



MISSIONS UNPACKED DEVOTIONS



The LCMS Office of International Mission (OIM) is very thankful for this devotional booklet, prepared by LCMS missionaries, called by the Lord through your LCMS Board for International Mission. Thanks be to God!

It is our prayer that these devotions provide you strength from the Word of God, encouragement in facing challenging circumstances and perseverance in praying “thy Kingdom come.” We are confident that they will open your eyes to the greatest blessings in mission work.

As directed by you, the Synod, and under the direction of your LCMS president, OIM serves the congregations of the Synod in all international mission endeavors. Guided by the policies of the Board for International Mission and Synod resolutions made in convention, OIM recruits, fully supports and cares for LCMS career and short-term missionaries. Our initiatives and investment of resources are also carried out in full collaboration with partner churches worldwide in existing mission endeavors and in the opening of new mission fields. Every missionary, project or grant sent, every conference held and every resource developed has as its goal the spreading of the Gospel, the planting of Lutheran congregations and the showing of mercy in close proximity to Word and Sacrament. Good and faithful stewardship of the church’s resources requires close communication, collaboration and coordination not only at home but also with partners throughout the world.

You have a critical part to play in the task of spreading the Gospel, planting Lutheran churches and showing mercy. Your contributions, prayers and partnership enable the fulfillment of Christ’s global mission through your called and commissioned missionaries. Ours is an ongoing and enduring multigenerational mission that must build upon the foundation which has been laid without creating unnecessary dependencies or unrealistic expectations. Most importantly, it must be faithful to the clear Word of Jesus. It is His mission, and for His glory, for the proclamation of forgiveness of sins and life eternal to all through faith in Him alone as our Savior.

May you discover all this and other benefits as you reflect on God’s Word and the concrete experiences and prayers of servants who have gone before you and have reflected here with thankful hearts.

God bless your meditation,

Rev. Daniel McMiller

Executive Director, LCMS International Mission

God's Word Grows

Psalm 1
Mark 4:26-34

**“And he said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how’”
(MARK 4:26-28).**

In order to grow a hedge between our house and the road, sticks cut from other bushes were stuck into the ground and left to grow. They were just plain bare sticks, but because of the constant sun and frequent rain here in Kenya, about a third of them have taken root and sprouted new leaves.

Jesus told a parable about how God's Word is like seed that grows, not because of anything we do. Another parable tells how some seed that is planted grows, while in another place it does not (Mark 4:1-20). The seed is good, but the hard ground does not receive it.

God sticks us where He wants us to help His church grow. In some places it is hard. In other places the growth is amazing. We cannot take credit for the growth; it all depends on Him. Because of His abundant blessings, it happens.

Jesus compared His death and burial to a seed being planted which springs up again with new life. Growth happens because of what He did on a cross-shaped stick in the ground of Golgotha. We have new life when we are branches who are joined to Him.

Lord and giver of life, when we were dead in sins, You gave us new life. When we feel dry, water us with Your word and give us growth. Use us, where You have planted us, to spread Your good seed. Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

The Rev. Vance Becker, a former parish pastor, and Linda Becker, a Lutheran elementary teacher, serve at Matongo Lutheran Theological College in Kenya. Vance is a theological educator, helping to train pastors, deaconesses and evangelists for the fast-growing church in eastern Africa. Linda works with the deaconess students and the music program.

QUESTIONS:

1. How is the concept of God being the source of growth different than the popular saying “bloom where you are planted”?

2. Discuss a time when God stuck you in a place in order to be an active part of His church.

Pentecost

Psalm 67
Acts 2:1-39

“And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself’” (ACTS 2:38-39).

Pentecost has always intrigued me. One day, the sound of a rushing wind is heard throughout Jerusalem and gathers a crowd. What look like small flames are resting on the apostles’ heads, and suddenly these men — some educated, some not — are speaking in multiple languages! People “from every nation under heaven” (ACTS 2:5) could understand what these men were saying.

If you look up the percentage of people in the world that speak a second language, it’s about 43%. That’s almost half of the world population that speaks a second language! And unlike earlier in the history of the United States, only about 20% of Americans speak a second language — which could be why the account of Pentecost astounds me. After I have worked and studied so hard just to learn a second language, I am astonished to hear that these men were gifted with the ability to say something and have it immediately understood by others of different languages!

We don’t know how long their ability to speak in different languages lasted, but we do know what the crowd heard about that day. They heard the Gospel, the Good News that Jesus died and rose again for them and all people. Perhaps this is why I was drawn to mission work — to tell others about Jesus in their own language. Will I suddenly become fluent in Farsi if I stand in a field and let the wind gust about me? Probably not. Will I have to work really hard and study a lot to become fluent? Most definitely.

But I'm not alone as I work to learn this new language. I'm not alone when I tell others about Jesus. And neither are you. God is always right there with us. He has sent His Helper, the Holy Spirit, to assist us. "For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself" (ACTS 2:39).

Dear Father, thank You for the gift of language and the ability to learn new languages. Dear Jesus, help us to speak about You clearly to all we encounter. Dear Holy Spirit, open the ears of those who hear to trust in Jesus. In Your name we pray, Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Rachel Krause serves in Germany, based in Leipzig, as a refugee outreach missionary. She assists German congregations with their outreach to refugees from the Middle East. In her free time, Rachel enjoys reading, cooking, playing the piano and hiking.

QUESTIONS:

1. Speaking in other languages instantly, like the apostles did on Pentecost, is like a superpower. What instant "superpower" do you wish you could have to spread the Gospel, and how would you use it?

2. Learning new languages for the mission field is difficult, ongoing work. What is a skill you currently possess that could be used in missions (either international or in your own neighborhood)?

Jesus Wants To Be With You

John 6:16-21

Psalm 27

**“But [Jesus] said to them, ‘It is I; do not be afraid’”
(JOHN 6:20).**

Jesus doesn't need you.

Did that sound mean? We like the idea of being needed. As a missionary, it's especially tempting to want my work to seem important and necessary to Jesus.

But consider with me the story of Jesus walking on water (JOHN 6) from a new perspective. The disciples wanted to bring Jesus across the lake. They may have been clueless about miracles, but they knew boats! It would take Him days on foot; He needed their help.

But then, the wind picked up. They realized they couldn't even cross the lake themselves. Maybe this is why Jesus wanted to walk: He knew His disciples would be no help. Jesus didn't need them. Worse, if He had relied on them, He'd be stuck in the middle of the lake, too!

As though things weren't bad enough, the disciples saw a terrifying sight. The waves closed in on them. They were powerless to defend themselves, to cross a body of water they had years of experience on.

I often feel stuck like that. How will I ever bring Jesus to that distant shore? I can't keep up. No matter how hard I row, I can only stay afloat and try not to backslide. Will anyone ever listen to this Gospel? That's when I hear again the message of this story.

Jesus wants to be with you. He wants to sit in the boat with you. He wants to use you. He doesn't need our strategies, but He will work through them anyway. Especially if we use the Means of Grace; they will work because He works. Jesus is going somewhere, and He wants you to come along.

Dear Jesus, thank You for always being with us. Help us to trust in You in all circumstances. In Your holy name, Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

The Rev. James Neuendorf serves as a church-planting pastor in Puerto Rico along with his wife, Deaconess Christel Neuendorf, who is helping to establish mercy ministries in Puerto Rico as a part of long-term disaster response work. Both have served as missionaries in this region since 2008, based in Panama and then in the Dominican Republic.

QUESTIONS:

1. How can we encourage someone who is struggling because they know their best is never enough?

2. Talk about a time when you tried to help Jesus out instead of following His lead.

Christ Is Risen!

Psalm 16
Matthew 28:1-10

“He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay” (MATT. 28:6).

Nothing makes one think about life like death. The death of someone close — or the realization of one’s own impending death — causes everyone, regardless of culture or age, to really ponder. That is the case for many in Taiwan on tomb sweeping holiday, in which the Taiwanese visit the graves of their ancestors to clean, practice rituals and make offerings to benefit them in the afterlife.

One year when Holy Week coincided with tomb sweeping holiday, I asked my two tutoring students about their week and the holiday. They responded with the usual descriptions of a family trek to the graveside with a less-than-enthusiastic ritual sacrificial offering.

The students then asked me about my week. I shared with them about the Christian celebration of Easter and Jesus’ resurrection. We discussed how just like they went to the tomb expecting their ancestors’ remains to still be there, the women went to Jesus’ tomb expecting the same. The women were there to anoint his body. Their experience turned out to be completely different, though. When they arrived, Jesus was not there because He had risen. We discussed the necessity of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Then I told the students, “God is living. He is alive. Like we are sitting here face to face.” I pointed them to two biblical promises: the resurrection of all the dead and eternal life with God for those who have physically died in Christ. Christ’s life, death and resurrection not only give new meaning to death, they give new meaning to life. We are no longer God’s enemies. We no longer fear death. This is the message God gives us the privilege of proclaiming as He expands His kingdom. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Dear Jesus, thank You for dying for our sin and rising to give us eternal life. Please continue to give us the gift of faith in You and extend that gift to those that do not yet know You. In Your name we pray, Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Andrew and Noel Schaff currently serve in Chiayi, Taiwan. Andrew is a full-time teacher at Concordia Middle School, and Noel tutors students in English.

QUESTIONS:

1. Tomb sweeping is a custom that led to the discussion of the Resurrection. Can you think of other customs (where you live or anywhere in the world) that might lead to other discussions about Jesus? Example: How could you use the custom of celebrating Independence Day or a birthday to point to Jesus? Can you think of more examples?

2. How do Christ’s life, death and resurrection give new meaning to death? To life?

The Joy of Togetherness

Psalm 46
Ephesians 4:1-16

“From [him] the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (EPH. 4:16).

After seven days serving alongside the Lutheran Church of Uganda (LCU) in rural Uganda, I was exhausted. The days were filled with amazing reminders of God’s love for His people as the LCU and our short-term team visited families in their homes. We accompanied the local pastors and walked throughout the villages sharing the Gospel.

We spoke words of encouragement, held babies, sang songs, prayed together, played games, asked and answered questions, smiled, laughed, observed and learned, ate different foods, drove on winding and dusty roads and strengthened relationships. Whew!

I was joy-filled. I was overwhelmed. I had many different thoughts and feelings, and it was difficult to categorize them. We were in the middle of the mission trip, and I had hit a wall. “God is our refuge and strength” (PSALM 46:1). As I sat quietly in the courtyard of the hotel, sipping my deliciously cold soda, God reminded me that we gather our strength from Him.

While I pondered our week’s service so far, the Holy Spirit reminded me of the various ways God was refreshing us throughout the week. “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations” (PSALM 46:10). Looking around the courtyard, I witnessed the local pastors joyfully encouraging one another as they prepared for the next day’s ministry. I was grateful to be a part of the body of Christ and to serve with them.

Dear Lord, thank You for the moments in which You remind us we are Your children, You are with us, and we are part of the body of Christ working together to serve You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

DCE Megan Mantey and her husband, Mark, serve as career missionaries in Uganda. Before living in Uganda, Megan served as a director of Christian education in northern Virginia and North Carolina, where she was able to participate in short-term mission teams through the LCMS Office of International Mission.

QUESTIONS:

1. From holding babies to sharing the Gospel, the writer listed a variety of ways to shine God’s light to others. Make a list of things you have noticed others doing to share God’s love in the past few days.

2. How can you encourage fellow Christians this week, so they can continue to serve God with joy?

Rock of Ages

Psalm 18
1 Peter 2:1-12

“The Lord is my rock and my fortress” (PSALM 18:2).

Recent events aroused my curiosity about Japan’s national anthem (the Kimigayo). The last half of the anthem characterizes the desired longevity of a prosperous reign: “Until the tiny pebbles / Grow into massive boulders / Lush with moss.” But, how does this happen?

A little searching revealed that just such boulders exist in Japan (*sazare-ishi*) and are composed of tiny pebbles fused by geologic conditions over time (thus “lush with moss”). These are often designated as sacred Shinto objects of worship, strung with sacred straw rope, and decorated with sacred streamers.

Why? Along with other notable examples of nature, these strange boulders are said to embody Shinto deities. At the same time, they are a symbol of national unanimity. Individual members of a community (pebbles) become a harmonious unity of strength (boulder), joined together for the greater good.

For Japanese citizens, the *sazare-ishi* boulder symbolizes the “Spirit of Great Harmony” (*Yamato-damashii*: the Spirit of Japan). However, for Japanese Christians the Word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ is their true boulder of strength: “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (MATT. 7:24).

1 Peter 2:4–5 tells us, “As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Our faith, built on the rock of Jesus, joins us together with Christians around the world and across time to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 PETER 2:9).

Lord God, Heavenly Father, You fulfilled Your promise in Jesus Christ to be our eternal Rock and Fortress. Grant that we may always drink the waters of eternal life from this spiritual Rock and thus find comfort and strength in Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

The Rev. Dr. Daniel Jastram serves in Tokyo, Japan, as the LCMS Asia region's Lutheran resource coordinator.

QUESTIONS:

1. Discuss a time you noticed something (in nature or in your every-day life) that reminded you of one of God's attributes or promises, such as God's omnipresence, power or sacrifice.

2. What are some biblical stories or illustrations that show strength when individuals come together? How do the individuals play a role? How does God act through the individuals?

Sing Praise to the Lord

Luke 1:46-56

Psalm 150

“Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!” (PSALM 150:6).

Most nights, sometime between 3 and 4 a.m., I wake briefly when I hear them chuffing and roaring in the distance. I remember, shortly after moving to our new home in Belize, the first time I heard howler monkeys in the dark and shadowy void of the jungle night; I struggled to understand what could be making that mysterious noise. But now when I hear them, I sigh contentedly, knowing they are alive and well and ruling the darkness from the seclusion of the forest canopy.

Later each morning, a lone whistle, warble or chirp signals the opening notes of the Dawn Orchestra of bird calls, and soon the Sunrise Symphony begins its glorious composition. It's still dark at that hour, so I have no idea what birds play in each section, but by the time I roll out of bed at about 5:30, the parrots and jays fly overhead squawking the closing notes as daylight begins anew.

Birdsong erupts throughout the day, but during the heat of the afternoon, I hear the cicadas take up their chorus, and soon they set the afternoon ringing with their siren reverberations. The noise is sometimes so deafening I can hear nothing over it, but then, as the sun sets, a sweet tranquility descends as the birds nest and the cicadas' call fades. Evenings vary, but sometimes there are a couple of hours of silence, and then, like the birdsong of morning, the frogs begin their evening serenade.

When I first heard all creation singing, I felt like someone apart, an observer, not a participant. But now I realize that God created all of us to sing His praises. If you don't believe me, check your Bible's concordance or search a Bible app and you will discover that there are hundreds of Bible verses that tell us different ways to PRAISE THE LORD! You, too, were created for this, and it's never too late to start singing.

Dear Lord, thank You for reminding us that we were made to praise You. Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Markie Burch and her husband, the Rev. Herb Burch, serve as missionaries to Belize. She spreads the Good News of Jesus through her work with children and has also become an avid gardener and tree planter.

QUESTIONS:

1. If possible, instead of writing a journal entry today, find some art supplies and draw an image based on this devotion. If you have no art supplies, highlight the images within the devotion.

2. Some people create art or make music. What are some other ways we can praise the Lord?

Blessed To Be a Blessing

Psalm 92
Luke 8:4-15

“The seed is the word of God” (JOHN 16:33).

One challenge in serving an expat community is that members are always coming and going. One family gets involved, and, before you know it, they have gone off, back to their home country. So, as the congregation bids farewell, it does so as a holy “catch and release” program. That is, we receive them for a time, only to pass them on to be a blessing to others and in other places.

This is the work and joy of the church. The local congregation is a seminary in the literal sense of that word, which means “seed bed.” In it, God abundantly sows His seed of the Holy Scriptures. Those words come into our ears and, further, even into our hearts, creating faith that clings to Jesus for salvation. Those words become visible in the Sacraments — water, bread and wine — and deliver to us the forgiveness that Christ has won for us. And through these, the Christian grows to become a healthy seedling and then on to maturity and, from there, becomes a bearer of fruit. It is as the reproductive cycle of plants: seeds to plants, plants to seeds; and the whole thing continues on in perpetuity.

This means we are all missionaries of a sort. True, some have answered the call to be a “professional” missionary, those who engage cultures not their own with the Word of God. That includes learning languages, learning about the culture, and finding ways to bring that Word to people outside of the church. But still, all Christians are missionaries at the very least in the lives that they live to the glory of Christ and in the calling of ever more sheep to hearken to the voice of the only Shepherd who can truly be called good. We — you there, and we here — are all a part of letting the world know the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are blessed to be a blessing.

Gracious God, You plant Your sacred Word within us and water it with Your Holy Spirit, the font of Your grace. Cause that precious seed to grow and bear fruit within Your church. Bless our missionaries with a rich supply of seed — missionaries far away and missionaries near. And when it is sown, cause the hearts of those who hear it to be fertile soil to the glory of Your holy name. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

The Rev. Dale and Suzanne Kaster are missionaries in Prague, Czech Republic. Dale serves the English-speaking congregation there of St. Michael the Archangel Lutheran, one of three language services held there. It is their joy to share the Gospel of Christ with word and deed ministry. They are the proud parents of three children (Joshua, Gretchen, Jonathan) and four grandchildren (Isaiah, Rachel, Jameson, Rebecca).

QUESTIONS:

1. Where do you see missions in your church and/or community?

2. How can we be like missionaries and learn the language or culture of our immediate neighbors and bring the Word to people who don't go to our churches?

Prayers for Missions

Before Serving in the Church: Lord God, without Your direction our task is hopeless. Grant Your wisdom and guidance in serving, so that by Your leading people may be served and Your Word and mercy may go forth; through Jesus Christ, our Servant Lord.

Before Volunteering Locally: O Lord, in grateful response to Your love for us we delight in serving our neighbor. So guide and direct us, by Your Holy Spirit, that we might serve those whom You have put before us with humility and love; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Before Exploring LCMS International Mission Work: Lord God, Heavenly Father, Your desire is that all people come to the knowledge of Your Son Jesus Christ. Grant Your wisdom that comes from above, that as I seek Your direction in international service, I may be so guided and directed to Your will in service to Your Kingdom. In Jesus' name.

When Deliberating a Call to Service: Almighty God, You are a God of order and through Your church You have extended a call for me to serve _____. So guide and direct the deliberation of this call so that trusting in Your wisdom and in the sure confidence of Your direction a good decision will be made. In Jesus' Name.

For the Spread of the Gospel Around the World: Lord God, Heavenly Father, Your desire is for all to come to know the height and depth of Your love for them through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. May Your Word continue to have free course throughout the world as Your laborers tell others of the hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

The Rev. Dr. Mark Rabe has served as a pastor in California and Georgia (the state), and in Kenya and Ethiopia as a missionary. He and his wife Stefanie have four children: Noah, Gabriella, Julianna and Matthias. Mark currently serves as director of recruitment for the LCMS Office of International Mission.

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