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PASTOR'S DEVOTIONAL

"Strengthen and bless friends and family gathered here, even as we call to mind those who are absent from us." – ELW Marriage Service

I have been blessed this year to have the privilege of presiding at many marriage services, witnessing two people making promises of love and faithfulness as they join themselves to each other as husband and wife. These weddings have been celebrated in a variety of locations: in both our sanctuary and chapel here at Zion; under a tent in a beautiful field; along the banks of the Grand River; and under an apple tree on a family farm. In all of these locations, family and friends gathered to witness the couples' vows, to join in their day of celebration, and to promise to love and support them in their new life together. While we rejoiced with those who were able to be present on these special days, we also remembered those who were absent – both persons who were unable to travel to the location of the wedding, as well as those who are gone from our sight and who we remember in our thoughts and prayers on both days of celebration as well as every day in which they are no longer present among us.



Even days of greatest joy can be bittersweet when we look at the empty chairs that were once occupied by people we love whose lives have come to an end. Whether it be at a wedding reception, or Thanksgiving dinner, or a Sunday afternoon in the backyard, their absence brings to mind both the joy we shared and the grief we experience when they die. In my office here at Zion, a wooden chair in one corner is the chair in which my father often sat at our family gatherings; whenever I look at it, it reminds me of the love we shared, the legacy my father left me, as well as the sadness I have often felt in the sixteen years since he passed away on November 12, 1999. It is a physical reminder of the man who passed on his love of God on to me, and it serves to inspire me to share this good news in the same manner.

This month, our nation will pause on Remembrance Day to remember those who gave their lives in the defense of our nation, those whose sacrifices played a critical role in establishing the freedoms we share here in Canada. As we gather on November 11 for this time of remembering, we also remember all of our loved ones who are no longer present among us, all of those whose chairs may be empty but whose memory lives on in the stories we share and the lives we lead. It is not by accident and that both Remembrance Day and All Saints' Day are observed in the same month, because as our nation remembers those who offered their lives for the sake of our people, we remember all of God's holy ones who gave of themselves as "*a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*" (Romans 12:1). As we pause to remember "*all the saints who from their labours rest,*" we dedicate ourselves to live together as the "communion of saints" in this generation, sisters and brothers in Christ whose lives will bear witness to the love of God that was instilled in us by those saints who once lived among us, "*that we like them in holiness may live and die in you.*"

In his *Sermons on the Catechism*, Martin Luther teaches that "*Christian Church* and '*communion of saints*' are one and the same thing. In other words: *I believe that there is a holy group and a congregation made up only of saints.*" As we remember and give thanks for the saints we have known who now rest in God's loving care, may we dedicate ourselves to being saints to others, a people who will one day be remembered for being faithful to Christ's call at baptism to "*let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*"

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Jeff Laustsen



VICAR'S REPORT

A few years ago I walked the Camino. The Camino is a 1000 year old 800 km pilgrimage that travels across virtually the entire width of Spain. It begins in St. Jean Pied du Port and ends at the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela, near the west coast of Spain – where the bones of St. James, the apostle of Jesus, are thought to be laid.

The pilgrimage was initially used as a means of penance by the church. Interestingly, for some it was just too difficult to complete so an alternate cathedral was designated as "little Santiago", at about the 2/3 mark of the journey, and if a pilgrim was injured, and walked through the north

door of that cathedral, their sins would also be forgiven.

I arrived in St. Jean full of excitement. I got up early on my first day, turned left out of my hostel and began my journey. Soon I saw people walking in the opposite direction and eventually someone pointed to where I had come from – I had begun walking in the wrong direction. I wondered how I would complete this 800 km journey.

That very first evening I met Martin – of all people, a retired Lutheran pastor. What were the chances that I would meet a retired Lutheran pastor on my first day? At that time I was not yet enrolled at the seminary. He and I, along with 4 others, began walking together for the next week to 10 days. Martin and I shared stories, spoke about our spiritual journeys, and even sang Taize songs along the way.

Then one evening, while walking back to our hostel from a restaurant, Martin approached me and said, “Albert, you need to go where your heart already is...you need to become a Lutheran pastor.”

I was shocked and immediately came up with all the reasons that I could not do so – I was too old, it took too long, it was too expensive. He just held up his hand to stop me and said, “Albert, you are enough!” (words I have reflected on often since that time).

It felt like the finger of God had touched my heart. For the remaining 600 km of the pilgrimage his words sank deeper...from my mind, to my heart, to my soul. Finally near the end of the pilgrimage the message was clear, I needed to join the seminary to become a Lutheran pastor. Since then it seemed as though life itself was conspiring to help direct my path in this direction. Doors opened out of the blue, mentors showed up unannounced, and unexpected opportunities presented themselves. Life took on a certain deepening synchronicity. At times I was astonished at the blessings that were flowing through my life, pure gift. Remarkable!

To me this has all felt like grace; God’s grace - directing, whispering, guiding, and showing me the way through his unending mercy and love. Asking me to lose myself and find myself at the same time. To let go of my ego, relinquish control, and rely absolutely on a God who loves us all more than we can ever imagine. On some level this sounds absurd – a free gift, absolute love, from the creator of the universe...but it is true.

As I write this message for the newsletter I am reflecting on my upcoming sermon this Reformation Sunday (October 25). It will be on this subject of grace. I look forward to exploring

together more deeply what it means to live under this unconditional promise.

“You were within but I was without. You were with me but I was not with you. So you called, you shouted, you broke through my deafness, you flared, you blazed, you banished my blindness, you lavished your fragrance...and I gasped.” (St. Augustine)

Vicar Albert Romkema



ALL SAINTS' SUNDAY

On Sunday, November 1, our parish, together with Christians around the world celebrates the Festival of All Saints. A time to celebrate the triumph of the Lord of Life Jesus Christ over the powers of death, the day is traditionally the time Christians remember those by name who have died since the last All Saints' Day. Indeed it is a good time to remember all our loved ones who have died and to praise our Lord for his victory over death and the grave. Come and worship!



ZION TABLE FOR SENIORS

Zion Table For Seniors, a beloved ministry at Zion promoting fun, food, and friendship, will be held on Tuesday, November 24 at 12 noon. Please let Doris Bartlett (519-271-9622) or Beryl Horst (519-276-3501) know by Tuesday, November 17 if you can attend. Lunch cost is only \$12. A deal by any name!

Our after-dinner guest will be the musical talents of Randy Satchell. All are welcome!

P.S. Sign up date for the Seniors' Christmas Dinner is by Tuesday, December 7, 10 AM. The Christmas Dinner will be held on Tuesday, December 15 at 12 noon.

ZION WOMEN OF FAITH

Meetings for November:

Wednesday, November 25 7:30 PM: Mary-Lou Drown & Jan Bennewitz

We will be asking for cookies for our shut-in baskets.

Saturday, December 5: Pack shut-in baskets

Sunday, December 6: WOF Christmas Dinner (more info to follow. Check your bulletin.)



We are still looking for people to help on the flower committee. Call Linda Springer if interested.

Eternity for Today - Would you like to receive this devotional booklet at home? Call Linda Springer 519-273-2093, if you would like to subscribe to this very inspiring devotional booklet.



YOU ARE INVITED! To a Composers Concert on Saturday, November 7 at 3 PM. Come join Marco Burak and friends Michel Allard, and Michael Dobinson as they present a concert of new music, mostly for piano. Free-will offering, with proceeds going to Zion's Friendship Meal Program.

OCTOBER VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers assist with our Sunday morning worship services. Listed below are those who serve in October as a reminder and as a thank you for serving.

Date	Communion Assistants	Greeters	Readers	Usher Captains	Counting Captains
Nov 1	Brian & June Junner	Jim & Kathy Schellenberger	Loralee McNaughton	Fritz Steigmeier	Bill Hoffard
Nov 8	N/A	Darrell & Judy Renecker	Janine Pearson	Steve Lamont	Bill Hoffard
Nov 15	Marie Hoffard & Irene Ehgoetz	Glen & Fern Schaefer	Joanne Wallace	Steve Lamont	Liz Forrest
Nov 22	N/A	Brian & Carol Schmidt	Linda Weitzel	Ed Illman	Liz Forrest
Nov 29	N/A	Percy & Edith Schneider	Nancy Schaff	Ed Illman	Kurt Gough



Ashton Gregory Wayne Young, son of Greg & Linda on October 24.