

CONNECTIONS

GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

“I have seen
the Lord!”
– John 20:18

Where do
you see
God?

MARCH/APRIL 2026
VOLUME 10
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I Have Seen the Lord

By Pastor Joanna Mitchell

My sister had a dream as a child that was unlike any other. In the dream she was in the presence of Jesus. She remembers being awestruck and aware of his incredible power, the infinite nature of his love, and his humility. Throughout the years, she will casually refer to her dream, stating that because of it she believes that Jesus is indeed God.

The interesting thing is that while this dream had a tremendous impact on my sister's faith and her unwavering beliefs, she has never been a regular attender of any religious community and feels no need to be involved in church. And she is not alone in that. Many people carry their faith in quiet, unconventional

Many people carry their faith in quiet, unconventional ways...

ways — outside of pews and programs — and there is room for all of us in this story. Don't get me wrong, my sister lives her faith deeply. She is a teacher committed to her students, a gardener, and an attentive steward of the earth. She is generous with her time, and she and I have even volunteered together with Habitat for Humanity.

I have always been jealous of my sister's dream. I am the one who is interested in faith and in particular God. How come she got to have this transformational dream, and I didn't? Why wouldn't God choose to show me — a pastor — a picture of Jesus that would erase my doubts and put me on the pathway of faithfulness? Why her and not me?

The Easter Gospel begins in a graveyard, with women walking in the dark to the tomb. It is always women — or in the case of the Gospel of John, a woman, Mary Magdalene — who goes to the tomb, caring for the body of their teacher and fulfilling the rituals of their time.

When Mary arrives, she finds the stone rolled away. She runs to find Peter and the disciples, who race to confirm what she said. Eventually Mary looks in herself and sees two angels, who ask: "Why are you weeping?" In her grief, she announces that Jesus has been taken and she cannot find him. She goes searching through the garden until she meets a gardener and says: Show me where you have taken him. The man responds by saying her name. Mary's eyes are opened. She runs back into the world and declares: I have seen the Lord!



...I keep looking. I keep searching.

My sister has often said these words to me: I have seen the Lord. It has filled her with joy and a deep awareness of the love of God. I have felt a little more like Mary — running around the garden of life, searching for Jesus. I have not had that eye-opening, clear-as-day moment where Jesus is standing right in front of me. And so, I keep looking. I keep searching.

What I have discovered in this search is that over and over again, I am blessed — because Jesus shows up in our world in so many ways. I have seen the Lord working through the dedicated musicians of our church, who give fully and completely of themselves. I have seen God when our children bring friends to church and are so excited to go to Sunday school. I have seen God through the handiwork of our quilters and in the faces of the kids of Rakai as they hold up their handmade blankets that come from Grace. I have seen the Lord in the generosity of our people when a young mother needed daycare funds — and in just two days, checks arrived, and we were able to provide three months of childcare, giving this mother an opportunity to get back on her feet.

...in my searching, my eyes have been opened to the many ways that God continues to work...

I have realized that never having seen Jesus clearly, in the way my sister did, has made me a forever searcher. In my searching, my eyes have been opened to the many ways that God continues to work and be present in the world. My unanswered longing became the very thing that opened my eyes. Perhaps if I had had the same dream, I would be content to believe. But because I didn't, I am continually startled by new glimpses of grace. It feels as if all of creation is calling my name — Joanna — inviting me to look and to wonder: am I seeing God right in front of me? And because God shows up in ordinary and extraordinary, but never simply obvious ways, I keep sharing my own experience and trying to help others see Jesus too.

Whether you have had a mountain-top moment of clarity or whether you, like me, are still looking — you are welcome here in this search. Together, I pray we keep searching, keep looking, and keep hearing God calling out to us. This Easter, I invite you to ask yourself: Where have you seen the Lord?

Grace 2 Belize

By Lynn Noren

Lynn Noren is a worship assistant at Grace for our 10:15am service. She also is a member of our personnel team and has served on Vision Board.

I was fortunate to travel with our Grace Team for a second year to the Maya Mopan community in Belize. To us, the people of Maya Mopan seem to have so little, but the extravagant love they show us just for our presence, is an impactful reminder of how much God loves us.



When we arrived at the Maya Mopan school this year, we were all greeted with huge hugs and excitement from the kids. After last year, I sponsored two kids, and they greeted me in the school yard, with hugs, saying, “you came back,” clearly remembering the bond we formed last year. Bold Hope had shared my letters and pictures, so they knew who I was. I was overwhelmed with their touching words, hugs and smiles, so freely shared.



I am certain God uses these trips to remind me to turn to Him and know there is more to gain from life than what my well-planned schedule holds. I have always loved the scripture verse “*Be still and know that I am God*” (Psalm 46:10) but have rarely felt the true meaning like I experience in Belize. On our second morning at the school, one of our Bold Hope leaders told me I would be going that afternoon to the homes of the kids I sponsor. It wasn’t on the schedule, but it was the most profound and loving experience. I got to meet the kids extended family members, learn more about their lives and pray with them. The impact of these visits will remain in my heart forever.

...they greeted me in the school yard, with hugs, saying, “you came back”...



Several women in our group were able to help prepare chickens for a soup to be shared at the women's conference we hosted. Just like last year, the time spent with the women of Maya Mopan was deeply meaningful. It's never about the task, de-feathering the chickens was our purpose, but the time spent together, learning about each other's lives and the deepening of our relationship with these women was the highlight.



The trip is a significant step for me in deepening my faith. Everything about it is outside of my life experience, and I find God working through all of it, helping me to see things differently. We sing the song, "Open the Eyes of My Heart" at Grace, and it so clearly describes what God was doing throughout the trip. Stepping into the unfamiliar, the simplicity of His love and care for us all shines through.



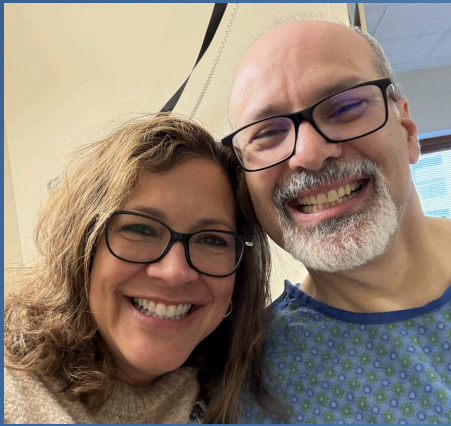
I can't wait to see what God has in store for us next year. If you are looking for a life-changing faith experience, please join us! For more information, please contact Nancy Jenkins dnjenkins@comcast.net.

God's Presence

By Frances Fernández

Frances Fernandez is a worship assistant at 8:30am. She has been a part of our Adult Education and Mental Health Team. She works at the University of MN as Faculty Director of the Healthcare Management Undergraduate Program. She is an advocate for Organ Donation and Mental Health.

There are moments in our lives when God's presence becomes so unmistakably real that it leaves us humbled, speechless, and deeply aware of His resurrection power moving in ways we could never orchestrate on our own. Our family has recently walked through such a season—one that has reminded us God is still in the business of restoring, redeeming, and breathing new life into the places we feared were beyond healing.

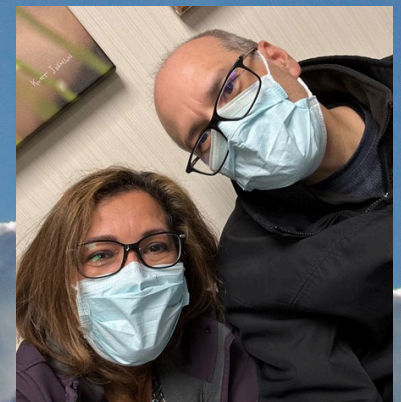


As many of you know, my husband, Carlos, was diagnosed with cancer and underwent a life-saving liver transplant, a journey filled with uncertainty, prayer, and absolute dependence on God's grace. What we did not expect—what we could not have imagined—was that the surgeon who walked into the operating room to care for him was the very same surgeon who performed our daughter Sam's kidney transplant almost 4 years ago. The moment we recognized him, we felt as though time stood still. It was as if God whispered, "I was there then, and I am here now."

Standing in that space, we felt the weight of God's faithfulness across generations—His ability to weave together stories we thought were separate, His tender way of reminding us that none of our steps are accidental. To see the same hands that once fought for Sam now fighting for Carlos felt like a holy reminder that God's resurrection power is not limited to Easter morning. It is alive, present, and active in our everyday lives.

We are not sharing this as people who have all the answers, but as a family still learning to trust deeply, still learning to surrender, still learning to look for God in the unexpected. We are simply grateful—grateful for life, for second chances, for medical miracles, for our Grace family and for the gentle ways God shows us that He never stops working on our behalf.

May our story be a reminder to you, as it has been to us, that God is near, God is faithful, and God's resurrection power continues to bring hope where hope once felt lost. *"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you"* - Romans 8:11



Hope

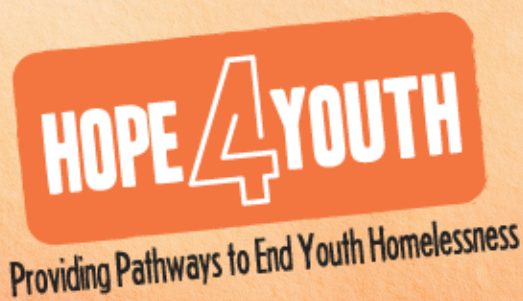
By Jan Anderson

Jan Anderson is a member of our Vision Board, plays in Grace Symphonic Ensemble and is a skilled BINGO caller both at Grace and the Farmstead.

Hope is not something you wish for; it is something that you work for. Indeed, hope is the operative word in HOPE 4 Youth, the organization for teens experiencing homelessness which has worked in partnership with Grace during the past 13 years. God's love is made tangible by each donation for as Christ says in Matthew 25:40, "Even as you have done it to [any of my family], you have done it unto me." Our hands and feet become expressions of God's love in everyday life.

The success stories are testament to HOPE's effectiveness. Sometimes a young person's life is changed by simply connecting with a volunteer at the Center. Such was the case with Hallie who wanted to follow a nursing career. After speaking with a volunteer, she was able to push through her last semester of nurse's training and obtain her certificate. Hallie is looking forward to launching her career.

Martin is another young person who was helped through the Youth Navigation Program, one of HOPE's resource programs. After escaping domestic violence at home, Martin was looking for a safe place to sleep when he arrived at the Center. Upon exploring his options, Martin moved into HOPE Place, a resident housing facility in Blaine. He is back on track with school and is continuing to work.



Hard as it is to be homeless as a young adult, it is even harder when you have young children. Such was Alexis' story when she came to H4Y while pregnant. Not only did she receive resources for her baby boy, but she is also building a healthy and stable lifestyle.

Sometimes it's simple things that are needed such as a cell phone for a young man so he could maintain connections with friends. Another reported that at times he didn't have money to do laundry. Thanks to H4Y, he now has clean clothing.

Each time H4Y has asked for help, Grace has responded with abundant generosity...

Each time H4Y has asked for help, Grace has responded with abundant generosity, even to the point of establishing two groups that supply meals monthly on the first and fourth Tuesdays.

In order for the world to see Jesus, He must be seen in action. Indeed, this year H4Y will finalize construction of their new facility in Blaine.

Growing into Youth Ministry

By Alex Erickson

Alex Erickson is a High School Student and the youth representative on the Vision Board. She plays basketball, and leads Kids Night Out. She works at Seeds of Grace part-time.

I never thought that I would find myself working with youth ministry. Every year, since I was 5, my mom would ask me a bunch of questions at the beginning and end of the school year, write down our answers, and tuck them away. If you were to go back and see what I answered to the question “what do you want to be when you grow up?” you would see things like mailperson, Target cashier, and garbage collector, but only one instance where I answered with a profession that had something to do with guiding those younger than me, a gymnastics coach.



Fast forward to my freshman year, I was participating in Own Your Faith, my sister was in Catechism, and my mom was teaching classes. I spent my Wednesday nights at Grace, Pastor Maria asked if I would want to help teach the Kids Night Out (KNO) classes, and I immediately said yes. It turned out to be so much more than a volunteer opportunity.

Every time I met with those kids, they opened my eyes to perspectives I have not even considered. They ask amazing questions, and are so curious, wanting to know more. As the end of the academic year approached, I felt I had really learned a lot from them and formed a connection. This year I could finally achieve my dream of being a VBS leader. I was really hoping I would get some of my KNO kids in my group, but I didn't. In the end, I had a blast with the kids I did get. Seeing them open up to each other, and to me, singing and dancing throughout the week, learning and asking questions, exploring their faith. I still think about my original group to this day.

God puts you in situations...I trust God's plan.



The next year, my sophomore year, I was leading Kids Night Out with the help of Kennedy Seelen and did VBS again (also a blast!). This year, we are at the point where we have so many kids attending classes on Wednesday nights, that we have to have two classes, which is amazing! I have plans to once again be a VBS leader this summer and have even begun working at the Seeds of Grace.

God puts you in unexpected situations every day, and it might be hard to understand. I never once thought that I would end up where I am, but I trust God's plan. These kids have taught me more than I think I have ever taught them. They came together and put together a food drive for our community. God put me where he saw fit, and I could not be more thankful for the opportunities God has granted me, and what he has shown me through the amazing kids here at Grace. If you would like to volunteer for VBS 2026 please contact Pastor Maria Markman or Will Weikle.

VBS 2026

4yrs to
completed
5th grade



Early bird (now-5/15)
VBS \$35 All Day \$70
Save \$10

Mon. June 8th - Thurs. June 11th
9:00am to 11:45am

All day option 9:00am to 3:00pm
(completion of 2nd -5th grade)

At Lord of Life in Ramsey
lol.org/ministries



Scan the QR
code for
information
& sign up.

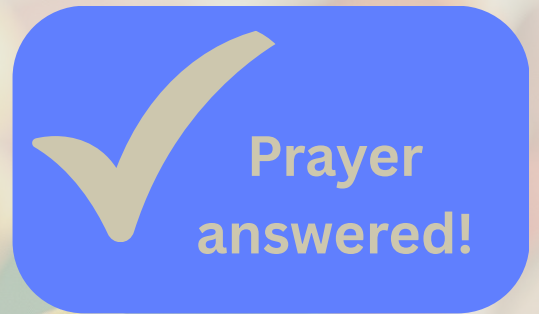
How have you “seen the Lord?”

By Jen Weingart

Jen Weingart is a teacher at Wilson Elementary. She sings in the Wednesday Night Praise Band, is on the Women's Retreat team and a member of the DEIA team.

Sometimes it's hard to tell, but sometimes God's timing makes it clear. I started recording my prayers in the YouVersion Bible App to be more intentional and align them with God's will. Some prayers take days, others months, and some are still on the list—but my favorite part is crossing things off: Check! Prayer answered! I often pray about diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA). One evening I prayed for direction on how to get involved with a group that cares about DEIA. The very next morning, Pastor Maria emailed asking if I'd be interested in reading *Blessed Minds: Breaking the Silence about Neurodiversity* by Sarah Griffith Lund. Check! Prayer answered!

What is neurodiversity/neurodivergency? A short answer is that it is an umbrella term for the many ways our brains are unique and differ. It is used as an antonym to “neurotypical.” Some examples could be ADHD, dyslexia, autism, etc. Sarah Griffith Lund says “To label oneself as neurodivergent means one intentionally includes oneself in the community whose brains are part of the diversity of human expression...to be neurodivergent is an identity that celebrates one's brain difference as contributing to humankind rather than being a deficit.”



Reading the book with a group of interested folks from Grace was the catalyst for the beginning of the Building Belonging: DEIA ministry group. Our team meets once monthly to discuss ways we can build belonging at Grace, in our community, and world. We are relatively new, but we can already see God working and how God is building belonging. The first big project that we tackled was completing an accessibility audit that enabled us to notice some physical changes we could make to our space and that led to us opening the Refuge Room in room 101. Personally, the impact has been obvious from the start. I've seen God working through this group in the discussions, listening, and friendships that are forming. When there were families at the elementary school, I work at that were fearful of safely getting their students to school due to ICE activity, members of this group and others at Grace stepped up and said, “we'll help them get to school safely!” Building Belonging. Check! Prayer answered!



As we continue to do God's work to build belonging, we ask you to join us! Take action, pray, ask questions, and share thoughts.

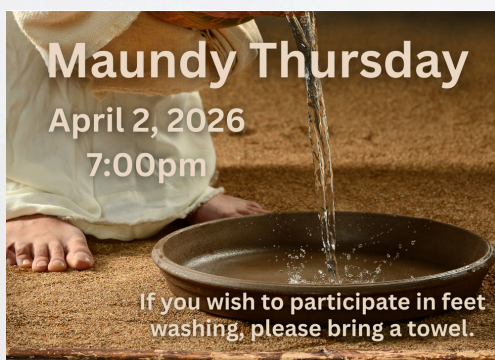
Hosanna! Palm Sunday

March 29, 2026
8:30am & 10:15am Worship



Quiet Easter
Worship

Wed.
April 1st
at 2:00pm



Maundy Thursday
April 2, 2026
7:00pm

If you wish to participate in feet washing, please bring a towel.

Good Friday



April 3, 2026 7:00pm



JOIN ROSE SPIELMAN AND THE YOUTH OF GRACE LUTHERAN FOR A
High Tea Party
SUNDAY, APRIL 12, 2026
AT 11:45AM

RESERVE YOUR SPOT ON REALM
WEAR YOUR FANCY HAT

\$30 FOR AN INDIVIDUAL, \$25 PER PERSON FOR GROUPS OF 2 OR 3, AND \$20 PER PERSON FOR GROUPS OF 4+




Volunteer Appreciation
Sunday
April 12th
9:30-11:45am



Let's come together to celebrate all the wonderful volunteers!




Graceful Seniors

Join us as Kathy Best from Arbor Oaks returns to discuss traditional curative based health care, palliative care, and hospice care.

Tuesday, April 14th
8:30am - Coffee
9:00-10:00am - Presentation

Book of REVELATION



Bible STUDY

BEGINS WED. APRIL 8TH AT 6:00PM
for 5 weeks.



GRILL + BAR
3470 129th Ave NW, Coon Rapids

Thursday April 16, 2026
11:00am-12:00am

When dining in mention "Grace Lutheran" and for take out the code is DoinGood.

Fundraiser

Doin' Good in the Neighborhood
Applebee's

NEW

MEMBER



CLASS

Sunday
April 26, 2026
11:30am - 1:00pm
Lunch provided



Scan the QR code to sign up.

Youth Summer Fun



Middle School Students
Thursdays from July 9th to Aug. 13th



Junior Leaders
Thursdays from July 9th to Aug. 13th



SUMMER FESTIVAL
July 19th - 22nd



July 10th to 18th




Grace Lutheran Church
13655 Round Lake Blvd. NW
Andover, MN 55304

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Easter Services

Sunday April 5, 2026

7:00am,

8:30am &

10:15am