

2019

“Meditations of Our Hearts”



A Lenten Devotional
of the
First Presbyterian Church
Jacksonville, Illinois

*“Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart
be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.*

Psalm 19:14

Romans 12:1-2 “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

This year, Lent starts quite a bit later than last year, but the winter weather has been harsh and long, so many of us have stayed in a bit longer. If we look at our faith journey as seasons in a year, we must be sure to take time for rest, study and prayer during this "season" in order to be ready for the new life of springtime. I hope in your daily Lenten devotions you can engage in spiritual worship and a renewing of your mind. As this journey unfolds you discern God's will and transformed by Christ's sacrifice.

Lent is a forty-day journey beginning on March 6 with Ash Wednesday, ending on Easter, and has its roots in Jesus' forty days in the wilderness. It is a period of reflection, prayer and fasting. We ponder the meaning of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The music during Lent is usually more somber and there are intentionally no “Alleluias” sung. Sometimes people give something up or “fast” as a daily reminder, while others will add a spiritual discipline.

I am thrilled for the many voices in our congregation who have such an important message to share. Each voice offers an opportunity to not to be conformed by the world. Each perspective is like the tiles of a beautiful mosaic, each unique, but when put together creates a marvelous display of God's love.

Please set aside time each day to read scripture, pray and reflect. When you do, take a deep breath, letting go all the distractions the world has, and remember that God has a plan for you that is good and acceptable and perfect. During each day, look for the many ways God may be speaking to you.

Blessings,
Rev. Jonathan Warren

Day One, Ash Wednesday, March 6, 2019

1 Peter 3:8-9 : All of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult but with blessing because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

Submitted by Debbie Lair

Day Two, Thursday, March 7, 2019

OPENING DOORS TO OPPORTUNITY

***And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.
Hebrews 13:16***

The greatest British composer of the mid-eighteenth century was Thomas Arne, best known for his Rule Britannia; Wagner commented that the whole of English character is expressed in the first eight notes of this song.

As a boy, like Handel, Arne defied his father to study music, even secretly practicing his harpsichord by muffling the strings with a handkerchief. As a man, he wrote for the London Theatre. His oratorio Judith featured the first woman ever to sing in a British chorus. Arne was best known for his operas, including Artaxerxes, a great favorite of Haydn.

What motivated Arne's works? While many of his contemporaries went for bottom-line profits, Arne created with a more personal—and person-centered—agenda. Living in an age when a composer could choose his own star performers, Arne composed the huge opera Rosamond with his sister in mind. When it opened, she stepped onto the stage in the leading role, launching an operatic career. Later, he wrote the opera Tom Thumb so his little brother could play the heroic role.

In such endeavors Arne worked for months with the goal of furthering the career of those he loved. Already celebrated for his talent, he could have chosen any soloists in England, and some “stars” might well have enhanced his own interests. Yet he chose to use his talents to open opportunities for others.

Perhaps you have achieved a certain level of success in your profession. You may already have tasted the joy of using that success to bless others less experienced than yourself. If so, you'll need little prodding to continue using your gifts to encourage others. If not, why not try to experiment? Think of a way to open a door of opportunity for someone else. It might take time. It might mean mentoring and coaching, but the satisfaction of seeing someone blossom is greater than any amount of money or fame can supply.

Prayer: Father, You have never been stingy with me. First, You have given me gifts and talents, and then You have given me the opportunity to develop them. Let me pass on the blessing to someone else who needs an open door of opportunity.

Submitted by Jean Harlow-Truesdell
From Spiritual Moments with the Great
Composers by Patrick Kavanaugh

Day Three, Friday, March 8, 2019

A Song of Comfort

Scripture Reading — *Isaiah 40:1-11 : Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.*

Each of us needs a healthy dose of comfort from time to time. The child at play who trips and scrapes her knee badly needs comfort from a parent or other caregiver. The young man or woman at college with its unfamiliar surroundings needs someone to talk to. Consider also the young couple whose first child was stillborn, the middle-aged couple whose son died in an accident, and the elderly man whose wife of 60 years is slipping away because of Alzheimer's. Who will comfort them?

Thank God that there is good news in Isaiah's song. God himself says, "Comfort, comfort my people. . . . Speak tenderly. . . ."

When we need comfort, we must remember, first, that God is the Sovereign Lord. He will meet us in every situation with his powerful arm. As an old hymn puts it, "Oh, let me not forget that, though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet." Never forget it! This is our Father's world.

Second, our Father is a loving, compassionate God. No matter what adversities you may be going through today, you can take comfort. Like a shepherd with his sheep, God carries us close to his heart. Remember Jesus' parting words: "I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Thank you, Lord, that you are our powerful God of comfort. Even as you carry us close to your heart, so too may we joyfully carry each other's burdens as we live for you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Submitted by Gail Olson
From Today Daily

Day Four, Saturday, March 9, 2019

John 7: 1-13

After this Jesus went about on Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him. Now the Jewish Festival of Booths was near. So his brother said to him, " Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing; for no one wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world"....

Devotional

Jesus had little doubt he would be arrested if he attended the Festival of Booths, a harvest-time event. He also knew the Jewish leaders wished to have him killed. If he had been arrested then, would the leaders' wish been fulfilled? And would his arrest been a mere annoyance to the Roman courts? Jesus knew his crucifixion could only occur with the backing of Rome. Pontus Pilate had to be put in a position to order Jesus' death. Jesus perhaps understood that his death, and therefore his resurrection also, had to take place in the time of planting and renewal. Spring is that time. Easter had to come when his Father had planned it. Jesus' death could not be rushed, nor could it be avoided. In the end, Christ knew when his time had come.

Prayer

Dear Lord, we praise your name and ask you to help us remember the importance of not rushing to a goal. In our life with you, help us to recognize our need to step back and ponder the journey. Help us to understand the time has fully come to accomplish your purposes in our lives. We ask this in your name. Amen

Submitted by Guy Crumley

Day Five, Sunday, March 10, 2019

Blessed?

“You will be a blessing.” -Genesis 12:2

I have nearly eradicated the B-word from my vocabulary.

Meanwhile, it seems the word *Blessed* is popping up all over the place: on t-shirts, on bumper stickers, on social media in the form of “humble brags,” *#blessed*.

What is a blessing?

If I say my health is a blessing, what about my neighbor who is battling a life-altering illness? I guess she’s not blessed.

If I say my home is a blessing, what about my neighbor sleeping out of his car? I guess he’s not blessed.

If I say my job is a blessing, what about my neighbor without the college degree, the able body, the agile mind? I guess he’s not blessed, either.

No, this can’t be!

I think sometimes we say “blessed” when we ought to say “privileged” or “fortunate” or “lucky,” though I don’t much care for that word.

Given my discomfort with the word “blessing,” perhaps it’s ironic that my favorite hymn is “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing” (*Glory to God*, #475).

“Come, thou Fount of every blessing; tune my heart to sing thy grace...”

Aha, that’s it! This may be a definition of blessing I can wrap my heart around: that which tunes or causes my heart to sing of God’s grace.

Prayer: Fill our empty words with renewed meaning. Fill our hollow hearts with renewed songs of grace. Fill our dry throats with songs of loudest praise. Amen

Submitted by Tim Chipman

Day Six, Monday, March 11, 2019

God's Presence on Monday

Psalms 139:7 - *"Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?"*

On Monday, as we go about our different duties and tasks, are we aware of the Presence of God? The Lord desires still to be in His old temple, wherever we are. He wants the continuing love and delight and worship of His children, wherever we work. Is it not a beautiful thing for a businessman to enter his office on Monday with an inner call to worship: "The Lord is in my office - let all the world be silent before Him." If you cannot worship the Lord in the midst of your responsibilities on Monday, it is not very likely that you were worshipping on Sunday. Many people have the idea that they leave God in the church sanctuary, and when we leave and drive toward home, we have a faint, homesick feeling that we are leaving God in the big box. You know it is not true but what are you doing about it? Pray that God would teach us how to transform our responses to frustrations, our relationships, our decisions so that they would be pleasing to Him. Take Him with you wherever you find yourself on Monday and every day!

"Funny but it seems I always wind up here with you
Nice to know somebody loves me
Funny but it seems that it's the only thing to do
Run and find the one who loves me."

Karen Carpenter reminds us never to feel alone in her song, "Rainy Days and Mondays". Christ has taken all our burdens to the cross, gladly bearing, He bled and died to take away our sins. Take some time to hang out with Jesus today, not in stressful moments but also thanking Him for joy bestowed upon your life this awesome Monday!

Father, As I begin a new week, I lay before you my whole self, spirit, soul and body. I ask that you would re-calibrate all that I am to align with your great will for me. May I keep my thoughts in line with your thoughts, my desires in line with your desires, my words aligned with your Word, and may all I do bring you pleasure. In my Savior's name, Amen.

Submitted by Dan Thompson

Day Seven, Tuesday, March 12, 2019

Isaiah 6:8 - ⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

Here I Am, Lord, by Dan Schutte

I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my peo-ple cry.
All who dwell in dark-ness now My hand will save.
I who make the stars of night, I will make their dark-ness bright.
Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord. It is I Lord.
I have heard you call-ing in the night.
I will go, Lord, where you lead me.
I will hold your peo-ple in my heart.
I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my peo-ple's pain.
I have wept for love of them. They turn a-way.
I will break their hearts of stone, Give them hearts for love a-lone.
I will speak my words to them. Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord. It is I Lord.
I have heard you call-ing in the night.
I will go, Lord, where you lead me.
I will hold your peo-ple in my heart.
I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them. My hand will save.
Fin-est bread I will pro-vide, Till their hearts be sat-is-fied.
I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord. It is I Lord.
I have heard you call-ing in the night.
I will go, Lord, where you lead me.
I will hold your peo-ple in my heart.

This song brings me to tears every time it is sung. It all started with my children in youth group. It is one of the youth's favorites to sing. They would sing it every Youth Sunday and the congregation was invited to sing along. Tears every time. My kids still make fun of me for it.

We all love Tim obviously, but it made me realize how important his work was and that he was teaching my children and our youth that God is speaking to them. That they are the future leaders to spread the word and do God's work. It really moves me because I feel the call also every time I hear it now.

Submitted by Amy Albers

(Mom to 3 First Presbyterian Church Members who will carry the love and support from our church with them their entire lives. Thank you for that.)

Day Eight, Wednesday, March 13, 201

Gratitude

1 Thessalonians 5:18 - "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

Since my retirement, I've become somewhat of a master with the hot glue gun, ribbons, and dried flowers. Yes, I have been spending quite a bit of time on Pinterest, choosing crafty projects to tackle. It was during one of these searches that I saw Gratitude Jars. What a fantastic idea! I imagine taking a Mason jar from the cabinet and gluing some burlap around it. Then I'll grab some orange and brown ribbon with turkeys or colorful fall leaves, and hot glue it on to make it look cute.

Now, for the slips of paper! I'll find some little patterned slips of paper the family can use for writing their gratitude phrases. We will capture sweet moments for which we are thankful. Of course, we will jot them down immediately and then - maybe later that year, say Christmas - we will pull them out and read them as a family.

Everyone will sit around the fireplace, drinking eggnog, taking turns reading them, smiling at the sweet memories.

Psych! Okay, let's get real! It's more likely my gratitude jar will take three or four slips of paper before being shoved to the back of the shelf somewhere, forgotten. It is a great idea, but somehow a pretty jar doesn't do the heart work for me.

In Luke 17:11, ten lepers dare to approach Jesus. They are unclean. They are contagious, and despised by all who see them. Jesus sends them to the priest, and on the way, their disease is healed. No more disfigurement. No more pain. They can return to their jobs and families. Imagine their joy as they danced into the temple, showing the priest their restored fingers, and skin as new as a babe.

One, a Samaritan, returns to thank Jesus.

Only one.

There is no doubt the other nine are just as elated, but only one is grateful enough to return and thank Jesus. Nine people are healed on the exterior, but there's some inner work that still needs to be done.

Sometimes our greatest heart work takes place when we acknowledge where we are the least thankful.

On holidays you might find your house full. There will be dirty dishes. Lots of them. Family will converge upon your home. Kids running everywhere. Maybe that one uncle or cousin will tell the same old joke - the corny one that isn't funny, but he can't help but tell it year after year. You see your

great Aunt coming toward you, the one who loves to grab your face and kiss you smack on the lips, arms outstretched. She's already puckering up as she makes eye contact with you, "come and give me some sugar!" It's easy to get distracted by the noise or the mess, but I can't help but wonder, *what if we stepped into our ingratitude with honesty*"

Dear Lord, today I saw the mess and heard the noise but failed to be grateful for the people around the table. Let me pause for a moment and point out all the reasons I am thankful.

People get busy with life. Errands, work, family, church meetings...I never have time to do what I want! I am soooooo busy!! Where did the day go?

God, have I thanked You lately for giving me a feeling of usefulness and purpose in my life?

Oh Lord, I gripe about my husband always up in his office working. He's busy all the time! Can't he even take time out for lunch with me every now and then or go take a walk with me? ...when just months ago, I was praying that we'd have enough money to pay our taxes and our daughter's upcoming wedding.

God, have I stopped to thank You for provision?

I have a birthday coming up...another birthday. 60 is staring me in the face! When I look in the mirror, I see those years adding up.

Father, I see wrinkles and years gaining, but I failed to thank You for another day. I'd like to change that.

When we step honestly into areas of ingratitude, it has the power to change us. We run back to Jesus, aware of the immense gifts we've been given.

Maybe one day I'll make that pretty jar with a burlap ribbon, but for now I am asking the Holy Spirit to open my eyes to see where ingratitude might be taking root.

Listen to our words everyday, look for miracles and write them on our hearts. Let's run to Jesus and tell Him...thank You!!

Father, sometimes we take our miracles for granted, or we think You already know that we're grateful. For whatever reason, I haven't expressed that, and I want to do it today. I'm falling to my knees to say how grateful I am. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Submitted by Donna Stare

Day Nine, Thursday, March 14, 2019

Metamorphosis

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

Butterflies are one of the most interesting and beautiful creatures on the planet. And they start as ugly little caterpillars. When I think about my life, I try to remember that God's promise is that He is always near and has a plan for each of us. I have struggled with seeing how I fit in God's plan. But I try to remember that if God cares enough to guide a caterpillar through the metamorphosis process toward a life as something beautiful, then God must have something great in store for each of us. I mean, that is why he sent his Son to die for us. Right?

Dear Father, please help me remember that you have a plan. And that it's a great plan. Amen.

Submitted by Liz Hollendonner

Day Ten, Friday, March 15, 2019

Several years ago, while I was serving on Session, I remember another Elder giving her devotion about her pending retirement. While I don't remember the specifics of what she said, I do remember that she was apprehensive about it and that apprehension was the basis for her remarks.

It started me thinking about life changing events. They can be positive or negative. They can alter our plans. They can change our future. Good life changing events could be getting married, the birth of a child, receiving a sought after promotion at work, or best of all, winning the lottery! But they might also be the unexpected loss of a loved one, divorce, losing a job, or assuming the role of a primary caregiver. A life changing event can be joyous, traumatic or seemingly insignificant, but it's how we are able to deal with it that matters.

We can turn to the Bible for guidance and inspiration during these times. In *Philippians 4:6* we read "*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*" And for further encouragement, *Joshua 1:9* reads "*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.*"

This brings me back to my unoriginal devotion topic. In late May, 1972, I journeyed to Jacksonville from my hometown of Loves Park, Illinois in search for a place to live. Having just graduated from college a couple of weeks earlier, I was eager to get settled and start my new career in banking at the Elliott State Bank. Forty six years and one employer change later, *my* retirement is fast approaching.

The aforementioned Elder was viewing retirement as a life changing event, and it clearly is. While many of us eagerly anticipate a time when our days are not defined by time clocks, meetings, or deadlines, there can also be apprehension about the unknown. What will life be like after retirement? My family, particularly Pat, has weighed in, suggesting that I am not *allowed* to retire: If I don't go crazy myself, she surely will!

The Bible doesn't discuss retirement directly, but there are some references to it. I did find a couple of verses that I can use during my upcoming transition. *Jeremiah 29:11*, "*For I know the plans I have for you,*" declares the Lord, "*plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*" And from *Proverbs 16:3*, "*Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.*" and lastly, my favorite: *Proverbs 16:31*, "*Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained in the way of righteousness.*"

While I don't have an exact date set yet, I don't think of retirement as being a negative event. I am convinced that after a few months of adjustment and with God's help, I will settle into a new routine with a new purpose.

Heavenly Father, You have a plan for all of us. From the day we are born until our last breath is taken, you guide us in all of our actions. We are all at different stages in our life's journey, living with different circumstances, and none of us exactly alike. When our plans change unexpectedly and our challenges are great, or as we reach another plateau, we know that you will lead us and nurture us and grant us peace. Amen.

Submitted by Rich Foss

Day Eleven, Saturday, March 16, 2019

Psalm 1:3 - And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

In April of 2017, we went to the Strawn Art Gallery Exhibit Opening for Mark Hirsch's That Tree exhibit. He has a 200 year bur oak tree on his property in Wisconsin. He took a picture of it everyday for a year and wrote a book with those pictures and exhibited 51 of those photos.

In meeting him and his learning about my self-propagating a sprout from our flowering crabapple tree that was cut down when South Main was widened in front of our house, he encouraged me to take a picture of it each day. Hence I started taking and sharing a picture each day on Facebook and called it My Tree.

I have become quite connected to My Tree. When my son and his family visited from Tennessee over Thanksgiving, we took a picture of he, myself, and my grandson in front of that tree...three generations!

When I reflect on this verse from Psalms, I think of my family; we have grown and nurtured one another. And whatever we have done, our love has grown.

Submitted by Guy Crumley

Day Twelve, Sunday, March 17, 2019

There are two days in every week about which we should not worry, two days which should be kept from fear and apprehension.

One of these days is "YESTERDAY" with its mistakes and cares, its faults and blunders, its aches and pains. "YESTERDAY" has passed forever beyond our control.

All the money in the world cannot bring back "YESTERDAY." We cannot erase a single word we said. "YESTERDAY" is gone.

The other day we should not worry about is "TOMORROW" with its possible adversities, its burdens, its large promise and poor performances. "TOMORROW" is beyond our control.

"TOMORROW'S" sun will still rise, either in splendor or behind a mask of clouds, but it will rise. Until it does, we have no stake in ""TOMORROW," for it is yet unborn.

This leaves only one day --- "TODAY." Any person can fight the battles of just one day. It is only when you and I add the burdens of those two awful eternities --- "YESTERDAY" and "TOMORROW" --- that we break down. It is not the experience of "TODAY" that drives people mad--- it is remorse of bitterness for something which happened "YESTERDAY" and dread of what will happen "TOMORROW."—

Prayer; Good morning Father of Creation! Through Your magnificent power has formed all that exist in the now and infinitely. You have perfectly placed planets, stars, central source of life stimulating sun in order to fulfill Your long range plan. Thank You Jesus for taking such good care of our physical needs. Most of all, I give humble adoration and praise to You for cleansing my soul.

"Lord Jesus, you have ransomed us with your blood and restored us to life with the Father in heaven. May your resurrection be our hope as we long for the day when we will see you face to face in glory." In the name of our Redeeming Christ, amen.

Submitted by Dan Thompson

Author Unknown

Day Thirteen, Monday, March 18, 2019

Slaying Dragons

In Seminary, Jonathan and I traveled “in the footsteps of Paul,” through what is now Turkey. In Istanbul, we visited St. George’s Cathedral, the seat of the Eastern Orthodox Church (the equivalent of the Vatican). It is beautiful building, although it has been destroyed by pillagers and fire on many occasions. It is humble in size because of an Ottoman Empire decree that no Christian building should be bigger or grander than the corresponding Muslim building. The church is dedicated to St. George, of dragon-slaying fame.

Visiting this church made me curious about the story of St. George. The legend, dating from the time of the crusades, says that a town was held captive by a dragon, who was unsatisfied by their sacrifices of sheep, and eventually demanded the regular sacrifice of children, chosen by lottery. Eventually, the king’s daughter was chosen. As she made her way to the dragon’s lair, St. George came along, slayed the dragon, rescued the princess, and baptized the entire town as Christians, building a church before he rode away into the sunset.

Recently, I learned of another saint who dealt with a dragon – St. Martha. This is the same Martha who made dinner while her sister Mary listened to Jesus teach; the same Martha who demanded that Jesus do something about her dead brother Lazarus. Her legend is that Martha, Mary, and Lazarus traveled to France, spreading the Gospel. They settled in a town who had a dragon of their own. One day, Martha came upon the dragon, and tamed it by sprinkling it with holy water and tying it up with her girdle.

These two stories about dragons have a lesson for us. When we come across “dragons” in our lives, we have a choice to make. We can allow the dragon to consume us. We can slay the dragon. Or we can, with God’s help, tame the dragon, and subdue it. Rev. Jane Spahr uses these stories to personify courage. “Courage could mean to slay the dragon. But could it also mean to tame our fears?”

Courage comes in many forms, doesn’t it? When it comes to fighting against something – a bad habit, systemic injustice, a small wrong we witness in our everyday life – we often imagine a St. George versus the dragon scenario. But St. Martha offers us another way to see the fight. Courage could also mean to dig in, to come into contact, to begin a dialogue.

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go. (Joshua 1:9)

Submitted by Siobhan Warren

Day Fourteen, Tuesday, March 19, 2019

Even If You Don't Understand

“Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.” -Jeremiah 33:3

I have come to believe that the question *Why?* has little value in the life of faith.

But try telling that to a two-year-old whose specialty response is, “Why?”

Ruthie adores her little children's Bible and the several stories it contains.

- Adam, Eve, and the serpent... to a kid told to wear clothes and always listen: *What did they do, Daddy? Why?*
- David and Goliath... to a kid told not to throw and not to hit: *What did he do, Daddy? Why?*
- Joseph and his Brothers... to a kid who is told to share and be kind to everyone: *What did they do, Daddy? Why?*

I find myself answering a lot of her earnest questions with the common answer, “Because God loves us, and God loves you.”

The other day, as we were reading from her Bible, we listened to a CD of kids' songs of faith. The lyrics to one were not lost on me:

*Listen to the word that God has spoken;
listen to the One who is close at hand;
listen to the voice that began creation;
listen even if you don't understand.*

Even adults, prone to asking why, need to remember to listen even if--especially when--we don't understand. Maybe that's why this short song, sung in a round, is included in our new hymnal. (*Glory to God*, #455).

*Prayer: Any one of us might ask why, O Lord. Build in us the kind of deeper disciple who might instead listen fervently to the One who is always close at hand... even when we don't understand.
Amen*

Submitted by Tim Chipman

Day Fifteen, Wednesday, March 20, 2019

Scripture; In Christ, I am blessed.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...”

Ephesians 1:3 NKJV

This year is the 170th birthday of my home and school, Illinois School for the Visually Impaired (ISVI). That Campus holds many treasured memories. The Historical Museum always brings a rush of treasured moments from the past.

When In this place, in an envelope of silence, I am keenly aware of a humbling emotional rush of past colliding with today filling the place. Anyone passing by would see just another “door in the wall.” However, those “bricks in the wall” creating the enclosure hold within them evidence of hopes, dreams, triumphs, failures and even a glimpse what is still possible to achieve.

Every person on this little rock among a vast chasm of universes struggles with where and/or how to fit in life’s puzzle. Being a little different than what is interpreted as “normal” makes finding just the right slot for sliding into more challenging.

Having the honor of preserving both concrete examples of our school’s historical achievements and abstract ones through sharing memories is extremely humbling.

Evidence demonstrating how visually impaired children from ages past search for ways to fit in, and forward thinking innovating adults will catch the attention of eyes or ears of all visitors. Stepping over the threshold is much more than just entering another room. A genuine time machine provides for a journey not soon to be forgotten.

In an attempt to prevent myself from falling too far into personal reminiscing, or drifting away from today’s message main point, I invite anyone interested in a unique experience of time travel, Send me an email. I promise you will not regret it.

As the School’s informal historian, I try stressing that past makes possible present and present can negatively or positively influence future events. This is also true as Christians.

We live in a world of “what’s in it for me?” and “what have you done for me lately?” thinking. It has invaded our society and distorts our way of looking at the world around us. This view of life has people thinking that they deserve more. That somehow they are missing out on something, or someone is holding out on them.

But to you and I, as believers in Jesus Christ, God has a wonderful answer. He is holding back nothing of the good things for those who love Him and follow Him. Paul says in Ephesians 1:3 that God the Father deserves all of our praise and adoration, because “Why”? Because He has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings found in heaven. God is withholding not one thing from those who have surrendered their lives to Him.

There are two important keys to remember if we want to access these blessings. One, these are spiritual blessings, not earthly riches. God has never promised us health, wealth, ease of life, or any such things. He promises spiritual blessings! We have forgiveness of sins, grace, mercy, love, God-sized power, discernment/wisdom, peace, joy, and much more.

Secondly, we have only one access to these blessings – Jesus Christ. Throughout the Letter to the Ephesians, Paul declares the key to the Christian life to be “in Christ.” Jesus Himself proclaimed this truth in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” The truth is in Christ – I have everything I need. In Christ, I am blessed beyond counting. With King David I can say, “My cup runs over” (Psalm 23:5).

"Our worldly successes cannot be guaranteed, but our ability to achieve spiritual success is entirely up to us, thanks to the grace of God. The best advice I know is to give those worldly things your best but never your all -- reserve the ultimate hope for the only one who can grant it."

Joseph Hall

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I know without a doubt, where I am today is directly a result of Your unceasing faith. Thank You for a generous helping of grace, mercy and countless opportunities molding the Dan of today.

Grant me wisdom of maintain an attitude of compassion, patience love on this day's journey. Show me ways to be Your presence where sorrow, doubt, or challenges abound.

Heavenly Father, Please give me strength to live another day;

Let me not turn coward before its difficulties or prove recreant to its duties; Let me not lose faith in other people;

Keep me sweet and sound of heart, in spite of ingratitude, treachery, or meanness; Preserve me from minding little stings or giving them;

Help me to keep my heart clean, and to live so honestly and fearlessly that no outward failure can dishearten me or take away the joy of conscious integrity; Open wide the eyes of my soul that I may see good in all things; Grant me this day some new vision of thy truth;

Inspire me with the spirit of joy and gladness;

and make me the cup of strength to suffering souls;

in the name of the strong Deliverer, our only Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Submitted by Author, Dan Thompson

Day Sixteen, Thursday, March 21, 2019

John 1: 35-42

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by he exclaimed, "Look, here is the lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned around and saw them following him, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother and said to him, "We have found the Messiah." He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon, son of John. You are to be called Cephas (Peter)."

Devotional

This story of John and his disciples is a great reminder of what discipleship is really supposed to look like. Too often as Christians we find ourselves going through the motions of busy daily lives. We believe that the life to which we have committed ourselves is pleasing to God, but we rarely allow God to intervene in our routine. I wonder what type of powerful impact it would have if we followed the example of these two disciples by asking Jesus everyday the all- important question, "Where are we staying?" and then, in response to that answer, dwell in that place with Him, and encouraging others to do the same.

Prayer

Dear Lord, I praise your name and want to ask you, "Where are we staying?" I will dwell in that place with you all the day long. And when the sun rises the next day, I will ask the same question again. I ask this I your name. Amen

Submitted by Guy Crumley

Day Seventeen, Friday, March 22, 2019

All Things New

If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!
2 Corinthians 5:17

Junkyards intrigue me. I enjoy working on cars, so I frequently make trips to the one near our home. It's a lonely place, where the wind whispers through discarded hulks that were once someone's prized possession. Some were wrecked, some wore out, and others simply outlived their usefulness. As I walk between the rows, a car will sometimes catch my eye, and I'll find myself wondering about the adventures it had during its "lifetime." Like a portal to the past, each has a story to tell - of human hankering after the latest model and the inescapable passage of time.

But I take particular pleasure in finding new life for an old part. Whenever I can take something discarded and give it new life in a restored vehicle, it feels like a small victory against time and decline.

It sometimes makes me think of Jesus's words at the end of the Bible: "I am making everything new!" (Revelations 21:5). These words refer to God's renewal of creation, which includes believers. Already, all who've received Jesus are a "new creation" in Him (2 Corinthians 5:17).

And one day we will enter into His promise of unending days with Him (John 14:3). Age and disease will no longer take their toll, and we will continue the adventure of an eternal lifetime. What stories each of us will have to tell - stories of our Savior's redeeming love and undying faithfulness.

Loving Lord, I praise You that I am a new creation in You, and that in Your kindness and mercy You have given me the promise of eternal life.

-- Written by James Banks and published in The Bible in One Year on December 30, 2018

Submitted by Chad Suhre

Day Eighteen, Saturday, March 23, 2019

Daddy Sang Bass

I have so many wonderful memories of my parents. As I get older, I find my thoughts traveling back in time more and more often. Memories are awakened by a smell, seeing an old recipe in my mom's handwriting or hearing a song. These feelings conjure up pictures in my mind that will never fade.

Whenever I see an older gentleman wearing blue shorts, I think of my dad. Dad had these robin egg blue colored polyester shorts that he wore often in the summer. I can still see him, as vivid as if it were yesterday...blue shorts, grey T-shirt, and black ankle socks with his white tennis shoes, mowing the yard or gathering wood for our campfire.

Dad sang in the choir at our church, First Presbyterian, in Murphysboro, IL. He had a beautiful baritone voice. It was not overpowering, at all. But, it was one that you could hear any time they sang an anthem; blending beautifully with everyone's voices yet providing a strong foundation that supported the higher voices. When I was in 7th grade, I began going to choir practice with Dad, and continued through high school. I looked forward to the weekly rehearsals, robing up and singing every Sunday. It was my time with dad. I most enjoyed sitting in front of the bass section and hearing my dad's voice in my ear as we sang. To this day, when I hear one of his favorite hymns, I close my eyes and can hear his strong, smooth voice joining in.

Music was a big part of my dad's life. He taught himself to play the guitar, just enough to strum a few songs. He sang with the Little Egypt Barbershop group for many years. It was apparent when attending his concerts that this gave him much happiness. We all understood his love for this group. So much so, that when Dad passed away in 2004, we asked that he be dressed in his puffy sleeved white shirt, striped barbershop vest and garters on both upper arms for his funeral. The barbershop group sang at his funeral, too. This meant so much to us, and we were more than aware that this was not an easy thing for them to do.

As a family, we sang a lot! In the car, around the campfire, around the piano in our dining room, while doing yard work or cleaning house, as we hiked or floated down a river. While in college, I would tell my friends about how much my family enjoyed singing. After a weekend at home, while at dinner in the dining hall, I was telling my tablemates about how my family gathered around the piano after supper and singing well into the night. One of the girls said, "Families actually do that?" "Oh yeah!" piped up my roommate. "I love going home with Donna. They sing all the time!"

A couple of times a month we would pile in the family Chrysler and head to Missouri to visit my mom's family. It was a two-hour drive to Dexter, and my oldest sister would bring her guitar. We would sing the entire way there. Dad would start us off with his, "Boom-rocka, boom-rocka, boom rocka", providing that sturdy foundation. Mom and one of my sisters would join in with, "Oh, rocka my soul. Oh, rocka my soul. Oh, rocka my soul. Oh, rocka my soul," and my other sister and I would finally join with, "Rocka my soul in the bosom of Abraham. Rocka my soul in the bosom of Abraham. Rocka my soul in the bosom of Abraham." Then we would all end with a resounding, "Oh rocka my soul!"

During the drive our car was filled with the sounds of "In the Jungle", "Good Morning Starshine", "Hear, Oh Lord", "Puff the Magic Dragon", "In Remembrance", "Mares Eat Oats", "Oh Little Playmate", "Blowin' In the Wind", "Leaving on a Jet Plane", "Oh You Can't Get to Heaven", any John Denver, Carpenters, Simon and Garfunkel, or Smothers Brothers songs.

It was as if we needed music like a flower needs rain. It brought us together. Music helped make car rides seem shorter, cooking evening dinner less tedious, camping trips even sweeter, housework more tolerable and yard work less cumbersome.

Thanks, Dad, for sharing your love of music with the family and filling my head with many musical memories. I just know that you are providing a great bass foundation for those higher heavenly voices in God's choir!

Psalm 104:33 - I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being.

Submitted by Donna Adams Stare

Day Nineteen, Sunday, March 24, 2019

Through the Eyes of a Child

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 18:1-4

Becoming a grandmother has been one of the most fulfilling events in my life. I have been able to experience the joys of having a small child around from a new perspective. When we have our own children we are often so busy with daily life that we do not seem to stop and spend a lot of time just watching them experience new things. In watching Skylar grow and develop, I have seen that there are many things we can learn from small children. We all have it in our nature to be like children because we were once there, but have since become too busy being adults.

When we got our first snowfall of the year, we were driving back to Winchester from Jacksonville and Skylar had been asleep in the car. When we arrived at the house and opened the car door, she woke up and exclaimed, “Wow! What’s that?” I explained to her that it was snow and she immediately repeated the word. The entire way to the house she was in awe about what was happening around her. She had to stop and watch the snow fall into her tiny hands, taking in the beauty of it. She then had to share her new experience with everyone that evening. In observing her wonderment, it made me realize that there are so many amazing things happening around us all the time and she, as a small child, had the desire to take the opportunity to learn about this new happening and wanted to make sure others got to experience it too. We should also be willing to stop and see the wonderful things happening around us, learn more about them, and be willing to share them with others. This is a wonderful way to spread God’s word and share what he has provided for us.

Often times when Skylar is out and about, whether it be a shopping trip or to grab a bite to eat, she makes it a point to say “hi” to all the people she encounters. When it is time to leave, she makes sure to tell them all “bye” as well. If someone does not seem to hear her, she simply repeats herself until they respond. She always gets a pleasant response and a smile. You can always see the joy in people’s faces when she does this. We can all be more intentional in providing a simple greeting or just a smile to the people we encounter in our daily routines. It may be the one thing that really lifts their spirits and provides a bright spot in their day.

God, please help us all be more like small children, taking the time to see the wonderful things in our lives and in nature around us. Please help us be more willing to step out of our comfort zone and spread joy to others even if it is just a simple gesture like a smile or just a short greeting.

Submitted by Frannie Suhre

Day Twenty, Monday, March 25, 2019

Inside, A Seed

“Give us seed so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate.” -Genesis 47:19

Whew, how does one get through to a misbehaving kindergartener?

Exhausting myself of resources, and exasperated at the dearth of adequate results, I decided the answer may lie in a change of scenery and fresh air, so I walked the five-year-old across the street from the school to the small park.

The autumn air was immediately healing for both of us.

After running gleefully, the young person stopped, looked down at the ground, looked up at a tree, and looked over at me. The student had found a large walnut shell, still in tact, that had fallen from the tree overhead.

Holding the dark pod up to me, the kid said, “Mr. Chipman, do you know what’s in there?”

Half-expecting some fanciful answer, I said, “Oh, please tell me!”

“Why, inside there... is a seed, of course!”

How evident. How simple and true.

What’s inside each of us? Why, a seed, of course.

*Soft rains of spring flow through the fields; earth awakes and greets a new year.
Deep within the soil of our hearts seeds of love begin to take root.
Summer brings floods, tempest and storm; sun breaks forth; birds tend their young.
Then the day of harvest will come, when we gather all that God gives.
 (“Soft Rains of Spring Flow,” *Glory to God*, #680)*

*Prayer: When our hearts are hardened, we forget about the seed--buried in each of us,
buried--miraculously--even within me. God of the seasons, plow and plant and have Your way! Amen*

Submitted by Tim Chipman

Day Twenty-one, Tuesday, March 26, 2019

Thoughts for Meditation of My Heart Devotional Booklet:

Proverbs: 3:5-6 *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”*

Throughout my life, I have witnessed many individuals that have modeled what a good Christian life might be like. Their focus on spiritual disciplines and a relationship with God have not gone unnoticed by me. Many of these loving friends have faced challenges and problems that seemed to me insurmountable. Yet I witnessed them say, *“When fears or doubts arise, I rely on God's promises”* or they quote from Psalm 12:1-2 *“I raise my eyes toward the mountains. Where will my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of Heaven and Earth.”* I try to focus on these words whenever I struggle with looming situations that seem beyond my human comprehension to fix.

This past year, a close teacher friend, Mackenzie, witnessed to me true strength of her faith in God as she and her husband journeyed through an extremely difficult pregnancy. Throughout their months of very difficult doctor appointments, tests, trips to specialists, and decision making, her strength was in knowing that *“God works all things for your good.”* She shared, *“We all have hardships in life. But if you hold onto the hope of our Lord, those hardships and difficult times will soon turn to blessings. Remember we only see a glimpse of the full picture of our story.”* Their sweet little Theo was born on June 8th and he lived for 50 minutes knowing and feeling the unconditional love of his parents and other family members before being placed in the loving arms of God. My friend started writing a blog to share with others their journey and how putting their trust in God gave them the strength they needed then and every day since. Her sharing of what she calls *“her leap of faith”* reminded me of a quote I read in Passavant Auxiliary's project *“The Gift of Wisdom”* coordinated by Janet Chipman and Ginny Fanning. It was shared by Sharon Rice from an unknown source stating, *“When you lose a loved one, time does not heal. It's what you do with your time that heals.”*

By now you must be thinking, where are you going with this? How does this relate to Lent? Lent is said to be a time to grow in our connection with God. It is a period of 40 days where we spiritually draw closer to God whether we give up something or do more concentrated studies of the Bible. My desire for Lent this year, is for Lent to be a springboard for how I live the rest of my life. I want to focus on meditative prayer and become more reflective in my living not just during Lent but in ALL my seasons of life. I pray my spiritual practices will demonstrate my desire to rely on my faith and to remember that we are not alone. God is always present to comfort and guide us no matter what circumstances.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us always to trust in your strength leaning not on our own understanding but in the knowledge that your ways are not ours. Help us seek your purpose for our lives. In your name we pray, Amen.

Submitted by Barb Bucy

Day Twenty-two, Wednesday, March 27, 2019

“Charlie Williams’s Girl”

“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are...Beloved, we are God’s children now...” I John 3: 1-2

It happened in the cold of this January, at County Market, in the produce section. Bob and I were there together, stocking up on groceries before the Arctic blast arrived. There was an older gentleman there, too, and he looked somewhat familiar. Bob and I approached him, with a smile, and began to converse. “You’re Charlie Williams’s girl, aren’t you?” he inquired.

I beamed with pride. I beamed with thanksgiving. His words warmed my heart. His words continue to resonate inside my soul. This may have been the last time I’ll hear those identifying words: “You’re Charlie Williams’s girl.” Most of my parents’ generation have passed into Glory; few may even know that I am, indeed, “Charlie Williams’s girl.”

Do people know I’m “God’s girl”? As a believer in Jesus Christ, the first letter of John makes it clear that we are children of God NOW (and forever). Would everyone I meet, at County Market, at my workplace, in my home, at a sporting event, or wherever, recognize that I’m “God’s girl”?

What if we established this simple exercise throughout this Lenten season – of simply looking at ourselves in the bathroom mirror upon waking and saying, “‘See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are...’ Yelp, I’m God’s girl (or guy)!” Claiming this truth and living into the reality that we are beloved, we are God’s child, can focus and guide our words and actions for each and every day. And then, at the end of the day with our last bathroom run before sleeping, we look at ourselves in the bathroom mirror again and say, “‘See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are...’ Yelp, I’m God’s girl (or guy)!”

Prayer: *We are in awe, Holy Father, that even with our imperfections You claim us as Your own – beloved children of God. May we live responsibly, joyfully, thankfully, bringing glory and honor to Your Name. Amen.*

Submitted by Janet Williams Chipman

Day Twenty-three, Thursday, March 28, 2019

Ezekiel 37 : 1 -5 - The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "Sovereign Lord, you alone know." Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath[a] enter you, and you will come to life.

Each year for the past 40 years, I have made it a practice to visit one of our National Cemeteries. People often ask me why I am drawn to the land of the dead. (Valley of Bones)

I am drawn to them for the hope of the future of our nation and mankind. In the springtime, I see the green pastures, lined with white stones row by row. The scent of spring flowers drifting on the air.

In the summer, I feel balmy breezes and see human faces among the shadows.

In the fall, I see brilliance of color glowing in the sunlight. I hear voices in rustling of leaves in the treetops.

In the winter, a blanket of snow gives a peaceful serenity to this heavenly place.

I walk the paths that much sweat, blood and tears have laid. I see fields of dreams that still live. We the living must face the challenges left undone, to keep these dreams and sacrifices sacred for the future of our nation and mankind.

In God We Trust,

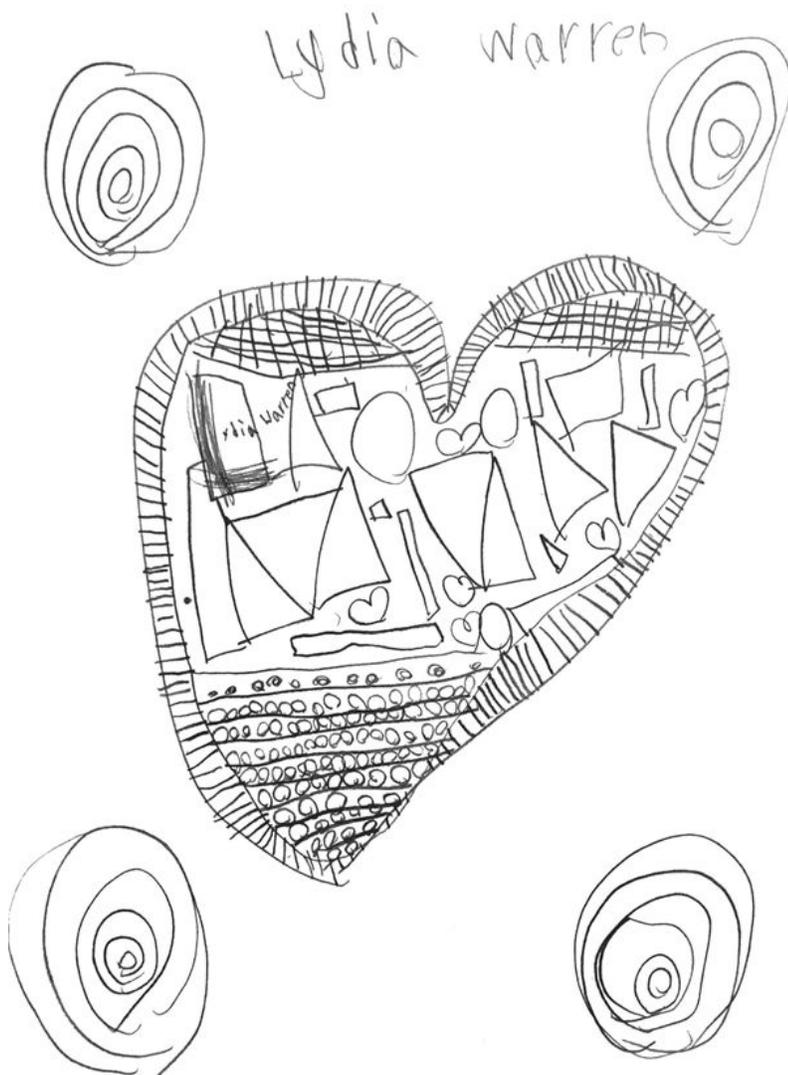
Amen

Submitted by Robert H McLin

Day Twenty-four, Friday, March 29, 2019

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

– 1 Corinthians 13:4-8,13



Prayer: Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. Keep me safe all through the night, and wake me with the morning's light. Amen.

Submitted by Lydia Warren

Day Twenty-five, Saturday, March 30, 2019

Therefore, take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

... For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have no need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all things shall be added unto you.

Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

In October, 1942, 52-year old World I American flying ace, Congressional Medal of Honor recipient, and president and general manager of Eastern Airlines Eddie Rickenbacker was tasked by Secretary of War Henry Stimson to visit American Air Corps units in the South Pacific. His assignment was to assess their morale and combat readiness, as well as offer encouragement. After a cross-country flight from New York to Los Angeles and a fifteen hour flight to Hawaii, Captain Rickenbacker was joined by his military aide, a young soldier returning to his unit in Australia after recovering from illness, and a five-man crew on a B-17 aircraft to continue the island hopping journey that would eventually deposit Rickenbacker at General MacArthur's headquarters in New Guinea.

Their first destination was Kanton Island, some 1800 miles southwest of Honolulu. The weather for the flight was fine, but for reasons never fully known, they ran out of fuel without ever sighting the tiny island and crash landed in the vastness of the Pacific Ocean. All managed to escape the sinking craft and scramble aboard the three tiny rubber rafts, but in the confusion their emergency food and water were left behind. Several in the group had suffered injuries from the crash landing, including Rickenbacker, who had in February of the previous year miraculously recovered from near-fatal injuries in a commercial air crash. Nonetheless, Eddie took command of the flotilla of three small rafts which had been tied to one another, divvied up the three oranges that were their only remaining food, and encouraged the survivors as they baked in the tropical sun, floating in the shark-infested waters.

One of the crew members had a small New Testament with him. One morning Rickenbacker suggested that the castaways pull the rafts together for a prayer meeting. They took turns reading Bible passages, singing hymns and offering prayer, and assembled twice a day for worship. Then on their eighth day adrift, having dozed off after their afternoon worship, Rickenbacker awoke to the sensation of something on his head. There a seagull had alighted, and Eddie secured it with his hand, crushed and defeathered it, and cut it into eight equal pieces. The men ate this providential meal, bones and all and used the intestines of the creature as bait for their fish line. They added two small fish to their feast and thanked God through prayer for their temporary respite from starvation. They collected water from the two rainstorms they encountered, but only enough for a half ounce for each person per day. A few nights later the young soldier in their group died, and they commended his body to the ocean.

All were nearing death when on day 24 they drifted near islands controlled by U.S. forces. By God's good grace the men, their emaciated bodies ravaged by thirst, starvation and the merciless sun, were rescued. They had survived their terrible ordeal. In his autobiography, Eddie Rickenbacker recalled the verses from Matthew cited above.

Prayer: Heavenly father, we pray for perseverance to live out each of our days in your service, but to have trust that you provide our most genuine need with your steadfast love.

Submitted by Dave Truesdell

Day Twenty-six, Sunday, March 31, 2019

End With a Bomp!

“Your word is a lamp for my feet, and a light on my path.” -Psalm 119:105

Years ago I was rehearsing a song with a flutist in our church library. Ken Bradbury walked by and overhearing us, popped his head in to listen. Having no written music in front of us, I said, “We’re struggling to know how to end our arrangement, KB.”

He smiled, knowingly. “When in doubt, end with a bomp!”

Yes, that was it. A bomp was the perfect ending.

Our new hymnal, Glory to God, begins with the hymn, “Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!” But what about the last hymn? Turns out Hymn #853 is “We Are Marching in the Light of God”--a lively Zulu freedom song, we’re told, originating in South Africa and sung in many languages all over the world.

I have yet to learn this song, but I bet it ends with a bomp.

The last time I saw Ken was at a community meeting at which I was speaking. Before rising to the podium, Ken handed me a business card, on the back of which he had scrawled one word two times, “Diction! Diction!”

I smiled. Ken wanted me to speak with a bomp.

Ken no longer walks this earth. I miss him terribly. But I rest in the thought of him marching in the heavenly light of God. I know he’s marching with a bomp.

Prayer: Dear God, shake us of our weariness of step, of speech, of soul. Stir in us what you so stirred in our brother Ken, who trusted whole-heartedly in the light of your love. Amen

Submitted by Tim Chipman

Day Twenty-seven, Monday, April 1, 2019

Marriage and Support

Ephesians 4:2-3: "With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Being married comes with several ups and downs. All the good and the bad weighed together. One of the best parts of marriage is having a committed partner that helps you through the bad times. Those times when you lose sight of everything. When I find myself at my lowest, my husband comforts me with cookies and cuddles. Well, God promises that same level of comfort and peace. That comfort can be felt in church surrounded by your church family, communing with God in prayer, and in the Word. We just need to embrace it.

Dear Father, please grant me the peace and serenity to recognize your comfort. And to embrace You through it. Amen.

Submitted by Liz Hollendonner

Day Twenty-eight, Tuesday, April 2, 2019

Psalm 84

How lovely is your dwelling place, Oh Lord of hosts! My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, Oh Lord of hosts, my King, and my God...

Devotional

During Lent we anticipate the joyful Eastertide celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. Over the 40-day period some of us may engage in fasting from certain foods. Others might fast from "screen time" to encounter the Lord personally in those nearest to them. Still others might take on a new task, such as meditation, Bible reading, or volunteering. Our common bond in all such activities is that each participant is seeking the "lovely dwelling place" of the Lord. Psalm 84 can have a real meaning for us today if in all we do, others should see the love within us --- the care we take of our physical world and the people therein. Let us seek God's goodness and love for all those with whom we walk.

Prayer

Dear Lord, we praise your name and joyfully give thanks that we need not search to find your Holy Shelter, for it surrounds us and is in us. In this season of Lent, we look to birds merrily building their nests throughout creation in the anticipation of the glorious spectacle of the renewed life to come. Let it be so. Amen

Submitted by Guy Crumley

Day Twenty-nine, Wednesday, April 3, 2019

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths.

Even though I am at retirement age my life seems as busy as ever. I continually make lists of things I need to do and get satisfaction in checking them off when done. However I tend to place more expectations on myself than I can handle, thus become frustrated. One devotional book I read each day is Jesus Calling and the February 15 entry was so appropriate.

“Come to Me with all your weaknesses: physical, emotional, and spiritual. Rest in the comfort of My Presence, remembering that nothing is impossible with Me.

Pry your mind away from your problems so you can focus your attention on Me. Recall that I am able to do immeasurably more than all you ask or imagine . [Eph 3:20] Instead of trying to direct Me to do this and that, seek to attune yourself to what I am already doing.

When anxiety attempts to wedge its way into your thoughts, remind yourself that I am your Shepherd. The bottom line is that I am taking care of you; therefore, you needn't be afraid of anything. Rather than trying to maintain control over life, abandon yourself to My will. Though this may feel frightening---even dangerous---the safest place to be is in My will.”

How does one “abandon oneself to Christ’s will? That is what I have to keep working on! I trust that the Holy Spirit guides me to focus on what is most important to do, say or be each day.

Prayer: *Gracious God, I praise you for your love and for sustaining me all my life. I confess that I tend to rely more on self than on you. Thank you for all you have provided me, my life, abilities, and challenges. Please guide me to focus on what is most important and give me the time and way to follow the path you desire for me.*

Amen

Submitted by Cathy Green

Day Thirty, Thursday, April 4, 2019

Layman's 10 Commandments

Someone has written these beautiful words. It's a must read. They are like the ten commandments to follow in life all of the time!

- 1) Prayer is not a "spare wheel" that you pull out when in trouble, but it is a "steering wheel" that directs the right path throughout the journey.

- 2) So why is a Car's WINDSHIELD so large and the rear view mirror so small? Because our PAST is not as important as our FUTURE. So, Look Ahead and Move on.

- 3) Friendship is like a BOOK. It takes a few minutes to burn, but it takes years to write.

- 4) All things in life are temporary. If going well, enjoy it, they will not last forever. If going wrong, don't worry, they can't last long either.

- 5) Old Friends are Gold! New Friends are Diamond! If you get a Diamond, don't forget the Gold! Because to hold a Diamond, you always need a Base of Gold!

- 6) Often when we lose hope and think this is the end, GOD smiles from above and says, "Relax, sweetheart, it's just a bend, not the end!"

- 7) When GOD solves your problems, you have faith in HIS abilities; when GOD doesn't solve your problems HE has faith in your abilities.

- 8) A blind person asked St. Anthony: "Can there be anything worse than losing eyesight?" He replied: "Yes, losing your vision!"

- 9) When you pray for others, God listens to you and blesses them, and sometimes, when you are safe and happy, remember that someone has prayed for you.

- 10) WORRYING does not take away tomorrow's TROUBLES, it takes away today's PEACE.

Live simply. Love generously. Care deeply. Speak kindly. Leave the rest to God.

Submitted by Dan Thompson
Author: Larry Perry

Day Thirty-one, Wednesday, April 5, 2019

Live Thankful

***Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
1 Thessalonians 5:18***

It was early in December 1980. We were living in Minnesota away from all our family, but we were working in a church and the people there had accepted us as family. They were very loving and supportive. That was a blessing in so many ways.

My best friend there and I had gotten pregnant at about the same time and we were really looking forward to enjoying our pregnancies together and then having new babies together.

This was to be our second child and John and I decided that, rather than give birth in a sterile hospital, we would work with a midwife in a birthing center in a nearby city. It was all so exciting!

Then it happened. I miscarried our precious unborn child and he was gone.

The upcoming holiday was especially hard - best friend pregnant, Mother Mary, Baby Jesus, and all.

I remember a significant event in my spiritual life at the time. It was right before Christmas and I was in the shower feeling extremely sorry for myself. I knew the scripture from 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

I remember crying out to God, asking how in the world I was supposed to be thankful for my baby dying and how could this be His will for me. It felt childish to be questioning God and doubting His Word, but that's how I was feeling at the time. I knew and trusted that He would still love me and would be patient with me until I could hear His answer.

It was a remarkable healing feeling when, right there in the shower, I did hear Him speak to my heart: "It doesn't say to be thankful FOR all circumstances. It says to be thankful IN all circumstances."

What a relief it was when I realized that I didn't have to be thankful for a miscarriage. I could rest in the love of God and be thankful that He is always with me and would help me every step of the way. My wonderful husband and our supportive church family were tangible proof of this, and I was truly thankful. This was His will for me.

I didn't always feel thankful. No, I felt sad and empty. I decided to live thankful and to be thankful for God's presence in our lives.

Dear Lord, no matter what good or bad things may come my way, help me to stay in your will and to live a thankful life. Amen.

Submitted by Marsha Nelson

Day Thirty-two, Saturday, April 6, 2019

At What Age?

Isaiah 40:31: but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Isaiah 46:4: Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

These past few months have been one filled with milestones in the birthday department in our family. Last November, my twins (my babies!) turned thirty. In December my husband, of thirty-eight years and counting, turned 65 and I reached sixty years of age in February of this year. Whenever we reach or experience any major milestone, most of us stop and think of how our lives are going by so quickly, gone like a flash, this cause us to reflect with both positive and negative thoughts.

At what age are we too old to help others by serving God? Many people my age or older are empty nesters with more free time to do things like traveling, visiting with friends/family and volunteering. What age should we stop volunteering and letting “others” do the work? Sixty? Seventy? Eighty? I think that we, at ANY age, young and old, have something to offer to help others and do God’s work.

Scholars say that Jesus himself was approximately 32 years old when he died on the cross. Apostle Paul was between 61 to 65 years old when he died. While Abraham was said to be 175 years old when he died. Noah lived to be 950 years (Genesis 9:29) and Methuselah supposedly lived the longest at 969 years. Whether or not the number of their age is accurate, that is not my point. My point is that we DO get older every year and while we DO have more and more limitations as we age, but we also have more to offer DUE to our age and experiences in other ways we can help and contribute. We can always contribute something or some way to help others, to help our church, to be a leader for the glory of God.

Whenever we feel tired or overwhelmed, whether due to age or other issues, we should try to not say “how can I get out of doing this task?” but take a breath and a few minutes of quiet to renew and then remember that our lives are only more fulfilled with doing God’s work and helping all of God’s children. He gives us the strength daily!

Dear Lord, Thank you for giving us birthdays. They allow us to measure our life in years, but also in experience and knowledge. Help me to not let age limit me in being a helper in doing Your work. Sustain me and renew my strength daily. Amen.

Submitted by Sarah Yuska

Day Thirty-three, Sunday, April 7, 2019

Brother Ed

“Assuredly, I say unto you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.” Matt. 25:49

Every time I drive by his house I think of him and all whose lives he touched. He was a quaint little old man of ninety-two with eyes of blue. They were full of honesty, love and light. The love of Jesus shown through them and his life was exemplary of what was on the inside. His name was Brother Ed Birdsell.

When I first met him he walked in to church and found his way to the third pew, far side. From that day forward you could be sure that Brother Ed would occupy that small space at every scheduled service. He became my friend and encourager.

Though he never talked about it, he could be found transporting someone to the doctor, buying groceries for someone else and delivering them, not only to their door, but putting them away in the refrigerator and cupboard, also. He helped the blind, the lame, the elderly (though he was usually more elderly than they), and the needy. He was bold to speak the word of God to those he met and if they would agree, he would bring them to church.

Brother Ed was devoted to the fight for the birthrights of babies. He received his social security check on the third of every month and, like clockwork, he could be counted on to be at the Jacksonville Crisis Pregnancy Center with his financial support for the cause. When he was ninety-one years old, he participated in the Walk for Life, walking as far as he was able.

I am missing Brother Ed right now as I write these words. For, you see, a few months ago he lifted his arms in praise to the Father, breathed his last breath, and met Jesus to live eternally with Him. Do I miss him? Yes, I do. But I have to smile as I think of him enjoying his eternal home. The memory of his love, compassion, encouragement and support will linger on in the lives of those he helped.

Heavenly Father, help us to be faithful servants in your Kingdom. We give you all praise and honor in Jesus' Name. Amen

Submitted by Peggy Post

Day Thirty-four, Monday, April 8, 2019

Deuteronomy 11:1 - "You shall therefore love the Lord your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always."

Just after Christmas, I stopped at a restaurant for dinner. I was alone and brought my datebook to make some plans for upcoming weeks. After ordering, I gazed at the datebook and looked back at the 2017 events. I flipped slowly through the pages of past days and weeks and reviewed the last twelve months.

I was amazed to discover all that can happen in a year: Our daughter had become engaged and graduated from Fontbonne University, Allen and I had traveled to Mexico, spent time exploring the wine trails of Southern Illinois. We had the opportunity to go to Iowa and visit The Field of Dreams for a Vintage Baseball event. Through my genealogy search, I discovered new family and had the honor of attending a family reunion where I met family members that I didn't know I had. I accepted a teaching position at Illinois College during the time that the Japanese students are here. Allen and I ended the year by witnessing the wedding vows of our only child, Jennie and welcomed our son-in-law, Kevin, into our family. These were just some of the major events; most of my hours were spent in the routines of living: sleeping, eating, exercise, mowing the lawn, going to the movies, attending concerts, cooking, cleaning the house, walking the dogs, attending meetings, and all the other unremarkable events that fill everyone's days and nights.

As my food arrived, I realized that the real question confronting me wasn't, How did I spend last year? but How will I spend the next? How will I use the most precious of God's gift - life and time?

I can make long lists of things to accomplish in the year of 2018. But I really need to do only two things: Love God with all that I am, and love my neighbor as much as I love myself. This is all that really matters.

Lord, keep me from seeing my days as something I own but rather as a gift that comes from You.

Submitted by Donna Stare

Day Thirty-five, Tuesday, April 9, 2019

How to Have a Heart of Compassion:

Three steps to help you follow Christ's example and love with a tender heart.

The term compassion has its linguistic roots in the Latin terms *com* (with) and *pati* (suffering). Practically speaking, we have compassion when we set aside indifference and connect with those who are in pain. In a curious way, this seems to be first step toward healing.

When Jesus saw the blind men, for example, he "had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him" (Matthew 20:34).

When he saw groups yearning for his teaching, "he had compassion on them and healed their sick" (Matthew 14:14). Christ noted the confusion of the people in the crowd following him, and "had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6:34).

All these examples of Christ's compassion have two things in common. First, Jesus notices the people around him. This tells us that compassion is only possible when we are attuned to others. If we're absorbed in our own feelings, problems, worries and desires, we will overlook the needs of those God puts in our path and ignore the opportunity to help them.

Second, Jesus responds to people, instead of reacting to them. He listens to the ten lepers rather than being irritated that they're interrupting his conversation (Luke 17:12-19). He takes time to speak with the woman who touched the hem of his garment, instead of simply chastising her for lacking appropriate boundaries (Matthew 9:20).

Like anything else, we get better at compassion when we practice. Here are three basic steps:

1. Build up your empathy. Spend five minutes a day practicing putting yourself in someone else's shoes. Choose a news report, a neighbor or a member of your own family and really contemplate what it feels like to be that person. Don't shy away as soon as you think, "That must be awful!" Delve deep into what it's like to suffer in that way. This exercise can help you learn to "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn" (Romans 12:15).

2. Learn to pause before speaking. Scripture tells us, "People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). To be compassionate toward others, we need to allow time for the Holy Spirit to override our tendency to judge. A simple prayer like, "Holy Spirit, guide my heart," often provides enough space (and guidance!) to help us see why people are behaving the way they are.

3. Recognize the barriers to compassion. It's impossible to be annoyed and compassionate at the same time. Frustration, suspicion, irritation, bitterness, dislike and anger are all signs that we may be looking at others without compassion. We can pray to the Father to "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice" that rules in our hearts (Ephesians 4:31).

Ask God to help you "be kind and tenderhearted" (Ephesians 4:32). Begin this very day to cultivate a spirit of compassion.

By Elizabeth Peale Allen

Submitted by Julie Bruninga

Almighty God,

We pray for compassion and humility

In our hearts.

Let us be kind, gentle, generous, loving, giving, and forgiving

Wherever we may go.

Allow pride to never get the best of us as You

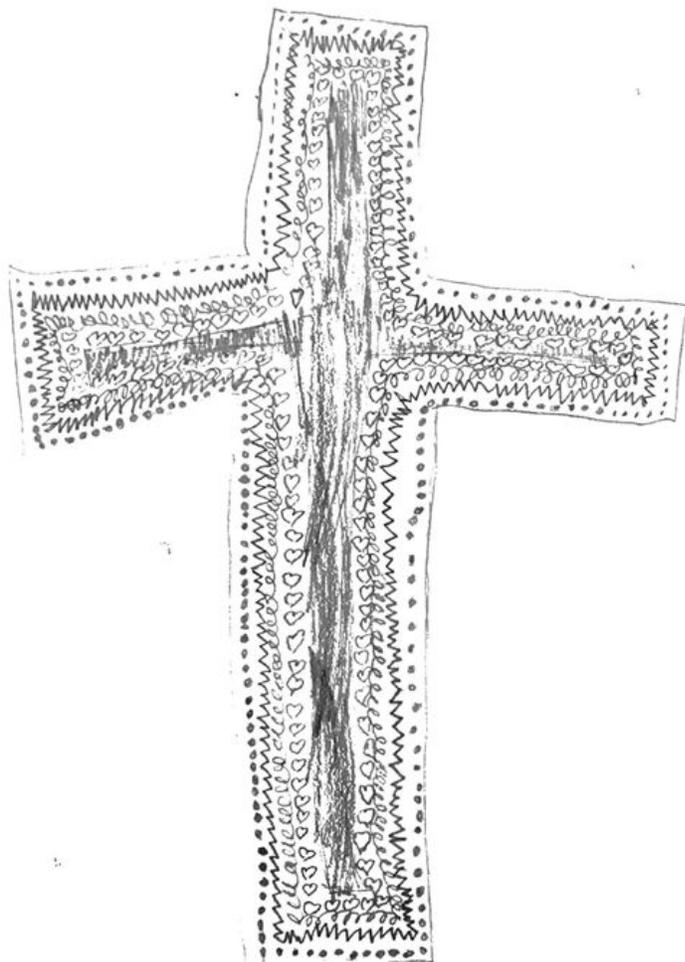
Fulfill our dreams.

Help us not to have a boastful tongue against our brothers.

Let humility invade our souls. Amen

Day Thirty-six, Wednesday, April 10, 2019

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? – Matthew 16:24-26



Prayer: Hold my hand, God, lead the way, help me be good every day. Let me know what's wrong and right, keep me safe day and night. Let me know what you have planned, lead the way God, hold my hand. Amen

Submitted by Hannah Warren

Day Thirty-seven, Thursday, April 11, 2019

1 John 3:1 – “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”

I’m not sure I have ever written a devotion about the Christmas pageant at our church, but it is absolutely one of my favorite events. Partly because it was a very special childhood tradition that we had at my hometown church too. A lady by the name of June Snell dedicated herself to sets, props, costumes and us. She was my favorite Sunday school teacher and a spiritual anchor for me in my formative years. It was fun to be with my friends and part of a special production.

Now, I understand why June had a Christmas pageant at our church for many years. The parts that I love the most, and probably June too, do not involve the actual performance of the pageant at all. One of my favorite times is the very first read thru of the pageant by the kids. Almost every year, I tear up. There is something extremely touching about hearing this story and God’s words spoken by such a young generation. The message of hope that the children are continuing by retelling it and reliving the story cannot be measured.

The other special part is going to Heritage Health to put on the pageant there for Epiphany. I’m always nervous that the kids will have forgotten the words or the lines, but they usually surprise themselves too. The kids are usually less nervous and have more fun than when we perform it for the entire congregation. But what the kids don’t know is that the reason that they do a great job is because the audience is radiate! (This probably happens at our church too, but I never get a chance to turn around and see all your faces!) As I play the piano from the front of the nursing home sanctuary, the people smile thru the entire pageant. The joy that we bring them makes them forget of their aches and pains and maybe even their forgetfulness. Some of them seem almost lifeless, but when those kids get up there and sing, a little spark enters their eyes or expression. It is miraculous.

This year was at Heritage Health was no exception. I didn’t have any many sheep, so Daniel Murphy and Pat Kelly wore the tiny little sheep hoods and stood in front with the children. It was a hit! The kids giggled and so did the audience as they walked up. When it was over Ethan came up and said “Christine! I think we did it better today than we did at the church!” I had to agree.

I also make the kids go around the room when we are finished and shake the hands of the people that come. I know parents usually cringe when I have the students do this, but there is nothing more healing than the human touch. And feeling a small hand inside of yours is something that even I miss. We go back to the church, wash up, eat pizza and the 6th graders sign the back of the stable. A stable built by the loving hands of Cal Verhoff, a legacy that I treasure.

This year the college students had returned in time to be home for the pageant. I caught Andrew Blue and Mae Gibson going up after the service behind the stable to peek at their names which are still there. After church Ellie and I talked about her memories of being in the pageant. Memories and joy that will never be taken away from them. A love that they can carry with them and to others every day. Strive to carry His love to others.....every day.

Matthew 18:4 – “Therefore whoever humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Submitted by Christine Smith

Day Thirty-eight, Friday, April 12, 2019

I enjoy reading tidbits of advice from the perpetual calendar we have in our home called *The Heart of the Family* by Dr. James Dobson (1990). Advice given continues to apply nearly thirty years later. As a parent of two children (junior high boy and high school girl). I find the pieces about youth especially pertinent.

The first tidbit is from ***Genesis 1:27. God created man in his own image, the image of God he created him.*** Dr. Dobson writes that “Your child will conform to the image he thinks you hold of him. If you call him lazy and stupid, his behavior will prove that assessment to be correct. Control your impulsive reactions and give him a high image to shoot for.” I understand this verse to mean that as parents, we need to instill God’s teachings in our children by acting as God intends us to act, and we should show love toward our children by using positive and encouraging words while talking to them in order to reinforce the love God shows us.

The second is from ***Proverbs 1:10. My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them.*** Paraphrasing Dr. Dobson, as a parent, I need to be aware that the generation of my children is experiencing much different pressures than I did at the same age. These pressures can be highly stressful as they try to continue learning about Jesus, form new friendships, keep current friendships thriving, be successful in academics and participate in activities both in and outside of school. I need to keep these differences in mind while lovingly parenting, and being thankful that my children can experience a variety of things that were never possible when I was a child.

The third is from ***Luke 12:15. A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.*** “Children want their parents more than they want the junk we buy them.” This holds true when I think of my childhood...I remember the times with family, traveling places, laughing and sharing stories while eating meals prepared by my late Grandmother, Bertha Donoho or eating fresh-baked bread and churned butter and home-made jam by Grandma Rosa Hoffman. Those memories last far longer than any of the toys I received. So, when my son is attempting to convince Rich to download one more game, I wonder if the game or time with Dad will last longer in my son’s memory?

Lord, I pray that you help me continue to see the positives in my children and show my love to them. Help me growing up fast as I attempt to be attentive to them among all the pressures I experience from work and the world. They are my blessings needing me to give of myself with the growing pressures of screen time; help all of us to see that the most important possession in our world is You. Amen

Submitted by Anita Donoho-Ott

Day Thirty-nine, Saturday, April 13, 2019

1 John 3:18 My children, our love should not only be words and talk. Our love must be true love. And we should show that love by what we do.

Philippians 2:3-4 When you do things, do not let selfishness or pride be your guide. Be humble and give more honor to others than to yourselves. Do not be interested only in your own life, but be interested in the lives of others.

2 Corinthians 9:7God loves the person who gives happily.

Mr. Tennessee Ernie Ford recorded a song entitled, 'Others.' Prior to the singing of the song he made the following statement”The desire to serve others is indeed a quality we all admire.

However.....Only when we enjoy serving others, does our service take on a radiant goodness which gives a contagious glow.”

Some of the song Lyrics are as follows :

Others

Lord Help me live from day to day
In such a self-forgetful way
That even when I kneel to pray
My prayer shall be for others.

Chorus :

Others, Lord, yes others
Let this my motto be,
Help me to live for others,
That I may live like Thee.

Help me in all the work I do
To ever be sincere and true
And know that all I'd do for You
Must needs be done for Others.

Closing Prayer.. Guide me to recognize those in need. Urge me to notice how I might be helpful. Remind me of my talents. Lead me to do these things with a light and happy heart and enjoy serving Others ... every minute, every hour , every day.

Submitted by Linda Feleky

Day Forty, Palm Sunday, April 14, 2019



"God is good, God is great, thank you for your love. Amen!"

Submitted by Ruthie Chipman

Day Forty-one, Monday, April 15, 2019

Perspective

We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.
Romans 5.3b-5

We all know how important grammar and punctuation are in the English language. Very important to Grandma!

Proper punctuation changes the perspective.

A husband and wife in California were surveying the damage after their home was destroyed by a fire. They lost everything. Then he looked up and saw that, even though their lemon tree had been consumed in the fire, one lemon had somehow made it through untouched. The man turned to his wife and said, "Look, hon, we can have lemon in our drinks tonight!" His wife replied, "We got out alive and still have each other. We are blessed!" Their perspective focused on what they had, not what they lost.

Thirty-six years ago, my dad battled his own personal war against cancer. Through the diagnosis, radiation, chemotherapy, loss of strength, loss of dignity, and finally loss of this earthly life, his faith and trust in our Father God never wavered. My faith remained strong, but I'll admit that I struggled with the reality of it all.

I remember one afternoon, I left the hospital where he spent his final days and went home for a little while. I decided to run the vacuum. I had to do something. There I was vacuuming like a crazy person and talking to God. Not listening, mind you. Just talking, whining and complaining about the unfairness of it all. Why did my dad have to suffer with the awful effects of cancer? Why so much suffering?

Romans 5 verse 3 came to mind, "...we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." But why? What good was this scripture to my dad when he was going to die?

In my life, I've had many experiences with God speaking to my heart. This time was different. I believe because it was such a difficult time for me, and because I was so consumed with grief, our loving and patient Father God chose that moment to do something for me that He had never done before or since. He spoke out loud, outside of my head, to get my attention and said to me, "It's not for him. It's for you." I knew in that moment He was referring to the scripture I had just thrown in His face. I didn't want to accept it at first (keeping it real here), but I knew that He was going to help me to persevere, to improve my character, and to instill hope in my heart.

I also knew that He had my dad cradled in His loving arms and was taking care of him, too. When the angels came and daddy went home to heaven, I knew that God was with him and with all of us.

My perspective changed as the Lord ministered to me through His Word.

Dear loving Father God, thank you for being ever present in all aspects of our lives. Thank you for taking our burdens and helping us to have the right perspective through your Word.
In Jesus' name. Amen.

Submitted by Marsha Nelson

Day Forty-two, Tuesday, April 16, 2019

Patience

Ah patience! The virtue eludes me. You would think that after having four children and teaching school for at least a hundred years, I would have learned patience. Sadly, it's a work in progress.

We have been thrust into this fast-paced world where we can't wait for multiple day delivery, or the car in front of us to move, or the repairman to show up. We are often impatient for answers to our problems or worries.

The Bible repeatedly advises us to be patient.

Be always humble, gentle, and patient. Show your love by being tolerant with one another. (Ephesians 4:2)

Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick tempered displays folly. (Proverbs 14:29)

Let your hope keep you joyful, be patient in your troubles, and pray at all times. (Romans 12:12)

Jesus showed us he was the King of Patience as he waited patiently for his often silly, doubting disciples when he was on earth. Luckily, God shows patience with us, his usually silly and always doubting followers today. Imagine what the world would be like with a little more patience.

So, as we observe this Lenten season, lets us practice patience in every aspect of our lives. Maybe it will get easier.

Dear Lord, fill me with everlasting patience and quell my impulsivity with your peace. Give me your patience to handle life's challenges big and small. Slow me down. Teach me serenity. Thank you for offering me rest and for not making me to do life on my own.

P.S. While you're at it, Lord, could you make session meetings go a little faster, please.

Submitted by Jo Anderson

Day Forty-three, Wednesday, April 17, 2019

Scripture Reading: ***“But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)***

During transition from one season to another, choosing clothing best suited for outdoors can prove challenging. Remember parents warning that leaving your coat on inside will not keep you warm when going back out in the cold? I must admit finding there is a lot of truth in that wisdom. It is sort of like after a time of very cold days, 40 degrees will seem very warm. One might believe it is perfect for wearing a shirt or thin windbreaker. Then one step outside quickly changes your mind.

Around here lately, there can be no confusion about appropriate clothing for the day. At the time of this writing, it is minus two degrees wind chill. This will be the norm for around one week.

What is warm in terms of attitude can be misleading to others encountered through the day. Some people put on a sweet syrupy appearance. Then after a few minutes, true character is revealed by their responses during conversation.

Their interest in gossip or they speak unkindly about others shows as layers of deception are lifted.

Our daughter Amy, says in Montana where it is very cold in winter months, people dress in layers. Outer clothing is gradually removed. Their main outfit of the day is not visible until a few hours have past.

This can also be true in relationships. Opinions, compassion (or lack of) take some time to show themselves.

In James 2:1-9, we are reminded not to be too quick in our judgements before considering our own character. Having faith in the wisdom of Jesus provides the perfect benchmark to follow.

“My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him.”

Whenever your decisions are guided by selfishness rather than love for Christ, it's as if you're walking around in ugly clothes and not even realizing how distasteful you seem to other people. But when you take off selfish attitudes and put on Christian virtues, others can see incredible beauty when they encounter you.

Here's how you can put on spiritual clothes that reflect Christ's character:

Recognize that God has chosen you to wear these clothes. God has chosen you to go on this spiritual journey of developing Christ's character. You don't need to be overwhelmed at the thought of how much you need to grow as a person to develop holy virtues to wear, because God knows exactly what kind of help you need, and He will empower you every step of the way.

Invite God to fit you for these clothes. Fitting into spiritual clothes doesn't happen just by trying to manage your behavior; it becomes possible when you invite God to transform you from the inside out, making you holy. When you cooperate with God's work in your life to change your soul for the better, you'll naturally be able to fit into the spiritual clothes that He wants you to wear.

“Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.” (1 Peter 3:3-4)

My question to anyone not yet knowing warmth of Christ, accepting freely won salvation and wearing their new faith would be:

“What are You waiting for?”

One whose season of faith in His children never changes is always waiting with welcoming open arms!

Prayer: *Lord, I pray for my friends and loved ones [or insert a specific person's name]. Please grant them your peace, love and understanding, and please protect them from the evils of this world. Lord, please guide their paths and help them to make the right decisions — choices that will lead them where you want them to be. In addition to wisdom, I pray for their protection and safekeeping, especially as they weather their personal storms. In the name of Christ, Amen.*

Submitted by Dan Thompson

Day Forty-four, Maundy Thursday, April 18, 2019

PEACE IN THE MIDST OF TURMOIL

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. John 14:27

Every day we hear stories that pull at our heartstrings and cause our spirits to churn. We hear about wars, natural disasters, shootings, injustices, etc. We live in a world that is not peaceful. Jesus wants us to have peace in the midst of the turmoil. This story is found in *Stories for the Heart* compiled by Alice Gray. It was written by Catherine Marshall in the book *Friends with God*.

PICTURE OF PEACE

There once was a king who offered a prize to the artist who would paint the best picture of peace. Many artists tried. The king looked at all the pictures. But there were only two he really liked, and he had to choose between them.

One picture was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror for peaceful towering mountains all around it. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. All who saw this picture thought that it was a perfect picture of peace.

The other picture had mountains, too. But these were rugged and bare. Above was an angry sky, from which rain fell and in which lightening played. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming waterfall. This did not look peaceful at all.

But when the king looked closely, he saw behind the waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. In the bush a mother bird had built her nest. There in the midst of the rush of angry water, sat the mother bird on her nest – in perfect peace.

Which picture do you think won the prize? The king chose the second picture. Do you know why?

“Because,” explained the king, “peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. Peace means to be in the midst of all those things and still be calm in your heart. That is the real meaning of peace.”

Dear God, help us to put our trust in you. Help us to find peace in the midst of our turbulent lives. Help us to be a guide and example to others who are hurting and need your peace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Submitted by Nancy Holt

Day Forty-five, Friday, April 19, 2019

Choices

“The human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps.” Prov. 16:9 (NRSV)

Choices. We all make them. Some are insignificant. Some are life changing. How do we know which choice to make?

The choices we make every day include when to get up in the morning, what to wear, what should I do today. These choices depend upon clear criteria to guide them. If we are going to work or school, that has large impact on our choices. If we have a day off, chances are we would make different choices. But what about the more important choices we make. These are often choices that we do not make on a daily basis. These choices often do not have clear criteria that we can use to make the choice. So, how do we know what to choose? These choices often impact our lives to a greater or lesser degree, more impact than what shirt we wear today. So, how do we choose?

During my years in seminary, I was required to do an internship of at least 12 months. Marsha and I spent about a year and a half living and working in Yellowstone National Park. This decision was not difficult. All the details worked out when they needed to work out and we went. The most pivotal choice of my life happened while we were there.

As we were planning to return to St. Louis so that I could finish seminary and move into full time ministry, we were offered the opportunity to continue our National Park ministry in Grand Canyon National Park. For me, this was a difficult choice. I loved working in the ministry serving visitors and employees in a National Park. It was amazing to live in such a wondrous place, it truly is unique to live in a National Park for an extended period of time. On the other hand, I was very anxious to get back to seminary, get ordained, and be a pastor.

I chose seminary. I have often wondered what would have happened if I chose differently. I have no idea what life would have been like going to the Grand Canyon, what was next after that? From time to time since I made that choice, I have spent time wondering about what would have been my life if we went to the Grand Canyon.

I do know what my life was like going back to seminary. It was not always easy, especially for the first few years. Marsha and I had some difficult situations to live through. I wondered, should we have gone to the Grand Canyon? But the choice was made, we had to move forward. I want everyone to know that, even though things were tough, God was always with us, strengthening us along the way. He has blessed us richly in our lives and that is something that I know. I do not wonder about God's blessings on us. It would not matter which choice we made; God's grace would always be sufficient.

Gracious God, we pray for our choices, guide us and bless us in every choice we make. Amen

Submitted by John E Nelson, Pastoral Assistant

Day Forty-six, Saturday, April 20, 2019

James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Sometimes the needs of the world are overwhelming to us. We are bombarded by 24-hour news streams that feature natural disasters, school shootings, famines, floods of refugees fleeing war or threats of mass executions, the effects of climate warming – it goes on and on. Meanwhile, in our own lives, we are trying to stay on top of health issues, caring for family members, worrying about jobs and finances, and juggling busy schedules that barely offer us time to sleep (and little time to pray).

During Lent, it's important to find that small slice of time during the day to take a breath, find a quiet spot, and read one of the devotions. It might be in the school parking lot, or at the lunch table, or yes – even in the bathroom (!) if that's the only option. Focusing on a verse of scripture, thinking about someone else's viewpoint for a moment, and saying that short prayer may be just the boost that our spirits need to carry on.

We are reminded that God is steadfast, a constant presence in our lives even when we don't take time to look for him. We are reminded that God is abundantly generous to us, while offering us the opportunity to multiply those blessings by being generous to others in need. We are reminded of God's endless love for us, and should be moved to share that love with others in the world so that ALL will feel that love and share in the justice, compassion, and joy that it brings.

Remember to take the time to reflect upon God's steadfast love for us and the many blessings in our lives. Give generously of time and talents and money to the programs that reach out to others. By sharing our own blessings, we are giving hope to the world every day!

Prayer: Gracious God, we thank you for the many good things in our lives. You created a beautiful world and we marvel at its perfection. You created people and we rejoice in relationships with family and friends. You know our every need, and we can count on you to be close by at all times. Help us to be generous in sharing this great love with others so that they may also experience the comfort of knowing hope. Amen.

Submitted by Diane Hollendonner

Day Forty-seven, Easter Sunday, April 21, 2019

John 19: 25-27

Romans 12;15

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn”

In John 19, as Jesus is being crucified he sees his mother and John at the foot of the cross and knowing how much they both love him and how much they will both mourn him, asks them to become family to each other in this dark time.

The disciples and other followers of Jesus do not know or understand the resurrection at this point in time so this is a time of great loss, great sadness. Besides seeing everything they believed in crashing down around them, the person that has loved them so, that they have grown to love is dying in front of them. What loss! What a time to mourn!

In Romans, Paul is telling Christians how to behave in love to each other. It is much easier to rejoice with those who are rejoicing than it is to mourn with those who are mourning. It is hard to face so much sadness. And it often goes on for so very long! When someone loses a partner of 50 years the sadness and loneliness doesn't disappear after the services are completed. When a parent loses a child, there is a lifetime of mourning that continues on some level.

Mourning is the expression of the grief we feel about a great loss and if it is not expressed, it is hard to heal. By mourning with those who mourn we support and love them for as long as it takes. That is love! All that means is to be there, present with them, family for them as Jesus wanted for his mother and John. There are no special words. Nothing can be said to make things better. The key word is “with”, being with those who mourn. Present.

I have friends that drove 200 miles to be with me at my mother's funeral. They knew I had family there. They said I needed them too. That's Christ's love.

How wonderful for the disciples that in less than a week they would also be able to “rejoice with those who rejoice” as they celebrated Christ's resurrection! It is also our joy to be able to celebrate Easter and know that we are promised eternal life with the Father because of Jesus sacrifice for us. So after remembering the mourning of Good Friday we will rejoice with each other on Easter Sunday.

Heavenly Father, Thank you for your Son, that he would leave his place with you to give us a spiritual body. Help us to love one another the way that he loved us. In His name, Amen

Submitted by Sue Weikert