**DO GOOD.**

**DO NO HARM.**

**STAY IN LOVE WITH GOD.**

**John Wesley’s Three Simple Rules as understood by Bishop Rueben Job**

**DEVOTIONAL BY THE LAITY OF THE**

**WEST VIRGINIA ANNUAL CONFERENCE**





**WALKING WITH JESUS THROUGH ADVENT**

Advent Season is here again, let each of us consider what it means to be called by God as we “Walk with Jesus” during this special time of preparation and anticipation. What do you believe it means to “Walk with Jesus”? Giving material gifts to others is a good thing to do, as long as this is not our sole focus for the Advent Season. Spending time with others to strengthen relationships. This is also an excellent way to occupy our time during Advent, especially if by becoming closer to someone else we can give guidance and instruction on the way Jesus wants us to celebrate his birthday.

Advent is the perfect time to consider, evaluate and become deliberate about our relationship with Christ. First spend time in prayer! I would recommend meditating on the Word of God. Listen for the guidance of the Holy Spirit on your life as you meditate. Have you ever felt God calling you to do something for Him? God calls Laity all the time to accomplish tasks for Him. Each person in the world was born with a purpose for which they are specifically qualified. Some folks believe the only time God calls a person is to become a pastor or preacher. No, some people do receive a call to pastoral ministry, but every one of God’s children have spiritual gifts. God wants us to share with others the gifts he has given to us. As we meditate during Advent, ask God what your spiritual gifts are, then ask how to share those gifts with others. Unfortunately many young people of today do not seek spiritual wisdom through the organized church. But that does not mean they reject Jesus Christ. Your spiritual gift may be the only gift that young person may be open to receive. I believe that by sharing our spiritual gifts with others we can make an everlasting impression on those who are seeking after spiritual awareness. If we share our spiritual gifts they may understand the meaning of their life. Walk humbly with our God!

I welcome your questions, comments and prayers!

Rich Shaffer, WV Conference Lay Leader, WV.Lay.Leader@Gmail.com

**WALKING IN THE LIGHT OF JESUS**

**Luke 2:1-20 December 25, 2019**

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”. This prelude to John’s gospel is one of my favorite passages. Later John says, “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us. The writer continues by relating the words of John the Baptist, who bore witness to Jesus, the Word of God, and the true Light of humanity. (I wonder if Bishop Sandra, as she led pilgrims from West Virginia through the countryside of ancient Palestine, may have walked near the place where John made these proclamations, or where Jesus later walked.)

We frequently hear a pastor or liturgist conclude a scripture reading with the phrase: “The word of God for the people of God.” It is a common practice to refer to the Bible as the “Word of God”, but John makes the case that it is more appropriate to use that phrase in reference to Jesus. It is probable that I will continue to think of the Bible when I hear those three words, but particularly during Advent, with its emphasis on the incarnation – God assuming human form and becoming a part of creation -- I hope I will remember John’s usage.

Amy Grant compares “Thy Word” to a “lamp unto my feet” and “a light unto my path”, just as John calls Jesus the “true light” that lights every person. “A man’s word is his bond” and “a man is only as good as his word.” “I give you my word.” Anyone’s word is important.

The first Genesis account of creation describes all creation appearing when God speaks – from the Word of God, as it were. God’s voice, God’s message, God’s manifestation on Earth, God’s creation – the Word of God means everything. That is why God sent God’s final Word in the person of Jesus Christ, to redeem the world and to be its perfect light.

**Prayer:** Almighty God, help us remember that in this season we celebrate the gift of Your final Word, and as John Wesley said, “The best thing of all is God is with us.” Amen.

Neal Lacey, Lay Leader First UMC, Beckley

**WALKING WITH JESUS, WHERE HE WALKED**

**Luke 2:1-20 December 24, 2019**

Christmas Eve, the night before Jesus’ birth. This is where it all begins for Him, and for our walk with Him. In 1989 I was in Israel, with a group from the Episcopal Church where I had my church home. 30 years ago, that's a long time, almost Jesus' entire life span.

It was the beginning of a new life for me, although I didn't know it at the time I was walking in Israel. You see two days after I arrived home, my father, with whom we were living since the death of my mother, fell and broke a hip. The day after that, my first husband announced he was moving out, to clear his head, he said. Two years later we were divorced.

As I reflect back, it is with gratitude that I was in that place. Without knowing it at the time I was gathering strength for what was to come. With no voice, because of laryngitis, I listened to my fellow pilgrims sing God's praise. Especially vivid in my memory is standing in the Chapel of the Ascension. The voices of my fellow travelers were the voices of angels ministering to me.

I spent 10 days in Israel. 10 days walking where Jesus lived and walked. 10 days to wander through his life. 10 days of gathering strength from the very earth to carry me forward into an unimagined future.

My faith and devotion to spiritual disciplines may have waxed and waned over the years. I have had good and bad days and years. But as did Mary, I have treasured and pondered things in my heart. I have memories of walking on the ground where Jesus walked, and hearing the Gospels read in the places where they were lived out. And those memories have sustained and healed me through the ups and downs of life. Alleluia.

**Prayer:** Gracious God, by the gift of Your Son whose birth we celebrate this night, sustain and strengthen us with the power of Your Spirit as we continue our walk toward perfection, because we ask in the powerful name of Jesus, born this night to be our Savior. Amen.

Jane Arnold, Capon Bridge UMC

**WALKING WITH JESUS, PREPARATION**

**Matthew 24:43-44 (NRSV) December 1, 2019**

But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

How does this passage of scripture help me walk with Jesus through Advent?

In the verse immediately prior -- Jesus tells us to keep watch because we do not know what day the Lord will come. The verse immediately following says we are to be a faithful and wise servant put in charge of His household to give food at the proper time.

It makes me humble to be a servant for the Lord, and more importantly reminds me to ask “is it well with my soul”? Because I have asked Jesus to be my Lord and Savior does not mean that I get to stop keeping watch in the night. It reminds me that I have to be ready at every hour.

As His servant I must continue to equip myself by reading the Word, coming together in worship, prayer and having fellowship with those who do not yet know Him as the Savior in the community. That is how I prepare for the unexpected hour of His return.

During this season of Advent help us hear and ponder the precious words of Jesus, putting them into our heart, and thanking him for the wonderful gift of His love.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, thank you for the abundant life that is mine through your son Jesus. Guide me according to Your will, and help me to be a worthy servant in all that I say and do. Give me courage to stay awake and claim the reward You have promised. Amen

Mary Bane, Mon Valley Certified Lay Servant

**WALKING WITH JESUS, IN HOPE**

**Romans 15:7-13 December 2, 2019**

Verse 12-13……. the root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in Him the Gentiles shall have hope. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is early September and the sun is bright and the days are beautiful. Even so I notice the difference in four seasons country and know changes will come soon and fast. Even though I am thinking of the weather, I know changes in our world and changes in our church also happen that same way. Nothing seems to happen slowly anymore. I suppose that is a result of being part of an aging generation, but I know that is not the whole story.

I sometimes wonder if Jesus found His life on this earth in the same way. In the mist of trouble and tribulations, of need and hate and hurt did He struggle with all the worries and cares of a world that seems upside down. Did He want to slow things down until a better way could be found. Then I remember that He is the better way. The one from the root of Jesse who brings hope into our world and into our church

I am a cancer survivor and for many years Hope has been what I hold on to. I remember hoping the next chemo treatment would not make me quite so sick and I hoped to be able to get through one more week of radiation without falling on my face. I held on tight to the HOPE that all would be well and knew God had a plan for my life. There was hope in knowing that I was never alone in my battle.

I look to that same hope for my life today. Hope that God will allow me to be who He wants me to be. Hope that His plan and purpose for my life will be my main goal. Hope that all of us will walk that road of life with Jesus as our ever-present guide and keeper.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for the hope we find in knowing you and knowing that you hold all things in your hands. May we live so others may see you and that hope that you bring, in us. Amen

Judy Raines, Trinity Bluefield, CCW Advisory Chair

**A CLOSE WALK WITH JESUS**

**Isaiah 63:7-9 December 23, 2019**

I will recount the Lord's faithful acts; I will sing the Lord's praises, because of all the Lord did for us, for God's great favor toward the house of Israel.  God treated them compassionately and with deep affection.  God said "Truly, they are my people, children who won't do what is wrong."  God became their savior.  During all their distress, God also was distressed, so a messenger who served him saved them.  In love and mercy God redeemed them, lifting and carrying them throughout earlier times.

As the youngest child in the family, I was listening to older siblings and became curious about many things.  A baby born to human parents and becoming a savior was one of those puzzling questions.  As I grew up and could learn from parents, Sunday School teachers, and others in the church, it became clear to me, what a miracle God had performed

Isaiah says that even though God was present and led his people, they were rebellious.  They strayed from God many times and He continually brought them back.  As in the beginning God would keep His promise to His people.  That promise was to ultimately send His son into the world.

For over two thousand years since God's promise to send a savior and redeemer, the world is now awaiting His return, but not as a baby.

Day by day we spend time in search of the truth as revealed in scripture. We can testify that truth is only in Jesus Christ.  At times we face situations where we know it is only by trust in Jesus that gets us through.

It is truly the promise of ages past that God works in our lives today.  We can declare that a close walk with Jesus brings a true meaning to our lives. Yes, I heard of a savior as a small child and more than eight decades later I truly know my savior and redeemer.  Thanks be to God for all He has done and will do. Praise Father God, Son and Holy Spirit!

**Prayer:** Father God, who sent your Son as a baby that we might be saved; May we receive Him again at this time and rejoice.  For all our blessings we thank and praise you.  All glory and honor be yours now and forever.  In Jesus name we pray.  Amen

Betty Baily, Calcutta UMC

**WALKING WITH JESUS/ EMMANUEL**

**Matthew 1:21-35 December 22, 2019**

Matthew 1:23-25b (NIV) These verses deal with the names that our Lord was given. In the first verse, the name Emmanuel/Immanuel was ordained by the prophet, Isaiah, and in the second verse the name Jesus was given by Joseph.

This familiar Advent scripture deals with a matter many young couples have before a child is born. Very recently, our son explained that choosing a name for their expected baby was a long thought process because it was so important. In our scripture Mary was reminded of a name given by the spirit-inspired prophet, and Joseph chose a very common earthly name *“Yeshua”*or Jesus. Yes, the name for our Lord was important! The prophet Isaiah’s name was not a personal name but a fulfillment, while Joseph’s name was one of the most common names of the period in that place. Yes, He is God and man so how fitting that this scripture recognizes that fact! Therefore, Emmanuel/Immanuel meaning “God with us—His people” is fitting for him as Son of God, and the very common Jesus/*“Yeshua”* is fitting for him as Son of man.

**Prayer:** Dearest Father, we praise you and thank you for our undeserved grace! May we bear name of Christian for your glory to this world!

Sharon Tabor Byrd

Morris Memorial United Methodist Church

**WALKING WITH JESUS, PATIENTLY**

**Matthew 3:1-12 December 3, 2019**

Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. . . Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him: . . .

Psalm 37: 3-4 & 7a

Just over two years ago, I announced my intention to retire. Our organization’s Board of Directors chose a search committee and I posted the position and passed along to them the resumes we received. I then left for a long-planned trip overseas. I returned to work after vacation and wondered at not hearing from the committee on a time frame for training my replacement. When I asked about the new director, I was told they had been unsuccessful in their search and thought our not-for-profit should close its doors. I immediately knew this was not a decision I could live with. It was as if I heard God say to me “Your time to rest is not now; your mission is not complete.” So I did what I felt called to do and stayed on the job.

While I thought I was ready to retire, God had other plans for me. The past two years I have been privileged to be part of our church’s Reaching New People efforts. Unlike my weekday job dealing with seniors, on Sundays I’m involved with children’s ministries as we now have children in church each week. Each day I have marveled at how God is changing my focus and I am blessed to see Jesus walking beside me each step of the way. Had I not waited patiently for God, I would have missed so much!

**Prayer:** Gracious God, Thank you for always knowing the better path for us if we are willing to wait for your lead. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of your son, may we always look to you as we walk through each day. Prepare our hearts as we prepare our homes and churches, that we may be ready to share the great good news with others. We ask your blessing on all we say and do. In his holy perfect name, Amen

Rose Thornburg, Barboursville, WV

**A LITTLE CHILD WILL LEAD THEM**

**Isaiah 11:1-10 December 4, 2019**

"The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat; the calf and the young lion will feed together, and a little child will lead them." Isaiah 11:6, CEB

These verses, especially verse 6, have captivated me since I was a child. Wolves and lambs, suddenly able to coexist and live together in peace? It's entertaining to try to imagine the logistics that would allow predators and prey to live in harmony.

We may want to think that a world where fear and oppression are no more means that certain people aren't welcome. They don't fit in, they threaten who we are, or we just don't trust them. However, predators aren't excluded from this vision of a perfect world. Predators aren't in captivity, safe in zoos where they can be observed from a distance, no threat to the lambs or goats who might visit. Instead, the predators are transformed, becoming beings that will not harm or destroy.

When we walk with Jesus, we will, at some point, walk with people we don't expect. We might see someone and find it hard to believe that this lion is really on our side. We might feel like a leopard among goats, repentant of the ways we have fallen short and caused harm. The closer we walk with Jesus, the closer we also walk in community with those around us. May we be given the strength to keep moving forward in our walks with Jesus and our fellow travelers as we are transformed by God's grace and love.

**Prayer:** Just as the Spirit rested upon Jesus, may the Spirit rest on us to bring wisdom and understanding, planning and strength, and knowledge and love. Prepare our hearts to seek you out in the most unlikely of places. Amen.

Robin Kelby, CLS, Lubeck UMC

**WALKING WITH JESUS WHILE LISTENING**

**Matthew 1:18-20 December 21, 2019**

The beginning of Jesus’ journey on Earth is celebrated every December, when the northern realms of the planet experience their longest nights of the year. It’s a cold time. Many plants lose their leaves and appear to the casual eye to be dead.

In the months before Jesus was born, it also seemed a desolate time. God had not spoken a word to any prophet — or layperson — for centuries, according to the “official” record. The Jewish state was under the control of far-off Rome, and monetary tribute was due, yearly, to a foreign power.

In dark times like this, when people are tempted to accept defeat and despair as their new normal, God offers a divine intervention.

When Joseph found out about the pregnancy of his fiancée, Mary, his first choice was to “dismiss her quietly.” He didn’t want her to endure public disgrace.

Then, via an angel in a dream, came news that changed the course of history. In the midst of a family crisis with the potential for lasting shame and hurt, in a time of political humiliation for the Jewish people, the Lord’s messenger told Joseph of the great news: The Holy Spirit is at work — in the form of a baby!

This day, in scientific calculations, is the Winter Solstice. We know, though, that the shortest day of the year, when the sunshine is weakest, will be followed by warmer, longer days, in which trees and flowers will “come back to life.”

Those who walked with Jesus, and listened closely, would have heard his promise. Despite doubters, persecution, and ultimately crucifixion, the power of Almighty God is victorious over desolate times. We still need to hear that, and to re-hear that, and to believe it and to share it — not only at Christmas but for the following 52 weeks.

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, You brought light and warmth to a cold and dark world. In your almighty power, help me to shine so as to help dispel the darkness in our world. Amen.

Tom Bone, Athens, WV

**WALKING IN THE STEPS OF JESUS**

**Romans 1:3-7  December 20, 2019**

**3**regarding his Son. He was a descendant of David with respect to his humanity **4**and was declared by the resurrection from the dead Jesus the Messiah, our Lord. **5**Through him we received grace and a commission as an apostle to bring about faithful obedience among all the gentiles for the sake of his name. **6**You, too, are among those who have been called to belong to Jesus the Messiah.

As I sit looking at these verses, I think what do they mean to me? How do they apply to my Christian life? These few verses tell me that through Jesus Christ we all receive grace. Are we all worthy of grace? Yes, even though at times I don’t think I am! My life hasn’t always been easy. I’ve lived a hard life from the time I was a child until this very day. I struggle to live the life God has laid out before me. But God has given me grace, He has never given up on me. He has called me to be His faithful child, to walk in the steps he has laid out for me, steps that I struggle to walk in daily. Looking back in my life I see the struggles throughout my life. I see the many times that God was there, the times I’ve walked away, the countless times I did not deserve grace. God send His Son for me to give me the grace I don’t deserve. We all walk daily in the footsteps God has planned for us. Do we follow them? Or do we take our own path. I know the path I've chosen now in my life is the right one, but there are times when I still try to take my own way. Sometimes I travel the path that wasn't laid out for me and I get myself into trouble. But the trouble we get into is never too big for God. We just need to remember to walk the path of grace he has laid out for us and we will stay the course. Times will not always be easy, struggles will come, and test and trials will be ahead. We need to just stay focused on God's love and grace and He will always see you through.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father help us to remember when the path we travel seems hard, that You are always there guiding our steps. Teach us to walk in Your ways Lord. Amen.

Teresa Prince, Highland Park UMC

**WALKING WITH OUR PROTECTOR**

**Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19 December 5, 2019**

     In Scripture, some who speak are not considered as Prophets.  Often what they say, is a form of Prophesy.  King Solomon wrote over a thousand songs, 965 years before Christ was born.  In Psalms 72, it is clear, Solomon speaks not of himself, but of Jesus, "The Son."

    In verses one and two, he says, "Give the King Your judgments, O God and Your righteousness to the King's Son. He will judge Your people with righteousness, and Your poor with justice."  Solomon was speaking to God "The Father."  In verse four, Solomon speaks of "breaking in pieces the oppressor."  Solomon was not going to tolerate "bullies" oppressing his people, those who gave allegiance to him.  Likewise, Jesus will not tolerate "bullies" who oppress His people, the people who walk with Him and worship Him.

    In Scripture, the word "fear" is synonymous with love and respect.  Solomon wrote; “They shall fear You, as long as the Sun and Moon endure, throughout all generations."  Solomon is speaking of the immortal Christ.

    We who accept Jesus as our Savior, the only begotten Son of God, "fear" Him and we will walk with Him, our Protector.  He will judge those who oppress His people. Judgement will be as sure as "rain falls on mown Grass."

    Solomon said, “And blessed be His glorious name forever!"  The King's Son, of whom Solomon wrote, is Jesus Christ.  He will reign forever.

**Prayer:**  Our Father: Hallowed be thy name. We accept You and desire to live eternally with You in Heaven. Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost!  Amen.

Joe Duckworth, Certified Lay Servant, Kanawha UMC

**WALKING WITH JESUS, THE BABY BORN OF MARY**

**December 6, 2019**

**Psalm 85:1-2,** Lord, thou wast favorable to thy land; thou didst restore the fortunes of Jacob. Thou didst forgive the iniquity of thy people; thou didst pardon all their sin.

    Psalms is a book of parallelism and synonyms. It’s a book of worship and service.  This passage reminds us of God’s protection and redemption.  You know what? That’s the Christmas story.  Through Christ’s miraculous coming, God restored the promises that he had made to his Old Testament patriarchs.  By Christ’s death and resurrection, God had promised to forgive the sins of his people and pardon their sins, i.e. Christ’s passion.

    Less we forget during this season that the Messiah’s coming was fraught with difficulties for thousands of years. He came to earth that Christmas. He reassured us that he was faithful and would restore all the promises that he has made.

    We know, “Jesus is the reason for the season”, “Emmanuel, God with us”, but for us to be truly restored this Christmas season through Gods favor , don’t  get “caught up” in the season, but only do this in a small way so that Christ can be larger than life.

Rededication is what Christmas is all about.  It is about believers in Jesus once again stopping, listening, and praying for God to restore his favor.  It is time for us to acknowledge our sins and be forgiven. It is a time to lift Christ up daily. Let’s dedicate ourselves again to consistent prayer, daily Bible reading, worship that fills us again with the wonder of the Nativity, and a pledge as we kneel at the manger to keep this Christ child in the forefront of our thoughts and what he means to us in the coming year.  Doing these things will open wide the doors of restoration and allow the Holy Spirit to keep us close to Jesus Christ.

    Let us once again sing Handel’s “Hallelujah” with the angels of old as we take the mysterious journey on the road to Bethlehem this Christmas morning.

Prayer: Dear Father, Son and Holy Spirit- grant us a clean and contrite hearts as we approach you again in humbleness and adoration.  Help us take a long look at the Christ child in the manger. Help us dedicate ourselves once again to take this joyous message of salvation to the whole world.

In Jesus’s name, Amen.

Helen Markwell, Riverton UMC

**WALKING THE HONORABLE PATH**

**Romans 1:1-2 December 19, 2019**

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God. Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:9 that he considers himself the least of the apostles because he persecuted the church of God. But he did what we must do. He firmly trusted that he was now a new man, and that he could follow the path God showed him. Sometimes we have faith in God but not faith in our own abilities. This doesn’t mean a selfish pride but standing firm believing that God has a purpose for our lives. When Jesus was tempted by the devil, He used the same weapon available to the weakest Christian – the Holy Scriptures.

Many times we do not want to take the step of faith to use this weapon. Weapons can be used to attack or defend. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us; “All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

How does God want you His solider to use the Word of God today? Is there a friend that needs reproof or correction? That’s tricky and hard to do. Only prayer and love can bring about the change that God desires. But He has gone before you and prepared the way. Use your past experiences, your present love for God and your firm faith in God’s plan for you to step out and be an “apostle” today.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, help us to be grounded in your Holy Gospel. Give us the power needed to reprove others in love. Also to accept this needed guidance from your Spirit to lead my brothers and sisters. Make our walk with Jesus an honorable path that others may see and follow you, Lord. Amen.

Jeanetta M. Mick. Oil Creek Church/ Orlando Charge. Lay Servant, Sunday School Teacher

**WALKING IN THE LIGHT**

**December 18, 2019**

**Psalm 80: 17-19**……… Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself. Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name. Restore us, LORD God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.

The request that God restore them can be taken more than one way, but it seems to be more of a spiritual focus rather than a material one and it could also be understood as “turn us again”. In verse 18 they admit that they turned away from God, but now they say they will call on God’s name. What they need, according to the Psalmist, is for God to “make his face shine on them”. What the Psalmist asks for is God’s Light.

The Psalmist asks God to shine his face upon his people. What is this shining face; this light from God? It is a realization, a dawning awareness, an epiphany. It is an understanding at the heart level that God is true and just and he is worthy of our obedience and our following. “I saw the light”, is what we are talking about when we say or sing about Jesus.

We sense God’s light shining on us and we have hope for our life. John 8:12 says.. Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

Even more important than the light we see with our eyes is the light that Christ brings to our hearts, giving our lives the understanding and meaning only he can give.

Advent is a time of divine restoration (Psalm 80) for we have all sinned, and only Jesus Christ can restore us back into a right relationship. The Advent Season is a time of prayer and fasting for the purpose of renewing and rededicating ourselves to Jesus Christ. Could we put aside the World’s cluttered, commercial view of Christmas? …and not miss the “real Christmas” – the birthday of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, our God Incarnate!!!

**Prayer:** When we are lost, restore us. When disaster strikes, when sadness overwhelms, when we have wandered from you, restore us. Praise to the Lord, our light and our guide. Restore us, let your face shine, and let us walk with you that we may be saved. Amen

Krista Cather – Memorial United Methodist, Williamson, WV

Certified Lay Servant, Church Lay Leader/Charge Lay Representative, Music Director/Pianist

**WALKING WITH JESUS BY GOING**

**December 7, 2019**

Are we there yet?

How many of us have used or heard this phrase?

When was the last time you checked the time—on your phone or computer or even the old-fashioned way on your watch or a clock—and only a few minutes had passed since the last time you checked?

When you pray, do you expect an immediate answer? Or maybe you’re in a generous mood so you give God a couple of days to answer and then become frustrated because he hasn’t accommodated your timeline.

Time is relative. Patience is a virtue. Where have you heard that before? Well it is a virtue and Paul lists it as one of the fruits of the Spirit. Let’s face it most of the time we are all learning lessons of patience.

Jesus was the epitome of patience. As Jesus walked this earth, preaching and teaching, he was constantly demonstrating patience. Think about how Jesus demonstrated extreme patience when he was in the dessert being tempted by the devil. How many times did Jesus teach a lesson only to have to explain it to his disciples? Patience. How many times did the Pharisees or Sadducees ask him questions trying to trap him with his answers? Patience. How many times did the crowds swarm him for healing and help? Patience.

Today’s Scripture is a lesson in patience. God works in God’s time. Our God is gracious. Our Lord Jesus Christ offers us salvation. Yes, the second coming of Christ is near and it will happen in the wink of an eye. Our patience grows when we are in action and not “clock-watching.” So my friends, be prepared to spend eternity with our Lord Jesus Christ, by growing in patience and GO! Go and make disciples of Jesus Christ. Go and help others praying for them to have a change of heart and lives. Go and teach others to distinguish between righteous actions and wicked actions. Go!

**Prayer:** Gracious and Loving God, Your grace abounds and covers us when we ask, “Are we there yet?” Develop our patience as we GO into this world to do your work. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Pam Todd, Bruceton Mills, WV

**WALKING WITH JESUS, EXPECTANTLY**

**Psalm 85:8-14 December 8, 2019**

As I “walked” through the verses 8-14 of Psalm 85, I heard how God restored his people, and spoke to them of peace and forgiveness for the faithful.

I also saw as I walked through the verses that God spoke of peace to his people, the faithful, who turned to him in their hearts. I also realized that if God was speaking it meant his people needed to listen.

I see today a church that is hurting. It speaks unkind words filled with anger and sits in judgement of others. The church is often impatient with people of differing opinions and lacks compassion. And the church as a body is frequently unwilling to forgive.

God spoke to his people. He communicated. What and how are we communicating God’s message of peace and forgiveness today? Communication is not just speaking words. It first involves listening. Our listening needs to be first to God. We need KNEE time! We need to pray before we speak and act with compassion toward others.

The longer I walked through this scripture, the more this question came to mind about our current world issues. How are we daily representing ourselves to God and to the world? Do we thirst for God and do we allow all who thirst for God a place at His table? Do those who thirst for God feel comfortable coming in our doors? Do they know their dreams and aspirations that God has placed on their hearts can be fulfilled in God’s church? Restoration and forgiveness start first in our own lives. I realize my heart is not at peace!

**Prayer:** Gracious and loving God my prayer is for you to open our hearts and make a path for your church that leads to forgiveness, where hearts are open. May we all thirst for you first, before ourselves. Amen.

Your servant,

Claudia Thomas C.L.M, New Haven UMC

**LED BY JESUS**

**Psalm 80:1-2 December 17, 2019**

Please listen, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph’s descendants like a flock.  
O God, enthroned above the cherubim, display your radiant glory to Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh.  
Show us your mighty power. Come to rescue us!

How many times do we pray to be led by Jesus? I know this summer I have prayed more than I have ever prayed before. This summer has been a very hard summer for me, my father who abused me for most of my childhood passed away. I had forgiven him for the things he had done to me and my brother. At first it wasn’t as hard as I thought it would be. I was the strong one, I talked to the doctors, nurses, set everything up, planned the memorial service. I did it all because I had to. I stayed strong for my brother because he needed me to be the strong one. He was always strong for me when we were children, he took care of me and as adults I had to take care of him. No one really knows the pain you go through when you lose a parent who abuses you. I never knew how much I would need Jesus walking with me.

I could feel the prayers that were going up for me and my family. Jesus led me! He gave me the strength I needed and still need. I am just like Joseph’s children. God led them like a flock. I’m sure at times I was worse than a flock to lead. But Jesus never turns his back on me. He is always there walking beside me picking me up when I couldn’t walk anymore. Giving me strength when I had no more strength and wiping my tears when I cried behind closed doors. Jesus walks with us daily. We may not see Him, but we can feel Him. I feel Jesus every day in my life. Without Jesus walking with me daily and guiding my steps I would not be where I am today or the person I am today.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, I pray that today we may all feel You walking with us guiding our steps as we walk through this life. Help us to remember You will never leave us alone on this dark road, You will always guide us and keep us safe. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Teresa Prince, Highland Park UMC

**WALKING WITH GOD’S SON**

**Isaiah 7:10-16 December 16, 2019**

These verses are beloved by Christians around the world. No nativity scene is complete without the phrase, “the virgin will conceive, have a son.” We cherish the beauty of the miracle of the virgin birth, an amazing miracle that takes place in the humble setting of a manger and experienced first by the young couple and witnessed by neighboring shepherds. This sweet and beautiful scene can be found on Christmas cards and displayed throughout homes and churches. However, the final element of the passage is perhaps even more miraculous than a virgin giving birth, and the words should touch and humble us all, “and name him Emmanuel”. Emanuel, which means “God with us” is the most amazing aspect of the Christmas season. At Christmas, we celebrate the Son of God being born. The incarnation is one of the central doctrines of the faith and one of the most difficult to fathom. We struggle to understand how Christ could be fully divine and fully human. Almost as hard to comprehend is the love of God that prompted this miracle. That the Lord of everything should enter the universe in such a humble and yet stunning way overwhelms us. That He would allow Himself to experience not only the joys of human existence but its great hardships and struggles should, even now, instill awe. The idea that God would enter into His creation like this is unique to the Christian faith. No other religion has any concept of their god loving humanity in this way. At Christmas, this is the center of what we celebrate. The little baby, who the virgin birthed, would live a human existence. He would suffer and see those He loved suffer, and eventually, He would allow Himself to be killed. This was because God loved us enough enter the human condition and live among us. One day, as Revelation 21:3 states, we will be in His presence, and at that time, we will experience His full glory in the way that the disciples did only briefly at the transfiguration, and we will experience it for eternity.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, Thank you so much for the gift of your Son that we celebrate this Christmas. Help us never to forget the magnitude of this miracle. We thank you that your Son truly became a human being for our sake. We thank you that, because of His work here, we will one day be in your presence forever. Amen.

Sarah Stewart, St. Marys, WV

**WALKING WITH JESUS, EYES WIDE OPEN**

**Matthew 11:2-5 December 9, 2019**

While John the Baptist was in a physical prison, we ourselves are often locked in a spiritual prison due to our sinful weaknesses. John sent his disciples to Jesus wanting to know if Jesus was the one John was waiting for. We too send out our brothers and sisters seeking such answers. We ask ourselves if we can receive Gods mercy and grace despite our sins, sickness, and failings.

We are blinded to the world we are destroying. We fail to see the destruction of our planet, our resources, and our climate. We are consumed with power and greed with little to no regard for Gods creation. We need to pray!

Our crippling, self-defeating attitudes, such as ‘I can’t’, ‘Let someone else’, or ‘it’s not my job’ keeps us from being the hands and feet of Jesus. We need to pray!

We are witnesses to the scourges of today, such as diseases, cancers, HIV, tumors, and other health related issues, finding cures through medical intervention. These interventions are not solely due to science but also with God, through our prayers. Miracles are a gift from God.

We tune out the cries of the world, from the impoverished, the downtrodden, those suffering under hard task masters, from the marginalized, those without voices, and to those who justice has been denied. We should pray!

We are the dead of this world if we keep Jesus to ourselves. We are dead to this world if we lock out those who are seeking hope and love. We need to pray and wake up and be God’s tools for God’s goodness in this world.

There are many who have not heard the gospel. We need to be disciples and go into the world spreading the good news. We can do this by talking with our neighbors, using social media to spread God’s word to our fellow countrymen, and people on the other side of this world.

**Let us pray**. Father, in this Advent Season work in me that I might be a good steward of Your creation. I ask for encouragement and strength and wisdom. For the healing of those in affliction and for miracles. To hearing the cries of the world and answer through my actions. I pray for Your infusion in me both joy and glory. Give me the strength and wisdom to go out into this world spreading Your good news. Amen

Dave Benton, Parkersburg, WV

**WALKING WITH JESUS, JOYFULLY**

**Isaiah 35:1-10 December 10, 2019**

A highway will be there. It will be called The Holy Way. The unclean won’t walk on it, but it will be for those walking on that way. …The Lord’s ransomed ones will return and enter Zion with singing, with everlasting joy upon their heads. Happiness and joy will overwhelm them; grief and groaning will flee away. Isaiah 35: 8, 10 (CEB)

I recall when I first became a grandparent someone saying to me, “Pat, when I asked you about your new grandbaby, you just beamed.” (I still do, even though that one is now 16 and the younger one is 11.) Recently a friend said to me, “Pat, when I asked you about how Grace (the cat) is doing, you smiled instantly.” Well, that’s because this sweet, quirky, little calico was “sent” to give me joy and companionship (hence, her name…).

I know all of you can relate to what I’m saying. All of us have those thoughts that instantly bring a joyous smile to our faces. It’s because of the specialness of the relationships. I guess I need to ask myself when someone asks me about my relationship with God, does my face instantly light up with joy – so much so that someone would notice? Do I live my life joyfully so that others will see the light of Jesus Christ in me? Do you?

Advent is a time of waiting with hope, love, **joy** and peace for the celebration of the birth of our Savior. This is also a time of remembering that Jesus is preparing *The Holy Way* for us to enter New Jerusalem when he comes again for the redeemed. *Happiness and joy will overwhelm* us in those days as we **walk with Jesus**, but we are called to walk with that same joy on our faces and in our lives **now**!

**PRAYER:** God, source of all our joy, help us to be an example of the *everlasting joy* of a relationship with Jesus Christ this Advent and beyond, so all will come to know him. Amen.

Patricia Ramsey, CLM, Wellsburg/Franklin Charge

**WALKING WITH JESUS AS PARENTS**

**Luke 1:38 December 15, 2019**

Luke 1:38  And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it so with me according to thy word. And the angel left.

     I sat on the front pew of my church late that evening. The moon shone brightly through the window on the painting of Christ behind the pulpit. I had driven home from the hospital where earlier that morning my wife had given birth to a healthy baby boy. I was a first time father. As I looked at the picture of Christ a new awareness of God’s love swept over me. I had only known my son but a few hours, but there was a bond already. I knew I couldn't give him up for a world of lost sinners as did our God. It was a price I could never have paid. "O the love that drew Salvation's plan".

     As my wife and I sat in the doctor’s office nine months earlier, we were scared beyond words. We had only been married six months, we had not planned on starting a family so soon. Could we be the parents this child needed, and give him a good home? I wondered and worried about so many things.

     I thought of Mary, as I sat there alone looking at the painting. At least we were married, we had a house we were remodeling and I had a good job. How was Mary going to explain to her fiancée, Joseph, she was pregnant? What were they to tell their families, the community? Mary had said yes to perhaps the second greatest task ever we read of in God’s Word. But how would it all work out, a virgin conceiving a child, without being with a man? Who could believe such a tale? Thankfully the same angel that appeared to Mary visited Joseph as well, telling him to have no fear, for this child was of God.

     Mary's faith and hope for a Messiah allowed her to become a vessel through which God could perform the delivery of our savior into this world. May we all be so willing to accept what He has for us to do for the advancement of his Kingdom.

God uses the most ordinary people to do the most extraordinary. Be on standby.

**Prayer:** Dear creator God, help us be as willing as Mary when You ask us to answer a call to be of service. You have created each of us for a specific purpose, clergy and laity. Amen.

Timothy Spratt, Van, WV

**THE JOURNEY REQUIRES PATIENCE**

**James 5:7-10 December 14, 2019**

James 5:7a, Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop,

How patient are we? Do we get frustrated standing in line at the store while purchasing gifts or groceries? Do traffic jams put you in a bad mood or even tempt you with road rage? Take a deep breath, thank the Lord for the ability to go to the store, to pay for the things you are buying and the car you own to be able to travel. Patience is a spiritual gift, and we need to practice patience at all times.

We are to be examples to those around us, a people set apart. In a world where we are being watched, have we put bumper stickers or Christian symbols on the back of our cars and cut others off in traffic? Have we spoken harshly to the store clerk or others waiting in line to check out?

Let us decide to show our spiritual gift of patience to those around us during Advent. Let the motorist who has been waiting to pull out into traffic go in front of you. Be especially kind to the clerk who has been working long hours just to make ends meet. While waiting in line, engage folks around you and share some Christmas joy with them. Christians are a people set apart! Show joy, generosity, patience and love everywhere you go. With this kind of attitude we will be presented with opportunities to make a difference in the lives of others. Even when we are stressed and rushed, a kind word and loving gesture can set the tone for the entire day.

Remember, the farmer prepares the soil and plants his seed, then he waits. Patiently expecting those seeds to produce a crop that will provide an abundant harvest. Through prayer the Holy Spirit prepares the hearts of those we will meet. With our joyful loving attitude we can plant seeds of hope in their hearts. Then we wait, as the seed takes root, although we may or may not see the harvest. Others who come after us may see the harvest. This Advent practice patience!

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for opportunities to be an effective witness for others to see You through our actions and attitudes, Amen.

Rich Shaffer, WV Conference Lay Leader

**WALKING WITH THE INDWELLING CHRIST**

**I Thessalonians 5: 16-24 December 11, 2019**

**I Thessalonians 5:23a** “And the very God of peace Sanctify you wholly…”

One of the highlights of our trip to the Holy Land was a tour of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem which was built on the site of the birthplace of Jesus. My thoughts were focused on the many events surrounding Jesus’ birth and praising God for sending Jesus to be our Savior. I was reminded of a verse of scripture that describes the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ by stating that God sent His own Son, not in sinful flesh, but image likeness of sinful flesh (Romans 8:3). His physical body and his nature were so different than ours that He Could be the Lamb without spot or blemish to be the complete sacrifice for the sins of the world; and we are indwelled with the Holy Spirit by the sacrifice Jesus made for us.

Today’s scripture describes our “walk” with the indwelling Holy Spirit as we exercise the power of the new life within us. We are born again of the Spirit and thus we become children of God. We grow in the measure that the Word of God takes effect in our lives. Christ does live in you; let Him live in you to fashion you to be like unto Him. Christ wants us to know Him and to walk with Him moment by moment. Even if we slip and fall and quench the Holy Spirit, Christ picks us up and sets us on our feet. He gives us a daily cleansing, He cheers us when we are faint, and He helps us when we are weary. It is wonderful to see him as He reveals Himself from day to day.

**Prayer:** Thank you Jesus for giving Yourself to us, help us as we give ourselves to others. Amen

David W. Byrd, Lay Servant-Morris Memorial United Methodist and Midland South Equalization Delegate to Annual Conference

**WALKING WITH JESUS BY TRUST**

**Luke 1:46-55 December 12, 2019**

Every day is a new opportunity for both the good and the bad. We never know what is going to happen even if we have everything planned out. When we struggle we tend to forget about Jesus guiding us. –I want to share a quick story: My in-laws were facing bankruptcy and the inevitable loss of their home and my husband (who at the time was only 23 years old) was asked by his father to apply for a loan to buy my in-laws home and our home. Now my husband knew that he wouldn’t get approved so he didn’t apply. After constant phone calls with his dad and praying for guidance, my husband decided that he would apply for a mortgage and to our dismay, we was approved for a mortgage for 2 homes. –In Luke 1:52-55 Mary says: “He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty-handed”. Those words ring so true for us in that situation because, the creditors who wanted my in-laws home didn’t get what they wanted. God was merciful and showed that in EVERY situation he is walking with us and working (no matter how slow or fast) to bring his love and grace to each of us. By trusting in his word to uplift us we can give his name the praise and glory he truly deserves.

Our walk with Christ is each individual’s own journey. If we focus on Jesus, trusting in His power, things that seem impossible through the power of our amazing God have a way of working out for those who love the Lord. Not only did God sacrificed his son for us but Christ willingly sacrificed himself for us. We need to truly depend on him for all of our needs, all of our wants.

**Let us pray,** Heavenly father, we know that our struggles will always be temporary. We commit today to allow our walk with you be filled with your love and your leadership and we thank you for the opportunity to bring praise to your grace-filled name. Please continue to lead us and guide us in your righteous path. Amen.

Tiffany Park, Baker, WV

**WALKING WITH JESUS, NO WORRIES**

**John 1:6-8 December 13, 2019**

 I’ve said before that I would like to have one hakuna matata day.  You probably remember that phrase from the movie *Lion King*. In the movie, hakuna matata means no worries.  Everyday life is full of stress. The Christmas season tends to have even more worries and stresses. We desire to walk with Jesus daily but as we prepare to celebrate His birth we get distracted by the world.  We can feel extremely overwhelmed, very quickly.

      I imagine Mary felt extremely overwhelmed, very quickly when Gabrielle spoke to her.  “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” This does not seem to be a hakuna matata day for Mary.  She probably had a dozen questions yet the first question out of her mouth is, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel said, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.” (Luke 1:30-35 NRSV)

    I would like to think I would have responded in faith if I had been Mary, but I think I may have asked, say what, can you run that by me again? But Mary’s faith does not waiver. It is as if she is thinking hakuna matata. She answers Gabrielle with, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”  We can have the confident faith that Mary had to know that nothing is impossible with God no matter how overwhelmed we are. The stress of life does not have to divert us from our walk with Christ. Every day can be a hakuna matata day when we put our faith fully in Jesus.

**Prayer:** Our Heavenly Father, you know we too often stress and worry about life. Forgive us for doubting You. We know that truly all things are possible with You. Today, and throughout the year we need to have the confident faith of Mary and be found doing your will with a peaceful and loving servant’s heart.  Amen.

Carol Hall, Walker, WV