



February 22nd-
April 8th 2012



Lent Devotions

A time of reflection,
prayer and worship.

Ash Wednesday, February 22
Read Luke 18:9-14

It All Comes Down to ATTITUDE!

What would the world be like if everyone went to church, prayed, fasted twice a week, and gave a tenth of all of their income to the church? What if everyone followed the Ten Commandments and didn't steal, commit adultery, or take advantage of other people? What if everyone remembered to thank God for that state of affairs? What a wonderful world that would be! Or, it could be a world full of Pharisees. In the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector, Jesus points out that our relationship to God goes deeper than simply *doing* the right thing. We must FEEL the right thing. As usual, Jesus' observation goes way beyond any human ability to assess a situation. As usual, we need to listen carefully to what Jesus says.

Jesus could have pointed out this outwardly good man and said something like: Be therefore like this man *and humble yourself before God* and you will be justified before God. But he didn't. He made his point even clearer by comparing the outwardly good man to a person who was widely thought to be at the other end of the spectrum; a tax collector. Tax collectors were despised because they took money from the common people in the name of the hated Roman occupiers. Further, they were known to pad their own pocketbooks with money ostensibly taken in the name of the Emperor. Almost anyone could be compared to a tax collector and appear to be a pretty good person. Jesus observes the Pharisee and the tax collector, hears their prayers, looks into their hearts, and declares that the tax collector is better off in God's eyes than the Pharisee. Remarkably, without any other conditions, based simply on these two prayers and what they indicate about the state of the two men's hearts, Jesus proclaims that the tax collector will go home today justified in the eyes of God.

What is it about asking for forgiveness that impresses Jesus so much?

It all comes down to attitude. Asking for God's forgiveness is connecting with God at a different level than following the Ten Commandments. Asking for forgiveness is good for us. It reminds us that we can do better and it puts us in the right relationship to God.

So what does this mean for us in today's world? While a lot has changed in the world since Jesus told this story, the relationship between God and our hearts has not changed. While there is nothing wrong with living like the Pharisee, we need to BE more like the tax collector and humbly ask God to forgive our shortcomings as we seek to live in His will.

Prayer: Dear God, we pray that You will forgive us when we ask for forgiveness....and when we forget to ask for forgiveness. Amen.

Larry Gaultney

Thursday, February 23
Read: Philippians 3:12-21

When I read the scripture above, which includes themes like; “walking the walk, not just talking the talk,” and not letting anyone or anything throw us off course; I couldn’t help but reminisce the past three challenging years that were kicked off by life-altering events that began on May 10, 2008. That was the day my dad passed away after a short illness. Seven days later I returned home from New Jersey after his funeral only to have to put down my sweet cat, Katie, very unexpectedly. Three days later, the new owners of the company I’d worked at for 18 years terminated me because they were downsizing and restructuring the company. And two months to the day we buried my father, my mother passed away. It was a devastating time filled with the huge void of losing both parents, a beloved pet, a job I loved, and essentially having to start all over at 61 years of age. Being the organization freak I am, I immediately set goals, disciplined myself to follow them, and did not let myself get sidetracked or lose sight of what needed to be done. I made looking for a job, a full-time job. That was my all-consuming goal and my main focus. My goal was to get a job. I stayed the course, stayed focused, and plugged away using every resource I could find. I was rewarded after six months of intensive and undeterred searching. I never took my eye off the “prize.”

In his letter, Paul writes with great affection to people he holds very dear to his heart, to live in godly unity and love; to be steadfast with prayers, and to happily follow the example of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ as he has always done. He tells them to center their lives in Jesus and to be content in all situations by not letting past experiences or dealings with other people that resulted in bad things, influence them negatively (which is so easy to do). We shouldn’t let past mistakes or events make our decisions for us. And even though Paul has led an exemplary life striving for the same prize all Christians hope to achieve —our home in heaven—he doesn’t think he’s already won the prize, but rather his “race” continues daily with a concerted effort to forget what is behind him so he can do his utmost best to reach the goal in front of him, which is to be with our Lord, Christ Jesus in heaven. It is a way of life that can sometimes be filled with impediments and detours, but one we must diligently strive to follow in order to be with God.

Paul’s letter speaks to pertinent challenges that still face each and every one of us today:

- Our thoughts are reflected through our actions.
- Lasting joy is achieved only through a close relationship with Jesus.
- Christians also have problems, but they can be overcome through the power of our Lord.
- A quitter never wins...a winner never quits.
- God never fails.

By emulating Paul’s example, which he shares through his relationship with God, as well as with other people, and by walking our own committed and loving walk with Jesus, and by living under the loving care of our church, we too will experience the overwhelming joy available to all Christians and to realize the prize we all hope to win —becoming a citizen in Heaven alongside our Lord and Savior.

Three months after losing my parents and life as I’d known it for so long, I turned to God and EUMC to find the guidance, strength, and encouragement I needed. Through prayer, faith, and

seeing all the different ways God has provided me what I've needed, I've managed to get through some very difficult times. Sometimes it has been very difficult to face the day, but I just keep taking it one day at a time. I've renewed and rebuilt my relationship with God and feel empowered and ever faithful that by following his example and keeping my eye on the goal, I will eventually win the prize we all seek.

*Prayer: Lord, no matter how dark the storm, how big the challenge, or how lost I feel, I ask You to bless me with the ability to stay on course and to follow your example; to never forget how much You love me and how Your belief in me and my faith in You will prevail to keep me on the path that will lead me to Your Heavenly home. Let me always keep on believing, trusting in You, and praying my way through.
In Jesus' loving name, Amen.*

Nancy Crawford

Friday, February 24
Read 1 John 4:16-19

“God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we are like Christ here in this world. Such love has no fear because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of judgment, and this shows that his love has not been perfected in us. We love each other as a result of his loving us first.”

At the end of the day, I know for me personally, that I am not sitting down and thinking to myself what did I do today that showed someone else the love and compassion of God. I am usually thinking about my day, how busy it was, what I did not get done, and what needs to get done tomorrow. A friend of mine was not thinking this way a few nights ago. After she struggled to fight the cold and wind to get to her car, she spotted a homeless man sitting on the side of the road. It was one of the coldest nights we have had all winter and it just happened to be snowing. She assumed he must be freezing and maybe there was something she could do to help. After my friend and her sister had gotten a little farther down the road, she felt something inside of her move so she told her sister to turn the car around and go back to Royal Farms. She went into the store and bought the man the biggest coffee they had and while in the store, decided he might also be hungry, so she bought him a sandwich. When she went back to where the man had been sitting, my friend saw that he was holding a sign that she did not see as she was driving by before. It said that he was hungry and needed food. She gave him the coffee and the sandwich and was delighted that he enjoyed it and that it was what he had needed after all. As they were getting ready to leave, the man said to them, “You guys must be Christians.” My friend and her sister showed this man the perfect love that God has placed inside all of us and the love that Jesus has shown to so many people. This love that God wants us to show to others can be given through small acts of kindness, through food and drink, and through just a simple smile and hello.

As we approach this time of Lent and eventually Jesus sacrificing everything just for us, maybe our minds should be more focused on how we live out this type of love. Jesus spent His life showing people how to love and how to be compassionate toward others. When the time had come, Jesus gave His life for us, despite all the bad things people said about Him, despite all the trials and tribulations He experienced to get there. This whole act was given out of love, and I think it's time we start perfecting that love inside of us and share it with everyone around us. This type of love is not meant to be kept inside--let everyone know of the ultimate love and what Jesus did for us!

Amanda Fetterolf

Saturday, February 25
Read Psalm 42

*Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God Psalm 42:5 & 11 (NIV)*

Depression

Our reading for today is one of 13 “maskils” in the Book of Psalms—the others being Psalm 32, 44, 45, 52-55, 74, 78, 88, 89 and 142. According to the New International Version of the Bible, a “maskil” is a term perhaps denoting psalms written to make a person wise or prudent, to increase a person’s success or skill.

In Psalm 42, we find the psalmist discouraged because of being in exile far from Jerusalem and not being able to worship in the temple on God’s holy days or festivals. Each of us has had to deal with depression at one time or another in varying forms and degrees. Depression can be very debilitating. We saw that with both of our loving mothers who suffered with it on and off throughout their lives. During those dark times, each of them meditated upon their favorite biblical verses. Mom Waddington’s was: *But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint* (Isaiah 40:31, KJ). Mom Mahoney’s was: *I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me* (Philippians 4:13). The psalmist and our mothers were wise and prudent. They knew how much they needed God’s word to sustain them in their lives.

During this Lenten season—a time for reflecting on one’s sins or misdeeds—let us remember how much we need to put our hope in God during the depressed times in our lives. May we always keep our eyes on the empty cross, knowing that beyond the so-called finality of the grave is life eternal if we only believe. SO BE IT!

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, forgive us when we do not turn to You and Your word for the strength, comfort and love we need to deal with the difficult times in our lives. So often we try to go it alone, only to realize we cannot. Thank you for putting God-fearing individuals in our lives to lead us to Christ and for being there for us in all facets of our lives. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Bob and Emilie Waddington

Sunday, February 26
Read Daniel 9:3-10

I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: "Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land. Daniel 9:4-6

Confess to a God Who Loves You

Daniel is writing at a particularly difficult time in Jewish history. It is the year 538 B.C - 67 years into the Babylonian Captivity, which saw the Temple looted and destroyed, and the best and brightest of Israel moved to Babylon to live as slaves. The prophet Jeremiah had predicted that the captivity would last 70 years; so as the end of enslavement draws near, how will the people return to Jerusalem and rebuild not only the Temple, but also the people of God?

As a leader of Israel well into his 80's, this weighs heavily on Daniel's mind. His prayer in the beginning of Chapter 9 is a model for us as we struggle with life's difficulties ourselves. His prayer, of which only the beginning is printed above, catalogs a list of offenses not unlike the prayer we recite in our own communion service (found on page 13 of our hymnal). It is a list of sins encompassing the things we have done that are wrong as well as things we should have done which are right and good, but haven't done.

For me, the strength of both these prayers is not just in the confessions they bare before God, but in the understood faith they acknowledge in an awesome God who loves us beyond measure and in spite of who we are and what we do. Daniel and Jesus both tell us about God's love as absolute and that the only thing that can separate us from God's love is our own refusal to accept it.

Our God is a God of second chances--and third and fourth and hundredth chances. He created us and He knows our weaknesses and limitations. All he asks is that we always remember that we are His children and strive to live our lives in line with His Will - and for no other reason than that His Will enables us to live happy, healthy, peaceful lives. Keeping the commandments is more about helping us to avoid the kinds of petty, self-destructive behaviors that remove love and grace from our lives than they are about a list of rules to be followed.

During Lent we are called to reflect on our lives in relation to our faith. In recognizing our relationship with God through our confession, we, like Daniel and David and so many others in the Bible, testify that we are imperfect, but that God sees through our imperfections and loves us completely. By recognizing his power in our lives, we find grace and forgiveness and connection. And that makes life the best it can be for all of us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Lord of the Universe and God of my life, thank you for your awesome love and grace. No matter what life brings, help me always to focus on your love as my compass and my strength.

Rick Ceresini

Monday, February 27
Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-19

After reading her essay, Ms. Cubie announced that Jana had done an excellent job of descriptive writing. Her use of figurative writing had captivated her classmates and created a vivid description on what the town looked like the morning after the storm. She then pointed out that the oral presentation, however, would have been more effective had she consciously increased and lowered the tone of her voice to emphasize the mood of the scenes depicting thunder, breaking windows, howling winds and the calm silence that followed. By opening her analysis of the speech with a positive remark Ms. Cubic minimized upsetting her student and tactfully drew attention to the area in most need of improvement.

As humans we are sensitive and should be mindful not to hurt each other with our words. Paul used similar wisdom in his address to the Corinthians. He writes to the church advising them to be mindful of continuing to work as a team but opens his remarks with blessings and encouragement in 1 Corinthians 1:4 saying *I thank my God always on your behalf for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ that in everything ye are enriched by him in all utterance and in all knowledge.* He then addresses the area of correction 1 Corinthians 1:10 stating, *Now I beseech you brethren by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that ye all speak the same thing and that there be no division among you but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment.*

As we reflect on the days ahead let us be mindful of each others feelings and aim to gently draw attention to areas of improvement without harsh judgments, but showing appreciation to our family members and coworkers for the things they continue to do right while lovingly pointing out areas that could use a little extra effort.

*Words are very important things:
Words can make you feel happy,
Words can make you feel sad,
Words can make you full of glee,
And words can make you feel bad.
Be careful how you use your words
Think before you speak.*

Latoya Adams

Tuesday, February 28
Read Genesis 37:12-24

God's Plans

How often have you had plans that changed? Having chosen this scripture to study and determine how it applied to the upcoming Lenten Season was a new adventure for me. After reading the selected scripture, I found three different lessons that I want to share with you.

My first reading helped me see how the direction of Joseph's life was changed by his brothers' hatred and betrayal. Joseph would probably have been a shepherd but because his brothers sold him to some merchants headed to Egypt, he became one of the most powerful men in Pharaoh's kingdom. Did this just happen by accident? **NO**, there was a greater plan for his life. **Jeremiah 29:11** tells us *"I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future"*. Can you imagine how Joseph must have felt being sold by his brothers and taken by force to a foreign land?

But instead of retaliating, Joseph forgave his brothers and in **Genesis 45: 5-8** he tells them **"Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me. It was not you but God who sent me here."** This part of the lesson shows us God has plans for us that we might not expect. It also shows us that through the love of our God, we are able to forgive others. This is especially meaningful as we examine ourselves during this Lenten Season to see if we are able to forgive others as God forgives us. Don't wait, do it now.

The third thought-provoking lesson I learned from studying this particular scripture was how there are so many examples in the Old Testament that foretold different events that would occur in the life of Jesus. Some say these are "shadows" of the coming Messiah. Isn't the Bible a wonderful gift and a life long study? Joseph's life could be seen as a shadow of Christ's life in these respects.

Jesus' Life	Joseph's Life
Beloved Son of God	Beloved son of Jacob
Sent by His Father to give us everlasting life	Sent by his father to see if his brothers were well or if in need of anything
Christ was hated and despised by men who called out "crucify him"	Joseph was hated by his brethren
Jesus was beaten, ridiculed, stripped of His clothing and thrown into a pit	Joseph was beaten, stripped of his clothing and thrown into a pit
Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver	Joseph's brother Judeah suggested they sell him for twenty pieces of silver
Jesus was thirty years old when He started His ministry	Joseph was thirty years old when he took charge of all the lands of Pharaoh's kingdom
Jesus took His place next to His Father in Heaven	Joseph had one of the most powerful positions In his time & brought his father to live with him in Egypt

As we journey through this Lenten Season may we look inward to prepare our hearts and renew our commitment to Jesus Christ. May we learn from this lesson and thank God for the plans He has for us and to freely forgive others even as we are forgiven and to let our lives be reflective of a shadow of Christ. Then may we draw closer to Him and know that He is always with us and will not forsake us even as Jesus was never forsaken by His Father.

Kay Michael

Wednesday, February 29
Read 2 Corinthians 1: 8-22

Anointed, Sealed, Guaranteed

Following the reading of this scripture, my eyes were opened by these words from Paul: *“Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.”* It amazes me that I am able to find new meaning in a scripture that I have read many times before.

The very idea that God set His seal of ownership on me, is amazing enough, but that He also put His Spirit in my heart, and...(drum roll here), this comes as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. This just blows me away! His ownership upon me, His spirit within me...His deposit...His guarantee! Does it suffice to say that I, that you, that we, are important to Him. He has it covered. If only our free will would allow Him to do His work within us, we would be His perfect children.

Thinking of the stuff that bears our own seal of ownership, the earthly stuff, our homes, our church, our cars, my observation is that we care for these things. We like to keep our homes presentable; freshen up areas of our church; keep our vehicles shiny and so on. The things we own represent us, just as we, under the ownership of God, represent Him.

A better example may be our children. While we do not own them, our stamp is upon them. We pour all we are able into them until a time when they will go out into the world...representing us. Free will comes into play, so our stamp carries no guarantee. Only God's stamp and "heart deposit" are powerful enough to guarantee what is to come.

Prayer: Father God, during this Lenten season, let us walk as your dear children, bearing your seal of ownership and representing you well. Help us to live not according to worldly wisdom, but according to God's grace. As we walk this lonesome walk with our Savior, experience His death and celebrate His resurrection let us walk in the newness of life each day. In Christ's name, Amen.

Gail Juergens

Thursday, March 1
Read Psalm 59

“Deliver me from my enemies, Oh my God; protect me from those who rise up against me. Deliver me from those who work evil; from the bloodthirsty save me.” Psalm 59: 1-2

In this Psalm, David prays to God for protection against men who are trying to kill him, just because King Saul doesn't like David. Later in the same Psalm, David asks God to protect him from foreign armies. Because David prayed to God to go before him, God shielded David from harm, so David thanks God by singing praises to Him.

David acted much like we, as Christians do today. When I am faced with something scary or upsetting, I automatically pray to God to help me through the difficult times. I then thank God that I was able to persevere with His help. I can't say that I have killers waiting for me like David, outside the front door of my suburban home and I will most likely never become King and have to worry about defeating armies from other countries, but I do have temptations and evil all around me just waiting to corrupt my soul and ruin my life.

When I go out with friends, there is sometimes the temptation of abusing alcohol and other illegal substances. I would much rather attend a concert or go to the car show than to sit through my anatomy and physiology labs and lectures. The temptation of going to the mall and spending money that I earned on high priced designer clothing or the newest electronic gadget to add to my collection is sometimes too hard to pass up. It's difficult to go home and eat a healthy meal when it's so easy to drive through and pick up fast food. These are my enemies. All of us have something or someone trying to tear us down. Like David, we need to pray to God for protection and guidance, asking Him to shield us from our "enemies".

During this time of Lent, my suggestion would be for all of us to pray for strength against our "enemies" and stop one bad or unhealthy behavior. If it's staying away from fast food or taking a walk after dinner instead of having a smoke, we need to take care of the body God has blessed us with. Instead of spending frivolously, maybe we should save to help pay for college or a down payment on a first home. Then we can all sing praises to God for going before us and shielding us from harm.

Wesley White

Friday, March 2
Read Mark 2: 13-22

The Calling of Levi

In our everyday lives, we are called to do many things – answer phones and doors, work for wages, answer e-mails, tend to and transport children, serve on committees, visit with friends and family – and the list goes on and on. Most of these things we cannot refuse to do, they are part of our existence. But how many of us hear the spiritual call that God sends us?

In today's scripture reading, Levi, a tax collector is despised by the Jews and considered by many to be unclean and a sinner. Levi is called by Jesus to follow him. Levi leaves his tax collector's booth and follows Jesus... just like that! Jesus did not ask Levi to do holy work or clean up his act before joining Him, He took him as he was and Levi did not hesitate.

After Levi, who was renamed Matthew by Jesus, makes his commitment to Jesus, he holds a banquet and invites his tax collector friends, who are other sinners. Matthew probably wants to introduce Jesus to his friends and to share his faith publicly to those who know Him. Not bad for a new convert!

As Matthew is celebrating his new-found faith with his friends, the Pharisees are critical of Jesus eating with the tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees are supposed to be the "religious" ones, yet they are self-righteous and judgmental.

So, who are we? Are we Levi or a Pharisee? Could we be able to drop what we are doing and respond to Jesus' call in an instant? He does not call the righteous, but seeks the sinners. Answering His call is not always easy and it may be messy, uncomfortable and unpredictable, but it is what He asks of us. During this Lenten season, listen to what God is calling us to do, and be ready to answer.

Prayer: Our Precious Lord, You have sacrificed everything for us. You gave Your Son to us and we sinned against Him. We ignore Your call, but You still love us. Please help us to hear what You want us to do and give us strength to follow You.

Terri Lokey

Saturday, March 3
1 Corinthians 4:1-7

¹ This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ² Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. ³ But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. ⁴ For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵ Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.

Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

⁶ I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, ^[a] that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. ⁷ For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? 1 Cor 4:1-7

Judgment: Most research in psychology explains that it is human nature. I have always been afraid of being judged; yet since the moment I was born, I have been inviting people to judge me so that I have validation about the choices I make. I took ballet classes hoping that my teacher was going to tell me, "Good job!" I handed in assignments at school hoping that I would get an "A" so that I could feel good about myself. Even recently, I did not share good news with people because I was so afraid of what they would think about me. I think part of my fear was because many times people tell me exactly what they think with no regard for the impact that their words will have on me. They believe that they are entitled to what they think and should share whatever comes to mind. I guess you could say that they lack a filter. At times I have been so focused on others' judgments of me that I forget whose judgments really matter: God's. The scripture says, *"But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me."*

I wish I could say that all of the choices that I make are to please God. But, I am learning. I am a work in progress. As I get older, the more I am learning that although I make choices even with God in mind, I have very little control over what happens in my life. He obviously has ultimate control over the path my life takes. The more I plan, the more "surprises" come my way. The wonderful part is, most of these surprises have brought me closer to God. The saying should be, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger and closer to God." I've also noticed that the older I get, the less in control I *need* to be. I have a peace that I have never felt before. Don't get me wrong, I would still be characterized by most people judging me to be a high-strung, detail-oriented woman, but I am fairly confident that at the beginning of each day I am open to the possibilities, care less about what others think of me than I did the day before, and do less judging of others than I did before. I am striving to be what the scripture tells us to be: a *"servant of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God."*

Returning to the classroom this year after being away for a while has really allowed me to practice being a faithful servant of Christ. I have literally been told to "take off my rose-colored

glasses," so I'm pretty sure I drive other teachers crazy with my unyielding desire to find the good in all the children we teach and to not judge them, especially the things beyond their control. Although my job as their teacher is to judge the quality of their work, it is not to judge their caregivers' parenting skills, friends they choose, or what extracurricular activities they participate in. It is so easy to pass judgment and blame the circumstances that are beyond the students' control. It is a far more challenging task to rise above those circumstances and focus on learning that we can do during our brief time together each day. I think God is telling me that it is my job to grade their work, not the students themselves.

I think being a wife and parent has given me the greatest opportunity to practice being a faithful servant of Christ. Jim and I take very seriously the role of teaching our girls to make choices that would "make God happy." Perhaps by teaching my children that what others think of them really doesn't matter as long as they are doing what pleases God, will help me to ultimately learn this lesson, too.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please help me to be a faithful servant and a steward of the mysteries of God. Help me to refrain from judging others and worrying about others judging me. I know that your judgments are the only ones that ultimately matter. Thank you for all of the "surprises" in my life and reminding me that You are the One in control. Amen.

Susan Zimmer

Sunday, March 4
Read Psalms 84

“How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young—a place near your altar, Lord Almighty, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you” Psalms 84 (NIV)

The Strength of Faith

Don't you wish this could be you? Wouldn't having that strong of a faith be wonderful? A lot of people go to church every week, show that they believe in God, and act faithful around others, but to feel so close to God that your “soul yearns, even faints” for Him is incredible.

Just because you go to church every week and have a strong faith doesn't mean that you have the perfect connection to God. There is always room to listen to Him more, ask Him for help more, and share His love more. He will always be there for us, not just when we think of Him, but always.

Many of us get caught up in the craziness of our daily lives that we do not leave nearly enough time for God. If we just took a little time, we could find that our lives may not seem as crazy. God wants us to be the rock on which we stand. If we took time from something that we do every day, such as driving to work or school, to talk and listen to Him with intention, we could be more relaxed, centered, and connected throughout our day.

The harder we work at our faith, the more dependent we can be on God. We can become more like the author of the passage, yearning for God at any time of the day. For those that do not feel like God is a part of your lives constantly, you can make that happen. We can feel His strength surrounding us, His faith in us, and His passion through us. Our faith can grow as long as we desire it to be so and commit to it.

Prayer: Lord, please help us to realize how important it is to take time out of our lives to focus on You. Thank you for being there for us at every time of the day, whether we are thinking of You or not. Help our souls to yearn for You. Amen.

Sarah Buckley

Monday, March 5
Read Psalm 57

*I lie down among lions
that greedily devour human prey;
their teeth are spears and arrows,
their tongues sharp swords.
Be exalted, O God, above the heavens.
Let your glory be over all the earth. Psalm 57: 4-5*

It was early on a Saturday morning, and I was feeling sorry for myself, for having to spend yet another weekend away from my family while traveling to Europe for business meetings. After 8 days of international travel, jet lag, missed flight connections, delays, and long drawn out meetings, I just wanted to be home. But here I was now in London, biding my time until my Monday commitment, and then my flight home on Tuesday. I scanned over the tourist map, and saw all the familiar sites of places I had been before in the city, courtesy of previous business trips to England. But then something caught my eye, at a small intersection about 5 miles outside the center of town--the home and first church of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism.

I hopped on the Tube or subway, and made my way to try and find this almost undetectable icon on my map. After several stops, asking many passers-by, some of whom laughed at the possibility of knowing where such a place would be, and getting lost numerous times, I finally took a left off a very busy street, walked half a block away from all the commotion of the city, and stumbled upon my destination. As I stood gazing at John Wesley's statue, and then entering the grounds, it seemed as though the noise of the city fell away from me. Due to the positioning of the home and the church, I could no longer hear the horns, sirens, and bustle that I had just left minutes ago.

I made my way inside the modest church and when I looked around, I noticed there was not another soul in the entire sanctuary. After sliding into a pew for a few minutes, a very calming feeling came over me, and I thought how as Christians this exemplifies our life. We walk through turmoil, many times we question our faith or have our faith ridiculed by others, and we often find ourselves lost looking for God's path. Yet, out of nowhere, He shows it to us, and He shows us His glory above everything else. Then as Christians, we are comforted.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for your blessings that never cease. During this time of Lent, let us not forget the comfort Your love provides. Help us to remember what Jesus taught us that through all persecution, and ridicule, You will never leave us, but will always be there to give us strength, and help us find our way back to You. Thank you, for the ultimate gift of Your Son Jesus Christ. In His name, Amen.

Steve Foster

Tuesday, March 6
Read Psalm 62

David was but a young shepherd boy when he was brought before King Saul to play his harp and become part of his musical entourage. David, through circumstances, ended up on a battlefield and many of us remember the heroic story of a slight boy who defeated the giant Goliath with only his slingshot and a rock. His skill did not go unnoticed by Saul, and David was put into service as commander of Saul's troops.

But Saul became jealous of David's skills and leadership and tried to kill him. After a few attempts at reconciliation, and Saul still attempting to kill him, David ran, knowing that was his only chance of survival. Because of the contract on David's life, he had to continue traveling, sometimes through enemy territory, hiding in caves. He was forced to live on the run. It was through these difficult years that David learned to depend and lean on God entirely.

This is only a fraction of the story of David and doesn't begin to touch on the reasons why he became the man and king that the Bible or historians describe him to be. He was a great leader in battle, a poet and writer of music but to some he is described as a great philosopher for the book of Psalms he wrote.

In the book of Psalms you can hear David pouring out his inner most thoughts of physical pain, anguish, anger, frustration and fear. But, in turn, you can also feel his hope, joy and happiness because he really understood what it meant to be truly dependent on God. He had a deep connection with God when he was disheartened and when he was joyous. David knew that no matter life's situation, God was with him.

This particular chapter David affirms that God is his salvation, his only salvation. He cannot depend on another human being or any material things. God is the one constant, his fortress, and because David believes in Him, he will never be shaken from his foundation. David has ultimate faith in God and wants others to share the benefits of trusting God alone.

Psalm 62:8 "Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge." David is reaching out and telling us that we need to release all of the things that keep us from God in order for us to be one with God. Ditch the worry, let go of the pain no matter what form it is, release the fear and let God bring us to that place of joy and happiness that is waiting for each and every one of us. God is waiting for you. What are you waiting for?

Prayer of St. Richard (1197-1253): Thanks be to You, our Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits which You have given us, for all the pains and insults which You have borne for us. Most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother, may we know You more clearly, love You more dearly, and follow You more nearly, day by day. Amen

Elizabeth Hook

Wednesday, March 7

Read Mark 4: 1-20

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Luke 6:38

Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop---thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times what was sown. Mark 4:20

In the "Daily Gospel Reflections", it states that Jesus was a storyteller who changed the world. He found a way to use images (Parables) such as the Good Samaritan and the Sower of Seeds to deliver a message to all of us. In these parables, He taught us the importance of giving generously of our time and our resources to our church, neighbors, friends, and family. Also, regardless of how big or small our efforts might be in helping those in need, it opens the door for them to become closer to God. Challenge yourself to be that Sower of Seeds and/or the Good Samaritan during the Lenten Season and throughout the years ahead.

A few months ago, I volunteered to be a part of the Home Communion Visitation Team, which was revived at our church. I was given a list of our church members who were identified as homebound or in a nursing facility. During my visitations, while sharing God's love and mercy, I realized that I was the one who was being blessed. I was blessed a hundred times over by just giving a little of my time to those precious women.

In Reverend Karen Bunnell's sermon a few weeks ago, her topic was "What Can You Give?" This topic can be applied to the Lenten Season. What can you give? We can be servants for God and reach out with our spiritual and material gifts that He has so graciously shared with us.

This is the time to use those gifts on your spiritual journey during this Lenten Season for the Kingdom of God.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for showing us the importance of giving through the parables which teach us to be true disciples. You have provided the examples, images, and directions, now we must find a way to follow in your well-designed footprint. Lord, we ask that You be with all of us as we open our hearts and minds to those in our church and neighborhoods, as well as, friends and family on our Lenten journey. Lord, help us to share Your love and forgiveness. Amen.

Barbara and Sonny Tenney

Thursday, March 8
Read Mark 4:21-34

Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lamp stand? Mark 4:21

This Little Light of Mine

In January at the annual talent show, the EUMC Children's Choir sang a resounding rendition of "This Little Light of Mine." The audience smiled and laughed as the children proudly held up their index fingers symbolizing candles and sang "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine...let it shine, let it shine, let it shine."

The second verse begins with "Hide it under a bushel? NO!" and as the children shouted "NO!" they removed their other hands from covering their candles. Sometimes it's easy to let our candles shine--especially when we are with other Christians, but are we willing to let our candles shine for the rest of the world? How can we let our lights shine for everyone? Our lights shine when we strive to live a Christ-like life. Often that means stepping out of our comfort zone by helping at the homeless shelter and soup kitchen, sponsoring a Compassion International child, mentoring at Thomson Estates Elementary School or contributing a hefty donation to UMCOR. How about giving up eating out for a couple of months and giving the money you saved to _____(you fill in the blank). Let your light shine!

In the next verse, "Don't let Satan blow it out," the children blow on their "candle" lights. Evil and sin creep into our lives in a multitude of ways: encouraging us to just look out for ourselves, showing us an 'easier' way, deciding to be dishonest because it's just a little white lie, participating in gossip, failing to love one another and so on. Be on the lookout for Satan. Let your light shine!

"Let it shine till Jesus comes" is the final verse of the song. Now there is a challenge! When new members join our church, we welcome them and we "renew our covenant faithfully to participate in the ministries of the church by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, AND OUR WITNESS." During this Lenten Season ponder our covenant to be faithful. Especially consider our promise to witness. Be a witness to Christ by living a Christian life and participating in all the ministries of Elkton United Methodist Church. Let your light shine!

Prayer: Lord, help us to find ways to let our lights shine and be Christian witnesses to others. In His name we pray. Amen.

Judy Pugh

Friday, March 9
Read Mark 4:35-41

Jesus Stills a Storm

After what was probably an exhausting session teaching the multitudes, Jesus was surely in need of a rest. No wonder He fell asleep on the boat! The waves probably rocked more than one of them to sleep at the beginning of their journey across the waters. But then things took a turn for the worse and a storm hit. The boat started filling with water! I can imagine the panic in their voices as they woke Him, *“Do you not care that we are perishing?”* They must have felt helpless. Three words from Jesus set things right again. *“Peace! Be still!”* And the wind and water obeyed. Another miracle. Their fears were gone, replaced with a better understanding of just who this Jesus man was.

On that night He asked His followers, *“Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”* I find I ask myself those same questions occasionally. Why AM I afraid? Why do I not have enough faith in myself to make the best decisions in my life? Does that mean I don’t have enough faith in Jesus? I need to remind myself that Jesus wants us to rely on Him. When things get stormy, I don’t have to panic! I don’t need to hold onto feelings of helplessness. I can “be still” and let Him provide whatever He thinks I need. That’s one of the reasons I look forward to the Lenten season every year. It’s a chance to slow down and still myself so I can center on Jesus. When I focus on that faith in Him, on His grace, I don’t feel helpless or afraid anymore. The panic gives way to peace and an understanding of the path He’s laying for me.

May we all use this Lenten season to draw closer to God by finding a better understanding of Jesus and all He offers us.

Dear Jesus, thank you for being there when we are afraid and when our faith isn’t as strong as it should be. Help us to be still in the midst of our storms so we may feel Your hands at work in our lives. Grant us patience and understanding with each other and thank you for Your wonderful gifts of grace and peace. In Your loving arms, Amen.

Sarah Bjerke

Saturday, March 10
Read Psalm 23

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me.....”

A Lenten Devotional on the 23rd Psalm

I recently attended the memorial service for a woman who had suffered from schizophrenia since adolescence. A lot of old friends and family were there and for me it was truly a celebration because, before Liz died, she found peace. Liz was a lovely girl when we were young; she was quiet, thoughtful and well liked. During the early onset of her disease most of us failed her. We were incapable of keeping a relationship with her; it was too hard. The only option was a “mental hospital”. The prognosis was a lifetime of confinement. She was depressed and unreachable, and required heavy sedation. The last time I visited her at that “Cuckoo’s Nest”, it was so troubling that I ran off the road and dumped my motorbike in a cornfield leaving the place!

Fast forward 40 years--mental health care has progressed so far that Liz was able to live “independently” near a community center with outpatient services. Speeches by her peers and the professionals at the service revealed their regard for Liz. They had not failed her; they had loved her and had cherished her friendship. When she moved into her own apartment, Liz thanked God for bringing peace into her life at last. He was certainly her shepherd, and she did not want. Her friends extolled her lack of complaints, even in the valley of the shadow of death **(The lesson to the rest of us: Don’t complain!)**. Somehow, it seems, though we could not always know it, He was with her. In His own way, God prepared a feast for her, anointed her with oil, and filled her cup to overflowing. Liz dwells in Your house forever.

Prayer: God, thank you for green pastures and still waters. Thank you for angels who lead us on paths of righteousness. This Lent, as we contemplate the great sacrifice of our Savior, let us also praise all those who live to guide Your sheep home.

Raymond Forney

Sunday, March 11
Read Mark 5:21-43

She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better, she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body she was freed from her suffering." Mark 5:26-29

The Power of Prayer

There is something to be said for the power of prayer. I personally suffered through a significant illness a few years ago. It was a sudden and very poor prognosis that changed the way I approached life thereafter. When this happened, I was a strong believer in the power of our Lord, but gained a much greater bond when I heard of so many relatives, friends and even strangers who were praying for me. Without their strong commitment in hope and belief as well as my own, I feel that my battle to heal would have been much more difficult. The way I live my life today is much different than the way I used to live my life. I do not sweat the small stuff anymore because I live for today and all the good things that life brings. I am so thankful for my family and friends and support them in all of the challenges that life brings to them as well. I am very thankful for my health and believe more than ever that when people have faith in the Lord, prayers do get answered.

Upon touching Jesus, the woman was healed and it was solely because of her true devotion and faith in Him. She would not have had that same result if her prayers were only for selfish purposes. She is healed both physically and spiritually as Jesus says "Go in peace and be freed from suffering".

I am blessed for all the days that are brought to me and hope that others will be able to share the same joys that I am able to experience every day. The power of prayer is strong and I hope that others in need have a circle of prayer to lift them up during difficult times.

Dear Lord, thank you for the blessings that You provide to so many people every day. Please continue to provide us strength and guidance as we endure difficult times and challenges. May Your word be spread to enlighten others and provide solace as we walk in Your footsteps on the way to Your Kingdom. Amen.

Linda Kosinski

Monday, March 12
Read Mark 5:21-43

Mark 5:21-43 is a story about two miracles performed by Jesus. Jairus, a strong leader/ruler in the local synagogue came and begged for Jesus to help his dying daughter. This request was very urgent because the child was near death. As they were walking, Jesus was surrounded and followed by a large crowd as He tried to go with Jairus to his home. This must have been really frustrating for Jairus because he knew that his daughter was near death and Jesus was his only hope. So if that wasn't hard enough, Jesus stops and looks around in the crowd because He knew that someone very ill had touched His clothes. He asked, *"Who touched me?"* The woman who touched Him came forward and confessed what she had done and why. The woman tells Jesus of her medical dilemma and He listens as well as tells her that *"Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."* Just at this moment, someone came running up to tell Jairus that it was too late and his daughter had died.

Now I don't know about you, but if I was Jairus, I would have been bitterly angry at the world. He had to first beg Jesus for help, then the crowds made it hard to get through, and then to top it off this woman causes Jesus to stop and takes up more time. Now his child is dead. I am thinking that there are very few of us, if any, that would have been very rational at this moment. However Jesus states *"Do not fear, only believe."* To Jairus' credit he did just that and he and Jesus walked the rest of the way to his house. As always, Jesus knew what would transpire and how everything would turn out. Jesus walks into the house and states, *"Little girl, I say to you, arise". "Talitha Coum."* The child immediately stood up and walked around.

Jairus was able to place his trust in Jesus and believe that there was still hope when it seemed that all was lost. The old woman was inflicted with a disease for 12 years yet she still had faith that Jesus could heal her. Put yourself in these two situations and think about what you would have done.

We often think we know exactly what we want God to do for us and what schedule that request or desire should be. The truth is that God is all knowing and His acts are in accordance to His will, not our wishes. We need to have faith and believe that there is a much bigger plan.

When I was a young nurse of 19 I figured I was in control of everything in my world. I had graduated from LPN school and was working in the emergency room (ER) department at a community hospital. To be truthful I thought I was hot stuff and invincible. Nothing could rattle my chains. I was a tough nurse and I believed I could handle anything thrown at me. I was helping to save lives and besides my job was important.

I was not involved in a church or any organized religion at that time of my life. My parents wanted to give me the opportunity to choose my own faith walk and did not have me baptized as a child. I experienced several different denominations of faith with

friends over the years, but my parents didn't go to church. Besides, now that I was important and busy as an ER nurse, I didn't have time for God stuff. I remember thinking many times as a child that God probably didn't even know who I was. Well...God had a plan for me.

Franky was a 9-year old boy with leukemia who came into the ER for blood work frequently. I became a favorite nurse of his and started doing some home health nursing over night to help his family. I became very attached to this little boy and yes, the day came when he passed on. I was so confused because I had had a moment with him before he died where he was restless and kept mumbling about the light over in the corner. There was no light in the corner. It was 3 am in the morning and very dark. I remember whispering to him that everything was going to be okay as I held his hand. Somewhere deep inside me I knew that there was a God and that Franky would be okay with him. Franky was gone and I started wondering about that light he saw and about God. Maybe the light was a physiological phenomenon where his eye captured some light or maybe he was delusional because he was so ill. I struggled and became frustrated that his death was so unsettling to me. Had I said the right thing? Who was God anyway? I reached out to a friend who introduced me to his pastor. That was the beginning of a major life changing event and the true beginning of my faith walk with Jesus. Somehow I believed in God and told a dying child it was okay. Wow!! I didn't know a thing about the Bible or God's word at that time. It was a door that opened for me and since then, I have grown in leaps and bounds with my faith. I can say with utmost certainty that I believe in God and that Franky is with Him today. God has a plan for each of us; we just need to have faith and believe.

Amy Whitney

Tuesday, March 13

Read Mark 6: 1-11

Instructions for the Twelve Apostles: *If any place won't welcome you or listen to your message, leave and shake the dust from your feet. (CEV)*

We know that as Christians we need to be disciples by following God's Word so that other kids can see how people should act and how we can show God's love. The Bible gives us rules to live by like the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule, but sometimes those are hard to do because not everyone in school acts this way. In this verse God is saying that if someone doesn't welcome you to act in a Christian manner or to talk about your faith shake them off "*shake the dust from your feet*", don't hang with them. The types of kids we shouldn't hang with are those that do drugs, call people names, threaten people with weapons, sexual abuse, and guns, or they drink alcohol, cuss, talk mean, bully, smoke or say God's name in vain. Even though we wouldn't hang with them we would pray for them as God said "*Pray for your enemies*".

Prayer: Dear Lord, please let people welcome the faithful just as they are. Please help me be strong to make good choices in my friends and to be a true friend if any of my friends are struggling with God's path. I pray in my heart, the seat of the Holy Spirit, that kids in my school will try to be kind and follow the rules. Amen.

This devotional was created by the 5th and 6th grade class after they read Mark 6: 1 – 12. Using brainstorming with stickies, they identified those types of activities that were not Godly and that kids in their schools portray. After a class discussion, ideas and wording were recorded and compiled for the devotional. Authors Carly, Leah, Kristina, Luke, Dylan, Jamie, Ben G., Cat, Kaitlin, Jocelyn, Misty, Conner, and Megan.

Wednesday, March 14
Read Psalms 82

“God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods.”
Psalms 82:1

God is in the Pew Behind You!

Clearly, this passage has very weighty implications and evokes a vision of God standing in the midst of an assemblage of gathered judges. However, after reading it, I was struck with an adaptation of a more local and personal nature.

I really do believe in the most literal interpretation of the verse. I feel and know that God is in the congregation when we meet and worship at the Elkton United Methodist Church! I'm not really sure how I know this, other than the feelings that envelop me before, during, and after spending time with our church family, our worship participants, and God.

Our church has been a crossroad that has drawn individuals into my life that I probably would never have had the privilege to know had it not been for our Christian worship. While many of us enjoy very different interests, this body has become a huge part of Lea's and my lives that has drawn us together into a family and community of caring. We enjoy laughs, share pain, and experience the common highs and lows that all true families experience. And, knowing that God is beside us in one of the pews as we talk, share, love, cry, and worship has been a source of comfort.

Of course, an integral part of knowing that God is in the room with us occurs by the very messages shared through our rituals, musical offerings, and our pastor's words of inspiration and challenge. Very few things in life touch me like an old familiar hymn that evokes feelings of Christian love and promise and Karen's words regularly reach into my inner being to provide hope, challenge, and reassurances that in fact, God is in the sanctuary with us.

And finally, God among us is such a wonderful feeling! He alone gives us the ears to hear, the words to speak, the emotions to embrace, and the love to share. As the Easter season approaches, we praise God for His son, and the divine rebirth that gives us all meaning and hope.

Helen Keller once said, “The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched -they must be felt with the heart.” I can't touch love, or support, or encouragement, or shared emotion, or even God, but I can certainly feel the spirit, prayers and divine intervention of those in the pews behind and around me when the choir sings an old familiar hymn or Karen brings me closer to the Lord. Having my church family and God in the congregation near me is one of those beautiful things!

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for always being behind us, beside us, and in front of us as we worship and go through life. Your gracious presence is the greatest comfort we could ask for! Amen.

Dick Gochner

Thursday, March 15
Read Mark 6: 30-44

As I sit here reflecting on the infamous story where Jesus was able to feed 5,000 men with just 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish, I am transported back to a time a few years ago when I faced a problem that seemed insurmountable. It involves telling a very personal story about my eldest daughter, Abby. Abby is a bright, funny, and very strong-willed young lady. However, starting when she was around two years old we started to have issues with getting Abby dressed. At first we thought it was just the terrible two's, but then she turned three and the problem continued. We tried everything to get her dressed: picking out clothes the night before, taking her shopping to pick out her own clothes, only buying certain clothes that we knew worked most of the time, etc. I would find myself yelling and pleading with her to just get dressed! I would force clothes on her to only have her yank them off as soon as I left the room. It would break my heart to see the pain that Abby was experiencing. You could tell that she wanted to wear the clothes, but for some reason she just couldn't. She is usually so eager to please that I just didn't get it. How hard can it be to put on a pair of pants? Well, for Abby it was asking the impossible, but we didn't know it until about 2 years later.

During the midst of dealing with Abby's difficulties with clothes, I could totally relate to the disciples. There were many, many times that the words "I can't" seeped into my head and I felt hopeless. I couldn't deal with the problem. My relationship with Abby was taking a very bad turn and I felt like I couldn't find a way to fix it. Like the disciples, I was lost in the problem and didn't see a way out. For the disciples, it was feeding all the people that had come to see Jesus. For me, it was how to get peace for my daughter. I didn't have faith that things would ever get better. It wasn't until one night I "silenced" myself and decided that I couldn't solve this myself. I needed help and that's when I decided to go to the doctor. After talking with the pediatrician, we sought out the help of an occupational therapist. The therapist tested Abby and it turns out she has a disorder called Sensory Processing Disorder: Tactile Defensiveness. Basically, due to several contributing factors (mainly being born 6 weeks early), Abby's nerves are constantly firing and in a state of agitation. The issue is exacerbated by clothes. With the help of the therapist we were able to set up an easy to follow therapy routine that produced results within a week. Soon Abby was wearing clothes that we had battled over in the past. We no longer battled over getting dressed. We had our sweet angel of a daughter back!

In times of trouble, we need to remember that Jesus will find a way to help us solve our problems. We need to silence ourselves and listen to what He is trying to tell us. He wouldn't want us to get so lost in our problems that we can't concentrate on anything else.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, please help us to silence our minds in order to hear Your words. Give us the patience to focus on solutions rather than getting lost in our own complications. Guide us down the path of faithfulness so that we can find the peace that You desire for us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Holly Wolf

Friday, March 16
Read 1 Corinthians 9:16-27

To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. 1 Cor 9:22-23

Have you ever been approached by a pushy salesperson who thinks he knows what you are looking for? Does he take the time to listen or does he have his own agenda in mind? Does this make you feel comfortable or do you want to run off the showroom floor?

Paul would say this is not the way to approach people. Instead you should make an effort to relate to your audience, use words they will understand - don't be a know-it-all. We should be welcoming and approachable to their questions; be sensitive enough to listen and show compassion. People will see your point of view as a caring individual rather than a self-motivated person. This would make them more receptive to what you have to say. You will be portrayed as someone who is doing this as a service for them and not someone who is out for his own personal gain and glory. Paul explains to be successful at this you must "train diligently" everyday because your spiritual progress depends on it. This is how Paul looked for opportunities to tell the world about Christ. Let him be an example for us of how we need to practice what we preach everyday.

Andee & Keith McKenica

*The Promise by Tracy
Chapman*

If you wait for me
then I'll come for you
Although I've traveled far
I always hold a place for you in
my heart

If you think of me
If you miss me once in a while
Then I'll return to you
I'll return and fill that space in
your heart

Remembering
Your touch
Your kiss
Your warm embrace
I'll find my way back to you
If you'll be waiting

If you dream of me
Like I dream of you
In a place that's warm and dark
In a place where I can feel the
beating of your heart

Remembering
Your touch
Your kiss
Your warm embrace
I'll find my way back to you
If you'll be waiting

I've longed for you
And I have desired
To see your face your smile
To be with you wherever you
are

Remembering
Your touch
Your kiss
Your warm embrace
I'll find my way back to you
Please say you'll be waiting

Together again
It would feel so good to be
In your arms
Where all my journeys end
If you can make a promise
If it's one that you can keep
I vow to come for you
If you wait for me
you'll hold
A place for me
In your heart.

Saturday, March 17
Read Psalm 136

His Love Endures Forever

My favorite part of the Easter story is when Mary Magdalene goes into the garden and finds the stone moved away from the cave where Jesus was laid. And she finds the gardener who is not really the gardener but is actually Jesus. All He does is call her by name and I can feel every single goose bump that she must have felt that day. It is such a wonderful story of a true follower of Jesus who was so distraught over His death until she realized that He was still there, right beside her, to love her forever.

I don't normally dwell on the story of Jesus in Gethsemane too much during Easter. I would prefer to think of those who stood by Him and loved Him rather than those who did not. However, as I was preparing this devotional I heard on my iPod the song printed to the left, The Promise by Tracy Chapman. I am sure when she wrote it she had other thoughts in her head. But when I listened to it again I thought about Jesus in the garden praying to God, knowing that all He had been, all He had done, everything that He had worked for was going to end. At some point during that time of prayer He must have realized that He had to stop asking God to change the course of history and instead asking God to help Him to understand what was going to happen to Him. Perhaps the words from this song were the conversation Jesus had with God that night.

Why do I think this? Because as I sit here and read those words and listen to that song, I realize that this is the conversation that I have with God. I know how much God loves me. I have felt His love, felt His touch and His embrace. And yet there have been times (and will probably be more) where I travel away. I know that He is always there. I know that He holds a special place in His heart for me, just as I do for Him. He tells me that if I come back to Him that He will fill that emptiness in my heart.

Psalm 136 reminds us of all that God has done for us. He has given us everything: the heavens, the waters, the sun, moon and stars. He saved us when we couldn't save ourselves: He brought Israel out of Egypt, parted the Red Sea so that His people could go through without being chased by Pharaoh's men, and He led us into the wilderness and back out to the Promised Land. Why would He do all of this? Because His love endures forever. Mary Magdalene knew this about Jesus. He is the place where all of our journeys end. All we have to do is keep our promise to love Him forever and to hold Him in our heart...and He will do the same. Amen.

Susan Starett

Sunday, March 18
Read Romans 8:11-22

For I reckon that the suffering of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” Romans 8:18 KJV

I don't listen to the news anymore. I can't hear one more terrible story about how bad things are. It always leaves me asking, what kind of world do I live in? Or worse, what kind of world have I brought my children into? I know that all of those stories are just a small percentage of the good that actually happens everyday, but the news still leaves me with feelings of despair and frustration. I always end up thinking that things are worsening by the day or that it must have been so much better hundreds of years ago; when people still revered and respected God. Eventually, I admit, I come to the real questions I can't help but asking: where is God and why can't I find Him in all of this nonsense.

However, my speculation and conjecture of how much simpler life must have been hundreds of years ago is proven exactly false by what we find Paul telling the Church in Rome from the referenced verses above: things were never better, just more of the same. In verse 22 he says, *“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.”* Paul's letter tells me that earthly suffering, in whatever form, has always been since the fall of man (Genesis 3:14-19) and will remain for some time. Since that day in the Garden of Eden, all creatures on this earth have been subject to sorrow and suffering. What Paul is telling the Roman Christians is still valid today. This passage shows me not to look to the past for better times. This passage tells me not to ask where God is in the desperate times we live in. This passage tells me that in this coming Lenten season to look to the Cross. Look at the suffering, the sacrifice, the humiliation, the torture and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and in the examination of His suffering not to get lost in the question of where is God; but to realize that the answer is in the resurrection and rise to glory that is just as true today as it was the day the stone was rolled away. In this coming Lenten season I choose to remember that God's only son has freed me from death and despair of this world because I'm promised all the Grace I will ever require to sustain me through my life on this earth and most important, the gift of everlasting life eternal. The ultimate bond of any suffering ever experienced by us on this earth has already been broken by the sacrifice of God's only son. God isn't missing; He has already given me everything that I need that day in Calvary. And that is the glory I see and will find in this coming Lenten season.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me not to doubt but to remember the Cross and that your son has already taken all the despair, all the fear, and all the sin; that which was and is to come, and made me free. Thank you Lord, Amen.

Eric Laramore

Monday, March 19
Read Psalms 89:1-18

*I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever; with my mouth will I make known
thy faithfulness to all generations. Psalms 89:1*

As I began to read this Psalm, my mind was quickly flooded with the familiar tune I was taught as a child. Research has shown that putting words to music serves as a highly effective learning tool. I'm happy to say my childhood church took full advantage of this methodology.

Revisiting this Psalm as an adult compelled me to examine the true meaning of the words. As I prayed for guidance in writing this devotional, the word "mercy" laid heavy on my heart. What is the true meaning? The word mercy can synonymously be referred to as compassion, or loving-kindness. Tender mercies can be described as the Lord's very personal and individualized blessings. As Christians, we accept God's great mercy upon us. It is not by our works or worth, but through His mercy, grace, and love we are saved through Christ. It is the tender mercies that are so easily forgotten or taken for granted.

As a pediatric nurse, I witness every day the challenges and overwhelming responsibilities that are associated with caring for a child with medical and developmental problems. Over the years, I have had the privilege of caring for hundreds of children--some healthy, and some very ill. I have also shared with a few families the extremely intimate and solemn time of losing their child to this Earth. One such experience changed my life forever. I remember as if it was yesterday admitting an extremely ill 4-year old into the ICU. She was absolutely precious with soft blue eyes and golden blond ringlets. Her health history quickly revealed she was severely disabled from cerebral palsy. She could not walk, talk, or feed herself. But according to her mom, she had a smile that would light up a room.

After attending to her medical needs, I spent a few minutes getting to know her mom. This amazing woman was not her birth mother, but a dedicated foster mom who had fostered medically complex children for years. She continued to explain that this special girl had touched her heart so strongly she had adopted her about a year ago.

Over the next few days, it was becoming increasingly apparent her frail little body did not have the strength to survive this acute illness. Her mom had made the brave and selfless decision that she did not want extraordinary lifesaving measures taken. It was just after 2 am that the medical team had determined she was rapidly deteriorating. My colleagues and I quickly rearranged the array of breathing tubes, feeding tubes, and IV lines to one side of the bed to allow room for mom to lie next to her daughter. I silenced the monitor and dimmed the lights. Although I was obligated to stay with them, I tried to provide desperately needed privacy. Glancing over at this heartbreaking image of this mother cradling her daughter for the last time, I could not help but tell her how lucky her daughter was to have such an amazing and dedicated mother. She looked at me with tear-filled eyes, gently smiled, and quietly said, "I am the lucky one". She continued to explain how blessed she was to have this precious girl in her life and how she had brought so much joy, just with a smile. What a humbling experience. I take for

granted that God has blessed me with three healthy children. This is more than a tender mercy – this is miraculous!

God shows His mercy on us each and every day. His faithfulness provides this loving mercy to all people, through all generations. It's so easy to take for granted the compassion and love that God bestows upon us. During this Lenten season, let us open our eyes to be aware and appreciative of His never-ending mercy.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for Your compassion. Please help me to have a kind and generous heart and be grateful for all Your tender mercies.

Carol Sise

Tuesday, March 20

Read Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness and come before His presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord, He is God. It is He that hath made us, and not ourselves. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His courts with Thanksgiving and into His courts with Praise. Be thankful in His name. For the Lord is good, His mercy is ever lasting; and His truth endureth to all generations. Psalm 100: verses 1-5

Do not be afraid to stand up and praise GOD. If we really take a look around us, His miracles and blessings and His works are everywhere in our lives on a daily basis. GOD works in mysterious ways. Some of them are not always pleasant or the way we would like to have them, but He has a reason for those things. It is He who has given us life, and helped us with a path and journey. His word is written as a guiding light for each one of us, and it is up to us to show our appreciation to Him by acknowledging Him with praise and prayer. Be thankful. Lift up you voice! Don't be shy; after all, He gave His life for each one of . . . US!

Prayer: This is the day the Lord has made, rejoice and be glad. Lord, we thank you for your bounty of blessings bestowed upon us, and also for Your guidance. Keep us safely in Your arms as we travel our individual journeys in life. We lift our hearts and voices to You Lord, in praise of all You do, and thank you for allowing us to bask in Your endless light. Amen.

Donna Dellinger

Wednesday, March 21
1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills.

I hope you have had the opportunity to be part of a special kind of group, be it sports team, orchestra, chorus, cast, work group or even a family working on a project, the kind of group where each member's strengths are utilized and the task at hand just flows seamlessly from one team member to another. For an individual, such a state is called being in the zone or in the flow, fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity. It is a state that can be attained by groups as well and it can feel nearly euphoric. As evidenced at the end of a winning game or during a standing ovation at a curtain call, it can even spill over to witnesses and bystanders. I think this is what God has in mind for the body of Christ.

Yet we know too well the darker side of groups when jealousy of each other's gifts leads to disagreement and failure to complete the assigned task. There is another failure too, one that leads to inaction. We know we have different gifts and sometimes we use that knowledge under the guise of false modesty to fail to act when called. We know our real reasons have more to do with fear, lack of motivation or disinterest, yet we demure using the excuse of being not capable. Moses tried that excuse in Exodus when called to speak for God, saying "*I am not eloquent*" and "*send, I pray, some other person*". The gifts of the spirit are more than our skills and our talents, these are instead gifts inspired by the Spirit, who apportions them to each of us individually according to His will. Once Moses accepted the task, God sent Aaron to help. What teams might God build if each of us when called would answer "yes" trusting the Spirit to gift and inspire us?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help me to not let "no" become my automatic default when you call me to action. Even when I feel inadequate or incapable, help me to trust You.

Mary Ann Schmook

Thursday, March 22
Read Psalm 73

"I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills."

I can't tell you how many times I have been asked, "If there was a God, why do bad things happen to good people and why do bad people seem to have no worries?" It is that question, and others like it, that some give pause when contemplating the existence of God. I must admit for a while it was a struggle that I had too. Every now and again I would take pity on myself and ask the age old question, "Why me, God?" Every time I think I will never again struggle with my faith, something inevitably happens to make me question who I am, what I believe and who Jesus really is to me. I was at that place almost ten months ago, once again. It was May 24th minutes after giving birth to the newest addition to our family, our second son. For months we prayed for a healthy baby, not boy or girl, just health for the both of us. So the day came and we were blessed with a beautiful baby boy and in a minute everything changed. The doctors were examining him when they discovered a lump on the crown of his head. I could see their expressions; they looked perplexed. No one seemed to have any answers of what it was or could be and all I could think was, "Why God, why me? Why him? What did I do to cause this?" That last question has two meanings: what was I doing that is not pleasing to God and what did I do physically to cause this. Of course now with a clearer mind and body, I know neither is true. God has a plan for everything and who am I to question Him. The doctor's guessed that this lump was somewhat of a cyst and that it should be removed. The MRI was inconclusive and they wouldn't know the extent of it all until they went in to remove the lump. The thought of our baby having neurosurgery scared me, but I also knew that it would be better to have the surgery now rather than later when his brain was more developed. Our son had surgery on September 19th and is now a healthy happy almost 10 month old! The best part of this whole ordeal is that I gained a very special relationship; one that I thought I lost when my mother left this Earth. I had never needed my mother more than I did that week and God sent me just what I needed. A long lost relative, if you will, called and offered to come and stay with us to help tend to our other children while we concentrated on our baby's surgery and recovery. Instead of being a difficult week it was the most wonderful week spent with new family. I too was like the Psalmist and nearly slipped and faltered. Our baby boy, our gift from God, Elijah John has renewed my faith in Jesus and that there is a plan, His plan. The struggles we face here on Earth are nothing compared to the Joy that is coming!

I would be foolish to say that I will never let doubt creep back into my mind, but my hope for all of us is that in times of trouble and/or turmoil we will quickly go to our knees to pray for guidance and assurance that only Jesus Christ can grant us.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, please help us not to question Your ways and give us the strength and courage to trust in You and believe in You for all the days of our life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Celeste Disciullo

Friday, March 23
Read Matthew 6:16-18

And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

My son has a phrase that he frequently says to me, "Just let it happen, Mom". These are simple words. Words that I am often tempted to dismiss as superficial and simplistic, but words that always come with the timing of a fine watch. Change happens all the time. Sometimes in mass quantities making me feel disoriented and insecure. I find myself trying to over think and fix every situation. Provide explanations to people so that they understand that I'm not unstable, but my thoughts and decisions are sound and based in goodness. People can never understand what is in my heart so I must manage it in a way that will show them why I do what I do. I then hear those simple words, "Just let it happen, Mom". I feel like someone puts my cheeks between their gentle hands, looks me in the eye and erases these self-serving thoughts out of my consciousness. A calm comes over me and the burden lifts. I recognize that I don't have to try so hard. I feel comforted knowing that God has taken over again and only He truly knows my thoughts and my motives. I owe no one an explanation as long as my motives are truthful to Him. The rest comes on its own.

The season of Lent encourages us to reflect on the power of God's presence in our lives. I pray that I am always surrounded by people in my life with the insight to bring me back to God. Thank you, my son.

Heather Blackiston

Saturday, March 24
Read 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13

*Love Is Patient, Love Is Kind. It Does Not Envy, It Does Not Boast, It Is Not Proud.
It Is Not Rude, It Is Not Self-Seeking, it Is Not Easily Angered, It Keeps No Record
Of Wrongs*

We are all familiar with these key verses found in Corinthians 1. I chose these verses for the devotional today because LOVE is so desperately needed in today's world and as a memory of my deceased father who read them at my wedding.

A bit of background may be helpful in understanding the situation for which these verses were explained by the Apostle Paul. The Corinthian church was quite young at the time Paul expressed his concern about the fighting and jealousy among members. According to Paul, the Corinthians were confused about spiritual gifts possessed by each church member and how they should be used. Corinthians were blessed with a variety of spiritual gifts such as prophecy, speaking in tongues, faith, and numerous other earthly gifts. In these verses, Paul tries to get across the point that any of these spiritual gifts are greatly diminished if they are not exercised out of a heart of LOVE. Paul goes on to provide detail of what LOVE is like and much of this is defined in the title of this devotional.

LOVE doesn't originate within us; it comes from God. God's LOVE for mankind was supreme when He sacrificed His Son for our sins. It is possible for us to understand this magnitude of LOVE?

As humans, we are likely to fall short in the pursuit of LOVE. Things that you played with as a child had little attraction to you in a few years. Maybe that's the way it is with LOVE? At first our understanding and wisdom about it are, at best, only partial. As we grow older and gain more experience, LOVE takes on more meaning.

For me, it was not until the later years as a parent that I really began to understand the meaning of true and everlasting LOVE. All the ups and downs of raising children present many challenges, but in spite of it, a parent's LOVE will be there through eternity for that innocent baby that has become an adult. Parents learn that LOVE gives power over anger and grants perseverance and patience.

In a world that tells us to think about ourselves, how do you show LOVE in daily life? Do you laugh when others laugh and weep when others weep? Do you understand that each person has special gifts but without using them with LOVE, the gifts are less than they could be? As defined by Paul, jealousy is incompatible with LOVE. Are we ever jealous of worldly things others possess, their success in life, or even their accomplishments at church?

God gives us spiritual gifts as part of the body of Christ. These gifts are meant to build up and strengthen fellow Christians and the church. Just think of the people gifts found within EUMC, and how our church family is strengthened in faith and community via these gifts. These gifts

are important while we are here on earth, but as Paul states, they will pass away. Only LOVE will endure forever.

Of all the gifts we humans have the potential to receive from God, it is clear from the preaching of Paul that LOVE is the most important. And LOVE should be our pursuit and priority.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please show us the way to incorporate LOVE into our lives in a way that strengthens those for whom we encounter each and everyday. Grant our church and church members the ability to use LOVE effectively in conjunction with our spiritual gifts. Father, we just thank and praise You for the supreme LOVE sacrifice You gave on the cross at Calvary for our sins. Amen.

Buddy Camors

Sunday, March 25
Read Romans 12: 1-12

Ever feel like you're living your life on repeat? You wake up, go to work, make dinner, take the kids to practice, watch some TV, and then go to bed. For many of us our days seem to be the same as yesterday, or even the year before. Somewhere we have sacrificed our time with God for TV or that extra hour of sleep. We've made excuses for ourselves for too long. In Romans 12:2 it says, *"Do not conform any longer to the ways of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is---His good, pleasing, and perfect will"*. God tells us to separate ourselves from the world; He knows the world has nothing good to offer us. It's an addicting, negative, self-evolved place.

It's so easy to live for tomorrow and not in the moment. It seems many of our lives have been on pause for a while. Or maybe we're too focused on our past that we haven't realized what God has prepared for our future. During this time of Lent, live in the moment, in that day. Focus on God's love for you and what He's done for you from the beginning to the end of the day. With God we will be able to withstand anything. Our relationship with Christ is much like a relationship with a great friend; it requires attention, conversation, and alone time. When it's hard to get through the day or you're worried with what tomorrow will bring, turn to God and prayer. He offers forgiveness, grace, and love. He is our strength to get through the day and He already knows the problems we will see tomorrow. Let go and let God!

Katie Hastings

Monday, March 26
Read Proverbs 3:5

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

Signs of His Love

While walking around the side of our wooded lot one cold grey day, my eye was attracted to one of our Lenten Rose plants which rose higher than any other plant in the flower bed. As I stepped closer I realized that despite the freezing nasty weather, it had buds on it, and before long would be blooming. Below the plant were leaves and the remains of dead, dried annuals and perennials that had been missed during our fall clean up. On closer observation, tucked below the leaves, I was surprised by some blooming snowdrops. What a lift to my spirits and a reminder that spring will come.

By trusting in God and going to His Word, we receive reminders of His goodness and caring even when we are in the midst of hard times in our lives. God gives us the predictability that spring indeed always follows winter. He also gives us the predictability that He loves us, and has shown us the extent of that love by sending His son.

During Lent we remember His life on earth, His death on the cross for our sins, and most importantly, His resurrection and triumph over death. All around us are signs of His power and love for us. We need only to take the time to see them. May it be so.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help us see the signs of Your love all around us in our daily lives, even when we go through the "winters" of our lives and we are enduring trials. May we put our faith and trust in You at all times. Help us to be able to stop trusting in ourselves and pray the words that Christ uttered, "Not my will but Thy will be done." Amen.

Charlotte Mehosky

Tuesday, March 27
Read Luke 10: 38-42

But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need for only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:40-42

Choose the Better Part

Life is so busy and hectic these days that one hardly has time to stop and enjoy their surroundings. We can gather from this lesson that it was hectic for Martha too, always feeling like there was so much to do. She was so busy with all her distractions that she didn't take the time to enjoy what was there in front of her. She didn't take the time to sit and listen to Jesus. Sometimes I feel this is how life is for me--always running. There doesn't seem to be enough hours in the day to get everything done. In reading this scripture, I really stopped to reflect on what one can miss out on if you are always so busy. Life needs to be more than work and the daily distractions.

Mary had the right idea. She knew that sitting with Jesus and listening to Him was much more important and fulfilling than running around cleaning and cooking. This Lenten season I want to strive to be more like Mary. To slow down and listen. I know God is talking to me and I want to make sure I am not too busy to hear Him.

Kim Heath

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, I thank you for everything I have. You have influenced my life in so many ways. You are always there with me, like when I was 6 and went down the basement steps on my bike. You have given me food, water, clothing, shelter and a family that loves me. There is nothing more I could ask for. Amen.

Bobby Heath

Wednesday, March 28
Read Psalms 119: 145-176

With my whole heart I cry; answer me, O Lord. I will keep your statutes. I cry to you; save me, that I may observe your decrees. I rise before dawn and cry for help; I put my hope in your words. My eyes are awake before each watch of the night, that I may meditate on your promise. Psalm 119:145-148

Relationships... Do You Have One?

In this scripture the psalmist wakes before dawn each morning and seeks God to talk to him. When evening comes he finds God has been with him all day.

There have been times in my life I have felt that God walked beside me in everything I did, and there are times when it has felt like He was further away. The times that I've had a close relationship with Him, I spent more time praying and talking to God. Also, reading the Bible daily and taking Bible classes. When I don't do these things my relationship is distant. So it seems, to have a close relationship with God it would be up to us to take the steps to build that closeness. God sent His son to die on the cross for us to show His love. There is no greater love for someone than what God has for us.

It's not just praying and reading the Bible and attending church, but including God in everything we do. I say thank you to God several times a day. I call these my small blessings.

For example, when my teens get up and brush their teeth, get dressed, eat breakfast and leave for school without turmoil, and when the door closes I say "**Thank You Lord!**"

One day I was eating lunch with my daycare children and one little boy said "Gram", (All my daycare children call me Gram too.) "This lunch is awesome!" I thank God that I was able to give this little boy an "awesome" lunch today. When the children go down for a nap without a fuss, I say "thank you God". When we have a fun, learning day, I say "thank you God". I thank God many times a day, everyday. It is because of God that I have those small blessings.

I can't tell you about the big blessings because I would have to write a book.

God loves us and we have to love Him back.

Prayer: *Dear God, we look past the things we don't understand to thank you for the things we do. Thank you for sending Your Son to die on the cross and sharing victory over death with us so we can continue to have a relationship with you. Amen.*

Diane Mauk

Thursday, March 29
Read Mark 10:17-31

Give It Up; He Is All Worthy

If there is something that God brings to our lives besides His promises of love, compassion, and grace; it is confrontation. With God as our Heavenly Father, Christians are exposed to confrontations that make them to change ways of thinking or acting. Sometimes God challenges them to make them grow. I still remember those Sunday mornings when my body was in the congregation looking at the pulpit, but with my mind and heart very anxious, looking at the watch, to leave church as soon the service ended to play a soccer match. My will was not fully given to listening to His word and as consequence; my soul could not be transformed by God's grace. No matter what age or life stage we are in, we usually find our will does not match God's will. And I dare to say that due to a close relationship through Jesus Christ, we all know what He wants us to do, but our human condition makes us hesitate and doubt about the accomplishment of His promises.

As the same way Jesus Christ confronted and challenged the wealthy man, we are all confronted as well. Jesus said to the man, *"Go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me"*. God does not receive souls partially. He receives and deserves the whole package, everything. Now, if we reword this verse by changing 'go' for 'come', 'sell' for 'let', and 'to me' instead of 'to the poor' what would my reaction be? It was basically the confrontation I faced when I felt I needed to stop going to play soccer on Sunday mornings, which I had been doing for my entire life, and give myself wholly to Him. Please, do not get me wrong. There is nothing bad with playing a sport. It keeps us in shape, is physically and mentally healthy, and is also entertaining, but because of the schedule conflict, I was depriving myself of being a part of a greater joy--the joy of his eternal gift. And oh boy! What a way to bless me through His promise. My sisters and brothers, homes, mothers, and children have been multiplied by attending and listening to His word at EUMC. Do not think that by making such a decision, I have become a good man. *"No one is good except God alone,"* Jesus said. The flesh still wants to keep doing other things rather than following Him, but the Spirit is stronger to direct us toward His will. Praise to the Lord.

Prayer: Father, please, show us how to put You as our first, second, and third priority in our life in the same way that Jesus Christ did. Teach us to give ourselves entirely to see the worthiness of Your Glory. In the name of Your Son, our King, we pray. Amen.

Carlos Reyes Rodriguez

Friday, March 30
Read Mark 10: 32 – 45

For over three years Jesus had been visibly walking His talk. He'd fed thousands of hungry people, cured withered hands and bodies, and healed broken spirits. He'd cast out demons, restored sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. He'd even raised the dead. In every imaginable way He'd demonstrated His love, and that loving leads to serving others.

Finally, on His last trip to Jerusalem He described the immediate future to those closest to Him. It was, in fact, the third time He'd told His disciples that He was about to die. This time He spelled out the details: He would be betrayed by the chief priests and teachers of the law. He'd be condemned to death and handed over to the Gentiles who would mock Him, spit on Him, flog, then kill Him. And three days later, He would rise. He couldn't have said it plainer.

Their response? *"Let one of us sit at your right hand and the other at your left in glory."*

Jesus didn't rebuke or ridicule that they'd never gotten the point of what He was doing, the point of the life He was pouring out in love for them. Instead, He said, *"You don't know what you're asking. Can you drink the cup or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"*

"We can," they assured Him.

He told them that they'd have that opportunity, but that to sit at His right or left was not for Him to grant.

And then the others, still absorbed with visions of their own glory, became indignant toward the two who'd asked for favors.

That's when Jesus called them together. Even then He didn't remind them of the astonishing thing He'd just told them. But He used the moment to do what He'd been doing all along—to teach about the call of loving one another completely, unselfishly, and of letting that flow naturally into serving. He tied it all together when He said, *"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."* (NIV)

Days later He repeated that lesson. But this time He singled out each disciple, making sure they got the picture. He wrapped a towel round His waist, donning the uniform of a lowly servant, and washed their feet. Holding the lowliest part of each one, He washed away every filthy stain from their toes and insteps, their roughened heels, and ankles—all the parts that had trudged through the dirt and muck of this earth, showing once again His entire purpose—to love them, and in loving to serve them in the way they needed most.

Less than 24 hours later He demonstrated the fullness of His love by giving the ultimate blood sacrifice to wash away all our stains of sin, all the muck from our lives and souls. He paid the

price of our ransom through His death, and in so doing, not only gave us life but showed us how to live: to love one another so completely that we pour out our love sacrificially.

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.”

Prayer: Loving Father, the gift that Jesus has given, the love that He poured out through His living and in His dying on our behalf consumes us; it overwhelms us. Help us, Father, to understand fully all He taught and demonstrated for us. Make us servants in His image. Amen.

Cathy Gohlke

Saturday, March 31
Read Romans 8: 15-29

Hope and Joy!

“I am afraid and lonely once again!”

There have been so many times when I have felt like this. When I have had this feeling of being afraid or lost, confused, unsure, sad. Basically, not knowing how to handle another difficult situation! Romans 8:28 has helped and comforted me through all these feelings of fear.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28

This verse reminds me that no matter what happens, God knows what is best for me and He is helping me through all situations. This gives me not only peace of mind, but comfort, as I experience any difficult circumstances.

In Luke 23, we learn about the two criminals hanging on either side of Jesus on Skull Hill. One taunted Jesus and challenged Him to save them and Himself, if He was really who they say He was. The other criminal, during the last few moments of his life, admitted to doing wrong and asked for forgiveness and died knowing he was going to paradise!

But what about Jesus? During His last moments before death, He was able to save a man! This man showed his faith by admitting to his crimes and was forgiven. What joy it must have given Jesus to be able to go to heaven with someone that believed in Him and was saved by Him! All of these things worked together according to God's purpose!

The disciples did not really understand why Jesus had to suffer and be crucified. They did not believe the women when they came back from the tomb telling them that Jesus was not there, that He had raised up. They thought the women were making it all up. It was not until Jesus Himself showed them His wounds and opened their minds to understand the scriptures that they believed and started praising God. All of this was God's purpose!

As you think upon the last few days of Jesus' life on earth, realize that all these events worked together according to God's purpose, just as all the events in your life work together for God's purpose. That purpose is to give us eternal life--eternal peace and joy!

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your help in writing these thoughts. Please help them to comfort those who are dealing with anything in their life that makes them scared or unsure. Help them to feel Your presence and to know peace and joy. Amen.

Sue Ivey

Palm Sunday, April 1
Read Luke 19: 41-48

⁴¹ *As He approached Jerusalem and saw the city, He wept over it . . .*
⁴⁵⁻⁴⁸ *When Jesus entered the temple courts, He began to drive out those who were selling. "It is written," He said to them, "My house will be a house of prayer; but you have made it a den of robbers." Every day He was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill Him. Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on His words.*

Jesus wept at the sight of Jerusalem. What a strange time it was for Him. On the one hand, He was being welcomed as a king; on the other hand, He knew He would soon be rejected presumably by some of the same people. Crowds of people laid down their cloaks to honor Him one day, and then just a few days later would be yelling, "Crucify him". Jesus did not need human approval, but He wanted the people around Him to "get it". He wanted them to understand and to have the peace that comes from faith in, and obedience to, God. When He talks of enemies and destruction, is Jesus prophesying the persecution of Christians and of Jews and the second destruction of the temple, which comes around AD 70? Very possibly, although it could just as well be spiritual destruction He was talking about. The reason for the destruction (literal or spiritual) is that people did not see Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah. And so He wept.

When Jesus arrived at the temple He found the money changers and people selling the "approved" sacrificial offerings. Jesus threw these merchants out of the temple. He could not teach in the temple until He had created a place for prayer, contemplation, and earnest conversation. He had a peaceful, worshipful place without the market haggling going on in the background. He taught there for several days. It would have been a place where most of the people listening could feel the presence of God. Others however, could not. They were angry with Jesus for wreaking havoc on their moneymaking schemes. They were looking for an opportunity to get rid of this man who was ruining the reputations of the Pharisees and the livelihood of the temple business people. With so many people hanging on His very words, they could not arrest Him then. While some people were learning amazing things about God and faith, others were apparently being disappointed that He was not offering the military overthrow they had hoped for. And so it goes still today. Are we looking to Jesus to fix all our worldly problems or are we looking to Him to rule our lives, to fix our spirits and thus to grow the kingdom of God here on earth?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help us listen to your words and understand them. Help us know what you would have us know and be what you would have us be. Help us live the Christ-like lives that will inspire others to want to know You also.

Heidi Gaultney

Monday, April 2
Read Mark 11:12-25

*So I tell you, when you pray for something, believe that you already received it.
Then it will be yours. Mark 11:24*

Everybody Has Bad Days

Bad days happen. They happen to all of us, even Jesus. In the scripture from Mark 11, He was in Bethany on His way to Jerusalem to the Temple and He and the disciples were hungry. Unfortunately the fig tree they encountered was out of season and He cursed it. They continued on their way to find an even bigger disappointment at the Temple. People weren't there praying, but buying and selling goods. His bad day was centered on things not working in the proper way, not doing what they were intended to do – the fig tree had no fruit, the people weren't using the Temple as a place to pray. We've all had this kind of day. Perhaps you oversleep because the alarm clock isn't working, maybe the battery has died in your vehicle or someone in your workplace isn't completing their share? Sometimes things don't go our way and we have to choose how to react to them.

We've got a morning routine at our house. Our morning starts when we, the adults, wake up at 5:30. From that minute on, we have until 6:50 to do anything and everything that a morning entails not just for us, but for our kids and dog too. It might seem like a long time, but as soon as one part of the routine doesn't go as it should, it's a domino effect. We all have jobs to do – Mom makes the lunches, Dad takes care of the dog, the kids make their beds and brush their teeth and we meet at the table for breakfast at 6:30. When we don't do our jobs and the routine is thrown off then we have to choose how to react to each other. We have to make the decision to either get angry or take a deep breath and figure out the best way to react so we can keep our schedule and patience intact. For most people it's not easy to be patient in those early morning hours, it's not easy to always keep tempers calm, it's not easy to take a moment to take a deep breath when you know you need to be in the car at 6:50 to get to the bus stop. Well, then what is easy? Just stopping...that's right...stopping for two seconds to realize that it will be okay! Stopping for even a small moment to pray a quick "Lord please help us get through this morning with patience" is easy! When we stop and acknowledge that something isn't working the way it is supposed to and pray for patience and calm, we'll receive it. Our bad morning or bad day will cease, or at least get a little better. And when we have another one, which always seems to happen, we'll do it all over again – we'll lift up our hearts to God and we'll get through another day.

Prayer: Dear Lord, We thank you for patience when we are having a bad morning or a bad day. We thank you for patience when we are faced with something that just isn't working the way it is supposed to. Most importantly, we thank you for the knowledge that if we lift our concerns to You in prayer, You will listen and get us through another day. Amen.

Bret and Kelly Eddinger

Tuesday April 3
Read Psalm 6

Turn, Lord and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love. Psalms 6:4

So often it is easy to get discouraged, to let the weight of events and interactions we have in our daily lives drag us down. As we go through this final week before the joyous event of Easter, we recall the pain that Jesus still had to endure, He knew what was to come and asked God, His father to help Him through that time. What if He hadn't? Where would we be today? We would be without hope, without knowing the love of God, without knowing what is to come. But none of those things are true. Psalm 6 seems a cry of desperation, though later in Psalm 94:14 we read, *"For the Lord will not reject His people: He will never forsake His inheritance"*. What a wonderful promise is that? And all we have to do is accept it! The best rewards often come through hard work, mistakes and trial and error.

I was once asked in a job interview, that if I could go back and change one thing in my life, what would it be? I had no answer for that. Everything I thought of changing would mean many other things would change that I wouldn't want to alter in the course of my life. I stated that while there were decisions I made, and things and events that I wished I did differently, those same decisions and events brought me to where I am and made me the person I am today, and I am quite happy and content with my life. The interviewer stated they had never received that as an answer. I feel that God allows us to make those "mistakes", offers us those choices in order to grow, serve as examples to others and realize the perfect and unfailing love He has for each of us.

Whenever I get discouraged, or don't like the way things are going, I remember that God has a plan and a purpose for my life and a reason for everything He places in my path. I also know that relying on Him will allow me to get through anything. I have changed the way I pray to be not for what I want, but for the ability to accept His plan for my life and the current issue that I am facing, knowing that I am not doing it alone. I have God and all the people that He has placed in my life. Especially this week I am reminded of the sacrifice that was made for me, and that makes all my problems seem pretty trivial in comparison, so they will certainly not be too big for our God to handle.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gifts of Your Son, your continual forgiveness and Your unfailing, unconditional love, knowing the promises that You have made to us will all come to fruition in Your time. Help us to remember to lay all of our concerns at Your feet, turning to You in all things for guidance just as Jesus did. Amen.

Sandy Lavelle

Wednesday, April 4
Read Mark 12: 1 – 11

Then He began to speak to them in parables - Mark 12: 1
When they realized that He had told this parable against them, they wanted to arrest Him, but they feared the crowd. So they left Him and went away. Mark 12: 12

What's in Your Parable?

All through the New Testament Jesus told parables, customized to the group He was addressing, and including in them familiar everyday situations and objects. He did this to help them better understand His teachings. When I read the parables in the scriptures, sometimes the meaning is obscure unless I take the time to understand the society of the time in which they were recorded.

If Jesus were to tell a parable to me today, I wonder what He would say. What references to my daily life would He use to explain the message of salvation and God's grace – of how best to live out my life in faith? How would my parable differ from the parable for someone who lives in France or South Africa or next door or anywhere else in the world? What lessons would Jesus want to teach me?

Would my reaction to my parable be like that of the chief priests, the scribes and elders to the one Jesus told them? They could not accept Jesus as the Son of God and a higher authority than themselves. They could not or would not see that through Jesus, His Son, God offered to them the blessedness of His Kingdom. They were filled with fear and turned their back on Him. Would my parable cause me to be fearful – would I turn my back on Jesus because I could not face His truth?

Prayer: O Lord my God, may I be open and receptive to the teachings of Your Son, Jesus, that I might know the full blessings of Your Kingdom and serve You to the best of my ability. Amen.

Dianne Thompson

Prayer Focus: What would Jesus teach me today?

April 5 Maundy Thursday
Read I Corinthians 11: 23-26 and Mark 14: 22-25

Remember Me

One of the services of worship I always appreciated at EUMC was communion in which I was given the privilege of serving others in the holy name of Jesus Christ. The words I used were the ones He used and may be found in the Bible readings for this devotion. This might have even been the reason Bettie Murray gave me the scriptures and asked me to write this devotion.

Jesus' words are simple and yet profound. After supper He held up the bread and gave thanks saying, *"Blessed art Thou for Thou hast brought forth bread from the earth"* and then he broke the bread adding, *"This is my body which is broken for you. Eat this in remembrance of me."* Likewise, he then held up the cup, gave thanks saying, *"Blessed art Thou for bringing forth wine from the vine"* and added, *"This is my blood of the new covenant given for the forgiveness of sin. Do this in remembrance of me."* The meaning is inexplicably simple and profoundly life changing. It is a reminder of who He is and what He does for us. No one else has ever been called to be the Messiah. It is incomprehensible and yet absolutely clear, He loves us.

This Maundy Thursday at worship, we have a chance to remember Him once again in Holy Communion, to be connected with God, ourselves, one another, others and even strangers in His holy name. The following words may be prayed followed by the Lord's Prayer before communion this evening.

*Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here,
and on these gifts of bread and wine.
Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ,
that we may be for the world the body of Christ,
redeemed by His blood.
By your Spirit make us one with Christ.
One with each other,
and one in ministry to all the world,
until Christ comes in final victory,
and we feast at His heavenly banquet.
Through your Son Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church,
all honor and glory is Yours, almighty Father,
now and forever.
And then we prayed the Lord's prayer. Amen.*

Reverend Don Hurst

Good Friday, April 6
Read Psalm 22:1-5

*My God, my God, why have You forsaken
me?
Why are You so far from helping me, from
the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but You do not
answer;
And by night, but find no rest.*

*Yet You are holy,
enthroned on praises of Israel.
In You our ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and You delivered them.
To You they cried, and were saved;
in You they trusted, and were not put to
shame.*

Reflection

Two years ago, I worked in a church where the associate pastor was also a District of Columbia police officer. One Sunday, he opened our worship service with a sobering prayer that yearned for God's Easter presence to be made known in a Good Friday city.

In a culture of self-help books, we scarcely take time to settle in with darkness, pain and suffering. On Good Friday we finally take the time today to dwell with our objections, doubts and counter-narratives. Even as we would sing, "Great is Thy Faithfulness," or "He is Risen," our hearts are broken and doubts echo through our minds.

How often, in pain, have we passed over Psalm 22 in order to take up the prayer of Psalm 23? The poet of Psalm 22 begins with suffering to which even God is deaf. How could her wrenching words fall mute on anyone's ears, especially God's? Yet, the poet is drenched in her own tears, hearing only her own sobs responding. She turns toward God in the heavens calling to the one who is trusted, who has delivered, who receives our cries and who saves. In her words, praise resounds that God has opened the sea and created a new home for God's people. In this sense, her words remind me of Job who is faithful to God through delight and despair. But in her words I cannot help but read *they* as a summons, or perhaps an indictment, calling to God who has saved *them*, and asking what about *me*. God has opened seas to create life anew. God opens a tomb to create life anew. What about *me*, and the depths of sorrow *I* have seen?

Our walk in life brings us to Good Friday. While I hesitate to write a litany of our own Good Friday experiences, Psalm 22 reminds me that this would be litany of faithful prayer. Psalm 22 guides us to lift the worst of life up to God in our faithful prayers. To see the dark night of Good Friday in the light of Christ is to find a dwelling place in deepest grievances. As I dwell in the depth of that abyss, and as you dwell in the depth of that abyss, we find that we are not so alone in our hurt and our poverty. The unexpected grace of Good Friday is that in proclaiming our aloneness we find a community of love with one another. The mysterious grace of Good Friday is that in dwelling in sharing these depths, God's work of moving us from Good Friday to Easter is breaking in through our sharing, love and community.

Prayer: God of us, may Jesus' quotation of this Psalm give us permission and encouragement to lift the heaviest of our experiences to You. Receive our prayers. As we find ourselves unable to lift hope on our own, may our community lift for us hope, joy and peace in You who revives dry bones.

Reverend Brett Pinder

Saturday, April 7
Read Hebrews 4:1-16

“Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. Hebrews 4:1-2

Finding Our Rest

As I studied these verses, the question arose as to whom the author is referring to as “us” and “them”. And what was meant by “entering His rest”. The “them” apparently refers to the people of the exodus, liberated from their bondage in Egypt. They were given the gift of freedom only to complain and turn disobedient. They thought God led them into the desert to be killed and in spite of their leaders’ admonitions, focused on their trials rather than on God’s promises. The exodus generation did not see the Promised Land. They could find no rest amid all their complaining. So the writer of Hebrews tells us not to repeat that history. He is now speaking to “us”.

The promise remains. We are the “us” and the Gospel is plain and clear for us to hear and appropriate for our lives. The “rest” that we seek is not a couch potato rest. Resting in God is not a passive activity. During the Lenten season we are called to use what we know and have heard and let that knowledge feed our faith to help us grasp that promise of a rest in God. In the *Confessions of St. Augustine*, we read: “*You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until we find our rest in You.*” I hope as we move toward the Easter season God will stir our hearts to truly know what God has done for us, you and me, to find peace and contentment in a busy and troubled world. While a previous generation did not find a profit in the rest of God, Jesus offers this promise to us: “*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*”(Matthew 11:28). I find much profit in that.

Prayer: God of life and love, as we contemplate the events that lead to the cross, how inadequate is our gratitude. Your Son found little peace in the trials and torture He endured, yet He found His rest in You. As He was faithful, help us to be faithful to You and others. Help us to realize that there is no profit in “busyness”. Show us what Sabbath and quietness really means and lead us to a rest that takes us into a continuing awareness of Your leading for our lives. We ask this in the name of our risen Christ. Amen.

Rev. George N. Leathrum

Easter Sunday, April 8
Read John 20:1-18

Whenever someone asks me what my favorite scripture passage is, I tell them this one - John 20:1-18 - the story of Easter morning. It is my favorite, not only because it tells the best news in all the world, but also because of Mary Magdalene's exclamation to the disciples, "*I have seen the Lord!*"

Mary Magdalene had been absolutely devastated when Jesus was crucified. Her whole world was tied up in Him, and what He had done for her. He had turned her world upside down. He had saved her life. Because of Him, she knew what abundant life was. She knew that with Him there is always a chance to begin again. She knew because of Him her past was forgotten, her sins were forgiven.

She had begun to live in a whole new way, and had pledged her all to Him. The future looked only bright and beautiful, and then, He was gone. Killed in the worst way possible, on a cross by crucifixion.

Just as quickly as Jesus had come into her life, He was gone, and nothing would ever be right again for her. She was in a fog of deep grief that first Easter morning, as she approached the tomb. Her heart was broken in two; she was inconsolable. The One she loved most in life was gone, and now she was alone. How would she go on? What would she do?

Then, to her horror, she finds His tomb empty and the grief that she thought couldn't get any worse, did. If she could have died too, she probably wanted to. When she fetched two of the disciples, they came and saw, but then they went back home. She stayed - rooted to the spot, rendered immobile by her grief.

Then she turned and saw the gardener. Maybe he knew where Jesus' body was . . . and so she began to talk to Him, and in that conversation He said her name, and when He did she knew that it was Jesus! He was alive! He was here! All was well! Life was good! Death didn't have the final word! Evil didn't have the final word! Her joy was boundless!

And all she could do was shout the good news, "*I have seen the Lord! I have seen the Lord!*"

On this Easter morning, that is our shout too! "We have seen the Lord, and we know, firsthand, that with Him all things are possible! Lives can be changed, sins forgiven, death overcome - all things are possible!"

May our prayer on this Easter and all the days ahead be that our words, our actions, indeed, our lives will show the world that we have seen the Lord. May our witness shout the good news of the risen Christ to a world that desperately needs to hear it.

Prayer: God of us all, on this most wonderful day of the year, we thank and praise You for the gift of Your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Like Mary, we are filled with joy over His victory over death. Like Mary, we pray that our lives will be living witnesses to His love in the world. Pour Your Spirit upon us, that we may have the courage to tell others that "we have seen the Lord," that they may give their hearts to him and know life in all its fullness. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Reverend Karen F. Bunnell

Thank you to everyone who helped with this project. Many hours were spent reading, writing, proofing, typing, organizing, and compiling the 2012 Lenten Devotional Guide. Elkton United Methodist Church is surely blessed with a family of amazing people. Many people felt uncomfortable taking on the challenge of writing for the devotional guide but were willing to go out of their comfort zone and commit. That wasn't just a coincidence—that was God at work!

During this time of reflection, prayer and worship, please use your devotional guide to become closer to God. Use this time to go beyond everyday routine and find new ways to be in God's presence.

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