ELCA SCHOOLS AND LEARNING CENTERS

GRACE FILLED DAYS

2018-2019 DEVOTIONAL GUIDE
Welcome to the 2018-19 edition of the ELCA Schools and Learning Centers Devotional Guide

Grace Filled Days

As ELEA’s Executive Director, I have been blessed to be a part of the production of this publication for the past nineteen years. While I enjoy most aspects of my job, holding the “Name the Devotion Guide” contest each year, along with soliciting new and returning writers, are some of my favorite activities.

Some years, we receive many entries in the Naming Contest, and often many of them are the same or similar. And then, occasionally, there will be a year where fewer entries are submitted, but they are all very different. I submit the names to our ELEA National Board of Directors, omitting the names of the contributors, and have the Board vote on their favorite. This year, “Grace Filled Days” was a clear winner and I have been intrigued to see how many writers refer to the theme in their contributions.

I have been a teacher, at all levels from early childhood to college, and I have been a school administrator. I know the challenges of our Lutheran school and early childhood center staff—behaviorally challenging children, some parents (do I even need to categorize their behaviors?), co-workers, church staff, state regulations—all of these aspects of education can make the need for a time of coming together and sharing a word of scripture, questions and a prayer of upmost importance. Whether the devotions shared in this guide are used at the start and/or close to school staff meetings, or with church Christian Education staff and volunteers, or in another capacity, I hope you and your staff find the words meaningful and grace filled.

This guide is a gift to the 1400+ schools and early childhood education centers of the ELCA, a joint project between the ELCA Churchwide Domestic Mission unit which provides its funding, and ELEA as the arm of Domestic Mission which provides all services for schooling with our greater church.

Thank you to all who contributed, and thank you to all readers for using these materials to enhance your Grace Filled Days.

Gayle Denny, Executive Director
Evangelical Lutheran Education Association
Our text for this week is a familiar one. Like the finger game, “Here is the church, Here is the Steeple, Open the Doors and See all the People,” a school is more than brick and mortar. You – the teachers, administrators, cooks, custodians, deacons, pastors, students and families are the school and learning center. And as the Apostle Paul insists in this week’s reading, it is your particular vocation and gift that the school and students need.

Education is rooted in our Lutheran heritage and core to our history and our baptismal identity. The ELCA Social Statement on Our Calling in Education states, “God calls us to educate people in the Christian faith for their vocation ... to develop personal gifts and abilities and serve the common good.” Martin Luther wrote volumes about the critical role of teachers, “I am speaking of school teachers who instruct the children and the youth not only in the arts, but also train them in Christian doctrine and faithfully impress it upon them ... so that our children could set before themselves, as in a mirror, the character, life, counsels, and purposes, of the whole world; on the basis of which they could take their own place in the stream of human events.”

This week set a “grace-filled” goal to celebrate the gifts present in your learning community. Look into the eyes of each staff person you work alongside and each child in your care, and say, “Person’s name, I see the gift of _____ in you. You are an important member of this school and the Body of Christ. You make a difference.”

Questions for the Week:
When did you decide on a vocation as a teacher? A school administrator? A cook? A custodian? A deacon or pastor? What gifts do you bring to your position and role? Who affirmed your calling?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Dear Lord, use me and my gifts to serve you and the children, youth and families in my care, that we might all grow strong in faith and become more like you, every day, in every way.

Linda Staats, Regional & Synodical Advisor for the ELCA Board, contributed this devotion. She is the Founder of HomeGrown Faith and resides in Phoenix, AZ.
We may be faced with a financial burden or a student(s) who is crying out for help but in ways that require special attention. And because they need that special attention, it pulls you away from other pressing matters. Sometimes it all seems too much, you want to give up, the road ahead is unpaved, and the hills set in front of you seem more like mountains and have jagged rocks.

Stop now and breathe. Remember God is by your side always and is giving you the tools you need to fix the issues that are currently at hand. The future will always be there, and the past will always be reminding you. But the here and now is where God needs you. You are allowing God to be seen through you to these children, parents, and co-workers. Together you and God are helping to pave the paths for others and giving a rope or a helping hand to those climbing mountains.

Questions for the Week:
Where do you least see God? How can you change it to remember that God is there and share God with others?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
God, although I may fall, I know you are there to help me up and guide me. When I cannot go any further, I know you will pick me up and carry me through this tough time. It is with you that all of this is possible.

This devotion was contributed by Mary E. Adams, Phoenix, Arizona, who works at Ahwatukee Preschool (ELEA).
“You are what you eat.” Most of us have heard, thought or used this phrase, especially when pondering our eating habits or facing down that lonely last piece of pizza.

I witnessed the reality of “you are what you eat” when we fed my daughter Katy lots of cooked carrots and squash when she was young and transitioning to eating various mushy foods. Soon her skin took on a slight yellowish-orange tinge. When we asked our doctor about it, she suggested we mix up her diet and feed her less yellowish-orange things. She was beginning to look like what she ate—a cause for concern.

You surely have your own observations—and questions—about the effects of what your students are consuming, eating, spending time on, wrapping their lives around or immersing themselves in.

In this passage in John, we’re reminded of what a complete, life-giving meal we share when we celebrate Holy Communion with each other. It feeds us with the reassurance of God’s gift of grace through Jesus Christ, and permeates our every cell, fiber, thought and behavior, transforming our very being for the work of being children of God called to do God’s work in the world—together. Praise God!

Questions for the Week:
There may be some interesting springboards for conversation around nutrition, health, how and why we enjoy meals with other people and the significance of Holy Communion for our faith and daily life. How are we different when Jesus becomes a living part of us? In what ways does God “feed” us, and for what purpose? Ask yourself: What does my daily diet—spiritually, socially, physically, etc.—look like?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank God for the ways in which you are nourished and equipped with faith, hope, specific gifts and wisdom for serving your students, encouraging your co-workers, loving your neighbor and being a witness to the good news of Jesus Christ. Pray for the people who have sustained, mentored and encouraged you at different times of your life.

This devotion was contributed by Rod Boriack, Des Plaines, IL. Rod has served in youth and family ministry, outdoor ministry and on the ELCA churchwide staff. He currently serves as editor and writer for the ELCA’s Seeds for the Parish and monthly Prayer Ventures.
“As shoes for your feet, put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication.”

I grew up watching Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood. I loved the gentle way Fred Rogers welcomed and invited his television audience each episode. Upon entering the studio house he would immediately open the coat closet. There he would trade his outerwear for a cardigan, and swap street shoes for a pair of sneakers. Mr. Rogers intentionally dressed for each very special teaching occasion as host in his television classroom.

St. Paul paints a word picture of getting dressed to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ as if preparing for the battlefield. While our world, and even the school environment can sometimes feel like endless battles, I find comfort in the gentle, peaceful approach Mr. Rogers modeled for entering the educational fray.

Fred Rogers was a man of faith; a Presbyterian Minister. His approach to teaching was cloaked in quiet, solemn prayer and care for the precious children of God’s creation and his passion for their education. St. Paul reminds readers to “Pray in the Spirit at all times.” Whenever you enter into your educational environment be mindful of the prayers you wear. Dress yourself in prayer to proclaim the gospel of peace with each and every precious child in your care.

Questions for the Week:
How do you enter into your educational environment each day? What are you “wearing” in terms of prayerful attitude and peaceful welcome?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Gracious God, clothe me with a Spirit of Prayer and guide me in my caring for your precious children. By my words and actions empower me to always proclaim your gospel of peace.

This devotion was prepared by Pastor Jeffrey Ingold, Abiding Presence ELCA home to APPLESeeds Preschool, Fuquay-Varina, NC.
The passages this week concern rules and regulations set down for smooth community life in ancient societies. Most of them are good today. Our schools and care centers conform to rules and regulations set down for smooth community life, protection of children and justice for employees.

As in Jesus’ day, we wash hands and utensils. As in James’ epistle, we watch our tongues, keep a clean heart, and care for orphans and widows. All these “rules” are important! The theme of this devotion booklet is “Grace-filled Days”! We can get tied up in the proper ways of doing things and forget the GRACE: the key to and joy of our faith!

Tiffany forgets to wash her hands (because she is so excited that her family is moving into a new house) and Jason refuses to sit in the story circle (because his parents just had a huge blow-up). We won’t know how to react to these “rule-breaking” actions unless we LISTEN. If our co-worker takes too long a break (because she needed to talk to her newly pregnant daughter) or our director seems preoccupied (because partner is having cancer tests today), we won’t know how to react to these “rule-breaking” actions unless we LISTEN. Two ears, one mouth!

“Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger…”

A grace-filled day is full of forgiveness (even for when we are slow to listen and quick to anger) and understanding. Staff and students alike are all God’s beloved.

**Question for the Week:**
When can one forgive breaking of a rule for the sake of love and how can I figure out when and how?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**
Ask God to make me quick to listen and slow to anger. Thank God for those who model these gifts of the Spirit.

_Pastor Beth Orling serves as Interim Pastor at Dungeness Valley Lutheran Church in Sequim, WA. Previous churches she has served had child-care centers and the sound of children’s voices in laughter and song warmed her heart. This church hosts a class for differently-abled adults whose voices also warm her heart._
September 9, 2018
Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Matthew 18:15-20

“Then looking up to heaven, (Jesus) sighed and said to (the deaf man who had an impediment in his speech), ‘Ephphatha’, that is, ‘Be opened.’” Mark 7:31-37

These are Grace Filled Days, the first days of a new, fresh, dare we say exciting academic year. Whether you are a few weeks in, a few days in or yet a few away from beginning, these are Grace Filled Days! Whether you are a faithful, experienced veteran or this is your first year around the calendar in Christian Education, these are Grace Filled Days! These are Grace Filled Days because we are blessed to show and tell God’s love and life to the young ones entrusted to our care. As he does with the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus gives us words to speak. Go into your classrooms this week and proclaim to your new students, Ephphatha!

Okay, maybe not, but Jesus’ word that the evangelist tells us means ‘Be opened’ is a word of grace for us. Be open to the new life and love of God as you give of your time, energy, talent and love to be God’s grace for your students this year. ‘Be opened’ is a word of grace for our students who may encounter the grace of God for the first time or in a way that becomes for them a transformational story and memory of grace that will carry them through the challenges of life. “Be open” is certainly a word of grace for the deaf man who had an impediment in his speech before encountering the grace of God in Jesus and was freed for days of new life and love. Grace filled days!

Question for the Week:
In what way(s) do you wish to be opened to the Grace Filled Days of God?!

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Pray for each of your students/staff to be opened anew this year to an experience of God’s love and life for them.

R. Adam Berndt is pastor of Cross of Hope Lutheran Church and Schools where he is praying for grace filled days as his daughter, Addison, will graduate preschool this year.
Winners and losers...

Following is not encouraged by American culture. No college commencement speaker will praise the "followers of tomorrow." No films are made about great world followers. No parent wants to hear "Your kid is a real follower."

Following is weak, for losers. Peter gets a sharp tutorial on following; it means going where Jesus goes and doing what Jesus does even to the point of sacrificial living. When people say something is "my cross to bear", they mean suffering that is imposed on them, to be accepted without complaint.

But that is not what Jesus is saying. We do not take up our cross and follow Jesus by quietly accepting the violence of a spouse or the manipulations of a drug-addicted child. Suffering that is imposed on us against our will is not redemptive. Suffering on the cross was not imposed on Jesus; he took it up himself willingly. To take up our cross and follow Jesus means we follow him in refusing to think only about ourselves.

Civil rights leader John Lewis knows a lot about redemptive suffering. What do you do when somebody else is being violently attacked - just stand there keeping your hands clean? That's hard to accept.

Lewis has a different answer. "If someone is being attacked it is your responsibility to intervene to protect them." But not returning violence with violence. Intervening means shielding the oppressed with your own body, accepting the blows yourself in order to save the other, even at risk to yourself. It means placing your body between the victim and the blows of the offender, absorbing the violence intended for another, shaming the offender into relenting, and changing. In other words, following Jesus is for losers; the question is what we are willing to lose.

Question of the Day:
What are you and your students willing to lose to experience the joy of Grace Filled Days?
Prayer for the Week:
Let us pray. Gracious and loving God in Jesus Christ who came to give us abundant life as followers on the way of faith, fill us with the strength to take up our cross and follow Jesus, that we might have the abundance of true life you intend for us and others may see your love and grace at work in us and follow with us as well. Through Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Donna Braband, lifelong Lutheran educator and learner, and former ELCA Director for Schools.
September 23, 2018
Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost
Thought for the Week: James 3: 13–4: 3, 7-8a

We are entering the time of year when things become real. The novelty of the new school year has worn off. Students, teachers and parents alike are settling in to the routines and conflicts begin to percolate up to the surface. Personality conflicts on the staff arise, expectations for our students increase and so students begin to show signs of stress, parents begin to question what you are doing/not doing, etc.

We all want harmonious relationships. But anywhere there are people, conflict arises, even in Christian schools. In our text, James gives us a road map to peaceful relationships.

In verses 3:13 – 16, James lays out what happens when we give in to worldly “wisdom.” He points out that left to our own devices, we descend into jealousy, selfish ambition, disorder and every vile practice.

However, James goes on to point out that if we submit to God, resist the devil and draw near to God, we will experience peace. Not an easy task when faced with angry parents, defiant children, self-centered colleagues, etc.

While it may not be easy, it is simple. God promises that when we draw near to God, God will draw near to us. God promises to be with us through those hard days and difficult relationships. So take a deep breath, focus your eyes on Jesus and go forward knowing that God is guiding you toward harmonious relationships.

Question of the Week:
How do you as a staff resolve conflicts? How do you model that for your students? Parents?

Personal Prayers for the Week:
Heavenly Father, Lord of our hearts, You see us, You know us, You love us and protect us. I pray that You will bless our relationships and lift us up in service to You and as the people you want us to be. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Gayle Renken who was a teacher and principal at St. Timothy’s Christian Academy from 2001 – 2018. Gayle currently serves as Lower Primary Associate Principal at Hong Kong International School.
"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer."

This verse from the Book of Psalms is a prayer that is commonly used during Christian worship. It is often said by the pastor before the sermon with a desire to share a message using words that are acceptable to God. The Psalmist, David, invites God into his heart. The Hebrew word for heart means the center or core of something. It refers to thoughts and feelings. What you say affects your heart.

In our relationships with others it is wise to take time to think about our words before we speak. What we say or the way we act can affect the thoughts and feelings of others in both a positive and negative way. Every day we have the opportunity to be a role model for children and youth in our settings. Knowing these young lives are in our hands as a gift from God, remember the impact that your words can have on their lives and ultimately their hearts. Using words that are acceptable to God in our relationships can change lives and make a difference in the classroom and beyond.

Questions for the Week:
Sometimes we speak before we think about what we are going to say and can hurt someone’s feelings. Do you ever think about whether or not your words are acceptable to God before speaking them?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Reflect on your relationships with children, youth, and others. Ask for help to show God’s love through your actions and words so that, as it is written in the Psalm, the words of your mouth and the meditation of your heart be acceptable.

This devotion was written by Debbie Streicher, Past President of the Christian Education Network of the ELCA and Co-Director of Milestones Ministry.
“O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”

Today is my son’s birthday and I remember toiling over what to name him. There were so many things to consider over something that seemed so simple. By now school has been in session long enough for most everyone to know each other’s names and with each of those names comes a memory of that student.

Names are important. It’s who you are and how you are known. Did you ever stop to think that this amazing God you serve has known you always by your given name? From the very beginning of creation God has always had a plan for you. Grace filled days begin by recognizing that you serve a God who is majestic (Psalms 8), creator (Genesis 2:18-24), superior (Hebrews 1:1-4) and protector (Mark 1:13-16). This amazing God chose you and knows you by name. You may be sitting there thinking who am I in this world? No one knows my name and does it even matter? Yes it does, you are a child of God so represent your Father in heaven and make Him proud that He chose you to be in His family.

Questions for the Week:
When someone speaks your name what are you known for? Are you teaching your students to value being known for their character and personal integrity rather than material possessions or status?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank God for being the ultimate model to live by. Ask God to forgive you in areas that you shouldn’t be known for and receive grace in knowing what your name can be known for – a child of God.

This devotion was contributed by Page Walwik, a wife and mother of two boys who went to preschool at Memorial Lutheran Chapel School in St. Augustine, FL.
I remember as a kid being quite upset when I would hear these verses from Mark’s Gospel. Verse 17 begins with a young man asking the question, “…what must I do to inherit eternal life?” That was my question too. It is the answer that is upsetting. “Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ And when he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.”

What was it about these verses that upset me as a kid? I was the oldest of six kids growing up on a dairy farm in Wisconsin. I definitely was not the richest kid at school. This was especially apparent each time I needed new shoes and mom would take me to the Red Wing shoe store in Chilton to buy the most basic shoes. Other kids went shopping at the better stores in Appleton or Green Bay.

At the same time mom and dad reminded us about all the starving children in China so many times before we realized that compared with almost any other part of the world, we were, in fact, quite well off.

It was later in college in my doctrine classes that I discovered that Jesus really didn’t mean what he said at all. This wasn’t about wealth, not really; it was about our absolute inability to merit salvation and our utter dependence on God’s mercy alone. So, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Follow Jesus!

My life’s work, my ministry, has been as a teacher and administrator in our Lutheran schools. I was not going to become wealthy in the material sense but rich in God’s goodness and Grace. My vocation, my ministry, is Lutheran Schools and Centers.

The Psalmist in Psalm 90:17 writes “…prosper for us the work of our hands…” The prayer, if you will, holds up the value of our daily work. Our daily work is important to God.

The Lutheran understanding of vocation is that every baptized person has a vocation or special calling to serve God and neighbor. Your job as a teacher or administrator in a Lutheran School or Center is holy when carried out as part of this calling. The daily work of vocation
happens at your school or center. May your daily work be *Grace Filled Days!*

**Question for the Week:**
The psalmist prays about daily work. What joys and concerns from your daily work could you include in your prayers?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**
Almighty God, source of every blessing, your generous goodness comes to us new every day. By the work of your Spirit lead us to acknowledge your goodness. Teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom. We give thanks for your benefits and serve you in willing obedience. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

*This devotion was contributed by Robert Federwitz, a lifelong Lutheran educator, retired, living in Dover, Delaware. Bob is the ELEA 2017 recipient of the Donald A. Vetter Educational Service Award.*
In my recent readings, there have been several articles pertaining to students with challenging behaviors. One was about expelling a four-year-old from preschool for his “violent” behavior. As I read each of the Bible verses listed above, a theme emerged of God’s gracious understanding—a grace God bestows on each and everyone of us—students and educators alike—no matter how challenging our behaviors might be. “All we like sheep have gone astray.” (Isaiah 53:6a)

Since each of us knows as Christians that we, too, have weaknesses—maybe even challenging behaviors—we are gifted by God with the ability to deal gently with our wayward students. (Hebrews 5:2) Knowing that Jesus was on earth to serve humankind, we in turn have learned that greatness comes from serving our students with grace-filled days. (Mark 10: 42-45)

When we call out to God, God answers us and stays with us in times of trouble, going so far as to rescue us and honor us. (Psalm 91:15) How gracious is our God! As our students call out to us with either their voices or their behaviors, may we answer them with love, respect and grace.

In the end, the four-year-old preschooler, who had witnessed a traumatic scene, was simply wanting to be liked and listened to by his teacher.

Questions for the Week:
What are your weaknesses and how has God dealt gently and graciously with you? Now look at your students and their weaknesses—how are you able to deal gently and graciously with them? A good start is loving them and listening to them.

Personal Prayer for the Week:
This week, begin the day praying by name for each student in your class.

This devotion was contributed by Gaye Rodriguey, Coupeville, Washington, a retired preschool teacher and director, who is now a Stephen Leader and Facilitator at Oak Harbor Lutheran Church.
October 28, 2018
Reformation Sunday
Thought for the Week: Psalm 46

“Be still and know that I am God”

One thing a preschool classroom usually isn’t – Still. What we once did naturally as children after playing outside all day, resting under a tree, watching the leaves float by on a stream may soon need to be taught to the latest generation of children. It is in the stillness that we hear and feel the wonders of God.

In your stillness, reflect on how you feel, hear, see and know God’s presence. How can you explain this to small children? We often marvel at the sense of awe children express, especially at God’s creation. When they learn to connect the stillness and awe, they will return to listen and feel God’s wonders.

Questions for the Week:
How can we find and defend our quiet and still places? What can we do to make this a daily habit for ourselves and our children?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank you, God, for speaking to us in our stillness. Thank you for waiting patiently for our hearts to be opened in your presence.

This devotion was contributed by Sandy White, Palm Harbor, Florida, who has served in Lutheran schools for 16 years.
On All Saints Sunday we remember loved ones who have been laid in the tomb – and in this story, Jesus joins us in our sorrow. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were Jesus’ “go to” friends, the ones that Jesus went to when he got too tired to care or too overwhelmed. He went to their home in Bethany. He ate at their table, he probably helped Martha with the dishes and told funny road stories to Mary and Lazarus and asked them to listen to his latest ideas and thoughts about life. These are his precious friends. When Lazarus gets sick, it is no wonder that Mary and Martha turn to Jesus for help. He takes his time getting there and by the time he arrives, it is too late. Everyone is weeping, and Jesus is so moved by this, he begins to weep as well. Jesus weeps. He weeps for Lazarus. He weeps for Mary and Martha. He weeps in anger and frustration that his efforts to glorify God lead to such hostility by the Jewish leaders. Jesus is rarely portrayed as vulnerable as he is here.

In the Old King James Version of the Bible, it says, “Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.” Sometimes Old King James catches an image in a way that no other translation can. We can truly be certain that Lazarus was dead. Jesus prays aloud that those present will see God’s glory – then calls Lazarus to come out from the tomb, which he does, still wrapped in strips of cloth. Now do you believe?

How often do we miss the glory of God simply because we are afraid of a stinking mess? Life is messy – especially life with children. I’m often amazed at how messy our classrooms become during Work Time; children utilize materials from different areas to extend their play, and soon half of House Area is in Block Area. At times, the room seems chaotic, hectic, and impossible. Yet, as the daily routine continues, and the clean-up song begins, children begin the ritual of putting the materials back in their proper place. Our messy rooms and our children’s messy lives speak to the nature of a God who calls us to be fully alive; to be open to taking pots and pans from house area over to the restaurant built in block area. Walk into the sunshine of this day.
and be grateful for the messiness of life both at school and at home. Only in the dying are we raised to new life, only in the labor is a new baby born, only through the stench does the fresh air of life restore us.

**Question for the Week:**
Before reading this devotional with your staff, give them strips of white crepe paper and ask them to write what they feel is binding them or keeping them from fullness of life, then wrap it around their arm. During the gospel reading, tear the binding off as Lazarus is unbound. Reflect together what binds us and how Christ sets us free.

**Prayer for the Week:**
We thank you Lord for the stinking messes in our lives, through which we glimpse your glory. Unbind us, and let us go forth as beloved children of God – in the joy of the resurrection promise. Amen.

*This devotion was contributed by Linda Burrier, director of Memorial Lutheran Chapel School, St. Augustine, Florida. Linda has been the director of Chapel School for 25 years, she is the former Secretary of the ELCA Schools and Learning Centers National Board, and a former ELCA National Early Childhood Director of the Year.*
“The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth.”

When I read passages like this, I know I should be filled with awe and joy at the presence of a miracle. But often I feel concern. I worry that people will read this story to mean that God will take care of the less fortunate, and they don’t need to get involved in giving or volunteering to help. Of course, God will serve these people, but we have to get involved because of God.

A deeper reading of the story illustrates this. God does not just give the widow food. God works through Elijah – sending him and the Word to the widow along with the miracle. Why? It’s because God is love. If bread just appears, those helped won’t know God. But when God works through us, we are able to show and share that love.

We, too, must be present to make God’s miracles manifest. We cannot just hope and pray that people will be assisted like magic. God isn’t magic. Prayer isn’t magic. God is grace and action.

Questions for the Week:
How can you turn God’s love into action? How can you teach children that we must act to make our prayers reality?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Dear Lord, please make us see where we are needed, and to be people of action. Embolden us to get beyond hoping for change in the world, to making it happen. Help us to learn how we can model this for the children we serve. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Jon Nelson, Beloit, Wisconsin, who is Associate Director for ALDE: inspiring, educating, and mentoring the Christian fundraising community to spark generosity for mission. He is also Principal of Nelson Business Communications, LLC, where much of his work is for Lutheran and Christian organizations.
November 18, 2018
Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
Thought for the Week: Psalm 16

Grace Filled Days

“Protect me, O God, for in You I take refuge. I say to the LORD, ‘You are my LORD; I have no good apart from You.’ I keep the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure. For You do not give me up to Sheol, or let Your faithful one see the pit. You show me the path of life. In Your presence there is fullness of joy; in Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

We have a tendency to allow our attitude dictate our lives. We easily become grumpy because the grocery line we are standing in moves so slowly; or angry because we were cut off in traffic; or disheartened because we’ve been overlooked by a parent or our boss. We become frustrated, jealous, sad, and over all miserable due to perceived actions of others. We tend to see what we want to see and not the whole picture. The whole picture should always include God.

I was in that exact spot. I was wasting one of the most joyous opportunities of my life because I was allowing my personal likes and dislikes dictate my attitude. My daughter was getting married and it was a destination wedding. Most people get excited and say, “Mexico? Great!” Beautiful ocean, warm weather, intimate setting. But what I saw was large expenses, no extended family, hot weather, food I won’t eat and body image issues that I won’t go into. I suddenly realized, about a week before we were to leave, that my joy doesn’t come from situations, but comes from the LORD. He would be in Puerto Morelos with me, He is at my right hand. I was allowing my attitude to dictate my joy, not the faithfulness of God. Thankfully, His joy returned, my attitude changed and along with it, a great deal of peace. The circumstances didn’t change, it was still an expensive week, it was hot and there was a lot of food I didn’t eat and I still won’t go into my body image issues, but there was JOY. It was a wonderful week, full of laughter and stories, a beautiful, jubilant wedding, special time with my children and husband, stunning sunrises and sunsets, glorious blue ocean waters, a catamaran trip, but above all JOY.
Questions for the Week:
Are you letting your attitude steal your joy? When you see yourself turning negative do you stop yourself and turn to the LORD and allow His joy to return to you? Do you realize that your attitude directly affects the children in your care?

Prayer for the Week:
Dear LORD, Thank you that You are my LORD, Thank you that I will not be moved away from You and Your faithfulness. Show me Your path and Your presence in all that I do. I lift up my attitudes, emotions and frustrations. I leave them in Your hands. Help me to reflect Your love and joy to the children and all others You have brought into my life.

This devotion was written by Barb Wigstadt, director of TLC Early Learning Center, a ministry of Transfiguration Lutheran Church in Bloomington, Minnesota.
November 22, 2018
Thanksgiving Day
Thought for the Day: Joel 2: 21-27

“No grasshopper on my Thanksgiving Day menu today” is what I thanked God for as I read this assigned text from the book of Joel. To be honest with you I had to re-read the early chapters of Joel to be reminded what this was all about. It was about a plague of grasshoppers: real, live multitudes of grasshoppers everywhere, right up to the dinner plates!

“Sounds like an ELCA school or Center to me”, I said. I know about those kinds of grasshoppers: parents whose kids are always right, teachers who show up late, kids who throw up, treasurers who complain, states who keep bringing in new regs. More grasshoppers than you can count. That’s the message of the first 37 verses of the book of Joel.

But then comes the response in Joel 2:21-17. The grasshoppers do not have the final word. God is still in control. There are people and forces, blessings and a God who overcomes all grasshoppers. There is a Divine Teacher working through human teachers. The Teacher promises, “I will give you my Spirit. Instead of being pestered you will be blessed. Your labors are not in vain. Your students will prosper. I promise.”

Thank God for this banquet on this Thanksgiving Day.

Question for the Week:
Think of one particular “grasshopper” in your school that really gets to you. Now think of three students, present or past, who bring you great satisfaction.

Prayer for the Week:
Dear God, on this Thanksgiving Day there are so many wonderful blessings from you that I can’t possibly list them all. I thank you for the children whom I have the opportunity to bless, the parents who really love their children and colleagues who support me. Above all I thank you for what you, God, have given me: faith, family, opportunity, forgiveness and hope. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Melvin Kieschnick now living in retirement in Carlsbad CA after more than 60 years of service in Lutheran education.
When I was a kid, the playground at my elementary school had a little hill in it. And since we were all little kids, it felt like a mountain to us. It seemed like this impressively high peak to reach and that made it the perfect location for the game “King of the Mountain”.

In this game the “king” would be a person on top of a hill and then the whole point of the game was to get up to the top of the mountain and to stay there. In order to stay up at the top, you had to keep everyone else down. So that meant that the only way to get to be king and to remain king was to be constantly pushing others down. You had to be ruthless because there could only be one King.

At an early age, we begin to associate being king and being in charge with certain negative and controlling behaviors.

In Christ, however, we find an entirely different kind of king. This is the kind of king and the kind of leadership that we want to instill in our children. Christ is not a king whose goal is to push everyone else down, to condemn all people. Instead he reigns with mercy. He reaches out to all of us.

Through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus announced the advent of a completely different way of being in relationship with other people and with God. This is what we must model and what we must teach—that in the realm of God, it is God’s grace that guides our lives.

Our rules, our views and opinions of other people, our relationships, our priorities: they are all drastically changed in the realm of God. The kingdom of God is about service and humility, not power and prestige. That’s a great thing for both children and adults to remember—that the thing we need most in our lives is God’s grace and that’s a gift that we already have been given. We don’t need to outdo each other or push each other down in order to receive God’s grace and love.

Instead, our king comes down with grace to meet us in our weakness and in our need in order to lift us up.

As a result, we can treat students and colleagues with that same kind of grace and love. We can lift each other up and care for one another. We can teach our children how to treat each other by following Christ’s example.
Questions for the Week:
Where have you seen God’s grace this week? How have you seen others around you following Christ’s example recently? How can you lift someone else up this week?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Gracious God, Thank you for the love and selfless example of Christ the King. Please help us to remember your grace. Help us to live in a way that seeks to lift others up. Help us to treat everyone—children and adults—in a way that follows Christ’s example.
In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Rev. Megan Hunt Fryling, Pastor at Bethlehem Lutheran Church & School in Granada Hills, California.
We are entering the season of Advent. We see many signs of Christmas appearing that remind us of what is to come. Some of these “signs” began months ago. In public we see decorated trees, bright lights, sparkles and ribbons and many sales to entice us into thinking that buying will make us happy.

In Church we see the Advent wreath with colored candles, and the oh so beautiful, white Christ candle. That candle rising above the rest represents the hope and promise of Christ. We will learn about the love, joy and peace of Christ as we move through the season. We focus on the Christ child and the hope and promises God brings through the tiny baby. Think about how we focus on Advent, how we get in touch with our need for Him and how we replenish our hope.

**Questions for the Week:**
What promises do we make? What promises do we keep? How do we instill the importance of keeping promises in the children we serve?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**
Thank you God for sending your son in the form of a tiny baby that we can relate to. Thank you for always keeping your promises. Help us to focus on you this Advent season. May we use this time to prepare our hearts for you. Amen.

*This devotion was contributed by Sherri Bishop, Director of Central College Preschool in Westerville, Ohio.*
By now, it’s surely looking a lot like Christmas around your school. These are exciting days at Lutheran schools filled with carols, parties, presents, decorations and the almost-there Christmas Break. But Advent is also a stressful season with too little time to do too much, in and out of school.

When things get hectic, it’s important to remember that our schools are “Grace-Filled” places. St. Paul’s gives us good guidance when he told his Philippian friends, “I thank God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you.” What a great way to go through life—especially as a Christ-centered educator! When you’re frazzled, how about if you pause to thank God every time you see or think of your students, families, colleagues and friends—even the difficult ones? And why not offer a little prayer for them at the same time?

Try it today. Living this way has big benefits for you, too, as God blesses your efforts! Paul reminds of us of this promise, “I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion.” May your Advent be filled with “Grace-Filled” joy!

Questions for the Week:
In what ways do you thank God every day when you work with your students? How is this a blessing to you? In what ways do you see this attitude bearing fruit?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank God for the opportunity to work with your students, families and colleagues. Ask for an extra measure of joy, patience and peace in this busy time of the year.

This devotion was contributed by David Hahn, Saratoga Springs, NY. Dave is the Executive Director of the Association of Lutheran Secondary Schools.
December 16, 2018
Third Sunday of Advent
Thought for the Week:
Philippians 4: 4-7 and Luke 3: 7-18

Whoa! Have you ever had one of those days where everything and everyone seems to be against you? Don’t you wish sometimes that on those days you could react the way Jesus did: “You brood of vipers!”? What a snappy retort and you’d think that would drive away those who came to be baptized by him. But no! Instead the interactions are filled with grace.

Think of all those times that children come rushing up to you asking for something. Or adults who expect you to solve all their problems. Ask then “What then should we do?” Share! Do only that which is fair! Be satisfied!

Those words certainly can come across as exhortations and not feel much like grace. But when issued by Jesus, in his loving way, we do experience those commands as good news. They do give us guidance for how we interact with all the demands on our time and attention. Then Philippians 4 becomes a way of life: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Questions for the Week:
1. What happened this week that made you want to call out someone or some things as a “brood of vipers”?
2. How were you able to turn that experience into a Grace-filled day?

Prayer Suggestions:
Give me/us grace and patience to experience life’s challenges. Help me/us to turn troubling interactions into times of sharing and satisfaction. List times of rejoicing and give thanks to God for those celebrative moments.

This devotion was contributed by Phyllis Castens Wiederhoeft, Executive Director of ALDE, a membership association of Christian fundraising professionals with which ELEA partners for IGNITE.
I recently lived through one of the most difficult times of my life. My husband of 37 years had heart valve surgery just one week ago.

I can’t say my faith is the strongest it has ever been, but now looking back I see that just getting through the week before surgery was an act of faith. The end of the school year’s art show, ice cream social, and book fair were all happening that week. It felt like a blessing to be busy, but I also felt like I was coming up short. I just needed more time. Time to say all of the important things to my husband, get our ducks in a row. The Sunday before his surgery, during the church service with him sitting by my side, I understood for the first time how important it is that our God knows us and forgives us. I no longer cared so much about coming up short. God had let his face shine on me.

After the surgery, which was a success, came the hard part. I was confronted with the magnitude of what had just taken place. My husband had survived open-heart surgery. To see someone you love in pain, even though you know they are doing great, is hard. One day on my way home from the hospital, a parking garage attendant asked me innocently, “How’s it going?” I replied without any filter, “I’m tired. It’s been a long day.” And that is when I saw the face of God shining on me again, in the form of a parking attendant who replied, “I hope it ended well, my friend.” I was touched that he was able to bring me peace through his compassionate response.

Praise God who continues to let his face shine in the middle of our feelings of inadequacy and complete exhaustion. May you too, see God in the people who you meet each day.

Question for the Week:
Have you seen God’s face shine on you lately? What did that look like?

Prayer:
Dear Father in Heaven, thank you for loving us in our desperation. You have saved us. Let us live knowing you are with us always.

This devotion was contributed by Jenny James. Jenny is the director of First Lutheran Preschool in Ellicott City, Maryland.
December 25, 2018
Christmas Day
Thought for the Week: Titus 3: 4-7

Are you a fan of the Polar Bear plunge? I’m sure you have heard of the people who gather at the beach on a winter’s day and run into the lake, ocean, pond, or river. Often the event is held as a fund raiser. It gives those of us who are not willing to expose ourselves to that shock a chance to participate. Are you wondering how this topic is at the start of a Christmas devotion? Stay with me.

In the Epistle of Titus which is appointed for this day there is a moving perspective on the power of gifts. “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” So think about it: The Savior appeared, on Christmas right? He saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, salvation is a gift, and we did nothing to deserve it according to his mercy, through the water, the water, like the lake, ocean, pond, or river.

Have you heard the phrases “you shouldn’t have” or “but I didn’t get you anything”? These phrases are exactly right when it comes to the gift of salvation that our God purchased for us. So how about on Christmas this year we remember the power of baptism, the water and the word that seals our salvation. You don’t have to take a polar plunge, but let’s remember the gifts of our God and the mercy He showers on us through the water.

Questions for the Week:
Do you remember baptismal birthdays at your school? Are there stories of your baptism as a part of your family lore? Has your ministry been blessed as one of your students was baptized during their year with you? Hope will you share the power of baptism with your students this year?

Prayer for the Week:
Jesus I celebrate your birth today. I think of the gifts you have showered on me. I think especially on the adoption that has given me a new life as I have come through the waters. Help me to honor your power and celebrate the new life you grant to me and to my students. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Don Gillingham, Executive Director of Rockford Lutheran Schools, Rockford, Illinois.
Can you imagine the feelings Mary and Joseph must have had on discovering that Jesus was not among their group after three days' travel on foot? Panic? Fear? Disbelief? Guilt? After another three days of searching, carefully retracing their steps, and finding him so dismissive at their dismay, they must have felt a combination of relief, anger, and confusion about his reason for staying behind. Jesus had grown beyond their childhood expectations for him, teaching with surprising knowledge and authority, while Mary saw only the little boy she loved and wanted to protect. Parenting Jesus came with a steep learning curve.

What if one of the children in your care wanders away from your group on a field trip? Searching everywhere you'd been, only to find that a gift shop had been the lure that separated you. There's an uncomfortable tension between wanting to berate the child for disobeying, and thankfulness for the child's safety. Though, like Mary, you'd probably wonder what s/he was thinking, finding a gift for his mother made perfect sense to the child at the time. For Jesus, teaching in the Temple was a logical fulfillment of his earthly purpose.

Consider these Questions for the Week:
What response would be best for us? For our children? Of course, safety is key, and requires immediate attention. Yet, we are not the only teachers in our classrooms, for our children have lessons to teach us. Do we take time to listen before we react? Does our discipline include both confession and forgiveness? Do our students leave feeling worthy of grace?

Prayer:
Lord of Life and Learning, Though you have called us to teach your children, we confess that we have many questions and concerns along the way. We are grateful that you are always willing to listen and forgive our mistakes. Give us patience and make us willing listeners, showing the good news of your unconditional love in our teaching and in our daily living. In the name of Jesus, let it be so. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Karen Kress, Waupaca, Wisconsin, a long time educator and friend of ELEA.
“...after Jesus was born, magi came to Jerusalem asking
‘Where is the child...?’”

After Jesus was born magi came looking for the baby. They asked, “Where is the child?” because they didn’t know. What was the last thing you had to look for recently? Your keys perhaps? Brain science tells us we don’t pay attention to where we put our keys if we don’t lay them in the same spot every time. Our brains just don’t care. They are busy storing information about emotional events like the kiss from your child or spouse on your way to work.

The Magi traveled to Jerusalem, the City of Peace, looking for Jesus. But they didn’t know exactly where to look. They had never done this before. They didn’t have a routine of looking for Jesus. All they had was a star. Once they found baby Jesus and Mary “they were overwhelmed with joy.” Sounds like an emotional event!

Have you ever had a “come to Jesus” meeting, whether you were full of joy or tears? Perhaps you remember an exhausting day of working with the kids, and like the Magi you sought Jesus. Hopefully you experienced joy, comfort and peace. Or perhaps your answered prayer felt well...less than joyfilled. Keep looking. Follow the star. And bring your whole self, all of your thoughts and feelings to Jesus, who in the manger was found in one of the most unexpected places.

**Question for the Week:**
How do you feel about the Holy? Is there a time you’ve been surprised by your experience of the Divine?

**Personal Prayers for the Week:**
Holy Spirit, Holy One, guide my journey so that like the Magi, I bring my whole self; heart, mind and spirit to my experience of you. Amen.

*This devotional was contributed by Pastor Janelle Rozek Hooper, Program Director for Ministry with Children for the ELCA.*
January 13, 2019
Baptism of Our Lord
Thought for the Week: Acts 8: 14-17

Grace Filled Days

When you and I were little children we experienced forever days filled with warm imaginings, virtually careless and unburdened as measured by adult norms. Those times we still treasure, if we take time to remember, and they were, in a small way, akin to our theme of Grace Filled Days.

Christ’s baptism was the beginning of God’s embrace of his children, each of us as individual creations. Through the Sacrament of Baptism we are baptized in Christ Jesus, we are baptized in his death, and his death conquers our own death. The Holy Spirit proclaimed Christ his beloved son in whom he was well pleased and so, by adoption, we too become his children in whom he is also well pleased.

From the moment of Christ’s Baptism and his blessing by the Holy Spirit, his ministry of grace filled days for us was begun. We are called by his name and he has created us for his glory (Is. 43). He will give us, his people, strength, and bless us with peace (Ps. 29). With these blessings we are encouraged, expected to luxuriate in this grace, embracing and being the presence of Christ for all others in his name.

Question:
We have all heard the phrase (curse?), “May you live in interesting times.” So, what about your “Grace Filled” times? Can you speak to one of those grace filled days that you experienced recently in your life? Not a miracle, just one of those small, seemingly insignificant and unremarkable but sure sign measures of God’s grace?

Prayer:
Heavenly Father, grant us times of solitude and peace to reflect, to remember, to celebrate the joys of our youth, to recognize that blessing in the children whom we serve, and most importantly, to receive and grow in your gift of grace filled days that embrace our lives every moment in time and space. We pray in the name of the baptized Christ in whom we also are baptized and through whom we are embraced with grace.

This devotion was contributed by Alan Feddersen – Retired Lutheran educator who lives in grace filled days.
“His [Jesus’] mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’”

It strikes me how John’s account of Jesus’ first miracle might reflect some of your interactions with your students as educators/caregivers. Mary, Jesus’ mother and educator/caregiver, points out Jesus’ growth opportunity at the Cana wedding: “They have no wine.”

Jesus, the budding student, objects with some attitude: “Woman...my hour has not yet come.”

Mary shows her confidence in her student by patiently stretching him past his doubt and snarkiness, saying to the attending servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

She then fades gracefully into the background and allows her student to shine as he turns water into wine—think Epiphany light here!

Because of Mary’s gracious guidance and patience, Jesus “…revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.”

Question for the Week:
Reflect on the precious opportunities that God is giving you as educators/caregivers to point out your students’ growth opportunities, help them stretch, and then step back to watch them shine!

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Gracious God, Thank you for the calling that you give us as educators/caregivers to guide our students. Grant us patience and fulfillment as we walk with them and lovingly stretch them past objections, self-doubt, or self-sabotage. Help us to fade gracefully into the background so that they can shine and we may turn to the next students who need us. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by the Rev. Karl Biermann, assistant to the bishop of the Northeastern Ohio Synod. Rev. Biermann, who previously served as a parish pastor for 10 years—including with a vibrant daycare ministry—enjoys learning alongside young people during congregational visits!
As a teacher, it is our mission to provide children with a deep desire to learn about and accept God's words. We often put a bit of “pizazz” into our teachings in the hopes of reaching the kids on their level. The word pizazz comes from the Hebrew word “pazaz”. It means “to be brilliant or bright”. When David wrote this verse he choose this word to reflect the essence of the gold, freed of its impurities and refined to a high shine. Pazaz, when written in Hebrew, shows an involvement with God when spoken from the heart. It's that fundamental concept we are trying to convey to our students.

In the second half of this verse, “the drippings of the honeycomb”, when written in Hebrew, re-enforces that overflowing connection we can have with God through our words.

A while ago at a fast food restaurant, a 3 year old child from our school displayed a very disgruntled face. Families were eating without saying prayer. The little one announced to all the families present it was time to say grace. She projected her voice, and led everyone in “Johnny Appleseed”. She concluded with “enjoy your dinner and chew carefully.” It is that kind of “pazaz” that verifies the overflowing involvement with God is more precious than the most refined gold or that sweet warm goo straight from the honeycomb. David wrote there is something better than sweet honey or refined gold. Praise and worship are very sweet. Sweeter yet is listening to the Word of God.

Question for the Week:
Why do you think David chose the word “pazaz”, an less commonly used word to express refined gold, over the more commonly used “zakak”, meaning “poured out”? 

Personal Prayer of the Week:
Good and gracious God, keep me mindful that material possessions like the purest gold and the sweetest honey cannot bring me joy—my joy comes from my involvement, my relationship with You. Let me feel Your presence and share it with family, friends, and neighbors, this day and every day. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Jill Majestic, who has been the Director of Noah’s Ark Preschool and Kindergarten, a mission of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Mesa, Arizona, for the past eight years.
February 3, 2019  
Fourth Sunday After Epiphany  
Thought for the Week: Psalm 71: 1-6

“Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” This adage had been taught to our children over the years to help them understand that sometimes others will use hurtful words and that we should remember they, only being words, will never hurt me. On the other hand, one would believe that if someone did throw a stone it might really hurt.

In today’s text, we are told that stones don’t have to hurt. We are reminded that through the grace of God we are protected. As we hurl hurtful stones at each other we are not living in the promise of this passage. In this case it is different. The stone, or the rock, is a symbol of the God’s everlasting love and forgivingness of our sins. God’s rock is the foundation of our faith journey that we walk upon each and every day. The rock is the refuge we are provided that protects and helps us when we are faced with indifference. God helps guide us to make better decisions when we experience hatred and the hand of the wicked. In that moment do we cast out another hurtful stone or put it in our pocket and know for certain, as we gently rub its surface, it truly is a rock of hope.

Questions for the Week:
How do you teach your students about sticks and stones? Do you share the words of God? How can you show that God is our rock?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank God for this reminder that no matter what comes our way, God is our protector. Ask God to guide us as we teach our children to turn those hurtful stones into rocks of hope. Prayerfully consider your role in making your school a safe and loving place to learn.

This devotion was contributed by Doug Boots, a speech-language pathologist with Central Rivers Area Education Agency. He has served at St. Paul’s Lutheran School in Waverly, Iowa, for the past nineteen years.
In this excerpt of Corinthians, Paul expresses self-doubt; “unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” Immediately he changes the tone of doubt to confidence, almost defiance. “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain.” It is grace realized and Paul is what he is because of it. God’s love, mercy, forgiveness, grace has changed Paul the persecutor into Paul the apostle, “one who is sent away”, Paul the teacher, Paul the disciple, student and follower of Jesus. He becomes a living vessel of the very things that changed his life.

Many of us have such experiences of catharsis and change when we are riding a high horse of pride and accomplishment and then have a crisis (or two or three) and then our world of security and hubris crashes and brings us to our knees. We beg for mercy and tenderness and God’s grace lifts us again. God walks at our side and puts an arm around us. We become who we are because of God’s grace and love: divine children of God.

Having God’s grace changes our lives so we can shine with love and grace. We can be like Paul and be an apostle, a disciple, a teacher when we teach children with love and mercy, forgiveness - the things of God. We become vessels of the things that change our lives.

**Question for the Week:**
How can you express love and grace without saying it?

**Personal Prayer:**
O God, let your grace and love come from our hearts, our words and into our actions. Amen.

*This devotion was contributed by Kristyl Downey, the Office Manager at Bethania Lutheran Church in Solvang, CA. She leads the singing time during chapel for the Preschool and After School Program.*
February 17, 2017
Sixth Sunday After Epiphany
Thought for the Day: Jeremiah 17: 5-10

SLAM!!!! “Hi Honey, How was your day?” “Hi” as you fall exhausted into a chair. “I can’t wait to tell you!” The day was either totally unbelievable or extremely wonderful. Or, then it could be somewhere in-between those extremes. But it rarely is boring if you are an educator of any age child.

Being a Christian educator adds yet another dimension and challenge to your life. For besides imparting knowledge of all varieties you have the Calling to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with your class. Not only what you teach but also how you act every day counts.

In the reading from Jeremiah 17, for this Sunday in verse 7 it says, “But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him.” Then in verse 10 the Lord says, “I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve.” NIV

When we approach each day with trusting in the Lord, He will guide our paths in service to him. That is when, like the apostle Paul, we can also claim, “But by the grace of God I am what I am.” I Corinthians 17:10.

It’s with that confidence in the Lord and his guiding our paths do we have “Grace filled days”.

Question for the Week:
When you return home from teaching are you ready to thank the Lord for a day that was filled with grace? Some days a lot of forgiveness is necessary. Strive for more “grace filled days.”

Prayer for the Week:
Dear Lord. As my guide, direct my path as each day I share you and your love with your children and others. Then may my day be filled with your grace so freely given. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Marge Robison, retired Lutheran educator, former ELEA National Board Member and 2010 recipient of the Donald A. Vetter Educational Service Award.
February 24, 2019  
SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPHESUS  
THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: GENESIS 45: 3-11, 15

I can only imagine this conversation between Joseph and his brothers. The shocked brothers, recounting all of their conspiring against Joseph, probably thought, “He’s gone mad!” Just reading it, I chuckle a little when Joseph encourages his brothers not to be angry at themselves for all that they put him through. But Joseph is no fool. He simply recognizes God’s working in his life and all of his experiences—not just the good ones. Joseph acknowledges that had he not experienced hard times, he would not be in the position he is currently in. He would not be able to do all that he had been called to do. That knowledge allows Joseph to move beyond the pain of what he experienced and to see God’s intended outcome.

I too have experienced trials. While I’ve never been thrown in a pit or spent years in jail, I have a son named Joseph who was stillborn after he became entangled in his umbilical cord. I have another son named Caleb. He was stillborn one year later—without an explanation. In between those two losses, my father died unexpectedly. My father provided balance in my life. Through all of this, I have LEARNED to acknowledge that every experience is working for my personal good—and the good of those who I will serve with my testimony. I am excited to see what comes of all of this. And I am excited to give God glory for his grace as I go through it.

Questions for the Week:  
Are there experiences in your work as a teacher that you could reframe in your mind? What about children who have challenged you? Instead of focusing on the stress, grief or trauma, try to consider all of the positives that might come from this experience.

Personal Prayer for the Week:  
Ask God for the mental discipline to think of the positive in experiences and in people instead of immediately focusing on the negative. Thank God for a circumstance that seemed, at the time, to be detrimental but has worked out for your good.

*This devotion was contributed by Kendolyn Pope, Houston, Texas, who is the Director of Faith Lutheran Day School and Mother’s Day Out.*
March 3, 2019
Eighth Sunday After Epiphany

Thought for the Week: Psalm 92: 1-4, 12-15

“It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre. For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy.”

How do you praise the Lord? Do you sing his praises with excitement, loudly, with the crashing of cymbals or solemnly with the meditative soul of the harp? However you choose to worship our Lord, it is a good to give thanks and to sing his praises. At our school, Pastor Charlie engages the children in songs of praise during chapel time. They sometimes sing very loudly, however, soon he will ask them how softly they can sing. Life can be loud and full of excitement, yet at times filled with quiet moments. God loves to hear our voices praising his name, no matter where we find ourselves on life’s journey, God has given life to us and to him we give our praise.

In Psalm 92: 12-15, God reminds us of his promise to be faithful to the end. “The righteous flourish like the palm tree...they are planted in the house of the Lord...in old age they still produce fruit...they are always green and full of sap showing that the Lord is upright: he is my rock and there is no unrighteousness in him.” Even as the years pass, and our bodies fail, we will still bring forth fruit. Nature may decay, but his grace will prevail. God is our rock from childhood and throughout our adult lives. He will be there to the end and we will continue to sing his praises.

**Question for the Week:**
What can you praise God for today?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**
God, thank you for allowing me to worship you through praise and song. Let me always be mindful of your faithfulness throughout the joys and trials of life remembering that you are my rock in all things.

*This devotion was contributed by JoAnne Gustafson, Director, Normandale Preschool in Edina, MN.*
“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.”

Today the church embarks on the six week season that we call Lent. During Lent we focus on our Lord’s journey to Jerusalem where he gave his life on the cross. These weeks prepare us for a fuller and more joyful celebration of Christ’s resurrection at Easter.

We need these six weeks of devotion and spiritual discipline to be fully prepared for Easter joy, just as we need the years of childhood and adolescence to be prepared for adulthood. Likewise we need the challenges of life because they often bring about the best growth. The psalmist knew that only through God can one obtain a clean heart and a right spirit. With God’s Spirit at work in and among us, cleansing and growth can happen even in difficult circumstances. As teachers and leaders in Christ’s Church, we have the opportunity to point to God’s presence in our daily experiences so that we and others can know the joy of a clean heart and a right spirit.

It takes time. A lasting relationship with God is just like a lasting relationship with a human friend in that friendships deepen over time and with shared experiences. May we take the time to know God’s abundant presence this Lenten season as we journey with Christ to the cross once again.

Question for the Week:
What will you do this Lent to experience God’s presence anew?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Creating God, continue to work in my life during this Lenten Season to create a clean heart and a right spirit in me. Guide me so that I will demonstrate the joy of your presence to those around me. In Christ’s name I pray. Amen.

The Rev. Martha W. Clementson is Co-Senior Pastor of Grace Lutheran Church and President of the Board of Trustees, Carroll Lutheran School, Westminster, Maryland.
March 10, 2019  
First Sunday in Lent  

Temptations and tests are found everywhere, encouraging us to be guided by something other than God: buy this item and your problems will go away; eat that food and you will be happy. We all experience tests and temptations, perhaps watching TV over the “to do” list or eating just one more chocolate when we have already had two. In the scripture reading from Luke 4, we read about Jesus’ temptation for forty days in the wilderness. He was hungry. He was tired. The devil tested Jesus, enticing him away from God. These days in the wilderness were challenging. Jesus responded to the temptations with God’s words.

Our roles as administrators, educators and child care providers are filled with great responsibility. We work hard to encourage students, to help them grow and succeed. Our schools become caring communities for families. But, we can also experience challenges. Schedules can be hectic, criticism often feels louder than praise, and activities do not go as planned. It can be tempting to feel overwhelmed and underappreciated. When these challenges occur, we can be guided by God’s words as well. “Worship the Lord your God, serve only him.”

We can rest in the knowledge that God does not leave us alone in these moments of difficulty. God provides strength with these words, pointing us back to God. “Worship the Lord your God, serve only him.” Similarly, the ways we serve and trust God can be a model for others.

Questions for the Week:
What are some helpful ways to cope with temptation in your daily life? What have you noticed helps others when they are tested? What are some Bible verses that provide strength or encouragement for you?

Prayers for the Week:
*Prayers of thanksgiving that God does not leave us when we are challenged or when we make a mistake.
*We all face tests, even Jesus experienced testing. Develop prayers for strength when faced with temptation. What tests have you noticed, for both adults and children, in your classroom or building this week?

This devotion was contributed by Amy Cauble, Director of Spirit of Joy Preschool in Sioux Falls, SD.
March 17, 2019
Second Sunday in Lent
Thought for the Week: Psalm 27: 14

“Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!”

Even in today’s fast-paced society, we still spend plenty of time waiting. We wait at traffic lights, wait for appointments to begin, wait for our food at restaurants, wait to hear back from our friends. One of the key social skills we teach our young students is to learn to wait their turn. Older children and many adults still struggle with waiting. We’re in an instant gratification era, and any time spent waiting may seem like time wasted. At the very least, a wait of any sort is viewed as an inconvenience.

At this point in the school year, many of us are feeling restless or burned out. We’re waiting for a break, or for the school year to end. Here’s where the words of today’s reading can help us. Instead of restlessly waiting for spring break or summer vacation to come, we need to change our focus to waiting for the Lord. God will give us strength and courage to meet the challenges of the school year.

Our students are likely feeling restless as well. The Lenten season provides a great opportunity for a conversation with our students about learning to wait, and learning to wait for the Lord. As we finish the school year, let’s try to focus on waiting with our students. Waiting for the Lord together helps prevent any of us from going our own way instead of God’s way. Rather than being an inconvenience, our mutual waiting time can be an experience of growth and fellowship both in and out of the classroom.

Questions for the Week:
What makes waiting difficult for you? How might you use your “wait times” this week to draw closer to God?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Find some quiet time to wait and listen for the Lord on purpose. Pray for strength and courage while you wait for the Lord.

This devotion was contributed by Melissa Roselle, Director of Education at St. John’s Lutheran Preschool, Springfield, Illinois.
March 24, 2019
Third Sunday in Lent
Thought for the Week: 1 Corinthians 10: 13

We all struggle. Whether it is with our health, personal issues with loved ones, difficulties with a co-worker, a temptation, a challenging parent or student, Paul tells us that “No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone.”

Often, when difficulties have occurred in my life, well-meaning friends may respond with Paul’s words that “God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength.” I often come away from such a conversation with a feeling that I don’t want God to test me to the limit of my strength. I feel weak, inadequate, not up to the task; at times wanting to yield to the temptation to give in to my human frailty and fall apart.

However, the verse continues, “but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.”

That “way out” is called grace. It’s OK to be weak, human, to make mistakes, and feel ready to fall apart. God made us that way and loves us just as we are. God is always there with an abundance of grace to fill each day. Through grace, we are given the strength we need to handle whatever comes our way. Being open to receiving God’s grace gives us the power needed to overcome our human frailties.

God has a plan for each one of us and with the help of God’s grace, the outcome will be bigger and better than any of us could have ever imagined.

Questions for the Week:
What have you struggled with recently? How are you handling it?

Prayer for the Week:
Ask God to shower you with grace to help you endure and overcome the challenges you face. Thank God for the faithful love and gift of grace that lifts us up each day!

This devotion was contributed by Joanne Osterland, who is blessed to serve as Director at Christ Lutheran Preschool in Dallas, TX.
March 31, 2019
Fourth Sunday in Lent
Thought for the Week: Psalm 32

“You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.” v.7

At our preschool, I know all the favorite hiding places for our students. They are the same every year. New kids come and discover the same spots all over again. Under the stairs, in a large bookcase shelf, in the bathroom, in the forest hideout, in the snake slide, behind mom or dad, and even with me in my office. There are so many, and students seek them for many reasons. Oftentimes, Rowan hides to skip clean up to keep playing. Landon hides behind mom to delay the transition to school. Eileen hides with a book in the library center away from the drama of 4-year-olds for a few moments peace. Wyatt hides under the stairs to concentrate on a challenging puzzle and complete it all by himself. Violet hides in my office to get some special attention when she’s feeling alone.

Our littles hide for safety, from hard work, for comfort, for peace of mind, to think clearly, and to feel loved. We, as adults, find hiding places, both literal and figurative for the same reasons. At work, those hiding places of choice (music, social media, friends, alone time) are nearly impossible to come by. Yet perhaps there has never been a place where we need preservation from trouble and glad cries of deliverance more than in our work, in order to love and teach our students in concert with God’s vision.

We all must come out of hiding places to live. Hiding places may shelter and protect us for a time but are by nature fleeting. God offers another type of hiding place entirely. God preserves and delivers our souls. He fills our lives with grace and our hearts with joy. May we seek to hide in the Lord.

Question for the Week:
What are your favorite hiding places? Where do you go to be preserved from trouble? How does God surround you with glad cries of deliverance?
Personal Prayer for the Week:
We thank God for being a safe hiding place for all of God’s children. Surround us in steadfast love and glad cries of deliverance. Bless us to offer this love and joy to our students and colleagues each grace filled day.

This devotion was contributed by Janean Moriarty, Poulsbo, Washington, who serves as director of Vinland Lutheran Preschool, a ministry of Vinland Lutheran Church. “Honoring God by nurturing children’s relationships.”
This verse elicits the image of someone who has to work hard to keep going on the journey. Have you ever been in the midst of inclement weather-heavy rain, blowing snow or howling winds and needed to be at a very important event? The temptation is to stop and take refuge, but since it is important to get to the destination, you press on. Our teaching journeys are often like that.

At a retirement celebration for a teacher who had answered the call for many decades, many stories were told about pressing on in the face of challenges. Sometimes it was establishing a new classroom with very few resources. At times it was a particular student who seemed incorrigible. All of the knowledge and techniques that were learned in classes and workshops did not provide the answer. It was not until the student realized that no matter how unlovable he/she seemed, the teacher’s love and devotion was not to be deferred or deflected. The teacher’s heavenly call of Jesus to “suffer the little children” was the prize realized and won time and time again.

The best part of this prize is that it can be won every day. The triumphs and failures of yesterday are left behind and the prizes of today lie ready to be won. The kind words of healing given to the person bruised by blows of mean words. The words of encouragement to a colleague who doubts themselves. The silent and nonjudgmental listening to a parent who needs to express their frustrations. And most important, letting every child know they are a unique creation and celebrate with them as they discover and learn.

The call of God to be in Jesus is personal, he has made you his own and will be with you each and every step of the way.

**Questions for the Week:**
As you begin each day, what are the “prizes” that you seek? How will you celebrate your “wins”?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**
Jesus, help me see each day as a new road with “prizes” along the way and walk behind, next to and ahead of me as I press on.

*This devotion was contributed by Hugh Kress who has served Lutheran Schools and Early Childhood Centers for five decades in many capacities.*
Stir it Up!
“[Jesus] stirs up the people by teaching”

Stir – of what do you think when you read this word? Does a spoon come to mind? a bowl? a delicious-smelling pot of soup on a chilly day?

Stir. It can mean blending, mixing, and folding ingredients together. And, certainly there are many ingredients to the week ahead that will be stirred together in the beautiful witness of Holy Week.

Stir. It can also mean something else – inspiring, moving, rousing... stirring. “He stirs up the people by teaching”. It was teaching, Luke writes, that stirred the people. Teaching! The people were stirred; yes, to the point of wanting him crucified. But, stirred because Jesus taught the ingredients for the Kingdom: love, peace and grace. Jesus stirred the pot, and will soon be crucified for it. Jesus stirred hearts, and will soon be conquer death for them.

· How is your teaching like stirring?

· In what ways are you mixing information, ideas and experiences together?

· In which ways are you stirring people, challenging and inviting them to love?

Let us Pray: Lord, stir up in us the power to witness to this Holy Week in our teaching, loving and learning. Amen.

Deacon Emily Myallis is the Children’s Ministry Coordinator at St. Paul Lutheran Church and Christian Early Learning Center in Lititz, PA.
Holy Week. The very center of our faith as the Jesus Community, these days occupy nearly a third of the Gospels, and form the deepest of our convictions as Christ’s followers. In the Passion story, these words stand as some of the most striking: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”

Good Friday can be difficult to teach. So much agony, violence and cruelty, throughout the story of Jesus’ torture, execution and death. These are hard themes to share with the young. Yet share them we must, sensitive as always to the age and settings of those in our care.

I find these psalmist’s words to be among the best. They are crucial to the Gospel narratives, presented in their Hebrew and Greek forms, tying together the promises of Israel’s history with the person and work of Christ on the cross. But, even more, they offer the opportunity to connect with every child’s experience of loss and abandonment, sorrow and pain. And, as we know from the events of this week, we are not abandoned. Through the self-giving love of Jesus, we too are loved by God. For Jesus loves us – this we know, for the Bible tells us so!

**Questions for the Week:**
How do we feel when we hear these painful words? What does it mean to know that Jesus endured such feelings, as we do? What do the events of Holy Week tell us of the love of God we know in Christ?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**
Lamb of God, you know the pains we endure, we and those whom we serve. May the story of your Passion remind us of your unending love for us and for the world. Teach us to love as you love, always. Amen.

*This devotion was contributed by Bill Hurst, Pastor and Mission Director of First Lutheran Church and School in Torrance, California.*
On the holiest day of the holiest week of the year, we celebrate the pivotal event in human history: the conquering of death itself by Our Lord and Savior.

On the cross, Jesus took upon himself the worst that humanity has to offer: sin, destruction, unspeakable suffering, and finally death. He immersed himself into all the iniquity, disease, and despair that can mark the human condition. He dared to enter the very depths of God forsakenness.

But three days later, our Savior emerged victorious over death, showing he is stronger than even the worst evil that can come our way.

Without the resurrection, our religion is a meaningless charade, and Jesus is just one more charismatic leader among many. But by absorbing and ultimately destroying death and sin, the Son of God provides the way through any fear, anxiety, or hardship that might beset us.

That’s the message we must convey to those in our care. The tomb is empty. The Lord is risen. In him, death has no sting, and through him is the path to eternal life.

Happy Easter!

**Question for the Week:**
How can you effectively convey the transformative significance of Easter to those in your care?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**
Pray for the grace to find effective ways to proclaim the Easter message to those you teach.

*This devotion was contributed by Joe McTighe, former executive director of CAPE, the Council for American Private Education.*

51
April 28, 2019
Second Sunday of Easter
Thought for the Week: Psalm 150

"Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary;
Praise him in his mighty firmament! Praise him for his mighty deeds;
Praise him according to his surpassing greatness!
Praise him with trumpet sound;
Praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance;
Praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with clanging cymbals;
Praise him with loud clashing cymbals!
Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!"

Praise him! Isn't this message from Psalm exciting!! It sparks excitement and joy in me. It made me stop and think of all the many ways that our preschool praises God through music and dancing. Teaching children songs like "Jesus loves me" and "He's got the whole world in his hands" is timeless. Many of us grew up knowing these songs of praise and isn't it amazing that it still applies today in teaching children about God's love and praising Him.

As a Preschool Director, I receive so much joy from observing my preschool classes during circle-time. I love to see the children sing and dance, march and play instruments. Music and movement is just one way that we can share the joy and Praise Jesus with God's children.

Questions for the Week:
How do you praise Jesus? How have you shown your family to praise Jesus? How do others see you praise Jesus?

Prayer for the Week:
Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the precious time that we have to Praise you. Thank you for the many opportunities that we have to share this praise. Guide us and lead us in a way which exemplifies this praise!! Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Renee Stinar, Director of Hope Lutheran Preschool in Eagle, Idaho. Renee also serves as Region 1 Board Member and ELEA Co-Ambassador representing ELEA's Region 1.
In reading the experiences of the disciples, I often wonder why they had such a difficult time seeing Jesus right in front of them or actually hearing what He told them. John 21 happens after Jesus’ death and resurrection and He had already revealed himself two other times to various groups of disciples; they have all seen Him.

So what are these seven disciples feeling when they decide to go fishing? Are they still reeling over the sight of their Lord who was brutally beaten and murdered, returning from the dead, as He had told them He would? Was this a “Let’s go fishing,” to clear their heads, to talk about what was going to happen next or were they trying to ease themselves back into their lives before Jesus? A man on the shore knows they have caught no fish … “Cast your net on the other side.” Before the haul could be brought in Simon Peter knew the Lord was waiting for them on shore, he put on some clothes and swam to Jesus.

After breakfast Jesus forms a question for Simon Peter, “Do you love me?...Feed my sheep” “Do you love me?...Tend my sheep” “Do you love me?...Feed my sheep.” Was Jesus telling him, no more fishing for you, you have a job?

How frequently am I blind to what God is showing me or deaf to what God is saying to me?

Question of the Week:
Watch and listen, where is God moving in your school? Where is God touching your life? Where is God speaking to you?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Lord, thank you for your still, small voice. Please help my ears to hear you when you speak. Lord, thank you for the wonders all around me. Please help my eyes to see where you are moving in my life.

This devotion was contributed by Denise K. Egge, Visalia, California serving as director at ChristKids Preschool & Child Care.
May 12, 2019
Fourth Sunday of Easter
Thought for the Week: Psalm 23: 4

As I received my verses to write from this year I was sitting with my father in the hospital, so I really didn’t look at what verses were sent until it was time for me to write. His health had worsened, he had an episode back in August and we thought things were going in the right direction. My Father had fought 3 battles of cancer (losing a lung) and battled congestive heart failure (this was over a 25-year span). After years of medication and treatments his kidneys also were diseased. He made his journey to his heavenly home April 21. Even through all of this my father’s faith was stronger than any of us realized. He lived life to the fullest and thanked God for every day. He loved the outdoors, he fished, hunted deer, squirrel, rabbit, didn’t miss a season. He lead by example, he taught each of us kids the value of life.

God had a propose for him and my father followed. Each day was not taken for granted, he helped where help was needed and lead when leadership was the call. But he always thanked God for the strength to make it through.

You always hear the stories of people when they are approaching their final walk; I got to witness the gentleness of his passing. Sitting with my father and listening to his request, I understood what was happening. He requested after days of dialysis to have it stopped. He wanted to go home, he knew he couldn’t go home until all the tubes and things were gone. Within a couple of days he went home. My mother went to his side and said it’s ok, ”I love you”, I looked up and watched him mouth “love you too” (that is how he always replied) and he was gone. He was so at peace and I knew all was well. He was not afraid; he knew God was with him every step of the way.

Question for the Week:
Do you walk with God daily? Have you thanked him for the day even if it has been less than pleasant?

Prayer:
Dearest Father, Thank you for this day. Help lead me through the difficulties that may accrue, I know you are at my side. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Michelle Schaffer, Christian Day Nursery School Director for 10 years.
May 19, 2019
Fifth Sunday of Easter
Thought for the Week: John 13:31-35

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

Do you remember the first time you felt loved? Perhaps it was when you were a toddler, feeling true unconditional love from a parent or grandparent. Sadly, there are times in our lives when we don’t feel loved and the absence of love can change our outlook on life. Without love, people are like plants without sunshine or water, we wither and withdraw and even die. But when we are given love, we flourish and blossom and grow.

The abundant love that Jesus has for each of us allows us to extend and share that love with everyone... regardless of their age, race, ability or politics. As in the Beloved Community of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., all of God’s children are lovable and loving. Just imagine being a part of a universal love that has no conditions... grace-filled love for all! Teaching unconditional love means showing love and respect for each person as each is created in God’s own image. So, treat each child and adult as if each *is* Jesus.

Questions for the Week:
Think of the many ways in which you can show love to your students. Encouragement, patience, respect, honesty, trustworthiness, hope and patience again. How can you teach them to love others? Can you see the Christ in each of your students? Help them to see Christ in each other.

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Gracious God, thank you for loving us and teaching us to share your love. Help to open our hearts and allow your love to flow through us so that others can feel your grace-filled love. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Pastor Lynne Morrow who has served Messiah Lutheran Church and Child Care Center in Park Ridge Illinois since graduating from LSTC in 2009.
“Here am I. Send me, send me!” In Paul’s dream he had a vision of a man from Macedonia calling for him to come and help. Knowing this was a vision from God, Paul did not hesitate and left “at once.”

As you wrap up this school year, do you have a “vision” for the year to come, or are you content to continue as you did this year? We are called to reach out, extending ourselves to those less fortunate. To spread the Good News. When things are going well, we love to just bask in the sunshine of God’s grace filled days and not look to that part of our community which could really use our help. Is there something on your mind you have been considering for your school, but have not acted on it? Are you aware it may be the Holy Spirit nudging you, quietly saying “answer the call”. Without a vision, your school world can become small and selfish. With a vision, it can open new doors for you and your church. Do not reduce your school to becoming only repetitious programs and rituals. Without a vision, your school can begin to look at your students only as the number you need to pay the bills.

“Hark the Voice of Jesus Calling”  Vs. 2 and 4 says it best:

If you cannot speak like angels, if you cannot preach like Paul,
You can tell the love of Jesus; you can say He died for all.
If you cannot rouse the wicked, with the judgment’s dread alarms,
You can lead the little children to the Savior’s waiting arms.

Let none hear you idly saying, “there is nothing I can do,”
While the multitudes are dying and the Master calls for you.
Take the task he gives you gladly; Let His work your pleasure be.
Answer quickly when he calls you, “Here am I. Send me, send me!”

Questions for the Week:
What is the vision for your school or classroom? Are you ready to answer God’s calling?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Dear Lord, As a shepherd, lead us to be a school who’s purpose it is to share the Good News of your love throughout our community. Help us to listen for your direction and gladly answer your call.

This devotion was contributed by Candy Rickard, retired Lutheran early childhood teacher and administrator, and former ELEA staff.
Times get rough, for sure. There are kids with whom we never connect. We have all had parents who seem intent on undoing all that we do. Even our colleagues and peers, with whom we share every detail of our life’s challenges often, find the dumbest way to express their concern for us. But!!! Don’t . . . EVER doubt that you are special, you are called, Jesus Himself prays for you. Listen to His words from John chapter 17: “The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one.” How awesome is that? Jesus gives us Glory and makes us one! What could possibly shake your faith?

But wait, it gets better, the words of Jesus again. “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word”, Jesus is asking for a blessing for every one of the children in your care. They will be blessed because of the lessons you teach, the stories you tell and the compassion that you show for each child of God in your classroom.

We are called to a wonderful work. Of course the devil and the world will conspire to steal our joy. There will be conflicts on the playground. You will have pink eye or head lice sometime in your career. There will certainly be gossip and inconsiderate talk in the staff room. But you are one with God. The ones that believe because of your words are blessed by our brother Jesus. Nothing can overcome that truth.

Questions for the Week:
When “pro jersey” week comes around what will you wear? What is it that draws you into that fan base? How will the world know the school or pro team that draws your loyalty? Think of the extra importance in the ways we identify with our brother Jesus. How will your kids know that you are one with Him . . . and they are one with you?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Jesus, as I prepare for my week, one that will have challenges, filled with checklists and “to do” items, send your Spirit and fill me with the comfort that comes from knowing I have been called and that you pray for me and my work. Make me ever mindful of the special bond that you share with your brothers and sisters in all times and in all places. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Don Gillingham, Executive Director of Rockford Lutheran Schools, Rockford, Illinois.
June 9, 2019
Day of Pentecost
Thought for the Week: John 14: 8-17

"I will ask the Father to send you a Helper, who will stay with you forever."

Who is this Helper? What does He do? How does He "fit into" our spiritual life, and how is He "helping us?" More importantly, why was He sent to help us?

Jesus knew. He knew that there would be times when we couldn't help ourselves, times that we wouldn't understand God's words, and times when we just needed to feel loved. He knew we would need a parakletos, an Advocate (the Greek word for "Helper"). He loved us enough to ask our Father to send us that special Helper.

Through God's grace, the Holy Spirit was sent to advocate, personally, for each us! The Holy Spirit was sent to dwell in us, to help us understand God's word, to guide us, to intercede for us, and to help us experience God's love!

What better inspiration, as educators, could we follow? Did you realize that you are teaching those precious children about the Holy Spirit every day? Can you count how many times you have shared God's word, counseled, prayed for, and nurtured the children entrusted to you? What a beautiful reflection of the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit leads us to be an advocate for all children, to exemplify the grace, that God has shown us.

Questions for the Week:
When do you feel the closest to the Holy Spirit? How does He advocate for you?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the beautiful reflection of the Holy Spirit, that we can share with others. Pray that you are a blessing and an advocate for the children. May God bless you and keep you close always.

This devotion was contributed by Angela Camp. She has worked in education for 23 years and currently serves as Director of Operations at Christ Lutheran Preschool in Dallas, Texas.
June 16, 2019
First Sunday After Pentecost
Thought for the Week: John 16:12-15

12 “I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”

In this gospel lesson, Jesus knows his time on earth is limited, and he wants his disciples to know how much He loves them. Jesus also realizes they cannot completely understand all that He has tried to teach them, and so now the Holy Spirit will guide them.

Jesus’ teaching and training the disciples has so many similarities to St. Paul’s Lutheran School at which I teach. St. Paul’s has several preschool classes and then continues on through sixth grade. At the preschool level and kindergarten, the students participate in a teacher-led worship. They learn that Jesus loves them. Just as the disciples needed time to grasp the meaning of Jesus’ teaching, so the students continue to learn about Jesus as they grow in age. In the lower elementary, the weekly theme often is centered on the lectionary for that week. The upper elementary study the Old Testament where the students learn some of the best-loved stories in the Bible. Then in fifth grade it is the New Testament. The sixth graders learn about Martin Luther and delve more deeply into the Old Testament. Throughout their years at St. Paul’s, the students learn that about grace: God’s redemption at Christ’s expense.

And so as educators, we have also been given the mission to teach each age according to what they are capable of learning. What a privilege we have been given!

Question for the Week:
What is the Holy Spirit saying to me as I teach my students?

Prayer:
Dear Lord, Just like the disciples, we do not always fully understand your message, but, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we are often able to do what we did not think possible. Thanks be to God for this gift. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Jo Groth, a fourth grade teacher at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church and School in Waverly, Iowa.
How often have you faced a young student who seems possessed—not in his or her “right mind,” as our text from the gospel of Luke describes the demon-possessed man? Such students can seem (almost) insane and unreachable as they act out in disruptive ways. Like the many demons described as possessing the man in today’s reading, many stresses and problems in a young person’s life can conspire to drive him or her to anti-social and destructive behaviors. It is as if they spend their days not in their right mind, like the man in our text, running about without constraint and unwilling to engage normal classroom life. When they speak, it is as if you are talking to a person possessed, and you wonder if you can get through to them.

Even as we know that leprosy is a disease treatable with anti-bacterial medication, not a spiritual disorder as described in the New Testament, we also know that demonic possession is a personalized metaphor in the New Testament for treatable social (and sometimes bio-chemical) disorders. In working with disruptive children, we know that we are not facing demons. Nonetheless, the profound troubles of some children make it hard to keep at it. Today’s reading from Luke challenges you as a teacher to be the persistent and patient presence of the love of Christ who calls all of us—including our troubled students—to our right mind and right living.

Questions for the Week:
When have you lost your patience with a student whose behaviors seemed beyond the pale? How can you show the patient but persistent love of Christ that call us all to right living? What professional skills do you need to develop to put this love into practice?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Pray that God will give you the patience to always see the true humanity and true selves of all troubled children and the wisdom to know when to call another professional into a child’s life.

This devotion was contributed by Mark Wilhelm, Executive Director, Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities.
June 30, 2019
Third Sunday After Pentecost

“As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus said to him, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

What does it mean to follow someone or something? What does it cost to follow someone?

Following someone or something can be exciting, can cause you to learn along the way, and can be a great experience. Following can also cause you to lose your way if you are not careful. It can be a free experience or cost you much more than money could ever pay for. We are asked to follow Jesus and it is not to take second place. Following by not letting other things get in the way or taking precedent. Nothing is to get in the way nor is anything to be more important. Following Christ means we are to give up all, knowing that with Jesus we will have more than the world could ever give. Not an easy task, but we do know that when we follow, God will provide and take care of our needs along the way. What a great God we have to follow!

As educators we need to model what it means to follow our God every day. The Lord has put us in the educational ministry and we need to make sure that those we teach, inspire, and develop every day see what it means to follow our Lord and Savior. During the year our students have many opportunities to receive things. How will you be able to show them that it is not about material things, but about what Christ provides for us as we follow Jesus? This is not very easy to do especially when they may see others getting more, receiving honors, or getting accolades for what they are accomplishing. Encourage them to continue to follow Jesus in all that they do. Empower them to follow Christ and in doing so, show others that Jesus gives them all they need. God does and will provide and all we need to do is follow with a faith
that is unconditional. As we struggle with this, know that Jesus will be there with us walking alongside, sometimes pushing us, sometimes pulling us, and sometimes carrying us. May God continue to be a blessing as we journey together with Jesus.

To God be the glory!

Questions for the Week:
How do you show others that you follow God? How do you follow Christ in a way that shows you are a child of God? How will you show your students today and tomorrow that you are willing to give up everything to follow Jesus?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Ask the Lord to help you as you show others what it means to follow. Also, pray that the Lord gives you the patience and strength to focus on the example of Jesus as you accomplish the task of following Christ. Pray for God to use you in a way that will show others you belong to the family of Christ. As you travel on the journey with Christ, ask for God to be guiding you along the way.

This devotion was contributed by Michael Rottmann, Principal at Grace Lutheran School, Winter Haven, Florida, and currently President of the ELEA National Board of Directors.
God was working through Naaman, but things got in his way. As the leader of an army, he won battles for his king. Yet, Naaman had leprosy which was miserable. Naaman found out that the prophet Elisha might be able to cure him. Naaman’s king wrote a letter and sent Naaman to the king where Elisha lived. That king got upset because he thought he was supposed to cure Naaman and he knew he couldn’t. Then Elisha sent a message and told the king to send Naaman to him. Finally, Naaman would get to see the prophet who could cure him. Except, it wasn’t that easy. Naaman didn’t even get to see Elisha. Instead, while Naaman stood in Elisha’s front yard, Elisha sent a messenger, who told him to wash in the river seven times to become clean.

Naaman was a strong man, who could win battles. Washing in the river seven times seemed silly to him. He wanted Elisha to wave his hands and declare that Naaman was cured. Instead of washing, he left, angry. He gave up hope that he would get rid of the leprosy. Then, his servants encouraged him to do what Elisha said. Naaman went to the river, washed seven times and the leprosy disappeared. His skin looked brand new!

Naaman’s anger kept him from following directions and almost kept him from being cured. Through the servants, God reminded him of the opportunity to live a better life. Even when Naaman gave up hope, God was there giving him another chance. By the grace of God, Naaman was cured.

Questions for the Week:
When have you become angry and refused to follow directions because you thought they were ridiculous? How can you figure out what God is leading you to do and enjoy God’s healing power and grace?

Personal Prayer for the Week:
Thank you, God, for your patience and for loving me, even when I am angry and don’t follow your directions. Thank you for the people in my life who help me understand your healing power and grace. Amen.

This devotion was contributed by Lynn Hess, who serves as the Director and teaches at The School of Grace, a parent participatory preschool, which serves typically developing children, children with special needs and children from refugee families. The school is a mission of Grace Lutheran Church in Raleigh, NC.
Then Amos answered Amaziah, “I am no prophet, nor a prophet’s son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’”

There is a wonderful book that I use with my High School students called *Do Hard Things: A Teenage Rebellion Against Low Expectations* by Alex and Brett Harris. One of the stories talks about elephants who stay put with a single rope around an ankle because they are trained over the years with shackles. They have learned to give in to the circumstances of their life.

How many times have you felt like Amos? How many times have you thought that you were not qualified to do what God has asked you to do? Scripture is filled with every day people like Amos, like you and me, who are called by God to a special task yet feel unqualified. It is easy to get shackled with the constraints of not enough money or staff or space or time; the home life of our children; the amount of paperwork and any number of things. Yet God has called you to be where you are, to do what you do to the best of your ability, knowing you will do the best you can with what you have – your love, your faith and your passion. So, go in peace to love and serve those whom God has entrusted to you trusting that God will provide!

**Question for the Week:**
What shackles you in your teaching? What shackles your children from learning and growing?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**
Pray, asking God to remove the systemic shackles that bind you and to give you a vision for the new school year and each child you will teach.
Spend time listening to God. Then give thanks that God is with you and will lead and guide you.

*This devotion was contributed by Pastor Juli Lejman-Guy, President of the Christian Education Network of the ELCA and Interim Pastor at Faith Lutheran, Fremont, Ohio.*
I have never liked the Mary and Martha story found in today’s text. Do you know why? Because my middle name is Martha. All my life I wanted to find the good aspect of Martha’s behavior in the story so I could somehow find personal justification to reflect my name. I have never heard sermons that exonerated Martha for tending to the business of getting the preparations done. 

So, today here is another perspective...perhaps in her busyness Martha was showing her desire to serve her Lord. Maybe she was using her best gift, which was serving, working in the kitchen, being a host. Once at a lunch after speaking to a church women’s group, someone came and asked me to come with her to the kitchen. She said, “I want you to meet the lady who makes the egg coffee.” At that moment I realized that not everyone’s gifts are “loud,” such as speaking to groups as I had done. Sometimes our gifts are “quiet,” like making egg coffee!! Maybe this woman had to stay in the kitchen to make the coffee while I was speaking. Just like Martha, while Mary was with Jesus.

Whatever our gift, God has given them to us to give away, use them whenever and wherever we can. So, Mary used her gift of listening, absorbing the words of Jesus. Perhaps Martha used her gift to serve, living the words of Jesus. Hmmm...now I feel better about my middle name.

**Question for the Week:**
What is your best gift and how are you giving it away?

**Personal Prayers for the Week:**
Dear Lord, make us mindful in our busyness that we honor you by living our gifts and serving you and others through them.

*This devotional was contributed by Dr. Kris Meyer, principal of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church & School in Waverly, IA.*
Our weekly chapel services always end with a prayer. The children will oftentimes sing, to the tune of “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”: “I will say my prayers, each and every day. I will always talk to God and God hears what I say.” I model the different ways that we can hold our hands in prayer and tell the children what their response to my prayer petitions will be, such as, “Thank you, God!” or “Hallelujah!”, spoken with great gusto. By doing this every week, the children are learning how to pray, using words that are familiar to them and participating in the prayers themselves, with their hands and their voices.

Jesus taught his disciples how to pray, using short, simple phrases that could easily be remembered and passed down through the generations, even to our own children. Not only does he teach us how to pray, modeling for us how we can teach the children in our care to pray, he assures us that God listens to our prayers and answers them. God promises to give us what we need, in the same way we give our children what they need. God’s answers to our prayers may not always be what we want, but we trust that God’s responses to our prayers will never harm us. As we teach our children how to pray, we can also teach them this important truth about how God answers our prayers so that their relationship with God can deepen and grow.

**Question for the Week:**
How does your own prayer life influence the ways you model prayer for the children in your care?

**Personal Prayer for the Week:**
Dear Jesus, teach me how to pray so that I might teach others how to pray. Help me to know that you always hear my prayers and that you will give me what I need. Amen.

*The Rev. Gail Rautmann is the pastor at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Lynnwood, WA, and offers weekly chapel services to the students of Gloria Dei Preschool.*
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