2015 CUCC LENTEN cuccstc.org

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





Table of Contents

February 2	.015
------------	------

Page 3	18	Rev. John Rodgers
Page 4	19	Patti Molloy
Page 5	20	Trish Thompson
Page 6	21	Sue Peterson
Page 7	22	Susan Rodgers
Page 8	23	Kelly Cameron
Page 9	24	Tassie Brautigam
Page 10	25	Mary Lou Bracken
Page 11	26	Nola Boyd,
		Mary Hansen
Page 12	27	Josie Ball
Page 13	28	Debby Graham

March 2015

March 2015				
1	Bob Brautigam			
2	Jeff Fairchild			
3	Kathy & Wayne Roland			
4	Jane Harland			
5	Kim Wascher			
6	Anne Valsa			
7	Charlie Peterson			
8	Joy Barker			
9	Ann Richards			
10	Rebecca Reber			
11	Scott Powell			
12	Mike Linder			
13	Ginger Krichbaum			
14	Barb O'Neil,			
	Mary Emily Anhalt			
15	Charlie & Janet Bell			
16	Bonnie Wallace			
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14			

continued

March 2015

Page 32 Page 33 Page 34 Page 35 Page 36 Page 37 Page 38 Page 39 Page 40 Page 41 Page 42 Page 43 Page 44 Page 45	23 24 25 26 27 28 29	Nancy Scorby Judy Legat Amy Burgholzer John Moore Jeanne Humke Penny Lancor
•		
Page 46	31	

April 2015

Page 47	1	Rev. Suzy Daly
Page 48	2	Jim Porter, Peter Ball
Page 49	3	Steve Sidor
Page 50	4	Kevin Brown
Page 51-52	5	Rev. Bill Nagy

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



February 18, 2015 • Ash Wednesday 🕆 by Rev. John Rodgers

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday. It has for more generations than any of us can count. Why a Wednesday? Simple-because it is 40 days from Easter, not counting Sundays as the church tends to do. 40? Because of 40 years in the wilderness before reaching the promised land for Moses. And 40 days in the wilderness for Jesus, seeking the will and direction of God. So it is for us, year after year, as we seek to discover and follow God's will in our lives.

During Lent for the past few years as a response to the Benediction we have sung "Here I am Lord, send me." Again throughout Lent, we will sing these words each Sunday after the 9:30 service. They are often hard words to say or sing – "send me" – but once we say them the whole world changes. Doors open before us. Resources flow. Challenges are met. Hopes and dreams realized. All from two little words – "send me."

So much stands in the way of that quick utterance – time, fear, desires. But if we would only start with a little trust, all of life flows to us. A little trust in God's presence, in God's love, in God's grace, will work miracles. Love and grace are there, surrounding each of us. Be still and experience them.

So next Sunday, when we sing the Benediction and you mouth the words "send me," pray them in your hearts and expect them to come true when you leave the sanctuary, throughout Lent and all of life.



Psalm 139: 1-5, 9

O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my every thought when far away. You chart the path ahead of me and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment you know where I am. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord. You both precede and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me and your strength will support me.

I first heard this scripture several years ago as a closing prayer. It quickly became my "go to" place for comfort. In these ancient words I am reminded to allow God's love to seep into every crevice of my being. I cannot close off any part of myself for He knows even when I sit or stand. Sometimes we don't let people get to know us completely. But God already knows everything about us, and accepts and loves us just as we are. The words "I am with you" and "I will be with you" and "Here I am" are scattered throughout the Bible over and over again. We are never alone.

I have two sisters who are my best friends. One lives in Pennsylvania, the other in North Carolina. We don't get to see each other very often but when we are together our time is precious. When we must part it has become our tradition to place one hand on top of the other's head. It may look a little strange but we are representing the blessing of God given to each other. At that moment, we are THE hand of God and his presence is very real.

God is with us through every situation, guiding, strengthening and supporting.

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for speaking with words that still resonate today. Help us to remember that you are present in every moment of our life and to count on your strength and support. Amen.



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.



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.



1 Corinthians 12:26

If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

The Apostle Paul wrote 1st and 2nd Corinthians as letters to the Christian community in Corinth, Greece. He had started this church. The letters were to encourage them in their faith in Jesus, and also to give guidance in solving doctrinal and ethical problems that were arising. Some of these were "human nature" problems, as I see them. They were wondering about who was best suited for leadership, and they were having difficulty getting along with each other in community fellowship.

In chapter 12, Paul used the analogy of the human body, explaining that each part of the body, i.e. hand, foot, etc., was important for the whole body to be healthy and function well. He then said that they were the body of Christ and God gave each of them talents to contribute to their communal "body of Christ." In the middle of this explanation, Paul writes verse 26 about suffering together if one member suffers, and being happy together if one person is happy.

I love this verse because it describes for me a very basic goal of church community. Paul tells us to care about each other and empathize with each other. That means we talk to each other and pay attention to each other's needs. In our congregation, we read the Prayer Chain and keep folks in prayer. We cook and bake and eat with each other. We see each other on Sunday morning and worship together. We participate in mission projects and enjoy each other's company. We work together on committees to keep our programs and facility running.

Verse 26 first became important to me, in a deeply personal way, when our son Geoff died. This church community suffered with John and me. It helped us to live with our loss. I continue to see that concern for others in their suffering and loss. It is one of the ways I know this body of Christ is alive and faithful.

Prayer

We pray to you, our God, to bless us with awareness so that we continue to see the concerns and joys of others, and the faith to join them in their footsteps. We pray this in your Son's name. Amen.



February 23, 2015 🕆 by Kelly Cameron

Philippians 4:6,7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

I have found that this passage from Philippians is a simple and firm reminder that, although human anxiety exists, God consistently is "looking out for you." God will guard your heart and mind, as long as prayers are given to the Lord and Jesus Christ. How giving of God – we can trust him completely and he will calm our distressed minds. He is listening. He is caring. God sacrificed his son for each one of us, but we must let our anxiety go (or at the minimum, make God aware of it so he can continue to watch over us).

It is also a gentle reminder to pray. In the craziness of our day-to-day lives, I find myself rushing from here to there, from this activity to the next without much thought in prayer. Daily prayer is not always on my "to-do" list (I don't often have much extra space on my post-it notes,) but how else will God know of our mortal concerns? We must speak to him. "Let your requests be made known to God."

Prayer

Dear God, we pray to you. Thank you for reminding us that you are there for us at all times. Please give us all the strength to believe that in hard times, and in good, that you are guarding our hearts and our minds. God's peace transcends all human worry. Amen.



February 24, 2015 🕆 by Tassie Brautigam

THE GREAT MASTER

I would like to reflect on "Invictus" by the British poet William Ernest Henley. If it sounds familiar to you, it was shared by Nelson Mandela in the movie *Invictus* with François Pienaar, captain of the mostly-white Springboks, South Africa's Rugby Union Team. Mandela, realizing that the Springboks represent prejudice and apartheid in their minds, remarks that he did the same while imprisoned on Robben Island. Mandela explains to Pienaar how inspirational these words were to him during his time in prison. Interestingly enough, Henley also wrote these words in the face of great adversity. After having lived a very impoverished childhood, having his leg amputated due to complications of tuberculosis, and almost losing his other leg, Henley wrote these words.

INVICTUS

Out of the night that covers me, Black as the pit from pole to pole, I thank whatever gods may be For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance I have not winced nor cried aloud. Under the bludgeonings of chance My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears Looms but the Horror of the shade, And yet the menace of the years Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate, How charged with punishments the scroll, I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.

Reread the Easter story. Luke 23: 1 – 43. Contemplate, ponder, reflect. Was Jesus showing us the way to be the captain of our souls?



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.



February 26, 2015 🕆 by Nola Boyd

1 Corinthians 13: 4-5, 7

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. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

These verses serve as a reminder and guide of how we treat others, whether it's our closest family members, our friends or even people we don't know. Are you always patient and kind with your spouse and children? Do you envy others? Sometimes that can be hard! Jesus came as that example of how to show love to one another. Make love the foundation for all you do and say.

Prayer

Help us, Lord, to exhibit love to everyone we encounter today. Remind us to treat others as we would want to be treated. Love will never fail us. Amen.

1 Peter 4:10

Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

In other words, each of us should use whatever gift he or she has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in various forms.

When God gives us gifts - spiritual or natural - we are to see ourselves as servants of others and stewards of God's property. Spiritual gifts are not given to enhance our personal relationship with God but are given so that we may reach out to others. Christians are asked in this passage to consider every gift from God as a trust to be used to serve others.

Prayer

Lord, please guide us to see the gifts we have and to share them with those around us without guile. Allow us to see the gifts in others and accept them with grace. Amen.



February 27, 2015 🕆 by Josie Ball

Psalm 23

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 right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint 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 my whole life long.

This is probably the *Psalm* our Lord was thinking of as he went to his death, and that we also think of as we say goodbye to our loved ones.

Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.



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.



March 1, 2015 🕆 Bob Brautigam

Matthew 7:1

Judge not, that you be not judged.

Judging, to me, many times can very likely be a failure to understand or tolerate the views, values, background or lifestyle of others.

Tolerance- the ability or willingness to tolerate something, in particular the existence of opinions or behavior that one does not necessarily agree with.

Is this not a somewhat passive or negative term? To tolerate is to put up with opinions of another?

When we speak of religious tolerance we refer to understanding and appreciating the faith of others. However, to understand how religious beliefs differ from what we believe, we must work to understand the meaning and the history of other's beliefs. We must also recognize that most associate religious values with peace and good, yet a large degree of upheaval and war throughout the ages have some connection to ill-conceived religious convictions.

That is not to say religious tolerance is an oxymoron but rather zealots or reactionaries have misinterpreted religious laws or principles. The impact on history of actions taken by man after man's misinterpretation of religion are monumental in scope. This is particularly true of the world's two largest religious groups: Christians at 32% of the world's 7.1 billion people and Muslims at 23%.

So in this season of Lent with greater focus on the teaching of Jesus, we may want to be less judgmental and more tolerant or seeking better understanding of others.

Prayer

IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE COMPASSIONATE, THE MERCIFUL, look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the controversial teachings of arrogance, divisions and hatreds which have badly infected our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; reunite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may jointly serve you in justice, peace and harmony. Amen.



John 17:21

-that they may all be one;

This is Jesus Christ's prayer expressing his hope for unity among the people of God. This is the motto of the United Church of Christ.

In the company of his disciples shortly after the Last Supper and before his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus commands his disciples to love one another as he has loved them and lifts his eyes to heaven, praying to God for the unity of those who follow him:

that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. **John 17:21-23**

Jesus' prayer is for his followers to experience the same unity as he experiences with God so that they may share the same glory and love that he knows and serve as a witness of that glory and love to the world. It is this powerful prayer for unity that inspired the creation of the United Church of Christ, founded on the vision of seeking unity among Christians and the many thousands of separate Christian denominations that had spawned in the centuries following Christ's death and resurrection.

continued on page 16



continued from page 15

Thus our denomination was born to heal the divisions among God's people by specifically seeking the unity that Christ prayed for, while understanding that unity does not mean uniformity, expressions within that unity will be as diverse as there are individuals, and unity without acceptance of that diversity is impossible. This understanding and the specific desire for unity have led to a number of valuable and important ideals within our denomination:

"In essentials unity, in non-essentials diversity, in all things charity."

"Testimonies of faith rather than tests of faith."

"Responsible Freedom. As individual members of the Body of Christ, we are free to believe and act in accordance with our perception of God's will for our lives. But we are called to live in a loving, covenantal relationship with one another—gathering in communities of faith, congregations of believers, local churches."

"No matter who you are or where you are in life's journey, you are welcome here"

In a world that is too often divided by difference and that too often urges us to form balkanized groups based on everything from nationality to ethnicity, race to gender, sexual orientation to politics, and sadly even religious beliefs, let us cherish the specific goal of unity in the love that binds all of us together as unique and diverse individuals.

Prayer

Gracious one, help us to overcome our earthly tendency to focus on our differences as a reason to divide rather than to unite; help us to join together as one celebrating, supporting and encouraging our blessed diversity; help us to witness to the world your glory and your love; help us to answer Christ's prayer that we may all be one. Amen.



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.



1 Peter 4:10

10 Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

This Lenten season, invest in the greatest gift—your time. There are so many different community projects and volunteer opportunities. It is so gratifying to see a happy face, a completed project or a feeling of accomplishment. In December our family participated in a month of random acts of kindness. Whether it was taking cookies to a neighbor, the fire department, dropping a book off at our local school, hanging a dollar on a vending machine or paying it forward, the feelings of joy were evident the whole month through. I encourage us all to follow these words from First Peter this Lenten season.

Prayer
Precious Lord,
help us listen for your guidance,
and let your blessings through us flow,
passing on with faith's reliance,
for as we share, you will restore.
Amen.



March 5, 2015 🕆 by Kim Wascher

Ecclesiastes 9:9 (MSG)

Relish life with the spouse you love, each and every day of your precarious life. Each day is God's gift. It's all you get in exchange for the hard work of staying alive. Make the most of each one!

Living God's dream means living in close relationships. There's nothing more precious than spending time with those we love. From time to time we should review what's really important in our lives and rethink how we spend our time. It's what life is all about-meaningful relationships.

Solomon observed the importance of friendships (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). Paul recognized the importance of marriage (Ephesians 5:22). God created people to be in relationship with him and in relationship with one another. Friends who work on a task can rejoice together in its accomplishment. Spouses rejoice in their children. Friends can help each other-if one should fall, the other is there to help her up. Those who have both a strong relationship with God and strong friendships with other believers will have bonds that strengthen life's joys and limit life's sorrows. Friendships among believers are precious, for they have the bond of Christ and eternity. We should both find good friends and be good friends.

Ask yourself this one question:

In light of eternity, how am I spending my time?



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.



Genesis 1:24, 29

Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth each kind of living creature, each kind of livestock and crawling thing, and each kind of earth's animals!" And that is what happened. God also told them, "Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant that grows throughout the earth, along with every tree that grows seed-bearing fruit. They will produce your food."

Did you ever take a walk in the woods on a warm, spring day? The leaves are just starting to emerge on the trees, the birds are singing, squirrels are hopping from branch to branch as if they were really enjoying the balmy weather. On the woodland floor, wildflowers are carpeting last year's leaves with fresh color. Insects are flying around looking for food within those flowers. If you're lucky you may even find a deer peering at you through the low branches of a tree. Watch the shadows of the trees play across the woodland floor as the wind whispers through their branches.

It's in those moments when I am walking or photographing that I feel the presence of God. Everything is connected. Each flower is made in a way to interact with its surroundings. Various insects look for certain plants so they can help that plant reproduce. The interconnection of all those elements is amazing.

And God created us to be a part of it.

Prayer

Lord, help us to find the time to take a walk in your natural world and to experience the beauty you have provided for us. Walk with us and help us to regenerate our souls as you regenerate our world. Amen.



Matthew 6:2-4

So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

During this Lenten season when we prepare for Easter, one of the things that many Christians do is give to people who have less than they do. I have fond memories from my childhood of my mother always encouraging me and my sisters to find some meaningful way to give to others. The gestures were never grand, but still built in us a sense of the importance of giving. I never thought a lot about mom taking meals to our widowed neighbor Mrs. Newhalfen, or paying for some groceries for her while at the store. She never talked about it....she just did it. As a child, I had no money to speak of to give others, but my mom showed us ways we could still give of ourselves. Each May 1st, I would labor for hours creating a woven basket from strips of construction paper. After plucking a few tulips and violets from the yard and placing them in my creation, I would gently place the handle of my handcrafted basket on the front door knob of Mrs. Newhalfen's house, ring the doorbell and run. Hiding in the bushes next door, I was able to witness the smile of my neighbor as she discovered my gift. Mom would simply say, "You just gave her a gift that money can't buy. Keep that good feeling in your heart. If you tell others about it, it isn't as special." Mrs. Newhalfen and my mom are no longer living. But, the message of simple, unassuming giving that involved these two women stays with me.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you are a generous God. Please help us to be generous with others in our thoughts and our actions. Amen.



Mark 12:28-31

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Luke 10:27

He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear O Israel, The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might."

Personally I find the three scripture lessons found in both the New and Old Testaments referenced as The First Commandment and The Great Commandment as my guide for daily living. All three scripture verses ask us to love the Lord our God, but the New Testament verses ask us to love others, even our enemies, as well.

In our daily life, "Can we love everyone equally; can we share our lunch with a homeless man on the corner; can we help a colleague with his/her work when he/she never helps us?" What would Jesus want us to do?

Prayer

We pray, Dear Lord,

help us to listen to the two commandments, not to be judgmental. Help us to understand people are all equal in the eyes of Jesus, and help us to serve others in the manner in which Jesus helped people live out his message. Amen.



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.



Matthew 20:17-28

While Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and said to them on the way, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised.'

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favour of him. And he said to her, 'What do you want?' She said to him, 'Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.' But Jesus answered, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?' They said to him, 'We are able.' He said to them, 'You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.'

When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'

Here Jesus is moving toward the final days of his life and ministry, heading to Jerusalem, where persecution and death await him. He clearly tells his followers what is about to happen. (He told them earlier in two other gospel readings what was to come in these final days).

continued on page 25



continued from page 24

And in this dramatic moment, the culmination of three years of ministry, a strange thing happens. The mother of two disciples, James and John, sons of Zebedee, asks the master for a favor. Could her two sons sit at his right and left hand, when Jesus enters his kingdom.... Oy Vey! Such a good Jewish mother!

Jesus may have thought- "They still don't get it!" After three years of closely following him, hearing him preach, teach, perform miracles, empty himself out for others, they were instead worried about who would sit with Jesus at the future banquet table.... "No can do!" says Jesus.

Then Jesus asks, "Are you able to drink the cup I am about to drink?" He tests them once again. "Yes we can," came their quick reply, although the listeners of the story are certainly not convinced...

Finally Jesus concludes the lesson to his followers with a basic admonition- "Whoever wishes to be first or great, must be last and a servant to others." He flips the world's thinking on its head with his life and with his message to those who follow him. After three years of ministry, Jesus is still teaching the fundamentals... How patient he was, and is, with us.

Prayer

Loving and Patient God, thank you for Jesus' life and teaching among us. Thank you for his patience with us and the steadfast nurturing of his followers, then and now. Help us to set aside our personal agendas, foibles, and self-centeredness. Help us to understand the profound challenge of "drinking from his cup." Grant us his wisdom and steadfast faith as we follow Jesus and live our lives as servants of others. Amen.



Psalm 40:6 [CEB]

You don't relish sacrifices or offerings; you don't require totally burnt offerings or compensation offerings – but you have given me ears!

What are you giving up for Lent? Whether it is something that you don't particularly care for the rest of the year, maybe that would be fried liver for some, or something you truly enjoy, like chocolate for many of us, it has long been a tradition to sacrifice something during this time of fasting. In various Christian traditions, this can be a way of paying penance for our transgressions, while others might stress that the discipline required to abstain from some desired food or activity tests our resistance to temptation, and thus through self-discipline, prepares us for Easter, the Resurrection that follows the crucifixion of Jesus.

So abstaining from a favorite food for 40 days is not a bad thing. But what did the Psalmist know about sacrifice? For a couple thousand years in many expressions of faith, including both those that honored multiple pagan gods and the Hebrew worship of our one God, it was common to take something of value, often a lamb or other food, and burn it, entirely, as a sacrifice to God. But what good is a totally burnt offering to God? Tribute? Certainly. But what God really asks of us is obedience. Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Is it possible then that we can use abstinence as a means of loving our neighbor? What if we were to go ahead and enjoy our chocolate bar, but instead forego a favorite breakfast cereal, purchasing 7 weeks worth of that grainy goodness, and rather than consuming it ourselves, donate it to a local food pantry who will see that some of our hungry neighbors have a full stomach as they start their day?

Prayer

Creator of all life, you have given us a world of abundance but at times we have failed to see that abundance is not enjoyed by all of us in equal portions. In the same spirit with which you sacrificed your son, Jesus Christ, show us how to sacrifice from our abundance with the purpose of helping our neighbors. In his name we pray, Amen.

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.



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.



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.



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 annoint 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.



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.



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.



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.



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.



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.



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.



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.



Proverbs 3:6

In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths.

When you're under a dark storm cloud and the rain blurs your vision, it's hard to understand why the Lord placed you in this direction. When you lose something suddenly, you don't always understand. "Why me? Why now?" is what we ask during these times. In those first moments, we don't know who to blame, and sometimes in those moments we place the blame on the Lord because we don't want to accept what has happened. When I lost my childhood dog, I couldn't accept it, it couldn't be happening. I had that dog since I was five; she was my best friend. She knew when I was feeling down, or when I was sick, and she would stay by my side until she knew I was feeling better. On that June afternoon, as I was leaving for a friend's graduation party, I told her that I'd see her soon and gave her a kiss on her head. Little did I know, that 'soon' wasn't as soon as I'd like. When I got home, my best friend had passed away. That night, I saw the first fireflies of the summer. In that moment, I realized that it was Hershey's way of telling me she made it to the Lord safely and that she's better than she ever was.

It was hard for me to come to terms with the events of that day, but when I took a step back, I could see that the Lord was taking care of not only Hershey, but me as well. I spent the next few days realigning, but the Lord was by my side and helped me straighten my path again.

Prayer

Dear Lord, every day we must place our trust in you. You guide us on the paths we take and help us overcome the hard obstacles that we face. With your guidance, our paths are clear. Amen.



Jeremiah 29:11

"For 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."

Lent is a great time for reflection. We may not always understand God's plan for us or what the future holds, but to know that THERE IS a plan and a future should keep us satisfied. Realize and believe in the talents and gifts you have. Nothing from God is insignificant. Remember that the gifts we have may be in his plan for someone else's hope and future. Do not be so naive as to believe our paths and plans do not cross and intertwine with others. Your faith, your compassion, your empathy, your voice, or even your smile may be a part of the journey to prosperity. Spend time this Lenten season to realize the talents and gifts you have and use them for the betterment of the world.

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for the gifts you have given. Help us to see all that we are blessed with now and all that is in store for the future. Allow us to understand your plan and our part in it, and always let us strive to be better people. In your name, Amen.



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 stongest 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."



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.



1 Peter 1:3

Praise be to the God & Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

When I reflect on this verse it brings me great joy and hope. The resurrection of Jesus Christ comes to us as a triumph. Christ died but saved our souls. We know that Christ lives within our hearts and souls and we see it in our relationship with God, the actions we take, and how we treat those around us. After all, this is the Christian way! We give God our Glory as we follow in his footsteps and live with hope and faith that we will be more like him. When I think about Easter and the meaning behind it I always refer back to my favorite Easter hymn....Christ the Lord Is Risen Today. This song goes hand-in-hand with the above mentioned verse...

Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia! Earth and heaven in chorus say, Alleluia! Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia! Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!!

Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia! Following our exalted head, Alleluia! Made like him, like him we rise, Alleluia! Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

Hail the Lord of earth and heaven, Alleluia! Praise to thee by both be given, Alleluia! Thee we greet triumphant now, Alleluia! Hail the Resurrection, thou, Alleluia!

Prayer

If we live the words of God...we WILL be saved. Keep the presence of his life in our hearts. Give him Glory and praise his words.....Amen.



March 29, 2015 • Palm Sunday ♀ by Rev. Pat Kitner

Matthew 21:10

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was thrown into an uproar. "Who is he?" the people asked.

It seems that even from his very birth through his death on the cross and to this very day, the question remains: "Who is he?" This Bethlehem babe whose birth we celebrate every year, whose life we revere, whose death we mourn, who came back to us on Resurrection Day and whose presence we claim to be "God with us."

The question is now posed to each of us: Who do you say I am? It's your turn to reply.

Prayer

Today as we remember the people waving palm branches and shouting "Hosanna!", may we welcome the great "I am" into our lives; perhaps not in a grandiose manner, but lovingly, gently, in our hearts, in our actions toward one another. Holy week beckons. Amen.



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.



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 right-eousness, 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.



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.



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.



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 4, 2015 • Holy Saturday 🕆 by Kevin Brown

Bible Verse - John: 3:14-18

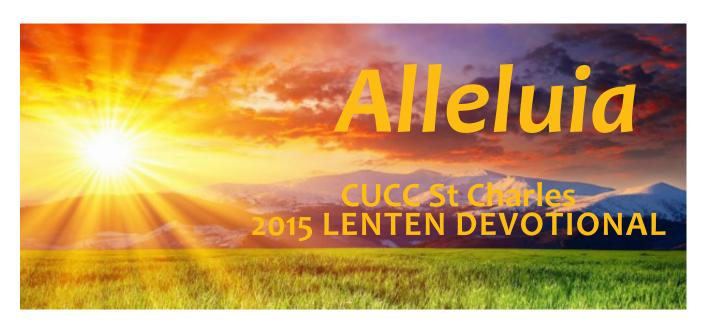
"And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

In this Bible verse, the people in the desert with Moses were to look up at the serpent that Moses was holding and be healed by God. This is the same reason that God sent Jesus into the world. We are to look up to Jesus and follow his teaching in times of trouble just like the people did with the serpent. Temptation and wrongful choices are present everywhere.

Having faith in Jesus helps me make the right decisions. Moses was constantly faced with choices that questioned his faith. May we all find the strength to be like Moses and keep our faith present in our daily life. Jesus was God's only begotten son, who died on the cross for our sins. He was lifted up and ascended into heaven as our Lord and Savior. During the Easter season, we can continue to lift Jesus up in our hearts, mind, and soul.

Easter Prayer

Almighty God, who through your only begotten son Jesus Christ overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of the Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by your life-giving spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. 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."

continued on page 51

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

continued from page 50

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.

