



First Presbyterian Church
Meditations of your Heart
2025

A Word from the Pastor

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. Ezekiel 36:26

We live in a world that does not always make things easy. It is easy to get discouraged. It is easy for anxiety and fear to rear its head. When things get tough, it is easy to be enticed by the ways of the world. When the Israelites were in bondage and had nowhere else to go, God offered them the help and freedom, hope and renewal they needed.

We have a chance to change direction, as we enter this Lenten season. It is my hope that each day you read the devotions and pray, you will renew your heart, which is the title of this year's devotional.

Henri Nouwen says, "Simply enter into the presence of Jesus as you are and ask him to give you a fearless heart where he can be with you. You cannot make yourself different. Jesus came to give you a new heart, a new spirit, a new mind, and a new body. Let him transform you by his love and so enable you to receive his affection in your whole being" (The Inner Voice of Love, p. 41).

It is my prayer that as we enter this Lenten season, Jesus will give you fearless hearts that will provide long-lasting life and freedom not only for you, but for our community and world to see.

Blessings,

Rev. Jonathan Warren

Cover Art by Lydia Warren

Day One, Ash Wednesday, March 5

“Sing to him a new song; play skillfully and shout for joy”. (Psalm 33:3)

Be Still and Know

If you made me and you know me
Are you wanting to show me who I am
And what you made me for?
If I turn off the TV, stop chasing the same things
Would I hear you knocking at my door
I know there's more to livin' life than what I see
And you know, I'll find it in the quiet and believe
You say, "Be still and know that I am God"
Be still, be still and know
You say, "Be still and know that I am God"
Be still, be still, be still
Are you waiting and watching?
Whispering softly
Underneath the never-ending noise
I'm not used to listening
But I'm curious, wondering
Would I really hear your voice?
You know there's more to livin' life than what I see
And you know I'll find it in the quiet and believe
You say, "Be still and know that I am God"
Be still, be still and know
You say, "Be still and know that I am God"
Be still, be still, be still
Be still, be still

*“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom’ teaching and admonishing one another
in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” - (Colossians 3:16)*

Be Still and Know, by Amy Grant,
“Be Still and Know...Hymns and Faith”

Submitted by Patrick and Gail Olson

Day Two, Thursday, March 6

“For we cannot clearly see him in this life, where we walk by faith only: our evidence indeed, that necessarily implies a kind of seeing him who is invisible, yet as far beneath what we shall have in eternity, as it is above that of bare unassisted reason.” (2 Corinthians 5:7)

On January 26th, the choir in church sang an anthem entitled - We Have Come This Far By Faith.

Here are the words to the first verse and the chorus.

“Just the other day, I heard a man say,
He did not believe in God’s word,
But I can truly say, the Lord has made a way.

He’s never failed me yet
We’ve come this far by faith
Leaning on the Lord
Trusting in His Holy Word
He never failed me yet
Oh! Can’t turn around
We’ve come this far by faith.”

It had a heartfelt message. It made me think of my life. When I was a child, I attended church and Sunday School. My faith was implanted early. My faith journey continued through high school and college. My dad died of a heart attack when he was 45 and I was 21, and my faith got me through that. A few weeks ago, I had TAVR surgery to insert a new aortic valve in my heart. I prayed beforehand and after the surgery to hold God’s hand throughout. People now tell me my color is better, and I have more zip.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I praise your name. You have been a steadfast force in my life...during the good times and the challenging times. I thank you for that and continue to love you! And you have helped me to spread love amongst my family, my friends, and even strangers. Continue to lead me on Your Path. In Your Name, Amen

Submitted by Guy Crumley

Day Three, Friday, March 7

Embrace Change

Change—even good change is hard for me. I bought a new car last month; it's lovely and wonderful and yet, if I am being totally honest, my heartstrings pull me to the old one, that was worn and broken-in in the right places.

This year has been filled with new beginnings, the biggest being my son hours away at college. Passing his quiet empty room is bittersweet. What I've found helps me in moments of longing for the past or worry over the future is to shift my focus to my faith—to breathe in deeply, feeling the present moment and know that with God's help I can bravely accept endings and welcome new beginnings.

This shift in perspective helps me to let go of resistance and open my heart to the feelings associated with change, fear or self-doubt, and release them to prepare for the blessings to come, trusting that His steps will guide me on the road ahead.

—Sabra Ciancanelli, Senior Editor, Guideposts

Submitted by Mary Sager Mullgardt

Day Four, Saturday, March 8

Scripture Reading: "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." (Jeremiah 29:11)

Born Burdened, Full of Potential

We all know someone who was "born burdened," but proved to have amazing potential. Being a burden could include a physical handicap, intellectually challenged, some type of syndrome, or someone with very little self-confidence. However, our Lord has blessed many of His children with

these mentioned burdens with awesome potential!! Maybe the person has been born into a poverty-stricken family, an abusive situation, emotionally stressful setting; or it might be of a physical nature such as lack of sight, hearing, CP or even lacking a limb. Whatever the situation, our Heavenly

Father, in many cases, provided the gift of a strong will power in such individuals and determination to succeed or prove the world wrong.

Life can be incredibly difficult when we start with significant challenges. Psalm 34:18 assures us, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." God is intimately aware of our struggles and offers His presence and comfort. Our burdens, though heavy, are not beyond His reach.

In my case I was born with a cleft palate and double pneumonia and was given two weeks to live. Once I arrived home six months later, I was faced with physical and mental abuse until being enrolled at the Illinois School for the Visually Impaired at age seven. I had a parent who was very resentful for having a handicapped child and she believed I would never become anything. In fact, I was told that many times in front of siblings even into high school.

The Apostle Paul experienced great hardships, yet he found strength in God. In 2 Corinthians 12:9 God tells Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Our weaknesses and burdens can be opportunities for God's power to be displayed in our lives. It is often through our struggles that God's grace shines the brightest. Our potential is not limited by our circumstances but is empowered by God. No matter the burden we bear, God equips us with the strength to overcome and thrive. Trusting in His power, we can achieve far more than we imagine. Despite the burdens we may carry, we are called to live out the potential God has placed within us.

"I can do all this through him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:13)

Though we may be born with burdens, God's blessings enable us to rise above our circumstances and realize our full potential. By trusting in His strength, embracing His plans for our future, and supporting one another, we can overcome the challenges we face. Let us remember that our potential is not limited by our burdens but is magnified by God's power working in us. May we live out our dreams and potential knowing our Lord's Hand is guiding our footsteps!! I would never have enjoyed such success and become a teacher without the hand of my Heavenly father pulling me

out of mistakes and guiding me through challenging journeys along the path of life!!! That Hand is visible through supportive friends, family, spiritual mentors, and a community of believers in a church family!

Prayer: Thank You for the potential You have made possible in my life, and for walking with me along this journey through this earthly world on my way back to You!! You know everything about my life, even the number of hairs on my head. Lord, I have no reason to fear anyone or anything with you beside me.

Submitted by Dan Thompson

First Sunday of Lent, March 9

“Always be full of joy in the Lord, I say it again-rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4)(NLT)

Rejoicing!!

Have you ever watched a toddler laugh? It's amazing, isn't it? Those adorable giggles are contagious. Before long, you can't help but join in, your laughter filling the room. After all, nothing compares to the sheer joy of an innocent child. It bubbles up from the deepest, God-given place, completely unhindered by concerns, worries, or distractions. How many times do we become so burdened by life's complexities that we forget to rejoice? What would it feel like to let those giggles rise to the surface, even on the worst days? What's that you say? You have nothing to feel joyful about? Look at those flowers blooming in the field! (Beauty!) Check out the food in your pantry. (Provision!) Glance into a grandchild's eyes or a coworker's heart, there's plenty of fodder for a joy-filled life. All we have to do is turn our focus from the pain to the glimpse of heaven right in front of us. Today, may your eyes be opened to many joy-filled moments.

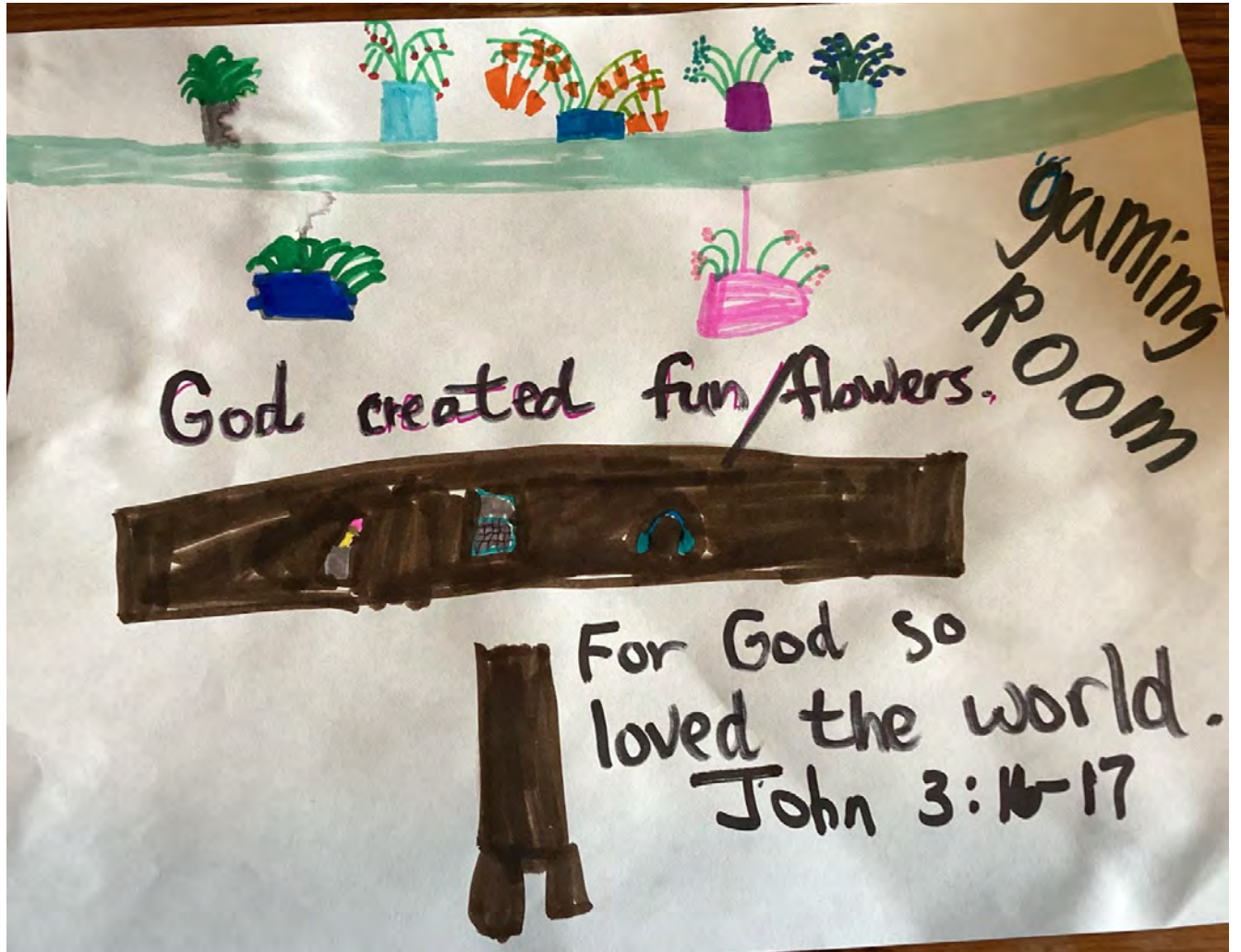
Taken from Daily Wisdom for Women 2017 Devotional

Collection

Prayer: I'm grateful for this reminder, Father, that I can be filled with joy, no matter the circumstances. They don't have to drive my emotions. Instead, my joy can drive my circumstances. Amen.

Submitted by Annette Simmons

Day Five, Monday, March 10



Submitted by Addison Attanasio

Day Six, Tuesday, March 11

Scripture: Be gracious to me, O God, for people trample on me; all day long foes oppress me; my enemies trample on me all day long, for many fight against me. O Most High, when I am afraid, I put my trust in you. (Psalm 56:1-3)

What Is life?

I'm going to take a chance and say that no one who is reading this devotion has ever felt the way the Psalmist felt when they wrote this. Maybe a few people? I'm really thinking that each of us has, at some point in our lives, felt pretty much this way – trampled down, criticized constantly, and people just being disagreeable. It's depressing just to think about it.

Actually, I have felt this way several times at different points in my life. One of these times was the year following my graduation from seminary. When I began my studies for ordination, I belonged to one Lutheran denomination. During my college and seminary years, I felt it necessary to join a different Lutheran denomination. This meant completing another internship after graduating from seminary. So, we (Marsha, daughter Emily, and I) moved to Minnesota for a year of working as an intern in a congregation. Without going into detail, it was the worst year of my life. My calling to ministry was called into question, my relationship with the Pastor/Supervisor was very difficult, my mother died, and I was not able to be at her side to comfort and support her through the process. I felt 'oppressed' and 'trampled down.' It took several years for me to recover from this experience.

I thought I had things planned out. But no, my plans didn't work out at all. But I did put my trust in God. It took some time, but I was back on track, although it was a slightly different track. I trusted God, as the Psalmist trusted God, and God took good care of me. God has taken me on a journey that I could never have imagined. It was not all smooth roads, but I was never alone. I put my trust in God, and even though I may have been frightened at times, God kept me safe and moving forward to where they wanted me to be.

Prayer: Loving God, who has been at my side, thank you for your love and grace, and the strength to keep moving on. Help me when I am afraid and remind me that you are always with me. Amen

Submitted by John E. Nelson, Pastoral Assistant

Day Seven, Wednesday, March 12

“Jesus said to them, ‘Let the children come to me; do not try to stop them; for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these.’” (Matthew 19:14)

A TALE OF TWO CHURCHES

Drawing inspiration from many of our members who contributed devotions last year, I felt a desire to contribute my first effort this year.

I am so fortunate to be a part of two loving and faith-filled congregations: First Church here in Jacksonville, where Wanda and I raised our two boys, Steve and Michael. Secondly, Karen’s Dahinda United Methodist Church near Galesburg, a small band of believers and doers led by the same God. Each church brings to us a uniqueness in style and size, but a richness in God’s love and acceptance of us. Karen and I call ourselves “Metha-terians” as we travel between our two churches week by week and month by month.

One of the blessings these two churches have in common is their worship of God through wonderful music. Each church has selected music this month that is written expressly for children’s choir and adult choir to be sung together. A beautiful and inspiring sound is the result, created by singers of all ages blending their voices together. It is also amazing to see so many children taking part in each of our churches.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for young children and adults of all ages who come to worship you and sing your praises. Thank you for those who plan and direct our music in worship. Amen.

Submitted by David Tiffany

Day Eight, Thursday, March 13

A Couple of Things to Think About....
(from God's Little Devotional)

"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." (Psalm 90:12)

Birthdays are good for you! Statistics show that the people who have the most, live the longest.

"The beginning of wisdom is this; Get wisdom and whatever else you get, get insight." (Proverbs 4:7)

Nothing beats love at first sight, except love with insight.

"But let your 'yes' be 'yes', and your 'no' be 'no'." (Matthew 5:37)

"No" is one of the few words that can never be misunderstood.

"Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred." (Proverbs 15:17)

A house is made of walls and beams; a home is made of love and dreams.

Submitted by Debbie Lair

Day Nine, Friday, March 14

Being still and patient has never been something I have been or am good at. Sitting quietly, staying inside, resting, letting others do for me are not the norm. This past year I have been put in the being still and being patient position more times than I like.

As many of you know, I have attended church more than once over the past few years with my arm in a sling. My shoulder likes to dislocate repeatedly, and it has outdone itself in 2024. The first time last year was when I was tossing a sippy cup into the kitchen sink. That day I had the three-year-old and the two two-year-old great-grandchildren with me at my house. They were little angels while I waited for my daughter, Frannie Suhre, to get her classroom covered and arrive to take us all to the hospital. While I was being well taken care of by the hospital staff, she had the three little ones in the waiting room for a few hours testing her patience.

Now to move forward a month. Sitting up from a chair one evening it happened again. Another phone call to Frannie and we were off to the hospital. After this dislocation I contacted my surgeon in Springfield to discuss my options. He had several years ago done repair to the shoulder hoping that would resolve the frequent dislocations. Nope. Now, after nine dislocations, I was looking at shoulder replacement in January of 2025.

But that was not to be. Early December I fell outside getting one of the two-year-olds out of the van. So, there I was. One two-year-old I had already gotten into the house, so I was on the ground with one of the toddlers inside and one still outside. Well I did manage to get all three of us into the house, sent all the adults messages to come as soon as possible when they got off work as we needed to go to the ER. Of course this was around 1:30 and they all work at schools so I knew they would not see the message for several hours. Again, little angels waited with me for around four hours for adults to arrive. Then into an ambulance I went. That was Friday and I had surgery on my broken hip the following morning. I stayed in Memorial for a week before transferring to The Grove for rehab. Sitting still, waiting for someone to come walk with me, tried my patience again. After a week there they said I was able to do everything myself, so I returned to Winchester and have been staying at the Suhre's. I am still at the Suhre's as Chad decided to remodel parts of my house (built in the 1820's) and we need for the weather to get a lot warmer and drier. Patience is still required.

Throughout all of this I have relied on my faith for healing, guidance and comfort. Pastor Jonathan brought me a small cross that has stayed by my bedside throughout this ordeal. When scared, nervous, in pain or just needing to know that someone cares I have, and continue to, reach for it.

My neighbor has gone through some very traumatic health issues this past year. I really didn't know her well but when she became ill I looked after her garden and flowers while she underwent surgeries and treatments. I have relied on her positive attitude and her trust in God as reminders that faith and prayer can work miracles. Her medical issues are much more complicated and severe than mine. Her prognosis has often not been bright. Not once have I seen her post anything about why me or wanting to have folks feel sorry for her. She often quotes the bible. One of her quotes really touched me: *Exodus 14:14 "The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still"*. My new motto: be patient, still and trust in the Lord.

Prayer: Dear God, please help me to keep my site fixed on Christ. Help me to trust the truth in Your word during all times but especially during times of struggle. Amen

Submitted by Dorinda Miller

Day Ten, Saturday, March 15

Wishing You Comfort

is what the greeting card says
words wafting above painted
lilies of the valley
but what I want to say
my wish for you is
wild and reckless grief
tears that fall from tops of trees
like copper coins
and ache that puddles as a fountain
beneath the roots system
I wish you complete and total
 emptiness
 to feel
richness in the void
a space for all that displaced love
dark and vacuous and hallowed
that even a small flick of a flame
might cast a light
 twice its size

Prayer: O God, teach us to rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. Not in superficial ways or through empty words but with real presence. Help us to show up for the brokenhearted just as you draw near to those poor in spirit. Amen

Submitted by Tim Chipman

Second Sunday of Lent, March 16

A Franciscan Benediction

May God bless us with discomfort
At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships
So that we may live from deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with anger
At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of God's creations
So that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless us with tears
To shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger, and war,
So that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and
To turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with just enough foolishness
To believe that we can make a difference in the world,
So that we can do what others claim cannot be done:
To bring justice and kindness to all our children and all our neighbors who are poor.

Submitted by Mary Sager-Mullgardt

Day Eleven, Monday, March 17

So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all God's holy people. You are members of God's family. (Ephesians 2:19)

Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. Romans (12:16)

There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

Belonging

Excerpts from "The Loss that Means You no Longer Belong" by Angela Williams Gerrell (2023) Presbyterian Outlook.

And it all began with loss.

You lost something precious—that person, that pet, that companion, that dream, that aspect of your physical health, that job, that status, that significance, that thing that made the world seem right and good, that thing that made you feel connected. And ever since that loss, the grief has overwhelmed you and caused you to feel like you no longer belong—to that person, that group, that story, that life that was yours...maybe you feel like you do not even belong to yourself. Grief has a way of pushing everyone away, so that you do not just lose someone or something, but you lose your way of fitting into the world.

When you are grieving you need belonging the most.

Sometimes grief allows us to belong in surprising new ways. You can find groups to belong to online. Sacred rituals of the church—guided meditation, lighting candles, silence, and historic prayers remind us that we belong to a story that began long before we took our first breaths. The rituals are concrete actions that link you to others.

...belonging is a lot like sleep. We do not usually ask one another how well we are sleeping, yet sleep is essential for well-being. We just assume everyone is getting enough sleep. I find the same to be true about belonging. Therefore, we need communities and individuals who intentionally say things out loud, like, "I want you to feel a sense of belonging in this place: and "I hope you feel like you belong in this group".

Belonging requires truly being present to other people. We undervalue seeing, really seeing, the people we encounter. Sometimes we literally need the eyes and mouths of others to tell us that we are actually still here.

True knowing requires curiosity. Learning what people value and appreciating those values go a long way in creating connections.

Excerpts from "What Our Search for Belonging Reveals" by Jeremy Linneman, Christian Living (2019)

To gain a sense of belonging, make space for others to belong. Take the focus off yourself. Too often, I can wait for others to check in on me, invite me over, or put together a social gathering. But when I take initiative, whether it's inviting church friends to our home or

offering to get coffee with someone outside the church, I usually find others quick to accept. My experience is that the more I take initiative to cultivate community for others, the more I feel that I belong with those people.

If you want real life, you have to give yours away. If you want to find yourself, you must lose yourself. When we take the focus off our own need for belonging, and create space for others to belong, we find ourselves surrounded by those happy to have us in their lives.

Excerpts from “What Does it Mean to Belong?” by Andrea Werner, Grace (2022)

We are relational beings by design. It is a remarkably powerful experience to be known by someone. For them to walk closely enough with you to see and know your heart. What we value shows up on our calendars. What’s important takes its place in our lives. As Christ-followers, people, relationships and community should be something we value and hold dear.

Prayer: Lord, give us new strength so that we can build places of belonging: to create a community for all to share their gifts, to know that each of us is loved, to help us to see the light of Christ in all that we serve. Let us remember that each of us is loved, each of us is willed and each of us is necessary.

We do this in Your name. Amen

Submitted by Julie Bruninga

Day Twelve, Tuesday, March 18

“Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease, as for knowledge, it will come to an end.” (1 Corinthians 13:8)

Some Encouragement for Lent

I've been researching thoughts about Lent to write a meditation for this year's booklet and I've come across a lot of helpful suggestions both in layman's terms and theological explanations. I would like to share some thoughts from my reflections. First of all, Lent is not just a season of sacrifice....it is an invitation to come into closer contact to God, to be renewed in His love, and to prepare our hearts for the joy of Easter. As we journey through the forty days, we need to remember these things:

*Your sacrifices, no matter how small, are seen and cherished by God

*Every act of prayer, fasting, and charity deepens your faith and strengthens your spirit

*Even when the journey feels difficult, God walks beside you, offering grace and strength

Lent is not about showing perfection. Instead it is all about progress..... getting closer daily to God one step at a time. If we stumble, we need not be discouraged as God's mercy is always there to lift us up. We must stay faithful, stay hopeful, and trust that the transformation happening in our hearts is preparing us for the glory of the Resurrection. We must remember we are loved. We are not alone. We must keep going!

Prayer: Dear God, I am so thankful that amongst the ever-changing events in our lives, you are always walking beside us along with your abiding love. Amen

Submitted by Barb Bucy

Day Thirteen, Wednesday, March 19

When I volunteered to write a meditation for the FPC book, I immediately thought of the perpetual calendar *The Heart of the Family*, 1990 written by Dr. James Dobson that we have in our home. Each day I turn the calendar to the day's message; some have a sticky note placed as a reminder of its connection to life. Some notes say, "Great advice for raising children," "child-rearing/overcommitment," "build self-esteem," or "pertinent to all ages; self-worth." All of these are unique words of encouragement or a simple anecdote connecting life to the Bible.

The one I selected did not have a note, however, is pertinent and states this, "A good marriage is not one where perfection reigns: it is a relationship where a healthy perspective overlooks a multitude of 'unresolvables.'" It references Ephesians 4:2 and Dr. Dobson writes, "Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love." This reminds me of my marriage vows as it may remind the reader of theirs as well. It also takes my mind on a detour to how a church can be like a marriage.

All of us are part of First Presbyterian Church in one way or another: attending traditional church or virtual church, attending Messy Church, participating or leading Bible study, assisting with Godly Play and other activities happening at church, serving Communion, serving on Session, hosting fellowship, donating requested items, bidding on baskets for the daycare fundraisers, serving meals for Youth Group or Deacons and feel free to add a few of your own ideas. These all show how we genuinely love God and our church. We are not perfect as individuals or as a church, and may disagree on societal things, but we all agree when it comes to our love of Christ and His family here at FPC. His love shows us how to be accepting and make allowances for the faults we all possess.

Dear God, Thank you for giving us the gift of your love and for the love we show others. Grant us continued humility and patience in our relationships whenever other's faults as well as our own may seem unresolvable. Amen.

Submitted by Anita Donoho-Ott

Day Fourteen, Thursday, March 20

“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” (Colossians 3:13)

Uses of Memory

By Frederick Buechner, Quote of the Day
Originally published in Telling Secrets

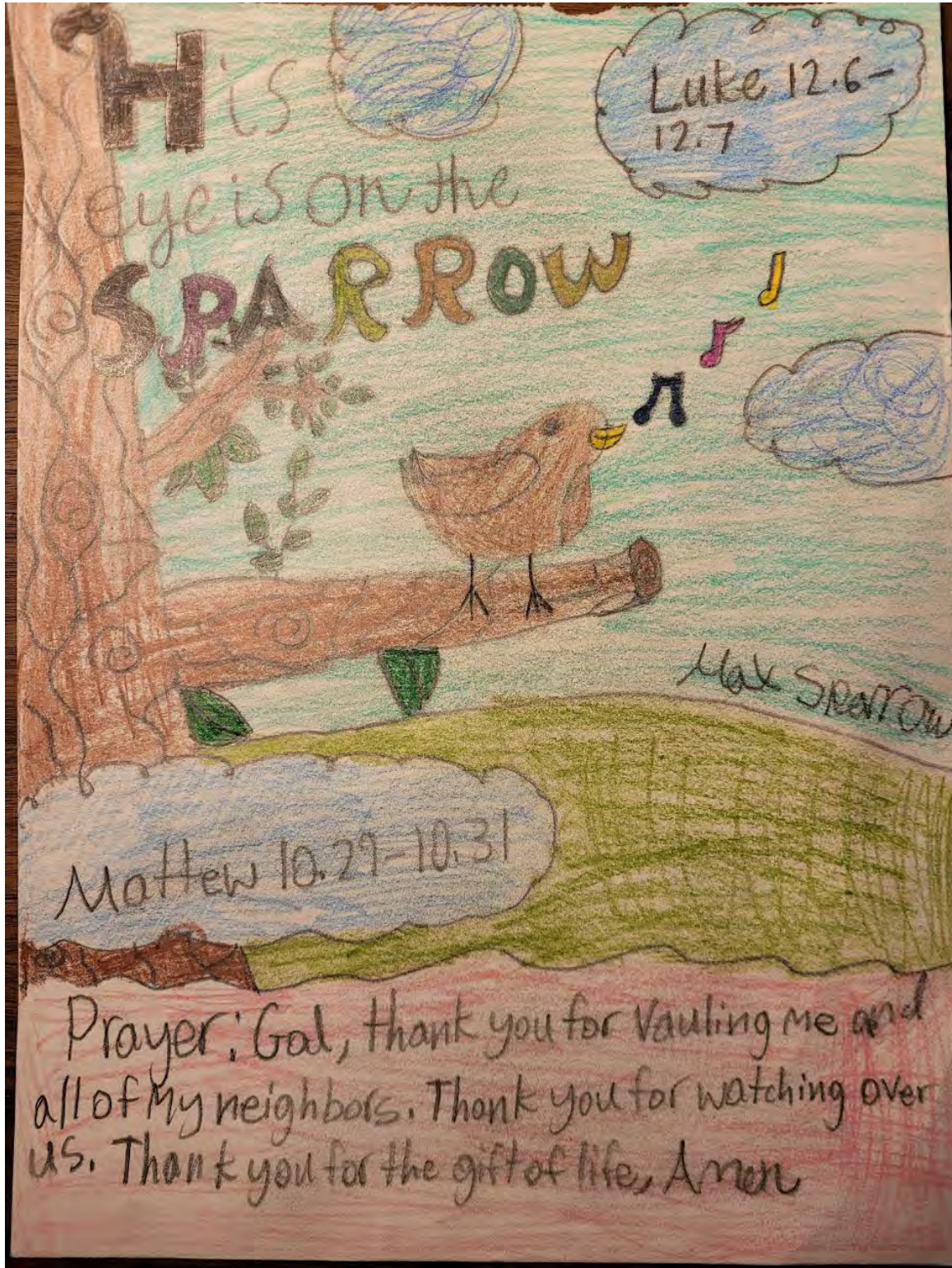
I am inclined to believe that God’s chief purpose in giving us memory is to enable us to go back in time so that if we didn’t play those roles right the first time round, we can still have another go at it now. We cannot undo our old mistakes or their consequences any more than we can erase old wounds that we have both suffered and inflicted, but through the power that memory gives us of thinking, feeling, imagining our way back through time we can at long last finally finish with the past in the sense of removing its power to hurt us and other people and to stunt our growth as human beings.

The sad things that happened long ago will always remain part of who we are just as the glad and gracious things will too, but instead of being a burden of guilt, recrimination, and regret that make us constantly stumble as we go, even the saddest things can become, once we have made peace with them, a source of wisdom and strength for the journey that still lies ahead. It is through memory that we are able to reclaim much of our lives that we have long since written off by finding that in everything that has happened to us over the years God was offering us possibilities of new life and healing which, though we may have missed them at the time, we can still choose and be brought to life by and healed by all these years later.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Thank you so much for sending your Son to take our sins to the cross so that we know we are forgiven. Thank you for allowing us to start fresh to learn from our past, to try with Your help to do better. Please help us to forgive anyone who caused us pain, betrayed us, knowing that we have been forgiven and in forgiving You offer us the possibilities of a new life and healing. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Submitted by Susan Weikert

Day Fifteen, Friday, March 21



Submitted by Max Sparrow

Day Sixteen, Saturday, March 22

My favorite musical is Rodgers and Hammerstein's Sound of Music. I love the music, the dancing, and the characters. Julie Andrews is my idol and she does really well in this movie. When Maria is assigned to be the governess of the seven VonTrapp children and is not quite allowed into the Abbey, she says "When the Lord closes a door, somewhere he opens a window." I think this is a great quote. When life lets us down we can expect to see hope somewhere else. After Maria says this quote she sings the song, I Have Confidence. In this song she mentally prepares herself to be in charge of seven children.

Psalm 27:13-14 says "I remain confident of this, I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord: be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." Staying confident is important for everyone. If you're confident you may end up trying things you never thought you would and be really good at it. And sometimes telling yourself that you can be confident is just what you need. Even when all seems hopeless and like your opportunity is gone, God can still bring you hope because when the Lord closes a door, somewhere he opens a window.

Dear God, help us see the windows opening and find the courage to pursue the things we find joy in. Allow us to look past those closed doors to new beginnings. In your name we pray Amen.

Submitted by Hannah Warren

Third Sunday of Lent, March 23

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous..." (Mark 2:17)

I did not write this but when I read it, it struck a chord with me. Am I guilty? Are you guilty? You decide.

YOU CAN SIT WITH ME

You got hammered at the bar Saturday but you came to church on Sunday. You can sit with me. You're right where you need to be.

You're a drug addict but came to church on Sunday. You can sit with me. You're right where you need to be.

You're divorced, and the last church you attended condemned you for it. You can sit with me. You're right where you need to be.

You've had an abortion and it is slowly eating away at your heart, but you came to church on Sunday. You can sit with me. You're right where you need to be.

You've been unfaithful to your spouse but you came to church on Sunday. You can sit with me. You're right where you need to be.

Here's the thing, people don't come to church on Sunday for you to sit in the pew and quietly judge them because you feel that you are somehow better than them.

People come to church because in their deepest, darkest, most painful moments, they heard about a man named Jesus who could save their soul and they would like to know Him.

Submitted by Keith Bradbury

Day Seventeen, Monday, March 24

What is the bikers' prayer?

The bike blessings are an opportunity to connect with some people who might never set foot in a church building. "It's like going out to where the people are, which is what the early Christian church did," Ahlborn said. He's there to spread the Gospel as well as ask God for protection over the riders. Bikers have thanked the pastors for the blessing that they believe has kept them safe. Some have walked away from horrible crashes where it seemed almost certain they would have been killed. "I say drop to your knees and thank God," Ahlborn said. There's something spiritual about riding a motorcycle on the open highway, soaking up things around you that would be blocked from your senses in a car. "It draws you closer to God's creation. You are much more sensitive to it," said the Rev. Lee Downey, with Six Seasons Motorcycle Ministry in northern Wisconsin. Downey has done many bike blessings over the years. "But from God's point of view, it's just a mode of transportation. He's interested in the individuals riding, and we are also," Downey said.

We humbly ask You to bless us with continued strength, wisdom and Resources to continue and expand our mission. Biker Angel, be my guide as I climb upon my scooter to ride. Let your halo guide the way and keep me safe from harm today. Let your wings provide me the wind and air and send it coursing through my hair.

"May the good Lord watch over you, and may he give you his guidance, protection and care. May God ride by your side and bring you home safe to your loved ones."

Submitted by Bob Hester

Day Eighteen, Tuesday, March 25

Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord. (Psalm 27:14)

In the Bible, it rained for 40 days and 40 nights.
Day 41 came and the rain stopped.

Moses committed murder and hid in the desert for 40 years.
Year 41 came, and God called him to help rescue Israel.

Moses went up on the mountain for 40 days.
On day 41, he received the Ten Commandments.

The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years.
Year 41, they walked into the Promised Land.

Goliath taunted Israel for 40 days.
Day 41 came, and David slew him.

Jonah preached a message of repentance to Nineveh for 40 days.
On day 41, God stopped His plan to destroy them.

Jesus fasted and was tempted for 40 days.
Day 41, and the devil fled.

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples for 40 days.
On day 41, He ascended into Heaven.

All this to say...don't quit! The rain will stop, the giant will fall, and you will enter your 'promised land.'

Don't give up at 40.

41 is coming.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you that you love us. Thank you for your attention to every detail of our lives. Thank you for answering every prayer, even if it is "no" or "not yet." Help us to stay strong, waiting for Day 41, whenever that may be. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Credit: McKenzie Miller

Submitted by Marsha Nelson

Day Nineteen, Wednesday, March 26

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

(2 Corinthians 1:3-7)

A Prayer for Comfort When You're Hurting

by Debbie McDaniel

Dear God,

Some days feel too hard. We're hurting. Struggling. Fighting fear and worry at every turn. Thank you in the midst of it all, you haven't left us to fend for ourselves. Forgive us for doubting you are there. Forgive us for thinking you've forgotten. Forgive us for believing we somehow know the better way.

You are fully trustworthy. You are All-Powerful. You are Able. You are Lord over every situation no matter how difficult it may seem. You are Healer and will never waste the grief we carry today. You will use all things for good in some way. Anything is possible with you. Nothing is too difficult for you.

We pray for those who grieve today. We ask for your comfort to surround those who weep. We pray for the peace of your presence to cover our minds and thoughts, as you remind us, the enemy can never steal us out of your hands. He never has the final say over our lives. We are kept safe in your presence forever, whether in life or in death.

We thank you that your ways are higher than our ways and your thoughts are bigger than our thoughts.

We lay it all down at your feet, every burden, every care. Believing that is the safest place for it to be.

We love you, Lord, we need your fresh grace.

In the Powerful Name of Jesus, Amen.

Submitted by Leslie Sparrow

Day Twenty, Thursday, March 27

"My people, hear my teaching, listen to the words of my mouth." (Psalm 78)

If you are squeamish or easily offended by what you have not experienced, stop reading here and go to the next page.

I was 14 years old. A week prior, we had a big thunder and lightning storm and one of our cows was hit by lightning. We didn't name our cows, but we did tag each one with an ear tag and she was number 50.

The lightning strike had paralyzed her in both rear quarters. We were carrying food and water to her and of course that could not go on forever. The farm was about 7 miles away and dad told me to take the pickup and a gun. He said try again to get her up but if she cannot.....we must put her down.

I did my very best. In fact I must have spent 2 hours pushing and lifting and talking and bribing. It wasn't going to happen. She had nothing in those hind quarters to help. After a while I just talked to her. I don't recall talking to her about Jesus because I don't think cows go for that, but I did talk to Jesus. I asked for assurance that I had done all I could do and that I am doing the right thing. I don't know if you have ever looked a cow in the face but they have very big brown eyes. She looked at me and those eyes said, "Help me. Do it." ...I did. To this day, I know that it was Jesus who resided deep in those brown eyes...telling me it is ok.

When you have hard decisions to make, when you are uncertain of the right path, you are never alone. The Lord is always there. He will always let you know that, "it is OK."

Prayer: Blessed Lord we are eternally grateful that there are always two tracks in the sand. Be our guide Lord. Be our strength. Amen

Submitted by Keith Bradbury

Day Twenty-One, Friday, March 28

“You are the world's light - a city on a hill, glowing in the night for all to see. Don't hide your light! Let it shine for all; let your good deeds glow, for all to see, so that they will praise your Heavenly Father.” (Matthew 5:14-16)

Let Your Heart Be Light and Your Light Shine

By the time the season of Lent arrives, Christmas carols are put away for next year along with the decorations, and we've moved on. Yet one carol stays with me well past Christmas. You know the words... “Have yourself a Merry Little Christmas, Let Your Heart Be Light, Next year all our troubles will be out of sight.” It's not exactly true though, that all our troubles are out of sight. They often follow us right into the new year. It's hard not to get caught up in things that make your heart heavy, or anything but light. News of destruction by hurricanes, floods and fires, families divided by politics, illness and grief, financial worries. There are difficult things to deal with all around us. It can be a dark world. In that dark world, we are called to be the light for others.

The phrase, “Let Your Heart Be Light,” encourages people to be happy and carefree by letting go of worries and focusing on positive emotions. It's a reminder that happiness is a choice, and that people can choose to focus on the good in their lives. But how can we be carefree when there are so many things that are truly worrisome. How do we take things and ourselves less seriously? How can we be a light for others?

I found this list of ways to let your heart be light:

- Give up complaining
- Give up the need for control
- Give up limiting beliefs
- Give up the need to always be right
- Give up self-defeating talk
- Give up blaming others
- Give up excuses
- Give up the criticism
- Give up the past
- Give up the need to impress others

I can certainly identify some areas where I could improve within that list!

In Christianity, the phrase “let your light shine,” is a reminder that people are called to “give glory” to God through their actions. It's a way to share the Light of Jesus with others. We've all enjoyed our church's own Kinder Angels sing “This Little Light of Mine, Let it Shine.” It's a sweet, lighthearted song that lightens our hearts and reminds us of the good in all of us, of a light that we can share with others to help them when times are tough. Little deeds of kindness mean a lot.

Our church provides many opportunities for each of us to help others, through something as simple as helping with fellowship, Godly Play, serving on a committee, making a dish for the warming center, or bringing in some canned goods for the food center. At home, we can all identify that neighbor who needs someone to talk to, a friendly smile, a card to celebrate a new baby or offering sympathy in a family death. By paying attention to the needs of others and helping when we can, we may find that we have lightened our own hearts so we can be a light for others.

Prayer: Lord, help to remind us of the importance of our actions. Help us to find ways to lighten our hearts. Let our light shine and allow us to share the light of Jesus with those around us. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Submitted by Gail Olson

Day Twenty-Two, Saturday, March 29

“The Lord will fulfill His purpose for me, your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not Forsake the work of your hands.” (Psalm 138:8)

A Journey of Renewal*

Emma stared at her phone screen, scrolling past endless posts of vacation pictures, restaurant meals, and new gadgets. With Lent beginning, she felt the nudge to do something different this year—something more than just giving up chocolate or caffeine.

She tapped open a new note and typed: **“Lent 2024: A Journey of Renewal”**

Instead of subtraction, she decided on addition---adding kindness, reflection, and service.

The next morning, she started small. At the coffee shop, she paid for the stranger behind her. She called her grandmother, who had been waiting for weeks to hear her voice. She spent an extra ten minutes in prayer, not just speaking, but listening.

As the days passed, temptations arose. Social media beckoned her into comparison, and busyness threatened her quiet moments. But Emma pressed on, reminding herself that Lent wasn't about perfection—it was about progress.

One evening, after volunteering at a shelter, she walked home in the cool air, feeling lighter than she had in years. She realized Lent wasn't just about giving up-- it was about making room. And in that space, she had found something unexpected: PEACE.

By Easter morning, Emma understood: the journey of Lent had changed her, not just for forty days, but for life!

*Story's author is anonymous

Prayer: Dear God, Give me strength to use my hands, my skills, my thoughts for your purpose. In your name we pray. Amen

Submitted by Barb Bucy

Fourth Sunday of Lent, March 30



1 John 4:19 We love because he loved us first.

Prayer: God, we love You. Thank You for loving me.

Submitted by Skylar Suhre, Age 8

Submitted by Skylar Suhre

Day Twenty-Three, Monday, March 31

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13)

Later I Look Back and See

Lord, when I face a mountain that is too high,
You lead me to climb.
Along the way, You help me find
The beauty and joy I would have missed,
If I had not trusted You with this.
Only later, do I look back and see
All the times You carried me.

When I face a desert that is too too wide,
You remind me that You will provide
What I need to get to the other side.
Along the way, I find... You go before me and behind.
Only later, do realize this truth:
The water in the desert was You.

When I face a storm that is too strong,
And lasts too long.
You teach me to hide beneath Your wings,
And to trust You with everything.
Even as the winds continue to blow.
You give me peace and hope.
Only later, do I look back and find
In the midst of the storm, You drew the line.

Karen Zimmerli

These words spoke to me as Guy and I traveled through a medical journey in the fall. I admit at times I became frustrated and thought "I can't do this." I would state, "God is in charge." However, I questioned what would come next. We are blessed that with the Great Physicians guidance the medical staff devised a plan and Guy's heart is working well again.

Lord God in Heaven, You are worthy to be praised. You know our needs and provide. Forgive us for the times we doubt or question. Thank you for providing for and protecting. Guide us to recognize the needs of others and to take action if needed. Amen

Submitted by Alexa Crumley

Day Twenty-Four, Tuesday, April 1

The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. (Psalm 145: 8)

God's Tremendous Love for Us

This clause: "The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" is written more than a half dozen times, either in this form or one strikingly similar, in various types of literature in the Old Testament. This is a key attribute of our God. Sometimes I think that we might forget about just how key this is to God.

Numerous times throughout my life I have forgotten this. I have done something hurtful to someone and I cannot seem to be able to forgive myself for my actions. I feel like I am such a horrible person to have wronged someone. What can make the situation worse is when the other person forgives me for the wrong that I have done. Still, I feel the guilt for my actions.

Why is this description of God repeated so often? So that we would see it more than once in a while as we read and hear from the Old Testament. Maybe it is to emphasize that our God is a God of grace and mercy throughout the Bible, not just in the New Testament!

Whatever the reason, why does not matter at all. What matters is that God has forgiven us because God "is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." God's forgiveness is not dependent on whether or not I have forgiven myself! I have wasted my time and effort feeling guilty for something that God has forgiven.

Prayer: O God, who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, help me to accept this love and forgiveness. Help me forgive myself as graciously as you have forgiven me. Amen

Submitted by John E Nelson, Pastoral Assistant

Day Twenty-Five, Thursday, April 2

And the blood of Jesus...purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1.7b)

Bloody Hymns

I once heard someone say that we shouldn't sing "bloody hymns." I thought about that and I came to the conclusion that we **MUST** sing bloody hymns, not only on Good Friday, but any time. They are about Jesus' redeeming poured-out blood for you and for me. It's his saving act of love that we carry with us no matter what is going on in the church, in our community, or in the world. Here are some of my favorites that have stood the test of time:

Nothing but the Blood of Jesus

Robert Lowry, 1877

What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
O precious is the flow
that makes me white as snow;
no other fount I know;
nothing but the blood of Jesus.

There Is Power in the Blood

Lewis E. Jones, 1899

Would you be free from the burden of sin?
There's pow'r in the blood, pow'r in the blood;
Would you o'er evil a victory win?
There's wonderful pow'r in the blood.
There is pow'r, pow'r, wonder-working pow'r
In the blood of the Lamb;
There is pow'r, pow'r, wonder-working pow'r
In the precious blood of the Lamb.

There is a Fountain

William Cowper, 19th Century

There is a fountain filled with blood
drawn from Emmanuel's veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
lose all their guilty stains.
Lose all their guilty stains, lose all their guilty stains;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
lose all their guilty stains.

Alas! and Did My Saviour Bleed?

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Alas! and did my Savior bleed
And did my Sovereign die?
Would He devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I?
But drops of grief can ne'er repay
The debt of love I owe:
Here, Lord, I give myself away
'Tis all that I can do.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father - to him be glory and power for ever and ever!
Amen. Revelations 1.5b-6

Dear Jesus, thank you for loving us. Thank you for washing away our sins by the power of your blood. Help us to hear your call and serve you by serving others. We love you, praise you, and worship you! Amen.

Submitted by Marsha Nelson

Day Twenty-Six, Wednesday, April 3

*Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; **but we had hoped** that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place." (Luke 24: 13-31)*

"But we had hoped..."

Two men were returning to Emmaus after the crucifixion and missed the significance of what had happened. They did not recognize Jesus walking with them. Like them, we don't always see Jesus in our lives. Jesus asks them to tell him their perception of what they saw. They expressed their disappointment and shared – but this was not *what we had hoped*.

Like them, how many times in our lives do we not get what we had hoped for? (sickness – death unfulfilled dreams – failures – relationships). How have we responded when these things happened in our lives? Do we blame God? Life is hard; it is not always fair. We will experience many other things *we had hoped* for that do not turn out the way we had imagined.

When things are going well it is easy to praise God and thank him for our many blessings. But what about when *bad things happen*? Do we want to blame God? Where was God when we needed him most? It's difficult for us to accept when we don't get *what we hoped* for.

Let us pray: Dear Lord, we thank you for the scriptures and the story of the men on their walk to Emmaus. We know that even though we have strong faith there are many times we don't recognize that Jesus is walking with us.... each and every day. We've all had times in our lives where we did not receive **what we had hoped for**, but because of our faith in knowing you are with us, help us to believe that you will make something good from our troubles, our failures, and our disappointments. Amen.

Submitted by Larry Bork

Day Twenty-Seven, Friday, April 4

"Be still, and know that I am God!" (Psalm 46:10)

For a period of time, I worked as a chaplain in a hospital. I met people at the most joyous and the most distressing times in their lives – from the birth of babies and the expansion of families to the last rites for someone moving to the next life. Hospital chaplaincy is not for the fainthearted, but I loved it. It was a privilege to come alongside God's people for a time.

I often wished I could deepen the relationships with the patients I encountered. One of the most memorable was an 87 year old lady recovering from bypass surgery. She had come pretty close to death, but when I walked into her room, she had the broadest smile and a deep sense of joy and peace. I asked her how she could be so happy considering all that she had been through. She said, "God has blessed me to open my eyes and see a new day. How can I not be thankful?"

God Bless You

I cannot find a truer word
Nor fonder to caress you;
Nor song of poem I have heard
Is sweeter than "God bless you!"

God bless you! So I breathe a charm
Lest Grief's dark night oppress you
Then how can Sorrow bring you harm
If 'tis God's way to bless you.

And so, not "All thy days be fair,
And shadows touch thee never,"
But this alone – God bless you, dear!
So thou art safe forever.

By Julia A Baker

Prayer: Gracious God, each day we are blessed to enjoy a new day. Let us always be aware of your presence; we face nothing alone. How can we not be thankful? Amen

From: Forward Day by Day

Submitted by Kay Black

Day Twenty-Eight, Saturday, April 5

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6: 19-21 ESV)

Decluttering

When I started packing up the house to move to Albuquerque the overall project suddenly seemed overwhelming. How did we accumulate and hold on to so much stuff? Living in the same house for 30 years and that house having plenty of closets and cabinets made keeping items easy. Many things were out of sight and out of mind, taking up space waiting to someday see the light of day; something we got used to going around; or moving to get to something else.

I also knew moving to a much smaller house without a basement or attic and many fewer closets and cabinets was going to require a huge effort to get rid of a lot of “stuff.” Even though many car and truck loads of items went to Goodwill and Habitat for Humanity while still in Illinois, I still wound up with piles of boxes which needed to be gone through in Albuquerque. Since the beginning of January, I have been unpacking the remaining boxes which didn't get dealt with after the closets and cabinets in the new house were initially filled up. Going through and earnestly decluttering what I have and letting go of items has been an enlightening and uplifting process.

While doing a little bit of decluttering every day I got to thinking of what am I keeping and not turning over to God? What am I holding on to which could be getting in the way of having a closer and a more meaningful relationship with God? Am I doing so many tasks or activities that they are taking time away from me keeping God in the forefront of my life and what does He want me to be doing?

Is our time with God a formal event where we only communicate within certain parameters, we have set up in our life? On the flip side in time of crisis is our communication with God a time of panic or desperation as the song says, “Jesus take the wheel?” I often think of Tim Chipman when he said a prayer during children's time or during a service. Tim always started his prayer or conversation with “Hey, God ...” Those words “Hey, God” makes me think our relationship with God should be an on-going and continual conversation. Just like we are picking up where we left off just a short while ago with our last conversation.

As I continue to declutter my physical life and home, I am focusing on decluttering my spiritual life and relationship with God by trying to be in a continual and on-going relationship with Him. Letting go and turning over what is going on in our daily lives is uplifting, relaxing and decreases your level of stress. I encourage you to try to declutter your physical and spiritual life.

PS: As for the stuff in your house, your kids won't want it and you can't take it with you. Also, when you get to your Heavenly Home don't you want to have a relationship with God more as a good friend rather than a stranger?

Prayer: (A Psalm of David 23: 1-6 ESV).

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Submitted by George Bengel

Fifth Sunday of Lent, April 6

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” (Hebrews 10:24)

There are many verses in the Bible that direct readers to encourage each other. I just happened to come upon this verse when I was reading through one of those daily inspiration calendars, and it inspired me to write this meditation.

If you are a grandparent, or a favorite aunt or uncle, or maybe someone who teaches or cares for children, then you likely know the feeling of being treated like you are a rock star. You are probably showered with hugs at every encounter. Your seat at the dining table is right next to theirs. You are included in every game and activity.

Young people, I believe, are intuitively great judges of character. They see gifts in us that we perhaps didn't even know we had. And often, they help bring those gifts into full bloom.

Thankfully, young people aren't the only ones who see the gifts God has given us. I have a couple of friends close to my age who seem to see things in me that make me want to try hard to become the person they think I am. Although I freely admit to being a work in progress, these friends spur me on toward love and good deeds. And at the same time, that makes me want to be that kind of friend for others. Remember the childhood warning, “I'm rubber and you are glue. Whatever you say to me, bounces back and sticks to you.”

Of course, God's gifts come in all shapes and sizes, and they are given freely to each of us. Everyone has been given a unique set of gifts. As we read through scripture, we learn that God wants us to not only use our own gifts, but to encourage others to use theirs, too.

Prayer: God, thank you for the many members of our church family who use their gifts to show love and do good deeds every day. Help me to be one who spurs others to love and good deeds, too. Amen

Submitted by Penny Turner

Day Twenty-Nine, Monday, April 7

“We will eventually see him face to face.” (Revelation 22:4)

His Wonderful Face

When the call came that my father, three days after his seventy-second birthday, had suffered a stroke, I didn't want to face the realities suddenly and starkly laid before me: the scant information about my father's condition, the necessity of cutting short a long-awaited summer vacation with friends, the daunting prospect of driving from Atlanta to our home in central Illinois.

My body began to jump into action as my mind raced to formulate a plan. That's when my wife Stephanie reached for my hands, looked me in the eyes, and said, “First, we pray.” And so, we did.

On that long drive home, and throughout the long weeks of recovery and medical set-backs that followed, I tried to set my mind's eye on my father's face--a poignant task I have continued these days and weeks since his passing. Equanimous and infinitely kind, Dad was known for his omnipresent smile--the most important accessory of all, according to this dapperly dressed gentleman.

As a child, after brushing our teeth or combing our hair, Dad and I would stand before the bathroom mirror, side-by-side, and say aloud in unison, “Like father, like son; like father, like son.” Each of us would smile broadly, facing our reflections in the mirror, and occasionally break out in laughter.

This endearing memory returned to me as I sat in a chair in Dad's room in the intensive care unit and faced my father who, lying in bed, had been turned in my direction. His inanimate body, now being maintained by various tubes and machines, was completely still apart from a slight rise and fall in the chest and the occasional fluttering of his eyes.

My own eyes, filled with tears, were fixed on him. Though changed by age and reconfigured by the stroke, I could see the younger version of my father's face smiling back at me in the mirror. Words alone, by this point, were largely obsolete so I turned to song: Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face.

And for a moment or two, Dad's eyes were opened, gently fixed in my direction. What he was able to see is hard to say. But as our eyes met and I looked full into his own wonderful face I knew once again what I had always known, like father, like son.

Prayer: Lord, our faces are created in the image of yours: like Father, like Mother, like son, like daughter. And amazingly, you invite us to turn our eyes daily toward you, for our strength, our assurance, and our peace. Amen

Submitted by Tim Chipman

Day Thirty, Tuesday, April 8

Scripture Reading: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3-16)

Love Divine

I find it interesting about the wide varieties of how people use that treasured word, "Love." I've heard people claim love for foods, drinks, activities, weather, sleeping, a wide assortment of athletics, and types of music etc.

As we all know those feelings come and go depending on our age, likes/dislikes for foods/drinks etc.

I believe the first lasting love in this earthly world we learn about is that of our parents' love for us as their children. Unfortunately, there are some who don't get to have that experience, myself being one of them. But in most cases, this love lasts our whole life and remains ongoing in the parent's hearts.

My first experience of meeting an adult I could trust not to hit or kick me for the slightest infraction of their wishes was when starting my first year at the residential school for the blind in Jacksonville, Illinois as a seven-year-old. I knew that Miss Bernese genuinely loved me by her voice, her reading me bedtime stories, and hugging me when I was scared from nightmares or sad. I have never forgotten her compassion over the years. Fortunately, I've met several other adults when growing up who genuinely cared deeply for those they supervised.

I've had several experiences with people as a youth and adult who said they were my friend or said they loved me, but unfortunately behaved completely opposite when out of my presence.

We have all had those puppy loves while growing up. I finally met my lifelong love in fourth grade, and we became a couple in seventh grade. Her name is Judie, and she was one year ahead of me in school.

I have met a few friends who will hold a lifelong special place in my heart and soul! A few of them have helped me through some pretty challenging rough experiences!

During this month of love most of us are reminded of past relationships, loss of dear loved ones or even for some, that ongoing search for someone to love. The love of this earthly world, no matter how genuine or everlasting in our hearts will one day fade away because overtime all of us are forgotten by current generations since all past generations have been gone for a long time.

The one type of Love that will never diminish or disappear is our Lord's Divine Love for each of us.

No matter what, God will always love us. No matter how many times we mess up, sin or fall away from him, his love is never ending and unfailing. He will continue to love us unconditionally through thick and thin, all the days of our life.

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (1 Corinthians 13: 4-7)

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.” (1 John 4: 7)

Prayer: Lord Jesus, Please keep us in the shadow of Your love every hour and moment of our lives, and help us to overcome all temptations of the flesh, and the influence of the powers of the evil ones, which so constantly surround us and endeavor to turn our thoughts away from You to the pleasures and allurements of this world.

Dear Jesus, through Your life, death and resurrection, You gave us everything we will ever need to live as children of the Light, including Your Spirit. We can't always control what happens to us, but by Your grace, we can control how we respond. I want to grow in my capacity to love others as You did, Lord. Whatever challenges life throws at me, give me the courage to respond in a way that glorifies Your presence within and all around me. Strengthen me to make choices that reflect the perfection of Your life-giving love, even when I'm under pressure. Fill me with patience, humility, kindness, forgiveness or whatever Divine attribute most powerfully expresses Your Love in the moment. Bless me with the inner peace and discernment to know the right response, so I can do Your work in the world – casting out darkness, with the Light of Your Infinite Love. In Jesus name, Amen.

Submitted by Dan Thompson

Day Thirty-One, Wednesday, April 9

The Acolyte Crisis

Micah 6: 8

It's a sign of faith that we as a congregation appoint a youth to enter a crowded room at the opening of our worship services, carrying an open flame. We sit there quietly observing the ceremonial lighting of the candles in the chancel. We also sense that the young persons, making their way down the central aisle, are probably aware that every eye in the sanctuary is on them. They don't have to say anything. They don't have to struggle to pronounce unpronounceable names out of the Old Testament into a microphone from the pulpit. They don't have to sing solos with the choir. I imagine them thinking to themselves, "You have only one thing to do . . . Don't screw it up." And yet there are the occasions when the flame goes out in front of everyone, or a recalcitrant candle refuses to light. It's a crisis done in silence.

Maybe this is their first humbling event outside of the family. And it's done without a peep. There is no crying in the brief youthful business as an acolyte. No shoulder sagging. You are an acolyte! These scenes, week after week take each of us back to the days of youth where one social crisis seemed (at last for me) to follow another in a long parade of youthful disasters.

After standing up with the family during a baptism, I was told later that my fly was down. You have only one thing to do. Just smile at her, you say to yourself, upon meeting that pretty girl. You discover later, while looking in the mirror, the spinach wedged in your teeth. You have only one thing to do.

Self-awareness can be a cruel reflection. Lighting candles, along with a list of things that should seem easy, can sometimes go wrong, and remain scorching memories. You had one easy thing to do. Little things become momentous things, and easy things become hard things.

And what does the Lord require
of you
but to do justice, and to love
kindness,
and to walk humbly with your
God?

That doesn't seem so hard. Wait. Let me think about that for a moment.

Submitted by Jay Jamison

Day Thirty-Two, Thursday, April 10

"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." (Roman 6:4)

The End/The Beginning

This last year I lost several friends, some suddenly and some at the end of a long journey: with another break in my heart each time. I also have several family members that are living with serious health issues that are doing well, but it could change at any given time. After the initial shock of the doctor's diagnosis, you have to figure out how to move on from the information and live each day the best that you are able.

The reality is that none of us know when our last day will be... The other reality is that that statement does not usually make us feel better! We try to be prepared, at least legally; but are we prepared spiritually and emotionally? We pray, we read scripture, and we carry on the best that we are able. We try to live the way God would like us to, but we are human and most likely fail on a daily basis. Fortunately, God continues to forgive us, 1 John 1:9 - "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

What I try to hold on to is that instead of sitting around and wringing your hands and worrying about "what if" or "when will it happen;" I try to live my life completely every day, I try not to say anything that I might regret tomorrow, I try to be kind and helpful to all people and the hardest one is that I try not to worry about tomorrow. I said "try," this is easier some days than others and not always as easy to do sometimes, but God promises us that we are assured a place with Him as long as we believe.

The next time you feel anxious or worry about "tomorrow," try to remember the well-known verse, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted." Ecclesiastes 3:1-2

Prayer: Dear Lord, please continue to be with me whenever I am worried or scared of what tomorrow might bring. Help me to show Your love to everyone in my life even on my darkest days. Amen.

Submitted by Sarah Yuska

Day Thirty-Three, Friday, April 11

“But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii[a] and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.””(Luke 10: 29-37)

Our Story

Last February, Jim and I watched our church service online when Rev. Polly Pulley preached on the story of the Good Samaritan. Little did we know how the story would impact our lives a few days later. We were skiing fast on an intermediate slope we've skied many times when I suddenly fell. I screamed to alert Jim who was way ahead of me so he would stop. Unfortunately, he was too far down the slope to come help me. I must have crossed my ski tips to cause the fall as nobody else was around. I was very afraid I had hurt my new knee I'd had for a year and a half, and frustrated because I couldn't get my skis back on. Jim called for 2 men skiing nearby to help me, but they went on by. Then a couple came, again Jim called to them and the man continued skiing. The lady was very kind to stop, help me up, and support me while I finally got my skis back on. She was a Good Samaritan. I was able to continue skiing and we went home, relieved I wasn't hurt.

That evening Jim and I watched a movie (“The Chosen, The Christmas Story”) with our lights low. At about 10:00 pm I turned on our deck and garage outside lights as our grandson Sam was coming from CSU to snowboard the next day. We do keep our outside Christmas lights on as they are so pretty with all the snow. I went downstairs to unlock our garage door when Sam arrived and stepped outside. Sam and I both saw a man about halfway up our driveway. He called for help. Sam could see him better than I and asked him if he had shorts on. He said he was in swimming trunks and needed to go back to where he was staying. It was 17 degrees out and he only had on a small towel, a lightweight jacket, a small cap, and sneakers. I said for him to come into our garage which is heated. He looked scared, very cold, mid-twenties, and kind of dazed. I asked if he'd been drinking and doing drugs and he said he had. I, of course, said, “Well you shouldn't do drugs.”

I told him to come into our house and got a fleece blanket for him to wrap up in. He was from Austin, TX, which is probably 9,000 ft. lower than where we live, and he really didn't know where he was staying. He thought it was “Timber” something, which I thought might be about one-half a mile downhill and around numerous streets from our house. He had no cell phone with him and didn't say why he had left the hot tub he'd been in. Sam agreed to help him find his condo as the man seemed harmless. They found 2 men with headlamps on who were looking for him.

His friends had missed him three hours before, had called the police, and there were 18 people out looking for him, probably in the woods nearby.

When Sam came back, he commented, "That was a God thing!" It was amazing a man so scantily dressed could survive for three hours in 17-degree weather. If Sam hadn't come up that night, we wouldn't have had our lights on and our neighborhood is mostly second homes with nobody else here at that time. Who knows how long he would have wandered on the snow-covered streets!

Late the next afternoon the man, Kyle Gardner, found his way back to our house to return the blanket. He was very grateful and humble. I told him I wanted him to keep it as a reminder not to do drugs. He said he couldn't take it on the plane, so I cut a corner off it for him to keep as a reminder. He said he would and that I was his "Guardian Angel." Actually, Sam was. Jim told him our names and invited him to come see us again.

The whole memorable event was a blessing to us to think we may have saved his life or kept him from frostbite. One never knows when you'll need a "Good Samaritan," or have the opportunity to be one.

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for the help we receive from others when most needed, and thank you for the opportunities we have to help others. Amen

Submitted by Cathleen Green

Day Thirty-Four, Saturday, April 12

“Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.” (Romans 1:20)

Sharing God’s Creation

A few years ago, after Chad got involved in Kemmerer Village, we had the opportunity to go to an open house at Camp Carew. Camp Carew is a Presbyterian church camp located in Southern Illinois that is run by Kemmerer Village and is open to all denominations. Loving the outdoors and camping, we both felt a connection to Camp Carew right away and decided that we would volunteer to attend camp workdays. This led to us ultimately volunteering to be unit directors for a week of camp during the summer as well as being on the Camp Carew Advisory Council (CCAC). We also knew that we wanted to share Camp with others in our family as well as our church family.

What makes Camp Carew so special? It is being in nature with God’s creation all around you and sharing it, along with His love, with others from a variety of ages and walks of life. So far, Chad and I have been in charge of the junior high age group. The first year, we had at least two campers that were there for the first time. Both of them returned last summer and it was great to see the more reserved one being more social and more willing to participate in games and activities. Our groups have consisted of campers whose parents are doctors, campers who are part of the foster care system, and everything in between. But, at Camp Carew, none of that matters. Everyone just becomes one great big family for the week, including the unit directors, camp counselors, and the rest of the camp staff. I never had the church camp experience as a child, so it has been a blessing to be able to experience it as an adult and to be able to share the experience with our grandchildren. My mom has also become a unit director for Mini Camp and a member of CCAC. Skylar and Emberlee both got to attend Day Camp last summer and are looking forward to going back this summer. They are hoping to reunite with friends from last year, and of course, make new ones. Skylar is super excited to move up to Mini Camp and can’t wait to stay overnight.

Prayer: God, thank You for giving us places like Camp Carew where we can enjoy the beauty of Your creation and help to spread Your word. Thank You for allowing us to be able to witness the spiritual growth of those around us in these special places. Amen.

Submitted by Frannie Suhre

Sixth Sunday of Lent, April 13

Scripture: [Jesus said,] "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus' Mission Continues

When Jesus read these words, he was in the Synagogue in Nazareth, the town where he grew up. He attended services at the Synagogues in the places where he travelled and was probably invited to read from Scripture when he visited. He was handed a scroll from the prophet, Isaiah, and he read from Chapter 61 verses 1 & 2. Upon completion of the reading Jesus said, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." This is a pretty bold statement to say in front of people would have seen Jesus as Joseph and Mary's little boy. I remember participating in the funeral for one of my aunts after beginning my studies for ministry. Some people had those looks of, "Isn't that Little Johnny up front there?" I think it would have been difficult for people to start relating to Jesus as God's Anointed rather than as a young boy they watched grow up.

But Jesus grew into the man who fulfilled the words of the Prophet Isaiah. Not only that but Jesus gathered a group of followers whom he empowered to carry on the mission and the ministry he started. That group has grown through the years (and centuries) and includes us also. As we have begun to follow Jesus' teaching and carry on his mission and ministry, we too fulfill the words of the Prophet Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." God has called us to follow Jesus in the mission and ministry that he began.

The good news is that we are not alone. We have others to help us fulfill our role in this calling. Together we can do what seems to be impossible. We can share God's Good News with others through the compassion that we share, the help we give, the time we give, the goods we share, and in other ways. This is how we "proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for sending us Jesus to show us the way to share your love and grace with those around us. We ask for your courage and strength to fulfill the mission that you have entrusted to us. Amen

Submitted by John E Nelson, Pastoral Assistant

Day Thirty-Five, Monday of Holy Week, April 14

*"I lift my eyes to the hills – From whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord."
(Psalm 121:1-2)*

LIFT

For the past 15 years, I have selected a word of the year – a word to focus upon, a word to guide my thinking and growth, a word that inevitably ends up surprising me as this word drops into my life. Often, this word is selected on the first day of the New Year; this year, the word came to me on New Year's Eve.

Even while surrounded by my loving family on a Caribbean cruise, New Year's Eve, 2024, was a difficult day/night for me, just thinking of going into a new year without Bob's physical presence after 54 years. After a delightful, dress-up dinner, I simply needed to return to my room, with the assurance I would later rejoin to ring in the New Year. I needed more quiet contemplation where I continued my conversational journal writing to Bob and lifted my weak voice – again – to God.

"That's it! That's my word for the year," I thought. LIFT.

As someone shared with Tim, and Tim shared at Bob's Celebration of Life Service, "Bob didn't just light up a room; he lifted it." I will honor him by being a weight-lifter; I will honor him with an improved "facelift." I will honor God by lifting my eyes to trust in His help. I will honor God by lifting my heart unto the Lord with gratitude. I will honor God by lifting my hands and feet to serve Him.

I am finding numerous Bible verses using the word lift – including verses that describe people lifting their eyes, lifting their voice, lifting their heart, lifting their hands, and being lifted up.

"Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven." Lamentations 3:41

"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." James 4:10

"Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning, for in You do I trust; cause me to know the way in which I should walk, for I lift up my soul to You." Psalm 143:8

"The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace." Numbers 6:24-26

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life." John 3:14-15

Prayer: Lord, we know it only takes a second for a life to change. May we grow into our unique intimacy with You as we lift our whole self to You...and answer Your call for us to lift up others. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Submitted by Janet Chipman

Day Thirty-Six, Tuesday of Holy Week, April 15

*“Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.”
(Psalm 71:31)*

“Lent is a time, quiet and still,
A season of reflection, a test of will.
Forty days to cleanse the soul,
To seek the grace that makes us whole.

A journey of sacrifice, deep and wide,
Where faith and hope do gently collide.
We fast, we pray, we give, we share,
Opening our hearts, shedding despair.

In the desert, where silence grows,
The seeds of renewal begin to glow.
With each step, we learn to let go,
Of worldly things that hinder and slow.

A humble path, a sacred quest,
To find in ourselves what’s truly blessed.
Through prayer, repentance, and light,
We walk toward Easter, shining bright.

Lent, a call to love and mend,
To reach for peace, to transcend.
A season of grace, a time to bend,
And in the end, to rise again.”
Anonymous

Prayer: May this Lenten journey bring you closer to God, filling your heart with peace, reflection, and renewal. May you be blessed with strength, grace, and abundant blessings along the way.
Amen

Submitted by Barb Bucy

Day Thirty-Seven, Wednesday of Holy Week, April 16

“God said to Moses, “I AM who I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.”” (Exodus 3:14)

I AM

One day I decided to change the background images on my desktop. While I explored the possibilities, I found a series of photographs, each featuring a path winding through woods, climbing high mountain passes, or twisting through dunes towards the seashore. Each photograph seemed to explore a facet of creation – each a beautiful moment captured in time. Like Moses in front of the burning bush in Exodus 3, I stopped and marveled at each scene.

Too often on our life's journeys, we become preoccupied by negative past experiences or anxious visions of the future and don't appreciate the beauty of the present. In doing so, we miss much. God is not simply, *I was* or *I will be*, but **I AM**.

There is much more richness around us than we realize. Perhaps we will catch the song of a blackbird, the glow of a fiery sunset, the movements of a caterpillar, or the aroma of fresh bread. And as we do, we may also glimpse something of God: creativity, majesty, goodness, even humor. God knows our struggles but has a plan for us and promises to be with us. Even now, God may be calling us towards new challenges and a chance to make a difference.

From Upper Room February 18, 2025

Prayer: Father God, give us eyes to see the wonders around us and the courage to respond when you reveal yourself. Amen

Submitted by Gail Olson

Day Thirty-Eight, Maundy Thursday, April 17

"The Lord is my Shepherd." (Psalm 23:1)

"The Lord Is Our Shepherd"

Since I was a little kid, my dad has been reading the twenty-third psalm to me, and I just listened to the words, not really understanding it. Then, when my grandpa passed, I was asked to read the twenty-third psalm at his funeral. I practiced it many times and learned what God was trying to tell us. That was a special time for me. Not only did we get to remember my grandpa, but I also learned the twenty-third psalm. I learned that God, like my grandpa, will always be beside me every step I take, even when I am sad.

Prayer: God is good. God is great. Thank you for the love and light we carry. We will follow you, Great God, our Shepherd. Amen

Submitted by Ruth Chipman, age 8

Day Thirty-Nine, Good Friday, April 18

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)

Feeling Comfort and Peace in God

My dad has dementia. There is so much frustration, pain, and loss that comes with that word. It hurts my heart just typing it.

One thing that has never faltered since his diagnosis is the presence of the Lord in my dad's heart. He has always loved the traditional hymns like How Great Thou Art and Amazing Grace. We all have those hymns that move us. Here I Am Lord and Amazing Grace are two that are special for me.

During the last couple of years helping my dad with his physical health, there were times I would play hymns for him on my phone while he was lying in an ER bed. They always brought forth a lot of emotion, but I also saw how much peace the music and words brought him as well. His wife passed away in December. He sang along to Amazing Grace and How Great Thou Art during her service. These are moments of comfort for both him and me. When we help him attend services at Lincoln Avenue Baptist Church, he is alert and listening when music is being sung.

My dad now resides in a memory care unit. We know it was the right decision for him, but his family also knows it is another loss for our dad. We are grateful that he has had several opportunities since being in his new home, sometimes daily, to continue to feel the presence of God through prayer and church services on television. The staff also makes an effort to get him to a special evening church service on Sundays right at the facility. There is no doubt that these moments with God continue to bring peace and comfort to my dad.

As people with dementia do, my dad remembers more about his early life and repeats those stories often. One story that he continues to tell is about the church he used to attend with his parents and how he was baptized in a creek in Winchester. He tells most people he talks to about how his baptism happened. I don't know if it is accurate, but that doesn't matter. Remembering his relationship with God is what is important and is what brings him peace and comfort.

I've made this statement several times. I am blessed to be able to help care for my dad. So very blessed. It doesn't mean that it isn't also a burden at times. I have come to accept that it is okay to say that. I make sure to thank God in my prayers for the time I've had with my dad in those moments. For numerous reasons, I have prayed more in the last several years than I think I have in total the rest of my life. The peace that comes with thanking God and asking him to help those that need Him in their lives brings me great comfort.

Prayer: God, I am grateful for music that worships you and that brings peace and comfort to so many. I am grateful for the peace and comfort that comes with sharing burdens with you through prayer. Thank you for being present during both the good and hard times in our lives. Amen

Submitted by Amy Albers

Day Forty, Saturday of Holy Week, April 19

"I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me for I have redeemed you." (Isaiah 44:22)

Love, Forgiveness, Redemption

Reminders about, whispers of, reflections on God's greatest gift are everywhere, in unexpected places and moments, even on television.

"*Fargo*," a popular, often baffling, sometimes thought-provoking series, concluded its most recent season with an episode exploring the meaning of love, forgiveness, and redemption, and contrasting the black and white lessons of the Old Testament with the covenant of the New Testament.

In the simple exercise of extending hospitality, making biscuits and sharing a meal with loving, forgiving people, a soul – long-tormented and lonely – found the joy Christ made possible through his suffering, death, and resurrection. Though orange soda and Bisquick stood in for the typical elements of bread and wine, the powerful message of communion was clear, conveyed in the paraphrased words of the actors.

Dot: "Why must debt be repaid? What if it can't be? Isn't the better thing, the more humane thing, to say debt should be forgiven?"

Oola Moonk: "You say that is if life is a circle, but it's a line...."

Dot: "It's a choice."

Moonk: "The man ate them all (sins) for he was starving. He can't sleep, cannot die, has no dreams. All that is left is sin."

Dot: "The cure is you gotta eat something made with love and joy, and be forgiven."

May we be attuned to the messages and lessons shared during the Lenten season as we anticipate the sorrow and joy of God's greatest gift.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace. Ephesians 1:7

Dear God, Thank you for your immeasurable love and the gift of your son, Jesus Christ. I pray you to open my mind and my heart to more wholly understand your love. Help me to live a life that reflects your grace and the promise of redemption. Amen

Submitted by Mary Ferguson

Easter Sunday, April 20

Keep nothing back.

Nothing that you have not given away will ever be really yours.

Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead.

Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin,
and decay.

But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him, everything else thrown in.

From C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

Thank you!

I want to thank everyone that submitted a devotion to our Lenten booklet, for without your help we would not have our churches devotion booklet to read during Lent. A special thank you to Lydia Warren for designing the cover. I also want to thank the Continuing Education chair, Susan Weikert and the committee – Sally Stock, Lynne Sheaff, John Nelson, Phyllis Lape, and Siobhan Warren along with our pastor, Jonathan Warren. A special thank you to Marsha Nelson for helping with proof-reading and a BIG thank you to Dana Davis who helps with all the work of putting this together for us to enjoy.