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Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

the little church with a big heart!

THOUGHTS ALONG THE WAY...

How big is your universe? How big is your faith? How big is your God? The way you answer these questions can have a profound, life-changing impact on the way you view the world, the way you interact with others, on your relationship with God—in short, on who you are. What do you expect from God? What does God expect from you? Where are the boundaries in your life? Why? Does God ever cross the boundaries? Does God ever do the unexpected?

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than *Elohim* (the Divine)
and crowned them with glory and honor. — Psalm 8:3-5

I remember camping, sleeping out under the stars on a crystal clear night on my tenth birthday. As I looked up into the bright, shining night, I was suddenly overcome by the sheer depth of space. I felt utterly small and insignificant. At the same moment, I realized that there was nothing between me and the creatures of the mountain night except my sleeping bag. It was an odd paradox—on the one hand, the ultimate vastness of space, on the other, a chaparral filled with bobcats, cougars, bears, snakes and scorpions. I felt completely vulnerable. I felt absolute terror.

I must have sobbed or gasped or something, because my dad, stretched out in his bag just a few feet away said, “What’s the matter?” I told him. I told him how small and meaningless I felt in the face of those stars dancing through the unthinkable deeps of time and space. And Dad said, “You’re right. We’re nothing. And we’re everything. Makes you think, doesn’t it? And isn’t it beautiful?”

He was right. My point of view shifted. The night was terrible. The night was beautiful. We are nothing. We are everything. We live and move and have our being in the infinite deeps of possibility.

We live in that tension between nothingness and being the apple of God’s eye. We see that tension in scripture. God says to Job, “Where were you

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Thoughts Along the Way Continues....

when I laid the foundations of the earth?" Who are you to tell me how to be God? On the other hand, we read "For God so loved the world he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life." We are as eternal as space. Maybe more so. We will not perish. And that is grace.

How big is your universe? How big are you? How big is God? And how small? How far? How close? How transcendent? How intimate? This is Epiphany, the season of light and revelation. This is the season for seeing things as they are, seeing ourselves as we are. This is the season to see if we can stand it to stand in the light of Christ and let ourselves be revealed, even if only to ourselves.

And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light...so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light.-- John 3:19-21 (NRSV) But to those who receive him, who believe in his name, he gives power to become children of God.-- John 1:12

We live in a big universe and sometimes we feel so intimidated by its bigness that we try to hide our smallness. We wrap ourselves in flags and causes and ideas and ideals so no one—least of all ourselves—will see how afraid we are of our own insignificance. But our God is a surprising God who finds a way to find us even when we hide in the darkest crevices of our fears and nothingness or when we disguise ourselves with puffed-up parade heads full of grandiosity. We are nothing—scuttling through the debris of comets to make a recycled existence. We are everything—calling on a God who loves us enough to call us children and make us eternal. We believe in things seen and unseen and we fear we are most unseen of all. But God calls us to stand in the light. To be seen. To be more eternal than the stars.

What mountains need to be moved in your life? What looks impossible for you? What makes you afraid? What makes you feel insignificant? Stop a moment. Listen. Do you hear the loving voice of your Father in the star-studded night saying, "Don't be afraid. It's only light. Makes you think, doesn't it? And isn't it beautiful?"

Pro Gloria Dei, Pastor Steve



COUNCIL UPDATE

Greetings and Good News !

There was a full agenda to attend to at the January meeting and you will hear much of it at the Congregational Meeting, slated for the last Sunday of January.

Jerry Gross, our Finance Committee Chairman, will present the Spending Plan for 2014 for approval.

I will let Walter Eidam fill you in with the details about the parking lot improvements.

There are also plans to renovate the Narthex to make it more presentable. In addition, plans for containment of collection items and more efficient use of space are needed.

We now have a "Child Care Provider" each Sunday, from 9:00 AM to noon. Her name is Mary Denk. She will provide care for the Christmas Eve service.

We have, on several occasions had parents with young children, who come to Adult Bible Study or to Worship and did not come back. We knew that we needed to change our presence of hospitality, if we were ever again to have young families in our Church. Please greet and meet Mary. She is a delightful, talented young lady.

The Christmas tree in our Fellowship Hall was provided by Frank Stanley. It is a beautiful tree and the personal ornaments make it special.

On behalf of the Council, we wish you a wonderful Advent Season and a blessed New Year.

Have a Glorious Dei.

Barbara White, President
Email: Bjways@verizon.net



NCD SMALL GROUPS

We're kicking off the new year with our first gatherings of Holistic Small Groups. Check with Pastor Steve and find the group meeting time that best fits your schedule!

**"I WILL BLESS YOU...AND YOU
 WILL BE A BLESSING."**

Genesis 12:2
Genesis 12:2

BOAT PARADE — COMMUNITY OUTREACH



We Need Your Help....



PLEASE TAKE A MOMENT TO SERVE...

We need teams to sign up to host refreshments for our FELLOWSHIP gathering after our service!

Won't you consider volunteering a few Sundays a year? — a small gesture to enhance our ability to connect and meet others at GLORIA DEI! Contact Gwen Gross (gwenegross@gmail.com) to learn more about this opportunity to be part of our HOSPITALITY Team!

CONNECTIONS & FELLOWSHIP



WHAT HAPPENED TO MY CHURCH — MARGIE BROWN

What happened to my church?

I am a lifelong Lutheran: baptized, confirmed and married in Lutheran churches. When I was young, my family attended Sharon Lutheran Church in Calgary, Canada.

Church meant one had to be quiet, sit still and only utter sounds when singing hymns. My dad was the head usher so he was always around to see that I behaved properly, whatever that meant, during services. (On more than one occasion, the pastor spoke to me about sitting quietly.) There were no funny stories, no laughter, no clapping during that sacred hour. Special decorations for holidays, like Christmas, did not appear. "Outreach" was a word that was unheard of. The only service to others outside of the congregation came from the Ladies aid society. During WWII, all our church ladies knitted Bundles for Britain. These included baby clothes, helmet liners and sweaters for the troops. Only the pastor conducted the rites.

After Don and I married, we attended College Lutheran church in San Diego. That pastor had a pleasant delivery. Still, services were calm, quiet and solemn.

Fast forward to Gloria Dei Lutheran. Suddenly the old-fashioned stoicism of my Lutheran ancestors faded away. At Christmas, a tree decorated with white symbols of our faith appeared. The Advent wreath was hung from the rafters. Paraments of the colors of the church season flowed from the pulpit, lectern and altar. Wow. This is great: color, smiles and sometimes decorations were obvious. And calling the pastor by his first name was very unusual for me. "Outreach" became a symbol of giving service to others, outside of the congregation. We began getting requests for financial aid to third world countries. And members of the congregation were participating in the liturgy.

Now we have guitar music, liturgy written by our pastor, laughter at stories that begin sermons. We even applaud to show our appreciation for something we enjoyed during the service. We have secular and spiritual music when we gather for Songs, Supper and Stories. The Lutheran Church Women have made quilts for use by women in Africa. The joy of being in God's house is very evident and we are free to express joy during services. Scripture tells us to "make a joyful noise unto the Lord." I like it; I hope you do too.

So what happened to my church? It grew in the Spirit, changed its presentation, and lifted the cloak of anonymity of giving to others. Hallelujah!!!

MAN'S BEST FRIEND — Victoria Gammer

The holidays are over. Many of us want to just kick back and enjoy the quiet time. Although there are various ways of relaxing, many households choose to relax with, what has been described as, *Man's Best Friend*—the faithful dog.

There is no question that we love our pets and they return that love unconditionally. They really don't care if you are old, young, short, tall, skinny, fat, ugly or beautiful because in their eyes **you are beautiful**. They love to see you when you come home. What could really be better than that?

I couldn't help but notice all the gifts on the market for doggie holiday presents including their own menorah and dreidel plush toys, doggie bakery treats, hats, reindeer headbands, neck kerchiefs, raincoats, shoes, sweaters, dresses, sunglasses, goggles (for motorcycle riding), remote control toys, life jackets, jewelry, beds, skateboards, dog perfumes, furniture and of course the pet photographers and artists. Now we have added dog therapists, trainers, caretakers, cafes, spas, parks and beaches. Some hotels cater to dogs as well as airlines.

Our canine friends have a unique place in our life and our history that is unparalleled by any other animal. Recent studies by Olaf Thalmann of the University of Turku, Finland, say that wolves were domesticated as early as between 19,000 and 32,000 years ago.

Yup, that's right—wolves. Scientists agree that "a single species, the *gray wolf*, is the common ancestor for all breeds of domestic dogs," and that the *gray wolf* population is most likely extinct," wrote Thalmann. "The other surprising finding is that most dogs turned out to be more closely related to ancient wolves than to modern ones," he added.

A survey in 2009-2010 documented an estimate of 77.5 million people had pet dogs in the USA. I found it interesting that the pet dog population grew noticeably after WWII when more people moved into the suburbs in the 1950s and 1960s.

What do we get out of this relationship besides unconditional love? **Plenty, like health!** Some studies have indicated that pet owners have better mental and physical health than non-owners, resulting in fewer doctor visits and less medication. Owners have shown "reductions in cardiovascular, behavioral, and psychological indicators or anxiety." Dogs have helped to increase social interaction for shy owners. And, of course, we have all heard about single men who "borrow" a dog to attract girls. Guess it works.

The list of jobs that dogs are happy to perform for us is impressive:

Work dogs: Herding livestock, hunting, rodent control, guarding, helping fishermen with nets, detection dogs, pulling loads, assisting police and military and general protection.

Service dogs: Guide dogs, utility dogs, assistance dogs, hearing dogs, and psychological therapy dogs (assistance to those with physical or mental disabilities). Dogs have alerted owners when an impending seizure was coming. They are also being used to help returning veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Because dogs have lived and worked with humans for so long, it is no surprise that they have been given the moniker of **man's best friend**. So get ready for the Rose Parade, and the Bowl games with a beer, your best friend and the clicker in your man cave.

Food for thought:

"Happiness is a warm puppy."

--Charles M. Schulz

"A Dog is the only thing on earth that loves you more than he loves himself." --Josh Billings.

"Outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend. Inside of a dog it's too dark to read."

--Groucho Marx, *The Essential Groucho: Writing for By And About Groucho*.

"A person can learn a lot from a dog, even a loopy one like ours. Marley taught me about living each day with unbridled exuberance and joy, about seizing the moment and following your heart. He taught me to appreciate the simple things—a walk in the woods, a fresh snowfall, a nap in a shaft of winter sunlight. And as he grew old and achy, he taught me about friendship and selflessness and, above all else, unwavering loyalty."

--John Grogan, *Marley and Me: Life and Love With the World's Worst Dog*.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS — JANUARY 2014



1 — NEW YEARS DAY

2 — Thursday

3 — Friday

- A.A. MTG. @ 1:00 PM
- D.A. MTG @ 6:00 PM

4 — Saturday

5 — SUNDAY

SUNDAY SCHOOL @ 9 AM
WORSHIP @ 10:30 AM
HOLY COMMUNION

O.A. MTG. @ 7:00 PM

6 — Monday
CHURCH COUNCIL MTG
@ 7 PM

7 — Tuesday
BIBLE STUDY @ 7 PM

8 — Wednesday
JOIN THE CHOIR... @ 7:15 PM

9 — Thursday

10 — Friday

- A.A. MTG. @ 1:00 PM
- D.A. MTG @ 6:00 PM

11 — Saturday
Happy Birthday Clara Fink & Cameron Chinn

12 — SUNDAY

SUNDAY SCHOOL @ 9 AM
WORSHIP @ 10:30 AM
HOLY COMMUNION
PRAYER OF HEALING SERVICE

O.A. MTG. @ 7:00 PM
Happy Birthday Courtney Manley

13 — Monday
GARDEN CLUB @ 1 PM

Happy Birthday Max Berg

14 — Tuesday
BIBLE STUDY @ 7 PM

15 — Wednesday
JOIN THE CHOIR... @ 7:15 PM
Happy Birthday Karen Como

16 — Thursday
ELCW LUNCH

17 — Friday

- A.A. MTG. @ 1:00 PM
- D.A. MTG @ 6:00 PM

18 — Saturday
Happy Birthday Cyndi Manley

19 — SUNDAY
SUNDAY SCHOOL @ 9 AM
WORSHIP @ 10:30 AM
HOLY COMMUNION

Happy Birthday Jerry Gross
STORIES, SONGS & SUPPER
@ 4:00 PM

O.A. MTG. @ 7:00 PM

Newsletter Deadline

20 — Monday
MARTIN
LUTHER KING
HOLIDAY



21 — Tuesday
BIBLE STUDY @ 7 PM
Happy Birthday Dondi Buchrucker

22 — Wednesday
JOIN THE CHOIR... @ 7:15 PM

23 — Thursday

24 — Friday

- A.A. MTG. @ 1:00 PM
- D.A. MTG @ 6:00 PM

25 — Saturday
Happy Birthday Katherine Stoner

26 — SUNDAY
SUNDAY SCHOOL @ 9 AM
WORSHIP @ 10:30 AM
HOLY COMMUNION
CONGREGATION LUNCHEON
 O.A. MTG. @ 7:00 PM

27 — Monday

28 — Tuesday
BIBLE STUDY @ 7 PM
Happy Birthday Stephanie Siemer

29 — Wednesday
JOIN THE CHOIR... @ 7:15 PM

30 — Thursday
Happy Birthday Georgie Lynch



GLORIA DEI EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

**5872 Naples Plaza
Long Beach, California 90803**



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