

“I am the
resurrection
and the life.
He who
believes in me
will live...”

John 11:25

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United Methodist Church**

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March 2, 2022
Ash Wednesday

Scripture reading: Matthew 6:16-18

Key verse: "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full." Matthew 6:16 (NIV)

Devotion:

Every year when we enter the Lenten season, we should find ourselves taking personal inventory to determine what we should give up for Lent, but the question is, "Why?"

Lent (Latin: Quadragesima, 'Fortieth') is a solemn religious observance in the Christian liturgical calendar commemorating the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the desert, according to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, before beginning his public ministry, during which he endured temptation by Satan. Lent, in the Christian church, is a period of penitential preparation for Easter. In Western churches it begins on Ash Wednesday, six and a half weeks before Easter, and provides for a 40-day fast (Sundays excluded), in imitation of Jesus Christ's fasting in the wilderness before he began his public ministry. Scripture does encourage fasting. The Bible is full of examples of fasting and prayer, and as you read passages like Matthew 9:15 and Matthew 6:16-18, you can easily conclude that fasting should be an important habit in our lives and included in our Spiritual Disciplines.

Throughout the years people have claimed they were fasting or giving up certain things during Lent. Some state they are giving up chocolate and such, whereas others give up food they do not particularly like. This is because they do not know what fasting really means or what it is for.

Fasting in Old Testament times was for penitence. There are stories in the Old Testament canon that tells of people who fasted desiring to rebuild their relationship with God. They fasted in combination with prayer so that they might be able to commune with God. But today, most people view fasting a little different. At times we still use fasting as a means of penance, but we also use it to give up whatever thing(s) is in our lives that obstruct our relationship with God.

Fasting is something that is between the individual and God, unless it is a corporate fast, and we should not brag about or treat it as such an inconvenience for us. To do so would put us in the same class as the hypocrites Christ was referring to in today Gospel reading.

In conclusion, fasting should still be practiced by the Jesus follower. It is a way to put self to the side so we can get one on one with God as we seek to discern his will. As we

enter the Lenten season, let us strive harder to discern the will of God in our own lives as well as his will for Morris Memorial.

Prayer: Lord, be with the family known as Morris Memorial this Lenten season, and guide their hearts to know how to remember you during this time.

Prayer focus: My response to the sacrifice of Jesus this Lent.

Thought for the day: How do I most honor Jesus in these weeks approaching Easter?

Pastor Ray Stonestreet

FAST THIS LENT?

Below are thoughts of how one can fast during Lent. They are from the words of Pope Francis. You may wish to put this in a location in which you may see them daily to remind yourself of these suggestions.

- Fast from hurting words and say kind words.
- Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude.
- Fast from anger and be filled with patience.
- Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.
- Fast from worries and have trust in God.
- Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity.
- Fast from pressures and be prayerful.
- Fast from bitterness and fill your hearts with joy.
- Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others.
- Fast from grudges and be reconciled.
- Fast from words and be silent so you can listen.

March 3, 2021

Scripture reading: Deuteronomy 26: 1-11

Key verse: "And now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O Lord, have given me."
Deuteronomy 26: 10a

Devotion:

This scripture in Deuteronomy is Moses' instructions to the people of Israel, told to them as they were being prepared to enter the Promised Land. Even before they had arrived, they were instructed to bring the firstfruits of their harvest to dedicate to God.

This idea of the firstfruits has really intrigued me. We live in a time where fruits, vegetables and meats are basically available year-round. We don't live lives like my farming ancestors, where they had to can and preserve food to get through the winter without starving. I feel like I would have reacted differently to this scripture if I was living on a farm, hungry after a long winter, had just harvested the first crops of the year, and then expected to give them to God. It takes faith and dedication to give under those circumstances.

In our present culture we may, instead, tend to give God out of our excess. We give God (or the church) some of what we have left over after we meet our needs. Giving of the firstfruits is a very different mindset, giving God the initial part of the harvest, as a way of saying we trust that he is going to provide all our needs.

In studying scriptures regarding giving and tithing, I have considered some other ideas. One approach to giving is to ask ourselves, what do we have to give? Back then, in an agrarian culture, it was mostly food from the harvest. In our present culture, money is the first thing which comes to mind. But what about giving our time? Do we give our time to serve the church and perform ministry? What about our talents? If we have talents or abilities, do we share those to serve the church or bless others?

I would encourage each of us to consider giving from a larger perspective-- not only our financial resources, but also our time and talents, to serve people in need. In this season of Lent, when we focus on sacrifice, I feel that will fulfill the kind of response God desires from us. Giving what we can with joy, as a way of saying "Thank you" to God for all he has given us.

Prayer: Lord, show me what you want me to give to strengthen our church and advance your kingdom.

Prayer focus: The many needs we see around us daily.

Thought for the day: What can I do to help people who are hurting?

Jim Caudill

March 4, 2022

Scripture reading: Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

Key verse(s): "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust.'" Psalm 91:1-2

Devotion:

After reading the scripture and praying for God's guidance with this devotional, the Lord encouraged me to testify that, "The Lord is my refuge and my strength, my God in whom I trust." Thinking back to 2003-2004, during my husband Bruce's first deployment to Iraq, I had no idea what I was to go through. I was alone in a new home because all of our children were grown and living hours away, and I found myself praying to God to be my strength to get me through this year of uncertainty and also praying for the protection of my husband and those he served with. The 91st Psalm (the Soldier's Psalm) became my prayer. The Lord answered that prayer in many ways: a sister living close, fellowship with other spouses of deployed soldiers, and encouragement from my church family at Morris.

Fast forward to Bruce's second deployment in 2007-08: Bruce and I used this Psalm daily to confirm to each other our trust that God would be with us again. We both survived the separations encouraged by our trust in God's protection for each of us. There are always trials and temptations in all of our lives. We can believe and trust in the Lord for assurance of God's presence with us as a refuge and strength.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank you for reminding me no matter where life takes me or stumbling blocks before me, you are my refuge and protection. I only need to trust in you. Amen.

Prayer focus: Trusting in God as my refuge and strength

Thought for the day: Trust God daily for all your needs. He is all the protection you need.

Judy Reed

March 5, 2022

Scripture reading: Romans 10: 8b- 13

Key verse: “For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” Romans 10: 9.

Devotion:

June 1966 was a pivotal year in my life. I was 13 years old. I was in junior high going to my first church camp—Camp Cowen in Cowen WV. I had never been to this area, or ever previously stayed in a camp dormitory.

It turned out this was not the pivotal moment, but one even greater! One day we were at a meeting and Rev. Morton, one of the ministers there, told us to write in our Bibles, “Jesus is Lord of my life, and I will prove it by my lips and my life.” He went on to explain that. We talked. He signed our Bibles. That was the start of my wanting to go to Confirmation Classes.

Throughout my younger years that verse would come to mind. But I recalled it most recently as we discussed salvation and our faith at Bible study.

Looking back now, I see that Rev. Morton planted a seed. I wonder how many campers have gone on to be saved, proving it by their lips and their lives.

It seems so simple, but we make it so hard. We need to set an example by our actions, not only by our words.

Witness to someone today. Tell them three things: Believe with your heart, confess with your lips that Jesus Christ is your Lord and savior, and you will be saved.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for Rev. Morton and church camps everywhere.

Prayer focus: BELIEVE

Thought for the day: Witness to others, so they can have the grace and love of Jesus Christ.

Cathie Brown

March 6, 2022

Scripture reading: Luke 4: 1-13

Key verse: "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." Hebrews 2:18 (NIV)

Devotion:

When I was in college, I took a course on Milton. Two of Milton's most famous works are *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. In the later of these two, Milton sees the temptation of Jesus as the pivotal moment in Jesus' life and ministry. Here in the forty days in the wilderness, as Jesus is being tempted, he chooses God above all else.

We are to understand that the three temptations Luke describes have real tempting quality for Jesus. Many have written extensively about each temptation and what it meant for Jesus. Here in Luke's gospel, we see Jesus first tempted with turning the stones all around him into bread. At forty days of fasting, which a healthy adult can actually do, Jesus' body is beginning to consume itself so that he can survive. We know that Jesus could have turned the stones into bread, as he once created enough bread out of five loaves for at least 5,000 people. On top of this he is starving, so his need is genuine. Jesus chooses what God will give him instead.

Luke tells us that the second temptation offers him what is rightfully his: the kingdoms of the earth. The cost would just be to worship (live for and serve) the devil. Jesus and we know that only God is worthy of worship.

The final temptation is Jesus being taken to the top of the temple and urged to show everybody that he is the Son of God. Jesus refuses to prove his identity to the devil or anyone else. It is not God that would be tried by his action, but Jesus, God with us, that the devil is seeking to try.

In his book, *Paradise Regained*, Milton does something that at first puzzled me. He added a fourth temptation: knowledge. Why did he do this? Then I realized that he added the thing that tempted him the most to seek after, even above Christ.

In Hebrews 2:14-18 and 4:14-16 we are told that Jesus shared our full humanity because he came to help us where we are most sorely tempted. He was tempted and suffered so that he could help us in any trial or temptation. Although there were certain things that tempted him the most, Hebrews 4:15 testifies that Jesus was tempted in every respect "as are we."

The difference, of course, is that Jesus didn't sin. Therefore, he is really able to help us when we are tempted. He can even help us when we are drawn to the thing that we would otherwise choose before Him.

Thought for the day: Jesus really can help us when we are tempted!

Prayer: Jesus, our dearest friend, be close to me when I am overwhelmed by temptation. Help me to say "No" to the devil and "YES" to you! Amen.

Barry Moll

March 7, 2022

Scripture readings: Luke 6: 46-49; Romans 7:15

Key verses: "Why do you call me, 'Lord, lord,' and do not do what I say?" Luke 6: 46
"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." Romans 7:15

Devotion: On May 25, 1972, I attended an Intervarsity Christian Fellowship spiritual retreat and accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. As with many new Christians, I was initially "on fire." I did daily Bible study (with highlights galore), I journaled daily as I recorded my prayers, and I strove to get over my shyness to be able to share the message of the gospel with others.

Fifty years later, as I examine my life, I have seen my share of peaks and valleys which I am sure that many other professing Christians can relate to. I'd say that my journey looks more like a broadband wavelength than a gradual consistency of growth.

I have no difficulty with the basis of my faith. Through profession of the Apostle's Creed, I affirm the sovereignty of God, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for my sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit sent to be my strength and my comfort.

However, even though I accepted Jesus as my Savior all those years ago, many times I feel like I cannot call him **LORD** due to my willfulness and lack of obedience. I fail to do what he says (Luke 6:46). I want to be in full control of my life and do things my own way. I fully identify with the apostle Paul when he said, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate to I do." (Romans 7:15).

Although I believe that I have laid a good foundation and built my house on solid ground as stated in Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish builders (Luke 6:48), I often struggle with losing my zeal for daily devotion and Bible study, feeling a lack of confidence in prayer, and resist sharing the gospel.

I recently had an insight about my spiritual foundation. I joined my daughter, Cathy, as she was house hunting. We automatically rejected those houses that had cracks in their foundation which had not been attended to. What I took away from this experience was that even though we may have built our spiritual house on a firm foundation, we need to be vigilant about looking for cracks and make the necessary repairs. If not tended to, the cracks will continue to grow and weaken the foundation. I believe that the Holy Spirit would be a great contractor to seek out.

One last comment about one of my spiritual weaknesses: For several years I have not abstained from anything for the period of Lent. This year I find that I have been able to open myself to a prompting of the Spirit to give up something that I value which I feel negatively impacts my productivity and opportunity to make time for spiritual growth. True confessions—I spend several hours a day watching shows streamed on Netflix. Accountability—you are welcome to ask me on Easter Sunday how I fared over the 40 days.

Prayer: "Lord, please hold on to me when I forget that I need you. When I let go, hold me again." (Lyrics from Hold Me by Lauren Daigle)

Prayer focus: Repairing the cracks in our spiritual foundation.

Gloriann Caudill

March 8, 2022

Scripture reading: Luke 5: 17-26

Key verse: "Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, 'Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?'" Luke 5: 22-23:

Devotion: Today's scripture reading is well known as the story of the healing of the paralyzed man. It is a story that shows love, friendship, and forgiveness. If you are a "Chosen" fan, you will remember how it touched your heart as you watched his friends lower him into the room where Jesus was teaching. What dedication and love came from that friendship to seek healing and forgiveness....and he didn't even know that he needed forgiveness.

Isn't that how our lives go some days?? Yet forgiveness of sins is the one thing we all need. That sharp tone we used with a loved one, that forgotten date where we should have taken time out of our day to acknowledge a special occasion, that phone call we've put off to check on a family member who is struggling, that time when we told a little white lie because we didn't feel like doing something that was asked of us, or maybe that fight you started because you were "right" about something but it cost you a relationship with someone you love? Forgiving someone is a hard thing to do. Sometimes we don't even want to think about doing it. We'd rather just move on....and asking someone to forgive you (well I'm sure you've never done anything that needed you to ask that), but for those of us who might.... let's just say sometimes a "bullet" might be better.

Jesus never hesitates to forgive. Think about that. He doesn't even ask us to go into a lot of detail. He just says, "You are forgiven." And we accept it....in my case I've personally accepted it almost daily (I figure He may get tired of me every once in a while), but He never hesitates to open His arms to me and welcome me home. I can't say that I am as welcoming. It's something I must work at. But I will tell you, it is essential to my walk with Him. It's not an option. It's a requirement.

Have you been hurt? Have you hurt someone? Said the wrong thing? Thought the wrong thought? Walked the wrong path? He knows what we are thinking and asks, "Why are you thinking these things in your heart?" WOW... Forgiveness is something I have learned that I need more than the other person. And I have learned to forgive myself. That may be even harder sometimes. But at the end of the day, no matter what the cost, I can walk hand in hand with my Father when he says, "Child your sins are forgiven.... pick up your mat and follow me."

Prayer: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and **forgive us** our trespasses **as we forgive** those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen."

Prayer focus: To truly incorporate the act of forgiveness in your day to day life, not only to others, but for yourself.

Thought for the day: Forgiveness is essential because it not only allows us to grow in our relationship with God and others, but it is an important part of our daily walk as a follower of Jesus. If Jesus can forgive us, shouldn't we also be willing to forgive others as well?

Jeannie Henson Morris

March 9, 2022

Scripture reading: Luke 6:27-38

Key verses: "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." Luke 6: 27-28

Devotion:

I was at a basketball game of my grandson for five-year-olds, where they were just learning the basics of sportsmanship. I did not see everything going on. However, when my attention returned to him, I saw him pushing and shoving another player on his team. I thought, "Why is he doing this?" How embarrassing! Please stop!

The coach or instructor finally noticed it and put a stop to it, praise the Lord! I was angry and embarrassed. After the game I asked him why he was acting that way. He said, "He jumped in front of me and took my place in line." It's our first reaction, to bad behavior, to push back, and it *never helps*.

He didn't realize his own bad behavior and was punished for it. It's always the retaliation to bad behavior that gets most of us into trouble with God, for God sees all and knows all. Our bad behavior never looks good, and it *breaks God's heart*.

Prayer: God forgive us when our reactions lead us to sin. May we always remember your words that we love even those who mistreat us. In Jesus' name, amen.

Prayer focus: Forgive and pray for your enemies. Be merciful, be kind, and be humble, and then you win.

Thought for the day: Love conquers hate, just as light overcomes darkness.

Mark Miller

March 10, 2022

Scripture reading: Matthew 20:20-28

Key verses: “She saith unto him, ‘Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.’ But Jesus answered and said, ‘Ye know not what ye ask.’” Matthew 20: 21b-22a (King James Version)

Devotion: You do not know. How this phrase shows up so often in our lives. As a child you do not know how to balance a checkbook, as an adult many do not know still. As a teenager you do not know how to make all the wise choices you should. As an adult you do not know what the best course of action is in choosing a new home, job, etc. The fact is we are woefully ignorant and would not say half the things we do, or perform half the things we perform, had we proper knowledge in the first place. Growth in life is an ongoing process, just as acquiring knowledge. However, the very acquisition of knowledge is not enough, it is the wisdom that only comes from God that can direct us in what we say and do. How many times have we asked God, like this mother in the passage, something that was motivated out of love for others, yet selfish or even foolish? The mother, commonly thought of as Salome, wanted the best for her boys, that was good. The problem was that Salome couldn't envision the scope of what she was asking nor its requirements. We often envision a project's completion before we sit down to count the cost. There is nothing wrong with that unless we never stop to ask God for direction first.

When the pandemic started, now two years ago, many had thoughts on its duration and its effects. Now two years down the road we see the ignorance and sometimes foolish thinking that originated. We can excuse some of that when we realize there was a lack of knowledge and wisdom. As Christians, we cannot see end from the beginning like God can. We jump into things and ask things that may not be what is the best in the long run. Like Salome, we just see what we want to happen, not necessarily inviting God's omniscience into our requests. There is a balance of proper asking and proper faith. However, the part of the equation that I and most likely you often miss is the questions of will whatever we ask bring glory to God or to us. For Salome's two sons to sit on the right and left hand of God was indeed a high marked and greatly desirable state, but it brought glory to them. Later, Jesus would remind them that even God Himself came to serve, not to be served (v.28). We Christians have had a problem with this from the beginning. The concept we deal with in life is to be honored and praised to get ahead, that is our culture, and it hasn't been fully purged from us. True greatness in God's sight means true humility in our sight (and His). If we could exercise this mindset, we most likely wouldn't be as envious, power hungry, or trying to promote ourselves to

the public, even if we try under a false humility to not draw attention to ourselves, even though it's obvious to others.

So how can we please God when we request something of Him? Let's endeavor to follow these steps:

1. Remember our place before God and man.
2. Ask with the motive of bringing God glory and not us.
3. Have in mind that will our request grow us spiritually?
4. Before asking, consider how what we ask will advance the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We often ask for things that are intrinsically good, but often misplaced in the chronology of importance. Remember that in Salome's request, the Lord will honor us in due time, but we must follow His course, His way. The Way is often opposite from man's way. When we want what God wants by the way that His Son Jesus gave us an example, we cannot fail in our requests. During this season of Lent, let us examine our whole lives and motives against the standard of Christ Jesus.

Prayer: Help me Lord to pattern my requests after Your desires and what You see as important. Amen.

Thought for the day: Endeavor to imitate Christ and set Him in the forefront of all we do.

Jon Browning

March 11, 2022

Scripture reading: I Corinthians 10:1-13

Key verses: “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.” I Corinthians 10: 13

Devotion: I love books and reading. In one of the book groups I participate in by Zoom, we just finished reading The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The pleasure in reading this book was to see just how joyful these two close friends were even though they have suffered greatly from years of exile and persecution. In this book, which centers around their meeting in 2015 to celebrate the Dalai Lama's 80th birthday, these two Nobel Peace Prize Laureates teased, laughed, sang and danced as they revealed how they have lived lives brimming with joy.

And how did these eminent men create and foster this joyful life even through years fraught with persecution, suffering and turmoil? First, they say they have identified the things that are obstacles to joy: stress, anxiety, frustration, anger, sadness, grief, despair, loneliness, envy, suffering, adversity, illness and the fear of death. Then, to overcome these obstacles to joy, they talked about filling our mind and heart with positive thoughts and feelings. For the mind they say we should nurture these four qualities: perspective, humility, humor, and acceptance. For the heart we should nurture forgiveness, gratitude, compassion and generosity.

The authors suggest that there may be an ascending hierarchy reflecting a connection between these qualities. A “God’s-eye perspective” helps us to see the universality of man and, thus, brings us down to earth. From that humility we create a greater capacity to laugh, especially at ourselves. It is telling that humility, humor and humanity all come from the same root word in the Greek – humus. From this less self-directed perspective and with greater humility (and humor) we learn to accept – and engage - life on its own terms rather than as we wish it to be. I think this is especially relevant to how we personally deal with COVID 19.

Now, the pillars of joy for the heart. Foremost is forgiveness. In our Sunday School class, we have read several Max Lucado books wherein he talks about forgiveness. And a common thread runs through them – forgiveness means freeing ourselves from the past – mistakes, hurts, heartaches and anger. In gratitude we can then look at the world through a new lens. This book says it is not happiness that makes us grateful; rather, it is gratefulness that makes us happy. The authors say man is hard-wired to be compassionate; to be “other-regarding.” Bishop Tutu said that each time he acted compassionately he experienced a joy that he found in nothing else. Finally, generosity is a natural outgrowth of compassion. The word generosity in Judaism is the same as for “justice.”

Prayer: Father, thank you for creation and the ability you have given us to better accept and engage our world and others through forgiveness, compassion and generosity. Amen.

Prayer Focus: The “God’s-eye perspective” to see others and our terrestrial world as God’s handiwork which God meant for us to love and preserve.

Thought for the day: The smiling face of the late Archbishop Tutu.

Tim Basford

March 12, 2022

Scripture reading: Psalm 37: 1-9

Key verses: "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun." Psalm 37: 5-6

Devotion:

During the last 2 years, it has been increasingly difficult to trust what you hear, especially as we have tried to navigate Covid 19 issues, advice, warnings, etc. Who do you trust and why when dealing with issues that you deal with in your life every day? Over the past 2 years I have discovered a way of being positive by trusting the things that are important to me to my Lord, Jesus. This reliance began when I was trying to make right decisions about issues, situations I was encountering in my Christian walk, some difficult and some not so difficult. I am one of those folks who can think they have made a right decision and then rethink that decision over and over again, not really sure if my decision was correct. I picked up my daily devotional, "Jesus Calling," one morning when I was trying to make a simple decision that I had made into something to worry about (I am good at that, as well). The title of the devotion had the word "trust" in it. As I began reading it was as if a lightbulb went on in my head. The key statement in the first paragraph was, "I trust you Jesus." I learned that I should look at situations requiring a decision or action as I thought Jesus would want me to do, and I prefaced my prayer concerning the decision with, "I trust you Jesus with this situation." I would say, "I trust you Jesus," until I believed what I was praying. I can't tell you the assurance I received from God and my increased faith that occurred as I began to experience answered prayers over and over again.

God loves us and is always just a whisper away. He hears our thoughts and prayers and is there ALL of the time to listen and then respond. He promises to give His children what we need; and He is here to help us in our everyday lives and in tough situations. He wants us to ask Him, and expect Him to answer our prayers and to listen to bold requests with our expectation of answers from Him when we say, "I trust you, Jesus, to hear and answer my prayer." Sometimes He answers with what I am hoping for and sometimes what I want is not what is best or what He wants, but I always trust Him and He never fails to hear and respond to my prayers. He is there to answer your pleas of, "I trust you, Jesus" as well. Within this past year I was telling my grandsons about the most important 4 words they will ever need. They were intrigued, so I told them, "I trust you, Jesus!" I then explained how God is waiting for us to ask him for what we need and He will always respond to our plea to Him, "I trust you, Jesus."

During this Lenten season, I hope we will be in tune to Jesus and all He has done and is doing in our lives. By trusting Him in all areas of our lives we will learn to expect a response from Him and we will praise Him without ceasing.

Prayer: I trust you, Jesus, to be with us as we grow in our understanding of your word and your plan for our lives. Help us to continually grow in our trust of you. We thank you for your Son, His death and resurrection so we can also achieve resurrection and eternity with you.

Thought for the day: In all things, I trust you, Jesus!

Jackie Frazier

March 13, 2022

Scripture reading: Luke 13:31-33

Key verse: "And he said to them, 'Go and tell that fox, "Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.'"" Luke 13:32

Devotion:

Years ago, I was driving on Skyline Drive, a scenic highway along the Blue Ridge in Virginia. I saw a historical marker about the feelings which the plantation owners on the east side of the mountain and the small farmers in the Shenandoah Valley had toward each other many years ago. The people on the east side of the mountain were mostly of English ancestry, many of them belonged to the Church of England, and they were part of an economy which depended heavily on slave labor. The folks in the Valley were more likely to be of Scotch-Irish ancestry, they tended to be Presbyterians, and they were much less likely to be slave owners.

The people east of the Blue Ridge tended to think that the people over in the Valley were backward and uncouth. They called the Valley residents "cohees." This word is thought to have been derived from an expression which was considered outdated in England and in eastern Virginia but was still used by the Scotch-Irish settlers of the Valley.

Those who lived in the Valley had their own name for those on the east side of the Blue Ridge. They called the Easterners "tuckahoes." A tuckahoe was the root of a wild plant which could be prepared and eaten the way that a potato would be, but it was not as large as a potato. What the people in the Valley were calling the Easterners meant "small potatoes."

In today's reading from Luke, Jesus calls King Herod a fox. Some might think that this meant that Herod was sly or clever. In the Jewish culture of the day, however, to call someone a fox was to call him or her "small potatoes." Jesus was saying that even though Herod was powerful in a worldly sense he would not be able to interfere with God's ultimate plan.

We who serve the Lord cannot assume that we will not face opposition. Jesus himself faced fierce opposition. We cannot assume that we will not have to suffer. Jesus told His followers that they were likely to suffer. We can be assured, however, that no worldly power will interfere with God's ultimate plan to give eternal life to those who put their trust in Jesus. If you are not yet convinced of this, please read the 8th chapter of Romans.

Prayer: *We thank You, O Lord, for those in every land who serve You. We thank You for those who have taken a stand for You. We pray that You would give them courage and that You would assure them that no earthly power can defeat Your ultimate will of giving eternal life in glory to those who put their trust in Your Son Jesus. This we ask in the name of this same Jesus, Your Son and our Savior. Amen.*

Prayer focus: Those who take a stand for the Lord.

Thought for the day: No earthly power can interfere with God's ultimate will of saving those who put their trust in His

Mark Flynn

March 14, 2022

Scripture reading: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Key verse: "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness."
Genesis 15:6

Devotion:

Wow! Just Wow! That is really all I can say about 2020, 2021 and now even 2022. You know what I am talking about, right? Life has not been a bed of roses. Just in my life, I have friends who have been ill with covid and other diagnoses. My sister and brother-in-law moved to another city. We lost precious loved ones who died in the hospital alone because of the covid no-visitor policy, and we lost relatives/friends from drug overdoses. Don't we all at some point feel like Abram? "God you are really going to give me a son at this age?" But our question is "God are you going to get us through this rough time?"

Even as I write this, I am praying for friends who are in the middle of health crises and my heart is heavy. But...(isn't there always a BUT?) deep in the recesses of my heart, I know my God is good and mighty. I know my God created the beautiful mountains and ocean that I view as I type this devotion. I know my God followed through with his promise to Abram. I know that we are included in the count of Abraham's offspring because of our Lord Jesus Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. I know my God was, is, and will be always be there for all the good and bad times we experience.

I just read a quote: "You don't have to worry about the future, because God is already there." If you are in the midst of a crisis, I hope that you hold onto your anchor. Our God will weather the storm with you. He will continue to be with us throughout our days. Please believe God's promises so you too, like Abram, will be credited to righteousness. Your burden will be lighter. The God of Abraham will deliver us.

Prayer: Oh Lord, thank you for being with us during the past couple of years during this world crisis. You give us hope and strength. May we be counted in your righteous.

Prayer focus: Keeping our eyes on God.

Thought for the day: God's promises surround us.

Monica Hatfield

March 15, 2022

Scripture reading: Luke 14:25-35

Key verse: "And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." Luke 14: 27

Devotion:

Why does Jesus ask us to give up our families and our own lives for him in verse twenty-six? He is teaching us the cost of discipleship. We need to understand that he wants all of us. He teaches us to love and has given us two of our commandments. One is to love your God with all you heart, mind, soul and strength, and the second is to love your neighbor as yourself. I believe he does not want us to hate our families and ourselves. He is wanting us to prioritize Him and to follow Him. Jesus says in verse twenty-seven that anyone who does not carry His cross and follow Him cannot be His disciple.

We spend so much time trying to do everything ourselves. You would think we would understand why we fall. Jesus makes it easy for us. He wants us to depend on Him. This Lenten season if you are going to give up something, give up yourself to Him. All glory and praise to Jesus our Savior and Lord. The third verse in my favorite hymn, Blessed Assurance, sums up what Jesus wants from us:

Perfect submission, all is at rest
I in my Savior am happy and blessed
Watching and waiting looking above,
filled with his goodness lost in His love.

Fanny Crosby, wrote this song which gives us the answer to discipleship. Two verses in her song begin with perfect submission and by this Jesus is mine. For us to be at rest we give all to Jesus. I am always amazed at the songs Fanny wrote. She was blind but God gave her the gift of songs. The words of these songs surely changed lives. When she left this world and opened her eyes, she saw Jesus.

Prayer: Our Father, we realize we need you and we need to rely on you. We thank you for sending your Holy Spirit to guide us in making decisions in our life. Your love conquers all and we just want to thank you for sending your Son to die for our sins. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

Prayer focus: The cost of Discipleship

Thought for the day: Jesus wants us to give everything to Him.

Larry White

March 16, 2022

Scripture reading: Luke 15:1 – 10

Key verse: "In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence in the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Luke 15: 10

Devotion:

Over the past two years all of our lives have changed, due to COVID-19 and all of its variants. We no longer go to the grocery store the same way; we no longer go to crowded areas. We buy more on-line. We now work from home, and even schools have changed for the youth. Because of this, we have stayed home and are alone more time throughout the day.

All of it, the flu itself, the new mandates, and the isolation by small group or ourselves, has caused immense stress.

Even how we attend church for worship has changed. Because of all the changes and the stress everyone has endured and the lack of communal worship and our association with other Christians in a community forum, we may have lost our way just like the sheep and the one coin mentioned in these two parables. During this time of preparation for Easter is a wonderful time for us to reflect on our relationship with God and other Christians.

It's an opportunity for us to strengthen our relationship with both God and our Church community. As we do this, we will begin to find an inner peace and there will be rejoicing in Heaven and with others in our church community

Thought for the day: Rejoice with your reuniting and tell others in your church about your rediscovery so they can rejoice with you.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to reflect on my life so that I may reunite my relationship with You. In your name I pray, Amen.

Prayer focus: Working with your church during these stressful times

Don Smith

March 17, 2022

Scripture reading: Isaiah 55:1-9

Key verses: "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare."
Isaiah 55: 1-2

Devotion:

When I first started reading today's scripture, my thoughts went to my grandmother. She was an awesome cook, and everyone was invited to her table whether you lived there or not. I can still hear her say, "Food is ready time to eat." I would tell her she was so good in the kitchen that she could make peanut and jelly sandwiches taste better than anyone else could.

I am also a QVC shopper, much to Larry's dismay. I will check to see what special value they are offering on any particular day. Even though they may have a product that is offered at what they consider a bargain, there is still a price.

God is offering us God himself. He offers His living water, the Holy Spirit, to those of us who are broken with nothing to offer Him. He offers it to those who have the means to buy worldly pleasures but can never seem to find anything that satisfies. God is inviting each of us to come to Him free of charge. The price has been paid through His Son, Jesus. That is the love that will satisfy our souls.

I will close with a verse of a song I sang several years ago.

Who can satisfy my soul like you
Who on earth could comfort me
And love me like you do
Who could ever be more faithful and true
I will trust in you
I will trust in you, my God

Prayer: Father, thank you that all are invited to your table. What you offer can truly satisfy our souls. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

Prayer focus: Come to the table

Thought for the day: I will trust in you, my God.

Kathy White

March 18, 2022

Scripture reading: Mark 4: 35 – 41

Key verse: “And Jesus arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, ‘Peace be still.’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.” Mark 4: 39 (KJV)

Devotion:

Anyone who has lived for much time at all knows that in life storms will surely come, and we can feel overwhelmed by these trials. Like the disciples caught in the storm on the Sea of Galilee, we can feel overpowered by these trials.

Following Jesus does not insulate us from life’s tempests, but we can take comfort from knowing God promises to hold us fast through them. He can calm our hearts. And He may even quiet the very storms themselves.

When storms come, we are often tempted to doubt God. As soon as the turbulence hits – our doubts and weaknesses burst forth. We forget WHO it is that dwells within us and WHAT He is capable of doing!

God does not always prevent storms from coming. Then we must believe that Jesus Christ can deal with the upheavals. When we see Jesus as the Creator, the one in whom everything holds together, then you and I can experience the calming of the storm.

Prayer: Oh Lord, help us to remember that you are forever faithful, and will hold us up by your nail-scarred hand. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Prayer focus: Even when I do not fully understand, I will trust God.

David Byrd

March 19, 2022

Scripture readings: Romans 5:7; 1 Peter 3:18; and John 15:13

Key verse: "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the spirit." 1 Peter 3:18

Devotion:

Chris had been dealing with heart problems for a long time. One day his doctors informed him that his disease had progressed to the point that he needed a heart transplant. At once he began to fervently pray for a new heart to become available to him for transplant. In time, however, he realized what a dilemma this was because someone would have to die in order for him to live. How would you feel in this situation?

Romans 5:7 states, "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die." This helps us put into perspective what a great sacrifice Jesus Christ made for each of us. It's mind boggling isn't it, when you really take time to think of it!

In 1 Peter 3:18 we learn, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit." In John 15:13 we learn, "Greater love has no one than this: that one lay down his life for his friends."

During this Lenten Season take time to reflect and meditate on this extreme sacrifice Christ made for you and how you have been transformed by His Holy Spirit within you. How has your life been changed knowing Jesus died for YOU?

Thinking ahead to Easter, we know that the resurrection has made all the difference in our lives. Christ rose and lives again with God the Father in Heaven just as was prophesied. He is coming again! Especially interesting to note is that there were many eye-witness accounts of His life after His crucifixion and of his resurrection. As a Christian you are alive in Christ and blessed beyond measure!

Prayer: Thank you, Dear Lord, for sacrificing your life for me and affording me the real privilege of eternal life with you.

Prayer focus: The gift of eternal life

Thought for the day: Once you were dead in sin; now you are alive in Christ! Thanks be to God!

Bill and Susan Vieweg

March 20, 2022

Scripture reading: Luke 13: 1-9

Key verse: “‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’” Luke 13: 8

Devotion:

The first portion of this scripture has Jesus speaking of calamities of his era. Unforeseen bad things happen to people, regardless of their faith. Thus, we shouldn’t wait until something bad happens to try to find our faith, as there may not be time then. The calamity of COVID has made this all too obvious.

The second portion is a parable about a fig tree that isn’t bearing fruit. If nothing else, this speaks to me because I have a fig tree at my house. In most years, my fig tree is EXCEPTIONALLY productive. I struggle to keep up in harvesting and finding uses for the fruit. However, there have been a few years when hard freezes took out most of the limbs. The subsequent season brings tremendous growth, but little in the way of fruit. But the following year resumes its productivity. All it takes is some patience and caring.

There are some who, in this era of calamity, have gotten away from the church or even their faith. In their misery, they may turn away from the comfort that God can provide. They feel barren. The question for those around them is, which character from the parable will they be? Will they want to cut off that person, like the landowner wanted to cut down the tree? Or will they be there to help the person recognize God’s love in their lives, and patiently help them to grow spiritually? That growth, though not always obvious, can result in tremendous spiritual yields over time. All it takes is some patience and caring. But it may be more than worth it.

Prayer: Lord, out of our shared calamity, help us to learn patience for each other. Give us your guidance to help us nurture each other to grow in our love for you and each other, so that we may be productive in your name.

Prayer focus: Those who have turned from the church.

Thought for the day: Understand we are all in this together. Use that empathy to help others.

Chris Terpening

March 21, 2022

Scripture reading: Luke 16:19-31

Key verse: "But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime received thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented in the flame." Luke 16: 25 (KJV)

Devotion:

I have been retired for over 4 ½ years and have been in a pandemic for almost two years. Some people may think that this pandemic is hell. But it is not. The only **heaven** the unbelieving experience is here on earth. The only **hell** believers experience is here on earth.

"The Rich Man and Lazarus" is the title of this portion of scripture. Some think this is a parable, but Jesus did not use names in parables. The rich man lacked nothing in food or clothing. Lazarus was a beggar and would have been glad to be fed with scraps from the rich man's table. When Lazarus died, he was taken into Abraham's bosom (paradise). Verse 23 tells us that when the rich man died, he ended up in hell in torment. He had not loved his neighbor Lazarus as himself.

Hell was not originally created for the descendants of Adam and Eve. Hell was created for the devil and his angels (see Matthew 25:41). When was the change made?

"Therefore, hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoices shall descend into it." (Isaiah 5: 14) God is speaking to the children of Israel.

Who says that there is a hell anyway? The word "hell" is written fifteen times in Matthew, Mark and Luke, and all of them are in red letters indicating that Jesus said it.

Some people believe that God is all good and would not send people to hell. Everyone needs to know that God does not send people to hell; they send themselves if they do not accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior. Look at John 3:26. "He that believes on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him." Hebrews 11:29 reads, "For our God is a consuming fire." Finally, Revelation 9:2 says, "And he (the fifth angel) opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the reason of the pit."

Prayer: O God, I pray that you will convict the people of their sins who do not know you as personal savior.

Prayer Focus: For those who have not come into a personal relationship with Jesus.

Thought for the day: There is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun.

Dave Cole

March 22, 2022

Scripture reading: Psalm 100

Key verse: "For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations." Psalm 100:5

Devotion:

"Go now in the fellowship of His presence...and as you go remember...that in the goodness of God you were born...that in the providence of God you have been kept all the day long, and that in the love of God, fully revealed in Christ Jesus, you are redeemed. And may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you always."

We do not always begin with a benediction, but as I was preparing to put pen to paper, our Lord brought this one to my mind. Growing up in First Presbyterian Church in Charleston, I recall Dr. William Benfield sending us forth with these words at the close of worship service. "Sending forth" is the key here. The benediction announces the sending forth. We are called to worship and sent forth to serve. Not the end, but the beginning.

We open our worship services with songs, specifically songs of praise. The uplifting song "Majesty" is one of my favorites. Hymn number one in the Presbyterian "Hymnbook" is "Praise to the Lord the Almighty." Our response to what God has done and is continuing to do for us should always begin with praise. Be joyful, worship and sing!

- 1) God has created us.
- 2) He has invited us into relationship and fellowship with Him through Jesus Christ.
- 3) He has redeemed us by His Grace (Hebrews 7:25)
- 4) He sustains us in His faithfulness.

He provides us with everything we need to glorify Him and enjoy His presence forever.

When I began to prepare this devotional, I discovered that I had misplaced my notes. I did not recover them. Instead, I was reminded once again that Jesus provides what we need when we need it. He is always on time. May we be "on time" for Him... praising, worshipping and serving, for "now is the time of God's favor; now is the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may we in thought, word and deed lift praise to you today. May we express thanksgiving in terms of acceptable service to you. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

Prayer focus: Thankfulness to God.

Thought for the day: Praise the Lord

Jim Kautz

March 23, 2022

Scripture reading: Luke 18:9-14

Key verse: “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke 18:14b

Devotion: Humble yourself and you'll be exalted. Exalt yourself and you'll be humbled. What does this mean? What is Jesus saying? How does he want us to act?

We all have an idea of what exalting ourselves looks like, right? We know the type – the ones who think they are “Special.” They think that they are above everyone and everything else. We've seen them when we're talking to someone at the store and they come up and interrupt what we are saying to the other person to talk to them because they think what they have to say is more important. They're the ones we see in social circles who “name drop” to make them seem more important than anyone else. They work with us, putting co-workers down to make themselves look good. We've heard them brag about how much money they've donated to a charity or cause. We all know them. But no one likes them, least of all God. They get their rewards on earth by people. But in Heaven their rewards will not be as great.

But do we know the humble ones? Probably not. Because they are humble, we don't know what they do. They are the ones behind the scenes who do the work, but want none of the glory. They're the ones that anonymously provide the money for the food bank when money is tight and the need is great. They're the ones who go to the senior center and sing for the residents and doesn't let anyone know because they don't want the spotlight. Maybe we know them, maybe we don't. It doesn't matter if we know them, but God knows them and that is what matters. They probably won't get all the recognition they deserve while they are on earth. But in Heaven, all that they have done will be told and they will be exalted.

Where do you want to receive your reward?

Prayer: Father humbly we come before you admitting that often we are like the Pharisee, extolling all that we have done and forgetting that we are just like the tax collector – a sinner. Forgive us for forgetting that. As the tax collector said in his prayer, we pray God have mercy on us. Amen

Prayer focus: Remember we are all sinners in need of God's grace daily.

Thought for the day: Everyone likes to get rewards. Just look at the number of businesses with rewards programs and you can see that. But where do you want get your rewards – on Earth by men, or in Heaven by God?

Michelle Stigall

March 24, 2022

Scripture reading: Psalm 27

Key verse: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear?" Psalm 27:1

Devotion:

Pondering this Psalm, having highlighted the first verse in my Bible, I began to think of our journey during the pandemic and even before. I also reflected on my life and circumstances occurring during the pandemic, as well as pre-pandemic...

On March 2, 2017, Jerry had a catheterization which revealed he had 90% blockage on one side of the heart and 100% on the other side. The cardiologist told me he might pass that night, in a week, a year or ten years. He is still alive as I write this showing the body does marvelous miracles by re-routing blood flow. We have discussed the fact we are thankful our arrangements were made and paid for while we were both in good health. We felt led in that direction. Clinging to our faith in Jesus Christ and God, we knew, as David knew, "The Lord is my light and salvation."

Each day is a blessing from God, and we give him the praise and glory for all things. Before the pandemic, Jerry could only manage a trip to the doctor. He is now on oxygen 24-7. So, with the arrival of the pandemic, it was not/is not difficult for Jerry to stay home. I have never once heard him complain about anything. He has commented he misses Sunday School Class and Church Service. He does not have the strength to do either one. He did try in the beginning but found he needed to go home. I found/find myself masking and going to the store when supplies were/are need. In the beginning I only ventured out when necessary.

The pandemic was not a deterrent to my spiritual growth because there was Bible Study on Zoom. The group(s) had questions to dig deep into and share thoughts at each session. The lesson guides made me dig deep into my faith (just like I am doing now). Worship services, during the Pandemic, were recorded and were available for viewing on Sunday afternoon. We did the Advent Wreath lighting during the Advent Season. They were taped on Friday, to be shared in the service on Sunday. So, although we were unable to be in the Church Building (a few attended practicing protocol spacing). I must admit I missed corporate worship with my brothers and sisters in Christ during that period. We came back into the church as a congregation Easter Sunday 2020. Praise His Holy Name!

During late summer, my eldest son had a motorcycle wreck and had to be life-flighted to Greenville, SC. He was in a coma for days and when I got the news Georgeanne was with me and immediately prayed with me. Prayer always gives us hope and peace during a crisis as well as in our daily walks with Christ. I had to trust in the God of light and salvation. I am happy to say as I write this he is doing well. I reminded him God spared him one more time. He realizes that God is his light and salvation. He told me

he prays always. All my sons were raised at Morris Memorial, and all give God the glory and credit for their successes.

The Lord IS my light and salvation. He walks behind me; He walks beside me, and He walks in front of me. When I falter, if He needs, He will pick me up and carry me. Being human, I fail in my daily walk. What comfort it is to know that God loves this sinner enough that he came down as baby Jesus, grew in wisdom and stature and in favor of God and man. He came to teach me (all of us) how to live a righteous and holy life. He died on the cross at Calvary for the sins of ALL humankind. He rose from the dead, walked, and talked with others before his ascension into his Father's heavenly kingdom. I must listen!!!!

"Show me your way Lord and lead me on a level path. Hear me when I call your name."
(Psalm 27:11)

Thank you for being my Heavenly Father. Thank you for giving my earthly family the desire to lead me into your word. Isaiah says in 41:10, "Fear not, I am with you." I raise my voice in praise and worship!

Are you afraid of something? Turn it over to God. We will all face hardships, difficult news, and obstacles in this life journey on earth. We must keep striving, praying, and going deeper in trying to understand God's word in our daily lives.

Thought for the day: Let Go and let God!

Prayer: Abba Father, please help us to release our worries to you who is our light, strength, and salvation. Please help us to get ourselves out of the way to be vessels you can use for your kingdom. Help us! In Christ's name I pray. AMEN.

Carolyn Ballard

March 25, 2022

Scripture reading: Psalm 32

Key verse: Psalm 32:11 - Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing all you who are upright in heart.

Devotion:

In December of 2020 one of our family members was hospitalized with Covid. We prayed for healing, for the treatment to be successful, for the doctors and for the researchers to develop a cure. At this time, with the progression of Covid, none of these things happened. We lost our sister, Faith, on January 1, 2021. Why were our prayers not answered?

The psalmist tells us that God hears our prayers, our confessions and our wants. God loves us in spite of the things in our lives. When our prayers are not answered like we hope they would be, we should not be discouraged or feel that God has turned his back on us. We should strive to remain steadfast in our relationship with God. He is there for us through all difficulties and will help us to face them as one of his blessed children.

God does not hold our shortcomings against us when we pray. He tells us to confess our failings and he will forgive them, and our sins will be covered. God wants us to love him, praise him and trust him.

Prayer: Heavenly Father when we humbly come to you and ask that your hand of mercy be placed upon us and for those whom we pray for, please grant us an understanding of your answer, Amen

Prayer focus: Accepting how God answers our prayers.

Thought for the day: Go to God first.

Michael and Pat Duffie

March 26, 2022

Scripture reading: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Key verse: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." 2 Corinthians 5: 20

Devotion:

Being an ambassador is a pretty big deal. In today's world, the primary function of an ambassador is to represent their home country in another country. As such, you are entitled to many special privileges, one of which is being addressed as, "Your Excellency." Being an ambassador for Jesus Christ is an even bigger deal. It could be said that to be the representative on earth of our Savior is the highest honor a person could have bestowed upon them.

And this is where the phrase "Your Excellency" comes into play. To not give a complete effort when representing God and Jesus Christ would be a disservice to God, to Jesus Christ and to ourselves.

After my first semester of university studies, I felt that I was not performing as well academically as I should have been able to. I was not in danger of having to leave school or of losing the scholarship assistance I had been granted, but my final grades that term were not what I had been accustomed to receiving in high school. During the holiday break, I sought out one of my teachers from high school to discuss the situation. He and I had a long discussion about everything that had transpired during that semester. He finally asked me, "If you were standing at the Pearly Gates and Jesus Christ asked you if you gave your best effort this semester, would you be able to tell Him?" The suddenness with which he asked the question left me unable to move or speak for a few seconds. Before I could say anything, he asked, "As long as we've known each other, can you look me in the eye and tell me you put forth your best effort?"

After I was able to collect myself, I did look him in the eye and say that I had given my best effort. My former teacher (who is still a trusted friend) leaned back in his chair and said, "Then you need to put this semester behind you and focus your energies going forward on giving your best effort at all times." Later in the conversation, he told me of what Paul had written in his first letter to the Corinthians, and that was when running in a race, run in such a way that you will win the prize, because only one of the runners will receive the prize. As Christians, we should always strive to achieve excellence when representing the kingdom of God.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the strength and ability to always put forth my best effort in all that I do, and that my efforts in representing your kingdom here on earth will be pleasing to you. Amen.

Prayer focus: Everyone who strives to have a more solid relationship with Jesus Christ.

Thought for the day: If perfection is the goal, excellence will be accepted.

Robert Stigall

March 27, 2022

Scripture reading: Luke 15: 3-7, 11b-32.

Key verse: "So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion." Luke 15:20

Devotional:

Clouds will raise up, storms will race in, but you will be safe in my arms.

Rains will pour down, waves will crash all around, but you will be safe in my arms.

These are lyrics from the contemporary Christian song, "In My Arms," by Plumb. I encourage you to give it a listen. You will not regret it. Most believe it's a song about a mother and child. There are other possibilities.

It could be about a shepherd watching over his flock of a hundred sheep. When he realizes one of them is missing, he leaves the rest to find the one. This lamb was lost and in danger of never getting back to his flock. But the shepherd was coming, perhaps even running, to find him. Soon the lamb was found and was once again safe in the shepherd's arms.

Or it could be the story of a father who watches and waits for his son to return home. The son who demanded his inheritance so he could see the world. Only to find himself broke and in a place of isolation. This prodigal son squandered all his money and ate with the pigs. He was filled with despair. He was willing to return to his father and work as a hired family servant. But the father saw his son coming down the road towards home. The father ran to his son and hugged him and celebrated his return. Once again, the son was safe in his father's arms.

The pandemic has taken us on a never-ending emotional roller-coaster ride of separation, desolation, and desperation. Missing birthdays, graduations, anniversaries, church, and even funerals. But like the lost lamb and the prodigal son, there is hope. God is always with us. As Paul proclaims in Romans, "nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Nothing. Not even a pandemic. Amen.

Prayer: Father keep us all safe in your arms during this pandemic. May the number of deaths from Covid-19 go down to zero. May we go the extra mile to love one another as you love us.

Prayer focus: Strength for the health care professionals risking their lives on the front lines to help others.

Thought for the day: Call your mother. No, really, call her. Thank her for all the times she held you and kept you safe in her arms.

Rick Johnson

March 28, 2022

Scripture reading: Psalm 51: 1-12

Key verse: "Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place." Psalm 51: 6 (NIV)

Devotion:

I call Psalm 51 the Psalm of repentance. You probably know that it is usually part of the Ash Wednesday liturgy. What a way to worship during this penitential season! King David, the author, role models the way of showing God sincere regret and how to promise God that we will turn away from all evil practices and deeds in this Psalm.

It is not a secret that I am an advocate of vaccines due to my science and medical care background. However, because I am so outspoken as an advocate, I did offend a good friend of mine who is also an advocate. I decided to tell her that since many refuse to get the vaccine that I felt they should be denied an ICU bed if they got Covid. She got very quiet and then told me not to say that. You see, she then said her 31 year old son had refused to take the Covid 19 vaccine.

Of course, I felt bad! I apologized and told her I hoped her son would not get Covid. In fact, I wished I had never said what I felt. Yes, I had a little talk with God using this Psalm as the model for my prayer. As I read verse 6, I begin to feel better because I did feel deep remorse and I know that God always knows my heart and my intentions. It was there that hope was infused within me and that not only would I be forgiven for offending her, but that I would quickly forgive myself.

This is another reason that I enjoy reading and praying with the Psalms. There is not one new human emotion that is not expressed in these Hebrew poems. They even modeled the way for Jesus when he was on the cross since he used them as his prayer book. Peace be with you.

Prayer: Lord, please give me insight into the Psalms.

Prayer focus: Psalm 51

Thought for the day: "For behold, you look for truth deep within me, and will make me understand wisdom secretly." Psalm 51: 7 Book of Common Prayer

Leahgretta "Gretta" Hairston

March 29, 2022

Scripture reading: Luke 13: 31 – 35

Key verses: "Go tell that fox (i. e., King Herod), 'I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and the third day I will reach my goal. In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside of Jerusalem!'"

Luke 13: 32-33, NIV

Devotion: "Jesus' Sorrow for Jerusalem" (title from the NIV)

Jerusalem—a beautiful Israeli city where three religions were birthed. Jerusalem—a sacred city where God led His chosen people. Jerusalem—a city where ancient prophets and our Savior Jesus were killed. Jerusalem—the city that saw His resurrection and ascension into Heaven. Jerusalem—a city where the Temple was destroyed, and Jews deported until its rebuilding around AD 70.

Jerusalem—an analogy for Christians today.

Jesus was subtly telling the people that He planned to continue the mission He was given, whether today or tomorrow, but on the third day, it would be completed. His "today and tomorrow" were not 24-hour periods like we know; it was the period of time for HIS MINISTRY on Earth. The third day was the day he was crucified, dead and buried, and it would signify the end of the His Ministry and His turning over the ministry to the Lord's followers. He even told where he would die, in the ancient city where others died.

We are now Jerusalem—Christians today who are preparing ourselves to experience Jesus' cross. We need to be asking ourselves, especially during a global pandemic where the culture is separating us into isolation and away from other Christians, if our lives are establishing God's kingdom in our world? Now, especially, are we too frightened to complete our mission because of contracting a variant of the COVID-19 virus? What is Jesus' message to us, collectively as Christians and as individuals, now in a confusing world? More importantly as we think about it, how have we resisted it?

Just as Jesus foretold of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the exile of the Jewish people, it is a desolation. Our current desolation is from being a community of Christians working together to being a Christian working in isolation or with a closely knit group of kinfolks. Yet our mission is constant: to share the Gospel and to bring others to the grace and salvation that God offers everyone.

How do we say, "Here I am, Lord. Use me to bring Your ministry to others."

Prayer: Lead me, Lord, where I should be. I want to be diligent, but I also want to be safe from the ravages of COVID. But I still am Your servant and must continue the ministry You appointed me to perform. How do I do this? In Your name, I pray, Amen.

Prayer focus: Keeping with your ministry during desolate days and trying times.

Thought for the day: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Luke 13: 35b

Katy Smith

March 30, 2022

Scripture reading: Psalm 18: 32-34

Key verse: "It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect."

Psalm 18:32

Devotion:

GOD promises to give us strength to meet challenges, but he does not promise to eliminate them. If he gave us no rough roads to walk, no mountains to climb, and no battles to fight, we would not grow. He does not leave us alone with our challenges, however instead he stands beside us, teaches us and strengthens us to face them.

Four years ago, our grandson began having seizures at age 13. The seizures were not the violent ones, but he would be confused for a short time and not know what happened. Tests revealed he has a malformation in his brain, it was there at birth. We were told by a neurologist that any attempt to remove it would leave him with many disabilities.

Our family reached out to friends, church groups, ministers, bible study groups and any Christian friends who would pray for our grandson.

A member of our daughter's prayer group led her to a brain surgeon in Memphis, Tennessee. He felt that surgery could remove a small section of the brain that was causing the seizures with no after effect. He felt it would eliminate or at least lessen the seizures. After many prayers and lots of faith we all believed the Lord was in control of our grandson's future. Although the surgery gave him a seizure-free life for four months, he did begin having them again but not nearly as often and we know positively God is in control. There are more options for his future where before there were none. We praise God for what we have received and are trying to be patient for our grandson's future.

Our human nature wants it done now but we have had to totally give it to God and in his time, not ours. We know our grandson will be healed

Prayer: Dear God, please show us your grace and healing power.

Prayer focus: GOD IS ALWAYS WITH US

Thought for the day: Each of us will go through struggles but God is with us every step.

Mary and Jerry Townson

March 31, 2022

Scripture reading: 1 Corinthians 10: 1-13

Key verses: "And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." 1 Corinthians 10: 13-14 (NIV)

Devotion: WARNING!!!

What is your biggest sin? I do not want to know. How do you worship? Not a question I would ask because I don't want to be in your business. Are you doing right by the person you are committed to? What hypocrisy have "You" seen that makes you just want to shake your head? These are the kind of questions you might have heard Paul ask in Corinth. He told the people of the transgressions of their forefathers and the consequences of their actions. These were God's people, and we are still God's people and they also were what we call good Christians. Didn't we just see all of this happen in our lives recently? We all have our sins. Some worst than others. Do you remember the sex scandals of famous people in the past two years? Do you remember when a certain group of us/we good Christians were worshiping a golden idol? How egregious. Do you see the hypocrisy of a group of people who just can not love? A warning was given to the people to place the blood of the lamb over their door to protect the first born...you know the story of the first born. But do you know the story of those that took the warning?

There is something that is killing us today and a warning has been given. We have been told to protect ourselves by wearing a mask and to take the vaccine to avoid or minimize the risk of death. We see the results of those that abide by the warnings and those that don't.

Through all this mass calamity, some of us good Christians cannot see how to show more love because there cannot be more love if there is no justice, and we are tempted to not use good judgement. But the wonderful Epiphany or the sharing of the light is that God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted more than what you can bear and he will provide a way out so that you can stand.

Prayer: Lord have mercy on us.

Prayer focus: Beware of the warnings.

Thought for the day: Listen

Jerome C. Hairston

April 1, 2022

Scripture reading: Isaiah 43:16-21

Key verse: "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland." Isaiah 43:19

Devotion:

During the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic nearly two years ago, while Chris and I were with you at Morris Memorial United Methodist Church, our Morris Enrichment Center was shut down and our church building was closed. I had the opportunity to interact with many of you through telephone conversations, email, and social media. The most common concerns revolved around our collective cabin fever, and when we would get back to the way things *used to be*. One of our leadership team told me privately that he did not think this would last more than two or three weeks, and then we would be back to normal.

Whether we want to admit it or ignore it, the symptoms many of you displayed were somewhat akin to the grieving process. While no one was prepared for what we would encounter for the next two years, nothing could have groomed me for pastoring a church congregation through the shark-infested waters of the first six to eight months of the pandemic. Individually and collectively we all experimented with sleeping more, binge-watching outdated television series, and some creative oddly funny humor. Then boredom set in. If the pandemic life was not fun in the early days, it certainly was not fun six to eight months in. Some of you discovered that you and your mate were not made for each other. Some of you experienced clinical depression, excessive weight gain, and the crazy notion that if you opened the refrigerator door and looked inside every fifteen minutes, somehow something in there might have changed. Mold does *not* grow that quickly!

I offered pastoral encouragement in small doses. Stick to a routine. Keep a schedule, even if you do not venture out. Get into God's Word. Isaiah 43 proclaims the greatness of God, who has been faithful to humanity for thousands of years. While we are not to dwell on the past, and we will never get back to the way things *used to be*, we must remember God's greatness in our midst, God's faithfulness to us in all situations, and that God is doing a new thing here in the twenty-first century. Yes, *here!* There is no question that God is doing a new thing. God is making a new way. God is giving us untold opportunities to recognize his presence among us. What are you allowing God to accomplish through you in the lives of everyone around you?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to know that you have our best interest in mind, and that you are always with us, creating and showing us the way. Help us to look for your presence among us. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

Prayer focus: How has God changed your life for the better during COVID-19?

Thought for the day: How might I positively impact someone's life today?

Pastor Bob Kirby

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April 2, 2022

Scripture reading: John 4:1-42

Key verses: “Then leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ‘Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?’ They came out of the town and made their way toward him.” John 4:28-30

Devotion: Have you watched the series, “The Chosen”? If you haven’t, I highly suggest the show. It is a series based on the life of Christ. The producers take some artistic liberties to add some back stories to characters in the Bible, but the series is very focused on the true message of the Gospel. One of my favorite episodes is from this chapter, chapter 4 in the book of John. This is the story of the Samaritan Woman.

The scripture tells us that Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down by the well. The disciples went on to the town to get food. It seems to me, that Jesus was aware that He was about to have this interaction with the Samaritan woman. What I love about this scripture is how she reacts and responds when she realizes who He is. She forgets all about her water jar and why she was there. She immediately went back to the town and started sharing the news!

The episode from “The Chosen” shows us this story in a very realistic way. It shows us more of the emotion that was probably involved. The character of the Samaritan Woman was just beaming, excited, and couldn’t wait to tell everyone she encountered. This excitement, energy, and urgency is so inspiring. So often, the message of the Gospel becomes too familiar and too common for Christians. We need to be more like this woman. We need to keep a renewed excitement and urgency to share the Gospel with those we encounter. We need to keep an eternal perspective as we face each day, so that we don’t lose sight of what is truly important.

Let the Samaritan Woman inspire us to beam with excitement. Let her inspire us to run to tell others. Let her inspire us to live like we are saved. The Gospel of Christ is the most spectacular love story of ALL time! We must share it!

Prayer: Father God, we praise your name. We praise you for you are worthy. We are grateful for your love and mercy. We pray that you give us courage to share the Gospel boldly. We pray for a renewed excitement to reach others for You and to feel a sense of urgency. We pray for opportunities to share your love with others in real, tangible ways. In the precious name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

Prayer focus: Enthusiasm and urgency

Thought for the day: Let us have a renewed excitement to share the Gospel!

Candice Anderson

April 3, 2022

Scripture reading: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Key verses: "Give thanks... his love is forever!" Psalm 118: 1 and 29

Devotion:

Faith trusts that we have a relationship with God; because God is our refuge, no evil can befall us. God can be trusted to be with us, He takes our fears, He is our strength, security, and best friend. God lets out His mercies to us for the rent of our praise and is content that we may have the benefit of them so He may have the glory. What a great love He has for us!

While in Brazil I had an experience with my daughter that caused me to stop and praise God. We were cleaning up weeds from our area and I looked over at her to see how she was doing, and she had picked up a nest of coral snakes which are very deadly. I spoke to her to throw her weeds on the fire we had built and as she did, we watched as they were destroyed.

Many times, through the years I have experienced God's love in my life. I immediately began to praise and thank God for His protection. I have learned to stop every day and be thankful for my life and what God has given to me. God's protection causes me to remember His love endures forever!

Prayer: Father we bow in your presence because you are worthy to be praised. Thank you for your love, comfort, and assurance all is okay. In Jesus' name we pray!

Prayer Focus: Beginning each day with praise and thanksgiving

Thought for the Day: Remember God's love endures forever!

Georgeanne Leake

April 4, 2022

Scripture reading: Revelation 4: 1-11

Key verse: "Day and night, they never stop saying, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty...'" Revelation 4: 8b

Devotion: (editor's note) As I was assigning scripture readings for this year's devotion book, it occurred to me that several former pastors were writing devotions this year. I decided to let our former retired assistant pastor Cecil McMillion contribute this one.

In our prayer chapel, there is a plaque in honor of Cecil's service to us. He died unexpectedly on July 10, 1995. He ate lunch, went to take a nap, and woke up in Heaven. When I heard he had died, I remembered he had given an incredible pastoral prayer the previous day, in which he described a vision of Heaven. I obtained a tape of that service and wrote down his prayer, which is on the plaque in the prayer chapel. When he felt he had made a particularly good point in a sermon, Cecil would pause, look up, and say, "If that doesn't light your fire, your wood's wet." Hopefully this prayer, his last prayer offered publicly in our church, will light your fire today.

Prayer: As we kneel at your holy altar, oh Lord God, we are like the prophet of old, come crying, "Holy, holy, holy." A God that is high and lifted up, and yet so deep within us all that we cannot fully comprehend you. We come rejoicing in the affirmation of faith that Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Heaven and earth are praising you, oh Lord. So enable us as a part of the communion of saints, that we rejoice in your nearness as well as your greatness. That we rejoice in your amazing grace that brings about miracles in life and in our own hearts.

We thank you, oh Lord, this morning for your church universal that stands as a symbol of your mighty invasion of this troubled world. May this be a day in the proclamation of the good news of the Gospel: those who walk in darkness and struggle through the terrible sins of life, hear and respond and find Jesus and the redeeming Lord.

We pray for those for whom prayer has been requested. May it be a day when they feel your mighty presence.

We pray for those, oh Lord, of our parish and congregation who tread, as it were, in the borders of the eternal world. May this be a day when they will be able to sing, as they catch a glimpse of the twinkling lights of the celestial city, that deliverance will come. Then palms of victory and gowns of glory we shall wear.

Let your great spirit pervade this service. Anoint your servant with power and wisdom and deliverance, that when this hour is over, all of us will be keenly aware that we have been to the foot of the cross and found the gate of Heaven. In Jesus' great name we pray, Amen.

Pastor Cecil McMillion

April 5, 2022

Scripture reading: Psalm 139:13-18

Key verses: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." Psalm 139: 13-14

Devotion:

I had the awesome opportunity to share the message at church on January 23rd for a youth-led service. I would like to summarize my message today for this devotion. The title was, "What is Your Worth?"

How do we determine the worth or value of a painting? Most of the time, we take two questions into account when determining the value of a piece of art: "Who created it?" and "How much is someone willing to pay for it?"

The cool thing about this analogy, is that we can apply these same two questions to us as humans. Let's start with question number one, "Who created you?" When referring back to our scripture today...God knit us in our mother's womb...we are fearfully and wonderfully made. So, you can see, the Father God Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth, created you and me. Think about that....that's amazing!

But He didn't stop there. What is question number two? "How much is someone willing to pay for you?" When we look at Romans 5:8, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Jesus, the Lord's son, paid for ALL our sins with His life! Now, think about that. Think about how much value God wants you to know you have.

His love, how far He would and will go for you, is how we know our worth. I hope you know today and forever that God values you, and longs for a personal relationship with you. Let's start living like it today and forever!

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, I thank you for everyone reading this devotion. I praise you for always valuing us and always being with us. Please let the message you have given us break through and flow right into our hearts. Help us to live a life worthy of the calling to which we are called. Thank you for everything that you are. Please help all of those in need and all those who need to hear about your love. Please forgive our sins. Thank you, God. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Prayer focus: Know your value and live a life worthy of your calling.

Thought for the day: We are made in the image of God, and we are loved!

Kendall Anderson

April 6, 2022

Scripture reading: John 15:1-17

Key verse: John 15:5. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing".

Devotion: My family loves to camp. Several times a year we pack up and head for a campground. One of our favorite camping activities is sitting around the campfire with friends. While sitting by the fire, I frequently grab a "fire poking" stick and, well, poke the fire with it. I notice that the longer the end of the stick is in the fire, the more it flames and glows a bright orange. As I remove the stick from the fire, the flame slowly goes away, and the bright orange glow slowly fades until it is gone. For the stick to continue to glow, it must remain in the source of the light and heat, the fire. Each time I go camping and play with the fire, it reminds me of my walk with God. Just as the stick must remain in or near the fire to continue to glow and burn, I must remain in and near God for my faith to remain on fire. Also, just as the stick loses its flame when it is removed from the fire, the flame of my faith begins to diminish if I don't remain connected to the source of my faith.

It is absolutely vital to my faith, my relationship with the Lord, and the production of fruit in my life, to remain connected to the Lord. Just as the scripture states in John 15:5, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."* I want to display the Fruit of the Spirit in my life with love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. I can try to live this way, but I cannot succeed on my own. As the scripture states, the only way the fruit of the spirit can be produced in my life, is if I stay connected to the vine. I cannot just try harder. I am to remain in the vine, near my source, with the Lord, and then He produces the fruit in me. This is so evident in my life. My faith feels smaller and "less bright" if I am not remaining connected to the vine with regular scripture reading, prayer, guarding what I put in my mind, etc... Just like the stick glows and shines bright as long as it remains in the fire, my life glows and shines with the Fruit of the Spirit as long as I remain connected to the vine, the Lord.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your love. Thank you that you provide for me, in me, and through me. Help me to remain in you. Please continue to grow love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in my life. Forgive me when I fail. All this I ask for your glory. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

Thought for the day: I look at the fruit of the spirit and think, I want those qualities in my life. These are the qualities and characteristics of Jesus. How amazing to know that I don't have to just try to be better and produce the fruit on my own. In fact, I cannot. I only have to remain in Him and He will produce the fruit of the spirit in my life.

Ryan Anderson

April 7, 2022

Scripture reading: Luke 6: 12-16

Key verse: "And when it was day, He called unto Him His disciples: and of them He chose twelve, whom He also named apostles." Luke 6:13

Devotion:

In our Julia Kendall Sunday School Class, we are now studying the book and video series In The Dust Of The Rabbi about Jesus calling, living with, teaching and sending out those we know today as the twelve disciples. Eight of the twelve were simple, uneducated fishermen from very small, rural, little-known villages in about a four by six mile area north of the Sea of Galilee. None had any formal religious training, sophisticated cultural exposure, or personal power. Yet these were the men Jesus chose to take His message to the sophisticated culture and magnificent cities of the Roman world.

Many other times God chose seemingly weak, less educated, hesitant, undeserving or unworthy people to fulfill His purposes: Sarah, an old, barren woman; Joseph, a hated brother and slave; Moses, a wanted criminal with a speech impediment; Rahab, a prostitute; Ruth, a non-Hebrew pagan; David, an adulterer and murderer; and Mary, an unmarried virgin from a tiny, dusty little-known village. God used a talking donkey to deliver His message to his servant Balaam; handwriting on the wall from fingers of a man's hand warning a king of his imminent destruction; pillars of smoke by day and fire by night to lead the freed Hebrews fleeing Egypt; and the events go on and on!

In the many years since Father's Day Sunday, 1974, when I accepted Christ as my Savior, I have learned more and more the ways of God are not the ways of man. God develops intimate, loving, growing relationships with those He calls and empowers them to fulfill His will. God doesn't see just who people are right now (forgotten, poor in spirit, weak, needy) but who they can also become through His power. Jesus chose disciples who were willing to learn, be patient, determined, and ultimately willing to die to fulfill His mission. Jesus didn't pick disciples because they were extraordinary but because He was extraordinary. He chose some of the humblest of his people so we would know how His power works. God doesn't look at the height, success, education, appearance, the things man looks at. He looks at the heart and whether a man is willing. Throughout the Bible and the history of the church we find this great truth illustrated again and again – our God is an extraordinary God who uses ordinary people, creatures, and events to accomplish His work in our world.

Thought for the day: 1 Corinthians 1:25-29

Barney Frazier

April 8, 2022

Scripture reading: Psalm 56: 8-13.

Key verse: "You number my wanderings; Put my tears into Your bottle; Are they not in Your book?" Psalm 56: 8 NKJV

Devotion:

These encouraging verses in this Psalm reflect a period when King David had fallen on hard times. He was hiding from his enemies and wrote about his pain, suffering and fear. He knew that God was with him through every adversity and held his hand during all the tears that he shed.

Why do we cry? We have basal tears that are produced 24/7 which function to lubricate the eye and keep it free from dust and infection. Then we have emotional tears which have a different chemical make-up to basal tears. They contain more hormones and a natural opioids type painkiller called leucine enkephalin. It is probable that at times of emotional stress, crying reflects the body's attempts to make us feel better. As the great "therapist/psychologist" of his day, William Shakespeare wrote in Henry VI, "to weep is to make less the depth of grief."

Looking back over the past 2 years, since we have been dealing with COVID, I am reminded of periods in my life when the tears were especially abundant. In September 2020, during the last week of my mother's life, I was especially blessed to be with her when so many people were having to die alone. Through the many tears that my family and I shed, I continued to feel God's presence. It was as if He had his hand on my shoulder and was whispering, "It's all right, she is coming home." Then, a week after she passed, I had COVID and was extremely sick. Through prayers and the excellent care of Lesa, I was able to stay out of the hospital and get back to work in 2 weeks.

Then came 2021 and the continued COVID fatigue and the challenges of going to the hospital every day and caring for people struggling with addiction. I have witnessed so many tears as people share with me the pain in their lives. So many have suffered from ACE's (adverse childhood events—emotional, sexual and physical abuse) and are now suffering from guilt, shame, regret and hopelessness. So many of them are suffering from PTSD from experiences they had in the military or while they were incarcerated. Many have been victims of rape or sex trafficking. Many feel they are broken beyond repair. I have witnessed many heartaches; but I have also witnessed many, MANY miracles. I feel so blessed to be used as an instrument of healing in this world. To see a person's tears of desperation, anger, fear and despair turn into feelings of hope and gratitude resulting in smiles and laughter—this is one of

my greatest joys.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to remember the hope we have in You, even when our situation seems hopeless. We thank you for our tears, which can move us closer to Your loving arms and caring embrace.

Prayer focus: God is with us through all of the pain in our lives

Thought for the day: The poet Elle Wheeler Wilcox wrote, "Laugh and the world laughs with you, weep and you weep alone." This aphorism is only true for the people who don't have God in their lives. We, as Christian believers, are NEVER alone!

Ed Eskew

April 9, 2022

Scripture Reading: Matthew 25:31-40

Key Verse: "Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, 'Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed [thee]? or thirsty, and gave [thee] drink?'" Matthew 25:37 (King James Version)

Devotion:

People say as you age, your mind is not as sharp as it used to be. Perhaps you can vouch for that! I certainly can! As we go through life, we will encounter various scenarios, places, people, opportunities and choices. Sometimes the greatest memories are not necessarily ones we remember well. Sometimes things we should remember, we don't because there was no memory, because there was no action because, there was no desire. Let's look at two scenarios based on an answer to a statement the Lord made, by which the disciples said, "Lord, when have we seen thee...?"

First, we find the statement in the positive outlook of forgetting actions done for Christ. We may not have known at the time the good we are/were doing. Where it is not good at all to be haughty or selfishly proud of one's works for Christ, we should realize, if for no other reason than motivation, that we should be actively engaged in the work of the ministry and we should be aware of what we are doing as well as who we are serving. The disciples in the passage here did not realize that when they fed the poor or clothed the naked, it was the same as had they seen the Lord hungry or naked, so there is something to be said for a realization. Perhaps you have heard it said that when we get to Heaven, we will be rewarded for things we didn't think was all that important, or, we have done so much, we didn't remember. Either way, the rewards that are given are to a great degree of what we did in our human lifespan. I do believe God will reward us greater than we can imagine for the service we do. In other words, the reward will greatly outweigh the work we did. So let us ask ourselves, are we doing enough for Christ that we lost count of our service to Him? The answer would most likely be that we are not.

Second, now we find ourselves genuinely asking because we really didn't notice a need. Unfortunately, this is the category where a lot of believers fall. The farther we progress towards the end of the age, I believe the softer the impact of Christ's mission through us will become. We are far too distracted with pleasuring ourselves with possessions, travel, food, basically all the things we need to be doing for others. In a culture of too much and throw-away conveniences, we neglect what is more important, serving others. I don't think we instinctively do this on intent, and maybe that is the worst of it all. It is one thing to willfully deny someone of something, but it is a far greater shame to be willfully ambivalent to others not caring or seeing beyond

ourselves. Many a church leader has challenged the flock to action. All members nod their heads in agreement that the action needs done, but they know inside they have no intention of doing what they Amen over. So let us be pricked in the heart that we may not be seeing the need in front of us because we cannot see beyond us.

So where do go from here? First, let us take a time that we do a self-introspection. Review what you have done for others in the last few months. Second, find out what was best accomplished and what needed improvement. Lastly, if there is no genuine pattern of service, repent and ask the Lord to put you on the path carved by His heart. Jesus said in verse 40 that He came not to be served but to serve. With this as our model, we be should be engaged in service to others. If we can put behind our prejudices or pride, then we find it easier to be His servants. A good place to start is to find that person in your church who no one pays attention to. Ask God for wisdom how to proceed serving them and finding others to serve. Being His disciple is far more than believing on Him for salvation. Calvary is just the starting point, serving is the long game. Do it well so there is no question as you stand before the Throne, "Lord when did we see thee...?"

Prayer: Open my eyes to what You would have me do Lord and the body of Christ you would have me serve. Amen.

Thought for the day: Where would you and I be if Christ came to be ministered unto?

Jon Browning

April 10, 2022

Palm Sunday

Scripture reading: Luke 19: 28-40

Key verse(s): "The Lord has need of it." Luke 19: 34

Devotion:

The old candy bar commercial ("Sometimes I feel like a nut, sometimes I don't") rings in my mind as I read this scripture. Of course it morphs to, "Sometimes I feel like a donkey, sometimes I don't." The owner of the Palm Sunday donkey upon which Jesus would ride into Jerusalem asked the disciples, "Why are you untying the [my] colt?" (v.33) To which the disciples replied, "The Lord has need of it." (v.34) Wait a minute – no one asked the donkey! It was assumed the donkey would do what was demanded, and it did. Yet, it is humored that God put an extra portion of stubbornness in donkeys, and they, at times, refuse the demands of their owners and need extra prodding and bribery to comply. Well, "Sometimes I feel like a donkey..." and I (and maybe you) act like the stubborn donkey and not like the obedient donkey. For many reasons (reasonable to us) we deny, postpone, or ignore God's requests for our assistance. We might ask, "Who needs this? Certainly not me." We might think, "Put THAT load on me?" like that donkey might have thought. The only response we might hear to our hesitations – "The Lord has need of it." Truly, do we need any further explanations?

We don't hear anything about the donkey after that day's honorable labor. Nor should we expect much after doing what the Lord requests. The "romantic" in me wants to believe the donkey recognized the Lord Jesus and received a blessing by him at the end of the ride – but, that is not Scriptural. The theologian in me believes in an eternal blessing for those obedient to the Lord's requests – and that is Scriptural!

Prayer: Oh, Precious Lord, please forgive me for my struggles to answer your calls and trust your leading. Help me celebrate that you have need of me. Amen.

Prayer focus: Staying faithful to the Holy Savior

Thought for the day: "Sometimes I feel like following Jesus..."

Bruce Reed

April 11, 2022

Scripture reading: John 12:1-11

Key verse: "Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." John 12:3

Devotion:

Mary knew Jesus for who He was and humbled herself before Him, honored Him and gave Him the best she had to offer. The smell of the perfume she poured on his feet spread through the room like the Gospel spreads though those who recognize Jesus and believe that Jesus is the Son of God and Our Savior. I know that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died for my sins and that He rose again.

These questions are a daily challenge to me.

Do I reflect His presence as my Savior?

Do I, like Mary, humble myself before Him?

Do I offer to Him the best I have?

Does my witness offer the joy of our salvation to others like the perfume she poured on his feet that spread through the room?

These are hard questions to answer and a goal to which I strive. Jesus is the Son of God and there are times and places in my life and our lives where only He can reach, touch, heal and help. I believe that and I center my life on Him. Therefore, the big question is, do I live in a way that demonstrates His love, His forgiveness, His faithfulness, His mercy and His grace?

Prayer: Dear Lord, Your love spreads through me like a sweet fragrance of peace and hope. May my walk with you offer that sweetness to others.

Prayer focus: How can I give my best to God?

Thought for the day: Who is Jesus to you?

Ann Kautz

April 12, 2022

Scripture reading: John 12: 20-36

Key verses: “Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” John 12: 24-25

Devotion:

If the strongest Christians in your life are anything like the ones in my life, you may be familiar with the unconcealable joy that shines through them and is very noticeable by the people they interact with. But it would probably be strange to hear any of them proclaim with a beaming smile on their face, “I hate my life!” In our culture and society today, these words and this attitude have a very negative and disturbing connotation, but it is recorded more than once in scripture where Jesus gives this message to his followers. What I believe Jesus is trying to teach us is that we should not have anything in this world that we love so much that we are not willing to sacrifice it, give it up, leave it behind, or place it at a lower priority than our pursuit of following Jesus and the eternal life that He gives us.

When I think about this lesson in the context of the past two years, I think about some of my favorite activities and familiarities that have been lost or changed as we try to keep everyone safe and healthy. Although we have been able to restore a bit of normalcy, I’m sure we can all still easily start to make a list of things we deeply miss and are hoping to be able to do again soon. But as I read the scripture for today, I can’t help but wonder if some of these things that I’m missing so much are things that God is trying to teach me to love a little less and rethink my priorities. Just like the kernel of wheat that Jesus mentions to his followers, maybe some of these favorite things in our lives need to “die” so God can lead us towards the many seeds he has in store for us. I hope I can follow Jesus’ example, and even though I may be troubled, I can trust in God and say “Father, glorify your name!”

Prayer: Almighty God, we know that you want what is best for us. When we are troubled over things we feel we have lost, help us remember that you may be making room and leading us into something even greater with even more blessings. Above all else, help us seek out what leads us to a closer relationship with you. Amen.

Prayer focus: Making God the top priority

Thought for the day: What have you gained in the last two years?

Matt Skiles

April 13, 2022

Scripture reading: John 13: 21-32

Key verses: "When Jesus had thus spoken, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, 'Truly, truly I say to you, one of you will betray me.'...Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give this morsel.' He gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, 'What you are going to do, do quickly.'" John 13: 21, 26-27

Devotion:

The supper in the upper room was one of love and betrayal. These two always have the possibility to co-exist side by side. To deny that we can and do betray Jesus in some way denies that we are loved by Jesus. Authentic love always risks betrayal.

Judas was loved by Jesus even though Jesus knew that he would be his betrayer. Judas was placed to the left of Jesus at the table, a place of honor. The giving of the dipped bread (sop) designated a special honor. It marked a divine love which ever seeks to overcome evil with good. Jesus knew Judas was against him, yet his love and goodness toward Judas seemed to become greater instead of lesser. He gave him every chance to repent. In accepting the sop, Judas shows himself impervious to the love of Christ. His heart had been hardened against Christ. Judas took the bread without any remorse and passed the point of no return. He went a step too far. He was beyond any hope of recovery. Satan came then to strengthen Judas in his decision so he could never come back. Jesus knew this and told Judas to proceed quickly.

On that night it was Judas, but at a different time and place, under different circumstances it could be any of us. It could be against those we are called to love, or against the Lord himself. We hand ourselves over to darkness. We turn from his light and once again Jesus is troubled in spirit. God feels anguish at our betrayals and failures to be loyal to him. God loves us. He wants to be involved in our lives. He has given us the choice to accept or reject him. He wants our love to be given freely. The prophesy of Judas' treachery can apply to all who partake of God's mercies and meet them with ingratitude. The choice is each of ours: darkness vs. light. Will your choice be light, or will you be like Judas and go a step too far?

Prayer: Heavenly father, you are a God of love and mercy. We as frail humans fail you and often betray you. Forgive us, Lord. Help us to stand strong against Satan who desires to get a hold on our lives and lead us farther away from you until we, like Judas, have gone so far away we have no recovery. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our light and hope. Amen.

Prayer focus: Those struggling with Satan's hold on their lives.

Thought for the day: What in your life is worth turning your back on Jesus?

Pam Higgs

April 14, 2022

Maundy Thursday

Scripture reading: Luke 22:47-62

Key verse: "And he went outside and wept bitterly." Luke 22:62

Devotion:

It is easy for us to be critical and judgmental of others. I know I have failed my Lord many times. When I first became a Christian I served God for several years, but then I fell back into sin. I sowed some wild oats. God didn't give up on me and I rededicated my life and shortly after that the Lord called me into pastoral ministry. Even as God called me to pastoral ministry I started running from God, because I did not want to be a pastor. I wrestled with God for awhile and finally said yes to God and then I had a complete peace in my heart. I can certainly identify with Peter.

The miracle of the rooster told Peter that a new day was dawning, for after all, that is what the rooster's call means each day. It was not a new day for Judas, but it was a new day for Peter as he repented and wept bitterly. "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Psalm 51:17) On Resurrection morning, the angel sent a special message to encourage Peter (Mark 16:7), and the Lord Himself appeared to Peter that day and restored him to fellowship (Luke 24:34).

Each one of us, at one time or another, will fail the Lord and then hear (in one way or another) "the crowing of the rooster." Satan will tell us that we are finished, but that is not God's message to us. It was certainly not the end for Peter! Peter was forgiven and restored.

1 John: 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Prayer: Lord, just like Peter, I have denied you many times. I ask for your Divine forgiveness. Please help me to grow and mature in the faith of Christ. In Jesus' name I ask. Amen.

Prayer focus: Remorse and repentance.

Thought for the day: Asking God to forgive us and give us strength to overcome the temptations we face.

Rick DeQuasie

**April 15, 2022
Good Friday**

“He Stirs Up All the People”

Scripture reading: Luke 23:1-49

Key verse: “But they insisted, ‘He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.’” Luke 23:5

Devotion:

I understand! Jesus stirs me up as well. According to these witnesses who cry out for Him to be crucified, they detest His teachings. Really? Even after being flogged, beaten, ridiculed, demeaned, laughed at, Jesus prays for God’s forgiveness of these human beasts of destruction. Forgiveness? It is not the first word that comes to my mind when I picture this moment in salvation history. People ought to deserve forgiveness! Don’t you agree?

When this pandemic first reared its ugly head, I wanted to place blame. Covid, what a simple name for the rampaging world-wide death of the innocent, destruction of families, personal loss, grief, economic instability. You probably have additional words for describing this viral killer. In those incubation days when information was sown rapidly to harvest a whirlwind of ideas as to why, where, what, how, and who we were waging war against, I only thought of blame. My life and those I love were experiencing disarray and I only wanted to find blame. Forgiveness for mistakes, words uttered without much thought, fear that gripped the world was but a fleeting thought, if that. I cannot answer for you, but I can for me. I wondered, “Where in the world was God in the midst of all this chaos and death?” Bodies were being loaded onto makeshift morgue trucks. Mass graves were being dug for bodies without families and some without names; victims of a non-discriminatory enemy called covid. Where were our leaders? Where was science when we needed it? Where could this masked up world hide until it was all over?

And then, we began to hear of vaccines! Could it be? Was there really an answer that would help bypass future pain and anguish? I stood in line! It reminded me of standing in line as a child waiting for my turn to receive a sugar tablet that would rid me and the world of polio. I stood in line three times for vaccinations and booster so that I could fight off this killer and protect those around me. But then there was a new battle that arose! People who chose not to be vaccinated. People who spoke of fear of the side effects. And then I went to funerals of people who continued to deny themselves a

vaccine and those loved ones around them. The innocent who were led down an infected path that someone else chose for them. Death, what do you think of that side effect? My anger boiled again! Forgiveness was not on my mind!

But today is Good Friday. The day in which the Christian world celebrates that Jesus died a horrible death by crucifixion to complete God's plan of salvation for God's human creation. And it is Jesus who endured the cross that prayed, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing." His death words still live, and they stir me up! It is difficult to fathom, but forgiveness is not an option for those who walk with the Christ. I might want to hold on to my anger, resentment, and disappointment so that I can use it in the future to benefit me in some way, but that is not the way of the cross nor is it the teaching of a Savior who died to stir us up. Why would I choose the prison cell painted in the destructive colors of hate, anger, and resentment when forgiveness is liberating? Forgiveness sets us free! Forgiveness graciously given by Jesus to each of us, so that we might get stirred up and give it away. Although, I might not totally understand where God is in these crucial days, I can affirm what I do know and believe. God is working for good some way, somehow. And it is Good Friday! A dark day in the life of Jesus and a day that gives us the gift forgiveness to light our way. And a day that is but a foretaste of what Sunday will bring!

Prayer: Father, forgive me again, because I don't always know what I am doing and also because I do know exactly what I am doing. Amen.

Thought for the day: Forgive...it will lighten your life and set you free!

Chuck Pullins

April 16, 2022

Scripture readings: Matthew 27: 27- 44 and Mark 15: 21- 41

Key verses: "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is to say 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'" Matthew 27:46 (KJV) "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' which is, being interpreted, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'" Mark 15:34 (KJV)

Devotion:

On the Saturday after the crucifixion, Jesus' followers must have been discussing the events of the previous day. That day has become known as Good Friday (God's Friday)! Good Friday is a day full of sacrifice and full of blessings.

Even though I grew up in the church, I never really understood the meaning or the significance of many of the words and actions from that day. I had an idea of the horrible physical pain that Jesus must have suffered. This was always paramount and humbling to me. The realization of the true pain that Christ experienced comes through His words in the key verses above. It was at this point that Jesus had willingly taken on all the sin of humanity for all time. Jesus was paying the price of sin, the one and only sacrifice that God demanded.

God had to turn away from Jesus. For the first time ever, Jesus felt separated from God. Jesus was suffering alone. God's turning away as the weight of the world's sin were taken on by Jesus. God cannot bear to see sin, to be in communion with sin, or the one taking all sins on. Literally, Jesus' inner being was being ripped in two. Jesus endured this tremendous mental sacrifice like the other physical one because of His love for you and me.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you so much for making the sacrifices on the cross, although you did not deserve them. In your obedience to God and your great love for all people, you have shown me an excellent model of how I should live my life with the benefits of the Holy Spirit. Thank you for being my Savior and helping me allow you to be the Lord of my life. Amen.

Prayer focus: Those who have not accepted the sacrifices that Jesus made for them on the cross.

Sharon Byrd

Sunday, April 17, 2022

Easter Sunday

Scripture reading: Luke 24: 1-12

Key verse: "In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead?'" Luke 24: 5 (NIV)

Devotion:

We can only imagine the thoughts of the women who went to the tomb on that first resurrection morn. They were most likely still filled with sadness as they reflected on what had happened to Jesus just a few days before, but still they went to finish the preparation of the body. When they arrived at the tomb, they found the stone rolled away and the body of Jesus missing. Their sadness probably changed to shock and panic as they tried to figure out what to do or who to tell, when all the sudden two men in dazzling apparel appeared and said, "Why do you look for the living amongst the dead?"

Many people look for something in the world to fill a wanton desire within their souls. They believe this or that will fill the void, but the only thing that will satisfy the want and longing in their heart is Jesus. Things of the world are dead or dying, but Jesus is alive and thriving. So why should people continue to look and seek amongst the dead?

As resurrection people, we should always remember that, though we face death on any given day, we still have hope for the future resurrection. The people on the first resurrection day did not understand fully what had taken place, but their faith eventually came to fruition, and they believed Jesus Christ was the Messiah.

On this resurrection day let each of us continue in our walk of faith and desire more earnestly to be more Christ like daily. Let us give up looking for life in things which are dead. Put your faith in the living Christ and you will be made whole, and you will find life.

Prayer: Lord, on this Easter Sunday, may you once again fill us with the hope of the resurrection. Empower us to share this good news with those who need that hope. In Jesus' name, amen.

Prayer focus: Those who are looking in the wrong places for their salvation.

Thought for the day: Look to the living Christ for hope, not the dead.

Ray Stonestreet