



2022 Lenten Devotions



Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

It's here – March 2nd, Ash Wednesday, and so our Lenten journey begins. I hope you remembered to use up your eggs, sugar, and butter on Shrove Tuesday in preparation for this time of reflection and confession. If you aren't familiar with Shrove Tuesday, look it up and share with a friend – it makes for interesting conversation as you connect with another!

Forty-eight laity from the WV Conference have once again provided thoughtful and meaningful devotionals to walk alongside us through the Lenten season. Individuals, Sunday School classes, book study groups, families, and entire churches are invited to read and reflect using these daily devotionals throughout Lent in preparation for Christ's crucifixion and, ultimately, resurrection.

I am confident you will find these devotionals Spirit-inspired and Spirit-filled. Won't you invite others to enjoy them, as well?

I am deeply grateful for each reader and writer, and I pray your Lenten journey is truly transformative. I wish you abundant blessings throughout the Lenten season!

Kristi Wilkerson
Conference Lay Leader

Ash Wednesday – March 2, 2022

Time to Return

Joel 2:12-17

The prophet Joel shared these words of admonishment in Chapter 2, verse 12:

*“But even now,” says the Lord, “**repent** sincerely and return to me with fasting and weeping and mourning.” (Good News Bible) [Emphasis added.]*

The word “repent” was a frightening term to me as a child. It was often used as a loud proclamation during the sermons of television and movie fire and brimstone preachers, and it always reminded me of the bad things that I had done. (For example, punching my mom’s rising bread just to see what would happen, putting our 9-passenger station wagon in reverse on a hill to see how the engine would respond, losing our family aluminum ice chest at a school function.... the list goes on.).

Now, in my 60s and at a different stage of life, the words of Joel are less threatening. In exploring other biblical interpretations, such as *The Common English Bible*, I have a better grasp of the message conveyed by Joel:

*“Yet even now,” says the LORD, “**return** to me with all your hearts, with fasting, with weeping, and with sorrow.”*

“Repent” has taken on a new meaning as I have pivoted from the fears of a young girl to an understanding that God seeks our “return” out of love. Lent is an opportunity to reflect and fast from those things that obscure our relationship with God.

Just as my parents forgave me for my youthful indiscretions (the flattened bread, damaged transmission, and lost cooler, etc.), God forgives us and welcomes us with open arms. Let this be our season to return.

***Prayer:** Lord, you are merciful and compassionate, slow to anger and filled with unfailing love. You allow us to return to you when we, through the foibles of our humanness, separate ourselves from your side. Thank you for your grace. AMEN.*

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March 3, 2022

Are We Alone?
[2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10](#)

²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us;

Recently I heard a radio program about UFOs (“unidentified flying objects,” more recently referred to as “unidentified aerial phenomenon”). A caller asked the radio speaker why he believes there is a fascination by the public with the idea of extraterrestrial life.

I admit. Sometimes watching a meteorite plunge towards earth during the annual Geminid or Perseid “meteor showers” has left me wondering, briefly, whether I was seeing a UFO.

My strongest connection to a meteorite-or-UFO came via a great uncle. Around 1930 my great-uncle Vinceon was plowing a field when he felt the plow blade hit something and heard a sound of metal striking metal. The plow blade had hit an unusually heavy rock that seemed to be made out of metal. He was curious and dragged it back to his barn. Over the years he used it many times as an anvil. Around 1968 Uncle Vinceon was reading John Deere's magazine *The Furrow* when he noticed a description of a meteorite. He contacted the author, Glenn Huss, who later visited him and confirmed that, yes, Uncle Vinceon's unusual rock/foundation stone/anvil was a meteorite.

The results were the scientific description of the unusual “rock” and its sale for enough money to pay for a remodeling project in my uncle's nearby farmhouse. The meteorite is officially known to astronomers as the Landes Meteor for its place of discovery. (The August 2011 issue of *Wonderful West Virginia* contained an article on the meteorite.)

The radio speaker suggested that our culture's concern with meteorites or UFOs might be deeper than scientific or monetary. It might be due to a sense of loneliness, a deeply seated belief or fear that in this universe of perhaps 100 quintillion stars, we are the only form of intelligent life.

In the past two years many of us have experienced an unanticipated form of isolation. We've been prevented from visiting out-of-state family members and restricted from participation in worship and other Christian activities in ways we never expected.

Yet even if the radio host is right, or almost right, that we as humans are alone in the created universe, we are not alone. We are given several glorious titles in today's passage.

We are: Christ's ambassador; God's co-workers; servants of God. God, the Creator of the Universe, exists and has given us specific tasks to represent Himself to others of His Creation on this planet. What a glorious, responsible task!

Prayer: *Creator of the Universe, we are awestruck that in a universe the size of your creation, you care about us individually and have specific tasks for each of us. In this season of Lent and beyond, help us experience the reality of our connection to you. In the name of your Son, we pray. Amen.*

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March 3, 2022

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Friday, March 4, 2022

Fasting...For the Right Reasons?

[Isaiah 58:1-12](#)

In the beginning of our text, God's people were questioning God.

*"Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?
(Isaiah 58:3a).*

The answer comes very readily. When you do these things that are in your own interest and not acceptable to God, you do not see the will of God. The prophet let them know that the "fast" God desired was in the genuine concern of others, not the ritual of the law.

Jesus used the same words from Isaiah 58:6-7 in Matthew 25:35-36.

³⁵" for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."

These words are often used as part of our mission statements in our churches. The prophet Isaiah assures the people that if they fasted for the right reasons, they would be rewarded, as did Jesus in His teachings in Matthew 25 as He promises eternal life.

The people in this passage of Isaiah were fasting in the wrong spirit and for the wrong reasons. Whether it is in fasting, worshipping, or in our prayer lives, do we sometimes find ourselves going through the same rituals -- depending on our own power and not on the power of the Holy Spirit?

During this Lenten season, we need to seek God's guidance to live as Jesus proclaimed in Matthew 25 (Read [Matthew 25:31-46](#)).

May we worship Him in the right spirit and for the right reasons so that we may experience the promise of eternal life.

***Prayer:** Christ Jesus, You desire us to work for Your kingdom here on Earth. Help us to allow the Holy Spirit to direct us as we worship during this Lenten season. May we be Your hands and feet in all we do and say. Amen.*

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Saturday, March 5, 2022

Stay Connected

[Psalm 51:1-17](#)

¹ *Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.*
² *Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.*

The past two years have really emphasized that we all long for human connection. We want to connect with the people we love. We want to spend time with each other. We want to get coffee together and eat meals together and play sports together and worship in church together.

We are made for community with each other and with God. We feel that sharply when something disrupts our community, our connection. The past two years that disruption has been a virus, something outside of our control.

This passage of scripture is a prayer from David to God when David realized that he had lost connection with God. This loss of connection was not from something outside of David's control, but rather it came from the decisions that David made. David lost connection with God, and his choices damaged the lives of many people. This Psalm is part of David's steps to find that connection again. Repentance and trust in the abundant mercy of God are steps in our daily walk with God that keep us connected to Him.

During this season of Lent, we reflect on the hope that we have because of God's abundant mercy. We acknowledge that we often lose that connection with Him, but He is unwilling to let us go. His steadfast love for us is so strong that Jesus came to us and gave himself for us, so that we might know His mercy and love, so that we might be connected to Him and to each other.

As we continue to walk an uncertain path forward, let us stay connected. Stay connected to God. Stay connected to His love and mercy. Stay connected to each other through that love which holds us fast.

Prayer: *Lord, we thank you that even when we stumble and fall, your mercy and love are a tether keeping us connected to you. Help us to stay connected to you and to each other through this journey. Amen.*

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Assigned Supply Pastor (Lay)

First Sunday of Lent - March 6, 2022

Three Effective Tools

[Luke 4:1-13](#)

“Submit yourselves, then to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7 - NIV)

As we examine our hearts during this 2022 season of Lent, we humbly, with contrite hearts, identify our sins, which might include: a loose tongue of gossip and dishonoring God; a domineering attitude toward others, rather than love and compassion; lust; lying; cheating; gluttony; not honoring our parents, nor teaching our children of Jesus, the Savior and Lord. This list is far from comprehensive.

Are there “tools” available to strengthen us to the point of successful resistance to the devil, no matter how attractive the temptation appears to be?

Today’s Lenten Scripture details Jesus’s experience of being tempted by the devil and successful resistance, as does Matthew 4:1-11 and as briefly noted in Hebrews 4:15.

Our Lord Jesus was tempted to feed his physical body weakened by 40 days of fasting; to take a short cut to world dominion by dodging God’s will and avoiding the cross and death; and to test God’s faithfulness. As noted above, we seek what the devil presents as pleasurable satisfaction for our physical and emotional being; avoiding suffering; feeling superior to others; and our desire to be on an equal (or higher than) footing with God.

So, what are these “tools” Jesus used...and are these “tools” available to us*?

- (1) We note the Holy Spirit had come to Jesus at his baptism. (Luke 3:21; Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:9)
The Holy Spirit comes to us. (John 14:16-17; Acts 1:4) The question for us is whether we listen to the Spirit and obey.
- (2) We note Jesus speaking God’s word of truth recorded in Scripture to the devil, counteracting the three temptations:
“...man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” (Deuteronomy 8:3 - NIV)
“Fear the Lord your God, serve him only...” (Deuteronomy 6:13a - NIV)
“Do not put the Lord your God to the test...” (Deuteronomy 6:16 - NIV)
Psalm 119:11 - NIV mentors us with “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” Ephesians 6:17 - NIV encourages us to “Take ...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”
The question for us is whether we are willing to commit time to learning God’s word.
- (3) “Jesus said to the devil, ‘Away from me, Satan! ...’”(Matthew 4:10 - NIV) The devil did leave Jesus.

When we are tempted, we can say, “Get away from me, Satan, in Jesus’s Name!” The questions for us are whether we want to resist the devil and whether we believe and trust Jesus, as Lord. There is ample evidence that these “tools” provided us are effective. During this season of Lent and beyond, may we commit anew to resisting temptations.

Prayer: *Awesome God, thank you for redeeming us and providing us your Spirit, your word, and connection to you through Jesus, that we may be successful in resisting whatever the devil offers. Shepherd us to resist evil and live to glorify you. In the matchless Name of Jesus, Amen.*

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Monday, March 7, 2022

Connect with The Father in Secret

[Matthew 6:1-6](#)

“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. .² “So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.^[a]

My Country Doctor Dad taught the importance of “keeping a confidence.” Making house calls with Doc in homes up and down the Buckhannon River valley gave me a chance to learn that lesson well.

The Hippocratic Oath that physicians subscribe to says:

“...Whatever I see or hear in the lives of my patients, whether in connection with my professional practice or not, which ought not to be spoken of outside, I will keep secret, as considering all such things to be private...”

Jesus, the Great Physician, teaches the same lesson learned. When the needy receive care, give and treat in secret. Do not let the left hand know what the right hand does. The reward for giving in secret will come from God the Father.

Likewise, country doctoring involved house calls in the middle of the night.

One Easter in my youth, Dad told us he had not slept through the night in his and Mom’s bed from Thanksgiving to Easter. Sometimes there was a baby to deliver; sometimes pneumonia to treat; sometimes a wound to dress. Dad made the point to say he grew closer to God praying earnestly and continually in the middle of those secret nighttime prayer vigils. My sisters and I slept securely and warmly in our beds also covered by prayer.

We have a connection to God who heals, Jehovah-Rapha; who supplies our needs, El Shaddai; and who provides, Jehovah-Jireh. God answers and rewards our prayers as we pray in secret. The rewards are abundant, worthy of a mighty God we serve.

Prayer: *Father God, today I connect with you praying in secret. I bow my head hallowing Thy Name. Our Father who is unseen but omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent, hear my prayer. Thy will be done. Amen.*

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March 8, 2022

Lord's Prayer

[Matthew 6:7-15](#)

⁹ *Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven hallowed be your name.*

¹⁰ *Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

¹¹ *Give us this day our daily bread.*^[a]

¹² *And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

¹³ *And do not bring us to the time of trial,*^[b] *but rescue us from the evil one.*^[c]

Jesus was teaching the Disciples when they asked him how that they should pray. He responded with what we call today “The Lord’s Prayer.”

He also reminded them that they should forgive anyone who trespassed against them. And if they did, then God would forgive them.

Other words than trespass can be used in the Lord’s Prayer: sin and debts are examples. Scripture presents sins as lawbreaking, shortcoming, rebellion, pollution (dirt) and missing one’s target. The Lord’s Prayer views it as unpaid debts and miss the point. Jesus’s thought is we owe God total, tireless loyalty—zealous love every day. When Archbishop Ussher prayed “Lord forgive most of all my sins of omission,” he showed a true sense of spiritual reality.

Today when we forgive anyone who trespasses against us then we are also forgiven by God. This builds a bridge between us and the person we forgave. It helps us to build a bridge that connects us with God and Jesus in heaven.

We must also learn to resist the temptation to criticize others who have done wrong to us, for this is not the way that God the Father wants us to react to each other. The greatest commandment is for us to Love each other as we love God and ourselves. When we do what Jesus taught us, it helps to build a bridge to God. And this helps us to do as God wants us to do.

Prayer is our bridge to God and the way we connect to him. This is our salvation to come from God. And God will answer our prayers when he feels the time is right.

God wants us to love one another and to love him as part of a divine plan that God has laid in front of us. He wants all his children to come to him. And together we can go to him if we just forgive each other.

Prayer: Father God, we learn from you and your teaching every day. We ask you to guide us in the ways you wish us to continue. We ask for your forgiveness for any trespasses we commit. Amen.

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Wednesday, March 9, 2022

What is Your Motivation?

[Matthew 6:16-18](#)

¹⁶ “And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”^[a]

Like many of you, I grew up a fan of Indiana Jones and his adventures. In my favorite movie of that series, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Indy is trying to find the Holy Grail. One of the many things standing in the way of his success is a group of loyal protectors who have sworn their lives to protect the grail. One of them asks Indy, “Why do you seek the grail? Is it for your glory or for Christ’s?”

The scripture for today from Matthew’s gospel asks us a similar question. Why do we do the things we believe to be pleasing to Christ?

What is our motivation? Are we doing these things to impress others by how “pious” we are? The scripture promotes fasting in a way that is not evident to others – put oil on your hair and wash your face. To go about unkempt during fasting would certainly bring attention, probably many questions of “what’s wrong?” from friends and family members; however, drawing attention to self, or creating drama, should not be the goal.

The pure motivation is a desire for a closer connection and relationship with our Heavenly Father, and scripture here says that He sees these efforts and will reward us.

***Prayer:** Heavenly Father, we adore you, and we confess that our motives have not always been pure. Some have been selfish, some of our worship efforts have been only habits, but we desire to glorify you through honest worship. Thank you for your desire to fellowship with us and please strengthen that desire in us. In the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.*

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March 10, 2022

What Do You Treasure?

[Matthew 6:19-21](#)

¹⁹ Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Lent is a poignant time in the church calendar. We are called to reflect daily and intently on our finite nature. It is a time for repentance and reflection on our frailty.

During Lent, we are called to the disciplines of fasting, almsgiving, and prayer. Our ability, and often inability, to live out these disciplines helps us understand what we truly value.

At the beginning of Lent, we eagerly set goals for ourselves, and then progressively they become harder and harder to uphold. It becomes increasingly easier to rationalize breaking our fast or giving less. Sometimes, we even come up with spiritual justifications for doing so.

Forty days is a relatively short period of time, and yet, it seems increasingly long when we are in the midst of Lent. It seems this way because, without realizing it, we have placed more value on earthly treasures than we would like to admit. We find even trivial enjoyments difficult to give up after a few days. Even though we know that the things of this world provide a limited amount of pleasure, we talk ourselves into settling for the instant gratification they provide, but this is the beauty of Lent that humbles us.

Lent should feel like dying to self. Lent helps to reveal the inner workings of our heart so that we can repent and draw close to Christ. It is a time when we learn what earthly treasures impede us from “storing up” heavenly ones.

We are called to follow Christ, who came and suffered and gave all for us, yet we struggle with temporary discomfort and sacrifice. The season of Lent helps us to reflect on this, and it softens our hardened hearts until, in humility, we draw closer to Christ.

Thankfully, because of Christ and His work on the cross, there is hope and forgiveness for us. Christ walks with us and before us and sanctifies us, and as a result, we are more and more able to set aside earthly things for the true treasure Christ offers and that which awaits in Heaven.

***Prayer:** Heavenly Father, during this season of Lent, help us to realize the times when we fail to set aside earthly things. Help us to come closer to You and recognize that our true treasure is a relationship with You. Knowing You provides far greater and lasting joy than any earthly possession. Amen.*

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March 11, 2022

What Powers Your Light?

[Matthew 6:22-24](#)

²² “Your eye is like a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is filled with light. ²³ But when your eye is unhealthy, your whole body is filled with darkness. And if the light you think you have is actually darkness, how deep that darkness is!

Maybe you're like me and prone to random, annoying eye problems. No? Well, fill in your own recurring annoyance, and think with me how that feels.

When my eyes are irritated, sore, or otherwise unhealthy, it affects my whole body, my whole outlook, and usually, my whole day. I feel sluggish and tired, achy and disconnected, and nothing is seen quite clearly.

In our scripture passage today, Matthew tells us that it's similar with our whole body. A healthy eye provides light for the body like a lamp, but an unhealthy eye fills the body with darkness.

So how do we see with healthy eyes? I believe that's when we let God's light be that which fills us and see as He sees. Like 1 Samuel 16:7 tells us, the Lord does not see as we see.

God sees such value in those who have been overlooked, discounted, and viewed as less than. God sees where we can connect at points of commonality, instead of focusing on boundaries and divisions. God sees something beautiful and precious in all of His creations.

Matthew continues with a warning that just thinking you're filled with light is not enough. It's an even deeper darkness than that seen with an unhealthy eye. What I heard in these verses is that in order to ensure that our light is healthy, we have to continually examine and engage in our relationship with God and with others.

Is our light powered by desires to get more, have more, and be more? Or are we connected to God's light that calls us to give more, serve more, and love more? Let us pray.

***Prayer:** Heavenly Father, help us to stay connected to you so that the light that we shine is a projection of your love. Help us to remain vigilant against the darkness that sometimes comes disguised as light. May your light from within illumine our paths to your side, and help others to find their way to you. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

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March 12, 2022

Don't Worry; Be Happy

[Matthew 6:25-34](#)

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

The order not to fear may be one of the most reiterated commands in Scripture, but it is probably the least obeyed.

Don't Worry Be Happy by Bobby McFerrin comes to mind. His “don't worry, be happy” philosophy -- give no mind to tomorrow and do what feels good today -- refers to instant gratification. But what Jesus wants us to do is to turn our worries over wealth and the material things in life toward reliance on God.

Verse 24 helps me gain a better perspective to the “Do Not Worry” passage. In the NIV it reads, *“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”*

What if the warning here is the replacement of one master with another? Shouldn't the declaration that wealth is not lord but Jesus Christ is Lord be made?

Isn't the goal recognizing who governs the cosmos? That the one who created the grass, lilies, and birds would one day be pierced to renew them.

Shouldn't we align ourselves with those who are working toward the day when all creation sings in perfect harmony the creator's praise?

Who is in control? Jesus is inviting us into God's realm where priorities are straight. If we are committed to wealth, we will worry. However, we should be operating out of God's vision for us doing God's work, leaving us with no room or need for worry. God is in control.

We are not alone. God sees, hears, and cares about us and our situations. Don't worry, be happy because God is in control.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help us to realign our minds and hearts to make you our priority over material things and wealth. Help us to remember that you are in control and through you nothing is impossible. Amen.*

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Second Sunday in Lent - March 13, 2022

Trust God and Find your Connections

[Psalm 27](#)

¹³ I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

¹⁴ Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

When I think of this passage, I think of the past few years. I was so confident in the work that I was doing at Spring Heights Camp and Retreat Center and in the church that I attend. I was so confident and secure that I didn't feel that doing anything else was needed or that I could better my work. Then everything changed; COVID came, and I did not get to have camp. Churches were shutting down, and we all were stuck at home.

After two years and a rough summer, I knew that this all must have happened for a reason. I felt that I could be doing more. In the middle of COVID, the church that I attend developed a youth program with the help of my mom and support of the pastor and church members. Before this we had 4 youth in the church, 3 were my kids and nephew. Now our youth program has an average of 20 kids each week. It was a risk, but with prayer and trusting the Lord and ignoring the foes, it has been great.

I also knew that I could not have another summer like 2020, so with lots of conversation with my supervisor and support from the Conference and churches, we decided to expand our DaySpring Mobile Camp. This was a risky move; this was something that I kept hearing the enemies and the negatives on why this should not happen.

But over all the other voices, I heard God saying, "I remain confident of this, trust me, and let me guide you." That is what we did; we trusted the Lord, and it was a success. It was a success because not only did I feel that I had purpose again, but it was also so much bigger. I saw campers, volunteers, and staff grow in faith. I was able to connect with 30 churches and show that sometimes reaching out and taking a different path is the path God provides.

Trust God and follow him; he knows the way. Connecting in ways that you never thought and going with it is putting your trust in the Lord. Make him your connection point and go down his path.

***Prayer:** Dear heavenly Father, You are my sufficiency and strength, my light and my life - my all in all. I pray that when dark clouds of unknowing loom across my heart that I immediately call to mind the wonderful truth of who You really are, and of the wonderful security and eternal salvation I have in Christ, in whose name I pray, Amen.*

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March 14, 2022

Call Out to God
[Psalm 91: 1-2; 9-16](#)

¹ *You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,^[a]
² will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.”*

He will call on me, and I will answer him.

Don't know about you, but I struggle with the literal words of these verses. God is really going to keep me safe? I've had numerous broken bones yet only near misses squishing snakes. I've managed to avoid lions, although I think it's best to chalk that up to “location, location, location.”

Maybe some think I wasn't living right when I broke bones, but I was when I avoided snakes? Sorry, I don't buy that. I've seen too many dedicated, thoughtful Christians suffer, and I ask, why? I've never once considered they were “deserving” of their misfortune.

What *do* I believe? I believe what I have personally experienced through God's gracious and merciful loving arms. I've endured, as we all have, periods of darkness. Even when my faith was weak, I never lost the belief that if I just trust **Him**, things will work themselves out, eventually. Will they work the way I want, the way I pray? Maybe; more likely not. Despite my brimming self-assurance that I alone know what's best for me, is it possible God knows better?

Many people simply aren't wired to allow someone (or something) else to be in charge of their lives. We revel in our misfortune. We wear our injustices as a badge of honor. Often, misery becomes our best friend.

I believe it takes great strength to call out to God, to turn oneself completely, fully and totally over to God and allow Him to be our strength, particularly when we can't see our way out of darkness. On the other hand, why wouldn't God want me to be happy or have peace even in the midst of terrible tragedy? Why wouldn't God want a wonderful future for me, even if it is not the future I think I want?

Step 1: God – HELP! Step 2: Refocus my eyes to see the blessings that I might otherwise overlook in my darkness. Step 3: Repeat.

There is release in letting God take over, and there is peace in His answer, like resting in a cool shadow on a hot day. God is *my* refuge; He never has and never will fail me, although sometimes I simply wish He'd be quicker and more obvious with His response . . .

Prayer: *God, thanks for being there. Thanks for listening. Thanks for answering. Amen.*

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March 15, 2022

Joy
[Psalm 126](#)

¹The Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those that dream. ²Then our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, “The Lord has done great things for them”. ³The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. ⁴Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Neg’eb. ⁵May those who sow in tears, reap with shouts of joy. ⁶Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come back home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

The seventh song of Ascents. Ascents were the short songs that were likely sung by the pilgrims on their way to the temple on Mount Zion for feast celebrations.

This is a song of joy beyond expression when the Lord brought back the captives of Zion. God set the people free of captivity. It was fulfillment of a joyful dream.

It seemed too good to be true. We imagine the words from the mouths of the pilgrims as they describe the goodness and power of God in bringing them from captivity of Zion. Their mouths were filled with laughter. The promise of restoration was known, but the actual moment was overwhelming. It was vivid, and they sang for joy. They celebrated the great things God had done for them:

- Joy of salvation.
- Joy of scriptures returned.
- Joy of Christian fellowship.
- Joy of network for God.

Persons from other nations saw what had been done and gave credit to the great giver of all good. A plan for God to continue the restoration of transforming sadness to joy recognizes that more needs to be done. Restoration had only begun.

***Prayer:** Lord, in your mercy, through your power, you have set us free to find joy beyond expression to live our daily lives as your servants. Amen.*

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March 16, 2022

The Lord's Servant

[Isaiah 42:1-9](#)

*42¹ Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.
² He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street;*

When Isaiah received these words from God, things were not going well for the nation of Israel. For centuries, God had shown mercy on them, as they made their way in the wilderness to the land of Canaan, established a nation, built a temple, and experienced both military victory and defeat. They may have wandered from their covenant with God, but their prophets were always there to point out the error of their ways.

But this time, things were different. God had allowed Israel to be conquered by the Babylonians, their temple destroyed, their goods plundered, and their freedom replaced by chains of bondage in a foreign land. They must have wondered how this could happen. Had God, after all this time of allowing them to stray and then be lead back to righteousness, abandoned them?

Into this scene of sorrow speaks Isaiah, with words of assurance! Isaiah poetically reminds the people of who God is, the Ultimate Creator! God will send them a Servant, and not just to them, but to all peoples! This Servant will not come to conquer by the force of destruction, but with the power of the Spirit of the Lord, to bring justice to all the earth.

During these weeks of the Lenten season, we try to take time out of our busy lives to draw closer to Jesus and to ponder the words of scripture as we prepare for the celebration of Easter or Resurrection Sunday. So many passages in the Old Testament testify to the coming of Christ, being the Light of the World through the nation of Israel.

As Christians, we believe that Isaiah is foretelling the Good News of Jesus Christ for all nations, a Savior for everyone, regardless of who we are in the world. All that is required of us is to let Jesus into our hearts, to be our light, and to let that light shine in us, so that we may help others dispel the darkness of the world.

***Prayer:** Dear God, we come to you with a grateful heart, thanking you for all you do and all you are, for being our light and our guide through your son Jesus Christ. We ask forgiveness for the times that we neglect to let that light shine in our lives, and for the strength to do better. We pray for all who need your light as they struggle with illness, depression, hardship and want; help us to reflect your light in all that we do and say. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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March 17, 2022

Love God. Love People.

[Acts 10:34-43](#)

Peter said, "I am really learning that God doesn't show partiality to one group of people over another." Acts 10:34

When I arrived at Forrest Burdette Memorial UMC in Hurricane, one of the first things that was given to me was a t-shirt that read, "Love God. Love People." I was delighted to receive this and felt an instant connection to the congregation. In the past few years, I have become more convicted that this is what God requires of me.

Jesus said, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind." And "You must love your neighbor as you love yourself." (Mt 22:37 CEB). Jesus told us that our "neighbor" was more than just those who live next door.

Loving people isn't always easy. As I try to follow this life command, I identify with Peter as he struggles with learning that God doesn't show partiality to one group of people over another.

Have you ever been the "different" person in a group? When we lived in England for several years, I learned that things I assumed were the same for everyone weren't necessarily universal. The words we used for items weren't the same and sometimes this meant moments of misunderstanding and embarrassment!

The hymns we sang weren't always familiar or were sung to different tunes. Some behaviors which we felt were rude or boorish were easily accepted there. More than once I had to plead ignorance when I trampled on some social norm.

Some food we ate was new to us, and I learned that you didn't serve savory and sweet foods together (could be why British children don't eat peanut butter and jelly!) or that people found it amusing that Americans serve salad as a "starter." How do we figure out when what we've always thought of as right or wrong are merely cultural differences?

As God revealed to Peter, our cultural differences do not matter to the One who has created and redeemed us. God is bigger than the barriers we put between us, and God's love can span the divisions that we create. Focusing on our love of God and love of people allows us to get past differences that otherwise keep us separated. Peter heard this message from God and was able to take the message of salvation to the Gentiles. This was a huge leap, but it allowed for the light of the Gospel to spread to the nations. May we also take a leap in love as we witness to others.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we are divided in so many ways by physical, social, and emotional barriers we have erected. You have made us pure in your eyes and called us to be united. May we learn to love You fully and abundantly, and may we love other people so that as we share Your love, they will hear our words and know You. In the name of the one who taught us to love, Amen.

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Annual Conference Secretary

March 18, 2022

Job's Despondent Prayer

[Job 14:1-14](#)

14 If mortals die, will they live again! All the days of my service I would wait until my release should come.

The heading in my NRSV Bible calls chapter 14 “Job’s Despondent Prayer.” Most of us would agree that Job had reason to be despondent: he had lost his livelihood, he had lost his children and their spouses, and his friends were hovering around waiting for him to confess the sin that had caused all this loss. (Were they waiting to be able to spread the juicy news?)

Like Job, we are living in a season in which the news seems mostly bad: a global pandemic, disruption of family ties, loss of loved ones, growing distrust in institutions which had previously seemed stable.

When Job was alive, he and the people around him did not know about an afterlife; the time they had on earth was all there was. The story of Job is one of the oldest in our Bible, likely handed down orally for hundreds of years before being written in its present form. Job’s story is a window into the thought of the people of his time. Through that window, we see questions: *Is this all there is? Is there some possibility that a person can live after death?*

As we journey through the dark days of winter, we empathize with Job. We ask similar questions. We wonder about our fate and that of the world. We wail, with Job, that we are “mortal(s), born of woman, few of days and full of trouble.”

Through the window of the Gospel, we look further than Job did. We know that people *do* live after death. We know that what we have on earth is *not* all there is. Jesus’ resurrection shows us that we *can* live on. So we need to focus on the Good News and not let ourselves be distracted by the other news pouring into our eyes and ears. Resurrection is real!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you suffered, died, and rose again so that we can have eternal life with you. When we are in despair and losing hope, remind us that you are with us no matter what is happening. Remind us of the reality of your resurrection and the faithfulness of your promises. Amen.

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Third Sunday of Lent - March 19, 2022

Thread of Connection

[Psalm 36:5-11](#)

Your unfailing love, O LORD, is as vast as the heavens; your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the ocean depths. You care for people and animals alike, O LORD. How precious is your unfailing love, O God! All humanity finds shelter in the shadow of your wings. You feed them from the abundance of your own house, letting them drink from the rivers of delight. For you are the fountain of life, the light by which we see. Pour out your unfailing love on those who love you; give justice to those with honest hearts. Don't let the proud trample me; don't let the wicked push me around."
(from *The BOOK*, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Wheaton, Illinois)

How are we going to connect or in this place and time reconnect to God?

Everywhere we turn, God is being taken out of our lives or at least something is attempting to do so. To disconnect us from God. To isolate us.

Read your Bible. Meditate on God's Word. Study God's Word.

Then connect or reconnect to God through prayer. Prayer is simply talking to God. God has something special to say to you and only you.

Well, why do I have to pray if God already knows my heart? It is for your benefit to pray. YOU need to know YOUR heart.

God's unfailing love is endless. He is faithful. You can find shelter and safety in the wings of God's arms wrapped around you. He is waiting and willing to connect.

I go around all the time talking to God. People think I am crazy, but I don't care. I LOVE GOD. I find my peace and comfort in God.

No matter what your situation is, God's got it! It's very trying to hang on for one more day. Keep hanging on to that thread that connects you to God. Hang on for dear life! Never let go!

God is listening, willing, and able. Keep praying. God always answers prayers.

Prayer: *Help me LORD to find my thread of connection. Keep me connected to you always. I love you LORD. AMEN.*

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March 20, 2022

Listen To God

[Isaiah 55: 1-9](#)

⁸ *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.*
⁹ *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

As we approach this Lenten season, let us be kind to one another and praise God.

Isaiah the prophet called upon everyone who is thirsty to “come and drink” from the waters God provides. He thinks that the people were so occupied with their own thoughts they had no time to “incline your ear” and listen to what God has to say.

Everyone is invited to accept God’s offer. God is speaking to the people who are saying where has God been when we needed him? God is trying to tell the people what he would do to help them. He wants them to seek God.

They are consumed with their own way, not God’s way. Their wants and thoughts were wicked, and God’s ways are holy. They have been so distracted about the things in life that had happened to them. They had not thought about all of the wonderful things God can do for them and forgive them for things that they had done. They are trying to find a way of forgiveness, but they do not know how to speak with God. Listen to God.

We are all invited to accept what God has to say and believe. What if you are going through really hard times in your life and someone said to you to pray on it? Would you? Would you read the Bible and pray that God will hear you and help you? In Isaiah, he is offering to help those that are suffering but are resisting help from God. We want God to watch over us and give us strength to make decisions that he would approve of.

Listen to God.

Prophets did two things: they worked to get people to accept the worst as God’s judgment, and they worked to get people who were beaten down to open themselves up to hope in God’s future.

Prayer: Lord, I thank you for placing your wonderful, protective peace in my life. Amen

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March 21, 2022

In the Wilderness

[Psalm 63:1-8](#)

Comfort and Assurance in God's Presence

A Psalm of David, when he was in the Wilderness of Judah.

7 for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.

These past 24 months have seemed like an eternity in the wilderness. Times of social unrest, uncertainty with a pandemic in our midst. I have felt like an exile among people I used to trust and respect to uphold the sanctity of all life. What is your current wilderness? Have you journeyed there before? What tools helped you survive?

Psalms is a prayer book for exiles designed as a virtual temple. The temple is a place to meet with God and to hear the entire biblical story of God's Kingdom. Being in the temple is to be in God's presence. This prayer book can be used by exiles who are learning to live by God's wisdom and to seek God's justice in the world.

I have been living in the virtual temple, slowly reading and reflecting how I can be an instrument or tool of Peace and Light for the Universe, holding the vision and trusting the process.

In order to transform the world, we need an effective toolbox. In that toolbox are effective tools.

When we realize we have what we need, we are effective in doing what is needed to create transformation. Sometimes a meditation is meant to stir the pot and raise more questions than to provide answers.

Friends and fellow exiles, I will see you in the wilderness as we journey to the Virtual Temple. May we continue to long, as David did, to be in God's presence.

Our spiritual survival would not be long without being fed by our relationship with our Creator God.

Prayer: *Creator God, lover of life, help us to respect the sanctity of all life and to remember that our version of the world is just one reality. AMEN.*

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Vice Chair Conference Board of Ordained Ministry
Rural Chaplain

March 22, 2022

Ferry Innovative

[Luke 13:1-9](#)

⁶ Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. ⁷ So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ ⁸ He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

When we first visited Sistersville, West Virginia, several people shared memories of riding the ferry boat. It is a source of great pride for this historic town to have the only ferry in West Virginia that crosses the Ohio River, especially since the nearest bridges are about a 20-minute drive.

People continue to use the ferry on their commute to work, to eat at the Riverview Restaurant in Ohio, visit family and friends, and now even take party cruises. It typically runs from about May-October during daylight hours several days a week. Tractor trailer trucks can often be found idling on nearby roads looking for a bridge, as their GPS systems group bridges and ferries together.

It is a unique method of transportation, but is not always available. In fact, it did not run at all in 2020 because there was no pilot to operate it. Many people wondered if it would ever return to service. It did, in fact, return in 2021, which brought joy to area residents.

Many of our churches have been through a similar experience during the pandemic. When congregations had to refrain from in-person gatherings, some people had concerns about the future of the church.

At a time when there was such uncertainty, we saw a wide array of worship opportunities emerge such as: live-streamed, outdoor, radio broadcasted, CD and DVD recorded services, etc. Congregations felt connected when they could not be together physically.

Challenging times can cause many types of hardships, but it can also be the impetus for innovation. In the most unusual circumstances many of us will ever see, we found hope in digital communication. Thanks to video conferencing platforms, families shared special events while apart. Thanks to digital apps, friends read and discussed devotional Bible studies together. We want to keep the traditions that hold so many memories for us, but it is also important to make room for connecting in unexpected ways.

***Prayer:** God of Grace, We thank you for blessing us with rich traditions and beautiful memories. Please give us the wisdom to know when to prune, when to be patient, and when to seek new opportunities. Forgive us our sins so that we may offer forgiveness to our neighbors. Above all, help us to reach out and connect with others. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

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WVAC Core Leadership Team

March 23, 2022

Asking for Help

[Psalm 40:5-10](#)

“...but You have given me an open ear”

And what have I done with that “open ear?” That question did not occur to me when I first started contemplating this devotional message. But the more I read these verses in various versions and translations, the more I felt convicted of my feelings of inadequacy and failures.

You see, my eye kept being caught by the psalmist’s recital of his actions of preaching and speaking and reciting the wondrous deeds of God, of Her faithfulness and saving power. *The Message* says God threw a party for me and I’m coming to that party!

Over and over the psalm tells us that there is joy in having God’s law within us, and that the response of such joy is action.

As I sat with my not-joy feelings, “Why are you cast down, O my soul?” came into my mind. I looked it up: Psalm 42:5 The translation I feel best describes my feeling is “Why have you agitated me, my soul and why have you perplexed me?” in the *Aramaic Bible in Plain English*.

That’s how I feel reading this portion of Psalm 40 right now as I prepare this devotion. I read the whole verse and it continues: *“Look for God, because I shall again praise him, The Savior of my entire being, and my God.”* As I pondered why this verse popped into my head, I was urged to read the whole of Psalm 40. And there in the very last verse was this:

*¹⁷ As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
Do not delay, O my God.”*

We are to be **people of action**, not just readers of words. And so when I feel inadequate and unresponsive, I must ask for the help I need to get up and do what I, what we, are called to do and be: Children of God who share with all we meet the LOVE of God for each and every human being on this planet, one person, one word, one small action at a time.

Praise God for the connections we have with each other and with God both in times of joy, and the times when we need help.

***Prayer:** Gracious and loving God, in those times we feel adrift and alone remind us to ask for the help we need; the help that comes from You and the Holy Spirit, and from our fellow pilgrims on the journey. Amen.*

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March 24, 2022

When Troubles Rise Like a Flood

[Psalm 32](#)

“Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.” (Psalm 32:6-7)

It was July of 2007, and torrential rain pushed many of West Virginia’s rivers and their tributaries several feet above normal flow. The TV news showed footage of a trailer floating down what used to be a road.

Newspaper articles would later paint pictures of loss and survival — one from a White Sulphur Springs man who saved neighbors’ lives but lost his wife, others about people who may have drowned had boats not rescued them from their rooftops, some about residents and businesses who weren’t as fortunate.

Those of us in the Mountain State know all too well the devastation of a flood. We’ve watched helplessly as rising waters from streams and rivers transform almost instantly from breathtaking beauty to breath-stealing horror.

Imagine now that what is rising so quickly, what is threatening to drown us, is not the swelling of a river’s water, but a flood of sin. As it rises, it smothers us with guilt, weakening us, sapping our strength, wasting away our bones, as the Psalmist wrote.

But we have no need to climb onto a roof to escape it. All we need to do is connect with God. He forgives our sin, lifts away the heaviness of guilt. And just as quickly as that torrent of trouble rose, it shrinks back down, forever washed away by a simple confession.

Those of us who trust God enough to simply connect with Him in prayer and admit our sin are delivered from drowning in guilt. We are not only forgiven, we are embraced with and protected by an unfailing love. And that is something worth singing about.

***Prayer:** Heavenly Father, thank you for surrounding us with your love, for protecting us from floods of trouble. Help us to connect with you in prayer more often, remembering that our confessions bring relief. For that, we rejoice! Amen.*

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March 25, 2022

For Jesus...

[Luke 15:1-10](#)

15¹ Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵ When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

In the thoughts of the Pharisees, Jesus is guilty of breaking the law and social norms of the day. In the Gospel stories, Jesus chooses to spend time with the tax collectors and sinners. The hard part for many in this world today is that they don't see themselves as sinners.

We all need a different starting point for others as well as ourselves. The starting point for Jesus is grace. For Jesus, everyone is invited. For Jesus, the defining characteristic of sin is not misbehavior but being lost.

The parables Jesus offers are about being lost. A sheep is lost. A coin is lost. Jesus' concern is for the one who is lost. The issue for Jesus is recovering and reclaiming the lost.

The point of these two parables is that Jesus makes it about God's character. They reveal God's grace. That grace and character are revealed in Jesus' searching, finding, and rejoicing. These are not three different things, but three demonstrations of God's one grace.

Depending on the circumstances of our lives, we experience grace differently. Ultimately, it means we all matter to Jesus. This Jesus who welcomes sinners and eats with them is constantly searching for us, finding us, and rejoicing over our presence at His table.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, may we become more concerned for the lost. May we share the love of Jesus with all we can give. May we live for Jesus. AMEN*

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March 26, 2022

Tempted and Tested

[Matthew 4:1-11](#)

Matthew 4: 7, 10 (NRSV) - Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ... Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

As I read this scripture, I kept coming back to verses 7 and 10. Temptation comes in so many different forms. It is no secret; the last two years have been hard. So many times, it has felt like I am wandering in the wilderness, hungry and alone and unsure of what to do next.

I think that this time has also felt full of temptations, too: Do what's easy. Do what we want instead of what is best for all.

Thinking of self before others. I'd like to say that I never fell to any of those temptations, but the more likely scenario is that we all have at some point. Temptations urge us to take the easy path, instead of the right path.

God and our faith urges us to do what's hard, but, sometimes, we choose the shortest, easiest choice instead.

As Christians we are taught to love and take care of our neighbors and to not judge others. During this pandemic, we have all fallen to the temptation of not following those basic rules that we've been taught our whole lives.

We have judged others for their choices of how to best keep their families safe during the pandemic. We have said they are being too cautious or not cautious enough. We have failed to take care of the strangers we encounter each day by doing what we believe is safe for us instead of being concerned for the safety of others.

We have made assumptions about each other based on the choices we see being made. We have tested God by pushing against the ways he has charged us with living.

Being tempted is hard. Standing strong against that temptation is even harder during difficult and stressful times. Right now, we are being tempted and tested each day. We must make the choice each day to stand strong and serve God, instead of giving into the temptation to serve ourselves.

Prayer: *Lord, please help us to continue to fight the temptation of doing what is easy for us instead of doing what is right by you. Amen.*

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Fourth Sunday of Lent - March 27, 2022

Surrender

[Hebrews 10:16-25](#)

22 let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.

I have a friend, who, when talking about the hymn *I Surrender All*, jokingly calls it “I Surrender Most.” I don’t think I am alone in my unwillingness to easily surrender all (or sometimes anything) to God. I like to hold on to control. I like to operate under the illusion that I can handle whatever comes my way – that I can, in fact, fix it all. And we all know that is not true, don’t we? We can’t fix it all. We can’t control everything.

This morning, I was listening to Casting Crowns’ song *I Surrender All to Jesus*. The lyrics include “At your feet I lay me down, all my scars...” And it goes on “No more chasing yesterday.” As you think about those lyrics, read verse 17 from our scripture for today: “*I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.*”

Do we surrender our sin to God? Do we offer the pain of it, the burden of it to God? Will we let go of it?

Look at the grace God is offering to us. “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” This is the covenant God makes with us. It is a promise from the heart of God. This is grace freely given – not offered in exchange for something, but already given to us.

In our transaction-based society, it is hard to imagine that something as infinitely valuable as God’s love and forgiveness are given to us freely. It’s hard for us to let go of that which we are ashamed, isn’t it? We relive our wrongdoing, playing it over and over in our minds, regretting what we did, wishing we could change the past. We can’t. We can’t fix the past. We can’t fix our sin.

Will you surrender your scars to Jesus? Will you stop chasing the burden of what you did wrong yesterday? Will you hear the words from God, “I will remember your sin and your lawless deeds no more” and believe it? Will you open your heart and surrender all of your sins to Jesus, and feel the flood of healing grace God has already given to you?

Prayer: *Loving God, we come to you in gratitude for the grace you have provided for us, for the loveliness of clean hearts and guilt-free souls. Strengthen us to let go of our past mistakes so that we can experience your grace. Amen.*

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March 28, 2022

Overcoming the Fear of Darkness

[Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16](#)

*¹ LORD, I seek refuge in You; let me never be disgraced. Save me by Your righteousness.
² Listen closely to me; rescue me quickly. Be a rock of refuge for me, a mountain fortress to save me. ³ For You are my rock and my fortress; You lead and guide me because of Your name. ⁴ You will free me from the net that is secretly set for me, for You are my refuge.
¹⁵ The course of my life is in Your power; deliver me from the power of my enemies and from my persecutors. ¹⁶ Show Your favor to Your servant; save me by Your faithful love.*

As a young child I was afraid of the dark. My fear of things that go bump in the night -- the monster under the bed, or the vampires waiting at the door for me to move -- scared the wits out of me.

In order to help me overcome my fear of the dark, my dad would take me into his dark bedroom, holding my hand. He assured me that he would be with me the whole time, and would rescue me from any attempts on my life by these imaginary threats. I eventually learned that there was no need to be afraid of the dark.

The last couple of years have been dark times to be sure! As a result, it seems that everyone has been gripped by fear to some degree.

But when we encounter dark times, it is so encouraging to know that our Abba Father is right there with us the whole time. He is there for us to take refuge in Him, to save us and rescue us, as well as deliver us from the power of our enemies.

We have no idea what the future holds with the COVID pandemic, but we can take comfort in knowing that the courses of our lives are in His power.

What an opportunity to share with others the strength, might, and comfort that our God provides in such times! Let us determine to show the world His light in this world of darkness.

Prayer: *Almighty God who rules from His mighty throne on high, help us to remember that You are always with us in the light and the dark, even when we can't see you with us. Give us opportunities to share your presence with others for your glory. Amen.*

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March 29, 2022

Breath of Life

[Ezekiel 37:1-14](#)

I will put my spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord has spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord. (Ezekiel 37:14)

This passage of scripture is probably familiar to most of us, but I don't imagine many of us have focused on the 14th verse. God gives us a promise that He will put His spirit in us and we will live in our own land.

He does not promise us prosperity, fame, or an easy life. He just promises us life. While we are in this season of Lent, we need to look at our lives to make sure we are living lives that give honor and praise to our God.

Many of us give up something for Lent. Others try to add things that will benefit our neighbors or those in need. Both of these things are fine gestures, but they should not be done for just a set time as Lent. These are things we should always be doing as Christians.

Sometimes we forget how much God is doing for us in our daily, ordinary lives. I remember when I was a sleep-deprived new mother with a colicky baby, I had no family nearby to give me any help.

A neighbor in the apartment complex came to my rescue. She had two older children and was able to offer good advice and some comfort. Most of all, she assured me that I was not doing anything wrong. I believe God worked through her to help me see that God's breath of life was working even in those dark days.

When we have dark days, it would benefit us to remember that field of dead bones. If we worship a God who can make dry bones come to life, how much more does it mean to breathe life into us.

***Prayer:** Dear God, when we are feeling sad and lifeless, help us to remember how great is your breath of life and let you take control of us. Amen.*

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Church Nominations and Leadership Development Committee

March 30, 2022

Connect

[1 John 1](#)

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. (1 John 1:1 (NIV))

We are about half-way through this season of Lent as we reach out and read this verse. What is it saying? What is our connection?

John is telling us that Jesus has *always* been with us, from the beginning of time. We, some of us, have heard, seen and touched Him.

We are connected to one another and to Him by our senses. We see Him in His wonderful creation: billowing clouds, colorful sunsets, twinkling stars, and shining sun and moon.

We are connected by touch: the loving hugs we receive from our family and loved ones. The reaching out, whether it be by telephone or cards, to those who are no longer able to be out of their homes.

We are connected by the smell of His works: clean fresh air after a gentle falling rain, the fragrance of the flowers in bloom, and fresh mowed grass.

We are connected by hearing: the sound of refreshing raindrops falling on a tin roof or the wind whistling through the trees.

We are connected by taste: when we enjoy eating nourishing fruits and vegetables grown because He gave the foresight to farmers and growers.

The senses are mentioned in the verse; and it connects those who will let Him be part of their lives -- the life Jesus offers freely. He accepts us where and as we are; He knows our every thought, understands our aches, pains, sorrows, and joys. There is no hiding from Him. He will be right by your side every step of the way. He gives us life. He, and He alone, is the essence of life, the meaning of life!

***Prayer:** Heavenly Father, thank you for your Son, Jesus, who connects me to life in the Word. Allow me to use my senses to show others how to walk in Your great love. Amen.*

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March 31, 2022

Cleaning Out the Closet

[Colossians 3:12-17](#)

“Put on, then, garments that suit God’s chosen and beloved people: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience. Be tolerant with one another and forgiving, if any of you has cause for complaint: you must forgive as the Lord forgave you. Finally, to bind everything together and complete the whole, there must be love. Let Christ’s peace be arbiter in your decisions, the peace to which you were called as members of a single body.” -Colossians 3:12-15

There is a lifecycle of wardrobe rejuvenation that goes on in my house every year, especially during the wintertime. When I’m confronted with extra time cooped up inside and am forced to face the consequences of my expanding waistline, I find myself examining my closet with a more critical eye.

Will I ever *really* fit into those pants again? Does this shirt really match anything else I have? Have I *ever even considered* wearing this tie of questionable taste that I was gifted ten years ago? So into bags things go – the too small, the out-of-fashion, the never-worn – to make their way to the local thrift shop for donation.

At the same time, I’m also forced to think about those things I *could* donate, but if I’m being honest really can’t be of use to anyone else anymore - the jeans with holes in both knees, the jacket with the broken zipper, the comfy but paint-spattered T-shirt I’ve kept since high school – I’m sure you have similar things you can cite. Sometimes the wintertime wardrobe cleanse involves knowing when it’s time to “put off” certain garments and for things to go away for good.

Colossians asks us to clothe ourselves in garments of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

That means knowing the difference between the characteristics we reflect in the world – the useful garments we know can be helpful and useful to someone else were we to donate them to a thrift store – and the ones which really can’t serve anyone much anymore.

The Lenten season asks us to put on garments that make us better individuals, yes, but not just for our own sake. All those characteristics mentioned above are of most value when they are reflected from our lives into the lives of others. In this way, the love we show “binds everything together and complete(s) the whole.”

Prayer: *O Peacemaker and Peacebringer – remind us that this season of holiness misses the mark if it serves no one else but ourselves. As you have forgiven us, help us to forgive one another and to live a life clothed in garments that suit all of God’s chosen and beloved people. Amen.*

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April 1, 2022

You Saved My Life!

[Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19](#)

I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me? I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the LORD. I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people. Praise the LORD!

Psalm 116: 1-2, 12, 17-18, 19b (NIV)

Sometimes there comes a feeling deep inside so full of gratitude that it overflows. It may spring from a delightful surprise, a visit with family, recovery from an illness, a goal accomplished, a meaningful conversation with a friend, or warm sunshine on a beautiful day.

That glorious feeling blooms in your heart and smiles on your face, reflecting God's great love. How can we thank God for all He does for us every day, as well as in these profound moments of bountiful joy?

Do you remember the episode of *The Andy Griffith Show* in which Andy puts out a small fire at the gas station where Gomer Pyle is napping? When Gomer realizes what has happened, he excitedly proclaims, "You saved my life! You saved my life!"

Gomer does everything he can think of to show Andy how thankful he is. He brings fresh fish for breakfast, mows the grass, washes the windows, and brings enough firewood for seven winters! He helps Opie with the chores and Aunt Bee in the kitchen.

He tells Andy, "Anything, to be of service to you and yours!" He does all these things with a big wide-eyed grin, a willing heart, tireless efforts, and a humble sincerity. "Little enough for the man that saved my life!" To top it all off, Gomer enthusiastically tells other folks what Andy did for him.

One of my favorite verses is Thessalonians 5:18: *Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.* Pollyanna's Glad Game reminds us to be glad about something in everything. God is here for us in the everyday moments as well as in the grand gifts of joy. What can we do for our LORD to show our thanks for all He does for us, even giving Jesus to save our lives?

We pray with joy and thanksgiving. We do deeds for others – "Anything, to be of service to you and yours!" We tell others about God, sharing His great love graciously *in the presence of all His people.* God saves our lives! God saves our lives!

Prayer: *Dear LORD, we love you! We are thankful that you hear us and are good to us. Thank you for the gift of your Son Jesus. Help us to serve you and your people, sharing your love with joy and smiles. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

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April 2, 2022

Out with the Old- In with the New

[Isaiah 43:16-21](#)

Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Isaiah 43:18-19a

Change can be hard, and it is easy to wish for things to be “like the good old days.” One sees examples of this with the Israelites when they left Egypt yearning for the Egyptian food and even the Judaizers in the New Testament who tried combining faith with the Mosaic law.

In this passage, Isaiah is remembering and celebrating Israel’s past (the Red Sea crossing), yet acknowledging that God will be working in new ways in the future.

This “new thing” will give refreshment and will be a positive change—all with the purpose of bringing glory to God. And Christians see the prophet’s message as referring to the new covenant—the one brought about by Jesus Himself.

The COVID pandemic has been difficult on everyone, and it has forced us to reimagine how we “do church,” whether on-line or hybrid. But one thing is true: its mission and purpose remains the same.

As C.S. Lewis wrote, the church’s whole mission is to make “little Christs”—to transform every member into the image of Jesus Himself. And if there was one thing Jesus modeled better for us than anything, it was CONNECTION: connection to the Father (His alone time with the Father), connection to one another (His disciples) and connection to the world (those he preached to and healed).

And while our connection to others may look a little different during these COVID times, may we be open to connecting in new ways. These new ways can be very positive, give hope and refreshment to those who need it, and reach more people than we possibly could imagine. The mission never changes but how we accomplish it can.

***Prayer:** Lord God, help me to be flexible and open to change. Transform me into someone like Your Son—one who lived His life in community and connection with You, with others, and with the world around Him. This can only happen with the power of your Spirit. I need You. Amen.*

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Fifth Sunday of Lent - April 3, 2022

Joy in the Morning

[Psalm 126](#)

*“Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.”
Psalm 126: 5-6*

After another bewildering year of life during a pandemic, we might ask ourselves what our hopes are for 2022. Are we looking for a restoration of the old normal?

Psalm 126 has the perfect message for a time like this. It is the story of a people who remember a time of great joy, and they want to have it again. Isn't that what we want, too? We know that life contains both joy and sadness. We all saw that happen throughout 2021 as the impact of the coronavirus got worse and then better. The pandemic affected all facets of life, some in negative ways and some in positive ways.

There have been difficult days when all you can do is get out of bed and do what you have to do. You keep going. Some days include tears and feelings that overwhelm you, and yet you are thankful for the blessings God has given you.

Even when life seems so hopeless, God never abandons us. If we have faith and keep putting one foot in front of the other, joy will always follow. Psalm 126 shows us that there is a cycle of sadness and joy. Great joy is often preceded by a time of tears as if the tears we sow are planted to reap the crop of joy.

This passage brings to mind an anthem Natalie Sleeth wrote for the inauguration of her husband Ronald Sleeth as the president of West Virginia Wesleyan College. The anthem was titled “Joy in the Morning” and the lyrics of the first verse reinforce the feelings of hope and joy:

*There'll be joy in the morning on that day,
There'll be joy in the morning on that day,
For the daylight will dawn when the darkness is gone,
There'll be joy in the morning on that day.*

As we engage in this journey through the Lenten season, we remember that Jesus sowed the tears of the cross for us until finally he died.

Nevertheless, the glorious reality is that he arose, and is now in heaven where he waits with the Father until his return, bringing his sheaves with him. There'll be joy in the morning on that day.

Prayer: *Father God, we know that your Son spilled his own blood for us. Grant us the courage to face difficult moments in our lives, and remind us that we need not face them alone without the hope of joy in the morning. Amen.*

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April 4, 2022

You Will Not Have Me

[John 12:1-8](#)

You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me. –John 12:8

In March of 2020 when the pandemic began, I was halfway through the second semester of my junior year of college. Life was normal. Then, the world was in crisis.

My college announced it would not be reopening and I moved home to complete my academic year from my childhood bedroom. The communities and relationships I had come to rely on were, suddenly, inaccessible to me.

My biggest connections to the outside world were 24-hour news channels which featured endless variations of stories regarding inequalities and tragedies that were being exaggerated by the pandemic: poverty, sickness, substance use, social injustices...

Now, three years into a pandemic, the world is still hurting, but is more open. We're less isolated. Yet I still feel myself longing for connection.

As I read the scripture to prepare for this devotional, I found myself repeatedly drawn to the last line where Jesus says to Judas, "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

Though Jesus is speaking of his impending death, it reminded me of the sudden isolation we experienced at the beginning of the pandemic. We certainly still had problems, perhaps even more than normal, but we no longer had each other.

Through these three years I have learned that opportunities for connections are not guaranteed. In fact, they must be forged, must be intentional. And most importantly, we must stop waiting.

Imagine a world where we didn't wait to connect. A world where we didn't have to be thinner, smarter, prettier, healthier, holier, better before we sought connection.

What does the kingdom of God have to gain by reaching out and loving each other as lavishly and intimately as Mary does when she anoints Jesus's feet? More importantly, what do we have to lose if we don't?

Prayer: *Creator God, we thank you for the gift of community. In a time of distance, isolation, and waiting, may we intentionally seek deep and intimate connection even amongst the grief of the world. Amen.*

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April 5, 2022

Number One Relationship

[Psalm 118:1-29](#)

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever. – Psalm 118:29.

As all of the world continues to navigate the ever-changing landscape of COVID, political division, and continued negativity, one thing seems certain. Connection matters and relationships are important.

The most important relationship of all is our relationship with Christ. Admittedly, while I very much value my relationship with Christ, I don't always prioritize that relationship as I should. So many things seem to get in the way, whether that be my four children and their activities, my job, or my family just to name a few.

We live in such a chaotic world with so many things competing for our attention. How can we use this time of Lent to recenter ourselves and focus our hearts on what truly matters?

The Psalms are packed full of people just like us who endured suffering, adversity, and who questioned many things about this complicated life. The Psalms can also help us find a renewal in our faith. Psalm 118 is a great encouragement to us that Christ is truly all we need in this life.

God is faithful, good, and a place we can find refuge in a troublesome world. This Psalm reminds us that without Jesus as our cornerstone, life will blow us about without direction or purpose.

Carving out time each day to build and grow our relationship with Christ is part of the Great Commandment. What's more, when we are fully connected to our Lord and Savior, we are better equipped to face the challenges of life, love others well, and reflect the character of Christ to a broken world.

I think about my children and all the time I have spent over the years trying to cultivate a close, loving relationship with them. I try to remind myself daily that the Lord who has saved me from my sin, provides me with unconditional unending love, and who has given me the promise of eternity, also deserves my time and worship. Only when that relationship is number one in our lives, will every other relationship in our life be enriched.

***Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for reminding us that you love us, that you are faithful, and that we can find comfort and safety within your loving arms. Help us to use this time of Lent to purposely carve out time and energy to prioritize our relationship with you. Amen.*

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April 6, 2022

God's Ambassador
[2 Corinthians 5:16-21](#)

¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

I love the connectional church! I love being a part of the connectional church. Those connections bring us closer in relationship with God, whether they are in our very own church community or across the globe.

Such an opportunity came before me during a Volunteer-In-Mission trip to Vietnam a few years ago. Our team's work included repair and renovation to a small school in the village of Da Lat. Our team had a very proficient interpreter, however those we worked along side of spoke little or no English. During the two weeks' time we depended on hand signals and nods and lots of smiles.

As the work time was nearing an end, we pushed to finish a floor for one of the classrooms. The work required squatting or kneeling and continuously brushing the concrete to a smooth finish so that stones surfaced to a smooth finish.

The native Vietnamese seemed to work effortlessly. The Americans really exerted effort to keep up. I remember vividly being on my knees, when I felt a hand on my shoulder. One of the young men had taken off his flip-flops and through gesture placed his shoes under my knees as I worked.

I was so humbled, I held back tears...no words were spoken. At that very moment I realized his gift to me. Acceptance was as important as the generosity. Seconds later he was gone. I looked across the room and made eye contact with a young Vietnamese woman as she mouthed the words "thank you."

Prayer: *Dear Gracious Heavenly God, guide us to be your ambassadors each day and in all ways to reflect your love and light. Open our hearts to love one another as you love us. Amen.*

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April 7, 2022

Keep It Simple

[John 13:31-35](#)

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

KISS, an acronym for “keep it simple, stupid,” is a design principle noted by the US Navy in 1960. The KISS principle states that most systems work best if they are kept simple rather than made complicated. Therefore simplicity should be a key goal in design and unnecessary complexity should be avoided.

In this familiar scripture, Jesus is gathered around the table with his disciples. The end is near and Jesus is giving them his final instructions. He tells them they must love one another.

Didn't Jesus mention this previously as being a high priority? Now that he is preparing to leave them, surely he has volumes of instructions. There is so much to do and the disciples always had questions.

If they are expected to continue the work of Jesus, it would be most helpful if there was a manual to follow. However, Jesus decided to follow the KISS principle – simply love one another. It may be simple, but that doesn't mean it is easy.

We encounter people throughout our lives who look different and think differently than we do. They do things that offend us and hurt us. Surely, we are not called to love “those” people.

Following the KISS principle, we are not encouraged to develop an elaborate system to discern who should and should not be loved. We simply follow the example of Christ and love one another. Don't make it complicated.

Prayer: *Gracious God, help us see the strength and beauty of simply loving one another. We are one in the Spirit; we are one in the Lord. We pray that our unity will one day be restored, and they'll know we are Christians by our love. Amen.*

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April 8, 2022

Trust

[Psalm 31:14-16](#)

¹⁴ But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God."

¹⁵ My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.

¹⁶ Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

Psalm 31 is a powerful testimony to God's protection. Verses 14 to 16 echo in my life. Have you ever needed to be delivered out of the hands of your enemies? I have, and I'll tell you my story.

There was this girl named Billie Jo, who loved to pick on me. I grew up poor -- one of the reasons she loved to pick on me. I tried to do everything I could to avoid her, be nice to her, and bribe her. She just loved picking on me.

She was around every corner, and I could not hide from her. Billie Jo knew I was alone with no one to look after me. One day she found me, backed me into a corner and scared me so badly that I did not want to go back to school.

We moved around a lot and never stayed in one house for too long. We usually moved before the landlord came looking for his rent. Soon, we moved to Philippi. I thought, "Thank the Lord I'm free of Billie Jo." For about a year, my life was going well. A new school, new friends. We still moved around a lot, but I could handle that as long as Billie Jo wasn't around.

One day the school secretary walked in and told us our class was getting a new student, and guess who walked into my class? Yep, it was Billie Jo.

I almost had a heart attack right then and there. At first, I tried to avoid her. Finally, I called the pastor of the church I used to attend. I could call him anytime I needed advice or any kind of help. We talked about Billie Jo and what I should do.

He said "Pray". Well, I prayed and asked God for help. After about a week Billie Jo came up to me and said "I'm sorry I treated you so badly. Will you forgive me?" I was shocked, but I knew God answered my prayers.

God delivers us from the hands of our enemies if we hand the enemy over to God.

***Prayer:** Heavenly Father, thank you for taking our enemies from us, even when we forget to give them over to you. Amen.*

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Church Trustee Committee

April 9, 2022

Connected in Christ

[John 15:12-15](#)

¹² “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.

Life can have twists, turns, trials, and tribulations, but what is the one thing that gets us all through them? Love.

The greatest gift that God has given the world is when He sent His Son to die on the cross. Why did He do this? Love.

God’s love for us is greater than anything we can ever begin to imagine! The Word of God is filled with so many promises, and love is mentioned throughout the Bible so many times. As we go through life, we can always remember the love that God has for us and the light we have in our lives through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

As the Body of Christ, it is our job to work together and bring others to Him. When we stay in the Word, pray, and love others, we are being faithful and working as the Body to bring joy, peace, and love to others.

Loving one another means being that friend who accepts someone, despite their past. Loving one another means praying for everyone in your life. Loving one another means sharing hope, through the Word of God, with someone who is going through a rough time. Loving one another means trying your best every single day to be like Jesus Christ was and openly embrace every person you encounter.

One of my favorite hymns is “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” because it gives me so much hope and fills my heart with love because Jesus truly calls us His friends in the Bible, and He’s always there for us.

We are branches on the vine that is Jesus, and together we are rooted in God, our Father. When we branch out and are fruitful in His name, we add more branches to the vine, the light in this world grows stronger, and we are all truly connected in Christ. God is so good, the Holy Spirit guides, and Jesus truly saves!

***Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son to die for my sins and for loving me unconditionally. As I go through my days, Lord, please help me to be fruitful in Your Name, and to bring others closer to You. I ask that you continue guiding me, and everyone in my life. Thank you for all you do. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.*

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Palm/Passion Sunday - April 10, 2022

Bridges of Love

[Mark 11:1-11](#)

⁹ Those in front of him and those following were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰ Blessings on the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest!” –Mark 11:9-10

There was great excitement as the people saw Jesus coming into Jerusalem. Their expectations were high as they anticipated what Jesus was going to do.

Some were wanting a military leader to drive the Romans out of their land. After all, Jesus was of the lineage of the greatest warrior of Jewish history, the heir of David. For 400 years there had been a Roman military presence to keep everyone in line.

Jesus was not sent to the world to be a military leader. He was here to be an example for the world to show how we are expected to live. Throughout Jesus’ ministry he showed compassion to the sick, the poor, and the outcasts of society. Jesus was more concerned about the heart / attitude of a person than he was about the status and importance the person had obtained during their life.

Jesus built bridges of love to show how love would transform a person’s life. He shared love with the Samaritan woman at the well, the unclean woman with an issue of blood who touched his garment, the woman caught in adultery, the unclean lepers who approached him, tax collectors, those who were possessed by demons and multitudes of others.

Jesus was love. God’s love sent to earth. As Christians, we also are to be in the business of building bridges of love!

If we are not able to show love to the unlovable, who will? If we are not Christ-like, how can we be called Christian? Jesus is concerned about the condition of our hearts. Because we are more than flesh and blood, we are to be concerned about the spiritual condition of our lives as well as that of our neighbor.

***Prayer:** Dear Lord, transform our lives with your love; help us to reflect your love to our neighbors. Show us how to build bridges of love to reduce the strife we see in this world today! Amen.*

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Holy Monday - April 11, 2022

A New Day
[Lamentations 3:22-24](#)

“The steadfast love of the Lord...[is] new every morning;” – Lam. 3:22a, 23a

I retired about eight years ago. In that time my whole life changed. Some of you may be able to identify with this experience. Remember, at about age 50, you began talking about the number of years you had left until you would be free at last? All the things you meticulously planned out would now fill your days at the Happy Rest Retreat upon your retirement.

Well, forget all the bright-eyed thoughts you had about things like seeing the world, playing golf at several international resorts, going to New York City during the Broadway season, or making your first million playing the stock market. If you are like me, the reality is grandkids, yard work, laundry, and shopping trips occupy most of your time.

That is until the Lord called me to do some work for Him. It all happened during a long-term Bible study class called Disciple. The leader said we were going to cover 80 percent of the Bible during the duration of our class. The Disciple class would keep us somewhat busy during the next 36 weeks. The leader wasn't wrong about the amount of time involved, but the more I got involved in the study, the easier and more interesting it became.

Then a strange thing happened one Sunday morning in church. The pastor announced that the district office would be offering a class to train people interested in becoming lay speakers. Was this some new program and, if not, why had I not heard about it before? I posed these questions to my wife and the pastor. What they told me was that no one in the congregation was interested in these classes. Well, I said, today is a new day in my life, in the church, and in my retirement.

“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.” As we journey to the cross this last week of Lent, let us not forget that as we plan our lives the Lord is also planning each step of our life.

So make sure your faith journey includes both prayer and time to listen to God's voice. Be sure to spend time lingering long at the foot of the cross. There you will find God's answer.

***Prayer:** God of our Hope, help us plan our lives and the work we do in your name to be for your Glory. May your faithfulness increase our faith. In the name of the risen Lord. Amen.*

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Holy Tuesday - April 12, 2022

New Life
[John 12:20-36](#)

“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. –John 20:24

Natalie Sleeth’s *Hymn of Promise* reminds us that “In the bulb there is a flower, in the seed, an apple tree. . .”

We know that seeds and bulbs must be covered in dirt for a period of time in order to be nourished and sprout into a new plant. I love to grow flowers and enjoy tucking their seeds or bulbs into the ground and then waiting, watching with anticipation for them to begin peeking out of the ground and growing into mature plants reaching for the sun.

What a delight it is to watch them grow and bloom as they provide colorful beauty for our enjoyment. They ask nothing in return. At the end of their life cycle they die and return to the earth to replenish the soil. Some drop seeds or spread more bulbs which stay in the ground until the next season when they again produce new life.

It’s a mystery as to how a small seed or bulb, simple and plain -- appearing lifeless -- can be transformed into a beautiful plant flourishing with leaves and blossoms.

Like the seeds that must fall to the ground and die, Christ also had to die. He was entombed for three days before his resurrection. He lay dormant, like the seeds, awaiting a transformation to new life.

The women who went to his grave were going there to grieve. They weren’t anticipating a risen Christ who had sprung from the grave into new life. They were expecting a lifeless body, and some say they even mistook Jesus for a gardener near the tomb.

His death and resurrection offer new life to all of us that we may flourish and share the good news with the world. As Sleeth’s last verse tells us, “In our death, a resurrection, at the last a victory.”

May we live our lives in such a way to reflect the beauty of Christ as the flowers brighten and add joy to our days. Then, at our death we also will rejoice in the promise of eternal life.

***Prayer:** Our loving God, we thank you for the gift of your precious son whose life, death, and resurrection gave us the opportunity to have eternal life. Help us to spring forth into new life and share the beauty and joy of your love and promise of a final victory. Amen.*

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Holy Wednesday - April 13, 2022

Hope for the Race

[Hebrews 12:1-3](#)

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

As I write to you, I can hear a January snowstorm pelting the roof with chunks of ice. The threat of treacherous roads led some churches in the state to cancel services today. Because the threat of COVID-19 is also at an all-time high, many more congregations find a large portion of their members worshipping online rather than in-person most Sundays.

Even when the congregants can gather together in one place, things just aren't the same. We socially distance with masks covering our smiles, avoid hugging or eating together, and aren't permitted to worship through song. It's hard to feel the connections to one another that we once took for granted.

The last two years have certainly felt like running a race that requires a great deal of perseverance. I can't help but think that if this were a literal race, at least we'd know how far we still had to go. Is this race five miles or 5,000 miles? How do you pace yourself and persevere when you don't know if the finish line is just over the next hill or in the next state?

From where I sit in January, it's hard to know what message will help you not to grow weary or lose heart in the race you run in April.

I have great hope for you. I hope that the sun is shining brightly on your face today and beautiful spring flowers are popping up everywhere you look. I hope that COVID-19 numbers are at an all-time low and still declining. I hope that the congregation where you worship is all back together with a renewed appreciation for one another and all the ways that you can reach out together in love to your community.

Unfortunately, I know that this may not be realistic. Sometimes it still snows in April, and this virus has been nothing if not unpredictable.

There's really only one message of hope that I can send: Easter is coming! Whether you have had a Lenten season full of revitalization and gratitude or a time of frustration and mourning, Easter will still arrive. Despite the many uncertainties in our world, the Good News does not change. Do not grow weary. Do not lose heart. We are Easter people. He is risen, indeed!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us find the perseverance today to run the race you set before us. Amen.

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Maundy Thursday - April 14, 2022

All Are Welcome to the Table

[1 Corinthians 11: 23-26](#)

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

We are coming to the end of the Lenten Season; we are nearing to the final moments leading up to Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Holy communion is the way that we remember what Jesus has done for us. We remember the breaking of His body and the shedding of our Savior's blood.

The background leading up to this set of scripture involves Paul rebuking the Corinthian church in their conduct while partaking of Holy Communion. They were exhibiting gluttony, drunkenness, and not being generous with the less fortunate. Paul read them the "riot act." Paul wanted them to respect and treat Communion as holy, not just as something commonplace. Their hearts were not in it. They were not seriously considering the magnitude of Jesus' sacrifice. Paul was not pleased, and more importantly, God was not pleased.

When I first experienced communion in my church 23 years ago, my pastor stated that "All Are Welcome." With this statement, I found a sense of peace and belonging that I have never experienced in church before. I had attended a different denomination in which communion was much more restrictive. To hear that all are welcome was a significant moment in my Christian life. I knew I was in the right place.

When we come together as the Body of Christ to receive Holy Communion, we are remembering all that Jesus did so that we could receive salvation. Before Jesus was crucified, He had a meal with His disciples where he instructed them to remember until He comes back.

When we take the bread, we remember that His body was broken for us. When we drink the cup, we remember that His blood was shed for us. We are connected as Christ's people who are in need of grace and mercy.

When I take of Holy Communion in my church, I feel a sense of closeness and unity. As Christians, we are brothers and sisters in Christ. This is the way it should be. We are one in Christ. We have the awesome privilege of coming to the table as sinners forgiven by grace and remembering what Jesus did for us. My we never take Holy Communion for granted. Jesus welcomes us all to the table. Praise God.

***Prayer:** Father God, help us to never forget Jesus' sacrifice for us so that we can inherit salvation. Help us to enter into Holy Communion with a right heart and know that we are all unified in Christ. Thank you for welcoming us to your table. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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Good Friday - April 15, 2022

Connecting to Preserve the Precious

[John 18:1-19:42](#)

³⁸After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. ³⁹Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. (John 19:38-41)

How important and precious this task was to Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Their work was timely and detailed. They jumped to it quickly. They met together, even though it seems clear that each one came as he felt led.

How about you? Is it possible there is something that you bring when you meet together at church—a prayer, a praise, a testimony, a song?

What if we connect with our fellow church-goers, old and young, and make a plan of how we can reach our community, street by street, business by business, schools, or nursing facilities? What if we set a goal, choose a realistic date by which we can meet this goal, and then launch out in pairs or small teams to accomplish this task?

Like Joseph and Nicodemus, we should be equipped with the necessary materials needed for our task.

Instead of strips of linen, we give scriptures of truth. In place of myrrh, aloe, and spices, we invite those we meet to receive eternal life through Jesus so that the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead may dwell in their body, too. That will spice up someone's life!

Just as God had provided a new place for Jesus' body, we can invite those we meet to the place God has provided for us to gather— at our local church, to learn and fellowship, and worship together, preserving the precious lives that Jesus died to save. Wow! That releases a sweet savor to the throne of heaven.

***Prayer:** Heavenly Father, help us to see how precious all our lives are. We pray that we can wrap others in the conversation of the Good News that preserves and delights the soul. Help us to be strong and supportive and the link that brings others to you. Amen.*

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Holy Saturday - April 16, 2022

Living for God

[1 Peter 4:1-8](#)

4¹ Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh,^[a] arm yourselves also with the same intention (for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin),² so as to live for the rest of your earthly life^[a] no longer by human desires but by the will of God.

Being a teen in today's world can be hard. Being a Christian teen can be even harder. There are so many things that demand our time: school, jobs, extracurricular activities, friendships.

Each assumes they are the most important thing in your life, and each has its own idea of how things should be done. It becomes hard to put church first, and when you do, you are often called names like "goody-two-shoes" or "lame." And when you try to live like Jesus has commanded us to do, you eventually get excluded from activities.

Sometimes it might be easier to just give in and forget about being a Christian. But Jesus did not take the easy path. He did unpopular things in the name of the Father, and even willingly laid down his life for our sins.

When I think about that sacrifice it gives me courage to say no to activities that don't respect my Christian values. I'd rather take a bad grade on an assignment than cheat. I dance, and dance can be competitive, but I always try to be kind, encouraging, and a team player.

My friends may be tempted to give in to peer pressure and make fun of someone, and while standing up for someone against your friends can be hard, I try to live by the commandments of Jesus to love one another and to treat others with kindness.

It may be hard to be a Christian teen (or adult) when all the world is telling you "you're no fun" or "you think you're better than everyone else," but in the end all that matters is God.

Knowing He gave His Son to die for us makes any unpopular thing I have to do easier. His Love and His Grace guide me, and that's all that matters.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, Today's world can pull us in many different directions, most away from you. Help guide us as we face these challenges so that your will be done here on Earth, through us, in us, and because of us. Amen.*

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Easter Sunday - April 17, 2022

Risen! Rejoice! Renew!

[Luke 24](#)

² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they went in, they did not find the body.^{1a}

I have two favorite seasons, fall and spring. Each year I look forward to spring. I expect it; I know it is coming, but not always as soon as I would like. Many times the winter months can be dreary because there is not much brightness and it is cold.

Thoughts of spring bring to mind a line from a wonderful hymn “In the cold and snow of winter, There’s a spring that waits to be!” Spring brings excitement of new life! Beautiful blossoms, trees begin to bud, the birds sing a new song and the fragrance of spring fills the air with a freshness unlike any other time of the year! It makes me feel renewed!

I am reminded by Jesus that he brings new life not just to the earth but to each of us! All has been resurrected!

We read in Luke 24 about the women going to the tomb except they were not expecting anything but to find Jesus’s body. I am sure they were feeling extreme sadness and disappointment. They had followed Jesus. They had heard what he had told them about what would happen to him, but really did not understand until they found the tomb to be empty.

They were reminded by the two men, “Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again” (Luke 24:6-7). But then they remembered! They ran back to share the good news with the eleven and with all the others. **No longer sad and disappointed but renewed and rejoicing!**

We see something similar with the two men on their way back home to Emmaus. They were able to spend time with Jesus on their journey home. In their conversation with Jesus, they told him what the women had told them about the tomb being empty, but they still did not believe it to be true.

Their sadness and disappointment blurred their vision to the empty tomb and with whom they were walking and talking. Their eyes were opened during the meal they shared. Once they realized with whom they had been talking and sharing a meal, they immediately returned to Jerusalem to tell the eleven and others that Jesus has Risen and what had happened on the road and how he had been known to them in the breaking of the bread. **No longer sad and disappointed but renewed and rejoicing!**

The Savior is Risen! Be Renewed! Rejoice! Get up! Go! and share the Good News with all you come in contact. Do not let the trials and disappointments of life blur your vision. It is spring and you are a new creation in Christ!

***Prayer:** Beloved Father, Thank you for giving us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Remind us to share that same living hope with others all our days until we are resurrected to be with our heavenly Father. This day we Rejoice in the Risen Savior! Amen.*

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Easter Monday, April 18, 2022

**He is Lord, He is Lord!
He is risen from the dead and He is Lord!
Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess
That Jesus Christ is Lord.
(UMH #177)**

Did you sing that hymn with me just now?
What a wonderful day it is, Easter Monday, when we can again proclaim:
Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen, Indeed! And, He is Lord!

As the celebration continues today, let us ponder [1 Peter 1:3-5](#) from *The Message*:

³⁻⁵ What a God we have! And how fortunate we are to have him, this Father of our Master Jesus! Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we've been given a brand-new life and have everything to live for, including a future in heaven—and the future starts now! God is keeping careful watch over us and the future. The Day is coming when you'll have it all—life healed and whole.

Read over it a few times if you would like. What conclusions do you draw? Where are you being led?

I have found that the good news of the resurrection is way too good to keep to myself. These words from 1 Peter 1 are way too important to not share with others. It is time to embark on a new journey – a journey of connecting and building. I'm sure you've heard it before: make connections, build bridges, and partnerships.

My four-year-old son has certainly heard this message many times before – “you need to share.” Share your snack. Share your toys. Share with your friends. Share with your sister and cousins. Share.

What does your personal ministry look like as you work to share the love and light of Christ with others?

It's time to take the next step. My prayer is that we all take that step together. Wow! Can you imagine the powerful impact that would make on our world? If we all took just one step toward sharing Christ with others as we make connections and build bridges. Can you envision how wonderful that would be?

The hope and peace of Jesus is for all. Every knee and every tongue. Everyone.

Prayer: *Gracious and Loving God, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Thank you for Easter and resurrection. Guide us and lead us all, as we take a step on the journey of sharing your love, grace, mercy, hope, and peace to all we encounter. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

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In Appreciation

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Kristi Wilkerson