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Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

the little church with a big heart!

THOUGHTS ALONG THE WAY...

"You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope." — Thomas Merton

Sarah laughed. She was old. She had long ago given up the dream of having a child even though Abraham would prattle on from time to time about a promise God had made to him one night out in the desert that his descendents would be as numerous as the stars and the grains of sand and yada, yada, yada. And now this stranger having an early dinner in the shade of the big tree outside the tent was telling Abe that he was going to be back that way in a season and that when he returned she, Sarah, would be bouncing her own baby on her knee. Funny stuff. So she laughed out loud and said to herself under her breath, "So this old lady's going to enjoy a little amorous attention once again? A little bliss beneath the burka?" But the man dining under the tree heard her laugh and said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh? Is there anything too wonderful for the Lord?" "I didn't laugh," said Sarah. "Oh yes you did," said the man, who really was God in disguise. And that's why about 9 months later they named the baby Laughter.

"What is impossible for mortals is possible for God." —Jesus (Luke 18:27)

"Mortal, can these bones live?" The question makes Ezekiel squirm. First off, it's God asking it, so that sets the discomfort bar pretty high from the get go. And then there's the business of being addressed as "Mortal," which, okay, it's God talking, so The Immortal One gets to do that, but it doesn't exactly inspire self confidence, especially when you're staring out a valley full of dried up human bones piled up willy-nilly all over the place. It's never really comfortable to have God asking you direct questions, even if you think you know the answer because, you know...God...in the face of whom all human answers are, at best, partial, and besides, God is famous for asking tricky questions. So let's parse this, thinks Zeke. It's pretty obvious that any connection between all these bones and being alive is a matter of past tense, as in 'this femur and tibia were once part of the same leg which were part of a man who actually stood on that leg but now he doesn't have a leg to stand on and there's no him to stand on it'...but then again, it's God asking the tricky question, so don't jump to conclusions, leg or no leg. So what's the answer? Can these bones live? God knows. Oh! There it is! "Lord, you know." Good. Now maybe he'll let me

Thoughts Along the Way Continues...

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off the hook and get me out of this creepy place and go away, thinks Zeke. But no. "Mortal, prophesy to these bones. Tell them they will breathe again. Tell them they will have muscles and sinews and skin. Call on the four winds to pull them together and stand them up and make them human again." Well, sure, thinks Zeke, and he does what he's told, and to his surprise there is a great, loud rattling of bones as they join themselves together and then the winds blow and Ezekiel opens his eyes and finds himself looking out at a valley filled with living people. Not dry bones. Living people. "What's this all about?" wonders Ezekiel. "These are your people, Zeke," says God in response to Ezekiel's unspoken question. "They've given up hope. They think they have no future. I want you to tell them that's rubbish. I want you to tell them that I will put my Spirit in them and they will live. This isn't the end, it's a new beginning."

"The possible's slow fuse is lit by the Imagination." — **Emily Dickinson**

"We've done mission studies before," said 80-year-old Jim. "They're gathering dust in the church office. I don't think these studies ever changed anything." And Jim was right. The studies never changed anything. Their congregation was aging. Membership was fading by attrition and attendance was slipping. Very few of their children and grandchildren were in the pews on Sunday. And the programs they had tried, the church growth plans they had tried...well some seemed to work for a while but eventually they ran out of steam. So they decided at First Presbyterian Church in Altadena that before they spent a lot of energy and effort in following another 10 sure-fire steps for Church Growth that they would pause. They decided that before they would look forward again they would take time to look back, to remember their own story, to remember the days of their best energy, to recapture what that had felt like and what they had been doing and what had drawn them together and held them close to each other and sent them out into their community with such vibrant energy once upon a time. They decided to rediscover their heritage. They remembered their grandparents, the original Japanese immigrants who founded the congregation in the early 1900s in Pasadena. They remembered how the common bond of their Japanese language and culture combined with the freedom to worship without restriction had energized them, how, as more relatives and friends came over from Japan their community grew and so did their church. They remembered the trying years of the war when it was all torn apart as so many of them were forcibly relocated to internment camps. They remembered how neighboring churches, Euro-American churches, protected their buildings and stored their things and did whatever they could to ensure that they would have a church to come home to. They remembered the post-war years of rebuilding—rebuilding community, rebuilding trust. They remembered the boom years of the 1950s and 1960s when the church grew like crazy because churches everywhere were growing. They remembered when the government took their property in the



"At the time of the Revolution [1776], despite all the bustle of the Great Awakenings, only around 10 per cent of the American population were formal Church members, and a majority had no significant involvement in Church activities. "In 1815 active Church membership had grown to around a quarter of the population; by 1914 it was approaching half - this in a country which in the same period through immigration and natural growth had seen its numbers balloon from 8.4 million to 100 million."

~Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: the First Three Thousand Years*

1960s by eminent domain in order to build a freeway. They remembered how they raised \$220,000 in 10 weeks to buy a new piece of property and build a new church home in Altadena. They remembered fundraisers and barbecues. Most of all they remembered each other, the times they had shared, the trials they had faced, the joys they had shared, the fun they had had, the love they had shared, the ways they had been community together and reached out together. And in all that remembering they recaptured their joy and their sense of mission. In all that listening to their own story they found the key pieces for reframing a vision for their future. In listening to their own history they found the energy to think creatively, to change the conversation, to stop talking about decline and start imagining provocative possibilities. In their appreciative inquiry into their past they found what they needed for living the resurrection.

"I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." –Isaiah 43:19

Pro Gloria Dei, Pastor Steve

CONGREGATION COUNCIL UPDATE

The council met on January 2nd and the meeting was well attended.

Whew, we made our budget for 2016, with some cut backs and extra funds generously given by the congregation in the last quarter. Consistent with pledges and anticipated giving, the spending plan for 2017 has been adjusted down about 10%. We are not funding the property reserve as we believe we are adequately covered for 2017 however we will need to revisit this for 2018. We reduced mission planned giving to 10% of our expected revenue. We also reduced some administration and church program spending for 2017. Missions — please note that the spending plan does not affect any donation that is designated for a specific mission.

At the annual congregational meeting, members approved the 2017 spending plan, brought our constitution up to 2016 standards, and approved the "Living the Resurrection" covenant.

As we move through Epiphany, Lent and Holy Week, please consider the following:

Finally beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable,

if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

-Philippians 4:8

Whatever is this? These words are helping to guide team members of **Living the Resurrection** and help our congregation review **values** we each see in our church. You will be seeing and I hope thinking of these words and how they relate to you and your relationships at Gloria Dei over the next few months.

Looking at our community, did you know 16% of Long Beach kindergartners fall below bench mark reading skills? 38% of 1st grade, 47% of 2nd grade, and 49% of 3rd grade students are below bench mark reading levels. This information comes from Jill Baker, Deputy Superintendent of Schools. They are working on an interventional tutorial program for Pre-K and Kindergarten level students to address this expanding literacy problem in our community along with working to bring older students up to grade level reading skills.

In closing, a prayer for good health and happiness to all who enter our doors.

Rejoice in GOD's blessings,
Stephanie Siemer, Council President





It all started on our son's birthday in April. By this time, my husband had been laid off from his work about three months already and four months after I had a benign nerve tumor surgically removed from my right abdominal wall.

My son and I were walking out of a store in Tustin and then I noticed a dime on the ground. I picked it up. I told my son that I would pray that the Lord would show me another coin before the end of the day, to remind us of God's faithfulness in our situation. We had felt the challenges of life that were upon us as we'd had it quite well for a while. The Lord did show me two more pennies by the end of that day!

This started my faith journey through lessons learned from coins that have come my way. From May to mid-July, the Lord directed me to a coin (or more) every day. The coin found on July 6 was when it hit me what was imprinted on the coin "In God We Trust." I remember sharing my journey with my aunt and she reminded me that the coins were like our manna. The Lord is reminding us that He does provide.

I have seen coins on stairs, on dirt, concrete cracks, in parking lots; even right in front of my foot at the end of a jog—it felt like angels were dropping coins for me to see. The Lord has given me eyes to see even the smallest things (such as coins), thus the lesson of simple trust in His faithfulness. In fact, there was an area on the dirt near the parking structure at church where I found 23 pennies! How is that all possible? Only God can show miracles like that! There have been ups and downs during this time. We have been learning to trust the Lord for His best. As He reveals a coin each time, it's a reminder of "In God We Trust" and His faithfulness.

In God's timing, on October 27, my husband got a written job offer. We are thankful, humbled and blessed. Praise God for His provision!

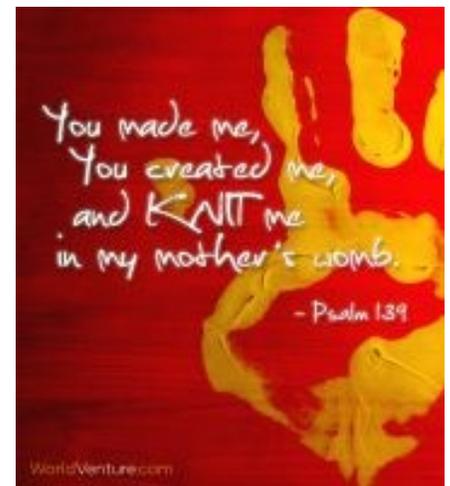
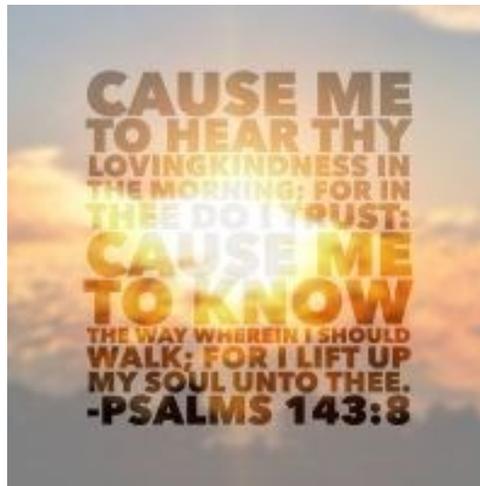
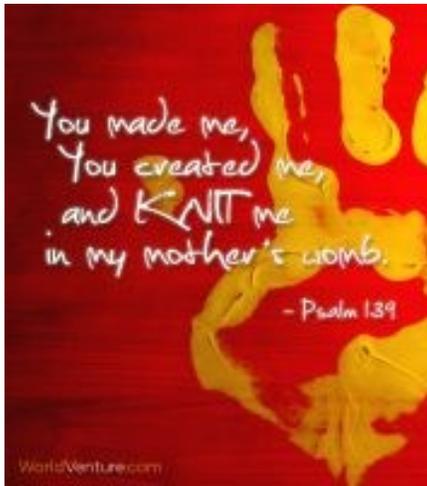
I wanted to share this as an encouragement to those of you who might be struggling. Whatever you might be going through, reflect on God's faithfulness and count your blessings! He does have the bigger picture—sometimes we just cannot see it when we are in the midst of the challenge. That is where our faith muscles are being tested and strengthened (like how my muscles in my abdominal wall had to be strengthened after the surgery). Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. —Matthew 10:29–31 (NIV)

—Shared anonymously

LIVING LUTHERAN

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

Won't you consider volunteering a few Sundays a year? — a small gesture to enhance our ability to connect and meet others at GLORIA DEI! Add your name to the sign-up clipboard in the fellowship hall...we need YOU to be part of our HOSPITALITY Team!



Our name means *The Glory of God*, so we try to live accordingly.

Our life together as a family of faith is built on worship, service, education and friendship.

Thursday, February 2 — Special Invitation! - We are invited to join with our sisters and brothers at Our Saviour's Lutheran in Long Beach to help make baby blankets for the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Miller's Children's Hospital. Bring your sewing gear or just a willing spirit at 9:00 a.m. For more information see the flyer in the Fellowship Hall.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 7 — NEW ADULT ED CLASS - REFORMATION STEW! This class will be a mix of biographies (a lot of Martin Luther), geography, politics, history and social climate as we take a look at how The Reformation took root in Saxony and spread throughout Europe. What made the times ripe for such a revolution—and it was a revolution?

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16 — ELCW

The Gloria Dei Women's group will host their meetings at 11:00 AM in the coming months. See a list on our bulletin board for future projects and activities. One project this year will be collecting used greeting cards. Don't throw out your Christmas, birthday, anniversary, etc. cards just yet. There will be a box in the fellowship hall where you can leave them. We will be sending them to a youth ranch in Nevada where the children will make new cards and sell them. Margie Brown, 2017 President

CALENDAR OF EVENTS — FEBRUARY 2017

1 — Wednesday

JOIN THE CHOIR... @ 7:15 PM

David & Sarah Fuller Anniversary

2 — Thursday

Happy Birthday Bob Siemer

3 — Friday

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

4 — Saturday

5 — SUNDAY

TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

ADULT EDUCATION @ 9 AM

WORSHIP @ 10:30 AM

HOLY COMMUNION

O.A. MTG. @ 7:00 PM

6 — Monday

CHURCH COUNCIL MEETING
@ 7 PM

7 — Tuesday

Martin Luther & the Reformation

ADULT EDUCATION @

10:00 AM & 7 PM

8 — Wednesday

JOIN THE CHOIR... @ 7:15 PM

9 — Thursday

10 — Friday

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

11 — Saturday

12 — SUNDAY

ADULT EDUCATION @ 9 AM

WORSHIP @ 10:30 AM

HOLY COMMUNION

HUNGER ENVELOPES

PRAYERS OF HEALING

O.A. MTG. @ 7:00 PM

13 — Monday

GARDEN CLUB @ 1 PM

14 — Tuesday

Martin Luther & the Reformation

ADULT EDUCATION @

10:00 AM & 7 PM



VALENTINE'S DAY

15 — Wednesday

JOIN THE CHOIR... @ 7:15 PM

16 — Thursday

ELCW MEETING @ 11:00 AM

ALL WOMEN are invited to our meeting in the fellowship hall. Bring your own lunch and favorite (empty) coffee/tea cup or mug and be ready for some fun!

17 — Friday

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

Happy Birthday Berlin Zook

18 — Saturday

LSS WORK PARTY 10-NOON

1611 Pine Avenue, Long Beach

Happy Birthday Roger Powell

19 — SUNDAY

ADULT EDUCATION @ 9 AM

WORSHIP @ 10:30 AM

HOLY COMMUNION

Noisy Offering

O.A. MTG. @ 7:00 PM

20 — Monday

PRESIDENT'S DAY HOLIDAY

Newsletter Deadline

21 — Tuesday

Martin Luther & the Reformation

ADULT EDUCATION @

10:00 AM & 7 PM

22 — Wednesday

JOIN THE CHOIR... @ 7:15 PM

23 — Thursday

Happy Birthday Lyn Hicks

24 — Friday

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

Happy Birthday Carrol Irwin

Happy Birthday Randy Hoffman

25 — Saturday

Happy Birthday Sarah Fuller

26 — SUNDAY

ADULT EDUCATION @ 9 AM

WORSHIP @ 10:30 AM

HOLY COMMUNION

COOKIE SUNDAY

PACIFIC FLUTE ENSEMBLE-7PM

O.A. MTG. @ 7:00 PM

27 — Monday

28 — Tuesday

Martin Luther & the Reformation

ADULT EDUCATION @

10:00 AM & 7 PM



GLORIA DEI EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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



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Gloria Dei Lutheran Church is a Reconciling in Christ Congregation. At Gloria Dei Lutheran Church we welcome all who are seeking God's love and grace. We welcome all because God welcomes all, regardless of race or culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, or relationship status. We welcome all without regard to the social, cultural or economic circumstances that too often divide us. Our unity is in Christ in whom we are all made new. (2 Cor. 5:17-19)

