined, create an opportunity for all adults to consider leaving as part of a holistic legacy for the betterment of future generations. This legacy is described in the following scriptures:

Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him. ~Psalm 127:3

The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for God has founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers. ~Psalm 24:1-2

Every child is indeed a heritage and gift from the Lord, and there is much in Scripture that gives parental and societal guidance on the devout upbringing of God's children. What could be a more meaningful legacy than delivering a world to future generations in which children can learn, play, and grow safely in an environment that provides clean air, clean water, nourishing food and healthy recreation that extends their lives rather than shortens them.

Each of us—not just parents—have been entrusted by the Lord to create social, spiritual, and a world ecology in which children can learn, play, and grow safely. Supporting God's children and (as stated on the Caring for Creation web site), “being earth keepers is foundational to our Christian vocation,” and central to our ability to leave a legacy that perpetuates the Lord's gift.

Merciful God, grant us the wisdom, foresight, and leadership to support and protect your children and to preserve your world for generations to come. Amen.



Friday, September 25

Carolyn Jacobs

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.... ~Hebrews 12:1

Two major inspirational events marked my religious formation. The first was an Ecumenical Student Conference in Athens, Ohio, in 1963, with the theme "For the Life of the World." The theme came from the title of our study book, which was written by one of the speakers, Alexander Schmemmann. Participating in education and worship with 3,200 college students in a large auditorium was unforgettable. An even greater gathering of 95,000 people at the closing assembly of the Kirchentag (biennial Protestant religious gathering--now ecumenical) in a stadium in Hannover, Germany, in 1983, was another high point. The theme of that gathering was "Umkehr zum Leben" or "Turn Around (repent) to Live." It focused on peace in the face of the nuclear arms race. Participating in such large-scale events with so many other people of faith is thrilling and inspiring. Yet the challenge is to follow through on those high points. Here is where the local church plays a crucial role in sustaining faith and spiritual growth to transform inspiration into action.



Born and raised a Lutheran, I naturally joined Christ the King Church when I came to graduate school at Rice in 1966. I was a member until 1970, then spent a few years away from church and eventually away from Houston. When I rejoined Christ the King in 1977, this congregation turned me from an inward focus out to the world again. Major strengths of CTK are our involvement with many organizations, issues, and projects where we can live out our faith, as well as providing opportunities and food for spiritual growth to keep us going for the long haul. On this 75th anniversary of our congregation, let us celebrate and continue these strengths as we look to what our community and country and world need today and in the future. Let us "run with perseverance the race that is set before us."

Dear God, as we face illness, injustice, divisiveness, and violence in our land and in the world, lead us to learn, to grow, to turn around, to act for change and for healing. Give us wisdom, discernment, strength, will, and courage to go forth on the path before us.

As we worship, grant us vision, till your love's revealing light in its height and depth and greatness dawns upon our quickened sight, making known the needs and burdens your compassion bids us bear, stirring us to ardent service, your abundant life to share. ELW 712 Amen.

Saturday, September 26

Kim Jacobson

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

Some years ago, I went on a “girls’ trip” with some friends to Montana. Our first stop was in a remote area about 10 miles south of the Canadian border. It was an absolutely gorgeous setting. We stayed in a guest house at the top of a hill that sloped down to a crystal clear lake with the Rocky Mountains as a backdrop. After a long day’s travel from Houston, we sat on the porch, luxuriating in the clean crisp air and stunning landscape. After a bit, I wandered down to the edge of the lake and perched on a log. Taking in my surroundings, I offered up a prayer of thanks to God for the opportunity to be immersed in such an amazingly beautiful part of His creation. I went on to thank God for my friends, asking that He bless our time together, that He watch over my family back home, and, honestly, I went on for quite a while. When I finished, satisfied that I had covered everything with God, I hopped up and started back toward the house. I had only gone a few steps when I felt a pull back toward the log. It was a very strong feeling and I yielded to it, stepping back and repositioning myself at the edge of the water. This time, however, I was quiet.....and I waited, as I once again took in the beauty of the lake and surrounding mountains. Within moments, I was enveloped by the most powerful feeling of love. It washed over me and through me – as if God was saying, “Okay, Kim, you had your turn to talk to me, now I want to talk to you.” It was the most amazing experience – in that moment, I felt completely loved and accepted as a child of God. Don’t misunderstand me – this was not a conversion-type experience. I’m a lifelong Lutheran – fortunate to have been raised with a strong faith. Rather, this was a transformative experience in the sense that God touched my heart and soul in a way that I have carried with me ever since. And, as so often happens when we look back, we can see God in the fabric of our lives. That “touch” from God has sustained me through some very difficult times and, to this day, it continues to nourish my faith and remind me always to find times to be still.



Be Still and Know that I Am God
Be Still and Know that I Am
Be Still and Know
Be Still
Be

Sunday, September 27

Daniel Johnson and Diane Persson

Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all our years away; they fly forgotten, as a dream dies at the opening day. O God, Our Help in Ages Past, ELW 632, Verse 5



“O God, Our Help in Ages Past” is familiar to most of us, and fits with a 75th anniversary. God is “our eternal home” as the first and last verses echo, and the metaphor of time as a tranquil flow is comforting, carrying us through the stages of life like a ride through Disneyland’s “It’s a Small World”. The flow of time seems intuitive to us in modern times, with clocks and calendars taken for granted, and we need no church bells to coordinate us. We scarcely notice the changes in text of the hymn, to “bears all our years” as the ELW has it from “bears us all” in the LBW green book, but the change captures the issue of who’s moving, us or what surrounds us. It’s not the only change our Lutheran hymnals have had, indicated by the “alt.” in the text credit to Isaac Watts, 1674-1748. His original “Bears all its sons away” was in the old red book (c. 1958) but couldn’t survive into the inclusive language era. Regardless the textual tweaking, the continuity of tone resonates in the familiar tune.

In sharp contrast are the words of Psalm 90, the first verses of which the hymn paraphrases. The King James Version which Isaac Watts probably used has verse 5 begin, “Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep” and the NRSV we now use has “You sweep them away; they are like a dream.” The original Hebrew uses the word *zaram*, to gush. No tranquil flow here, it’s a turbulent tsunami or flash flood following a downpour, maybe even recalling cultural memory of flooding of the Black Sea about 7500 years ago following the last Ice Age, and presaging the catastrophic sea level rise that may sweep away Christ the King Church before 7500 more years roll by.

Big changes set the stage for rebirth and renewal, and Isaac Watts crystalized consolation from the gushing flood. This seems like the physical process of annealing, where glass or metal is heated to loosen brittle bonds, then cooled to become stronger.

Poem prayer:

Anneal me Lord. Stir my soul. Melt my heart. Open my mind. Pry apart the sticky strands of my DNA. Forge me in the fire that does not consume. Recombinant! The old is made new. Crystalize the insight. Steel my nerve. Stirred not shaken.