

REFLECTIONS for LENT 2022

Katharine Fairchild



Sarah Kern

HOSANNA!

Ryan Schmidt

the POINT of all of this...

The season of Lent is traditionally a time when Christians take up any number of disciplines to grow closer to God. Devotional books like this one help us commit to regular reading of scripture, reflection, and prayer. The reflections are offered to get us started thinking about how the scriptures intersect with our own lives.

You might be wondering why we needed to write our own devotional booklet. These reflections mean something to us precisely *because* they are *yours*. Each of us has different experiences, perspectives, and talents, and God is present in all of them. By sharing these stories, we are inviting one another to know God as we do, and into deeper relationship with God and the church. We pray that these holy words will mean something to you also.



how to use this DEVOTIONAL...

Thank you to everyone who opened their hearts and their minds to share their faith. It is not easy for any of us, so try not to compare your devotion to those of others. All are valuable. We pray that sharing your story is as much a blessing as hearing the stories of others.

Set aside a time each day to read this devotional--when you get up or go to bed, before a meal, while waiting in the car, or with a loved one. Choose a time you can stick to each day. If you miss a few days, don't beat yourself up. Pick up with today's reflection. Mark the ones you miss and go back to them later.

Although these devotions are meaningful as printed in this booklet, we encourage you to read the full scripture passage listed on each page to hear the full context and weight of God's Word before reading the reflection.

Finish by saying the prayer. Feel free to add anything God has moved you to say, or additional prayers you've learned over the years.

get this on your PHONE or TABLET...

Are you more likely to read these devotions if you have them with you all the time on your phone? Download a PDF version at www.hosannatogether.org/devotion.

SHOWING OFF WHILE STORING A TREASURE

Wednesday, March 2 - by Don Baken

Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:19–21

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

- Matthew 6:19–21

What a proud day for us. This was the first brand new car we had ever owned. The word “owned” was used loosely here because this shiny toy was only half paid for. Naturally, it was parked in our driveway for viewing by our neighbors, rather than hidden in our garage. It seemed important to show off to our neighbors.

This was a day and evening for celebration. My wife Jan and I had reservations at a fine restaurant and tickets to the Ft. Worth Theater in the Round. What could possibly go wrong? On our way to dinner we were caught in a heavy rain storm. Water poured in the right front passenger floor area. So much for comfort in our new car. All told, there were over a dozen things that needed to be fixed on this machine before it was really new. Because of constant repairs the car did not last a long time. It finally gave up when I got tired of major repairs. In this world THINGS just don’t last very long.

God does last forever and His love for us is never ending. He proved that through the gift of his son Jesus. God was there when Janet died and he gave me the right amount of love and strength to get through that difficult time. Pastor Mike was there too when Jan died, and I’m so grateful for that. Thank you God for all the blessings and gifts you have given me throughout my entire life.

1. When have you had to give up on “earthly things” that just aren’t working out?
2. What do you find yourself treasuring the most?

Gracious God, thank you for the things in our lives that really matter and that stick with us our whole lives. Help our hearts trust you and your love for us. Amen.



Katharine Fairchild

“I WANT TO SEE THE BRIGHTNESS OF GOD...”

Thursday, March 3 - by Anna Fairchild and Katharine Fairchild

Scripture Reading: 1 John 1:3-10

“...God is light and in him there is no darkness at all...If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another...” - 1 John 5, 7

Anna has been practicing a Susan LaBarr choral piece for her school choir. She tells me that it is difficult to sing. But I want to keep listening to the practice recording. The words and music haunt me but in a good way. One could interpret this as a constant prayer.

The lyrics are an Advent-Christmas poem written by Jan Richardson who shares, “though we cannot see or feel or know all the ways that God is radiantly illuminating us, may we open ourselves toward that light. May we open our eyes, our hands, our hearts to meet it. May we lean into the light that begins in the deepest dark, bearing itself into this world *for us*.”

Towards the final measures of the piece, the lyrics add a line that is not included in the poem: “We are where the light begins,” and then returns to the first two stanzas of the song. We have fellowship with one another in the light and with God’s eternal presence.

Anna keeps humming as she walks around the house. Humming with light.

1. What does it mean to you to walk in the light?
Darkness? When have you experienced coming out of darkness into light?
2. Where do you see God’s light in your life?

*Jesus Christ, You are the Light of the World.
Shine within Your people here. Amen.*

**Acknowledgement to Kathleen Thomerson for lyrics from her hymn I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light*

Where the Light Begins

Perhaps it does not begin.
Perhaps it is always.

Perhaps it takes a lifetime
to open our eyes,
to learn to see what has forever
shimmered in front of us

the luminous line
of the map
in the dark

the vigil flame
in the house
of the heart

the love so searing
we cannot keep from singing,

from crying out
in testimony
and praise.

Perhaps this day
will be the mountain
over which
the dawn breaks.

Perhaps we
will turn our face
toward it,
toward what has been
always.

Perhaps
our eyes
will finally open
in ancient recognition,
willingly dazzled,
illuminated at last.

Perhaps this day
the light begins
in us.

-Jan Richardson

THE BUMPY ROAD TO TRUST

Friday, March 4 - by Donna Mason

Scripture Reading: Psalm 25:1-10

*All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees. Psalm 25:10*

When I did this exercise two years ago, I chose a verse based on the virtue of Faith so I like the symmetry of moving to the next virtue of Hope which can also be described as Trust.

Saying we Trust in God is not difficult during easy times, but keeping this in the front of my mind in times of stress and trouble is for me the hard part. This is the issue that the psalmist seems to be addressing.

He is entreating God to help us strengthen our Trust – to help us deal with our enemies. It doesn't specify physical enemies which is comforting because I think most of our enemies today in our regular lives are internal threats to our wellbeing from outside, uncontrollable sources – surrendering to worry, doubting God's grace, fearing we don't have the capacity to stand up to our fears.

He asks the Lord to teach us His paths and lead us on them because it is acknowledged that on our own, we will get lost – sometimes by accident and sometimes on purpose by the ill-advised choices we make.

God is asked to forgive the sins of our past because of His steadfast love for us – not because we deserve it but because we Trust in him to remember His love for us and out of His own goodness. "All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness for those who keep his covenant and decrees" ends the psalm. All of the paths and tools we need are there before us if we Trust in God to keep us on – or at least near - the paths we have been shown.

Ending with a line from a hymn that has stuck with me for many years: "Rest, the Lord is near; refuse the fear; enjoy his Love". Trust or have Hope that God will help us manage our fears, bring us to resources we didn't recognize were near at hand, and let us have peace in the love with which he surrounds us.

1. Can you identify ways God strengthens your Trust in Him? Perhaps focus on trying harder to follow those ways when temptations lead to other paths?
2. Remember a time of challenge when you did stay true to one of those Trusting paths.
3. Is it presumptuous of the psalmist to ask a God who never forgets to remember to show us his mercy or he the psalmist just acknowledging to God that we are so very dependent on the gift of that mercy since it is beyond us to earn it?

Lord, please help me remember that if I put my Trust in you, you will respond with the path I need to follow – maybe not to the destination I have in mind but to the one where you want me to go. Amen.

I AM SICK

Saturday, March 5 - by Jane Bradbury

Scripture Reading: Matthew 9:2-13

“But when he heard this, he said, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.’ - Matthew 9:12

I am sick! I am sick of Covid, crime, hate, racial inequality, child abuse, illness, family disputes, inflation, loneliness, homelessness, politics, war, drought, floods, and earthquakes. I have a lengthy list of things about which I am sick. Our world in its current state is a complete mess. Why doesn't God step in and take care of this mess? Before I get myself too wrapped up, I think about Jesus, the Great and Glorious Physician of this world and I am reminded that the Kingdom of God is right here, right now. Sometimes I forget that and think of the Kingdom of Heaven as the future. Why do I want to live in the future? I am here where I am supposed to be, and I live in a wonderful Kingdom with the most wonderful Physician. Yes, our world needs healing but so do I. Living in my sin, I contribute to the chaos in the world. Thank God I have Jesus who has washed away my ugly sinful nature and made me white as snow with each new day.

I need to constantly remind myself to refocus on Jesus. A dear friend, recovering from alcoholism, told me that whenever doubts and temptations surface by saying “Hey, God” he gets back on track because he is reminded that God is always available and present.

Our God is gracious and glorious and one day he will send Jesus to remove all the ugliness in this world and take us to a spectacular place in eternity to be with Him. In the meantime, through His grace may I be a small healer of what is sick in our world and focus on the beauty of His Kingdom.

1. What is my role in healing my surroundings?
2. With whom can I share the Gospel to ease their hurting?
3. How do I stay focused on Jesus day to day?

Heavenly Father, thank you for your merciful healing of all that is sick in the world and for giving us your Kingdom here and in eternity. Amen.

REMEMBER

Sunday, March 6 - by Katharine Fairchild

Scripture Reading: Genesis 9:8-17

God said..."When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature..." - Genesis 9:14

I admit that I often find the Bible, especially the Old Testament, confusing, if not bewildering. This then causes doubt. The Noah's Ark story is one of those cases. I pray that when I am in the glory of God, I will either: a.) gain the answers to my questions; or b.) learn that my confusion, misinterpretation and doubt about this story is forgiven and has no bearing on whether or not I receive the grace and love of Jesus Christ.

There are at least 39 notations for the word *covenant* in my Bible's concordance. A covenant is "a binding agreement made by two or more persons or parties." My Bible also says that this is the first major covenant between God and His people - the righteous Noah, his descendants and every living thing on earth – and describes "an unconditional divine promise never to destroy all earthly life with some natural catastrophe, the covenant 'sign' being the rainbow in the storm cloud."

To be sure, the list of covenants I deny, forget or need to be reminded about goes on and on. But why does God need to "remember" the covenant He made? He is Almighty, the Alpha and Omega and creator of all things. I have difficulty understanding how or why God needs to remember.

Perhaps Moses didn't exactly take good notes when God relayed this story to him, and maybe it's us humans who need to remember. Maybe when we see that rainbow after a storm, in the mist of a waterfall, from a garden hose when watering plants, or a cut glass prism in our house, we should remember all of God's goodness and forgiveness. We should remember to be thankful of this covenant and the 38 others in the Bible. We should remember that God gave His only Son to die on a cross for our constant sins.

God's covenant of grace and forgiveness has no end. His binding agreement is for you and for me, even when we doubt. Remember this.

1. What covenants have you made with others? What makes them hard to fulfill?
2. Do you think God has a tough time remembering?
3. What does the rainbow signify to you? Is it just beautiful?
Is it God's weapon (bow and arrow) hung in the sky?

*Father God, grant me confidence in Your mercy and hope in Your promises.
Help me to remember all that You do for me. Amen.*

WHAT? ME?

Monday, March 7 - by Stacy Dowd

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2:1-10

"...All of us once of us lived among them in the passions..." Eph 2:3

"...the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For grace you have been saved through faith and this is not of your own doing..." Eph 2:7-9

Why did I receive this gift, get so lucky, to have faith such as this? Why did God choose a "wretch" like me? I seem to be too sick to be able to perform the good works I used to treasure in the good old days. Those that the scripture seems to say here we were made to perform are perhaps the vital and indispensable consequence and evidence of life with God. God chose us to be new bearers of His image that conforms to His character,

But then we Lutherans are more about grace and just liking to do these good works, I think I remember Luther not caring a great deal for the Book of James and faith without works being dead. There is certainly no lack of compassionate action within our Lutheran church today. But our calling from God, our grace from God, His life in us is so very active on His own.

The way He works in our hearts every day, softening us towards others, keeping us from being bitter, sad, lonely, discouraged, envious, those dark thoughts are pushed out with intercession. It is because he dwells in our heart and is holding our collective hand. Comfort also comes from scripture, "See I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continuously before me" Isaiah 49:16

The devotional scripture from Ephesians 2 reminds me why I never had to count the accomplishments for Christs with the three husbands that eventually passed away. Christ loved them first, and it was His accomplishment. This is grace.

My husband Mike accompanied me and my two small children to Lutheran church every Sunday even though he did not believe. I criticized my second husband for crying in church because I thought we were having problems (and because I thought he was still an agnostic), brought up in the church of England. But it was God who came to him that day about a year before he died of a heart attack. That is grace.

1. How can I find grace in little things?
2. What does it mean to be in rebellion against God, and do we still do it a little?

Lord, Help me to find little ways to fulfill your will and works. Amen.

PROTECT ME AGAINST EVIL

Tuesday, March 8 - by Janeen Bollhoefer

Scripture Reading 1 Peter 3:8-18a

“Do no repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called-that you might inherit a blessing” - 1 Peter 3:9

When I first read this scripture, my first thought was my father.

My father was a bully from his youngest days to adulthood. He grew up during the depression, and being the oldest of his siblings, had to grow up quite quickly to help support the family. He entered the Army and was shipped off to the Korean War. He was injured with shrapnel in his back during the taking of ‘Hamburger Hill’. Surgeons could not remove a piece of shrapnel that was too close to his spinal cord. The military deemed him 100% disabled, but he was a very good lumber grader and not so good farmer. He gave up in trying to make his/our lives better.

Now, I can’t even imagine what our soldiers experienced in Korea, but I do know that it added to his bad behavior and into what I grew up with. I believe he suffered what is now Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as with each year he got worse with his rages, alcoholism, and the mood swings. We just all learned to tip-toe around him and walk on eggshells. A lot of mental abuse shared amongst all of us kids and Mom. Anyone that tried to stand up to him or prove him wrong resulted in yelling matches and sometimes physical altercations. Looking back, he mentally abused his immediate family, sexually abused my sister, which results in her untimely death by suicide and physically abused my Mom.

You don’t ever want to think that one of your parents are evil, but I truly believe he was evil. Your family is supposed to be the ones that help you out whenever it’s needed. But even his brothers and sisters wouldn’t come to visit, because he would always want to pick fights. Growing up and seeing him abuse animals and how he treated his own family, I knew that deep in my heart that I couldn’t and wouldn’t grow up to be like this man. Our family did not grow up in the Church world, but I just knew or maybe this was God’s intervention and not allowing me to follow in my father’s footsteps, that he was turning me away from the evil around me and pointing me to be a better person.

I often ask myself how in the world did I come out of my family being the ‘good’ one, and now I know that this was God’s saving grace in protecting me from a life he knew I didn’t belong.

1. When you’ve been filled with bitterness, frustration, or anger, what did God (or God through others) offer that helped you set those things aside? (at least for a moment)?
2. How does turning from evil and seeking peace help us ‘see good days’?

Dear Heavenly father, protect us from the evil in this world, what we can physically see and what we cannot see. Help us to see the spirit of goodness and bestow blessings upon us so we can see the good days. Amen.

“Don’t count the days, make the days count.” – Muhammad Ali

LOOK TOWARD THE HEAVEN AND COUNT THE STARS

Wednesday, March 9 - by Robbin Musgrave

Genesis 15: 1-6, 12-18

He brought them outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars if you are able to count them". Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be". Gen 15:5

In this reading, the Lord comes to Abram and tells him not to be afraid He is Abram's shield and his reward will be great. By the end of our reading a covenant was formed (our promise as well). Abram will not only have descendants as numerous as the stars, but also the land from the Nile to the Euphrates. All that was needed was Abram's faith in the Lord!
Easy, right?

Tony and I met in 1966 and had our first child in 1977. Of course, not all of that time was spent wanting a baby, but quite a few years were! There were many months of disappointment and doctor visits. We could totally relate to Abram and Sara. But, at that time, I'm sure we weren't as concerned about who would inherit our "wealth". All we wanted was a baby and I know for sure that I didn't have the faith that Abram showed. But, FINALLY, we had our family. While Abram's focus was on his descendants, we also have the chance to look back at our heritage. Ancestry websites give us the ability to show us where we came from. We have the chance to connect with our past and, like Abram, also look to the light of the future.

The second part of our reading tells us that Abram fell asleep and a terrifying darkness descended upon him. The Lord comforts him by telling him that he will go to his ancestors in peace ... even though his descendants lives will be hard. We don't have the control in our lives that we think we do!

During our life together, Tony and I talked a lot about the future ... what plans that we had and what to do. There were the "normal" days and there were also the bad times. As our boys left and had families of their own, we started to think more about the "stars" in our lives (Brady and Chris). What has given us satisfaction in life is knowing that our boys are happy, healthy and are great parents to their children. This brought us to estate planning. I know it's not a FUN topic, but it includes MORE than "who gets what". It also gives us a chance to think about final planning. Several times after "getting our affairs in order" Tony made it a point to tell me that he felt like he had lived a full life and wasn't afraid of death and everything would be OK. Now, there are a lot of times that I don't feel that it's OK, but I do know that he, too, has gone to his ancestors in peace and is one of the stars that we can look up to.

1. Who are the stars in your life?
2. Have you looked to the future with doubt or the faith that God is our strength?
3. Do you trust in God when the going gets tough?

*Dear God, you have cared for us throughout the generations.
Continue to watch over us as we shine our light to all and for all. Amen.*

WRITTEN IN THE DUST

Thursday, March 10 - by Alison Kern

Scripture Reading: John 7:53-8:11

“Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.” - John 8:6

We are living in a time when our words can be quickly and easily shared for all to see. We can type, text, video, instant message, or use good old-fashioned pen and paper to preserve our ideas, from the most profound thoughts to the random sayings of our toddlers.

But the image of Jesus writing in the dust reminded me of how quickly our words can fade away if we don't have thoughtful action to back them up. The mob mentality of the Pharisees gave them a false sense of security, but ultimately, none of them were left standing when Jesus challenged them to look within themselves. No one knows exactly what Jesus wrote in the dust, but his message was loud and clear: if you put the Son of God to the test, you'd better be ready for your own trial.

I recently read that the areas we are quickest to criticize in others are the places where we feel most vulnerable in ourselves. What burdens of sin and shame did the Pharisees carry that weighed even more heavily than the stones in their hands? What burdens do we carry that are holding us back from a closer relationship with God and our loved ones?

Jesus makes it simple, for the woman and for us: “Has no one condemned you?... Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.” His words hold the power of forgiveness and grace, but they also come with a command. It's not enough to say we're going to change—we have to back up our words with actions.

The Pharisees thought they were doing the right thing by trying to uphold the law, but they failed to see how they had fallen short of their own standards. We are blessed to be loved by a God who wipes away our sins like words written in the dust and walks alongside us as we daily try—and fail—to sin no more.

1. What “stones” are you quick to throw at others? How might this help you find areas you need to improve in yourself?
2. How do you think the woman's life was changed by her encounter with Jesus?
3. Sing or read the text of “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” taking time to release any burdens you are carrying today.

Gracious God, you know our sins, but you also give us the courage to keep striving to overcome our temptations. Walk with us today and show us how we can put our faith in action. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Friday, March 11 - by Sarah Oprinovich

Scripture Reading: Genesis 21:1-7

“Now Sarah said, ‘God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.’” – Genesis 21: 6

Sarah laughed at God. God gave her a baby at 90+ years old. That’s enough of a story to prevent me from ever laughing at God – EVER. But in all those years of thinking about having a baby, surely she would not have picked the name, Isaac, because that was specific to her laughing. What happened to all the other baby names she surely had thought about over the years? Names are funny – they mean a lot to the parents, but I’m not sure the meaning holds the same weight for the child. I like my name just fine, but I’m not the one who agonized over finding a name that could not be nicknamed and would have a nice ring with Kennedy, which is even sillier now that I think about how likely it would be that I would someday change that name. When we named our first, we ran across “Nona” by chance. Nona also happens to be a family friend who has had this incredible life full of the most unlikely occurrences, so the name brings me to a place of possibilities in the face of society’s barriers. If you look up the meaning of Nona, it’s “the Ninth, as in the ninth child,” or I also saw something about a fertility goddess. And that’s where God laughed at me – “I don’t care what your plan is, you’re having a bunch of babies... sooner than later.” My Nona doesn’t know her namesake, but someday she’ll understand why her name is special to me, and sometime after that I’ll warn her that she should be more careful about the meaning of the name she gives her firstborn. Just as Sarah said, “Everyone who hears will laugh with me,” the meanings of names are shared with others. The name, Isaac, reminds some of God’s promises fulfilled even if not on the human timeline. People give their son’s the name Isaac after struggling with infertility and starting to give up hope. It’s not really the same laughter anymore, but people really do laugh with Sarah in the joy of hope fulfilled.

1. When have you laughed from sheer joy?
And is there a word or a sound that takes you right back to that place?
2. Did your parents tell you the whole story of why you were named as you are?
What insight does knowing the meaning of your name give about your parents and how they felt about bring you into the world?

Heavenly Father, you were there when my parents named me, you knew the hope in their hearts, and you know ME now. You are always there to help me embody that hope that brought me into this world. Amen.

WHO AM I?

Saturday, March 12 - by Mike Kern

Scripture Reading: Mark 8:27-30

“On the way, Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” - Mark 8:27

I have no earthly idea how I would answer if I were one of the disciples to whom Jesus asked this question. How could I look into his eyes and say something profound and faithful enough? I worry it was a test before Jesus cuts the 12 disciples down to 6? Kudos to the disciples for even trying to answer it. I'd be the silent one.

Over the years, I've found myself wishing that I could ask the same question of Jesus. “Jesus, who do you say that I am?” I wish I didn't worry about what other people think of me, but I do. I know that my best qualities don't always shine through, and sometimes I'm misunderstood. Behind that is the fact that I question who I am really.

That's why I'd like to hear what Jesus has to say. What does the Almighty God of the universe who knit me together in my mother's womb think of me? What does the God who knows me better than I know myself say about me? God knows not only my sins and failures, but also the pain, stress, misinformation, and baggage that leads to them.

I've been around church long enough and read enough of the Bible that I think I know the answer. Jesus would not speak badly of me. But I also doubt Jesus would name all my wonderful talents or list all my successes to debate my insecurity. Instead, I suspect that Jesus would simply tell me that I'm enough, that I do have value. Jesus would honestly and truthfully look me in the eyes and tell me that I'm lovely, because God loves me. We all need to hear those true words.

Even though I've never heard those words straight from the mouth of Jesus, when I'm honest with myself, I do hear God speaking them--through the Bible, through the people who do actually know me, and through the movement of the Holy Spirit. I might still question who I am, and still yearn to hear those words from Jesus, but when I'm honest with myself, I know how Jesus would answer me, and how he's answer you.

1. What's behind our desire to be affirmed by others?
2. If you got to ask Jesus, “Who do you say that I am?” how do you think he'd respond?
3. Is there anything about you so insufficient that it could possibly be greater than God's love?

Gracious God, I question myself and my actions a lot. I worry about what others think of me. Help me remember the goodness you've created in me and hear your words of affirmation. Let it be enough for me. Amen.

GOD PLAYS THE LONG GAME

Sunday, March 13 - by Mike Kern

Scripture Reading: Mark 8:31-38

“Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” - Mark 8:33

I feel bad for Peter. Nobody likes to be called “Satan,” but for *Jesus* to be the one calling you “Satan,” that’s rough. We have the privilege of hindsight, and we all know that Jesus loved Peter. We know that he became the solid first leader of the church.

I don’t think Jesus intended to put down Peter, but to name what was happening. He says it in his very next sentence: “You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” That’s easy for Jesus to say. He’s human, but also divine. He understands a lot more than we do. He can “live on the very word of God.” But we can’t. We need food and water. We have very real, human, earthly concerns, like wanting our loved ones not to die.

In fact, this is all in response to Jesus mentioning that he was going to die, and soon. Peter might have wanted Jesus to stick around more for his own benefit than for Jesus’ benefit, but still, it’s a pretty reasonable want. Jesus provided Peter with life-changing, fulfilling work that he could accomplish. He gave Peter inspiration and hope. But Jesus wants to give Peter and all of us more.

That’s one of the annoying things about God. Jesus is playing the long game. And like Peter, I’m impatient. It’s hard to think about eternal salvation and the good of humanity when you are hungry or hurting today.

Not only is it annoying, sometimes it makes us feel like we’re being rejected in the moment--as if God doesn’t care. It’s annoying, but deep down, we recognize it’s best. When we think about it, we play the long game, too--we save for retirement, we invest in relationships, we don’t give our kids everything they want in the moment, and quite frankly, we get out of bed. So, while I get annoyed and impatient with God, I am in fact thankful that God is playing the long game. Though sometimes I end up with a bruised ego, I’m thankful that God is looking out for my future and the future of my loved ones.

1. When do you get most impatient with God?
2. How well do you think God understands the “human things”?
3. What’s God’s long game?

Dear God, help me be more patient and understanding. When I fail at that, help me at least recognize that you are good and that you are working for my benefit. And thank you for doing what I need, not just what I think I want. Amen.

FEAR NOT

Monday, March 14– Jeanine Yeager

Scripture Reading: Matthew 4:1-11

*“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”
- Matthew 4:1*

When we/I am in the dark, my fear is greater. I question the dangers that I can't see, my mind creates monsters. And then I go back to what God says, “do not fear for I am with you.”

We are all tempted by the devil. He preys on our weak minds. All he needs is a crack in our thinking so that he can place fear that can take over. If we truly know Jesus, and what he has given for us, we will have faith in the most darkest, frightening places. God is our father. He only wants the best for his children.

We have choices. We get to choose to follow Jesus to God. Life is full of temptations. Pray... Pray... Pray...

It strengthens your own foundation. It's easy to give in to a little white lie, or not taking money back to Wal-Mart if you forget to pay for your dog food. These are all the cracks in your foundation the devil needs to take God from you.

My biggest temptation is probably becoming fearful in storms. Storms come from turbulent weather which we have no control of. Huge fear of flying. If we were meant to fly we'd have been given wings. These are the times I pray may hardest.

1. When are you most afraid? What don't you have control of that you wish you did?
2. What are you tempted to do when you are afraid or lacking control?
3. How does prayer provide comfort or strength when you're afraid?

*Dear God, help me
when I'm afraid.
Lead me away from
the temptation that
comes with my
biggest fears.
Amen.*



Jeanine Yeager

FAITH IS THE ASSURANCE

Tuesday, March 15 - by Karen Weber

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 11: 1-3, 13-19

*"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,
the conviction of things not seen." - Hebrews 1:1*

I have always been interested in my family background. All of my Grandparents on both sides of the families were from Germany. I have spent many years tracing all of the generations back to 1400 century. I talked to my Dad one day and told him I had found our relatives related to my Grandparents. We talked for hours about our family. I told Dad about my trip to Australia when I was 20 years old and how I flew 24 hours to get over to that country in which I had never been to before. I was just going to visit a pen pal whom I had written to during my school years. I told Dad about my feelings when I arrived at the airport and my pen pal wasn't there right away to greet me and how nervous I was. At least down there they talked the same language. When my ancestors arrived in the USA, they couldn't speak English. I told Dad they had faith in God that He would lead them over to a country they had never been to and to have a better life for their immediate family and generations to come. It says faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. They had faith in God that this new country would be better for them even though they had never seen the United States.

I have been back home in Iowa many, many times since 1962 when I left to take on a new journey in my life. It is never the same to go home but now I'm preparing and talking to people about our heavenly home with God and how wonderful that will be. I have faith and trust in God that He will always be with me through my life journeys.

1. Do you have faith so that you are pleasing God everyday?
2. What are the signs of true faith in your life today?

*Gracious Father, thank you for holding me in your arms while I travel
through so many journeys in my lifetime. Keep me safe and let me
show other people ways to praise and love you. Amen!*

GIFTS OF GOD

Wednesday, March 16 - by Marie Summers

Scripture Reading: Romans 3:21-31

"They are now justified by his grace a gift." - Romans 3:24

This past year has been filled with great challenges for many of us. Challenged by a broken leg, anemia, and cancer, it was the first time I had ever really been faced with my own death. I found myself returning to the bedtime prayer that I learned as a child (with one little change):

Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord this child to keep.

Now the change... If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.

Amen

I accepted God's gifts of grace and protection no matter what happened during the night (and the next day) and asked Him to decide if I should live or die. By accepting that this is truly God's decision, I could sleep peacefully. When I woke each morning, I was assured that I would have strength to deal with whatever was presented by the strong drugs, pain or the physical therapists. With the continued support and encouragement of my husband and many prayers, my strength and health returned. I began using the prayer my mama taught me long ago:

Now I lay me down to sleep.

I pray the Lord this child to keep.

Keep me safely through the night,

And wake me with the morning light.

Amen

I am now confident that God's grace has redeemed me so I fear neither life nor death, and sleep well.

1. What gifts has God given you?
2. What have you accepted as God's decisions?

Heavenly Father, I thank you for each day and night, and for sending gifts of strength, protection, faith and for your redeeming grace. Amen.



Ella Eickman

SOMETHING AMAZING

Thursday, March 17- by Alison Kern

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 2:4-10

“Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” - 1 Peter 2:4-5

When I was young, I was fascinated by a particular decoration my father kept on his bookshelf. It was a geode—rough, plain, even ugly on the outside, but when that rock was split open, it caught the light and was truly amazing.

Now, I know next to nothing about geology (we’ll have to ask the Chapman family for more details there!) but I did a bit of research to find out more. Geodes form when something different—water vapor, pieces of wood or coral, or even mud—gets trapped inside the rock while it’s forming and creates a hollow space within the harder outer shell. Over time, as groundwater seeps through the rock, it leaves behind mineral deposits that grow into the wondrous variety of crystal formations we see in geodes. Pretty simple formula, isn’t it? Air. Water. Wonder.

Could it be possible that Peter, whose name literally means “the rock” in Greek, was thinking of geodes when he penned this letter to believers in exile? Yeah...probably not. But I love how Peter calls us “living stones” that have been “rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight.” The folks Peter was talking to were going through a lot, suffering humiliation and rejection from their communities for following Christ. Peter encourages them to stand strong and lean on one another for support during difficult times.

When you look in the mirror, you may see something pretty ordinary. Rough, plain, even ugly on the outside. But from the moment of your creation, God has been working within you and with you to create something amazing. God breathed life into you, washed you in the waters of baptism, and is with you every day as you seek to develop the precious gifts God placed in you. Pretty simple formula, isn’t it? Air. Water. Wonder.

And on the days you don’t feel so wonderful, remember that you are one stone of many in the “spiritual house” that is the family of believers. In those times, remember that you can lean on us--your neighbors at Hosanna!--to help you find strength.

1. When have you been surprised by something that was not what it seemed, like a geode? How has this changed your perspective?
2. Think of someone who has been there for you during a difficult time. How could you let them know what that meant to you, or pass along the gift of support to someone else?

Lord, in the times I feel rough, remind me of the gifts of strength you have given me, both in myself and in those around me. Amen.

TREASURED POSSESSION

Friday, March 18 - by Stacy Dowd

Scripture Reading: Exodus 19: 1-9a

"...You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you out to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession... but you shall be a priestly kingdom and a holy nation." - Exodus 19: 4-6a

Have you ever been saved from an awkward or even harrowing position? I have two rescue animals, a dog and cat. Each live in his or her separate sides of the house. The dog gets the living room, so I go out of my way to visit my cat in the dining room or bedroom for her special attention. Today's scripture reminds me a little of my cat situation. It speaks of a holy nation, set apart. Israel is to be a priestly royalty, a status that Adam and Eve forfeited. The Israelites will also become a holy nation because God, the Holy One, will come to dwell with them.

I have always been intrigued by the thought of being God's treasured possession. This is especially where I think of how much I cherish my kitty cat kisses. All is right in the world as I pick up her front paws from the back and she uprights her head so that I can plant my face in the soft white fur between her two ears on the top of her head. She purrs and gives me her little smile the whole time. She looks at me with those adoring, gleeful, blue eyes that melt my heart. Could I possibly make God feel this way sometimes? Could I possibly please Him?

The basic structure of the relationship God has established with people is the covenant. It is usually thought of as a contract or an agreement without negotiation. The first element of these Old Testament covenants is the preamble which lists the respective parties. The second element is the historical prologue which lists what the Lord has done to deserve loyalty, such as bringing the Israelites out of slavery. This is the section of grace. In the next section, the Lord lists what he requires, such as the ten commandments of Exodus 20. The final part of the covenant lists blessings and cursing's. Covenants were ratified in animal blood by the people.

The new covenant, the covenant of grace was ratified by the blood of Christ. Here we receive God's promise of redemption and more! I would have to say that my cat operates under this "New Testament type" of covenant with me rather than the Old. She makes some mistakes with her fingernails on my hands sometimes due to her upbringing, but she is good as gold with most things most times. Any kind of covenant the two of us share has unfortunately been ratified in a little bit of my blood, and I'm not quite sure if she understands the terms.

My cat follows house rules. She uses her cat box faithfully. She doesn't make a mess when she eats. The dog doesn't get bothered in the living room. She has mellowed with her age. I think that knowing she is a treasure helps her behave. She is naturally furry and fun. Her name is Theodora which means she loves God. I didn't name her.

1. How do you imagine God's love for you as His treasured possession?
2. What happened to the cursings from the Old Testament covenants?
3. Think of a time that God helped or saved you from a situation. Were you more likely to sustain your end of the covenant?

*Heavenly Father, Help me to feel your love as it is your will.
Set me apart for you. In Jesus name. Amen.*

10 PROMISES

Saturday, March 19 - by Mike Kern

Scripture Reading: Exodus 20:1-17

“Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” - Exodus 20:12

Growing up, I really only thought of the 10 Commandments as a list of God-given rules. They were always depicted as a neatly organized list on two stone tablets, five on each one, with Roman numerals next to each one (which I'm *sure* meant they were extra important). I learned they were all about how to be a good person.

My impression of the Commandments has changed over the years. We see them not on beautiful tablets, but in a jumble of lots of words that represent the jumble of life the Hebrews were experiencing in their new freedom. There's story before them and after them. The people were used to being told what to do as slaves, and struggling to function as a community on their own.

More importantly, I realized that many of them are actually longer than the list I learned. For example, the fourth Commandment says I should honor my parents (in my opinion, one of the hardest Commandments to follow), but it also says, "...so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you." It's not a rule. It's a promise! When I respect and listen to my elders and those in authority, I might learn a thing or two. I might even be spared of making mistakes!

I've come to see all these "Commandments" as promises. Spending time with God will be good for my soul. Taking time to rest and enjoy creation will keep me from working myself to death. I will in fact get along better with my neighbors when I'm not stealing from them and worried they might kill me. I'm also likely to enjoy what I have much more if I'm not always coveting the things I don't have.

Looking back at scripture where God gives these 10 "Commandments" to Moses, I'm surprised to see that *God* never uses the word "commandment." God didn't give these promises to control us, but to direct us to a more life-giving way.

1. What did you learn about the commandments growing up?
2. What promises do you hear in each of the 10 "Commandments"?

Everlasting God, show me your ways. Support me when I stumble and wander, so that my days may be long and joyful in the life you have given me. Amen.

FLIPPING TABLES

Sunday, March 20 - by Jealaine Marple

Scripture reading: John 2:13-22

"He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables."

John 2:15b

Working at a hospital in the midst of a pandemic has been interesting. I don't see a lot of the "medical" ins and outs as a chaplain, but I hear a lot of interesting chatter between the medical personnel. Much of their frustration stems from the overwhelming amounts of misinformation that they must battle every single day. Many who have had a loved one critically ill with COVID have asked about "solutions" that just don't work. Either their loved one is outside the window when medical intervention would prove useless or the proposed solution is simply a placebo. I've read more than once that we should not sit at tables Jesus would flip. A phrase like that has the power to stick with someone. I have sat at the table of misinformation more than once during the last 2 years. Does anyone else remember disinfecting their groceries at the beginning of all of this? What about wearing gloves to pump gas or grocery shop? For every high and low of the last 2 years, I think I could fill banquet tables full with misinformation or even theories that don't have enough research yet.

What might cause someone to sit at a table of misinformation? I don't think we do this out of spite or to be smug. I think misinformation for some are actually facts for others. In the midst of chaos (and let's be honest, we've been in chaos for quite some time) humans feel the need to grasp onto anything that lets us feel like we have control. If we're really honest, sitting at those tables can feel comfortable when we're desperate or just afraid. People have held onto so much of the misinformation during these last 2 years simply out of love for themselves or their family members who may be ill. But, there is a simpler word for misinformation: lies. We all have lies we tell ourselves whether we admit to it or not. These lies may (or may not) have anything to do with the pandemic.

Some of my favorite lies are "I'll do that later" or "I won't forget." Jesus flips these tables for me often and humbles me but also reminds me that God's ways are better than mine. The actions of Christ ultimately got him killed. I wonder what I must "die to" in order for Jesus and Jesus' ways to rule in my life. One of the ways I "die" to the sin of misinformation is simply asking myself the question "but what if I am wrong?" Here's the thing: I hate this question. I don't often like to admit that I am wrong. But what price am I going to pay (besides flipped tables) if I insist that I am right and my way is the only way? There were those in the crowd who didn't believe that Jesus would rise again after three days. What might have happened had they just wondered "but what if I'm wrong?"

1. How does it feel when you sit with the question "but what if I'm wrong?"
2. What tables of misinformation or lies have you found yourself to be too comfortable?
3. When you have given control to God, what has happened?

*Surprising God, give me the courage to step away from tables you long to flip.
Grant me the grace I need when I struggle with being wrong or wanting to
be in control. Help me to be zealous for you. Amen.*

NO WORDS

Monday March 21 - by Marjorie Yates

Scripture Reading: Psalm 19

*“There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;
Yet their voice goes out through all the earth.” - Psalm 19:3-4*

Each morning when I wake up I am greeted by the morning sky through my bedroom window. During the winter months when the trees have shed their leaves, I am able to see the dawn breaking on the horizon. Some mornings it is a marvelous palette of blue, orange, pink and red. At certain times I am also able to see Venus whose large twinkling mass looks almost like a UFO. Sometimes Venus is flanked by a crescent or waning moon. The opening words of Psalm 19 always come to mind: “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork”.

The heavens are but one of God’s many marvelous creations. The Psalm continues “there is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth”. We humans are a catalyst for sharing the glory of God through all the earth. We capture its beauty in photographs, paintings, music and poetry. People often see pictures in the clouds such as angels or a silhouette of Jesus and see them as omens. A recent photograph posted by another Liberty church showed a cross hovering over the church courtyard and suggested this “X” marked the spot for folks to come and worship. Hymns extol “the beauty of the earth, the glory of the skies” and we raise our voices to sing “how great thou art”.

Multiple studies have shown that time spent outdoors in nature can improve our physical, mental and emotional health. Also urban areas with green spaces have lower crime rates than the concrete jungle areas. So we as humans can share God’s creation of plants to improve the lives of other people and animal life. I could go off on a tangent about the benefits of using native plants in the environment, but that should probably wait for another time.

And old axiom tells us that our actions speak louder than our words. The beauty of the heavens and Earth have no words, yet they have such a positive influence through all the world. Our actions as human beings can assist in spreading this comfort and joy. No words are required.

1. What can we do to spread the glory of God’s creation?
2. How can we encourage our children to help in this endeavor?
3. How can we tie these actions into our mission?

Dear God, Creator of the heavens and earth. Help us to appreciate the beauty of nature that surrounds us each day. Thank you for these wonderful gifts. Helps us make use of these resources to benefit all living creatures. Amen.

FOOLISHNESS

Tuesday, March 22 - by Mike Kern

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

“For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” - 1 Corinthians 1:18

When I really sit down and think about Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection, the whole thing sounds pretty ridiculous. Why would the Almighty God of the universe choose to experience our lives? Why die a gruesome and painful death? Why not just show up and show off God’s almighty powers and prove to everyone they should just believe? Why did God (who could do anything God wanted) choose in the first place to create people that take a lot of work and just end up disappointing and hurting God?

Because love. It’s the same reason the heroes of every book and movie go off and do something foolish that risks their life for humanity. It’s the same reason we choose to make friends and why lots of people get married and have children. It’s the reason we foolishly giggle and laugh out loud, try new foods, and go on adventures to new places.

Love does involve sacrifice. It involves going outside our comfort zones. It involves putting others’ needs and wants above our own. Love involves disappointment and heartache. But it also involves fun.

Jesus’ life and death are indeed foolish. But it’s because they are loving acts. God doesn’t just want us to believe so that we go to heaven and God gets unending praise. God is genuinely excited about being in relationship with us. God looks forward to the surprises, to laughing out loud and experiencing new things. Even if sometimes it involves heartache.

God might be foolish to create and love us, but God isn’t dumb. God knows the joy and life that comes from relationships with others. And so God does everything God needs to invite us into the joy and life, even if it means making some foolish sacrifices. God’s power is not in God’s phenomenal cosmic abilities or wisdom, but in God’s willingness and capacity to love. And God’s invitation into foolishness is what gives us the capacity to love, laugh, and experience new things, too. Even if it is a bit ridiculous.

1. What is the most ridiculous thing you can think about that happens in the Bible?
2. How might that action be the result not of reason, but of unbridled self-giving love?

Almighty God, reason can’t explain your actions. Help me see the love behind them. Empower me to join you in foolishly loving, no matter the cost. Amen.

BAD NEWS AND GOOD NEWS

Wednesday, March 23 - by John Kreidler

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 58:1-12

*“God speaks through Isaiah: Tell my people what’s wrong with their lives, . . . !
They’re busy, busy, busy at worship, and love studying all about me. . .
They ask me, ‘What’s the right thing to do?’ and love having me on their side.
But they also complain, ‘Why don’t you look our way? Why don’t you even notice.’”
- Isaiah 58:1-3*

A young pastor preached a sermon being careful to emphasize God’s love, compassion and forgiveness - the Good News of Jesus. As people were leaving, some complained because his sermon was too oriented to the law. The pastor was confused and distressed that he had so missed the mark. He spoke with his supervising pastor who said. “When you proclaim the law, people in the congregation may hear it and think of “those people” who aren’t in church and who obviously have faults and are doing thing wrongly. But when they hear the good news of God’s love, through Jesus, they cannot understand it without being aware of their own separation from God, their own faults, their own failure to live fully and actively in response to being loved. In short, for them, the harsh news of the law is good news because it does not apply to them, and the good news becomes bad news because receiving God’s love means being aware of their need for God’s love.

God continues to speak: *Break the chains of injustice, get rid of exploitation in the workplace, free the oppressed, cancel debts. What I’m interested in seeing you do is: sharing your food with the hungry, inviting the homeless poor into your homes, putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad, being available to your own families. . . Then when you pray, GOD will answer. You’ll call out for help, and I’ll say, ‘Here I am.’ . . .¹*

¹ Peterson, E. H. (2005). *The Message: the Bible in contemporary language* (Is 58:1–12). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

1. Why is it so tempting think the law is for “those people,” but not for us?
2. What is the Good News of Jesus for you? Why can it feel like bad news?

*Lord God, during this season of Lent, as I draw closer to the cross of your Son who suffered so I could have healing, who died so I could live, who endured rejection so I could be drawn into love, grant that I may be aware of my sinfulness and your desire to forgive me. Help me to understand that prayer is also action and worship is more than Sunday. Guide me so that I will desire to respond to your love by loving.
In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

UNCONDITIONAL ADOPTION

March 24 - by Rachel Cerra

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:3-6

“He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.” - Ephesians 1:5-6

I was adopted from Seoul, South Korea when I was three months old. If you know of anyone who has been adopted or has adopted themselves, you will find that no two experiences are the same. Despite our different parentage, I was raised and loved no differently than my brother and sister. My grandparents proudly shared my accomplishments and life events with their friends and showed off pictures of my kids as excited great-grandparents. It hasn't ever mattered to my family that I share no biological genes with them. I understand that my story isn't every adopted person's story; I have always known how blessed I am. It wasn't until I was older and had children of my own that I truly understood the kind of love my biological mother had for me. Holding my first born shortly after his birth, I was overcome with emotion and love for him. I imagined my own mother after she had given birth to me. I couldn't imagine loving and caring for a child for nine months and then knowing it was best for me, allowed another family to raise and love me. She loved me more than herself and knew she couldn't care for me in her current situation.

In my situation, there was a lot of love on both my biological mother's end and my adopted family's end. Just as my family has loved and accepted me unconditionally, God loves us and accepts us into God's family. God celebrates with us when something good happens in our lives and wraps us up in love when things are tough. It doesn't matter to God where we come from, God loves us all the same. I try to never forget that love, just as I encourage you to remember that God chose you. God wants you to be a part of God's family. God's family isn't complete without you. You are an important and loved member in the Body of Christ. Thanks be to God.

1. What is your experience of receiving others with unconditional love?
2. What conditions do we put on God's love that aren't really there?
3. Why would God choose you?

*Loving God, thank you for adopting me as your own, even before I can prove myself.
Help me always remember I can rely on your love. Amen.*

RICHERS OF GOD'S GRACE

Friday, March 25 - by Karen Bruns

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:7-14

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. - Ephesians 1:7-8

As I read this scripture, it makes me think about the season of lent. A time to realize all that Jesus gave to his people. A time to mend our behaviors, a time to grow in our faith and the way we live our lives.

We can spend more time in prayer, in study, in helping others. Maybe it's time we each made a list: what helps us to grow in love and service?

Sometimes it's just little things that help us grow. Other times it takes a huge effort on our part. Yet in this passage it seems God does much of the work for us.

This scripture is something we should read often to remind us of the gifts God has given us.

1. What is God's will (set forth in Christ)? What is God willing to do to accomplish it?
2. What is our inheritance from God in Christ? How have you received part of that inheritance already? What more do you look forward to receiving? What does God have to give up for you to receive those things?

Giver of all I need, help me to continue to recognize our many gifts and give you thanks and praise. Amen.

The text "Spread Love" is written in a hand-drawn, colorful style. Each letter is filled with a different color and has a rough, textured appearance, as if drawn with markers or thick paint. The colors include red, orange, purple, green, and blue. The letters are slightly irregular and overlap slightly, giving it a personal, artistic feel.

Sarah Kern

NO NEED TO UNDERSTAND

Saturday, March 26 - by Cathy Baker

Scripture Reading: John 3:1-13

*“The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”
Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” John 3:8-9*

I love it that Nicodemus asked such a blunt question, “How can these things be?”. I myself have asked similar questions of God many, *MANY*, times. “How can this be?” ... “How does that even make sense?” ... “I just don’t understand!” And most of the time, I’m asking these questions at night. When I’m by myself. Where no one else can hear me. That way no one will know how much I simply don’t understand.

I don’t like to have conversations about things I don’t understand. Especially when it’s a topic that I trust. I don’t want to have to defend myself because I don’t want to sound silly or worse. Kind of like electricity. I don’t understand it (*and yes, I’m married to a Physicist!*). But I trust it. I don’t want to explain how it works, where it comes from or where it goes. When I flip on the light switch, I simply trust that the light will come on.

Just as the wind blows, we can hear it, feel it, see the results of it, but we can’t see the wind itself. So is the Spirit. We feel it, hear it, see it’s results, but we don’t see the Holy Spirit. But yet we trust it. We know it’s there. And though we may not fully understand, we know that through Christ we can receive it and enter the Kingdom. No where in the Bible does God command us to understand him. Just trust him. And I’m thankful for that.

1. Have you ever had questions like Nicodemus? How would you feel about the answer Jesus gives him?
2. What is something you didn’t believe or understand was possible that was later proven to be true?
3. What is your experience of the wind? How is it like the Spirit of God?

*Heavenly father, thank you for loving me in spite of my own understanding.
May your spirit continue to move in and through me so that others can see
you and know you through me. Amen.*

GOD'S LOVE FOR THE WORLD

Sunday, March 27 - by Margaret Rockhold

Scripture Reading: John 3:14-21

*"For God so love the world that he gave his only son,
so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."
-John 3:16*

I have heard John 3:16 for as long as I can remember, and it never ceases to amaze me just how much God loves us. He loves us and wants to make sure nothing stops us from being with him so much that he sent his only son to take away our sin and we didn't have to do anything to earn it. John 3:19 tells us that the light has come into the world in Jesus and those of us that do good deeds want to be in the light where God can see what we have done. It's only when we do evil things that we want to hide from God in the dark. The dark is good for watching movies or fireworks or looking up to see the stars, but we still carry a flashlight to help us see. I don't mind the dark when I am with someone, but when I am alone, I like to turn on a little light so I can banish the fears I have of the unknown that darkness brings. I love the light it makes everything brighter and dangers are more visible so we can avoid them easier. God loves us so much and so unconditionally that we don't have to hide in the darkness when we don't do the right thing. God's abundant light and love will find us and illuminate us no matter where we are or how much darkness we surround ourselves with. God sent Jesus into the world to tell us that there is no sin we can commit that would keep us from God and that no amount of darkness can hide us from God's light.

1. When have you tried to hide in darkness from God?
2. How can you embrace the light each day?
3. How can you help others to embrace the light and turn from darkness?

Gracious God, you love us no matter what we do. Help us to live in your light each day and turn from darkness. Help us bring your light to those who are still in darkness, just as Jesus brought it to the world all those years ago. Amen.

THANKSGIVING FOR DELIVERANCE

Monday, March 28 - by Cindy Plesko

Scripture Reading: Psalm 107:1-16

“They cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress; he brought them out of darkness and gloom, and broke their bonds asunder. Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind.” - Psalms 107:13-15

I don't understand how people without faith can endure life's tragedies, complexities and celebrations. Have you ever made a decision to follow a path (new job, a new home, birth of a child, retirement, etc.), and then as life unfolded, you felt the challenges were unsurmountable?

I knew I wanted to be a caregiver for my parents. I also knew I had the full support of my parents, husband, children and extended family. During the 6 1/2 years there were many physical, emotional, and spiritual changes. Most were handled gracefully and life continued. But as the years drew on, all our bodies and, yes, even our souls started to tire. On the days when our minds, body and spirits were in a good place, we enjoyed each other's company. We were able to focus on life happening around us. On those days when there was illness, despair and fear, it took much effort to find strength.

I would find myself looking for a quiet corner and crying out to God in fervent prayer to give me strength for just that day. Give me guidance to navigate new territories. Give me peace so that I could give to others in love, as Jesus would do. I would ask for forgiveness in my shortcomings. His steadfast love would slowly flow into my body and I could feel the strength return. I could feel His loving response and knew I could return to the task at hand with a warm peace surrounding me.

I am grateful and give God thanks for His steadfast love. I am grateful for Pastor Mike who would visit, support and guide our faith during these extremely difficult days. I am grateful for a loving family who would gather and give each other strength. I pray that others will find faith to sustain them during life's journey.

1. Have you ever made a decision to follow a path, and then as life unfolded, you felt the challenges were unsurmountable?
2. When has prayer helped you feel God's steadfast love and strength flowing into you?

Steadfast God, thank you for always being there, especially when we're stuck. Forgive our shortcomings and struggles, and give us strength for the journey. Amen.

NO COMPLAINT

Tuesday, March 29 - by Jeanine Yeager

Scripture Reading: Numbers 20:1-13

"The people quarreled with Moses and said, 'Would that we had died when our kindred died before the LORD! . . . Why have you brought us up out of Egypt, to bring us to this wretched place?'" - Numbers 20:3, 5

Every household is different... yet each is a blessing given by our father God. We are Gods puzzle and we each fill a space that completes the bigger picture. I didn't know that then but 100% see it now. The good, the bad, the beautiful even the ugly, its only a particle of his plan.

I grew up in a household of thirteen souls... it was a challenge to do, or have a complete of anything, and when I was younger it never occurred to me to complain about any of it.

Daddy worked for GM and momma took in other peoples' children and laundry. It was a time and era that held men and boys in high regard. The women and girls were last to eat, get new clothes or even drive a car (at least in my case).

I was a middle child and the oldest girl. I had 5 older brothers, 4 younger sisters and 1 (baby of the family) younger brother. They called me the quiet one. The chaos was real though. At my house if you were late to dinner you made yourself a bowl of cereal (if any was left). If you missed the school bus you walked five miles to school. If you got sick, momma was the doctor.

Who is God? I didn't even know God existed... not until my dad lost at ping pong with the Baptist pastor at a near by church who's bus ran near our house every Sunday. Yep, we got to know God when daddy lost. I think he lost on purpose so his children could win.

I stayed on the bus when my older brothers jumped off two stops before the church. I got saved at the age of ten and stopped going when they wanted to baptize me. I thought they were trying to take my soul so I started hiding when the bus came around. However, I never stopped talking with God and I did get baptized as an adult.

As a teenager I began to see how much other kids had that I didn't. Nice clothes, cars, extra money for a burger or a movie. I was jealous for a time but soon found that what my parents couldn't give us in material things they made up in keeping food on the table, shoes on our feet and Christmas filled with love. I realized that each of the struggles we overcame was a blessing from God and the prize was becoming stronger in faith.

- When we complain we feel we are justified but in times God gives us what is needed.
- Being thirsty/dehydrated is difficult, but not like being in a desolate place. If God was there in the trauma of this move he would want his children to turn to him for help... to build faith.
- God is our water. He fills us every day if we let/ask him.
- I don't put a lot of trust in people... that's not to say I don't try to put my trust in them. We are all a piece of this human puzzle, some of us just don't know it.
- People struggle... lots of times the struggle is brought on ty our own doings. We often think the grass is greener in someone else's yard only to find out their struggle are different.
- God gives us his mercy, grace, blessings. We are born in his image and are molded to become the perfect fit to life's puzzle. We are his through it all.

Gracious God, help us value what we have been given, and not complain about all that we want, but don't have. Thank you for your never-ending love. Amen.

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF LIFE

Wednesday, March 30 - by Alison Kern

Scripture Reading: Exodus 16: 1-8

“The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, ‘If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.’”

- Exodus 16:2-3

Isn't it amazing how quickly our bodily needs can overwhelm our good intentions? The story of the Israelites' complaining reminds me of the children's game Chutes and Ladders. In the game, the players race to the top of the board, but they run into some squares showing good deeds that advance them higher (the ladders) or bad choices that set them back (the chutes). I find it interesting that two of the longest chutes on the board involve cookies—in one, the child is trying to sneak the jar off a high shelf and it breaks and spills everywhere, and in another, she eats a whole pan of cookies and gets a stomachache. Oh how the mighty are brought down by a growling stomach!

God didn't want the Israelites to suffer. He had given them a huge “ladder”—freedom from a life of slavery in Egypt. But they couldn't see the reward at the top because of their hunger, so he provided enough manna and quail for them to eat each day. In the midst of this, though, God wanted them to remember the importance of listening to his voice over the rumble of their bellies. That's why he caused the manna to spoil if they disobeyed his instructions and tried to store up more than they needed for the day.

How often do we ignore the “ladders” God has built for us in favor of forging our own path? Then, when the going gets tough, we're complaining to God because our human desires have caused us to fall once again. It can be really hard to see God's provision when we are in the midst of a time of physical or spiritual hunger and thirst. Yet God has promised to give us what we need each and every day, even if it doesn't seem like the answer we're looking for. And someday, when we get to the end of the game, I think it will all make a lot more sense!

1. When are you or others tempted to complain to God? Does it help the situation?
2. Think of a time when you thought God had led you astray or abandoned you, only to realize later how his guidance was at work in your life. How do you feel now, looking back? Did the experience help you trust God more?

Lord, you have been with me through the ups and downs of life. Even when the way didn't seem clear, your hand was guiding me and providing me with all I needed. Help me to trust in you each day. Amen.

RETURN AND REST; IN QUIETNESS AND TRUST

Thursday, March 31 - by Marty Berggren

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 30:15-18

“For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength . . . Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you; therefore, he will rise up to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait on him.” - Isaiah 30, 15, 18

Work has been an important part of my life and identity. Mostly the work was helping clients find solutions to specific business needs and developing proposals for how to solve their challenges. So...my nature is to fix things! I always sought to do a good job. But sometimes there are things that I cannot solve, no matter how hard I try. That is not only true in my work but also in my life.

God reminds me that strength is not found in myself, but comes from God. I need to stop all my restless activity and endless striving and allow God to be God. If my life is full of busyness, I cannot hear God. Thanks be to God for our Salvation through Jesus who died on the cross so that we may be saved. Because He saved us, we can trust him and be confident that He will give us strength. My hope is in Christ, not in myself. When I rest in Christ, repentance comes and makes salvation possible. I am so grateful for God’s grace and mercy and so thankful for His personal relationship through prayer. God patiently waits for me to continue to mature my faith.

God has a perfect plan for us! God modeled resting from the work of creation after His work was done. We see in the new testament where Jesus modeled going to the wilderness to pray to his Father.

One of the beautiful hymns which speaks to Isaiah 30:15 is *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind*. Even though I am a sinner, God gives me undeserved blessings.

1. How does rest bring salvation? Think about why God instituted the Sabbath. Have things gone smoother, or have you had better ideas after resting from working too hard?
2. How are quietness and trust strengths? What do they mean? Are they passiveness, or something more?
3. We’re used to waiting on God. Have you ever considered that God is being patient with you? What might God need to wait for you to do?

Lord, thank you for your grace and mercy. In quietness and trust, may we be strengthened. Give us your Spirit every day. Amen.

STEADFAST LOVE

Friday, April 1 - by Kristin Belcher

Scripture Reading: Psalm 51:1-12

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.” Psalm 51:10

When I went through confirmation, we had to choose a verse to recite and speak to during our service. I had a hard time picking one and wanted it to be unique and meaningful. After talking with my Grandma Hilde, she gave me Psalm 51, specifically verses 10-12, and it is what I ended up using. At the time, I think I was 15 or 16, I didn't know how much of an impact these words would have in my life or how they would find me later in life.

I didn't attend church much after high school graduation. I moved and went to college away from home, and church was not one of my top priorities. I remember trying to find a church home in my college town. I went to one church service, and it just didn't feel right, and that was my “out.” After college graduation and moving to Kansas City, I told Tony that I wanted to find a church home. I tried a few different churches but still didn't find the connection or feeling of home. Living in a new state and being away from my family, attending these church services felt familiar and was comforting. I remember hearing Psalm 51 during one of those services, and it struck me with emotions and memories of my Grandma Hilde, my confirmation, and of my life up to that point, and I knew it was a sign that I was on the right path. A sign that I was creating a “clean heart”, and God was working on putting a “new and right spirit within me.” It was like a flame had been re-lit within my heart. It was what I needed to hear from God; that he was still there and waiting to welcome me with his words and love, and to forgive me and cleanse me from my transgressions over the past years. I kept going to services and Tony was supportive as we began our life as a married couple. Eventually, we found Hosanna! and we both knew after our first visit, that we had found our church home.

Every time I hear Psalm 51 in church, and especially verse 10, it sparks a memory in my heart and soul. I remember my Grandma Hilde, and the love that she gave me and the faith she helped instill in me. I feel like this was part of God's plan for me, to help guide me and keep me grounded in my faith. It has been a verse I have carried with me over the years. I find myself reciting this verse through hard times and it helps to provide comfort and calming. I think of it as a good reminder to reset my mind and my heart and open it back up to God. God is understanding and forgiving. When I feel like giving up and I am not enough, I turn to God and ask for his mercy. God will cleanse me and restore in me the joy of his salvation, and for that, I am eternally grateful for his love.

1. How do you reset your heart and mind during the hard times?
2. What might a “new and right spirit” feel like?
3. When I hear the song “Clean” by Natalie Grant, I think of this Psalm. Take a moment to listen to it and its message. How does this Psalm come through in this song? What meaning do you find in it?

O God, create in me a clean heart, and put a new and right spirit within me. Wash me in your mercy and cleanse me from my sin. Restore to me the joy of your salvation. Amen.

I POLISHED MY SHOES

Saturday, April 2 - by Duane R Witt

Scripture Reading: John 12: 1 - 11

"Martha took a pound of costly perfume....anointed Jesus feet and wiped them with her hair." - John: 12: 3

I was a farm-kid growing up in the "Dirty Thirties". We lived 15 miles from town and church, 2 miles from a country school and the closest neighbor was 1/4 mile away. I learned that God loved me, when you died you went to Heaven, and I was to respect my elders. God and Church wasn't in my life. Living in town for high school, several classmates attended MYF on Sunday evenings at the Methodist Church. So I went too. I found that Christianity was what I needed and wanted. (I also met my future wife, Carol.) It wasn't too long that I was driving to Church every Sunday morning, continuing after getting married. One big change---in later years we wanted something different and transferred to Faith Lutheran Church. Now I'm enjoying Hosanna, the people and Pastor Mike.

I love to read about history so the Bible is on my list. Since retirement I have read through the Bible several times and each time I get a better understanding of the scripture. Today's scripture is an example. First, lets acknowledge that the only mode of travel then was walking; barefoot or in sandals. The feet must have been really tough. But yet they would probably have to care for them. It seems that Jesus was always walking to another town to preach the Gospel. Today He is on his way to Jerusalem, knowing it was for the last time. He stopped to have supper with Lazarus and his sisters. We read in John 11: 5 "Now Jesus loved Martha, her sister and Lazarus." Did He stop for a last "Good Bye"? Martha is sewing. Scripture doesn't really indicate when, but Mary goes to Jesus and anoints His feet with some costly perfume oil. Then wipes His feet with her hair. Surely Mary waited until Jesus was done eating. Was this a show of love, like we give hugs of affection? They must have been wealthy to have a bottle of oil worth 300 pence. That would be \$50 in our money. And Judas Iscariot, the traitor, had to speak up. That oil had better uses; give to the poor. Always somebody has to be different.

1. In Luke 7: 38 a woman washes and anoints Jesus' feet. Do you think this was very common?
2. Jesus must have really liked them, when Lazarus died, John 11: 35, "Jesus wept". Do you shed a tear at funerals?
3. In the Bible, so many times guests came unexpectedly, the lamb is killed and the meal is served. That is sure preparing the meat quick. What else did they serve at a meal?
4. Do you think everybody had a basin of water and a towel at their front door to wash their feet before entering? What did you do if the ground was muddy?

Heavenly Father, Thank you for the comfort I feel each morning,, knowing You are watching over me. May I carry myself that others will know I believe in you. In the name of Jesus Christ.

AMEN.

SEEDS OF FAITH

Sunday, April 3 - Jealaine Marple

Scripture reading: John 12:20-33

“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” John 12:21b

The congregation I previously served as Pastor was filled with farmers. Many of them farmed the “Iowa standard” of corn, soybeans, hogs, and beef cattle. Every spring, I would look out the parsonage windows to see a green or red planter chugging along, the humming of the engine like the song of a prayer. Farmers are some of the most faithful and faith filled people I know. To plant row after row of crops that will literally turn into thousands of dollars. Or not. I quickly learned some keys/tools I needed for ministry in Iowa: a rain gauge and a constant knowledge of the farm market report. The mood on Sunday morning often depended on what either of these tools had to share. A lot of hope and goals were tied to one tiny seed. One tiny seed can produce much fruit (or grain). It can also die and produce nothing.

Our faith is a gift from God. We nourish it with worship, being in community, studying God’s word, prayer, and on and on. Every time we engage in nourishing this gift of faith, we lose a little bit of ourselves, but in the best way possible. It’s a humbling thing to remember “it’s not about me.” While we may be able to say that on a surface level, to feel it in our souls is another thing! One of my favorite authors (Sarah Bessey) says that Jesus turned her into a feminist. In that way, reading the Bible and engaging in worship has turned me into someone who cares about social justice and those on the margins. Any time the focus is not turned inward, we lose ourselves. We cannot be the body of Christ in a hurting world if our first question is “what does this do for me?”

As we nourish the seeds that God planted in us, we may start to look at the world through what I like to call our “cross shaped glasses.” The cross put to death an empire that cared more about power, money, and winning (so to speak) than it did about caring, loving, and remembering the forgotten. At the beginning of this reading we hear some say “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” I will admit to requesting this myself more than a few times. I wish to see Jesus. In fact, in the last few years I’ve been asked more than once if I thought we were in the end times. I know just as well as anyone else.

Should we desire to see Jesus we need not look any further than our neighbor. Jesus is in the forgotten, the marginalized, the hungry, the underemployed, the sick, the unhoused, the mourning, the young, and on and on. If we wish to see Jesus we need look no further than the people we would rather avoid. That’s when we must die to ourselves and realize the people we would rather not nourish relationships with are exactly the people Jesus hangs around. I’ll admit it’s not easy. It’s not easy to let your guard down and risk seeing that we may have more in common with those we’d rather distance ourselves from than we care to admit. There are multiple fields ready to be planted. It’s good for us to remember that new life (relationship with others and a deeper relationship with Jesus) can come out of death--our own metaphorical, of course.

1. Where have you seen Jesus that has genuinely surprised you? Why was that?
2. What aspects of your life may need to die in order that other fruits may blossom, grow, and live?
3. In what ways has Jesus changed your life compared to 5, 10, even 30+ years ago?

“Seed that in earth is dying grows into ears of grain. Grapes that are crushed in the vessel turn into golden wine. God, through this mystery grant us faith in our deepest darkness, life in our night and death.” Amen. (“Seed That in Earth is Dying” ELW #330)

I KNOW NOTHING AND EVERYTHING

Monday, April 4 - by Mike Kern

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34

“This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” - Jeremiah 31:33

When I was in seminary studying to be a pastor, I took a class on the book of Jeremiah. By the end of the semester, we needed to write an in-depth paper on a passage from the book. I chose to write this 14-page paper (including the title page, of course!) on these 4 verses. I translated anew from the Hebrew, researched the historical context, examined the literary technique, and came up with preaching ideas. I got an A on the paper. And yet, even at the time, I felt like those fourteen pages contained nothing about anything meaningful.

Understanding the Bible can be hard. We can read the same thing over and over, see what others have said about it, and still not get it. We can study and say all kinds of things that make sense about the Bible and about God, and still never really get to what it really means to us.

As I look at this passage now, I think I understand it a whole lot more. For starters, I recognize now that God’s promise (the covenant part) can’t be learned by study and research alone. It takes experience. I’ve experienced a lot more life--the good, the bad, and everything in between--in the 15 years since writing that paper. I’ve had a lot more opportunity to see God working in my life and the lives of others. And I’ve taken those things to heart.

In spite of all my study, my mind still struggles to understand much about God. However, my heart has seen and felt God, and it mostly gets God. Even now as we continue through this never-ending pandemic (admittedly shorter so far than the Israelites’ exile Jeremiah is writing about), I have hope. That hope isn’t based on anything I’ve learned with my head, but has everything to do with what I’ve learned with my heart in my everyday experience of God. God has come through for me and all the people I’ve loved. Not always the way we want--sometimes it’s a new thing. But God has come through for us one way or another *without fail*.

1. What do you know about God? How and from whom did you learn that?
2. How do you continue to have faith when you don’t have all the logical answers?

Steadfast God, I don’t understand you and all you do. Sometimes I don’t know what to believe. Nonetheless, I feel your love and grace in my heart, and I trust your faithfulness. Continue your promise of life and love for me and for all whom I love. Amen.

DOORS OPENED AND DOORS CLOSED

Tuesday, April 5 - by Betty Hucke

Scripture Reading: Psalm 118

*"The LORD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation . . .
Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the LORD." - Psalms 118:14, 19*

Through the journey of my life I have had many doors opened for me. The first door was when God put me in the care of my grandparents. Another door opened when God opened the door and I started going to church with my neighbors. When I was 12 I was saved and Baptized.

Then a door opened and I got a small scholarship to college. And all through this I knew I was loved. Another door opened and I met my husband. Another sign of how much I was loved. And then more doors opened with the birth of my 4 children. More signs of Love. And all through this I knew how much God loves me.

And then my husband passed away and I thought a door had closed. But God opened another door when I moved and met my neighbor Jane who introduced me to Hosanna. Jane, also, introduced me to Sue. Jane and Sue have become my wonderful friends, and that is another sign of Love. Because I know how much they love me and I love them. And through all this, Love is the cornerstone of my Life because God loves me and has put many doors for me to open which is marvelous, because doors are a sign of love. And I will give thanks to my Lord because his love is forever.

1. What doors has God opened for you?
2. Is the closing of one door the end of all things, or could it be a new beginning?
3. What doors might God still have to open for you?

God of endless possibilities, thank you for all the opportunities you've given me out of love. As each opportunity I've come to love ends, help me see that your promise of life is not yet over. Amen.



Easton Eickman

MAKE MY JOY COMPLETE

Wednesday, April 6 - Karen Bruns

Scripture Reading: Philippians 2:1-11

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” - Philippians 2:5

Paul makes it sound so easy what he writes about seems overwhelming. Avoid selfish ambitions—how does that affect your work? Your lifestyle? Be humble - will that really be beneficial, or in fact do you feel too humble and want to build your self confidence?

We spend much of our lives in our own pursuits. Seems almost as if we are trained to do so. Yet Paul tells us to look to the interest of others. How do this happen in our lives. Take the time to pause, to prayerfully consider our lives, our interests, and importantly our relationships. That is what makes us who we are. Does it make us who we want to be?

At this point Paul gives us an answer. At least to start at being who we were meant to be. Verse 5 tells us to develop the same mind as Jesus Christ. None of us can come close to being the person he was. He is the model form, an example of how to live our lives, remember that as we strive to live more like he did.

We may not have his ability to heal, but we have ways to heal the hurts of family and friends and even strangers. We might be amazed to be in line with someone we've never met and share a greeting with a smile or a hello which seems to change their day and ours.

As an older person, I can't count the times I've lugged bags from a store and a total stranger has picked up those bags and put them in my car. I can only say thank you and God bless you, but the joy with which they accept that is also a blessing to me.

Reread the second half of this lesson from Paul. It shares the miracle of our Lord Jesus. Take time to thank God for the gift of his son and be assured you will be blessed for any measure you take to please God more fully.

1. How can you look out for the interest of others?

*Precious Lord, help me to experience the blessings you have prepared for me.
Amen.*

CONFUSION IS NOTHING NEW

Thursday April 7 – by Katharine Fairchild

Scripture Reading: Luke 1: 26-38

“But Mary was much perplexed by his words and pondered...” – Luke 1: 29

A beautiful portion of Marty Haugen’s *Holden Vespers* contains the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-28, 30-32, 38) and Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). An angel notifies Mary that she will be the mother of God’s child. She then glorifies God and thanks Him for blessing her. It is a wonderful arrangement, however, Luke 1:28 is missing. Verse 28 states that Mary was troubled and “perplexed” upon hearing the words from the angel.

Maybe Haugen didn’t want to change the tone and feeling of what is actually an uplifting piece of music, but I think we should not forget about Mary’s confusion. We know that she is scared at this moment. She doesn’t necessarily understand, but she does boldly walk with God and accepts His plan.

This is not the only occasion Mary, Joseph and the rest of Jesus’ earthly family experience difficulty understanding how God is trying to communicate. When Mary and Joseph present Jesus in the temple, Simeon says all kinds of glorious things to their baby; the parents “marvel” at his words (Luke 2:25-35). Jesus as a teenager stays behind in the temple, and when his harried parents finally locate him after two days, they “did not understand” why Jesus said He would be in His Father’s house (Luke 2:41-50). Hear what Jesus says to his mother before His first miracle at the wedding at Cana (John 2: 1-11). Listen to what Jesus says about family when they visit during his ministry (Luke 8:19-21).

At Jesus’ crucifixion, Mary watches her son suffer and die, and after over 30 years of being the mother of the Savior, does she understand this event? Is she still troubled about how God talks to her? I think Mary has continued to walk with God in amazement and/or clarity with each and every communication and occurrence since the angel’s visit. I think God’s message did make sense to her at that moment when she was a teenager. The gospels do not say if Mary continued to glorify and thank the Lord aloud the rest of her life, but I don’t think she was perplexed anymore.

Maybe you will have, or already have had, an epiphany experience with God. Perhaps this occurs in the form of a thought or an action. This might be just one small instance, or it could be recurring. If everything that God is trying to say does make sense in that moment, truly rejoice and be glad! Shout for joy! Tell someone! Maybe your revelation will last a lifetime, or maybe it is just a passing thought. But for that place in time, your mind was not troubled; you didn’t have to ponder. The fog lifts, and you can clearly see the path ahead.

**Acknowledgement to Cyndi Lauper for lyrics from her Time After Time song.*

1. Does God talk to you? Do you hear Him? Does any of it make sense? When?
2. Why do you think Mary went along with God’s plan, even though she might have been scared and confused, and uncertain of her ability to do well with it?

Almighty God, You can rescue us from confusion. Help us to listen for your grace and see your glory, now and in the future. Amen

WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING

Friday, April 8 - by Mike Kern

Scripture Reading: Philippians 2:12-18

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” - Phil. 2:12b-13

I love the second part of this scripture, but rather dislike the first part. It doesn't quite fit my picture of God. But then again, God doesn't always fit my picture of God, nor do I always fit my picture of myself.

I grew up loving math and science. I disliked reading, writing, and especially public speaking. By mid-high school, I was pretty sure I'd pursue a career in civil engineering. It fit me. Or so I thought. As I started visiting colleges (mostly big engineering schools), I oddly found this tug pulling me to ministry. Totally unlike me. Not at all my will. So naturally, I squelched it.

As you well know, I ended up a pastor and not an engineer. But it wasn't a smooth journey. I was pretty sure an introvert who got jittery and sweaty talking in front of people was not a good fit. I quite literally began this new direction fearing I couldn't do it and trembling in front of people. I moved forward with seminary, working for God's good pleasure, but I didn't know how I was going to pull it off in the end.

But God was at work in me. The deeper I got, the more I realized God wasn't just *starting* to work in me, but had been my *whole* life. My introversion...makes me a good listener. My love of science...means I'm curious and eager to learn. My analytical thinking...makes me good at translating abstract to concrete. My social awkwardness and not fitting in as a youth...leads me to compassion for those overlooked.

While I've worked at this whole pastoring thing for over 14 years now, there are still days (including a great many of them early in the pandemic) that I've wondered if this is really what I will for my life, and whether I really have the right skills. And so still, this work comes with fear and trembling at times. But I've also come to understand through all of it is that it's life-giving to me. It's not just for God's good pleasure, but mine, too. It fits the real me. I just didn't know it before God showed me.

1. What do you want to do and work at that still causes fear and trembling for you?
2. How has God surprised you with talents and passions you didn't know you had?

Good God, I question what I'm doing at times. Grant me the will and the way to continue in the work you've given to me, and fill me with the joy of it's fulfillment. Amen.

SIGHT AND VOICE GIVEN

Friday, April 9 - by Mike Kern

Scripture Reading: Mark 10:32-34, 46-52

"Many sternly ordered Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'" - Mark 10:48

As a child, I grew up believing the adage that children are "to be seen, not heard." This was especially true in church. I can distinctly remember an instance when I was a kid that I stood in line at the customer service desk at the grocery store to get a raincheck for my mom while she continued shopping, and an adult stepped right in front of me as if I wasn't there.

I don't presume to think my situation as a child was near as tough as it was for a blind man in Jesus' day, but the message felt very similar: "We will tolerate you until you make a commotion." "You don't matter until someone tells you that you do." It took me a long time to get over the subsequent implication: "Don't speak up for yourself."

Fortunately, Bartimaeus spoke up for himself. Although he received all the same messages I took in as a child, he seemed to know God had a different idea of the way things should be. Every person matters to God. Every person is worthy of love and respect.

I think it's comforting and speaks volumes about Jesus that he took the time and care to speak to Bartimaeus, but that's not all. I'm struck by the fact that Jesus didn't just go over and heal Bartimaeus's blindness. Instead, he asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" The answer was clear, but Jesus gave Bartimaeus the power to speak for himself. He gave Bartimaeus a voice (along with sight). And then Jesus listened.

1. Who doesn't have a voice in our community? Why is that? Is it because what they are saying makes us uncomfortable? Because no one is listening?
2. Who is God calling you to give a voice to, and to listen to?
3. Are you guilty of perpetrating "good deeds" on someone without listening to what they say the really need or want?

Healing God, help me speak when I am in need. Help me invite others to name their needs, to listen myself, and to respond with love. Amen.

PALM SUNDAY



Katharine Fairchild

ALL GLORY, LAUD, AND HONOR

Palm Sunday, April 10 - by Louise Ahrens

Scripture Reading: Mark 11:1-11

*“Those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting:
‘Hosanna! Blessing is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’” - Mark 11:9*

Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday! Jesus' triumph ride into Jerusalem! Oh, what were the disciples thinking? What did those in the crowd think about? When I think of Palm Sunday, I think of that magnificent hymn, "All Glory Laud and Honor." which many of us have sung from childhood:

*All Glory, Laud and Honor to you redeemer king.
To whom the lips of children made sweet Hosannas ring! **

When I hear that hymn it brings back memories of a church we attended years ago. The congregation would all gather in the parking lot prior to the Palm Sunday service. Each of us were given a palm branch. Members who would like to could receive a handbell to ring at random and the choir would lead the congregation into the sanctuary singing this hymn. There was excitement in the air! It was like we were in the crowds praising our Lord! Oh, the joy! It gave me time to reflect on how much Jesus was loved by his followers. His disciples asked no questions to get the colt. That was such an act of faith and devotion? Would I do that today?

At our sending each week, it is said, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." And we all enthusiastically respond "Hosanna!" I think of the love of our Lord, which He showed to each of us, by suffering and dying on the cross and the beginning of his walk with the cross starts on Palm Sunday. I think of how we as a group of believers come together to worship, show Christ's love for each other and those in the community! Oh, what a blessing!

Hosanna means "Lord, save us." Everyday when I pray I am looking for God to sustain my family, friends and all who are in need. To be there for me to uplift and give me the strength to help when called upon. Throughout your life God gives you the opportunities to be there---to follow along with your strong voice shouting "Hosanna!"

1. If the Lord was to ask you to get a colt, would you question or do as he asked?
2. How do you honor our Lord?

*Thank you Lord for giving us your only Son to be our Savior and to give his life for us.
Help me to make everyday a day of rejoicing to say "Hosanna!" Amen*

**Hymn from Lutheran Book of Worship, #108, Augsburg Publishing.*

GOD'S OKAY CHOICE

Monday, April 11 - by Mike Kern

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 42:1-9

*"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him." - Isaiah 42:1*

I preached many times before officially becoming a pastor, but the first time I was about to step up to the pulpit as an ordained pastor, all of the sudden I wanted to throw up and run away. I was hit by an overwhelming feeling of unworthiness. What do I have to say? What does this young kid know about anything, much less God?

While not always this extreme, this feeling of unworthiness still pops into my mind. It happens when I'm leading Communion, visiting someone in the hospital, leading a funeral service, or even just being invited over to be a part of another family's celebrations. Why invite me into your lives? I honestly don't have the wisdom, patience, strength or grace to do these things. I still don't like standing up in front of people and talking.

That's why I struggled for a long time over becoming a pastor. I am not worthy to speak for God, or even the privilege of being a part of your lives. Fortunately, at some point, I realized that I don't have to have all the answers or be the perfect Christian (or the perfect person). God can use me as I am. God is strong enough to hold up immature, stubborn, imperfect people like me. With God, I *can* walk into a hospital room without having all the "right" words ready to say and God's Spirit will convey what God wants people to hear. I *can* stand up in a pulpit and say what little I *do* know about God.

I still feel totally unworthy at times. However, I've learned to trust that God is more powerful than my incompetence, and that God's got things even if I don't. God gives us the wisdom, strength, and love even when we don't have them worked out going in. We can trust God to provide when we cannot provide these things ourselves. And if that's the case, we can all serve God. I pray for each of you reading this, that as unworthy as you might feel at times--at work or home, with neighbors or friends, talking about God or just the weather, in word or action--that you trust God to equip you with what you need to accomplish what God has called you to do.

1. In what situations do you feel most unworthy? How might God be picking up where you fall short?
2. Have you ever considered that people see God's wisdom, strength, and love in you?
3. When do you want to flee in fear of not being good enough...but don't need to?

*Gracious God, give me the strength, wisdom, and boldness to act, even when
I feel totally unworthy. Help me trust that you are at work in me.
I pray that others know you and your love better through me. Amen.*

MAY THE LORD KEEP YOU

Tuesday, April 12 - by Mary Kunkel

Scripture Reading: Numbers 6:24-26

“May the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; may the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.” - Numbers 6:24-26

A little over a year ago I had a tremendous internal struggle due to the heartbreaking loss of my dear mother. I realized upon her death that she had been the last remaining immediate childhood family I had. Since my dad and brother had already been gone for 22 and 15 years respectfully, she was the thread that kept me tightly connected to my youth & adolescence. Losing her meant losing the ability to ask pertinent questions about my past and our family history. I could no longer turn to her and ask who 'that' person was in the picture, or be reminded 'how to' - whether that be modify a recipe, stitch a hem, substitute 'a this for a that', or just simply ask her to help me finish the story when I stumbled and completely forgot the ending. Letting my mind wander and thinking too deeply brought about a slight sense of panic, fresh crocodile tears, and an overwhelming feeling like my heart was ripe to bursting at any moment. I felt vulnerable, raw, and alone.

However, during this emotional time my restlessness, especially at night, brought to the forefront of my mind whispers of that which I had been unintentionally forgetting to put into practice and the bedrock which was instilled in me as a child ... that being my faith. I am reminded that faith begets trust, and trust in the words of our Lord, Jesus Christ, brings peace.

Therefore, to live by these words, brings not only peace but also healing to one's soul: “May the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; may the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”

1. What scripture sustains you when you experience deep loss?
2. How might God's face be shining on you right now?
3. How are you touched by the children's blessing at the end of worship each week?

Gracious God, thank you for your blessings and grace. Give me your peace today and every day. Help me heal where peace is still elusive in my life. Amen.

PERSEVERANCE

Wednesday, April 13 - by Mike Plesko

Scripture reading: Hebrews 12:1-3

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us .” - Hebrews 12:1

I hate fishing. You can do everything that you are supposed to do, but then you have to just wait on the fish to bite. Every fiber of my being wants to be doing something to make things happen. In my pride, I always think I can. However, that is not the truth of fishing.

So, when I was contemplating an early retirement offer from Prudential, I prayed about what I should do. The answer was to take the offer and then go into consulting. What I hadn't thought about enough was how to attract customers. It turns out to be a lot like fishing. My family was waiting with me, so there was a little pressure. My pride was telling me to “do something.” I had some activity, but not enough to be comfortable that this was going to be a success. I was wondering if I had listened to God in my prayers or only my own pride. So, I prayed again. I told God that I needed a little reinforcement to be sure I was on the right track. Within two weeks, a solid client appeared. Things built from there.

It turned out the prayer was my best action step.

1. How do you know if you are listening to God or just your pride?
2. Why might prayer be an important action step in our journeys?

Dear God, I want to take more steps forward in my life. Help me see the path you've set before me so that I know where to place that next step. Amen.



Grace Yeager

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

Maundy Thursday, April 14 - by Janeen Bollhoefer

Scripture Reading: John 13:1-18, 31b-35

*"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: 35*

What would I have done if Jesus started to wash my feet? First, freak out, seconded try to understand why Jesus is doing such a menial task? Taking care of yourself is something that we do daily or should be doing. But to care for someone else, your family, friends, and acquaintances, I think this is something that is born within.

All of my life I've seen my Mom, take care of others, family, friends, and neighbors. My Mom was a registered nurse, always been a great caretaker. Still call her to this day, asking for her Nurse hat to be put on. She started in a nursing home and then eventually worked for the county hospital. I watched this growing up, Mom having this caring ingrained in her, where she would honestly give her shirt off her back if you were lacking.

I loved this about her and seeing her do this with so many people, hearing her stories about taking care of neighbors, I picked up on this same caring attitude. Always wanting to assist, bring someone food when they are sick, or just to sit with someone. My heart feels so full after helping others in need. I think this is what Jesus was trying to tell his disciples, that I care and love you and when he said "you also ought to wash one another's feet", he's trying to tell us and challenge us to take care of each other and love one another.

But why do some people have this skill and others don't? Is there a message that some missed? Why can't people see that we all should be taking care of others but still do nothing? Can't they learn from example?

I do know that I will continue to follow my heart and not deny God's wishes for us to care for one another and show compassion.

1. Why is it so hard for us to love one another?
2. Why is so hard for us to understand and accepts God's love?

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for loving me. Open my heart to love one another, both friends and enemies, in the same way that you have loved me. Help me show your love, so others can understand how much you love us. Amen.

GOOD FRIDAY



Oliver Yeager

A MOTHER'S LOVE

Good Friday, April 15 – by Sue Tonks

Scripture Reading: John 19:16-30

“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Women, here is your son.” - John 19:26

As many of you know, I grew up in Pennsylvania. My home church would always do a Good Friday service from noon to 3. Back then, most people had Good Friday off and most mothers did not work outside the home anyway. This service would be open to the community and was always packed. Several area pastors would give short sermons and our choir would sing. As a youth choir member, I still marvel at the fact that I could pay attention and sit that long. Especially since our choir loft was in the front of the church where everyone could see me. I'm sure we had been warned with our lives to behave.

I still remember when I first heard and retained a sermon that was given about Mary as she faced her biggest fear. I think that this fear is the thing that is most feared by mothers – losing a child. I remember pondering the pastors' sermon about the feeling that Mary must have been experiencing. I could not have understood at my young age the depth of this pain.

My heart goes out to Mary and wonder if she totally understood that Jesus' was born to die. Had she buried the words of Simeon that were spoken at Jesus' birth? Is she recalling these words as she stands by the cross with John? Is she realizing that this is the sword that Simeon had spoken about that was piercing her soul?

“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many will be revealed. And a sword shall pierce your own soul, too.” Luke 2:28-32

I wonder if she recalled Jesus' words to her when he was 12 and was already doing his father's work in the temple. Jesus showed selfless love to Mary while he hung on the cross. Only a mother's love for her son could have held her there by his side until the end. May we show such selfless love in our lives to others.

1. Mary's pain is evident. How does Jesus' death feel to you? Why?
2. What was the most moving experience you had during worship on Good Friday?

Grant me the grace to live a life that reflects God's unending love for me and have me show his love in all that I do. Amen.

AFRAID AND ASHAMED

Saturday, April 16 - by Mike Kern

Scripture Reading: John 18:15-27

“Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, ‘You are also one of his disciples, aren’t you?’ He denied it and said, ‘I am not.’” - John 18:25

When I’ve denied things in the past, it’s generally been for doing something wrong--something of which I’m ashamed (yes, even future pastors lie to their mothers). But following Jesus is a good thing, right? Why deny it?

Fear is powerful, and Peter has lots to be afraid of. He could be put on trial as Jesus’ accomplice. He could be held accountable for cutting off a man’s ear while trying to prevent Jesus’ arrest. I imagine he feared not only for himself, but for his family, too.

I’ve never been in Peter’s position--afraid of being arrested as an accomplice to insurrection or having cut off someone’s ear. I don’t know that I’ve specifically denied being a follower of Jesus either. My fear is quite different than Peter’s. However, I do know there are times I’ve conveniently not said anything about my faith.

I like to think that I’m a rational and caring person, but I fear people will think I’m not. The church can be perceived as anti-science and extra-judgmental. Unfortunately, that perception has been well-earned at times. I believe in science, but also that God is working in my life, and not just because it makes me feel good. I believe that my faith *leads* me to be more understanding and caring of those who are different and marginalized. So, to be honest, sometimes I am ashamed of the words and actions of my fellow disciples, just as I’m sure some were ashamed of Peter’s denial.

We think that the church and we ourselves must be perfect, and that we don’t need grace. But then we’re offended when people outside the church see we’re not perfect and they don’t afford us the grace we say we don’t need. Maybe instead of hiding our faith, we simply ought to be more honest about it--that we don’t have it all figured out, that we make mistakes, and that we need grace, too--from God and from everyone else. And then maybe it would be easier to share our faith and God’s grace with others, too.

1. When have you been hesitant to let slip that you’re a Christian?
2. What is the worst that could happen if someone knew?
3. How could you change their perception if they knew?

Dear God, forgive my shame. I love you and I wish everyone else knew your love, but it’s complicated. Help me un-complicate it and share your love. Amen.



Katharine Fairchild

WE CAN ONLY IMAGINE

Sunday, April 17 - by The Schmidt Family

Scripture Reading: Romans 6:3-11

“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” – Romans 6:5

As we, as a family, begin to write this devotion, we are struggling with the death of our beloved dog, Peanut. Many tears have been shed and Heaven has crossed our minds a lot this weekend. Over the years, we've had many discussions with family, friends and among ourselves about what our new lives would look like after death. What does Heaven look like? Will we be reunited with loved ones? Will Peanut be barking at the gates for us? What will Jesus look like face to face? Sing along with us.... I Can Only Imagine.....

We discussed together what resurrection and a new life would look like. Ryan said it would be beautiful. Pam said it will be amazing. We will be reunited with everyone and get a giant Hosanna hug from Jesus. Scott said there will be no more divisions of negativity or pain. Eva said Peanut is having fun and meeting new dogs. She thinks Heaven will be good (emphasized with a thumbs up). Emma said it will be paradise. After hearing everyone's opinion, it seems we all have the basic same ideas. It will be better than any day here on Earth. We look forward to a better world and seeing our loved ones again.

This gives us hope with our daily struggles so that no matter what we do here, what sins we commit because all commit them, we have the assurance of being resurrected like Christ. God forgives us when we repent, eases our guilt and promises a better tomorrow. It's not just hope for Heaven for us but hope for a new life where there will be no pain, no murders, no Covid, no bad news EVER. We need to believe there will be good moments in these challenging times here. We are blessed to have a Lord and Savior who take us as we are, sinful and all. He loves us and has promised that He will be waiting with open arms when it's our turn to go home. Hopefully, with a little white dog standing right beside Him wagging her tail.

1. What do you feel resurrection means to you?
2. What does Heaven look like in your mind?
3. How do you think you will be resurrected?

Loving God, thank you for forgiving us daily and for the promise of resurrection to new life with you. We look forward to the day we will live in your world eternally. Amen.

EASTER



Ellen Marple