

2015 CUCC LENTEN DEVOTIONAL



The Congregational United Church of Christ
40W451 Fox Mill Blvd, St. Charles IL 60175





CUCC St Charles 2015 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

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Compiled • Sue Peterson
 Layout-Design • Carleen Bart
 Edited • Pat Kitner
 Web Master • Mike Linder



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February 20, 2015 † by Trish Thompson

Matthew 7: 26-27

Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?

I am not enough of a student of the Bible to have a favorite verse but this one has always spoken to me - as a wife, mother, grandmother, daughter, sister and friend. It seems the more you love, the more you worry. Matthew encourages us to quiet our troubled minds and trust in God. Sounds absolutely right and feels nearly impossible. If I trust in God, will everything truly be ok?

These beautiful words, “Look at the birds of the air,” inspire us to be joyful. They promise that, if we trust in God, we too can be free. Of course, life is messy. People get sick. Cars slide on wet pavement. Marriages end and jobs are lost. But we are endowed by our creator with the resolve to endure and to thrive. We are surrounded by people who will help and, ultimately, we are promised a happy ending. All will be well.

We are that loved.

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for these words from Matthew which remind us that worry is a thief but your love can restore us. Amen.



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February 21, 2015 ☩ by Sue Peterson

Colossians 2:2-3

I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's Mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

It took me awhile to know that God's mystery is just that-a mystery. I do not have to understand all about God to have faith or to trust that in all things God is with me. God gives what I need as I need it, not before. Wisdom and knowledge come from God. Faith is a lifelong process. As you have heard - please don't judge me yet, just hang around. God's not finished with me yet.

For Lent this year, I decided to try to be an encourager. I am seeking to be uplifting in my words and actions with the help of God.

Prayer

God, thank you for helping us grow in our faith. We are not where we want to be, but we are closer than we used to be. Give us wisdom and knowledge to live each day as you would want us to. Help us to encourage. Amen.



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February 25, 2015 ☩ by Mary Lou Bracken

Psalm 46:10

Be still, and know that I am God.

Lent is a 40 day journey (not counting Sundays) to focus on God and prepare to remember and celebrate Jesus' dying on the cross and rising from the grave to save each of us. It is a time to find some time to "be still" and reflect on our relationship with God. Being quiet is difficult. I am realizing how addicted I am to activity, schedules, and noise. In the midst of our busy, over-scheduled daily lives, stillness is something that is usually at the bottom of our "to do" list.

Lent can be that time when we consciously make time for quiet reflection. Rick Warren says there are several things that will help us get our hearts and minds ready for quiet reflection. We come to that quiet time with expectancy, reverence, alertness, and a willingness to obey. Are you listening for God's plan for your life? What things or habits in your life would you like to change? Is there a habit of yours that you believe has a negative impact on others? Perhaps during this Lenten season we can take some time each day to wait quietly. We will listen for God's direction that will bring freshness and renewal to our lives. Just sit, look, listen, and remember what it's like to be still.

Prayer

Dear God, during this Lenten season show us what a deep need there is for quietness as an element of true waiting upon you. We want to hear with a freshness how sincerely you invite us to ask and receive, seek and find, knock and the door will be opened to us. Help us to take the time to sit and quiet our souls before you so that we may hear you speak to us. Help us take the challenge to "Be still and know that I am God." Amen.



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February 28, 2015 † by Debby Graham

Grace in Old Age

“Sometimes in the Christmas story the focus is mostly on children, on the young woman Mary and the birth in the manger. We miss another element in the story of Christ’s birth. That element is Grace. Grace is not just for the young, but for the old or older as well. It’s not hard to see the possibility of new life and new beginnings when we are young or in the lives of the young. It may be more difficult to imagine such grace and newness when we are well beyond that time of life, when the future is no longer so open or full of promise as it once seemed. All the more reason then to receive the gift of this part of the story. The promise of grace and new life is not only for the young, but for the no-longer-young too. Grace happens. Surprise and new life can come no matter what our age. Look today for the surprise of God’s grace in your life, no matter what age you are.”

I found this in one of the daily devotionals that I read. For some reason it spoke to me. I know it is discussing Christmas, but the message of Grace was one I was ready to hear, especially at my age. And also especially at Easter time when we all try to find new life in our own lives. So when we marvel at the Christmas story and the gift from God in Jesus, we also must marvel at the gift of the resurrection, to help us know God’s love and grace, to give new life to each day in our faith.

Prayer

Thank you God, for the grace you provide in our lives. Help us to appreciate it as we move along on our faith journey. Amen.



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March 3, 2015 † by Kathy & Wayne Roland

John 20:26-29

Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand and place it in my side; do not be faithless but believing." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

This scripture to us means that while we feel the need to see everything in order to believe it to be true or false, Jesus is telling us that if we have faith and believe in him and draw strength from this faith we will find what answers we are looking for. We believe that some answers may not be exactly what we are looking for but it was the answer he thought we could handle. With the passing of Wayne's father last month, we have found ourselves pulling our strength from our faith and believing he is in a better place, his body is strong again and he has no pain, as we struggle with the loss of his time with us. As with Jesus showing himself to his disciples, we do believe we will see dad again someday.

Prayer

May we find strength in your faith and the courage to believe what we cannot see. Amen.



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March 6, 2015 ✝ by Anne Valsa

Colossians 3:12-17 (RSV)

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

We are holy and beloved—this statement is so powerful! Through this scripture we are encouraged to be like Christ—exercising compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, patience, forgiveness, and thankfulness. Most of all, we are to love, for love binds everything together in perfect harmony. I believe if we practice these virtues in our own lives, harmony will spread throughout the world.

Prayer

Thank you, God, for sending your son to us to teach us how to live with and help each other along our earthly journey. Help us to be thankful and loving in all we do, no matter what circumstances we are in. Let us be your voice in all we do. In Christ's name, Amen.



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March 10, 2015 ✝ by Rebecca Reber

Genesis 1:26

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

This verse has many meanings throughout History. Typically, it's been used to show that humans are to DOMINATE nature and use it to our advantage. However, that's not how I understand this verse. First, the author of Genesis states that we are made in the image of the Trinity "after our likeness", meaning that the Spirit of God is within us. Compassion, forgiveness, and power lie within us; and if we read closely, we can see how these traits are to be used in the phrase "let them have dominion". Dominion does not mean dominate. The origin of the word is Middle English: via Old French from medieval Latin dominio(n-), from Latin dominium, from dominus 'lord, master.' And if we dig a bit deeper, we find that 'master' as used in this verse (a verb) is defined as to acquire complete knowledge or skill in (an accomplishment, technique, or art). Therefore, having dominion simply means that we should use our similarity to the Trinity to act compassionately, model forgiveness, and use our power to protect the world around us, acquire knowledge of it...and take care of it. It's a gift from a loving God.

Prayer

Loving Creator, we thank you for the great responsibility you have bestowed upon us through your generous gift of this world and all the life contained within it. Please help us to use the compassion, forgiveness and power that we have been given by you to acquire the knowledge needed to use your gift as you intended us to do. Amen.



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March 13, 2015 ☩ by Ginger Krichbaum

Psalm 52:8

I trust in God's unfailing love forever and ever.

"Strive to trust in me in more and more areas of your life."

Whenever you feel anxious about any situation, whether it be a totally new situation or repeating an uncomfortable set of circumstances, see it as a growth experience. How sad it would be if you wanted to but never tried anything new or different. Go for it! Trust that God will help lead you in the right direction. Start right now, with today. Don't look back. Begin a new day today. We have all had times when we say to ourselves, "Why did I" or "Why didn't I." Begin a new day today and trust in God to help you. I know a lady who is about to try a new venture in life. She said to me, "I think it is time to explore a little more." Go for it. She is very nervous and very questioning. But God has been telling her not to look back. Now is the time to try it. Don't waste your energy wondering how things might have been. Trust in God and Go For It!! God will support you all along your journey. Start today.

Prayer

Dear God, thank you so much for all that you do for each of us as we go through life's journey. Please continue to say to each of us, "You can do it." Amen.



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March 14, 2015 † by Barb O'Neil

Deuteronomy 31:6

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

This verse resonates at all times of the year but never more so than in the weeks leading up to Easter. It's difficult to conceptualize the fear and uncertainty that must have filled Jesus as he approached and accepted his own death at the hands of men who hated him. Imagine the fortitude it would take to face your execution with nothing but your own faith in a loving and devoted maker to embolden you. When managing struggles of my own, these words remind me that strength, courage, and faith in God can carry you through even the most challenging times.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for your constant presence in our lives. Without your unfailing support, the fearful moments of this earthbound life would be too difficult to endure. Thank you for your complete and unfailing love. Amen.

† by Mary Emily Anhalt

Romans 8:28

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.

When happenings in our lives do not go according to our anticipated outcome and we are faced with disappointment or heartache, uncertainty and fear can become overpowering emotions. It is during those times when a visual image of God's caring hands cradling loved ones or those affected, bring peace and an inner calm. We know, through our faith, that God is a loving God and no matter what we may face in our daily lives we are assured of his constant presence in the plan he has for our lives!

Prayer

Lord, in times of question, increase our faith and help us to trust in your caring plan! Amen.



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March 15, 2015 ✚ by Charlie & Janet Bell

Genesis 1:3-4

Then God commanded, “Let there be light”—and light appeared. God was pleased with what he saw. Then he separated the light from the darkness.

In our every day life, most of us place high value on light. We wish for sunny days with bright skies. But wait—we couldn’t appreciate those gorgeous twinkling stars without the blackness of the sky. In the darkness of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed and received strength..... In the dark before dawn, the tomb was empty.....Maybe the dark days of our lives, as well as the bright ones, can be good times to learn and grow with God.

One of Charlie’s long time favorite sayings which we have framed and hanging in our home is from Henry VanDyke: *“Be glad of life because it gives you the chance to love and to work and to play and to look up at the stars.”*

Prayer

**And so, in the brightness and darkness of life, we offer our Lenten prayer:
Let us celebrate, learn and grow from the Light and the Dark! Amen.**



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March 16, 2015 † by Bonnie Wallace

I have chosen the **23rd Psalm** for my meditation. This is the first thing that comes to my mind when I am troubled or anxious. These words give me comfort and peace, especially when struggling with things that are beyond my control.

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want” reminds me that I have all I really need when I foolishly compare myself to others.

“He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside the still waters, he restores my soul” reminds me that he is there to lead me to a place of safe haven. I have only to watch for his guidance and follow.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me” reminds me that no matter what I have to face he is there to help me through it. I have had my share of “valleys” as we all have, and these words never fail to give me strength.

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows” reminds me that I have a special relationship with God, and that I am invited to his table to share in his love and his willingness to pour out his blessings.

“Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” reminds me that as a member of his body I am under his protection, care, and love for as long as I am in relationship with him.



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March 17, 2015 ☩ by Rachel Innis

Ecclesiastes 3:11

He hath made all things beautiful in His time.

This time of the year always tries my patience. The long, midwest winter is finally drawing to a close, and my favorite season, spring, is on its way. Then, just when I think we've had our last snowfall, we get one more! Temperatures rise enough that I am able to open the car windows... and then undoubtedly fall again! Then one day I spy a glorious sign in the tiny green sprouts of the daffodils. My faith that spring actually WILL arrive is restored! Long winters may be trying, but they definitely teach patience and I appreciate, even more, God's wondrous beauties of nature when they arrive each year.

Prayer

Dear God, during this Lenten season, please guide us in finding ways to nurture our relationships with you. Help us to be patient, not only while we await all the beautiful gifts of springtime that you give, but also with our families, co-workers, neighbors, and all other people we encounter in day-to-day living. Amen.



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March 18, 2015 ✝ by Ron Koeppel

1 Corinthians 16:13

Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong.

Christ has risen! If we firmly believe this, then our faith is strong. From November 2 until now, I feel I have been tested. When put into a situation where one's mortality is in question, one needs a "branch" to hang onto. Twice in my 39 days of hospitalization, I was really afraid. Toxic levels of CO2 and massive blood clots on both lungs put my life in jeopardy. Where was my "branch"? I found it in my faith. My belief in God and the fact that he sacrificed his only son but also gave him everlasting life was my branch. I put my life in the hands of the medical professionals, and my savior provided a "branch" albeit a life extension. Thank you, God.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help strengthen our belief in God by providing us with the methods to carry on lives that have been filled with many great moments. Do this for our family and extended family. Bless all who come to your table. Amen.



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March 19, 2015 † by Donna Burg

What's the big idea? *Psalms*, a collection of lyrical poems, is one of only two Old Testament books to identify itself as a composite work containing multiple authors (Proverbs is the other). The book was originally titled Tehillim, which means “praise songs” in Hebrew. The English title of “*Psalms*” originated from the Septuagint’s Greek title Psalmoi, also meaning “songs of praise.” *The book of Psalms* expresses worship. Throughout its many pages, *Psalms* encourages its readers to praise God for who he is and what he has done. The *Psalms* illuminate the greatness of our God, affirm his faithfulness to us in times of trouble, and remind us of the absolute centrality of his word. As the *Psalms* present a clear picture of God lovingly guiding his people, the responses of praise and worship to God are never far from the psalmists’ pens. The portrayal of worship in the *Psalms* offers us glimpse after glimpse of hearts devoted to God, individuals repentant before him, and lives changed through encounters with him.

Psalm 84:1

For the Lord God is our sun and our shield. He gives us grace and glory. The Lord will withhold no good thing from those who do what is right.

Heavenly Father, we are never alone. You, Lord, are always beside us. You know our thoughts, our desires, our needs, our fears, our gifts... Help us to remember your presence, to always seek and remember your words of wisdom, and the ultimate sacrifice you made for all of us. Amen.

Psalm 29:11

The Lord gives his people strength. The Lord blesses them with peace.

Dearest Lord, sometimes we forget to allow you to be the source of greatest strength in our lives. We think we must do it all ourselves. No matter how much and how often King David stumbled, he kept his eye on you. Remind us during this Lenten season to never doubt or forget the salvation you promised us. We march toward a better place. Amen.

Psalm 20:4

May he grant your heart's desire and make all your plans succeed.

Dearest Lord, we bow before you... Yesterday is done, tomorrow is but a hope, today is unfolding before us. Father, guide us to appreciate the opportunities that come our way each day... opportunities to appreciate life, love, family, and you. Please guide our ways, our words and our hearts each and every day throughout this Lenten journey. Amen.



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March 20, 2015 ☩ by Sandy Mohn

Luke 20:36, 38 (KJV)

*...The children of God, being the children of the resurrection. . .
For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him.*

I have always enjoyed the Easter season above all others. Not just because it brings Spring and so much color and new life to our surroundings but because of its promise. Christmas is a beginning but Easter fulfills the promise. God is with us as we live here on earth and he will be with us as we live again with him in eternity. He is truly God of the living.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, help us remember that you walk with us all our days. Our strength is a gift from you in this life as it will be in the life to come. Amen.



CUCC St Charles 2015 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

March 21, 2015 ✝ by Cheryl Gaydos

One of my favorite passages is Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Twelve years ago I was at the lowest point in my life when my beloved dad died so suddenly in an auto accident. We were extremely close and I treasured the time I spent with him. My husband and I were just weeks away from bringing home a little girl from China and on top of all the grief and despair, I also felt cheated that my dad would not be there to share the joy and see his first grandchild. I was inconsolable and just couldn't understand why God would let this happen to my family. And then one day a friend sent me a sympathy card with a poem inside based on the words of Jeremiah 29:11. I would like to share this poem with you as it was the only thing that gave me comfort during those dark days.

The Plan of the Master Weaver

*Our lives are but fine weavings that God and we prepare,
Each life becomes a fabric planned and fashioned in His care.
We may not always see just how the weavings intertwine,
But we must trust the Master's hand and follow His design,
For He can view the pattern upon the upper side,
While we must look from underneath and trust in Him to guide.*

*Sometimes a strand of sorrow is added to His plan
And though it's difficult for us, we still must understand
That it's He who fills the shuttle, it's He who knows what's best,
So we must weave in patience and leave to Him the rest.
Not till the loom is silent and the shuttles cease to fly
Shall God unroll the canvas and explain the reason why
The dark threads are as needed in the Weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned.*



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March 22, 2015 ✝ by Nancy Scorby

Corinthians 13:7

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

I think this verse is so simple, but really touches adults and children. This world is so full of fear, but if more people spoke of love and not hate, there would be less violence. We talk so often of our differences. We need to talk more about our love for one another.

The love between parents and children is so strong and indisputable. The love between husband and wife should be as strong, but certainly more complicated.

Many times, I need to be reminded of the simple and most important things in life: Love of God, Love of my family, Love of my church family and friends.

Prayer for Friendship

Loving God,

Bless our lives with the gift of friendship.

For those who have chosen to be our friends, we are grateful.

Let our love, respect and affection for each other flourish.

Make us good friends who are loyal and caring and ready to forgive.

To you, who are our truest friend, we pray.

Amen.



CUCC St Charles 2015 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

March 23, 2015 † by Judy Legat

My favorite Bible passage is the 23rd Psalm.

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil; for thou art with me;
Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.*

*Thou prepared a table before me
In the presence of my enemies;
Thou anointest my head with oil,
My cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

This passage assures me that I am never alone. The Holy Spirit is my constant companion, and I am grateful for that companionship. Jesus was sent to live among us to spread the word of an eternal life with the Holy Spirit. Though he is no longer among us in body, he lives on within us, and I am comforted in the knowledge that one day my spirit (soul) will join the Holy Spirit and the spirits of those who have gone before me.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, please open our hearts and minds to your constant presence that we may be comforted in knowing that we are never alone as we journey through our lives. Thank you for the gift of eternal life through your son, Jesus Christ, after our journey has come to an end. Amen.



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March 26, 2015 ☩ by Jeanne Humke

Matthew 22:36-40 (NRSV)

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to them, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

In these passages, we are told that what matters is our relationship with each other and our relationship with God. We forget that in God’s eyes, we are all the same: rich, poor, educated, uneducated, Christian, Jew, Muslim, Black, White, etc. We are all a part of his creation. As one of my favorite puppet songs says, “God loves everyday people... It doesn’t matter what church they’re in.” Then why do we have such a hard time doing the same? While watching the news I think how far we are from this commandment.

Maybe what is important here is the relationship with God first. Jesus stresses this when he says first we must activate our heart, soul, and mind. Those are the parts of us that govern our daily behaviors. And, Jesus wants us to do so with the strongest emotion we have, Love. Maybe what he is saying is that the second part of this commandment is too hard for us mortals to achieve without God’s help.

And then, Jesus goes on in verse 40 to stress how important these two commandments are. They are at the center of all God wants from us and if we can work on these, everything else will be accomplished. Wow! How many times have I quoted these lines! But, although it sounds so easy, relationship building is an ongoing lifetime task.

Prayer

**May God help and bless us all, as we struggle with his
“Greatest Commandment.”**



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March 27, 2015 ✚ by Penny Lancor

Corinthians 13:4-8

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

The comforting hug of a parent, a friend's patient ear to hear our troubles, a child's adoring smile, or the trusting soul of a spouse – we likely have experienced these acts of love. As these examples show, we do demonstrate our love, unfortunately, we fall short in consistency. Imagine a home, a school, a workplace, a community, a country, and a world where all human interactions were guided by these simple verses of scripture.

These verses are included in a larger message, teaching that love is the greatest of virtues. If one is a great speaker but has not loved, you are but a noisy gong. If one is very wise and truly faithful but has not loved, you are nothing. If one gives away all possessions or becomes a martyr but has not loved, you have gained nothing. How sad it would be if at the end of our days we have accumulated a lifetime of accomplishments, yet found all was for naught because we had not loved along the way.

In the crazy tempo of our lives, we strive for faithfulness, self-sacrifice, and wisdom. We value education and discipline as means of providing better lives for our families and communities. Yet, do we invest as much energy into simply loving each other more? In its beautiful simplicity, Corinthians 13:4-8 guides us in precisely how to do just that.

Prayer

Lord, help us love as Jesus has loved. Please give us confidence in our own lovability, that we do not feel a need to be arrogant, rude, jealous, selfish, irritable or resentful. Grant us power to slow the pace of our lives so that we can consistently put this lesson of love into action. In Christ's name, Amen.



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March 30, 2015 † by Tracy Richter

John 31:1-15

Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. And during supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded. He came to Simon Peter; and Peter said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand." Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part in me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over; and you are clean, but not every one of you." For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "You are not all clean." When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

This Scripture is about the Passover feast, Jesus knew this was his last meal with his disciples. His sense of calmness in this moment, his desire to show them that no one is above another, and his hope that the messages he has delivered to the world will not be forgotten, remind me that there is always a reason to be hopeful even at the darkest hour, to show kindness even when we are hurt, and to remember that it is never the wrong time to show love to others.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for giving us this day. Please continue to help us spread your word in our thoughts, words and actions. Please remind us of our strength through trying moments and how it is always the right time to show love for others. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



CUCC St Charles 2015 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

March 31, 2015 † by Rosemary Kagel

Matthew 5:3-12

The Beatitudes

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The beatitudes are sometimes referred to as Jesus' rules for happiness. They emphasize man's humility and God's righteousness. They teach us how to act, what to do, and what is meant to be good.

Prayer

Lord, may we always be humbly open to the blessings and grace we receive daily. Amen.



CUCC St Charles 2015 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

April 1, 2015 ☩ by Rev. Suzy Daly

April Fool's Day

Ecclesiastes 3:3

***There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:
A time to weep and a time to laugh.***

Now many people think that this is the day to play pranks on family, friends and coworkers... to have a good laugh but I happen to disagree.

I think EVERY day is a good day to laugh and have fun keeping each other on our toes. I am not talking about setting up a gallon of water to dump on someone walking in to a room but little ways to make people come together in laughter. Telling a joke, sending a funny email, holding a door closed, turning out the bathroom lights for a second, posting a silly sign or decoration, putting a rubber band on the kitchen sprayer, that kind of thing.

I always tell the kids on work tour (which we are on right now) that pranks should not inconvenience anyone or destroy anything but bring about laughter and good feelings from everyone. For instance, for the past 10 years I have been finding hand lotion containers in my office, in drawers, on my bookshelves, in boxes I have stored for youth ministry. Warm feelings and a chuckle, each time I come across one. I know the culprit, and when I took a picture of my last tube in November and sent it to her---I got a bagful for Christmas!

From WebMD : Feeling rundown? Try laughing more. Some researchers think laughter just might be the best medicine, helping you feel better and putting that spring back in your step. "I believe that if people can get more laughter in their lives, they are a lot better off," says Steve Wilson, MA, CSP, a psychologist and laugh therapist. "They might be healthier, too." Yet researchers aren't sure if it's actually the act of laughing that makes people feel better. A good sense of humor, a positive attitude, and the support of friends and family might play a role, too.

So as you greet your day today (and everyday) know that you are loved, by God, by friends, family and community. Also know that it is a good day to smile, to laugh and to draw others into your laughter as best as you can!

Proverbs 17:22

A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. Amen.



CUCC St Charles 2015 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

April 2, 2015 † Maundy Thursday

† by Jim Porter

John 11:35
Jesus Wept

Two words, but OH the depth of them! Our living Lord able to weep; he who gave it all so we may live with our sins forgiven is also humanistic, humble, loving and divine, but weeps in feeling for us as well. He cares and shows it...fully accounted in just two words! Amen.

Easter/Lent: When someone who deeply loves you so much that he dies for you then returns to dwell within you speaks volumes to me about how my daily actions should be conducted.

Prayer

Our Heavenly Father, thank you for the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. May he dwell in us and direct us to follow his example. In his name we pray. Amen.

† by Peter Ball

1 Peter 5:6

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

I feel that for me to be humble in the presence God's mighty hand is so hard to do. For example, do I give all I possess to less fortunate people than myself? Well I do a bit, BUT not all because I am selfish and like my creature comforts. For example I like a newish vehicle or a warm and dry dwelling. I enjoy more than enough food to eat.

Prayer

Lord, help us become better understanding toward our fellow men. Amen.



CUCC St Charles 2015 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

April 3, 2015 † † † Good Friday • by Steve Sidor

Mark 8:22-25 (CEB)

Jesus and his disciples came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to Jesus and begged him to touch and heal him. Taking the blind man's hand, Jesus led him out of the village. After spitting on his eyes and laying his hands on the man, he asked him, "Do you see anything?" The man looked up and said, "I see people. They look like trees, only they are walking around."

Then Jesus placed his hands on the man's eyes again. He looked with his eyes wide open, his sight was restored, and he could see everything clearly.

Mark is the only gospel writer who tells us this strange story of a two-part healing. I like it because it shows the humanity of both the blind man and of Jesus. When the man fails to feel the full effect of the miracle at first, he doesn't respond with disappointment, "Oh, it didn't work! Everything is still blurry." And he doesn't "take what he can get" and walk away either. He tells Jesus what he is experiencing, and he is honest about it. He gives Jesus another chance at making him whole. Jesus shows patience with the blind man. He is not offended when the man claims he is not yet well. Jesus is willing to try again too. The second chance is a blessing for the man and for us. Jesus is not a one-shot deal. He's willing to work with us, even if the results don't come all at once. Like the blind man, we need to be honest and humble with God. We need to tell him the truth about how we feel and give him, and ourselves, as much time as it takes to clear our vision.

Prayer

God, thank you for second chances. Thank you for your willingness to work with us as long as it takes to heal our wounds. We are so glad that we can talk to you honestly. When the world is blurry to us and we are confused, please help us to remember that we can always come to you and you will never turn us away—you will restore us. Amen.



April 5, 2015 • Easter Sunday ☩ by Rev. Bill Nagy

Mark 16:1-8

*When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. **He has been raised**; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*

This morning, worshippers throughout the world are hearing the words: HE IS RISEN followed by the response, HE IS RISEN INDEED. William Sangster was a world renowned preacher during the first half of the last century. Unfortunately, at the height of his ministry he developed muscular atrophy, a neurological disease that left him without a voice. A few years before his death, one Easter morning he penned the following note to his daughter: “It is a terrible thing to awaken on Easter morning with no voice with which to shout, HE IS RISEN, but it would be far more tragic to awaken this morning with a voice but with no reason to shout the salutation.”

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April 5, 2015 • Easter Sunday ✝ by Rev. Bill Nagy

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The risen Lord does not return to live around the sea of Galilee and collect crowds to see one returned from death. Jesus does not rush to be with his disciples, but tells them they would eventually find him. He meets them on the beach over a campfire preparing breakfast and at first they do not recognize him. He appears in rooms where the doors are locked. He walks with two men on the Emmaus Road and breaks bread with them and then simply disappears out of their sight. He demonstrates his reality to Thomas. And later appears to the Apostle Paul on another road.

Jesus is alive. He appears to young and old, women and men, and they see Jesus as he washes the disciples feet. And they turn to service of all kinds. Engineers and doctors travel to Africa, food is gathered into community pantries, the grieving are comforted, children are nurtured. If this is not the resurrection, then what shall we call it? Jesus, the Lord of the Church, is alive.

Amen.

