



LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2022



VINJE
LUTHERAN CHURCH



JESUS SAID, "I GIVE YOU A NEW COMMANDMENT, THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER. JUST AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, YOU ALSO SHOULD LOVE ONE ANOTHER." JOHN 13:34

Most Americans believe in the separation of church and state. And while there are many reasons this value is wise; it also has its limits. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to love others. In fact, love for others is the foundation of values that Jesus taught. And sometimes these acts of love will call us, even demand us, to take actions that others may call "political".

John Danforth who served three-terms in the U.S. Senate and as the ambassador to the United Nations, was also an Episcopal priest. Danforth didn't believe that his faith was to be kept out of his political endeavors, rather it was the inspiration and calling that led him to public service. He says to his fellow Christians, "We have a God-given commission, but it is not a commission to be self-righteous know-it-alls – quite the contrary. Our work in God's world begins with the acknowledgment that we are not God, and that our most bitter rivals are made in God's image." Danforth proves that faith can not only inspire us to act in love and service to others, but it can bring a sense of humility that our world so desperately needs.

God calls us to act in love and humble service to others. There are many ways to do this, but certainly there will be times that our acts of discipleship will call us into the civic arena. Scripture is undeniably clear that we are to care for the hungry, the homeless, the sick, and the underprivileged. Sometimes we can do that by serving an individual and sometimes it calls for larger changes to our society. God wants a better life for all people and calls us to pursue the common good.

ask yourself this...

- WHAT ARE THE WAYS THAT YOU ENGAGE IN CIVIC LIFE TO MAKE THE COMMUNITY A BETTER PLACE FOR ALL PEOPLE TO LIVE?
- HOW DOES THE NEW COMMANDMENT THAT JESUS GIVES US INSPIRE YOUR OPINIONS ON CIVIC ISSUES?
- HOW DO YOU SHOW HUMILITY WHEN DISCUSSING POLITICS OR REFLECTING ON THE ISSUES OUR SOCIETY FACES?

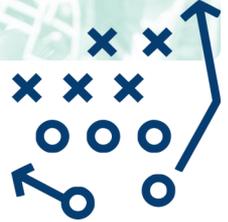


Wednesday, March 9

"ABOVE ALL, LOVE EACH OTHER DEEPLY, BECAUSE LOVE COVERS OVER A MULTITUDE OF SINS. OFFER HOSPITALITY TO ONE ANOTHER WITHOUT GRUMBLING. EACH OF YOU SHOULD USE WHATEVER GIFT YOU HAVE RECEIVED TO SERVE OTHERS, AS FAITHFUL STEWARDS OF GOD'S GRACE IN ITS VARIOUS FORMS." 1 PETER 4:8-10

team

The 2017 Minnesota Vikings (remember the Minnesota Miracle?) was the best football team Minnesota has had for a while. Of course, they met the same fate as every Vikings team did, bringing fans the disappointment that we have come to expect. However, the fascinating thing about that team was the lack of major superstars. Case Keenum at quarterback certainly did not intimidate opponents. But the team had success because they played, and they won, as a team.



Many of us think about sports when we think of teams. But teamwork is essential to so much of our lives. Something being achieved without the help or support of another is so rare in our world that it is practically impossible. No one wins alone. Vince Lombardi, who won five NFL championships, said, "Individual commitment to a group effort—that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work." Our ability to work with others is how our world works.

Thankfully, it is also how God intends us to work. God has given each of us different gifts and created us to be in relation with one another. At the beginning of creation God saw that it was not good for Adam to be alone. No one has all the gifts necessary for our world to thrive. But when we can come together and offer to the team our own gifts, with care and respect for all, the world is as God intends it to be.

ask yourself this...



- WHAT GIFTS HAS GOD GIVEN YOU TO SHARE WITH OTHERS?
- WHEN HAVE YOU NEEDED OTHERS TO REACH A GOAL THAT YOU COULDN'T ACHIEVE ON YOUR OWN?
- WHY MIGHT GOD HAVE CREATED HUMAN BEINGS TO BE RELATIONAL CREATURES? WHY WOULD GOD WANT US TO NEED EACH OTHER AS MUCH AS WE DO?



family

“WHERE YOU GO, I WILL GO; WHERE YOU LODGE, I WILL LODGE; YOUR PEOPLE SHALL BE MY PEOPLE, AND YOUR GOD MY GOD.
RUTH 1:16



Family can be complicated, can't it? We have all been a part of a family at one point or another. Our families are the people who help make us who we are. We share lots of common experiences within our families, and for good or for bad, our families know a lot about us. Of course, because our family members know us so well, they can love us better than anyone... and they can often push our buttons better than anyone. But no matter what, your family is your family. And in moments of stress or challenge, we often get to see what our family is made of.

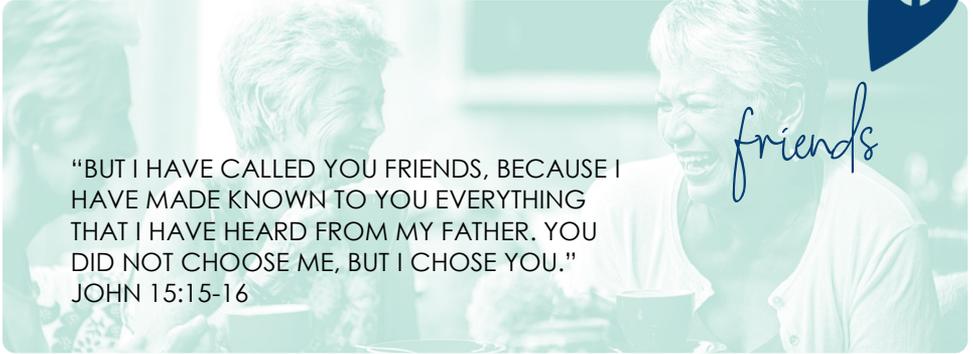
In the book of Ruth, there is a family that is met with a painful reality. Naomi and her two daughters-in-law all lose their husbands. They are all devastated, because at that time women had no property rights on their own. And with no males left in their household, they would have nowhere to turn and all of them would have to start over again. Naomi tries to send her daughters-in-law away to make a new life for themselves and find a new family. But Ruth will not have it. She tells her mother-in-law, essentially, “No, you are my family, and nothing can take that away.” By the end of the story we find out a lot about Ruth and what family means to her. And this story gives us a powerful example of what family can be.

ask yourself this...

- WHAT ARE SOME OF THE JOYS AND STRUGGLES YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED IN YOUR FAMILY?
- HOW CAN FAMILIES BE A PLACE WHERE WE FEEL LIKE WE BELONG, OR SOMETIMES A PLACE WHERE WE DON'T?



Wednesday, March 16



"BUT I HAVE CALLED YOU FRIENDS, BECAUSE I HAVE MADE KNOWN TO YOU EVERYTHING THAT I HAVE HEARD FROM MY FATHER. YOU DID NOT CHOOSE ME, BUT I CHOSE YOU."
JOHN 15:15-16

We all know Jesus had those disciples who followed him, the students who had a lot to learn from him when he walked on this earth. But one of the things we often forget is that Jesus called those disciples his "friends." These were the people that Jesus spent time with day after day, the people who Jesus knew well and the people who knew him well, too.

A phrase that gets used a lot these days is your "chosen family". These are the people who aren't related to us by blood, but the people who we know well, and the people who know us well, too. These are the ones who know all our faults and failings, and yet they love us for exactly who we are. We are in relationship with them, not because we're related to them, but because we choose to be with them and they choose to be with us. It is these "chosen family members" where we can find a place where we truly belong. And it is with these friends that we can experience God's love in a profound way.



ask yourself this...

- WHO ARE THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE UP YOUR "CHOSEN FAMILY," THE FRIENDS WHO KNOW AND LOVE YOU JUST AS YOU ARE?
- WHAT IS ONE STORY YOU CAN REMEMBER OF A FRIEND OR A GROUP OF FRIENDS WHO MADE YOU FEEL THAT YOU BELONGED OR THAT YOU WERE LOVED?



I have heard it said that grandparenting is the most sensational job someone could ever have. The gift of being able to interact with multiple generations of family is truly astounding, and I have known many who take this unique belonging very seriously.

When thinking about Ancestors, extended family life is often our first thought. However, one of my very favorite things about church life is watching folks of different generations who are not necessarily family interact with each other. Older folks with gray hairs who make faces at bald babies during the church service. Teenagers watching out for younger kids roaming the halls. Mentors meeting with confirmation kids and just talking with each other. Each generation brings gifts and wisdom, and the church is one of the last institutions where generations meet one another on a regular basis. We have a unique gift to give others in the ways we reach across age gaps to belong and love one another.

God meets us in the gift of each other. Across ages, years, and generations God is faithful. Where wisdom, encouragement and grace can be delivered by unlikely or unexpected messengers. Where love is expressed in small ways and big ways. In each generation of family and church life, God is still at work forming us into loving places where folks find belonging.



ask yourself this...

- DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE MEMORY OF AN ADOPTED GRANDPARENT FROM YOUR CHURCH LIFE?
- WHAT IS THE WISDOM OF YOUR GENERATION? HOW DO YOU SHARE IT WITH OTHERS?
- WATCH AND SEE: CAN YOU SPOT DIFFERENT GENERATIONS OF PEOPLE INTERACTING WITH EACH OTHER THIS WEEK? WHERE DID YOU SEE THEM; IN CHURCH, AT YOUR HOME, IN THE GROCERY STORE?

Wednesday, March 23



“GOD’S GIFT TO US IS THE
HAPPINESS WE GET
FROM OUR FOOD AND
DRINK AND FROM THE
WORK WE DO.”
ECCLESIASTES 3:13

work

There are 8,760 hours in a year. If you follow the recommendations for eight hours of sleep each night that leaves 5,840 hours. And if you work forty hours a week that is 2,080 or 36% of your waking hours. Hopefully employment brings happiness to you, because it is, will be, or has been, a significant part of your life.

Do you ever think about how God is present with you at work? Is it more difficult some days? When you are swamped you tend to notice God’s presence more or less? When you are stressed? Whether we notice it or not (and I’ll admit there are times even as a pastor that I miss it) God is at work while we are at work. No matter what you do, you are serving God’s mission in the world by making the world a better place for others.

Martin Luther once said, “The Christian shoemaker does their duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good work.” However you are doing your work in the world today, know that God is with you. You need not be a pastor or over-spiritualize your work for God to be with you. Amid all that is happening today, take a moment to pause and look around. How is God showing up as you do the work you have been called to do.



ask yourself this...

- WHAT IS YOUR DREAM JOB?
- DOES THE KNOWLEDGE THAT GOD IS INTERESTED IN THE WORK WE DO GIVE YOU A SENSE OF PEACE AND COMFORT, OR DOES SOUND MORE LIKE DEMAND FOR YOU, SETTING HIGHER STANDARDS?
- WHEN HAS YOUR WORK GIVEN YOU A SENSE OF BELONGING IN YOUR LIFE? WHEN HAS IT NOT? WHAT HAS CAUSED THOSE EXPERIENCES TO BE DIFFERENT?



Sunday, March 27

“FOR WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED IN
MY NAME, I AM THERE AMONG THEM.”
MATTHEW 18:20

Online community is not virtual community. It is real community, and we participate with our bodies as persons who live in a material world. Close physical proximity with other people is not the only possible way of being present to one another.

Many people, including members of Vinje who were not digitally savvy before the pandemic, have learned to use iPads and smartphones and are able to participate in online worship and are connecting online in a planned and deliberate way with family members and friends.

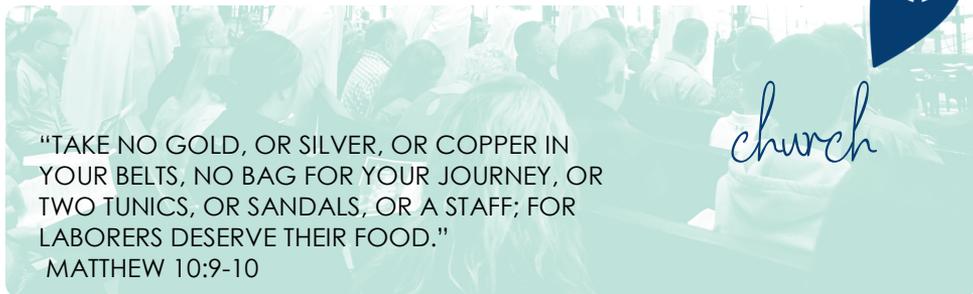
Several members of Vinje have stated that they hear better what is said during worship when they participate online or listen to the radio. And they are not excluding themselves from communion. They have incorporated the habit of having communion while participating online.

The fact that we can be present to each other in the digital space is not different from the way in which Jesus promised to be with us when we are gathered in his name. We do experience divine presence in embodied ways even though Christ is not present in physical form. The apostle Paul was normally physically distant from the churches he served, by present through his letters that were read aloud to the gathered community.

ask yourself this...

- HOW CAN WE USE OUR DIGITAL TOOLS MORE INTENTIONALLY TO BE PRESENT WITH OTHER PEOPLE, AND ESPECIALLY WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE SUFFERING, LONELY, OR VULNERABLE IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER?
- HOW CAN OUR WAY OF WORSHIPING BECOME MORE INCLUSIVE AND HONOR MORE FULLY THE PARTICIPATION OF THOSE WHO JOIN ONLINE?

Wednesday, March 30



"TAKE NO GOLD, OR SILVER, OR COPPER IN YOUR BELTS, NO BAG FOR YOUR JOURNEY, OR TWO TUNICS, OR SANDALS, OR A STAFF; FOR LABORERS DESERVE THEIR FOOD."

MATTHEW 10:9-10

In the sending out of his disciples, Jesus makes a radical demand of his followers: complete reliance on the hospitality of strangers. This is the calling that Jesus puts before those who would form the early church: to provide healing, do miracles, and sanctify those around them. And while they're doing these wonders they're meant to refuse a salary and pack nothing extra. Jesus invites his followers into a posture of dependence for their physical needs. It's almost incomprehensible for us to imagine this level of vulnerability. Who would go on a road trip or long journey without money or extra clothes or snacks? And yet, Jesus tells his disciples to have faith that they will find places where they are welcomed and will be provided for.

This calling to search for places of welcome is at the heart of our identity as a church community. We're called not only to be a place where we offer hospitality to others, but to put ourselves into the position of being dependent on our community for what we need. Something shifts when you let go of the power of being the person in charge and let your self be open to the welcome of others. While church nowadays looks very different from the Early Church it continues to be a gathering of people on their faith journeys who are seeking connection along the way.



ask yourself this...

- HOW WOULD YOU SHOW UP DIFFERENTLY AT CHURCH IF YOU PRIORITIZED CONNECTION OVER DOING THINGS?
- IS THERE A TIME WHEN YOU WERE SURPRISED BY THE WELCOME YOU RECEIVED FROM OTHERS?



"BUT ASK THE ANIMALS,
AND THEY WILL TEACH YOU...
ASK THE PLANTS OF THE EARTH,
AND THEY WILL TEACH YOU."
JOB 12:7-8

What is it about being outside that helps us feel grounded? When we go for a hike in the woods, or when we tend to our garden, or when we feel the wind on our face, we can experience the awesome nature of this world in a tangible way. We can also experience the goodness of God, simply by hearing the sounds, seeing the sights, and even taking in the smells of God's good creation.

When asked about where he experiences God the most, my uncle often says it is when he is fishing at our family lake. It isn't that he doesn't experience God in church buildings (he goes to church almost every Sunday). However, he feels a deep connection with God when he is "out there" in the world and in touch with this world that God made. It is as if everything in the world speaks of God's goodness, and out there on his boat, he's able to breathe in God's life with every breath. Sometimes it is the act of being one with this creation that helps us to remember the God we belong to, who created us all.

ask yourself this...

- WHAT IS ONE OF THE BEST EXPERIENCES YOU HAVE HAD IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS?
- HOW DOES GOD SPEAK TO YOU THROUGH NATURE IN A WAY THAT IS DIFFERENT THAN THE WAY YOU MAY EXPERIENCE GOD OR GOD'S LOVE IN A TRADITIONAL WORSHIP SERVICE?



Wednesday, April 6



stories

"I WILL GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD WITH MY WHOLE HEART; I WILL TELL OF ALL YOUR WONDERFUL DEEDS."
PSALM 9:1

Ever heard the expression: "lost in a good book"? Or binge-watched a TV series meaning only to watch one or two episodes, and suddenly an afternoon has flown by? Or have you met a friend over coffee and traded newsy updates about those you love?

If you have answered yes, you have been connected to others through stories.

Before the Bible ever came to be in written form, the stories of our faith were told in stories over and over. Stories told around dwindling fires, repeated as they travelled dirt paths and dusty roads. Stories told before bedtime and in blessings of a new day. Believers for generations listened to stories of great heroes: of David and Samson, of Ruth and Naomi, of followers of Jesus, like Peter and James and John. Starring in these stories was the power of God working through ordinary people. When these stories were repeated, they worked on their hearers. As people listened; they learned who God is, how God can be trusted, and where God had been for others in the past. The stories of faith shaped their imaginations to be able to wonder where God is now, and how we can trust God into our future.

Stories have incredible power to shape our imaginations and expand our power of empathy. God is at work claiming us and connecting us

ask yourself this...

- WHAT IS THE BEST BOOK YOU HAVE READ LATELY? WHAT IS THE BEST TV SHOW OR MOVIE YOU HAVE WATCHED? WHAT ABOUT IT DID YOU LIKE?
- WE TELL EACH OTHER STORIES ALL THE TIME—HOW DO YOU THINK THIS WORKS IN CREATING CONNECTION AND BELONGING?



