



WALKING WITH JESUS

 **West Virginia Conference**
The United Methodist Church

LENT: LAITY DEVOTIONS



**This devotional was compiled by the Laity of
The West Virginia Conference of
The United Methodist Church.**

**Please meditate on each daily reading and
Pray for God's Spirit to direct your life
In a special way during this
Season of Lent.**



**A digital version of
This devotional guide
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Website:
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NOTES

WALKING AS A GOOD NEIGHBOR

Scripture: Leviticus 19:11-18

Ash Wednesday, February 26, 2020

As I write this devotional, I am preparing for a trip to Israel. My preparations include a study of Israeli customs and social norms. There are two reasons for this. First, I want to immerse myself in the culture. With this knowledge, I hope to gain a more profound experience. The second reason is more important. I desire to be a good neighbor.

Around the world, customs and social norms become manifest in a variety of ways. However, if we look closely, the underlining purpose of these practices is the same – to foster and maintain peace by extending respect and dignity within the community.

Today's verses, Leviticus 19:11-18, contain instructions for how we are to treat each other. "You shall not steal....you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice, you shall judge your neighbor.... you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor...." Verse 18 provides the essence for these moral codes; "you shall love your neighbor as yourself...." In the Talmud, Rabbi Akiva says: "This is a fundamental principle of the Torah." - [*Torath Kohanim* 19:45] Jesus tells us that this is the second greatest commandment. – [Mark 12:31].

We cannot know all the customs and social norms of the world. So, how do we love our neighbor when our neighbor is foreign to us? The *HaKsau V'HaKabbalah* offers this advice:

"Your affection must be real, not feigned. Always treat others with respect. Always seek the best for them. Join in their pain. Greet them with friendliness. Give them the benefit of the doubt. Assist them physically. Do not consider yourself better than them."

Prayer: Gracious Father, thank you for never forsaking me. I pray that you will make me a blessing to everyone that I meet, and that they will be a blessing to me and others. Amen.

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DIRECT ME IN MY WALK

Scripture: Psalm 119: 33-40

February 27, 2020

Oh, God, Show me Your ways - Your intention for my life

When was the last time you asked for directions in your life or even on a trip? Or in a grocery store? I recently requested help in two different Sam's Club stores looking for unshelled peanuts. In store #1, a young clerk walked with me and showed me the stack. In store #2, I was told Aisle 30 and I was left to find them on my own. Which example made me feel more respected – loved as a child of God?

In this passage, the writer is asking for directions for life. Several phrases are *“Teach me”*, *“Give me understanding,”*, *“Direct me.”* I am sure I am like you, and ask God daily for direction for my life.

As I sit with this passage, I can see we have no further to go to seek direction in our life, than to look at the examples of Jesus in His life and His teachings. He shows us how to behave.

Jesus says, *“Love your neighbor”*. Jesus shows us by example. In Samaria Jesus sits with the woman at the well. He sat with her, told her about her life. An Israelite man spending time with a “fallen woman”.

Jesus went to forbidden places and talked with the lepers – and healed them. Jesus gave us an example of who we are to consider our neighbor in the example of the Good Samaritan.

I can see how Jesus shows me to follow Him. Not just in words, but in action. By His example.

Prayer: Most gracious and loving God, when I seek your direction may I remember the examples of Christ. When someone looks to me for direction, may I BE the living example as Jesus is for me. In Christ's Name. Amen

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WALKING WITH THE RISEN CHRIST

Scripture: John 20:1-18

Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020

John 20:1 Early in the morning of the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb.

Mary's shock and anguish at witnessing the brutal death of her Lord on a cross, was punctuated by her discovery of an empty tomb. She ran to Simon Peter and the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, to tell them that Jesus' body had been taken. They ran back to the tomb with Mary and discovered the folded linen cloths lying there. The disciples returned to where they were staying, but Mary remained outside the tomb, crying. Jesus stood beside her, but in her grief, she supposed him to be the gardener. It was only when he called her by her name, “Mary”, that she recognized Him.

Mary ran to the disciples a second time and was able to announce “I HAVE SEEN THE LORD!”

This past year has brought a series of “firsts”. Last Easter was the first one without our beautiful daughter, Emily. She died of the disease of opioid addiction. I survived the first weeks and months under a heavy blanket of grief. Slowly, I was able to recognize divine assurances that our daughter, released from her suffering, is whole, healed and joyful in His presence. Like Mary, at first, my indescribable loss kept me from recognizing that Jesus was and is beside me through everything. He calls me by my name and I can allow myself to be comforted. Tears still flow as I miss her so, but I am confident that death does NOT have the last word.

Jesus Christ, God's Son, willingly sacrificed Himself for us and was raised. Believing, we have life in His name forever!

Prayer: Father God, you understand all our sorrows. Help us to imagine ourselves, as your children, climbing into your hands and resting there. Heal and restore us to be joyful Jesus followers. May we be able to announce, I have seen the Lord! Amen.

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HOLY SURPRISES!

Scripture: Matthew 28:1-10

April 11, 2020

Have you ever been surprised by something in life that was very different when you saw it than the way you pictured it in your mind? That happened to me just about every day on our recent trip to the Holy Land. Some things were much smaller than I imagined, like the Jordan River. Others were much larger than I had imagined, like the stones used to build the wall around Jerusalem. My surprise was not limited to size, in many cases the places we went and the things we saw were just very different than I had seen them in my mind. I'm sure some of it is due to the influence of movies and TV shows, and some is just due to my imagination.

One day during our trip we visited a site where a tomb was located and the guides claimed that it was the one Jesus had been laid in after his crucifixion. (It's a long story, but some people say there is a different tomb site.) This tomb is in a garden and we were able to walk in and look around for a minute as part of our tour. I'm not really sure what I expected, but it was surprising to say the least to be standing in the site where Jesus had been buried.

As I read today's scripture again with the lens of having been in the garden tomb, I think of the surprise the women must have felt. Jesus' body is gone. An angel tells them "He is not here; he has risen" and they will see him in Galilee. Then they are greeted by Jesus himself! What wonderful, Holy surprises!

Prayer: Lord, thank you for Holy surprises. Too often our minds are thinking small, when you are a God of wonder. May we walk with you and find joy in unexpected ways each day. Amen

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WALK TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD

Scripture: I Corinthians 1:10-11; 16-23

February 28, 2020

At first glance I missed the point of verse 16. Paul says, "You yourselves are God's temple." He doesn't mean me, he means us. The temple he refers to is the church, and as the song says, "The church is not a building ... the church is a people." Paul speaks of his foundational work that he did on his first Corinthian visit, then he points out that others are building on that foundation. He warns that dire consequences await anyone who would seek to destroy that temple – the church, the body, the collective people of God.

My thoughts immediately turn to the possible schism threatening our denomination, but that's also missing the point. The church is not First Church Beckley; it's not the WV conference. It's not even the United Methodist Church. The Baptists down the street and the Catholics across town as well as the Pentecostals and Presbyterians; we know are all part of the "temple" – Christ's church.

Whatever happens to the organic structure of Methodism will not "destroy the temple". We all will still be the church. I am a part of that "temple" every day, and so are you, and so are our sisters and brothers in other denominations, as well as those within our denomination who may disagree with us on some issues. Changing our structure will not destroy the temple, whether the change be large or small, soothing or painful, sudden or gradual.

Whatever happens to our structure -- and even if nothing happens to our structure, we are still the body of Christ. We can disagree on minor points; we can disagree on major points; but we must all agree that God will use us to bring the knowledge of Jesus Christ to, as our pastor frequently says, "this beautiful and broken world".

As we continue this season of reflection, let us renew our determination to be part of a church that seeks to transform the world by making disciples for Jesus Christ. By so doing we continue to be a part of God's holy temple as envisioned by the Apostle Paul.

Prayer: Our loving creator, sustainer, and savior, help each of us to be part of your temple today. Give us the strength and inspiration to resist any force that would weaken our message and our mission, and help us to continue to make disciples who will transform the world. Amen

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HUMBLER BY WALKING WHERE JESUS WALKED

Scripture: Matthew 5: 38-42

February 29, 2020

In verse 41, we read about being humble and obedient. About 44 years ago while I was preparing for my first trip to the Holy Land, I imagined the places where I would experience a “spiritual high.” The places that I imagined were in Bethlehem, at the Sea of Galilee, or at the place of Calvary, however, my greatest spiritual experience came in the sub-basement of a small convent. As our group toured in silence the area of The Pavement of the Antonia Fortress, I was profoundly moved and changed. We walked reverently along the stone floor in the area where Jesus’ trial had taken place. I was able to bend down and touch the markings of the Roman soldiers gambling games. This was the area where my Lord had been flogged, beaten, spit on, and mocked for me! I was overwhelmed with the realization that He took this undeserved treatment in my place...the sacrificial lamb was going more than “the one mile.”

During Jesus’ earthly ministry, He taught His followers what to do when suffering undeserved, ill treatment. Jesus’ way demonstrates to us how we should face life with the eyes of faith and obedience. In Ephesians 1:3, we are reminded that we are equipped for spiritual warfare and delivered from the powers of darkness. This knowledge should affect our behavior in ways that correspond with our inner Christ-led life.

Prayer: Almighty God, thank you for giving so much for me. Through Your Holy Spirit fill me with strength to live a joyful, humble, and obedient life and to always shine Your light to others. Amen.

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WALKING THE VIA DOLOROSA

Scripture: Hebrews 10:-16-25

Good Friday, April 10, 2020

Walking with Jesus on this last day of his earthly, human life, I remember walking the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Sorrow. I have participated in many services, rituals, of *The Stations of the Cross* both as an Episcopalian and a Methodist. My first experience was opening night of my Cursillo (the Episcopal version of Road to Emmaus). It was after dinner and introductions when we went to the chapel for, I thought, would be an Evening Prayer Service. It wasn't. It was the Stations of the Cross: scripture and a reading about each station. After this service we retired, in silence, to our cells (we were in a monastery) for the night.

I had been overwhelmed by emotions during the readings. Never had the story of Jesus’ last walk been so powerful. Until that is, I walked the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem in April 1989. Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, walking these rough stone streets, bearing his cross, stumbling, falling, rising again and again as He willingly walks to his death. His death for me.

Women along the way wept for him. Tradition says one even reached out and wiped his face, trying to clean off the blood and sweat and tears. Others in the crowd reviled and mocked him. Where would I have been? How would I have behaved? Would I have had love and courage enough to go to him, to wipe his face? Or would I have been a part of the mob that shouted “Crucify”? Would I have stood watch on Golgotha with Mary and John?

It was not that long ago for us that we remember Mary “pondering all these things in her heart” after the visitation of the shepherds and then the Magi. Now she mourns. And so must we.

Prayer: Gracious loving God, on this most sorrowful of days, help us to mourn; to mourn our own sinful ways, and to mourn the death of your dearly beloved Son that those ways made necessary. Be with us through this darkness that joy may come in the morning. Amen.

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GOD IS OUR PROTECTION

Scripture: Psalms 118: 1-2, 14-24

Maundy Thursday, April 9, 2020

Traveling through the Holy Land was an amazing experience for me as many of the scriptures in the Bible became alive. One consistent theme that we encountered that I had not really considered was the reign of King Herod. We remember from the gospels the story of his fear of the King that was to be born in Bethlehem and the brutality that followed the birth of Christ. As we travelled we saw a couple examples of his insecurities built in stone. Herodium was an impressive fortress built on top of a hill just outside Jerusalem, but the more imposing structure was the fortress and palace at Masada. It appeared to be completely impenetrable from any side due to the natural structure of the mountain on which it was built overlooking the Dead Sea. The fortress had elaborate water systems and rooms to store food for a long siege. It also contained living quarters fit for a king. Masada was later used by a group of fighters from the Jewish rebellion which occurred a few years after Christ's ministry on earth. In order to overcome Masada the Roman army built a ramp 375 feet tall and used a battering ram to get in. In Psalms 14 we read "the Lord is my strength and defense". As Herod's fears caused him to build elaborate defensive structures we know that only God can offer a defense that is certain and can never be destroyed.

Prayer: Oh Lord we thank you for the reminders of human attempts to protect ourselves and yet we recognize that the only true safety we can find is in trusting you, Amen

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WALK AND TALK WITH JESUS

Scripture: Matthew 5:43-48

Sunday, March 1, 2020

The scriptures today come from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is telling his disciples and the crowds what is expected of them if they are going to walk in his footsteps. They would have been familiar with Leviticus 19:18 that says "love your neighbor as yourself" This teaching of Jesus goes much further. Jesus is telling us that God loves all people the righteous and the unrighteous. We are not to only walk, encourage, assist and support those who like us and agree with us - but all people. We are not to show hatred and retaliate against our enemy but rather pray for them and lift them up. How much better our walk with Jesus would be if we replaced our hatred with kindness and our name calling and ridicule with prayer.

Matthew chapter 5 finishes by saying "Be perfect, therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect." What a heavy order! We are to imitate the God we worship. We are to step out of our comfort zone. We may start with hesitant steps – showing kindness in a world where hate is shown more often. We can work together to bring healing, unification and peace to others who are badly in need of a friend. We are to strive to walk beside Jesus – imitating, glorifying, and praising him.

The lyrics of the song "***Walk and Talk with Jesus***" author anonymous help to sum up this passage of scripture:

Verse 1

I want to walk and talk with Jesus each and every day

I want my life to be an example for Him in every way

I want to treat my brothers the way that Jesus wants me to

Because He said "Do unto others as you would have them to do unto you"

Chorus

I want Him to shower me with His blessings from up above

and rock me, rock me, rock me in the cradle of love.

Verse 2; I want Him to lead me and guide me in everything I say and do

In His service I want Him to choose me and use me I do – don't you

What a wonderful Counselor, Mighty Prince of Peace is HE

And all I want each day is just a closer walk with thee.

Prayer: O Lord help me during this Lenten season as I walk and talk with you. Help me to identify the ways that I can draw nearer to you and show kindness to everyone.

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CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN

Scripture: Exodus 24:12-18

March 2, 2020

Sometimes in life we feel distracted. We have a difficult time hearing God's words that he so dearly wants us to hear. We have our careers, our families and children, time dedicated to our communities and churches, with everything that we carry we can easily get distracted and turn in a different direction than what God has planned for us. Sometimes we need to step aside from everything and climb a mountain to be God. Exodus 24: 16-18 says; "and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud. To the Israelites 'the glory of the Lord' looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. Then Moses entered the cloud as he went up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights". We have to remember to look up and see God for all the glory that he truly is. This passage from Exodus reminds us of God's covenant with his chosen and we are a part of his chosen people because we have chosen Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior but from that we have to make a covenant with God to commit to him truly and fully. We can't see God's burning flames of amazing grace unless we step back from the business in our lives to see it.

Let us pray....Lord God, we thank you for your grace filled word, we thank you for your covenant with us and for us. We pray that as we continue our walk with you that you remind to take time and simply look up to see all that you all and all that you are ready to show us. In Jesus Christ our savior we pray. Amen.

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WALK CLOSER TO GOD

Scripture: Acts 10: 34-43

April 8, 2020

Most of my life I have heard the phrase "Hear the Good News". As God continues to lead and guide me thru my daily life, I must share this story.

In December of 2019, my brother-in-law succumbed to his 5-year battle with brain cancer at the age of 52.

While we were all saddened for our loss, God quickly reminded me of John's spreading the "Good News" to everyone he encountered. It didn't matter if he were in the grocery store, pumping gas, in church, he was willing to share his walk with God to anyone who would listen.

As in Acts 10: 42 Peter writes "He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead".

In this Lenten season let your walk grow ever closer to God. Let his light shine through you.

Prayer: Dear Lord, as we gather to celebrate the Resurrection. Let us share your Good News with all we meet every day. In the name of Jesus, I pray these things.

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WALKING ON WATER

Scripture: Matthew 14:22-35

April 7, 2020

The Sea of Galilee. The disciples in a boat tossed by the waves, far from shore. Jesus walks to them on the water, and the disciples are terrified.

This is a humanly impossible place to walk with Jesus...on the water. He is God and has dominion over all creation, we do not. Yet Peter asks to walk with Jesus and it becomes a reality. When Peter's eyes were on Jesus, he walked on the water with Him. Only his fear and doubt caused him to begin to sink. Peter cries out "Lord, save me!" Jesus takes Peter by the hand and Peter continues to be able to do the impossible...walk on water.

What seemingly impossible place is God calling you to walk? "I can do all things through Him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13). The Bible tells us 365 times not to be afraid. God knows the enemy fills us with doubt and fear. When we are sinking we can cry out "Lord, save me!" Jesus can and does take us by the hand. We can join him on the water. With Jesus, the impossible can become reality.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to step out onto the water when you call. Help me to keep my eyes on you. Calm my fears and doubts. Thank you that even when I falter and sink, calling on you is my rescue. Lord, save me!! Amen

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Walking in Grace

Scripture: Romans 5:12-19

March 3, 2020

"If death ruled because of one person's failure, those who receive the multiplied grace and the gift of righteousness will even more certainly rule in life through the one person Jesus Christ." Romans 5:17, CEB

I usually don't pay much attention to the section headings in Bibles, because I know that they aren't part of the scripture and just summarize passages and separate verses into more easily understood chunks. However, the section heading right before verse 12 in my Bible struck me, reading, "Grace now rules." I must admit the first thing that popped in my head was "Grace Rules!" with the slang definition of "rules" that's more like awesome or cool.

This passage describes how the rule of death and sin was ended by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Just as the Judgement of Adam was multiplied to all of humanity, the gift of grace through Christ was multiplied and made freely available to all. Grace doesn't just rule in the sense that it's awesome and cool, it has transformed our relationship to God in a way we didn't deserve and can never earn on our own. Grace acquits us, despite the ways we fail and fall short.

Imagine how it would feel to sit in a courtroom where grace is the judge. Imagine walking out of that courtroom, gaining freedom from death and sin. Do we live as though we have been set free? Are there aspects of ourselves we have not given over to grace and forgiveness? As we walk with Jesus, may the gift of grace rule in our lives, inviting others to join us along the way.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, let us never take your grace for granted. Strengthen us to share the good news with all those who long to hear it. In your name we pray. Amen.

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WALKING BY GRACE

March 4, 2020

Scripture: Psalm 99

Psalm 99: 8 (NKJV) You answered them, O Lord our God; You were to them God—Who—Forgives,

Have you experienced the forgiving grace of our Lord? The people of the Bible are all sinners with of course the one exception Jesus the son of God. God has always been the God-Who-Forgives. No one has been able to keep the Law, we all sin and fall short of what the Law demands! If we were required to obey all the law there is no hope for any of us. When we judge other people based on the law, are we condemning ourselves? If we hold someone else accountable to the letter of the Law does that negate the grace given to us through the precious blood of the Lamb, Jesus? Are we saying to others, Jesus' Blood is not powerful enough to cover your sin? If we lack the faith to believe that the Blood of Jesus cannot cover their sin, can it cover ours?

Jesus does not expect us to live by the Law that is why Jesus came to this earth, to show us the Way, to forgive us and establish a relationship with us. In the Lord's Prayer (which are the words of Jesus) He said; "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. If we do not show mercy to our neighbor, who is a sinner, Jesus will not show mercy to us when we sin! Yes, it is easy to point out the faults of others. It is often easy to ignore my own faults, and by pointing out the faults of my neighbors I am actually saying "I am a better person than my neighbor" and that is my EGO talking. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself.

How much do we love God? Then as a believer follow His commands. Have we loved our neighbor as ourselves? Have we thrown stones at the adulteress, if so, are we bringing judgement on ourselves? My God is a God-Who-Forgives! Go and do likewise.

Prayer: O dear Lord, it is so easy to find fault in others. Help us learn to be tolerant of others and befriend others so that, we are the fragrance that attracts others to You. In the precious name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

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WALKING WITH JESUS: A LIVING WITNESS

April 6, 2020

Scripture: John 12:1-11

Lent is definitely a time to consider our walk with Jesus. Are we a living witness to His power? To His salvation? To His love? To His worthiness? In the Gospel lesson for today, Mary certainly was a living witness contrary to what Judas demonstrated in this scripture.

Jesus has returned to Bethany despite knowing the Jewish leaders were out to get him. He has come to be with his friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Dinner has been prepared and then Mary takes a jar of very expensive perfume and anoints Jesus' feet, wiping them with her hair. Mary knew that Jesus was about to endure suffering and death, so she honored Him. She witnessed to His love for all of us. She witnessed to His worthiness. She recognized her need for Him just as we do when we accept Him into our life. She is a witness to the salvation He gives us when we but just ask.

Out of gratitude she anoints the feet of Jesus; she is a witness to that gratitude. The hallmark of a Christian is gratitude and Mary demonstrates that. Mary was convicted of the life of Jesus and what it means to her and she witnessed to that. Mary is truly a living witness to the power, salvation, love, and worthiness of Jesus. Are you? Are you living as a witness to Jesus?

I remember on two different occasions having the privilege to kneel at the place marked in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem where Jesus hung on the cross. In adoration and praise I knelt at the "foot of the cross." It was a humbling experience and impressed upon me how I need to be a living witness to all that Jesus did for me.

Prayer: "Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small; love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all." From [When I Survey the Wondrous Cross](#).

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WALK HUMBLY WITH GOD

Scripture: Philippians 2:5-11

April 5, 2020

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited.”

Paul’s letter to the Philippians urges them to live in humility, to become as a slave like Christ did. True humility comes from seeing yourself in relation to God. It is essential if we want to walk with God. Scripture tells us often to walk humbly with God.

Who wants humility? A lowly or humble person meant being a slave. Everyone assumed that lowly people had no intelligence. The idea of humility seemed especially out of place in Philippi. The town obeyed the Law of Italy, which made it a rather small, self-governing town. Pride and self-importance were part of their everyday life in Paul’s day.

Paul insisted that Christians cultivate humility – but not with groveling and abject demeanor. Paul wanted the people of Philippi to have biblical humility. This is not thinking of oneself more highly than anyone else but rather acknowledging what one truly is – with all of one’s strengths and weaknesses, pluses and minuses, successes and failures. Real humility makes people so truthful that they don’t hesitate, when necessary, to tell about even their good qualities. Jesus praised the humble, the poor in spirit.

Jesus was obedient to God. Obedient so much that He died on the cross. Are you willing to be obedient to God? Do you live by humble means? Humility is not an option for us believers. It is essential. We are urged to live and love as Christ did. We are not called to love only those who are like us or only do the things we do. Christ tells us to love one another no matter what. Have the mind of Christ. Love EVERYONE, regardless of their lifestyle, socio-economic status, gender, or beliefs.

The Christian life should be a sacrifice if we are to follow Christ. Does your faith cost anything? If Christ is our example then we see that there is no cross without a crown. If we suffer with Him, we will also reign with Him!

Prayer: Lord, let me know my end and what is the measure of my days. Remind us to love everyone as Jesus taught us. Is there anything coming between me and you and our fellowship today? Give me wisdom for the day and help me remember it is not about me today but about YOU. May my life song be pleasing to you oh God. Amen

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WALKING A DIFFICULT ROAD

Scripture: Matthew 17:1-3

March 5, 2020

17 After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ²There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. ³Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

How many of us wished at some point in our lives that we could be someone else? Be transformed into a new person, someone new? I know the life I had a child, I was always wishing and praying that I was someone different. I had wished I could have lived with different parents, maybe my aunt and uncle could have raised me. I thought, as a child’s mind thinks, if I lived with them things would have been much better. Life would have been easier, simple. Food would have been in abundant supply; my aunt and uncle never beat their children, they never fought. Maybe if I was someone different, the abuse I suffered as a child wouldn’t have happened. I had even thought maybe if I didn’t cry while my father was beating me, the beatings would stop sooner. The things you want to change as a child isn’t something that you can change on your own. You need help, when I was a child, transforming myself into someone or something new would not have stopped the abuse I suffered. God was the only transforming Grace I had. Without Him my life would have been much worse than it was.

Trying to be someone other than what God had made you to be won’t work. God always had a plan for you, He set that plan in motion long before you were born. My life with my parents was set out for me when the world was made. God knew me before I was born. He knew my life and the struggles I would go through. Should I wish to change what I have been through? Should I wish that I would have had different parents? If my life would have been different maybe I wouldn’t be able to tell my story. Maybe my life was put in place to help someone who has lived the same kind of life I have. The only transformation we need to make is transforming our lives into a life lived for God.

Prayer: Dear Lord help us all to transform our lives into the lives you have laid for us. Help us to be your people living our lives for you. In Christ name we pray. Amen.

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WALKING THE NARROW PATH

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:16-21

March 6, 2020

I remember vacationing, as a younger child, at Brandywine State Park. This was a very primitive campground. Running water was by way of a hand pump and the bathrooms were literally outhouses. The only bathing facility was the lake. When I wanted a drink of water, I had to follow a path to the hand pump. During the day this wasn't a problem, but at night without a flashlight, the path was hard to find and even more difficult to remain on. Walking with Jesus illuminates our paths. His light shines brightly even in darkness of our lives. His light will help us find the path and help keep us safely on the path.

Peter tells us that the disciples weren't spouting a tale or spinning a yarn regarding the power and the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. For Peter, James, and John were eyewitnesses to Jesus's majesty. Peter was on the sacred mountain when Jesus was transfigured. Peter, James, and John heard God speak from heaven, telling them that "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased".

Peter tells us that the words of the prophets are made more clearly and certain. And when we are in dark places, remember the words of the prophets are like a lamp shining in the darkness. Peter tells us that man did not create prophesy on his own, but rather man recorded Gods words as the prophets were led by God.

So, while walking with Jesus, know that you are walking with the Light and in the light. When we stray and find ourselves in darkness, let us remember the words of the prophets and return to Jesus's side and walk in the light.

Prayer: God, keep me safe in the light. But, when I veer into the dark paths, allow me to remember the words of the prophets and Peter, and return to Jesus's side and walk in the light. Amen

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WALKING AND TRUSTING

Scripture: Psalm 31:9-16

April 4, 2020

As I read and re-read this passage in Psalms I began to think of the Palestinians we met while on the Walking with Jesus Tour. Our guide, Joseph and the bus driver Robert are both Palestinian Christians. As we traveled they taught us the history of the area and where Jesus Walked, we also learned of the Palestinian people. Much like the writer of this Psalm the Palestinian's have endured gossip, sufferings, suppression and false hoods that continue today. Yet they still have trust in the Lord that one day their suffering and suppression will end. Psalm 31, ¹⁴"But me? I trust you, Lord! I affirm, "You are my God." ^{15a} My future is in your hands.

I too can relate to the Psalms writer and even the Palestinians, as I have suffered from being told I that I would fail or that I didn't belong in a particular high school class. That I would not be accepted into a school, since it was felt my desire for that school and profession was not real. All of these affected me by producing doubt in the direction that I felt I was being led. But I had to trust in God that he had a plan for me. Psalm 31, ¹⁵ My future is in your hands. Don't hand me over to my enemies, to all who are out to get me!

Since first being told, in high school not to take a class and not being accepted to a school. I have attended and graduated from three different professional schools in my 51 years since high school. Because I trusted in the Lord, allowing the plan that had been layout for me by God.

It may be difficult to not be heard or accepted at the time but trust in God he has a plan!

Prayer: My father in heaven there are times in my life that may be hard for me to accept but I trust that you are with me and will lift me up. Psalm 31, ¹⁶ Shine your face on your servant; save me by your faithful love! Amen.

Grace and Peace

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WHERE AM I IN THIS PATH?

Scripture: Isaiah 50: 4-9

April 3, 2020

The Cost of Discipleship
Righteous Suffering
The Suffering Servant
Servant Leadership.

All of these are key words as I sought understanding of this passage. The key participant has accepted The Lord's leading; *"a well instructed tongue to know the word that sustains the weary"*. The participant listens, and accepts tortuous behavior without running away. He accepts the task. He knows that God will sustain him.

Where am I in this path? Where are you?

I have accepted responsibilities that make me shake my head and say "what were you thinking?" All because I think, with God's help, I can make a difference. There are times when I feel overwhelmed. Times when I have to make difficult decisions about doing something for my own pleasure or following through with my responsibility. Jesus faced many of these same hard choices.

Each of us are part of a larger community. We are part of a local church, a charge, a parish, a District and an annual conference (for us, the West Virginia Annual Conference). We are called to seek God's counsel in pain filled discussions leading to sometimes painful decisions.

This passage asks us to listen, to open our ears, to accept some pain. As I read over many versions of this passage, I was reminded we have two ears and one mouth, making listening more important than speaking. Accepting some pain along the way may be part of the process. If God is for me, who can be against me?

Prayer: Most gracious and loving God, we live in uncomfortable times. We are being asked to make some uncomfortable choices into decisions. May I make my life reflect my decision to be a follower of Christ. In Jesus name. Amen

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ANGELS GUARD OUR STEPS

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11

March 7, 2020

"Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him." Matthew 4:11 (NIV)

It's Christmas Day, perhaps an odd time to be writing a Lenten devotion. But we as United Methodists have just completed an Advent season emphasizing the Angels of Christmas: their messages of strange news, of encouragement, and of great joy. They had appeared to and spoken to Zechariah, to Mary, to Joseph, and to the shepherds in the fields. And they had been near the place where the small family rested until it was safe for them to travel.

This passage in Matthew takes place about 30 years later, immediately after the baptism of Jesus, at the beginning of his ministry. After 40 days spent fasting and praying in the wilderness, Jesus was probably as weak and as in need of care as that new born baby in the manger. This time instead of his mother and earthly father to take care of his physical needs, it was angels who came to minister to him. They came from God for this purpose, but weren't they actually there all along? I like to believe they were and are always nearby. Even as the devil challenged Jesus to call on them for protection, they waited until Jesus had defeated the devil at his plan.

I like to think that those same angels who watched over Christ, continue to watch over his followers. As we walk each day with Jesus, He and his angels guard our steps. A friend has a sign hanging near her work station that reads: "Guardian angels are real, but sometimes they don't have wings and go by the name friends." As Christians, we are called to walk with Christ and to minister to others, just as the angels attended Him. Too many people we encounter daily are broken, lost or grieving. Imagine a world where we hold to Jesus with one hand, and reach out to others with our other hand.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Thank you for the angels who walk among us. They may not be dressed in glowing white or have wings, but we remember that Paul wrote some had entertained angels without knowing. May we be angels to those in need as we seek to walk with Christ each day. Amen.

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RIGHTEOUS BY WALKING WITH JESUS

Scripture: Romans 5: 12-19

March 8, 2020

Romans 5:19 “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”

Jesus defeated Satan because He was God. Phil, 2:5 tells us to have the mind of Christ and explains that Jesus was equal with God. This was the position that Satan desired and will never obtain. Jesus moved in love to become a servant to buy our salvation. He became “obedient unto death” for us.

We can’t just blame Adam for our sins. Satan wants us to follow the sin path. Sin is a trespass and intrusion of self-will into the sphere of divine authority. We easily let sin weaken our resolve to follow God. Hopefully not in a major way, but a “small sin” damages our soul, our witness, and our love of God. When we sin, we cannot trust ourselves, we need to be filled with God’s word and know his promises. If we know for sure that God has a plan for our lives, we can trust Him to direct us.

The Bible teaches of God’s plan for Satan also. Isaiah 14:16 speaks of the world looking at Satan one day and asking, “Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who did shake the kingdoms?” Compared to us, Satan is a giant. But he is not a match for the power of God! He has a set time and a limited amount of power.

Prayer: Dear Father, Make us aware, new each day, of the great price you paid and the great power you offer. Amen.

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DIRECTION IN OUR JOURNEY

Scripture: Matthew 21:1-11

April 2, 2020

This past summer I attended the West Virginia’s annual conference at WV Wesleyan in Buckhannon for the first time. I had no idea what to expect or what I would be doing. On the first night the youth delegates met together and got to know each other. We quickly became friends because of our faith and our desire to worship and serve God. We had Bible study and shared our thoughts and concerns. We prayed together and grew as brothers and sisters in Christ. I participated in the anointing service and came forward to express my calling to serve my local church. Even though I didn’t know where I was going that weekend, God showed me a bigger picture of His church. Back home, our church has a small congregation that cares about God and each other. My mother is the teacher of our one room Sunday School, and I help her with the elementary aged students. I recently confirmed my faith before our congregation, so my journey with Christ is just beginning.

Any time you are on a trip, it helps to know where you are going and have the directions. However, when you are walking with God, you may not know where he wants you to end up. Sister Monica Joan, a character in one of my favorite television series Call the Midwife, once asked “what if God hasn’t shown you all that he intends?” As a teenager, I certainly don’t know yet everything God wants me to do or where He wants me to go. For now, I know He wants me to care about the children in our church and support the older members with friendship and affection. As I grow up, I pray I continue to be open to God’s direction. I want to go where He sends me. In this time of Lent, we can all pray for direction in our journey and, just like Sister Monica Joan, wait for all that God intends for us.

PRAYER: Dear God, help us to be open for your calling wherever you want us to go. Give us courage and peace to follow you. Let us be ready to say, “Here I am, Lord.”

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A WALK WITH A FRIEND

Scripture: Proverbs 18:24

April 1, 2020

One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

John 15:9-14

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friend if you do what I command.

I can think of few more joyous and refreshing activities than walking through the woods on a warm afternoon with a true friend – a friend with whom I can share my most intimate thoughts and feelings, who will share the burdens of life and make them bearable, who knows my greatest joys and fears, who knows when I need silence and when I need a word of encouragement, in whom I have absolute faith, and for whom I desire to give my all.

Amazingly, I have such a friend, and He has by laying down his life given for me, and all who believe in him and follow his commands, the Greatest Love! Jesus is our friend who sticks closer than a brother! He has shown us his Father’s love, and He makes our joy complete if we will follow his commands by loving each other as He loves us!

During this Lenten season, I hope you take the time to enjoy a quiet walk with our Closest Friend, Jesus Christ, and share His Father’s love which He first shared with us.

Prayer: God, thank you for your love and the gift of your Son, Jesus. Thank you for sending Jesus to guide us as a true friend. In His name I pray. Amen.

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WALKING IN THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

March 9, 2020

Scripture: Genesis 2:15-17

15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it. **16** And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, **17** but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat^d of it you shall surely die.”

Several years ago I found myself standing in the doorway of a small fresh produce market in Jericho. Others from my tour group were in an adjoining shop considering pottery, native garb or carved pieces of olive wood to carry home as keepsakes. I, on the other hand, had longingly eyed several open air produce markets from my window seat on our tour bus. From the very first sighting, I wanted a closer look at the beautiful produce I had seen on display.

I entered the small shop with the awe of a child on Christmas morning. Boxes stacked high with fruits and vegetables. Heads of cabbage and cauliflower larger than basketballs, beans, broccoli, corn, tomatoes and grapefruit the size of cantaloupes! Oh the glorious, mouthwatering smells!

I could not read the signs. I did not recognize any of the labels as similar to those we see in our grocery stores indicating from which country the product originated. I could, however, read the prices. When I asked the shopkeeper how they were able to import such a variety of fresh foods at such reasonable prices he smiled his toothy grin and said “My friend, we do not import. It is from here we grow it! All from Israel!”

More than half of Israel’s territory is classified as true desert or near desert. Israeli farmers and agriculturalists have made reclaiming the soil, innovative water management and developing new and sustainable ways to grow food a priority. As a result, Israel is not only agriculturally self-sustaining, they have also developed a very lucrative produce export industry. Additionally, Israeli agriculturist share their gleaned knowledge with farmers and agriculturists from all over the world. In essence, Israel, which is slightly more than 1/3 the size of West Virginia, is feeding their population of over 8.5 million people from food grown on a land mass equivalent to less than one sixth of West Virginia with plenty left over to share.

This evening, as I write, there are people, some right here in the town where I live, settling down for the night with a growl in their bellies they cannot quiet. In many places in this world there are people alive tonight who will not be alive when I wake in the morning only for lack of a sip of clean water and a bite of nutritious food. Tomorrow will be the same. We have the knowledge to change this. Men and women with a God inspired drive to solve our world’s hunger problems are willing to share what they’ve learned and yet, every day we find reasons to hinder their progress... economics, greed, tribalism, denial, apathy...

God has blessed us with curiosity, wonder and an ache to learn and discover. God has scattered far and wide answers to questions we have not yet thought to ask. How things work. How things break. How things hurt. How things heal. How things grow. How things die. The gifts of Curiosity and Knowledge were not the fruit of that tree in the garden. Understanding how knowledge can be used to do good or to inflict harm was the fruit chosen that day.

Prayer: Loving God, we understand the fruit was picked and the bite consumed long ago. We thank you for the gift of your Son who has rescued us from certain death and has delivered us to life eternal with you. Empower us, we pray, through your Holy Spirit, with the wisdom to see clearly the opportunities placed before us every day to choose good. Teach us we pray to recognize and shun evil. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

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A WALK WITH JESUS

March 10, 2020

Scripture: Genesis 3:1-7

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

²The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

⁴"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵"For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

⁸Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

¹⁰He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

I have never made a trip to the Holy Land, but I think my life has been a journey of faith. We read in today's scripture how Satan tempted Adam and Eve (who were both in the same place) and changed this journey forever. We are touched by the intimacy of their relationship with God's newly created world and all that was in it. Their walks with God in the cool of the evening show their intimacy with God Himself. All of that changed with just a bite of forbidden fruit.

Notice I said changed not ended for we can all walk with God in the cool of the evening wherever we find ourselves. Our relationship with all of God's creation can be a relationship built on our caring for God's beautiful world.

Even in the had times, the dark times, the bad times filled with grief and pain just a few quite moments can change our journey of fear into a journey of hope. Yes, it is true that we live under the curse of Adam and Eve, but we also walk in the footprints of a God who carries us when the way gets too hard.

During this time of Lent, let us look forward to the days ahead and prepare ourselves for the next stage of the journey knowing that God's love for us and the sacrifice His Son made for us will get us through. Walk each day in the knowledge that He walks with us and cares with us always.

Prayer: Dear loving God, in this time of preparation, prepare our hearts to serve you better. Prepare each of us to walk closer with You. Thank you for the gift of Your Son and the sacrifice He made for us. Prepare us for the walk we take with you daily. Amen

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THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

March 31, 2020

Scripture: Hebrews 9:11-15

Hebrews 9:12.... But by His own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

While I was in Jerusalem, I toured the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, that was located at the site of the cross and tomb of Jesus. My heart was prompted by the Holy Spirit to thank the merciful God that had planned from eternity past to remit the sin of the world by sacrificing Jesus Christ on the cross. At the Church an acolyte explained that where the cross stood was a hole near the altar. Under the hole was a jagged rent in a rock caused by the crucifixion of Jesus; and tradition has it that the blood of Christ dripped down through the rock to the cave below where the blood fell into the grave of Adam.

Through the New Testament the salvation that is presented to us through Jesus Christ is explained in terms of the shedding of His blood; because the death of Christ is an expiatory sacrifice; once for all and by this one offering there remained no more offering for sin. The shedding of His blood is the pouring out the life of Christ which redeems us from our sin. The blood of Christ has flowed and salvation is provided and paid for.

Now is the day of salvation! Will you in this moment turn away from every alluring voice that would keep you from your salvation and come to the Savior that His blood can avail for you and cleanse you from all your sin?

Prayer: I turn to Jesus Christ and accept the gift of saving faith given to me when I was given new life by the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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WE HONOR JESUS BY WALKING WITH HIM!

Scripture: Isaiah 49:1-7

March 30, 2020

*“Nevertheless, the Lord will grant me justice; my reward is with my God. ...Moreover, I’m **honored** in the Lord’s eyes; my God has become my strength.”* (Isaiah 49:4b, 5b CEB)

Sometimes I forget that I am privileged to live the life I do. I get so caught up in the trappings of this life that I fail to be truly thankful for all of the wonders God gives me. For instance, driving and owning a car are a privilege; having a well-equipped home is a privilege; having a computer, cell phone and internet are a privilege.

Here’s a wild thought: serving our Lord is a privilege.

I know that sometimes I look on my work for God as a burden and drudgery, especially when I’m so tired mentally and physically because of feeling that what I’m doing is not making a difference. But then Isaiah reminds me that **EVERYTHING I do in my calling to serve and walk with Jesus Christ is an honor**! We need to remember this when God’s work goes long and hard. God will grant justice; if not in the here and now, then in the time of final redemption.

During this Lenten season, while we are called to introspection and repentance, let’s remember that our reward is with God; he is our strength. So let’s attend worship like it’s a privilege. Let’s be the light of Jesus Christ to a dark world like it’s an honor. Let’s be the people called by God to serve even before we were born, knowing that this honors us in the Lord’s eyes, and especially honors God to all we serve!

Prayer: God of justice and strength, help us to be thankful for all of the privileges you give us, especially for the honor of serving you. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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PRAYING SILENTLY AS I WALK WITH JESUS

Scripture: Matthew 6:5-6

March 11, 2020

⁵ “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Those who know me are well aware of my aversion to praying non-communal prayers publicly. (For the record, I enthusiastically share in reciting the Lord’s Prayer each week in church.) I have a deep appreciation for good pray-ers in the same manner as I do for good cooks; I am a grateful eater of home cooking, but I am not so much of a cook myself! My avoidance of public prayer is a bit incongruous as I enjoy public speaking and I am not a shy person. Though I have done it on occasion, spontaneous public praying is simply not part of my DNA. A few years ago, when I took on a leadership role in the UMC, I spoke to the Bishop about my prayer phobia and he reminded me that God accepts all of us and not to despair. He then shared the story of a person, much like me, who, when asked to pray in a public forum, became so flustered she could not remember how to end her prayer and concluded with “good-bye” instead of the more traditional “Amen”. Undoubtedly, she and I are kindred souls!

I believe that the message of Matthew 6:5-6 is that we should pray with sincerity to the primary recipient, our Lord. If you are praying for the right reasons, then you can speak privately to God rather than catering to the masses in order to establish your devoutness! If you only want the accolades achieved from praying to an assembly, then that is all you will receive. It is the genuineness of the prayer and not the number of listeners that pleases God. An audience of the One is just fine. While I confess that I do take some solace that Matthew provides support for my private prayers, this is not a criticism of those who are gifted at praying before a larger group. God exalts those who honestly: pray out loud on any occasion, write beautiful poetic prayers, can only utter a sigh, and, like me, offer private, conversational, often inarticulate, ramblings! This Lenten season pray in the manner that is authentic for you.

Prayer: God, prayer is personal, and you know that not all of us can pray spontaneously in public. You listen to us through any means we are able to connect with you. Please help us to always be sincere in our communication. Amen

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WALKING FOR A PURPOSE

Scripture: Matthew 6:16-21

March 12, 2020

We were encouraged to write toward the theme, ‘Walking with Jesus.’ I was excited about the prospect because of my love for walking. It was an activity I enjoyed with my father and today an activity I enjoy with family and friends. I walk for exercise and to bask in the beauty of God’s creation. In some of my solo walks, Jesus has walked with me and has revealed complete messages that have been shared with my Church and with the Edgewood Summit retirement community.

I recalled that Jesus was always walking somewhere. Although I am sure he acquired some health benefits through his walking, I believe his walking had greater purpose as he pursued his mission to teach and serve.

In the scripture reading, it speaks about where we should place our treasures. William Barclay shared a story regarding the early church in Rome which cared for the sick and distressed. Believing the Church was full of treasures, the Romans sat out to loot the treasures. Upon arrival and finding none, they inquired where the treasures were. The Church prefect pointed out the widows and orphans who were being fed, the sick who were being nursed and the poor whose needs were being supplied. “These,” he said, “are the treasures of the Church.” What we keep, we lose, and what we spend, we have.

I am blessed to be at a downtown Church which tends to our homeless neighbors on three Fridays each month with fellowship, food, worship and prayer. We cannot meet all the needs, but it is a recognition of our treasures. If thieves broke into our Church, it would be sad, but it would not change who we are. If we stopped caring for the poor, it would be a tragedy.

Prayer: Precious Lord take my hand. Lead me on to the places I need to be. Open our eyes to the treasures all around us. Amen.

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WALK IN THE LIGHT

Scripture: John 11:1-45

March 29, 2020

“Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.” John 11:9-10

At the 2018 WV United Methodist Conference each church was presented with a Unity Globe Candle. The lights connect and inspire us. We have a visible reminder that Jesus Christ is the Light of the world, our loving Savior in whom we trust and with whom we walk.

In this amazing story of Lazarus, Martha and Mary sent word to Jesus that their brother was sick. Jesus deeply loved this family, but he waited. When he felt it was time to go to them, the disciples tried to talk him out of it. They had nearly been stoned in that area! Jesus reminded his disciples that they would not stumble walking with him. He had already told them “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12). Thomas -- yes, the “doubter”, now courageous, although a bit pessimistic – said “Let us go, that we may die with him.” So the disciples walked with Jesus, not sure of what would happen, but trusting in the light for the journey.

Their walk with Jesus was full of wonders. They heard Martha declare her faith: “*Yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.*” They marveled at Mary’s trust, and felt Jesus’ compassion as he wept with her. The disciples heard Jesus give thanks to his Father, trusting what was to come. Then they witnessed one of Jesus’ greatest miracles as Lazarus walked from the tomb. God’s glory was brilliant.

We can be confident like the disciples, knowing that walking with Jesus gives us light to keep us from stumbling. What wonders will we witness? No matter what may lie in the path of our journey, we will see the glory of God! Let us strive to walk faithfully with Jesus. Let us thank our Father and share the light so that others may believe. When we see our unity globe candle at church, let us know that we all walk together with Jesus! What a gift!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your gifts in Jesus, the Light and Love that we cherish. Please always guide us as we walk in your light, to see your glory, and to share your love in the name of Jesus. In His name, Amen.

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PAUSE TO THINK ALONG THE WAY

Scripture: Romans 8:6-11

March 28, 2020

When I look around my apartment, I see things like a Keurig, an air-fryer, toaster oven, a refrigerator that has food in it, a television, furniture, etc. I even have a nice bed to sleep in. I am blessed to have these things. There are folks that don't have those things. Folks who are less fortunate than us that are looking for a warm place to stay for the night because sleeping under the bridge would be too cold. Hungry children sleeping on the floor or on a mattress on the floor, because addiction has taken over the lives of their parent(s).

This passage should give us all a "cause to pause." What would Christ think about the life you are living? What would Christ say today about your spending habits? Pause, because everyday life as we know it is really the good life. Pause, because we have been blessed to have had jobs that allow us to have some of the finer things in life. Pause, because we take care of ourselves and don't look beyond our own "needs."

Pause, because what we perceive as a need is really just something we want out of selfishness.

In this season of Lent, some perceive that we should "give up something." I challenge each and every one of you to pause before you buy the next thing you "need." Is it something you really "need" or is it a "want?" If it is a true need buy it. If it is a want not something you really need find a box or a jar, even a baggie and put the amount of that "want" inside. Do this for the remainder of the Lent or better yet, the remainder of the year. Then donate the money to church, the food pantry, one of the missions in our Conference, UMCOR, buy Christmas presents for a less fortunate family or children on a giving tree.

Prayer: Gracious God, You give us all "Cause to Pause." Help us to live into the Spirit of Christ, Your Spirit, by exemplifying Christ-like behaviors and not selfish behaviors. Amen

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WALKING WITH JESUS IN JOY

Scripture: Psalm 32

March 13, 2020

Greetings my fellow travelers. We have completed about a third of our Lenten journey to date, and as I sit and watch the snow fall outside my window, I am most thankful for those who have written before and after me.

My commentary tells me that Psalm 32 is about "the joy of forgiveness". As I made this my reading of choice for several weeks, I realized that no matter how good I think I may be; I am still a sinner saved by grace. Unworthy – until I realize that I can be happy because my transgressions are forgiven, and my sin has been covered. I have joy. Why – because I acknowledge my transgression (sin) and ask for forgiveness. I am to be faithful and offer prayer in my weakness and You will hide me. I am to keep my eye on Him. He will instruct me. I am to be steadfast in my love of Him and His Word. I will rejoice and know the joy of His salvation. He forgave me. I count it joy to tell others of Him.

Prayer: Dear Lord, every day of my life is a journey with You. I will take time to think, pray, and study Your Word. Guide my steps and keep me mindful that today offers an opportunity to tell the story of You to those who do not yet know You. Let me celebrate the blessing of joy you have brought by Your life. Amen.

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THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF SHADOWS

March 14, 2020

Scripture: Matthew 4:8-11 ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Away from me Satan! How many times have we said that? I know I’ve said it many times. It seems that no matter what I do Satan is always lurking around. As Christians we pray, read our Bibles and listen to God for guidance. But no matter what we do Satan always seems to show up. I remember one time when I was young, there was a kid who would always pick on me. Growing up poor I’m sure I wasn’t always clean, and I probably didn’t smell very good. But no matter what I did she would always pick on me. It was to the point I didn’t think I could take it anymore. When things were just about as bad as they could get between us. My parents came to me in the middle of the night, gave me my box and said, “Pack, it’s time to go.” My problem was solved. We were moving to a new town, a new school, new kids, and maybe even new friends. My parents had gotten divorced things were looking up. I started going to church, life was better. Then guess who showed up in my class, the same girl who always picked on me. Of all places to move, she came to the same town my dad moved me and my mom. How could this be, I’m back in the same spot I was before. I was going to be picked on all over again. But now things were different I have things a little better, I had clean clothes, we had utilities so I could wash up before school, but what mattered most I had God. She could try to pick on me if she wanted to, but it wasn’t going to work. I had made friends. I was someone now. That’s how God see’s us. We are someone, we are important, we are His children.

Get away from me, Satan I am God’s. No matter how hard things get just say “Get away from me, Satan”. He must listen to us because we belong to God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father help us each day to realize we are your children, protected by you. Give us the courage to say “Get away Satan”. In Your name we pray. Amen.

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CLIMBING MT. SINAI

March 27, 2020

Scripture: Psalm 130

“My soul waits for the Lord, more than those who watch for the morning...” (Psalm 130:6)

Psalm 130 is one of my favorite Psalms for many reasons, but one of them is the image of waiting through the night in anticipation. Think of the times you have done this. Sometimes you aren’t sleeping because it is your responsibility to stay awake, perhaps for work or because you are helping someone. Sometimes you aren’t sleeping because of the excitement that you know the next day holds. Sometimes you are worrying, or your mind is “racing” with thoughts.

I remember waking in the dark the morning of my wedding. It was too early to get up (and I needed my beauty sleep!) but I could not go back to sleep. I waited until the morning sun shone through the window. Another long night of waiting with anticipation was when I went into labor with our first child just after midnight. I stayed at home through the night before we went to the hospital. There is a special peace in the dark of night when you know something big is happening!

There is also a time when waiting for morning is not peaceful or comfortable. I can remember many nights when I’ve been backpacking waiting in the darkness for the morning. For a start, a sleeping bag on the ground isn’t plush, but then there are those noises...a chipmunk? A skunk? A bear?! Or there are the times when I’ve been up with a sick child or spouse. It means listening for breathing or coughing or checking for fever. Somehow, the darkness makes all fears bigger.

In October, we traveled with the bishop to the Holy Land and Egypt. One of the highlights for me was climbing to the top of Mt. Sinai during the night. We left around 1 a.m. and arrived at the top at 4:15 a.m., about an hour before the first light of dawn began to show. Sitting in the early morning darkness at a place of holy mystery was an amazing experience. I contemplated waiting on the Lord.

“Out of the depths, I have cried to thee...Oh, Lord, hear my voice. With my whole heart I want to praise thee. Oh, Lord, Hear my voice.” Psalm 130:1

The stillness of the night. The immensity of history. The closeness of God’s presence. All these thoughts occupied my mind as we sat. And then, the sun began to rise, and the darkness was pierced. The majesty and glory of God was so close.

We wait through the night with a Lord who is interested only in sharing our waiting. We wait in the darkness of Lent with promises of peace, of resurrection, and of the comfort of the Spirit. We wait.

PRAYER: My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning. Out of the depths, we cry to you, O Lord, knowing that you hear our voice. With our whole hearts, let us praise you. Thank you for overlooking the many times we falter and let you down. Wait with us and reveal to us your promises. AMEN.

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WALKING WITH JESUS

March 26, 2020

Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1–14

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ²He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." ⁴Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. ⁵Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord." ⁷So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. ⁹Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." ¹⁰I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. ¹¹Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' ¹²Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act," says the Lord.

*The foot bone's connected to the leg bone.
The leg bone's connected to the knee bone.
The knee bone's connected to the thigh bone.
The thigh bone's connected to the back bone.
The back bone's connected to the neck bone.
The neck bone's connected to the head bone.
Now hear the Word of the Lord!*

Given the opportunity to attend youth camps, youth retreats, and church camps, we usually sang this song either outside around a fire or indoors. While indoors, we would stand and direct attention to the parts of the body during the singing. The song would be sung with tempo and much excitement, and for those already familiar, it was a delight.

Now years later and after study of the scripture, there's the interpretation of the prophet's message, which I must admit, was unknown during my youth; but I did understand the Hope.

Now what was understood by singing the verses is an appreciation of the power to give life and to revive life by our Lord. Now, when reading these scriptures, I sense the power of the spirit and the trust that all things are possible by trusting our Lord.

Them bones gonna rise again! I know it, know it! Indeed, I know it, brother. I know it, WHEEE! Them bones gonna rise again!

Prayer: Through Lent, may our witness demonstrate the power of love and hope of our Risen Savior. Thanks be to God. AMEN.

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WAITING WITH GOD

March 15, 2020

Scripture: Exodus 17:1-7

This passage is an important reminder to God's people that it is easy to focus on our physical condition to the exclusion of the plan of God. We want to see before us exactly how our provision and deliverance will take place, but sometimes, God asks us to wait and trust Him. The Israelites had witnessed many miracles since the beginning of Exodus, and yet they immediately doubted when they could not see a way forward. They failed to trust that God would meet their needs and see His plan through to completion. Often, when circumstances seem insurmountable, we doubt God's faithfulness and His ability to deliver us. Most often this is because we assume that we will be God's instruments to bring these plans about; we are really trusting in our own abilities. This passage demonstrated that God can, and does, bring about deliverance in ways that we never would have expected or thought possible. God, who is Lord over all, can bring water from a rock. He can also bring life from death. For Christ's followers, it must have seemed hopeless on the day of His death. Certainly, they could not have seen a way forward after the crucifixion, but God could and had already planned to bring deliverance. God unexpectedly brought the greatest good from the worst tragedy. The son of God died so that sin might be atoned for, and He was raised so that His followers might be as well. Life comes from death. Forgiveness comes from the one being sacrificed, the ultimate triumph from the greatest tragedy, all proving that God, who is over all creation, has the power to bring salvation in His timing through seemingly unfathomable circumstances.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Help us to remember that there is no circumstance so great that it can circumvent your plans. When we can't see the way through our circumstance help let us turn to you in faith, trusting that you know the solution and in proper course it will be made known to us. Amen.

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THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE

Scripture: Psalm 95

March 16, 2020

“...let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise...” Hebrews 13:15 (NIV)

During the season of Lent, or at any time in our lives, it is appropriate that we respond to the call to praise God (Ps. 95:1-7) and the call to align our hearts genuinely with our words of praise (Ps. 95:8-11); thus, living our lives in loving obedience to our Lord God.

There are helpful reminders within Psalm 95, incomplete though the list is, of WHO GOD IS, that we should praise him in both private and corporate worship:

- § the Creator of all (in Hebrew - Elohim)
- § King of kings, Lord of lords (1 Timothy 6:15)
- § Most High God/Sovereign (in Hebrew - El Elyon - Genesis 14:18; Luke 1:76)
- § Almighty (in Hebrew - El Shaddai)
- § Rock of our Salvation (Savior/Deliverer/Redeemer - Luke 2:11; John 4:42)
- § Shepherd (in Hebrew - Rohi - Psalm 23; John 10:14; Hebrews 13:20)

I am grateful to lyricists and vocalists, whose work enhances praise efforts. I offer some samples, though I'm certain each reader may already have favorites.

§ “Age to age you're still the same, By the power of the name. El Shaddai, Erkam Ka, na adonai (Online information says Erkam Ka is a blend of Hebrew and Aramaic that would be Eracham cha in Hebrew.) Phrase translates in English, “I love thee, O Lord, my strength.” My favorite is Amy Grant's rendition of *El Shaddai* penned by M. J. Card and J. W. Thompson.

§ From Rich Mullins, both lyricist and vocalist of *Awesome God*: “I hope that you have not Too quickly forgotten that Our God is an awesome God...He reigns from heaven above With wisdom, power and love. Our God is an awesome God.”

§ And there's lyricist and vocalist, Hezekiah Walker's *Every Praise*. You will be able to find the flash mob interpretation on You Tube.

As we move through this Lenten season, may we find ourselves remembering the abundant life our Lord provides us, regardless of our earthly circumstances and renew our living in praise to Him daily.

Prayer: Almighty God, quicken our hearts that we will live in praise and loving obedience to You.

Thank you in the holy Name of Jesus. Amen.

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THE PRICELESS VALUE OF KNOWING CHRIST

Scripture: Phil 3:4-14

March 25, 2020

4 Though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if other have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even made! 5 I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin-a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. 6 I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault. 7 I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. 8 Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of know Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ 9 and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ*For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. 10 I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, 11 so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead! 12I don't mean to sat that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection from which Christ Jesus first possessed me. 13 No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it,* but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what ahead, 14 I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God,

Not a day goes by that we don't face questions about our faith. Our commitment to you is challenged by decisions we must make and by societal pressures with which we must deal. Fill us anew with steadfast hope, that we may deepen our resolve to respond to your call with trust. Thank you for your faithfulness to us, even when we fail to be faithful to you. Renew our covenant with you this day as we offer to give ourselves fully to you this year. Deepen our commitment to you and increase our interest in your Word and Knowing You. Increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we obtain what you promise, make us love what you command. You have given us the Spirit you promised to help us witness to Jesus. Inspire us afresh to proclaim Jesus as Lord and to share with others the good news that Jesus is Savior; that all who hear us may trust in your grace and receive new life; in Jesus' name we pray. Amen

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PRAYER FOR GOD'S PRESENCE WITH EACH STEP

Scripture: Psalm 126

March 24, 2020

The young boy was playing a war game on his iPhone as we waited, among many other strangers, for a table at a local restaurant. Since I didn't know him, I politely tried to avoid staring too long over his shoulder. But I couldn't help noticing how well this young "general" mastered the simulated battles. His side won every time with a celebratory "Victory!" banner appearing on the screen, and with winning points piling up. I wanted to ask him, "Who are they? What happens now? Where are their families? Will they be reunited and survive?"

I couldn't help pondering what this skilled young warrior will eventually encounter in real life as he grows older. As he matures, will he learn the actual consequences of war? Will he understand that after the victory, there are other challenges? In spite of the victorious tallied points - families can become separated and devastated. Neglected land and environment will need tending. And our young man might ask, where is God in all of this? Has God been with us all along, waiting to help us restore?

Psalm 126 celebrates victory over oppression, but cries out to God for restoration now that the battle has been won and the exiles are back in their homeland -- their stark, scarred homeland. They pray for restoration of abundance, restoration of soil for planting. And though they tearfully plant, they anticipate God's help in a successful harvest.

Can our young war gamesman know that God will be with him in all his real world battles? Can he know that God will be there as he sows and as he reaps?

Prayer: Dear Lord, watch over our young people as they take on battles yet unseen, unimagined. Stay with them through the strife and through the aftermath. Let them feel your presence in each step they take. Amen.

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PEACE WITH GOD

Scripture: Roman 5:1-11

March 17, 2020

"Therefore, since we have been made righteous through His faithfulness combined with our faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Vs. 1 - CEB

Do you ever feel overwhelmed with all the trials and troubles in your life? I am sure that at some point in all our lives we have experienced this. Recently I have been in this situation myself. After experiencing a fall which left me unable to take care of myself, I had to depend on others. Not only that, but I could not do all the things I wanted or needed to do and driving was one of them. To add to my problems was another more serious. My middle son was hospitalized in Tennessee with many health issues.

Being virtually house bound, I had much time to reflect on many things. The most important was that I certainly had time to pray (not too busy or forgetful). This time in prayer, I am sure helped make the situation much more bearable, and through this prayer time God gave me the reassurance that He is in control I do not need to spend time worrying. Do we sometimes experience a renewed sense of who we are and whose we are in such times as these? I have no doubt that we do.

Prayer: Dear Lord, when we put into perspective that Jesus died for us that we might live for Him that says it all. I truly believe that only in God through Jesus Christ can we know a peace even in trials that passes understanding. May it be so!! Amen.

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WOULD I HAVE FOLLOWED JESUS?

Scripture: John 4:5-42

March 18, 2020

As I read the New Testament accounts of Jesus' interactions with The Twelve and his other followers I am sometimes envious. If only I had lived 2,000 years ago! It would have been exciting to have heard Jesus deliver the Sermon on the Mount and to eat a portion of the loaves and fishes he miraculously multiplied! Maybe I could even have made it on the list we're given in Luke 8 of some women who travelled with Jesus!

But I remember reading decades ago Kenneth Roberts's novel *Oliver Wiswell*. The book is historical fiction set in the time of the American Revolution and told from the perspective of a British officer. As I read, I thought: Was it a certainty that had I lived at the time of the Revolution I would have sympathized with the Colonists? Or would I have interpreted Paul's statement to the church in Rome (Romans 13:1) "The powers that be are ordained of God" as requiring me to side with the Tories against my own family, those ancestors I now celebrate and honor because they had, in my opinion, the good judgment to assist in the struggle for independence?

Would I have followed Jesus during his earthly life or would I have supported enthusiastically the religious leaders of the day in opposing him?

As I slowly read chapter 4 of John's gospel I noticed something I hadn't observed before in verses 40 and 41. "When the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And **because of his words** many more became believers.(NIV)" Rather than envying the Samaritans who got to hear Jesus's message from Jesus himself I began to feel gratitude that I have access to printed copies of the Bible in which I can read and re-read the recorded words of Jesus as often as I like. Rather than relying on memory that can fade or become unreliable or carrying around a piece of papyrus, a container of ink, and a pen or brush (no convenient ball-point pen or smart phone!) to make my personal record of his teaching, I can simply open a copy of the book available at stores in the country and read these ancient words. May they have the power in the lives of the people of today (and me) as they did in the lives of the Samaritans!

Prayer: Dear Lord, we have no way of knowing if we would have followed You while You were here as a physical person. We are Your followers here and now. Give us strength to carry out the mission of making disciples for the kingdom. Amen.

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LIVING WATER FOR WALKING AND WORKING IN THE DESERT

Scripture: Isaiah 43:16-21

March 23, 2020

It is a late August early September morning, temperatures hover around 95°(F) at 7:00AM and will rise from 110° to greater than 115° by midday. Even in this heat, work is performed wearing thick pants, long-sleeved shirts, and gloves which protect one's flesh from becoming 'baked' in the desert sun. Bandanas are worn over the face in an attempt to prevent inhaling the fine dust which constantly swirls. Ten-minute hydration breaks are required after 50-minutes of exposure. Thus, a brief glimpse of work in a Middle Eastern desert.

Was ancient Palestine this hot and arid; did Jesus work and minister, at times, under these weather conditions? Perhaps, Scripture indicates that our Lord did face harsh physical, hardships; hunger, pain, even death on the cross.

But our Lord also taught us that even more destructive than physical hardship and harsh weather is the spiritual damage wrought by sin, specifically our personal sin, which can potentially be eternally fatal. Idolatry, pride, arrogance, lust, and greed leave our souls "baked" under its deceptively withering glare. As a consequence, our attitude and response toward others (and God) may often be insensitive, impatient, less kind, less gentle, less loving and more self-serving.

Isaiah wrote: *'...for I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people.
The people whom I formed
for myself
so that they may declare my praise'*

Jesus clearly demonstrated that God fulfills His promises. Jesus made time to seek God, to pray and talk with His Father (Our Father) and to tarry in His presence at every opportunity. God bathed Jesus with His 'Living Water' of Love and Grace, such that Jesus withstood every physical, emotional, and spiritual hardship, (again) even death on the cross.

God will do no less for us. He will rehydrate/ refresh our soul with His 'Living Water' by giving us His Peace, His Guidance, His Wisdom; when we take time in our busy lives, to tarry but a few minutes with Him. By His Grace our sins will be forgiven and His Will be done, and we will 'declare our praise for Him'.

Prayer: Lord, give us the 'living water' to refresh our soul so we can continually praise Your Holy Name! Amen.

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WE DO NOT WALK ALONE

Scripture: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

March 22, 2020

1 Samuel 16:7 (from *The Message*) – “But God told Samuel, ‘Looks aren’t everything. Don’t be impressed with his looks and stature. I’ve already eliminated him. God judges persons differently than humans do. Men and women look at the face; God looks into the heart.’”

* * *

We are now deep into the Lenten Season and it’s the perfect time to reflect on our personal spiritual journeys. At first glance, however, I struggled to connect this particular scripture passage with my Lenten journey. After re-reading the text and thinking a bit more, several themes emerged.

In general, I like to “be in control,” as I am sure many others do as well. I like to have a plan and know what direction I’m heading. I also like routines and processes. Too much unanticipated change too quickly upsets my rhythm. But, as we see in this passage, God is truly the one always in control. While there is comfort in understanding that God is in control, my personal journey requires a reminder from time-to-time, and often these reminders appear when I least expect them.

Here, when David is anointed King, it comes as a surprise. They expected a different son to be anointed, but the Lord selected David, and it’s a reminder that God is in control.

Society often tries to persuade us of what is good or best, such as having money and material possessions, being beautiful or handsome and slender, or following the latest trend on social media because it is popular. This text illustrates that those societal images are surface-level only. They focus on outward appearances, but God looks into the heart. Traveling through this Lenten journey, another gentle reminder has appeared, and it is two-fold: look closer and see what is in someone’s heart, and look at your own heart and examine what is there.

And there it is... A simple summary of a Lenten journey found in this short passage – to remember that God is in control and to look at the heart. I get it now. Discover where God is leading by diving into the heart of the matter, by considering what is in someone’s heart, and by exploring my own heart.

A final reminder unveiled recently was stated perfectly by John Wesley many years ago: “Best of all, God is with us.” Indeed, as we walk our spiritual and Lenten journeys we do not walk alone as God is always with us.

Prayer: Loving and gracious God, thank you for gentle nudges that you provide throughout our journeys. Thank you for being in control, and thank you for guiding us to do your work. And, most of all, thank you for always being with us as we travel through both good days and bad days alike. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

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GET YOUR DAILY WALK IN WITH JESUS

Scripture: John 9:1-41

March 19, 2020

“While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” –John 9:5 (NIV)

A little more than a year ago, I was told I needed glasses in order to help my vision and stop the headaches I was experiencing. At the time, I was not very keen on the idea. I had gone the previous 27.5 years of my life without glasses, so why now?

If I don’t have my glasses to help aid my astigmatism, then I struggle to see things clearly on my phone and computer. When I received my glasses, I didn’t realize what a tough time I was having seeing things clearly.

Jesus introduces—at the beginning of chapter 8—the idea of being the light of life as part of his “I Am” statements throughout the book of “John. He continues to spread this idea into chapter 9. Much like my inability to see clearly without my glasses, it is tough for us to focus on the light of the world if we don’t go on a daily walk with Jesus each and every day.

One of my goals at the beginning of the year was to be more of an encourager in everything I do. Whether it means sending a text or an email to a friend I know is struggling or helping someone in the community, I was to be more of an assist to those around me regardless of the situation.

With so much darkness in the world, it is easy for us to fall into this trap of darkness as well. As I’m challenging myself to be more of a positive influence, not just this Lenten season, but every day, I invite you to be more of a light for Christ in a world full of darkness. And remember to get your daily walk with Jesus in.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, as we continue to walk with You, show us ways to encourage those around us to become disciples so Your kingdom will continue to grow. Amen.

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WALKING IN THE LIGHT

Scripture: Ephesians 5:8-14 (CEB):

March 20, 2020

“You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord, so live your life as children of light. Light produces fruit that consists of every sort of goodness, justice, and truth. Therefore, test everything to see what’s pleasing to the Lord, and don’t participate in the unfruitful actions of darkness. Instead, you should reveal the truth about them. It’s embarrassing to even talk about what certain persons do in secret. But everything exposed to the light is revealed by the light. Everything that is revealed by the light is light.

Therefore, it says,

Wake up sleeper!

Get up from the dead,

and Christ will shine on you.”

Throughout the season of Lent, we are reminded of the sacrifice Jesus made for us, his children. A common Lenten practice is to “give up” something throughout the 40-day period. This passage from Ephesians is another reminder to us to act as Jesus would want us to. A reminder to act in ways that are just and truth-seeking. This Lenten season, take a look at any habits or actions you have that may have a negative impact. Consider “giving up” these habits and try forming a new one that allows more light into your life. As disciples, our purpose in this world is to be Christ’s light and to go out and create more disciples. Bringing people closer to Jesus and helping them along their journey with Christ brings an abundance of light to the earth. As Ephesians says, wake up from your sleep! Be the light that shines brightly alongside Jesus Christ to bring more disciples into His kingdom.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we are so thankful to be your disciples and to be able to spread Your word. This world is a dark place, Lord. Guide us through these troubling times in order to spread your goodness and grace. Help us this Lenten season to shine brightly for You and to create more disciples. In Your holy name we pray, Amen

Grace and peace,

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FOR THOU ART WITH ME!

Scripture: Psalm 23

March 21, 2020

Psalm 23.... *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.*

If I were to ask, “What is your favorite chapter in the Bible?” most of you would say, “Psalm 23.” There is something beautiful about it. I wonder if we have ever really stopped to think about what makes it so beautiful.

Picture a shepherd guiding his sheep along a path. The path our Shepherd guides us is the path of righteousness - the right path to God. Jesus walked a perfectly righteous path for thirty-three years. He never took a single spiritual misstep. He did FOR us what God expects FROM us. Through faith in Him and what He did, God credits US with walking that perfect path. When I see what He was willing to do for me, it makes me want to try harder to follow the right path. I want to live like He lived. I want to love like He loves. I want to serve like He served. I want to walk with Jesus. And when I do, it brings glory to His name because people know I am one of His sheep. He guides me in paths of righteousness for HIS name’s sake. When you are going through those dark valleys - whether it is the valley of temptation, loss, sadness or sickness - turn and look to your Shepherd. His rod and His staff will comfort you because you know that He is risen from the dead and He is more powerful. Even when you walk through the darkest valley - the valley of the shadow of death - you will fear no evil. He will be with you. And He will guide you through that valley right into the Paradise He has prepared for you. He will anoint your head with oil. There your cup will overflow. You will have more than you could ever need. Most importantly, you will have His goodness and His love as your constant companions for eternity. Because you will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Prayer: Gracious God, strengthen and keep us in your amazing grace through hard times. Help us this Lenten season to trust you with faithful confidence through prayer, time and reflection upon scripture as we walk with You. In Jesus name, Amen.

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