

2020

“Meditations of Our Hearts”



LENT

A Lenten Devotional
of the
First Presbyterian Church
Jacksonville, Illinois

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

Psalm 19:14

A Word from the Pastor

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ...And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1, 14)

Much of our faith has its foundation and understanding around **words**. We read and listen to the *Word* of God at home and in worship. As a Minister of the *Word* and Sacrament, I study Scripture, I read commentaries, I carefully craft *words* and stories into a relevant sermon each week. In worship our congregation sings hymns, we pray and celebrate the living *Word* together.

And now as we begin our Lenten journey, we encourage each of you to daily read Scripture, devotions and to pray. While, the *Word* and all these words are very important for our faith, there is also so much more to our faith than just *words*.

In his first letter to the church in Corinth, Paul says, "If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1). The devotions and prayers in this Lenten devotional have been collected and shared in love. As we make this journey to the cross over these next forty-seven days, I hope God will inspire you to something beyond just *words*... to share God's love with one another.

During each day, look for the many ways God may be speaking to you and move beyond *words* by answering this question: **How is God calling me to share God's love with someone else today?**

Blessings,

Jonathan

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him may not perish
but may have eternal life. – John 3:16*



Thank you!

Many people thank me for putting the Lenten booklet together for our church. Without you sending devotions to me to put into the booklet, it would not have been able to be completed. This has become a valued tradition at the First Presbyterian Church for many years now. We have enjoyed many of the devotions from the years past and it is my hope that we will be able to continue the Lenten booklet in the future.

I also want to thank Dana Davis, Pastor Jonathan Warren and the Continuing Education chair and committee: Lynne Sheaff, Jean Harlow-Truesdell, John Nelson, Siobhan Warren.

~Sarah Yuska~

Day One, Ash Wednesday, February 26

GIFTS ABOUND

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” – Ephesians 2:8

Of course, we think about gifts especially at Christmastime. But here we are in the reflective time of Lent. Without the focus of what gifts, we might be getting for others, maybe we could focus during this season of Lent on the daily, innumerable gifts we receive from God.

Look around you...Gifts Abound!

One of my favorite quotes comes from Meister Eckhart, a German theologian who lived from 1260-1328. He said, “Be ready at all times for the gifts of God, and always for new ones.”

With a project that I adopted and adapted from Ken Bradbury, probably close to 20 years ago, entitled Making It Real, one of the projects students can choose is to create a list of 10 gifts that no amount of money can buy. What would your list be?

Here are 10 gifts that money cannot buy, compiled from several of my freshmen students: a boyfriend, less stress, confidence, more friends that are not fake, no hunger in the world, to get rid of trash and pollution, a cure to all diseases (especially cancer), peace in the world, more time, for my loved ones to never die...

The greatest gift comes into the world - wrapped in swaddling cloth – unwrapped on a wooden cross – a gift to be received and loved; a gift that is always new, if we are ready and willing for it, for Him, to be so.

“The free gift of God IS eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” – Romans 6:23

“Thanks be to God for HIS inexpressible gift!” – 2 Corinthians 9:15

As a spiritual discipline during Lent, consider your personal daily recording of 3 or 5 or 10 gifts from God; truly gifts abound.

Let us pray:

Gracious God, may we live in the reality of Your inexpressible gift; may we seek You with expectant eyes and ears and an open heart to “Be ready at all times for the gifts of God, and always new ones.” We pray this in and through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Janet Chipman

Day Two, Thursday, February 27

Share the love of Jesus with others today!

John 15:12 - My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

I am fortunate in my job to see God's love at work every day. As the director of the Jacksonville Public Schools Foundation, I see the people in our community share their love by supporting the students in our public schools. There are numerous areas supported, but one area that has seen a recent increase is meeting the basic needs of warm outerwear and shoes for our students. In the first semester of school, the Foundation handed out about 100 coats and 65 pairs of shoes.

Through the love and care of many, we are able to meet these basic needs for our students. It isn't a matter of one person being able to buy a pair of shoes or a coat. It takes a community of caring individuals to make it happen. First, the teacher, bus driver, custodian, classroom aid, administrator or counselor has to first see that a child has a need. Helping the student cannot be done if that doesn't happen first. Then, once the need is communicated, the Foundation office is able to provide what is needed. That can only be done because members in our community have already shared God's love with us by donating shoes, socks, coats, gloves, hats or money. Because those donations are already in the Foundation office, the items can be delivered to the student the very same day in most cases.

I am reminded daily of how many students need God's love in their lives, and I am blessed to be able to help these children because so many have shown God's love by making these students feel cared for and loved.

"Anyone who does anything to help a child is a hero to me." — Fred Rogers

Dear God, help us not to be so consumed by busy lives that we fail to find time to share your love with others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Amy Albers

Day Three, Friday, February 28

Luke 6: 37 Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

I have worked professionally at the Jacksonville Correctional Center for about fourteen years...first as a teacher, then, as my grandson says, as the “principal of the prison”! The offenders in both my classroom and in my office usually were polite, considerate, and interested in learning. I never asked why they were in prison. It was not important in the classroom. They had to follow classroom guidelines. Their conduct in a classroom was usually one of mutual respect. I think they appreciated the classroom environment because it was totally apart from the prison environment. They had an opportunity to be treated as students. Many of these students were bright and had for some reason not been successful in their previous educational programs. The first goal when they were in classes was to help them believe that they could learn. Many were surprised they were able to succeed.

However, when friends or community members heard I was working in a prison, their reactions were usually of surprise. “Aren't you afraid?” they would ask. When I told them it was a great working environment, I am sure many were dubious. They did not believe offenders could be great students when motivated. My favorite quote to students was one by the poet Maya Angelou who once said, “If you do not like something, change it; if you cannot change it, change the way you look at it”. Students certainly did not like being incarcerated, but it was an opportunity for many to succeed in obtaining their GED...and in some cases college credit. When they left the institution, they often left with tools for a better outlook in the community. When they were successful in learning, they became different people. I remember one student clearly. He was in his 50's when he was paroled. Before he left, he said to me, “Dr. Lape, I did not get that certificate I wanted; however, when I came to prison, I could not read my own mail. Now I am able to write letters home.”

He had certainly looked at his time at Jacksonville Correctional Center differently.

Dear Lord: Help us to accept others regardless of their appearance or actions. Help us to learn to be tolerant. Amen.

Phyllis Lape

Day Four, Saturday, February 29

LIKE A FOREST

Accept one another. . . just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Romans 15:7

As my husband and I drove through the forest to our campsite, I studied the trees along the road. One had some dead branches, another a broken top; still others had bent limbs or odd shapes. In fact, every tree seemed to have some imperfection---yet together they formed a vibrant, green forest full of life. They provided shade for ferns and orchids and homes for any number of animals---from tiger swallowtail butterflies to white-tailed deer. And they gave us a peaceful place to camp and enjoy nature. Even the dead trees had a specific purpose; they were rotting into compost to nourish younger plants.

That forest reminded me of the people who make up God's church. We all have scars and imperfections. We make mistakes. Yet together we can form something beautiful. We can bring forgiveness to the broken, strengthen the tempted, and pick up the fallen so that they---in turn---can do the same for us. Instead of condemning those who make mistakes, we can offer a listening ear and a helping hand. Together we can become a community that serves God and helps those in need while strengthening one another.

Dear God, help us to accept others and love them as you do, despite their imperfections---and despite our own. Amen.

Jean Harlow-Truesdell

From *The Upper Room*, June 2019

First Sunday of Lent, March 1

Psalm 145:8 THE LORD IS GRACIOUS, AND FULL OF COMPASSION; SLOW TO ANGER, AND OF GREAT MERCY.

I have written for Meditations of our Heart several times. Each one based on my own experience but generic enough that it might apply to anyone. That's the idea. Right? I'm going to be a little selfish this time and write on a very personal topic that, I hope, never applies to you.

When Nancy was first diagnosed and before we got down to "Let's beat this thing". We went through a lot of emotions. Shock at first, then anger, then "why us?" This all followed by an eternity of worry. My role was quickly defined as caregiver by all the articles and information we read. We attended seminars. And we read a lot. Something happened to me during this period. Something I am not very proud of. I started listening to people differently. At least I heard them differently. In conversations with friends, in the newspaper, on the TV and radio, whenever someone would talk about their problems, I would think to myself, Really? That is your problem? That's it? Dear Heloise "I can't get my sheets clean". TV talk show. "My teenager wants a new phone and is throwing a fit". Newspaper, "I am suing because that company offended me." Friend, "Our flight is so early we will hardly get any sleep." Really? This is your problem? Ever had cancer?

That is when I think I developed the "Holier than thou" attitude. Fortunately, I recognized it and as Barney Fife would say, "Nipped it in the bud." While I was thinking "How dare you", I should have been thinking "How dare me." God does not measure our needs by MRI's or PT Scans. He does not ask where or how bad does it hurt? Each of us fights battles. Each of us fights demons. These fights come in different packages and burden us in different ways. But they are real. Cancer does not make our battle any more God worthy than yours. For those thoughts and feelings, I am truly sorry. That is not who I am. I look at others' problems differently now. I look at cancer differently now. I look at God the same. Forever giving. Forever caring. Forever loving. Forever one God.

Lord, you give us a world of individuals with a world of challenges. We pray for continuous strength and wisdom to help you help them. Use us lord. Keep us in step with you and your love. Amen.

Keith Bradbury

Day Five, Monday, March 2

Open the Door

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. Rev. 3:20

We can become lukewarm in our passions about the important issues in life. Consider the church in Laodicea in the third chapter of Revelation. Jesus' message to them was that they were "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked". They did not even know this was their condition. Jesus stands at the door of our hearts. If we can hear him knocking, we need to respond. Time with the Lord in prayer and study is the way to know how to come out of our wretched condition and into a relationship that shows us how to attend to the important issues in life; issues such as showing kindness, spreading good cheer, and meeting the needs of those around us. Suppose we do not respond. Will the knock become fainter and harder to hear?

When Steve and I were young homeowners we would sit around with other couples and discuss our to-do projects. Our friends Karen and Don spoke about the dreaded wallpaper project that needed to be done in their kitchen. Karen said the avocado green and harvest gold design made them ill, but the obligations of life kept them from starting the project. Months passed and one day Don came home, walked into the kitchen and back out, and returned with tools to tackle the job. "Why now?" asked Karen. "Because" said Don, "when I saw that wallpaper today it didn't bother me at all. I am at the point that I could live with it." Years later I remembered this and the spiritual lesson in it. We can ignore that knock on the door of our hearts but the consequences of drifting away from the Lord are dreadful. Let us be quick to hear the knock, before we are numb to it, and open the door and enjoy the benefits of a relationship with the Lord.

Oh, Dear Lord, please renew the passion in our hearts for the things concerning you. Continue to knock at the door of our hearts and give us a desire to open the door wide. Come in and abide with us and show us all we need to know to live abundant lives for the glory of God. Amen.

Nancy Holt

Day Six, Tuesday, March 3

“Time Flows By”

Psalms 90:12 “Teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.”

2020 is turning out to be a HUGE year for my family on many personal levels which has caused me to take some time out to reflect on my own life lessons some of which I now will share. Being raised in a small rural Presbyterian church where your father was the pastor, had many blessings but one of the most memorable ones was singing “Count Your Many Blessings” during our opening Sunday School worship the Sunday closest to your birthday. Reflecting on this, brought me to think of other ways I have felt blessed and most thoughts went away from materialistic things and towards experiences: reading bedtime stories to my kids, taking walks with my dogs, hiking in the Smokey Mountains, snorkeling in the waters around Costa Rica, planning Christmas outings with my five grand nieces, playing card games with my kids and their fiancés, just to name a few. The point is, the blessings came not in the sharing of material ways but rather in the love shown in the activity being completed. As I age, more and more I am trying to think of experiencing the blessings in the time spent doing things with my loved ones. It is in the observing of facial expressions, the hearing of giggles, and the sheer excitement witnessed that brings me the most blessings. In fact, in trying to decide what to write this year for my devotional, I came across a clipping written in “Dear Abby” by ‘Happy Granny in Pennsylvania’ that I want to share with you but it goes along with my belief that most blessings in one’s life comes from being a positive role model by giving to others your most precious gift which is the gift of ‘YOU!’

‘Ten Commandments for a Long and Peaceful Life’

- 1. Thou shalt not worry, for worry is the most unproductive of all human activities.**
- 2. Thou shalt not be fearful, for most of the things we fear never come to pass.**
- 3. Thou shalt face each problem as it comes. You can handle only one at a time.**
- 4. Thou shalt not cross bridges before you get to them, for no one yet has succeeded in accomplishing this.**
- 5. Thou shalt not take problems to bed with you, for they make very poor Bedfellows.**
- 6. Thou shalt not borrow other people’s problems. They can take better care of them than you can.**
- 7. Thou shalt be a good listener, for only when you listen do you hear ideas different from your own. It’s very hard to learn something new when you’re talking.**
- 8. Thou shalt not try to re-live yesterday for good or ill-it is gone!
Concentrate on what is happening in your life today.**
- 9. Thou shalt not become bogged down by frustration, for 50% of it is rooted in self-pity and will only interfere with positive actions.**
- 10. Thou shalt count thy blessings, never overlooking the small ones-for a lot of small blessing add up to a BIG ONE!!**

God of all our years, thank you for giving us blessings each and every day. Thank you for your hand that has led me, is leading me, and will lead me tomorrow for the opportunities to follow you. Amen.

Barb Bucy

Day Seven, Wednesday, March 4

*I remember the days of old,
I think about all your deeds,
I meditate on the works of your hands. Psalm 143:5 (NRSV)*

Lectio Divina is a way to worship God quietly and deliberately. In short, one reads a portion of Scripture and ponders it for a while. The same Scripture will be read several times with different goals. As a person begins, they should begin with the expectation of hearing from God. God often speaks to us in the quiet of our thoughts. Lectio Divina dates back to the fourth century and was encouraged by St. Benedict, for whom the Benedictine Order is named. Since that time several different forms have developed along these lines. This is the attitude to approach Lectio Divina.

First reading, one reads the passage slowly and deliberately. Listening for pieces that seem to be attracting your attention. These are the verses to concentrate on throughout the time of prayer. These are the pieces that God is speaking to you.

Second reading, one should attempt to understand what made these verses stand out. Why did they attract my attention? One needs to ponder this carefully. Distractions may happen, if so, one should ask God to help concentrate on the task at hand, eventually, one should begin to express what makes these verses meaningful.

Third reading, one should pray for God to reveal what effect these verses should have in your life. What should be the response to these words from God? It could mean giving something up or taking on a new responsibility. In the silence, one should seek to have this response imprinted into their heart and life.

Today, pick a Scripture or use the one above using the Lectio Divina approach.

Gracious God, we thank you for your grace to us. We pray for the quiet times when we can more clearly hear you speak. Amen.

As part of the Lenten Wednesday series, the Continuing Education Committee has chosen to learn and worship in different ways. This evening, after the Soup Supper, we will be learning Lectio Divina. We invite you to join us after the 5:45 pm Soup Supper, where we will be learning Lectio Divina beginning at 6:30.

John Nelson

Day Eight, Thursday, March 5

LOOK!

“Then again He laid his hands upon his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and saw everything clearly.” Mark 8:25.

“Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Genesis 15: 5

“Look among the nations and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told.” Habakkuk 1:5

“After this I looked, and lo, in heaven an open door!” Revelation 4:1a

A new day dawns; a new decade comes. When I was a child, did I “look” to or even contemplate 2020? I don’t think so. As physical vision changes, I humbly ask for increased spiritual vision, to truly LOOK – look up, look out, look within, look at, look for, look to. Therefore, I chose the word LOOK for my 2020 word of the year – obviously drawn to this word because of the year 2020. I realize that I often go through a day without looking at the sunrise or the sunset...without looking into the eyes of my family, my students, the people that surround me each and every day. This year I am practicing looking. Lent is an excellent time to explore and discover the ability to look, inwardly and outwardly – to look back, to look forward, to look now.

Looking back, I see countless signs and times of God’s grace. How very blessed I have been by wonderful people and opportunities of education, work, service, talents, travel.

Looking forward, I see the shadow of mortality, causing me to want to really look even more.

I long to look now – every hour and every day – focusing on God’s power to empower me to live fully with faith, hope, love. I long to focus on Christ, depend on Christ, trust in Christ, live in Christ. How can we know where He is leading us if we are not looking and listening?

Let’s look for God in the small things during Lent; find something to be grateful for. A grateful heart can change our outlook.

Lord, look into our hearts and minds with Your continued grace. May we look at the possibilities still before us with wonder and awe. Amen.

Janet Chipman

Day Nine, Friday, March 6

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, Faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Galatians 5:22-23

The following is from Sally Clarkson's daily devotional book, Mom Heart Moments. While the words are written to mothers, and the context is preparing for the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays, I believe these words offer wisdom for each of us. In November and December, I found myself reading and re-reading this meditation on the fruit of the Spirit almost daily. I hope these words bring a bit of comfort and challenge to your heart, as they did to mine.

This morning, I was thinking about how to prepare myself for a wonderful holiday weekend... sometimes with all the cooking and work and family and ideals flying around, we can find ourselves in the midst of a lot of extra stress. Children eat more sugar, sleep less, have to share more, are in unfamiliar places, and so...the potential for disaster is higher! Knowing this, the best way to arm ourselves is to walk by the Holy Spirit so we can give them the gift of a Spirit-filled mom.

I am going to yield to the Spirit's work of producing fruit in me:

Love – I want to love, affirm, and look at my sweet ones with eyes of gratefulness that they are my beloved.

Joy – I am so blessed. God is good. He is with us. I will choose to be joyful in what He has provided.

Peace – Peace will rule me, so no matter what happens, I will keep peace and give peace in every situation.

Patience – By choosing to exercise patience in every situation, I will bring the music of god's heart to the atmosphere of our holiday.

Kindness – Giving a kind word and graciousness to each person, seeing their heart needs, and serving them will bring a sense of His presence into our day.

Goodness – Because He is good, I will rejoice and be glad in the reality of His promises and in His willingness to provide.

Faithfulness – I will be faithful to serve all the people around me, to do the hard work of cooking, washing, and serving, that others might know the joy of celebration and beauty.

Gentleness – On a day heightened with emotion and expectations, I will bring Jesus' gentleness to each person in each moment.

Self-control – I will choose to control my spirit, tongue, and attitudes and give to God my worship through my Spirit-controlled attitudes and heart.

May God's Spirit shine through me as I interact with others today. Amen.

Siobhan Warren

Day Ten, Saturday, March 7

Proverbs 22:6 - Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.

Having retired, I now have the wonderful play job of watching my great-grand daughters Skylar Grace and Emberlee Rose. What treasures they are. Emberlee is a year old and is growing and experimenting daily. Unlike when I was a working mother and grandmother, I now have the time to stop and look at her and wonder in amazement how she is learning so quickly.

Skylar is an active three-year old. She is filled with love and kindness. When someone is injured or ill, she is the first to ask if they are okay. There is always a 'thank you' acknowledgement when someone has given her something or done something for her. Such a sweet soul.

God's word says to train these children in the way they should go. I question myself daily if I am training them in the way of God or in the way of the world. When we go to the store and they get a treat or toy when they have more than enough, is that God's way? When I sing Jesus Loves Me to them at nap time, am I doing things to teach them who Jesus is or is it just an empty song?

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

"Here I am, Lord; is it I, Lord?" are words from the Christian hymn by composer Dan Schutte. My favorite line is "I will go, Lord, if you lead me". Every day I pray that my teaching of these two young children will be strong enough to teach them to love and honor God throughout their lives. Each day I ask God to show me the way to best help them when they become teens to stay true to God and to lead them to be faithful adults. With God's lead, I will do my best to show Skylar and Emberlee the difference between the way of the world and the way of the Lord.

Dear God, thank you for the children. True blessing to our hearts. You loved our babies before we knew they existed. Your love for them is greater than ours. We trust You with their lives and their futures. Please give us the strength and knowledge to enable us to lead them to Your loving arms. Amen.

Dorinda Miller

Second Sunday of Lent, March 8

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." 1 Corinthians 12:26-27

As a new mom, I was hyper aware of every sound my daughter made in church. And there were a lot of them. Squeals of delight and cries of frustration seemed amplified within the hallowed sanctuary. Yet week after week, fellow congregants would greet me after church with assurances that the sounds aided worship rather than distracted from it. While my instinct was to shush and subdue, I was met with nothing but acceptance and excitement as the church fully embraced its newest attendee. And with each subsequent noise, the people of First Presbyterian Church told Tim and me they not only heard our daughter but loved her right along with us.

Like a parent, God hears each of our utterances, spoken and unspoken. God hears and responds then calls us to do the same. Listening to one another and responding to each other's needs is what being part of a church community is about. Together we celebrate joys and share concerns. But while our smallest members share their noises freely, not everyone can or wants to vocalize each high and low. We may need to listen more closely to hear the unspoken needs of those around us by regularly asking God to show us how to help one another.

Lord, help us to listen to you and to one another as we join together in the body of Christ. Through you, may we be a help to each other, sharing each other's burdens and delighting in each other's joys. May we see and hear one another as you see and hear us so that together we can do what you have called us to do as your disciples. Amen.

Stephanie Chipman

Day Eleven, Monday, March 9

OxiCleanser
(Omnipotent Xalted Infinite – Cleaner)

Scripture Reading: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3: 16, NAS)

For most people today in trying to remove major stains use a common go to cleanser called "OxiClean." Consumers are told to "Reach for the original versatile stain remover first! It has earned its reputation as the go-to product for tough stains on laundry and almost any other surface in your home!"

I have made much use of this miracle mixture in the garage, on our deck and even on the carpet. While applying some of this wonderful solution to an extremely challenging stain, I pondered what is a Christian's OxiCleaning agent? Immediately, John 3-16 came to mind. In that verse John speaks of an agent that guarantees to remove all stains on our souls. Not just for a day! Rather it is a permanent fix.

When once mentioning John 3:16 among some friends their response was, "So what? Why is that more important as compared with other verses?" The encounter inspired me to do some personal evaluation concerning understanding of some of my favorite Bible Verses. I did not want to be known as someone who can recite but lacks genuine insight when sharing Good News of Jesus Christ and Scripture. Not being a formally educated Bible scholar, here's my best attempt at sharing what "John 3:16" means in my life.

No other verse in the Bible so completely summarizes God's relationship with humanity and the way of salvation. Some consider John 3:16 as the "theme verse" for the entire Bible. John 3:16 tells us of the love God has for us and the extent of that love, so great that He sacrificed His only Son on our behalf. John 3:16 tells me and hopefully other true followers of Christ's teachings that anyone who believes in Jesus Christ, "God's Only Son, will be saved. John 3:16 gives us the glorious hope of eternal life in heaven through the love of Jesus Christ.

In this world, land that's difficult to traverse is smoothed out with man-made heavy-duty earth moving equipment. But no matter how rough life seems, Jesus has made possible access to an eternal soul moving tool. Through His death and resurrection, our souls have been cleansed. By accepting this freely given salvation, a doorway opening onto One who possesses limitless power is at our fingertips. However, there are a few things that must be done to unleash such an amazing energy source. Recognizing Christ as the one true Divine Savior of mankind is essential. Additionally, demonstrating total submission by bowing of head, bending of knee, folding of hands, Bible meditation and prayer will open the door to those who come knocking! "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8, NIV)

Saying there were many times God answered my prayers, moved what felt like impossible hurdles, helped carry heavy burdens and shined light into darkness would be a significant understatement. Having the Holy Spirit as a permanent resident in my soul has made life's journey much less treacherous. With God being my Divine GPS (God's Plan for Success), or (God's Plan for Sharing), makes for a lot less earthly world recalculations caused by stubborn attempts of taking complete control.

Perfect Provider, Creator God, our world is still rejoicing the birth of your Son. However, Lord, as we pause to offer this prayer, we realize that some things have been rushed, and, in the process, some important things have been forgotten. In this brief moment of quiet, help us to be at least thankful. Help us to appreciate the Word that comes to dwell with us. Help us to hope in the promise of His way, truth, and life. Help us to join with the angels who sing your praise. Grant us the lasting peace of this great season of joy. Thank You Heavenly Father for sending the ultimate OXI Cleanser of our souls! We pray in the name of our long-expected Lord. Amen.

Dan Thompson

Day Twelve, Tuesday, March 10

“On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?’” Matthew 26: 17

The Jews had celebrated Passover for centuries, beginning with their exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12). Jesus and his disciples also celebrated Passover in Jerusalem. The following poem describes how God instructed the Jews to celebrate the first Passover. It serves as a reminder to us, today, of how to follow God.

Passover Remembered by Alla Bozarth-Campbell

Pack nothing. Bring only your determination to serve.
Do not hesitate to leave your old ways behind-
Only surrender to the need of the time-
to love justice and walk humbly with your God.
Do not take time to explain to the neighbors.
Tell only a few trusted friends and family members.
Set out in the dark.
I will send fire to warm and encourage you.
I will be with you in the fire, and I will be with you in the cloud.
I will give you dreams in the desert
to guide you safely home to that place you have not yet seen.
Outsiders will attack you, and some will follow you,
and at times you will get weary and turn on each other
from fear and fatigue and blind forgetfulness.
You have been preparing for this for a long time.
I am sending you into the wilderness
to make a new way and to learn my ways more deeply.
Some of you will be so changed by weathers and wanderings
that even your closest friends will have to learn your features as though for the first time.
Some of you will not change at all. Some of you will be abandoned by your dearest love
and misunderstood by those who have known you since birth and feel abandoned by you.
Some will find new friendships in unlikely faces,
and old friends as faithful and true as the pillar of God's flame.
Sing songs as you go and hold close together.
You may at times grow confused and lose your way.
Continue to call each other by the names I've given you,
to help you remember who you are.
You will get where you are going by remembering who you are.
Touch each other and keep telling stories.
Make maps as you go, remembering your way back from before you were born.
This is the first of many beginnings-
your Paschaltide.
Remain true to this mystery
Pass on the whole story.
Do not go back.
I am with you now and I am waiting for you.

God, lead us, guide us, shepherd us along our journey. Help us always to seek justice, love, mercy and walk humbly with you. Amen.

Lynne Sheaff

Day Thirteen, Wednesday, March 11

Wholeness and Healing

Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. James 5: 14 (NRSV)

When Jesus walked this earth, a major emphasis of his ministry was to heal the sick. He healed many different illnesses and used different means to perform the healing. At times he would speak, and the person was healed, at times he touched people and they were healed, he also healed by forgiving sins. Mark 2: 1-12 is a story about Jesus doing just this. He was speaking in a house and drew such a crowd that men, who had carried their friend to be healed of paralysis, could not get close to Jesus. So, they opened a section of roof and lowered him in front of Jesus. Jesus forgave his sins. When questioned by the church leaders, Jesus asked if it was easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven" or "Rise, take your bed and walk?" Then Jesus told the man to rise and walk, so he did. Wholeness and healing are the results of God forgiving each of us our Sin. Jesus has passed this ministry on to succeeding generations, that means it is part of the ministry that God has entrusted to us.

The Presbyterian tradition takes this part of Jesus' ministry seriously and has several services for Wholeness and Healing. Each service addresses a different aspect of wholeness and healing. A major component of bringing wholeness to someone is through prayer. We do not have the same power that Jesus had to bring healing, so we rely on prayer to connect with God's healing power. When God's people come together to pray, it is generally a part of a larger service of worship, sometimes involving Holy Communion.

The order of Service for Wholeness in a Congregation is virtually the same as the order of service we use every Sunday. The exception is time is set aside for people to be prayed for by the Pastor and Elders of the church with the laying on of hands and possibly anointing with oil.

From the Book of Common Worship:

A service of wholeness includes the proclamation of the Word, focusing on the promise of abundant life in Christ. Prayer may be enacted through the laying on of hands and anointing with oil, provided that these actions are carefully introduced and interpreted: healing always comes as a gift from God, not as a product of human prayer.

Wholeness and Healing come from God, who knows us and loves us.

Gracious God, thank you for your mercy on us. We pray for wholeness in body and spirit. Amen.

John Nelson

As part of the Lenten Wednesday series, the Continuing Education Committee has chosen to learn and worship in different ways. This evening, after the Soup Supper, we will be worshiping by using a Presbyterian Service of Wholeness for a Congregation. We invite you to join us after the 5:45 pm Soup Supper, where we will be learning Services of Healing in the Presbyterian Church beginning at 6:30 pm.

Day Fourteen, Thursday, March 12

A Lane to Meekness

*Scripture Reading: "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth."
(2 Timothy 2:24-25, NIV)*

One Monday when coming home from a teaching job in a nearby town, we got caught up in the 5:00 pm rush home. Both The driver and myself were both very tired. I usually get up around 4:00 am to finish the morning routine before leaving around 6:30 am. The routine involves listening to a sermon on my VictorStream, saying prayers, sending out a morning devotion, having breakfast, getting all teaching supplies ready and finally doing a few 'honey do'. Before leaving. I don't get home until around 5:00 pm. So, it makes for a long day.

Getting into another lane for passing was impossible. I jokingly suggest I could take the wheel and do a little off-road travel. Then when stopped by police, I could use the excuse that I felt like I was still on the road. Wisely, my friend didn't take the offer. Instead he kidded me: "You need to preach some sermons about learning to be aggressive!" I shot back: "You're right! Perhaps from the text where Jesus says, "Blessed are the aggressive, for they will conquer the road ahead and beyond!" Of course, Jesus didn't say that, but we had a good-natured laugh (and arrived home safely). This also helped me see how often we prefer aggression over meekness and brute force over gentle humility. Jesus insists that under his leadership, aggression is out. Those who are meek and gentle, who are slow to anger and patient in the face of provocation, are truly happy. A meek person doesn't fuel the fires of conflict with unfair accusations. Being meek means letting your temper chill when you'd rather argue with your spouse. It means showing patience with your children. It means not losing your cool when coworkers repeat their mistakes. Meekness is often difficult for us because it seems like weakness. But it's really about patience and self-control, which require great strength. In going to the cross, Jesus illustrates that the path to great life is through long suffering love. Jesus was humble and meek for our sake. His humble greatness is what gives us life! As we see the beauty of Jesus' meekness, may we become more like him.

There's an old saying that the wheel with a loud squeak gets things done. However, I believe the one who is meek makes a greater and more positive impression.

To be meek is to be gentle, humble, lowly.

The meek are the “gentle”, those who do not assert themselves over others in order to further their own agendas in their own strength, but who will nonetheless inherit the earth because they trust in God to direct the outcome of events.

If God, the infinitely great and all-powerful one, is gentle and meek, how much more should we be! Meekness shapes the way we relate to our Christian brothers and sisters.

“Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:1-3)

We’re not to fight and scrape, intimidate or pressure our brothers and sisters to get our way. Rather we should relate to one another with complete – “ALL” – humility and gentleness.

Meekness changes our speech “A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but perversion in it crushes the spirit.” (Proverbs 15:4, NIV)

Lord Jesus, since we share in your victory, help us to be meek, as you have shown us. May today be all that I need it to be. May Your peace Creator God and the freshness of the Holy Spirit rest in my thoughts, rule in my dreams and conquer all my fears. May God manifest himself today in ways that I have never experienced. May my joys be fulfilled, my dreams become closer and my prayers be answered. I pray that my faith enters a new height, that my territory is enlarged and that I make one step closer to my destiny. I pray for peace, health, happiness and true and undying love for God. In my Lord Jesus’s name, amen! Amen.

Dan Thompson

Day Fifteen, Friday, March 13

Proverbs 3: 5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

Be Generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity.
Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor,
And look upon him with a bright and friendly face.

Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich,
An answerer to the cry of the needy,
A preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge.
Be fair in thy judgement, and guarded in thy speech.
Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men.

Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness,
A joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty,
A haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression.
Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts.

Baha'u'llah

Creator God, As I rise each day, help me be grateful for your presence and guidance. My life will not always be problem free but help me understand the meaning and purpose you have for me. Let me walk in your steps and be blessed for you are always with me. Amen.

Connie Roegge

Day Sixteen, Saturday, March 14

Ephesians 4:2 Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowances for each other's faults because of your love."

As an Itinerant Teacher, most days I am on the road more than in classrooms or working with students. This travel time allows me to think, plan and or re-plan various lessons in my teaching and life. While it may be cliché' to say I'm blessed, well, I really am—I have a loving family, steady employment, supportive friends, and love of Christ.

Each of those blessings assists me in my day-to-day stress relief. When I feel like a situation at work isn't fair to me or anyone in the case (whether it be difficult parents, difficult students, or difficult colleagues), or I don't feel my best, my husband reminds me of the loyal, skilled and caring teacher I am. My children state "You got this, Mom!" Friends are corroborative and helpful by giving of their time and understanding over the phone or dinner. Most importantly, Christ continues to do what he promised to do—love me regardless of my faults and shortcomings.

In Jeremiah 31:3, we read "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore, with loving kindness have drawn thee." I have found reinforcement through all my blessings and am grateful to all of them.

Heavenly Father, continue to help me recognize my blessings during the day-to-day routine. Encourage me to assimilate that Christ knows and loves me just as my other blessings do. Amen.



This is a recent picture of my family at Christmas time.

It includes all children, grandchildren and spouses.

My mother and father are in the center.

Anita Donoho-Ott

Third Sunday of Lent, March 15



This portrait of Mary, mother of Jesus, may have been inspired by Barbara Brown Taylor's terrific children's book called *Home By Another Way*, which depicts Mary graciously receiving from the three kings "gold, frankincense, and myrrh--all the wrong things... things [the baby] had no use for." Nevertheless, Mary holds these expensive gifts up for Jesus to see as she treasures the stars, she sees in the eyes of the three visiting strangers. In this Lenten season, we might reflect on the stars--of anguish, of disbelief--in Mary's own eyes.

"Mary" by Ruthie Chipman, age three

Day Seventeen, Monday, March 16

TRUSTING JESUS

Psalm 28:7 The Lord is my strength and shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.

Joshua 1:9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

Simple, daily faith saves us from chronic worry. When we abide in Christ and rest in His promises, no alarm can overwhelm us for long, and no anxiety can sustain its attack. That's the theme of the beloved song written by Edgar P. Stites, a Civil War veteran and riverboat captain. Stites was converted in the revival of 1857 and became a Methodist preacher. He wrote "Trusting Jesus" in 1876. Evangelist D.L. Moody saw the words in a newspaper and handed the clipping to his music director, Ira Sankey, who wrote the melody and popularized it in the Moody-Sankey campaigns.

**Simply trusting every day,
Trusting through a stormy way;
Even when my faith is small,
Trusting Jesus, that is all.
Singing if my way is clear,
Praying if the path be drear,
If in danger for Him call;
Trusting Jesus, that is all.
Trusting Him while life shall last,
Trusting Him till earth be past;
Till within the jasper wall,
Trusting Jesus, that is all.
Trusting as the moments fly,
Trusting as the days go by;
Trusting Him what'er befall,
Trusting Jesus, that is all.**

Precious Lord, You have commanded me to be strong and of good courage! You have commanded me to not be afraid or discouraged; for You, my Lord God, will be with me wherever I go. Father in Heaven I have faith in You and Your word because I know that Your word never fails nor returns void back to You. I thank You for the many promises You have spoken over my life, I place my trust in You. Amen

From: Devotions for Lent: Meditations Based on Best-Loved Hymns by Robert Morgan

Julie Bruninga

Day Eighteen, Tuesday, March 17

Thoughts About Grief at Lent

Having recently experienced unexpected losses and the guilt that surrounds them, my thoughts have sometimes ventured into dark, joyless territory. But, according to Julie Yarbough, who blogs at Beyond the Broken Heart, this soulful contemplation that many of us experience at some time in our grieving process is very much akin to the spiritual introspection and self-examination we undergo during Lent. “When we grieve, we look inward,” she writes.

“When we grieve – especially at Lent – sometimes it’s sufficient simply to identify and acknowledge our distractions and pray that our mind, heart, and soul will find some deeper focus. Perhaps we make the spiritual effort to see the interplay of grief and Lent in our lives, or maybe we defer our soul-searching to a time when some balance and order return to life.... There are no rules for Lent or grief.

“What I’ve found ... is that I must direct my focus away from the distractions of life intentionally in order to be still, to rest, to listen. When I do, I find within my restless soul the unexpected residue left by grief, some ash and trash in desperate need of a good, vigorous cleaning. ... In the wounded recesses of our heart, negativity, cynicism, guarded resentment, and protective pride can grow and flourish without our even being aware. ... In grief we need the will to put on our spiritual hazmat suit and purge our heart and soul of all that threatens our emotional and physical well-being, of all that blocks the way that ultimately leads us forward, beyond our grief.

“At Lent and in grief we seek a deeper experience of the grace of God. Look within... As we grieve, we see more clearly that God’s grace is the essence of love at work in our lives, the sacred gift that restores us and makes us whole.”

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 - 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.

Mary Fergusson

Day Nineteen, Wednesday, March 18

Evensong

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thess. 5:16–18 (NRSV)

Evensong, or Evening Prayer as it is also known, is a way to connect us in prayer with Christians around the world from many different cultures and different traditions of the Christian faith. Prayer is two-way conversation between us and God. Evensong can be helpful for us to hear God's side of the conversation.

From the Book of Common Worship (as quoted from Directory for Worship, W-5.0102, 5.0202):

Prayer is meant to be a gracious gift from God, not a ask or obligation. It is an opportunity to draw inspiration and strength from one's relationship with God in Jesus Christ. It is a way of continually seeking the gifts and guidance of the Holy Spirit for daily living. Prayer is a practice to cultivate throughout one's life, and one that will bear much fruit.

Evensong traces its history back to ancient Jewish and early Christian traditions praying throughout the day. Every three hours a short time was set aside to spend some time in prayer. Along with Evening Prayer, the Presbyterian Book of Worship has orders for Night Prayer, Morning Prayer, and Midday Prayer. As we enter into prayer at these times, we are assured that we are not alone in our prayers. Others in God's family are also praying to God, offering up their praises and requests.

The order of service consists primarily of songs, hymns, readings from Scripture, and of course, prayer. The readings from Scripture can be from the Sunday before (beginning of the week) or the Sunday after (end of the week). The readings could also be from the Lectionary, which is a list of readings from Scripture that often date back to ancient times that give a sense of deliberateness to reading the Bible. When the lectionary is followed, we read the same Scripture as Christians centuries ago. This connects us with Christians throughout time.

We are not alone as a Christian. God is always with us through our prayers. Scripture readings connect us with Christians in every time and place. God is good!!

Gracious God, thank you for prayer and its ability to connect Christians in every time and every place; help us to "pray without ceasing." Amen

John Nelson

As part of the Lenten Wednesday series, the Continuing Education Committee has chosen to learn and worship in different ways. This evening, after the Soup Supper, we will be worshiping by using a Presbyterian Service of Evening Prayer. We invite you to join us after the 5:45 pm Soup Supper, where we will be learning Services of Prayer in the Presbyterian Church beginning at 6:30 pm.

Day Twenty, Thursday, March 19

Today, let's focus on the word COMPASSION and the huge impact it has for changing thoughts and concerns for all of life's activities. This is what COMPASSION means to me:

Caring and consideration about the welfare of all regardless of differences

Open-minded to the needs of everyone regardless of differences that exist between myself and others

Mercy to relieve the suffering of everyone who needs an ear to listen or hands to help

Protection from harm when required

Assistance to help those with special problems and concerns

Security for all regardless of differences

Sensitivity to the needs of each individual

Individuality acceptance needed for those who do not always seem to fit in with our beliefs

Objectivity needed to replace judgment

Needs of others met with empathy and kindness, with God's help through prayer.

Anonymous

Psalms 145:9 - The Lord is good to all; He has compassion on all he has made.

Colossians 3:12 - Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Dear God, please help us to be aware and ready to act with compassion for those who need it most. Amen.

Day Twenty-one, Friday, March 20

Psalm 23...The Lord is my shepherd...he makes me to lie down beside still waters, he restoreth my soul... "

When the new year arrives, we are all supposed to make New Year's Resolutions. But this New Year Prayer puts a different spin on it.

NEW YEAR PRAYER:

Thank you Lord for giving me
The brand new year ahead.
Help me live the way I should
As each new day I tread.
Give me gentle wisdom
That I might help a friend,
Give me strength and courage
So a shoulder I might lend.
The year ahead is empty,
Help me fill it with good things
Each new day filled with joy
And happiness it brings.
Amen.

Dear Lord, we praise your name. Please help us to help our friend. Please help us fill our lives with good things and joy. Let us smile with the happiness it brings to our lives. We ask this in your name. Amen.

Guy Crumley

Day Twenty-two, Saturday, March 21

ark 10:16 New International Version (NIV)

And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.



God bless Mommy, Daddy, Emmie and me.
Amen

Skylar Grace Suhre, Age 3

Fourth Sunday of Lent, March 22

Micah 6:8 - He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Living with humility seems like such a simple principle; and yet it is so challenging. Humility is defined as “a modest or low view of one’s own importance; freedom from pride and arrogance.” It can seem almost impossible to live humbly in a world today that presses in on us each day to make ourselves better, to climb the ladder, to win championships and accolades. In the midst of all the messages to elevate “me,” how do we remain humble?

In Biblical time, Israel’s focus was on their external religious rites, and their questions show a progression from lesser to greater. First, they ask if God would be satisfied with burnt offerings of year-old calves (Micah 6:6b). Second, they ask if they should bring “thousands of rams, with ten thousand of rivers of oil” (Micah 6:7a). Third, they ask whether they should offer their firstborn sons as a sacrifice for God. Would that be enough to cover their sin? Would God be pleased with them then?

Verse 8 follows with God’s answer: “He has told you, O man, what is good.” In other words, Israel should already have known the answer to their questions. God then says that He did not need or desire their religious rites, sacrifices, or oblations. Instead, the Lord sought Israel’s justice, mercy, and humility.

The answer was something much deeper than any religious observance: they needed a change of heart.

“Act justly” is living with a sense of right and wrong.

“Love mercy” means “loyal love” or “loving-kindness.”

“Walk humbly” is a description of the heart’s attitude toward God. God’s people depend on Him rather than their own abilities (Micah 2:3). Instead of taking pride in what we bring to God, we humbly recognize that no amount of personal sacrifice can replace a heart committed to justice and love.

God’s people today will continue to desire justice, mercy, and humility before the Lord.

Dear God, continue to guide me so I may learn to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with you. I welcome your hand in guidance daily in my life, during all times, those of joy and of need. Amen.

Sarah Yuska

Day Twenty-three, Monday, March 23

Anytime is a Good Time to Sing

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord...Ephesians 5:19

An exciting thing about the Christian faith is the singing of the hymns when we congregate every Sunday. The hymns we sing contain spiritual truths that can keep us anchored in our faith. Familiarity with the authors' life stories inspires us to keep the faith despite our situations in life. In good times and bad, in times of peace and war, in times of want and plenty, we sing to the Lord and it brings blessings to our souls.

One of the worst conflicts in our nation's history was the Civil War. It was a dark time for all those alive then - Northerners, Southerners, and four million African Americans in bondage. It was a dark time for sure, but it was also a time of great singing. Some of the most beautiful African American spirituals including *Go Down, Moses* (1862) came from that time. Many of the hymns we sing were found in both Union and Confederate soldiers' hymn books including *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing* (R. Robinson), and *O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing* (C. Wesley). My great grandmother, Catharine, wrote a letter to her husband, Matthew, in 1863 pleading for him to desert the army and come home. His letter dated Feb. 15, 1863 reminded her that he could not take that chance (he was captured for deserting in 1862) but he did encourage her to read her Bible and pray for help and strength. He ended the letter with this, "I have one testament and two hymn books, and I read them every chance I get." Matthew knew the blessings of knowing the songs of the faith.

We enjoy a great heritage singing the old hymns including some that our ancestors sang before us. In happy times these songs thrill us and lead us heavenward; in sad times these songs comfort and sustain us. Anytime is a good time to sing the hymns whether we are at church and can sing loudly or going about our business during the week and singing silently in our hearts.

Dear Father, thank you for the people in our church that bring us beautiful music and those that write songs of our faith. Help us to sing with grateful hearts and teach us to live according to your Word and the words we sing. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Nancy Holt

Day Twenty-four, Tuesday, March 24

God's Good Gifts

James 1:17 – “Every good action and every perfect gift is from God.”

Ever feel like you have nothing? Just look at the gifts [God} has given you:
He has sent his angels to care for you, his Holy Spirit to dwell in you, his church to encourage you and his word to guide you....
Anytime you speak, he listens; make a request he responds.
He will never let you be tempted too much or stumble too far.
Let a tear appear on our cheek, and he is there to wipe it.
Let a love sonnet appear on your lips, and he is there to hear it.
As much as you want to see him, he wants to see you more...
You have been chosen by Christ.... He has claimed you as his beloved.

Dear God. Help us to remember that every day we were chosen by you and that you are with us in every step we take. Amen.

From Max Lucado – Grace for the Moment with permission from When Christ Comes

Annette Simmons

Day Twenty-five, Wednesday, March 25

“Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.” Luke 4:13 (NRSV)

God has made each of us unique. No two of us are exactly the same. We do have many similarities, however. These similarities draw us together into different groups, one of these types of groups is church. We have gathered and worship as Presbyterians, everything is done in order. Quakers, on the other hand, have a much different form of worship.

When Quakers come together for worship, there is no bulletin with an order of service. There are no hymns or songs of any kind. There are no readings from the Scriptures. There is nothing that we are accustomed to during worship. There is nothing. Actually, there really is something going on and it can really take on the elements of worship that we are accustomed to.

Let me explain. When Quakers enter their worship space, they enter in silence. The entire Meeting (term Quakers use for the service) is in silence unless; someone is led by God to share a Scripture reading, a song, a message, a prayer, of anything else that would be uplifting to the gathering. The silence is to spend time individually with God. Prayer and meditation are two-way communication with God. To hear God clearly, often times we must shut out the distractions of our surroundings, to be present with God, and to listen. This will last a specified amount of time, then people will share in fellowship. This is called an Unprogrammed Meeting. This is the foundational form of worship for Quakers. Many meetings (also the term is used for the “congregation”) hold Programmed Meetings. The difference is that parts of the meeting are preplanned, but there is part of the meeting that is still unprogrammed.

I have attended both types of Quaker Meetings. The Programmed Meeting is much like we do on Sunday mornings without the formality. There is an order to the meeting but that may change from one time to another. The Unprogrammed Meeting was certainly different. It was refreshing to spend time alone with God. After the meeting, I spoke with my friend who had invited me, and he asked if I heard any good messages. He was not referring to what was spoken audibly, he was referring to the messages from God revealed only to me.

Christians from around the world and throughout all time are different but still gather with similar Christians to worship God in different ways. It is such a wonderful blessing that God has given us, to be able to gather in groups who believe the same doctrines and worship in the same way.

Gracious God, we thank you for our individuality and the way you have gathered us together to worship you as family. Amen.

As part of the Lenten Wednesday series, the Continuing Education Committee has chosen to learn and worship in different ways. This evening, after the Soup Supper, we will be learning Quaker style of worship. We invite you to join us after the 5:45 pm Soup Supper, where we will be learning Quaker style of worship beginning at 6:30.

John Nelson

Day Twenty-six, Thursday, March 26

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

Our youngest grandson is in his second year of college. He has been a preferred walk-on for the Iowa State football team. He was excited when his first summer started. He was red-shirted his freshman year, but he has completely attended all of the required practices and work outs. It is a demanding lifestyle, almost year-round. He traveled with the team to two Bowl games...one to San Antonio and the other to Orlando. However, last summer while at summer workouts, he had a painful back injury. After several sessions of physical therapy, he finally went to an orthopedic doctor. Injections were ordered, and he had several different injections. None seemed to help. When he was home for winter break, he went to another physician...who also ordered different injections. Then he returned to school.

He finally decided to walk away from football. We know It was a very difficult decision. He had played football since fifth grade and was a great player (keep in mind this is his grandma speaking). He watches football; he knows football statistics; he knows outstanding players. You get the picture. Football has been his focus for many years. It has also been a family focus...watching him at games.

Now, he must learn to adjust to a new college world. But, as he has said, he has closed one door, but other doors will open. I am proud he has placed his health as important. I am sure he will now be able to do other things he enjoys. He will be able to attend family events; he will have time for fishing and golf. And his education (which has been very successful so far) will receive even more attention.

We are proud of him. He has his priorities right!

All of us make decisions every day. Do we have our priorities right?

Think about what is important in your life. What would you rank first? How do you make decisions? Is going to church on Sunday morning a priority? Where does your family rank? Where does God rank? Where does work rank? Keep your priorities in order and make decisions based on what you think is most important.

Dear Lord, help us to have our priorities in life right. Help us to know what is important, and to make correct choices. Amen.

Phyllis Lape

Day Twenty-seven, Friday, March 27

Nails

My dad did this many times over. He bought a piece of farmland. Fired up his small D4 dozer and went to work making it a better piece of property. Clearing hedgerows, terracing, building new fences (yes, everything was fenced back then) and turning non-tillable into tillable. He didn't get rich doing this in the 50's and 60's but it was good extra income to his farming operation and John Deere Dealership, and it gave steady work to his two unsuspecting boys. Each time the dozer made a pass it left any stumps and roots that had to be cut loose and loaded into a truck for the burn pile.

Sometime these properties included a house or a barn. If the structure was not worthy of repair, usually a match would resolve the issue. But sometimes that building held within it some very good lumber which dad would repurpose into another building or structure on our farm. Enormous headers or stringers that were oak. Wall studs that were a full 2 x 4 pine without a single knot to weaken them. It was lumber you cannot buy today at any price. So, this being the case those unsuspecting sons, were required to take the building down shingle and board at a time being careful to not damage the valuable timber.

Now that task alone was monumental when we are talking about a two story 10 room farmhouse. But wait. There is more. This house was of the age that each board was secured with square nails. For you youngsters, that is as opposed to round nails. These nails were made of a cast material that is not as flexible as today's nails. You must pull them out as straight as possible to avoid breaking them. So that is huge task number two. Add to that the fact that dad had heard these square nails were quite marketable in the historical building world. Therefore, each nail was pulled and STRAIGHTENED, by laying them on a brick and tapping or sometimes smacking them with your hammer. The nails then went into a wooden keg where they laid for many, many years.

OK Keith so what is your point? After dad's time of improving farms and removing old buildings passed, he took upon another adventure. Those square nails, that his unsuspecting sons had so gallantly rescued, resurfaced. Dad decided to give them a purpose and mission none of us had ever envisioned. He sorted the nails by size and began to make crosses. A hole was drilled in one nail about one third of the way from the top to receive the other nail. Then that same nail got a hole in the very top to offer a place for a string so that it may be worn.

First just a few were made. My brother Ken took them with him to Green Pastures Performing Arts Camp and of Lay witness trips. Giving them to believers all over the country, usually without any explanation of their origin. Dad and I would also give one to those who we thought would appreciate the significance of a cross made of nails. In the end dad went through dozens of drill bits and used every nail. Now hundreds of people have one of these crosses. I know that one lady asked to be buried with hers. And she was.

This was a long way to go to get to this point. How can you reach people? How can you spread the Word of Christ and reaffirm a faith that may be faltering? You do not have to be a bible scholar. You do not have to be a dynamic speaker. Dad touched so many people using the crosses as God's hand. Having taken a part in this ministry by tearing down the house and painstakingly straightening each nail, I have a grateful satisfaction. But more importantly I have the lesson taught to me by my dad that anyone can reach out. Anyone and anything can make a difference.

Lord accept our gifts as tokens of our faith Amen.

Keith Bradbury

Day Twenty-eight, Saturday, March 28

19 Horses

One rich man owned 19 horses when he died. In his last will and testament, he had written that upon his death, half the horses he owned should go to his only son; one fourth to the village temple and one fifth to the faithful servant. The village elders could not stop scratching their heads. How can they give half of the 19 horses to the son? You cannot cut up a horse. They puzzled over this dilemma for more than two weeks and then decided to send for a wise man who was living in a neighbouring village.

The wise man came riding on his horse and asked the villagers if he could be of any help to them. The village elders told him about the rich man's last will and testament which stated that half of the (19) horses must be given to his only son, one fourth must go to the temple and one fifth to the faithful servant.

The wise man said he will immediately solve their problem without any delay whatsoever. He had the 19 horses placed in a row standing next to one another. Then he added his own horse as the 20th horse. Now he went about giving half of the 20 horses that is ten horses to the son. One fourth of 20-that is 5 horses were given to the temple committee. One fifth of twenty-that is 4 horses were given to the faithful servant. Ten plus five plus four made 19 horses. The remaining 20th horse was his own which he promptly mounted, spoke a few inspiring words, and rode back home.

The villagers were simply dumbfounded, full of disbelief and filled with admiration. And the parting words of the wise man were inscribed in their hearts and minds which they greatly cherished and passed on to their succeeding generations till today.

The wise man said: In our daily lives, in our daily affairs, simply add God's name and then go about facing the day's happenings. Ever come across problems in life that are seemingly insurmountable? (Like the villagers, do we feel that such problems cannot be solved?).

The wise man continued: Add the God Principle in our daily lives and the problems will become lighter and eventually will disappear. In the manner of the ice which, with the

addition of the heat principle will turn into water, and that will eventually evaporate as steam and disappear. And how do we add God's name in our daily lives? Through prayers, filled with true love and devotion with sincerity of purpose and dedication that only total faith can bring about. Meditation is a powerful means of directing the mind Godward.

But without true love and devotion entering into it, it remains like a boat without water. It is not difficult to push a boat that is floating in water, but extremely hard to drag the same boat on dry land.

Author: Unknown

Dan Thompson

Patient Heavenly Father, Grant me wisdom to turn towards You when this earthly world puts up stumbling blocks that interfere with the clear view of Your presence in my life. Please guide my daily footsteps into another person's life where Your power in my walk of faith can be shared in a life changing way.

As I start this day, help me remember that I belong to you, and my desire is to act accordingly. Keep my feet from stumbling and my mind from wandering into distractions that could steal precious time and energy from the most important things you have designed for me. I'm proud to be your child, Lord. And I'm so grateful that you died for me—rising again on your own new morning—so that every day could be filled with the wonder of your love, the freedom of your Spirit, and the joy of knowing you. In the name of Christ, Amen.

Fifth Sunday of Lent, March 29

Do It Again

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” -Philippians 4:6

I imagine many of us could recite the above verse for memory. But, did you know that a recent unearthing of an ancient scroll reveals the words that were inadvertently left off of this comforting command?

*“...let your requests be made known to God **and do it again.**”*

OK, I made that up. But, in my mind, those words belong: *do it again.*

Last year, I could feel anxiety’s grip on me. I was grateful for the opportunity to engage in Craig Albers’ Sunday morning class that followed Max Lucado’s text, *Anxious For Nothing*. Through that process, I decided I needed to commit myself to prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, as I had not done before.

The change I made was unremarkable, certainly not magical, and it has cost no money. Each morning, I sit silently in a small room with scripture and the weekly bulletin prayer list at my fingertips. I breathe and stretch and invite God into the day God is already making. Some days the sense of steadiness and calm I feel is palpable. Some days I can’t get past the allure of breakfast and the mental march of deadlines.

For me, the perfection in this simple plan is not measured in results but in the obedience of the repetitive practice itself. Because God is faithful, I can be faithful.

“Perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony,” writes G. K. Chesterton. “It is possible that God says every morning, ‘Do it again,’ to the sun, and every evening, ‘Do it again,’ to the moon.”

Tomorrow morning, I will sit with God just as I have done today. And, sure as the rising sun, I will do it again.

Do it again, Lord. Show me in this moment that I need not be anxious for anything. Hold me accountable to present my requests to you with thanksgiving. Teach me to be faithful as I too strive to exult you majestically in monotony. Amen.

Tim Chipman

Day Twenty-nine, Monday, March 30

The Will of God

What is the will of God and how do I participate? We should all be asking that.

God's will be done whether we participate or not, but it just feels right when we are in God's will. It brings a sense of fulfilment that we can't create ourselves. By reading the bible we can see what God would have us do: care for and encourage others, show kindness, participate in Church functions, give our time and talents, etc. The nice thing about being in our Church is there is so much we can do and be assured it is in God's will. The community of God is full of love, and it feels so nice to be in it.

Do you ever have that tug on your heart to do something that you know you should do? That's God pushing us along. It is soooo hard to respond most of the time, but the benefits are huge. Doing that thing that helps someone or helps to build up our Church can never be bad. Doing it only for God and not to boast seems to be the prize.

Lord, help me to be in your will today. Point out what you want me to do and give me the courage to do it. Bless my time and use my talent. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Stephen Holt

Day Thirty, Tuesday, March 31

Color Does Not Matter

Galatians 3:28 – “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there neither bond nor free, there is neither male or female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

When I was around 12 or 13 years old my father took me to see a group called “Up With People”. Even at that age I wanted to be in the choir, this group was young people on a mission to do good through their music. Per their website their Mission is “Through music and action we empower young people to be positive agents of change for a more hopeful, trusting and peaceful world.”

With all the tensions in the world today I still remember the song that meant a lot to me that was sung by one of the young men in the group. The song is called “What Color is God’s Skin”. The Music and words to this song were by Tom Wilkes and David Stevenson and was originally released by Up With People in Hollywood in 1967.

The song starts with a little boy asking his father as he tucks him in his bed at night “Tell me Daddy what color is God's Skin”?

The father answers:

“What color is God’s Skin? I said it’s black, brown, it’s yellow, it is red, it is white. Every man’s the same in the good Lord’s sight.”

The song continues with the son asking Why do the different races fight. The father answers that:

“That is part of our suffering past. But the whole human race is learning at last, that the thing we missed on the road we trod is to walk as the daughters and the sons of God”

My hope is one day the premise of this lovely little song will come true. That we can all walk together as daughters and sons of god.

Dear God. Please help us all to remember that we should not care about what color our skin or what we wear, as we are all the daughters and sons of God. Amen.

Annette Simmons

Day Thirty-one, Wednesday, April 1

Stations of the Cross

Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden, there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. John 19: 41 (NRSV)

The Stations of the Cross (or Way of the Cross), is an aid to meditation and contemplation on the death of Jesus, dating to the very earliest time of Christianity. Christians came to Jerusalem to walk the path that Jesus walked as he went from Pilate's palace to Golgotha where he was crucified. In time, the route took shape into a means of meditation on the death of Jesus. By the Middle Ages, it was difficult for many to go to Jerusalem, so the Way of the Cross came to them.

The Way of the Cross developed 14 separate Stations where people heard from Scripture and prayed. Of these 14 Stations, only 8 are actual biblical events the others are implied by Scripture. Several versions of the Way of the Cross have developed, some using 14 Stations, some 8, some 7 (a holy number), and some use 15. The 15th Station depicts Christ Resurrection on Easter.

Walking the Way of the Cross can be an extremely emotional and spiritual experience. Allowing ourselves to feel those emotions is good. For Christians, this is a very moving time in the life of Jesus. Knowing that Jesus came to live among us as one of us to die for our Sin. In the words of an early Christian hymn in Philippians 2:6b-8: (speaking of Christ Jesus)

who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

The Stations of the Cross is part of our Christian history that is not as well-known but can be very helpful in meditating on what Jesus did for us. The Good News is that this story continues to Easter!

Gracious God, thank you for your Son, Jesus, who became one of us, to die for our Sin. Help us to be ever mindful of this sacrifice and the forgiveness that comes from it. Amen.

John Nelson

As part of the Lenten Wednesday series, the Continuing Education Committee has chosen to learn and worship in different ways. This evening, after the Soup Supper, we will be worshipping following the Stations of the Cross. We invite you to join us after the 5:45 pm Soup Supper, where we will be learning about Jesus journey to the Cross beginning at 6:30 pm.

Day Thirty-two, Thursday, April 2

“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl: instead they put it on the stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:13–16

The Sunday morning worship service was just getting started when one of the smaller acolytes struggled to light her candles. After several unsuccessful attempts – even with assistance from her partner -- help arrived from the congregation. Finally, she was able to complete her job and march back up the aisle. I turned to my son Ben and jokingly asked “How many Presbyterians does it take to light a candle?” He replied, “They have to form a committee first!”

There are many reasons contributing to the challenge of lighting those candles on the first try. Sometimes the acolyte is too short to judge the correct distance between flame and wick. Sometimes the candlestick needs to be filled up with more oil. Occasionally, the flame isn't strong enough to transfer light to the candle's wick. A stray gust of air might blow out the flame completely.

As Christians, every one of us carries the light of God's love within – but sometimes we have a hard time letting it shine. When faced with a challenging project (or a call from the nominating committee), we might not feel “big enough” to tackle the job. There are times when we run short on energy as the pressures of work, family, or illness make us feel “empty” inside. Sometimes our faith is flickering if we are listening for God's message and not hearing an answer to our prayers. And every day, we are aware that for many people the light of hope has gone out entirely.

Years ago, our congregation was known around town as “the church that gets the power turned back on” as many sought financial help here when their electricity was disconnected for non-payment. It's time to uncover the light and let it shine all around, stoking the light within as well as reaching out to others to fan the flickering sparks by sharing our love and our faith.

Heavenly Father, thank you for filling me with the Holy Spirit and for sending Jesus to remind us of your enduring love. Help me to let my light shine brightly. Make me quick to see the needs of others and eager to do your will by ministering to them. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Diane Hollendonner

Day Thirty-three, Friday, April 3

Pass the Faith

Proverbs 22:6 Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.

In one of my classes we have been reading a nonfiction text that promotes a discussion of parenting styles. In these discussions, we have taken a look at some articles that have been published about what makes a good parent. One article that we looked at, "What Makes a Good Parent?" by Robert Epstein, includes a list of the top ten most effective things we can do as a parent. Among these things were showing your children love and affection, appropriately managing stress in our own lives, having healthy relationships with the people around us, promoting educational opportunities for our children, teaching life skills, providing a healthy and safe environment, and managing behavior. However, the one that really stood out to me was religion. Of course, I find religion to be very important in my life and feel that it is important to promote religion in the lives of our children. I was just pleasantly surprised to see this in an article that claims to have used a scientific analysis to come up with these ten most effective practices. This definitely makes sense to me and I feel that religion, or rather faith, makes us able to better perform all of the other tasks.

Reading this article and having a parenting discussion with my class made me start thinking about how well I have incorporated religion into our lives. Our children may not always attend church with us as they grow older and go their own way, but that does not mean that they do not have faith in God and include God in their daily lives. I often see small things that remind me that we have done a good job in teaching our children about faith, both in my own family and in our church family. My mom often tells me that Skylar will stop what she is doing during a normal weekday and pray. This generally involves asking God to bless all of the people in her life. As a three-year old, she has witnessed the adults in her life praying, whether it is at church or at home. She is a very caring child and will observe the behaviors around her and likes to make sure that everyone is okay. She has witnessed the people around her living a life of faith and she is already, at such a young age, doing the same. If we model a life filled with faith, we are passing it on to those around us and it is an amazing thing to witness young children learning about faith.

God, please help us to always remember to live a life filled with faith in You so that we may pass that faith on to the children in our lives as well as all the others around us, both young and old. Amen

Frannie Suhre

Day Thirty-four, Saturday, April 4

God Is With Us Always

I encountered this remarkable Psalm 139 at the recent memorial service for longtime friend and church member Jo Parlier. The final words of this ancient prayer are the text for an anthem that we have sung in the choir on several occasions, but I was not familiar with this powerful acknowledgement of God's remarkable omnipresence.

I invite you to find some quiet time today and make these remarkable words spiritual food for meditation. God is with us in everything!

Oh Lord, you have searched me, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord.

You hem me in – behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

If I say "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well.

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I am awake I am still with you...

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Amen.

Dave Truesdell

Palm Sunday, April 5

John 12:12-13

The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So, they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"



Lydia Warren, age eight

Day Thirty-five, Monday of Holy Week, April 6

A Time...

Ecclesiastes 3: 1- 14

*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:
a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,
a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,
a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,
a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,
a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.*

What do workers gain from their toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it.

This has always been a favorite passage of mine. I never knew why or how old I first was when I would have said that it was a favorite. I used to think it was because we were farmers (a time to plant and a time to reap), or maybe it was that I think my family embraced this same “life philosophy” so I just grew up with the same thoughts.

These words have helped me to be comforted when things are stressful or my life is in turmoil, and also gives me hope that for all the turmoil and tears that there WILL be laughter and joy. That God gave us all such a gift is true love. Some might think that it would have been so much better to have just the positive and the joyful things in our lives, but if you never experience sadness or hurt, then how can you fully enjoy and welcome the good things. It also shows me that God has a hand in our lives...that all emotions and actions, both negative and positive, have important meaning and people should experience them all throughout life.

Dear Father, With the rain, comes the sun; with the tears, comes the smiles. I know you are with me at all times, although there are times that I need your hand on my shoulder to help through the harder times, and I thank you for that. Please help me to remember that all things are in your time and by your hand, and I can only help by being your servant. Amen.

Sarah Yuska

Day Thirty-six, Tuesday of Holy Week, April 7

Remember Your Baptism--and Delight In It

“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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.” - Romans 6:3-10

Earlier this year, I received a lovely certificate stating, “having been examined and ordained, according to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),” I am an Elder.

What am I going to do with this certificate?

My high school diploma, which came after four years of study, is mounted in my old bedroom at my parents’ house. My baccalaureate and master diplomas, the results of years of tuition and toil, hang above the computer in my office. Mere pieces of paper, yes... but I’m proud of what they represent.

But this new certificate of ordination, what have I done to deserve it? I have truly accomplished nothing yet.

In December, I heard the Rev. Catharine Healy, rector of my brother’s church in Hyde Park, preach on the baptism of Jesus. In her sermon, Rev. Healy shared the pride she felt in receiving her diploma upon graduation from seminary--a testament to her endurance and drive.

“Frame it, and hang it proudly,” her mentor advised her. But her mentor offered one more word of advice. “But remember, this pales in comparison to the worth of your certificate of baptism.”

Rev. Healy confessed she wasn’t sure where her certificate of baptism was. Probably with her parents. Maybe in a box or a scrapbook. Same goes, I assume, for me.

In my baptism, I claimed an identity and inheritance I already possessed. I didn’t choose it. I didn’t deserve it. As an infant, I had accomplished nothing yet.

But as I’ve aged, I’ve wrestled with it, I’ve accepted it, and time and again, I’ve delighted in it.

For now, my certificate of ordination is stashed in the pocket of my Session binder. I may not ever frame it or mount it, this mere piece of paper. But I hope when I see it, I’ll remember the promises of an answered call. I’ll remember... and I’ll delight.

O Christ, through my baptism, I share in your death. Through your life, I live in life anew. Not my will, but yours. Not my accomplishments, but your grace. Not by my strength, but to your glory. Amen.

Tim Chipman

Day Thirty-seven, Wednesday of Holy Week, April 8

Wait Patiently

John 13:7 Jesus replied, 'You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.'

I am not a patient person! It is often joked about with my family...I have been very patient twice in my lifetime. Oh, wait! I get to make that four times now: waiting for the birth of my two wonderful children and most recently my two amazing granddaughters. I am getting better at this. Well, maybe I still require a lot of work in this department.

Yes, I teach high school students, which requires its fair share of patience, I also drive a school bus that on most days is occupied with twenty-five to thirty children from preschool to high school, which requires a much greater amount of patience. As I seem to have the patience that it takes to do these jobs well, it appears that they may be different kinds of patience.

When I know the timeline, such as how long it takes for a child (or even a baby goat) to arrive, I can handle it pretty easily. However, Chad may think otherwise. I do still get excited and often can't sleep when it comes to holidays or waiting to leave on a trip, but if I try to keep myself occupied time seemingly passes at a decent pace.

The patience that I seem to struggle with is waiting for things to happen that are even more out of my control, or rather totally in someone else's control. Waiting to hear back about test results and insurance approval are some of the worst! When dealing with these kinds of situations, I have had to teach myself that all things will come when it is time. More importantly, I have had to revert back to my faith and remember that even though I am patient, I may not get the answers that I would like. There may be other things on the horizon that are yet to come and will be even better options, which requires even more patience but will undoubtedly be worth it in the end.

God, please help us to have patience in all things and to remember that we must believe in You, knowing that we will be taken care of in the timeframe and ways in which You know are best for us. Amen.

Frannie Suhre

Day Thirty-eight, Maundy Thursday, April 9

“Peter said to him, ‘You will never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.’” John 13: 8 (NRSV)

Jesus did a very unusual thing on the Thursday before his death. He washed his disciples’ feet. Washing people’s feet was not at all unusual. Frequently, when people came to someone’s house, they would need to have their feet washed as they entered to help keep the home clean. Think of walking around all day in very dusty conditions, just think how dirty their feet must have been. The unusual part was that Jesus, their Teacher, washed their feet! This shows us just how much Jesus gave up for us. Jesus is God. Paul said it best in Philippians 2: 6-8 (NRSV)

[Jesus] who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Imagine God washing your feet. Peter’s reaction doesn’t sound so far-fetched to me now. By this time in Jesus’ ministry Peter was beginning to fully grasp who Jesus is. OK, he did have a few missteps soon after this event happened, but that was the weakness of his flesh coming through. Peter knew Jesus. Peter knew that Jesus is God. Peter was not willing to allow God to wash his feet.

Jesus’ response is priceless. ‘Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.’ Peter reacted over the top, which was his typical response. When Peter heard why Jesus was washing feet, he wanted more body parts washed. Again, Peter overreacted.

The point of this is not that the man, Jesus, washed his Disciples’ feet, it is that God washed their feet. Jesus is our example to follow. Jesus is the proof of just how much God loves each and every one of us. After this Jesus went forward and laid down his life for his friends. That includes us also.

*God died for you and for me, in order that we might live in God’s presence for eternity.
Gracious God, may we always follow your example of humility. Amen*

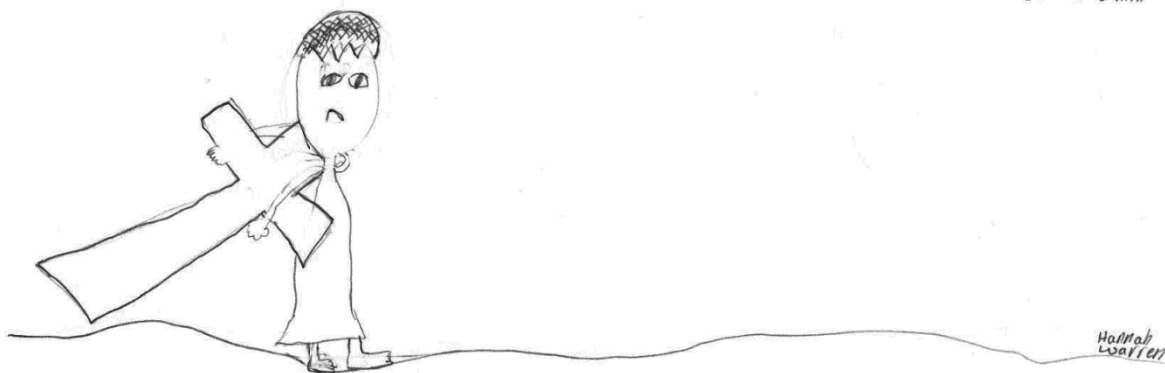
John Nelson

Day Thirty-nine, Good Friday, April 10

John 19:16-18 Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them.

John 19:16-18

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the skull. there they crucified him



Hannah Warren, age eleven

Day Forty, Saturday of Holy Week, April 11

GIVE OF YOUR HEART

1 John 3:18 (The Message) "Let's not just talk about love, let's practice real love."

1 John 3:18 (International Children's Bible, New Century Version) "My children, our love should not be only words and talk. Our love must be true love. And we should show that love by what we do."

1 John 3:18 (Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version) "Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth."

On Sunday February 9, 202, our Church Growth Committee at First Presbyterian Church did a fantastic job of hosting ...

Give of Your Heart Sunday. It was a time for people to evaluate their talents and determine how to best share those talents with our church family. People hustled and bustled about reading, snacking, visiting and signing up to share those talents. Opportunities were available in the areas of:

- Helping church members and friends
- Helping to keep our church beautiful
- Providing support in the church office
- Helping with Sunday church services
- Helping with activities and special events

Those opportunities remain and folks are welcome to sign up at any time to share their skills and talents with the church family. Much appreciation sent to those who have already signed up.

Opportunities to care and serve arise in our daily lives as well: visiting a neighbor or friend, sharing a meal, picking up a neighbor's mail, shoveling snow for others, as well as offering a kind comment to another. These can all be ways to Give of Your Heart on a regular basis.

We can Give of Our Hearts all the days of the week, at church and in many different places. Look for the opportunities.

Dear Lord, open our hearts and our minds that we may see the times we can be of service to you and others. Let us Give with open and willing Hearts. Amen.

Linda Feleky

Easter Sunday, April 12

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

As a lover of music, and an enthusiastic (if not always accomplished) singer, my favorite part of worship is singing hymns. For me, hearing the words of scripture turned into the poetry of song is such a powerful encounter.

I also love hearing and singing hymns that follow the seasons and celebrations of the church calendar. The longing songs of Advent, the joyful carols of Christmas, the resplendent Alleluias of Easter... and the intentional withholding of the word "alleluia" during the season of Lent.

Sometimes called the finest hymn ever written, Isaac Watt's penned "When I Survey the Wonderous Cross" in 1707. At the time, this was a new style of hymn. Up to this time, hymns were mainly musical versions of the Psalms. Watt's controversial hymn spoke in the first person, inviting the singer to interact with the words on a personal level.

Today, let your prayer be these deeply powerful words; a reflection on the meaning of Jesus' sacrifice for each of us.

*When I survey the wonderous cross
on which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.*

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
save in the death of Christ my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.*

*See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.*

Siobhan Warren