



The Branches

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Seasons of Life: Spring

The long, dark, cold season is finally breaking up. Somewhere in the coldest part of it I found it impossible to picture the color green outside in place of the white banks of snow. Thirty below and five months into coat-wearing weather had a lot to do with that.

Thankfully, God has never operated solely within the boundaries of my imagination. Here is the promised release from ice and darkness—longer and warmer days that coax the crocuses from the ground under the melting eves.

I've seen the change from winter to spring often enough to know that it never fails to come. It could be anytime between March or May, but eventually it gets here. I've been waiting for it since January, but God's timing is better, even when I don't agree. He takes desolate circumstances and "makes all things new" (Revelation 21:5). Whether in our lives or in the life of another, we see circumstances, attitudes, and weaknesses that, on the outside, look hopeless—totally incurable. "Will this never end?" "What next? This never improves!" "Why doesn't God just fix this?"

Those are not Christ-like questions to entertain. We feed our sinful human nature by voicing our impatience. The Bible shows us repeatedly that God is constantly at work in our situations, not only sustaining us but improving us. "But I'm not in the Bible." Not by individual name, but you have the same unwavering promises from Him (Eph. 1). Also, you can see that though He occasionally "hid His face" temporarily from His people, He never abandoned them, and it was always short-lived and for the good of those going through the trial. "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

We needn't question God's deliverance in difficult circumstances. God has given us His straight-forward Word, and He has also set up demonstrations of it in nature to remind us. He breaks and recreates hearts, nurtures dead to life, and sustains it all, just like we see in the seasons. He takes care of all situations; in the same way He clothes the lilies of the field (Matthew 6:28), how much more we can trust that He cares for us. We have the hope for relief in our circumstances told to us through His Word and actions. It is not necessarily a removal of the problems that plague us, but a new light shed on them. May a spring-like season warm your soul through God's Word and create a hope-filled contentment in your heart.

—Abby Matzke, St. Peter's, Stambaugh, MI

*"Then He who sat on the throne said,
'Behold, I make all things new.'"*

—Revelation 21:5a

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Spring is for the Hopeless

"The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children got the sour taste."

—Jeremiah 31:29 (NLV)

Nobody liked Michelle. She smelled terrible. And no wonder, because at nearly 10 years old, no one expected a little girl to mess her pants anymore. But Michelle did, and worse yet, she did it *on purpose*. That wasn't all. Michelle was disobedient, hyperactive, cruel, and impossible to reach. She had suffered neglect and abuse at the hands of numerous adults. No one loved Michelle—no one but God. And Michelle didn't have a clue about Him.

I met Michelle when I worked at Intermountain, a treatment center for emotionally disturbed children, located in Helena, Montana. The kids at Intermountain varied widely in their backgrounds, the extent of abuse, neglect, or family dysfunction they had endured, the number of homes and treatment centers in which they had been placed, and their current challenging behaviors. But they all had one thing in common: no one wanted them anymore. The kids' families, and more often the State, wanted these kids put away, given away, thrown away. So they were sent to us.

What do you do with eight emotionally disturbed kids? You take them camping! You take them fishing, hiking, swimming, skiing, to soccer, to art classes, to museums, to the park, and out to dinner. You take them to church. You watch movies with them, read stories, help with homework, cook their meals, wash their clothes, change their sheets, comb their hair. Does this sound familiar? You parent them. You love them and care for them, every single day. And you love them despite their intolerable behaviors, their anger, pain, aggressiveness, smelliness, or stubbornness. You teach these abandoned children what it means to "just be a kid and have fun."

Showing God's love to deeply hurting children has been one of the greatest challenges and most heartwarming experiences of my life. How can these children learn of God's great love when they have never felt love in their own lives? A sinner myself, I could never have shown Michelle the full extent of God's love. Our relationship could only begin to teach her about love and acceptance. I know that God loves me just as He loves Michelle, and that my sinful behaviors are just as intolerable to God as are Michelle's to the world. And yet, God continues to love us both, with His amazing love.

When you think of Spring, do you think only about the beautiful, the nurtured, the loved? Or do you think also of the down-trodden, the despised, the hopeless? The new beginnings of Spring are only possible when the harshness of Winter has expelled all hope. The entirety of our sins must be revealed to God with a repentant and sorrowful heart before His grace is shown to us through complete forgiveness and acceptance into His eternal kingdom. We welcome Spring by casting out Winter. Though our sins, and the sins of our parents and ancestors, are heaped upon us in a cascade of bitter winds and icy storms, the new and nurturing Spring blossoms through God, who loves us all.

—Katie Sumey, Faith, St. Louis, MO

The World Comes Together

A father wanted to read a magazine but was being bothered by his little daughter. Finally, he tore a sheet out of his magazine on which was printed a map of the world. Tearing it into small pieces, he gave it to her and said, "Go into the other room and see if you can put this together."

After a few minutes, she returned and handed him the map correctly fitted together. The father was surprised and asked how she had finished so quickly. "Oh," she said, "On the other side of the paper is a picture of Jesus. When I got all of Jesus back where He belonged, then the world came together."

—submitted by Ruth E. Pussehl, Gethsemane, Saginaw, MI

Easter Sunday, 1970

The April 1970, Palm Sunday Worship Service at Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church, Red Wing, MN had just finished. Holy Week promised its own unique blessing. Church cleaning, choir practices, special foods and other preparations for Easter Sunday were planned. Warming temperatures reminded us that spring was gently but firmly refusing to be "recalled" by winter! What a glorious time of the year!

Adding to the weeks' events, on Good Friday, I was expecting a visit from my fiancé, Buddy Gutzman. After being deployed for seven months on a "Med Cruise" out of the Charleston US Naval Base, we were delighted that he "got leave" for 4 days! On Good Friday, my dear sister, Ruth, and I headed up to the Minneapolis/St. Paul Airport to meet his plane. The 8:30 PM flight from Charleston did not deliver Buddy. The 10 PM flight did not either. Nor did the "red eye" at 1 AM. While at the Airport, my sister and I had great fun. But in the wee hours of Saturday morning, tired and disappointed we drove back to Red Wing—without "that sailor."

A phone call early Saturday morning from Buddy confirmed that the evening before an ice storm in SC had grounded all planes. He was on standby for the very next flight to Chicago. He hoped to arrive in Minneapolis on Saturday afternoon or evening. Full of renewed vigor, my sister and I tore off for the Airport again. We spent the next 12 hours checking out every possible flight that could be arriving from Chicago. Alas, even the last flight from Chicago to Minneapolis did not yield this phantom sailor. So in the wee hours of Sunday morning, double disappointed and triple tired, we drove back to Red Wing not only without "that sailor" but also very little zest for the 10 AM Easter Service that was to begin in a few short hours. A phone call early Sunday morning from Buddy confirmed that Saturday's wintry mix of snow, sleet and fog had grounded all flights at O'Hare. He was on standby for the very next flight to Minneapolis. He promised that he would join me for Easter Sunday Service, in Red Wing, no matter what it took!

I was beyond tired and wild horses could not have stirred my sister to go the Airport again. Not that I didn't blame her! Many other times in my life, she had championed with me for this reason or that. Her loyalty was true blue... but that early Easter morning look on her face told me that *this time* "that sailor" was going to have to get to Red Wing on his own power!

Our Redeemer's Easter Sunday Service commenced with songs of praise by the children, adult choir and congregation, special music by the organist, the fragrance of lilies, and brilliant sunshine. The Gospel Message of our Risen Lord filled our hearts and minds. As focused as I wanted to be, I was felt keenly the absence of "that sailor."

Our closing hymn, "I Know That My Redeemer Lives!" began. The powerful lyrics and glorious music of that hymn were sweeping me away. In my heart was gladness. In my eyes were tears of joy.

"He lives to silence all my fears..." By now, the congregation and choir were singing to me. "He lives to wipe away my tears..." By now, my tears were different. "He lives to calm my troubled heart..." Why was the pew space that I had saved for "that sailor" still empty? "He lives all blessings to impart..." A rich tenor voice was joining the singing of this final line... and "that sailor," dressed in his USN blues, was not only sliding into that saved pew space but also singing next to me!

We sang the last 3 verses of this hymn with hearts full of love, joy and thankfulness!

In 1970, a \$50.00 taxi ride was a lot of money to anyone, let alone a sailor. But to this sailor, that amount of money and that lengthy taxi ride was not going to deter him from hopefully getting to the church on time!

For the next 35 years, my husband and I enjoyed telling this story from our own points of view and experience. As you can imagine, my charitable sister has had her own story to share about the weekend—and rightfully so.

Today, I need not and do not want to save a pew space for my husband. Daily my heart is filled with God's Peace the he is "Safe In the Arms of Jesus." Daily my eyes are lifted up unto the hills and my walk is one of thankfulness for God's immeasurable blessings to us both.

On that Easter in 1970, "I Know That My Redeemer Lives" became our favorite hymn. God's grace allowed my husband and me to live our lives reflecting the Joy this sweet sentence gives. May each of you be so blessed.

—Laura Gutzman, St. Matthew, Dallas, TX

News & Notes

“The Potter and the Clay”

That was the theme for the CLC Women’s Retreat West held in Chadron, NE, on September 22–24, 2006. “But now, O Lord, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter; And we are all the work of Your hand” (Isaiah 64:8, ESV) was the inspiration for the leaders of devotions and the speakers we were blessed with. The topics were: being content as the work of God’s hand, why God’s plan is best for us, dealing with isolation, our relationships with other clay pots, and a workshop on keeping our clay emotionally intact. (Gloria Hanson’s speech concerning “isolation” is included in part in this issue of *The Branches*.)

Our Saturday afternoon activities included a crazy nine patch quilt class with one of the participants winning the quilt top at the end of the day. Other choices included a book discussion, a virtual grocery store tour with advice on healthier food choices, and paper book making. Pastor John Klatt led our Sunday morning worship service with the theme “God inspires our relationship to Him.” A sharing of VBS craft ideas, a sing-along with a harmonica and keyboard accompaniment, good conversation, wonderful meals, and everyone enjoying the game “Apples to Apples” rounded out the week-end. All received a hand-made clay pot to take home as a reminder of the weekend.

Everyone attending was blessed with Christian fellowship and learning throughout the weekend and a good time was had by all!

—Kay Morrison, Grace, Valentine, NE

The Seasons of Life— The Finale

*Spring
Summer
Fall
Winter*

When all the seasons of our life,
Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter,
Have been fulfilled as God directs—
We go to meet our Maker.
He bids us come
To His own home
Where we shall live forever.

When in a moment, we shall see
The New Heavens and New Earth,
And God our Father on His throne
Through Christ’s blood will judge our worth.
“Come, take your place,”
He’ll say, “by grace—”
The fruits of baptismal birth.

This Lenten time we dwell upon
Our Savior’s death on a tree
Remember that He rose again
From our sins to set us free.
Ascending high,
Into the sky,
Till He returns for me.

—Jacquelyn Radichel, Grace Lutheran, Fridley, MN

Christian Confidence

Many women struggle with having confidence. As we take on new roles (or continue to serve in old ones) within the church, where do we get the confidence to do God's work? Confidence consists of a feeling of assurance, especially self-assurance. But as a Christian, do we look to ourselves for this? Here is what Scripture has to say about confidence...

In Psalm 118:8 we read that "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man." And in Philippians 3:3 we learn to "have no confidence in the flesh." In Psalm 65:5 we read: "Oh God of our salvation, You... are the confidence of all the ends of the earth." And in Proverbs 3:26 we are reminded that "...the Lord will be your confidence."

That is just a small sampling of what the Bible instructs on confidence. Two of those verses warn against self-reliance or self-assuredness. The latter two point out from whence confidence is to come. We are to lean wholly on Jesus and His promises. With God's promises, of which we can be certain, we can be confident in the Lord. We can be so confident in His plan for our salvation that we are content to let Him use us to work and do His will, and we pray for wisdom to let His will be done, not ours, and not let our flesh get in the way.

So as we take on a role, perhaps one never filled before, we are able to have confidence that Christ will accomplish His will. It's not about us and what we can or cannot do, it's about Him and what He can do through us. So we plan to serve with confidence—not ours, but His.

So how would God like to use us to do His will? That is what we can reflect upon and explore. Are we assisting our fellow Christians to grow in knowledge through study of the Word of God? If not, how can we do this? Where will we get our confidence to do this? Let's not underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish His will, but let's move forward with confidence that we, by the grace of God, accomplish His will.

We pray: Lord, we pray that You will guide our thoughts and our plans to share Your Word . . . that You would have each of us grow in Your Word and be better servants to You. We pray that You would use us according to Your will to accomplish your plans, whatever they may be. Just as You sent Jesus to serve and not be served, so let us be like Jesus in this manner. Help us to glorify You in all that we do. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

—Trudy Wales, Grace, Fridley, MN

Trials Teach True Confidence

"For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead."

—2 Corinthians 1:8-9

**"Now 'tis the spring, and weeds are shallow-rooted;
Suffer them now, and they'll o'ergrow the garden,
And choke the herbs for want of husbandry."**

—William Shakespeare

Choices and True Success

Never having been a fan of snow and cold, the coming of spring was something that was much anticipated. In junior high and high school, my teammates and I would run laps through the school and work out in the weight room during the winter, getting ready for spring sports. Track was my favorite. It was wonderful to be outside, preparing for meets and watching the dull, gray landscape turn to beautiful shades of green.

During my junior high years, our track team had some success. That success, however, did lead me to make some bad choices in my life. When it was time to make the decision about attending high school at ILC, the choice was made to stay at home. I was scared to move outside my comfort zone. And, my friends and coaches did not want me to leave the team.

As the years passed, our track team became one of the more successful in the area. We were conference and district champions four or five years in a row. I held conference and district records in the 100 and 200 meter dashes, even having the opportunity to run the 100 meter dash at two state track meets. When I was a junior, our 800-meter relay team placed second at the state meet and the four of us were members of the all-state team.

Those events are all distant memories. The sport that was the biggest driving factor in my life for six years now has little bearing on my daily life.

Fast-forward to 2006. Our youngest son has a great passion for running. He was a member of the cross country team during his seventh and eighth grade years for the same public school I attended. Last winter he asked if he could go out for track. We agreed that he could.

What fun it was for me to watch my child participate and be able to relive some of my high school experiences. It was enjoyable to visit with former coaches and school mates.

Our son had a wonderful experience. He ran the mile and two-mile events throughout the season. The head coach was very impressed with his abilities and asked on several occasions if we would consider letting him stay at home, instead of going to ILC, so he could be part of the varsity team during the next season.

It would have been so easy to say yes to that request. My selfish nature would have loved nothing more than to keep him at home. We are grateful that the Lord did not let us waver from providing our youngest child with the opportunity to further his Christian education.

Every day each of us is faced with making choices and the consequences that result. The choice to remain at home instead of attending ILC resulted in both bad and good consequences. During my high school years, my choices of friends and my actions were far from God-pleasing. God's Word and the faith that should have been the most important things in my life were often neglected or not considered.

However, in His love and kindness, the Lord led me to a wonderful husband. That relationship was greatly blessed with three children. Ultimately, the Lord provided my husband with the greatest blessing of all, faith in Him as Savior. Through God's grace, our children have been able to attend the CDS at our church and high school and college at ILC. The gifts the Lord has provided through these opportunities are innumerable.

Because of our sin, we will not always make the best choices in our lives. How wonderful it is to know that we have in a Savior who forgives our sins and makes even the poorest choices work for our good.

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God..."

—Romans 8:28

—Jan Voit, St. John's, Okabena, MN

Encouragements

“That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

—2 Corinthians 12:10 (NIV)

I read a book title the other day that just fit this encouragement. It was called “Everybody’s Normal Till You Get To Know Them” by John Ortberg. Now, I haven’t read the book, but loved the title! The book description went on to say that we all come “as is.” How true! Whether or not we admit it to others, we all have things to deal with—weaknesses, difficulties, illnesses, and hardships. Sometimes they are very obvious for others to see, and we wish they were not. Other times, they are imperceptible, yet still there.

Those of you that know me personally probably know that I have had Crohn’s Disease for about 16 years. It’s an inflammatory disease of the bowel that causes severe pain and diarrhea. My wonderful husband could tell you hours of stories of how he has driven quickly to the nearest rest stop, found me a bush, and once even stood around me holding pillows to cover me and my porta-potty in the Minnesota Zoo Parking Lot. That story is funny now! Not so funny then, when I was 5 months pregnant and the tour bus drove by! I tell you these things not for sympathy—I am not whining. I wanted to share them to bring to light that we all have trials to deal with. Sure, there are times when I am very embarrassed about my Crohn’s. But the Lord always strengthens me and holds me together that I might continue serving Him day after day.

In the above Scripture, Paul was speaking of the thorn he had been given that he asked the Lord three times to take away. The Lord told him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9, NIV). We are not told exactly what the thorn was, and it does not matter. When we are prideful and full of ourselves, it’s nearly impossible for us to leave room for Christ to fill us with His grace. Through our weaknesses, difficulties, illnesses, etc, we are weak, and more apt to turn to Christ. Sad, but so, so human. It’s very difficult to be prideful and conceited when hiding behind a bush trying to shield myself from oncoming traffic, hoping I remembered to bring bathroom tissue. When I look at it this way, perhaps in His love for me, Crohn’s was a necessary part of my life because I am a sinful human being. I’ll never know for sure while I’m on this earth, but I do know that He will sustain me as He always has.

Whatever trial you have in your life, know that the Lord’s grace is with you, and will hold you close to Him. For when we are weak, then we are strong. Paul said we are to delight in our weaknesses. I am still trying to “delight” in my weaknesses... and hope that whoever drove by me in that tour bus never sees me again! God Bless!

—Julie Schopp, St. Luke’s, Lemmon, SD; Julie has recently launched a website for her Encouragements—more have been written than we publish here. Visit the website at: www.encouragementsbyjulie.com. Email Julie at: encouragements@sdplainswb.com.

“Difficulties are God’s errands; and when we are sent upon them we should esteem it a proof of God’s confidence—as a compliment from God.”

—Beecher

Food Section

After a long, cold, snowy winter, spring is indeed very welcome. In the kitchen, the simmering soups and stews of winter give way to fresh ingredients and lighter fare. I am thinking ahead to early spring greens, asparagus, and marinating items for the grill. Below, you will find a tangy dressing for spinach or field greens and a few marinade recipes to encourage you to wheel out that gas grill. And to top it off, we have something sweet for dessert too.

Several women had humorous and poignant memories of Easter and have shared them with us as well. Included is a fun recipe to brighten your Easter table.

For the next issue, we are looking for recipes that remind you of a loved one—those recipes you use which immediately bring to mind the giver. I have several from my dear mother in law, Lois Mackensen, who isn't able to cook and bake like she used to, which have become family favorites. Please open your card files and share those with all of us! Send items for the Food Section to Gail at gsmackensen@yahoo.com.

—Gail Mackensen, Messiah, Hales Corners, WI



Delicious Dishes

Edible Easter Baskets

- 1 Tbs. butter
- 1 c. mini-marshmallows
- 3 Shredded Wheat biscuits (crushed)
- Jelly Beans (regular or mini size)

Place butter in medium size bowl. Microwave at 100% power for about 20 seconds or until melted. Add marshmallows. Coat marshmallows with butter. Microwave at 100% power for about 45–60 seconds or until marshmallows puff and mixture can be stirred smooth. Stir in crushed cereal. Shape mixture into Easter baskets or nests. The size is your choice. Let cool on waxed paper. When cool, fill with jelly beans. Makes 4 to 6, depending on what size you make them.

—Laura Gutzman, St. Matthew, Richardson, TX

Lemon Dressing

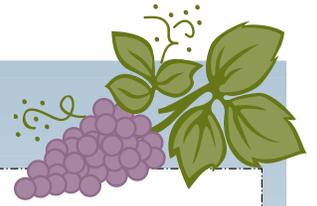
- 1/4 c. vegetable oil
- 2 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- 1/2 tsp. sugar
- 1 1/2 tsp. Dijon mustard
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1/8 tsp. pepper

Mix all ingredients well. Toss with salad just before serving. Makes 1/2 cup.

—Gail Mackensen, Messiah, Hales Corners, WI

Dad (Pastor Ude) and Mr. Noeldner counted and hid Easter eggs (not the plastic variety) for everyone to find. We were living in the basement of the church in Middleton so they hid the eggs in the sanctuary as it was cold and wet outside. I am sure we had a lot of fun but all I remember was that at the end of the day one egg was missing and no one could find it. Two weeks later, in church while Mrs. Noeldner was playing organ, she glanced down and saw between two pedals the white shell of the missing Easter egg. I have heard the story told that without missing a note she bent down and retrieved the lovely egg so as not to spoil the service with such a smell as a rotten egg. I don't think we ever used 'real' eggs again.

—Mandy Bailey, Messiah, Hales Corners



Delicious Dishes

Sesame Soy Marinade

1/3 cup soy sauce
3 Tbsp. sesame oil
3 Tbsp. minced green onions, including tops
1 Tbsp. minced fresh ginger
1 Tbsp. vinegar
2 cloves garlic, pressed
dash of cayenne pepper

Makes enough marinade for 1 1/2 lbs. meat, fish or chicken.

—Gail Mackensen, Messiah, Hales Corners, WI

Soy Ginger Marinade

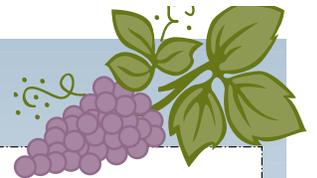
1/4 cup minced fresh spearmint
1 Tbsp. grated gingerroot
2 cloves garlic, minced
1/3 c. molasses
3 Tbsp. soy sauce
3 Tbsp. Hoisin sauce
2 Tbsp. water
2–1 lb. pork tenderloins (or chicken or beef)

Combine all marinade ingredients thoroughly. Pour over tenderloins in bowl or resealable bag and marinate for 8–24 hours. Coat grill rack with cooking spray and grill slowly for 30–45 minutes till just slightly pink in center. This marinade is especially good with pork tenderloin, but works well with chicken and beef as well.

—Gail Mackensen, Messiah, Hales Corners, WI

Nothing says spring better for me than the first rhubarb pie, which sometimes makes its appearance for Easter Sunday dinner, if Easter is late enough and the weather warm enough.

—Sue Eichstadt, Messiah, Hales Corners, WI



Delicious Dishes

Melting Moments Cookies

1 c. butter
1/3 c. powdered sugar
2/3 c. corn starch
1–1/4 c. flour
1/2 tsp. salt
1 tsp. vanilla

Cream butter and sugar. Add the remaining ingredients. Drop by teaspoon on ungreased cookie sheet. Bake until light tan around edges, 350 degrees, for about 12 minutes.

—Sue Eichstadt, Messiah, Hales Corners, WI

Icing

1–1/2 c. powdered sugar
2 Tbsp. butter
1/2 tsp. orange rind
1–1/2 tsp. orange juice
a drop of food coloring, if desired

Frost cooled cookies. Makes about 3 dozen.

—Sue Eichstadt, Messiah, Hales Corners, WI

Dealing with Isolation

This article consists of portions of a speech made by Gloria Hanson at the Chadron Women's Retreat West, 2006.

Isolated? What does that mean? To be separated from others; to be alone. We all know people who are isolated, and probably even more people who simply feel isolated for one reason or another. You have probably had feelings of isolation yourself. Maybe you feel that way right now. We don't have to be alone to feel isolated.

Did the people of God ever feel isolated? Think back to all the different stories we learned about Old Testament believers. Adam and Eve probably felt this way when expelled from the Garden of Eden. Consider Noah and his family floating on the waters that destroyed the earth, Lot after fleeing his hometown with his family and losing his wife, Joseph after his brothers threw him in the pit and sold him into slavery, and Job after his friends and his wife turned on him in his trials.

What did these of God's people do when they felt isolated? Adam and Eve believed God's promise of a Messiah to free them of sin (Genesis 3). Noah, in faith, followed God's commands. Noah was given a promise by God that He would never destroy the earth in a flood again; the rainbow symbolizes that promise (Genesis 9:9-17). Lot trusted the Lord and was delivered from destruction (Genesis 19:15-27). Joseph trusted in the message God delivered to him through many trials. God turned the wickedness of others into good for Joseph and his family (Genesis 37-50). Job believed that God would take care of him no matter what Satan did to him. He trusted in God! And God blessed him more in the end than he had been blessed in the beginning (Job 42:12).

What about people in the New Testament? Think about Christians from that time. Do you think any of them ever felt isolated? Mary could have felt quite isolated after the angel announced that she was with child knowing she had never been with a man. She believed in the promise of the Messiah, but now she was to be His mother. Who could she talk about this to? Who would believe her? Consider Peter after denying he knew Jesus and being caught for it, Stephen who was stoned to death for preaching the Gospel, Paul who was imprisoned several times and was beaten for his testimony of Christ, and remember Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane—none of the followers would even stay awake with Him to pray. Though Jesus is God, He is also man, and the human part of Him must have felt isolation.

What did these New Testament believers do? Mary was joyful and thanked God for the great honor and grace He was bestowing upon her. She had faith that He would work it out according to His plan for her and the whole world. She rushed to tell Elizabeth and spoke the words of the Magnificat (Luke 1:40-55). Peter went out and wept for his sin, prayed for God's forgiveness, then believed he was forgiven. His confession of Jesus Christ as Savior is the "rock" upon which Christ built His church (Luke 22:62, Matthew 16:18). Stephen knelt in prayer and asked for forgiveness for those stoning him and for God to receive his spirit (Acts 7:57-60). Paul dedicated his life to spreading the Gospel and traveled far from home to do so (Acts 9:20ff). Jesus prayed "Thy will be done," then willingly did what was necessary out of love. He did it without complaint. What agony He endured for us! (Luke 22:39-46)

When we feel isolated, we should turn to God and His Word. Only God can give us the strength to face our feelings of isolation. In His Word we find the answers we seek. In the book of Psalms, we find many passages that we can turn to when we feel isolated.

"I have set the Lord always before me; Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved" (Psalm 16:8).

"I will love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies" (Psalm 18:1-3).

Here are a few other verses you may turn to: Psalm 46:1-2, 7; Psalm 55:22; Psalm 55:16-17; Psalm 86:6-7; Psalm 119:116. And in the New Testament a few helpful verses are: Ephesians 6:10-11, 17-18; 1 Peter 5:6-7; Galatians 3:26-29. We can also turn to our hymnals. We have so many beautiful and uplifting hymns! Consider the words of TLH 435:

Continued on next page

Dealing with Isolation—Continued

“My spirit on Thy care, Blest Savior, I recline;
Thou wilt not leave me to despair, for Thou art Love Divine.

“In Thee I place my trust, On Thee I calmly rest;
I know Thee good, I know Thee just, And count Thy choice the best.

“Whate’er events betide, Thy will they all perform;
Safe in Thy breast my head I hide Nor fear the coming storm.

“Let good or ill befall, It must be good for me;
Secure of having Thee in all, Of having all in Thee.”

Nothing happens in this world that God doesn’t have control over. Nothing happens to any of us that He doesn’t know about. Then, we may ask, why does God allow us to have these feelings of isolation? God uses our loneliness and isolation to bring us closer to Him.

I would like to share some words written by our pastors, who speak far more eloquently than I do. The first part is a sermon that Pastor Reim gave on July 23, 2006. He was talking about Philip meeting the Eunuch from Ethiopia—who also felt isolated:

“The Eunuch probably felt like a stranger in Jerusalem. He was barred from the temple by something he couldn’t change, but still, he knew about the true God, the One who saves. Philip explained Jesus and what He had done, and he baptized the Eunuch. Like Jesus, who died for our sins, we who are baptized, die to our sins... And like Jesus, who rose from the dead, we who are baptized arise every day to a glorious new life, a life filled with the love of God; a life marked by the peace He brings to our hearts; a life quickened by the hope that rests with a living Jesus Christ; a life rich in the joy of salvation. God, in His love for us, knew us before we were born. He chose us for Himself through Christ’s redemption. It’s not a credit to us, for we are no different than anyone else; it is to the praise of His grace. God carries out in time what He willed in eternity. He uses circumstances and events in our lives to bring us to a knowledge of our Savior, and He manages our lives to keep us in the faith and leads us to serve Him until the end of our lives.”

The second part is from one of the daily devotions that are sent through email every day of the week. We received one in August that I felt was fitting to the subject here.

“How can we withstand, maintain? By walking with Jesus; by constantly looking to Him; by using Word and Sacrament consistently, regularly, thoughtfully; by making Christ’s Word our daily companion. When we, by God’s grace, focus on what Christ has done for us and says to us, then nothing else can be more real, more important, or more valuable. Salt must be in contact with the food it preserves. As Christians, we cannot withdraw from this world and the problems that afflict it because of sin. We are to live out our faith right in the middle of unbelief. We are to practice Christ’s mercy, love, and forgiveness right where there is so little mercy, love, and forgiveness. Where lies and misconceptions rule, we are to boldly speak the truth in love. By living our faith in word and actions, we Christians are God’s preservative in a rotting world, counteracting the decay and corruption that is all too prevalent. We do this, holding fast to the truth of God’s Word, by prayers of intercession, by the example of godly living. So often we want to charge on ahead of God. We like to determine our own way to go rather than let His word show us the way. This is a recipe for disaster. God’s guidance is infallible. He will not lead us astray, rather He Himself will lead us in the way everlasting.”

This weekend we have been talking about how we are like clay pots. A clay pot can easily crack or break—and so can we. But no matter what happens in our lives, we must remember that God is in control we need to turn to Him and His Word. Above all, we need to pray. Pray for God’s help, His guidance, and His strength to endure whatever comes our way. God alone can enable us to rise above our circumstances. His Word tells us:

“Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6).

Continued on next page

Dealing with Isolation—Continued

“And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive” (Matthew 21:22).

My husband, Kirby, and I are both from Minnesota. We were raised in families who went to Sunday School and church services every Sunday, without question. I played the church organ, and we sang in our church choirs. We were taught to pray before meals, to thank God for all the blessings in our lives, and to seek His guidance and strength whenever trials arose. We didn't know any other way of life.

Kirby served 21 years in the military, and if any of you know anything about the military, you know that where they send a soldier, they usually send his wife and children too. We always felt that we were in it together. And, I might add, in those 21 years, we lived in 16 different homes—from the east to the west coast and several places in between, as well as three tours (totaling 8 years) in Germany.

We spent most of our military years in areas where there were no churches—at least none that we wanted to attend, none that taught what we believed. We were isolated. We knew we had to find our own way to worship God, using the gifts and tools He had given us, praying that whatever we did would be acceptable to Him.

We set aside time every Sunday to hold church services. We used audio cassette taped services, then the CLC Video Tape Mailing Program. When the children were old enough, we had Sunday School class for them before our worship services. In the summer, I had a week of VBS for the children. We never asked, “Shall we have church and Sunday School today?” It was a given that we would. We wanted the children to grow up knowing God and how He expects us to live. Our friends knew that Sunday morning was our worship time and they did not disrupt us. On Christmas Eve, we all dressed up and had our own special Christmas program, singing all the wonderful Christmas songs, with the children memorizing and reciting the wonderful Christmas story.

We felt isolated, and we were isolated, from fellow CLC Christians, but we were not alone. God was with us (Matthew 18:20). Every time we read and studied His Word, and in every moment of our lives, He has promised to be there for us.

When we feel alone, when we have no one to talk to, when we feel that no one cares about us, we may find that if we do something to help others we actually help ourselves. (Matthew 25:40, Mark 10:45, and Hebrews 13:2 are suggested by the author to expound upon the thought of serving others.)

Before Kirby and I were married, he was in the war in Viet Nam. I felt so alone during that time, and I felt sorry for myself. Someone told me often of the story about the man who felt sorry for himself because he didn't have any shoes . . . until he met the man who didn't have any feet. That story made me stop and think. We need to remember that no matter how bad our own circumstances seem, there is always someone who is worse off than us.

We should also remember there are people who do not know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. How do they deal with the trials in their lives without knowing they can call on the name of the Lord? Who do they turn to? What message of comfort do they have? We need to tell them of the hope that is in us. 2 Corinthians 1:3–5 tells us: “Blessed be... the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.”

How thankful we should be that we are God's chosen people. He is our Father and we are His children. He has promised to hear our prayers—and to answer us. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Luke 11:9–10).

When we feel isolated, we need to turn to God. We need to search the Scriptures to find the passages that will reassure us of God's love for us and remind us of His promise that we will never be alone. God is always with us. He alone can make our feelings of isolation disappear. We may be like clay pots that easily crack or break, but if we rely totally on God, we can deal with whatever comes our way. He alone can give us the strength to deal with the ‘cracks’ and ‘breaks’ in our pottery. If you ever experience feelings of isolation, I pray that you will find the strength you need and the comfort you seek in the only one who will always be there for you—your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Hebrews 13:5 reminds us, “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”

—Gloria Hanson, *Prince of Peace, Loveland, CO*

My Soul Rejoices

Why is it that the self despairs
When on its frame we load our cares?
Why is it that the soul rejoices
When on the Lord depend our choices?

The self is molded by the will;
It cannot stretch the spirit full.
No wider sphere does it require
Than that we seek of earth's desire.

But Christ enlightens all the heart,
To spirit, vision does impart.
A wider sphere does He require
Than that we seek of earth's desire.

Our Lord is present infinitely,
Master of the cosmos. He
Takes His state from God above,
Yet bears man's shape to show such love

As none but Holy God can teach,
Unsearchable but within reach.
Tender Shepherd, do not cease
To fold us in transcendent peace.

Little worldlings whom you love
So much that on the cross you gave
Your life that we might joyful be,
By grace forgiven and truly free.

Grace and forgiveness, these certainties
Endure throughout the centuries;
Comfort and strengthen, exalt us to see
The splendor of homecoming, ours by decree.

—Janet Wilson, *Messiah, Hales Corners, WI*

Sister so Still

My sister went away one day,
so quiet... and so still.
Carried by the angels' wings
up that last great hill.

She doesn't seem so far away—
I can feel her yet.
My spirit nearly touches hers
the older that I get.

So thankful for her all those years;
Her Way was paid in Glory
Not ashamed of the Word of God,
she told me that same sweet story.

I'm glad she helped me o'er some bumps
along Life's treacherous road.
She and the Lord together
helped me shoulder my load.

I smile when I just think of her.
I love Christ 'cuz He first loved me.
The bottom line is this:
She helped me, don't you see?
Thank you, sister.

—Elna Krueger, *Faith, Markesan, WI*



A Look Ahead

Upcoming Themes

July's theme will be "Where to Look for Joy." All of us fall into the trap of negativism. Remember to renew your subscriptions to join us for a look into how to combat and defeat this attitude problem!

Sharpen those pencils! The deadline for articles intended for the July issue is May 15th.

This allows time for compiling, editing, formatting, printing, and mailing. Please send articles of all types via regular mail to: Abby Matzke, P.O. Box 238, Stambaugh, MI 49964, or email to: abby_matzke@yahoo.com.

Women of Faith

On Christmas Eve 2006, my 24-year-old cousin literally dropped dead.

Derek had been seemingly healthy, living an independent life, working and indulging his artistic streak. But underneath lurked an unpredictable ailment, either a weak heart or blood vessel, we still don't know.

At the visitation I approached Derek's mom, my Aunt Sandy, number 15 of Grandma Hager's 16 children, my dad's younger sister.

I hugged her tightly, then clasped her hands into mine. I looked into her watery eyes as my own teared up.

"Remember your mom," I said.

Grandma Hager buried five children. Two in 1933, babies who were victims of a whooping cough epidemic. One in 1983, when a heart attack claimed Uncle Davey. Then in 1990, two more: Uncle Neil in February, again a heart attack, and my dad in July, terribly sick one day and dead three days later of a previously undiagnosed cancer.

Sandy looked at me and gave a wan smile. "I remember," she said.

Grandma was the epitome of strength through faith. How else would anyone be able to deal with the grief that comes with losing five children?

Grandma went about her faith quietly. She didn't make a show of it, didn't preach to her kids and grandkids, didn't make a spectacle of herself as the Pharisees did.

She led by quiet example. The serene picture of Jesus in her house. The wooden sculpture of hands folded in prayer that sat for years by her bedside, and now sits by mine. The wooden rosary with beads the size of golf balls that hung on her wall. Her devotion to Mass every Sunday. Reverently receiving Communion, crossing herself, and going back to the pew to kneel in contemplation.

Of course the deaths of her children saddened her. I witnessed her tears at Davey's funeral, at Neil's, at my dad's. But then I'd see her after that, at family weddings or graduations or our massive Christmas Day gatherings at her house where more than 100 relatives crammed into her rambler in Medford. On those days, her eyes glowed and a smile never left her mouth, as if the corners were pulled up by invisible strings.

She took delight in what was before her. Her family here on Earth gave her immense joy. She turned her energies toward them, because she knew the children who had gone before her were in a better place and she would see them once again. That's the definition of faith.

Not that her faith never wavered. The family story goes that after baby Mary Jean died in 1933, three months after Lucille had passed away, Grandma lost her composure. She was almost 27 years old and had given birth four times, but now sobbed and wailed for the two who were dead.

The nurse at the hospital tried to calm Grandma, but her comforting words of no use. So the nurse slapped her.

"Stop that now," the nurse admonished. "You have two girls at home who need you. Your other babies are with God."

Grandma always remembered that, and it was that message she remembered more than 50 years later when her other children died.

It was that message I wanted Sandy to know. And she knows it; I don't have to remind her. For Sandy takes after her mom, and I know she'll be all right because she has faith.

—Rachael Hanel, *Immanuel, Mankato, MN*

Subscription Renewal Time!

2007–2008 Subscriptions

Mark your calendars! July 2007-June 2008 subscriptions are due **June 15, 2007** to ensure that you receive your July issue. Rates will stay the same at **\$12.00** for 4 issues per year. Individual subscribers will receive a postcard reminder in addition to bulletin inserts at church. Please keep in mind that subscriptions are not limited to women of the CLC. Please contact the business manager with any questions.

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***I am the Vine,
you are the branches.
He who abides in Me,
and I in him,
bears much fruit;
for without Me
you can do nothing.***

—John 15:5

***“Let us lay aside every
weight, and the sin which
so easily ensnares us,
and let us run with
endurance the race that
is set before us.”***

—Hebrews 12:1



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