

Monday, October 12 *Sharon Ostwald*

When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. When they had rowed about three or four miles, [a] they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading. ~John 6:16-21



I remember many years ago when Mel and I, with several other young couples, climbed aboard a friend's pontoon boat in Excelsior, Minnesota to picnic while we watched the sunset across Lake Minnetonka. A few clouds drifted through the sky with a soft breeze that promised a smooth ride – and we were all in high spirits. Before we had sailed too far, the beautiful clear sky began to turn dark. Then the wind picked up and the rain came, first soft, and then hard and stinging. The pontoon boat did not offer any shelter and the waves began to toss the boat. The conversation stopped as we sat quietly and held on to our seats and prayed. We were frightened! We were too far from shore to turn back. The Captain of the pontoon, more familiar with Lake Minnetonka than most of us, steered the boat toward Big Island, a deserted island in the middle of Lake Minnetonka. He made the right decision and we reached the shore safely. We all scrambled off the boat, cold and soaked to the bone with baskets of wet, soggy food. But we were safe and we were thankful.

We are all in a storm now; it is called COVID-19. While it is easy to say that “we are all in this together”, the truth is that while we are all in the same storm, we are in different boats. Some are sailing in expensive, well-equipped yachts, some are in open pontoons, and still others are in rusty rowboats, quickly taking on water. We do not know when this storm will end or how our lives will be changed. But we do know the Captain who has promised to always be with us whatever our situation.

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. ~Romans 8:38

O Great God, thank you for living and loving in us and through us. May all that we do flow from our deep connection with you and our love for all beings. Help us become a community that vulnerably shares each other's burdens and reaches out to help those who are in need. Use us to help heal our world. Knowing you are hearing us better than we are speaking, we offer this prayer in all the holy names of God. Amen. (adapted from Fr. Richard Rohr)

Tuesday, October 13 *Beverly Palmer*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ~John 1:1

Then God said..... ~Genesis 1

In my childhood home, words were used only to express unhappiness, bitterness, disappointment, judgment or to give orders and demands. But then because of my extraordinary junior year English teacher in high school, and a subsequent long-term immersion into university English programs, I began to learn the true power of words. I learned that the powerful feelings about everything trapped inside of me could be expressed and that the expressed emotions are what can transform your picture from black and white into wide-screen technicolor.



I know our parents loved my sisters and me, but rarely was that love ever expressed in words or physical affection. Nor were thanks ever offered for things other than an occasional gift. Then one day while dating my husband-to-be, he called me an endearing term, and even now I recall the thrill that charged through my entire body. It was then that I learned how meaningful and therapeutic to others kind and loving words can be. And I continued to learn about words.

I learned that words can give much joy to others. When I moved away from home in 1969, I began writing frequent letters to family and friends, and began receiving letters from them telling me how much they enjoyed them and how they laughed at my descriptions of daily life. I looked forward to their letters in turn.

I learned that gentle, rational words can diffuse difficult situations. Many misinterpretations and misperceptions in interactions with others can be avoided by well thought-out words, thereby enabling wonderful friendships and relationships instead of resentments, failures and hatred. I learned that words have power to change others. Discussion and sharing of feelings in my childhood home were non-existent. Gradually each family member began pouring out his/her heart and soul in letters in response to my letters and to each other's letters. Tolerance of others' foibles grew. I learned how words and memory are intricately linked. As I reviewed all my saved correspondence, my family is vividly present to me again. I was also reminded how retrospect is truly clearer than hindsight as I have begun to understand a lot of my history. Sometimes I wish I could go back and change things or even apologize, but understanding has also enabled healthier current relationships.

I did not have to learn how words can be used in every negative way possible—to deceive, to manipulate, to hurt. It happens everywhere every day. I will not use words in that way. I see a true Christian's role as contributing to the world's beauty and diminishing its ugliness through word and deed.

As a result of all I have learned about words, I find myself constantly assessing each vision, each utterance, each experience, for its meaning, its beauty, its relationship to everything else, and considering ways I can share it with others, verbally or in writing. I think psychologists call this living mindfully. This habit has enriched my life and provided flexibility in dealing with its vicissitudes. Perhaps this is what Jesus meant by truly "seeing" and an "abundant life."

75th Anniversary Devotions

Is it no wonder that God's mode of operation is through the Word? God spoke the world into being. God continues to call each of us into service by name. God sent Jesus to us so that he could teach us through his words in our physical presence. God inspired the writing of the scriptural words that continue to teach and inspire us. God is present to us weekly in church through word and song. Now all that is truly powerful use of Word. I find it most humbling that God chose to make us in God's own image, giving us the ability to also use words. I pray that we use them wisely.

Wednesday, October 14

Hatley and Audrey Post

Now faith is the assurance of what we hope for and the certainty of what we do not see. ~Hebrews 11:1

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand; one belonging to him, and the other belonging to the Lord. When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times of his life. This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it. "Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me." The Lord replied, "My precious child, I love you and would never leave you. During times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints in the sand it was then that I carried you."



The devotional story above is one that I first heard a few years ago in a Bible study setting and it has stayed with me throughout the highs and lows that have happened since. It feels much easier to remember and glorify God when things are going well and life is good, but by the same token, it can also be easy to forget God's presence when things are hard and to ask Him where he was. The trials we experience are part of the paths we walk throughout life -- there is no road where the going is always easy. What the devotional above highlights, however, is to remember that God is always there with us, supporting and caring, when the seas get rocky and storms roll in. Quarantine has been incredibly difficult. We've each experienced a loss of some kind — loss of connection, a sense of normalcy, things we were looking forward to, and more. It is easy to bemoan the losses experienced throughout this period of upheaval and to wonder how we will survive all of the challenges that seem never ending. By remembering that God is always supporting us, however, we remember that all we experience is placed in front of us for a reason and that we never face it alone.

Dear Lord, it is in these times of need that I turn to you, I look for your light as the darkness around me encroaches. I look for your wisdom in the endless uncertainty of my world. I look for your direction as I feel directionless. I strive for your forgiveness as I navigate the trials and tribulations of a country in turmoil. But above all, I look for your kindness to lighten the darkness, I strive for your kindness to lighten the darkness. Amen.

Thursday, October 15

Ben Remmert

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent His only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and His love is perfected in us. ~1 John 4:7-12



2020 has been a year unlike any that has ever been seen before. Every year can boast this, but not with such a high level of anxiety and mass communication for the world. We have so much concern about how life will go back to “normal.” When will schools/day cares be able to safely have our children and youth learn? When can we comfortably gather with our family and friends to celebrate holidays and family milestones? When can we go to the store without fear that our neighbor may have something that would cause us to be sick? I am reminded that through all our anxiety and concerns, God’s love for all is greater than our fears of the unknown.

Love appears in the Bible 872 times while the word “fear” is in the Bible 524. So it’s clear that God’s love is greater than fear, right? If only it were that easy. The news we receive constantly drum up fear. Our bodies have a physical response to our brain telling us something is coming our way that could cause harm to us, to our family and friends, and to our way of life. That “someone we love” piece holds the other side of this equation. When someone we love is in danger, our love moves us beyond our fear. Yet we live in a world where:

- sickness and cancer win too many times.
- people are not welcomed.
- violence becomes our response to injustice.
- children are hungry.
- young people live in fear of their parents being deported.
- women and men march for rights we thought were long ago attained.
- fear seems to win.

And yet... our Christian faith tells us this about love. There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear. Since fear is crippling, a fearful life—fear of death, fear of judgment—is one not yet fully formed in love.

I pray to be fully formed in love that calms during fear. I pray our communities challenge the fearful world. I pray that each of us not only prays for love to banish our fears, but for that same love of Christ to move us to action for our neighbors across the world. Amen.

Friday, October 16

Velma Rice

*I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.
~Joel 2:28-29*

*Hope's home is at the innermost point in us, and in all things. It is a quality of aliveness. It does not come at the end, as the feeling that results from a happy outcome. Rather, it lies at the beginning, as a pulse of the truth that sends us forth.
~Cynthia Bourgeault*



In his book, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Walter Brueggemann uses the Exodus story to explore how to nourish a community from a dominant culture of oppression to an alternative community of justice and compassion. Like Brueggemann I feel there is a parallel with our current society. Brueggemann writes that we have lost our identity and our hope. The first thing that Moses does is to expose the static gods of oppression and exploitation; then Moses begins to form a new community of justice and compassion around the freedom of the great I AM. "Liberation begins with the grieving complaint of Israel", the primal scream, and the capacity to grieve! "And God heard their groaning". This new community knows "that something is 'on the move' in the darkness"; they affirm the darkness and find the "one who can be trusted" with the darkness. This is when the community begins to understand that this God of freedom is also God for us, the powerless marginalized people.

Then the community can reclaim their hope and their identity. Being made in the image of God they sing and dance their freedom in the doxology, the Song of Miriam.

The Spirit of Pentecost has been poured out on us! Let us reclaim our identity and rise up, individually and as a community, and name the impotent gods. Let us lament until our groaning becomes the moan of birthing. May we walk with St John of the Cross through the "dark night of the soul" trusting "the one who can be trusted with the darkness". May we listen with the Indwelling Spirit, the one who from the beginning, sends us forth with the pulsing hope of love and compassion. And in the Spirit of freedom and Prophetic Imagination may we dream dreams, see visions, and sing & dance as an alternative community.

Saturday, October 17

Judith and Phil Richey

Love God. Love your neighbor.

Five seemingly simple words. Putting the concepts into practice on a daily basis and in every situation proves much more difficult.

Jesus answers the query as to which is the greatest commandment with these words “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” Mark 12:30-31

It seems that in today’s environment this is a particular challenge. Everywhere I look, I see division. Which lives matter? Only one type? All types?

And what about political choices? Does choosing one side make the other wrong automatically? Does hurling vitriol toward the other justify your choice?

What about exercising your personal freedoms? Are those freedoms guaranteed? Do you interpret what freedom means differently from your neighbor? If so, who’s correct?

Everywhere I look in social media, on the news, in the online news reports I read, I see division. I see very little love for the neighbor, much less for God.

Even my God-loving friends are divided on what loving God is supposed to look and sound like.

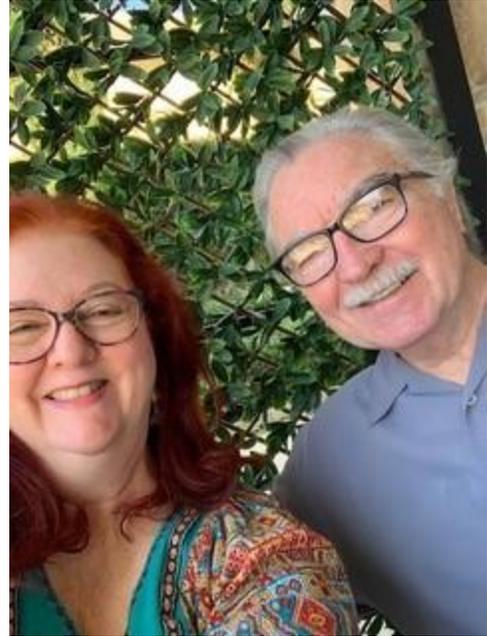
Some would even take this pondering a step further and ask “Who has the truth?”

We question if there is such a thing as an ultimate truth. Is it more about beliefs than truth? Maybe we don’t have knowledge of the truth...

Where does that leave us?

The scribe who came to Jesus and asked about the greatest commandment probably thought Jesus would respond by picking one of the commandments handed down to Moses. Jesus, instead, led the listeners in a new direction by giving them these two commandments of which “There is no commandment greater than these.”

Can we go in a new direction when it comes to love? Can we literally choose love in every situation, with every person, every day?



75th Anniversary Devotions

On social media, it's so easy to get sucked into the river of hate that flows through our screen. Viewing those hate filled posts gives us the choice to engage with same, or to "show love, love, love", to quote the Beatles.

My choice is to show love. With my God-loving friends whose brand of faith looks radically different from mine, I read, digest, seek to understand, and move on. With my friends who spew the hate, prejudice and promote racial injustice, I stop and say a prayer for them. Sometimes I engage in loving the neighbor within myself by "snoozing" someone for 30 days to take a break from the anger. I also take banana pudding across the street to our neighbor who freely uses inappropriate language because of all the other things that are so wonderful about him— his loyalty as a friend, willingness to do anything for you, the way he has taken one of my sons under his wing and been a hunting and fishing buddy. With the bad there is a world of good.

Isn't that really what it's about? Within our world, there is bad and there is a world of good. When we devote ourselves to being the good through loving God and loving our neighbor, maybe we can affect change, one moment, one post, one person at a time.

Oh Lord, we thank you for the opportunity to show love to our neighbor, every day, in every way. Where there is hardness in our heart, cleanse our hearts and return our sight to you. Where there are bitter words on our lips, cleanse our tongues and return our thoughts to you. Where there is cowardly courage in our fingers through our keyboards, direct our hands and fingers to bring uplifting messages sharing your love for all through all of our communications. Show us, Lord, every way we can bring your love through our actions so we may truly love our neighbor as we love you. Amen.

Sunday, October 18 *Sergio Rodriguez, pastoral intern*

Blessed is the one whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord, their God, the maker of heaven and earth, the seas and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever, secures justice for the oppressed, who gives bread to the hungry. ~Psalm 146:5-7a



An emotional weight fills the heavens and the earth around us during times of great suffering and loss. In many respects, our collective life seems to be gathered up in a thick fog, a cloud, that seems to make our days longer, our resiliency shorter and our need for guidance greater. In short, each of us reaches out to familiar faces, places and rituals as a way of moving forward day by day during this paradox of a year; an anniversary in the middle of a pandemic. Even though, dear sibling in Christ, I may not know you as much as I would have liked, being your Intern for this year, I want you to know that I too bear upon my shoulders a heaviness of sorts. I carry a heaviness because I wish the circumstances would have been favorable; I still have much life that I would care to share with you in person. During a similar time of loss, when my sister and I had to close our food truck, my mother would speak these words that seemed to impact the healing power of hope to my wounded heart: *Vivimos bajo la misma luna* (we live beneath the same moon). Whenever it would seem like you're far away and sorrow carries you to distant lands of grief," she would say, "we are much closer in spirit and love even though you may not discern it. You may not see it but it's Dioscito (our precious God) who made the heavens and earth, the seas and all that is in them, he is the one who has set this moon for us as a sign of hope. *Ten Fe* (Have Faith)."

Yet to be honest, my mother's words are difficult for me to accept. I struggle with the boldness and sincere confidence of my mother; the tenacity and the embrace of God even while the storms of life rage. I struggle because I carry within me doubts born from suffering and grief. I carry these doubts because, as many of you have experienced in life, my own life seemed to have proven the contrary. Growing up in a working-class household, there were times when my parents had no bread. So I would wonder about God. God, when will we have food and parties like the people on tv? When I grew older, I lost my baby sister, grandmother, uncle, both grandparents to various unexpected circumstances. Again I asked. God, when will I see them again? And where did they go? When folks would ridicule me for my accent or tell me to go back to the other side of the river, I would again ask God; why do they hide much ignorance and hatred within their heart? For a while when I discovered I was gay, I felt ashamed to even talk to God. Years later when I found myself sitting alone in my room in Fort Wayne, IN contemplating why I had made the decision to get my Master's at a Missouri-Synod seminary, I found myself asking God; where are you in the middle of this night of the soul that I am experiencing? After each of these moments of suffering, I would hear in the stillness of my soul the very voice of my mother echoing these words: "*Ten fe. Vivimos bajo la misma luna.*"

So, I offer up to you, dear friends, I bless you with these words that they may accompany you during the fogginess of this time:

Blessed are you who live under the same moon as I; the moon made as a sign of hope by the Maker of heaven and earth, the seas and all that is in them. Amen.