

Like a River”

If you worshiped with us yesterday, you know that our opening song was “When Peace Like a River.” What a blessing that song is. It doesn’t seem like we have had much peace lately. It’s Covid-19 or political unrest, politicians telling us what to do, extreme heat, not knowing if your kids will be able to get back to school in person like they really need. You name it, it seems to have gone wrong. Again, not much peace. If we focus on these things that affect our mind and body only, we are going to be in trouble. We will be depressed, panicked, and all those other things that this year has brought into our lives. But we do much better if we concentrate on the things of the soul as this song says. No matter what happens to our earthly body and mind, it is still “Well with my soul.” Because Jesus came to live the perfect life we cannot because he died to suffer the punishment we deserve due to our constant sinning and because God raised Him from the dead as proof this suffering and death are enough to put us right with God, it is well with our souls. And no earthly trauma or stress can change that. We can continue to praise the Lord as the hymn invites us to do. Or as the Psalmist says in our Scripture for today: “Praise the Lord, O my soul, all my inmost being praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits- who forgives all your sins, and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit.” (Psalm 103:1-3) So if you feel your life is “the pits” remember what Jesus has done for you. Praise him for forgiveness, for healing your diseases including Covid-19 or your fear of it. Praise him for bringing your life out of the pits and life might feel a little bit better. Listen to the song and remember through Jesus, “It is well with my soul.”

URL for Song: ["When Peace Like a River \(It Is Well With My Soul\)"](#)

August 5, 2020 Devotion: Scripture Matthew 11:28 and Song “Come to the Altar”

It’s the first Wednesday and August and it should be the most peaceful time of the year, with vacations and picnics and school still in the future, a few weeks away but maybe still in the back of the mind. But not this year. Parents are screaming for the schools to give them guidance about what is going to happen when school starts and the schools don’t have any answers- not really anyway. Most vacations have been canceled and if you do go, depending on where, you might face a 14-day quarantine before you can go back to work when you return. You might be at the end of your rope. You might feel guilty about wanting your kids to go back to school even if it isn’t safe because it will make things easier for you and you think it is the best way for them to learn despite Covid-19. Where do you go when you don’t have the answers. Elevation Worship has a song that gives you their answer. It’s “Come to the Altar.” At the altar, you can pray for help and turn everything to God who has the answers to all your problems. If you are overwhelmed by sin they sing or at the end of yourself, come to the altar, to Jesus, your Savior. From sin

and everything else that threatens you in life. As Lutheran Christians we know that at that same altar we receive the body and blood of Jesus, a guarantee that what Jesus has done is enough to cover our sins, to make up for the times when we try to solve our problems on our own and come to the end of ourselves. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus has the answer to coming to the end of ourselves when he says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. He gives you rest from the burden of your sin as at the altar as you are forgiven because of your faith in Jesus' death and resurrection for you. As the song says Come to the altar, the Father's arms are opened wide, Forgiveness was bought with the precious blood of Christ." If this summer is not going the way you wanted, if you don't know the way out, come to the altar and receive the free and full forgiveness of sins, won by Jesus on the cross. Then praise Jesus with elevation music in the words of this sacred song.

URL for Song: ["Come to the Alter"](#)

August 7. 2020 Devotion: Scripture Hebrews 13:8 and Song "Built on the Rock"

Early on in the Covid-19 crisis, it seemed like the church was falling apart. Services were canceled at the order of many governors, something people thought couldn't and shouldn't happen. And it took a couple of weeks for the electronic service to start and then things started to get a little better. And in June, many churches opened their doors again, at least for services. Then politics raised up its ugly head. There were riots and churches burned because Christians, at least white ones, were racist. And it began to look grim again. Then the church, at some of it, has been trying to adapt and listen, and maybe things are a little better. But still, a long way to go to even think about going back to the way things were. But do we have to worry about the church-going away? The hymn for today, "Built on the Rock, the church does stand" says no. Many things will go away or change the hymn says but the Word is forever. Over and over through this hymn, the truth of Scripture rings out. Things may change but as verse 6 says as it quotes Hebrews 13:8 Jesus doesn't. As the writer of Hebrews says, "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever." The church may change or even go away as we know it, but the Word of the Lord endures forever and that's Jesus. Jesus was in the beginning at creation with the Father, he was on the cross for us, and he was alive on Easter as the tomb was empty. He will come back in glory to take all belief in him to heaven on the last day. And he is the same loving, caring compassionate, saving God at all those places and times. Just as he is now. Listen to the hymn "Built on the Rock," there is so much for you there. Hold on to those words and promises, sung from Scripture. As you listen to the hymn. Remember, don't lose heart, if everything else changes, and it will, Jesus is still the same, yesterday, today, and forever.

URL for Song: ["Built on the Rock"](#)

August 10,2020 Devotion: Scripture Isaiah 6:8-9 and Song “Here I Am, Lord”

Covid-19 has caused many people to question their worth, what their purpose for being is and similar thoughts. So much of what many thought their purpose was has gone away. Many men especially felt that their job was their purpose for being. It provided for their families, gave them an identity, something to look forward to and then just like that it was gone. Many women too were unable to live life the way they were comfortable as life became taking care of the kids at home, being their home-school teacher, and going to the grocery store. So much else that made up their lives was gone. And children too lost school and sports and dance and more. It was new and scary and not what we wanted. Now it's been over 5 months and we have had time to see God at work in all of this and some have. Parents, children, workers have heard God calling them as God called Isaiah in our Scripture reading from Isaiah 6. God asked, “Whom shall I send? Who will go for me? And Isaiah answered, “Here am I, send me!” It reflects the words of today's song: “Here I am, Lord.” The chorus says, Here I am, Lord, I have heard you calling in the night, I will hold your people in my heart.” The video I have picked shows pictures of all the different people we have been called to hold in our hearts. If up to now, you've been in the dumps, wondering what your purpose is, today is the day to change. If you can't get out, you hold God's people in your heart by holding them up in prayer. If you are back out and about, take the time to watch those around you and see how God has called you to reflect Jesus and His love for them by treating them kindly and helping them as you are able. Listen to the song and especially watch the video and see how you help. God is calling you through the pandemic to share Jesus. Pray for ways you can do that.

URL for Song: ["Here I Am, Lord"](#)

August 12, 2020 Devotion: Scripture John 3:16 and Song “God So Loved”

Today is devotion #87 since I started choosing songs, hymns and Scriptures during Shelter-in-place near the beginning of the Pandemic. Many important Scriptures have been used but one of the most important, the one we call the Gospel in a nut-shell hasn't come up. Of course, you know what it is, John 3:16, right? “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” I guess I was waiting for the right song and today I am sharing it with you. It called appropriately, “God so Loved” by We the Kingdom. The chorus echoes the words of John 3:16 and the verses point why believing in Jesus will bring eternal life. The second verse, for example, says, “Bring all your failures, bring all your addictions and lay them there at the foot of the cross. Jesus is waiting, arms wide open, See His open arms. And then the chorus, God so loved.” We all know we have failed to deal with Covid-19 in oh so many ways, and when everything except staying at home was taken

away, our addictions were pointed out as well. Don't despair though for as Jesus says, "God so loved the world, and sent Him to the cross for us. Go to God in prayer and lay them at the foot of the cross and receive the forgiveness we all need and then rejoice that "God so loved" as you listen to today's song. And remember because of this, tomorrow is a brand new day!

URL for Song: ["We the Kingdom"](#)

August 14, 2020 Devotion: Scripture Matthew 6:8 and Song "You've Always Been"

Our world for many years has been what we can get for ourselves. Our kids say things like "I know I don't need it but I waaaant it." Very few adults have had the ability to save enough money before purchasing things and as a result credit card debt and the amount of money in loans that families have continued to increase. Then Covid-19 came and people got a rude awakening to what they need as opposed to what they want. They were able to get what they needed, the food at the grocery store, a place to sleep, and not a lot more. So much that we have taken for granted was gone, at least for a while. A lot changed but one thing didn't. God stayed the same and continued to take care of us, even if we weren't aware. Today's song, "" You've Always Been," by the group Unspoken reminds us that God gives us all we need, Pandemic or not. In talking about prayer and how we are to approach God in Matthew 6:8, Jesus says, "Do not be like them (the Pharisees and others who pray aloud and flaunt themselves in public), for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Or as the song puts it, "Everything I've needed, Lord, you have always been." When we stop and look back to what went on during the worst part of the Covid-19, God was there with us. He did provide what we needed, food and a place to live, messages from His Word even if they were virtual and not in person, and especially daily forgiven won by our Savior on the cross for us as we moaned and complained, struggled and generally had a hard time coping. As we are about to begin another August weekend, and Covid-19 still doesn't seem to be under control, listen to the song and see what the group Unspoken reminds us God is, everything needful, especially, "Savior, Sustainer...." There is a great difference between what we need and what we want and thank God that he understands that. He is in control, he will save!

URL for Song: ["You've Always Been"](#)

August 17, 2020 Devotion: Scripture Revelation 2:10 and Song “For All the Saints”

It's the middle of August and if were a normal year, families would be getting in their last few days of vacation before school starts again and those who weren't would be school shopping or getting in the last few rounds of golf before Labor Day. Of course, it's not a normal year and things are a bit different. Shopping is different as many don't know yet if they will be in the classroom or back to virtual learning and if you have been blessed enough to get a vacation that is probably different as well. It is tempting to give up, to think that all is lost and there is no end to Covid-19 and no end to all the other issues like the presidential election and the crashing economy and more. We are tempted, that is if we go it alone. Our song for today, "For all the Saints, who from their Labors rest. tells a different story We are not alone in the battle and it has an end. We are already victorious because Jesus' perfect life, death, and resurrection has made it so. And we are not alone because there are many saints, fellow Christians who have gone before us to show us the way and there are many Saints going through the battle with us. The third verse of the hymn explains so well what I am talking about. "Oh, may thy soldiers, faithful, true and bold. Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old. And win with them the victor's crown of gold. Alleluia." We are the saints who are fighting the temptations and the arrows of the evil one. But the Saints of old who are heaven show us it can be done. And the victor's crown of gold has been won by Jesus. Revelation 2:10, our Bible text for today puts it this way, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." That's what we look forward to. Jesus' victory is ours as we remain faithful. God provides the faith, God keeps us faithful and when we fail, there is forgiveness in Jesus. Listen to this beautiful hymn and be encouraged. The victory is won, the crown of life awaits.

URL for Song: ["For All the Saints"](#)

August 20, 2020 Devotion: Scripture I Corinthians 13:8 and Song “This One Thing Remains.”

Since March, it seems like everything is failing. Everyone thinks the government has failed us, no matter what party you support. For many, our jobs have failed us, the schools have failed us as we've been forced to teach our kids at home. The church has failed us as for the first time in history there weren't many if any public services each Sunday. Kristian Standfill performs a song that reminds that one thing remains that hasn't failed. The title of the song is "One Thing Remains," and the chorus reminds us that the one thing that remains that doesn't fail is Love. He echoes the words of Paul from I Corinthians 13:8, "Love never fails." Now you might be thinking, I fail to love all the time. I fail to love my spouse, my children, my neighbors, and I certainly don't love folks of other races all the time as is being pointed regularly by groups such as Black Lives Matter, But our love is just a poor

reflection of what real love is. I John 3 says, "God is love." And that is certainly shown in what God did for us in sending in Jesus and in how Jesus carried out God's plan to save the world. God loved us enough to send his one and only Son for us and that Son, Jesus, lives the perfect life of love that we can't and don't and then suffered and died on the cross to show that perfect love was enough to cover our failure to love. And then God raised Jesus from the dead to prove that Jesus' love overcame death and in that way, love never fails. Listen to the song: "One Thing Remains" and know that all is not lost, we don't need to give up. Heaven and perfect love are ahead for all who believe.

URL for Song: ["This One Thing Remains"](#)

August 21, 2020

Devotion: Scripture Philippians 3:14 and Song "Fight the Good Fight"

Paul talks about living the Christian life as running a race and from Philippians 3, we know it's not a sprint but that he is in it to go the distance and encourages to be "in it for the long haul." He talks about not having obtained eternal life but one thing he does is "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead," he says in our Scripture verse for today, Philippians 3:14: "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called heavenward in Christ Jesus." Our hymn for today, "Fight the Good Fight," echoes Paul's words from Philippians 3. Verse 2 says, "run the straight race with God's good grace. Lift up thine eyes and Seek His face. Life with its ways before us lies; Christ is the path and Christ the prize" Before Covid-19, many people thought sports or making money or enjoying themselves at the Lake or Cottage or owning a big house or many other things similar was the prize. Covid-19 took much of that way and allowed to remember that Christ is the path and Christ the prize. If we seek the things of this world, Covid-19 might point us toward giving up. If we follow the hymn's direction and "fight the good fight," if we follow Paul's guidance from Philippians 3, 'to press on toward the goal and seek the prize, which is Christ Jesus and heaven then we will have benefited from Covid-19. God will again have used something bad for good. Be encouraged by the hymn and press on toward the goal, which is heaven.,

URL for Song: ["Fight the Good Fight"](#)

August 24, 2020 Devotion: Scripture John 8:12 and Song “Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness”

Today’s hymn comes to us from England and is a hymn we like to sing at St. Andrew on a pretty regular basis. It seems like since Covid-19 there has been much darkness. The darkness of illness, the darkness of lost jobs, the darkness of protest and anger at our government officials, and the darkness of not seeing our friends in person for quite a long time. Satan caused the darkness and on our own, we aren’t able to break it. Jesus is the only one who can and has broken the darkness. He has overcome Satan by His perfect life, death, and resurrection. The hymn, of course, is “Praise the One who breaks the Darkness” and if you listen to the words, it doesn’t take long to know that the writer of the words of this song is talking about Jesus. Even before his death on the cross and his resurrection, Jesus was letting his disciples know that he was the Light, come to break the darkness. Jesus’ words from John 8:12 spell it out clearly: “he said, ‘I am the Light of the world. Whoever believes in me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’” Our faith in Jesus will get us through all the things I mentioned above. Whenever you are tempted to let the darkness overcome you, listen to the hymn for today and praise the one who has overcome the darkness. No darkness is too great for Jesus. The light of the world has overcome the darkness. Sing along with the hymn and be encouraged. URL for Song: [Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness](#)

August 26, 2020 Devotion: Scripture John 15:19 and Song “Where I Belong”

So many people today think this world we live in is the ultimate and life is about getting as much as you can from the world. Whether it is power, money, prestige, retiring early to live the lifestyle they feel they are entitled to, it’s about conquering the world, making the most of the time we have in this world. Covid-19 took away most of that. All we had left for 3 months was taking home and taking care of our family. As Christians, we know that we don’t belong here in the world and that what is ahead is where we belong. A group called Building 129 has been around a while and their song, “Where I Belong” hits the nail on the head. The chorus has it right. “Take this world and give me Jesus.” We don’t belong to the world and the world hates us because of that. As Jesus puts it in John 15:19: “If the world hates you keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world.” That’s why Building 129 sings, “Take this world and give me Jesus.” If there’s one thing to be learned from the turmoil the world is in right now, it is that we need Jesus. Listen to the song and remember that every day. You need Jesus! URL for Song: ["Where I Belong"](#)

August 28, 2020 Devotion: Scripture Matthew 15:22-28 and Song “More Than Anything”

Our last song for this week comes from Natalie Grant. It's called “More Than Anything.” She expresses clearly her need for Jesus. She sings that even when she's suffering and prays for relief, she knows she needs the healer more than healing. Even if Jesus doesn't answer her prayer as quickly as she wants or in the way she wants, she knows that he still needs Jesus and his perfect life, death, and resurrection for her. Natalie's expression of her faith and sticking to Jesus no matter what reminded me of the Canaanite women from Matthew 15. She asked Jesus for healing for her daughter and at first, it doesn't seem Jesus even hears her. The disciples tell Jesus to send her away. She's annoying. Then twice Jesus seems to treat her poorly. He says he can't help her because she's not from Israel and then he tells her that “it is not right to take the children's bread and give it the dogs. She sticks with Jesus and tells him that even the dogs eat the crumbs off the table. She knows she needs “Jesus more than anything.” Jesus wasn't treating her poorly though, he was testing her faith. She stuck with it and verse 28 shows the result. Jesus says, “Woman, you have great faith. Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed. In these difficult times, our faith is tested. I pray that all of us understand as Natalie Grant does and the Canaanite woman as well that we need Jesus “More Than Anything.” May the faith God has placed in your hearts, your faith in Jesus stay strong. Listen to Natalie Grant and understand why.

URL for Song: ["More Than Anything"](#)

August 31, 2020 Devotion: Scripture Matthew 16:21 and Song “Come Thou Once Despised Jesus”

Yesterday's sermon hymn is our hymn for today's devotion. “Hail thou Once Despised (or rejected) Jesus” is its title. It talks about Jesus' suffering for us so that our sins might be forgiven. It's the sermon hymn because it goes well with the Gospel lesson from yesterday as well. In Matthew 16:21 we hear: “From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” As the hymn tells us, because he suffered the shame we deserve, “we have life in His name.” There are many scared about life virus now. Covid-19 could cause us to lose our lives. Most of the things that made our lives special (we thought), have been taken away, at least for a while. Many feel like giving up, life just isn't like it

should be. For us as Christians, we know better. Jesus has given us life, both here on the earth and eternally in heaven. If we lose this life, what are better lies ahead? If we are struggling with life now and feel like we are losing, we know that the victory is already won. Nothing can take that away from us. Listen to the words of the hymn and realize that Jesus was despised for us so that we might live, a life that the circumstances of life can't take away. Be at peace because Christ did suffer and die that we might have life.

URL for song: ["Hail Thou Once Despised Jesus"](#)