

The United Methodist Church of Berea

Lent 2017

Living in God's Presence
Lenten Reflections of our Scriptures and Prayers



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Written by
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of
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We gratefully acknowledge the Memorial Committee of UMCB for the support of this booklet. Thanks to Sean Moss, a member and present college student for the photo for the cover. We give appreciation to Beth Barner, our office manager, for producing the booklets this year.

Living in God's Presence

Lenten Reflections of our Scriptures and Prayers

Introduction

Welcome to the 2017 Lenten Devotional booklet. The Adult Planning Council would like to thank everyone who contributed to this year's Lenten Devotional booklet.

As you begin your journey through the Lenten season by reading each of the daily reflections from the members and friends of the United Methodist Church of Berea, our hope is that you will sense the **Presence** of God as you read each one.

The greatest gift each of these reflections give each of us is that each writer has expressed their unique, personal perspective in expressing how they feel the **Presence** of God in their own way. It is hoped that you will receive the gift of each reflection to enrich your daily devotions throughout the season of Lent this year as you continue to feel the **Presence** of God in your lives each day.

We would like to remind you to review all of the worship and study opportunities for the Lenten season and Easter Sunday that are available to you at our church as outlined on the following pages.

May God's **Presence** fill you with a peace that passes all understanding during this season of Lent.

Claire E. Powell,

Adult Council Chair

Opportunities for Worship, Lent and Easter Sunday 2017

Ash Wednesday Worship—March 1 at 12 pm and 7:30 pm

The season of Lent—forty days of preparing for Easter—begins on Ash Wednesday, this year on March 1. Join us in the Sanctuary at 12 pm or 7:30 pm for a time together in worship including the imposition of ashes—as a sign of our mortality and changed hearts and lives—and the celebration of Holy Communion.

Labyrinth Walk

Before and after our time together in worship, a labyrinth will be available in Fellowship Hall for those who would like to use it for a time of prayerful centering. Walking the labyrinth is a way of praying with our bodies, minds, and spirits, opening our whole selves to God. For those who have not used a labyrinth previously, some resources for guided prayer will be provided.

Palm Sunday Worship—April 9 at 8 am, 9 am, and 11:15 am

Join us in worship and help us to wave palm branches, beginning our Holy Week journey by remembering Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Maundy Thursday Worship—April 13 at 7:30 pm

On Thursday evening in Holy Week, we will gather in the Sanctuary to remember Jesus' last supper with the disciples and the commandment we have been given to serve one another in love.

Good Friday Worship—April 14 at 7:30 pm

We will gather in the Sanctuary at 7:30 pm to remember Jesus' crucifixion with a Service of Tenebrae (Shadows).

Easter Sunday Worship—April 16 at 8 am, 9 am, and 11:15 am

Invite your friends, co-workers, family members, and neighbors, and join us for worship on Easter Sunday as we celebrate God's love, grace, and hope made real through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!

Opportunity for Study, Lent 2017

Forgiveness: A Lenten Study

Forgiving others and humbly asking for forgiveness are central practices for all followers in the way of Jesus Christ. Lent is a great time to deepen our understanding and practice of forgiveness. This year, guided by the work of Marjorie Thompson in her book, *Forgiveness: A Lenten Study*, over the course of six weeks we will address questions such as:

- *Is forgiveness a Christian duty under all circumstances, or are there situations when Christians need not forgive?*
- *Is forgiveness a matter between individuals, or is it meaningful only in the context of communities?*
- *Is forgiving the best route to healing for the injured?*
- *How do we get past emotional barriers to real forgiveness?*

Using biblical examples and real-life situations, Thompson's work illustrates each week's theme in an informative and engaging way. With clarity, insight, and sensitivity, this will be a great resource for examining both our ability to forgive and our own need for forgiveness. Please join us.

Wednesday Evening Group: 6 weeks, beginning March 8 at 6:30 pm in the Parlor

Thursday Morning Group: 6 weeks, beginning March 9 at 9:30 am in the Parlor

“The Heart of the Matter”

Core Spirituality of Judaism and Christianity

Led by Hugh Burtner on Sundays at 10:00 am on March 19, 26 and April 2

Other Opportunities

Adult Discussion and Movie Night. We will show *The Risen* at 7pm and snacks are provided. Come and see how this compares to *The Passion of Christ*.

April 22 Women's retreat at Marting Hall sponsored by UMW and Adult Council.

July 10-12 Summer Sabbath with Cleveland TOPS Swing band playing on Wednesday. Jim Wonnacott is the Director.

Ash Wednesday, March 1, 2017

Confession & Forgiveness

²⁵ “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.”

Mark 11:25 (New Revised Standard Version)

I really struggle with the instruction given in this verse. I want to be forgiven. No, I need to be forgiven. That part is a no-brainer.

The part I have trouble getting past is the forgiving “anything against anyone”. Too often it seems, I think of that “anything” that “anyone” did (or I perceive they did), then my anger and hurt well up again. What is it about those feelings that make them so hard to break free from?

We have wild raspberries that grow from my neighbor’s yard through my fence. The birds love them. I, however, do not. They have very tiny curved thorns that curve into hooks. Their branches creep up on me as I garden along the fence or mow the yard. They attack, latching onto my skin and clothes. Slowly, carefully, painfully, I attempt to extricate myself without getting hooked by other thorns on those same wily branches.

I think the feelings I have when thinking of the “anything against anyone” are much like those raspberry thorns. Hooking into me, latching tightly, and causing me pain.

However, there is a method to “extricate” ourselves from “thorns” of anger and hurt. God loves His imperfect humans so dearly. He realizes we will fail Him over and over despite our best intentions. To save us from ourselves, He sent His perfect and Beloved Son to take on our sins and to be crucified on our behalf. By truly forgiving, we are released. We are freed to accept God’s gracious gift of forgiveness.

Prayer:

Gracious and Kind Creator,

We struggle to understand how You can offer us forgiveness knowing that we will fail you. We are easily ensnared in our own feelings against the “anyone”. Help us to follow Your example of forgiveness so that we might ourselves be graced with Your forgiveness. In the Name of your Son and our Redeemer,

Amen.

Beth Barner

Thursday, March 2, 2017

After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.

Genesis 5:22–24

The first person recorded in history to have a walk with God was Enoch. There is mention of man calling on God in the early days in Genesis 4:26, but Enoch was the first to truly embrace a relationship with Him. Have you ever noticed that the men and women we read about in the Bible and consider “great” were all people who allowed God to be the most significant part of their loves, and were willing to make a sacrifice for Him?

When the zeal of God captures you, it will ignite you with a great passion to walk with God and to be his friend. Imagine being Enoch and living 365 years—and having this growing relationship with God! One can only wonder what glorious depths of intimacy Enoch uncovered. Perhaps Enoch's heart longed so deeply for more of God that God grew weary of withholding himself. Maybe God's heart was saying, "Enoch, you love me with such a pure and sweet passion, I don't want to say 'no' to you anymore. I'm going to answer your prayer and show you my face. Come on up!"

As you draw close to God, he will not likely take you up to heaven as he did Enoch. However, he does desire to reveal the beauty of his face to you. As we walk with him, he will open the Scriptures to us through the Spirit of wisdom and revelation and reveal to us the light of the glory of God that is to be found in him.

When we walk with God, we enter the dimension where God unfolds the secrets of his kingdom. These are the paths that the ancients trod before us. Noah knew the secret of walking with God (Genesis 6:9), as did Abraham (Genesis 24:40). Through Christ, you can explore the glorious riches of knowing God like they did—and to even a greater degree because of the Spirit which has been given to us!

Dee Bosl

Friday, March 3, 2017

Jesus' Example

*³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴ and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was. ³⁵ **Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.** ³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"*

Mark 1:32-27 NIV

What a fabulous example in Jesus that I can certainly apply to my life! Mark 1:35 was my chosen verse but to really grasp the importance of Jesus' example in verse 35, one must read before and after the verse. We see in verses 32-34 that the night before Jesus was a very busy man seemingly pulled in many different directions. In verse 36 we see that much more was expected of him the following day. What did Jesus do in between being pulled in so many different directions? He filled his cup! He became rejuvenated in prayer. Physical rest alone was not enough to prepare him for the following day. He got up very early the next morning, left the house, and went off to a solitary place and prayed.

How often do I feel pulled in many different directions – all day and evening – and then again first thing in the morning? How important is it for me to not only rest my body and mind at night but also to fill my cup in prayer before I start my day the next morning? The Son of God needed prayer time first thing in the morning. I certainly do too!

Prayer:

Dear Jesus, help me follow your example. Help me make time to fill my cup each morning when it is still early before my day begins. Help me spend time in prayer, so I can be better able to fulfill your will for my day.

Diane DeCaprio

Saturday, March 4, 2017

Hospitality

Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

Hebrews 13:2

Jesus showed hospitality to many strangers. He set an example for us to live by. We should try to show hospitality to people we know, but also to people we don't know as much as we can. Such as if someone drops their books, you can help pick up their books. You can also show hospitality by welcoming a new person in your school or work.

Prayer:

Dear Jesus, please help me to show hospitality to people I know and don't know as much as I can.

Bella



DeCaprio

Artwork, Bella DeCaprio, Grade 5

Sunday, March 5, 2017

Being a Blessing

² While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul (Paul) for the work to which I have called them."³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Acts 13:2-3 (NIV)

This was the beginning of Paul's first missionary journey. The church was involved in sending Paul and Barnabas, but it was God's plan. We read that Paul and Barnabas were "set apart" or dedicated to God's special purpose and led by the Holy Spirit. They followed the roads built by the Roman Empire which made traveling easier. Visiting Synagogues, speaking first to the Jews in hopes they would see Jesus as the Messiah and help to spread the Good News to everyone.

Today churches dedicate pastors, missionaries, and church workers for their tasks. We can also dedicate our resources (time, money and talents) or learn something new. Something you always wanted to do and if you are retired, now you have been blessed with the time. For me, going to work with daily challenges or changes was a way of life and a way to stay employed. Ask God what He wants you to be "set apart" for Him. Do it all for His glory and your enjoyment because you are serving Him!

Heavenly Father, Holy Lord, I thank you for your Grace and Mercy. Help me to practice Your presence in my life and help me to be a blessing to others. Thank you for those who are a blessing to me by coming along side when I stumble. Dear Heavenly Father, help me to recognize the needs of others and help me to be a blessing, too! Amen.

Benediction – The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. (Philemon 25, NIV)

John Kappeler

Monday, March 6, 2017

Patience

In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly.

Psalm 5:3 (NIV)

The definition of patience is tolerating or delaying your reaction to someone's annoyance, such as being late.

Just as God is patiently waiting for us to obey Him and follow Jesus' teachings, so must we be patient with our spouses, children, relatives, and all human beings.

Perhaps people want us to listen and hear and not offer an opinion; maybe they want us to say I understand.

As people it is difficult not to respond to the loud cell phone users, the careless drivers, crying babies on airplanes, but we must work to control our actions and show patience.

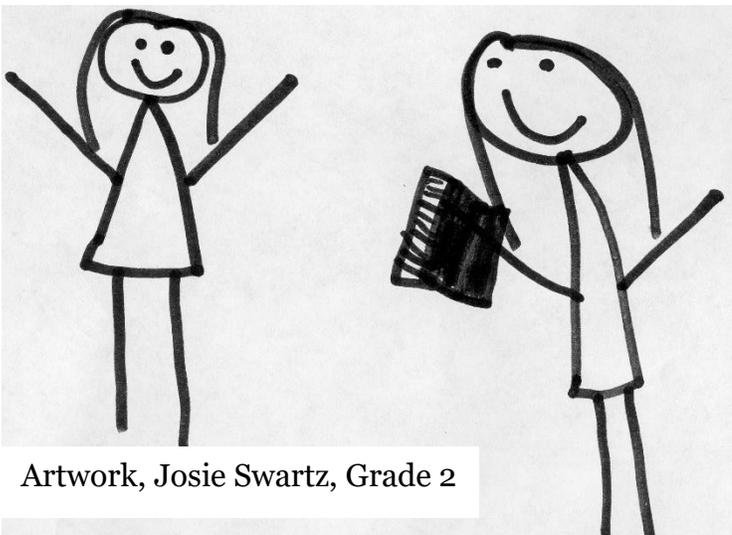
As we pray to God and ask for guidance and forgiveness let us also ask Him to help us to be patient with others.

Let us be slow to anger and quick to forgive.

Prayer:

I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. Psalm 40:1

Russell Simon



Artwork, Josie Swartz, Grade 2

Tuesday, March 7, 2017

Joy

Always be full of joy. Never stop praying. Whatever happens, always be thankful. This is how God wants you to live in Christ Jesus.

I Thessalonians 5:16-18 (ERV)

I have to admit I've had a tendency to approach worship with selfish motivations. I would walk in the big red doors with these thoughts running through my mind:

"I hope the sermon is relevant to my life" or "It was a crazy week- I really need this in order to get through the next week."

A while back, a church friend pointed out to me that worship services are for praising God, not for serving my needs. Not only that, it's my job to show up prepared to worship God.

While the above passage is a wonderful reminder of how to live my life daily, it also gives me the perfect way to prepare myself for worship. Be full of joy: Walk in the door smiling- joy is infectious, and is meant to be shared with others. Never stop praying: Why wait to pray until the service? Pray before walking in to get into the right frame of mind. Always be thankful: Don't get caught up thinking about what could be better about the service. Be thankful for the good and the bad, the big things and the little things. After all, we are living in Christ Jesus, and there's nothing to be more thankful for than that.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for inviting me into your house, and for giving me the amazing gift of your grace. Help me to recognize your blessings, spread your joy, and to live in you every day of my life.

Amen.

Mary Potts

Wednesday, March 8, 2017

Listening

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

1 John 5:14 (NIV)

Recently I started eating macaroni and cheese again. There was a day when I had eaten so much of it that I said I'd never eat it again, but as they say, "never say never." When our sons were growing up, macaroni and cheese, the kind that comes in the blue box, was a favorite. They would eat it morning, noon and night if allowed. There were worse things to eat but my desire was to feed my children something better. I wanted them to have something with a little more protein, a few more vegetables and a few less carbohydrates, at least most of the time. This did not stop them from asking for their favorite, but I would often turn a deaf ear. However, I was "all ears" for suggestions and requests for foods that were according to my will.

Reading our verse for today, we learn that our heavenly parent is "all ears" when we ask anything according to His will. What is God's will? I like to think about my will for my children when trying to answer this. I wanted them to be healthy and happy. I wanted them to learn how to live and make choices that would help them enjoy the very best that was available to them, not only for the moment but for the rest of their lives. They were young and could not always see things the way I did so I was asking them to trust my judgement. I believe God wants the same for me. He wants me to make choices that will help me enjoy the very best He offers to me. He wants to answer my prayers but won't give me things that go against His best for me. I am not always able to see things the way God does, but I can trust His judgement and keep seeking Him and learning more of what His will is for me.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for wanting your best for me. Help me to seek and know your will for me. I ask this in your loving name, Jesus. Amen.

Barb Rochford

Thursday, March 9, 2017

Reward

But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Matthew 6:6 (Revised Standard Version)

I get performance anxiety in public praying. “But Moses said to the Lord, “Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either heretofore or since thou hast spoken to thy servant; but I am slow of speech and of tongue” (Exodus 4:10 RSV). The Lord encourages Moses, but Moses persists. God becomes angered but ultimately offers the option of having Aaron do the talking. Through regularity, and meeting with God in everyday situations, I found my voice with God, like sharing joys and concerns with a loving parent.

I rejoice that the Lord Jesus Christ teaches us how to pray, and am glad that God hears what a quiet voice has to say.

I pray for forgiveness, for not praying with many words or quickness.

My reward comes through frequent and private, or as the verse says secret, conversations, intimate exclamations of supplication, thanksgiving, intercession and confession, adoration and affirmation, meditation with patience, and prayers of praise simply because He Is!

In prayer there is reward. That quiet time spent with the Lord our God. Alone, but not alone, a talk with Thee.

In my room? Sure, but not necessarily, but a place of quiet. There we can tarry. Perhaps the garden, without distraction. Whether my lips speak it slowly or my thoughts untranslated when the words fail to flow, the purest interaction, in the stillness, the Son of God discloses not a voice on my ear, but His closeness is the joy that is shared. The reward, His presence. The present, my cup refilled, I rejoin the world renewed, where He hears me still.

Prayer:

Oh heavenly Father, I proclaim Your infinite goodness and thank You. I humble myself to Your will. Allow me the insight of walking in another’s shoes so as not to judge them. Forgive me as I have made wrong turns, but through Your Son Jesus Christ, the path to Your forever kingdom is illuminated that I may find my way. Amen.

Jim Rollins

Friday, March 10, 2017

Healing

Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

James 5:16 (NIV)

In early January when I chose this verse from The Letter of James, I did so because the topic was "Healing." On January 17, I had major surgery and was looking forward to contemplating God's presence in my recovery.

As I studied and researched this passage, I became very interested in that little word "sins." Different words are used in other translations. "Transgressions," "trespasses," "falls and offenses," and "faults" are just several that I found in my studies. "Faults" is used in the King James Version. It is an interesting concept. We are usually aware of our sins but many times we overlook our faults.

Webster's dictionary defines "fault" as "a moral weakness less serious than a vice." We could call it an unattractive flaw in a person's character. So what faults were you and I guilty of today? What did we do that made others uncomfortable or unhappy? Were we judgmental, cranky, short-tempered, miserly, petty, childish, rude -- etc., etc., etc.? The list could go on and on.

Everyone needs to confess and to pray -- the sooner, the better. Obviously, the healing in this verse is not totally physical but includes the spiritual also. The body and the soul are connected. To heal one is to bring comfort to the other.

This isn't the Lenten Reflection I thought I would write but I am glad for the path of contemplation I was led to follow.

Prayer:

Lord, our faults are many but with Your help and guidance we will change. Amen.

Cass Beckman

Saturday, March 11, 2017

Listening

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

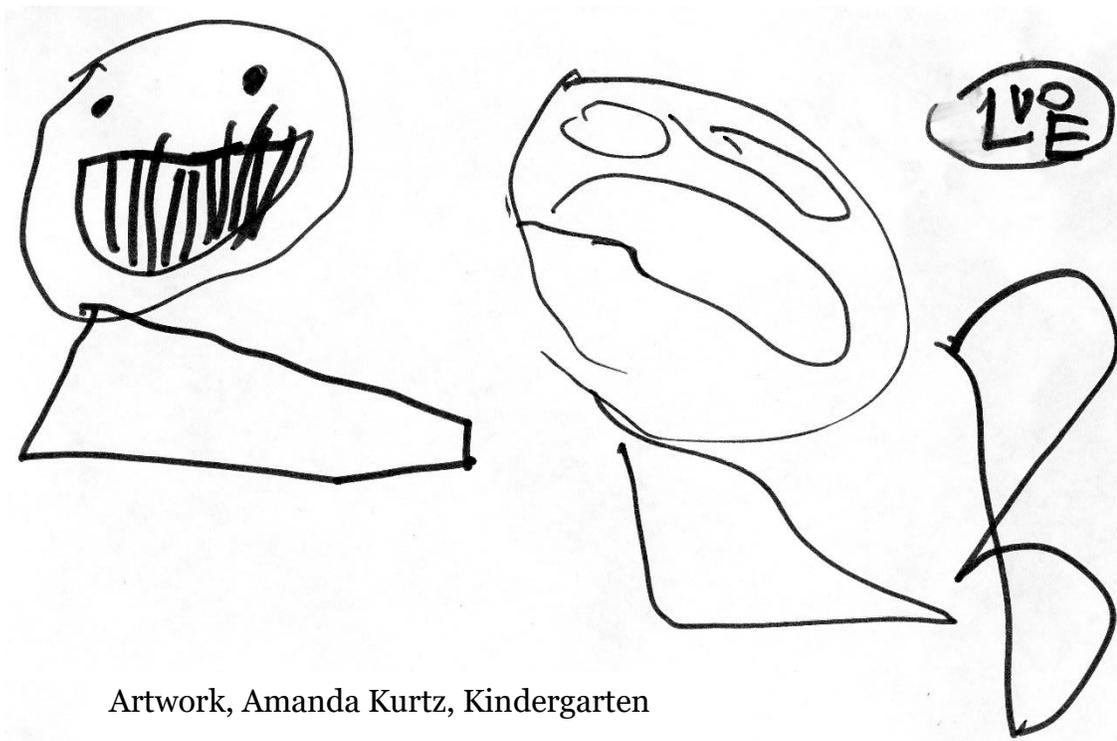
Acts 16:25 (NIV version)

Paul and Silas were praying late at night. This time with the Lord is very common for many Christians. This can be the opportunity to sort out our thoughts, worries, joys and fears that have been building throughout the day. We may have been confronted by enormous personal challenges. When the pressure cooker gets too high, we can explode. The Lord knows this...He is there to be with us. All the time.

Prayer:

Our gracious and loving heavenly Father, we lay ourselves at your feet. Comfort our anxieties, clear our minds, open our hearts to your counsel. Show us your direction and give us the stamina and courage to proceed. Our faith is in you. In thy holy name. Amen.

Von Smith



Artwork, Amanda Kurtz, Kindergarten

Sunday, March 12, 2017

Hope

Pray without ceasing.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 (King James Version)

I do not interpret this verse to be a command for us to remain in a constant state of prayer with our heads bowed and eyes closed, but rather to live our lives with a consistent mindfulness that God is with us and our reliance upon His grace and faith in His promise should be our first resort when dealing with situations that bring about anxiety, anger, fear, or any sort of uncertainty. All of our conscious thoughts and actions should ultimately reflect on our relationship with God and the teachings of His word. A persistent dialogue with God in our thoughts will reinforce our dependence on Him and keep us humble.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, I pray that in moments of uncertainty and distress throughout my day, that I be reminded of Your presence and grace so that I can make decisions and take action based on my faith in You.

Ben LeBrun



Artwork, Emily Kurtz, Kindergarten

Monday, March 13, 2017

Community

They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

Acts 1:14 (NIV)

Just think about what they all had been through for the past couple of months. They were still in Jerusalem because Jesus, who had been with them 40 days, had told them to wait there. They were waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

There were the 11 remaining disciples and their wives and a total of more than 100 believers. They had to be bewildered by what had happened and wondering, "where do we go from here?"

They must have hoped that with the Holy Spirit all would be made clear and they would be empowered to take on the challenges of God's plan for them.

This group of believers spent their time together and in prayer.

This is a powerful thing.

We come together with dear Christian friends and neighbors. We pray together. We can share silence together feeling God's love and the love of this group. We are not alone. Of course, God is always with us, but we know that this group, filled with God's love is also with us.

This is The Body Of Christ.

Prayer:

Dear Lord,

When we pray with words or in silence, we are waiting. When we are rewarded by feeling your presence, we know we have received the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Roy Mallarnee

Tuesday, March 14, 2017

Family

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.

Luke 11:13

When I decided to write about family, I didn't realize I would have such a difficult scripture to reflect on. But this one kind of makes sense. Most of us want what's best for our children and will go to any length to fulfill their needs. The word "gifts" doesn't necessarily mean "presents" (which all our children love to receive) but rather it could be giving them what they need to succeed in the world. Whether it's a good home, family values, food on the table, shelter, education, or even some of the extras that we love to sprinkle on top. You know, the extracurricular activities that help them grow into well rounded individuals.

I think that this scripture reminds us that God loves children, and will reward those who take special care of them. Especially when they turn to him for help. I constantly pray to be a better parent and a better wife. I always ask for signs that I am making the best decisions for my family, and in my prayers I ask for the patience to deal with the stress that having a large family can provide sometimes. It's a very rewarding challenge to have four lovely (and sometimes wild) daughters. My family is everything to me, but I do pray that I am doing my best to help guide them in life. To close, I will end with a personal prayer.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, I come to you today to ask that you guide me in the right direction, help me make the right decisions, and grant me the patience to be loving and kind when my children are not. Help me to be the best mother and wife that I can be. Please help me carry on this week without shouting or screaming, and when I do, please help them forgive me. Thank you for giving me my wonderful family. Amen.

Rikki Price

Wednesday, March 15, 2017

Love

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Matthew 5:44 (NIV)

Our perceived enemies usually have the same faults that we have.

Thus, we must pray for them as we ask for our own forgiveness.

Pray on the premise that there is the possibility of good in every one.

With the love of God encircling us, we are never without hope.

As I reflected on the Matthew 5:44 passage, two of my favorite hymns entered my thoughts. Both gave light to the meaning of the scripture.

Where Charity and Love Prevail (written 9th Century based on John 4:11)

Forgive us the faults of others as we confess our personal faults.

Let us love each other well in Christian holiness.

Let strife among us be unknown, let all contention cease;

Let Christ be the glory that we seek, and ours be his holy peace.

Jesus United by Thy Grace (written by Charles Wesley – 1742)

Jesus united by thy grace and each to each endeared,

With confidence we seek thy face and know our prayer is heard.

Help us to help each other Lord, each other's cross to bear.

Let all their friendly aid afford, and feel each other's care.

Touched by the load stone of thy love, let all our hearts agree,

And toward each other move and ever move toward thee.

Prayer:

When the road is rough and my heart is weary – Lord give me the reminder of your strength.

When the night is long and my fears build up – Lord give me the assurance of your peace.

When the way is lonely and I feel overwhelmed – Lord give me the comforting touch of your presence. AMEN.

Vivien Swaddling

Thursday, March 16, 2017

Understanding

Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.

Jeremiah 33:3 (New Revised Standard Version)

My conversation with God:

Me	God
Lord, I am a sinner.	Yes, you are, but I still love you. I love you so much. Why do you ever doubt? <i>So Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done." Matthew 21:21 NKJV</i>
Lord, I am a sinner and imperfect.	Yes, you are, but I still love you. I love you so much. Why do you not abide in me? <i>"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." John 15:5 NKJV</i>
Because I am a sinner and selfish.	When you abide in me, your breath and thoughts are mine. When you abide in me, your actions are mine. You are a reflection of my light. When you do not abide in me, you become brittle. <i>Jesus once again addressed them: "I am the world's Light. No one who follows me stumbles around in the darkness. I provide plenty of light to live in." John 8:12 MSG</i>
Lord, I want to abide in you forever. Help me.	<i>You've been raised on the Message of the faith and have followed sound teaching. Now pass on this counsel to the followers of Jesus there, and you'll be a good servant of Jesus. Stay clear of silly stories that get dressed up as religion. Exercise daily in God—no spiritual flabbiness, please! Workouts in the gymnasium are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both today and forever. You can count on this. Take it to heart. This is why we've thrown ourselves into this venture so totally. We're banking on the living God, Savior of all men and women, especially believers. 1 Timothy 4:6 MSG</i>

Prayer:

Loving and Teaching God,

Thank you for your clarity and truth. Help me to remove the excuses and make time to abide in you throughout the day and every day. Help me to open your Word each day, to feel the Bible, to make notes, to pray and reflect on the passages, and to open my heart to you. Help me to open my eyes to the world and help me listen to your voice. Help me to obey your call. Guide me, my family, our church and the Church to abide in you for your life giving, nourishing love, hope and peace. In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, the Morning Star. Amen

Greg Rentsch

Friday, March 17, 2017

Trust

But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

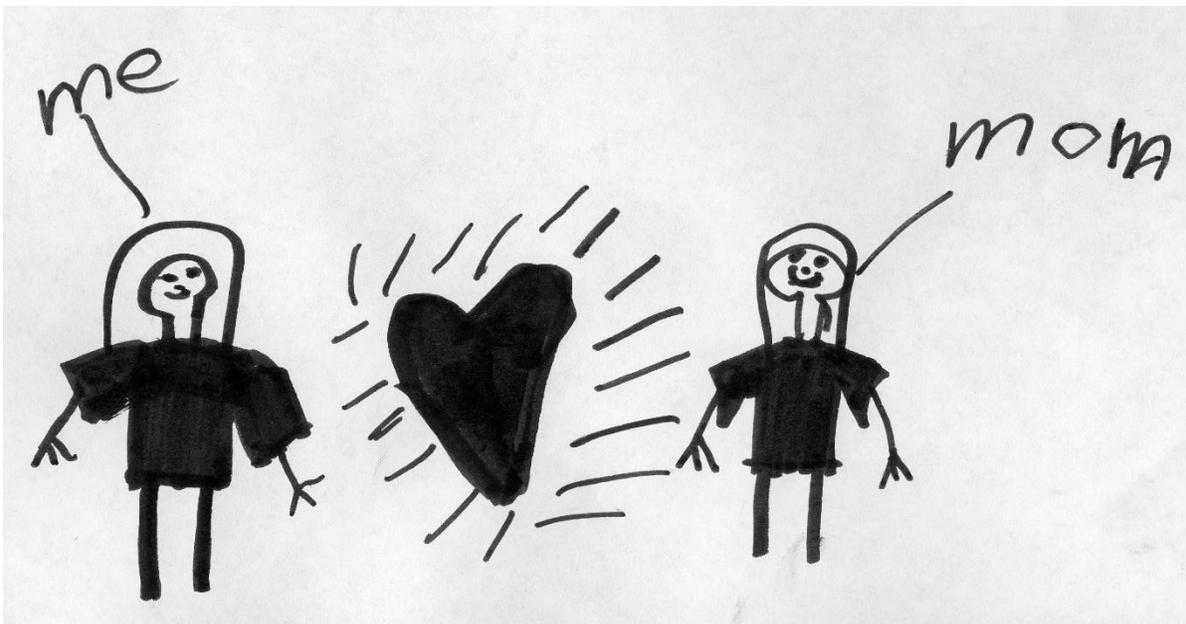
James 1:6 (NIV)

We as a church are asking God to make us a Healthy Church (HCI). If we put God in charge of the process, we must believe and not doubt. The Scripture says if we doubt it's like being tossed in the waves and blown by the wind. Experiencing being on a boat in a storm is frightening, the waves are in control of what direction you're going in. You have to return home to safety and then you are back where you started. To completely trust in God may be scary at first, but think of being caught in the storm of doubt. Winds and waves are terrifying. Faith and belief in God will help get us to shore safely and on solid ground where he wants us to be. We as a church must not doubt, but believe that the Lord our God will lead us in the right direction.

Prayer:

Father help us to be strong in our belief in you. We ask that you be with Pastor Nathan and his leadership and make this rock solid not just for us but for all those who come to receive Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.

Dave Ulman



Artwork, Katie Scaife, age 7

Saturday, March 18, 2017

Mercy

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, that we may receive mercy and find grace in our time of need.

Hebrews 4:16 (NIV)

I saw a DVD at the library that caught my eye...caught my eye because I had the book at home but the size of it was so daunting that it kept me from making the effort to actually read it. It was *The Red Tent*.

The story recounts the story of Jacob and his family, including his four wives in Old Testament Israel and later Egypt. The focus is on Dinah, one of his wives, who matures and experiences an intense love that leads to a devastating loss and, the fate of her whole family is forever changed.

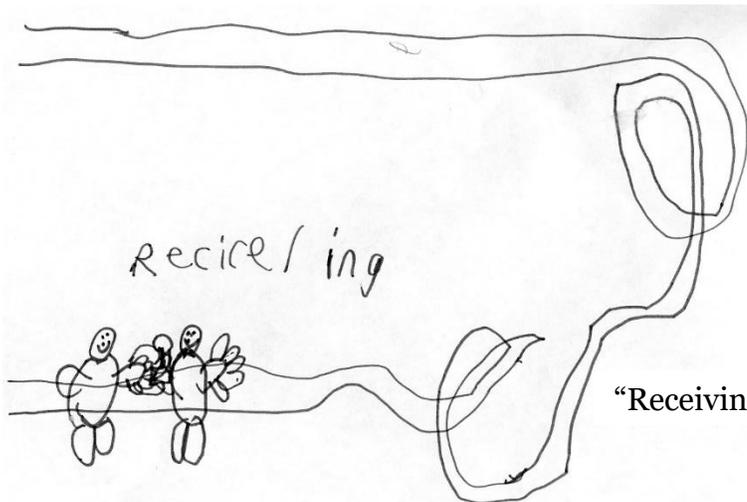
Yet, through her trials, she continues to seek God and is steadfast in her faith. She showed mercy to others as she was beset with tragedy and in turn, others were influenced by her grace. Is this what some might call today, "paying it forward"? Perhaps as we show mercy, that mercy and goodness is returned to us in unimagined ways, if only we have faith.

This amazing theme carried throughout the story is that we can always approach Jesus Christ with boldness knowing He will meet us with mercy and grace. We are never alone in our hour of need.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we are so thankful for your promise to meet us with mercy and grace. Help us to be ever mindful of your love, compassion and mercy as we seek you now and in our times of need. We pray in Your name.

Bobbie DiNicola



"Receiving" Artwork, Cameron Andrulis, Grade 3

Sunday, March 19, 2017

Praying

Therefore, I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.

1 Timothy 2:8 (NIV)

While in El Pena, Honduras, after our afternoon meal, I looked across the road and saw an older man praying over his meal. His clothes were dusty, his hands gnarly, his nails broken and full of dirt. His hands are what drew my attention. His hands were clasped together in prayer. His Bible close by.

I asked if I might take a picture of his hands, he looked at me, not quite understanding my question. I took out my camera and aimed it at his hands. He smiled and nodded yes. This man was a farmer in the village where we were working in mission. He had worked a full morning, taking the cattle up the hill to the fields and working the fields of corn and soy beans, and he would have to bring the cattle back this evening. His smile was radiant, and even with missing teeth, that smile was beautiful. We engaged in conversation after I had shown him the picture, digital. This man, this village, had no water to their houses, no plumbing, and no indoor bathroom. His and the other villagers' outside bathroom consisted of a concrete stall for a shower, a cistern for water and a toilet. Yes, a toilet. To use the toilet, you had to take water from the cistern and flush the appliance with the water by pouring it in the bowl. No plumbing, remember. Did I mention no electricity?

And yet, his prayers, he told me, were of thanks for a roof over his head, food to eat and people who came to help his village to help bring clean water. He was not angry about the "things" he did not have, or dispute with the Lord about things he did not have, he was thankful for what he did have.

I wish I could write a better reflection for you about this wonderful person, not angry or disputing his place on earth. Not arguing angrily with the Lord about his life or do not haves. His name: well his name was Jesus. Which we would say, "Hey sus", in English. And I am reminded of him every day, as I have his praying hands with me, frozen in a picture, to remind me of thankfulness, not anger.

Prayer:

The Lord is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness. The Lord is good to all. Amen

Sandy Marek



Artwork, Isabel Scaife, Grade 5

Monday, March 20, 2017

Gratitude

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

Colossians chapter 4, verse 2 (NIV)

In the book of Colossians chapter 4, Paul gives instructions for prayer and mercy, as well as final greetings from other prisoners of the faith. To single out this verse is to really examine the idea of making the act of prayer something of which we can be devoted. What does devotion mean? If we truly examine our lives honestly, what would an outsider observe about the things with which we are devoted? Are we devoted to a particular lifestyle or activity? Where does our devotion lie?

As we examine our journeys in this Lenten season, let us adopt grateful hearts and devote ourselves to new life in Christ. It is from that spirit of gratefulness that new action can be forged. If you are looking to grow as a Christ follower, consider adopting a regular prayer regimen. Whether picking specific times of day to pray or being more open to what you observe in your daily life and using that as a springboard for prayer, we can all devote ourselves more to prayer and communing with God in that special way. Brothers and sisters, devote yourselves fully in prayer; for our church, nation, and world and may God's blessings be upon you now and always.

Prayer:

Most Heavenly Father, make us a prayerful people. Give us hearts and minds that long to be better servants of You, giving open and honest prayers daily. Inspire us to be more devoted followers of Your Son, Jesus Christ and fill us with the strength to display thankfulness and devotion to You throughout the world.

In Your Son's most holy name we pray, Amen.

Christopher Neely

Tuesday, March 21, 2017

Spirit

“And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

Acts 13:2 (NASB)

There is a faithful promise in Hebrews 11:6 . . . “that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” And here in Acts 13:2, the intensity, as well as the intentional seeking of those gathered, is on display. The Lord, who in Acts 1:24 tells us, “knowest the hearts of all men,” is about to respond to their trust, earnestness, and yieldedness to Him. They were “ablaze,” fervent in their zeal and love for the Lord, and wanted only His heart and mind in taking the good news to places beyond.

Jesus invites us to do the same – to minister to Him. What an awesome privilege! We don’t know how they were postured, whether they sang praises, shouted out thanks, or with a sort of ebb and flow, worshiped, then quieted themselves before Him. But it is at this point of welcome, that the Holy Spirit speaks, giving the next instruction, that of a specific ministry to Paul and Barnabas.

Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus,

You came showing us how to love the Father. It is in this positioning of faithfulness and humility where we want our hearts to be and to stay, ready to listen, trust, and obey. Through Your Word, faithful teaching, and fellowship, confirm Your will to me. Amen.

Ann Pieta



Artwork, Annabeth Price, Grade 5

Wednesday, March 22, 2017

Faith

For I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

Philippians 1:19 (NIV)

Faith is believing in someone or something. This scripture expresses the writer's confidence in his beliefs that God will provide and in Jesus Christ. His faith upholds him because it is clearly focused. My faith grew when I hit a crossroads years ago; I couldn't keep going straight and had to turn left or right. One way said that Jesus was not all He claimed to be. The other said that He is EVERYTHING He claimed to be. There was no middle ground or picking and choosing! My heart filled with joy, light and awe as I realized yes—it is all true—and this changed my life!

The scripture acknowledges the prayers of others. Prayers of others make a very real difference as we traverse challenges. They give energy, love and strength to the recipient and to the one praying! The prayers offered for me through my journey with cancer have lifted, comforted and enfolded me. God has provided us with a church family to do this for one another while He does His work.

God has given us His Word to direct and guide us and then He comes in with “the devil's knock-out punch”—the Spirit and very name of Jesus Christ. My faith allows me to see and feel these forces of good at work in my life. They are real and they make a difference.

As the writer was confident about His deliverance and salvation, so am I, through the power of Jesus Christ which our God supplies abundantly. He looks for our open, receptive hands and hearts and waits to fill us to overflowing. Believe and receive, have faith and receive.

Prayer:

Lord,

Thank you for the faithful promises given through your Word. I believe you! I wait expectantly for you to act in amazing ways; far beyond any request I could think to make. Infuse my life with the Spirit of Jesus which upholds in all circumstances. Amen.

Linda Donahue

Thursday, March 23, 2017

Rest

The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.

1 Peter 4:7 (NIV)

When I was growing up, our kitchen radio was tuned to the am station WEOL. My mother listened daily to Rev. Ralph Neighbor's "Morning Sunshine", followed by the local Elyria news, and then the syndicated Paul Harvey news commentary. Paul Harvey would give the news of the day, pause and follow with his signature tagline "and now for the rest of the story".

So what is rest of our story... reading today's scripture doesn't sound restful at all, in fact it sounds anything but. Are we to be on high alert, waiting for what God has up His sleeve next? — Is the end of all things with hell, fire, and destruction just around the corner, as some would have us believe? Are we to be focused in constant prayer, yet with one eye looking over our shoulder?

If you continue reading, the following verse, 1 Peter 4:8, reads

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

The rest of God's story, 1 Peter says, is one of love, powerful and life-changing. Love that ends hate, love that ends fear, love that ends despair, and love that ends our debt of sin.

So where are we in this story...we are told to love each other deeply and pray, no rest in those instructions. But how worth the effort, to tap into a love that strengthens us, forgives us, and desires us. Yes, the end of all things hurtful and evil is near when we keep our minds and hearts focused on God's love.

Prayer:

God, we thank you for your love and ask your strength as we walk today in this world. Open us to your presence as we pray, that we can love the unlovable and know your peace and mercy for all.

Amen.

Joanne Mansfield

Friday, March 24, 2017

Joy

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. (NIV)

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. (NRSV)

Romans 12:12

My New Year's resolution is to have a more positive attitude. It has been a struggle so far, as the year has started off with multiple hardships to overcome.

People suffer in different ways and at different levels of severity. Sometimes the issues that everyone deals with on a regular basis can become almost too much to deal with when they all happen at the same time. Sometimes a single problem may seem almost too much to bear.

Whatever the circumstances, our troubles are much easier to deal with when we have Christian faith.

Our faith gives us hope. Joy comes from hope. The love of God helps us to be patient through our struggles. We can depend on Him to help us through our suffering and to find joy in the journey.

We do this through prayer. Some people may find it difficult to pray. They may see how others pray and feel insecure. Praying can be done in many different ways. Personally, I prefer casual short prayers instead of long prayers. I like poetic prayers. I enjoy praying to music or through art. Maybe just walking on the beach or dancing in the rain and saying "Thank you." I have learned that after you stop comparing yourself to others, it is much easier to pray. You just need to find a way that works for you; so that you can be faithful in prayer.

Prayer:

Lord, Help me to rejoice in hope, be more patient, and turn to you in prayer. Help me to laugh and smile more often, be more grateful for my many blessings, and remember your love. Amen.

Janet Mallarnee

Saturday, March 25, 2017

Community

For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

Romans 12:4-5, Revised Standard Version

When I was thinking about what verse(s) to use for the Lenten Devotional Booklet, the word community was on my heart. I'm not as familiar with the Bible as others so I looked in the "suggested readings" section of another Bible I have and found Romans 12 for the topic of "Christian life and service." In reading through Chapter 12, I was drawn to verses 4-5 as it reminded me of the large picture of Jesus that is in the stairwell that leads to the 3rd floor classrooms. I see it when I go to do a count of people in the classrooms on Sundays. I love how the picture is made up of many smaller pictures of people that form a single large face of Jesus, and how this scripture reminds us that we are all part of God and Jesus and that He created each one of us with a different purpose but all to work together to make the "body"/all of His creation work to create peace and to follow the teachings of Jesus. This theme of working as "one" was reinforced by Pastor Nathan and our guest preachers in January reminding us that God calls us to serve Him by helping others in different ways and by not shying away from things that might be uncomfortable and to fulfill God's purpose we cannot ignore those who are hurting and should help them as He calls us to do so.

God calls us "to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God" (from UMCB 1/29/17 Bulletin). For example, some people are good at providing an ear to listen and others are better equipped to assist with gathering/distributing supplies to give to those in need. "When each stranger that we meet is called a neighbor, then we know that God still goes that road with us." *Cuando El Pobre (When the Poor Ones)* hymn, UMH 434

Prayer:

Dear Lord,

Thank you for blessing each of us with your love and grace and for giving us gifts and talents unique to each of us. Thank you for reminding us to recognize those who may not have food, clothing, shelter or water or love or may not know you and your love. I pray for your guidance and the opening of my heart and mind to understand what it is you would have me do to help share your love with others. I also pray that you will help us to work with each other to reach others and do justice in your world.

Wendy Jelinek

Sunday, March 26, 2017

Courage

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God, is with you wherever you go.

Joshua 1:9 (Gideon)

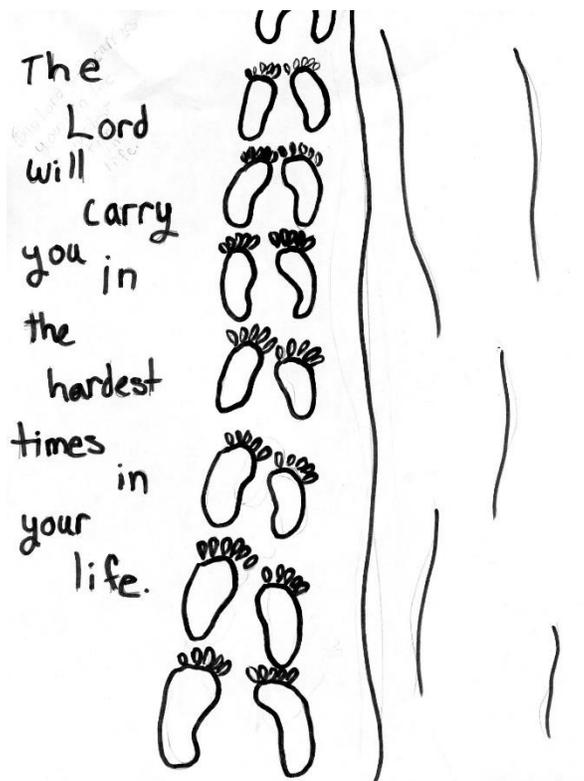
This is a verse that tells us to preach to people no matter what they think about God. It is about reassuring the people of God that He will be with us always. To be confident and never give up. Not to be afraid and try new things. That every decision you make opens a new opportunity. That God has commanded us to be successful and to not be afraid, and that He will protect us wherever we go. He is still God and will watch over every child of God no matter wherever they go. All in all, God is a commander and commanders lead us, and He is to be trusted. So, follow God's commands and trust Him always.

Prayer: Dear Lord,

I know that you're always with me when times are good or bad, and when my friends and family need help.

Amen

7th Grade Confirmation Class



Artwork, Bella DeCaprio, Grade 5

Monday, March 27, 2017

Comfort

Do not let yourself be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

John 14:1 (New International Version)

The words above, spoken by Jesus at the Lord's Supper, were meant to reassure the Disciples who were gathered with him. Jesus knew what his fate was to be; the Disciples did not, and they were trying to make sense of Jesus' words. Jesus spoke rather cryptically about leaving them. Jesus spoke these words to give his Disciples courage as they faced an uncertain future.

Each of us for one reason or another has faced an uncertain future. These situations are familiar: loss of good health, loss of employment, loss of a loved one, loss of a relationship, and so on. Nothing about our lives is permanent. Everything is in a constant state of change. The Disciples were facing the loss of their beloved savior.

Jesus asks us to detach from our troubles. Most, if not all, of the world's major religions practice detachment from life's troubles. Buddhism teaches that 'life is loss.' Indeed, loss seems to be at the very center of our existence. Our human egos are inclined to attach to external realities.

Like most, I have suffered much loss in my life, particularly loss of health. Since 2001, I have survived three bouts of cancer and open heart valve surgery and grieved the loss of both of my parents. I did not survive these changes on my own. Jesus' encouragement and my surrender to God's will for my life enabled me to survive; the Holy Spirit was with me in a very tangible way. I detached from my life's external realities and turned my burden over to God's loving care. Jesus' promise soothed my troubled heart. I trusted that my life was unfolding just as God meant it to.

Prayer:

Dear Sweet Jesus,

Thank you for loving me. Help me detach from the burdens of my life, and instead attach to your love, strength, and wisdom. True peace and an untroubled heart are only found by surrendering to your divine will.

Ronal Young

Tuesday, March 28, 2017

Presence

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.

Psalm 42:1 (English Standard Version)

On a dismally gray January afternoon a friend and I were driving along woods-lined Valley Parkway when we came upon two does. While the first unhurriedly crossed the road, the second elegantly posed herself, utterly still, in our lane--interrupting our conversation, temporarily disrupting our plan to cut through the Metroparks en route to the freeway--and unabashedly returned our gaze. No more than a minute, I'd guess, but a palpable and pregnant clearing in the busyness of the day's events...a moment simply to be fully present, to experience an energy that resonated inward and brimmed outward.

Perhaps I'd have soon forgotten the encounter except that the very next morning in the course of my customary browsing whilst sipping my coffee, I happened upon a poem -- "Five A.M. in the Pinewoods" by Mary Oliver:

I'd seen
their hoofprints in the deep
needles and knew
they ended the long night
under the pines, walking
like two mute
and beautiful women toward
the deeper woods, so I
got up in the dark and
went there. They came
slowly down the hill
and looked at me sitting under
the blue trees, shyly
they stepped
closer and stared
from under their thick lashes and even
nibbled some damp
tassels of weeds.

This is not a poem about a dream,
though it could be.
This is a poem about the world
that is ours, or could be.
Finally
one of them—I swear it!—
would have come to my arms.
But the other
stamped sharp hoof in the
pine needles like
the tap of sanity,
and they went off together through
the trees. When I woke
I was alone,
I was thinking:
so this is how you swim inward,
so this is how you flow outward,
so this is how you pray.

Can it be that I'm surrounded by calls to prayer if only I can be awake to God in the small details of my everyday life?

Prayer:

Today set your intention to be mindful of whatever comes your way as opportunity to weave prayer—time with the divine—into your everyday life. Be ready to stop, to be silent...to rest in God-ful grace. Namaste.

Pat Nixon

Wednesday, March 29, 2017

Speaking

But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

Matthew 6:7 (KJV)

There are many kinds of prayer by which we can communicate directly with God. There are prayers of gratitude, supplication, intercession, petition, affirmation, etc.

This scripture, Matthew 6:7, (along with Matthew 6:6) seems to recommend solitary prayer, free of pretense or the desire to impress others. Our Father knows ahead of time what things we have need of, before we even ask Him (Matthew 6:8). Therefore, we are advised to communicate with God in a simple, direct, and sincere way – almost as if we were communicating with a good friend.

God hears our prayers based on their sincerity. There is no need to use vain repetitions, as the heathen do. Truly, the “effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” This is true whether or not we pray alone, or in the company of others (Matthew 18:20).

Prayer:

“Lord, help our prayers to be heartfelt and sincere, free of pretense and vain repetitions. Help our prayers to draw us closer to you, and to your will for us.” Amen.

Molly O. Force



Artwork, Charlie Reams, Grade 5

Thursday, March 30, 2017

Love

God promises to love me all day, sing songs all through the night. My life is God's prayer.

Psalm 42:8 (Peterson translation)

Descriptions of church services when St. Paul was leading them make the comment that the members “sang Psalms.” We have no record of what those “songs” were, but the Psalm quoted (above) gives us a feeling. “My life is God’s prayer.” We can aspire to that.

How can we live our lives as though our life was a prayer? A challenge to be certain.

Some years ago a dear friend gave me a small picture frame in which she had written these words:

The light of God surrounds me.
The love of God enfolds me.
The presence of God watches over me.
Wherever I am, God is.
Those words serve as a prompt for me before I sleep.

Singing each Sunday is another reminder of God’s presence. The world is facing serious decisions. That reminds me of a hymn that does not appear in our hymnal – “Once to every man and nation.” The challenge of the lyrics is as follows: “Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide in the strife of truth and falsehood for the good or evil side.” We Americans are facing such decisions. Keeping God as our center piece can guide our decisions.

Prayer:

God of all nations, help me to focus on your promise of love. May I spread love throughout my life. Even when I disagree with the decisions others make, remind me of Christ Jesus’ example. Love one another.

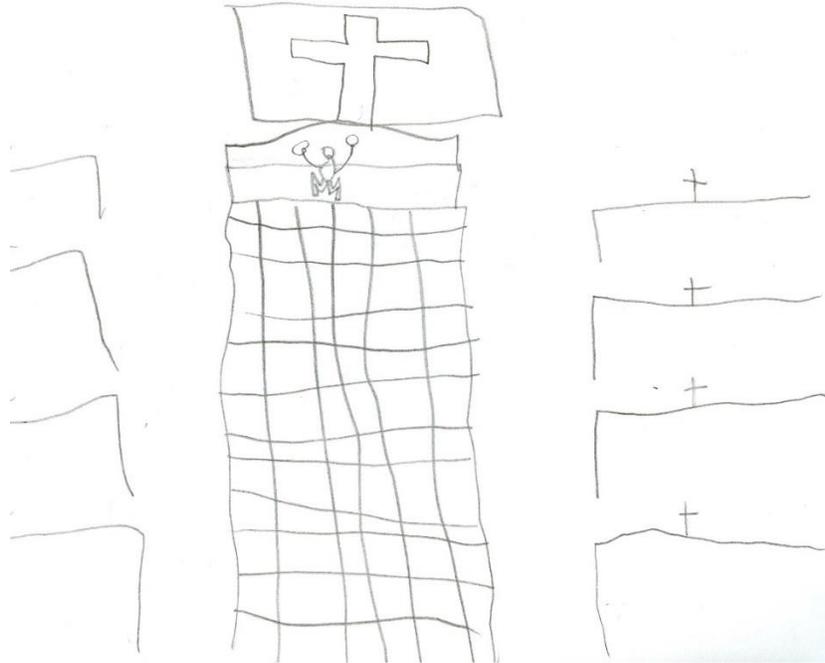
Jo Swanson

Friday, March 31, 2017

Hearing

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

1 John 5:14 (NIV)



When we're alone with
God, there are no more distractions
to the development of intimacy. It is
just us and Him. The rest of the world
must wait.

light for my path
for teens

Josh Ulman, Grade 5

Saturday, April 1, 2017

Worship

Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”

Jeremiah 29:12 – 14 NIV

The prophet Jeremiah wrote the Lord’s message to His people exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon and entrusted it to messengers to take it to the elders and priests living in Babylon. The Jewish people were living in a foreign land. In moments of questioning and doubt, they quite likely wondered if God even knew where they were, or cared. And then they received this message of assurance.

Call on the Lord, come to Him and pray. He will hear.

These words can easily be applied to each of us today. Even though we are not in a foreign land, we can feel alone, out of place or stuck and question, “Does God hear me?” “Will he find me?” “Does he really know what I need?” He does. He will. He knows.

Call on the Lord, He will listen. Seek Him with your whole heart; He will let you find Him and he will bring you back from captivity. We are told so many lies by society (and ourselves) – “Next time I’ll make it.” “This [insert object] is really going to fix things.” “Just one more and then I’ll stop for good.” But all we really need is Jesus to help us in whatever foreign land we’re dwelling.

God’s truth is where we need to focus. Seek him, find him and he will deliver us.

Prayer:

Father, I know you can do immeasurably more than I can ask or imagine, but I need to do my part by continually calling on You and seeking Your face. Inspire me to come to You and open my eyes as you reveal Yourself and Your will to me. Amen.

Meredith Kurtz

Sunday, April 2, 2017

Heart

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Psalm 19:14 NIV

This is a very powerful short scriptural passage. It encompasses several components of our senses all at once, it engages our sense of hearing by saying, May these words of my mouth, our sense of sight by saying, be pleasing in your sight and our sense of pleasure by saying, this meditation of my heart.

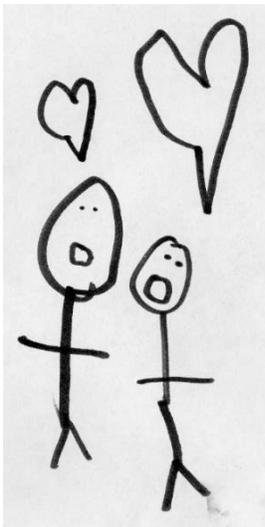
Our hearts are where we say we can feel happiness, pleasure, and joy as humans as well as sadness, pain, and loss. We express our heart is full of pride, happiness, and affection or our heart aches because we are lonely, ridiculed or made to feel less than accepted.

Imagine how God feels when people use words to put down, bully, or make fun of others who are different from them. Do these words make our Heavenly Father's heart feel good? Do they make the people who are being ridiculed feel good, are these words the result of the meditations from someone's mouth who loves our Lord as their Rock and their Redeemer? Whose sight are these words acceptable in?

Prayer:

Dear heavenly father, please be with each of us as we all try to understand and make sense of the varied opinions and words that are being spoken in our country today regarding entire groups of people who seek freedom. Help us to be a people who will speak words that will be pleasing and acceptable in your sight always.

Claire Powell



Artwork, Paxton Brenneison-Baughman, age 5

Monday, April 3, 2017

Wait on Lord

Psalm 27:1-14

When you open the Bible in the middle you find the collection of devotional poems we know as Psalms: may they be in the middle of our walk of faith during Lent. Today I invite you to find Psalm 27 in the Bible (any translation will do). In the Psalter section of the United Methodist Hymnal you will see this text on pages 758-759 designed as a responsive reading. READ THE PSALM to yourself-silently and then aloud. Is this a psalm you remember? Are some phrases familiar to you? You may have heard this text at a funeral service. What verse seems especially strong or memorable? Here are a few background details about this text: [1] the author locates himself and his poem in the Jerusalem Temple: here he feels secure; here he experiences the presence of God. [2] most likely the psalmist is on pilgrimage to the Temple, though it is possible he is part of the liturgical staff of the Temple. [3] though the text is a personal expression of trust, the psalmist locates his poem within the corporate worship of the Temple. The psalm naturally divides itself into four parts: vv. 1-3, 4-6, 7-10, and 11-14. READ THE PSALM again, noting these four units or sections. The opening verse compares the LORD to a 'stronghold' or fortress. The psalmist feels safe within this redoubt or defended position. In verse five he asks, 'raise me high upon a rock' -a metaphor that intensifies the underlying idea of security or safety. The psalmist tells us in vv. 8-9 that he seeks God's 'face' [that is, an inner assurance of God's presence]. He knows that he is in the right place for his prayer to be granted. The last verse, in the older King James Version reads: 'Wait on the LORD: be of good courage and he shall strengthen thine heart . . .' Like the poet who gives us Psalm 27, we too seek God's presence. For the psalmist, his physical and spiritual location was the Temple in Jerusalem. For us, our place of worship is here at our church in Berea. The next time you come to worship, recall our psalmist, and like him, seek God's presence for your lives. We may use a stanza of a recent hymn as our prayer:

Here are symbols to remind us of our life-long need of grace;
Here are table, font, and pulpit; here the cross has central place.
Here in honesty of preaching, here in silence as in speech,
Here in newness and renewal, God the Spirit comes to each.

['God Is Here,' stanza two, The United Methodist Hymnal, pp. 660/1; words by Fred Pratt Green, 1978].

Hugh Burtner

Tuesday, April 4, 2017

Praying

“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”

Luke 6:27-28 (NIV)

We don't pray for God's benefit – He already knows our thoughts, joys and concerns. We pray to change our hearts, and to remind ourselves that God's love is for everyone. Yes, even the people who get on our nerves at school, work, in the car next to us, the grocery store, etc. If we remember that God loves them, then it's easier to look past the annoyances, and the differences.

Prayer is a practice of self-improvement. It helps us recognize what to be thankful for – the good and the bad. Sometimes we even need to be thankful for the small things that we may take for granted – breath in our lungs, our favorite song on the radio, food to eat.

Prayer is a relief. It is a way for us to get things off our chest. Prayer opens the way for a conversation with God. Prayer isn't always talking, but also listening for God's voice – in our Bible, the nudging of the Holy Spirit, or the words that somehow speak to us at exactly the right moment from TV, music, movies or the words of a friend.

Prayer:

Father, please grant us peace with each other and peace of mind, especially for those that struggle with anger. Lord, help us love you with all our hearts and love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Amen.

Senior High Sunday School

Wednesday, April 5, 2017

Listening

¹⁴ When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. ¹⁵ As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

¹⁶ “What are you arguing with them about?” he asked.

¹⁷ A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸ Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.”

¹⁹ “You unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.”

²⁰ So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

²¹ Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?”

“From childhood,” he answered. ²² “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

²³ “If you can?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.”

²⁴ Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

²⁵ When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.”

Mark 9:14-25 (NIV)

I relate to the Disciples in this story! I try to do things in my own power, with my own strength, all the time. Sometimes, I succeed. More often than not, I fail. And there have been a few times, that I have failed miserably. This scripture reminds us that we can do nothing separate from God. Prayer is one more thing that connects us to our Creator. To pray without ceasing just grows that connection.

Prayer:

Father, how great you are! Even though I try to do things in my own power, Lord, have your way with me and in my life. Remind me that you are made strong in my weakness. Father, how glad I am to be Yours. Amen.

Sarah Dave

Thursday, April 6, 2017

Stillness

He says, "Be still, and know that I am God;

I will be exalted among the nations,

I will be exalted in the earth."

Psalm 46:10 (New International Version)

This verse remains one of the most comforting lines of text I have ever experienced. "Be still, and know that I am God." The simplicity, the grace, and the love that are shown in those words are the foundation of knowing and trusting in God. How often we find ourselves rushing through our days, tackling our to-do lists, taking care of others, and feeling exhausted. God calls us to BE STILL: to find moments throughout our day to practice self-love and experience His holy love so that we may better share it with others. He will deliver us from our trials and fears, and we proclaim these good things to the world as we wait in joyful hope for salvation. I hope that each one of us finds stillness in the coming weeks as we embrace Christ in the Lenten season.

Prayer:

Lord, help us each to find stillness in our days. Help us to discover moments of inner peace where we can recharge in the presence of Your love. Give us the strength to continue when we are overwhelmed, the grace to be kind when we are tired, and the hope to overcome our trials and fears. We ask this through the love of Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Paige Heidrich

Friday, April 7, 2017

Praying

“I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.”

I Timothy 2:8

One of the beautiful things about our God is how badly he wants us to communicate with Him. Our God is perfection. This verse tells us that He wills us to pray, to communicate with Him on a daily basis. He has all of the power and the wisdom, yet He desires to hear from each of us. We all go through trials and tribulations at some point in our lives. Some of the adversities we face are self-inflicted, some are the result of other people and some appear to happen suddenly. When we go through tough times with other people, it is easy to target other people, to blame them and consequently allow the situation to ruin our days. However, whatever we face, we have a person who yearns to hear from us. Ultimately, prayer requires the right heart and attitude. We need to be focused when we pray. Anger and strife do not function with prayer. Prayer is a holy work, in which we should submit ourselves to God’s listening ear. When our attitude is right, when our focus is heavenward, then God listens and responds to what we ask. It is important to understand that He does not always provide us with the things we want to hear, or when we want to hear them, but He is always on time. He wants us to bring our problems to Him so He can be a part of our daily lives. Instead of pointing our fingers at other people or situations, let us raise our hands to God. Let us enter in a state of humility and give Him glory.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for all the blessings that you have bestowed upon me. Thank you for waking me up this morning, clothed in my right mind. Thank you for your loving kindness, your tender mercy and your everlasting love. I ask that you open my heart to receive your love at all times and that your life flows through me into every interaction I have today. I give you all of the praise, glory and honor for loving me despite my many flaws. Cover me in your grace and allow me to be the servant you desire.

Christopher Dave

Saturday, April 8, 2017

In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly.

Psalm 5:3 NIV

As a child and young adult, I was not a morning person. So it is surprising to me that I now treasure the quiet mornings when I wake up and have time alone with God. I still wake up often tired and in a negative mood. I guess that's just who I am. But I have found ways to turn my days around. No matter how I feel or what worried and discouraged thoughts come into my mind, I begin to connect with God before I put my feet on the floor. I say to God, "I'm awake, are you there?" Silly perhaps but it's what comes to mind. Then I remind myself: "This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!" I am grateful for the days when an uplifting hymn or praise song is in my mind upon waking up. That's one reason I go to church regularly and listen to songs about God and faith regularly so that they are in my mind when I need them. Depending on the day and when I wake up, I usually have a half hour of quiet time either before I get the girls off to school or after they leave. This is the time when I can read inspirational readings, scripture, and talk to God. I try to do this first because once I allow myself to begin to focus on the tasks of the day, my mind is off and running and it is near to impossible to slow it down to be quiet and listen to God. So in the morning, I take a brief period where I pause before I jump into the to-do lists and interactions with all the people around me, and speak to God. Sometimes I read scripture out loud, which I think my dogs like, also. It helps me to slow down and focus on the words as I say and hear them in the air. I think I will start to allow more time for listening to what God may want to say to me. Having patience to wait and listen is not easy for me. I am ready to jump into the swirling chaos of the day. But I do feel the expectancy in the morning, of a new day, and want to give the day to God and follow what he would want of me each day. I am encouraged and supported in this spiritual growth by others who I spend time with attending my weekly Sunday school class (FaithLink) and often attending a women's bible study or book group that focuses on spiritual matters. I appreciate the opportunities to see and hear how others seek God and live their lives differently to follow their faith. We may have different beliefs and opinions about life and God, but we are all seeking to live according to our faith.

Prayer:

God, I know you are there each morning and every minute of my life. Help me to be aware of you and continue to pray with you. Help me to listen and hear what you want of me. I know you love me and, I am grateful for your presence and all that I have been blessed to have in my life. Please be with me and all the people around me who are hurting and need you also. Amen.

Joy Wood

Sunday, April 9, 2017

Palm Sunday

Alive Now

God, today, we wave our palm branches, cry for help, and lay the green leaves on the dusty ground

in hopes that our prayers will reach your ears.

Save us, God, from our greed, our arrogance, our selfishness. From our ignorance, our apathy, our complicity.

Save us, God, from sickness and abuse. From people who would have us be someone other than ourselves.

Following Jesus is hard, God. It means we must sacrifice and yield; sit still and explore; forgive and love.

So we ask you, and we ask each other for help, for companionship, for love.

Will you enliven us to help each other? To share the bread and the cup not only with our loved ones but with our enemies, too?

Only time will tell, Holy God, if we will be your hands and feet this Holy Week.

Palm branches wave across the sky.

Hear us, God! Save us, God! Help us, God!

We hear you say: I am here, child.

Silence falls like rain. We save our voices because we trust you know our hearts.

[Silence.]

Amen.

By Claire McKeever-Burgett, March/April 2014

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Monday, April 10, 2017

¹⁶ Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." ¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. Mark 1:16-18 (ESV)

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." John 1:43-45 (ESV)

God's grace and calling to us is still a mysterious, powerful, and beautiful thing to me. One name, Jesus.

To this day, I remember the first "Philip" who told me I needed to meet Jesus. She was failing in efforts to teach me piano. I met my second "Philip," and then my third. They were my age, and also engineering students.

I didn't know why they felt it so urgent to focus on me – I was a decent guy. A Methodist even! Why couldn't they find some drunk or reprobate who REALLY needed Jesus?

God's grace is not about turning from bad to good. It's not about wise decisions, morality, societal improvement, family, or even love. All of those come along in time, but they're the hat, not the cowboy.

Prayer:

Lord, I'm yours. Thank you. Lead on!

Paul Richards, Director, Hanson House

Continued on Tuesday, April 11th.

Tuesday, April 11, 2017

First, the call. Read the Mark and John verses again. With Simon and Andrew, Jesus made it clear: He wanted to be their moment-by-moment boss. If they agreed, it meant their life would go in a whole new direction-permanently. Jesus gave no details, no guarantees, and the decision needed to be made now. He wanted to be their Lord. They were giving up income, would face static from their families and rabbis. A no-nonsense guy calling them to let go of all that made them who they'd become. He claimed to be God.

When Jesus became my boss, I knew it meant I would be a "Philip." I want others to meet Jesus. I often get "No thanks, I'm okay with my life." Sometime it's less polite.

I nearly always get along and cry thankfully after someone says yes. I know it's a hard decision. It changes lives, and it came at a high cost to my Glorious Savior. I'm thankful God sent me three "Philips." It's an honor to be adopted into His family, secure for eternity, and part of what really matters to Him.

Prayer:

Lord, I'm yours. Thank you. Lead on!

Paul Richards, Director, Hanson House

Wednesday, April 12, 2017

Fear/Doubt

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Isaiah 41:10

I am in the midst of a difficult journey right now called nursing school. With nursing school, I'm constantly left with the thought that I can do more, I can do better. It's a tough thought to have when I am already giving my best. Will I graduate nursing school, and be the best nurse ever? No. With time I will become a seasoned nurse and be the excellent nurse I can be. In the meantime, it's a scary thought to think that in one 12 hour shift, I will be in charge of the care for five patients. I'm not fluffing pillows, I'm taking care of a life to ensure that the patient will exit the hospital healthy. I'm not sure how I'll be a good nurse.

This past fall semester I entered my third semester of nursing school, my last year of nursing school. I also started a new job at the Cleveland Clinic as a nursing assistant which got in the way of school. A couple of weeks into the semester, the worst thing imaginable happened, I failed my class. I might as well pick up hours at the hospital as a nursing assistant for five months. I am now a well groomed nursing assistant. Am I the best nursing assistant? No, but I am still learning and still striving to do better. The experience that I am gaining makes the thought of being a nurse less scary.

As I went through this break from school I see God's plan. God lessened my worries by giving me experience in the hospital. The break was not ideal and I hated it at first. However, I see that I needed the break; I am not so worried about becoming a nurse one day.

Prayer:

Dear God, please continue to stand by our side through the good times and more importantly the hard times. Please continue to guide our paths. We may not understand your plans but we trust your ways. We trust that you will lead our path in the right direction. Amen.

BJ Bosl

Thursday, April 13, 2017

Maundy Thursday

34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

John 13:34 (New Revised Standard Version)

The disciples walk along with Jesus as they have many times before.

They don't know of the suffering he will endure this week. They don't know that the end of the story is upon them and that in the ending is the beginning of a new covenant.

They are traveling from Bethany to Jerusalem. It is a journey of at least two miles across Mount Olives, a ridge of hills overlooking the old city. Jesus and the disciples walk along the steep bank. Their feet kick up dust as they step, and the way is rocky. Perhaps the disciples question the teacher. Perhaps they laugh. Perhaps they feel the heavyheartedness of Jesus.

We know that Jesus has sent two ahead to prepare for the Passover. The sun goes down, and Jesus and the twelve gather at the table with the blending of the aroma of lamb, unleavened bread, and the wine. They probably each want to sit near Jesus. Jesus rises from the table and begins to wash and wipe the disciples' feet, an act of humility and servanthood. Peter resists, then offers his hands and head also. Jesus asks that they do as he has done. He also gives them a new commandment: "Love one another."

According to the accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus breaks the bread and blesses it and offers it to them, a symbol of his body.

Then Jesus takes the cup, gives thanks, and all of them drink from it. A symbol of a new covenant, poured for many. The moment had to be precious and holy.

This year may you feel the journey of Lent. During the solitude of your reading and worshipping may you find your place.

Prayer:

God of Light and Love, help us to find quiet moments of contemplation. Help us to see beauty in another's eyes. Help us to walk along a path that leads to you. Amen.

Karen Caldwell

April 14, 2017

Good Friday

³⁴ At three, Jesus cried out with a loud shout, “*Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani*,” which means, “My God, my God, why have you left me?”

Mark 15:34 (CEB)

The topic of the Lenten booklet this year is “Living in God’s Presence”. But when we go to Mark, the oldest of the gospels, we read of what happened on Good Friday. If we turn to the most modern translation, the Common English Bible, the words Jesus spoke last on the cross are: “My God, My God, why have you left me?” Other gospels give us other things Jesus said. But the oldest and the earliest are those just quoted. They speak to us because we may feel the same way. Life hits us in ways both public and private that don’t seem fair, don’t make sense and make us feel as if we are no longer in God’s presence. We feel like we have been left alone. Abandoned if you will, and left to suffer.

Most of us know that the Good Friday story is followed shortly by the Easter account. If we skip forward to that, we may miss the message found in this early account of Good Friday. Even in the smoothest of times, the best of times, we find ourselves needing to face the fact that life doesn’t always play fair. It is important for us to face and deal with the hard things too. Those around us, in their attempts to make us feel better may be doing us no favors by glossing over what happened, or by explaining it away with pat phrases. When in our minds we say, “My God, My God, why have you left me?”, the answer is, God has not left us. We have lost sight of the fact that when we feel this way, we have left God.

Prayer:

Remind us, O God, that if any one has left, it is us and not you. You promised always to be with us, and sometimes, in our despair, we forget that. Remind us that when we are hurt or angry or just plain lost, you are still with us. Remind us to be aware of and acknowledge your presence. Amen.

Kenneth Lane Williams

Saturday, April 15, 2017

Carrying God's Presence

Alive Now

Our prayer life relies on the “interior” life, on moments of solitude away and apart. . . But spirituality is not exhausted in the private prayer closet. We carry our experience of God's presence and our conversation with the heart of God into the places where we conduct our business, raise our families, enjoy our leisure, engage in social and political involvements, and refresh ourselves in friendships. All of those relationships require journeys outside the cocoon of solitary life. We venture out to be with others, to be for others . . .

Our prayer life is more than striving for premeditated goals and arriving at anticipated destinations: the discipline of prayer invites us to practice, as Jesus practiced, a sensitivity and compassion for those persons and needs encountered on the way.

Holy God, as you guide my steps, so also guide my eyes and ears that I may not be so busy with my priorities as to miss the priority of seeing and ministering for you.

In Jesus Christ. Amen.

From *Traveling the Prayer Paths of Jesus* by John Indermark. This material is reprinted from The Upper Room magazine, copyright 2014 by The Upper Room, Inc, P.O. Box 340004, Nashville, TN 37203-0004, www.upperroom.org, and is used by permission of the publisher.



Photograph of a Honduran farmer

Easter Sunday, April 16, 2017

Psalm 118.1-2, 14-24 (NRSV)

In verse 24, Psalm 118 gives us these familiar words: “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” These words function as the climax of the psalm, with the preceding verses (especially vv. 13-23) leading us through a crescendo of causes for celebration and praise. Certainly, then, these words are appropriate for us on Easter Sunday, the apex of the Christian year, the day that defines who God is in Christ and who we are as Christian people.

But these words should not be limited to this single day, Easter Sunday. After all, every Sunday is a “little Easter,” a celebration of the risen Christ and a reminder that we are resurrection people. And every day of the week is one “the Lord has made”; therefore, each day is a cause for celebration. Each day is holy. Each day, we live as resurrection people.

Prayer—the practice of opening ourselves to God’s presence—is the means by which we do this. Prayer is the means by which we make contact with the God of resurrection. Prayer is the means by which we are re-oriented as resurrection people. Prayer is the means by which all the other components of our lives fall into place.

In the presence of God, we remember the truth about God, about the world, and about ourselves. In the presence of God, we awaken to the holiness of this day, this place, this moment. God is here, wherever and whenever “here” might be. “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it,” living as Christ’s risen body, God’s resurrection people, each and every day.

Prayer:

“This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Christ is risen. Christ is risen, indeed! Hallelujah! Amen.

Nathan Howe

Thank you to all of our contributors:

Beth Barner	Sandy Marek
Cass Beckman	Christopher Neely
BJ Bosl	Pat Nixon
Dee Bosl	Ann Pieta
Hugh Burtner	Mary Potts
Karen Caldwell	Claire Powell
Christopher Dave	Rikki Price
Sarah Dave	Greg Rentsch
Bella DeCaprio	Paul Richards
Diane DeCaprio	Barb Rochford
Bobbie DiNicola	Jim Rollins
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Molly O. Force	Von Smith
Paige Heidrich	Jo Swanson
Nathan Howe	Vivien Swaddling
Wendy Jelinek	Dave Ulman
John Kappeler	Josh Ulman
Meredith Kurtz	Kenneth Lane Williams
Ben LeBrun	Joy Wood
Janet Mallarnee	Ronal Young
Roy Mallarnee	7th Grade Confirmation Class
Joanne Mansfield	Senior High Class

Thank you to the children who submitted artwork for the booklet:

Cameron Andrulis
Paxton Brenneison-Baughman
Bella DeCaprio
Amanda Kurtz
Emily Kurtz
Annabeth Price
Charlie Reams
Isabel Scaife
Katie Scaife
Josie Swartz
Josh Ulman

Thank you to Julie Rentsch for collecting the submissions and formatting the booklet.

Thank you to Megan Howe for proofreading the booklet.