

Journey to the Cross

DAILY DEVOTIONALS FOR LENT

DUMC Lent and Easter Season

WORSHIP

Ash Wednesday Service

March 6, 6:30 p.m., Sanctuary

Palm/Passion Sunday Services

April 14, all services, normal worship times

Holy Week Midday Services

Monday, April 15 – Friday, April 19, 12:05 p.m., Sanctuary with lunch following in the Fellowship Hall

Maunder Thursday Communion Service

April 18, 7:00 p.m., Sanctuary

Good Friday Tenebrae Service

April 19, 7:00 p.m., Sanctuary

Easter Morning Services

Sunday, April 21

8:00 a.m. Contemporary Service
Sanctuary

9:10 a.m. Traditional Service
Sanctuary

10:15 a.m. Traditional Service
Sanctuary

11:20 a.m. Traditional Service
Sanctuary

LENT SERMON SERIES

Conversations Around the Cross

Meet some of the characters and visit a few scenes that led Jesus to the cross and, ultimately, to the empty tomb. From his follower Peter to his judge Pontius Pilate, you'll get a new perspective on Jesus and what it means for him to be on the cross. Journey with us through Lent as we listen to some of the conversations and hear what they might have to say to us today.

March 10 A Condemning Conversation

March 17 A Courtyard Conversation

March 24 A Crowd-Pleasing Conversation

March 31 A Thoughtless Conversation

April 7 A Redemptive Conversation

April 14 A Courageous Conversation

EASTER LILIES

Easter lilies can be purchased in memory or in honor of someone. The cost is \$10, and they are placed around the altar for Easter worship services on April 21. Flowers may be taken after the last service on Easter Sunday. Place your lily orders beginning March 6 – April 5. Order on the church website, dunwoodyumc.org, or contact Susan Kee, 770-394-0675.

Welcome to Dunwoody UMC

SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP

8:45 a.m. Chapel Service*, *Chapel*

8:45 a.m. Contemporary Service†, *Sanctuary*

11:05 a.m. Traditional Service†^, *Sanctuary*

* *Holy Communion is celebrated every Sunday.*

† *Holy Communion is celebrated the first Sunday of each month and open to all.*

^ *Foundations and Traditions is a worship readiness class for children K – second grade following the Children's Moment in service. All children remain in worship on the first Sunday of each month.*

JOIN DUNWOODY UMC

We invite you to explore membership at Dunwoody UMC. Contact Rev. David Melton at david.melton@dunwoodyumc.org or 770-394-0675 with questions.

CLERGY

Senior Pastor: Rev. Dan Brown

Associate Pastors: Rev. Josh Amerson, Rev. Kathy Brockman, Rev. Jenna Kennedy, Rev. David Melton, Rev. Sonny Walden

The Lenten Journey

Years ago on a trip to the Holy Land, I stood at the traditional site of Jesus' crucifixion. Located inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, there is a set of stairs. At the top there is a hole underneath an ornate altar where they say Jesus' cross was placed and where he died.

There is usually a large crowd standing in line waiting to kneel at the spot and place their hands in the hole. However, there was a man standing off to the side. I casually asked, "Aren't you going to go and touch the spot where the cross stood?" Rather casually, he replied, "No, I don't have to touch the place where the cross once stood, for the cross has already touched me."

Ultimately, this is the heart of the Lenten Season. Lent is the 40-day period prior to Easter, not including Sundays, that begins on Ash Wednesday. It is a time for us to make the spiritual journey toward the cross so that the One who was crucified on the cross can touch us.

Throughout the centuries, the Church has observed the season of Lent by focusing on such spiritual disciplines as prayer, penance, fasting, almsgiving and repentance of sins. Often, people will give up something as a way of remembering what Christ has given for us. Others will make a commitment to "do something" as a way of remembering what Christ did for us.

One thing I encourage you to do is use this Lenten Devotional Guide as a way of helping make your own personal journey. Written by our members and staff, these reflections will help deepen your faith and enrich your life.

As you make your Lenten journey, please know that I will be holding you in my prayers.

Your Pastor,



Rev. Dan Brown
Senior Pastor

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6

A Mardi Gras Start to Lent

By Wendy Schmitt

“Let’s hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, because the one who made the promises is reliable. And let us consider each other carefully for the purpose of sparking love and good deeds. Don’t stop meeting together with other believers, which some people have gotten into the habit of doing. Instead, encourage each other; especially as you see the day drawing near.”

HEBREWS 10:23–25

In February 1987, I traveled to New Orleans for Mardi Gras, also known as “Fat Tuesday” or “Shrove Tuesday” and the holiday before Ash Wednesday and the start of the Lenten season of fasting that leads us to Easter Sunday.

Seven or eight of us packed into a sketchy hotel room for a few nights, and we tried to gather as many beads as possible between crawfish boils, hurricane tastings and laughing hysterically. It was a spectacle for sure! *Laissez les bon temps rouler!* I have no real recollection of Lent that year.

In February 1988, I joined Weight Watchers for Mardi Gras, thinking that “Fat Tuesday” was the correct time to start. I am not sure how successful a journey it was because I do recall feeling jealous of my friend who lost more weight than me. I must have given up something, though, and therefore, I did have the thought of Lent in my head.

In my early career, Mardi Gras involved getting King Cake for the employees at my work, deftly hiding the baby Jesus and worrying that an employee would choke on him. Normally for Lent, I gave up Diet Coke or chocolate, inspired by my Catholic roommate.

Attending DUMC for the past 15 years has surely inspired me to think more about Lent, the 40 days, Christ’s sacrifice and the miracle of his resurrection. I look forward to this devotional book, and I’ve made efforts during Lent to add things, such as a kind gesture to others (even as simple as letting someone ahead of me in traffic), donations to charity and silent prayers before I go to sleep (a habit that stuck!).

I have learned the most from attending my Sunday school class, *A Wing and A Prayer*. Primarily, I have learned that our relationship with Christ is a constant journey with twists and turns, and that it is a personal one: no use getting jealous if someone seems closer to Christ than me, but grateful that I am with a group who will share and grow and learn together.

I doubt that I will attend Mardi Gras in New Orleans again, but I love the memory that makes me smile at the start of Lent each year.

Prayer

Dear God, As we enter into this season of Lent, help us reflect on our faith journey and look for ways to grow as Christians. May we seek your guidance to continue to learn and be in community with others to share your love. Amen.

Today’s Thought

In earlier times, people used Lent as a time of fasting and repentance. Since they didn’t want to be tempted by sweets, meat and other distractions in the house, they cleaned out their cabinets. They used up all the sugar and yeast in sweet breads before the Lent season started and fixed meals with all the meat available. It was a great feast! Through the years, Mardi Gras has evolved (in some places) into a pretty wild party with little to do with preparing for the Lenten season of repentance and simplicity. Oh well. But Christians still know its origin and hang onto the true Spirit of the season. —Cedar Falls First United Methodist Church

THURSDAY, MARCH 7

The Right Time

By Tambyn Freund

“See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land. The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me.”

SONG OF SOLOMON 2:11–13

Maybe it’s just me, but some years it seems like Lent comes at the worst time. After the indulgences of the holidays, I usually spend a big part of January and even early February trying to get myself “back on track.” And, if I’m not actively doing it, I’m well aware I could be! But getting on track usually means I’m sacrificing. I’m eating fewer sweets, spending less money and spending more time running, cleaning or generally being productive.

By mid-to-late February, signs of spring are showing, and I’m ready to relax a bit. Warm days are starting to mix into the cold days. Nights are shorter and days are longer. My favorite flowers are peeking up from the ground, and some have even started to bloom. Seeds are being started indoors or in the garden, and signs for festivals and outdoor events are popping up around town. By mid-February, I’m ready for spring. I’m ready for play time and for celebrating that winter has ended!

Then comes Lent. It asks us to delay the indulgences. It asks us to take a little more time in the quiet. But, is it really asking us to ignore spring? Would we even be the people Christ calls us to be without Lent?

Lent comes as winter shifts into spring. The world doesn’t suddenly pop up full of flowers and light and birds chirping and busy bees. Spring wakes up across weeks. We can copy spring and wake our spiritual selves that might have been set aside since the pageantry of Christmas. On the warmer days that break through, we can sit outside on a porch or in a yard and say a quick prayer as we take a deep breath. As the days get just a little longer, we can use that extra light and energy to do something good for someone in our family or for ourselves to help us experience the generosity of Christ. As we watch flowers push up through cold, hard clay, we can marvel at the beauty God can create from a seemingly barren place.

When we see birds starting to fill our trees, we can copy them by gathering with friends and neighbors to plan our Easter celebrations. It’s not time to celebrate yet, but like the birds building nests, we can prepare for the joy that is coming. When the first bees start to buzz along their paths from hive to plants, we, too, can get ourselves into spring routines that bring us joy and connection with God.

So, maybe Lent comes at just the right time. Maybe instead of seeing Lent as a time of waiting, we can see it as a chance to wake up our spiritual selves as the world around us wakes up for spring. Because the glory of Easter will be nothing if we are still asleep and focused on ourselves instead of taking time to notice the glories that God is displaying all around us.

Prayer

Dear God, Thank you for this season of Lent in which I can slough off the focus on improving myself and marvel in the grace and glory you give us each year. Help me to build a connection to you so that I may better reflect the light of Jesus to the world. Amen.

Today’s Thought

What signs of spring do you see today? Have you stopped to thank God for the beauty awakening around you? What can you imitate today or this week to help awaken yourself to connect with God?

FRIDAY, MARCH 8

Let YOUR Lights Shine On

By Shannon Whiting

“You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can’t be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.”

MATTHEW 5:14–16

Lent has started, yet I keep thinking back to Christmas. I’m thinking about how the weeks before Christmas are all about getting ready, kind of like you do when you are expecting company and definitely how you would prepare for a birth of a baby. The shopping, the cooking, the cleaning and then the fun of decorating. During this Christmas season, I feel like everyone's house comes to life and shines so bright with the twinkle of all the lights, all kinds!

The weeks after Christmas can feel like the total opposite. The gifts are unwrapped, the food is gone, the house is a mess and you start to undo all the decorating you worked so hard on. The houses seem to get darker as the "twinkle" lights come down. A few weeks later everything is back to "normal."

In our house, I try to keep the tree up as long as I can before it, too, starts to die. This year, we had two trees—one "fake" on our porch and a small "real" tree inside (mostly for the smell). As we took down the real tree, we decided to burn it since we were having a fire pit night that evening. As we sat by the fire, I watched the small tree light up one more time. That tree brought me so much joy during the weeks it was in our den. I was so excited to turn it on each morning. I was so sad to take it down, but it was time.

As the tree burned, I had a moment of reflection of the season. Just because we have taken down all the lights doesn't mean that we have to let the light burn out. Continue to let YOUR light shine all year.

Prayer

Jesus, As we enter the season of Lent, it can be dark and dreary and sad. Help me to keep my light shining throughout this season of reflection and beyond so that someone sees your love through me. Amen.

Today's Thought

We are told to let our light shine, and if it does, we won't need to tell anybody it does. Lighthouses don't fire cannons to call attention to their shining, they just shine. —Dwight Moody

SATURDAY, MARCH 9

Is Giving Up Okay?

By Anne W. West

“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won’t perish but will have eternal life.”

JOHN 3:16

We’re taught throughout life not to give up. Yet, Lent is the time when “giving up” is okay. Or, is it? Does giving up chocolate really help us walk closer with God? Will refraining from using social media really grow our faith?

When I saw a “40 things to give up for Lent” list, I wondered if we should revisit the whole “give up” concept to focus on what really matters. The first 10 things on the list are:

Fear of Failure – You don’t succeed without experiencing failure. Just make sure you fail forward.

Your Comfort Zone – It’s outside our comfort zones where new discoveries are made.

Feelings of Unworthiness – You are fearfully and wonderfully made by your creator.

Impatience – God’s timing is the perfect timing.

Retirement – As long as you are still breathing, you are here for a reason. You have a purpose to influence others for Christ. Our work is not always tied to a paycheck.

People Pleasing – I can’t please everyone anyways. There is only one I need to strive to please.

Comparison – I have my own unique contribution to make and there is no one else like me.

Blame – I am not going to pass the buck. I will take responsibility for my actions.

Guilt – I am loved by Jesus and he has forgiven my sins. Today is a new day and the past is behind.

Overcommitment – Do less better and accomplish more.

You can see the entire list, with one item for each day of Lent, at philressler.com. Maybe this Lent should be one in which we “take on” or “stick with” the things that truly have an impact on our faith journey.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, All too often we are quick to give up and slow to take on. Help us focus on the things that truly make a difference as we journey through Lent. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Will you give up something this Lent? Or, are you willing to take something on?

SUNDAY, MARCH 10

Spiritual Lesson from Life

By Rev. W. Melton McNeill

“O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.”

PSALM 136:1

Spring will soon be surfacing. Its lengthening hours of sunlight will chase winter's short days. Warm rays will gently nudge sleeping jonquils. Trees gray with winter's dress don new colors. Plant roots reach out for earth's life-giving-nutrients. The world will be resurrected.

Spring! A young man's thoughts turn to love, says the poet. Yes, and our thoughts turn to God's love.

It is a love that calls forth new life.

Outside of Christ, life is drab, colorless...without beauty, without meaning.

With Christ, a new person emerges; and flower-like, blooms for the whole world to see. A new life in Christ reflects God's glory as he calls forth a real, new you.

Spring resurrects the Earth. Christ resurrects the living and the dead. Thank God for the love that created Easter.

Prayer

Father God, We welcome spring and the Lenten season as we prepare our hearts for Jesus' journey to the cross and his glorious resurrection. Thank you for loving us. Amen.

Today's Thought

How does your life reflect God's glory?

MONDAY, MARCH 11

Remembering God

By Rev. David Melton

“A man named John was sent from God. He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him everyone would believe in the light. He himself wasn’t the light, but his mission was to testify concerning the light.”

JOHN 1:6–8

Have you ever heard someone say that they believe babies must know what God looks like because they have just come from God’s side? I have a friend who strongly believes this, and apparently she’s not the only one.

In the book, "Chicken Soup for the Soul," Dan Millman relates the story of Sachi. Sachi was a four year old girl whose mother brought a baby boy home with her from the hospital. Sachi liked to spend time alone with the new baby, and the parents were quite naturally concerned about this for fear of jealousy. One day the parents took a peek into the room where the baby and Sachi were sitting together, and they heard Sachi say to her brother, “Please tell me what God is like. I’m starting to forget.”

As Christians, we claim to have an understanding of what God looks like. We believe that God came to us in the human form of Jesus Christ. If that is so, then Jesus must look like God. Yet, sometimes we forget this. We not only forget what God looks like, but also even forget that God came to Earth and is with us still. We forget that God’s goodness and love are available to all who will follow Christ. We forget that God brings salvation to those who call upon the name of the Lord.

So many of the problems of the world would find solutions if only we would remember what God looks like, and turn to Christ, and follow his ways. We need a baby to remind us to look for God in the eyes of each other. We need a John the Baptist to point out God’s light to us. Will you be such a witness? Will you point to God who came in the form of Jesus to bring light to the world? Will you share the love of Christ with the world? Will you?

Prayer

O God, who brings salvation and light, I pray today that you make me see you more clearly and love you more dearly. Make my life to be an example for your grace and love. Help me to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Help me to bring acts of kindness and love to the world on your behalf. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Today’s Thought

As we enter into Lent, a season of preparation, self-reflection and repentance, may we seek to realign our lives and focus toward God.

TUESDAY, MARCH 12

Peaceful, Easy Feeling

By Jay Pryor

*“God’s Spirit makes us loving, happy, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled.
There is no law against behaving in any of these ways.”*

GALATIANS 5:22–23

I am a fan of the Eagles. That is, Eagles the band and not Eagles the football team. Often when I enter Dunwoody Methodist I think of a line from one of their hits: “I get a peaceful, easy feeling and I know you won’t let me down.”

You see, Dunwoody UMC gives me a peaceful, easy feeling. It’s a feeling that I don’t often have when I’m in the daily routine of dealing with Mt. Vernon going from two lanes to one. Or, when I’m trying to go somewhere in the afternoon and going up I-85 is the only route that makes sense to get there. Or, when dealing with countless other ankle-biting issues.

I’m retired. I shouldn’t be bothered by any of this stuff. But I am.

Thankfully I know where I can, and do, find comfort. It might be in meeting someone new at Wednesday night supper, sharing a paint bucket while helping out with Habitat for Humanity or using my very limited skills helping Johnny and Ann Stone with the DUMC Fourth of July float.

We are blessed to have this church of fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. And that’s a song worth singing throughout our community.

Prayer

Loving God, As I go through this day, help me to remember the fruits of the spirit and show love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control in all that I do and say. Amen.

Today’s Thought

What can you do today to give yourself or someone else a peaceful, easy feeling?

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13

Knowing What to Do When I Get There

By Virginia McGuffey

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.
The second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*

MARK 12:30–31

Our son, Mack, coaches his young son’s baseball team. Most of the players are five –six years old and are new to the game of baseball. To help the boys learn to play the various positions, the boys generally would be assigned to play at two or more positions during each game, one placed in the infield for two or three innings and another in the outfield for the other innings.

Mack’s wife, Laura, made large posters that they hung in the dugout every week showing the batting order and the positions for each of the boys to play. In the early games when the boys would ask where they should go to play in the field, Mack or Laura would tell them. After a few games, Mack began to point to the posters and ask the boys to find their names on the posters so they would know where to play. The boys would go to the posters, find their names and then jog out to the assigned place to play.

At the next to last game, one of the boys asked about his position, and Mack pointed to the chart. The boy looked up at him and said “I already looked at the chart and I know where I’m supposed to play.” There was a pause. Then the boy said, “But I don’t know what I’m supposed to do there.” Mack, in his kind and gentle manner, said “I’ll go out there with you and show you” and the two of them ran out to his place on the field.

Some days my life feels like that as well. I know where I’m supposed to go but I don’t always know what I’m supposed to do when I get there. Jesus has made it clear that there are two things that should guide us in all we do— love God and love our neighbors. How simple to remember, yet how hard to do.

Jesus came into the world to show us how to live in accordance with those commandments, and he goes out into the field of life with us every day to show us what we are supposed to do.

Prayer

Wherever I go today, Lord help me know what to do when I get there. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Remind yourself to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and to love your neighbors as yourself.

THURSDAY, MARCH 14

Be the Light of the World

By Angela Arnold Go

“You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? It’s good for nothing except to be thrown away and trampled under people’s feet. You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can’t be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.”

MATTHEW 5:13–16

Twice a week, I’m greeted by a Jehovah’s Witness at the train station where I board to go to work each day. His cheery “Good morning” or “Have a good day” helps me positively start my morning. His colleagues generally smile and nod to me as well, but he makes a point to greet my fellow passengers and me.

I began thinking about what his messages meant and how he may be the only word of God many hear. He offers this greeting not to get anything in return but to share God’s love and what He can do in each of our lives.

As Christians, we are called to be the light of the world, just like this man. But how do we answer this call?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, Help us to shine your light on a world in darkness. Led us to share your love with others so that we may reflect the love you gave to us. Amen.

Today’s Thought

How can I share God’s love today and each day?

FRIDAY, MARCH 15

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

By John Rhea

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites.”

MATTHEW 23 (vv. 13, 23, 25, 27, 29)

“You snakes! You brood of vipers!”

MATTHEW 23:33

“Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man (with leprosy).”

MATTHEW 8:3

“While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with Him and His disciples.”

MATTHEW 9:10

In one of our men’s Wednesday Night study group meetings this fall, we discussed an author’s argument of the importance of feeling respected. He argues that it may be more important to men to feel respected than to feel loved. And on reflection, aren’t many stories of violence triggered by a feeling of being disrespected? How many relationships disintegrate when someone no longer feels respected?

Our conversation then turned to Jesus and how he showed respect.

At first thought, you’d think Jesus treated everyone with equal respect—wasn’t that what was unique about him? But on closer examination, he was not impartial. In fact, he showed contempt and disrespect for the powerful religious leaders—those that were used to getting respect and felt they deserved the highest esteem (i.e. best seat at the table; my seat on this pew). Jesus certainly knew human nature and understood what the reaction would be to his scorn. Perhaps the actions of the religious leaders that led to His Crucifixion had a lot more to do with the disrespect that they felt than with their allegation of “heresy against God” in his claim of being the Son of God and the Messiah.

At the other extreme we see Jesus giving his respect to those who expected none and were probably very surprised to get it—the woman at the well, the sinners and tax collectors, the children and the hero of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Using one of today’s buzzwords, Jesus was a “disruptor.” Could his deference to those traditionally ignored and scorned have had as much to do with the success of his ministry as the many miracles and healings he performed?

As we go through this Lenten season’s study, I’d encourage us all to be alert to whom Jesus is showing esteem, dignity and honor (and to whom He voices contempt). Consider the feelings of each group in the Easter story, and their respective reaction to Jesus’ ministry.

Prayer

Father God, This week make me more aware of how, and to whom, I show respect and disrespect. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Consider these synonyms for “respect” as you look for ways to show it to others: esteem, regard, high regard, high opinion, acclaim, admiration, approbation, approval, appreciation, estimation, favor, popularity, recognition, veneration, awe, reverence, deference, honor, praise, homage, consideration, thoughtfulness, attentiveness, politeness, courtesy, civility, deference.

Devotions Without Parameters

Foreword by Samantha Faklaris

Last Sunday in church, I asked Anne West if she was still looking for devotions. Appreciating all the Wests do for DUMC (they were one of Lexy's first Sunday school class teachers!), Chris or I usually try to write one each season. She said she did need a few more, so I mentioned it to Hannah and Abby after church (Lexy and Chris were out of town for soccer) and suggested they should write a devotion and off I went to play tennis.

Now, I share this because I'm not sure my girls have ever read the Advent or Lent devotions DUMC publishes each year. Yes, they have read Jesus Calling, been in church and Sunday school their whole lives and know what a devotion is...but when I mentioned this to them, they had NO parameters—just me saying "I think you should do one."

My heart melted that afternoon when I checked my email and saw Hannah (age 13) had written a devotion. When I got home, Abby (age 12) told me she did one, too. They are simple and certainly not in the format DUMC follows, yet the simplicity is what makes their words and Bible verses so special. They did this on their own. The repetition of attending church, participating in activities DUMC offers and loving our God is impacting them in ways that we should all strive for. Yes, they groan sometimes about coming. It's not always easy to get three teenage/pre-teen girls to church each Sunday...but when I see these words they put on paper, it's so worth it.

God Is Always With You

By Abby Faklaris

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding, in all your way submit to him, and he will keep your paths straight."

PROVERBS 3:5-6

I picked this verse because it spoke to me when I was going to Africa. I was really scared that I was going to get sick. But then, I prayed to God, and I had a blast in Africa. I made so many memories, and I loved it. So, you have to remember that God will always be with you in whatever you go through and he is always there to keep your paths straight.

Prayer

Dear God, Please help me to understand that you love me and will be with me always. Teach me that even though I can't necessarily see you, you will always be a shoulder to cry on. I love you so much, and I am so grateful for each and every thing you have blessed me with. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Today's Thought

Sometimes your best talks with God are those without parameters.

Lean On Me

By Hannah Faklaris

"But the Lord stood with me and gave me strength."

2 TIMOTHY 4:17

This verse really touched me because I learned that God will stand with me through the thick and the thin. He will always be there waiting for me when I need someone to lean on. And he loves me. Christ Jesus loves each and every one of us so very much.

SUNDAY, MARCH 17

That Only Jesus Can See

By Sid Linton

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church...”

MATTHEW 16:18

Despite Jesus’ declaration, Peter was at first anything but a rock and stumbled all the way through the Gospels.

Everyone struggles. Everyone has flaws and weaknesses.

As we approach the Last Supper, we are reminded that even Jesus’ remarkable Disciples struggled. Just look at them from the front side of history, before they became famous. They were an ordinary group dealing with everyday life.

They were jealous of each other and of outsiders; one was a traitor for earning his living collecting taxes for the Romans and was probably hated by Simon the Zealot who, in turn, was no doubt feared by the others; and then there was Judas Iscariot. Who knows what his struggles were?

Thomas and Philip doubted. Jude and James the Less seem not to have done anything. Even Nathanael, a man without guile, was undiplomatically blunt.

The others had foibles, too. They were all, at first, just everyday people.

Yet, even with all their ordinariness, flaws and shortcomings, they were invited to the Last Supper—just as we are for Holy Communion.

They had strengths that only Jesus could see, and they yielded to Him to become the most influential group in history.

We, too, have strengths that only Jesus can see, and we will yield to Him to become...what?

Prayer

Merciful God, We struggle with life. We struggle with how to be good Christians. We struggle with how to show others your love. Help us, we pray. Amen.

Today’s Thought

I am no longer my own, but thine. Put me to what thou wilt.

The First Meal on the Moon: The Lord's Supper

Compiled from various sources

"I am the vine, ye are the branches."

JOHN 15:5

On July 20, 1969, Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong had only been on the lunar surface for a few minutes when Aldrin made the following public statement:

"This is the LM pilot. I'd like to take this opportunity to ask every person listening in, whoever and wherever they may be, to pause for a moment and contemplate the events of the past few hours and to give thanks in his or her own way."

He then ended radio communication and there, on the silent surface of the moon, 250,000 miles from home, he read from the Gospel of John, and he took Communion. He later recalled:

"In the radio blackout, I opened the little plastic packages which contained the bread and the wine. I poured the wine into the chalice our church had given me. In the one-sixth gravity of the moon, the wine slowly curled and gracefully came up the side of the cup. Then I read the Scripture, 'I am the vine, you are the branches. Whosoever abides in me will bring forth much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing.'"

I had intended to read my Communion passage back to earth, but at the last minute [they] had requested that I not do this. NASA was already embroiled in a legal battle over the Apollo 8 crew reading from Genesis while orbiting the moon at Christmas. I agreed reluctantly. I ate the tiny Host and swallowed the wine. I gave thanks for the intelligence and spirit that had brought two young pilots to the Sea of Tranquility. It was interesting for me to think: the very first liquid ever poured on the moon, and the very first food eaten there, were the Communion elements. And of course, it's interesting to think that some of the first words spoken on the moon were the words of Jesus Christ..."

As super human as Presbyterian Elder Astronaut Colonel Buzz Aldrin was (Third in his West Point class, three Air Medals, two Distinguished Flying Crosses, two Distinguished Service Medals, 66 combat missions, first astronaut with a doctorate (MIT), first crew to the moon and second man on it), he, like all of us, struggled with down-to-earth human problems. His included clinical depression, three divorces, tangles with news media and his bosses and alcoholism (sober since 1978). Despite all this, he never lost his faith.

Every year his church, Webster Presbyterian Church in Webster, Texas, celebrates Lunar Communion Sunday with his lunar chalice on the Sunday closest to the anniversary of the first moon landing and will again on the 50th anniversary this year.

Prayer

Dear God, We give thanks to you this day and every day for the ability to freely worship you. May we hear your words with new ears throughout this Lenten season. Amen.

Today's Thought

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

TUESDAY, MARCH 19

And God Saw That It Was Good

By Nancy Parker

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands."

PSALM 19:1

For many years, my husband's family owned a small cabin on Laurel Lake in Northern Wisconsin, near Eagle River. For over 40 years, from the time our boys were toddlers, we spent time there every year. It was very primitive. An outhouse was our bathroom, water was heated in a teakettle on the stove and baths were taken in the lake. The peace and beauty were unmatched, however, and we loved it.

Boating, fishing, hiking, swimming and campfires were all daily activities. We especially enjoyed the wildlife. Deer ate in our back yard, including a doe that frequently brought her fawns. We enjoyed watching the raccoons, except when they tipped over our garbage cans. We had jet black squirrels and many eagles, loons and herons on the lake. Birds ranged from a multitude of hummingbirds to a pair of pileated woodpeckers that lived in our woods. We even had a pure white deer, famous in the area that we saw frequently on our runs.

One evening, right after a rain storm, I went to sit on the dock. The clouds were a mixture of gray, white, pink and purple. A rainbow was in the sky. Over them all, an eagle flew over the lake. It was so beautiful that it brought tears to my eyes.

Nature proclaims God's existence. I don't know how anyone can see the beauty and majesty of nature and not praise the God who created it all. *"How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom, you made them all."* (Psalm 104:24)

Prayer

Loving God, As I go through the busyness of my day, remind me to slow down and look at the beauty of the world you've given me. Open my eyes to see your wondrous works and to use them to replenish my soul. Amen.

Today's Thought

"This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it." (Psalm 118:24)

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20

Welcomed in God's Sanctuary

By Mary Ruffin

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

MATTHEW 11:28-29

We create community with the marginalized in society by meeting their basic needs and inviting them to join us in worship.

On Sunday, January 20, a saint that I know relayed this experience to me. She looked around her normal area for her pew friends, but none were there. For some reason, she decided to sit away from the aisle although she can hear best there when the Gospel is read to the people from the center of the middle aisle.

Not long into worship a man entered and sat on that aisle seat. He had on several layers of pants, probably most of his clothes, and placed his bag of belongings beside him. He was looking so tired, so she reached out her hand to hold his. His hands were really rough and dry. She continued to hold his hand, until he spoke that he wanted to pray now, pulling his hand away with a slight smile.

The man remained for Communion, walking ahead first from the aisle seat to the front to kneel. The saint positioned next to him at the rail, placed her hand on his shoulder for a moment.

She said that she just felt the man needed someone that moment and she acted with no forethought or words. She had thought about telling the man about the ministry for those in need there, but realized that he must know this, otherwise he would not have felt welcomed to come as you are.

PRAYER

Jesus, We come to you in all forms and fashions, from all social standings and financial positions. Some have much. Others have little. Help us to be like you and to see everyone as a child of yours as we welcome them into your arms. Amen.

Today's Thought

Invite someone to church this week. Sit in a different spot in the sanctuary. Greet someone you've never seen. Help DUMC be a welcoming congregation.

THURSDAY, MARCH 21

Planting Seeds

By Kenneth Abele

“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

ISAIAH 55:10–11

Recently two Jewish twin brothers visited my Sunday school class to give their testimony of how they came to Christ at different times in their lives. One described how he was approached by a waiter at a local restaurant with a message from God who told him to tell this diner about a relationship with Jesus. At the time, this young Jewish man was taken aback but was inspired enough to inquire and learn a little more. Today he doesn't have a relationship with this waiter or have the Bible that was given to him, but he still points to that event as the spark that started his path to salvation.

I look back on 2001 when I signed up for Disciple I at DUMC at age 36. I had grown up attending church regularly, and I had a wife who regularly prayed for me, but if I were honest, I would have to say I didn't know what it was to have a personal relationship with Christ. I was concerned about missing classes due to work conflicts, so I signed up for a class offered on Sunday morning at 8:00 a.m. What was I thinking? Most Disciple classes are well attended with 20 – 30 people. However, my class was made up of me, Joe, a consultant, and the leader, an attorney named Bob. We thought about cancelling the class due to the size, but something told each of us to push forward.

Over the next 34 weeks, we read a lot of scripture, watched the regular videos (Rev. Zan Holmes did the audio and sounded like what I thought God would sound like) and shared our thoughts. I learned a lot from Bob, who obviously had a deep biblical knowledge and asked insightful questions.

Some people have conversion events like flashes of lightning or similar to Paul on the road to Damascus, but I developed a relationship with Jesus by studying the Word and learning from others. This path is still my preferred path.

I don't know when Bob moved from Dunwoody or where he is today, but I do know that he helped plant a seed in me that I believe has grown tremendously and is still growing today. I also believe that my attending that 8:00 a.m. early morning class was no accident.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us be prepared “*to give an answer to everyone who asks to give the reason for the hope you have.*” (1 Peter 3:15) Amen.

Today's Thought

You may never know the impact you make on others by sharing your story. But trust that you are part of a plan.

FRIDAY, MARCH 22

Repent, Then Bloom

By Rev. Keith Lawder

“Create in me a clean heart God, and put a new and faithful spirit within me.”

PSALM 51:10

Lent is always a difficult time for me. I don't like repenting. Repenting makes me look at things I don't like about myself.

I wonder if there is not a smoother, more pleasant road to Easter. The word “Lent” comes from an old English word, “Lengten” which means to lengthen, as in days.

In nature, plants dry up and turn ugly before blooming in the spring. Sadly, repentance or examining the ugliness in my life is needed before I can bloom into the one God wants me to be. Although I must be intentional and focus on my sin, I know that God is with me throughout. And, I know that Easter is coming! Therefore I can embark on the difficult journey of Lent in faith!

Prayer

Create in me a clean heart O God! Replace my selfish desires with a new and faithful spirit! Amen.

Today's Thought

As you see nature's blooms come out this Lenten season, think about what you can do to bloom in God's love and grow in your faith.

Newness of Life: A Remembrance of Easter Past

By Jerry Sanders

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

JOHN 3:16

As we get older, we often fondly remember times of the past—our friends, our homes, our traditions and many of the things that made a lasting impression on our lives. For me, one of those lasting childhood impressions was Easter time.

I grew up on my grandfather’s farm in a small, rural community in South Carolina. It was an area where everyone knew their neighbors as well as everyone else in the area (which could be both a good and bad thing). The same was true for the small rural church where I grew up. You have probably seen similar churches as mine—white clapboard siding, fairly small and a cemetery in its surroundings. Even today, I suspect those who go to such churches are very similar to those who attended mine. They are caring individuals who are always ready to share in times of joy as well as very willing to pitch in to provide comfort and relief in times of sorrow and need.

It is in this church that I fondly remember Easter. Even though most of the members were not rich in material possessions, they did their best to celebrate on Easter Sunday with newness. The men might have a new necktie to wear or a new shirt or, if no new clothing, at least newly shined shoes.

But it was with the little girls and ladies that the newness really stood out. Most of the little girls would have a new dress. The ladies who could would also have a new dress, often custom made (that means they sewed it themselves). And, if the ladies did not have a new dress, they at least had a new Easter hat (even if the hat was from a prior year and redecorated to appear new). The hat was a well-kept secret until revealed on Easter Sunday.

One other thing that stands out about those years long ago was that the women usually wore a flower on Easter. The flower may have been a corsage from the local florist or a fresh flower from the yard. They wore the flowers very proudly to represent the beautiful spring life just beginning.

You might ask, “What does this have to do with Easter?” Well, what is Easter if it is not newness? It is a newness of life that has been provided to each of us through Jesus’ death and resurrection. We beam in our new clothes or newly shined shoes. We wear fresh flowers to broadcast the reawakening of new life. Indeed, at Easter, we Christians are joyous, and we celebrate that in death there is victory because there is a resurrection that is the beginning of our everlasting life.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, We give you thanks for loving us so much that you gave your only Son so that we have newness in our life and celebrate victory in death with a promise of everlasting life. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Easter is a time for renewal. Instead of looking at material newness, look for ways to bring new life to your faith journey.

The Ups and Downs of Lent: Joy, Despair, Hope

By Randy Pilkenton

“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.”

PHILIPPIANS 4:6–7

Joy: In the years of his ministry, before the Cross, many miracles were performed by Jesus, and he healed the sick and the desperate. Each time, it brought joy to those who received these blessings, to those who witnessed these events and to Jesus as well, I like to think. Jesus shared in the joy as any human would, for he was fully human.

Despair: During his trial, he had to go it alone. Peter denied knowing him. As he hung there on the cross, his chosen ones left him, running away scared. The end for Jesus was emotional and came with extreme physical cruelty.

Hope: God had made a promise to Jesus—that he would become the Savior of the world. Even better: he would be reunited with his Father in heaven!

In our lives, we will experience all of these emotions, just as Jesus did. Lent provides a season where we can renew our faith and re-dedicate ourselves to being like Jesus: finding time to be contemplative, time to confess and show penance, time to pray and be in communion with God, and definitely finding time to experience the hope of Jesus’ sacrifice and the promise of joining our Father in Heaven.

Prayer

In gratitude and hope we pray to you Father: while we may experience a roller coaster of emotions in our life, by following your son’s example we are strengthened, given hope—and joy—because of the promise of eternal life with you. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Develop a new habit during Lent to spend time with God every day.

MONDAY, MARCH 25

Awareness

By John Sivak

“People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unboly, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.”

2 TIMOTHY 3:2–5

Many years ago, while attending one of our frequent fraternity parties at Georgia Tech, a well-meaning fraternity brother asked me a question that took me by surprise. He asked, “John, how is your spiritual growth?” I had never been asked this question before, and it certainly was not on my mind at a fraternity party. However, my brother did make me think and I have been thinking even since... nearly four decades later.

It is so easy to go through our days and not be aware of what is happening to us spiritually. Whether you are a new Christian who is just learning what the Bible is about or a seasoned veteran of the Bible and its teachings, we are all being influenced spiritually every single day. Our days are filled with so many worldly things that it makes it difficult for even the wisest of people to stay on track for what is worthy of growth in the Spirit.

Think about your days and how they are filled—TV shows you watch, interactions at home and work, what you think about in your private time, all the minutia that is part of an ordinary day. What is happening in your life that is pulling you away from Christ or keeping you so busy that spiritual growth doesn’t even come to mind? Recognize the things in your life that make spiritual growth difficult.

Today’s scripture from 2 Timothy speaks of some of what we were told to stay clear of 2,000 years ago, and yet is still relevant today. Awareness of what is pulling us away from Christ and what is drawing us closer helps us see where changes need to take place and actions to be taken. We need to be strong and confident in making those changes.

Prayer

Dear Lord, Today’s distractions are different from the ones your follower’s faced more than 2,000 years ago, yet they have the same effect. They keep us from spending time with you. As we move toward the cross this Lenten season, help us to focus on growing spiritually and better serving you. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Will you become more aware of what influences your spiritual growth on a regular basis?

TUESDAY, MARCH 26

Wake Up

By Rev. Josh Amerson

“The light entered the world, but people loved the darkness...”

JOHN 3:19

Have you ever been in bed asleep when someone enters the room and turns on all the lights? It's incredible how quickly we can go from a state of deep, peaceful sleep to a state of utter rage, isn't it?!

The in-breaking of Christ into the world is just like that. So many of us love the darkness more than the light. For some, it's because we prefer to keep our sinful actions and thoughts hidden from the rest of the world.

For many of us, though, it's just that we would prefer to stay asleep. To the concerns of others, to the places where injustice reigns, to the demands of living in beloved community, and to the growth needed for our own souls we say, “Can't you see I'm too tired for all that? Turn out the light!”

But the light of Christ is not going anywhere. It won't be extinguished, even by a cross. And we will certainly regret it if we put the pillow over our heads and shut our eyes to God's glory around us. So may we heed Paul's call: “Wake up, O sleeper! Get up from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!”

Prayer

Heavenly Father, Wake me up to hear your word, to feel your love and to accept your grace. Help me to see the light of Christ. Amen.

Today's Thought

Wake up today knowing that Christ is shining on you every step of the way.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27

We're Not Alone

By Chris Faklaris

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

ROMANS 8:28

We all go through times when we aren't sure of what's coming next. No matter who you are or what you do, you will experience feelings and even seasons of uncertainty.

Today is no different.

The economy, which has been strong for years, has a more uncertain future. The political climate, no matter which side you support, is as uncertain as ever. Our families, our jobs and our communities are changing.

It is easy and natural to try to go it alone and solve our own and all the world's problems ourselves. We are raised to be independent and problem solvers. But the Bible teaches us that we are not alone and don't have to figure everything out on our own.

As Proverbs 3:5–6 says, *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight."* So today, as you worry about what's happening in your life, try to take a step back, breath, and look to God for the answers.

Prayer

Dear Lord, Thank you for your everlasting love and guidance. As we go about our days, please help us be reminded of this love and your invitation to trust in you. Amen.

Today's Thought

"I've commanded you to be strong and brave. Don't ever be afraid or discouraged! I am the Lord your God, and I will be there to help you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9)

THURSDAY, MARCH 28

Is It Worth It?

By Rev. Jenna Kennedy

“It is also true that we must love God with all our heart, mind, and strength, and that we must love others as much as we love ourselves. These commandments are more important than all the sacrifices and offerings that we could possibly make.”

MARK 12:33

Before any big decision is made, most of us wonder what kind of sacrifices will be required. If we have another child, will we forfeit travel or retirement savings? If we move, will we still be able to go out to eat? If we buy a car now, will we have enough money for anything else?

I have caught myself before as I wondered about my sacrifices thinking how can I think any sacrifice would equal the sacrifice Jesus made for us? I do not remember any Bible verses where Jesus thinks, “If I do decide to save people from their sins, will they make their lives worth it? If I die for (insert your name here), will they do all they can to live for me and share my love? Is it worth it?”

This season let us remember the sacrifice Christ made for us—the ultimate sacrifice—and then ask yourself how you can make your life worth that sacrifice?

God loves us even if we don’t, and we will all definitely falter at times, but Christ deserves our best. Let us live our life for him!

Prayer

Dear Lord, You have given us life and love, yet we fail to acknowledge your sacrifice. Thank you for giving us another chance and help us to focus on the things that are “worth it” as we live our life for you. Amen.

Today’s Thought

I will love God with all my heart, mind and strength.

FRIDAY, MARCH 29

Fear Less

By Bette Whitley

“The angel said, ‘Don’t be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful joyous news for all people. Your Savior is born today in David’s city. He is Christ the Lord.’”

LUKE 2:10–11

“Fear Less.” Emblazoned on the t-shirt of a teenage girl walking toward me at the mall. A message to herself or to me?

There is, however, much to fear: chaos, change, failure, illness, loss, death. There are so many ways to fail, so many reasons to feel less than; how could a rational person not find something to fear. Except for that thing about what the Bible, Old Testament and New, tells us a whopping 365 times: be not afraid.

We have read the stories about angelic visitations to illiterate shepherds and pregnant women, people hearing the very voice of God, a man swallowed by a whale, a teenager cheerfully handed over by his siblings to kidnappers with nefarious intent and a man in close quarters with a lion. I don’t know that we spend nearly enough time considering how terrifying any of those encounters would actually be. Most of us will never know fear based on experiences similar to those biblical events, but many of us will have or have had moments of pure white, unadulterated fear.

I have read many excellent articles, essays, devotions and meditations on fear, well thought out, beautifully written and convincing, at least for a while. For me, the most memorable statement about fear is the one I read more than 25 years ago, written in black marker on a piece of yellow poster board taped to the wall in the room of an anonymous nursing home patient's.

I was visiting another patient on a sunny day, feeling fine, not a problem in the world or so I thought. I read, on that wall, Isaiah 41:10: *“Do not be afraid, I am your God; I will help you, I will protect you with my strong right hand.”* I found myself standing in the hall, crying, understanding in that moment that the message was for me as much as for the unfortunate soul confined to that bed. That verse has never left me.

When I consider, once again, the fear the disciples and Jesus’ family, friends and followers must have felt in the hours leading to his arrest, imprisonment, execution and death, they must have been overwhelmed. Only Jesus himself, human and divine, knew that there was nothing to fear.

Prayer

Eternal God, Creator of the Universe, let us feel your presence always, whether praising you or seeking help and comfort. You are our God, we are your People, and we are grateful for every blessing so richly bestowed. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Don’t let fear rule your life. Look to God to help you overcome fear and “be not afraid.”

SATURDAY, MARCH 30

Too Busy for God

By Chuck Cape

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

ROMANS 12:2

I’m a busy guy. Take writing this devotion. I was asked over a month ago to prayerfully consider writing a Lent devotion. I agreed. However, when it came right down to it, it was difficult to find an hour to sit down and actually perform the task.

Sure, my job as a Software Development Manager for General Motors does keep me pretty busy. And, of course, I’m also handling the inevitable house tasks, such as minor repairs and general upkeep that keep popping up. I also like spending time with Sharon, my wife...she’s a lot of fun. I still want to spend time with the kids. Yes, they’re grown but we still make time for each other. The dogs have to be walked...twice, every day. And, if you know me, then you know that I can’t walk by a piano and not sit down to play it. Add in doing taxes and reviewing the portfolio and planning the vacation and trying to decide if we should finally “cut the cable” and, and, and, and...a million other “ands.”

So, here I am, one day before the due date, late at night, writing my devotion.

Don’t get me wrong. I’m not complaining. I actually enjoy it.

But it occurred to me that it is really is difficult to have a quiet time...to find time for God. To read his word. To pray. To reflect. To just be still and hear God’s quiet voice over the roar of my 21st century life. There are certainly a lot of potential excuses.

But, as Lorraine Murray (from Grace Notes) put it... “I’m not sure that I want to tell St. Peter at the pearly gates that the dog ate my Bible.”

Prayer

Lord Jesus, This world is hard. With so many responsibilities clamoring for our attention, it’s easy to allow this world to block out your presence in our lives. Help us. Help us to make you the priority. Help us to stay in contact with you throughout the day. Help us to slow down and focus our hearts and minds on you. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Today’s Thought

We somehow find time to do all the “things” in our busy world, yet we fail to find time to spend with God. What can you do today to change that?

SUNDAY, MARCH 31

Blessed to be a Blessing

By Rev. David Melton

"I will bless her and even give you a son from her. I will bless her so that she will become nations, and kings of peoples will come from her." (v. 16)

GENESIS 17:1-7, 15-16

Patrick Lencioni, in his book, "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team," shares that the first dysfunction is the lack of trust. He states that trust is the foundation of every team and every relationship. If trust is not there, and we are not vulnerable with each other, we will not grow in relationship with each other, and the team will not accomplish its tasks.

From the beginning of the Holy Scriptures, God asked all of creation to honor and trust God. But, the first humans failed to do so. Adam and Eve did not trust God and ate from the forbidden fruit in the Garden. Ever since that time, humans have had an ongoing relationship with God that has been challenged and plagued with alienation and reconciliation. There have been times when we have trusted God and turned toward God, and times when we have only trusted ourselves and put boundaries between ourselves and God.

In Genesis 17, God blessed Abram and Sarai with a son and a multitude of descendants because they were willing to drop their boundaries and honor and trust God. Their names were changed by God, they left their homeland in Ur, followed God to a new land and God used them to bless the whole world. They were blessed to be a blessing.

Creating boundaries between ourselves and God often leaves us questioning our dreams, desires, expectations, beliefs and even our love for God. Our willingness to trust God and to follow God leads us to a blessed life. When we trust God we can be a blessing to all of those around us; even to the ends of the whole world.

Prayer

Gracious God, I come before you today burdened by countless distractions, worries and fears. Lift me up with your healing grace, and revive your spirit within me. I praise you because you keep your word. Forgive me when I do not trust you. May my life be focused not on my failures, but on your love and forgiveness. Amen.

Today's Thought

Will you trust God today?

MONDAY, APRIL 1

An Attitude of Gratitude

By Anne W. West

“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

PHILIPPIANS 4:6

Last year, a friend gave me the daily devotional book “365 Devotions to Embrace What Matters Most.” The introduction explains that while time can seem to muddle on forever, as we get older the more we realize time really does fly by. We wonder where the time has gone and how we spent it.

Did we do something meaningful and discover new things? Or, did we binge watch television shows and go from one superficial encounter to the next? Did we allow fear or laziness to win the day when we were unhappy with our job or our life?

One daily entry that has stuck with me is “The Art of Attitude.” It points out that our attitude is key to being a better human. Our thoughts and emotions are ours to control. So, too, is choosing our attitude.

The devotion came to life when our Sunday school class recently did a day-long study on Philippians. It’s a short book, with only four chapters, that Paul wrote to express his appreciation and affection for the Philippian believers. Despite being in prison, he encouraged them to live out their faith in joy and unity. Paul choose his attitude. He maintained a positive outlook and unwavering faith. He wrote, *“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”* (Philippians 4:13)

Lent is a time of self-reflection, making it a great time for an attitude check. Since our study, I’ve thought a lot about how to be more like Paul and develop an “attitude of gratitude” for the things that God has given me and for those things he hasn’t. I can start by embracing what matters most and trying to make a difference somewhere along the way.

Prayer

Loving God, I rejoice in the fact that you surround me with your love. I ask for your forgiveness. I seek your guidance to help me live a better life. Amen.

Today’s Thought

The remarkable thing is, we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. —Charles R. Swindoll

TUESDAY, APRIL 2

Christ Is in Your Heart— Yes, Your Heart

By Sean Taylor

“When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.’”

LUKE 19:5

More than 10 million readers have enjoyed Robert Boyd Munger's spiritually challenging meditation on Christian discipleship, "My Heart, Christ's Home." Imagining what it would be like to have Jesus come to the home of our hearts, Munger moves room by room considering what Christ desires for us.

In the living room, we prepare to meet Christ daily. In the dining room, we examine together what appetites should and should not control us. We even explore the closets in our lives that Christ can help us clean out. Munger's practical and profound book helps you give Christ control over all your life.

There are likely times in all our lives when we don't feel very honorable, stretching the truth for our own agendas, telling ourselves the actions are for some greater good that we feel everyone is ultimately better for. Zacchaeus is a biblical example of this. He was not known for his honesty or his examples of faith-based leadership. In fact, he charged his own people huge fees on top of the taxes the government demanded from them, effectively making everyone despise him.

Christ was keenly aware of all this but made it a point to call upon Zacchaeus and said specifically "I must stay at YOUR HOUSE today." Why Zacchaeus's house? A house that was built upon the money he had effectively stolen from his people. Well, this really hammers home the point even more.

All our houses are built with some degree of faulty construction without Jesus. Whether it is a faulty foundation of pride, our faulty wiring of lust and covetousness, pipes flowing with envy and jealousy or rooftops only partially covering our sins and evil thoughts, each home is destined to deteriorate, depreciate and ultimately collapse without Christ residing in it. What's even more amazing when you read this scripture is that Jesus isn't waiting for Zacchaeus to invite him, he's going ahead and inviting himself.

Jesus is as aware of your failures and sin as he was aware of Zacchaeus's shortcomings, yet he wants to move in and make your heart his home. In fact, he's there right now and has been there all along. You just need to decide to sit down with him and explore all that a relationship with him can be.

Prayer

Father, Thank you for living in our hearts and making it a home worth living in. Amen.

Today's Thought

What room will you visit Christ in today?

Let God Take Your Burdens

By Sally Murphy

*“Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you,
Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”*

ISAIAH 41:10

Worry consumes too much of my life. For as long as I can remember, I have been consumed by anxiety, fear and uncertainty. My mind seems to be like a hamster on a wheel, constantly running and running but never reaching a destination of interest. Hours and hours lost to needless doubt.

Why is it so difficult to turn off the whirlwind of dark thoughts when I know God will gladly take away my troubles if only I would let them go?

Saint Francis de Sales prayer reminds me that God will always watch over me... and all of us who believe in His truth:

Do not look forward in fear to the changes and chances of this life;
Rather, look to them with full confidence that, as they arise,
God, to whom you belong will in His love enable you to profit by them.
He has guided you thus far in life, and He will lead you safely through all trials;
and when you cannot stand it, God will bury you in His arms.
Do not fear what may happen tomorrow;
the same everlasting Father who cares for you today
will take care of you then and every day.
He will either shield you from suffering,
or will give you unfailing strength to bear it.
Be at peace, then, and put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginations. Amen.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, You know our worries and fears. Lighten our hearts to the comfort of your love. Amen.

Today's Thought

Let God carry your burdens today.

THURSDAY, APRIL 4

Like a Little Child

By Barbara Sanko

“And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.’”

MATTHEW 18:2–4

When my oldest grandson, Nathaniel, was a toddler, he invented a game that we played often. Whenever he would first see me, he would hide behind his mother’s legs. Then he would cautiously peep around, break into a delighted smile, run pell-mell toward me, and, when he was close enough, launch himself into my arms. I always caught him, smothered him with kisses and dissolved into giggles with him.

One day, as I watched him prepare to launch, it struck me that this miniature human being does something very naturally that we full-size humans must learn and relearn and sometimes never master—trust perfectly. There was no room in his mind for doubt—if he launched, I would catch.

It occurred to me that God must want us to trust Him in that open, childlike manner—completely, totally, with every ounce of our being. Jesus reminded his disciples of this in the scripture passage above. Because of our life experiences, we adults have learned not to trust. It is important, though, for us to realize that God is worthy of our complete, perfect trust. When we trust him perfectly, we can surrender our all to Him. Like a loving parent (or grandparent!), He will be there with us and for us.

Prayer

O Lord, Help thou our unbelief! Help us realize that as our Father, our Creator, you are always there, loving us, waiting patiently for us to love and trust you. Thank you for sending us little children to love, to care for and to learn from. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Trust God with the innocence of a young child.

FRIDAY, APRIL 5

Choices

By Rev. Dan Brown

“Look here! Today I’ve set before you life and what’s good versus death and what’s wrong. If you obey the Lord your God’s commandments that I’m commanding you right now by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways... then you will live and thrive, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you refuse to listen, and so are misled... I’m telling you right now that you will definitely die... I call heaven and earth as my witnesses...I have set life and death, blessing and curse before you. Now choose life...!”

DEUTERONOMY 30:15–19

Life is loaded with choices. All kinds of choices! In fact, chances are good that before you started reading this devotional you already faced dozens of choices today. There are the quick, simple choices that we have to make: what to wear, what to eat, which route we will take to get to school or the office, whether to take the time and stop to get gas, or risk getting to our destination without stopping, etc. You get the idea.

There also are the choices that are slightly more difficult, but still don’t stress us out. For example, when I sat down to write this devotional I had to decide the subject on which I would focus. After reading this far, you may be wishing I had chosen a different subject. Oh well, this was the choice I made. Some of our choices are like that, aren’t they? They demand some thought, but they don’t push us too far emotionally.

However, some of the choices we make really are crucial. Even if we’re not aware of it at the time, they have lasting consequences. When I stood at the altar and married Carol, I knew I was making an important choice, but I couldn’t even begin to imagine the impact that one decision would have on the rest of my life. Fortunately, it was one of the best decisions I ever made. When we decided to have children, we knew our lives would undergo change, but nothing—not even the advice of friends, parents and ministers—could have prepared us for the difference our children would make in our lives.

One of the most important choices we face is how to live our lives. We have our options. We can choose to live for ourselves, put ourselves at the center of our lives, do what we want, when we want, and the way we want with little regard for anyone or anything else. We can choose to make life about things and put all our energy into acquiring and amassing a bunch of stuff so we can show it to others. We can choose to live with little character, or we can choose to make character a very high priority in our lives. We have the choice of how to live our lives.

In the verses above, there is some of the best advice you will ever read about how to live life. The people stood at the edge of the Jordan River. On the other side was the Promised Land, the land for which the people had searched and yearned and dreamed, the land that flowed with milk and honey. They were just about to realize their dreams. However, right before Joshua led them across the Jordan, Moses had the words in this scripture for them. Sounds like Moses is telling us in a brutally honest way that the most crucial choice we can make when it comes to every aspect of life is to live with and for God! It’s something to think about!

Prayer

Oh Lord, Thank you for breathing into us the breath of life. Now, give us the courage and the wisdom to live with you and for you. In Christ’s name, Amen!

Today’s Thought

Choose to live your life with God beside you every step of the way.

SATURDAY, APRIL 6

Faith That Withstands Fire

By Lexy Faklaris

“If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

DANIEL 3:17–18

One of my favorite Bible passages is the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. During the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar, he commanded that the entire kingdom of Babylon bow down to a giant gold statue of him whenever the music played, and if not, they would be thrown into a fiery furnace.

However, three Jewish boys, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, would not bow down. They were taken into the King’s custody and thrown into the fire. Before they were thrown into the fire, they said to the King that they knew their God is capable of saving them, but even if he doesn’t, they will still worship Him. They were thrown into the fire, and there were four men seen walking around. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire unscathed, without even their clothing singed. From that point on, King Nebuchadnezzar declared that the kingdom of Babylon must worship the one true God.

I believe that this Bible passage is such a great example of what our faith in God should look like. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego knew that God was capable of saving them, but they promised to worship him even if he did not. I think we as Christians need to have faith like that of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego: faith that God always has a plan for us, even if it is not what we think, and faith to trust in Him.

Prayer

God, Give us the courage to be as faithful as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Does your faith withstand the fire test?

SUNDAY, APRIL 7

Looking in God's House

By Kim Bertschi

"When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'"

LUKE 2:48–49

A devotion I read this morning made me see this passage in a new light. There are many things that I search for in this life. Peace. Love. Comfort. Challenge. Courage. Acceptance.

I search for these things in the world around me. I look to other people, loved ones and strangers alike, for acceptance and for love. I buy things to try to fill the empty spaces. Or, I decide I should improve myself in some way—healthier, stronger, smarter, more generous, more loving—all the while looking to find that which can only be found in my Father's house.

All those things I need to complete me, all the love, comfort and acceptance, cannot be wholly found in the world. I can find imitations of them. I can find quick fixes, but they do not last.

Yet, if I look in my Father's house, God's house, what do I find? Everlasting love. True peace, the peace which surpasses all understanding. I find hope and, with it, the courage to try again another day. I find God's unconditional acceptance—for He alone knows me through and through and chooses to love me anyway.

I find forgiveness. I find comfort, and I find a place to rest, a place to discard the fears and anxieties that I heap upon myself by living in, and of, the world around me. Jesus' Father is my Father, too. I am his adopted daughter, and His house is always open to me. I may feel like a visitor, but it is my home.

Prayer

Loving God, Thank you for accepting me as I am. Forgive me of my sins and help me to love others as you love me. Amen.

Today's Thought

God is not a quick fix. Take some time today to visit with him, in His house or yours.

MONDAY, APRIL 8

Imagine Your Firsts

By Rev. Kathy Brockman

“God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.”

GENESIS 1:31A

We live in a world that seeks to define us by our appearance and judge us by the value of our work, skills and accomplishments. It starts when we are children and we are asked the question, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” As adults, we are asked another version, “What do you do for a living?” Society and the world attribute our value to appearance, accomplishments and our ability to fit in.

God does not define us using these criteria. We are created in the divine image of God and declared “good” from the very beginning. However, we have a hard time loving ourselves most of the time and realizing that we are enough. Loving ourselves takes time and self-awareness and intentionality.

Joyce Rupp wrote a poem, “The First Time,” and these are a few of the lines of the poem:

imagine the first time
you opened your eyes

I recently led a group of women in a spiritual growth study where we reflected on the many “firsts” of our human experience. “Firsts” such as opening our eyes to see another human face, touching the softness of our own skin, hearing our name, walking on our own without falling, having a warm bath. It sounds like something simple to think about, but it is not as simple as it seems.

I invite you to think about this for a minute, you probably won’t remember the exact first time you did each of these but imagine what they may have been like and felt like. As you imagine them, notice what feelings come up for you. Where do you see the reflection of God in these feelings? It may take a few minutes of reflection to get there. It may take remembering that you are created in the image of God and loved more than you can imagine.

When you’ve thought about it for a few minutes, give God thanks for yourself and then ask God for help as you continue to notice how sacred you and your experiences are. This exercise of imagining your “firsts” will be different for each of us. I hope that it is one that reminds you of the God who created the heavens and the earth and all that dwells thereon. I also hope it reminds you of the God who loves each of us so much that he came to show us just how great that love is.

Prayer

Father God, As we reflect on the “firsts” in our lives, may we see the unending love that you grant us. Amen.

Today’s Thought

God created you. He loves you.

TUESDAY, APRIL 9

I've Got a Bunch of Questions

By Paul Rozeman

"Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed."

PROVERBS 15:22

We are all really "curious types." God made us that way. You can probably recall as a little kid or teenager asking your parents question after question after question. Meaningful ones like:

Why is that tree green?

Why are there bumps in the road?

Why do I have to eat my vegetables?

Why can't I sleep late?

Why are you dragging me to church?

Do I have to get a summer job?

Can I live with you guys after I graduate?

Are you guys going to leave me an inheritance?

As adults, we still ask our parents questions (if we are lucky enough to have them with us). We ask our siblings questions, our teachers and, of course, our almighty God. The experts say the primary thing that prevents us from asking questions is fear.

Speaking of fear, we recently solicited questions about life from our 10th and 11th grade small group. We encouraged them to think in terms of questions you might have for God, questions about faith, life, the future, etc. You just never know about teenagers. Some of the responses:

Where did God come from?

Do I control the outcome of my life or does God?

Can you see the Earth when you die?

Can you live forever?

We will talk about these questions going forward without fear and hopefully instill in these teens the notion that God not only is big enough to handle anything but also craves their curiosity!

We know asking questions helps us to know God better. We know that we can challenge things we need help with and we know that we can bask in the wonder of the Lord. Think about this as we advance toward the Calvary: Jesus asked God a very difficult question, one that seems so vivid, raw and, sometimes, heartbreaking. From the cross, Jesus asked; "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" In other words, where are you God?

God answered in such a magnificent way!

Prayer

Gracious God, With confidence we know that you are so great that you want to work in our lives to answer our questions and understand our doubts. May we fearlessly crave to know you better and bask in the wonder of your Word. Amen.

Today's Thought

God is plenty big enough to handle all our questions and even our doubts.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10

Counting My Blessings

By Sharon Nuckols

“A Friend Loves at all Times...”

PROVERBS 17:17

In January this year, I celebrated a Big Birthday—I turned 70! WOW, I can’t explain the many emotions I experienced up to this date. I really didn’t want to celebrate this birthday; I just wanted it to “quietly pass.”

My dear, young friends had other ideas. They wanted to celebrate me and have a small party. So, I agreed to have a “70’s” party on my 70th. They organized and prepared everything. I just donned my 70’s outfit and appeared. It was the most fun ever. Everyone got into the 70’s spirit. It was my all-time favorite birthday. I’ll treasure the memories made that evening forever.

But, mostly, I’ll treasure the bond and friendship of these extraordinary people that came into my life when I stepped out and agreed to be in a musical some 10 years ago at DUMC. I have done 13 plays/musicals since then. Through the course of these years, I’ve made friends that are now treasured family. I have daughters I never thought I would have. My life is more enriched because of the experiences I had during each show. The audience can’t comprehend the camaraderie that is formed during the process of every production. We, the actors on stage, reap more rewards than the audience could ever imagine. Laughing, helping each other, encouraging each other, and listening to each other, are all the ingredients for forming lasting relationships.

So, this year, my 70th, I count my blessings starting with every person that was at my celebration. I would never have known any of these people if not for the Performing Arts Program at DUMC. So, next time you are at one of our shows, remember that there’s more than meets the eye and what is happening on stage.

Prayer

Lord, Thank you for the gift of friendship that often appears when we least expect it. May we always open our hearts and minds to others. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Friends are often our chosen family.

Fully in the Moment

By Helen Rice

“O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.”

PSALM 63:1–3

Lent is a season of preparation, opening my heart for Christ’s re-entrance into my life through His sacrifice on the cross. It isn’t like Advent because there is little family tradition attached to it—no family stories, parties, dinners or gift exchanges to heighten my sense of involvement, excitement and anticipation. Lent is an introspective time. It may not even be comfortable or celebratory for us as we fumble through the idea of sacrificing, searching, praying or stretching further than we already have.

Lent is a time for renewal, confession and reality checking. It requires some quiet and “be still” time, something today’s society and life styles don’t necessarily lend themselves well to. Maybe it’s too hard for me right now. My schedule is busy. My plate is full. I am doing all I can comfortably do. Yet, there is a little nagging thought in my soul that tells me I can do more.

During Lent in the Methodist Church we were attending many years ago, I was asked to sing at the early service. I was seated in one of the front rows when our pastor simply asked us to close our eyes and bow our heads as we contemplated the upcoming crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Through my mind’s eye, I was immediately transported to the base of the cross where Jesus hung. Like a moving camera, my eye slowly rose from His feet and up His slumped body and panned out the length of His outstretched arm, sagging and white on the underside, to His hand pierced and bleeding. Then my eye slowly moved back to His head with the crown of thorns pushing into His brow, the agony clear on His face. I was stricken by the reality of this moment. I could hardly breathe. In my mind I cried out, “Oh Jesus, I am so sorry that you had to endure this.” Then He said to me in clear unmistakable tones, “Helen, I did it for you.”

I felt limp, shocked, overwhelmed. He knew my name!! He spoke to me in a way that still rings in my spirit today when I think of it.

I’ll never forget this Lent moment. I didn’t do much to receive it. I didn’t pray a lot or read my Bible more or sacrifice sweets or behave any better. I just made myself present to receive anything that might be revealed to me at that moment. I obeyed the minister’s request. I bowed my head, closed my eyes and opened my heart to receive. It took a tiny space of my time. And God poured out the blessing of His love for me, His mindfulness of me and His response to my cry of grief.

For Lent and for any season of our life, my strong well-seasoned advice is bow your head and close your eyes. Be there fully in that moment—at His feet—loving Him, thanking Him. He will meet you there. Talk to Him directly. Sing to Him directly. Concentrate on Him without distraction. He will reward even the shortest of prayers from our hearts directly to His in love and faith and humility. It will surprise you. Even now the reassurance of His presence with me stuns me regularly.

Prayer

Loving God, We come to you with so many distractions. Help us to truly listen for your voice. Thank you for always being beside us and loving us, even when we aren’t listening. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Be still and KNOW that I am God. Jesus the very thought of thee. Mold me and make me after thy will while I am waiting yielded and still. Be still and know the Lord is on thy side. Were the whole realm of nature mine that were a present far too small—love so amazing—so divine—demands my soul my life my all.

FRIDAY, APRIL 12

Accept the Offer

By Sid Linton

“The one who supplies seed for planting and bread for eating will supply and multiply your seed and will increase your crop, which is righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous in every way. Such generosity produces thanksgiving to God through us. Your ministry of this service to God’s people isn’t only fully meeting their needs but it is also multiplying in many expressions of thanksgiving to God.”

2 CORINTHIANS 9:10–12

While out of town recently, I got an email that a neighbor was in the hospital. Upon returning I called him, and our conversation went like this:

“How are you doing?”

“I’m home, but not doing so good.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, Jack, can I bring you lunch and/or dinner today?”

“Yes. That would be great.”

At first, I was surprised by his quick acceptance of my offer. I thought, and think, that most people would hesitate and provide an out to the one doing the offering.

But, this is a remarkable man. He is well known in our Conference and District and his church (not DUMC) and in our region outside the church as a deeply devout Christian who walks the walk as much as he humbly talks the talk. He and his wife fostered and adopted several children in addition to their natural born. He has long given generously to many Christian causes and has taught Christianity in many places including, in his days of better health, a Bible study in his home every week.

Then it struck me that those who are naturally generous in sharing God’s gifts also are naturally ready to accept them from others. He KNEW that my meager offer was not a sacrifice but was God working through me to answer his needs.

Prayer

Father, Hear our prayers. May we bear your light to all we meet along life’s way. Amen.

Today’s Thought

The next time I am reluctant to accept someone’s offer of kindness, I’ll remember that maybe I don’t understand that generosity is truly a two-way street.

SATURDAY, APRIL 13

Wise Counsel

By John Sivak

“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”

PROVERBS 15:22

A person can be driven to succeed in areas such as school and work by believing in themselves and pressing hard for the goals they set. However, there comes a point in time where a person realizes the need for God’s help and for the advice of others. This happens when a person reaches a plateau or is burdened with repeated failures.

Personally, I have had to admit my weaknesses and break from the “do-it-myself” attitude. While I want to be in control of my work, my relationships, my finances, my health...everything, the greatest thing I have done for myself is to give up a lot of that control and let God and others help me.

God is the “Wonderful Counselor,” and God has put others in our lives to provide wisdom and advice...parents, teachers, employers, friends, attorneys, accountants, athletic coaches, financial planners, etc. Are you seeking God’s counsel in prayer and in studying His Word? Who comes to mind as people in your life that offer wise counsel and advice?

If possible, identify more than one counselor in each area of your life and then weigh and discern what they are advising you to believe and do. Compare this with what God says to believe and do.

I have committed to intentionally seeking wise counsel in all areas of my life. I intend for my year to be filled with counsel from many advisors: a tennis and golf coach to help me with my swing, a financial counselor to help us plan our retirement strategy, our married couple small group to counsel us as we grow as a couple and a new manager at work that has the keys to success in his organization.

It is never too late to seek advice! I only wish I had realized the benefits of other’s experience and counsel sooner.

Prayer

Loving God, You truly are the “Wonderful Counselor.” We praise you for the guidance and direction You give us and for those You place in our lives to help us along life’s way. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Does God’s word come to mind when you think about wise counsel and advice?

SUNDAY, APRIL 14

Palm Sunday

By Rev. W. Melton McNeill

“When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, ‘Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.’” (vv. 1–3)

MATTHEW 21:1–11

What a contrast between this Sunday’s scripture lesson and next week’s. Jesus has instituted the Lord’s Supper and now is on his way to his death on the cross. Picture this in your imagination: the long awaited Messiah, King of Kings and Lord of Lords riding on a donkey’s colt, not astride a beautiful majestic white stallion, no leather and star studded saddle, but someone’s used cloak thrown over the colt for his saddle.

People not only lined the streets with branches cut from trees but also actually took their cloaks and put them on the ground to form a pathway for the incoming Jesus. They let their voices be heard resounding through the city “Hosanna to the Son of David, Hosanna in the highest.” Adoration, excitement, the Messiah is here.

Next week, an adoring crowd turned to an accusing crowd, stirred to fanaticism to cry out “crucify Him, crucify Him.” What a contrast from Hosanna to Crucify!

Then follows a cruel, humiliating death on a cross,
disciples who denied him and fled in fear for their own lives
because of their association with Jesus,
and an empty tomb!

What I see as crucial, in his crucifixion, were his words, *“My God, my God why hast thou deserted me.”* (Matthew 27:46) His excruciating pain was from not only the nails in his body but also the angst of abandonment from God. He feels God has left him desolate, all alone, abandoned. But then these words, *“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”* (Luke 23:34) Even in the midst of his suffering, he thinks of his people he came to serve, and he lives up to his teaching in the Lord’s Prayer, *“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”* (Luke 11:4) And since he was forgiving to those who were taking his life, with calmness and assurance he can say *“Father into thy hands I commit my spirit.”* (Luke 23:46)

Would to God, we can remember forever what Christ did for us and make sure we follow His teaching to love one another, even enough to forgive those who trespass against us.

Prayer

Loving God, We know You never abandon us and that You are always at our side. Open our hearts and minds to follow Jesus’ teachings to love one another. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Christ forgave those who were crucifying Him. Are we as forgiving?

MONDAY, APRIL 15

The Lunches

By Cheryl Dunbar

“You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”

JOHN 3:7

One of my favorite times of the year is Lent. It is usually associated with spring, flowers, bunnies, Easter eggs, new growth and beginnings and good food.

I really like the services that we have during Holy Week. The Maundy Thursday service and the Good Friday service are both very special. My favorite times during the week are the mid-day services we have each day that are followed by lunch.

About eight years ago I was asked to be in charge of the Holy Week lunches. Don't worry; my responsibility does not include anything to do with the meal preparation! Debbie and her staff do a terrific job with the soup and sandwiches.

Basically my job is to organize and staff the lunches with the UMW members, as they assist the kitchen with setting up the tables, serving the food and cleaning up. The UMW is very talented and faithful. We decorate the Fellowship Hall to make the room happy and bright so that all of us can enjoy the lunches just a little bit more.

I had no idea what I was getting into when I accepted this responsibility. I now know that it has been one of the best experiences I have ever had at DUMC. Working with the UMW is so rewarding. I always have an abundance of volunteers to help me get through this week. It is full of God's grace and abounding love.

Lent is a time of reflection and preparation. Serving God and the church in this way and at Easter gives me the joy that I need to be ready for Sunday morning.

Prayer

Thank you for sending Jesus to die on the cross. Thank you for Easter, when we celebrate the risen Lord. Amen.

Today's Thought

My favorite song at Easter is “Was It A Morning Like This?” as sung by Sandi Patti. If you haven't heard it, look it up online and you will be filled with love.

TUESDAY, APRIL 16

Why Do We Have Easter Eggs?

By Sharon Gilbert

"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;'"

JOHN 11:25

As a child, I remember asking the question, "Why eggs?" because rabbits don't lay eggs. It was as an adult that I found and read the children's book, "The Legend of the Easter Egg," by Lori Walburg. She explains in wonderful text and beautiful illustrations the meaning of the Easter egg.

In a summary of the book:

Just as a chick breaks out of an egg, so had Jesus broken free of the tomb of death. Easter eggs remind us that Jesus conquered death and gives us eternal life. That is the promise and joy of Easter.

The egg, an ancient symbol of new life, has become for Christians a symbol of the resurrection. Through the gift of Easter eggs, Christians remind each other that through Christ's resurrection, they, too, will conquer death and receive the gift of eternal life.

Prayer

Thank you, God, for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thank you also for the image of the egg to give us a visual representation of the resurrection. Amen.

Today's Thought

Spread the good news of Easter!

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17

Just Breathe

By Angela Arnold Go

“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”

COLOSSIANS 4:2

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16–18

Are you trying to increase your prayer time with God? I am. It’s one of my new year’s resolutions, but life always seems to get in the way. I seem to be able to pray mostly at the start or end of the day or over a meal. So how do we pray during the drudgery of the day?

At a women’s retreat earlier this year, I learned a simple way to pray, anywhere, anytime. It’s a “breath prayer.” While I’m sure many know this, it was a bit revolutionary for me as, I had grown up with the very formal concept of prayer.

A breath prayer encompasses one breath during which you say a name for God. Then as you exhale, you say your prayer, a request to God or praise for something God has given to you or done for you. Nothing could be simpler.

We are charged to pray without ceasing, which seems incredibly difficult to do. Maybe we are commanded to pray at all different times, during many circumstances and in a variety of ways. A breath prayer is one way to do this.

Prayer

Breathe in—Dear Lord, breathe out—help us learn to pray without ceasing. Amen.

Today’s Thought

I can pray in all circumstances if I simply breathe my prayer.

Making the Time

By Samantha Faklaris

“No discipline is fun while it lasts, but it seems painful at the time.

Later, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness for those who have been trained by it.”

HEBREWS 12:11

I'm far from a disciplined person. I have the best of intentions—and usually get everything I want (and need) to get done, but I'm often a last minute person for things I don't make priorities. There is always something else that comes up. Errands to run, chores to do, email and Instagram to check—ha! Yes, I'll get my exercise in, but it may not be as long of a workout as it should because I'll put it off. Goodness... I need to be committed (read: paid for) to a class and have it on my calendar for me to attend regularly.

Reading the Bible often is one of those things....there is always extra sleep to be had, a phone call to be made or dogs to play with during my quiet time. However, when I'm in a group that I need to be accountable to, it makes me disciplined to read, study and reflect. I'm not sure why I'm wired this way, but I am....and I'm so thankful for DISCIPLER classes to help me.

Over 15 years ago, I took my first DISCIPLER class with my husband. It was before we had children, I was traveling often for work, and it was hard to keep up with....but I was so glad I did it. I learned so much. I've taken Bible study classes here and there throughout the years since, but in September I joined my second DISCIPLER class and once again, I'm so thankful I did.

Not only am I learning every week (it's amazing how you can read the same Bible verse multiple times, but it means something different to you every time you read it), the time for reflection (personal and with others) has been incredible. I'm still not always good about the daily readings, but I'm working on it. The peace and hope it brings is like no other. Thank you God for you!

Prayer

Dear Lord, Thank you for blessing us with so much. As Christians, we are tasked with not only doing good, helping others and being kind, but we are supposed to continuously worship You and study Your word—from that we learn and adapt daily. Please help me to stay the path and continue to spend time with You each day. Distractions come easy, but when I make my time with You routine, discipline to study Your word and live Your way becomes much easier. It's in Your name that I pray and give thanks. Amen.

Today's Thought

God has given us today. How will we use it?

FRIDAY, APRIL 19

The Obituary

“When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

JOHN 19:30

Jesus Christ, 33, of Nazareth, died Friday on Mount Calvary, also known as Golgotha, the place of the skull. Betrayed by the apostle Judas, Jesus was crucified by the Romans, by order of the Ruler Pontius Pilate. The causes of death were crucifixion, extreme exhaustion, severe torture and loss of blood.

Jesus Christ, a descendant of Abraham, was a member of the house of David. He was the Son of the late Joseph, a carpenter of Nazareth, and Mary, His devoted Mother. Jesus was born in a stable in the city of Bethlehem, Judea. He is survived by his Mother, Mary, His faithful Apostles, numerous disciples and many other followers.

Jesus was self-educated and spent most of his adult life working as a Teacher. Jesus also occasionally worked as a Medical Doctor and it is reported that He healed many patients. Up until the time of His death, Jesus was teaching and sharing the Good News, healing the sick, touching the lonely, feeding the hungry and helping the poor.

Jesus was most noted for telling parables about His Father’s Kingdom and performing miracles, such as feeding over 5,000 people with only five loaves of bread and two fish, and healing a man who was born blind. On the day before His death, He held a Last Supper celebrating the Passover Feast, at which He foretold His death.

The body was quickly buried in a stone grave, which was donated by Joseph of Arimathea, a loyal friend of the family. By order of Pontius Pilate, a boulder was rolled in front of the tomb. Roman soldiers were put on guard.

In lieu of flowers, the family has requested that everyone try to live as Jesus did. Donations may be sent to anyone in need.

Prayer

Dear God, You gave your only Son for us so that we may live. We are forever grateful. Help us to be worthy of your love. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Long ago on a Good Friday, people trusted in God.

SATURDAY, APRIL 20

New Beginnings

By Teresa Dietz

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!”

ISAIAH 43:18–19

This past year was full of changes for our families. At about the same time, both sets of parents got to the point where a change in living arrangements was required.

First, it was my mother. At the beginning of last year, shortly before her 90th birthday, she decided to sell her house and move to a Senior Living facility. With the help of my brother and sister, she downsized and put her house on the market, which thankfully sold right away. By April she moved into her new apartment and closed on the house. The move marked the start of a new phase of life for her.

She took an interest in the apartment, started volunteering and walked all over town—to church, to the drug store, to get her hair cut and to do her shopping. She enjoys having neighbors in her age group and eating lunch with them in her building. Her attitude changed from worrying about all that could go wrong to one of joy and contentment. Her first Christmas turned out to be picture perfect as family members took turns visiting her so she wouldn't be overwhelmed with too many people at once. She was able to prepare some food for everyone...still one of her many joys. Perhaps she should have moved before she did, but we are grateful she did move and that this new phase of her life has turned out to be a positive new beginning for her.

While all this was going on, Dave's dad became ill and ended up in the hospital and rehab. When he came home, he required physical and occupational therapy and weekly health care to get him back to his baseline condition. It soon became clear that his baseline condition was not optimal as Dave's mom was the sole caregiver. Because of his blindness and inability to do much for himself, she was getting worn out. Dave's family felt the time had come for them to move but with all that was going on, his Mom was overwhelmed and unable to focus on making a change. We decided to give them time and space to figure out what they wanted to do.

Suddenly in the middle of the summer, they decided to move to the Methodist Home in their area. They immediately put the house up for sale and started to prepare to move. Luckily the house sold quickly, and before we knew it, they had moved and begun a new way of life. The move has also been perfect for them. Because the Home is large and has lots of options, including a restaurant, Dave's dad is now able to get some exercise by walking around the building. Many people from their neighborhood and/or church are residents so they quickly got to know their neighbors and spend time daily socializing with them. We hear from them weekly how much they are enjoying their new home and this new phase of life.

Just as God promises us a new beginning as we move from Lent into Easter, in the same way he gave our parents a new beginning in the latter years of their life. And, just as they had to be open to making a change to experience this blessing, we must be open to the chances God gives us for new beginnings in our lives so we may experience his blessings.

Prayer

Dear God, Thank you for new beginnings and all the joy they can bring. Amen.

Today's Thought

God gives us many chances for new beginnings throughout our life if we are open to what he is offering us.

SUNDAY, APRIL 21

Victory in Jesus

By Glenda Joiner

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

1 PETER 1:3

Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again! We repeat this most Sundays because this is what we believe. Our hope is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

In the past year, I have felt the loss of nine people. Four were sweet folks in my Sunday school class all who loved Jesus and put their trust in him. Then outside of DUMC, three friends in different arenas in my life have gone on to be with Jesus. I also lost my Dad in 2018, and he, too, was a believer.

As I write this, I have just lost someone very dear to me, my mother’s sister, who is like a second mom to me. A fast growing brain tumor in just a few weeks has taken her away. Over the last five years since my mother’s death, my Aunt and I have talked everyday by phone since 250 miles separates us. I’m so thankful her Lord and Savior is Jesus.

For those of us who believe in Jesus’ death and resurrection, there is the hope of eternal life with him. In the time of sadness that bites our guts and grieves our souls, we are comforted by God’s will through Jesus who has given us hope of resurrection. The comforter, the Holy Spirit, who the Father has sent to live within all believers gives us this assurance.

Jesus, The Word, [The Word Became Flesh] In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. (John 1:1–3)

This Jesus is our creator who stepped down from His Heavenly powers, sacrificing everything willingly so that you and I could be reconciled to God our Father receiving life everlasting. A promise which releases the all-consuming fear of death for ourselves and those we love.

“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:55)

Prayer

Thank you, Father, for amazing grace giving us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Today Jesus Christ is at the right hand of God interceding for us. Praise to God for a Living Hope and the promise that one day we will see our loved ones again.

Ministry Opportunities

MISSIONS

Habitat for Humanity—Save the Dates!

The 29th Habitat for Humanity home, April 25 – 27 and May 1 – 4

SUPPORT

Stephen Ministry

Stephen Ministers provide high quality, confidential, one-to-one Christian care to hurting people.

DivorceCare

Wednesday nights, 6:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Alzheimer Support Group

Second Thursday of every month, 10:00 a.m.

Contact kathy.brockman@dunwoodyumc.org for more information on support.

FELLOWSHIP

Small Group Studies

New Small Group Studies begin this Spring. Contact david.melton@dunwoodyumc.org or 770-394-0675 for questions and offerings.

Real Marriage: In the World, Not of the World

June 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29, during the Sunday school hour. Led by Rev. Josh Amerson and Lindsey Amerson. Space is limited. Register to jenna.kennedy@dunwoodyumc.org by May 1.

MUSIC

Join a Choir

Interested in joining the Children's, Youth, Adult or Handbell choirs? Contact music@dunwoodyumc.org.

PERFORMING ARTS

Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat

April 12 – 14, Fellowship Hall. One of the most enduring shows of all time, "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" is a re-imagining of the Biblical story of Joseph, his father Jacob, eleven brothers and the coat of many colors. Tickets are \$15 at the door.

MAD Camp—Seussical KIDS

Monday – Fridays, May 28 – June 5, 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m., rising second graders and up. Performances are on June 6 at 3:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. Cost is \$125. Registration and audition details to follow. Contact robert.edwards@dunwoodyumc.org.

SPORTS AND LEISURE

Sports and Leisure Summer Camp

All are welcome. Registration is open. Visit dunwoodyumc.org/summercamps for all offerings and registration details.

NURSERY

Weekday Summer Camps

All are welcome. Visit dunwoodyumc.org/summercamps for all offerings and registration details.

Drop-In Nursery—Childcare for Members

Available from 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., Monday – Friday, for church and preschool families. Cost is \$30 per day. Reservations are required. Please contact debbie.lowrey@dunwoodyumc.org.

Sunday Morning Nursery Care

Sundays, 8:15 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Available for babies and children (six months – three years). Contact nursery@dunwoodyumc.org for more information.

CHILDREN

Vacation Bible School (VBS) and God Squad

Monday June, 17 – Thursday, June 20. "To Mars and Beyond" Vacation Bible School (rising pre-k – rising third grade) and God Squad (rising fourth grade – rising sixth grade). Visit dunwoodyumc.org/children to register or volunteer.

YOUTH

Sixth Grade Confirmation

Sundays, 10:00 a.m. – 10:50 a.m., Fellowship Hall. Visit dunwoodyumc.org/youth for details.

Save the Dates

Youth Sunday, April 5

Confirmation Sunday, April 28

SENIOR ADULTS

Pryme Tymers Visit Fernbank's Planetarium

Thursday, March 21, lunch at Mary Mac's Tea Room followed by two presentations at Fernbank Museum's Planetarium. The cost is \$10 per person (lunch is an individual expense.) Contact Susan Kee at 770-394-0675, ext. 112. or susan.kee@dunwoodyumc.org to register.

STAY CONNECTED

Subscribe to Dunwoody UMC emails at dunwoodyumc.org/forms. Friday morning's eConnections includes a weekly message from Rev. Dan Brown and a listing of upcoming events. You also can subscribe to Daily Readings, Christian Sympathy, Children's Ministry Parents, Youth News and seasonal devotionals.

Watch the 8:45 a.m. Contemporary and 11:05 a.m. Traditional services at home with Livestream. Log on to livestream.com/dunwoodyumc.



Follow Dunwoody United Methodist Church on Facebook and Instagram.



A Dynamic Christian Community of Fully Devoted Followers of Jesus Christ
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Prayer Line: 770-671-8239 |
prayer@dunwoodyumc.org

Minister After Hours | 770-542-1667
In case of an emergency such as a death or critical illness.