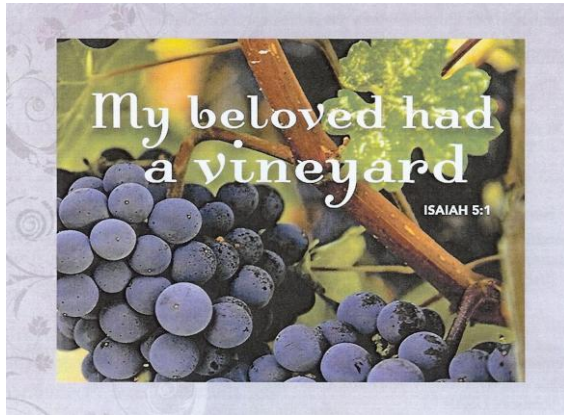


**Sunday, October 4, 2020**  
**Pentecost 18**  
**Grace Lutheran Church**  
**Somers Point, NJ 08244**  
**Interim Pastor: Rev. Kevin Hilgendorf**  
**“Bible Verse Nearest Your Heart”**



"Of the Psalms, Martin Luther said, I love them all...but this Psalm (118) is nearest my heart, and I have a familiar right to call it mine. It has saved me from many dangers...it is my friend. Dearer to me than all the honors and power of the earth."

The Reformer loved many parts of this Psalm. He had a copy of verse 17 on his wall, "I will not die, but I will live to tell what the Lord has done," and referred frequently to the messianic verses in the latter part of the Psalm. Such as 118:22 "The Stone rejected by the builders has now become the

cornerstone." This verse is fulfilled in Jesus Christ as noted by Matthew's Gospel today where the question was asked, "have you not read the scriptures?" Also in Ephesians 2:19-20, "so then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone." And 1 Peter 2:7 "To you then who believe, Jesus Christ is precious; but for those who do not believe, The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner."

Prior to my confirmation, I had to be examined with my class (over 50 catechists) in front of the congregation. After two years of studying the catechism I felt ready until at the last minute the Pastor gave us two pages of scripture verses to look up and memorize verifying our answers from the Bible. I was very nervous to stand facing all the members and family. I answered the question but then I needed a verse. Silence. Awkward. Pastor asked if anyone knew a verse to verify the answer. I did not remember then, but I do now Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

When I was eight years old I memorized Silent Night verse one and sang it confidently at the Christmas Eve service. But I also was given a verse to remember. When my turn to recite came I did not remember. So the teacher said each word and I echoed each one separately, "Joseph, Joseph, with, with, Mary, Mary, went, went, to, to, the, the, city, city, of, of, David, David, called, called, Bethlehem, Bethlehem."

Pastor Rochelle Menander states in *The Word in Season's* preface Joshua 1:9, "I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." God's people were on a journey. Before they went into the promised land, God said to them three times, "Be strong and courageous." (I wonder if this verse was nearest to their hearts.) Because of the pandemic that hit this year, many of us spent more time at home. But we are also on a new and sometimes frightening journey. We've had to find new ways to do almost everything: work, play, connect, and worship. We worry about friends and family. We face the unknown: no one can predict where the journey will take us next. Just like God was present with the people of Israel, God goes with us wherever we go. Because God is with us, we can be strong and courageous. No matter what life brings us, we walk with God's strength and courage."

Back to Luther, when he was summoned to the city of Worms to face the charges against him, he was warned by friends not to go. But quoting Psalm 118:6 Luther said, "The Lord is for me, so I will not be afraid I am determined to go though as many devils should oppose me as there are tiles upon all the houses."

Share your verse nearest to your heart with each other and call those absent from our gathering and ask what is the verse nearest to their hearts. All Scripture is inspired by God's breath (2Timothy 3) and in sharing we will be made strong and courageous.

Amen.