

Back TO THE Basics



2022 Lent Devotional

BY: MEMBERS OF BETHANY LUTHERAN, RICE LAKE, WI

Introduction

I am so pleased that you have picked up this devotional for Lent. In these pages, you will read the writings and reflections of your fellow members from Bethany Lutheran Church. Please remember, Lent begins on Ash Wednesday. In the Ash Wednesday liturgy I shared these words, “I invite you, therefore, to the discipline of Lent—self-examination and repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving and works of love—strengthened by the gifts of word and sacrament. Let us continue our journey through these forty days to the great Three Days of Jesus’ death and resurrection.” Bethany’s Lenten Devotional is designed to help with self-examination and prayer as we move through the season of Lent together. May God bless your Lenten journey.

-Pr. Arthur

March 2

ASH WEDNESDAY PSALM 56:3

“When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.”

We know that we should trust in God at all times. We are told in scriptures that we can trust in the Lord and we should do so with all our heart. When situations of fear enter our lives, circumstances may feel overwhelming and it becomes difficult to have the trust and faith to allow God’s love and promises to calm, comfort and support the stress of the moment. We know God’s love for us, but can we trust that we will really feel that presence when we need it most. Will our fears, anxiety or pain be relieved “exactly like we want,” because we ask with faithful hearts? Our trust is tested when we pray, asking God to take our fear, provide the guidance and care for our needs, because the results may not be just as we want. I believe God knows our every need far beyond our comprehension and will answer prayers and provide accordingly.

In times of fear, difficulty, pain, loss and struggle, we may not ever realize we need this presence of God. We may be hesitant to pray about these fears and problems and trust in God’s promise. We need to remember that God comes to us in many ways, especially through others with love, comfort, support and understanding to help us through our fears and challenges. I also believe that our greatest “faith growth” comes during the most difficult times of our journey in life.

Prayer: Lord, help us remember that we are never alone in our fears, pains and challenges of life. Give us faith and trust to come to you with our every need. Your promise and your presence is real. Amen.

Carol Sevals

March 3

HEBREWS 12:2

“Looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.”

As I read Hebrews 12:2, it so plainly speaks to me of our call to do more than our share. Jesus’ death wasn’t a death of only himself, it was a death he endured for all mankind. Talk about going the extra mile!

As the oldest of three brothers, I, at times, felt burdened. Dad and Mom expected me to do things I felt weren’t my responsibility. I didn’t get help from my brothers, it would be mine to accomplish. I was expected to do something more, something extra.

When Ren and I were raising our four daughters, I coined the acronym, DMTYS; Do More Than Your Share. It could be heard when one of them complained, “Why me... I did it last time... or I’m too busy, etc.” I smile now when I hear these same girls saying it to their own kids.

What if Jesus had been a rebellious son? I bet he was at times, often questioning Mary and Joseph, why me? Yet, at the same time, he went to do the work of his Father, facing troubling times and uncertain circumstances.

God certainly wants us to experience joy in our lives. He knows the joy that helping others, being good examples humbly going through our lives while putting other first, can give us. None of us can do everything - however, we all can do something.

I’m aware that good deeds don’t give us any free passes, but I also know how it makes me feel when I anonymously do good for someone else. Image how Jesus felt as he struggled to breath all those hours on that wooden cross, before succumbing for all of us sinners. We he really thinking about saving mankind - yes, he was - it blows my mind.

Dave Swanson

March 4

JOHN 11:25-26

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’”

As humans, we will all die eventually, but Jesus says that if we believe in him, our spirits can live forever. The first thought I had as I was reading these verses was of my grandma. Although she is dead, I can still feel her presence in difficult times. She believed, she died and now she is living, just as the rest of us will eventually do.

As I am sitting here writing this, I am dealing with some serious writer’s block, but in the back of my mind, I can hear all of my dead loved ones around me cheering me on and telling me to push through it. It’s not just family, it’s friends, and even strangers, too. We’re all on the same team, cheering for and supporting each other, even if we can’t be together. We love each other unconditionally and become so attached that the thought of going a single day without each other is unbearable. Through Jesus, we are given the opportunity to stay together forever, regardless of whether we are dead or alive.

Morgan Musil

“If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

Now retired, we winter in Florida. When we arrived this winter, we quickly learned of an angry conflict between the tennis and pickleball groups. The older established tennis group did not like that the newer pickleball group was taking over their courts. Where in ancient and recent history have we seen conflicts between old established groups and new groups?

Most of this Florida skirmish was about the lines on the courts. The pickleball lines were distracting to the tennis players and the lack of lines on the remaining courts caused too much wait time for the pickleball players. How are lines drawn on a court a symbol for us?

What does 2 Chronicles 7:14 teach about this? It calls for us to quiet and humble ourselves, end the shouting and the anger, and instead, turn to the Lord and follow his commandments. If we do that, he will heal us.

We have told the story of a disagreement between tennis and pickleball, but isn't that much like many of the conflicts that we see today in our country over differing viewpoints. We are holding on so tight to our convictions that we lose sight of what is truly important. Might we be better off by serving the Lord and simply loving our neighbors as ourselves. Then, through the Lord, we can heal.

Tom & Julie Stephens

The forty days of Lent (except Sundays) bring immediately to mind the forty days of Jesus' struggle and testing in the wilderness, a story that had its past history in Moses' forty days without food on the mountain, Elijah's forty days in flight to the mountain of God, and of course, the forty years of Israel's struggle in the wilderness. Forty days in the wilderness seems to be a pretty big thing in the Bible.

Today we focus on the temptation of Jesus and what insight we might gather for our own journey through Lent.

In the first temptation Satan suggests that people can be appeased if their physical needs are met. We often adhere to the theme that people can be attracted and kept if we give them what they want. It works for children, dogs, adults (maybe not cats), it works for most. But this way of motivation does not take in the spiritual dimension of people. Jesus reminds us that everything comes from God who is gracious in providing our needs.

In the second temptation Satan suggests that power means glory. It's all about you and you looking good. Happiness comes with "power over" rather than "walking alongside" another. Jesus emptied himself, humbled himself and came to show us this better way.

In the third temptation the devil suggests lifting up pride – to be publicly recognized. Why remain in obscurity when so much good can be done by coming out into the light in a glorious and spectacular way? In our culture, the flashier people are the more popular they are. Jesus understood the way of the cross was not the popular one, but essential.

The devil did his best to seduce Jesus into using strategies that looked like they might further his ministry, but Jesus saw them for what they were—betrayals of his identity—and he refused them. Can we follow that example?

Prayer: O God, we are often tempted by this world. We are weakened by our wandering in the wilderness of sin. Fill our cups with your grace. Let your love overflow in our hearts, and make us come fully alive. Amen.

Pastor Sue Eidahl

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.”

In Colossians 3:12, there was one thing that caught my attention and I had a perspective of how God benefits us with his gifts, as in this verse a metaphor, “clothe yourselves...” of course with the qualities of the verse. These qualities seemed much more plentiful than riches or being in the position of a king, instead having those qualities that seem small, but make a large impact to help spread God’s word and his abundant love. These qualities being “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience” seemed to stand out to me, as most of the time, the average human has other subjects to work and worry about, but they are qualities humans tend to long for.

In a past sermon that Pastor Sue gave, there was one subject that stood out to me. This was to have kindness and to have the level of love for others as if you were in Kindergarten. The world has never been perfect, and probably never will be, but as Pastor Sue marked very clearly, we should all have more of the motivation of a kindergarten to spread God’s love to others. Doing acts of love of any size, even if simple or small, shows others how God loves them.

Like in the scripture from Colossians 3:12, we are the chosen ones, the children of God here to be servants and messengers for the Lord. We are to fulfill His will to spread His love and word. We are the beloved and surrounded by His holy love, so why not give his love to other as well? Like in the children’s song “It’s About Love” a lyric in this song says “God loves us, we love each other...” and as God’s children of the world, we should all love each other, no matter what our heritage or past is, but because God loves us even though we are all sinners and we are all different. We all depend on God’s love and we also need to love each other for God’s will.

Brooklynne Jenkinson

March 8

EPHESIANS 4:2

“With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.”

For a number of years I have used a book of daily meditations by Henri Nouwen for part of my morning devotions. His entry for February 1 resonated with me each year as I accompanied my wife Kris I’m her journey with dementia.

“The first thing that struck me when I came to live in a house with mentally handicapped people was that they’re liking and disliking me had absolutely nothing to do with the many useful things I had done until then. Since nobody could read my books, the books could not impress anyone, and since most of them have never been to school, my 20 years at Notre Dame, Yale, and Harvard did not provide a significant introduction... relationships, connections, reputations could no longer be counted on. These broken, wounded, and completely unpretentious people force me to let go of my relevant self—the self that can do things, show things, prove things, build things— and forced me to reclaim that unadorned self in which I am completely vulnerable, open to receive and give love regardless of any accomplishment.”

Prayer: Lord, please grace me with your humility, gentleness and patience. May I be a vulnerable conduit of your love. Amen.

Con Eastwold

March 9

ISAIAH 12:4-5

“And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted. ⁵Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; let this be known[a] in all the earth.”

When reading Isaiah 12:4-5, I ponder the things that I have done to praise and share the Lord’s message with others. Whether it be in prayer, singing or just plain conversation, spreading the good news doesn’t have to be any big production. Each and every way you tell his story is spectacular. Thinking about what is going on in the world, specifically Ukraine and Russia, I realize how much everyone needs to have God in their lives to help understand that we are all of his people and shouldn’t be against one another. He even states this in his ten commandments.

As people of the Lord, especially the ones who are lucky enough to be baptized and confirmed, we must do our duty to teach the younger generation and the whole world about God’s great love and how he will heal everything that will come our way so that in the future when things happen in their lifetimes, they know how to spread his word as he first taught it to us.

Prayer: Dear Lord, May we, the people of your church and community, learn how to teach others about your love and how to teach it themselves as you have created many forces to make sure we understand your power and in the end come home to you. Amen.

Jaymee Sevals

March 10

PHILIPPIANS 2:3

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather in humility value others above yourself.”

Humility is not a subject that many of us want to talk about. It has been for me, a struggle to come to terms with how to live it out in my life. There is such negativity towards humility within our culture, because we translate humility as weakness, or not standing up for ourselves, or being more susceptible to things like bullying. Humility can then become a stumbling block in our daily struggle to be heard, accepted, and to matter, so our tendency is to put it in a locked box and throw away the key. I think we sometimes assess humility in our lives as meaning we are unworthy, which is false humility. Paul writes in Romans, “I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted.....Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly.” I believe this verse is reminding us that humility is the great equalizer. God loves us all – no exceptions – and we are to do likewise. What a standard to live by.

In my struggle to grasp the concept, it’s meaning in my life, and impact on my faith journey, I understand humility as the center of God’s grace, gifts, goodness, and faith. Humility opens my heart and mind to faith, to a deeper understanding of the gifts of the spirit, and to seeking to “walk by the Spirit,” as Paul reminds me in Galatians 5.

Deberra Slagstad

“There is no fear in Love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made in perfect love.”

When I read this verse, I wondered if it was about fear? Love? Both? Fear is something that I think we all deal with in one way or another. Fear of making a mistake, not saying something right, not fitting in, not being able to love and so on and so forth. It seems to me though, that if we put all of our faith and trust in God, then the fear we have will go away. You might feel that the love you have for your family is a perfect love. I know I would like to think that. But in all reality, its not as perfect as the love that God has for us.

This reminds me of a woman whose name is Corrie ten Boom. If you don't know her, I recommend that you look her up and read her book *The Hiding Place*. She tells a story of a time when she was speaking at a function and afterwards a Gentleman came to her and explained who he was. She tells how it made her feel as she knew who he was and also knew that she needed to forgive him. But how could she. So she asked God to help her and she explains what happened when she extended her hand to him which was a struggle for her to do. She felt a surge of power go through her arm to the man. That was God and she was able to forgive the man. WOW! That's pretty amazing if you ask me. That's a love like no other.

I'm going to end with a couple of quotes from Corrie ten Boom:

“There is no pit so deep, that God's love is not deeper still.”

“Whenever we cannot love in the old human way...God can give us the perfect way.”

No Fear!

Diana Halvorson

“I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; as you are, being rooted and grounded in love.”

“By faith,” two of my favorite words. I use and hear them a lot. When I agreed to write a reflection and read my assigned verses, my first thought was, “yep, this is me.”

Anyone who knows me knows that I love kids. I love to be a small part of their lives and help them on their faith journey as I continue on my own faith journey. In the Here We Stand study Bible that we use, these verses are part of a section titled, “Prayer for the Reader.” The prayer in Ephesians is at the heart of how and why I work with our youth. The words reflect two of my prayers to God. First, that God’s grace and love work within me, to give me the inner strength to be a positive, faithful, and dependable person the youth can rely on. Second, that as they grow in body, they will continue to grow in faith. That no matter what happens in their future, they will continue their faith journey, feeling God’s grace giving them inner strength. That they will feel a sense of peace knowing love, Christ’s love especially, is the foundation of everything.

“By faith,” I see that God, Christ, and the Spirit live in and around us. United they are unbreakable. United with God, Christ, and the Spirit by faith, we can all have an inner strength that is unbreakable.

One final prayer for all; *may you find faith, unity, and love.*

Jan Wilking

“At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, ‘Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.’³² He said to them, ‘Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.’³³ Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’³⁴ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!³⁵ See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

In Luke 13: 31-35, we hear Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem. After Jesus is warned to leave to leave for fear of Herod’s murderous plot against him, Jesus predicts his death and resurrection. But he also mentions Jerusalem. Jesus says, “How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.”

In a way, Jesus is comparing his passion to a mother hen. A hen has no defensive weapons. There are no claws to fight or wings to fly away; she only has her body to protect her young. That’s what Jesus uses on Good Friday. He doesn’t use a sword to fight or armor to protect himself; he gives himself up for crucifixion.

That’s the love that Jesus has for you and for me. A love that enters into sin, death and evil on the cross. A love that brings us life, forgiveness and salvation from the empty tomb. A love given to us in the waters of baptism. Let us pray. Holy God, thank you for Jesus’ unending love. Draw us to that love and strengthen us to live by that love, now and always; In Jesus’ name. Amen

“How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.” Luke 13: 34b

Pastor Arthur

March 14

PSALM 32:1

*“Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.”
(NRSV)*

*“Count yourself lucky, how happy you must be—you get a fresh start,
your slate’s wiped clean.” (The Message)*

When have I felt the great blessing of sin forgiven? The most genuine times occur kneeling at the Sanctuary railing while receiving communion. To be kneeling for the Lord’s Supper is fulfilling to my inner core, my spirit. I feel a sense of a clean conscience and peace with God – it’s like a wholeness comes over me and everything seems more together.

Admittedly, it has been a while since there has been the opportunity to take communion at the Sanctuary railing. And honestly, I have been distracted with the mechanics of our alternate communion elements as well as our alternate spaces to receive communion. Partly to blame, I have not been as intentional in preparing my mind on seeking peace in God’s protection. Why I have let this happen, I am not sure. I do recognize a new Lenten season is underway. This allows me to refocus and reflect on the words by Johan Hinderlie, collaborator of the podcast, *Ground Up Grace*, “freedom for forgiven livin’ is grounded at the cross where Jesus takes all my sins upon himself and gives me in exchange his abounding grace.”

Alexa Giddings

“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;”

Throughout the ages, the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians has been called The Love Chapter. Love is the very basis, the bedrock of our Christianity. In Bethany’s WOW discussion group, we are learning from reading Richard Rohr, the importance of relationships - our relationship with God, our relationships with each other, even our relationships with all of creation. And, the very core of all these relationships is love.

In chapter 13, Paul gives us a basic primer on love. In verses 4-5 he lists specific do’s and don’ts for us. Certainly the list isn’t complete, even if you take in the rest of the chapter. However, I can’t help but wonder how our relationships would be affected if we would use these as a guideline. Pundits are saying that right now our country is more divided than it has been in over 100 years. Even here in Bethany, division and dissent sometimes rear their ugly heads.

How would our relationships be affected: if we were patient when listening to others’ concerns, kind when presenting our own points of view. If we didn’t show envy when a colleague makes an achievement, boast or show pride in our own accomplishments. If when working with others, we showed respect instead of dishonor, were not self-seeking when pursuing our goals but self-giving. If when engaged in arguments, we didn’t succumb to anger or hold a grudge (keep no record of wrongs). When Jesus gave us the commandment to love our neighbor, Paul was telling us that Jesus meant all of these things - and so very much more.

Bonnie Dahl

“We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.”

[²Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor. ³For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” ⁴For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. ⁵May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, ⁶so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.]

Jesus taught us a spirit of service. True service is putting others before yourself. In God’s eyes, all people are worth serving. God did not put us on earth just to live by ourselves. He wants us to make the world a better place, acting wherever and whenever.

At my son’s drive-up-due-to-Covid funeral visitation, we watched a young man standing off in the corner of the parking lot taking it all in. Towards the end, we met with the young man. He went on to say.... “I do not know the people here; I am here for Ben today. I was the kid in school who was always easy to pick on.” Then he explained that Ben was the guy that very often searched him out in school to ask me “how are you doing, are you okay?” A powerful example of what God is asking of us during a time of being turned upside down. Unselfish, unplanned acts of kindness. No reward needed in this lifetime. The reward is eternal life!

Kevin Jacobson

“Let all that you do be done in love.”

As we approach this Lenten season, we need to remember what brings us here.

There are things that you do in life because you love them. I learned to make cheesecakes from a Jewish friend in Minneapolis in the early 1970s. I started making them for family and friends in Marshall and a business developed, which I ran for 32 years. All because I shared something that I loved with them.

In closing, what brings us here this Lenten season? Each one of us have a different reason for being here. The love that Jesus has for each one of us. This hymn talks about my faith journey.

Savior, Again to Your Dear Name

Savior, again to your dear name we raise
With one accord our parting hymn of praise,
Once more we bless you ere our worship cease,
Then, lowly bending, wait your word of peace.

Grant us your peace upon our homeward way;
With you began, with you shall end the day;
Guard all the lips from sin, the hearts from shame,
That in this house have called upon your name.

Grant us your peace, Lord, through the coming night;
For us transform its darkness into light.
Keep us from harm and danger till the dawn;
Your evening presence promise to your own.

Grant us your peace throughout our earthly life,
Our balm in sorrow, and our stay in strife,
Then, when your voice shall bid our conflict cease,
Call us, O Lord, to your eternal peace.

Lynn Sulackow

March 18

MARK 10:45

“For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.”

A year after my husband died, we had a memorial event with the theme, *“Make Me A Servant.”* Dan had been a servant in many ways. As a high school counselor, his favorite accomplishment was getting scholarships for inner city students who thought they had no hope of going to college.

He served on many church councils working on everything from art projects to building a parsonage garage and rebuilding the church kitchen.

There are many ways to follow our Lord’s example to serve. He needs those in every walk of life, helping others in ways large and small. May we always look for ways to be a servant, following Him who gave His all.

Shirley Sorenson

“¹⁴Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

My Dad wore a Harris Tweed sport coat for special occasions. He looked like a different person than when he wore his normal work clothes. When he would put on that sport coat, something special was going to happen.

After my sophomore year in college, I was privileged to participate in summer school at the University of Oslo. Knowing that I would be traveling through Europe after summer school and ending up in London, my Dad gave me money for a Harris Tweed coat. I found a tailor who measured me up. I left for home, waiting for my special coat to arrive. Finally, it arrived. I had a new coat.

Lent is a time for contemplating God’s actions and God’s word for our lives.

Paul reminds us that when we were baptized, our Heavenly Father gave us a “new coat.” It is the coat of love. God says, “Clothe yourself with love.”

Our “new coats” are lived out in our daily lives with the love of Christ:

“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” --1 Corinthians 13:4-7

May God bless you, clothing you with love to be lived out in your life!

Sam Kochel

March 20 3RD SUNDAY IN LENT LUKE 13:1-9

One could hardly find a gospel reading more appropriate for Lent or more characteristic of Luke. The entire passage is an urgent call to repentance, a turning from sin and to new life in Christ. The theme of repentance occurs more in Luke than in other New Testament writings. It is said that the gospel of Luke is the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness of sin.

In this reading, the crowds are filled with questions of tragic events and divine will. Sound familiar? How many times have we heard the question, “Why?” Perhaps we have asked it as well. We ponder events, evaluating them as blessings or curses, rewards for righteousness or punishment for sin. Why do bad things happen to good people? Or why do good things happen to supposedly bad people?

I’m not saying it’s wrong to ask these questions and like others, I’d love to know the answer. In any given moment, we get caught up in the event or situation and want answers, but maybe we need to ask another question about divine will. Maybe we have to let go of the “good, the bad and the ugly,” as the saying goes, and remember that in God’s eyes we are all equal.

The will of God is not so focused on events as it is on each of us and our relationship with God. Perhaps you’ve heard the saying, “it’s not what happens to us, but what we do with what happens.” The promise of faith is that we will never be lost or forsaken. God longs for our confident trust in Him. In a world that encourages us to believe in ourselves and to achieve all we deserve, it’s paramount to understand who and Whose we are.

God is at work using tragedy to show His love and draw people to Himself. It’s true! The horrible events happening all around us and our world can cause us to despair or lead us into fear, but we don’t have to! You don’t have to fear God’s anger or judgment! When you’re afraid, when you’re heartbroken, when you’ve got your own, “Why?” questions, run to God. When you’re horrified and terrified by the sin and evil of this world, run to the shelter and safety of Christ’s cross.

Prayer: God of infinite love and compassion, when we stray, you patiently await our return. When we return, you welcome us. When you welcome us, you forgive us and heal us. We are grateful for your love. Amen.

March 21

PSALM 143:8

“Cause me to hear Your loving kindness in the morning. For in You do I trust. Cause me to know the way in which I walk. For I lift my soul to You.”

In the quiet of morning, it has been my habit to set aside time to center my heart on God for this new day, through devotions and meditation. For this day will come but once; there will be none other exactly like it.

Within this space of time, I pray for guidance to be open to the nudging Spirit that lives within me and within all. I pray to listen with my heart and to respond in this day with the needed word of love or the binding of wounds to my kin - for the world is kin.

This day is filled with possibilities that I may not see, so I pray to be aware, alert and to trust that you, Lord, will open my ears and eye as we walk though this day. Help me show tangible love through the silence of listening or the demonstration of the forgiveness and mercy that you have shown to me.

Help me to realize that the small, still voice that calls me Beloved child is the voice that simultaneously pronounces all as Beloved child and uniquely Beloved child - recognizing the richness of our “Belovedness.”

So, Lord, on this day, and whatever it holds, I trust that You are with me and I am with you. Thank you for this gift.

Mikey Seymour

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

In his ministry, Jesus was often confronted and challenged by the “wise and learned” authorities such as the Scribes and Pharisees, who often complained that his healing and compassionate activities were not in compliance with strict interpretation of Jewish laws. The authorities appeared to be nitpicking around the edges while ignoring or being totally oblivious to the core of Jesus’ teaching.

In contrast, we are often privileged to witness our children demonstrate their faith in Jesus as their savior and as an example of serving those in need. Jesus, in this verse from Mathew 11, seems delighted that God has hidden “these things” from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children.

Lent is a time for reflection, a time to set aside our busy multi-tasking behaviors. Perhaps during this Lenten season, we should lose a bit of our wise and learned mindset and instead approach Lent with childlike eagerness to focus on the essentials of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Mark Nymo

March 23

ISAIAH 43:25

“I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.”

As I read this verse, and pondered and did a little internet searching, I have come to the conclusion that this is one of the most amazing gifts I have received from God.

When I think of all the mistakes I’ve made over my lifetime, some small and rather insignificant in the scheme of things, and others rather large and very regretful...it’s reassuring to know that God does not “tally” up a grand total and hold it against me. What he does do is tell me (and you) “Yep, you did wrong...and I forgive you... now move forward and do better!” Thank you, Lord!

Mary Updike

“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.”

There is a familiar verse to “leave everything to God in Prayer,” but I believe there is a limit to that, and here is why.

Lately, I have caught myself praying about my expectations, my wants, my needs, how I want and think my life should go, rather than praying, seeking and trusting God’s expectations and desires for me. I have been catching myself praying, “God, I want this, please do this, please let this happen, thanks, Amen.” I have even have caught myself bartering deals with God as my prayer. And if I don’t get an answer or get the wrong answer to what I wanted, I find myself getting upset with God and asking, “Why me, or why not me?”

This did not come into fruition until recently when I heard a speaker on a Podcast challenge the listener that the next time you and I pray, ask God what do you have for me? What do you want me to do today? How do you want me to serve you today, even if it may be uncomfortable? What can I do that glorifies you and makes this world a better place? We can pray for our needs and wants, but we need to trust God already has those covered, even though they might not be what we wanted.

So during this Lenten season, let’s focus our prayers on thanking God for everything he has given and done for us and asking him how we can be of service to him and be a light for his kingdom.

Paul Baribeau

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways, submit to him and he will make your paths straight.”

There are two key words in this verse, trust and submit. What is God telling us about trust and submit? Simply put, God is telling (commanding) us to put (submit) ALL our trust in Him! And why would God want us to give Him total trust, trust with ALL our heart? Why is He commanding ‘trust’ that is beyond our understanding and comprehension? Again, simply put, if we put our trust in God, our trust will be honored and we will have guidance throughout our life that will bring us peace, comfort and happiness! A life God wants for us!

Thankfully, God knows more about what our lives need than we do. God knows that trust is an important quality that we need to have a happy and peaceful existence on this earth. It is part of all our relationships. These relationships can be simple or complex, and they can be between individuals, groups and/or nations. If you look in the dictionary for the meaning of the word trust, you will find words like truth, happiness, strength, honesty and belief. These words touch many aspects of our life, therefore, who would not want all of these in their life?

So, what did God do? God gave us the gift of TRUST to help us live a happy and peaceful life... if we will trust Him. I believe it is first given at birth. A baby learns about trust from the care and love given by his/her parents. With guidance, trust will continue to develop and grow throughout life allowing us to share God’s trust with others and have happiness, comfort and peace. Trusting in God and His guidance gives us the needed strength to withstand ‘mistrust’ - the doubts, unhappiness and disbeliefs that exist in this world. When we experience mistrust, God wants our trust in Him to help us withstand these disappointments. That is why God has given us trust. I have heard the statement, “Trust is Sacred.” Why wouldn’t it be? It is a gift from God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for knowing and providing for the needs of our life! Amen.

“We love because he first loved us.”

There are only seven words in this seemingly very simple sentence.

“We love because he first loved us.”

I think it is significant that there are only seven words and two of them are “love.” This is one of those verses that would be easily overlooked. Yet, this sentence could summarize the Bible. It’s really all about God’s love for his people.

“We love because he first loved us.”

Why is it difficult to love? An age old question that has filled bookshelves. I think we just get in our own way. It’s easier to keep our hearts closed, protected, callused or only partially open, to just the right person or situation. Remember, God still loves us. ALWAYS. Let love shape you into something more. Even in hard times. God loves us during the dreary routine of days or years. He loves us especially when we question loving ourselves.

Remember God shows us the way. You love...because God first loved you. It’s not about us. It’s about God. Open your heart. Let God’s love trickle in the space you open to him. Let his love overwhelm the floodgates to your heart and soul. Let love flow into and through you.

Here are a few words to spark a deeper appreciation of 1 John 4:19. creator, relationship, savior, father, child, grace, giver, receiver, thanksgiving, sharing, generosity, neighbor, family, forgiveness, acceptance, change, transformation, friendship.

Peg Martin

I have long thought the parable of the prodigal son is misnamed. I believe the proper name should be the parable of the forgiving father. Because this parable is familiar both inside and outside of Christian community, it's easy to overlook details.

Both sons are disrespectful. The younger asks for his inheritance. The older son bellows at this father. If you were a Jew in Jesus' day and age, you would have been mortified by the sons' conduct. Then there is the father. He humiliates himself when he runs out to his younger son exposing his legs to run in his robes. He humiliates himself when he allows his older son to yell at him. Once again, both acts were unthinkable.

The father has come for both of his sons. The father loves his broken sons so much that he is willing to humiliate himself. Jesus comes for everyone including both the tax collectors and the Pharisees alike. Jesus comes for us by humiliating himself on the cross. Let us pray. Gracious God, sometimes we are like the younger son squandering our lives. Sometime we are like the older son believing we are righteous. No matter our sins, you come for us out of love to redirect our lives. Help us to accept that redirection. In Jesus' name. Amen

“Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, ‘This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.’” --Luke 15:1-2

Pastor Arthur

“Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.”

Trees are mentioned often in the Bible. This reference in Jeremiah is a favorite. If you have been on lakes and rivers, you have seen the tree on the shoreline with its roots stretching along the waterline. The water provides a regular supply of nourishment so the tree can grow to be strong and sturdy, withstanding storm and drought.

But the tree does not just consume. It provides! Shade, fruits, beauty, homes for birds and little critters. The tree also removes CO₂ from the atmosphere and gives us the oxygen we need to live.

God provides us life and the sustenance we need daily. In the waters of baptism and in the Word of grace, mercy and forgiveness, we are nourished and sustained, able to weather the storms that this life includes. But there is so much more.

Like the tree on the water's edge, we do not exist for ourselves. God does not simply provide for us. We are to provide for others without qualification, serving in Christ's love, forgiving, giving of grace, mercy, time and resources. We are the tree planted by the water.

Lent is the time to reflect upon what God provides us for this life and how we in turn provide for others.

Kurt Jacobson

“Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing. He took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal’s death of a cross.”

What does it mean, “Made himself nothing.” He came as a humble slave in human form. Many folks were unhappy that he was not the King who would rule the country. To be humble can mean lowly, unpretentious, modest, to lower in pride. Jesus felt the need to be humble to perform his work on earth with all people.

Jesus was a friend of all, the poor and lowly as well as the rich and haughty. He brought the dead back to life. His love for children was tender and heart-warming. Jesus baptized those who came to him. He wanted no one to go hungry or thirsty.

What directives are we as Christians faced with? How can we do our part to be humble in our actions with all people, not just people that look like us or act like us. I think being respectful of others and expressing good words for others’ accomplishments is a good start. Think of the ways you can help people, those who you know and live close-by and those faraway. Many are in dire need of medicine, food and clean water. These things we can do with humility and the love that God has shown to us.

When I was 15 years old, my entire high school voted and I was honored to be voted in as the Homecoming Queen. Many of the boys and girls congratulated me. I was surprised, but elated and probably giddy. But some school mates were not pleased, as they had voted for someone else. This put a damper on my happiness, AND wouldn’t you know it, a good friend approached me after the school day. She said, “I hope you don’t get a big head over this.” I felt really bad as I thought it was really mean to say. I still wonder about my actions. Was my happiness an example of being less than humble and sensitive to the other girls? Through prayer, I feel confident that I have been forgiven long ago.

In closing, I want to share words from the hymn, *Blessed Assurance*, which I plan to use for my Lenten prayer.

Prayer: Blessed assurance Jesus is mine! Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine! Heir of salvation, purchase of God, Born of His spirit, washed in his blood! This is my story, this is my song. Praising my Savior all the day long. I pray this in the name of Jesus our Savior, who humbled himself to die a criminal’s death on the cross for me and for you. Amen.

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.”

“It’s like my father always said to me, he said to me, ‘Roseanna Roseanadana, it’s always something. If it isn’t one thing it’s another! It’s always something.’” ~ Roseanna Roseanadana, SNL 1977 (Gilda Radner)

“Anything that can go wrong will go wrong”~ Murphy’s 1st Law

“It’s a hard knock life.” ~ Annie

These familiar quotes are ingrained into our minds – those and many more. And even the promise contained in Isaiah 43:2 begins “When” you go through hard times vs. “If” you go through them.

We have all been caught into some pretty difficult days – in particular during these past two years. Loved ones have suffered and died, divisions exist in our nation and even our families have become divided over politics or immunizations and mask wearing. We know all too well that living through a pandemic is like navigating through rough waters and through a fiery furnace. It’s always something, isn’t it?

But here is the real deal, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you: and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.” (Isaiah 43:2) It may not feel like it and maybe today is a day that you doubt this promise. But, His Spirit is present through those around us. Whether through the hands of the people making prayer shawls, the friends who show up with a meal at your door or the kind words shared in a caring card. Or maybe it is through less obvious ways like a text message, or a joke or a comment on your Facebook page – all of these simple gestures are evidence that “you are loved, you are precious, you are honored” (Isaiah 43:4). God is with us as we are going through tough times in our journey. That is the real deal.

Because of the presence of the Divine we are able to say:

“My glass is half full vs. half empty” ~ Origin Unknown

“It will all come out in the wash.” ~ My Mom

“All you need is love.” ~ the Beatles

“I am with you always.” ~ GOD

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.”

Many people spend their whole lives waiting; waiting with excitement; waiting with anticipation; waiting with expectation; waiting with hope. Waiting can be exhilarating!

These past two years we’ve all been waiting to see how things unfold, waiting for signs of hope and promise, waiting to see what the future holds. Waiting can be arduous.

Every year during Lent, we have the opportunity to reflect and wait with the anticipation of the coming of Christ. For me, this is a refreshing reminder that we don’t need to wait for Lent to reflect and wait with excitement, we can practice every day. On a recent trip to Holden Village, I spoke with a spiritual director who challenged me to think in terms of “God’s imagination for me” as opposed to “God’s will for me.” Switching that up seems to open up many more possibilities, much more excitement and a renewed hope. Considering what God imagines for me!

My hope and prayer during this Lenten season is that each of you consider what God imagines for you. I hope you can delight in these visions and open your heart to consider what God has in store for you. Embrace the journey!

Laurie Carlsen

“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

I was so mad I could have spit nails!

This common saying conjures up a humorous image of a clenched fist, a frown and nails as projectiles discharged from one’s mouth.

But, ANGER is not humorous. It is a real emotion with real consequences, and we all feel anger periodically.

The question is, what to do about that anger? And how can the anger be controlled?

Anger is an intense emotion felt when something has gone wrong. It is typically characterized by feelings of stress, frustration and irritation. Everyone feels anger from time to time. It’s a perfectly normal response to annoying or difficult situations. Triggers for anger, such as losing patience, feeling an opinion or efforts aren’t appreciated or worrying about personal problems sometimes escalate into aggressive behavior.

As a friend or family member, we have a choice to try to diffuse an episode of impulsive or aggressive behavior. This involves handling anger in a controlled manner by choosing our words carefully. . . “a soft answer turns away wrath . . .”

Prayer: O Lord, Fill my heart with compassion instead of conflict, humility instead of hatred and faith instead of fury. I pray that I would speak words of peace instead of anger. May I use my words to build up rather than tear down. In your name I pray. Amen.

Sue Hildebrand

The origin of the phrase, SPITTING NAILS:

Carpenters have been known to hold nails in their mouths so they can use both hands in their work. This practice is probably a terrible idea from the standpoint of risk assessment, but anyone who has ever worked with a hammer has probably done it.

To yell at someone, you would have to spit out the nails. Whatever had angered you would have to be so impactful that you would rather lose the nails than keep your cool.

“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives[a] in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”

This verse makes me think that even when times get hard, and you feel that Jesus does not always have your back, you need to remember that He does. Jesus will always be there for you and He may put you through hard times, but He knows what you are capable of handling.

Jesus will make appearances in your everyday life, even if you do not notice, because He is within you and you are one with Him. He is always there rooting for you along the way, no matter what. You should always recognize when Jesus is there, in the good times and the bad times.

As times get hard, some may think to turn away from Jesus, because they may put the blame on Him when you really should turn towards Him and let Him help guide you. This verse brings me hope and confidence in Jesus that He is always there watching us grow in our faith and watching our love for Him grow.

As I grow up and become an adult within the Church, I connect the small and the big moments with Him and recognize Him more in my daily life. My love grows more and more for the Lord, whom I am within everyday.

Clara Stinson

Once again, Jesus and his disciples were in Bethany. He was there to spend time with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. The last time they were together was dramatic. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. After that experience, they wanted to find a way to honor Jesus. This is why they invited Jesus once again to their home. Martha was the “hostess with the mostest”. Lazarus sat at the table and hosted Jesus. Lastly Mary anointed Jesus’ feet with costly perfume.

In contrast to Martha, Lazarus and Mary, we have Judas Iscariot. He was a disciple of Jesus who carried the money purse. Scripture speaks how he stole from that purse. Judas questioned whether this was good stewardship. He said, “shouldn’t we sell the perfume and give the money to poor?” It was nothing more than grandstanding to get his hands on even more cash.

The question for us is, “How do we honor Jesus like Mary?” Expressions of service, love and generosity are the best ways to honor Christ. Let us pray. Loving God, help me always to follow the way of Martha, Lazarus and Mary who honored Jesus. Strengthen our words and deeds done in Jesus’ name so that our world would become a better place. In Jesus’ name. Amen

“Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.” --John 3:12

Pastor Arthur

“Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray continually, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

“Bless us oh Lord, and these Thy gifts....”

“Now I lay me down to sleep....”

“Our Father who art in heaven....”

“God bless Mommy and Daddy and”

“God bless Pammy, in the name of the Father, and”

I was fortunate that prayer and other faith practices were part of the rhythm of life of my childhood. Never would we start a meal without grace, nor go to sleep without saying our prayers and being blessed by our mother as she tucked us in. These habits, when not performed, somehow left life a little off balance.

And so it is that now, as an adult, I am trying to nurture an additional new prayer practice, one of quiet and contemplative prayer. When I can avoid yielding to the cacophony of life that distracts me, and I sense the hollowness of my self, there is God, waiting for me. Ready to fill me, lead me, and always enfold me in unconditional love. This is an intimate relationship that sometimes feels fleeting to me, but always fills me with a thankfulness that can’t be expressed in words. I am just aware of GIFT.

Prayer: My dear God, thank you for leading me into a deeper and more intimate relationship with you. Thank you for my parents who taught me to pray, and now for those angels around me who also teach me in your Name. Keep me as a vessel which you fill with all I need. And I give thanks, Amen.

Pam Crouse

“So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.”

Concerning Anger

In my Lutheran Study Bible, my verses are in a section labelled “Concerning Anger.” And when I consider the past few years, haven’t we all let anger and frustration lead our lives at times? Did that expression of anger help? Probably not. Did that unkind word solve the problem? Probably made it worse. Did annoyance and weariness keep you from assisting someone? Probably regret followed.

As we settle into 2022, this season of Lent, and learning to live long-term with some of the ongoing pressures of our every day lives, we should accept Jesus’ direction to “reconcile” with one another. God is asking us to be right with those around us before approaching the altar to “offer our gift.” Later in Matthew – chapter 25:40 – we read, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” Those expressions of anger, unkind words, and deeds undone were as hurtful to God as they were to the recipients of your frustration. Use Lent as a time to apologize and ask forgiveness from the sisters and brothers you have wounded. That way, when you do approach the altar and offer your gifts to Christ, you are “right” with those around you and your Lord. What a humbled, cleaned, and refreshed way to reset and re-start during Lent.

Amy Pelle

April 6

PSALM 119:114

“You are my refuge and my shield. I have put my hope in your word.”

Will climate change cause great harm to our planet?

Will Russia invade Ukraine?

Will the US remain a world leader?

In such uncertain times that we live in, we need to be able to rely on our faith in God as our ‘rock and security’ to guide us. This verse is so basic and calming in the midst of the worries about our planet, the threat of international wars, our country and its divides, and our community and our church.

“You are my refuge and my shield,” is just what we need to hear and ponder right now. We can’t solve these large problems, but with our faith in these words, we can calm down and center our lives to live like we were intended to by our creator.

“I have put my hope in your word.” Let’s get back to regularly reading the Bible and let it give us hope and guidance in our lives.

We have a God who loves us!

Dave Wilson

“Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. ⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”

I received a verse that feels like an arrow right to the heart of the Gospel. Such vivid and clear language reminding us that without Jesus, we are broken. Without the incredible and violent and grace-filled action of both our Lord and his Son, we are not healed.

This is a direct reminder that we are not in the driver's seat - his punishment was required to save us. And while burdens are removed from our shoulders and placed onto Jesus' shoulders, we are not off the hook.

Does this seem like an incongruous reality? We are at once not in control and not off the hook? I feel like that is central to what we wrestle with during Lent. We cannot do anything to earn our spiritual, physical or mental health. Yet, I believe that for us to embrace and enjoy our spiritual, physical and mental health, there is plenty we need to do. We need to care for ourselves, we need to care for others, we need to connect to others with a purpose, we need to understand and follow God's word. None of this is what we must do to earn anything more. It is what we are compelled to do. How can we not be compelled against the backdrop of our Lord's Son being pierced? Being struck? Being broken?

What will we do with this time of reflection during Lent? Can we use it to not just compel but propel us? Without doing a thing, we have peace with God. Our wounds are healed. Let the power of that reality propel us to greatness in God's name.

Sara Scheu

“Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”

I think it is very easy to dwell on the challenges of life. Over the course of the last couple of years, we have faced a lot of adversity. The challenges of a pandemic and all of the disruptions of normal life that resulted can very easily overwhelm us. It is during times like this that we need to turn toward our faith and prioritize what is truly important in our lives. The hope and promise that we gain through our relationship with God can help to calm our heart and bring peace in a world that is challenging.

For me, I think I look at the everyday chaos of life. As we get busy and life seems to throw us curve balls, can we put our hope into the Lord? It is in those challenging times that we need to take a step back. These are the moments that I try to silence the noise of life and really listen for that guidance.

I look at Lent as the time to really look internally at myself. Are there ways that I can lean into my relationship with Jesus? Can our family make church a bigger priority? What is truly important in my life? I try to create balance in my life between work, sports, family and my faith.

I feel most connected to Jesus when I am with my family at church. Our life is very busy with work, activities and family events. Attending Sunday church is a time for us to slow down and spend time together. We are able to take some time to reflect and re-evaluate what is important in life. It is time for us to focus on that relationship with God and pray together.

Josh Tomesh

“with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.”

When I shared this verse with my family, they laughed. I clearly do not exude patience at home, particularly in this busy season of our lives. They could likely recount many times where I have not been gentle, particularly when homework, chores, practices and other commitments push on our time (and my sanity). I can fully admit that I foolishly believed that at this stage of my life I would have my act together. Instead, I am often left looking around for an adult to provide some guidance to my chaos, only to realize that I AM THE ADULT.

This is when my faith stabilizes me. Jesus is the adult in the room with me. I am not alone. When my patience is tested, I am not alone. When I lack humility and my spirit is harsh, I am not alone. Jesus loves us through all of our shortcomings. He provides us guidance and strength during challenging times. He has put the right people in my life at the right times. His love is unconditional.

I think this is what is most amazing about Jesus' love for us. Instead of wallowing in my shortcomings, I feel invigorated to do better and follow Christ's example of humility, gentleness, patience and love for all. No judgment. No shame. Just love.

Laura Doebereiner

This year we remember Luke's version of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. It is a time of great joy and anticipation for Jesus's disciples. Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a colt is a symbol of a king. People spreading their cloaks upon the road are a symbol of respect for Jesus. Lastly, we have the crowds shouting out, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

Apparently, the crowds are so loud, the Pharisees ask Jesus to make them stop. Jesus refuses the request. Lutherans have been described as the frozen chosen. We are faithful in our spirituality, financial giving and in a thousand other ways. But when it comes to shouting our dedication to Jesus like the first Palm Sunday, that's just not what we do.

We will cheer for our favorite teams. We will cheer for our kids and grandkids. When we get to the chance to talk about Jesus and our faith life with someone who wants to know more, we are called to be like Jesus' disciples on the first Palm Sunday. Let us pray. God of energy, fuel our passion for your crucified and risen son. Give us the words to share about you when we are given the opportunity. In Jesus' name. Amen

"Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, order your disciples to stop.' He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.'" --Luke 19: 39-40

Pastor Arthur

April 11

JAMES 1:17

“Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

To me, this verse is displaying how God has blessed us with the gift of generosity that can not be changed or manipulated. I like to think of generosity as sort of a “win-win” situation because, at the end of the day, both groups will feel content and loved by the actions they do or receive.

One of my favorite ways to showcase my generosity is by paying for the car behind me’s order in a drive-through. Though I can not ever see their personal reaction, I can leave knowing that I, hopefully, have made someone’s day just a little brighter. Of course, it only makes sense that such a perfect and lovely gift could be given from our Father above. This connects me with Jesus by showing me just a fraction of the good he has blessed our world with.

Jordan Nelson

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.”

I decided I wanted to be a part of this again this year. I responded to the email and waited for my assigned verse, 1 Peter 2:24. I read the verse and then reread it. I Googled the verse because my first thought was this is a big verse, how do I write a devotion about this? Then I procrastinated for a few days, thinking about it and reading about it.

The message I took away from that verse is Jesus carried a lot for us, to show us a life we were not used to. Envision carrying your sins around much like carrying a large rock, then think about Jesus carrying everyone’s sins and how heavy that burden was. It’s not something we have to do, because Jesus did it for us so that we could live our “best life.” But what is our best life on earth? It’s not perfect. I feel that my perfect life is yet to come when my time on earth is done. I will do my best in this imperfect world, knowing that someday I will see the perfect world. It is all possible because Jesus carried our sins so that each of us can live our best life.

Kara Lundequam

“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”

Hope...such an immense concept. It could mean wishes and desires, but what it means in my world—a feeling of trust.

Jesus never said go to the beach, lay in the sun, get a tan and follow me. Right? I didn't miss it, did I? He did say pick up our cross and follow me. He didn't say it would be easy.

Sometimes, actually, lots of the time, life is hard. It takes work. A coach of mine once encouraged me to say to myself, “I can do hard things!” I will admit that I use it from time to time and it does make me feel stronger. When friends or my kiddos need a boost, I will remind them of this as well. However, it doesn't solve/answer/resolve all things. In fact, sometimes it seems a bit PollyAnna-ish. Sometimes I think, I must not be strong enough or aren't doing things right. This usually means it is a me-in-control issue.

But if I can remove my need to be in control and give it to God, the whole focus shifts. My entire direction changes. When I first learned this verse, Jeremiah 29:11, the language was this, “For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your future. A future full of hope.” In these words, it helps to me remember that I am not in control. God is. When I can let go and let God, it brings me a sense of peace. I don't need to worry or stress. God's got this (and not just this, but everything!) and has it ready for me—a plan for my future and that future is full of hope!

Julie Bever

April 14

MAUNDY THURSDAY
DIRTY, BUT NOT DEFINED BY DIRT

When Jesus approaches Peter to wash his feet, Peter's reply is, "You will never wash my feet." Many will feel the same tonight. We struggle to confess that we have dirty feet, that we live in dusty homes and have messy lives. We would like people to see us with our shoes and socks on, neatly wrapped and presented to the world. In private though, we are painfully aware of our shortcomings. We can feel like miserable failures, hopeless cases, lost causes. We are none of the above. We are creatures of earth, living in earthy bodies and inspired with the breath of God. We are dirt, but we are not our dirtiness.

When Jesus knelt at Peter's feet to wash them, it was Peter who was affronted by the seeming impropriety of the situation. But to Jesus, who sees with God's eyes, it was a chance to wash the feet of a loved one—not unlike the feeling you might get touching the feet of an infant. We are children of God and, like any loving parent, God simply wants to give us a bath. Through the eyes of love God looks at us the way we might choose to look at our church, at our lives, at our feet—as things redeemable.

Our feet—stinky with decay, wrinkled with age, ugly from infection, bruised by labor, signs of our march toward death—our feet are not scary to the one who has bound us up into a new body, a body of life, a body we entered into through baptismal waters. God, who is not afraid to draw close to the decaying portions of our world, sees our feet and loves them, and we are given the new commandment to love one another as we are loved.

Prayer: Eternal God, in the sharing of a meal your Son established a new covenant for all people, and in the washing of feet he showed us the dignity of service. Grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit these signs of our life in faith may speak again to our hearts, feed our spirits, and refresh our bodies, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

from Sundays and Seasons 2022

April 15

GOOD FRIDAY
LUKE 22:33-34

“But Peter said, “Lord, I am ready to go to jail with you, and even to die for you.” But Jesus said, “Peter, let me tell you, between now and tomorrow, when the rooster crows, you will deny me three times!” (Living Bible paraphrased)

I need to ask myself, how many times in my life have I failed to stand up or share my faith in Jesus with others? The following story is something I experienced when I traveled twice with my daughter to an orphanage in Haiti. She had been going there for several years; sometimes three or four times a year. She survived the earthquake in 2010.

Life there was something I could not even imagine. Dogs, pigs, goats and chickens, etc., roamed free everywhere, looking for food. While at the orphanage, I saw a chicken on top of a table outside, picking around where food was being prepared for the children and us. Probably a common sight. Roosters were often heard crowing. It was Holy week when we were there. At 4:00 a.m. on Good Friday, I was awakened by a rooster crowing. I couldn't help but to be reminded of Peter and what Jesus said to him. Immediately my thoughts were that my name could have replaced Peter's name. However, I also felt reassured that because of my faith and God's love, as well as His grace, that we have all been forgiven of our sins and failures.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

Helen Schmidt

April 16

FIND STRENGTH AND HOPE
IN THE CROSS

It is difficult as we kneel before the cross to hear the voice of the gospel. We might imagine that it waits for us at Eastertide, that the law says its peace and come Sunday the gospel will finally win the day, but that is not so. The gospel spells freedom for those held captive to sin. The resurrection only matters for those who know they are dead.

We, who are both saints and sinners, kneel before the cross and hear it speaking to us as both verdict and promise. It is true: each of us is guilty of our participation in the world's suffering. We, each bearing the image and likeness of God in our very skin, do not respect that image in one another, much less the world we inhabit, God's good garden.

We do not respect God's creations—one another, or the world we live in. We put one another on the crosses at which Jesus now joins us. We must admit this or there is no need for the salvation Christ brings. We must admit we are in bondage to these patterns of human violence and environmental degradation before we can be liberated from them.

This is the promise we experienced yesterday, Good Friday: we will be liberated from these crosses—the ones we hang on and the ones on which we hang one another. These crosses, at once symbols of the divisions between us and a symbol of the end to all divisions, promise that God will not abandon us in our suffering. God comes to us just like this, just as we are, but God does not leave us this way. This is the cross—evidence of our sin, and sign of God's love.

Prayer: Merciful God, your Son was lifted up on the cross to draw all people to himself. Grant that we who have been born out of his wounded side may at all times find mercy in him, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

from Sundays and Seasons 2022

April 17

EASTER SUNDAY

He Is Risen

He Is Risen, Indeed

Alleluia

Prayer: God of mercy, we no longer look for Jesus among the dead, for he is alive and has become the Lord of life. Increase in our minds and hearts the risen life we share with Christ, and help us to grow as your people toward the fullness of eternal life with you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Cross
Faith
Forgiveness
HOPE
HUMILITY
LOVE