



Covenant United Methodist Church

Lenten Devotional 2012

40 Days of Renewal

ASH WEDNESDAY

RETURN TO ME

They say that until you are a parent, you do not understand how much your parents love you. You also do not understand the heartache you caused your parents until you live through similar trials and challenges with your own children. To put it succinctly, I now have great respect and appreciation for my parents. Not that my daughters have been overly challenging. They've actually been pretty awesome most of the time. But just living in separate cities than both of them these past few years has given me a greater appreciation for my mother's repeated inquiries over the years of whether I might ever return and live in her vicinity again. It hurts my heart now to know that longing to have my children nearby and to know just how insensitive I was for so long to her heart's desire.

RETURN! That is the central message of the Lenten Season, which we begin today, Ash Wednesday. Here these words from the prophet Joel regarding God's ongoing desire for his children to return to him.

"Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing." -Joel 2: 12-13

Lent is a time of return; it is a time of leaving behind that which separates us from God. It is a season of reflection, prayer, fasting, sacrifice and service. We do so in imitation of our Savior who said "Follow me." We do it in anticipation of the coming Easter celebration of Christ's resurrection.

Today marks the beginning of our 40 day journey with Christ, walking the path of faith, trust, hope and sacrifice in His name and tradition. We turn and return, leaving behind our unholy ways of being. We return to God more intentionally acting as those desiring to be sanctified and satisfied by our redeemer and sustainer. We do this during this 40 day period not so we can soon return after Easter to our old ways of being, but so we might be changed from the inside out—transformed more fully into the people God calls us to be.

In the ancient Hebrew, the heart was not the place of emotion but the seat of will and intellect. Joel's call to "Rend your hearts" rather than your clothes, is to say we need nothing less than a tearing of the will and intellect, a remaking of our hearts if we are to turn away from our current ways of being and begin to walk the path of life offered to us through Jesus Christ. May today be the first day of truly returning to God with all our heart, our soul, our mind, and our strength.

Let us pray:

"Help me, O God, to discern the stumbling blocks on my path with you. Give me the courage to give those things to you and to make commitments this Lenten Season that will grow me in your Grace and Love. In Christ's name I pray. Amen".

In Christ's Love, Pastor Valerie

FEBRUARY 23rd

I've Got This!

“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.” Jeremiah 29:11

I was so angry! I was publically berated by someone who was not involved and did not have all the facts. As I pondered and pouted, I thought of information I knew about this person, and I began to plan how I would use it. That's when I clearly heard, 'Roxie, I've got this!'

Oh no, no, no, no, no God, I get to do this. I deserve to do this. This one is mine! Once again I was arguing with God that my way was better. Again I heard, 'Roxie, I've got this!' But, but but...I didn't want to let this go. Again, 'Roxie, I've got this!' Fortunately God persevered, and convinced me this was not mine to address. I reluctantly agreed to let God handle it. Of course it turned out there was no need for my meddling. God had it all under control as always and did not need my input here.

Things always work out for the best when I let God lead the way instead of trying to do it all myself. As I look back on this situation today, I can see that retribution was not the answer and would not have erased the unkind words that were said to me. God's timely intervention kept me from making a big mistake. God has our backs, and God's love and guidance protect us from the hurtful words of others, as well as from our own impetuosity.

Let us pray:

Dear God, help us to be open to the words You speak directly to us, and to remember You have a plan for each of us. Amen.

Roxie Greenway

FEBRUARY 24th

“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. 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. And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” Matthew 6: 1-6

I am looking at the Lenten season a bit differently than I have in years past. I actually began to think about it during Advent. I began to think about how the two are tied together. Through the season of Advent we look forward to the birth of Jesus, and on Christmas we celebrate that birth. During Lent our focus is on the sacrifices that our Lord Jesus made for us – for me! When you put the two together it becomes about the birth, the life Jesus lived as a role model and the gift of life through death that God has given in His only son.

In November, 2011 we received a devastating call. “Pa (my father-in-law) is being transported to the hospital.” He had had a small stroke. Well, with all of the health issues already surrounding Pa, there was nothing “small” about it. We knew immediately what the implications could mean for Pa and for our family.

Over the several weeks that Pa was in the hospital... then rehab... then a skilled nursing facility, I began to look at his life. He was a man who absolutely walked humbly with his God. He was never one who boasted about the things he did for his family or his church. And he *never* boasted about the private time he spent with the Lord. You see, every day at about 2:00 Pa would go into his room to read the Upper Room Daily Devotional and spend time in relationship with Christ. He would read scripture and he would play hymns on his keyboard. He was demonstrating the prayer life that Jesus taught us and modeled for us.

The entire time Pa was in the hospital, I never once saw him cranky with anyone. (Well, maybe just one time when they had to prick his finger 3 times to get enough blood to test his blood sugar level). I would most certainly have been a LOT crankier than he was:) He was always cheerful and always happy to see whoever came by. Even in his critical health, he treated everyone with kindness – just as Jesus had taught him to do. The whole family gathered together to celebrate Christmas with Pa. On December 29th, his 65th wedding anniversary, he went to be with his Lord.

As I said earlier, I will never look at Advent or Lent in quite the same way. Through the birth of Jesus Christ we have hope. Through the life of Christ, we know the lives we should live. Through the sacrifice and death of Christ, we can know eternal life. Pa was a model for me and I have every confidence that he is in heaven chatting with Christ, and probably fishing with Simon and Andrew!

I am eternally grateful for all of the “Pa’s” in my life who gently teach me and guide me. May I live a life worthy of the one who offers me eternal life.

Let us pray:

“Lord God, prepare our hearts and help us to learn to walk humbly, be giving, love our neighbors, and be eternally grateful for the death and resurrection of your son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.”

FEBRUARY 26th
FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Lenten Scriptures – Common Lectionary

Genesis 9:8-17

Psalm 25:1-10 (UMH 756)

1 Peter 3:18-22

Mark 1:9-15

Join us at Covenant United Methodist

4410 Duval Road

Austin, TX 78727

8 & 11:15am Traditional Worship

9am – Oasis of Praise Contemporary Worship

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FEBRUARY 27th

“When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, “Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.” Matthew 21.1-11

Most of us think of donkeys as rather dumb creatures whose only talent is to carry heavy loads for humans. We quickly forget that God can use a donkey to achieve God's purpose or at least to show others the importance of humbleness and hard work. In any case I want to believe this particular donkey and her foal were special beasts of burdens chosen by Jesus to fulfill what he wanted to accomplish.

Remember Balaam's donkey? Toward the end of the Book of Numbers we find Balaam focused and riding toward his preferred destination over where God wanted him to go. But somehow the donkey was smarter than Balaam and kept changing direction to move away from the evil ahead toward the good. I want to pet him and call him a good donkey.

I wonder if the donkey Jesus rode into Jerusalem was a smart donkey too. Do you think it possible that the donkey looked around and saw the palm leaves being waved? Do you think he knew that palm branches were used to welcome people and also as a means of keeping bad things at bay? What if that donkey knew that some of the people would reject Jesus within one week's time and most would deny even knowing him. Maybe, like Balaam's ass she kept trying to steer Jesus away from impending doom. I would like to think so – at least it would make for an interesting Palm Sunday sermon, don't you think?

All of this causes me to meditate on my own journey in life. Does my donkey try to lead me toward the good even while I steer it toward what is less desirable? And how about you? Will you try to lead or allow God to lead you? That is really the proper question for all of us – don't you agree?

With thanks to a pastor friend,

I Am Anonymous

FEBRUARY 28th

Aligning with Jesus' Mission

“Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: ‘Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.’” Matthew 4:12-16

When I was about 8 year old we had some family friends named the Warriners. This was a family of four very active boys. Danny and Mike were around my age, so I spent a great deal of time playing with them. One Saturday night we went to the Warriners and ended up playing a game of hide & seek all over their house. Mike convinced me that he knew the absolute best place for me to hide. He proceeded to take me down to the basement, shut the light off, closed the door and left. It all happened so fast that I had not even gotten a chance to really see where I was. You see, at 8 years old, I was terrified of the dark. I didn't even like to go into a dark room for a few minutes. I would dart in and then out very quickly. There I was in a pitch black, strange place...and frozen so solid with fear that I couldn't even move. All I could do was wait ... and wait. Surely someone would eventually miss me and come to find me. I was down there for what seemed like an eternity (in reality 30 minutes). At age 8 in fear, it was a lifetime. I was in desperate need. All of a sudden I heard the door to the basement open and a bit of light streamed in. Then, the basement was flooded with light and I heard my father's voice say, “Hey, what's going on down here”? I was so overcome with relief and happiness that I couldn't contain myself. I ran to the doorway and clung to my dad's long legs out of sheer joy. I was in great and dire need and there was my savior, my 6 foot 3 inch father. He very matter of fact, picked me up and said, “Wow, it was pretty dark down there”. I must have had visible signs of my stressful encounter with darkness because I remember the entire family leaving shortly after the experience.

Let's re-read Matthew 4:16 again: *“the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.”*

This is the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. He comes to shine light in the world of darkness. He comes to a world of poverty, pain, hunger, oppression, imprisonment. He comes to a world in physical and spiritual darkness to shine His light of love to those in need. When you think about it, that is our mission and ministry too.

Jesus has saved us out of darkness in our lives both physically and spiritually. His light floods us with freedom, peace, joy and purpose. Because of the great love He has shown US, we want to reach beyond ourselves and share with others. We want our brothers and sisters, friends and family to know the glory of the light shining in their darkness. That is our part in aligning with the mission of Jesus. Consider how you can align your life with the mission during this Lenten season.

Let us pray:

“Lord, open our eyes to see the world as you do, to see our kinship with those you love, our brothers and sisters that are in need of knowing you. Give us the will and the means to minister to our family, friends and our community. To see the need in all your people and to lift them up to your gracious and life-giving power that shines the way out of darkness.”

Amy Wendland

FEBRUARY 29TH

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” James 1: 2-3

Recently my 4 year old granddaughter, Annabelle, came to spend the day with me. In true Grandma fashion, I planned all her favorite treats, the highlight being to rent her favorite video, Cinderella. But when we were settled in front of the TV, Annabelle confessed that the mean stepmother always frightened her. Concerned, I said, “Maybe we should have rented something else”. “Oh no Grandma,” she said, patting my hand reassuringly, “I just fast forward past the scary part.” And so she did, zipping past the scary part and looking up at me with a serene smile.

I couldn't help speculating on how blissful it would have been to fast forward past certain parts of my life until I got to the good parts. Things like a loved one being injured in a bad car accident. But no, not that part. That's when I learned that instead of praying frantically when I'm afraid, sometimes I need to be still so I can hear his reassurance and be in daily contact with God.

I shook my head. No fast forward for me. It seems I need the scary parts if I'm to continue growing spiritually. And the next time you run into a scary part, remember it's just a rough spot that eventually leads you to the good part: a clearer perspective and a wiser point of view.

Let us pray:

“Dear Lord, help us face life's problems as they come with the sure knowledge that you'll always be there, even and especially in the scary parts. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen”

Judy Bright

MARCH 1ST

FASTING IS A BLESSING!

There are many ways to draw close to God, not only during the Lenten season but every day of our life; by reading and studying His word, by praying constantly in many different ways such as silently in our minds where ever we may be, out loud in the security of our homes, in church during worship services, in our many meetings, in Sunday School classes; and in many positions such as on our knees, sitting in an upright position or sprawled face down on the floor. However we do it God is listening to us.

Another way we can draw close to Jesus is by fasting. In the previous years when I fasted I found it to be most rewarding. There are many ways of fasting. Fasting is primarily the act of willingly abstaining from some or all food and/or drink for a period of time. I have always fasted for 24 hours without food and water. In Matthew 6:16-18 instructs us how to fast. *“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”*

In the Old Testament, God commanded Israel to observe several set times of fasting. For New Testament believers, fasting is neither commanded nor forbidden in the Bible. While early Christians were not required to fast, many practiced prayer and fasting regularly. Jesus himself affirmed fasting in Luke 5:34-35 and Matthew 9:15, Jesus answered, *“How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.”*

Fasting is one of the most effective methods of spiritual as well as physical cleansing and healing. Fasting directs our hunger toward God. It clears the mind and body and draws us close to God. So, as we gain spiritual clarity of thought while fasting, it allows us to hear God more clearly. It allows us to see how we are completely and utterly dependent upon him. Through fasting and prayer, the Holy Spirit can transform our lives.

By all means, consult your doctor before you begin to fast. You may have a physical problem that will make fasting unwise or dangerous. Also if you are taking some type of medication, make sure you talk to your doctor before changing your regime. Be prudent and cautious. Once you are sure you are in good health then you can begin to plan and prepare for your fast.

In preparation, examine your heart; repent of your sins, those known and those sins of omission. Wean yourself off caffeine and sugar products to ease the hunger and discomfort during the early part of the fast. Plan your work schedule so that it does not interfere. You will want to spend as much time as possible in prayer and study, singing to God and praising God.

At the beginning of the fast drink a small glass of water and don't eat a large meal before you start the fast. Eat lightly. At the end of the fast drink a small glass of water before you eat and eat a light meal, not something heavy.

The desire to fast must be to glorify God, not to have an emotional experience. God will honor your seeking heart and bless your time with Him in a very special way. Praise God!

Dana Ripley

MARCH 2ND

Today, March 2nd, is Texas Independence Day. On this day in 1836, brave men and women stood up for their dream of a free land of opportunity. It was, in many ways, their promised land. It was an untamed and dangerous place, yet it offered *unbounded hope and promise*. Those must have been exciting times. It must have seemed as if anything were possible. Will days like that ever come again? Can I experience that?

Jesus said anything is possible. He said, *"If you had just a little faith you could tell a tree to throw itself into the ocean and it would do it."* (Luke 17:6) Anything is possible! Not in some future world, but here and now. Can we take this text at face value? *Do I really believe* that I could command one of my oak trees to go jump into Lake Travis? The disciples said, just one verse earlier, *"Lord...Increase our faith!"* Now there's a verse I can relate to!

We're in the season of Lent. It's a time of preparation, a time of hope and promise. Sometimes we just want to skip the sadness and pain of the passion story and jump right to the unbounded joy of the Resurrection. But life's not like that, even for God's Son. Like all men, Jesus suffered this life's cruel pain. Independence wasn't won at the Alamo; but it was a necessary step. The men inside the Alamo all died. They didn't want to; but they gave their lives for something greater.

Jesus was totally obedient to His father. We too know that our Father will keep the promise He made to us. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for. Our hope is not some whimsical dream. Our hope is unbounded. Our hope is assured.

The rallying cry for the remainder of the war was *"Remember the Alamo!"* Ours should be *"Remember Calvary! Remember the Empty Tomb!"*

Let us pray:

"Lord, as the demon-possessed boy's father cried out to you, I also pray, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

Carl Wilson

MARCH 3RD

March 3, 2012—Today would have been my father, Alvin H. Jones', 88th birthday. Daddy was a devoted Methodist. Daddy loved God and his family and everyone knew it. One of my favorite Bible verses that remind me of Daddy's love for God is Psalm 100. Daddy made a point to ensure his family gave God all the praises for his Glory.

Psalm 100 A psalm. For giving thanks.

¹ *Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.*

² *Worship the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.*

³ *Know that the LORD is God.*

*It is he who made us, and we are his
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.*

⁴ *Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;*

give thanks to him and praise his name.

⁵ *For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.*

A favorite song of mine is, “**Shout to the Lord**”

*“My Jesus, my Savior, Lord there is none like You,
All of my days, I want to praise. The wonders of Your mighty love.
My comfort, my shelter, tower of refuge and strength,
Let every breath, all that I am. Never cease to worship You.”*

CHORUS:

Shout to the Lord, all the earth let us sing

Power and majesty, Praise to the King.

Mountains bow down and the seas will roar

At the sound of Your name.

I sing for joy at the work of Your hands.

Forever I'll love You, Forever I'll stand.

Nothing compares to the promise I have in You.

During this Lenten season, take the time to Shout to the Lord, worship Him, and sing of his praise for all His goodness you receive from His on-going love.

Love and Peace.

Tonna Marcyes

MARCH 4th
SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Lenten Scriptures – Common Lectionary

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

Psalm 22:23-31 (UMH 752)

Romans 4:13-25

Mark 8:31-38

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MARCH 5TH

“After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them.And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking to Jesus....Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” Mark 9:2-7

What an incredible event that Peter, James and John witnessed on that mountain top as Jesus was transfigured before them and the appearance of Elijah and Moses talking with Jesus happened before their very eyes. Scripture goes on to tell us that a cloud appeared and enveloped them as a voice came from the cloud: *“This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!”*

A cloud is frequently a symbol of God’s presence to protect and guide. The full sense includes us obeying him. We understand through God’s word that Elijah and Moses were faithful followers and they were loved and blessed by God. Read again and focus on who God tells the three disciples to listen to. God calls Jesus his Son and tells us He loves him. I believe that God wants us to listen to Jesus because He is the way, the truth and the light. As children of God He has a plan designed for each of our lives here on earth as well as a place that He has prepared for us to spend eternity if we so choose. In order that we might receive these undeserved gifts, Jesus died on the cross so that our sins could be washed clean by His blood.

“Father, I pray that we will see this season of Lent as an opportunity to earnestly seek your will for our lives. Help us to carefully listen to your Son and receive joyfully your blessings on our lives through our obedience to your word. Amen”

Anonymous

MARCH 6TH

“Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.” Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence. 15-16: He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy hi and show him my salvation.” Psalms 91: 1-3; 15-16

Do you contemplate what you will "give up" for Lent? Do you even consider the reason for lent or is it a ritual you just follow for the 40 days before Easter?

I have often said I would give up something but maybe only followed through half-heartedly. Last year I made the decision to give up a food item I am very fond of and that is chocolate. I did not eat one bite for the 40 days of Lent. I could not actually call my decision a sacrifice because it was not a true deprivation. I did not fast or make radical changes by "giving up chocolate."

When I think about Jesus being in the desert for 40 days I realize that I was not even close to the real meaning of Lent and what it actually means to come face to face with temptations that are constantly coming into people's daily life. We are told in Psalms 91 that by trusting in God we will live close to him and He will be our refuge, so why is it that when I am faced with a deprivation that I look for an easy way to get around the situation? Do I want to be in control and fail to ask God to be my protector and refuge?

I do believe if each day I would pray for God's direction in my life, knowing that deprivation does come into all lives, and that everything would not be just as planned, then I would realize that Lent is not only with us for 40 days but constantly because of issues which come into our lives beyond our control. It is not just during Lent that we are to call upon God but each day, because he is our refuge and strength, we are his family, and he chooses to deliver us from our deprivation so that we can live with him forever in His Kingdom.

Praise be to God for his unrelenting love.

Barbara Perry

MARCH 7TH

The older we get, the more we remember of olden times, or so it seems! Maybe it's because we have lived long enough to have lots of memories.

When I was little, in the 30's, we were pretty normal, waiting for the Easter Bunny to arrive with candy. Nothing more than a few of those hard coated candy eggs, that tasted terrible because of the dye in the coloring. Our 'bunny' took extra effort and arrived several times, leaving just one or two eggs each time, and we, naturally, couldn't understand how we missed seeing him every time.

Such 'pretend' was fine, but a couple of hours later we found ourselves on the way to Sunday school, with 2 pennies tied in the corner of a handkerchief. Following Sunday school we went to worship with our parents. They made sure we understood the difference between the Easter Bunny, and the true meaning of Easter.

While we surely didn't understand it fully at the age of 3 or 4, the meaning of the 'gift of forgiveness' grew as we did. I remember my early teens (when I joined youth fellowship) when the 'light bulb' came on, and I realized that Christ had died on that cross for ME, and all Christians. I began to be more serious about my actions, knowing that Jesus did love me, just like the song we sang so many times in Sunday school, and that if I tried to be a good person, I would be freed of any sins because of our loving Lord.

Easter is a time when we reflect on our lives. We question our actions, and hopefully improve our daily thoughts, remembering to LOVE, and care for, ONE ANOTHER.

We are so—o—o blessed!

Let us pray:

"Lord, we ask that you touch each of us with the knowledge and willingness that is needed to be good Christians."

Sincerely

Carol Zimmer

MARCH 8TH

“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. His love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of gods. His love endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord of lords: His love endures forever.” Psalm 136:1-3

Lord in Heaven, thank You for even allowing me to address You,

What a privilege to carry everything to You in prayer.

Thank You for giving us Your son that we might take the name of Jesus with us wherever we go.

Thank You for giving us peace, like a river in our souls, joy like a fountain.

Thank You for our church where we can truly experience Your presence, feel Your mighty power and grace.

Thank You for mercy, mercy still reserved for me.

Thank You for grace, Your awesome amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.

Thank You for song leaders that encourage us to sing to God who reigns above.

Thank You for church leaders who lead and guide us to only trust and obey.

Thank You for Spiritual leaders that invite us to say come, Spirit come, our hearts control.

Thank You for songwriters that put into words Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand.

Thank You for eyes to see the words it is well with my soul.

Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.

In Jesus' precious name

Amen

Anonymous

MARCH 9th

“After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters -- one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.” -- Mark 9:2-9

I have always loved mountains, towers and high hills that overlook a city or wide valley. There's something special about being in the high places that I find fascinating and almost magical. From that new vantage point high above the surrounding area I can often see things that are hidden or obscured from ground level -- a rooftop garden growing among the high rises of New York, the geometric layout of Washington D.C., or a solitary white church steeple rising above the colored leaves of a Virginia valley in fall.

In Mark 9:2-9, when Jesus took his disciples up the mountain, he was trying to give them a new vantage point to view the Messiah. The disciples had followed Jesus for several years and they knew him “at ground level” as a teacher, a friend, a healer and a miracle worker. But on top of the mountain, Peter, James and John were blessed with a view of the bigger picture when Jesus was transfigured and revealed in glory before their very eyes while the voice of God powerfully proclaimed Jesus as his son.

During this season of Lent take some time to step out of your normal, everyday routine and seek out that high place, that special place, where God can speak into your life and give you a new perspective.

Roger Weaver

MARCH 11th
THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Lenten Scriptures – Common Lectionary

Exodus 20:1-17

Psalm 19 (UMH 750)

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

John 2:13-22

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MARCH 12th

FLIPPING THE SWITCH

“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.” – Psalm 19:7-11

I read this verse what seemed like a hundred times before the first word of this devotional went on paper. There are so many things you can take from these amazing words. Then it hit me. It seems so simple. So why do we, as Christians, struggle so much with the application of this verse?

There are so many moments in life when you suddenly “get it”. It starts with simple things like hitting a ball with a bat, understanding that geometric theorem, or finally knowing the meaning of that movie you watched last week. They certainly aren’t moments we would call epiphanies, but they can be exciting nonetheless. Then, as we grow older these “get it” moments become more meaningful. We realize our parents aren’t the dumbest people on the planet, we WANT to spend time with our family on holidays, and we work hard for the feeling we get rather than because we have to. You could say, “the switch flipped” in these circumstances. We realize there is a deeper, more meaningful reward for living in these moments a different way.

Our spiritual lives should be no different. We need to flip the switch. Instead, we try to make the law of the Lord work for us. We shape it for our lives instead of shaping our lives for it. It’s just too hard, or not conducive to our schedule. We don’t want to sacrifice what we think is important. As verse 7 says, “the law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.” God rewards us when we follow his law, he revives our soul. He fills our cups, not to the top, but till it runs over. Following his law should not be a burden; it should fill our hearts with joy. We need to flip the switch.

As the Lenten season continues and we move closer to Easter, it’s hard not to think about the sacrifice God made for us. He sent his only son to die for our sins. Yet, we still struggle with much smaller sacrifices for Him. Verse 11 reminds us, “in keeping them there is a great reward.” God has no shortage of rewards for us; and on top of all does for us He still promises us the greatest reward, eternal life.

Let us pray:

*“Lord, I thank you for blessing me with so much. Forgive me for being selfish and not following your law. Help me to walk more like you, and make sacrifices for you in my daily life. Help me to see the true meaning in life’s moments. I ask that you be with those who may not know you, or need you even more than I. Help me to recognize “this” as a precious gift, and celebrate this chance to be alive. Thank you for loving and saving me.”
Amen.*

Phil Hampsten

MARCH 13th

SHEDDING OUR PARTIALITIES

“Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” Acts 10:34-35 (NRSV)

Home-made carrot cake is my favorite. If there are several desserts from which to choose I will usually pick carrot cake, so I guess I show a strong partiality when it comes to certain desserts. I enjoyed watching the Super Bowl with family and friends although I didn't have a favorite team on the field (I guess living in Green Bay really did make me a diehard Packer fan). And after 4 years in Austin I have discovered that I have become partial to the Dallas Cowboys.

I am also prone to show partiality when it comes to people: there are some I like more than others. I try hard not to show partiality when it comes to religion but I'm certainly proud to be a United Methodist and find myself questioning some of the practices of other religions even though I think we should be open-minded and honor people who aren't worshipping the same way. Karl Barth said that one should say I'm a Christian and also a Methodist (you substitute your own faith for Methodist). He goes on to say that too many people are *also* Christians: they proudly say I'm a Baptist (again, substitute your own religion) and, by the way I am *also* a Christian.

Yet, God does not show partiality which means that God loves everyone the same (however, I'll bet God would choose carrot cake every time). As we think about that Biblical statement it becomes so deep that none of us can truly grasp its full meaning. Think of it: God loved Saddam Hussein as much as God loves me. God loves a convicted murderer on death row as much as God does you and me. Try that statement on and wear it the next time you think about the death penalty or harshly judging someone else's lifestyle.

In the days of the fledgling Christian church this statement was profound and probably not heard with pleasure, especially by Jews who were coming into the fold. It went against almost everything they had been taught. But are we so different? We have our own partialities engrained in us and find them difficult to shed. This Holy Week would be a great time to let go of a few of them, don't you think?

In His Grace,
Betty Armstrong

MARCH 14th

KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE PRIZE!

“I have not yet reached my goal, and I am not perfect. But Christ has taken hold of me. So I keep on running and struggling to take hold of the prize. My friends, I don't feel that I have already arrived. But I forget what is behind, and I struggle for what is ahead. I run toward the goal, so that I can win the prize of being called to heaven. This is the prize that God offers because of what Christ Jesus has done. Phil. 3: 12-14”

During this time of Lent, as I struggle to deal with all of the temptations, shortcomings, and mistakes that I have taken on in my life, I look to Paul, and what he said about his own life as a new Christian. He had more reason to brag about who he was than anyone else. He was circumcised when he was eight days old. He was from the nation of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin, a true Hebrew. As a Pharisee, he strictly obeyed the Law of Moses. He did everything the Law demanded in order to please God. But Christ showed him that what he once thought was valuable was now *worthless*.

As Paul said to the Philippians, *“Nothing is as wonderful as knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have given up everything else and count it all as garbage. All I want is Christ⁹ and to know that I belong to him. I could not make myself acceptable to God by obeying the Law of Moses. God accepted me simply because of my faith in Christ.¹⁰ All I want is to know Christ and the power that raised him to life. I want to suffer and die as he did,¹¹ so that somehow I also may be raised to life!”*

So as we “put on Christ” this Lenten season, let’s acknowledge who we have been, and what we have been through...but realize that Christ has brought us through it! We will “die” with Christ on the cross this Good Friday, but ALL of our sins will die with Him! PRAISE JESUS!!!

And when we rise on this coming Easter Sunday morning, we will rise with Christ anew, fresh, clean, and triumphant over our past sins, mistakes, struggles & shortcomings. Let us learn from them, but put them behind us and consider them as garbage! Let us keep our eyes on the prize and move forward, living life in *victory* because of what God has done for us by the blood of Jesus Christ, our Savior, our Victory, our new life...our Resurrection!

Let us pray:

“Thank you Lord! Thank you for loving enough to consider ALL that we have done in sin against you as “garbage”, forgiving us for putting your Son Jesus on the cross, and instead, being willing to let him die for what we have done. Help us not to dwell on those mistakes and errors we have made...but instead to press on to be who You want us to be, ever walking, talking, living and rejoicing with You for our new life in Jesus, our Forgiver, our Sustainer. By His blood, and in His powerful name, we pray. AMEN!”

Randy Nettles

MARCH 15th

THE PEACE OF CHRIST

“That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” Mark 4:35-41

Every day at around 3:00p.m. my day is transformed from the quiet confines of my studies to a parade of chaos that erupts when my three school-aged children come home from school. It is a jubilant display of three individuals simultaneously barking out events of the day and various homework assignments in stereophonic sound. A symphony of voices accustomed to a day of competing with 400 others to be heard reverberate off of our tile floors. Backpacks, papers, shoes, and socks are enthusiastically flung in every direction as cabinet doors are slammed in consistent repetition as three empty stomachs go looking for an afternoon snack. During this everyday ritual I struggle to put away my all too many unfinished tasks of the day and switch hats from fulltime student to fulltime Mom. It is during these times I often find myself asking...no begging, for a time of peace and calm.

Recently as I was sitting almost struck helpless by the chaotic throws of yet another jam-packed Monday, I thought of the familiar story of Jesus and the disciples crossing to another shore in a boat when a furious storm broke out. Violent winds were blowing the vessel in every direction and waves were crashing over the side of the boat with such force, the little boat began to fill with water. The disciples, afraid for their lives, threatened with drowning, and at their wits end turn to their master and what is he doing? He is peacefully sleeping.

Like the disciples, when the constant pull of too much to do and not enough time to do it starts crashing over me and the anxiety begins to pull me under I want to cry out, “Lord, how can you be sleeping? Don’t you care if I drown? Wake up and bring me peace!” But what I realized that day was that the peace of Christ that I prayed for didn’t come from him calming the storm, it was already there in the midst of it. As I looked around me and reveled in the chaos, Christ was there sleeping on a cushion in our midst. We don’t have to wait for a time of calmness, quiet, and solitude to find the peace that comes with the love of our Lord and Savior. It is his presence within the midst of all the furious storms we weather through life that brings us the peace that will keep us afloat and will never let us drown.

Let us pray:

“Holy God, show us your calming presence in the midst of our busy and chaotic lives. Be the one to bring us peace that surpasses all understanding no matter what circumstances face us this day. We pray for these things in the name of the Prince of Peace, Christ Jesus. Amen.”

Lisa Rush

MARCH 16th

THE POWER OF THE CROSS

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.’” 1 Corinthians 1: 18, 19 (NKJV)

Nothing moves me more than my heart pierced by truth, whether it be God’s Scripture coming alive in a new song, the purity of a child’s comment on the obvious, or the cleansing and washing away of another layer of the world’s briars and thorns.

I actually look forward to the Lenten season each year since my insight always deepens with the harsh realities of the path that Jesus walked...the path that He urges us to walk with our eyes focused on Him and not centered on our limited human understanding. Tears are my first indicator that this is the lesson this year. What is my response to the question “Who do YOU say I am?”

In 1 Cor 1:17 Paul sharply contrasts human wisdom with God’s wisdom... He preaches, teaches and solidifies the core theme of the cross....

Only the cross – tears down human pride

Only the cross – lights the way

Only the cross – provides transformational deliverance

Let us pray:

“Dear Heavenly Father, create in us a new heart, a heart aligned with Yours. Give us new perspective on Your ancient wisdom, a fresh “way” of understanding the cross through the weight of its tragedy. Thank you for the frailty of this human body as it teaches us that we can do nothing without you.”

Donna Stone

MARCH 18th
FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Lenten Scriptures – Common Lectionary

Numbers 21:4-9

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22 (UMH 830)

Ephesians 2:1-10

John 3:14-21

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8 & 11:15am Traditional Worship

9am – Oasis of Praise Contemporary Worship

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MARCH 19TH

“Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. “Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.” Luke 22:39-46

It surprises me that some people dread Lent because I have always loved it. Maybe that's because I've always had a melancholy personality. I find myself withdrawing and isolating myself when I want to have a deeper spiritual experience. I also can see the beauty in suffering. I'm not saying I like to suffer, or that I wish suffering on others, but I see the value in it.

While I was in seminary I went through a depression for several months. My friends started to worry about me because I wasn't my usual fun-loving self. I walked around campus with my head down and no longer met everyone with my characteristic smile. I sat by myself in chapel instead of with my friends. I carried my journal with me everywhere I went and preferred writing in it to talking with others. But I can honestly say that those months of intense inward examination and wrestling with God produced stretch marks on my soul. I look back at that time with a sense of wonderment and even long for it sometimes. So, for me, taking a few weeks every year to enter into the suffering of Christ is meant to be a beautiful thing.

Let us pray:

“Lord, draw me close to you. Help me find solace in you in the midst of my struggles. And help me have a heart like yours. Amen”

Laurie Strawbridge

MARCH 20TH

“I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.” Philippians 3:10-11

I'd like to think if I was chosen by Christ to be his student and walk with him daily, that regardless of the events leading to his eventual crucifixion my belief in his teachings and his boundless love would continue to sustain me and I would not lose faith and hope.

The truth is, I think fear and doubt would most likely take over and my faith and hope would waiver.

It happens to me now even when I have the benefit of all the wonderful, personal stories, events, and miracles written about in the bible. These stories reveal god's promises, faithfulness, unending grace, forgiveness, and love for all of us.

It is an awesome blessing that through Bible study, worship, small groups & community gatherings we all can relive the life of Christ, His crucifixion, and then His resurrection.

May the season of lent in its sorrow and joy renew, strengthen, and enrich our personal relationship with the living Christ.

Judy Yemington

MARCH 21ST

... *“Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified.” Matt 28:5*

The world is a frightening place, and was for about 2,000 years before the birth of the Christ child. Long before that Day, God inspired Old Testament writers to urge the faithful to “be not afraid”. That involved many situations as frightening, or more so, than those that face the people of the world today. In fact, that message appears in the same or similar words in almost every book of the Bible. In many cases, it was coupled with the words such as, “I will be with you” or “I will go with you” or “I will fight for you”.

Much of what we fear stems from our inability to control things like war, disease or the evil that drives certain people. Our “fear factors” have not changed, and God’s response to fear has not changed. Knowing that the human race is infested with fear was the reason that God has reminded us so many times in His Word to fight our natural tendency to let our minds jump to fear at the slightest provocation. When God charged the angel to meet the women at Jesus’ tomb it was important that he repeat the “fear not” message because God’s true response to fear had finally come. The resurrection of Christ was God’s manifestation of His perfect love and that event expelled any justifiable reason to fear our eternal well-being.

God’s response to fear continues. Jesus gives us a daily assurance by telling each of His faithful, “I will be with you”, “I will go with you” and “I will fight for you”. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus offers all a promise with the assurances, “I will forgive you”, “I will heal your soul” and “I will give you eternal life”. To all He continues to say, “Fear not”!

Thank Jesus for His glorious resurrection!

Terry Hillis

MARCH 22ND

“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Ephesian 6:4

What does this Bible verse have to do with Lenten season one may ask? A few years ago I became involved with a foster agency volunteering my services. These children came from severely abusive homes, both physically and mentally. In fact the monthly average of children being removed by CPS from abusive homes in Travis County is 200 per month. This is staggering when you realize what it actually takes for a child to finally be removed from such an environment. This means there are literally hundreds or thousands more children beneath the surface that have not yet been discovered. From the 200 monthly removals, 80% are sexual abused, of which these scars rarely ever heal. Hard to imagine harming anyone much less your own flesh and blood. This all being said, it is an absolute must that the revolving door of child neglect and abuse stop in order to have a future as a loving caring society living in a Christ-like manner. Parents need to show love through their nurturing and sacrifices they make for the good of their children just as God loves us by sacrificing his only begotten Son to bring us a better life and salvation.

Think about it: we are born into a family without any choice as to who will raise us or be our role models. I myself am a child of three, born into a stellar family and could not have asked for better parents. Happily & thankfully, I can say both parents raised us children with discipline and instruction of the Lord. This is just one of my many blessings that I am extremely thankful for.

Thanks Mom & Dad.

Let us pray:

“Father in Heaven, may your word touch the abused and abusers and lead them to reconcile a new life of nurturing and love to place behind them a world of self-destruction. May not our will be done but thy will be done in thy Holy name.” Amen

Andrew Sterling

MARCH 23RD

Read Numbers 21:4-9

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” – Isaiah 53:5 NRSV

The bronze serpent in this passage represents the Israelites’ pain and suffering in the desert. After they complained to Moses about the miserable conditions, God sent them venomous snakes and many of the people died from snakebite poisoning. He told Moses to make a bronze snake for the people to look at after being bitten and they would then be healed and live.

So, too, when we face life’s many adversities we are reminded to look to Jesus, the rock of our salvation and our Comforter. He is the One who has borne our pain and died for our sins. One of my favorite hymns has always been “Come Ye Disconsolate,” found on page 510 in the United Methodist Hymnal. There’s something about the melody and lyrics that speak to my heart.

*“Come, ye disconsolate, where’er ye languish,
Come to the mercy seat, fervently kneel.
Here bring your wounded hearts, here tell your anguish.
Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal.*

*Joy of the desolate, light of the straying,
Hope of the penitent, fadeless and pure.
Here speaks the Comforter, tenderly saying,
Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal.*

*Here see the bread of life, see waters flowing
Forth from the throne of God, pure from above.
Come to the feast of love, come, ever knowing.
Earth has no sorrow but heaven can remove.”*

There is no sorrow on earth that heaven cannot heal, cure or remove. What a blessing and what a promise to claim during Lent.

Nancy Karr

MARCH 25th
FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Lenten Scriptures – Common Lectionary

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalm 51:1-12 (UMH 785)

Hebrews 5:5-10

John 12:20-33

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8 & 11:15am Traditional Worship

9am – Oasis of Praise Contemporary Worship

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MARCH 26TH

MADE PERFECT THROUGH SUFFERING

“In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father. “And he says in another place, “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.” During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him¹⁰ and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.” Hebrews 5: 5-10

As the mother of an active three year old, I find myself often shouting warnings to protect him from danger, and scolding in hopes to correct unruly behavior. I will not be able to protect him from all the suffering this life will bring, nor am I sure that my scolding is doing much to encourage obedience. Sometimes after I have enforced a punishment, I am tempted to not follow through, tempted by tearful eyes and fervent cries of my beloved son, but I realize that I must hold firm if I desire any chance of teaching my son obedience.

Hebrews reminds us that even our Lord Jesus had to suffer and that “he learned obedience from what he suffered.” Sometimes I tend to think that Jesus had it a little easier than us in the sense that He is divine and is somehow above the worries and troubles of this world. These verses state that it was through suffering that “he learned obedience.” How often in my life have I learned to rely more on the Lord through times of trial? It is in these times when our obedience is tested and our faith can grow. Jesus had to be perfectly obedient in order to be called the sinless Lamb of God. Therefore, He had to suffer in order to learn and demonstrate that obedience to the cross.

In the Old Testament, a high priest was the only one authorized to enter the “Holy of Holies,” i.e. presence of God, and he only did so annually in order to perform the atonement sacrifice. One particularly mystic figure is the high priest Melchizedek (v10), who is thought by some scholars to represent the Messiah. Because of His “reverent submission”, God designated Him “to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek” thus transferring the role of the Old Testament high priest to Himself. No longer is there a separation between our Father in heaven and us. Jesus, as our great high priest, is our source of eternal salvation as the once-and-for-all atonement sacrifice and our intercessor to God the Father.

Hebrews very eloquently describes the humble and human Jesus who suffered and also the divine Jesus, our great high priest who is sitting at the right hand of the Father. These are two images that are sometimes hard to wrap our minds around. What is your view of Jesus? Do you accept His humanity as He endured far greater suffering than we can even fathom? Do you also accept His current place at the right hand of the Father, praying for you as your personal great high priest?

Let us pray:

“Lord, help me to have an accurate view of your Son, Jesus Christ. I lean on you for comfort in suffering, as you suffered before me, and trust that you are making me perfect through it for your purposes. As my personal great high priest, I leave all my anxieties and problems at your feet and rest in the peace only you can give me. Amen.”

Kristin Hampsten

MARCH 27TH

*“Many, LORD my God, are the wonders you have done, the things you planned for us. None can compare with you; were I to speak and tell of your deeds, they would be too many to declare. Sacrifice and offering you did not desire -- but my ears you have opened burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, “Here I am, I have come— it is written about me in the scroll. **I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart.**” I proclaim your saving acts in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, LORD, as you know. I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and your saving help. I do not conceal your love and your faithfulness from the great assembly.” Psalm 40: 5-10 (especially v. 8)*

Jesus says your law is in my heart. Jesus traveled & spoke of living a righteous life in the eyes of God; of helping & feeding the poor, loving your God with all your heart (the biggest), loving your neighbor the second, giving what you have, lending a helping hand to your brothers & sisters (The Ten Commandments).

Before marriage, church, my baptism, Emmaus walk, bible studies & a loving church family; the Bible for me was nothing but writing in a black covered book. Now words from the Bible mean something to me. Jesus died for our sins on the cross. We were rescued from sin with redemption. An understanding of God's covenant; John 3:16 has given Nancy & me an understanding of living life with purpose and living life through the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray:

“Our father in Heaven, in the name of Jesus, who died for our sins on the cross, we pray for our brothers & sisters in this world who need your helping hand & comfort. We thank you for our families, friends, gifts, guidance & direction you have given each of us. Amen.”

Steve & Nancy McCain.

MARCH 28TH

“1-3: Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story— those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south. 17-22: Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities. They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He sent out his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave. Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind. Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of his works with songs of joy.” Psalm 107:1-3;17-22

When we have a good experience, we usually want to share it with others. Whether it's telling a friend about a fun new restaurant or talking about the great service at a store, we make recommendations and share our experiences with others because we want them to be able to have their own positive experiences. But while we may be willing to share our great experience at a car dealership or with a company's excellent customer service, we are often hesitant to talk about our personal experiences with the Lord's unfailing love. We need to remember that sharing our personal experiences can be a powerful tool that can reach people who may not have experienced the Lord's love and redemption.

Luke 6:45 says “For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks”. When we stop to reflect on how the Lord has been active in our lives, our hearts should be filled with gratitude and joy. The Scripture verses today list several reasons we should be giving thanks to the Lord; reminding us of the Lord's unfailing love that endures forever and welcomes us back with open arms even after we have turned away. He has rescued us from the grave, heard our cries for help, saved us from our distress and done wonderful things for mankind. Not only should we be thanking and praising God for his love and involvement in our lives, we should also be sharing this wonderful truth with everyone we encounter.

“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever!” Are you willing to share this news with someone who hasn't yet experienced the goodness of the Lord?

Emily Shryock

MARCH 29TH

"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah." This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts, I will be their God, and they will be my people."
Jeremiah 31: 31, 33

Christians study God's covenants as recorded many places in the Bible, with promises to people in the Old Testament like Noah, Abraham, Moses, and King David all leading to the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross for the redemption of our sins. Although we talk of a "new covenant" often during Lent, we didn't need to receive any new understandings because of a change on the part of God – instead the loving Father keeps reaching out across history to help us understand his plan and true nature.

Lately I have experienced consternation due to my difficulty in finishing activities at home, at work, and even at church. Many decisions and tasks which should be simple get surprisingly complicated and take much longer than planned. Of course most of the complications and delays are my own fault, but it is still hard to keep them from interfering with my spiritual focus. Life seems "messy" and I long for some clarity as I imagine the Patriarchs had during their mountaintop experiences with God.

A recent dark and rainy day was no exception. I was struggling to complete an errand which I had thought would be trivial that morning, and by the late afternoon my frustration with the inefficient way my time had been spent had affected my attitude for the worse. Then as I was driving, I made a right turn and suddenly there in front of me was a rainbow. It was far from the image of the sky-sweeping magnificent arch that you would see in a travel magazine photo. In fact it was only a small patch of color in the dissipating storm clouds, and even that view was partially obscured by the trees ahead, but it was a rainbow nevertheless. The totally unexpected appearance of the rainbow right when I needed to see one reminded me that the covenant promises are a constant source of comfort to us as God's children, especially during dreary and uncertain times.

Let us pray:

"Dear God, please help us remember that we can always rely on your promises and in the Grace You have shown to us through Your Son Jesus Christ, whether we are experiencing the wilderness, the mountaintop, or all the times and places in between." Amen.

Robert Allgood

MARCH 30TH

When I received the message that more devotions were needed, I had just finished reading an email regarding ‘aspirin for heart attacks’! I quickly went to Snopes to verify the validity, and found the advice to be ‘partially’ true!

They said to take aspirin when a heart attack first comes on! Don’t lie down! And there were many other pieces of advice. Snopes says “The first thing to do is dial 911, then LAY down.” We all need to be aware of receiving false information. Next time you see your doctor, ask his opinion regarding ‘what to do first’.

But nowhere did I find any mention of Praying, of visiting with our Lord. Agreeably, I believe if you don’t do ‘something’ when signs of medical problems surface, you may get to ‘visit’ the Lord (in person) earlier than expected. But it should be common practice to summon the Lord when anything shows peril. He has promised that He is with us always. Our blessings are many, and we should feel confident in knowing ‘Who is in charge’.

During this season, we are reminded of the great sacrifice Jesus made for all Christians, and we are ready to rejoice as we celebrate His victory over the grave. Regardless of struggles and challenges that come our way and because He loves and cares for each of us, our life is worth living.

Never forget: **IN GOD WE TRUST!**

Carol Zimmer

APRIL 1st
PASSION/PALM SUNDAY

Lenten Scriptures – Common Lectionary

Liturgy of the Palms Mark 11:1-11

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 (UMH 839)

Liturgy of the Passion

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm 31:9-16 (UMH 764)

Philippians 2:5-11

Mark 14:1-15:47 or Mark 15:1-39 (40-47)

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4410 Duval Road

Austin, TX 78727

8 & 11:15am Traditional Worship

9am – Oasis of Praise Contemporary Worship

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APRIL 2ND

Amazing Grace

“Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away.” Psalm 31:9-10

January 27th, 2011, the day my life turned upside down. The day I felt just like the words from the Psalms – *“Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress, my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also.”*

Never had I felt such a devastation of my entire world. The man who I had promised to love and care for the rest of my life had just been lead away in handcuffs, charged with a crime I could not comprehend. How had my life come to this? How could I handle this? My strength did fail as I fell to the floor, too bereft to even cry. *Psalm 31:12 I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel.”*

I prayed to God... One short sentence. “Help me.” And the next thing that came to my mind, through the fear, the hurt, the sorrow, the pain, was “Call Val.” Somehow I managed to dial her number. Somehow I managed to make enough sense for her to realize I needed her help. And with her invitation to come to her house that night, God answered my prayer to be gracious to me ... for not only did she and John open their house to me that night ... they continued to do so for a month ... to listen when I needed an ear, to just sit quietly when I needed the quiet. And through the next nine months and through the week of Rick’s illness and death, I continued to experience God’s graciousness shown through the acts of my brothers and sisters in Christ.

One woman I hadn’t known very well wrote me unexpected notes, letting me know that I was in her thoughts and prayers and encouraging me to have faith, to find strength in the Lord. If she only knew how those notes lifted me up and seemed to come along when I needed them the most.

Then there was the young man who seemed to be there on instant messenger while I was alone in Dallas and feeling so very far away from all that was familiar. Those messages where he let me know that he too was praying for me and I that I could talk to him anytime ... letting out all the fears, the anger, and the worry without judgment or condemnation of any of those thoughts.

And there were so many more of those moments of God’s grace reaching out to me through the darkness and horror of those days. The phone calls checking up on me when I hadn’t been heard from in a while. The cards delivering messages of encouragement. An unexpected visit from one of my “Sisters in Christ”. The prayers offered up that I could feel wrapped around me. The one daughter that never doubted me for a minute. The invitations to lunch when I did come “home” for a weekend. Invitations for a place to live if and when I came back to Austin to stay. And the young couple that opened their home to me while I tied up the loose ends of the old life and began on a new chapter of my life. All signs of God’s graciousness to me.

But how much more grace have we all received from our Father, who gave us His only Son, and our Lord, Jesus Christ, who gave up so much more for us so that we could have a relationship with our Father. And that grace continues to bless us as we build relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ, who buoy us up in times of need. What amazing grace we receive from God. As the words of the song so wonderfully put it:

*“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me....*

*I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now, I see.*

*Through many dangers, toils and snares...
we have already come.
T'was Grace that brought us safe thus far...
and Grace will lead us home.*

*The Lord has promised good to me...
His word my hope secures.
He will my shield and portion be...
as long as life endures.”*

Amen

Michelle Hendricks

APRIL 3RD

Jesus said, "But among you, it will be different, for whoever wants to be a leader among you, must first be a servant". Matthew 20:26

We sometimes are servants and don't even know it. My daughter, Tracy, recently related a story of an encounter with another young woman with whom she does charitable work for families of deployed soldiers. The other young woman is very dedicated and very persuasive as it was she who encouraged Tracy and many other mothers and wives to help. The lady though, it seems, is very easily flustered when overwhelmed with too many projects. Tracy came by her home recently and found her in tears as she was late for meetings, had not prepared for some other obligations and her son had called and needed prescription medicine picked up and delivered to school.

My daughter sat her down, and sorted out for her, her priorities; what needed to be done now, what could wait and that she would pick up the medicine and deliver it. Of course, the lady was incredibly relieved. But, in our conversation, Tracy was telling me in the context of her bewilderment that her friend, who was such a hard worker and persuader (Tracy is not a persuader) could be so lost at time management and organization. She and I then discussed recognizing what skills and talents God gave each of us to be servants of each other and how they can often compliment. Incidentally, He also blessed me with a daughter who makes me proud every day of her life.

Let us pray:

"Dear Lord, thank you for your word that illustrates that we should know our gifts and recognize those who are in need of what you have truly given us. We pray this in Jesus name, Amen"

Charlie Bright

APRIL 4th

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS?

“As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with 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.” Colossians 3:12-17 (NRSV)

Even in retirement I find that setting out a plan for the day is an important step in getting things done. After coffee and devotions it helps me to look at the list I made yesterday and set some priorities. Yet I've found that my “planning” has to allow for flexibility—you know: unexpected things do happen. But after reading Colossians 3 I felt I needed to ask what am I planning to do today “in the name of the Lord Jesus as I give thanks to God through him?” I was reminded that living the Christ-like life means doing everything in word or deed in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord. Is there someone we need to forgive? Is there anybody from whom we need to seek forgiveness? Do we feel the love of Christ in our hearts today not only for our friends and family but for those who are not in our circle of acquaintances? Is there someone who's been on the prayer chain who needs a word of encouragement? Are we truthfully allowing the peace of Christ to rule our lives in such a way that people see us as peacemakers? Are we living in love with all we meet? I wonder.

That's why I think this reading from Colossians is so appropriate for us as *“the Big Day”* draws near. Hopefully we have all of the eggs colored and ready to hide; we have picked out that new dress or suit to wear; we're ready to join in the *Hallelujahs* on Easter Sunday. So, are we able to stop now and ask what it all means?

Easter is often harder on us than we want to admit. Understanding what the resurrection means in our lives is a question we may have to ask often as we journey toward our heavenly home. But if we read today's text with eyes that are open and ears that can listen we will see the light of Christ shining through. We will hear a desperately needed word of hope, joy, love and peace. Then, as we claim a vibrant sense of His holy presence, we can start living lives that are more deeply immersed in Christ Jesus the Risen Lord.

May this Easter bring a fresh inflowing of God's unfailing grace and renew in us compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience as we continue to walk toward our own resurrection glory with Christ.

Blessings
Betty Armstrong

APRIL 5TH

SOUL FOOD

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take, this is my body" - Mark 14:22 (NRSV)

One day a few weeks ago, I was channel surfing and came across a TV show called "Hoarders". Hoarding is characterized by the excessive acquisition and inability or unwillingness to discard large quantities of objects that appear to the average person as useless or without value. I watched episode after episode and became increasingly sad. Not just because of the amount of stuff that the hoarders had collected, which was utterly astounding, but because of the emotional events that had triggered this behavior and allowed it to continue. The vast majority of the people had experienced a traumatic event that brought them to this state. A large aspect of this program is that professionals are brought in to help the hoarder cope with their emotional and mental issues and deal with their chronic hoarding. This help drives the hoarder to run the gamut of reactions from hysterical laughter and happiness to violent anger. The behavior that they exhibited showed how deeply attached they had become to things of absolutely no value. Episode after episode showed how challenging it was for the individuals, and the professionals assisting them, to clean and attempt to heal the damage done to their homes, lives and their families.

Now I'd heard people joke and make fun of people being pack rats for many years. And, when I was in my early 20's I remember reading an article about people who had gone through the great depression that were hoarders because they were afraid that they would have absolutely nothing ever again so they held on to everything. I had no idea that over the years mental health professionals have determined that approximately 5% of the population of America is hoarders.

I have to admit I felt more than a little depressed after watching several episodes of this TV show. I had to sit down and think about the hurt and pain that influences humanity and allows for complete emotional attachment to meaningless objects. I saw these people with a hole in their soul without Jesus living inside of them. I thought of why Jesus died for me. He died to fill the hole in my soul that aches because of loss, emotional pain, deep seated depression and misery. He came as the bread of life to feed me. He made the choice to come to earth, abase himself, become human, live like us and with us, so that he could feel the holes in our souls first hand. He came to be fully human, fully man so that he could understand who we are and what we feel.

I know in my heart that Jesus died and was resurrected as our Savior, our Messiah and our Lord, because we so absolutely need him to save us from our human emptiness that we cannot heal ourselves.

That is the glorious message of Lent to me; Sacrifice that ends in triumph over pain and suffering forevermore.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, please come and fill our emptiness each and every day with the food that only you can provide for our soul. Amen

Amy Wendland

APRIL 6TH

“I’M FULL!”

“Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross.” Philippians 2:5-8 (American Standard Version)

Many of you have probably seen this late Taco Bell® commercial where the man exclaims loudly “I’m Full!” after having eaten there for lunch. I decided to try it out myself and see if I could really keep my “wallet and my stomach full” by eating there for lunch. Well, one day I tried it, even though I’m not a huge fan of Taco Bell®, and discovered on about \$2.00 plus tax, I really could be full! Every time after that first try, eating at Taco Bell®, I began to say “I’m Full!” after eating there. I was able to save some money and move on with my life after that, because I was full!

At a time in my life when I was learning to think more theologically (yes, you can have theological musings from listening to commercials!), the commercial caused me to think about what it means for my soul and my life to “be full.” “I’m Full!” I began to exclaim, because of what Christ has done for me! “I’m Full!” because of Jesus Christ’s life, death and resurrection! It may even seem ironic, a sort of “twist,” that because Christ emptied himself, taking the form of a servant (*this self-emptying of Christ is known as kenosis: the relinquishment of divine attributes by Jesus Christ in becoming human*), I get to be full! Full of life, full of joy, able to enjoy the abundant life that God has for me, no matter what trials may come my way! And, but for the grace of God, I would still be full of other things which God *doesn’t* have for me; things such as hatred, prejudice, selfishness and insecurity.

Thanks be to God, He has a different plan for our lives. John 10:10, one of my favorite scriptures to quote says this: *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.* This is what God has desired for us from the very beginning, even before the Fall of Man: fullness of life, fullness of joy, and abundant living.

How has Christ made your life full? During this Lenten season, I hope you have been challenged to reflect on this fullness Christ is intended to bring to your life. Will you learn to wholly accept the fullness God in Christ Jesus wants to bring to you?

Let us pray:

“Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.” (Prayer of Saint Francis)

Rosie Gratten

APRIL 7TH

HOLY SATURDAY

Jesus died at 3 in the afternoon on Friday, the Day of Preparation for the Jewish Sabbath. Sabbath begins at sundown, so there were just 2 hours before all work had to cease.

Joseph of Arimathea hurried to Pilate's house in Antonia Fortress to secure the release of Jesus' body. By the time Joseph returned to Golgotha, the shadows of the crosses were lengthening. As the sun set, Jesus' body was laid in a nearby tomb that Joseph had prepared for his family, but now gave as a gift to his Savior. As the last rays of sun streaked overhead, Joseph rolled a stone door in front of the entrance. Sabbath had begun.

All over Jerusalem, wives lighted Sabbath candles and recited a centuries-old prayer. At the tomb, a leaf skittered across the stones as a night breeze rose. All was quiet.

For Jew and Christian alike, Sabbath is a day of rest. God rested on the Seventh Day. However, unlike human beings, God does not get tired. Could Sabbath have a deeper meaning?

Different Christian traditions have different names for the Saturday before Easter Sunday. The Eastern Orthodox Church calls the Saturday before Easter "The Great Sabbath." All are wrapped in a great mystery: What was Jesus doing between death and resurrection?

Although the Gospels are silent, tradition derived from other parts of the New Testament proposes an answer. In the Apostles' Creed we say that Jesus "descended into hell." One version of the creed says Jesus "descended to the dead." What He was doing there is where their visions veer. One tradition says that Jesus leads the righteous from the beginning of the world until that time into heaven. The unrighteous stay behind. Another tradition has it that Jesus goes to the unrighteous and offers them one last chance to repent and become righteous. Although traditions attempt to explain what happened during this period, we do not know.

In the graveyard, the tops of the tombs turn pink with the rising sun. Soldiers arrive and put a seal on the tomb. They stay and guard it. A chilly breeze from the valley sweeps up into the graveyard. Here in the valley, it will be well into the morning before the sun is high enough to warm the guards.

Overhead, the sun moves across the sky. Faint sounds of worship from the Temple waft among the tombs. Overhead, an eagle soars and cries out in the midday sun. A soldier wipes his brow, wondering why he is guarding the grave of a dead man. As the shadows of the tombs stretch across the graveyard, the sun sinks below the horizon, and the breeze quiets. All is still in preparation for the coming day.

Let us pray:

"Oh Lord, on this day of thunderous cosmic events, let us be silent and see Your glory. Amen"

Paul McKelvey

EASTER SUNDAY

Since its publication in 1918, the poem *The Wreck of the Deutschland* has attracted much critical attention. Written in 1875-1876 by the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, this long poem with Christian themes depicts the shipwreck of the SS *Deutschland*. Among those killed in the shipwreck were five Franciscan nuns who had been forced to leave Germany because of the May Laws, which resulted in the closing of many seminaries. The nuns drowned at the mouth of the Thames in the early morning hours of December 7th in 1875.

One line toward the end of the poem is particularly intriguing. It says “Let him easter in us.” What a powerful expression and use of this rare verb. How appropriate it is for this Holy Day. Indeed, may Christ easter in us this day!

What might it mean for you in your life for Christ to easter in you today? What in you and your life needs Christ’s resurrection power? What area of your life needs the light of Christ’s love to defeat the powers and principalities of darkness?

May Christ easter in us this day as our resurrection faith in him conquers all our fears. May Christ easter in us as our resurrection trust in him defeats our doubts and cynicism. May Christ easter in us as our resurrection hope in him prevails over the despair, sorrow and grief we experience along the path of life.

Let us pray:

“Thank you, O God, for defeating powers of darkness and death through the resurrection life in Jesus Christ. Please let that same power to conquer sin and death prevail in my life this day and forever more. In the name of the resurrected Christ I pray. Amen.”

Have a joyful Easter Day!

Pastor Val