

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Thursday, October 1, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Joshua 1:13 – The Lord your God is providing you a place of rest, and will give you this land.*

*Luke 12:24 – Jesus said, “Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!”*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

My wife and I were homeless once - for about two hours, while the paper work was being completed on a house we had just purchased. It was not a very traumatic event and definitely not a depressing one. The sale of our old house was complete, and we were thrilled at the prospect of moving to the new one. I can only imagine the trauma felt by the children of Israel who had been homeless, wandering in the wilderness for forty years, as they anticipated entering the land God had promised them through Moses. Moses had died, and with him, some of their hopes for the fulfilment of God's promise. They had to learn to trust the Word of the Lord - again. Many years later, Jesus was still trying to teach that lesson to His disciples. He was teaching them to live in the hope of the promise that God provides for His children. In these difficult times, we need to hear the words of Moses, of Joshua, and of Jesus again and again. *God is already providing for our future. God considers us of much more value than the birds of the air. God has not forgotten or failed us. God is with us and God will provide for our needs.* How blest are those who know the Lord and trust in His infinite loving mercy! (lls)

**PRAYER**

*I put my trust in you, O Heavenly Father. You have been with me all of my life, watching and caring for me. With your great promises, I know for certain that you are planning for my future and that I will someday see you face to face. It is in the name of Christ my Savior that I pray. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Friday, October 2, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalm 28:1 – To you, O Lord, I call; my rock, do not refuse to hear me.*

*Luke 17:13-14 – The lepers called out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

The words of the Psalmist have been my words many times. In country school, having to face a couple of big kid bullies; in high school, nervously waiting to face the judges at music contest; in the ministry, contending with the very real possibility of “burn out”; in the doctor’s office, faced with critical medical problems for members of my family or for me. Each time I called on the strength of the Lord when I knew my own strength was not enough. Like the lepers who had nowhere else to turn, I prayed for mercy. The stories of the Bible are a soothing balm to my troubled spirit at those times. They are reminders that God is indeed still in charge, still cares about me, and is still compassionate. While God is silent and slow to act, as I count time, God is never deaf. Even as “I know that my Redeemer lives!” I know that my Savior listens to my cries and answers in ways I don’t always recognize until days, weeks, months, or even years later. The lepers went on their way and were healed. Rather than being down, depressed, and derailed from the work and ministry in which we are involved, we need to “keep on keeping on” - go on our way fulfilling our purpose in God’s plan. On the way, we too will discover God answering our prayers and the miracles already taking place in our lives. May we call upon the Lord, believing that Jesus is already answering our petitions. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*“Oh Jesus, Master, have mercy on me!” Many times I can only cry the words of the lepers. I cannot help myself. Restore my faith when I grow weak. Listen to my prayer. May I never take your grace and love for granted but always return to you with joy and gratitude. In your Holy name. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Saturday, October 3, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalm 109:30 – With my mouth I will give great thanks to the Lord; I will praise him in the midst of the throng.*

*1 Peter 1:3 – Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

Our school soft ball fell apart when John hit it for what should have been a home run. It had gotten pretty mushy, and the binding had started to unravel, but the bat finished demolishing it on that swing! In a sense, it was funny to watch, but in another sense, it was sad, since that meant the end of our ball games for the fall. The next day Zeke brought his ball, and we were in business again. When the snow flew, the ball season ended for the year. The first warm day of spring, when we wanted to play ball, the ball was gone. Zeke had taken it home. How easy it was for us to forget whose ball it was, until it wasn't there any more. The same thing is true of the things of this world God creates and allows us to "play with" and work with. The Psalmist was aware that daily prayer and praise were needed to remember the One to whom it all belongs. One of my favorite devotional tools is called TRIP. TRIP stands for Thanks, Repent (confession), Intercession, and Plan. My wife and I often spend a few minutes each day jotting down a list for each category, and then praying about them. The list always begins with remembering the things for which we are Thankful in the past day or two. It is really an eye opener which helps us center on the grace and mercy of our generous and loving God. Why not try it right now. Take a minute to make a list of those things for which you are thankful to God. May your list keep growing every day! (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Please join me as we take this "TRIP" of a lifetime, dear God. As we travel each day, may I always remember who has given me all things; to whom things **really** belong; and to remember you each day in prayer. Thank you for your generous love that you shower on me each and every day. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Sunday, October 4, 2009**  
**18<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pentecost**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalm 23:6 – Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.*

*Luke 22:35 – Jesus said to the disciples, “When I sent you out without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?” They said, “No, not a thing.”*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

When I broke Grandma’s heating pad, I ran and hid. I felt shame. I thought I would vomit. After calming down, I knew I couldn’t hide in the grove of trees forever. Gathering my five-year old courage, I went back to admit to Grandma what I had done. The relief I felt when she hugged me, was tremendous. “Confession is good for the soul.” In my case, confession has also always been good for my mental and physical health as well. Sin separates. It separates us from God. It separates us from friends and family. And it separates us from ourselves. Quite literally we are “beside ourselves” when guilt enters the picture. The Psalmist knew that separation and longed for the goodness and mercy of the Good Shepherd, and the return to closeness once again. The confession of the disciples was that their anxieties over their needs for their mission were groundless. They lacked nothing. God provided. They needed to return to trusting God again. Yesterday I wrote about making a list of the things for which we are thankful in the T (thanks) of the TRIP devotional. The R is just as helpful. It stands for Repentance or confession. I make a list of those things I regret, for which I am sorry. Yes, God already knows our sins - our failings, but we need to acknowledge them and confess them so that we can receive forgiveness and be restored to oneness with our Shepherd. Try making both lists right now: Thanks and Repent or Regret. Then pray about them and enjoy returning to oneness with the Lord, others around you, and yourself. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*I am so sorry for the way I act with you and others, my dear and loving God. I break relationships by what I say and do. I repent of the part I have had to play in all my broken relationships, ask for your forgiveness, and pray that I will have the courage to try to mend them. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Monday, October 5, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*1 Samuel 14:6 – Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few.*

*Mark 11:24 – Jesus says, “Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

We lived in a neighborhood of helpers. If a neighbor stopped by or telephoned to say they needed help with anything - machinery, field work, or animals - Dad and Mom would be there for them, knowing that if the shoe was on the other foot, they would do the same. A couple of times, our whole family went to answer the call. A call for help was like a sacred duty. That is God's attitude, both in scripture and in real life. When God's people call on Him for help, He answers in ways that sometimes amaze us, sometimes puzzle us, and sometimes challenge us. But God does answer. The key, of course, is to ask; and to ask for that which is in keeping with the Word and the Will of God. In our daily devotions using TRIP (Thanks, Repent, Intercession, Plan), in addition to making lists of things for which we are thankful, and those for which we are sorry, we also make a list of those we know need God's special blessing. These *Intercessions* may be for specific healing or help, or they may simply be to ask God to surround them with His golden light, trusting that God knows what they need more than we do. The blessing of praying for other people comes when we can take them from the Intercession list and add them to the Thanks list. Our prayers of Intercession also include situations and concerns we have in our personal or professional lives. Over a period of several weeks or months, we are often amazed at how God has been at work in the lives of so many people. May your Intercessions list grow and flow into prayers of thanksgiving as God answers your prayers. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*O God, my list of intercessions can be as long as the number of people I know. Listen to my plea on their behalf, and if it is your will, grant their needs. I lift up to you myself and all of these people I name out loud...and all those who remain in my heart. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Tuesday, October 6, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalm 25:5 – Lead me in your truth, and teach me.*

*John 16:13 – Christ says, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

I’ve been involved in a number of renovations. By the time we finished renovating a bathroom in an old farm house, we were on plan “G” or “H”. One thing always led to another. The same thing was true in renovating the sanctuary, moving the parsonage, fixing up the church offices and lounge. It seemed as if the old adage from “Of Cabbages and Kings” was true: *“The best laid plans of mice and men oft go astray....”* In each situation, thankfully, we had a plan, and the flexibility to change the plan as needed - many times. *Without a vision (plan), the people perish!* Thus, in our daily TRIP (Thanks, Repent, Intercession, **Plan**), Sue and I always include a list of plans for the day which we lay before the Lord in prayer. Our day and our plans become God’s day and God’s plan, and God becomes part of all that we do. Someone joked that if you want to hear God laugh, tell Him your plans! We’ve found the opposite to be true. We’ve found it extremely helpful to share our plans with one another and with God. Sometimes we can be like the voice of God helping one another modify or reduce our plans. It helps to see our plans through someone else’s eyes, and I personally see the feedback, not as interference, but as a way of involving God in those plans. Why not give it a try today. God won’t laugh at your plans, but He just might help you make those plans more productive and satisfying. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Give me wisdom; give me vision, that I might see clearly what my plans should be, O Lord. May they always include You and what You think is the best for me as Your servant. Help me when I become rigid and can’t seem to bend and change my plan so that I can conform to Your will. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Wednesday, October 7, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*2 Samuel 7:28 – Lord God, you are God, and your words are true.*

*2 Thessalonians 2:13 – We must always give thanks to God for you, because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

When I was six, my cousin and I stayed with grandparents for several days. One hot summer day we decided to dig a swimming pool in the shade of the grove of trees north of the farm house. By the time we had an area of about four feet by four feet dug down about a foot, we concluded that the tree roots were more than we could manage. We connected all the garden hoses we could find and strung them from the nearby chicken coop. The hoses didn't quite reach, so we tried to fill our pool by filling buckets and carrying it the rest of the way. I'm sure the surrounding trees appreciated our efforts, but we never had more than a foot of muddy water in our swimming hole. My cousin, who was several years older than me, convinced me there were fish in our pool. When I leaned over the edge to check it out, he gave me a shove. Sputtering and yelling, covered head to toe in mud, I climbed out and flung mud at him with a vengeance. I learned the hard way, there are some people you just can't trust! King David learned that lesson many times over and concluded that there was only One in whom he could trust - the Lord his God. It is a lesson which takes some people a lifetime to learn. Yet, it is the most important lesson for all of life. Having learned that lesson himself, St. Paul wrote to his Thessalonian friends thanking God for them, for they had proven to be the *first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit*. They were following God's example for trustworthiness rather than the world's path of deception. May we learn to rely on the faithfulness of the Lord our God, following His example in all of our dealings with our friends, relatives, and neighbors.(lls)

**PRAYER**

*It is so good to know, dear God, that when others fail, I can always trust in you and in the promises that you have made. You have promised never to leave me, and in my darkest hours I find that you are still there. May others be able to trust in me in friendship and love. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Thursday, October 8, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalm 119:130 – The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.*

*Hebrews 2:1 – Therefore we must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

Simplify! That is a key word these days. When Dad taught me how to prepare the mower for cutting alfalfa, he broke everything down into simple tasks and showed me step by step how to do each one. Good teachers have the ability to take complex problems and simplify them so that most students paying attention will be able to solve them. One of the many problems that came to light with the housing crisis, as the recession worsened, was that many contracts and many rules and laws were so complicated, even the experts had trouble understanding them. Anyone trying to read the instruction manual for almost any computer program will tell you the same thing. The manuals need to be written by novices and simplified. Some people try to complicate the Bible in the same way. The Psalmist considered the *unfolding* of God's word to be a primary task. It should be so for all of us. Instead of complicating it, we should be able to *unfold* it or simplify it for others. The basic message of all of scripture is that God is the Creator. God is in control. God loves His creation enough to die for us. God is and always will be the victor! Any time the message *drifts away* from those basics, we risk missing the truth God has for us. The writer of Hebrews encouraged his readers to *pay greater attention to what we have heard* so that we don't drift into falsehood. May God's message become a simple, uncomplicated story we can all share with all who will listen. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Thank you for giving me Your word, O God, which shows me what you intend for me; to love you above all else and to serve others. Your scripture becomes complete when I see that it points to you and how you came to be with us. May I never stray from its teachings or from life in you. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Friday, October 9, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Zechariah 8:8 – They shall be my people and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.*

*Romans 9:4-5 – To the Israelites belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

Old Dr. Flack, the oldest and dearest of my seminary professors, in the days before women were part of the seminary community, often referred to pastors who had been ordained as “his boys”. He would tell of their successes and accomplishments with a great deal of pride. If we had not known otherwise, we might have thought they were his biological sons. Without a doubt, they were as precious to him as his own son. He gloried in their accomplishments and seemed to feel the pain of their struggles. It is not hard to understand God’s fierce love for those with whom God made a covenant. Thus, Zechariah, the prophet makes it clear that they were “God’s people” and God knew the way in which their history was interwoven with His Story. In the same way, Paul reminds the Roman Christians that the Israelites - the Jews - are the original “children of God”. Most of us, are “adopted” into God’s family, but loved just the same. We dare not turn our nose up or our backs on the legitimate “children of God”. From them has come the Messiah. For that we should give thanks and willingly share our joy with those who are still waiting; for now we too wait for Christ’s coming again. As one of our Jewish friends said, “When the Messiah comes, I’ll ask Him if this is His first or second visit.” For those who already know, may we live every day as true “children of the heavenly Father.” (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Dear Father, you look at us and lovingly call us your children. Do you take pride in what I have accomplished when I followed you by serving others? Do You weep when I fall short of your glory? Thank you for being my Father and loving me with love and tenderness. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Saturday, October 10, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalm 16:11 – In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.*

*Colossians 2:9-10 – In Christ the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

In the presence of important people, it is amazing how special we feel. I have attended several events as the guest of the keynote speakers. As such I was given a special place to sit, and was included in conversations by people who probably wouldn't have paid much attention to me. At two events, during the question and answer segment following the speeches, I was asked to speak about my experience in dealing with the speaker's subject matter. That was scary! However, all the lessons the speakers had taught me, were so much a part of me, that I didn't have to struggle for words. The Psalmist wrote as one who knew the Lord and the Lord's work intimately. He is so full of the joy of the Lord he bubbles over with excitement. Paul caught that same spirit when he wrote to the Colossians about Christ, declaring that every part of Christ was full of God. He declared that the same thing can be true for each of us when we open our lives to Christ. As the fullness of God lived in Jesus, so the fullness of Jesus can and will live in us. God is, therefore, not "out there somewhere". God is truly Immanuel - "God with us" - here and now and always. May we experience the fullness of His presence every day in every way; and may we know just how special we are in His sight! (lls)

**PRAYER**

*May I know you so fully and intimately, that I can, at a moments notice, speak knowledgeably to others about you, gracious Lord. May they see through me how much love you have to share with them and that you want them to also know you fully. In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Sunday, October 11, 2009**  
*19<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pentecost*

**SCRIPTURE**

*1 Samuel 7:3 – Direct your heart to the Lord, and serve him only.*

*Revelation 3:15 – Christ says, “I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot.”*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

Some of my classmates had a real passion for sports. They would put 100% of themselves into practice and training. They could recite the rules and the statistics at the drop of a hat. Some of them became really good players. One even became a coach. I, on the other hand, enjoyed playing the games, but had no real interest in perfecting the game. My passion was music, and I spent hours in a practice room or at the keyboard. Coaches and teachers have a pretty good eye for those with both the skill and the passion for a subject. Samuel, the prophet and priest at the time of David, urged the Israelites to concentrate their passion on loving and serving the Lord only. The promise that follows is that the Lord will continue to bless them in their struggles with their enemies. When Christ confronts the church in Laodicea, He accuses them of having no passion for the Lord. They are lukewarm - neither cold nor hot. In fact, He says He'd like to vomit them out of His mouth. The challenge of the church, the body of Christ, is to be alive and passionately involved in loving and serving the Lord in every way possible. Our individual challenge is to ask ourselves if we are as passionate about the Lord and His Word as we are about sports, or music, or money, or our work, or.... What is your passion in life? May the Holy Spirit inspire you to focus your passion on the Lord.  
(lls)

**PRAYER**

*May I become more passionate about you than I am for many of the trivial things that I am involved in, O God. May I use all of the many gifts and abilities that you have given me, becoming so passionate about them that I might use them for your service and for your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Monday, October 12, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Malachi 3:14 – The Lord says, “You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God. What do we profit by keeping his command?’”*

*2 Timothy 2:13 – If we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

The “jungle” north of our farm house was the scene of some fierce “world wars”. Many were the armies that perished in the foxholes and trenches of the battlefield. Grenades and bombs of various sizes shook the earth to its core. In such critical fights, it was important to have dependable officers and soldiers. To that end, our top general shouted “Time out!” when the cook called from the mess tent to tell us lunch was ready. Everyone, including any neighbor kids who joined the fight, marked their spot so the war could continue after lunch. When we took our places after lunch, the true dedication and faithfulness of our soldiers came to light. Some didn’t bother to return, often leaving us dangerously out-gunned. Malachi, the prophet, accused the religious leaders of abandoning the spiritual battlefield by telling people it didn’t matter if they kept the Law or not. Malachi renounces such thinking, declaring that God is faithful and just, and God will certainly punish their faithlessness. Paul wrote to tell Timothy something similar. God is faithful even when we are not. God will surely act on behalf of those who respond to God’s faithfulness and love. May we be found full of faith and faithful when the Lord returns to judge the living and the dead. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*What a blessing it is to know that you are so wonderfully faithful to me, gracious and loving God. When you come again, I pray that you will find me being as faithful to you as you are to me so that I may hear you say those words, “well done, good and faithful servant.” In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Tuesday, October 13, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Ezekiel 37:27 – My dwelling-place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

*Revelation 21:2-3 – And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals.’*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

I just returned from a week of continuing education. The event was great. The bed was comfortable. The food was OK. The people were inspiring. The scenery was amazing. But it felt so good to get back home. As much as I like to travel, I must admit that I miss home and am always glad to return. God promised Israel that His home would be their home and their home His home. For a people referred to as a “valley of dry bones”, who would end up in exile, those words didn’t connect at the time. The people didn’t see themselves as spiritually dead or in danger of being conquered. It was not until later that they could look back and remember God’s promise through Ezekiel, and find hope. No doubt the early Christians facing extreme persecution longed for that same renewed relationship and found hope in the revelation received by John. His picture of the “holy city, the new Jerusalem” must have stirred their longing for their eternal home where God was a permanent resident. In our world of social, financial, and moral upheaval, we are in danger of being that “valley of dry bones” and of losing the close relationship God wants to have with us. May we return to the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, and soul, and invite Him to make His dwelling place with us. May we make our home a welcome place for the Lord our God. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*What a good and wonderful feeling knowing that you dwell within me, O Lord, my God! To be able to rest in your arms after a busy and tiring day. To be able to talk with you; to learn more about you; is like a little bit of heaven here on earth! Ah, home. It is good to be there. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Wednesday, October 14, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Isaiah 41:13 – I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, ‘Do not fear, I will help you.’*

*Luke 4:40 – Those who had any who were sick with various kinds of diseases brought them to him; and he laid his hands on each of them and cured them.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

When I was in second grade, our teacher was sick with the flu for several days, so a substitute teacher greeted us when we arrived at country school. She was a little flustered about how Miss Robinson ran things and what assignments we needed to complete. She didn't know any of us by name, nor did she know our favorite games. She had to leave that to the "big kids". When one of the kindergartners shed some tears, she was almost at the point of tears herself. She may have been a good enough teacher, but she was not "our" teacher. When Miss Robinson returned, we all breathed a sigh of relief. She was the teacher who knew us and cared about us. Isaiah delivered God's message to people in difficult times who had lost sight of God. They wondered if God had deserted them. But God declared that He was not far away. He was close enough to be holding their hand to take away their fear. When Jesus passed through their town, it was that hand of love to which the multitudes of sick flocked. They wanted the healing touch of Jesus to make them whole again. In Jesus, God was close to them. They could reach out and touch the hem of His garment and they could feel the healing touch of His hand. Before His resurrection, Jesus promised that He would be with us always, even to the end of time. May we never forget that Jesus always keeps His promises and always will. As God told the Israelites, Jesus tells us: *I am with you always. I am holding your hand. Do not be afraid.* May the healing touch of the Master's hand rest upon us and the power of His love flow through us. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Some days, when I am stressed or worried, it feels that you are nowhere around, my Lord. Open my eyes that I might see that you are always there and that you have never abandoned me. I have just neglected to see you with me; holding my hand all along. Thank you for being there. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Thursday, October 15, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*2 Kings 19:14 – Hezekiah received the letter and read it; then he went up to the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord.*

*Matthew 6:9-10 – Our Father in heaven, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

Bad news often causes us to panic and jump to conclusions or try to fly; or it can cause us to crawl in a hole to hide or avoid what is coming. Neither action solves the problem. In fact, they may make matters even worse. The letter King Hezekiah received was terrifying news. The blood-thirsty Assyrians were on their way to annihilate Judah. Rather than panic, try to run away, or hide, Hezekiah took it to the Lord in prayer. He knew that Assyria had wiped Israel, the northern kingdom, off the map, and that Judah didn't have enough military might to stand up to Sennacherib's army. There was only One who could help Judah, and that One was God. (Read the "rest of the story" for the thrilling conclusion.) When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He didn't tell them to pray to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, or any of the other Hebrew "saints". He invited them to go directly to the throne of grace, His Father in heaven. It's good to know that in times of trouble we can go to the Source of all power, the One who, with His rod and staff, can lead us through the valley of the shadow of death. There need be no "middle man or woman". We can go to the Father of all Creation, in Person. May we find delight in addressing our worries and our prayer to our Father in heaven when we "take it to the Lord in prayer". (lls)

**PRAYER**

*O how unproductive it is to go into a panic when I hear bad and terrifying news, gracious Lord. The next time I want to panic, gently lead me into your presence. How good it is to know, as the old hymn says, "what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer." Thank you. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Friday, October 16, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Exodus 15:26 – I am the Lord who heals you.*

*Luke 8:47-48 – The woman came trembling; and falling down before Jesus, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

A friend of mine had been suffering from severe pain for several weeks following surgery. Nothing the doctors gave her seemed to give her any relief. After a great deal of prayer, she went to a specialist who ran some tests and discovered the problem. With joy she related that within hours of taking the prescription she had no more pain! How we all wish for and long for that kind of speedy relief. No matter how long it takes nor how speedy we find relief, we need to heed the word of God given to the Israelites in the wilderness: *I am the Lord who heals you*. It is God who ultimately heals. God may use doctors, nurses, medicines, and modern technology to help us heal, but the real and final healing is from God. The woman who had been bleeding for twelve years knew that. When she told the crowd of her miraculous healing, she gave credit where credit was due. She had spent all of her money, undergone many painful and embarrassing treatments, and finally went to Jesus. We too need to take advantage of the miracles of modern medicine, but we also must remember that it is ultimately the healing power of God which works those miracles in us. It is well that we prayer for our medical people as well as the medicines and procedures God has given to us through them. May we rejoice in the healing power of Jesus. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*You have the ability to heal me, dear Jesus. It is fascinating to see that many and different ways that you do so; prayer; the gift of doctors and medicine; and sometimes just a healing touch through a loved one or friend. May I always go first to you. In your holy name I pray. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Saturday, October 17, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalm 30:5 – His anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.*

*Romans 14:9 – To this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

Like his father before him, my father had a temper we learned to avoid. When Dad fell through the “roof” of our straw fort in the barn, when he was in a hurry to bed down the cows, we heard a string of angry words I will not and dare not repeat on this page! While his bark was worse than his bite, there was no doubt it could be heard a mile away. We scattered and braced ourselves for the lecture we knew we would get when he came in for supper. Once we had been properly scolded, Dad went to wash up. When he returned, the fire was gone, and we knew we could breathe easy again. That pretty well describes the Psalmist’s view of God’s anger. Make no mistake: God does get angry. But as angry as God can get, God’s loving grace and joy “comes with the morning”. Paul proclaims the good news that the coming of Christ was for that very purpose. Christ took the pain, suffering, and death we deserved because of God’s anger. And because God’s anger was appeased, in Christ we have a new beginning and a new and joyous hope. For Christ indeed is “the Lord of both the dead and the living.” For our part, we live in that tension: knowing that we can anger God with our sin, but also knowing that in Christ we can be forgiven and “joy (will come) with the morning.” May we seek to avoid God’s righteous anger so that we can live in the brightness of God’s joy. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Why do I like playing with fire, O God? I do things that I know will make you most unhappy; maybe even angry with me. I completely ignore you at times. I treat others with little respect. I become selfish and only think of myself first. Forgive me and I thank you for your gracious forgiveness. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Sunday, October 18, 2009**  
*20<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pentecost*

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalm 69:32 – You who seek God, your hearts shall live.*

*Hebrews 11:6 – Without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

Mom saved seeds from the garden and kept them in jars in the deep storm cellar through the winter. They didn't look like much to me as a child, when we carried them out in the spring. They looked dead. Dad plowed a patch in the pasture, disked and harrowed it smooth; and then fenced it off to keep the cows out. With stings of tied-together baling twine we marked off the rows. As seeds were placed in the rows, I asked if Mom really thought these dead seeds would grow. She assured me they would, if we planted them, watered them, and kept the weeds from killing them. And sure enough, we had a bumper crop of tomatoes, radishes, and other vegetables. Had she not believed in the life within the seeds, we would not have bothered, and would not have planted a garden. The Psalmist wrote about the importance of believing in and seeking God so that we, like the garden, will live. The writer of Hebrews emphasizes the importance of that faith in pleasing God. God doesn't depend on our faith to be able to act, but without faith we do not receive the seeds of God's love. Our garden lies fallow and empty, not because God doesn't exist, but because we did not seek Him and allow His miracles to work in us. May we seek the Lord with all our hearts so that our hearts will live to be gardens of God's grace. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Your seeds lie quiet and seemingly dead inside me, waiting to be planted, watered and nourished, dear Father. May I seek you so that you may bring life to what seems to have no life. May I grow and bloom; showing the world your abundance of grace and love. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Monday, October 19, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalm 96:1 – O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.*

*Hebrews 13:15 – Through Jesus Christ, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

Until we got our first television, WJAG radio, Norfolk, was my best and only source of new songs. Granted, they were not the latest, but they were new to me. I loved singing along with stars of the Grand Ole Opry and music stars like Frank Sinatra and Tony Bennett. When our first small black and white TV arrived, and when the reception was good enough to actually see a picture, I enjoyed the “Hit Parade” where lots of new songs were performed every week. The Psalmist gives the impression that new songs will be standard fare for those who praise the Lord. They are the best way of praising God for all the wonders of creation. The writer of Hebrews encourages his congregation to *continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God*. My mind sees the choirs of men and angels making joyful music constantly around the throne of God. I am convinced that music is the true language of heaven. Scientists tell us it truly is the language of the universe. Everything that exists does so at a specific musical frequency. The most ancient of scriptures were most likely sung around a camp fire, rather than spoken. The Psalms were written as hymns. The angels sang praises at Jesus’ birth; and Jesus and his disciples sang hymns as part of their worship. No wonder the Psalmist calls for us to sing a new song to the Lord. May our every word vibrate with the music of heaven to glorify our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*You have written a song of praise and placed it within my heart, O God. I just need to open my mouth and let it come joyfully to the surface. It is so wonderful to know that no matter my pitch, my tone, or ability to sing a note, it is glorious music in your ears. In Jesus’ name I raise this song. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Tuesday, October 20, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Leviticus 19:11 – You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another.*

*Colossians 3:5 – Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry).*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

We had chicken thieves creeping up in the middle of the night, several nights in a row. The last night it happened, Dad was waiting with his 12 gauge shotgun. He had set a trap and prepared his gun ahead of time. When the chickens squawked, he opened the window and opened fire. Amazingly, two racoons died that night with the chickens they had tried to steal, and the thieving ended. God's instruction in Leviticus (as well as Exodus and Deuteronomy) was not aimed at racoons. It was aimed at people who needed to know how to live in harmony with one another. Lying, stealing, and cheating do not make for good neighbors any more than thieving racoons. God doesn't aim a shotgun at people, but encourages them to guard and protect the truth. Paul told the Colossians to *put to death* those things that are not of God, those activities which make gods or idols of things and people, rather than trusting in the generous and gracious love of God. Sexual immorality, selfish greed, and desiring to get what does not belong to us are included in a long list of things - "racoons" - we should aim to get rid of. The present financial crisis of our nation can be traced, in large part, to "racoons in the chicken coop" who worshiped the wrong gods at the expense of their neighbors. May we follow the meanings in the Small Catechism which encourage us to help our neighbors care for and protect what is theirs. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*The majority of problems in the world come from our inability to live with our neighbors, dear Lord. Forgive me when I try to take what is my neighbors; whether that be any of their money by dishonest means or even their good name by my words to others. Help me to be a good neighbor. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Wednesday, October 21, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Jeremiah 24:7 – They shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.*

*1 Thessalonians 5:24 – The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

I knew my grandparents and one great grandmother, but my personal knowledge of other relatives in my genealogy ended there. Then I met a distant cousin in Denmark who had done extensive research into our family tree, with records that date back to 700 A.D. He had collected notebooks full of details about family members in Germany and many other countries. Knowing bits and pieces of family history back that far was a tremendously exciting thing, especially since some of the earliest records called some of them knights. I knew I belonged to a long line of families going back as far as records could be found! The people of God can trace their genealogies back to Adam, but of even greater importance is the fact that God claims those who return to Him as children, no matter what their family trees may show. Jeremiah delivered that good news to the people who were convinced God would turn His back on them and reject them. God, who is faithful and just, declared just the opposite. God called those who turned back to Him His own people. Even those who were unfaithful and turned their backs on God for a time, have the opportunity of returning to the Lord their God. Paul declares God to be truly faithful and trustworthy. May we always remember to whom we belong and make every effort to turn back when we have gone astray. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Tracing my family tree back can be embarrassing, dear Father; especially when it comes to those who so willfully disobeyed you. I can think of three right away; Adam, Eve and myself. Thankfully, my tree goes all the way back to you, and you have called me your child. Thank you for your love and faithfulness. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Thursday, October 22, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Jeremiah 29:11 – Surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.*

*John 1:16 – From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

As I was growing up, my parents and teachers tried their best to funnel my energies and imagination in directions I didn't always appreciate. In fact, I thought some of the chores and assignments they gave me were "cruel and inhuman" treatment. They weren't, of course, but as a ten-year old I was not happy about what seemed like hours and hours of piano practice. By age twelve, having to shovel chicken manure or walk the endless rows of corn for chopping cockleburrs seemed mean. Being disciplined for not completing assignments in the time I was given, or not doing them to the best of my ability, also seemed mean-spirited. However, looking back, I can see how those very things helped to mold me into the person and the pastor I am today. Jeremiah passed that concept on to the people of Judah who chafed under God's direction and from the struggles and challenges that faced them. God declared that He had a plan for them and it didn't include harming them. In fact God's plan was for their own good. We face many difficulties in our lives, some of which may be given to us by God for our own growth and development. Some, however, may not be from God at all, but from the enemy of God who wants to drive us away from God, in much the same way Satan tried to make life difficult for Job, to discourage him. The gospel of John reminds us of the good news that God's plan is for our welfare as "*from His fullness we have all received grace upon grace*. May we allow God to work through every experience in our lives, in order to bless us for accomplishing His plan. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Ew, how I chaff during those times when you expect me to do things the right way, dear God. I don't want to use my hard earned money to feed the poor! I don't want to take time to read your word. But thank you for insisting and staying with me with grace upon grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Friday, October 23, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Zechariah 7:10 – Do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor.*

*Colossians 3:14 – Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

I never gave much thought to the reason my family migrated to the United States, until a tour guide in another country pointed out that most people in Europe migrated because of war, famine, or poverty. The vast majority of immigrants to this country came with little or nothing in their pockets. My grandfather, for instance, was given the last quarter his family had when they got off the train in Norfolk, Nebraska, and was sent to search on foot for relatives fifteen miles away. During much of those early days, they lived as poor outsiders - aliens - in a strange land. Only by the grace of God and kind neighbors were they able to survive their first winter in a dugout. Zechariah understood the extreme difficulties of those who were alone with no one to help them - the widows, the orphans, the outsiders, and the poor. These, Zechariah said, were of special concern to God too. Their lives are already difficult enough. Don't make them any worse, but help them in any way you can. This is the love with which Paul told the Colossians to clothe themselves. They were not to think only of themselves, but to consider the needs of other less fortunate people. Sometimes we get overwhelmed by the calls from the Rescue Mission, the Hunger Appeal, World Relief or Disaster Aid organizations, and a number of others. Yet, instead of feeling frustrated, perhaps we should give God thanks that we have enough for ourselves and more to share with those who have so little. May we all *clothe ourselves with love.* (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Thank you for this nation, which is a nation made up largely of immigrants and others who are or who were outsiders at one time. May I always remember, dear Father my ancestors and the hardships they endured. Use me to help those in need by giving of what I have. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Saturday, October 24, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalm 22:4 – In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.*

*Hebrews 12:1-2 – Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by this faith our ancestors received approval.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

The old, well-worn German Bible was never far from my grandmother's rocking chair on the evenings when I stayed with my grandparents. After the chores were done, supper was eaten, and the dishes were washed, Grandma took her place in the creaky old chair. Her lap was an open invitation for me to snuggle in heavenly comfort with her. Grandpa sat nearby on the sofa next to the big box radio he tried to fine tune. Grandma would reach for her Bible, and over the scratchy sound of the radio, she would read to me words I could not understand, but which "felt" good to my ear. I knew I was sitting with a woman of deep and powerful faith. I wonder if the Psalmist had a grandmother like mine who read God's word to him as he snuggled in her lap? I cannot define her faith any more than I could understand her words, but I knew it was there. She trusted the One about whom she read and when she spoke to me in words I could understand, made it clear that this loving God had brought her from the old country to a wonderful life in her new country. The writer of Hebrews declared that this was the faith of his ancestors too. It was a faith passed on from generation to generation, and it was a faith which caused God to smile with heartfelt approval. May we be faithful in passing on our faith to our children and our children's children for many generations to come. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Thank you for those warm laps that I could snuggle into as a child, dear Father. How wonderful that they included a hug, reassuring words, and a faith that would be passed on from generation to generation. May I be a safe refuge where little ones can come and know about my faith. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Sunday, October 25, 2009**  
***Reformation Sunday***

**SCRIPTURE**

*1 Kings 18:30 – Elijah said to all the people, “Come near to me.” So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord which had been torn down.*

*Revelation 2:5 – Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

Reformation Sunday in the past was always an opportunity for Roman Catholic bashing. While Martin Luther certainly had his disagreements with the Pope and the established church of the day, it is well to remember that he also loved that church and did not want to leave it. Like the altar of the Lord which Elijah repaired on Mt. Carmel in his duel with the priests of Baal, Luther wanted to see repairs made to the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church. (Note that “catholic) with a small “c” refers to the universal Christian Church while “Catholic” with a capital “C” refers to the Roman Catholic Church.) Were Luther to return to do a survey of Lutheran and other Protestant churches, he no doubt would have some major reforms in mind for all of us today also. This is a good day to take stock of what we believe and how we practice our faith, no matter what denominational label we wear. Jesus, in Revelation, told John to *remember from what (he) had fallen* – his spiritual roots, and repent or change directions. Again, it is sound advice for any church or any organization. Elijah remembered the importance of twelve stones in the altar he repaired as he rebuilt it. Do we remember the lessons we learned from the scriptures and the catechism, or have they gotten lost in traditions and practices because “we’ve always done it that way”? May our lives be *reformed* and may our churches follow suit so that we become the true body of Christ to which we have been called. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*I give you thanks, O God, for your church through the centuries and for those who have sought to reform it so that you, and your teachings are foremost at its heart. I pray that I might never become complacent and comfortable, that the church might stop changing. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Monday, October 26, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalm 95:7-8 – O that today you would listen to his voice! Do not harden your hearts.*

*Acts 10:44 – While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

I hate to admit it, but I inherited a “bull-headed” gene from my ancestors. I have to fight it and redirect it, but it still pops up once in a while. When I was trying to learn sentence structure by way of diagramming them in seventh grade, that gene reared its ugly head, I dug in my heels, and declared the task to be stupid! No matter how Mrs. Wilson tried to explain it to me, it didn’t make sense. I didn’t want to do it and I didn’t care what anyone said. Thankfully, she made me stay after school and worked with me until it broke through my thick skull. Once the light dawned, it all made sense, and I believe I could outline sentences to this day. The Psalmist knew that many people have that same “bull-headed” gene when it comes to God’s voice. The Pharaoh in Egypt at the time of Moses wasn’t the only person in history to harden his heart against the Word of the Lord. Too many people who were baptized and confirmed in the church let a gradual hardening of their “bull-headed” heart take place. However, the good news is that when we allow the Word to penetrate our souls, the Holy Spirit can and does perform amazing miracles in our lives. Peter, the coarse fisherman, preached the Word with very little eloquence, but the Holy Spirit used those words to inspire and convert thousands. May we give up our “bull-headedness”, listen to the voice of the Lord, and be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Forgive me for those many times that I have said, “I don’t want to listen to you and I don’t care what your word says”, O Lord. It is difficult to change a heart, but I know that with you, all things are possible. Change mine and help me to listen to your voice. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Tuesday, October 27, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Isaiah 58:7 – Share your bread with the hungry.*

*Luke 12:48 – From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

Late on the afternoon of the blizzard, the teacher and seven of us in scattered grades from kindergarten to eighth grade discovered that we would have to spend the night at school. All we had left were the remnants of our lunch bags, which amounted to some bread crusts, some uneaten carrots, and a few partially eaten pieces of fruit. I was in kindergarten and probably had the most leftovers because I ate like a bird, and I was more excited than hungry. Some of the big kids were starving! We gathered our meager meal together and began to divide it up. When I told them I wasn't hungry, I immediately became best friends with two of the boys who had not been overly kind to me. I gave my share to them. To me it was simple. I wasn't hungry (especially for the scraps of food we had to share) and they were. Fortunately for us all, a nearby farmer came later on his tractor with a basket of food. The Babylonian exiles evidently needed a lesson in sharing, as did the first disciples. Both Isaiah and Jesus make it clear that selfishness and stinginess are not the will of the Lord. God gives us all things so that we will share all things with those who have not received them. Food, clothing, money, and other material possession are ours to use, but we are expected to give generously to those who have a special need. May we *share our bread with the hungry* and be cheerful givers to those who struggle to survive. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*I have no idea what its like to experience hunger day after day, dear God. You have blessed me with an over-abundance of good things it is almost unbelievable. I pray that I have the discipline to eat only what I need and give what I don't spend on myself to those who do need it. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Wednesday, October 28, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*1 Kings 8:24 – You promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand.*

*Acts 13:23 – From David’s descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior, Jesus, as he promised.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

We saw the need for a new roof on the church. It seemed so expensive and so hard for us to manage in these economic times. Then, we prayed about it and trusted the voice of God speaking through the congregation. We took the steps of faith; and the roof is now covering the building. Granted, it is not all paid for yet, but we have already seen some miracles taking place, and we know from experience that God will help us meet this challenge too. Solomon had the privilege and responsibility for building the first Temple in Jerusalem. It was expensive. It probably seemed extremely expensive and so difficult for him to manage, but he trusted the voice of God. At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon made it clear that the Temple was the direct result of trusting the promises of God. Paul declared to the church in Antioch that Jesus Christ was the answer to the prayers of the Jewish people through the centuries. Christ is that promise in the flesh for them to celebrate. The challenge for us is to discern the will of God, take bold steps to make it happen, and trust that God is already fulfilling His promises to us, even as we make the decision to act. May we live boldly, believing that God has fulfilled His promises and will continue to do so for those who place their trust in Him. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*You are the God of the church of all ages, O Holy One. You have blessed it and promised to be with it and sustain it through all times. I pray that we, as your body, have the faith and trust in you that it will enthusiastically support its mission for the years to come. In Jesus’ holy name I pray. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Thursday, October 29, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Joel 2:28 – Then afterwards I will pour out my spirit on all flesh.*

*Acts 15:8 – God, who knows the human heart, testified to the Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

I wasn't overly excited about taking dance lessons. Sue was excited about the classes, and several friends were going to participate. The lessons were on an evening when I didn't have any good excuse not to go. So, reluctantly, I agreed to take the lessons. The first night was pretty discouraging, but I agreed to give it some time. By the time the lessons were finished, I was hooked. I got into the spirit of the dance, and now I love to dance. I look for opportunities for good ballroom dancing. The prophet Joel was speaking of a different kind of Spirit for a different kind of "dance." This "dance" would be with the "Lord of the Dance" whose Spirit would move us and motivate us. That same Holy Spirit was given to Gentiles, non-Jewish members of God's family, who may have thought they had two left spiritual feet. But God taught them, through His Holy Spirit, to dance the dance of Life with Him. They too can sing: "*Dance, then, wherever you may be! I am the Lord of the Dance,*" said He, "*and I'll lead you all, wherever you may be. And I'll lead you all in the dance,*" said He. When the Spirit of the Lord gets into us, we can do all things, through Him who strengthens us. May we get the rhythm and get the Spirit that keeps us "dancing" the Lord's "Dance"! (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Dance with me, dear Lord. Be my partner through this dance of life. Lead me and I will follow. Stir your Holy Spirit within me; strengthen me for your service; open my mouth so that I might ask others to join this dance of a life-time. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Friday, October 30, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Exodus 9:34 – When Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned once more and hardened his heart.*

*Luke 23:39-40 – One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him. But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?”*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

During my internship, I attended a softball game between two church teams. One of the girls on our team was up to bat. “Pray for me, Pastor, and if God will help me make a home run, I’ll be in church every Sunday!” she declared. To everyone’s amazement, she hit the first ball over the plate with a perfect crack that sent it high over right field and into the trees. It was the home run that brought in two additional players and won the game! I’d like to say, she kept her promise, and that she was actively involve in the church from that day on. But sadly, her promise was quickly forgotten and she seldom came to worship. Like Pharaoh, when the pressure was on, promises came easy. When the crisis was over, the heart turned hard again. One of the criminals suffering on a cross beside Jesus used the opportunity to repent and ask for mercy. The other had a heart already turned to stone, filled with nothing but contempt. One received mercy, the other rejected hope. We live with the baptismal promises made by our parents and sponsors. At confirmation we took over the responsibility for those promises for ourselves. Some spend their lives doing their best to be faithful to those promises. Others, like Pharaoh and the thief on the cross, harden their hearts and forget those promises. May we daily re-examine our baptismal promises to faithfully *hear his Word and share in his supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.* (1Is)

**PRAYER**

*You have called me your own and pledged your promises to me, O God. Your promises can be trusted and always true. May I live out my baptismal promises made to you with the same commitment that you have for me. I pray this in the name of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*

**DAILY DEVOTIONS**  
**Saturday, October 31, 2009**

**SCRIPTURE**

*Psalm 42:1 – As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.*

*Revelation 22:17 – Let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.*

**THOUGHTS TO PONDER**

The long hot days of summer have almost faded from memory as the cool fall breezes tease us with the hint of bitter cold to come. During one of those hot summer days when my brothers and I were bringing in hay bales, we accidentally knocked over our jug of water. It was a gallon jug covered in wet burlap to keep it cooler in the shade. In its burlap coat it was hard to tell that it had tipped over on the dirt clod on which it rested and the cork had come loose. The temperature soared to over 100 degrees. When we took our water break, we were sorely disappointed to find an empty jug. The hot dry afternoon of work in the sun dragged on for what seemed like an eternity. Then we saw Mom coming with our mid-afternoon lunch. In no time at all we finished off every drop of lemonade and begged Mom to take our water jug home to refill it. We were thirsty! That's the kind of thirst for God the Psalmist had in mind. For him the love of the Lord was like a cool refreshing drink for a parched soul. No wonder Jesus offered Himself as the gift of the "water of life" to all who are truly thirsty. On this Holy Evening - Halloween or All Saints Eve - it is well to remember that the thing that marked the lives of the saints was their thirst for and their search for the presence of the living Water in their lives. May we long for the streams of Living Water, and may our souls be thirsty for the Word of the Lord. (lls)

**PRAYER**

*Much of the time I go through my day not even realizing that I am not drinking enough water, dear Lord, until I realize I'm dehydrated. . Much of the time that is also true of your life-giving water that nourishes my soul. Refresh me with your water. Renew my spirit within me. In the name of Jesus. Amen.*

*\*\*Thoughts to Ponder by Pastor Sydow, Prayers by Pastor Freeman*