

Blessed Trinity Lutheran Church at Rosemont

DAILY MEDITATIONS — NOVEMBER, 2025

November 1, 2025 — All Saints Day

Love never fails.

1 Corinthians 13:8

For some reason, from childhood on, I've never had any doubt that there is a life after this one. I have also believed – deeply and instinctively – that there is, or can be, a connection between us and those who have gone on to that next life. Many people have such beliefs. Some people even talk to their long-gone parents or siblings, to deceased spouses, children, and others, whom they still love, miss, and remember. When my Mom was alive, she and I would sometimes have a 'Windish day', when we spoke only in that language, properly known as Slovenian; the language with which Mom grew up and which I spoke in the way my grandparents did. It was a good way for me to keep my speaking skills. Since Mom's passing, I haven't had a 'Windish day'. But I have begun to do something else. Instead of just thinking about deceased loved ones when a memory comes to me, I sometimes say, "Spend the day with me. Be with me. Come to me. Remember with me. Give me any signs or messages you wish. Let's spend time together today." Inevitably, as I go about my activities on those days, and as I open myself to the memories or thoughts that come, there is a sense of connection, of Mom or Dad, or a grandparent, a relative or a friend, being, somehow, nearby. It can almost feel like companionship. And there is always a sense of love and connection. That isn't surprising. Most of us, when we think of our own mortality, want to be remembered after we're gone, especially by those we love or cherish. How it must please our loved ones – in their new, heavenly lives – when we remember them, when we talk to them, when we say, "I miss you. Come ... be with me today." *"Creator God, from much that we sense, you are not alone in your heavenly realm. Those who have gone on from this life are now with you. Let them be with us, too, especially on this All Saints Day. As we open our minds, hearts, and souls to the possibility of connection – to the transparency of the veil that separates this dimension from the next – let us be open, also, to your mysterious ways, and to the incomprehensible reality of life ... and love ... that never ends."*

November 2, 2025

Rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God.

Joel 2:13

Many worshippers in Christ's time, and in the centuries before, went to temples and made a huge show of their supposed remorse and guilt. For some, the repentance may have been real. But perhaps Jesus was right when he said that those who kneel before God to confess their sins and ask for mercy are closer to God's expectations than those who make a show of their worship, whether they are praising or confessing. Just going through the motions never gets us anywhere, in life, in worship, or in our relationship with God. Only sincerity leads us to truthful insights and new ways of living. When we are truly sorry for something we have said or done – or have failed to say or to do – both God and we will recognize our honesty. To change our ways, we must change our hearts, our motives, our way of relating to others. God welcomes our return and our sincere repentance.

November 3, 2025

A shoot shall come out of the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. Isaiah 11:1

Today's verse refers to the prophets' vision of how the Messiah would come to Israel. For people and tribes with a long oral tradition of remembering and relating their history, this reference to expected genealogy was natural. But verses, such as today's, can speak to us of more than ancestry and tracing lineage. Living things – animals, trees, shrubs, flowers, vines, and vegetable stock – almost always create new life. New shoots spring from old. Human beings, of course, create new life in their children and future generations. Those who do not have children still generate new life in other ways— in their loving influence and effect on other people and on the work and the life of the world. New life is always possible. Branches burst forth at any age and at any time. We are linked to the ever-living, ever-loving Creator, and God can bring forth new life in our lives at any time.

November 4, 2025

The night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Romans 13:12

Few things seem as dark as the political atmosphere around us: so many insults, so much ugliness, so much accusation, so many false statements and claims ... and so little shame, common sense, wisdom, humility, or true vision for our future. A dark time, indeed. But today's verse calls us to turn from darkness, to put it aside, and turn to the light of our own wisdom, our God-given ability to think and to make decisions from a God-centered, humane, and loving perspective. In other words, to rely on the wisdom and leading that God provides to us. It is perfectly all right to ask God to guide our thinking and voting, just as God guides our lives. Abiding in God, we are wiser than we know, and confusion will not overwhelm us. When we 'put on the armor of light', we can make choices that seem wise to us; to vote in confidence and good conscience.

November 5, 2025

Even before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear. Isaiah 65:24

Prayer is one of our connections to God, and we each find the form of prayer that is most meaningful for us. For some, it's a formal process of praying the rosary or reading or reciting written or memorized prayers. For others, it is a conversation with a divine Parent. At times, when we're in despair and can't even form words, our pain and our tears become our prayers. "Thank you" is a two-word prayer and so is "Help me". At its best and truest reality, prayer is being at one with God, being linked to God in a kind of communion with God, a joining with God, allowing God to infuse us with love and divine presence, opening our minds, hearts, and souls to the Creator, the Comforter, the Light, the Love. Whatever else we do on this day or in this week, let us make time to pray, to be in the presence of God, even if our prayer is simply silence in that divine presence.

November 6, 2025

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. Deuteronomy 6:4

In the time of the Old Testament, people had an array of gods from which to choose. They could worship nature-based idols, created 'gods', or anything decreed as divine, including the golden calf in Exodus, which the Israelites made and which enraged Moses. Some worshipped Baal; others worshipped Shamash, Yarik, Chemosh, and infamous Molech who required human sacrifice. One of the first lessons God taught the Israelites, the lesson God stated in the first commandment, is that God is God. There is no other. God knew that he and his people could not walk into the future together with strength, security, and success if people were distracted by new gods at every turn. Thousands of years later, we have major religions in the world, but we don't have an assortment of gods being hawked at us from every direction. Or do we? Perhaps we should look at what really matters to us ... where do we give our time, our attention, and our money; how much time do we spend on our phones, and how much time in prayer? ... and then face the fact that we might be worshipping some false gods of our own.

November 7, 2025

(Jesus said) "I am with you, even unto the end of the age." Matthew 28:20

Often, when I'm watching television shows filmed in England, I find myself looking at the scenery as much as following the story. Scenes of the countryside prompt my own memories of England, and looking at those lovely landscapes is soothing to me, even if the film is a murder mystery. Recently, I may have figured out why. It's the mossy stones: the stone walls in the Dales; the 1,000- and 1,100-year-old university chapels in Oxford and Cambridge; St. Pancras church in London, built in 313 A.D.; stone walls in the north, built in Roman times ... in the century after Jesus walked on earth. These stones, these structures, are still standing today. Perhaps, in the chaos, confusion, and scary happenings of today's world, there is deep, unspoken comfort in looking at places and structures that have been here for thousands of years. I like looking at places of worship that were standing when the Crusades were the news of the day. In England, it is humbling to touch wood and stone that were in place when Henry VIII and Elizabeth I walked by them or sat on them. Even the Tower of London

seems to have a tranquility that rises above its gory past. I've decided it's the mossy stones— old, old things that whisper to us, in our world of trouble and turmoil, "This, too, shall pass." Human beings, of course, should never become hardened to, or uncaring about, war or conflict. But in our fears and anxieties, perhaps there is peace and strength in looking at ancient structures ... at mossy stones ... and remembering that our ancestors endured much, survived much, and that humanity has ... thus far ... prevailed, and that God is always with us. *"Lord of all time and circumstance, help us to remember that, although today's wars and threats are real, you are – now and forever – in loving and saving control of our lives and all of life. Calm our fears and help us to always hear your words: 'I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'* "

November 8, 2025

**For I desire mercy and not sacrifice.
... knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.**

**Hosea 6:6
James 1:3**

The woman who volunteered at the non-profit organization meant well. She valued the organization's mission and services, and she offered many hours of her time. But ... she drove people crazy. For her, everything had to be done in a certain way, no deviation, no changes. Publications had to be stored in a specific place in a specific way. Set-up for meal service had to be done precisely the same way each day. Staff and volunteers were usually patient with this drill-sergeant approach, but sometimes that patience wore thin. Some volunteers simply stopped coming. Others did work far removed from wherever the 'sergeant' was working. I was familiar with the organization, but I was not a volunteer, so I saw this scenario only at a distance. One day, when I was visiting, this demanding woman began to talk to me ... about many things. I had the clear feeling that this was one of those times when I was supposed to just listen. She told me that she had been married for many years but was now divorced. "Back then", she said, almost casually, "there was no recognition of such a thing as domestic violence. Even if someone called the police and they came to the house, they just told the husband to 'cool it' or not make so much noise. Even if they saw the wife and kids with bloody faces and bad bruises, they called it 'a family matter' and just turned and went away." There it was, as clear as day. This woman's need to control, to have everything in order, precise, predictable, was probably rooted in the chaos and violence she'd seen and endured. No wonder she wanted no surprises in her life. Who knows how often she was surprised by fear ... or a fist? She not only *wanted* to be in control; she *needed* to be in control. So often, when people are difficult, when their behavior grates on us and is irritating, there is a deep-down reason for that behavior which, if we knew it, would break our hearts. Patience and mercy. No wonder God asks us to have both.

November 9, 2025

Christ says, "Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life."

John 5:24

There is a very wise saying that emanates from Eastern religions and beliefs: 'When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.' This means that when we are ready to learn some deep truth or something important about ourselves, the teacher – a person, an experience, or a dawning in the soul – will come to us. The teacher is there all along, but we must be ready to receive the lesson, the message. Jesus understood this. He knew that his teachings had to find receptivity ... fertile soil in people's minds, hearts, and souls ... in order to take root. His message in today's verse – his lesson – is as simple as it is life-changing. If we hear his words, and if we are ready to receive this teaching, if we believe the God who sent Jesus to us, we are already part of the kingdom of God. Death may change us, but it cannot take us. Eternal life is ours already. It is an awesome lesson, but we must be ready to receive it. *"Lord, you know me. You know where I am in my life's journey and where I have yet to go, what I have yet to learn, including your promise of eternal life. Be with me, guide me, and open my heart to learn the lessons that will draw me closer to you and help me to understand myself. Thank you, Teacher."*

November 10, 2025

...for the people had a mind to work.

Nehemiah 4:6

Last year, one name seemed to appear in news stories almost as much as the usual political names: Taylor Swift, the Pennsylvania native who was doing a five-continent, 51-city tour, giving 149 concerts. I'm not familiar with

celebrity news, but I know her name, and when I picked up a magazine in a doctor's waiting room, a story about her astonished me. The story described the work and planning that went into the world tour she was doing. One description was amazing. In order to do a concert, to be on stage for three to four hours, and to be always moving physically as well as singing, a performer must be in top condition— voice, lungs, body. That makes sense, but it's *how* Taylor Swift achieves this high level of fitness that stunned me. According to the magazine article, she gets on a treadmill and, while jogging at a brisk pace, sings all the songs in her concert program, just as she sings them on stage. Oh, my! I can't imagine anyone – even a young, healthy person – being able to sing for three to four hours while running on a treadmill, but apparently doing so gives this singer an ultimate workout: body, lungs, voice. Surely, few people can achieve such fitness. But there's a lesson for all of us in her concert prep routine. We have to work hard – sometimes darn hard – to reach our goals, especially big goals or major commitments. Most of us know that, but the image of a pop star wearing earphones and singing while running on a treadmill ... for three to four hours ... is unforgettable. Maybe that image can be a reminder of what Jesus and Paul, and the psalmists and prophets, tell us: we must be diligent and focused on what we do, not lazy, not careless, not half-hearted. God will help us in all our work, but we must provide time and effort. We must do our version of getting on the treadmill and singing. Inspiration and encouragement come in many forms. We may sometimes forget the words of scripture related to hard work, but most of us won't easily forget the image of Taylor Swift singing ... on a treadmill.

November 11, 2025

Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely.

Psalm 139:4

Psalm 139 is one of the most beloved and well-known portions of the Bible, and for good reason. It tells us, in this verse and so many others, that we are known to God; really, truly known. The God who flung the stars across the sky knows the depths of our souls. The God who flashed the seas upon the earth, and made the tides roll, knows us by name and knows every hope, fear, dream, agony, and desire of our hearts. God welcomes us to come to him in prayer, but we never have to worry about whether we'll have the right words, or whether God will understand us. God knows what we need to think, have, and do in our lives, and what we want to say before we say it. *“Thank you, Lord, for seeing into those parts of my heart and soul where there aren't any words, only longing, only what I feel most deeply, only the desire to be with you and be held by you. Thank you.”*

November 12, 2025

The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes.

Psalm 19:8

Truth seems to be in short supply in our world. From arguments on education and taxes, to contradictory statements about which foods are healthy for us, or which household products are safe to use, it seems that we can find opinions all over the spectrum. It's hard for even the most aware and best-read people to stay in tune with what is accurate and truthful. Today's verse assures us that we can be sure that the values and guidelines given to us by God ... as we can best discern and understand them ... are right and good. A few of these are beyond debate. We are to love truth, to love others as we love ourselves, and to reflect God's love in all we do and in all our interactions with others. We are also to forgive and to accept forgiveness for our own errors, and we are to be compassionate, kind, and charitable. It isn't a long list, but it is a true and enlightening one.

November 13, 2025

(Jesus said) “But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things, but now he is comforted and you are tormented.’”

Luke 16:25

Most Christians are familiar with the Biblical account of Lazarus, the poor beggar. In his earthly life, Lazarus is so poor that he lies at the gate of a rich man, hoping to be thrown crumbs from the table at which the rich man feasts. More horrifying, Lazarus has a skin disease – perhaps the reason people don't want to employ him or be near him? – and dogs lick at his sores. It would be hard to imagine a more pitiful figure than Lazarus. But in their lives after death, the positions of Lazarus and the rich man are reversed. Lazarus is carried “to Abraham's bosom” in heaven, where he is cared for, comforted, and provided for, while the rich man is tormented in Hades,

begging Lazarus to dip his finger in water and “cool my tongue” (v. 24). We probably have varied reactions to the story of Lazarus. We can understand the divine kindness shown to Lazarus in heaven, but the punishment for the rich man – for eternity? – is terrifying. Perhaps we wonder where we rank on the spectrum of rich and poor. Few people, in any time or place, are as wealthy as the Biblical rich man. Few are as poor and pitiable as Lazarus. Most of us are somewhere in a wide swath of ‘the middle’ in terms of what we have. We hope to have shelter and food for each day. If we’re a bit better off, we have heat for our homes. At the next level we have furniture, maybe a bathroom, or even a TV or radio. Having a car takes us to a far higher level on the ‘have’ list.

If these gradations sound far-fetched, look at photos of many people in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and parts of America. Some sleep on bare floors, some have cots. The more fortunate have a table and a chair or two. There are many levels of being poor, just as there are of being rich. There have always been people of wealth, even stupendous wealth – think of the pharaohs – but only in recent decades have so many people emerged at the highest peaks of wealth. These multi-billionaires – about 3,400 of them around the globe – have multiple homes that are beyond luxurious, \$400 million planes, \$500 million yachts, private islands. Newspapers, TV, and magazines cover their lives continuously: \$30,000 handbags, \$40 million weddings, \$100,000 tuition for pre-school,. At some point, the word obscene comes to mind, and such mindless spending strikes many people as sickening. Perhaps the distinction between the Lazaruses – the abject poor – of the world, and the rich of the world, has never been sharper. To be sure, many ultra wealthy people are philanthropists, giving hundreds of millions, even billions, of dollars to important causes and to those in need. Their generosity is exemplary. How we respond to today’s reading, to the story of Lazarus and the rich man, is a personal choice and decision for each of us. The first step might be to pause and read Jesus’s words in Luke, Chapter 16. Think of the extremes of wealth and poverty in our world today and then consider Jesus’s observation: “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God ... (but) the things that are impossible with men are possible with God.” Therein, God’s mercy for all ... for *all* ... is clearly shown. It is one blessing that the rich man and Lazarus have in common: what is impossible for us ... entering the kingdom of God ... is possible with God.

November 14, 2025

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it. Proverbs 22:6

Yesterday’s reading caused me to recall something experienced by a friend of mine many years ago. An emerging community leader, my friend had just gotten a major promotion at his company, a promotion that provided membership at a country club. I wasn’t surprised when he suggested having lunch there. At lunch, I congratulated him on the promotion ... one he had clearly earned through his hard work ... but he seemed ambivalent about the country club benefit. “You know,” he said, “my wife and I grew up in blue collar families; low income, money was tight, lots of love, but no extras, and certainly nothing like this. My wife’s parents didn’t even have an indoor toilet. Their toilet was in a room off the back porch.” When I said that he might be new to this setting, but he surely would be comfortable in it, he told me about something that happened a few weeks before. He and his sons, 10- and 12-years old, went to the club’s pool for the first time. The pool and its surroundings are lovely, and the boys were excited to use the chaise lounges and have a large pool in which to swim. But soon after they arrived that day, a scene unfolded near where they had settled down on their chaises. “A little boy was there,” my friend said, “maybe six years old. When the waiter came by, the boy started to yell: ‘I want my juice, and I want it now!’ The waiter was upset and embarrassed, and he explained to the boy that the kitchen was very busy that day with a large breakfast gathering, but he would go back to see if the juice was ready. ‘It better be!’ the child yelled, stomping his feet, ‘and if it isn’t, I’ll make sure you’re fired!’” My friend was shocked by that scene, and he watched his sons staring at the boy and at the nervous waiter. “It hit me all at once,” he said. “My wife didn’t have an indoor toilet, and my sons are watching a rich child threatening to fire a grown man. You shouldn’t have that contrast within two generations. That’s too much, too much change, too much difference, too much of the world turned upside down.” My friend and his wife kept their sons grounded in good values, and over time they grew up to be fine young men. But neither they, nor my friend ... nor I, after he told me the story ... forgot the scene of a little boy threatening to fire a grown man. Wealth, position, unearned power or privilege ... all are things people should handle carefully, in our time, as in Lazarus’s.

November 15, 2025

Proclaim, give praise, and say, “Save, O Lord, your people.”

Jeremiah 31:7

Proclaiming, praising, and beseeching are all blended in today's verse. That's as it should be. We often hear the strange phrase, "the sacrifice of praise". How can praise be a sacrifice? Isn't praise synonymous with joy? Well, when we praise God, as we should, in all the circumstances of our lives – in the heartbreaking moments, as well as the joyful ones – we're doing nothing less than saying to God and to ourselves, *"Lord, I praise you. I know that you and your power are greater than my sorrows and difficulties. Your love is greater than my loss. Your strength is greater than my weakness. Even in this, my time of need and trial, I praise you."* When we do that, we say that God has more power than evil. Jeremiah was right. We should proclaim, praise, and then beseech God for our deepest needs. Proclamation and praise are the right bookends for prayer and pleading.

November 16, 2025

Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Mark 1:15

Not everyone's experience of an 'epiphany moment' with God comes at the same time. Often, children – in their innocence and openness – understand God's love in a way that lasts a lifetime. Others feel that touch of God's Holy Spirit at confirmation, or at the communion railing, or at the altar, when they make a commitment to another person. For some, the birth of a child, or the loss of a parent, makes God real as never before. Whatever your 'epiphany moment' is ... the moment when you sense God saying that the kingdom has come near to you and is here for you ... embrace that moment, and allow yourself to believe, believe deeply, in the good news of God's love. If you have never really felt such a moment, perhaps today's verse is meant for you— today.

November 17, 2025

For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future.

Ephesians 4:4

I remember a professional football game from a few years ago. A good game became a great game in the fourth quarter, when the lead changed several times, and the game went into overtime. Fans were going wild in the stands. Players on both teams wore expressions ranging from joy to excitement to exasperation. An apparent touchdown – which caused pandemonium on the field as well as in the stands – was reversed, and the ball was placed at the two-yard line. A penalty followed, and soon the other team got the ball back. More pandemonium! A fumble returned the ball to the other team, which went on to score on a touchdown pass that was a thing of soaring beauty— high in the sky and right into the receiver's hands. Thousands of delirious (and dejected) fans shouted deafeningly. As the on-field celebration erupted, TV cameras caught a calm scene in the midst of the tumult. Members of both teams – white jerseys and black jerseys – were gathered, kneeling in a prayer circle ... dozens of them. Rivalry forgotten, they were united in prayer and in faith: black and white jerseys; black and white men, from the North, South, East, and West. Some had gone to elite schools, and some had grown up in poverty. They must have been a mix of conservatives, centrists, liberals, and who-knows-what else; city-bred and country-bred; men of diverse faiths. Clasp hands. Heads bowed. United in prayer and purpose. 'If only the whole country could be like that,' I thought. Then I realized that the most beautiful sight of the night wasn't that picture-perfect touchdown pass, it was this circle of men, this symbol of faith, this promise of hope. *"Lord, guide us toward unity, mutual respect, and kindness toward all. If it can happen on a football field, it can happen everywhere else."*

November 18, 2025

Above all, maintain an intense love for each other, since love covers a multitude of sins. 1 Peter 4:8

Once again, the sign in front of a church said it all, like a powerful mini-sermon: "Turn your mind to truth, and your heart to love." It was so simple, so profound. Life might still have its troubles and challenges, but how much better we'd fare in life if we heeded that advice. "Turn your mind to truth and your heart to love." Amen.

November 19, 2025

Indeed, you are my lamp, O Lord, the Lord lightens my darkness.

2 Samuel 22:29

Light was a precious commodity in the lands and times of the Old Testament. No one could enter a room and flip a switch and have the room be illuminated. Work was done from sun-up to sun-down, to take advantage of the daylight. Oil for lamps was expensive and often scarce, so it wasn't wasted. Only for a very few hours did lamps burn in tents or rooms after dark. There were no streetlamps or flashlights, so travel at night was sometimes dangerous, and only done if absolutely necessary. No wonder the Israelites thought of God in terms of light. They knew what it was to deal with darkness—the darkness outside, in the sky; the darkness that shadowed them as a people in bondage and then in exile; and the darkness that can come over any human heart. But they knew that the Lord could bring light to their minds and hearts and lives. God can do that for us, too.

November 20, 2025

The Lord said to Gideon, “Peace be to you; do not fear, you shall not die.” Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord, and called it, The Lord is peace.

Judges 6:23-24

There are three important aspects to today's reading. First, God answers Gideon's plea. Second, Gideon hears and believes what God says. Third, Gideon praises the Lord by building an altar. Let's look at the second of those things. We can understand someone – even a leader like Gideon – turning to God in prayer. And we can understand Gideon's being grateful and doing something (building an altar) to thank God. But do we believe that Gideon actually heard God speaking? Do we believe, as Gideon did, that God speaks to us? Some of us have difficulty believing that we can 'hear' God. But God can make his words, his will, and his answers known. Sometimes God speaks through readings in the Bible or in devotionals or spiritual books. Sometimes God speaks through the words of trusted people, and sometimes, if we stop to listen, we can hear God's words in our hearts, like a kind of knowing, a sureness that God has answered us. If we've never heard God speaking, perhaps it is time to simply listen. God is always willing to guide us, and God will find a way to show us, to answer us, to speak to us.

November 21, 2025

Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! Psalm 130:2

Some of the most personal and helpful stories we read in devotional guides are the stories of men, women, and even children who have prayed, often for years, from the depths of their hearts: 'Lord, help me to deal with my father. He is so nasty and unkind, and I can't get past the wall he's put up.' 'Lord, help our daughter to stop using drugs. It has been so many years, and I'm so afraid we're going to lose her.' 'He's been an alcoholic for so long, Lord. Please help him ... help us.' 'God, please make mommy and daddy stop fighting. I get scared when they fight.' It can break your heart. So many deep needs; so many prayers said, for years, and even decades, waiting for answers. God hears every prayer. God certainly hears the prayers we cry out, from the bottom of our beings, from the depths of our needs. God hears the prayers with the exclamation points, like the psalmist's prayer above. *“God ... Jesus ... Holy Spirit, my heart is on its knees today. Help me! I pray with exclamation points! Help me in this need _____!”*

November 22, 2025

If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods. 1 Samuel 7:3

If you have ever had to clean out a house, whether it was because you were moving, or because the house was ready to explode with 'stuff', you know how hard it is to part with things. Most of us hold on to things: matchbooks from a restaurant in New York, a hula doll from Hawaii, a sweater that stopped fitting 20 years ago, grandmom's apron, and grandpop's tools. We want to keep these things because of their associations with people we love, or with times in our lives that are precious to us. Sometimes, it's just as hard to let go of the empty things we seek and value: more wealth, self-importance, power in the workplace, popularity, looking young, or being admired. Very few things are bad in themselves. It is when we place things above God's position in our lives that we go off the right path. Keeping souvenirs and family mementoes is fine. Abundance is fine. Popularity and even power can be positive things. But nothing in our lives should rank higher than the God who created us, and the love God gives to us and asks us to share. Nothing.

November 23, 2025

Show mercy and compassion for others, just as your heavenly Father overflows with mercy and compassion for all.

Luke 6:36

When my Dad had laryngectomy surgery – complete removal of the voice box – his doctor insisted that Dad have a Handicapped placard in his car. At first, Dad resisted, but the doctor explained that, if Dad were to be in distress, he couldn't shout 'Help me!', or speak any other words. His car had to be parked nearby, so that he could drive himself to get emergency help. Dad understood that wisdom, but he never used the placard. He thought that, because his handicap wasn't apparent, people would think he was cheating by parking in a reserved space. Dad's impairment was invisible. Decades later, so is mine. I have difficulty hearing. But I'm lucky—I do very well in everyday life. Except for occasionally having to ask someone to speak louder, or repeat what they said, I converse easily with store clerks, physicians, family, and friends. I can hear the TV at normal volume, and I hear street noises and nature's sounds. But I no longer attend plays or concerts. The last time I went to the movies, years ago, I missed most of the dialogue. In-person worship can be a challenge. There are many words and phrases I miss, because hearing is a combination of comprehension as well as sound level. I can hear the sounds, but I can't always understand the words. A few years ago, in church, when my heart was especially troubled, I prayed that I would be able to hear any words meant for me. On that Sunday, I heard the words I shared in October's first Meditation: "There is no good thing, in heaven or on earth, that God does not will for you." My heart needed those words so much on that day, and I believe God gave me the special blessing of being able to hear them. But it's still frustrating to miss words, especially when something funny is said, and the congregation smiles and laughs ... and I don't know why. A feeling of lostness and isolation settles in. Dad's experience, and mine, have reinforced that old lesson— we can seldom know what others are going through, what their burdens or sorrows are, or what ills or impairments they may have that we cannot see. Recognizing this truth should help us to be kinder to others, even if we can't see or know what their troubles are. *"Lord, no wonder you spoke so often of mercy. So many of us need it ... in so many ways. Have mercy on us, Lord, and help us to be merciful to others, even when we can't see their problems or know their pain."*

November 24, 2025

I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long. Psalm 146:2

The blessings and deliverance that the psalmist received were so great that he promised to praise the Lord all his life long. How great his gratitude must have been! Sometimes, when we receive something beautiful and life-changing – like healing, finding someone to love, the birth of a child or grandchild, the touch of wholeness and forgiveness when we have been broken and lost – we are so deeply grateful that we want to thank God for the rest of our lives. How wonderful if we can do that! But even if we only remember to turn toward God occasionally and say, "Thank you", God hears and appreciates our gratitude, as we appreciate God's blessings. *"Thank you, Lord. Thank you for _____"*

November 25, 2025

Wash your heart clean of wickedness so that you may be saved. How long shall your evil schemes lodge within you?

Jeremiah 4:14

Only you and God know if, deep within your heart, you harbor hate or wish bad things for others, if you plan or wish for vengeance or harm for another. Only you and God know. No one else can see into your heart ... or into anyone else's heart. What is in our hearts is known only to us, and to God. When we've been hurt in some way, when someone has deliberately brought trouble into our lives, or harmed those we love, our natural anger can make us want to retaliate or to punish in return. The world itself tries to tilt us toward vengeance: "Don't get mad, get even." "Forgive but never forget." Some even invoke "An eye for an eye." We must tune out these voices of vengeance and turn from the ways of the world that might encourage us to get ahead by hurting others, or to punish instead of to forgive. The world, and the people in it, don't know the other voices speaking in our hearts; the voices of forgiveness, the 'better angels of our nature', calling us to live as God and Christ ask us to live. There can be many impulses and voices in our hearts. Voices of vengeance and voices of love. Only you and God hear them. Only you and God can choose. Only you and God.

November 26, 2025

But God said to him, “.... This very night your life will be required of you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?”

Luke 12:20

Today's verse, like many others in scripture, cautions us to not take today – take life – for granted. We know “neither the day nor the hour” when our lives might change dramatically, in positive or negative ways, or when life itself might end. We seem to get, and give, mixed messages when it comes to planning for the future. Or ... maybe it isn't planning, so much as it is control, that bedevils us. We know that we must be wise in planning for the future: taking care of our health, saving for retirement or special needs, keeping our homes safe and in good repair. Our common sense tells us to pay attention to these things. But control is another matter. There are very few things in life, or death, over which we have absolute control. Two funerals this year showed me that truth. The first was for a fine, intelligent, and active man who was very precise and particular about his likes and dislikes. He had planned his funeral well in advance. That's a good thing. But in his case, many of the things he had specified couldn't be done or provided. He lived alone, and items he stipulated couldn't be found, people couldn't be contacted, connections couldn't be made. Even the suit in which he wanted to be buried couldn't be found. Only he knew how to find these things and fulfill all his requests, but he died suddenly ... something he clearly didn't plan. The second funeral was for a woman I didn't know well, but a close friend of mine was a lifelong friend of the woman who died, and I agreed to take my friend to the out-of-town funeral. I liked the deceased woman, and I enjoyed the times when I had dinner with her and her husband. But it was at her funeral service that I learned so much more about her. The large, elegant funeral home was filled with family, friends, neighbors, and former colleagues. It was standing room only. The photos of her in her teens and early adulthood showed a startlingly beautiful young woman. Later photos showed a stylish and still beautiful woman whose smile was as gorgeous at 80 as it was at 18. But it was in the comments of family and friends – in words describing her warmth, wisdom, kindness, humor, love of life, and love of them – that a full picture of her emerged. Her children shared the life lessons she taught them, the encouragement she gave them, the wisdom that shaped them, and the love that strengthened them. Through their tears, family members and friends described a woman who touched their lives in loving, lasting ways. As I listened to these descriptions, I thought, ‘That's one thing no one can plan for: what people will say about us when we're gone.’ In this case, even angels could not have praised her more lovingly. The eulogies were a tribute to her, her life, and God's presence in her life. Decades ago, in my teen years, on one of those days when I stretched out on the grass, looked up to watch the clouds drift across the sky, and thought about the meaning of life, I concluded that, for me, it comes down to this: to live lovingly and die bravely. More than 60 years later, I can't improve on that thought. It may be the only plan I'll ever need. What plans would you like to make?

November 27, 2025 — Thanksgiving

But I call to remembrance my song in the night ...

Psalm 77:6

At the spring book sale at the Public Library, I bought a photo book of Bermuda. It was a large book, and it had a lot of text as well as beautiful photographs. At the summer book sale, I saw another Bermuda book, by the same author/photographer, and this one was published more recently. When I brought it home, I sat with it for hours. It had descriptions of the prehistoric formation of the island, over tens of thousands of years. Fascinating. But it was the photos of the City of Hamilton, the south shore, and landmarks such as the Bermuda Cathedral that captured my attention. It felt as though I was looking at photos of home. I fell in love with Bermuda on my first visit, when I took my parents there as a Christmas gift. In 29 years of marriage, they had never had a go-away vacation, and they enjoyed Bermuda as much as I did. Over the decades, I returned to Bermuda 17 times, including the day trip I described in an earlier Meditation this year. As I looked at the panoramic, overhead photos of Hamilton, it felt as though I was strolling on Front Street. I looked for stores and shops I still know so well, and the library, post office, yacht club, and Cathedral. It almost felt like being there. I savored memories of sailing across the harbor, under electric blue skies, with white longtail birds gliding above and the sweet scent of oleander, jasmine, and roses encircling us as we headed to Southampton Parish. Photos of Long Bay and Horseshoe Bay, where turquoise water meets pink sand, evoked images of the sea and shore that my heart memorized long ago. It was on a coral outcropping near Long Bay that I had my scariest incident with a shark—when I was *out* of the water. That encounter was one of the most powerful proofs I've ever experienced of God's ability to rescue us. On Thanksgiving Day, we give thanks for the major blessings of health, food, faith,

family, friends, and a place to live. For these, our gratitude is boundless. But we should also give thanks for the blessing of memories: of people we have loved, of those who've loved us; of moments ... weddings, the birth of children, 'anniversaries of the heart' ... that are cherished by us, and of places that are important or precious to us. God gives us many blessings, and treasured memories are among them. *"Thank you, Lord, for everything."*

November 28, 2025

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.

Luke 1:68

Perhaps it was at this time of year, a time of harvest and ingathering, that the people of ancient Israel were particularly inclined to think of God and his blessings, and to express their thanks to God for that year's bounty, and to ask God's blessing on the seeds planted for next year. For us this is the season of Thanksgiving for many blessings, including those we might take for granted. Here's something we might try— for the rest of the year, let's try to think of one blessing each day; one thing for which we're truly grateful. It doesn't have to be something that happened on that day, simply a blessing, current or remembered. For many years, I had a small book on my office desk. I called it my blessing book. I tried to write something in it each day, even if it was simply that I'd seen a goldfinch, or talked with a friend. That awareness – that openness to recognizing blessings – often reminded me, in the middle of stressful days, that my life was more than work, more than worry, more than the day's challenges. Whenever, or however, we can, let's look for blessings. That could make for a lasting spirit of Thanksgiving ... throughout life.

November 29, 2025

See, the Lord's hand is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. Rather, your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God.

Isaiah 59:1-2

One of the most comforting assurances in the Bible is the statement that God's hand is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. We usually reach for verses such as today's, and cling to their assurances, when it seems that what we need ... what we have asked for in prayer ... is impossible to receive or achieve. Today's verse reminds us that God hears, and God's power to save or to answer is never diminished or shortened. But our sinfulness can be a barrier to our receiving or understanding God's presence, protection, and provision. When we focus on our sins, our unworthiness, or our guilt ... when we concentrate on the enormity and impossibility of what we seek, instead of focusing on God's power ... we're looking at the wrong thing. Let us keep our eyes on God, on the hand that is never too short to save, and the ear that is never too dull to hear.

November 30, 2025 – The First Sunday in Advent

I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you."

Luke 15:18

We know this verse and this story so well. It is the story of the Prodigal Son; a moving story of rebellion, repentance, forgiveness, and restoration. In many ways, it is the story of our relationship with God. No wonder Jesus used it to explain our Father's love for us. Perhaps, as we begin this Advent season, it would be a good time to do some soul searching; to look unflinchingly at our sins, and at whatever else may be troubling us in our relationship with God; a good time to come to our Creator, admit our failings, and ask for God's forgiveness. Whether we've been openly rebellious and sinful, like the errant son, or whether we have been resentful and unforgiving, like the 'good' son, most of us have some debris in our lives and souls to clean out. Advent is a good time to do that— to sweep our hearts and minds clean, so that the newborn Christ can enter. *"Lord, this time of year, when we prepare for and await your birth, is a special blessing, a time to pause, to be silent, to let the wonder in. Busyness often intrudes and distracts us. Our own reluctance to face our sins and weaknesses also keeps us from looking at you ... at that manger and at that star. Touch us now with your love and forgiveness. Cleanse our minds and hearts as only you can. Prepare us so that we can prepare to welcome you."*