**ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH,WOODLAND, MI**

**Midweek Lenten Service, March 10, 2021**

**Week of Lent 3: Change of Circumstances**

We move from elementary to middle school, or from our hometown to a new community. We lose a job, or gain a child, or accomplish a goal, or relinquish a dream. Through it all, we learn to give thanks to God in all circumstances.

**OPENING DIALOGUE**

For all our blessings, we give thanks to the Lord.

**God is our rock and salvation, a help in times of plenty.**

With all our burdens, we pray to the Lord.

**God is our rock and salvation, a help in times of need.**

In all our celebrations, we sing praise to the Lord.

**God is our rock and salvation, a help in times of joy.**

With all our grief, we cry to the Lord.

**God is our rock and salvation,**

**a help in times of sorrow.**

We will not fear, though the earth should change.

**God is our rock and salvation; thanks be to God!**

**GATHERING SONG “Jesus Is a Rock in a Weary Land” ELW 333**



**PRAYER**

O God our rock and salvation, you walk with us through all the ups and downs of life. Whatever our circumstances, bring us closer to you. Teach us to rejoice in the good times, find hope through the bad times, and always place our trust in you. In Jesus’ name we pray.

**Amen.**

**PSALM Psalm 103:1-5, 13-18**

1Bless the LORD, O my soul,
 and all that is within me,
 bless his holy name.
**2Bless the LORD, O my soul,
 and do not forget all his benefits —** 3who forgives all your iniquity,
 who heals all your diseases,
 **4who redeems your life from the Pit,
 who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,**
 5who satisfies you with good as long as you live
 so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

**13As a father has compassion for his children,
 so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.**
 14For he knows how we were made;
 he remembers that we are dust.
**15As for mortals, their days are like grass;
 they flourish like a flower of the field;** 16for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
 and its place knows it no more.
**17But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting
 on those who fear him,
 and his righteousness to children's children,** 18to those who keep his covenant
 and remember to do his commandments.

**READING 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24**

A reading from 1 Thessalonians.

12But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; 13esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. 14And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. 15See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. 16Rejoice always, 17pray without ceasing, 18give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19Do not quench the Spirit. 20Do not despise the words of prophets, 21but test everything; hold fast to what is good; 22abstain from every form of evil.
23May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**GOSPEL READING Luke 12:22-34**

### The holy gospel according to Luke.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

22He said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. 23For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. 24Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! 25And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? 26If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? 27Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 28But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you — you of little faith! 29And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. 30For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.
32Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

**REFLECTION Pastor Becky Ebb-Speese “Change of Circumstances”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

 This is the sermon that I had prepared for our Lenten service that we did not have last year. I did use it for the first Sunday that Tara and I made an attempt at recording me last year. It seemed so fitting for what we were dealing with at that time as our theme was to be change of circumstances.

As I read it a year later, I am amazed at all of the change of circumstances that we have been through as a congregation and as families and individuals this year. Some things that I said a year ago remain the same.

We have not gathered as a congregation in our pews for a whole year, other than the 6 weeks we were able to do so in the fall. This makes me very sad but it has been necessary to keep everyone safe and to stop to spread of this virus even as many are starting to get the vaccine. Yet, we have been and are still the church. We are being the church more in our homes now, but we are still the church. We enjoyed the parking lot services in the summer and I am thrilled that people still want to come worship in their cars this winter. We had church on FB live and now are able to fully live stream from the sanctuary. Christmas Eve in the parking lot was sure different, but it was a beautiful, simple service and I am glad that so many came. Meanwhile, please stay in contact with each other, especially those who are alone. People are weary of being isolated. There are some who may need help getting food or other items. We can help them. We are the church. We will get through this as we reach out to each other and care for the needs of all.

That being said, its always a challenge when life throws us a curve ball. This is happening so much right now. We have had things we have counted on doing or going to are being cancelled and things continue to be cancelled or done virtually into this year. I remember how last year I already had a pretty full calendar with a lot of events to look forward to. And day by day, week by week, every single one of those events ended up being cancelled and some of the same is still happening for this year. Events are either not happening or will be done virtually. We have no idea when life as we used to know it will resume.

 This virus outbreak is just one thing that is causing a lot of changes in circumstances around our world. But every day we may face some kind of change in plans that we were not expecting. In Michigan winters, it can happen with snow storms. Look what happened to Texas in when the winter storm hit there. It happens with routine health issues when we have to cancel plans due to illness. It happens when we get into unexpected accidents which can cause injuries that are life changing, if even for a time. It happens when jobs are lost due to company downsizing and now due to so many businesses closing due to the pandemic. It happens when a loved one dies and we have to adjust to a new normal.

Not all changes in circumstances are negative. Some are changes that we want. We may want to move into a new home. We may want a new job. We may want to retire. Students may want to leave home to go to college or change majors along the way in college. We may want to choose to live healthier lifestyles.

Even when circumstances beyond our control hit, once we get through the shock of things that happen in life, sometimes we find that the new normal is better than the old normal in time.

It has been said that when we make plans, God laughs. When we think that we are completely in control in our lives, we find out that we are not when things happen that are out of our control. There are times when we question God’s plan in our lives, especially when things happen that are hard to deal with.

We cannot get through life without change. Our circumstances change all of the time. Resilience is an important word. Have you noticed that some people handle change, even negative or difficult changes with such a positive attitude or with great strength. Does this mean that the change of their circumstances doesn’t bother them? Probably not. Does this mean that they have stronger faith than me? Probably not. It means that some people have a strong amount of resilience.

We build resilience through dealing with changes in circumstances.

Everyday Health: **Common Questions: Resilience**

“Resilience is the ability to withstand adversity and bounce back from difficult life events. Being resilient does not mean that people don’t experience stress, emotional upheaval, and suffering. Some people equate resilience with mental  toughness, but  demonstrating resilience includes working through emotional pain and suffering.

**Common Questions: Resilience**

Resilience is important because it gives people the strength needed to process and overcome hardship. Those lacking resilience get easily overwhelmed, and may

turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms. Resilient people tap into their strengths and support systems to overcome challenges and work through problems.

The good news is, resilience isn’t a fixed trait. You can build or bolster resilience
by changing thoughts and behaviors, and finding your inner strength. Factors that can help people process trauma and become more adaptable include social support, realistic planning, self-esteem, coping skills, communication skills, and emotional regulation.”

I would add to this, faith and having a faith community. When talking with people who have gone through a life changing circumstance, those who are people of faith have almost always said these words to me, “I don’t know how people without faith would get through this.” We have certainly been confronted with the need to be resilient in this past year.

Our Gospel lesson is a reminder that God takes care of our needs in every circumstance of life. We take our lessons from nature, from flowers and birds who have no apparent need for worry. As God provides for all living things, God also provides for us.

There is a verse in Deuteronomy 31:6 that God speaks to the people of Israel as they prepare to enter the promised land. They were fearful because of the people already living in that land. There had been reports from the spies that Joshua sent in to the land, of giants living there. This was a huge change of circumstances after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. Though they were tired of the wilderness, it was familiar. Though they had looked forward to entering the promised land, it was scary.

6Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the LORD your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you."

While at MapleCreek, I got to know a woman who was struggling with the onset of Alzheimer’s Disease. When I first met her, she was still pretty high functioning. She knew that she had this disease but was able to hold good conversations. She was a woman who had strong faith. One thing that she did was journal about her experiences every day. We talked a lot about her fears of how this disease would progress for her. One day, she asked me, in tears, if she would ever forget God or lose her faith? This was heartbreaking to hear her ask this. I assured her that God would never forget her and that the spiritual part of the brain is not lost in the disease process. I had seen so many people in very late stages of Alzheimer’s still be able to sing a hymn or even say the Lord’s prayer, even after they had lost their speech. This seemed to give her much comfort. Then she surprised me by reciting this verse from Deuteronomy. This became a very important verse for her as she lost more and more of her memory. She wrote in in her journal and often remembered it in times when she was having a lot of distress.

The fact that God promises to never leave or forsake us, is what gives us resilience in the changes of circumstances in our lives. Whether they are circumstances of our choosing or things that happen to us, whether they are positive or negative, we have this promise that though life changes all around us and in us, God is a solid constant. God will never leave us or forsake us.

Let’s remember these words in all that probably will still happen in the season to come. We don’t know when we will be back to normal and normal may become a new normal. We have learned a lot during this time of physical distancing and isolation. I hope that you have used this time to draw closer to God and to take this period of time to slow down from normally very busy lives.

But we are the church. Our circumstances have changed but God has not. God is with us and will get us through this very new and strange time. Lets hold on to that hope and promise today and in the days ahead.

May the peace of God which passes all human understanding keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

**HYMN OF THE DAY “Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me” ELW 623**



**PRAYERS**

O God our help,

you walk with us through all of life’s changes.

**Grant us strength, patience, wisdom, and understanding.**

O God our hope,

you come to us in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

**Show us your salvation,**

**and lead us in the way of the cross.**

O God our shelter,

you enfold us like a mother hen gathering her chicks.

**Watch over all who are sick, grieving, lonely, and in need this day.**

O God our home, you claim us as your beloved children.

**Lord, remember us when you come into your kingdom.**

All this we ask through the one who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

**Amen.**

**LORD’S PRAYER**

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

**Our Father, who art in heaven,**

**hallowed be thy name,**

**thy kingdom come,**

**thy will be done,**

**on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread;**

**and forgive us our trespasses,**

**as we forgive those**

**who trespass against us;**

**and lead us not into temptation,**

**but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,**

**and the power, and the glory,**

**forever and ever. Amen.**

**THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus,

and especially for all who are suffering or are in any affliction.

Merciful God, you sent your Son to be our peace.

Help all those who suffer any pain or grief, hopelessness or anxiety.

In your great mercy,

**hear us, O God.**

Mighty God,

mercifully grant strength to the weak

and comfort to those who suffer,

that their sickness and pain may be turned into health.

In your great mercy,

**hear us, O God.**

God of peace and reconciliation,

bring an end to the sickness of the world,

especially violence, terrorism, war, and their causes.

In your great mercy,

**hear us, O God.**

Holy God, Holy One,

your Son prayed that your people may be one.

May the gift of baptism be a power

for healing the church’s brokenness,

and bless all efforts for renewal and Christian unity.

In your great mercy,

**hear us, O God.**

Loving God,

mend broken relationships and bring peace

to our families, our congregation, this community, and the world.

In your great mercy,

**hear us, O God.**

Eternal God, we thank you for all the faithful departed. Heal the pain of all who grieve.

In your great mercy,

**hear us, O God.**

O God, we bring these intercessions before you,

knowing that you will hear us as you have promised,

and will answer according to the mercy shown in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

**BLESSING**

The Lord of peace give you peace at all times and in all ways.

In the name of the Father, ☩ Son, and Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

**SENDING SONG “In the Cross of Christ I Glory” ELW 104**



**DISMISSAL**

Go now in peace, for nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

**Thanks be to God.**

Some of the prayers are based on the text of “O God, our help in ages past” (ELW 632; text by Isaac Watts) and Luke 23:42.

Text of the Lord’s Prayer from “Salvation unto us has come” (ELW 590). Text © 2006 Augsburg Fortress.

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**Thank you to all who served in worship today!**

**Presider: Pastor Becky Ebb-Speese Musician: Martha Yoder**