

DECEMBER 07, 2022 MIDWEEK LUM DEVOTIONAL

Spoiler Alert: All my mid-week devotionals in December will focus on 'time markers' such as "the day" "morning," etc. May they be a blessing!

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: ROMANS 14:5

One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind.

BLESSED THOUGHTS: "THIS IS THE DAY THE LORD HAS MADE"

Long-time listeners to CJOB know who Hal Anderson is. I used to be a regular listener to his program because I did a lot of driving while he was on air. One of his regular features was what special thing was celebrated that day, from National Hot Dog Day to Take Your Daughter to Work Day. This was a sort of joke segment, because (a) no one took these "special days" very seriously, and (b) some of the days were goofy to the extreme. Actually, most days had several commemorations.

Workers in Canada know what "Stat Holidays" are. Employers pay you even though you have the day off for some special occasion. Over the years, a lot of these national holidays have migrated to make a "Long Weekend." One of my favorites was always Victoria Day, since I put aside my regular pastoral duties and planted my garden instead. Some holidays were invented, like Louis Riel Day in Manitoba (we do need a break in February, don't we?), and in recent years we've added Truth and Reconciliation Day in September.

We're nowhere near the number of holidays they had in the Middle Ages. There were about one hundred and eighty days in which people were expected to attend mass in honor of some saint or other. With the rise of the Protestant Reformation, most of these "feast days" or "holy days of obligation" fell away, although while I was doing my clinical training at Philadelphia State Hospital, I volunteered to take the Roman Catholic student nurses over to the Catholic Chapel for a Celebration of Ascension. Later on, we took off to an Ice Cream Parlor after hours—myself and about eight student nurses, crammed into my 1961 Mercury!

In Bible Times the most Special Day ran from sundown Friday to sunset on Saturday. It was called the Sabbath Day (or the Rest Day). However, in the Early Christian Church (almost all members were Jewish), in addition to the Sabbath, Jesus' followers also gathered before work on Sunday morning and after work on Sunday evening for worship. The two things the disciples most missed from their time with the earthly Jesus were the fellowship meals they had together, and the teaching and learning (often as they walked from town to town), so they had a common meal and prayed and listened to teachers. This "extra" holy day became known as The Lord's Day, in honor of Sunday being the Day when Jesus rose from the dead. St. John had his vision of the Age to Come on the Lord's Day, while he was exiled in a sort of prison camp. Eventually, as Christianity became the State Religion of Rome, Sunday, the Lord's Day, took over, and only the Jewish people retained Sabbath Observance. It's interesting that one of the Ten Commandments orders Israel to keep the Sabbath holy to God. Technically speaking, we Christians do not actually "keep" that commandment with our Sunday worship.

What about all the other "holy days" in our church calendar? Some have disappeared, almost completely. Ever been to a Michaelmas Celebration? I thought not. Very few congregations gather for Ascension Day (and typically Ascension Day sermons are the poorest

preaching you hear all year). In some communities all the churches gather together on Good Friday—at Peace Lutheran Church in Fort St. John everyone from the Mennonites to the Roman Catholics brought their special worship treasures for all to share. That was an awesome morning!

Yet other Christian groups do not gather on Good Friday, or on any other day in Holy Week. In the Lutheran Liturgy we occasionally observe special days such as Trinity Sunday or the Festival of Christ the King, but I bet not one Lutheran in ten knows why. Christmas ought to be a special day, but this year (2022) Christmas Day falls on a Sunday, and attendance is not high, since families claim that day for their own enjoyment. January 1, 2023, is the day set aside to honor the Holy Name of Jesus, but, in fact, football games and recovery from the night before will likely be more important.

Apparently, St. Paul was asked to weigh in on all this, and his advice was to live and let live. We are free to find God where and how we can. The Book of Psalms reminds us that today and every day in our lives is a precious gift made for us by God. Let us rejoice and be glad we're here to live it!

For some reason, a lot of church leaders ignore this advice. There are those who lament that you and I don't spend more energy observing the Advent Season, for instance, the four weeks leading up to Christmas Eve. Now in the parish ministry "Advent" meant that it was up to me to manufacture an Advent Wreath for the front of the church. This I did every year since 1968! In Lac du Bonnet I frequently found the evergreen branches on fir and spruce trees growing around town. A snip here, a snip there, it all added up, and no one ever missed their "contribution." Nowadays, it gets harder every year even to put up a Christmas Tree in our living room, yet despite the aches and pains involved, there's something about doing it that is still a treat and a treasure.

And I haven't even mentioned those special "personal" days. Every July 27th I have a few rituals to connect me to all those past birthdays of mine. December 27th in the church calendar is the Festival of St. John: in our calendar it's a special day to honor the fifty-two years of marriage my wife and I have experienced. There's also one day in November that haunts me every year: on it I recall one of the hardest days of my life, when I stood up in an Episcopalian church in Pennsylvania to give the eulogy for a co-worker who took her own life. I remember how some of my young friends noticed that I was shaking and trembling before her funeral began: I know this really scared them! Sometimes, though, it comes down to this: life can be very hard, and even the day the Lord has made can bring very cruel hours. How wonderful to have supportive friends on such days!

I mentioned this before in one of my previous devotionals, but at the Queen's funeral everyone sang one of royalty's favorite hymns, "The Day Thou Gavest, Lord, Is Ended." What I didn't know at the time was that British Prisoners of War often sang that song, led by their chaplains, at the close of day in their POW camps. Even those dark days of imprisonment and despair were days made by God!

Winter days can be hard ones for homeless people. The approaching holidays can also bring sad days for folks living in poverty. Some people are as afraid to set foot in a Christian worship service, as they would be to enter a hospital for major surgery, while others look forward to their Sunday morning closeness with Almighty God: for them, the Lord's Day brings a still point in a world spinning out of control.

For all of us, wherever you maybe when you read these words, “This is the Day which the Lord has made.” May God richly bless you as you live your best life in it! Amen

A PRAYER FOR LIVING IN THE NOW

I believe that you are making all things new and that you have prepared for me glory beyond what I can imagine. Help me to live into that glory even now. Please, help me to live in the light of your Son, Jesus, in whose name I pray: Amen.

MUSICAL BLESSING: “THIS IS THE DAY”

Click on this link and sing along with the kids!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cccJhMVFrLs>

–written with gratitude by Barry Bence