

# Alive Together in Christ

Reflections to honor  
75 years of ministry

*A devotional created by and for  
the people of Faith Lutheran Church  
Glen Ellyn, Illinois  
2022*

# How are we alive together in Christ?

*We are made by God.*

How blessed we are at Faith to have known this for the past 75 years! What joy to celebrate God who has been so faithful to this congregation!

*We are made by the God of relationships.*

Embodied by the Father-Son-Spirit relationship of the Trinity, God has always desired to be in relationship with us. God is constantly reaching out to us in many and various ways. For 75 years, God has called to us in *this* place, Faith Lutheran in Glen Ellyn. The faithfulness that's been lived out in this congregation has shown that God is always with us.

*We are made by the God of relationships to be in relationship with each other.*

As you read through this devotional celebrating Faith's 75th anniversary, you will find stories of how our lives are intertwined with one another. You will read time and again how God intends for us to be together. Some stories are so very relatable, some so very surprising! Interwoven in every story, though, is God's faithfulness. Let these stories of our relationships with God and each other inspire you!

*Pastor Shelly Satran & Pastor Joe Yucha*



## Alive together in Christ, we praise the Lord.

*Amen.*

## Memories and Hope

*For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations. (Psalm 100:5 NRSV)*

At his last supper with the disciples, Jesus instructs: “Do this in remembrance of me.” We are to remember Jesus as we worship together and live in community.

Remembering is, in part, what enables us to be alive together in Christ. When the Psalmist declares that the Lord’s “steadfast love endures forever,” we remember how those who came before us transmitted the faith in words and deeds that live in our memories and in our present life. The Lord’s steadfast love sustained past generations, and we can trust that it will sustain us in our present challenges and joys.

Jesus’ resurrection is the basis of our hope. It is how the Lord’s “faithfulness to all generations” has been revealed to us Christians. We have hope because God’s love triumphs over hatred and evil. The future is secure because God is faithful. We have Faith because God’s faithfulness endures “to all generations.”

We are alive together in Christ because of our memories and our hope.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we praise the Lord. Amen!*

## Lasting Friendship

*Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. (Psalm 100:3 NRSV)*

When I reflect upon my friendships, I notice that I have a person from every stage of my life. I have a friend I met in kindergarten (some 57 years ago), my college roommate, a colleague from early in my career, and a neighbor I met and befriended 30 years ago as we both moved into our first homes, and who later became my daughter’s Godmother.

Each of these friends knows me in a different way, and accepts me for who I am. We have shared history and secrets, dreams and losses. We feel safe with each other. We love each other.

However, it is the relationship I have with Jesus that has seen me through *all* the stages of my life. This is the friendship I lean on every day. He is the one I thank when times are good, and the one I call upon when they are not.

I think of the hymn *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*, and I feel safe. I feel loved.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we praise the Lord. Amen!*

## God Shines Through

*The Lord is good and his steadfast love endures forever and his faithfulness to all generations. (Psalm 100:5 NRSV)*

I have felt God's Love throughout my life. God is faithful and remains with us throughout our struggles and temptations. I have experienced significant losses in my life but know through the care of others that God is present in my life and yours. And through the generations, I see His presence in my own children and grandchildren. I thank God!

Today's Old Testament reading is from Jeremiah. Jeremiah was steadfast for sure, preaching faithfully throughout his life, one of God's chosen. I treasure that we are a Family of God, baptized children residing in many countries around the globe. Let us pray for one another through our joys and sorrows.

And in today's New Testament reading we find comfort. John tells us that Jesus became human and has truly delivered the Good News. Let's take the greater revelation that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

God's Word endures. We are alive together in Christ! Praise God!

*Alive together in Christ,  
we praise the Lord. Amen!*

## Go Tell the World

*And he said to me, "Son of man, listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you." (Ezekiel 3:10 NIV)*

Music resonates with me. My grandfather held dances. There was a family jukebox business. Appreciating different genres of music came naturally.

Words, lyrics or otherwise, also resonate. I remember Pastor Honig speaking of the power words hold. Writing in ink guides the intentionality of choosing your words.

The scripture readings for today are full of meaningful words. God's words! Yet I struggled to decipher them into a reflection for this booklet. Driving home, contemplating failure, sensing this writing task was too challenging, I flipped channels. *Commission* by Cain was playing.

"My spirit is with you wherever you go. You have a purpose and I have a plan. I'll make you this promise. I'll come back again but until then ... go tell the world about me."

The readings I had struggled with leaped to my ears. Like Ezekiel, I needed to consume and embody the words God was giving me.

God's words kept me strong. I pray they do the same for you. And together, we can go tell the world.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we praise the Lord. Amen!*

## A Kingdom to Come

*In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. ... His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. (Daniel 7: 13-14 NIV)*

The world has been torn in two. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has turned life upside down. Unnecessary loss of life, intent to destroy a democracy, threat of nuclear war. All this has raised anxiety levels. We feel helpless as we watch the unthinkable unfold on our screens.

Daniel's vision shows the son of man as the sovereign power over all people and nations. The verse specifies that this kingdom will be everlasting and never be destroyed.

This is balm for my wounded soul.

It is a powerful statement. While I don't believe that we should sit idly by without helping people dealing with this tragedy, I take comfort that whatever happens in this world, the kingdom of God will prevail. This horrible situation was created by man. We lust for what we don't have. We fight for power not peace, money not mercy, dominion not generosity. Our job is to continue to push peace, mercy, and generosity into this world, while we wait confidently for the next—knowing that we will remain alive together in Christ.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we praise the Lord. Amen!*

## Refreshed by God's Goodness

*"The Lord has raised up strength for the people and praise for all faithful servants, the children of Israel, a people who are near the Lord. Hallelujah!" (Psalm 148:14 NRSV)*

I forget God's goodness sometimes.

The past three years have been full of deep mourning, anxious waiting, and loneliness. No hugs. I do miss hugs!

I walk. A lot (I have a dog). Especially during these past three years, my walks have been a deep dive into the goodness of God. You know, all the things that God told us are "good" in creation and in people. My walks became worship: the deep green of redwood trees, the warmth of the sun—I saw two finches building a nest today! And of course my masked brothers and sisters. We passed each other (six feet apart), smiled with our eyes, and nodded to each other. In commiseration, maybe. In joy for the day, absolutely.

I always return home refreshed by my communion with God's goodness: the deep and beautiful generosity of creation and the fellowship of other children of God.

Alive, together in Christ! Hallelujah!

*Alive together in Christ,  
we praise the Lord. Amen!*

## Do You Have a Jonathan?

*And Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul. (1 Samuel 20:17 ESV)*

Have you ever realized that a powerful person in your life no longer wanted you around? How did this make you feel? How did you discern this to be true? Did anyone help you discern?

Hopefully, if you have ever been in this situation, you've had a "Jonathan" beside you. Jonathan and David's friendship provides a biblical model of friendship for us—showing us a picture of loyalty, devotion, constancy, and self-sacrifice.

Some things we can't figure out by ourselves. And often when God is telling us something, God will confirm it using another believer.

God didn't *have* to give Mary a companion like Elizabeth to walk through pregnancy, birth, and motherhood with her; but out of great love for her, God did.

Since all of the best things in my life have come to me as unexpected gifts, leading with friendship has become the way I have decided to live my life. As we walk the Emmaus Road together, we realize that we are alive *together* in Christ.



Alive together in Christ,  
we love one another.

*Amen.*

*Alive together in Christ,  
we love one another. Amen!*

## Dwelling Together in Unity

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! (Psalms 133:1 NIV)*

I may well be Faith's longest member, so I have been "Alive Together in Christ" at Faith for a long time. I remember visiting Faith with a friend when I was in high school, and the services were conducted at Main Street School in Glen Ellyn. At the time, the Faith's pastor did not have a car, and neither did we, so many would walk to church on Sunday mornings.

When I married my first husband, we joined Faith because he was Missouri Synod Lutheran, and Faith was a good compromise. Faith is where we raised our four children, and had countless baptisms, weddings and funerals. We made some of our best friends over the years in the pews at Faith.

I have found Faith to be my place of comfort throughout my life. A place where we dwell together in unity and realize how good and how pleasant it is to be together. I pray that Faith can mean the same for all who enter its doors.

Blessings and love to all from God, our Father, forevermore.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we love one another. Amen!*

## Loving Christ, Loving Each Other

*How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity. (Psalm 133:1 ISV)*

During the long, two-year COVID pandemic, we, the members of Faith congregation, stayed united in our love of Christ. Although it was difficult to adapt to the many challenges, in unity we created new ways to get together and communicate our love for each other, as well as for Christ.

Outdoor services took us out of the quiet sanctuary into the sounds of our world, from birds chirping to ambulance sirens roaring down Park Boulevard, reminding us of life's beauty and frailty. For those unable to attend the services, live-streaming helped our brothers and sisters in Christ join us in worship from home. Others stepped up, working together to set up an outdoor "sanctuary," ushering creatively, and volunteering to bring music to our services.

Yes, unity in our love of Christ and love for each other is what makes us the special congregation we are ... and I am grateful to be blessed to be a member of Faith.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we love one another. Amen!*

## Small Beginnings

*The disagreement became so sharp that they parted company.  
(Acts 15:39a NRSV)*

Acts 15:36-41 describes a squabble between Paul and Barnabas that escalates out of hand. They were friends, and faithful preachers of the love of Jesus. But they disagreed on what seems a fairly small point—a difference of opinion stemming from Paul's unresolved grievance against John Mark. "The disagreement became so sharp that they parted company."

How could two heroes of faith allow a relatively minor issue to cause this harmful split?

I have no right to criticize.

I've enjoyed many decades-long friendships, a wonderful marriage, the joy of community in the church. But there are friends I've neglected, unloving words I've spoken, trusts I've failed.

Our life with one another is a gift. Christ lives with us to sustain this gift. We put those bonds in peril by allowing thoughtless words, unintended slights, hurt feelings, or stubbornness to fester and morph.

Christ patiently lives with us in that damaged and weakened relationship, suffering the hurt we inflict upon one another. With tireless love, Christ takes up the challenge to change hardened hearts, heal wounds, and restore the broken bonds of friendship and community.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we love one another. Amen!*

## Spinach

*So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily. (Acts 16:5 NRSV)*

I like spinach—cooked or raw, creamed, stir-fried, or salad. It tastes good and it's good for you. Popeye said it best: "I'm strong to the finish, 'cause I eats me spinach!"

What's the spinach that has kept our church strong for 75 years? Why is Faith even still here? Like the Church in Acts, Faith has stayed faithful to the teachings of Jesus. That's the only unique element we have to offer.

However, we have other gifts that amplify and convey that message: a succession of wonderful pastors, committed and skilled members who step forward to lead and work, love for music and liturgy, a congregation that maintains a continuum of age groups, care and support for each other, and an outward focus of service to neighbors and the world.

St. Paul teaches us that we plant and sow but God gives the growth. God's presence makes us strong.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we love one another. Amen!*



## Every Good Path

*Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path. (Proverbs 2:9 NRSV)*

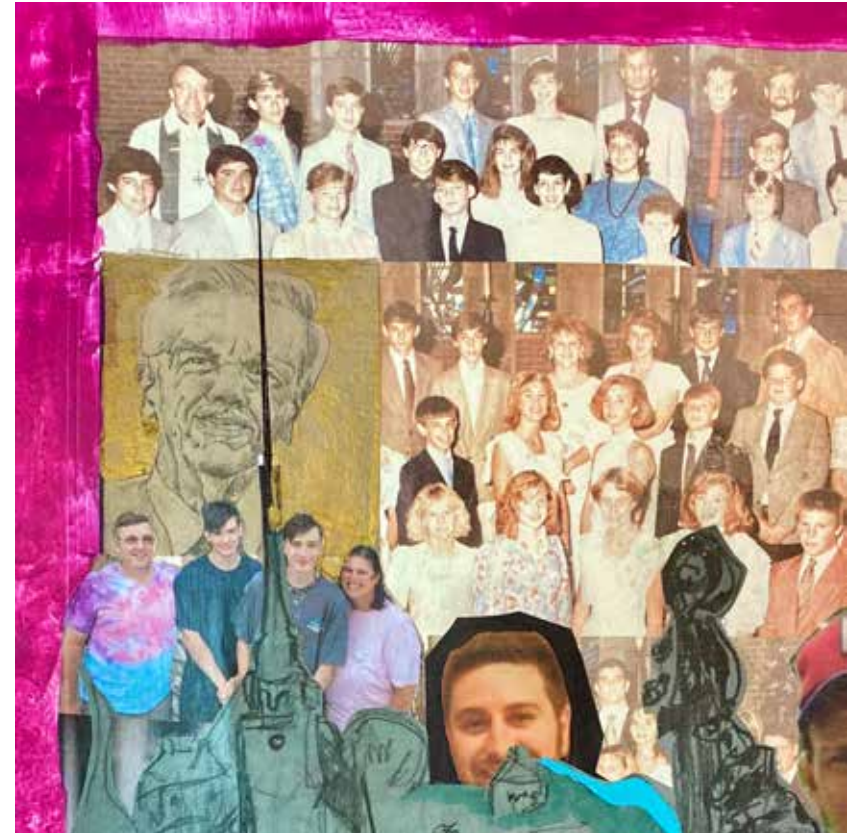
Did you know that this verse was originally composed as a teaching for young men about to enter adulthood? Today, the words serve as a reminder of God's plan in our development as Christians.

We're guided to discern between good and evil through an understanding of the virtues of wisdom, courage, integrity, and justice. In so doing, we're promised a life of goodness with the ability to guard against the ways of the devil. As Christians, we commit to pursue a life of righteousness and forsake the ways of darkness.

In short, we look to the life of Christ as our moral compass in the conduct of our daily lives. We choose our friends on the basis of their character and mutual respect. We support causes that will improve the quality of life and preserve our planet. We endorse leaders who embrace the ideals of justice and fairness.

I pray that God will keep us in the path of righteousness—the path where God has created us to walk. I pray also that God will guide our leaders in pursuit of a just and equitable world.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we love one another. Amen!*



Alive together in Christ,  
we make our home.

*Amen.*

## Where Is the Throne of God?

*The Lord is king, he is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed, he is girded with strength. He has established the world; it shall never be moved; your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting. (Psalm 93:1-2 NRSV)*

For many Christians, a literal interpretation is a source of comfort. For others, “throne of God” is a metaphor and mystery; a place from which God rules with power.

Teresa of Avila, Christian mystic of the sixteenth century, does not see the throne of God as some remote place where God rules. She says that God rules from the very soul of life. The soul is an interior castle, and God sits on the throne. The real ruling power of God is located not in the external world but in our very hearts.

God is not only met in temples, churches, or synagogues, but God “robed in majesty” lives in the innermost heart of every human being. Even though we inevitably divide the world into “us” and “them,” there is but one life living through us and that life is the very heart, the throne of God.

If God sits in the throne of every heart, what does this change about the way we see ourselves and relate to the world?

*Alive together in Christ,  
we make our home. Amen!*

## The New Jerusalem

*I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. (Revelation 21:22 NRSV)*

During my childhood choir practice at Faith, we were given an incentive to do our best. The reward for a job well done was not a material thing. Instead, we were enticed by the prospect of being given the privilege of singing *The Holy City*. We reveled in the crescendo of “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, lift up your gates and sing.” We lifted our voices in praise, feeling God’s faithfulness holding us close.

That music and lyric are about a promise. A promise that tells us if we seek the Lord with all our heart and soul, God will be forever faithful.

Earthly treasures have been designated by humans throughout history. Sometimes we perceive God’s dwelling place as splendidous, jewel encrusted, where the streets are paved in gold—a human construct. Yet the new Jerusalem is a place where:

*“The light of God was on its streets,  
The gates were open wide,  
And all who would might enter,  
And no one was denied.”*

No temple, just God. What a beautiful reward—from choir loft to glory. Our Jerusalem will not pass away.

“Hosanna forevermore.”

*Alive together in Christ,  
we make our home. Amen!*

## Permission to Depart

*Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace: your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of every people: a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel. (Luke 2:29-31 NRSV)*

Simeon, a temple priest guided by the Spirit, had been waiting for the Savior. And then one day, he holds him in his arms, a small infant. There, in the most fragile of flesh, is what he had been seeking, and now he marvels at the sight of God in his midst.

Simeon's words, found in Luke 2:29-32, are known traditionally as the "Nunc Dimittis" which means "permission to depart." Through the centuries, Christians around the world whisper these words as the evening comes to a hush and (in some churches) lift them in song after communion.

When you lay down to sleep tonight, pray Simeon's Song. Take a moment and ask yourself: *Where do I yearn for God? Where have I marveled at God?*

This Sunday, as you prepare to depart the service into this big, beautiful, horrifying world, remember that you, like Simeon, *have held Christ in your hands*. You too are guided by the Spirit, and as we wait for Christ to return in his fullness, we believe we are mysteriously, wonderfully, and fearfully made alive together in Christ.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we make our home. Amen!*

## Called to Be Witnesses

*Jesus said, "You are witnesses of these things." (Luke 24:48 NRSV)*

All who believe in God the creator, Jesus our Savior, and the Holy Spirit who inspires, are called to be witnesses. The act of witnessing is not passive. It is an outward turning to the world to tell what one has seen. The disciples were sent out to the ends of the earth. These days, witnessing can happen with cell phone video and a hashtag. Either way, it is truth telling—for the sake of God's Beloved Community.

We are called to provide food and shelter for those who need help, speak to the evil of racism, practice radical hospitality to those who the church has shunned, and advocate for the care of creation. Truth tellers face resistance. As people of faith, we are called to difficult work.

Faith Lutheran Church has journeyed on the path of truth telling for 75 years, walking alongside both resistance and partners. Faith Church continues that journey, active in witnessing and alive together in Christ.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we make our home. Amen!*

## Hate What God Hates

*The Lord loves those who hate evil; he guards the lives of his faithful; he rescues them from the hand of the wicked. (Psalm 97:10 NRSV)*

Hate is a word I constantly try to reduce or eliminate from my own daily use, but that's easier said than done. Distaste for a specific vegetable or musical artist probably deserves a less harsh word, but something as significant as evil certainly warrants its use—especially when referring to what God would define as evil.

This psalm tells me that to love God, we must also hate what God hates. Since “righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne” (Psalm 97:2), acting on obvious injustice against the faithful demonstrates hatred of evil. As one always trying to live a more faithful life, this speaks to me—and it gives all of us another way to show our love for God on a daily basis.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we make our home. Amen!*

## Face of God

*And the WORD became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 NRSV)*

As a child I attended a small rural Lutheran church. Above the altar was a large painting of Jesus kneeling in the Garden of Gethsemane. That's where I first saw an image of God's human face.

Some years later, a new Lutheran church was built in the village. My mother was buried from the new church. After her funeral, as I followed her casket down the center aisle, imagine my surprise to look up and see this same painting of Jesus praying in the Garden. It had been moved and hung at the back of the balcony of the new church.

As I remember my mother, her deep faith and her Christ-like life, I see Jesus' love reflected in her. This same Jesus, the face of God, died and rose again, so that each of us might know God and have new life. For Jesus and for my mother's faith, I am grateful.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we make our home. Amen!*

## The Furniture is So Interesting



Alive together in Christ,  
we are never alone.

*Amen.*

*[Moses] took the covenant and put it into the ark, and put the poles on the ark, and set the mercy seat above the ark; and he brought the ark into the tabernacle, and set up the curtain for screening, and screened the ark of the covenant; as the Lord had commanded Moses. (Exodus 40:20-21 NRSV)*

When our grandchildren visit, we strive to make our house hospitable and child-friendly. We rearrange the furniture, get out the appropriate toys, and make sure we have the right snacks on hand.

Of course, at one level the state of the house or cupboard doesn't matter; what really matters is the time we spend with the children, and the love we share. But at another level, the contents of the house matter precisely because they are part of the experience of being together. The furniture is special because it can reflect, or be a vehicle of, love.

Maybe that's why Exodus describes in so much detail the organization of the tabernacle. The tabernacle is where God dwells, and everything in the tabernacle shimmers with the glory of God's presence. Therefore the layout of the furniture in the tabernacle is immensely interesting!

In Jesus the glory of God has dwelt among us. Our everyday lives have been made holy. The furniture of our lives has become immensely interesting, because it can reflect, or be the vehicle of, our love for God and neighbor.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we are never alone. Amen!*

## We Can Be the Difference

*“Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?” Paul replied, “Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.” (Acts 26:28b-29 NIV)*

I sent a message to a friend. We were discussing how sad the events of the world are right now. Destruction in Ukraine, horrible laws attempting to marginalize people in the LGBT+ community, and many states denying the history of slavery and segregationist laws.

My friend said how sad she is that we are leaving the world in such a horrible place for our children. I replied that it is horrible and there are terrible people wanting to hurt and destroy others, but we have to keep trying.

We must have hope and believe that each one of us can make and be the difference—just as Paul trusted God to work through him with King Agrippa and those around him. We must trust and believe and keep trying, one person at a time to love, share God’s love, and not stop fighting for the good. There is a way to make a difference. God promises to be with us. As it seemed everyone was fighting against Paul, Paul never quit, and Christianity continues today.

With God’s help, we can be the difference, as Paul was.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we are never alone. Amen!*

## Strength and Peace

*The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace. (Psalm 29:11 NIV)*

In my mind, strength and peace go together.

We all go through challenging times in our lives; times of stress, times of hardship, times of overwhelm.

During the most challenging times of my life, I try to remind myself not to worry. The biggest thing that can cause me to worry is feeling like it’s all on me. But I am never alone. I remind myself that I do not have to do it by myself—the Lord is always there for me. I can reach out and find strength from the Lord by getting grounded and finding peace. Praying, meditating, or stopping to take a deep breath takes me to that place.

I can find my inner peace, which leads me to the Lord and back to a place of strength. A strength that I, alone, do not possess. We can all find that calm, peaceful strength. That truly is a blessing.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we are never alone. Amen!*

## Let's Talk about the Spirit

*When you send forth your Spirit, they are created. And you renew the face of the ground. (Psalm 104:30 NRSV)*

This verse is like a piece of art. It's up to the beholder where your thoughts may go.

The Hebrew word for spirit (*Ruach*) is also the word for breath. Spirit. Breath. Both are not much noticed. We take breathing for granted. And we don't talk much about the Spirit.

Take the next minute to just breathe. For real! Set a timer for 60 seconds on your watch or ask Alexa. Close your eyes and just breathe. Right now!

\* \* \*

"And you renew the face of the ground." Depending on where you live and what you see in the news, the ground around you may be floods or droughts or melting Arctic icebergs. Or the richness of dark soil being planted. Or devastated ground in Ukraine and other war torn areas.

What's the condition of your own personal ground? Rocky challenges? Rich fertile soil? Overwhelming waters? Tulips abound? Dangerous lurking potholes?

God's promise is for renewal. Renewal is filled with possibility and hope. Allow the Spirit to renew your spirit.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we are never alone. Amen!*

## Overflowing

*For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground. (Isaiah 44:3 NRSV)*

I have constantly found myself running on fumes. I am a mom, wife, clinician, neighbor, and volunteer. I am pulled in numerous directions and struggle to fulfill them without feeling like I am in a constant state of chaos. There are things I do not enjoy that steal my time and energy. My mind is constantly "on" with multiple tabs open. The juggle of everything is so overwhelming and hard that when I pause, I do not take the time to completely fill my tank.

I agreed to write a reflection for our church devotional and feared I had overextended myself once again.

However, God spoke directly to me through this verse. When God sees my spiritual tank is empty, God not only gives, but pours out the Spirit. God gives in abundance, so as my spiritual needs are filled, the Spirit overflows to other aspects of my life.

Regardless of the chaos around me, if I go to God and receive the Spirit in faith, I am restored. What an amazing promise God has for us!

*Alive together in Christ,  
we are never alone. Amen!*

## Let's Go for a Walk

*So the two of them went on. (2 Kings 2:6b NRSV)*

Jesus is on his way.

An elderly couple. He remembers. She does not. He holds her hands. "I will not leave you." They walk on together ...

A Ukrainian teacher in a van with others. She awkwardly holds a rifle. She volunteered yesterday. Terror shows in her eyes. She weeps as they drive to meet the enemy ...

A young couple gazing into each other's eyes. Their hearts are bursting. "Marry me, and everything that follows will be ours together."

A boy watches. She sits alone. It doesn't show, but she feels she is dying. She hates what makes her different. They both hear snickers. They are not snickering at him ... yet. He stands and begins to walk.

A woman behind a dumpster. No one sees her, but she sees their feet as they walk by. She wonders what their shoes cost.

A driver sees a bumper sticker. He becomes angry. He doesn't make eye contact as he passes.

A woman turns down a promotion. Her career will suffer. Her son is connecting with the youth group. It is not a good time to leave.

No one follows Jesus alone. The way of Jesus can only be taken together.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we are never alone. Amen!*



Alive together in Christ,  
we understand peace.

*Amen.*



## Hidden No Longer

*No, the wisdom we speak of is the mystery of God—his plan that was previously hidden. (1 Corinthians 2:7a NLT)*

We rolled out of bed and started hiking at 2:30 a.m. Our goal was to get through the bottom of the Grand Canyon before the heat of the day. My wife, sister, brother-in-law, and I had only headlamps to light our way. We stayed focused on the path ahead but everything else was pitch black.

As the sun began to rise we began to see what we'd been missing. As we looked up while hiking through the bottom of the Grand Canyon my wife exclaimed, "I thought this would be amazing but it is so much more than I could have ever imagined!" I was in total agreement. I was overwhelmed by and in awe of what God had created.

How many days am I NOT in awe of our God who never changes? How often am I NOT completely overwhelmed by God? Our God is always working! I just need to pay attention to what God is up to. May we simply take notice and allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by God and in awe of God's plan!

*Alive together in Christ,  
we understand peace. Amen!*

## A Mighty Fortress is Our God

*Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, consider well her ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation. (Psalm 48:12-13, NIV)*

Walking the streets of Salzburg, I deliberately tucked my phone and map into my purse, choosing instead to use the lofty fortress on the hill as my navigational tool. No matter where I was, I looked for the fortress, trusting it to help me find my way.

When asked to write for this devotional, I heard that the Holy Spirit and prayer would be part of the process, and I should not be surprised by the Spirit's appearance. So later, seated in my Salzburg hotel, I opened the email about this project, found my assigned readings, and searched them on my phone. What happened next can only be described as an uncontrolled goosebump moment.

I read Psalm 48.

Exploring Salzburg, where had I turned for direction? That high-ground fortress, that impregnable stronghold. Zion—before me, behind me, above me, beside me. The Psalm suggests a temporal and spiritual structure. This spiritual structure that gives peace and direction to me, a believer, defends against attack. Making me completely secure, helping me find my way in this world, trusting that God will keep God's promises and guide my way.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we understand peace. Amen!*

## Favored Women, Beloved Children

*You have found favor with God. (Luke 1:30b NRSV)*

*Roses are red,  
violets are blue.  
Our Mother's Day gift  
is grandchild #2!*

That's how we broke the news to my mother-in-law of her next grandchild. Grandchild #1 was unexpectedly announced under circumstances not planned by the parents or grandparents. Learning of this second pregnancy in the family—a long-awaited child—brought a mixture of emotions. We didn't want one child to be more favored than the other, as both were conceived of love and would draw the family together around them.

I wonder how the family of Elizabeth and Mary felt, receiving the news of two pregnancies—one long-awaited and the other shadowed by shame. Did they temper their enthusiasm over Elizabeth's release from her shame and lower their voices in trepidation when talking about Mary's? Mary and Elizabeth dismissed it all, drawing together with the hope of all they carried within them, any shame overshadowed by the power of the Most High.

The Holy Spirit conceives great things in us, drawing us together to further the reign of God—no matter our circumstances.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we understand peace. Amen!*

## Knowing Hope in My Heart

*I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people. (Ephesians 1:18 NIV)*

Hope comes naturally to me. Though life has thrown challenges my way, hope and the reassurance of love were always there.

But my hope has been challenged lately. The daily bombardment of rancor, discord, illness, and death in the media wears me down. Physical isolation from our neighbors, coworkers, church community, and even family strains hope. It's a constant noise demanding attention. The squeaky wheel gets the grease, right? But is that squeak drawing me away from something more important?

I'm inclined to pray to stop the rancor, stop the illness and death. I ask God to change others, change things. But this passage says I should pray for the eyes of my heart to "be enlightened to the hope." Instead of expecting change in others or situations, the change should be in *me*.

Now, my perception of hope includes internal changes. I pray to see what God reveals, that I recognize what God is showing me, that I will know the hope I am called to know.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we understand peace. Amen!*

## Sudden Panic, Sound Wisdom

*My child, do not let these escape from your sight: keep sound wisdom and prudence, do not be afraid of sudden panic, for the Lord will be your confidence. (Proverbs 3:21, 25a, 26a NRSV)*

When the planes hit the World Trade Towers on 9/11, that image was on the national news every night. That horror sent me into a depression cured only by a good doctor and a great God. Only recently did those feelings resurface as we watched the Russians bombing Ukraine. When you read this, we may know how or if it was resolved.

I like to think that God is in control, and God usually is. And yet, there are times when we wonder what is happening. In our times, we have seen the Nazis, the Viet Cong, Al-Qaeda, and, yes, the Russians, and many others at work stirring up and distorting peace.

Our only hope is God's word, that God's wisdom in creation gives us assurance that we will walk in our way securely, that our foot will not stumble, and that our sleep will be sweet when we lie down. Most of all, we are not to be afraid of sudden panic, "for the Lord will be our confidence."

May it be so for us and for our Ukrainian brothers and sisters.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we understand peace. Amen!*

## Lost and Found

*"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49 NIV)*

You know that feeling you get when you realize something is missing? An important document, a cell phone, a wallet. Your stomach drops. You double and triple check, hoping what you suspect isn't true. What you were positive was with you just a moment ago is now gone. A frantic search begins.

In today's reading, Mary and Joseph spend three agonizing days searching for their son. I wonder what those three days were like for Mary and Joseph, backtracking where they've traveled, asking strangers if they've seen Jesus. Probably terrified that they would not see him again.

Sometimes I catch myself in that same frantic search for Jesus. When I feel lonely or lost or scared, I look around and feel like I lost Him somewhere along the way.

But we know how the story ends. Mary and Joseph find Jesus in the temple, right where he was supposed to be. This story reminds me there's no need to frantically search. We have now what Mary and Joseph didn't have then: a promise. We have the certainty of knowing Jesus is always near—in our church and in our lives.

*Alive together in Christ,  
we understand peace. Amen!*

# Faces of Faith

Faith member Tom Zima created the artwork for this booklet: a series of mixed media collages in celebration of Faith's 75th anniversary. His original piece for the cover, shown again here, is 18-by-24 inches. Look closely. Do you recognize Faith brothers and sisters from past and present? Together, our community is always growing, always *Alive Together in Christ!*



# Alive! Together!

By creating this devotional booklet, the authors have given voice to Faith Lutheran's enduring liveliness. Thanks to past and present members, staff, and clergy who answered the call to reflect and contribute:

Carla Aufdengarten	Chad Jacobsen
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By example, our pastors inspire us to stay in conversation with God. Thank you, Pastor Shelly Satran and Pastor Joe Yucha, for coaxing us to speak, teaching us the Word, and joining us in prayer. Above all, we give thanks to God for creating this faithful congregation of people who are so very *Alive Together in Christ.*

## AMEN!

# Alive Together

FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH | 75 YEARS

*We have referenced the following scripture versions:*

*ESV - English Standard Version*

*ISV - International Standard Version*

*NIV - New International Version*

*NLT - New Living Translation*

*NRSV - New Revised Standard Version*

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