



Jan/Feb 2026

Today

refresh, refocus, renew

A New Year,
A New Work

ALSO: PEOPLE OF PEACE

Dear Friends:

At the beginning of a new year, lots of people make resolutions to “reinvent” themselves. But trying to become a “new and better person” is really difficult, if not impossible.

In January, Pastor Darrell Delaney reminds us about the meaning of true change. First, we need to recognize our need for spiritual change, and then, by God’s grace, we need to turn to Jesus to find our identity in him alone. Following Jesus doesn’t merely change us; it transforms us into a new creation, oriented toward glorifying and desiring God.

Then, in February, Pastor Beth Fellingner challenges us to think of connecting with other people as an opportunity to share the love and peace of God for the sake of his kingdom. Think of the many people we meet while shopping, traveling, working, going to events, or just walking a dog in the neighborhood. There are all kinds of ways in which we encounter strangers. These encounters can open doors to meet sisters and brothers in Christ, and they can provide us with opportunities to share the love of Jesus with people who are seeking peace in their lives.

As you read these devotions, may you be refreshed, refocused, and renewed in God’s Word!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kurt Selles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kurt Selles

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“A New Year, A New Work”
Darrell Delaney



“People of Peace”
Beth Fellingner

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february

People of Peace

Beth Fellingner

Imagine being sent out by Jesus without any supplies or travel gear and searching out a person of peace who would provide for you for the sake of the gospel (the good news of the kingdom of God).

As you reflect on stories about people in the Bible and others who have been open to receiving the message of God's love and peace, may you too have opportunities to be a person of peace for others. This month, let's take some time to explore what it looks like to be a person of peace.

Pastor Beth Fellingner has more than 40 years of experience in pastoral ministry. She and her husband, Barry, have created a missional community in their neighborhood called the Ugly Couch Café, where they serve coffee at a blue picnic table in their front yard, pray with neighbors, and host faith gatherings on a weekly basis.

IT'S NOT A GENERIC TRAIT

“If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you.” —Luke 10:6

On my Facebook page I asked a question about how people might define “a person of peace.” I received lots of answers, and a few of those can be summarized as an answer for all. “A person of peace,” they said, “is someone who opens doors for others so that they see life differently.”

Another answer (via Google) can help us get to the heart of what Jesus was saying when he sent out 72 followers: “A man or woman, young or old, rich or poor, who is prepared by God to provide entrance into their community for the sake of the gospel.”

When Jesus sent his followers on mission for the sake of the gospel (the good news of the kingdom of God), he talked about finding people of peace. These would be people who were open to the message of God's love and peace, and

they would welcome Jesus' followers with hospitality.

One thing I have learned about engaging with people who share God's love and peace with others is that they do not have a particular personality or come from a certain demographic. Anyone can be used by God to open opportunities for the good news to be shared. It might even be someone you wouldn't expect.

This month let's explore some stories from the Bible and discover what it looks like to be a person of peace.

Dear God, help us to pay attention when you ask us to go and create spaces for others to hear the message of your good news and love for everyone. Amen.

THREE SLICES

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. —1 Timothy 4:12

Aaron was young and active and loud. He gathered friends easily. He was also one of the first teenagers to show up at a pizza lunch at our church.

We had decided that inviting students from the high school next to our church for lunch each week might be a good thing. A toonie (two Canadian dollars) would get you three slices of pizza and a pop.

When the first six kids showed up, we had lots of pizza, and they inhaled a lot more than three slices each. Then Aaron began inviting others. They began to show up week after week, and opportunities to feed them both physically and spiritually began to happen.

Now, 20 years later, the pizza lunch continues, serving about 180 hungry kids. What's more, the youth pastor at the church today is one of those first six who came the first week.

We all have a place to open a door for someone else so that the gospel can be shared. When I served those first slices of pizza, I did not know who would help to advertise the lunch idea, but God knew. He used a young teenager full of zest and noise to invite others. I did not know who would serve in that ministry after me, but God knew. God also knew that thousands of pizzas would be served to students who might not otherwise have had a chance to hear about him. I am so glad that God knew!

God, thank you for noisy, appealing teenagers. Thank you that you can use any of us to invite someone in. Help us to listen to you, to have courage, and to respond. In Jesus, Amen.

BEAUTIFUL FEET

How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?
Romans 10:14

Have you ever wondered what beautiful feet look like?

A woman who walked into my office one day helped me to see that beautiful feet make the effort to go on mission. She had a heart for second-generation Koreans who were leaving the church. She said she needed someone who could help her find a place for them.

In the next couple of weeks we worked on how that could happen within our church. We looked at our Alpha course, which invites people to ask questions about God, Jesus, the Bible, and the Christian faith. We decided to offer the Alpha course in both English and Korean. The door that she opened in my office that day has led to many Koreans coming to faith in Jesus and becoming a part of his church. Families, students, and the young

people she had a heart for now lead in worship, serve on our staff, teach, and volunteer.

Is God calling you to advocate on someone's behalf? Like the woman who walked into my office, perhaps? Or maybe you could invite someone to your home for coffee or to join you at church? Is there a group of people or a person whom you would love to see learn more about Jesus? Can you think of ways to help or to open a door for them to hear the good news of Jesus? Have you looked at your feet and thought, "How beautiful!"?

Dear God, thank you for beautiful feet that walk in the direction of helping others to find you. Give us the courage to invite others into your story. In Jesus' name, Amen.

COME AND SEE

The woman . . . said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?"
—John 4:28-29

It started as an ordinary day. The woman had her routine planned—including going to the well at the hottest time of day, when no one else would be there. She was tired of the looks and the whispers of others. Life had not gone as she had hoped. She was glad to have a house to live in and a man to share it with her. At least he did not seem to mind the rest of her story.

As she approached the well that day, the woman noticed someone was there. But she needed water, so she continued to the well and began filling her water jar. The stranger engaged her in a conversation that should never have happened. And yet what he said was amazing. Leaving her water jar behind, she raced back to her village to tell others, "Come and see . . .!" She needed them to know what

had happened and that there was hope and life.

Jesus chose an unlikely woman to carry out his mission of peace and good news that day. She went from hiding to inviting others to hear the story.

Have you ever felt as if your story disqualified you from sharing with others? Well, Jesus is calling. He is inviting you to share with others the message of God's grace and truth. Will you too invite others to come and meet Jesus, who knows everything about us all?

Dear Lord, thank you for interrupting our ordinary life to show us your glory. Thank you for choosing us to share your story. Thank you for bringing us hope and light and truth. Amen.

THE UNLIKELY

While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people.
—Acts 10:27

She walked to church regularly on Sunday mornings, and on one occasion she saw a most unlikely character. He was barely sober and headed to the liquor store. Though she might easily have ignored him, on that morning she felt she needed to invite this man to church. She suggested that he come with her the rest of the way and enjoy both a service and a coffee. He accepted her invitation and came through the doors.

Many years earlier this man had heard the story of Jesus, and on that morning it all came back to him and filled his heart. He soon began attending worship services regularly. He also began coming in to help clean the building, and he made coffee for anyone who came through the doors. Often, when he was standing on the front steps, he began to invite others in. When someone

asked him, “What is this place?” he explained that it was the church. The door began to open more frequently because of his invitations. And Jesus became real to many of the people who came in because of this man’s invitations.

Cornelius the centurion was a believer who was not Jewish—yet God chose to connect him and Peter to make the story of the gospel bigger. Cornelius filled his home with people who wanted to hear more—and Peter, inspired and led by a dream, shared the good news of Jesus.

Whom might your unlikely person of peace be?

Dear God, help us to see each person as one of your dear children. May we respond faithfully when you call on us to share. In Jesus, Amen.

ABOUT MIDNIGHT

The jailer . . . was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.—Acts 16:34

It wasn't a place they would have chosen to stay for the night. Yet God chose a prison cell to be the place where Paul and Silas would share the gospel. And they were determined, despite the situation, to praise and honor God. So in the middle of the night they prayed and sang hymns to God. Then, suddenly, a great earthquake shook the prison, opened all the doors, and broke everyone's chains!

Next the story gets even more interesting. The jailer "was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, 'Don't harm yourself! We are all here!'" Amazed and trembling, the jailer asked Paul and Silas about the God they served. He invited them into his house, and his whole household heard the story of Jesus. The jailer shared food and cared for them as Jesus

became the center of conversation. And the whole household came to believe in God.

Recently a team of volunteers was helping people clean up after a hurricane and flooding. They entered a house where a woman had not received any help and had lost hope. As they came and helped, her outlook changed. The hands and feet of Jesus were now ministering to her and others in her community. And the team was able to share the story of Jesus with them, even in the midst of their loss.

How can you share the peace and love of God with someone who is struggling?

Dear God, help us to connect with you. And where people are struggling, help us to bring hope through your message of love and peace. Amen.

COWORKERS

Greet also the church that meets at their house.

—Romans 16:5

Paul was a traveling preacher on mission for the Lord Jesus, and Priscilla and Aquila welcomed him to stay and work with them (see Acts 18). They knew the importance of the gospel and were willing to do what it took to help share God's love in their community. Priscilla and Aquila offered genuine hospitality and were not afraid to open their home to others so that the good news of Jesus could be preached.

And when Paul greets many of his friends in Romans 16, he calls on them to greet the church that met in Priscilla and Aquila's home.

We need to pay attention when God gives us people to share with. They might be tired and worn out, needing rest and a listening ear, or they might be eager and needing direction for something God has been preparing them to do.

Not long ago, at an event where I was speaking, an older woman came up to me and said, with a twinkle in her eye, "It's your fault." I wasn't sure what she meant, but she explained that at another gathering about a year earlier, I had told a story that had inspired her. She then began opening her home for a weekly Bible study that is now blossoming in her neighborhood. I am not sure if she would consider herself a person of peace, but I suspect that Jesus does.

In what ways have you been encouraged to step out and risk doing something new for the sake of the gospel?

Thank you, God, for opportunities to show hospitality and to share your love with others. Help us to be a voice of encouragement to all. Amen.

RECALIBRATE

There was great joy in that city.

—Acts 8:8

Our reading today describes a great persecution against the church of Jesus and how people like Philip responded.

Saul (also known as Paul) was convinced he was doing the right thing, even at the cost of many lives. His actions caused the church to scatter to other places, and Philip was one who decided to move out from Jerusalem to preach the good news of Jesus elsewhere. Philip recalibrated his spiritual radar and went to a city in Samaria, some 40 miles (64 km) away. The idea of taking on a new direction turned into a wonderful opportunity. When the people in that city saw the impact of the gospel, they too followed in the way of Jesus.

There may be times in our lives when we too may need to recalibrate our direction. If our situation is showing signs of heading the wrong way, we need to ask where God is lead-

ing us. Through prayer and seeking God's will, we may be able to discern a new choice and see what could be achieved if we try something new. It can be a wonderful opportunity to see the gospel spread into areas we hadn't thought about.

When our local church purchased an old bar that had been known for ungodly activities, God showed up. People who might not have had a chance to hear the gospel or who felt like they couldn't belong became followers of Jesus. More people of peace became part of God's family and shared his love with others.

In what areas do you need to recalibrate?

Lord, help us to see new opportunities and areas where we can share your love and grace. Amen.

COME AND STAY

“If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said,
“come and stay at my house.”
—Acts 16:15

The door of our church can be opened by pressing a “Push to Open” plate, and on Sunday mornings a greeter stands there to welcome people coming in. As they approach, he delightedly pushes the button to open the door, and there are lots of smiles as a conversation begins. Before they even enter the building, people feel welcome. His deliberate actions make the atmosphere inviting for so many people.

Lydia knew how to open the door of her home to others. Her insistence to Paul and his companions showed that she was someone who understood hospitality. An echo from Luke 10:5-9 shows up here: when you find a person of peace (someone who is open to God’s love and the work of his kingdom) stay there, hang out, and work together.

When we do that, the kingdom of God comes near.

When we emulate the posture and actions of Jesus, we lean into what it means to share together the good news of life with him.

What does hospitality look like to you? Are you a door opener? Are you ready to share the good news with someone who is looking for a way to spread the story to others?

A prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi begins, “Lord, make me a channel of your peace . . .”—and this can be paraphrased to say, “Lord, let me be a person of peace who invites someone in your name.”

Dear God, thank you for each person you bring into our lives to engage with. Thank you for the opportunity to share your story. Amen.

IMPACT

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”
—Matthew 5:9

J. John, an evangelist and speaker from the United Kingdom, has said there are two reasons why someone is not a Christian. The first is that they have never met a Christian and have not heard of Jesus. The second is that they *have* met a Christian but the experience was negative.

How we engage and live our lives matters. What if someone is looking for us to be a person of peace? Do our actions show that we know the love of God in Christ?

In a world that has become increasingly focused on the self, we may need to be reminded that, as Jesus suggests, perhaps our blessing comes from living with a new attitude that seeks to share his peace with others.

There is a story about a teacher who went to visit a young boy in the burn unit of a hospital. Wearing a mask and a

sterile gown, she explained that she would be helping him with verbs and adverbs over the next few days. Instead of concentrating on his pain, she gave him hope that perhaps life wasn't over yet. The staff at the hospital were amazed at the difference that made in the boy. His recovery and motivation to live suddenly changed. He said later, “After all, they wouldn't send a special teacher to teach verbs and adverbs to a dying boy, would they?”

We too have the power to offer someone hope. Who needs you to be a person of peace for them?

Dear God, teach us how to be the people you have called us to be. Help us to see others' needs and to give them hope. In Jesus, Amen.

JESUS OPENED THE DOOR

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known. —John 1:18

One of our latest adventures in the past year has been to invite about 10 people at random to our home for dinner—a mix of neighbors, church people, and anyone else whom Jesus invites us to meet.

Once a month, after sending out invitations, I set the table, and people show up. And as food is shared and conversation happens in a random way, Jesus shows up.

That can happen when a question or a concern about life comes up, or when someone shares a thought they have been wondering about. Somehow, the table talk eventually moves from what we might have in common to where God is in the story. For some people at the table, the idea of bringing God into the conversation can be a totally new thing, and for others it can be quite familiar. It doesn't mat-

ter. Somewhere in the midst of conversation and sharing, the good news of Jesus is shared. It doesn't always look the same or sound the same, but the underlying message is there, whether the topic is light-hearted or weighing heavy with concerns.

I think that must have been what happened when Jesus came "and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14)—or, as we read in *The Message*, when Jesus "moved into the neighborhood." His presence made it possible for people to encounter God in a new way.

Thank you Lord, for fun ideas and for showing up in the neighborhood for us. Thank you for your presence and for giving us a chance to introduce you to others. Amen.

IT'S THE VISION

"In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."
—Matthew 5:16

I was intrigued by a church's vision statement for 2026: "Empowering believers to embody Christlike values in their workplaces, businesses, and daily interactions, becoming ambassadors of Christ in every sphere of influence." I couldn't help imagining what a city or community could look like if that happened.

Imagine a ragtag collection of surrendered and transformed people who love God and others. They are mesmerized by the idea that their life is not so much about them but all about Jesus. They are transfixed by his story and his heart for their local community. They are hope bringers and grace givers, risk takers and dreamers, young and old. They link arms with anyone who embraces the story of Jesus. They empower the poor, strengthen the weak, comfort the outcast,

and seek the lost. They serve together, play together, worship together, and live life together. Their city or community will change because God has sent them.

God has also sent us.

There are lots of vision statements, but the main thing is that action is required. This means becoming the people in our communities who share the love and good news of Jesus and finding opportunities for others to do the same.

What's your vision?

Dear God, help us to move into action. Help us to become people of peace and to find ways to help others share your peace and good news too. Amen.

IT'S FREE

"If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward." —Matthew 10:42

I'm not sure how widespread the tradition is in your area, but when the 13th of the month falls on a Friday, like today, there is often a community gathering. In our area, anyone who is a biker heads off to the small town of Port Dover, Ontario. Thousands spend the day showing off their bikes, eating, and hanging out with people who have a shared interest in motorcycles.

In the same small town is a wonderful ministry to young adults called the South Coast Beach Project, or SOCO for short. Young adults are welcomed into a home for the summer (May-August) where they share life together, grow in discipleship, and work and hang out in the community. A few years ago the young adults decided to set up a table on Friday the 13th when crowds of bikers came to town. They

gave away freeze pops and made lots of connections. The SOCO director told me, "People couldn't believe we would give something away for free. It was fun to say, 'We are just being neighborly.'" It was a moment of hospitality and generosity. It was an open door for conversation.

I love how the SOCO group partnered with an event already happening in the community, and how they could share a "Jesus in the neighborhood" moment.

What kinds of local events can you partner with to invite gospel conversations?

God, thank you for opportunities to partner in our community. Help us to open our hearts to new ideas and new people. In Jesus, Amen.

FINDING FREEDOM

“The Spirit of the Lord . . . has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners. . . .”
—Luke 4:18

In our city there is a center for forensic mental health. Part of its work involves care for people with mental illness who have been part of the criminal justice system. The center aims to help individuals begin a journey of recovery, and that includes providing some of them with day passes to volunteer in the community.

Our church has had the opportunity to meet a number of these individuals, and many have become a regular part of our church life. They have volunteered in the kitchen, in the community garden, and in other areas. They also attend worship services on Sundays. It all started with one young man being invited in. He felt safe and invited others to join him. Some have even been baptized.

I remember asking one young man about the difference Jesus has made in his life. He explained that he has been able

to feel something for the first time in a very long time. His smile that day was radiant. One Sunday another young man from the health center read Scripture at the beginning of the worship service.

I have also been able to spend time at the center hearing stories in which individuals share about the freedom Christ has brought them in the midst of tough situations. And as relationships have grown, our church has been invited to conduct worship services on-site.

In what ways is Jesus calling on you to help others find freedom in him?

Dear God, thank you for connecting us with people who need to hear your truth and who then quickly pass it along. Thank you for helping us to imagine where we can share your love. Amen.

GARDENING, ANYONE?

“Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you. . . . Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”
—Jeremiah 29:7

Carrots and potatoes and peas—oh, my! Actually many kinds of vegetables show up in this community garden.

It began when two people who were invited into our church found faith in Christ and wanted to begin growing vegetables to help provide others with healthful food. A small container garden took shape behind the church building. What started with a few containers soon multiplied as more people became curious. Then the city offered to give property to the church to create a much bigger garden. The city would provide water and electricity if the church would provide volunteers.

Today, nine years later, a talented woman named Rebecca heads a team of gardeners from both the church and the local community to plant, grow, and harvest. The conver-

sations about God that happen in the garden are inspiring and rich. The food is shared with people in need, and the vegetables used in church dinners are incredible.

I am not sure who is more blessed, but everyone involved has a story of God's blessing and peace to share. And those stories become a blessing and inspiration to others.

None of us knows what will happen when we invite someone to partner with us in a project that the Lord makes available. But God knows.

Dear God, you have a plan for each of us. Thank you that when we reach out, you create space for much more. Help us to work with you in each new story you prepare for us. Amen.

MAKING ROOM

“Let’s make a small room . . . for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us.” —2 Kings 4:10

We have a guest room in our house. It gets used on a regular basis. My mother uses it when she comes to visit, our grandkids use it for sleepovers, and anyone else who has needed it has slept there too. It has a bed, a dresser, a chair, and a lamp. I’m sure it doesn’t look the same as the room that was made for Elisha, but it may have similarities in purpose.

I wonder how God wants to use our spaces or our availability, wherever we may be. What are we willing to do to prepare for others? Are we ready for when Jesus calls us? I wonder if having a space available is about knowing that “the kingdom of God has come near” (Mark 1:15).

I love the way my Korean friends pray. They pray in expectation so that they are ready for when Jesus shows up, wanting to do something in their lives. They are not

scrambling at the last minute; they are in welcoming mode. They are prepared so that when Jesus or someone he has sent shows up, they can accommodate as needed, serving as people of peace.

The woman in our text was a person of peace for Elisha, and I hope we too become people of peace for whoever may be in need of us.

Are you looking forward to the next person Jesus is planning to send in your direction?

Dear God, help us to create space in our lives so that we can be people of peace to whomever you send into our lives. Thank you for challenging us to be prepared for every encounter. Amen.

GENEROUS HOSPITALITY

Publius . . . welcomed us to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days. —Acts 28:7

Paul was on a ship with 275 other men riding out a storm that they could have avoided. Nevertheless, God had a plan. They were shipwrecked on an island where people needed to hear the gospel story. When the travelers arrived, ragged and wet but all safe, the islanders showed kindness and generosity. They provided food and a warm fire for everyone.

Then Publius, the chief official, welcomed Paul and his companions into his home. And with God's power Paul was able to heal Publius's father.

The door to the gospel was now opened to many more people. As the island residents heard of this healing, their hope increased, and they began to bring all the other sick people to Paul, who healed them.

A new chapter began for the people of the island of Malta.

They were so thankful that they continued in their hospitality and provided the travelers with the supplies they needed when they were ready to sail again. What had looked like a disastrous situation became a God moment.

Sometimes God calls us out of our safety and comfort for the sake of sharing his good news.

Are you ready for what God may have in store for you?

Lord, thank you for your protection and faithfulness, even in the midst of storms. Lead us in the direction of people you are preparing to hear about you. Help us to become more like you. Amen.

BREAKFAST?!

Use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace. . . . —1 Peter 4:10

It was Easter morning, and I was excited to be part of the church service that day. My ideas and sermon were ready to go. I was anticipating a great morning. When I arrived at the church building, there seemed to be more cars than usual, considering how early it was in the morning. I smiled and walked through the door.

The smell of bacon and other breakfast favorites hit me, and I saw smiling faces who were ready to celebrate Easter too. What a surprise! I am sure I looked startled because it took me some time to adjust my face, and I think my heart skipped a few beats.

Greeting me were new believers who were excited about sharing God's love with others, and they had decided to surprise everyone with a wonderful breakfast before the worship service. One of these new Christians owned a small

restaurant downtown, and he had planned it all.

I am sure that Jesus was happy with all this, and after a few moments I was able to adjust too. We shared a wonderful meal and then a wonderful time of worship and praise to God—all with the smell of bacon still hanging in the air.

Recognizing the gifts of others is a lesson we all need to learn. And celebrating all this to the glory of God is essential. What's more, giving people room to use their gifts in ways that open doors lets them enjoy being people of peace.

What is your gift?

Lord, thank you for the joy of serving you and serving others. Remind us to be thankful for others' gifts and to celebrate together. Amen.

INVITE THEM IN

“And where is he?” . . . “Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat.”
—Exodus 2:20

Church planting can bring lots of excitement and challenges.

Have you ever met a church planter? They give up many of the comforts and expectations of a church home because God is calling them to reach out. They are moving in a direction that hasn't been tested before. With that comes great excitement and a little fear. They are motivated to start a new church so that others can hear the good news and come to know Jesus. They invite others to join them, and that can mean serving on a steering committee. They meet neighbors and other Christians and share meals and ideas as they make conversation and discuss strategies and plans, and the list of people touched by God's love continues to grow.

Every church planter looks for the person or group in a community who can introduce them to others whom they

might need to reach. These can be people who know how to connect with others and share stories, people with helpful skills, people who can help with financing or vision or provide support in other ways. They are all community champions and people of peace.

Moses became a person like that when he helped Reuel's daughters. They invited him in, and he became part of their family. He became a keeper of flocks. In that space he learned from God, who was preparing him for important work to do.

In what ways might God be calling and preparing you to join him on mission?

Lord, help us to hear you and respond to your plan and purpose for our lives. Guide us to move in the direction you are sending us in. Amen.

FAITHFUL

It gave me great joy when . . . [I heard] about your faithfulness to the truth. . . .
—3 John 3

Last year I watched the televised funeral of a godly leader and statesman. Tributes from a friend and a family member reminded me of a leader who worked diligently to bring God's love, mercy, and justice into people's lives. And that helped me picture what a person of peace looks like.

A person of peace is deeply committed to God and to others. This is someone who is willing to reach out and find out how they can help to bring hope and change in communities. This is a person who sees people through the eyes of Jesus. A person who models well what it means to be a servant to others. A person who takes on risks to bring the good news of Jesus to others.

I was reminded of the words of John as he writes to encourage a dear friend. And those words give us helpful reminders of our calling to be

followers of Christ, to be people of peace.

In a world that is often at odds with being a person of peace, we might rather avoid Jesus' call and the challenges it can bring. But let's be encouraged by the examples of so many people of peace who have gone before us—whether they are public figures and powerful influencers or ordinary people like neighbors, friends, and family members. Welcoming others with hospitality and working with them in Jesus' name is our goal.

Are you ready?

God, help us to become who you need us to be so that we can spread your gospel far and wide. Thank you for calling us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

RECOGNITION

They urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening. . . .” So he went in to stay with them. —Luke 24:29

One of the intriguing details of this story in Luke is that the two disciples who were walking and talking with Jesus didn't know it was him.

I suspect that the impact of the previous few days had distracted them. These followers of Jesus had seen him die on a cross, and they had heard some women say he was alive again, but they couldn't understand what had happened. As they headed back home, they were probably tired and disheartened. So when a stranger came up and began talking with them on the road, they wouldn't have expected the man to be Jesus. Yet even though they were feeling worn and beat up, they had the presence of mind to invite this stranger in.

They must have wondered how this stranger knew so much about the Messiah and his suffering. He recounted a

history that was accurate and compelling. They might well have thought he was some kind of rabbi or something.

But then, in their home, “when he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it,” and gave it to them. And suddenly they recognized that Jesus was right there with them. Then, just as suddenly, Jesus disappeared—and they realized they needed to share this news with their friends.

I wonder if we too recognize Jesus when we meet a stranger on the road, invite them into our home, or have a meal with them.

God, help us to see Jesus in the strangers we meet each day. Help us to hear their story and listen well. Help us to tell our stories so that others will meet Jesus too. Amen.

A WAY IN

They went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles . . . right in front of Jesus. —Luke 5:19

Have you ever lost your house key? I am so thankful that our house has a keypad entry so that all I have to remember is a code.

On that note, have you ever lost your way about how to connect to the church?

A woman sat in a pew, wishing for more. She had been part of a church for most of her life, but she was searching for a fresh place of worship, where she could use her gifts and abilities. She also lived with some doubts and pain from past experiences.

She came to our church one day and found God's freedom to forgive. Now she often helps with washing dishes after a church dinner. She'll soon find other ways to serve too.

A church may close its doors and leave some of its members looking for a new door to walk through. Our church happens

to be on a street where some of those people walk by. They can walk through the door and engage in conversation. They can also wash dishes and study the Bible with others. In the presence of Jesus they can find new friends.

Two adults and four small children came in, trying to put life back together. Finding a place to be accepted is important. We welcomed them, and now they bring coffee and make desserts with their kids to share with everyone.

Is there an access point that you can use to help bring someone to Jesus?

Lord, help us to see different ways of opening doors for others. Give us courage and strength to try and to succeed so that people can meet you. Amen.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

[Look] not . . . to your own interests but . . . to the interests of the others.
—Philippians 2:4

I live in an area where snow falls in winter, and I would prefer that it would stay off my driveway. My husband looked outside at the snow one day and scowled. He knew I would need the driveway cleared off soon. Just then our doorbell rang, and three enthusiastic brothers stood at the door with shovels in hand, asking if they could help to clear our driveway. Delighted, my husband hired them right away.

Now, whenever snow falls, we wait for the doorbell to ring. We pay the neighbor boys in cash—and often in cookies too. Then their smiles get bigger.

They were here one day when we had company sitting at our table. I heard the bell and opened the door, and they had already shoveled half the driveway. They were letting me know they were there. When they finished, I offered them some goodies, and our

guests remarked on how polite and well-mannered they were.

Then I shared part of their story. The youngest brother had recently gone through a battle with cancer. We gave thanks for the good news that his treatments were over and that he was home. Friends and neighbors had also gathered for a rooftop party at the hospital to encourage the young brother during that time. We talked about the many prayers and examples of care that were shared with the family. We thanked God that his family shows up when needed.

Thank you, God, for everyone who serves their neighbors. Thank you for your family of believers who pray, encourage, and help. May we be people who show up for your sake. Amen.

TERRIFIC TUESDAY

“Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds . . . perch in its branches.” —Matthew 13:32

The door opened, and in walked a woman I did not know. She explained that she was from a business downtown that had recently received the Terrific Tuesday Award. (Our church sends a bouquet of flowers each week to a different business or organization in town to encourage the staff and let them know that the church is praying for them that week.) She said she needed to stop in and share her story.

The owner of the business had recently been admitted to the hospital with a terminal illness, and the employees were trying to deal with that news when the flowers arrived. The woman said she had been praying and that when the flowers came, she was reassured that God was listening and in control. She wanted to thank us for our part in offering them hope at this difficult

time. She also asked if we would continue to pray for the business owner, who was now in palliative care. This helped me realize how we need to remember that God is always at work in the details of our lives.

When we began sending flowers on Tuesdays, we had no idea how often it might create an opportunity for sharing God's love and peace. But it helped make connections we hadn't imagined, and we were able to pray and share with people who needed hope and encouragement. Jesus used it to show up in people's lives.

Dear Lord, thank you for opportunities to reach out to all kinds of people so that, like a mustard seed, your kingdom will grow. Amen.

SAUSAGES

John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same."
—Luke 3:10-11

The man had been invited in, and he had become part of the church. He lived on a pension and struggled with a mental illness. He had been the CEO of a large company in Toronto until his health had changed. His life had become drastically different, but he lived with a large and generous heart. He wanted to contribute, and one day he walked into the church to join others.

He said, "I have eight sausages, still frozen. I don't like sausages, but I would like to share them with others. Can we make two pots of soup; one with sausage, and one without?" We assured him that we could do that. He enjoyed the soup that had no sausage, and he was pleased that others enjoyed the soup with sausage.

He knew that meals were harder to find at the end of the month. He had learned that a

pension check goes only so far. He knew that if he shared with others, it would be good news for them. His sharing also inspired others. It was the start of our church's Stone Soup meal, and many people have contributed to it. He was glad to find a place of peace that could help him serve others.

Stone Soup is now a community event where food, clothes, and friendship are shared on two Thursdays each month. Many are invited so that the good news can be shared. This has led many people to walk through the door of a church who might not have otherwise done so. You are invited too!

Dear God, help us to be generous and kind even if our life turns upside down. Help us to use what you have given us to bless others. Amen.

CONNECTORS

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.
—Ephesians 4:3

Years ago, when we served a church in the community of Terrace Bay, Ontario, we were far away (17 hours by car) from our extended family. If we wanted to get home quicker (14 hours), we could cross the Mackinac Bridge, which is five miles (8 km) long.

When we visited Nova Scotia a few summers ago, we encountered a different kind of bridge. It was the connector at Little Narrows. Actually, it wasn't a bridge but a ferry boat. The crossing is only 150 meters, but it is also part of the highway.

I mention these connectors because they are a part of how life unfolds. We don't all have the same journey, but we all have the ability to be a "bridge" that brings people together with the story of the good news of God's kingdom. One of my favorite sayings is this: "You need to build a

bridge so that Jesus can walk from your heart to someone else's heart."

We are the connectors, the people of peace that Jesus wants to use. He showed us how to make connections to others, and then he said, "Do the same." It requires effort and commitment—much like that of the engineers who have colossal bridges and powerful boats.

What are you building to help make connections so that people can meet Jesus?

Dear Lord, guide us to become the bridges and other connectors that help people to meet you. Help us to build with unity and purpose, secured by the presence of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

LEAST EXPECTED

“If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.” —2 Kings 5:3

I love this Bible story for many reasons. Naaman was a guy who had everything. As an army commander, he could tell people what to do and where to go. He also had a family and was very wealthy. His army carried out raids on other countries, and one day they carried off a young Israelite girl who became a servant for Naaman's wife.

But Naaman learned that having everything wasn't enough. He discovered that he had leprosy, which in those days often led to banishment, disfigurement, and a lonely death.

The young slave girl could have said nothing, but she loved God and others and had good news to share. She told Naaman's wife that he should go to Elisha the prophet and be healed. Naaman was humbled by that, but he eventually did what he was told and was healed. Naaman's life turned

around, and he became a follower of God in a foreign land.

This story could easily have turned out differently. But a young girl chose to share the love of God, and she opened a door for healing and restoration to happen. Naaman was in a tough situation, but Elisha blessed him with peace.

We too have choices to make. We can hold back and justify our reasons for not sharing our faith, or we can choose to be gracious and giving even to people who may have offended or harmed us.

What can you do to share God's love and bring peace?

Dear God, help us to share your message of hope and healing, even if we are tempted to hold on to grudges or bitterness. In Jesus, Amen.

SOUP'D

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together . . . but encouraging one another. . . . —Hebrews 10:24-25

Before the pandemic, our church had a chance to take part in a soup contest called “Soup’s On” for the Heart and Stroke Foundation. Along with other agencies and chefs in the city, we would be serving soup to about 150 people. And not only would the event be a fundraiser; it would provide a way to connect with new people and share about our church.

We made sure the soup we served was top notch, and we earned awards for our efforts. This event created a space for us to serve and to share. It also encouraged others to hear why we existed and how God was working in and through our congregation.

The next soup contest was shuttered by the pandemic, but this year the event will be on again. And our church will again join in to share good news and good soup. This will

also encourage us again to move out of our usual spaces to see what Jesus might be up to in other spaces. We are eager to use our gift of hospitality to share God’s love with our extended community.

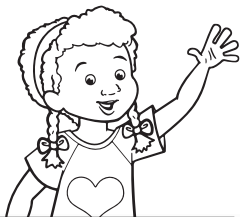
How do you “spur one another on” to reach out and connect? Where might there be a place to share the good news of Jesus in your community? Where might you find the peace of Christ shining?

Dear God, help us to inspire one another “toward love and good deeds.” Help us to meet and pray and talk and act about how we might connect to our world and our community for Jesus’ sake. Help us to bring light into new spaces. Amen.

NOTES

NOTES

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