

LENT DEVOTIONAL

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2

Should I Give Up Something For Lent?

By Fairy Mills

“And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased!”

HEBREWS 13:16

As a child, I grew up in a Baptist household. Both of my parents were raised Baptist, and my maternal grandfather was an old fashioned Baptist preacher. I am talking the “hell fire and damnation” type.

As Baptists, we did not observe Lent. It wasn't until Rusty, Robby, Andy and I joined Dunwoody United Methodist Church that I truly learned about Lenten devotionals, Ash Wednesday, Holy Week and Maundy Thursday.

Through the years, I have tried to observe Lent by either giving up something or doing something positive for someone else each day. Guess what? I was never able to stay committed and make it through the entire 40 days. I guess it wasn't ingrained in me. There were years where I tried to give up something. I am not a big sweet eater, so that wouldn't be much of a sacrifice. Plus, giving up sweets is nothing like the sacrifice our Lord Jesus Christ made for us. There is absolutely no comparison.

I have also tried doing one positive thing for someone else each day. That didn't last long.

So what can I, and perhaps you as well, do to follow through on our commitment to Lent?

Here are a few ways we can turn 40 days of sacrifices into 365 days of spiritual practices and it will become like second nature to us. It should help make Lent easier to observe.

- Attend weekly worship services at a local church.
- Establish a daily Bible reading program.
- Establish a daily prayer time.
- Look for opportunities to share with someone why you celebrate Easter or other religious holidays.
- Look for opportunities to help others in need.

If the above practices are already part of your routine, consider adding these:

- Join a weekly small-group Bible study.
- Invest one hour a month at a local shelter, soup kitchen or other community program. Make clear that you serve because of what Jesus has done for you.
- Spend time with at least one neighbor each month. Speak about your faith in Christ if the opportunity arises.

If we spend the weeks before Easter cultivating spiritual practices that make our new life more evident to others year-round, we honor the Risen Christ who gave us that life, don't we?

Prayer

Dear Lord, Please guide us, not only during Lent, but year-round to make sacrifices by doing for others in your name. Amen.

Today's Thought

Trust that God Our Lord will help us to understand and decide how best to serve him.

THURSDAY, MARCH 3

More Than Money

By Sherry Waugh

“Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, it is more blessed to give than to receive.”

ACTS 20:35

We have kept a stash of \$1 bills at our front door to tip a couple or three dollars for package deliveries from FedEx, UPS, etc.

With the advent of COVID and as our home deliveries expanded, our appreciation of those who were out working and helping us grew. We now keep \$5 bills to give with a “Thank you.”

Most folks would smile and say “thanks.” One notable older man said that “I made his day!” But one very young man will remain in my memory. I had to call him back to the door to hand him the money. He took it by a corner and just stared at it, as if he were processing what it was. He quizzically looked up to me, and I said, “It’s just a thank you for your service.”

He took a few slow steps out toward his truck and turned back waving the bill and saying, “I know what I can do with this.” He took a couple more steps, turned again with a big smile and said, “I can pay it forward!”

This small episode touched me way more than anything \$5 can buy!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, Thank you for all our blessings. From the smallest events to Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, we are truly thankful. Amen.

Today’s Thought

May you find God’s blessings in even the smallest ways this Lenten Season.

FRIDAY, MARCH 4

How do you Recognize God this day?

By Anne Horton

"Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God." (v.1)

ISAIAH 40:1-11

How many times during a single day or week do we seek comfort from God? We seek this comfort for many reasons: loss of a loved one, direction for our lives, our children's lives, and I could list many more. Today, I share two stories that continue to stay with me.

I struggled with the loss of my Dad. He was my go-to person when I needed advice or wisdom. At his graveside service many years ago, folk gathered to show their love and support for the family. The cemetery's western boundary has Amtrak and Norfolk South Railway lines going south from Birmingham to Tuscaloosa. I only know this cause my Dad worked for the railroad for 40+ years. My brother and I were well acquainted with the different rail lines in the area.

In the mist of the service, the 2:15 train was passing through blowing its horn and ringing its bell. For me, this was a God moment. As the sound registered within, I began to smile as many attending started smiling, too. We knew God and my Dad were enjoying trains in heaven. It was a signal to me that all was going to be well. I did not need to be afraid.

The other story is more recent. I love to walk in the woods and that is where I find calm and peace from a hectic and busy life. Last spring, I was hiking in the mountains not too far from my house. I was seeking direction for this next phase of life called retirement. Work? Not work? Part-time work? Or play?

As I hiked, I went to the right onto a path that was not well traveled. As I came around the other side of the knoll, there in front of me was a gorgeous "flaming azalea." The sun was shining brightly on the orange blooms. I paused in awe of what was before me. I felt I was on Holy Ground. I heard a rustle of leaves behind me but did not turn. I felt God's presence all around me. In those moments, I found comfort and guidance.

Prayer

Come for a walk with us today, Lord. Guide us, comfort us as we discover what is beyond the next turn in our journey. Help us to walk with confidence and awareness of the simple gifts that surround us. Give us strength to walk with a grateful heart as we affirm, "the Lord God has done great things for us." Amen.

Today's Thought

God's with you today and every day. Take the time to recognize that he's there.

SATURDAY, MARCH 5

Active Kindness

By Randy Pilkenton

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

GALATIANS 5:22-23

In October 2020, Pope Francis published “Fratelli Tutti”, an encyclical which is basically a “letter” to the faithful. In reading it I found many excellent themes for Lent. Overall, it is about “fraternity and social friendship.” Or, if I can be allowed to restate the Pope, it is about “creating a community of mutual support and friendship.”

In Galatians Chapter 5, Saint Paul writes about kindness as a “*fruit of the Holy Spirit*” (v.22). Paul uses the Greek word *chrestótes*, which describes an attitude that is gentle, pleasant and supportive, not rude or coarse. In exploring the word *chrestótes*, I found that it is not merely kindness, but is kindness that is “useful.” The kindness Paul, as well as the Pope, describes is more than an attitude. To be useful with our kindness we must take action.

This can take many forms but I found the Pope’s letter instructive when he wrote that it is kindness that “makes people’s lives more bearable, especially by sharing the weight of their problems, needs and fears.” It can include thoughtful acts of kindness, being intentional not to offend by word or deed, a readiness to step in with your time, your talents and your service to alleviate the burdens of others.

The ancient writing of Saint Paul, and the contemporary writing of Pope Francis, both are describing a world where all of God’s people are living in harmony and mutual support. This heavenly reality is realized when we practice an active form of kindness. During this Lenten season, I hope that we can listen to, reflect on and adopt what Saint Paul and Pope Francis are teaching us.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, With a heart of contrition and gratefulness, we come to you seeking your help and guidance to adopt and embrace active kindness in our daily lives. We pray that in doing so we will reduce the burdens, listen to the fears and help fill the needs of the brothers and sisters we encounter. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Today’s Thought

There is always an opportunity for kindness.

SUNDAY, MARCH 6

The Body of Christ

By Rev. Kathy Brockman, Associate Pastor

“Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

ISAIAH 40:31

Lent is 40 days (not counting Sundays) that represent the time Jesus spent in the wilderness, enduring the temptation of Satan and preparing to begin his ministry.

Sometimes Lent can feel like a true wilderness for us depending on what is going on in our own lives. These past two years have felt like a sort of wilderness for me and I suspect for others, as well. We have tried to put the pandemic behind us but it tends to rear its ugly head and remind us that it is not finished yet.

One of the things we know is that when we find ourselves in the wilderness, we need the body of Christ even more than ever. We need our faith community because it is within that community that we will find the prayers, the stories, and where we will encounter scripture. It is in that community where we can find the strength and encouragement to help us get through the wilderness times.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, wrote that the Christian life was never meant to be lived in isolation from other believers. As we walk this path of Lent, walk it with others. Find ways to be connected to your faith community that will guide you through this time in a meaningful way. If you can, reach out to others as they make the same journey and remind them that God will be with you throughout this time in the wilderness. Be assured that you never walk this path alone, that God will be beside you guiding you, comforting you, strengthening you and loving you.

Prayer

Loving God, You call us to follow you out of the wilderness and into the light. Help us to draw nearer to you throughout this journey of Lent and when we find ourselves in the wilderness, knowing that you will always be beside us or in front of us leading the way. Amen.

Today's Thought

Stay focused on the journey that is ahead, God is with you.

MONDAY, MARCH 7

Longing for Quiet?

By Tambryn Freund

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

JEREMIAH 29:11

If you're like me, Lent has been sort of a hit or miss season of observance. I was really focused on making Lenten studies and practices a priority before I got married and had kids. I can remember reaching Easter and feeling truly fresh and connected.

I long for that feeling again this Easter, but y'all let's be honest that the Lenten season is LONG! 40 days is LONG. When my kids were younger, I remember there were some single days that felt 240 hours long instead of just 24. In that time, I lost my habit of sitting in the quiet of Lent. To be honest, any quiet time usually involved me sleeping. Yet, part of me longs to do more than just rush through my days. Can you feel that part of you calling as well?

Some piece of us can get lost when life changes (for reasons great or terrible), and it can take a while to realize you're not totally you anymore. That's the gift of Lent. There's enough time in the quiet for us to look at who we are, see what may be missing and work to find ourselves again in some small way before the glory and noise of Easter.

I may not find myself keeping a perfect habit or sacrifice for 40 days, but I can work to find a few moments to renew my connection to God, to practice being the best version of who I was created to be or to practice making space for a little quiet (without falling asleep). If I can do that even some of the 40 days, I will be closer to the identity God created me to be when Easter comes.

Then, I can sing the hymns, eat the chocolate and hear the prayers knowing that I have used the gift of Lent to do something (big or small) to honor the love of God and the vision he has for my life. That's a pretty joyous thing indeed.

Prayer

Dear God, Please help me to seek you in this season. Help me to see the version of myself that you see, and help me find little ways to reach toward that. Thank you for the blessing of the quiet of Lent to seek you. Amen.

Today's Thought

What's something you used to do, enjoy or identify with that has slipped away from you over time? Can you find a way for any small piece of that to find new roots in your life now?

TUESDAY, MARCH 8

You've Got to Move

By Lanny Gilbert

"In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan."

MARK 1:9-13

In the Gospel of Mark, the Greek word *euthus*, which is usually translated into English as "immediately", is used 41 times. It can also mean "just then" or "straight away." In any event, in the Scripture above, Jesus is baptized and is "immediately" driven to the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. While our baptism experience probably didn't (or won't) lead to a wilderness temptation experience, it "should" lead to good works in the name of Christ.

Some might tend to believe that baptism is the figurative end of the Christian journey. Perhaps they treat it as their "ticket to heaven." But think about it. If baptism is the culmination of the Christian experience, then why don't you just vanish as soon as you are baptized, on your way to, as my Granny would've said, "a reserved seat in the Better World?"

A friend told me that when he got his solo pilot's license, his instructor told him, "Here's your license to learn." It meant that he'd just gotten started, no matter how confident he might've felt about what he'd done so far.

The same holds true with baptism. Getting baptized and joining the church is just the start of your Christian journey. God needs you to move – immediately, straight away – to get out of the church and into the community where people who need Jesus are.

As Francis Chan put it, "Christians are like manure: spread them out and they help **everything** grow better; but keep them in one big pile and they stink horribly."

Prayer

Lord, We ask that you show us what you would have us do. Put us to doing, put us to service. Immediately. Amen.

Today's Thought

When the Lord gets ready, you have got to move.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 9

Happy Orthodox Ash Wednesday!

By Sid Linton

"...on the first day of the week..."

LUKE 24:1; MARK 16:2; JOHN 20:1

We Protestants and Western Roman Catholics celebrated Lent last week on March 2.

You'll recall that's because we use the Gregorian Calendar initiated by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582 to make a calendar more accurate than Julius Caesar's calendar, which had been used since 46 BC. To bring it up-to-date – pun intended – the Pope amputated some days in his version creating a now 13-day difference between the two calendars.

The Gregorian Calendar was not universally adopted by Christian countries immediately. Some didn't adopt it until 1923 and some, whose populations are mostly Orthodox, still have not.

That's because the Eastern Orthodox Churches had split from the Western Catholic Church 500 years earlier. Naturally, they had little allegiance to what Roman Catholic Pope Gregory XIII had to say, and sort of still don't.

So, most Eastern Orthodox Churches today still use the Julian Calendar, and because of the strange rules for determining Easter (*on the first day of the week* [Sunday] after the first full moon on or after March 22) their Lents and Easters usually fall, like this year, a week later than ours. Depending on the moon, some years they are the same date, like 2017 and 2025. Some years they are more than a month later, like last year and again in 2024.

So today, Orthodox Ash Wednesday, you may see your Eastern Orthodox friends celebrating with smudged faces. Offer them a blessed Lenten Season, and on April 24 wish them a Happy Easter.

On the subject of greeting friends of other faiths, this year the moon and sun align within a day of how they did on the first Easter. So, on Good Friday remember to greet your Jewish friends with, "Have a Kosher and Happy Passover!"

Prayer

Lord, Bond me with all of my God-fearing brethren. Amen.

Today's Thought

Look for smudged foreheads and smile.

THURSDAY, MARCH 10

Breathing for a Sense of Clarity

By Asti Nicholas White

“The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life. Answer me, if you can; set your words in order before me; take your stand. See, before God I am as you are; I too was formed from a piece of clay. No fear of me need terrify you; my pressure will not be heavy on you.”

JOB 33:4-7

The days of running were life giving more than refreshing to my physical body but also my spiritual wellbeing. I can remember in High School and college running avidly and consistently. Since then, I would run on and off for my own, until this year. I have dusted off my watch and running shoes.

The practice of running daily brings me into the love of God as I journey through the trees and hills of Atlanta, and I connect with creation. I connect in a way to breathe deeper and to witness God’s love calling upon my heart. I picked up running and will continue to add this into my Lenten practice as I gain a sense of clarity in conversation with God.

My awareness to detail and the ways I both live and share the gifts God bestows on me are heightened in each breath I take. I shared with my classmates that it would be an injustice if I ran without returning to write. As I run, I must come to my grounding spot of writing and reflecting upon my thoughts, prayers, images and experiences for me to draw into the depth of God’s love for me.

My prayer for you today is to breathe. Breathe when you step outside, breathe when you get angry and breathe when you get sad. Breathing grounds us to God and enables us to hear a little bit clearer.

Prayer

God, You have given us so much but we often take it for granted. Help us use the simple things in life, like breathing, to connect with your creation. Amen.

Today’s Thought

I pray today you can breathe more, be more conscious of your breath, and enjoy the blessing of breathing.

FRIDAY, MARCH 11

Taking Time to Heal

By Rev. David Melton, Associate Pastor

“What do you want me to do for you?” And he (the man) said, “Lord, I want to regain my sight!” (v.41)

LUKE 18:35-43

I'm always amazed by the tenderness and compassion shown by Jesus for those seeking help and healing. In this passage, Jesus is making his way to Jerusalem (through Jericho) where, at the conclusion of the week, he will be crucified. Yet, even in what would have to be an anxious and difficult time for Jesus, he took the time to heal a man who asks him for the gift of sight. Jesus is walking in his final days and without hesitation extends mercy to this man that others consider a bother and a nuisance.

I would like to think that I, too, would take time to care for the needs of others, but maybe I wouldn't. Maybe, I'd react like the crowds around this man. Sometimes I think whatever I'm involved in is more important than anything else, so I just can't be bothered with someone else's needs. As the UMC Communion liturgy reminds us, "...we have not heard the cry of the needy." It is so easy to tune out the concerns of the world.

But Jesus didn't think like that, and neither should we. Instead of being a nuisance, the man became a unique opportunity for Jesus to show compassion. Even though Jesus had healed so many before this man, he had not healed this man. The man's life would never be the same as a result of Jesus talking just a moment to bless him. Not only was the man healed and began to glorify God, but "when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God."

As we walk to Jerusalem through this season of Lent, may we reach out to others along the way, take care of their needs and invite them to travel with us.

Prayer

O Lord, Your continued compassion is amazing. Your love for your people is moving to us. Your focus on ministering to the needs of others is humbling. Help us all to turn away from the rush of the crowd, and may we reach out to those around us, so that we may bring them to you. Amen.

Today's Thought

Can you be bothered? Do you hear the cry of the needy? It's time to tune "in" the concerns of our world.

SATURDAY, MARCH 12

Giving Up or Letting Go

By Randy Pilkenton

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

EPHESIANS 4:31-32

There are, of course, many translations of the Bible. The one I used for the verse above struck me as a bit extreme – and hopefully none of you reading this have been brawling (I don't want you to get hurt!) and you are refraining from slander (you could be in legal trouble!).

More seriously, during Lent there is a well-known tradition of “giving something up.” While I did not practice this tradition when I was younger, over the last decade or so I have adopted it and find it to be a beneficial practice.

Yes, I have to admit I've probably used it to practice some self-improvement purely for its own sake. I've given up dark chocolate (which I love) and one year I gave up “eating any grains” (crazy since it ruled out many more staple and delicious foods and beverages than I realized when making the pledge!). I did try to be conscious that when I felt the pangs of missing these things it was the opportunity to think about love of God, the sacrifice of his Son, and the presence of the Holy Spirit to support and guide me.

This year, instead of giving up some treat or some other tangible thing, I have been thinking about “letting go” for Lent. In particular, thinking about forgiveness as the perfect way to give up something spiritually important and valuable. I know that through the grace of God I am fully forgiven; God's grace is not a one-time thing, it is forever.

During Lent, a commitment to intentionally, and with love, “let go” of the things that might be damaging relationships, preventing reconciliation, or in the way of unconditional love has the potential to transform us. The 40 days of Lent may be insufficient time to address what can be a long and difficult process, but the reality of Easter is that forgiveness is possible. For me, for you, and for all sinners alike.

Prayer

In the name and spirit of Jesus, who made the perfect sacrifice of his life in exchange for the forgiveness of our sins, We pray that during this Lenten season that forgiveness will be foremost in our minds, in our hearts and lived out through our actions. Thank you, God, for giving us the strength and will to do this. Amen.

Today's Thought

Maybe there is something in your life that you could give up or let go to help you be closer to God.

SUNDAY, MARCH 13

Cause of Unanswered Prayer

By Elvin Aycok

“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

MARK 11:24-25

Do all your prayers get answered? Most Christians would answer no. However, there are reasons our prayers are not answered by God – unforgiveness is one reason. Let's see what the Bible says about unanswered prayers.

Remember the story about Jesus and the disciples passing by the fig tree that Jesus had cursed the day before. The fig tree had dried up from the roots. Jesus used this occasion to teach His disciples about praying (see Mark 11: 20-25).

Jesus told them that if they had faith and did not doubt in their hearts, they could say to the mountain, *“Be removed and be cast into the sea.”* Their prayers would be answered. But, just as important as it is to have faith and belief when you pray, it is important to release all ill feelings against anyone and forgive them. In verse 25, Jesus gives a reason for unanswered prayers. He said, *“And whenever you stand praying if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.”*

Forgiveness is the key point Jesus is making. Unforgiveness creates a blockage between God and us. It is like an invisible, thick barrier that prevents our ability to receive from God. You say, “God can do anything!” Yes, that's true. But, God isn't the problem. The barrier of unforgiveness in our hearts prevents the answer from manifesting in our lives. When our prayers are not answered, we need to look within our own hearts. Have we allowed unforgiveness to separate God and us? God is the same today as He was yesterday. God is not the problem.

God always answers our prayers. *“And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.”* (1 John 5:14-15)

Prayer

Loving and forgiving God, Open our hearts to your will and your way. Give us faith to trust that you hear us and will answer our prayers in your way. Amen.

Today's Thought

Forgive and let the joy of God flow through your whole being. Go to AskGodForHelp.net for more information.

MONDAY, MARCH 14

Lenten Meditation

By Rev. Keith Lawder

“Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified and in the garden was a tomb in which no one had ever been laid...They laid Jesus there.”

JOHN 19:41, 42b

Growing up my family did not emphasize Lent. It was simply the time between Mardi Gras (my mother was from New Orleans) and Easter. Easter, on the other hand, was a huge deal: new clothes, great worship and a huge feast, as well as the traditional Easter egg hunt!

On a trip to Israel a few years back, Mary and I visited the garden tomb, one of several places folks believe to be site of Jesus' burial. It fits the description in John. There's a hill that looks like a skull nearby. The tomb is hewn out of the rock wall of a beautiful garden. There is a huge stone standing by the entrance. It fits the details of John's narrative.

However, what struck me most was the overwhelming feeling that this is a place of resurrection, not merely death. Jesus lives! He overcomes all the worst the world can offer. It is a present reality, just as powerful today as 2000 years ago.

Prayer

Oh Lord Jesus, Fill me with faith that I may not fail to believe that you live! Amen.

Today's Thought

Certainly, we face a lot of tough stuff today. Yet because he lives, we can still face tomorrow!

TUESDAY, MARCH 15

So Who is Doing Most of the Talking?

By John Rhea

“Be still in the presence of the Lord, and wait patiently for him to act.”

PSALM 37:7

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow Me.”

JOHN 10:27

I am re-reading the book “Prayer 101” by Elaine Helms. This morning I read the chapter on *Persistence and Listening in Prayer*. She reminds me that my Prayer is two-way communication – me and the Lord. She asks who is doing most of the talking? (it’s me, by a hefty margin). She reminds me Who has the greater knowledge (it’s not me, by an infinite margin). Then, she reminds me that I have one mouth and two ears.

Helms encourages us to train our ears to listen to the Lord, both in being silent and in reading scripture during our prayer time as he may be directing us toward a scripture that holds an answer. And, she does warn us to be patient and discerning when listening for His response. He may not answer immediately.

Lastly, she quotes Henry Blackaby who said, “the moment God speaks to you is the very moment God wants you to respond to Him.” That is probably the reason I’ve been reluctant to listen – I’ve wanted Him to do all the hard work.

So, I am challenging myself during this Lenten season to spend twice as much time listening as I do talking in my conversations with God. I challenge us all to reflect on our prayer life habits. Is it a monologue, with us asking God for our wish list? Or, are we giving Him time to speak to us, to mold our wills to His and to give us our marching orders?

Prayer

Dear Lord, Give me ears to hear Your responses to my prayers and the heart to accept and obey Your answers.
Amen.

Today’s Thought

During this Lenten season, take the time to listen to God in silence.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 16

Working With Each Other

By Charlotte Crofton

“He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

LUKE 18:9-14

Something that interests me about this parable is that Jesus tells us that the men went up to the temple to pray, but not that they were going to the temple together. Jesus teaches that both of these men were journeying and were on their way to encounter God. Yet, what may seem like something that should be a communal experience has actually become an exclusively personal experience. Through Jesus’ words we can see that the Pharisee and tax collector were not calling for each other, they were not in community with one another. It almost seems like these men had a competitive edge to what they were doing rather than working with each other.

While this parable shows us that when we humble ourselves before God we will be exalted, I also think that this parable holds with it the possibility of what could happen if we were to invite people into our journeys, if we were to approach our relationships as collaborative and not competitive, if we were to approach faith and life from a communal place, not solely a personal place.

Prayer

Father God, As I approach faith and life, help me to see the community. Help me to serve those in need by working together with my faith community. Amen.

Today’s Thought

May we look to those around us and see what really matters – that we are to live in community with one another, inviting others in.

THURSDAY, MARCH 17

Let's Pretend

By Sid Linton

“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

MATTHEW 25:40b

Let's pretend that it's finally your turn to stand at the Pearly Gates. Saint Peter looks over his big desk down at you while he checks your file and mumbles, almost to himself.

“Uh-huh. I see. Very interesting. You know God loves all his children, and he certainly loved you, too, because I see here that He provided your church with some of the best ministers available in your denomination. Wow! Especially the most recent ones. Going to church must have been a great joy in your life. And even when you couldn't go during the Pandemic – I know, I know, the Pandemic, it's a complicated subject up here too – the ministers and staff went to great lengths to bring our message right to your home. Seems unbelievable to an outsider but that's just God's way of looking after his children.”

Then, the one-way conversation changes.

“You know, with all you had going for you, spiritual learning-wise and all, especially recently, one might think you could have done better than you did. Gee, surrounded by like-minded good people who love you like a sibling, most of whom would have done anything for you, you were in a great Christian Community. Some folks have to struggle with their faith in hostile surroundings. But you had it all didn't you? And, having so much, you must know it really troubles us up here that so few of you tithe.” Peter sighs. “Really troubles us.”

“I see you did pretty well overall. You had your ups and downs. We all did. Me, too. I was down there too, you know, and struggled just like you. But you read the Bible, so you know all that. Speaking of your Bible, one of His favorite passages is Matthew 25:31-46. You often did okay there. I personally think you could have done better. But I'll stamp this with a recommendation for entry, and we'll pass it up the line to Him and see what He says. Jesus will be on your side of course; He always has been.”

“Good luck and May God bless you.”

Prayer

Lord, forgive me when I forget your generosity to us and my commitment to you. Amen.

Today's Thought

What might I do a little better today to the least of these?

FRIDAY, MARCH 18

Fried Fish Fridays

By Gayle Baxter Hurd

“For God is not a God of disorder, but of peace, as in all the meetings of God’s holy people.”

1 CORINTHIANS 14:33

Today is a Friday and my brain feels a bit fried – thus the title. It’s been a full week. Not a bad one, but one that pulled my energies every which way. With this fried brain situation, finding inspiration for writing a devotion was a challenge. So, I did what anyone searching for answers would do...I searched Google for “Lenten Images.”

The results produced beautiful imagery of crosses and palms. However, at least half of the images had something to do with Fish on Fridays – and many were specifically for “Fried Fish.” This struck me as humorous. We do love our food.

Fish on Fridays is a thing. Jesus died on a Friday, and fasting on Fridays is a way to honor his sacrifice. Fasting in olden days meant abstaining from eating the flesh of warm-blooded animals. And fish, having the misfortune of being cold blooded, became the go-to fasting meal for obedient Christians. This helped drive growth of the global fishing industry, Friday fried fish specials and, sadly, high cholesterol.

So, where is your brain this Lenten season? Does it bring up imagery of a palm-strewn road, a cross on a hill, a boulder pushed aside? Or, are you finding your brain a bit fried and overwhelmed. Often, we let people, work, activities and even food fill our days – but these all fall short of filling our hearts.

My goal this Lenten season is to prayerfully look at my life-scape and strip away things that clog my brain and my energy – keeping me from being closer to God. If I can have a clearer mind and heart, then my conversations with God would be more frequent and fruitful.

Prayer

Thank you God for your steadfast love and patience with us. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Look at what may be clogging your mind and keeping you from a closer relationship with God. Try to move out those things and see what changes.

SATURDAY, MARCH 19

Music Speaks

By Cheryl Dunbar

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but will have everlasting life”

JOHN 3:16

Sometimes during the Lenten season, I often think of special hymns. Two of them come to mind.

One of my favorites is “The Old Rugged Cross.” It is one of the first hymns I learned. I remember singing it as a little girl. My mother was pointing to every word for me to read as the hymn went along.

I tear up every time I hear that wonderful hymn. It happens to be one of my favorites. It was sung at my mother’s funeral.

Another hymn that I like and really relate to is “Are You Able Said The Master?” It is a beautiful song. I remember singing it from the Cokesbury Hymnal, especially at the Sunday Night service when I was a youth.

Other popular Easter songs are “Christ the Lord is Risen Today” and “The Day of Resurrection.” Music speaks to me and my soul often more than words do.

I am thankful for music as it speaks to my soul. I am very thankful for the hymns we sing during Lent and Easter. It is great to sing those songs and others as we prepare for Lent.

Easter is coming. I often ask myself the question in the “Are You Able” hymn. “Am I able” said the Master. I think that is what I strive for each day.

Prayer

Loving God, May the music of the Lenten season fill my soul as we make our way to the cross. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Are You Able Said the Master?

SUNDAY, MARCH 20

Everlasting Life is in His Blood

By Glenda Joiner

*“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another,
and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”*

1 JOHN 1:7

When reading, hearing or watching the story of Jesus’s trials, beatings, rejection, ridicule, mockery, emotional, mental and physical suffering it is too much for my spirit to handle.

I can’t look at the represented images of my Lord and Savior nailed to a cross. Year after year emotions spring up inside me and tears follow as I revisit the greatest story ever told. The cruelty that mankind delivered to our Deliverer is incomprehensible.

Yet, if all the people who ever lived had never sinned except for me then my sins alone would have sent Jesus to the cross to save this one lost lamb.

I relive this wonderful story of love and grace with humility and a heavy heart realizing Jesus received the punishment for my sins for my entire life. Jesus paid my debt that I could never pay. I am thankful to God for His love and forgiveness despite my imperfections.

When God looks down at us from His heavenly throne He isn’t judging us because Jesus has paid our debt. God sees the blood of Jesus on the Mercy Seat as a sacrifice for the atonement of mine and your disobedience.

Prayer

Father, Forgive me if I should ever sit in judgement of another having never suffered their cross upon my back. Father God you have blessed us who believe upon your Son by the gift of the Holy Spirit. May I never be so blind as to think I have the authority to reject my neighbor within whom the Holy Spirit lives. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Life is in our blood, but everlasting life is in the blood of Jesus.

MONDAY, MARCH 21

The Cross

By Anne W. West

*“He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them,
If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”*

MARK 8:34

James Avery Artisan Jewelry is known for its understated elegance. The carefully crafted silver trinkets often send a Christian message.

Here are some things you might not know about James Avery. He was agnostic during much of his early adult life and began attending church after the demise of his first marriage. He commanded a B-26 bomber and survived 44 missions over Germany during WWII. After the war, he taught at the University of Iowa and the University of Colorado, where he began experimenting with jewelry-making techniques. The self-taught jeweler started the business out of his second mother-in-law's garage with about \$250 in capital.

Today, about 20 percent of the jewelry line is crosses and chalices. There's the La Primavera Cross that combines the Christian symbols of a dove and the ichthus with the icons of spring to convey a harmonious expression of hope, love and renewal. The name La Primavera is Spanish for “the season of spring.” There's a Margarita Cross, using the Spanish word for “daisy, a flower often used in Christian art to symbolize the innocence of the Infant Christ. There's an Old Rugged Cross, a Nail Cross, a Fisher's of Men Sculpted Cross, an Eternal Ribbon Cross.

Each comes with a tiny 1 ½ x 2 inch “brochure” that reads:

Several hundred versions of the cross have existed throughout the centuries; it is one of the most universal symbols of all time. Only about 50 different forms of the cross have been used extensively by Christians. Among these are the Greek cross, with arms of equal length; the Latin cross, which is the form on which Christ was crucified and is the most widely used, and the Crucifix, which supports a figure of either the crucified or risen Christ.

Early Christians believed the cross was a sign of sorrow and suffering and hesitated to use it as a symbol of their faith. But through his death on the cross, Jesus rose triumphant, forever the victor over sin and death. The cross stands for his everlasting love for us. And while it does remind us of his sacrifice, it is through his death that we can live with him forever. In this sense, the cross is a glorious symbol of redemption, new life and hope.

Prayer

Loving God, Guide our eyes to the cross, no matter what “style” it is, and help us find redemption, new life and hope. Amen.

Today's Thought

Where will you see a cross today?

TUESDAY, MARCH 22

Easter Egg Lessons

By Scott Heath

“Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.’”

MATTHEW 19:13-14

In my mind, Easter is a season of change that provides an opportunity to use the Resurrection as a means to redefine your own self-image...for the better.

One of my favorite parenting memories during Easter happened roughly 15 years ago when my two sons were 7 and 4 in 2008. They were so excited for DUMC’s Easter Egg Hunt. I was working long hours, so my wife Rebecca (as usual) handled all of the family scheduling details. I looked forward to this fun family event, but in all honesty, I had no idea of the logistical details.

All four of us were excited that morning, but when we arrived at DUMC we learned that we would be separated since there were different Hunt locations based on age. There were more “Mommy Friends” of Rebecca’s there for the 7-year-old group, so she took our older son, Cooper, to the Scout Hut location while I took our younger son, Chandler, to the Preschool Playground location. One major detail that I had failed to understand was that each family was to bring 12 plastic eggs per child filled with candy, and each family was to limit their child’s “collected” eggs to the same total of 12.

Unfortunately, my competitive spirit took over and once the Hunt began, I urged Chandler to get as many eggs as he could. While some children searched near the swing set and jungle gym equipment, Chandler saw that the edges of the hardscape wall were filled with eggs. He ended the hunt with 20 or 30 eggs, and I cluelessly brimmed with pride.

My enthusiasm was quickly overwhelmed with guilt, when I saw that a couple children ended the hunt with only 5 or 10 eggs. Clearly, the Dear Lord was there to save the day (and me), as my 4-year-old son offered his bounty of eggs to those kids with only a few. The Holy Spirit was working overtime that morning to offset an over-zealous parent with the innocence of a selfless child.

As a family, we have talked about this lesson where sometimes in life the child teaches the adult. Several Bible scriptures come to mind where God inspired a child to fulfill His message, while adults learn from the younger generation with humility. Specifically, Joseph was sold into slavery at age 17 by his older brothers, but showed maturity and compassion later in the scripture by saving his family from being persecuted as spies. Teenage David courageously slayed Goliath, while the tribal leaders sat with cynical expectations of the outcome. Lastly, when Jesus fed the thousands in Galilee, at dusk the Disciples suggested that the large crowd be dispersed so they would have time to travel home and eat dinner. But it was a young boy who offered his lunch of five loaves and two fish to Jesus to allow for this miracle.

I humbly look forward to the lessons I’ll learn during Easter 2022.

Prayer

Lord, It is with a grateful heart that I come to you today to thank you for the children. Help each of us, no matter our stage in life, take time to see and learn through the eyes of a child. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Jesus loves the little children. Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight. And, so are you!

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 23

Many Blessings

By Linda Miller

“Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.”

PSALM 100:4

Why should we think of being thankful when fasting and abstinence are the traditional thoughts of the Lenten season?

When we realize that everything we have comes from God, the Lenten season provides a time to reflect and consider the many blessings that God has given and provided to each of us. As the hymn states, “Count your many blessings, count them one by one.”

The Lenten season provides a time to remember and be thankful that God gave the world the greatest gift of all, his Son, Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Savior. Every time that we see a cross, we can be glad and thankful for the gift that a loving God gave to the world.

Prayer

Our gracious Heavenly Father, We are truly thankful for all our many blessings and especially your Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today's Thought

Each new day is a blessing to count your blessings and see what God has done!

THURSDAY, MARCH 24

Rescued

By Joe Seegars

*“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,
in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”*

COLOSSIANS 1:13-14

There are many songs about turning to God when life is overwhelming – “Jesus Take the Wheel” and “One Day at a Time” are two well-known ones. While running errands, my iPhone shuffled and dealt me a song that started this way:

“I know that I should think about giving
and think about helping out
and think about living
but I can’t seem to rescue myself”

What struck me about this song is that, unlike the more well-known ones, the singer doesn’t turn to God for help by the end. Instead, he asks “what about my bank accounts?” that will “keep me happy and warm inside...at least they said they would, said they could.”

I doubt you have ever heard this song – it’s a deep cut. I’ve listened to it many times but, thinking about it with Lent in mind, I felt sad for the subject because he ended the song in a worse spot that he started – knowing he was looking in the wrong places for security but not knowing where else to turn.

During this season of Lent, rejoice that you have been rescued, but also remember those who don’t know they have been, and look for ways to show them or tell them how your rescue enables you to live the full life that God wants for each of us.

Prayer

Thank you for sending Your Son to live among us and love us enough to die so that we might know You. Help us to prepare ourselves to live our lives in such a way that we show that love to others every day. Amen.

Today’s Thought

I hope you have a wonderful Lenten season filled with giving, helping out and living. You have been rescued.

FRIDAY, MARCH 25

Whose Image Do You Bear?

By Rev. Calissa Dauterman, Associate Pastor

“They asked him, “Teacher, we know that you are right in what you say and teach, and you show deference to no one, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?” But he perceived their craftiness and said to them, “Show me a denarius. Whose head and whose title does it bear?” They said, “The emperor’s.” He said to them, “Then give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

LUKE 20:21-25

Each time I’ve heard this passage preached, it’s been used to explain how we should honor authority – secular, divine or both. Judging from the number of sermons I’ve heard on this text, there’s a lot to say about each of those angles.

But, as I read this passage from Luke this year, I find myself more drawn to Jesus’ question than to his answer. Looking at the coin, Jesus asks, “Whose head and whose title does it bear?” suggesting that the things bearing Caesar’s image naturally belong to Caesar. The question we develop in return is, “What bears God’s image?”

As Christians, we believe that every human bears the imago Dei, the divine image. But, too often, we ignore this truth. We lie to ourselves about our worth and our belovedness. This Lent, even as we repent of our sin, may we hold fast to faith that we are God’s, stamped with God’s image.

Prayer

Creator God, Help me to bear your image well, and to know in my heart that I am your beloved child. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Each of us bears the image of God.

SATURDAY, MARCH 26

Listen for the Still Small Voice

By Teresa Dietz

“For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path.”

PROVERBS 2:6-9

Easter to me as a child wasn't so much candy and colored eggs as it was the new Easter outfit. Every year my sister and I would plot and plan way ahead of time what we were going to wear to church on Easter Sunday. Sometimes we got to buy new shoes or a purse or other accessories, but more often than not, the dress or spring coat we were planning to wear was lovingly and beautifully made by our mother. And how we looked forward to wearing our new ensemble!

But we grew up in Pennsylvania and many times the weather just didn't cooperate. Not only was it often too cold for our spring dress and coat, but horror of horrors, sometimes it even snowed! Snow boots with our pretty outfits? I think not! We moaned and cried, determined to wear our Easter finery as planned, but in the end, we lost the battle. Common sense (and my father's firm stance) prevailed, and snow boots it was, even though we still insisted on our lightweight spring coats, preferring to shiver in the cold rather than don the ugly winter gear.

I am reminded by this story of how often we think we know what is best for our lives and, even though the facts staring us in the face prove otherwise, we are determined to forge ahead and make it so. Sometimes determination is a good thing; sometimes determination is really immaturity and shallowness disguised as something else. We often would do better to listen to God's "still small voice" and learn to be open to what he is trying to tell us rather than trying to figure things out for and by ourselves.

Prayer

Loving God, Speak to us with that still small voice when we try to figure things out for ourselves, instead of waiting to hear what you have in mind for us. Amen.

Today's Thought

Help us be still and listen and be open to other alternatives when we think we know the right path to take.

SUNDAY, MARCH 27

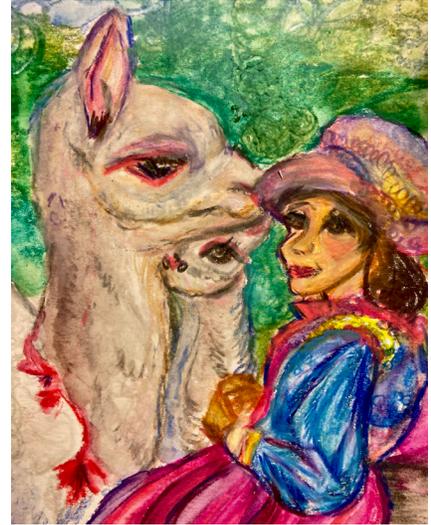
Easter IS Coming

By Sally Murphy

“Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; Save me, and I shall be saved, For You are my praise.”

JEREMIAH 17:14

After long dark nights of cold
Fear and hopelessness plagued my soul
I yearned for warmth and sunny skies
And dreamt of spring and butterflies
Moments when chaos and fear were the norms
A world consumed by anger and storms
I prayed for guidance and strength each day
And struggled to overcome the growing dismay
I thought of Christ’s own suffering and struggle
And held onto the notion that I, too, could juggle
The challenges that feel so daunting
Lost in one’s thoughts can be haunting
Yet spring waits around the bend
I must remember this too will end
Soon flowers will bloom; spring will be here
The days will grow longer; and skies will clear
Easter is coming; time to rejoice dear friends,
Jesus has risen; His love for us never ends.



Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, Help us to find strength in our darkest moments and rejoice in your grace and enduring love. Amen.

Today’s Thought

The Lenten season is a time for healing and renewal.

MONDAY, MARCH 28

A Place Prepared

By Margaret Gallagher

“My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?”

JOHN 14:2

Chuck Cape wrote an instrumental piece for violin and piano that he and Elizabeth Lamback gave as an auditory offering during the February 26, 2022, Chapel and Traditional services. Titled “Appalachian Hymn,” its haunting tones immediately transported me back to my grandparent’s Virginia dairy farm just off of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

In a conversation after that, others complimented Chuck’s gift for composing. Someone said it sounded like a movie soundtrack; someone else said it was so good it should have lyrics. As I thought again of life in the mountains, I was reminded of the blessings that afforded: the rugged beauty of God’s creation, the tenacious faith of the generations there and the sound of the Easter Sunrise service that woke us from across the meadow every year before Pa’s rooster crowed. If lyrics were necessary, these would be mine:

As I laid in darkness, weary and world-worn,
Toils and sorrows blocking starlight like a grey winter storm,
Across the crick and pasture, I heard gathering throngs.
Sunrise hymns of praise were swelling, joining with the birds’ song:

Springing forth, there is The Promise captured in the dogwoods’ blooms;
I’ll come home, washed clean and holy, where there are many rooms.
After cares and labors finish, passed where blue mountain mist looms,
I have shelter and a refuge: for me, Jesus prepares a room.

Plants to tend and tether. Cows to milk and feed.
Fence to mend, and storms to weather. Everywhere, there’s some need.
Winter’s cold, harsh beauty whistles through my hair,
But the embers of His mercy glow strong and declare:

Springing forth, there is The Promise captured in the dogwoods’ blooms;
I’ll come home, washed clean and holy, where there are many rooms.
After cares and labors finish, passed where blue mountain mist looms,
I have shelter and a refuge: for me, Jesus prepares a room.

Prayer

O Love that will not let me go, May I see and hear and remember Your goodness. Even in the storm, let me trace the rainbow through the rain; even in the shadows, I trust that morn shall tearless be. And, am ever blessed that that You prepare a place for me. Amen.

Today’s Thought

I’ll come home, washed clean and holy; for me, Jesus prepares a room.

Traditional Service, 2/6/22, Offertory: <https://youtu.be/jRaINHMnEVE?t=1300>

TUESDAY, MARCH 29

Dorotheos

By Scott Dunbar

“He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’”

LUKE 4:16-19 (ADDITIONAL: LUKE 4:28-29)

One of my favorite “interesting facts” is from early Christian history in the 3rd-6th centuries. There was a sizable group of monks, nuns and hermits that lived in solitude and with other monks in the desert in Egypt. Someone wrote a book called “Sayings of the Desert Fathers” that is still in print.

An example from that book is a quote by an Elder, “A man who keeps death before his eyes will at all times overcome his cowardliness.” There are over 1,000 zingers like that. These men and women have greatly influenced the church and the UMC to this day.

The verse from Luke above reminds me of one of the Desert Fathers named Dorotheos. In his abbey, believe it or not, there was a problem with some monks and nuns not being able to worship with others because they disagreed about something.

Dorotheos pointed to a wagon wheel and said the center of the wheel is God, and the rim represents the people in relation to God. The spokes connect the people to God. He said that the closer we get to God the closer we are to each other. This is like a modern saying: the church is like the public swimming pool; all the noise comes from the shallow end.

Prayer

God help us as we seek you to remember the essentials and love our brothers and sisters. Jesus came to save us all and showed us how to live in harmony and in love. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Wesley said, “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, live and let live.”

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 30

Time

By Kathy Pilkenton

“In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.”

PROVERBS 16:9

The other day I stopped to ask myself “What does Lent mean to me?” This time last year I believe I was too distracted to give Lent the focus it deserved.

According to UMC.org, “Lent is a season of 40 days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. The 40 days represent the time Jesus spent in the wilderness, enduring the temptation of Satan and preparing to begin his ministry. Lent is a time of repentance, fasting and preparation for the coming of Easter. It is a time of self-examination and reflection.”

Growing up in various Christian churches, I mostly remember Lent as a time leading up to Easter and the celebration of the resurrection. My family did not fast or “give up” something during Lent. I know when I initially asked myself what Lent means to me and if I wanted to give something up this year to remember the sacrifice made for me my answer was “No!”

In my mind all I could think about was already giving up something precious to me over the last two years – and that is time. Time with my college-aged children free of worry. Time with my parents who are in their 80s and the last people on earth I would want to expose to an illness. Time to travel to see far away family. Time to hug those who lost loved ones. Time to attend church and Bible Studies and to volunteer. When I was “getting through” the last two years that was not how I was thinking. But I sometimes do now as I look back. Maybe all these thoughts are very selfish?

So, for Lent I will purposefully focus on strengthening my relationship with God through prayer and reaching out to others. I will be grateful for every day with family and friends. I will remember the sacrifice God made for me and everyone else. I will look to the future with hope. I will try to not look back but look forward.

Prayer

Dear God, Thank you for the opportunity to focus on your Word and please guide me in always remembering the true meaning of Lent and the sacrifice you made. Amen.

Today's Thought

Each day is a time to give thanks to God for the opportunity to look forward and grow in faith.

THURSDAY, MARCH 31

The Risk of Surrender

By Michael Culver

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!" (v.17)

2 CORINTHIANS 5:11-21

I have to give credit to author Trevor Hudson, from his book *Questions God Asks Us*, for the title of this devotion. Just like we need to give credit to Jesus Christ for his amazing sacrifice for us. He surrendered all so that we may live free. Free from the bonds of sin. Free to live a more enjoyable and fulfilling life. We need to take His example and risk surrender so that we can truly enjoy life each and every day.

Now is a great season to take small steps of surrender. We need to surrender time for morning devotions and time for Bible study. Surrender prayer time. We need to surrender Sunday mornings to be back in worship and fellowship. Perhaps we need to surrender something in our life that is an unhealthy habit or that consumes more of our spare time, when we could be more focused on service, our loved ones, our family.

Surrender to Him involves risk. We have to give other things up. We have to change our schedules. We may be ridiculed or left out. He may ask us to do things we are not comfortable with. These risks are worth taking.

Jesus surrendered Himself to the cross so our sins would be forgiven. The reward of surrendering to Him is amazing. Like that flower covered cross in front of DUMC on Easter morning, a pair of wooden beams placed in a cross is made beautiful and new. That can be us – Surrender.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, Help us to be open to the risk of surrender to You. Help us to be open to following You with our whole heart and our whole mind. Show us one day at a time how we can surrender all to you, and glorify you in all that we do and all that we are. Amen!

Today's Thought

Surrender to the beauty of the cross.

FRIDAY, APRIL 1

The Bread and Wine Sacrament

By Sharon Gilbert

Jesus replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You must love your neighbor as you love yourself."

MATTHEW 22:37-39

The sacrament of bread and wine goes a long way back in time, since the events in Genesis. When Abram and Lot grew too big to live together, Lot moved to Sodom. At some point, the town of Sodom was taken over by kings from the surrounding areas. In this takeover, Lot was taken captive. When Abram found out Lot was a captive, he set out with troops to retrieve Lot. He defeated King Kedorlaomer, and the kings allied with him and saved Lot.

After Abram's victory, "The king of Sodom came out to meet Abram in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand. Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything." (Genesis 14:17-20)

When Moses, through God, placed the last plague on Egypt for the first born sons to die, the people were to put blood over their doors and make unleavened bread which indicated their hurriedness to leave Egypt. This ceremony, called Passover, was in honor of God and His power. This ceremony was to be continued yearly in remembrance of God's mighty acts and His power. (Exodus 12)

Jesus, at his 3rd Passover during his three-year ministry, sends the disciples ahead of Him into Jerusalem to set up and prepare for this feast. But this time, Jesus was changing the covenant. He offered the wine as His blood and the unleavened bread as His body. Then He walked into the garden to pray, setting up the event of Jesus being the sacrificial lamb to pay for the sins of all. His Resurrection on the 3rd day showed He represents eternal life for all.

Jesus did all this to fulfill the covenant God made with Abraham (saying it is finished) and establish a new covenant with all mankind (resurrection and eternal life). The laws given to the nation of Israel became obsolete (animal sacrifices, stoning, animals not to eat, laws in Leviticus) to us because Jesus was the only lamb needed to be sacrificed, once and for all until the end of time. He gave the new commandments "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You must love your neighbor as you love yourself."

We continue the sacraments today and follow these 2 commandments until Christ comes again.

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for establishing communion with us through bread and wine. May each time we celebrate this sacrament, we ask forgiveness and set ourselves right before You. Amen.

Today's Thought

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. And your neighbor as yourself.

SATURDAY, APRIL 2

Being Human

By Anne Reich

“So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being, I delight in God’s law; but I saw another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

ROMANS 7:21-25

Have you ever had a day where you feel like you’re doing everything you’re not supposed to do and you’re not doing anything you are supposed to do? You know the right thing to do or say, and you want to do it; but, you don’t.

For some reason recently, I had been feeling like that a lot. Like I just wasn’t being a good wife, mom, friend, sister, daughter, neighbor, you name it. I couldn’t understand why I wasn’t being the person I wanted to be. And then I’d start thinking, “Why would God love me when I was acting like this?” In my mind I could hear God say, “There goes Anne, sinning again.” And it would cause me inner turmoil that I kept making the wrong choices.

Then, I read this in a devotional and it really struck a chord: “If sin annoys you, is your burden, and causes you grief; holiness lives in you, and the present painful conflict will end in everlasting peace.”

I kept reading it over and over, and I felt such a sense of relief and peace. The devotional quoted Romans 7:21-25. I read that passage over and over. I finally got it: I’m human! Sin lives in me. The devil is working in me Every. Single. Day.

But guess what? The good news is God loves me anyway. I am wretched. But thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! Halleluiah! I am so thankful that I read that devotional when I did because I desperately needed it. I hope that if you ever find yourself having one of those “sinful” days, you’ll remember this, and it will bring you peace.

Prayer

Dear Lord – Please forgive me. Forgive my sins and have mercy on my wretched soul. I adore you and I pray that I will do what I am supposed to do and not do what I’m not supposed to do. Thank you for dying for my sins. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

Today’s Thought

Find peace to day knowing that God loves you!

SUNDAY, APRIL 3

A Lasting Act of Kindness

By Sheryl Winton

“There was once a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. One the way he was attacked by robbers. They took his clothes, beat him up and went off leaving him half-dead. Luckily, a priest was on his way down the same road, but when he saw him he angled across to the other side. Then a Levite religious man showed up; he also avoided the injured man. A Samaritan traveling the road came on him. When he saw the man’s condition, his heart went out to him. He gave him first aid, disinfecting and bandaging his wounds. Then he lifted him onto his donkey, led him to an inn, and made him comfortable. In the morning he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying ‘Take good care of him. If it costs any more, put it on my bill - I’ll pay you on my way back.’ What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?” “The one who treated him kindly” the religion scholar responded. Jesus said, “Go and do the same.”

LUKE 10:30-37

Several years ago at my mother’s funeral, a man I didn’t know approached me. I was surprised to see a stranger; most attendees were family or family friends. He asked if I was her daughter. After I confirmed that I was, he told me a story.

When he was about 9 years old, his mother died. Understandably, he was very distraught. The person who comforted him was the nurse at his pediatrician’s office. He just remembered how kind she was at that time and how she made him feel.

Years later, he read that the kind nurse had died. He took a day off work to come to her funeral to tell me how kind my mom was to him.

You never know the effect that your kindness may have on someone. I still can’t imagine a young boy remembering the name of the nurse in his doctor’s office. Yet, her kindness obviously meant a lot to him. His kindness to come and tell me that story has meant a lot to me.

“Go and do the same.” Make that phone call. Smile at the stranger. Hug someone who is hurting. Tell a friend how much you love her. You can make a difference.

Prayer

Father, Thank you for your Son and the kindness he showed to all. Help us to strive every day to be a good Samaritan to everyone we meet. Amen.

Today’s Thought

“The smallest act of kindness is worth more than the greatest intention.” –Kahlil Gibran

MONDAY, APRIL 4

Don't Fear

By Joy Culbreth

"For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you."

ISAIAH 41:13

Each of us can think back to a time when we felt fearful and wanted to retreat. I sure can. Remember Jesus' Disciples who were hiding in fear after Jesus died on the cross? What happened to their faith in His promise to return to them? Did the Disciples forget Isaiah 41:13?

The Apostle Paul calls us to live out our faith, to grasp it with confidence, for God's love is sure. We have nothing to fear: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

Author, evangelist and Methodist missionary, E. Stanley Jones wrote:

"I am inwardly fashioned for faith, not fear. Fear is not my native land; faith is. I am so made that worry and anxiety are sands in the machinery of life; faith is the oil. I live better by faith and confidence than by fear, doubt and anxiety. In anxiety and worry, my being is gasping for breath—these are not my native air. But in faith and confidence, I breathe freely—these are my native air."

But fear stifles creativity. Fear destroys our dreams. Fear blocks God's love. Fear prevents us from telling others about the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Fear is one of Satan's favorite weapons against believers.

God, however, calls us to move forward in the victory His love has secured, just as the apostle Paul reminds us "we are more than conquerors" through Christ who loves us and gave Himself for us (Romans 8:37). The redemptive love of God is yours and mine to enjoy. Claim it by faith and refuse to allow fear to rob you of God's blessing.

Prayer

Father, Forgive (me) for the times that I have taken my eyes off of You and allowed myself to be overwhelmed by my circumstances. I know that You are sovereign over all things, that Your love for us is deeper than I can fathom, and that I have nothing to fear, for You have overcome the world!! In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit Jesus. Amen.

Today's Thought

So... Easter People look up, don't fear, Sunday is coming!!!

TUESDAY, APRIL 5

The Healer

By Sean Taylor

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”

PSALM 147:3

What does this simple verse from Psalms tell us? It tells us quite a lot. Let's break it down and examine what is here.

First, this verse tells us we are less than perfect. It tells us that we are in the condition of being broken and wounded. Everyone can relate to this. Not a day goes by in our lives where we don't feel either physically (wounded) or emotionally (brokenhearted) bankrupted by the world we live in. Our heart is either empty or split or incomplete. Our bodies are less than capable of taking on the rigors of another day. We, on our own, are not in perfect mental or physical health.

Second, this verse tells us we, at some time in our lives, will seek ways to address this less than perfect state. Many of us live our lives, day to day, in a less than perfect state and we are absolutely fine with that. However, there comes a time in each of our lives where this imperfection affects us in one way or another. It could be that it affects us in our relationships – a relationship with a spouse, parent, child, coworker or just someone we run into during our everyday walk of life. It could be that it affects us physically, an injury or an illness that is not expected.

Third, this verse shows that we cannot fix our brokenness or heal our wounds on our own. There is a state of pain that we enter and at some point, the things we try and do ourselves will simply not be able to restore us to health.

Finally, this verse gives us the answer. The answer is “He.” When we seek Him, simply reach out to Him in prayer, He gives us what we need. He provides us with the way to heal our broken heart. He provides us with the answers that heal our wounds. Simply put, He can heal all because He loves us that much.

As we prepare for Him this Lenten season to give His all for us, may we remember how much love He has for us all.

Prayer

Jesus, Thank you for the love you give to us, a love that heals our brokenness. Amen.

Today's Thought

We don't have to be perfect because He is perfect in His sacrifice for us.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 6

Real Faith

By Ralph Freeman

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

HEBREWS 11:1

Perhaps, you have heard these expressions: “I’m at my wits end,” “When you reach the end of your rope,” “At the end of the day” and “When it’s all said and done.” Each echoes a sense of finality, but those of us who walk with Jesus have the blessed privilege of knowing that there’s always hope.

In January, while celebrating the Martin Luther King, Jr., holiday, I decided to review some of Dr. King’s powerful sermons. For many reasons, they were very inspiring to me. After hearing the news of his death, I remember walking across the campus of Morehouse College (our Alma Mater), grief-stricken. As a young student, I became very concerned about the future.

In one of Dr. King’s messages, he talked about receiving an unexpected phone call around midnight from someone who intended to harm him and his family for standing up for truth, justice and righteousness. Completely awestruck, he recalled it as a time when none of his academic education and achievements, combined with his religious practices of the past, could bring relief from the discouragement he felt.

It was only when he called upon Jesus, which was his custom, that he felt his faith was real. Have you ever been there? Do you sometimes take faith for granted?

Prayer

Gracious God, Help us to stand up for your truth, justice and righteousness, even when it is unpopular. Show us how to build bridges of peace and harmony. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Real faith is trusting God when you don’t have all the answers.

THURSDAY, APRIL 7

Listening

By Glenda Joiner

“Jesus said, ‘Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.’”

MATTHEW 24:35

I read once years ago that every utterance that comes from our lips lingers in space forever. I have no idea if that is scientific or absurd. It sounds unreasonable, but so does watching television and seeing something happening across the world as it occurs. It seems impossible, yet I know it to be real.

Imagining words forever floating around like electromagnetic wave signals from a microwave tower started me thinking about the possibilities of words lingering forever.

Are the words of Jesus still hearable? Could His sermon on the mount still linger in space? Could sound waves pierce my eardrums so that I might hear Jesus say, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do?” Imagine if we could hear His very voice when He said, “It is finished.”

Actually, we can because we retell the greatest story ever told, every year. We hear and read Jesus’ words so we never forget His sacrifice. We share it so that younger generations know about their savior. We collectively feel the emotions of grief within us as we remember the betrayal. We find it heart wrenching to walk with Him on the pathway to Golgotha.

Prayer

Father, May we hold the words of Jesus in our hearts and memory forever. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Never quit listening.

FRIDAY, APRIL 8

Lent Questions

By Asti Nicholas White

“What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?”

ROMANS 8:31-32

Lent is a season that I grew up sharing a variety of different understandings and practices. Do I not eat meat on Friday? Is it me giving up something that I really like? Maybe I find something that others are also giving up and follow them? Lent, what is this? Is it a time of preparation? Am I giving up unhealthy foods, practices, relationships? Where do I even begin? Whatever this season may bring for you, know these questions and reflections are okay to have.

The Lenten season does not always have to be a time of “giving something up” or a time of “emptying yourself” because often this shares a negative connotation or misunderstanding. How can we truly empty ourselves? The spirit and intentionality of the Lenten season is about change and transformation. In 40 days and 40 nights, we reflect on the life of Christ who traveled many terrains, fasted, prayed, and lived out as a faithful witness to God. This season can also offer us an important time to slow down, reflect and share in the somber moments of our lives.

It is my prayer that we may be able to engage in the sacred space and time of Lent to collectively join in the message of God and God’s love through the power of the Holy Spirit and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. I share an invitation to add a healthy meal, practice, conversation or joyous opportunity in your Lenten journey this year. God’s abundance has continuously transformed the minds and hearts of the community, and I believe this can begin with you.

Prayer

Loving God, As we go through this season of Lent, help us to be aware of how your abundance transforms each of us. Amen.

Today’s Thought

What will be your Lenten practice this year?

SATURDAY, APRIL 9

Steering Wheel

By Jane Cox (reprinted from 2011)

“He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’”

LUKE 11:1

Not too long ago I saw a quote, “Prayer is not a spare wheel that you pull out when in trouble, but it is a steering wheel that directs the right path.” As I thought about this, the song “How Long Has It Been” came to mind.

In this song, we are asked how long has it been since we’ve talked with the Lord and told Him our heart’s hidden secrets. How long has it been since we’ve knelt by our bed and prayed to the Lord up in heaven? How long has it been that our heart felt no burden? And, can we call Him our friend? How long has it been?

During this time of Lent and soul searching, we are reminded of God’s love for us and His sacrifice and that He is our friend.

Prayer

Father God, Sometimes we let too much time pass before we call on you. You know what’s on our heart and in our mind. Help us open both to you and your love. Amen.

Today’s Thought

May prayer always be our steering wheel and not a spare wheel.

SUNDAY, APRIL 10

How Long?

By Katie Marie Wax

“God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment: ‘How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Selah Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.’ They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk around in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. I say, ‘You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, and fall like any prince.’ Rise up, O God, judge the earth; for all the nations belong to you!”

PSALM 82

Psalm 82 is one of my favorite Psalms because God finally has had enough. Enough of what, you might ask? Enough of the injustices, harm, partiality and harm to others. How many times have you just had enough and simply wanted to (or maybe have), thrown up your hands and walked away? I picture that being the human response to watching orphans and street friends being kicked to be the “lowly and the destitute.” But what is the Creator’s answer? God sits and simply asks, “How long?”

In this season of Lent, I pray that we can reflect on this convicting passage. “How long” will we “show partiality,” treat others differently, act holier than thou? Psalm 82 is supposed to make us humans feel uncomfortable. We are all called to a place of unrest, to live in the darkness with our neighbors whom we all have kicked to the lowly, who we have not given justice to, and whom we have not rescued when they have cried out. May we go forth this Lenten season, removing the focus from ourselves, and giving justice to the weak, orphan, and needy. I ask you this, siblings in God, how long are we going to let this keep going? How long?

Prayer

God, Turn my eyes away from myself and toward those who need my help. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Do you hear the cry of those in need?

MONDAY, APRIL 11

Jesus Loves LARGE

By Janice Marshall

“Then Jesus said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ The other table guests began to say among themselves, ‘Who is this person, that even forgives sins?’ Jesus said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.’”

LUKE 7:48-50

We all struggle with something at one time or another, right? In this passage, Jesus is explaining to a Pharisee, Simon, forgiveness and gratitude by explaining His forgiveness of the woman’s sins. ‘The one who is forgiven little, loves little.’ Jesus loves LARGE!!!!!!!

Each day of Holy Week has a special meaning to Christians in our walk. Palm Sunday is the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Holy Monday is when Jesus cursed the fig tree, sent merchants from the temple and answered those who questioned his authority. Holy Tuesday is when He foretold his own death (In New Orleans, Fat Tuesday is celebrated with a pancake dinner!). Ash Wednesday is when we remember Judas’ betrayal of Jesus and the Tenebrae (darkness) service with ashes. Maundy Thursday is the Last Supper, Christ’s ‘new commandment to love one another and His arrest. In some churches, there is an act of foot washing to represent service to others. On Good Friday, we remember Jesus’ trial before Pilate, the death sentence, torture, crucifixion, death and burial – truly a Black Friday, but WE KNOW Easter IS coming!

For over 30 years, my husband and I prepared and served a pancake dinner at our small membership church on the Wednesday before Easter (wrong day?) and breakfast before Easter Sunrise service. We loved doing this so much. As we grew in our faith, these meals meant more and more to us – not because of the meals, but because of Jesus’ teaching us all to love LARGE!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, Teach me your ways, help me be your hands and feet. Create in me a pure heart. Thank you for your faithfulness and love, and please forgive me when I stray! Amen.

Today’s Thought

As I begin each day, is there some way I can serve others?

TUESDAY, APRIL 12

Fasting

By Rev. Matt Stone, Associate Pastor

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

MATTHEW 6:16-18

Lent is such a gift to our people! The notion of setting aside time specifically to focus on the state of our hearts and souls is a crucial component of our spiritual health. Even more, Lent has focused for generations on the oft-misunderstood spiritual discipline of fasting.

In a day when intermittent fasting is the current diet fad even as our culture tells us to satisfy every urge without thought or reflection, Christian fasting is a powerful tool for the reorientation of our hearts toward the One who provides for our every need.

Nonetheless, don't make the mistake that too many of us make around this time of year. We tend to get so excited about our fasting that we talk too much about it and as the challenge of fasting sets in, our talking turns to whining. Remember that fasting is a gift from God that forms and aims the desires of your heart – it is deeply personal and intended to remain so.

Prayer

Dear Lord, Help me rely on you and your provision today. Help my unbelief; help me to trust in You! Amen.

Today's Thought

Turn toward God in the challenging moments and rely on His provision!

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 13

Why Pilate?

By Angela Arnold Go

“Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

MATTHEW 27:23

Pontius Pilate’s role in Jesus’ crucifixion bothers me each time I hear the Passion story recounted. Was he really Jesus’s sworn enemy, or was he symbolic of someone else?

Bible stories tell us that King Herod was a known enemy of Jesus – both father Herod the Great and son Herod Antipas. It is easy to see their evil actions. The senior Herod ordered all Jewish baby boys killed to prevent Jesus from growing up. Herod Antipas, who ruled later, beheaded John the Baptist at his daughter’s request and threatened to kill Jesus as told in Luke 13:31-35.

Pilate, however, claims to have no issues with Jesus. He pleads with the crowd to release Jesus and then renounces all responsibility when the crowd demands his execution. Pilate is shades of gray, much like us. He doesn’t appear bad. He shows his compassion saying, “I find no basis for a charge against him.” (John 19:6b) But, Pilate, who has the power of the Roman government behind him, could have saved Jesus. Instead, he hands him over to the mob and washes his hands of the responsibility.

Do we do the same? We don’t hand the fate of our Lord and Savior over to an angry mob, but how often do we knowingly stray. “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins,” says James 4:17. Fortunately, we follow a loving God who sent to us His only son to save us from our sins.

Prayer

Father Almighty, Help us to follow your will and not bend easily to the ways of the world. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Our God is such an awesome God to send His son to die so that we may live.

THURSDAY, APRIL 14
MAUNDY THURSDAY

Washed in Love

By Rev. David Melton, Associate Pastor (reprinted from 2014)

“For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.” (v.15)

JOHN 13:1-17

In the celebration of the final meal that Jesus shared with his disciples, he gave his followers two commandments: “Do this in remembrance of me,” and “even as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” These commands were given by Jesus Christ, Emmanuel (God with us), the living Son of God, who walked among God’s people, shared God’s love, and washed the feet of God’s loved ones.

As we gather on this Holy Thursday night to remember these words of love from Christ, we remember that he gave his body and blood as a sacrament of love for each of us. When Jesus blesses and breaks the bread to the glory of God he tells those he loves, “This is my body which is given for you.” It will be broken for you. When you share it, after you bless God in prayer, remember me. Jesus also asked them and us to bless the cup as a new covenant in his blood. This remembering should be lived out in our words and our deeds, as we live and serve the world in the good news of Jesus’ ministry, death, resurrection and reign.

In baptism God adopted each of us as children of God, royal princesses and princes of the kingdom that includes all people on earth. It is a holy priesthood of those who believe and who tell the story of his wonderful love of us. We are to show the same regard for each other that God has shown for us in our baptisms.

As we follow the commandments of Christ, we show love to each other. We are agents of grace remembered as we embody the one who lived, died and rose for us. Our actions are not simply our love. We incarnate, in just a brief moment, Jesus’ redeeming love as disciples of his, as if we, too, were at that last meal.

The holy meal that we receive this night is a gift of grace formed into acts so that we can remember that in baptism we are made members of the body of Christ; a body sacrificed for each of us. As we leave the worship service tonight, we are renewed in Christ to follow his commandments and serve his people in our work and in our play. We rejoice in the goodness of life. We give everything we do to God and we give thanks for the living and the telling of the story of Jesus’ redemptive love. May God bless each of us in our coming and our going.

Prayer

During this week of holy days, we bless and praise your name, O God, for your blessings to us as your people. Grant that our worship will bring us closer to you and your people. We ask you to pour out your Holy Spirit on each of us that we might serve you in our fullness. Enable each of us to become ministers of healing and support for others in need. Bless us this day and forever more. Amen.

Today’s Thought

In two commandments Jesus calls us to actions that offer glimpses of the love that God has given to us to share. This gift of love invites us to live out the same love to God’s world.

FRIDAY, APRIL 15
GOOD FRIDAY

Good Friday Obituary

From an e-mail (reprinted from 2010)

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.
In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”*

PSALM 3:5-6

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 16

The Glorious Music

By Erin Jackson

“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing. Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.”

PSALM 100:1-3

Maya Angelou said “I’m always amazed when people walk up to me and say, ‘I’m a Christian.’ I think, ‘Already? You already got it?’ I’m working at it, which means that I try to be as kind and fair and generous and respectful and courteous to every human being.”

I am not a very good Christian. I’m still working on it. I judge (ask anyone about my opinions). I’m irreverent and quick to respond, rather than being prayerful or thoughtful. In fact many people would question whether I pray frequently at all. This irreverence is why a traditional high church service is so important to me. My worship, my peace that passes all understanding, comes from the music, and I am an unabashed snob about it (I judge, remember?).

This season is glorious with its music. I have favorites that I feel belong to this season, but one that I love and believe goes with all seasons is an old favorite from the beginning of the 20th century. “Let not your heart be troubled. These tender words I hear. And resting on his goodness, I lose all doubts and fears...For his eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me.”

It brings comfort. It expresses joy. It can be done in any style and not lose its brilliance and meaning. This song isn’t a traditional Lenten or Easter song. Rather, it is a song for times like these when it seems like so much is uncertain and “normal” is a distant memory.

Prayer

Father God, We lift our voices to you this Lenten season and ask you to help us focus on being your people. Whether we praise you in the quiet of our hearts or in the strength of our voices joined together, we know you are with us. Amen.

Today’s Thought

What song gives you a clear perspective on Easter? Read the words instead of singing them to see if you hear a new message.

Jesus Has Risen

By Dr. Phil Schroeder

“On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” Then they remembered his words. When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.”

LUKE 24:1-12

Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen indeed!

Today is a day for shouting Hallelujah, a day of celebrating new life and possibilities! Yet, it did not start out that way for the few faithful women who had followed Jesus since he changed their lives.

You might remember from our reading of Luke 8 earlier in the year that a group of faithful women followed Jesus and provided for the needs of the other disciples. In Luke 8:1-3 we read, “Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.”

Because these women had experienced new life and healing, they faithfully followed until the very end. They come to the tomb for their last labor of love, to anoint the body with spices. They find the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. Two men in lightning-like clothes invite them to see the scene differently. “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here; he has Risen!”

May we stop returning to the places of death and loss in our lives. May we remember what Jesus told them and tells us. New life is possible. We can live as resurrected people.

When we send a text message and are waiting for a reply, there are three dots there telling us something more is coming. We wait with expectation for what is next for we believe in a God of new beginnings. Look for those three dots today and in the days ahead as God tells us this story of new life will continue! Remember that resurrection is the promise that the worst thing to happen to us is never the last.

To be continued . . .

Prayer

Lord, Help me to wait on your answer that might only look like three dots to us right now but is really your promise for a future of hope and hallelujah. Help me to remain faithful in the early morning, trust that you will roll the stone away for me as well. Amen.

Today’s Thought

Christ is risen, indeed!