**MID-WEEK THOUGHTS - MARCH 31ST**

This piece is from the Living Lutheran website and is by Meta Herrick Carlson is a pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church Twin Cities and co-host of the *Alter Guild* podcast.  Her recent book is titled, “Ordinary Blessings: Prayers, Poems, and Meditations for Everyday Life.”

When I was growing up, my mother encouraged me to try everything: sports, music, art, student government and camps of every kind. These extracurricular activities helped me build friendships in different peer groups and showed me what makes me feel passionate and alive.

They also taught me how to appreciate the ways I am average, third-string and most-improved. I learned to cheer on my teammates, set personal goals and participate fully. There were all kinds of blessings in being “pretty good.” Through it, I discovered the joy of showing up—and my sense of humor.

Popular culture has repurposed the term “blessing” to suggest a reward for faithfulness or an income of good things. But in Scripture, BLESSINGS can be inconvenient, risky and wild moments that reveal another way to be. These blessings have textures that transform our hearts, change our views, move our feet to a new location or prompt us to honor that space we’re meant to hold.

**A blessing for Meta**

I am, of course, often tempted to think otherwise. When my first child was born, I struggled with postpartum anxiety and felt like a failure. When we learned we were expecting a second child, I felt a surge of competitiveness. This time, I thought, I’m going to be much better at mothering a newborn.

When the ultrasound detected two heartbeats, I remembered that “better” is always relative. This pregnancy would be different no matter what grief and goals I brought to it. So I yelled and laughed and began to release everything that was keeping my plain old self from participating in a new adventure.

**A blessing for Abram**

In Genesis, Abram and Sarai receive a blessing that moves them physically. They are told to leave their family and the land they have known forever and travel to an unspecified destination. On the way, they are told, God will bless them with land and descendants who will build a nation and bless the whole world.

Years later, when Abram is still without land or children, he dares to ask God a few clarifying questions. He wonders if the blessing has already occurred and he’s missed it. God replies by inviting Abram to look up—way up. His descendants, God says, will outnumber the stars in the heavens (Genesis 22:17).

Abram is relieved to hear the vow again and to have somewhere to look for hope. He returns to the ordinary rhythms of his life, where God will bless him with Ishmael and Isaac; where God will give him a new name, Abraham; where God is in the formation of relationships with other tribes and families so that he may purchase his first field at a fair price and peacefully.

**A blessing for Jacob**

Abraham’s grandson Jacob receives a blessing that changes his identity. An angel of the Lord meets him in the wilderness between who he has been and who he longs to be. Jacob wrestles the angel with stubborn hope (Genesis 32:22-31). He wants a blessing that’s meant for him, that he comes by honestly instead of stealing it from another. He wants to believe there is room to become something more.

Right before dawn, the angel strikes Jacob’s hip to break up the fight. Jacob releases his grip on the angel, but also on his own pride, shame and past. He receives a new name, Israel. Now he is the one who struggles with God and with humankind and lives to tell the tale.

His new identity will be one of tension and struggle, of past and present, of a story that will last well beyond his tricks and schemes. Jacob’s blessing is the struggle itself, the most ordinary thing of all. And now he’s got a limp to show for it.

**A blessing for Mary**

Mary shows up at Elizabeth’s home with a strong internal call (Luke 1:39-45). She knows why she has said yes to God’s favor. She believes her unborn child is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. But Joseph is thinking about dismissing her quietly, and we don’t hear from her parents at all. The consequences for an unwed mother are fierce to the point of death.

Fear’s noise is quickly drowned out by Elizabeth, who flings open her front door for Mary in welcome, ambles out to embrace her cousin and preaches the gospel with both her body and her words. She sees the fullness of Mary and the moment—both the gift and the danger—and delights with a loud voice to bless it all.

**A blessing for you**

Blessings are highways of promise from heaven that travel through and beyond us, connecting and expanding us to love with more power and possibility than we have on our own. Blessings push back on the limits of our imaginations and our solutions for success. They are strong and subtle resistance to social norms.

The great blessing of my life has been the invitation to relish what’s ordinary. It’s where I have been shaped by sacred texture and received permission to be myself. The ordinary has grace and wisdom to share in spades, which we miss when we are chasing a perception of greatness instead.

My blessing for you is a call to the everyday life where you are already—where you are always loved, where you are more than enough, where God is showing up in your showing up.

***As challenging as it may be, look for the blessings each day.  Often it takes pausing from the many thoughts that are racing through your mind.***

***One of the email subscriptions I must have signed up for over the years is with National Geographic.  Just the other day, they sent out a link to the Monterey Bay Aquarium.  They have been creating short meditations online with video clips from the aquarium.  I was surprised how easy it was to get drawn into the reflection.***

**You can check out the links below to Monterey Bay, you will need to copy and paste in your browser. Gmail does not seem to like me doing bulk email with links right now:**

www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNQfdUHFaMY

www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLq\_DVMr7CmlJ3DJothjCJNylwgyrB72V6

**Take Care!**

**Pastor Craig**

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**Pastor Craig Wolfgram**

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