



Embrace Release

God Sightings

Lenten Devotional 2017

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

Freeland, MI

Dear Zion Family,

We celebrate 10 years of God Sighting here at Zion with this edition. If you like what you read, just know I publish a weekly story like this every week of the year. To participate simply send an email at freelandpastor@zionfreeland.org and I will add you to our weekly mailing.

Thank you to Carol Little for the cover art that reflects our Lenten theme of **RELEASE** and **EMBRACE**.

Thank you to Allison Dakos our office manager for technical assistance.

Thank you to Susan Becker for serving as editor of all our stories. Susan is a recent addition to the church family, who thanked me for the chance to serve the church this way.

Most of all thank you to each contributor that shared a story.

God continues to transform and change every one of us. In this process we are invited to embrace some things and let go of others. This process is true in life, true for church. There is a time for rest, healing and letting care strengthen us.

But the longer I am a pastor, and wisdom grows, observing others and living as the church in culture today we are all called to be self-reflective and actively engaged in the process of release and embrace.

I invite your prayers into that meaning for your life, our church and our collective future.

In Christ – Pr. Rob Lent 2017

➤ **March 1st**

Luke 22:19 New International Version

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

The Sunday School kids never cease to amaze me. I had the opportunity to fill in for our P/K teacher one Sunday. We only had 2 students that day so we decided to get an early start on the Sunday School Scavenger hunt. The assignment was to find as many Pictures / Statues / Representations of Jesus we could find.

As we were walking, the kids found the picture above the stairs, the statue in the front of the sanctuary, and the statues of Jesus standing on the earth. Then they started to notice the pictures containing Jesus' name, the Jesus fish above Allison's door, the Jesus painting from Pastor Rob's family vacation, and a small cross with Jesus' name on it. As we re-checked the sanctuary for "Jesus," Grayson and Jude pointed to the bread and wine pictures sewn onto the tablecloth. It took me a moment to figure out they had made the connection of the bread and wine representing Jesus. They GOT IT!

Jodi Dahley

Prayer: Dear God bless our Sunday School teachers and participants from young to old that we may continue to offer Sunday School for the glory of your name and knowledge we gain and share in the process. Amen

➤ **March 2nd**

Luke 1:79 ESV

To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

I am vacationing. We rely every day on a GPS to help us find our way. I rely on God to help me make decisions. Yesterday my sister found a good urgent care facility. She will be better in time. Every day I pray for good health and safety for me and others I care about. Thank you God for travels with my family.

Jan Hennink

Prayer: Dear God thank you for the many ways you journey with us daily through times of travel and need, stability and growth, and healing. Help us view the system known as a GPS as a reminder that our lives are directed in the same way by your Holy Spirit. Thank you for technology and bless all technology for good, not evil. Amen.

➤ **March 3rd**

Revelation 21:4 ESV

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

Jo Wegner died and was buried here at Zion. Her story since my time as a pastor includes healing, acceptance and service to and for the church. That healing continues through the grace and love of God.

Jo lived with her daughter Donna. Like most people she has some stories of difficulty and conflict that have to do with family and church.

Part of the blessing of being a pastor is getting to hear these stories, and prayerfully work toward healing. And so over the course of months I met and prayed with Jo and Donna, learning and listening, challenging and praying.

They eventually became two of the best attending members at church never missing Sunday or Wednesday worship. The church had become a place of welcome and healing again for both ladies.

Planning the funeral for Jo and meeting with Norm and Donna began a new phase and sense of healing for the family. Healing and peace that started was continuing as we spoke of death, funerals and faith.

Donna and Norm (and his wife) have shared with me how the healing process, companionship, and support of siblings continue to grow.

Even after death, there is new life in this world too. I thank God for the love and faith shared as we planned a funeral for Jo. Through that process healing has continued, and will continue by faith and love.

Written by Pastor Rob for Donna Wegner

Prayer: Dear God death is a sad and painful time for many. Yet even in that spot, we find your love and grace has power to bring families together. We pray for all families that grieve and plan funerals that a closeness and cooperation grows, not animosity and pain. Amen.

➤ **March 4th**

Matthew 7:7 “Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you.”

It seems like a never-ending battle- the battle of the bulge. The older one gets, the more difficult it gets, and the more tiring it gets. I’ve done Zumba, aerobics, and tried silly diets. They work for a while and then I’m right back to where I started. I don’t want to be overweight because it’s affecting my health, not just my clothing size. But what else can I do?

This time I kept it simple- and just prayed. Usually when I pray it’s not for myself. I’ve always prayed for others in their time of need, so why not pray for myself for a change? *“I’m fine and I don’t need any help. There are plenty of other people in the world who need it more than me. I thank God for everything and everyone I have- I am truly rich and blessed with my life. I don’t need to ask Him for help.”*

But I decided to ask God for his help in getting this extra weight off. Lord knows I alone cannot get it off- and keep it off-without help from someone! Lo and behold, He sent me help through someone on Facebook. Someone I went to school with was becoming a Coach. He sent her to me not once, but twice! The first time I didn’t believe Him and it was going to cost too much, etc. I had all sorts of excuses not to believe she was the answer. Then she appeared again! Ok, OK, Ill call her and try it!

Well she’s helped me lose a few pounds and inches, and Im learning to eat and live healthier. Better yet, I’ve developed a few relationships along the way. I even reconnected with some people from high school! God is great!

Patty Paisley

Prayer: Dear God, help us understand the answer to prayer comes in many ways. Help us not only pray for others, but for us. Thank you for all of those who remember us in their prayers. Amen

➤ **March 5th**

2 Timothy 3:14-15

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”

Seeing God in a classroom you ask? How can it be, classrooms are boring, classrooms are regimented, classrooms are stiff. All of these misconceptions are just that, pictures in our minds. I can tell you though after attending many Adult Education classes here at Zion that with rare exception that picture definitely is not the case. We have talked about World Religions, the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of John, some of the Epistles, lesser prophets, DVD-led studies, the Ten Commandments, and currently a book entitled Being Lutheran. We use many different types of class dynamics. Now that the PSA is completed let me tell you how I SEE God in these settings.

While we think about what we read, God enters more often for me in the shared thoughts of others. For example, how they see God, how they interpret what they have read, how they react to what others see and say. This is where God is to me. When I find the time to keep my mouth shut and my ears open, God often is revealed. You can see through the eyes and thoughts of others how God speaks to them and through them.

Can these Bible/book studies be boring at times? You bet. Are these studies more often informing and invigorating? You bet. Can we learn how God touches ourselves and others by sitting in these studies? You bet. I SEE God through continuous searching and sharing with others by what the words mean to me and what they mean to you. I am thankful; though the numbers are few we have people in our church who continue to learn and grow their faith through studying and sharing. I SEE God in learning.

Bob LaDuke

Prayer: Lord help me to always thirst for understanding of the way you would have me live my life and the way I should treat others. I thank you for the gift of your words that we may study and learn your way and your ways. Amen

➤ **March 6th**

Mark 16:15 “And he said to them, go into all the world, and proclaim the Gospel to all creation”

What the heck just happened?!

I was visiting my Mom at the nursing home on a Friday. I usually stay 30-45 minutes, but she normally falls asleep in her wheelchair after the first five. This day was no exception, so I had planned to read my adult Sunday School chapter and Bible verses while she slept. The lesson was about parables, and I was just starting to read about the Good Samaritan in Luke to refresh my memory about specific details.

As I was reading, one of the residents was rolling past in his wheelchair. I looked up and said, “Hi,” fully intending to bury my nose back into my reading. I was a bit surprised when he stopped rolling and started talking. My inclination was he was just jabbering, and I was ready to ignore him and start reading again.

But something struck me this would be contrary to the message of the Good Samaritan. To show love, I should try to pay attention to him and maintain eye contact. So I did. He spoke in a quiet voice, and somewhat mumbled. If I knew him and was used to his speech, I would have probably been able to better understand him. As it was, I was able to understand less than 5% of what he was saying. I have no idea if he could carry on a conversation.

Even so, as I tried listening to him, I quickly discovered that his was not random gibberish. He had noticed and understood that I was reading the Bible. He was telling me about his faith, about God, about how both his mother and father had taught him about God, and how he had taught his children about God, even after they reached adulthood.

Unfortunately, I was unable to understand the vast majority of what he said, but I did pick up on some pieces of what he was saying, including:

You can find answers to every one of life’s questions in the Bible.

God loves us. God cares for us. God wants to help us. We should not be afraid of God.

We should not be afraid to talk to and pray to God, or ask for His help.

Wonderful things can happen when we fall to our knees in prayer.

People are surprised to hear that it is that easy to interact with God.

The devil is doing his best to lead us astray.

I was also able to pick up on a longer message and two stories:

Each one of us has our own faith path to find our way to God. Everyone’s path is different, but they all end in the same spot. Each path is narrow, though, and the farther we stray from our path, the more trouble we get into.

His adult daughter was stressed out about bills. He told her to just put her bills in a pile, pray to God for help, clear her mind and sleep on it. Things would be better the next day.

He also told the same daughter to look at herself in the mirror in the morning and to think about her life. Then she should write down a list of all the good things in her life, and a list of all the bad things. As she practiced this, she would be amazed how much longer the good list was, and the difference in lengths would increase over time as she did this.

The gentleman spoke for 25 minutes straight. All I did was nod my head and say “uh, huh.” I finally had to excuse myself to take Mom to lunch. My Sunday School lesson remained unread, but I felt blessed and invigorated even though I understood only a very small portion of what he was telling me.

How many of us could give an uninterrupted, unrehearsed 25 minute testimonial of our faith to a total stranger? I was amazed.

Ilmar Doubulis

Prayer: God help us remember we are invited to SHARE our faith AND LISTEN when others share theirs! Strengthen us to be your witness to testify to the world. Amen

➤ **March 7th**

Jeremiah 29:11 ESV

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

Changes, upheaval, uncertainty. The last year has been full to bursting with them, as in children moving away, losing my job, my husband's new job and the decision to move away from our home of over 20 years. Sometimes it's felt as if life was spinning out of control.

But in the midst of all this, new opportunities have been discovered. New friendships have been formed. Again and again I've been reminded that no matter how lost and afraid we feel, God has a plan.

This spring we'll be moving away from Freeland, but I will always cherish the memories we created and the dear friends we have made. I pray the next season of our lives is as blessed.

Hillary Norfleet

Prayer : Change is a constant in our lives and cannot be stopped. Help us understand that by faith we are to believe God is with us in all things great and small; difficult and joyful. Amen.

➤ **March 8th**

Matthew 25:36 ESV

I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'

We have a ministry that regularly visits our two local nursing home here in Freeland. Did you know that? Every Thursday morning for the last 6 years we go to Stone Crest or Barton Woods to pray, read scripture, sing and even share communion. Can you join us at 10:30 am?

It is a great ministry organized and supported by members of the church, not the pastor. I just show up. It is selfless, and totally focused upon others. Our church gains no members or finances this way. But we grow through living the scriptures and commands of Jesus.

We serve members of our church who are residents at these homes. It is a powerful witness of Zion to be there. It is even more powerful when members and their families see our ministry in action. We provide ministry as they age and die. We share love and in turn grow from them. We are touched by their stories. They are blessed by the many volunteers and musicians that come from Zion to bring church to them.

As a pastor it is one of my greatest joys to be a part of this team that serves the community in this way. Thank you to the people that are a part of our nursing home ministry. Please consider joining us.

Pastor Rob

Prayer: Dear God thank you for allowing us to minister to our community through these two nursing homes. Thank you for the members of Zion that organize, provide music and participate bringing the life, love and power of Jesus through their efforts. Bless them 100 times over for their ministry of love and care shared so freely. Amen.

➤ **March 9th**

John 7:24 ESV “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgement.”

When my son was two, he was running across our front porch, twisted his leg and fell. He sustained a spiral fracture to the left femur. He was in a body cast for two months and I was six months pregnant with our second baby. The most horrific part of it however, was we were automatically investigated for child abuse due to the nature of the fracture. His chart was sent to the U of M for one month as we awaited their determination. Any car that pulled in the driveway made me physically shudder afraid someone was going to take him away from his momma when he needed me most.

The pain and discomfort he was in was absolutely heart-breaking-indescribable, and he was too young to understand.

It was finally determined we were not responsible for his injuries. During that month in waiting, people came out of the woodwork to help us in any way. We were assisted financially, spiritually, in-person, via phone, via mail, in every possible way. His pediatric PA, my co-workers, mother, brother, sister-in-law, and COUNTLESS friends and family as well as people we didn't even know from all over the US took care of our family in every way. He and 8 of our family members were even treated to a VIP day at Comerica Park courtesy of the Detroit Tigers.

What was an unimaginable, horrific, freak accident, turned into the most immeasurable acts of love and kindness from above. We made a “Pay it Forward” album for my son of all the people who helped and what they did, so when he is old enough to really understand, he can see how the Lord was present and filled countless people's hearts to take care and love my sweet little boy.

Susan Becker

Prayer: In the midst of trying times Lord your compassion and mercy are made known. Help us to be slow to judge, and quick to love as we place all things into your care trusting that mercy and justice prevail.

➤ **March 10th**

3 John 1:2 ESV

Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.

I became very sick in May 2016. A severe case of pneumonia became life-threatening. I was in the hospital for 12 days. The doctors tried to avoid it, but I needed open lung surgery with a long extended recovery.

While I was in the hospital, I was visited by Pastor Rob more than once who administered communion to me, prayed with me and my family, and took a genuine interest in my spiritual health. My wife and son went to church one Wednesday when I was in the hospital, and my son went up for the children's sermon. It was then Pastor Rob presented him with a prayer shawl to bring to me. He said a prayer for me and my wife brought it to the hospital.

As a relatively new member of Zion, I felt very welcomed, cared for and touched to receive such a personal gift. I've since wondered who actually made it and would like to thank all who perform this ministry at this time. I know it helped me with the healing process both mentally and physically. I will always remember Pastor Rob's and the congregations' kindnesses to me and my family.

Mike Becker

Prayer: Dear God thank you for the prayer shawl ministry that gives blessings and care to others. Thank you for the chance to welcome others into the church and share healing, love and care with one another. Amen

➤ **March 11th**

Romans 12:9-21 English Standard Version (ESV)

Marks of the True Christian

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit,[a] serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

Becoming a father is an incredible experience for a number of reasons. The love you feel for your new child is like nothing you have ever experienced. You also discover a new level of love and admiration for your wife, knowing that she is going to face battles and climb mountains throughout the entire process, while all you can do is support her. But one of the most amazing signs of God throughout the process is the outpouring of love from family and friends, coworkers and neighbors. In times where it's easy to be pessimistic and sour about our world, but there are still good people who are willing to go out of their way for others. I will never forget the random acts of kindness people in my life have shown my family over the past few months. God has truly blessed us in countless ways.

James Kuch

Prayer: Lord bless all parents, bless all children, bless all community that we may care and support one another in need knowing this is our call to faith. Amen

➤ **March 12th**

Matthew 21:15-16 New International Version (NIV)

But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant. “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked Him. “Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read, “From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise”

I'm not exactly sure when I first saw this, but it deeply impacted my day and has since changed every day and how I say or sing our Lord's prayer. I know I was sitting near the front of the church on the right hand side. A young mother and her son were one pew forward and on the other side. It happened to be a Sunday when we were singing the Lord's Prayer. The mother kept trying to tone her son down as he was happily singing at the very top of his lungs. What a joy to see a young person so involved in sharing his voice and praise!! After the service, I took a moment to approach her and I asked her to please, NOT shush her child. She responded with a comment about him being unable to carry a song in a bucket. My reply was "Please, let him sing. Loudly and joyously!" She agreed to not shush him and has since let him sing it out, HIS WAY!! To this day, whenever I say or sing the Lord's prayer, I remember my young friend (Drew) and his family. If they are not near me, I still smile. I know that Drew is praising our Lord in his own beautiful way and I am reminded that together, we can all make a joyful noise unto the Lord!

Jackie Munger

Prayer: God thank you for the voices of children praising you in our church. Thank you for the talking, crying and noise our little ones bring too. Help us welcome and extend kindness to our future church. Amen

➤ **March 13th**

JOHN 6:35 NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (NIV)

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Sunday July 24th, the church was in need. As is sometimes the case, we were short-handed when it came to worship volunteers. Specifically we were short-handed when it came to distribution of communion.

While sharing the peace with one another, I asked Norine Carrigan and her grandson Josh Baird to fill in the gap.

Serving the church is a sacred duty, and honor. Yet for many reasons people do not volunteer. But very few people experience such an invitation to serve like this.

And so on that day, a Grandmother and grandson stepped forward to share the sacrament of communion with the church. They served well. And ever since then, they have continued to serve.

When God calls... can you fill the gap?

More than 6 months later Norine shared one more detail with me. That day was the 2 year anniversary of her husband Bob's death. A special memory was created that day through the willingness to serve.

Written by Pr. Rob after discussion with Norine

Prayer: Lord God we are called in very unexpected ways to act in a way that helps bring forth your presence in the world. Help us always be willing to step out of our comfort zones when we can fill a need and share faith. Amen.

➤ **March 14th**

1 Peter 4:10 ESV

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. We live in a world that is very busy. Everyone is scrambling. Depending on your generation, serving the church has different understandings and meanings.

For some generations service means showing up, getting it done; because that is what we do at church.

Other generations will respond to written invitations and announcements. One may not assume what is needed, but if the announcement or advertisement is noticed, a response is evoked.

Another generation needs to be invited personally by someone who has made them feel welcome and included, valuing input and ideas. Then they step forward realizing they too can serve- they have been given permission.

Other generations may just assume they are not wanted, not valued, and not invited because they cannot make long term time commitments, or have many other work and family obligations.

As a pastor the pain I experience when I hear people explain they did not feel welcome within a group and or are told that is not the way we do things here is difficult to hear.

What I have learned through my research and experience is people respond and want to help after they are welcomed and invited to participate.

Newer members and a younger generation are especially waiting for that personal invitation and conversation to serve. It takes getting to know people. And earning about their life and family makes it easier into inviting and welcoming them to participate.

This past week I have been blessed by finding three new volunteers to serve the church in specific capacities. Two CPA's who will serve on the audit team and the editor for this God Sighting book.

All were happy to serve. All responded to personal conversation and invitation and are sharing their gifts with the church.

To all our volunteers thank you for the many ways you have and continue to serve. For the many generational understandings and responses to serving the church thank you.

I encourage you to look for ways to serve the church. I encourage you to form relationships, welcome new members and ideas, and invite others to serve with your ministry.

Pastor Rob

Prayer: Dear God thank you for the service our visitors and members give to Zion through their volunteer services and ministry participation. Help us never tire of welcoming people into our church and serving the church in the ways you have called and empowered them with their skills and gifts. Amen.

➤ **March 15th**

Luke 24:15-17 ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷ He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”

God sightings? For me there have been times in my life when it seems a God sighting is as rare as capturing a glimpse of the elusive Big Foot- and what is sad about that is it's because of choices I am making that I do not see Him.

When things get rough for me whether it's at home or work I begin to shut out everything around me. I isolate myself in my own sadness, anger, and frustration. I choose to wallow in my own grief and dissatisfaction. I refuse to look out and see what is surrounding me, God's love.

When I choose to keep my eyes open I see God everywhere. I see God in the sunrise and sunset, in both sunshine and rain, in light and in darkness. I see God when I look at my husband. I know we were given to each other by God to help one another through our life journey. I see God when I look at my children and grandchildren as I have watched them grow and become the people they are meant to be. I see God in the actions of my coworkers and friends. I see God at Zion. I see God when I look for Him. He is with me each and every step I take. God is always with me on this journey- the question is why don't I always see God? The answer is simple and dependent completely on me and my decisions, as in where I allow God to walk? It's hard to see someone who is walking behind you- I see God everyday when I let Him walk by my side or I allow Him to lead me through the hard spots.

Connie Engelhardt

Prayer: Dear God help us remember to look for you in our daily joys and struggles. Help us find you in boredom and excitement. Bless us on our journey into life and growth as we look for you walking with us as we remember we are never alone. Amen.

➤ **March 16th**

ACTS 20:35 ESV

In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

Shirley Seitz was telling me we were nearly out of prayer shawls. She said the replacements were not coming in as fast.

Previously, the prayer shawl ministry had reached out to Joyce Parsons and welcomed her to the group. Sharing her skills and joining the prayer shawl ministry was a way Joyce connected with Zion, and was a valued and contributing member. Joyce became more and more ill and was unable to participate with the ministry anymore. But I know Shirley would call Joyce, and check on her.

Joyce recently died. And her daughter Becky just showed up at church with 4 large trash bags filled with prayer shawls and baby prayer shawls. Although Joyce was not here in her illness, she was busy none the less making prayer shawls. Sitting at home, she was connected to Zion. She was making prayer shawls for others. And just when we were almost OUT, her gift of love arrived delivered by her daughter a few months after her death.

God provides. God provided a welcome to Joyce through the prayer shawl ministry. God provided a caring relationship between that ministry and Joyce. God provided Joyce with meaning and purpose as she was home ill, to care for others with her skills. God delivered those gifts to the church when we were almost all out.

What blessings- the prayer shawl ministry, the relationship and outreach to Joyce, and the gifts made for others by Joyce. God provides.

Prayer: Dear God bless us in the ways we reach out to welcome others into our church family. Thank you for the caring relationships that form, as we welcome others. Help us be mindful of the gifts that are being prepared and shared at the hands of others. Thank you that even in death, we can be reminded of life through the gifts we leave behind for others. Amen.

Written by Pastor Rob in Loving Memory of Joyce Parsons

➤ **March 17th**

Ephesians 4:26 ESV

Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.

Proverbs 14:29 ESV

Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.

I sat down on the couch and began typing this God Sighting on my phone...

There was something different when pulling into the church parking lot that morning. There was a woman who did not look like she belonged, pushing a shopping cart and looking in the dumpster. (Eric comes over and sits by me and reads over my shoulder, "Mom, you mis-typed When..")

My boys looked at me with questions in their eyes, and on their lips. ("Mom, you mis-typed lips")

Exasperated because it is hard enough to type a document from my phone key pad, I did not need or want someone to keep pointing out my flaws, and I reacted in the worst possible way

"Eric! Just go away!!"

I saw the hurt in his eyes as he got off the couch and went into his room. "Mom, I was just trying to help."

By that time, I could not finish my God Sighting about the woman because I was so mad.

-Mad that I was seen as the bad one in that event

-Mad at myself for being mean to Eric

-Mad that no one else could see my point of view

-Mad that I could not finish the God Sighting

-Just ...plain... mad

I went into his room and told him to come out with us and finish his TV program before bed.

At this point I figured it was all fine. I went into Reed's room to tuck him in for bed.

I heard down the hall Eric and his Dad talking, about how much it hurt him that I told him to go away.

Such simple words, so easy to fly out of my mouth in frustration.

Not so simple to the heart.

Eric and I had a long conversation that night, why I said what I did, and how I still love him.

I apologized for hurting him, and yes, I love having him around me, and truly appreciate his help

My take away from this - think twice before just blurting out my first

thought or feeling.

Do not say something to my kids or other family members that I would not say to a friend.

This does not mean I have to always be nice, chipper and cheery.

Next time I have frustration, I will communicate better, not to be "soft" but to build relationships instead of break them.

Jodi Dahley

Prayer: Dear God thank you for showing us the cost of our anger in honest ways we understand. Forgive us when we hurt others. Give us the Holy Spirit to help us find peace and offer comfort after we cause conflict! Amen.

➤ **March 18th**

Matthew 25:35 ESV

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.

The Saginaw Metro Ministry operates a food pantry for the Saginaw area at St. John's ELCA on second and federal in Saginaw. Our church is invited to work there quarterly, in serving that community in need.

I have witnessed the love of Christ in action from members of Zion showing up the food pantry to help. Our members are there to accompany people in need, share a smile, and assist them collecting their food. It is a rewarding and humbling experience.

Our church supports Saginaw Metro Ministry through paying \$500 in dues to this organization as well as \$1,500 designated for the food pantry from our line item budget annually.

Zion is trying to feed the hungry, and welcome the stranger. I invite you to prayerfully support this ministry through your offerings that we may meet our budget, and participation by joining the members of Zion that serve the food pantry in multiple ways.

Pastor Rob Schmidt

Prayer: Dear God thank you for the members of Zion who participate with the food pantry. Help them share their experience and stories with others growing the ministry through their testimony and witness. Amen.

➤ **March 19th**

John 10:27 ESV

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

On Valentine's Day this year, it will be 9 years since my mom passed away. Her short battle with cancer was brutal and she suffered so very much. She battled with chemo but was just not strong enough; the cancer was ravenous and took over. This was so very difficult to watch. Near the very end, she knew her days were limited and in a very short time, she would meet her maker. We talked about death, about what it would be like, what would she experience as she passed? Pastor Rob was gracious enough to visit both of my parents as they both battled cancer together. He prayed with both of them and assured them God loved them and would welcome mom with loving arms.

Mom also loved American idol and watched every episode. During mom's battle, Carrie Underwood recorded 'Jesus take the wheel'. Mom loved that song and often said, 'there is not much I can do now but 'let Jesus take the wheel'. She was fearful yet comforted knowing that she was protected and would be released to God's care.

This past fall, my father passed away as his battle with cancer ended as well. He put up one heck of a fight but was abruptly taken by a heart attack while undergoing chemo. Losing mom was so hard for me but I was not prepared for what the loss of my father was going to be like. Now both of my parents are gone....It has been 5 months and I suffer and struggle daily, often overcome with waves of grief. I feel like an orphan, a lost sheep wandering, waiting for someone, something, to lead me into more comforting times.

The process of mentally preparing myself to go through their belongings, sorting, disposing, packing and giving away has been difficult. We have started to pack household goods but I have yet to pack away daddy's clothes and personal belongings. Just today, I sat and talked with Kyle, wondering when I was going to be ready to do this. He assured me there was no rush. We are going up tomorrow to try to make some progress. As I sat with tears rolling down my face, Carrie Underwood came on the radio, 'Jesus take the wheel'. Someone was listening and knew exactly what I needed to hear at that exact moment. I am certain both of my parents will be with me as we journey together through this process.

Prayer: Dear God thank you for continuing to speak to us about our loved ones who have died and are safe in your care. Help us hear your voice as you give us memories of love, strength and guidance through music, laughter, tears and memories of our loved ones safe with you. Amen.

Submitted by Sheryl Krenzke (Feb 2016).

➤ **March 20th**

Psalms 36:7

“How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.”

So a few years ago, (1989) my older brother was diagnosed with cancer. Some of you, who know me, may remember this event in our family history. I was 12, he was 16. This was a life changing event for all of us, and its effects can still be felt today. Fast forward to last May. My brother and his wife have a beautiful three year old little girl, who was truly in God’s time, delivered to them. She just had her third birthday, but wasn’t feeling well. One thing led to another, as she progressively got more ill, leading to a hospital trip. One test after another was performed, and then ultimately was diagnosed and confirmed with Leukemia. TIME TO FALL APART!!! I know how my brother and his wife must have felt. I have been there before with my own little girl. Your own little slice of hell carved and served up like a freight train of anguish and pain and anger of “HOW CAN THIS BE HAPPENING!!!” But wait . . . this is a God sighting! Not a hell sighting for Lent. Here is how I know (AGAIN) that God is always present in everything.

My brother had an Oncologist years prior who called my mother at 11:30 on a Sunday night from Ann Arbor, and I know, no believe, is why my brother is alive today. A few years after my brother was diagnosed and cured he earned a full ride scholarship to Western Michigan University and called to tell that same Oncologist about the great news. The Oncologist had good news to share with him as well. Unrelated, he informed my brother that he was going to be moving his practice to Bronson hospital in Kalamazoo. Some would say coincidence, right? Well, time went on, and my brother and sister went on to great things in their careers and eventually had Elise. This was a miracle in and of itself, but that is another God sighting altogether. Meanwhile, his Oncologist had been training up and coming people at Bronson hospital. Those same amazing and wonderful people who are still helping my amazing niece Elise today defeated this disease. Coincidence does not exist! THIS IS GOD, if we are open to listening and seeking Him, He is always there.

Kristopher Lentner

Thank you Lord, for those small glimpses into your ultimate and “surpassing all human understanding” plans you have for us. Continue to lead us to listen and seek you, even in our darkest times, for that love that you intend for us! Amen.

➤ **March 21st**

Psalm 63:4 ESV

So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.

Leading worship I get to watch the congregation, and so I see something you cannot. I see all of you.

I see in your faces and pasture your stories of struggle, strength and faith. I watch your faces and gestures all during worship and preaching. I see when you are tracking, talking and sleeping. I am directed by what I see.

It is always energizing to see the Spirit at work. There are times and ways people become engaged and lit on fire. Those moments are sacred and blessed.

One particular Sunday I noticed how my gestures were being mimicked by a man in a wheel chair in the back of church. This was especially true when my hands were stretched out in prayer.

Each time, his hands and arms were opened and stretched out to me. It struck me in such a sacred and powerful way this man was participating in worship. The love of God, the grace of God, were all pouring out of him back toward me.

God spoke and reminded me of the faith and power people bring to the sanctuary. Some days I see it, some days I do not. But it is always being poured out upon us all.

Pastor Rob

Prayer: Dear God as we gather to worship let your Holy Spirit work within and through us all in your sacred space. Amen.

➤ **March 22nd**

Matthew 25:40 ESV

And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

There was something different when pulling into the church parking lot that morning. There was a woman who did not look like she belonged, pushing a shopping cart and looking in the dumpster. My boys looked at me with questions in their eyes, and on their lips. "Who is that, what is she doing?"

Gathering as always was in the nursery and then we headed down to the sanctuary. As we walked out of the door, the same woman was sitting, dirty, smelly, at one of the fellowship hall tables. The kids all looked and whispered. During opening in the sanctuary, the kids sing songs and hear the gospel reading that day. We talked about the lesson a bit. The kids kept glancing to the back of the church where the woman sat in the back and looked like she was praying with a bowed head. The kids were then dismissed to their classes. The woman returned to the parking lot, pacing back and forth.

The 5th and 6th graders were meeting in the pavilion. They began to discuss the woman and decided she needed food, and as a group went to pick produce from the garden to share. The 2nd and 3rd graders came out of the church with cards in their hands. They wanted to share the love of Jesus with the woman. Along with their teachers so they were not approaching a stranger alone, they stopped the woman, gave her the cards and talked about God's love with her. Some even gave her a hug.

Closing was in the pavilion that day. The kids gathered and began talking about the woman, for whom they felt so bad. They wanted her to come to the closing so they could give her the produce that the 5th and 6th graders gathered.

The woman was hesitant to come to the pavilion. The kids started to sing "Jesus loves you". The woman was in tears she was so touched by the children's reactions. (The cards, the produce, the song, the hugs.) At the end of Sunday School, we explained there are people in this world that need help, that are hungry. We help them by growing the garden, by helping with food pantry, noisy offerings.

Before dismissing the children I explained the woman was my mother, she was not in need, she was playing a role that she played when I was in Sunday School. The lesson stuck with me, and I know from their reactions, the lesson will also stick with these kids.

Parents, be proud! Your children have HUGE hearts!
Jodi Dahley

Prayer: Dear God thank you for the creative ways we educate and share love in Sunday School. Bless the loving and responsive nature of our children as they lead with love and compassion teaching us all. Amen.

➤ **March 23rd**

1 Thessalonians 5:18 ESV

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

This past week I have been quarantined to my bed for an upper respiratory infection and 3 strands of the flu, so I have had a lot of time to think. Rob posted a Daily Prayer Text that talked about the blessings in being sick and I quickly responded that I was not there yet. As I laid in my bed I would go from freezing, chilled to the bone, to hot as the Sierra Desert in all but a matter of minutes. I could not keep any form of liquid down, my head felt like an elephant was doing a constant dance in it with knives for claws, my eyes, lips, and facial skin was drying up like a prune, and my nose was either running or stuffed.

As I lay there I started to think there are many families and/or people that live like this on a daily basis. People are out on the street who freeze from the cold, rain, sleet, hail, etc. Or they are hot because of the humidity and temperatures of hot summers. There are people who do not have shelter, blankets, sweatshirts, choices of layers of clothes or little clothing. There are people who do not have the choice to eat or drink each day because they cannot buy food, find it in a dumpster, or manage to venture out to get anything. There are people who are sick daily and cannot go to the doctor to get antibiotics, do not have a vehicle, insurance, or someone to drive them there because they are too weak to do it on their own. There are people sitting under bridges homeless, begging for food on the streets, needing a ride to an appointment, needing a blanket, needing a warm meal, needing an "I love you" or a gentle hug. Where are we as God's disciples in this process? The longer I grappled with all of this in my heart and mind the more thankful I became for my illness and all of the family, friends, prayers, and love I was receiving. No one asked for anything in return except for me to feel better. God opened my eyes by thinking of the many people right around us each and every day that do not have these blessings and not to take them for granted. Pray for others who do not have these means, pray for those who interact with other people, pray for the sick, pray for the homeless, pray for the person who looks or smells different. God made each of us in His image and God does not make junk!! We all have struggles in life but always try to see the blessing in how we get through these times and all blessings we have around us. Not everyone has those opportunities.

I had someone to take me to the doctor and labs, I had someone go to Meijer and get some things for me when we were at the doctor, I had several people make slurpee runs for me. I had Kleenex boxes on every level, I had a humidifier set up for me, I had medicine brought to me, I had clean up services for mishaps, I had blankets, a fan, a cold cloth for my head, back/neck massages, special food made, and text, phone calls, and support from co-workers who went above and beyond. I had nothing to complain about but I did have a whole lot of soul searching to do about others around me and not overlooking their everyday needs. Today I am thankful for my sickness and do see it as a blessing.

Sue Schmidt

Prayer: Dear God there are times when we are down and out for many reasons and we thank you for the love and help that comes to us through others. We are grateful for the knowledge and insight we gain through prayerful reflection. We pray for all those that are in need of this same love and insight. Help us find them, and love them. Amen.

➤ **March 24th**

Luke 18:1 ESV

And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

I write a daily prayer and send it to people via text every day. For the most part this prayer service has had a powerful impact upon people participating. It is a simple prayer that goes out to over 275 people as of today.

I am amazed how often people respond to these prayers to share their life story, present circumstances, and meaning of the prayer that just arrived.

It is a simple action to try and keep people connected to our church and God daily.

It is not for everyone, but it demonstrates an attempt to find a new way to share Gods love and grace. It is an effort I make. The service has been criticized by some that feel it is not needed or it is just another distraction. But it is most definitely reaching people and growing their faith.

It may not be for everyone. But there is no reason why everyone does not pray for the success and outreach it represents. It is just another example of change. And as change happens people respond in different ways.

I invite you to pray about ways to reach out to new people in new ways.

To join our daily prayer service simple text the message @1minprayer to the number 81010 and you will join daily prayer. Or you can call or text pastor Rob your cell number and I can enroll you.

Prayer: God thank you for the impact our daily prayer service via text is having upon our community. Use it to keep people connected to Zion and growing in faith. Continue to move those that use the service to sign up their family and friends and use the prayer as a form of faithful growth and discussion. Amen.

Pastor Rob

➤ **March 25th**

James 2:15-17

If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

I would like to share a God sighting I felt last week. On the way to work I saw a homeless person on the side of the street holding a sign "VETERAN DOWN AND OUT- ANYTHING HELPS. This is not the first time I have been at a stop sign and saw a homeless person. I have seen them many times and turned my head the other way, due to safety first and time- always going somewhere. I was taught you never give money to homeless people because of safety, they are unpredictable and could hurt you if you put the window down. Another big reason I was taught to never give money to homeless people is because they will use the money for drugs and alcohol and that is just enabling their addition.

We are on a fixed budget right now due to my current position and I wasn't getting paid until Friday. I knew I had \$10 dollars in my wallet. I could think a thousand reasons to use the \$10 before my pay day. For some reason, on this particular sunny day, I saw this homeless person and knew God was with me and I would be safe. I am almost 29 years old and I have never given money to a homeless person, but it was the right thing to do and he needed the money more than I did. I rolled down the window and handed him the \$10 bill and said "God Bless". He said, "thank you" and I rolled up the window and went on my way to work. I could see in my rear window that he grabbed his bag and left the corner.

My first thought was hope. Maybe this homeless person would use the money to buy drugs and alcohol, but maybe, just maybe this man was going to buy food, blankets, or clothes. I am so hopeful that me sharing Gods discipleship may have really helped this person. One act of kindness could have made that man's day by being treated like a human being and not just a homeless person.

I feel good because I was open minded to a situation I felt so closed about in the past. The flood gates of God have blessed my life. I have all I need and want in life and I know God is always with me. This last year I have found my life purpose to help others and always stay humble. I am engaged to a wonderful man, I found love in my heart for my Teddy dog I didn't know I was missing, volunteering with Ministry of Education where I met some of my best friends, my passion for working with multiple non-profits for a great cause, and a loving family and friends. My faith is stronger than ever in my entire life, not because I am happy right now, but because I never gave up on my faith when I was in a darkest place. I saw the light and I was saved too.

Lisa Rittmaier

Prayer: God help us see in the needs of others the very healing and love we need our self. Thank you for the many ways you reach out and touch us in our darkness. Thank you for giving us the chance to do the same for others. Amen.

➤ March 26th

Luke 11:13 ESV

“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

2017 will be a big year for our family as our daughter will graduate from college and get married all within a 3 month period. We are so excited for Samantha as she has grown through the college years, her accomplishments, staying true to herself with bumps and bruises along the way and coming out on top. In July of 2016 Zach proposed to Samantha in NYC after asking Rob and letting Megan in on the secret. We were all home when the official call came in and it was screams and yells all over the living room as we Face-timed with the newly engaged couple. Since the day our children were conceived we have prayed for their friends, teachers, and if meant-to-be, future spouses. Now we actually have a face and name of who that would be for Samantha.

Zachary Bruick ,a good ole Nebraska guy who is going into meteorology and we could not be happier, Zach is a patient, well balanced, good for Sam, southern gentleman, with a great future ahead of him. We believe this is truly the man that God has been shaping and molding to ride this next journey of life with our daughter. So we have the man, the proposal, and now it is time to start looking for the wedding dress...

Samantha and I spontaneously went out one Saturday just to look and have some fun and it was nothing I will ever forget---I saw our beautiful little girl standing in front of me in wedding dresses, not playing dress-up, but preparing to becoming a bride. My baby girl was transformed right there and then into a Godly woman. Each dress was beautiful but than she came out with the one and I cried like a baby (they quickly grabbed the tissue box for me), it was everything I had always pictured her in and it fit her beautifully. Then they started to do up her hair and fit a veil; it was a transformation of my heart and my tears flowed even more. I was speechless because she was glowing and I wanted to freeze that moment forever. As my dad always told me growing up "it's not the dress it is the person inside it that makes it beautiful"! God has blessed us with wonderful children and the gift to watch our oldest daughter get married is a mixture of such blessings! I am excited to welcome Zach into our family and to watch them grow together through the years.

We never expected to find a dress that fast and were so excited but a little disappointed her sisters were not with us. So we had them write everything down and brought her sisters back the next day. It was ordered and marked off the list of things to do however it will never be marked off in my heart; as it will be a day I will never forget. The blessings, the feelings, the tears, the love, and the excitement of what this means for our daughter and us as parents. God has the book already written and I just want to keep on reading. I cannot wait until the wedding in August (I will need a truck load of tissues then). All happy tears of change and blessings!!

Sue Schmidt

Prayer: God help all parents, family and friends be empowered and strengthened in the resolve to pray long and consistently for the ones they love. Help us never cease to pray for and with the ones we love. Thank you for answered prayers. Amen.

➤ **March 27th**

John 13:34 ESV

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

What an amazing year. It truly has been for sure. First off, by finding Zion. The peace I find there, the people; how wonderful. Second is the conversations I get to have with God; and they are conversations. I don't call them prayers. I do pray. These are actually conversations. By doing so I have been able to put some things in order. I've been able to ask for God's help in letting some things go; to lift some burdens and release some feelings. The fall of 2016 marked a year since my husband's death. I asked God to help me by releasing some of the feelings and emotions of the last 3 ½ months of his life. Also, to look at the 36 years of living and laughter and everything else along the road. In the conversations I've had with God, I've told him how thankful I am for bringing people into my life. I am so grateful for one family in particular. They are now my family and I love them with all my heart. After listening to the sermon on 2-19-2017, God is working in me to love everyone. There have been a few people that I would like some sort of revenge. To tell you the truth, see that they get what's coming to them. But I no longer choose that. I'm choosing that some way they can find God and peace. By letting these things go I'm not feasting on myself. I'm not sure some of these relationships can ever be mended. And I think it's okay to be mad at someone, just not seek revenge. But I do know in my heart there is love. That's what I choose. God has given that to me. I know God has blessed me in so many ways. The love I have I hope I can in return do that for God.

Doug Harrington

Prayer: Dear God help us understand to love is a decision. Help us share the same unconditional love you have for us with others; even when it is difficult. Help us find the pathway to peace through prayer and love. Amen.

➤ **March 28th**

Proverbs 12:15 ESV

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

I love going to church. Every week I listen to my friend and colleague Pastor Derek Hoven preaches his sermon. Then on Wednesday morning we discuss our sermons, because he watches mine.

Both of us use YouTube services where our sermons are posted weekly. I presently have over 250 sermons posted and 11,000 views. This is a great way to stay connected to Zion if you miss a week, are out of town or want to listen to a sermon again or share it with someone else.

You can find my YouTube page by googling Pastor Rob Schmidt or go to the following link to subscribe to my page: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJXYNhSJCqKVtCuKQzUS_hQ

The MOST important part of watching sermons on line for me and then meeting with Pr. Derek on the phone is the discussions about our preaching, theology, world events and ministry. Pastor Derek is a mentor and friend that I use to grow in faith and service to the church. He is someone who can discuss being a pastor and challenge and affirm discernment and direction.

I hope everyone has a friend like Derek where you can continually strive for growth. He is a huge blessing to our church. And you may never have known that before today.

Pastor Rob Schmidt

Prayer: God bless the sermons we post on line, that they may bring growth and grace to all who listen. Thank you for my colleague Pastor Derek Hoven and the role he plays in my growth and development. Help us all have the willingness to actively work at growth seeking out the right people to help us. Amen.

➤ **March 29th**

1 John 2:9 ESV

Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.

I recently went with my family to see the movie, Hidden Figures. The movie brought back memories of my mid 1960 and 1970's visits our family took to visit my sister in Florida. I remember taking my daughter to a doctor appointment and seeing the signs for "colored" restrooms, waiting rooms and drinking fountains. We experienced an African-American gentleman stepping off the sidewalk when encountering our family so we could pass. It gave me a sad feeling for these people, but my sister told me that this is how the culture is here.

As years passed, this culture was addressed and segregation was thought to be put behind us. However, when a business trip with my associates took us to the south, a form of segregation was brought to life again. My group had 2 African American women traveling with us. We arrived at the hotel, completed check in, and proceeded to check in for the conference we were attending. The center was busy with the process and we had to wait in line for about 30 minutes with all the other attendees. My African-American co-worker who was ahead of me, stepped up to the registration window and then, stepped away and stood against the wall with no materials. I asked her why she didn't have her materials and she said she was told she had to wait until the line was finished. I asked her why she had to wait. Her reply was because of my color.

It is hard to explain my feelings at this point. We are professional people, working for a large corporation in the late 1970's; this should not be happening. My anger was immediate, to the point of boiling over. I stepped to the window and asked for her to be let back in line to receive her materials or our group would not be participating in this convention. My co-worker returned to the line, received her materials (along with the rest of our group) without further problems or embarrassment.

I was ashamed of the way she was treated at the facility. I was even more heart broken and ashamed that she was willing to step away when asked and watch everyone else be waited on while she stood there. After all, she was just like everyone else and color did not matter.

I am so thankful that we are past these times and hope and pray I never experience a situation like this again. However, if I do, I know my Lord and Savior will guide and help me handle it.

Bonnie Miller

Prayer: Dear God in this tumultuous time we live there is so much judgment and hatred of "The Other Person" the "Different and Not Normal" among us. Give us the courage to speak and act in ways that allow us to see all humanity through your eyes Lord; not our judgment. Amen.

➤ **March 30th**

Isaiah 41:10

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

It was one week before my first of two knee replacement surgeries. Even though I had been in extreme pain for a long time, I was panicked. The surgery and recovery loomed before me and it seemed as though it was going to be more than I could handle. 2016 was a terrible year full of loss and pain, and I didn't know if I had the strength. The anxiety was deafening. I prayed, and cried, and tried to calm myself but it seemed nothing would work.

I decided to walk to the mailbox, and inside was a small box. It was addressed to me from my Aunt Kathy, wife to my beloved Uncle Jim who had died the year prior after a long fight with kidney failure and then cancer.

I opened the box and inside was a small, carved, marble cross. This was the cross a stranger had given to my aunt when she found her praying in the waiting room at Mayo during my Uncle's battle. The stranger told her somebody had given it to her in her hour of need, and she hoped that it would give my aunt strength, asking only that she pass it along to somebody else when they needed it most.

My aunt had included a note just letting me know she was thinking about me, and she had felt a nudge to send it to me, and explained it was on loan under the same conditions given to her. I couldn't believe it! When I was feeling my weakest, HE provided!!

I texted her later to thank her and tell her how much it meant to me, and she told me she hated to part with it, but that it was okay, because that evening at her Monday night prayer group they made handmade crosses. God provides!

Tracy Miller

Prayer: Lord you grant us the gifts and peace we need through the care and love of others. Train our hearts and minds to respond to the prompting of your Holy Spirit as it directs us to pray for, respond and reach out to care for others. Thank you for the people that do this for us. Amen.

➤ **March 31st**

Proverbs 12:25 ESV

Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.

Sometimes you can be an accidental “angel”. Driving to work one day, a woman was pulled off on the side of the road. Her 4-ways were on and she was out of the car. Thinking she may have hit a deer, I pulled over to check on her. I learned she was having severe anxiety and had pulled over in tears. We talked she calmed down and was ready to go. I held her in my prayers that day and continue to pray for her when I pass that place on the road.

Submitted with no author name

Prayer: Dear God help us respond when we think there is a need. Thank you for the ability to pull over in the midst of our day, life and schedules to check on others. Thank you for the times people do the same for us. Amen.

➤ **April 1st**

2 Peter 1:20-21

Know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

My girlfriend is a special education teacher, and she works with elementary age students. One of her students made a lot of progress and she asked him what he was doing to make such improvement and he told her, "God is helping me!" She asked him what God was doing to help him so much so maybe she could try it with other students.

The student, quite seriously, pointed at her heart and said, "He's putting the love in here," and then moving his finger up to her mouth said, "and makes it come out here."

Tracy Miller

Prayer: Dear God thank you for the wisdom and teaching that comes from others and their experiences. Help us value the stories and experiences of others and see how God is speaking through the people we may too often discount. Amen.

➤ **April 2nd**

Matthew 4:19

And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

I was fishing on the river with my friend and it was muddy; really, really muddy. We were walking along and I saw something in the water so I tried to cast to it. My bait got stuck in a tree that was off this seven foot hill that leads to the water. So as I bent over to grab my bait my feet slipped and I fell. I still had a hold of a branch but the branch broke however still stuck in the ground. That is what saved me from falling into the river. As I was sitting there pulling myself up from the bottom of the hill I realized the odds the branch would fall perfectly right in my arms so I wouldn't fall in the river were very slim. Then I realized it was God; that branch falling was not a coincidence. I have been going to church more often lately because of confirmation and I think going to church really paid off because God spared me. Since then I have been thinking what would have happened if God wasn't there for me on that muddy slope.

Adam Cassells- 7th grade

Prayer: Father in heaven thank you for the gift and ability our youth have to take a slip in the mud and catch their fall, and then reflect upon your love and grace in the midst of the fall. Help us all find you Lord in the midst of the slippery times we too fall. Bless our students of all ages. Amen.

➤ **April 3rd**

Philippians 3:20-21

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

In August my mom became very weak, she could not even stand in the hospital. She has dementia, so she didn't understand why she was there. She was so scared someone had to stay all night with her. We thought she would never come home again. My prayers at that time were, "God if it be your will please help to strengthen her and bring her back home or send her to her heavenly home with you." She was sent to a nursing home where she went through physical therapy. She still not understand why she couldn't go home. We took turns staying with her until she fell asleep. After 6 long weeks God answered our prayer. She was able to come home. She was walking with a walker and happy to be home. I brought both my parents to church on Christmas Eve, both with their walkers. I looked at my mom and got tears in my eyes; she was singing most of the Christmas songs without looking at the screen. She remembered them from the past. GOD IS GOOD!!

Judy Gray

Prayer: Holy Spirit that comes from the breath of Jesus breathe strength, hope and restoration upon our sick, aging and broken family and friends that as they live they may have quality of life and we may find joy in sharing life with them. Help us remember by faith our eternal home is with you. Gather us in to your kingdom in due time to our final home. Amen.

➤ **April 4th**

Luke 18:1

And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

Our confirmation students were asked what does it mean to have a Guardian Angel during Confirmation praying for your growth?

- It shows someone cares about you, and prays for you.
- It is nice to know someone is praying for me and wants to help me grow in my everyday faith. It is also nice to know people are thinking and remembering me.
- I'm always watched over and someone always is caring for me.
- It is important to me because they are caring about me and they are a nice person because they are taking their time and energy to do something for me, and thinking of me.
- It means someone is always looking after you and praying for you.
- Having a guardian angel shows me someone loves me.

Prayer: Dear God thank you for our guardian angel program and all those who participate in this program of prayer and care. Strengthen and sustain our guardian angels that they may continue their efforts in prayer and love to strengthen, encourage and grow our students. Amen

➤ **April 6th**

Matthew 14:29 New International Version (NIV)

²⁹ “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

I know many of you who know me would probably never believe this, but I am a shy person by nature. It is more in my comfort zone to sit back and observe, learn and process and what is happening around me than to participate. However, that does not mean I do not have the desire to participate, it simply means I am not always comfortable doing so....So what makes us get out of our comfort zone? For me it took the passing away of a good friend.

Last fall Morgan Robinson, one of my friends who worked with me at the Castle Museum for over 20 years, passed away. Throughout the years, I had learned so many things from him, and not just about history. His faith was very important to him and he knew mine was to me; as a result we often had discussions about religion and playing bells. Being African-American and originally from the south, he offered new perspectives on things I had learned growing up. Morgan also perceived things about me and about my faith - things that always made me wonder how he saw them, when I could not.

Morgan's was the first African-American funeral I have attended and even as I said good-bye to him, I realized he was continuing to teach me by enabling me to experience the cultural diversity as well as similarities between my life and his. As the service continued and it came time for people to say a few words about Morgan, I began to feel an overwhelming need to get up and say something on behalf of myself and the museum. However, this was really not in my comfort zone. All these anxieties went shooting through my head – “Were we supposed to tell the minister beforehand that we wanted to speak? I shouldn't say anything, I had nothing prepared and I want to be respectful and not stumble over my words or be tongue-tied. There are about hundred people here and I only know a very small handful of them, I can't get up in front of all them and say something. This was not a history program; this is so not in my comfort zone”. As the line of presenters began to diminish, I struggled desperately to make a decision. There was only one more person left to speak, if I did not get up, I would lose my chance. I knew I was being called out of my comfort zone, I was being called out in faith. How was I going to respond? And then I knew. It was not about me, it was about my friend. I rose and made my way to the front of the church. As I waited patiently for my turn, my heart was racing and I was praying the words would come to me. As I stood at the microphone, God gave me the words to honor my friend that day.

I will forever miss my friend Morgan, but I will always remember him and the final gift of faith that he shared with me that day.

Sandy Schwan

Prayer: Thank you, dear Lord for blessing our lives with good friends who help us to grow our faith. Thank you for using them to call us out in faith when we are afraid to step out of our comfort zone. Thank you for giving us strength, through faith to answer that call. Amen

➤ **April 7th**

Matthew 28:19-20

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Confirmation students were asked to share a simple story that connects life and faith, and how you saw God in the story or grew in your faith.

Whenever I am upset my cat always comes over to me and will snuggle up on my lap or paw at me. It always reminds me God is always with me.

-Sara Kern, grade 8

When I didn't do very well on a huge test and my mom still respected me and was there for me and that reminds me God is always there for you.

-Adam Cassells, grade 7

I used to have this cat I didn't like because it was mean, but then when it died I was pretty sad because I didn't appreciate the time I had with it. And now I appreciate the time I have with things.

-Justin Stedry, grade 8

My dog, because when I get home he's excited to see me.

-Carter Vasizek, grade 8

My family and pets because they can always cheer me up when I'm sad or sick.

-Kenedee Beyers, grade 8

Prayer: Dear God thank you for the ways you fill our hearts and lives with love through the companionship of our pets. Amen

➤ **April 8th**

1 John 4:19-21

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Confirmation students were asked to share a simple story that connects life and faith, and how you saw God in the story or grew in your faith.

I did the Polar Plunge, which raises money for the Special Olympics. They raised tons of money and donated it all to charity. Everyone helped others, and raised money and faith.

-Ella Wagner, grade 8

When my Uncle died my nanny (grandma) was very depressed. So, I explained to her that he left for a reason, and that God thought he was ready to leave.

-Hailie Krasinski, grade 7

When I was confirmed I connected my everyday life with my everyday faith and it taught me to pray everyday and help other people out.

-Faith Thomas grade 9

Prayer: Heavenly father help us put into action the same love and care you show us through your grace and Holy Spirit. No matter what our age, give us confidence to understand we can share faith and love through teaching and serving others. Amen.

➤ **April 9th**

Hebrews 10:25 ESV

Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Zion has both a Facebook page and a Facebook group. A page is open to public views. A group is closed to the public.

Recently a man asked to join our group. Ron was from Ohio, and appeared to be struggling with a few issues. Ron was granted access to the group.

Ron began to share his life story, struggles and doubts. He was hurting. And the members of the Zion Facebook group began ministering to him. Our members gave words of encouragement, prayer, welcome and affirmation. The love poured out over the internet to welcome Ron.

I began to privately message Ron and begin a bit of teaching and encouraging Ron. On a summer trip to my Doctorate of ministry program I went to meet Ron. I brought him a bible and a prayer shawl. It was a great meeting. Ron just did not understand why the people of Zion were so welcoming and encouraging. And why I cared to meet him. He was touched by the Holy Spirit through our love.

I continued to speak with Ron on and off by private message through the computer. I encouraged him to find a church near by his home. And he did. He found Zion ELCA located just a mile from his home and started to attend.

This past winter I was able to attend the baptism for Ron, at that church, and serve as his God Father.

I am not even going to try explain how Ron found us on Facebook. That is a miracle in itself. But know just as God used the printing press to spread a printed bible, so too God is using the internet and Facebook to share miracles as well.

If you are not friends with the church on Facebook please find us.

Pastor Rob Schmidt

Prayer: God all things created can be used for good or evil. Help us use technology in a way that promotes our church and welcomes others into this space and your grace. Amen.

➤ **April 10th**

1 Corinthians 10:31

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Confirmation students were asked to share a simple story that connects life and faith, and how you saw God in the story or grew in your faith.

One time I was having a rough time after a basketball game, because we lost by 4 against the hardest team in the league. Mr. Goldensoph cheered me up and let me believe in myself for who I am.

-Nathan F, grade 8

This year on the 9th of February, I got my tonsils out. But I wasn't scared at all, and that was because I knew that God was with me.

-Kaleb Lenten, grade 7

I see faith in everyone and everywhere and it connects me to life, and sees what the purpose of life is.

-Izzy T, grade 7

Prayer: Dear God help us grow in our ability to find you in all things and then share those stories. Amen.

➤ **April 11th**

James 5:14 ESV

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

Don't take life for granted. I found this out one Saturday in January when I flew out of bed and couldn't breathe. I went outside in the snow and put some snow on my face. I put my finger down my throat and still I couldn't breathe. I put ice and water over my head and finally got my breath back.

I really thought I was a goner. It was very scary. That night after finally catching my breath my dog jumped on my lap and I fell asleep.

The next day I went to church. I probably should have gone to the hospital which I later did after church. They kept me in for 2 days. They told me I probably passed a blood clot based on my pain in the chest area and difficulty breathing. The moral of the story is God is Good!

Bill and Evelyn knew I was not well from church and then called to check on me in the hospital. I told them not to come see me because there were many sick people in the hospital. But they did and brought me a prayer shawl.

A nurse came in to give me a shot and she said, "Oh what a beautiful blanket." I said "it's a prayer shawl our ladies in church made!" She said "how nice and I told her they are for sick people who need prayers." Many of the nurses came in and said they needed that blanket. I told them they could touch it and put it around their shoulders and they did one by one. They said they needed the prayers too. They also all knew Pastor Rob and they loved God.

So, I guess I was to be in the hospital to spread the joy of our prayer shawls and prayers.

Thank you Lord for the work you are doing in us through us!

Ann Lash

Prayer: Dear God in our illness and danger you are there with us every moment and we thank you. Thank you for the love and care of others, especially their prayers when we need them, and especially for the prayer shawl ministry. Help us remember to share prayers with and for others even in our illness. Amen

➤ **April 12th**

Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.
Why is it important to go to church? [Wisdom from a teenager]

To grow in faith.

-Ella Wagner, grade 8

To learn and grow faithfully.

-Sara Kern, grade 8

By going to church, you can be forgiven by praying. Also, it's an easy way to worship God.

-Abby Diechman, grade 7

Because to forgive and pray and get forgiveness, and find who you are.

-Carlee Parsons, grade 7

To learn how to use faith and find your own path.

-Halie Krasinski, grade 7

Prayer: Dear God stir the hearts of our church, community and world to understand and value the chance to come to church and worship. Help us understand faith does come through hearing, and the word of God. Help us prevent the death of our church by considering the importance of worship. Amen.

➤ **April 13th**

2 Thessalonians 1:3

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.

Why is it important to go to church? [Wisdom from a teenager]

Forgiveness for our sins, and to find the right path to our own faith.

Faith Thomas, grade 9

So we can learn about Jesus

-Izzy T., grade 7 (?)

So you don't lose your faith.

-Adam Cassells, grade 7

To have confession and forgiveness.

-Justin Stedry, grade 8

To learn about Jesus and what he did for all of us.

Kaleb Lentner, grade 7

Prayer: Thank you for all those that attend church and value the word and sacrament offered there weekly. Help us understand every Sunday and Wednesday we are making a statement about our love for you when we attend or skip church. Help us understand we are teaching our family, neighbors and children the importance of worship when we attend or skip. Amen.

➤ **April 14th**

John 20:30

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book.

My grandmother and I were extremely close - she was one of "my people". I believe you can have soul mates aside from your partner, and my Gram was definitely one of my soul mates. She and I often had long, meaningful conversations about love, family, and most of all, Faith. My grandma left us to be with our Lord in August, and while I was heartbroken, I was happy that she was no longer suffering. I knew that she was lighting up heaven with her smile.

I've always believed birds are God's way of communicating with us, if you'll only listen. And of course many of us have heard the cardinal is a message from God that a loved one that has passed on is near.

The morning of my Gram's memorial service, one of my children spotted a cardinal outside our morning room window. We often have birds come to our feeder, but rarely cardinals. This cardinal came closer than our feeder, landing on the tree right outside our window. I called over my husband and son to join my daughter and me, thinking the cardinal would startle and fly away, but he didn't. He stayed there for at least a full minute (though it seemed like an eternity), looking at us from side to side, before he flitted away, never even visiting the feeder.

The four of us just looked at each other in disbelief. "Did you see that?" Even my 7-year old children knew that was something special. Great Grandma was going to be okay, and I am so thankful for that message from God, and all the messages that have come since then, too.

Tracy Miller

Prayer: Thank you Lord for the loved ones that have impacted our lives spiritually and the gift it is when we realize what they have done for us. Help us be that gift for our family and others. Help us believe that you still speak to us today, reminding us that you have our family safe in your care after death. Thank you specifically for the messages of the cardinal. Amen.

➤ **April 15th**

John 4:24

“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Why is it important to go to church? [Wisdom from a teenager]

To worship, and keep growing faith.

-Carter Vasizek, grade 8

So you can go to heaven and not to hell.

-Brendan G, grade 7

It is important because it is a way to show your faith and love for God.

Kailey M., grade 7

It's important to go to church because it helps you have faith in your life and ask for forgiveness.

Kenedee Beyer, grade 8

It is important so you can learn about God and forgive your sins.

-Nathan F, grade 8

Prayer: Lord help us remember that one of the ways we honor and love you is through worship attendance. Help us worship in spirit and truth as we attend the church services offered. Make clear to us the world will only know you and the value of worship as they watch our example. Strengthen us to know our value and purpose as it pertains to teaching others about worship by example. Amen.

➤ **April 16th**

1 Kings 19:11-13

And he said, “Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

As someone who has always maintained a busy lifestyle, I’ve learned to appreciate moments of peace whenever I can steal them. The few moments I can let my mind wander between meeting the demands on my time and energy are precious. Often, these moments- waiting for a cup of tea to steep, the quiet of the early morning when I first wake, the few moments it takes the shower warm, time spent driving between activities- are when I have my best ideas and biggest revelations. In these moments I have learned who I am, what I believe in, and what is important to me. Sometimes in these moments, I experience God.

One such revelation occurred about a year ago, while I was alone in my car, traveling between obligations and mindlessly singing along to the radio. A song I’ve heard at least a million times came across the airwaves. I sang along, as I usually do, but this time I really heard the words I was singing...

“You always think I’m somewhere on a mountain top, but never think behind bars. You’d be amazed the places that I go to be with you, where you are.”

I immediately stopped singing as those words sunk into my mind. I pictured the prison cell- dark, cold, noisy, damp, scary, and lonely. In my mind I saw a person sitting quietly in the cell, feeling abandoned, and empathized with their suffering. I imagined the Holy Spirit surrounding them, and offering peace in a seemingly hopeless and frightening situation. In that moment, my entire understanding of where God dwells changed.

Since then, I’ve made a conscious effort to try and look for God in unexpected, and often difficult situations. I’ve been blessed with many mentors in my life who are strong in faith, actively seek justice, and demonstrate the ability to see God in a way I can only hope to understand someday. Of course, I often fail to see and more often forget to look, but I’m working on it, and as I do it gets easier.

As I continue to live an extremely busy life, with little time to daydream, I take more and more solace in the quiet moments. I actively seek them out, something I never would have done a mere few years ago. The importance of these quiet moments has become clearer with each passing day. With that clarity I feel as though I have heightened my awareness of the Divine, in both the expected and unexpected places. For all of this, I thank God.

Allison Dakos

Ps. If you’re interested, the song those earth shattering words are from is “More Than You Think I Am” by Danny Gokey.

Prayer: Lord Help us hear you in the moments you ask us to slow down and listen, as you wait for our minds and bodies to find silence that you may speak. Amen.

➤ **April 17th**

Luke 23:43 ESV

And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Have you ever wondered if those who have passed are around you? Do you see certain things and don't really recognize they are blessings from heaven? My grandmother and I had a special bond. For example, she called me one day and asked if I was pregnant. I simply told her not to my knowledge. However, I began to wonder if she was right, took a pregnancy test and lo and behold I was pregnant. I remember taking her to the eye doctor one day and while traveling on M-46 near Alma, witnessing a bunch of jet vapor streams in the sky. She asked me, “wouldn't you like to know where all those planes are traveling to?” Not long after, my grandmother was told that she was in perfect health and should have no problem living to be 100, but passed away of a heart attack. One of her fears was she would die alone. By the grace of God, my mom and dad were with her when she passed. It was a very sad day for me as my last grandparent died at 96. She had given me so much wisdom about life lessons and always told me that I was a good mom and wife. I miss her every day!

I had a feeling inside of me after my grandma passed that she was with me. It wouldn't become obvious to me until I was driving home from work one evening on a beautiful cloudless day and saw one single jet vapor stream in the distance directly in front of me. I instantly thought of the conversation that my grandma and I had some time before. Then I was sitting at work and happened to look outside and there was a bright red cardinal sitting in a bush. Oh, I forgot to mention Cardinals were my grandma's favorite bird. I continually see Cardinals in random places and just smile to myself knowing that my grandmother is around me. I truly believe this is a gift from God. My heart is filled with happiness and I know that she is in an unbelievable fantastic place that I long to be one day.

So if you are ever missing a loved one who has passed...open your heart, eyes and mind to think about things that you randomly see that remind you of that person and know God is sending you this gift of happiness right when you need it.

Jennifer Grasso

Prayer: Gracious Heavenly Father, please allow your blessings to be obvious to those who need it most. Let your spirit fill the hearts of those who mourn with happiness. Amen