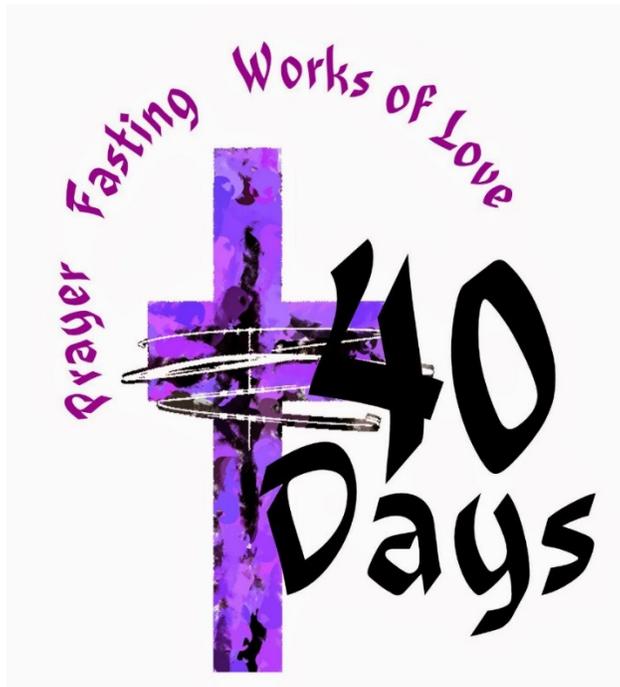


Our Lenten Devotional ~ 2019 ~



Prepared by members & friends of
First Presbyterian Church, Carlisle, PA



As you take the pages of this devotional in your hands and read it during the season of Lent you will be experiencing the thoughts and prayers of your fellow church members and friends. As you read the scriptures and devotions and as you pray, I hope that we will grow together more and more as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Psalms God invites us to “be still” so that we might know Him better (Psalm 46:10). For most people using a devotional like this is part of their quiet time alone with God. But as you read through these pages I hope you will realize that you are not alone. Not only is God with you, but in the pages of this booklet so too are your brothers and sisters who have written to help us all know God better.

Jesus said, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). What follows is an abundant feast, prepared for you by the members and friends of First Presbyterian Church. Take, read, and pray that we may know God and one another better. Take, read, and pray that we may love God and one another more.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Tony Lorenz

Wednesday, March 6, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Joel 2:1-17

“It’s Not Too Late!”

I don’t watch scary movies because... well, because they’re scary! Joel 2 opens a little bit like a scary movie. “The day of the Lord is coming,” Joel proclaims, “a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, a large and mighty army is on its way.” God’s judgment is coming to Israel and to us. Just imagine it! And for the next few verses Joel describes, in stunning detail, what we find hard to imagine.

In verse 11, Joel asks the question we all want to ask: “Who can endure it?” Who, indeed, can endure the judgment of God?

Then come two little words. Two small words that will change everything. “Even now ...” (Joel 2:12). With these words God completely transforms the atmosphere. “Even now,” God says we can repent. “Even now,” the Lord is gracious to us if we bring Him our hearts. It’s as though God looks us straight in the eyes and says, **“It’s not too late.”**

I wonder how many people think it is too late for them? How many folks wonder if God could possibly forgive them?

But here's the thing. Our God **longs** for all of us. "Return to the Lord your God," Joel says, "for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity" (Joel 2:13). God wants our sincere repentance: "Rend you heart and not your garments" (Joel 2:13), and He does not desire that any should perish (see 2 Peter 3:9).

If someone is still breathing, there is still time! There is still time to confess and be forgiven. God's judgment is real, but **it's not too late**. Even now God is willing and able to forgive and redeem those who turn to Him. When the Day of the Lord comes, I don't want anyone to have the terrifying experience of being found against the army of God. And neither does He. In His great love for the world, God sent His Son. Scripture tells us that whoever believes in Him will be saved.

PRAYER: Father, you are so full of love. You saw me, in all my sin, and You sent Your Son to take Your wrath upon Himself on the cross. Thank you for not giving up on me. And thank you for not giving up on the people around me. Help me to share Your love with them. In Jesus' name.

AMEN

Rita and Bill Beck

Thursday, March 7, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Acts 7:30-34

These verses of Acts focus on Stephen's recounting of the history of Moses and the burning bush.

The aspect of this passage that resonates the most with me is when God tells Moses to remove his shoes "for the place where you are standing is holy ground." This verse draws attention to God's presence everywhere and the fact that we can find Him anywhere at any time - in a striking ray of sunshine through the clouds, the faint green buds we'll soon see on trees, and a myriad of other things. His presence in nature is profound and we are reminded to seek Him and worship Him there as well as in the sanctuary.

Lastly, in verse 34, God keeps His covenant and tells Moses He will finally end their 40-year sojourn in the desert.

PRAYER: Lord, thank you for the beauty we are able to see all around us. Help us to see You in the nature that surrounds us and to remember Your hand in all that we see and do.

Anita Ashbaugh

Friday, March 8, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Acts 7:40-41

They told Aaron, “Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt – we don’t know what has happened to him!” That was the time the Israelites made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and held a celebration in honor of what their hands had made.

These verses are from Stephen’s speech to the Sanhedrin. He had been accused by false witnesses of blasphemy against Moses and God, and was giving his testimony. Throughout his speech, Stephen nicely summarizes Israel’s history and calls them out on constantly turning away from God. As a nation, they repeatedly killed His prophets and ultimately crucified His Son. No one likes criticism and being called out, and the Sanhedrin was quite wroth at Stephen’s speech. Thus, things ended badly for Stephen, as he ended up being stoned to death. As a sidebar, Saul (later Paul) was present giving approval of the stoning, and the false witnesses laid their clothes at Saul’s feet.

These verses in particular make me think of what makes us reject God’s truth. Perhaps when the going gets tough, we desire to turn towards something comforting and away from

the difficult path. Witness the moth: the moth sees the flame as a source of comfort, but upon approaching too close, the reward is not what the moth expects. Death instead of light and warmth is the consequence.

What are the things that we choose to be comforting? Do we choose things that feel good in the moment, but like the moth's mistake, leave us in more pain? The Israelites wanted the Golden Calf, but it cost them 40 years of wandering. During this time of Lent, a time of reflection and often one where we give something up, perhaps we can consider relinquishing a little of our desire for momentary ease and comfort and focus more on the path God wants us on.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, help guide me and lead me on the path You wish for me to follow. Help me let go of the things that are not good for me. Let me find my comfort and joy in You and all of the many blessings in my life. AMEN

Ryan Crim

Saturday, March 9, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

To everything there is a season for every purpose under heaven (3:1).

Many people are familiar with this passage of scripture, especially the baby boomers who listened to the Byrds' (Pete Seeger) 1965 song "Turn! Turn! Turn!" (I bet you added those words in your mind when you read the scripture). This scripture reminds us that at different times in our lives we will be experiencing or doing certain things and there is really no pattern to it. This sentiment is also expressed artistically in ***The Voyage of Life*** series by artist Thomas Cole.

The Voyage of Life is a series of paintings created by Thomas Cole in 1842 representing an allegory of the four stages of human life: childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age. The paintings depict a voyager who travels in a boat on a river through the mid-19th-century American wilderness. In each painting the voyager rides the boat on the River of Life accompanied by a guardian angel. The landscapes, each reflecting one of the four seasons of the year, play a major role in conveying the story. With each installment the boat's direction of travel is reversed from the previous picture. In childhood, the infant glides from a dark cave into a rich, green landscape. As a youth, the boy takes control of the boat and aims for a shining castle in the sky. In adulthood, the adult relies on prayer and religious faith to sustain him

through rough waters and a threatening landscape. Finally, the man becomes old and the angel guides him to heaven across the waters of eternity.

(refer to last page of devotional)

As you probably noticed in each these four pictures there is a guardian angel. I prefer to think that Thomas Cole used the angel to represent God. In all stages of life, it illustrates how believers depend on God.

The first picture representing our birth and childhood. We are all unique gifts from God. We are full of potential. Note that the angel is the one steering the boat and the river is calm and narrow, symbolizing the sheltered experience of childhood. The figurehead on the prow holds an hourglass representing time. In our childhood we hopefully develop good morals and values and our faith begins to grow, but we are not yet in control of our lives. God, with the help of parents and religious and secular teachers, prepares us for the day when we leave our parents' home and start our own lives.

The second picture represents youth. To me this picture shows that God has given us the tools we need to prosper in this life, but somehow knows that He may not see or hear from us for a while, but his hand is still outstretched to us to

let us know he is still there for us. He understands that while we are at college, moved away from home, joined the military or are the spouse of a military member, we will develop our own thoughts, goals and desires. We will have a tendency to forget that God is still watching out for us and credit our success in life to our own hard work. We tend to think we are the ones in charge of our life and God is just an afterthought. Even though we develop these thoughts, God still remains faithful to us and he is in control regardless of what we perceive.

The third picture represents adulthood. The angel is small and more difficult to see and behind the man, and seen as distant and not on this earth. How true that is! Many people struggle during adulthood dealing with raising families, and pursuing a career. Not only that, adults also have to deal with the death of parents and other loved ones. The struggles we have in life are represented in the painting by the dark stormy sky, rough waters filled with various debris, and trees that we must go around. But notice how the man is handling it. He is down on his knees and humbly praying for God's help. He's not steering the boat. The boat is being steered by God! Somehow, as adults we seldom find time for God and appreciate how relevant he is in our life. We are the ones that are lost. God is always there. He hasn't left heaven and failed to leave a forwarding address!

The fourth picture represents old age. The man has grown old; he has survived the trials of life. The waters have calmed; the river flows into the waters of eternity. The figurehead and hourglass are missing from the battered boat but it's still floating; the withered old voyager has reached the end of earthly time. The man appears to be touching God. We know we are coming to the end of our lives. Perhaps because we have grown in faith, we see God is now in front of and closer to us. We know as Christians, that in a short time we will be with God forever. We will receive the eternal award that God promised us.

So what does this have to do with Lent? During Lent we should reflect on Jesus' sacrifice for us. He loved us then and loves us now. No matter what season of life we are in, it pleases Him when we put our faith and trust in Him.

PRAYER: Lord, help us to remember how much you love us and help us put our faith in you no matter what season of life we are in. AMEN

Earl Zimmerman

Sunday, March 10, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Romans 10:8b-13

Highlighted verses from this reading:

v. 8: "God's message is near you, on your lips and in your heart."

v. 10: "For it is by our faith that we are put right with God; it is by our confession that we are saved."

v. 11: "Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed."

v. 12: "God... richly blesses all who call to him."

We can count on God, when we confess our sinfulness to Him. We can count on Him and will not be disappointed in Him. I believe we are to live life fully while we are here on earth. And, when I read this statement, this strong statement, I think that we will be pleased when we finally do meet with Him, at life's end. Almost two years ago, my family lost both my father and sister within two days. It was a very difficult time. But more recently, I have felt more peace for them that they are in heaven. Although I strive to fully live each day on earth here, I am thankful that we can count on Him at the end.

I also have found that He richly blesses us. I have felt richly blessed in the past two years. For example, sometimes things in life that seem positive and yet so coincidental, to me are signs that God had His hands in these situations.

Even when life can be difficult, I think when we look for God's hand in things, we can find ways to feel richly blessed. Many blessings to you this day and this Lenten season.

PRAYER: Savior of the world, I pray that my verbal confession of You and my way of life will be an integrated expression of my faith and will be pleasing to You and a witness to others. AMEN

Beth Whitman-Pitzer

Monday, March 11, 2019

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 2:1-6

“Walking as Jesus Did”

How do we get from where we are now in our lives and where we want to be when we see Jesus? In 1 John 2, the disciple tells us two ways to make that transition. First, “We know that we have come to know him (Jesus) if we obey his commands” (1 John 2:3). Then this, “This is how we know we are in him (Jesus): Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did” (1 John 2:5-6).

What John is really describing here is the process of **sanctification**. Sanctification is how the Holy Spirit works within us to make us more like Jesus. Historically, sanctification has been described in two ways, definitive and progressive.

When we profess faith in Christ, His atoning work on the cross allows us to be holy and righteous before God. The moment we profess faith in Christ we are legally innocent and made right with God. This is definitive sanctification.

On the other hand, progressive sanctification is a process, one that makes us more like Christ over time. Through His Word, prayer, difficult relationships and the general stress of

life, the Holy Spirit changes our attitudes and behaviors so that we look and walk more like Jesus.

Sanctification is a beautiful thing where God works within us and we respond to His extravagant grace with obedience to His commands and a willingness to walk in our lives as Jesus did.

Our confidence, dear ones, is not in ourselves or our gifts and abilities. Our confidence is in Jesus. We have no need to build our trust in who we are or who we have been. It's *all* about, and *only* about, Jesus.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I want to grow to be more and more like Jesus. Help me to see and confess my sin, to obey Your commands, and to walk like Jesus. Grow me into that kind of person, I pray in Jesus' name. AMEN

Rita and Bill Beck

Tuesday, March 12, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 17

*O LORD, hear my plea for justice. Listen to my cry for help.
Pay attention to my prayer, for it comes from an honest heart (Psalm 17:1).*

King David is one of the greatest people of prayer in the Bible. He is a man after God's own heart (Acts 12:22), and when he prays, he prays from the heart. David understands that relationships, whether with God or with close friends like Jonathan, are built when people share with honesty and openness. Although he acknowledges God's greatness and supremacy, David never holds back his true feelings. He knows God wants more than platitudes; God wants honesty, even when it's raw and painful. Many of David's passionate prayers are recorded in the book of Psalms. His outspoken honesty with God provides a pattern we can follow. We too are to approach the throne of God with our true thoughts and emotions.

PRAYER: *Father, give me an honest heart. Make me more like Jesus in whom there is nothing false. AMEN*

Debby Madden

Wednesday, March 13, 2019

SCRIPTURES:

Job 1:1-22; Psalm 17; Luke 21:34-22:6

Satan asks God, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied, "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and hearts are spread throughout the land." (Job 1:1-22)

Satan thought it was the material things that Job possessed and the family he was blessed with that made him believe in God. God showed Satan that Job's faith was unwavering, even when all of his livestock and sons and daughters were taken from him.

The story of Job shows that God trusts in us and no matter what happens we should trust in the Lord, just as Job did.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, during this season of Lent, may our trust in the Lord be unwavering no matter what happens in our lives to test our faith. AMEN

Tricia Naylor

Thursday, March 14, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 13:1-18

“Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.” So Lot chose. (Gen. 13:9)

There will not be enough land for both Abram (soon to be renamed *Abraham*) and his nephew Lot. Both men own enormous flocks, according to the story, so both will require an abundant amount of land for grazing, water for drinking, and space for moving around. The presupposition of scarcity has already led to inevitable competition, conflict, and aggression. The herders of the flocks are fighting with each other. Maybe Abram and Lot can hear the loud voices as their hirelings shout at each other in the surrounding fields.

God has promised land to Abram, but did God forget to mention nephew Lot would be taking up space, too? Where will the relatives put up their tents? Will more fences be needed to keep the flocks separated? Who will keep the peace between the competing herders? Is this divine humor at work: here is the promised land but you also have to share it with Lot? The scripture says that all the land is now before them. Abram, do you want the left or the right?

Significantly, Abram makes no land grab, nor does he assert a prior claim. Abram makes no choice. Three words in the text reveal a reality deeper than scarcity is at work. “So Lot chose.” Abram risks everything by letting his nephew make the first choice. For a moment, the promise hangs in the balance of a decision. Abram trusts God’s promise, yet Lot makes the choice.

Lot chooses the well-watered plain of Jordan. He moves his flocks and family eastward. Only then does God speak once more to Abram. Only then does Abram know what will happen as a result of the choice he gave to Lot. Only then is the promise re-confirmed as God instructs Abram to raise his eyes to see the land already promised. Abram and his family and flocks move on.

In this part of the longer story, Abram is portrayed as gracious and generous in the face of potential conflict in the face of supposed scarcity. His strength comes from his trust in God’s promise. Because of his “practice of the promise” as Walter Brueggemann calls it, Abram permits God’s blessing to come to both Abram and Lot. Abram lives into the economy of promise. He demonstrates what God has declared, “You are blessed to be a blessing.”

During the Lenten journey, remember God's claim through the sacrament of baptism. "You are mine," God says through Christ. "You are blessed – to be a blessing." Especially when the temptation to trust an ideology of scarcity, remember God's promise and live as an heir. Trust God's faithfulness.

PRAYER: Dear God, let gratitude and generosity enable us to be a blessing, in the name of the promised One whose name you bear: Jesus Christ. He is enough – and more.
AMEN

Jon Black

Friday, March 15, 2019

SCRIPTURES:

Genesis 13: 1-7, 14-18; Psalm 27, Philippians 3: 17-20

Biblical commentaries say that today's readings amount to a declaration of belief in the greatness of God and trust in the protection he provides.

These notions can seem almost quaint when viewed through the lens of our contemporary human experience; we all have different heroes, and most of the times they end up disappointing us.

Trust in many of our institutions seems as shaky as ever.

This is where our faith can really help.

I've met a person who regularly declares herself to receive direct messages from God, and I wonder what that experience must feel like. I don't know about you, but I just don't feel like I have that direct of a line of communication with the Lord.

But I do have faith. And I think it is by that faith that I am both encouraged to try to live my life in the right way, and assured that there is layer of comfort for the faithful, even in the face of everyday problems and realities that we cannot change.

I think that's the greatest thing about having faith; if you can hang onto it, it comes with an ironclad guarantee that - past, present or future - God is always with us.

The worldly tests for us, then, as Paul wrote to the Philippians, must be trying to retain and nurture that faith in a world run by its own rules, and then to live graciously and gratefully so that we can share our light with others.

The troubles of the human world are evident in all three passages: turf battles between Abram and Lot; pleas for God's help in outlasting enemies in the Psalm; and warnings about the enemies of the Cross in Paul's letter.

Goodness knows we have our share of troubles in the 21st Century, too. It's our faith that helps to overcome.

PRAYER: LORD, you are my light and salvation--why would I be afraid? Yet sometimes I still am! Protect me from the dangers of the world and from my own self-doubt. Enhance my confidence in YOU! AMEN.

Charlie Thompson

Saturday, March 16, 2019

SCRIPTURES:

Psalm 118:26-29

*You are my God, I extol You. Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;
for His loving kindness is everlasting.*

Matthew 23: 37-39

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together . . .and you were unwilling . . . For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

This pairing of readings seems to be contradictory, and it requires some serious contemplation to sense a connection. David's verses in the Psalm call for affirmation of belief in God; for giving thanks for His presence in one's life; and for absorbing the knowledge that God's loving kindness will always be present.

However, the words of Jesus quoted in Matthew indicate that God will *withhold* His loving kindness from Jerusalem because of the city's history of condemning prophets. Was Christ thinking of his own crucifixion as he said these words about Jerusalem's history? He would have liked to protect the city, but the people - chiefly the Pharisees - were unwilling, and the terrible corporate guilt of the city made God's forgiveness impossible. According to scholars, Christ made this statement on the Tuesday of Holy Week - certainly aware of

what the people of Jerusalem would soon be doing to him. David's words of faith would have been known to Jesus and perhaps sustained him during those last days of his life.

Christ's words to Jerusalem remind of wrong-headedness, but do not leave the people without hope, as he tells them that when they recognize "He who comes in the name of the Lord" then they can and will be subject to God's loving kindness.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, grant that we, like David, will be able to give thanks and praise for Your presence in our lives. May we recognize and accept Jesus and then extol God and His goodness. AMEN

Susan Meehan

Sunday, March 17, 2019

SCRIPTURES:

Genesis 15:1

Do not fear Abram, I am a shield to you. Your reward will be very great.

Psalms 27:5-6

For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle, in the secret place of His tent. He will hide me; he will lift me up on a rock.

Philippians 4:1

Stand firm in the Lord, my beloved - He will transform you.

March 17th, St. Patrick's Day, has become more of a secular occasion for wearing green and drinking green beer than a commemoration of the life of a man who introduced Christianity to parts of the Western world. Stop to think of Patrick's strong faith and belief that God could and would enable his success in converting pagans to Christianity.

St. Patrick may well have relied on his memory of verses such as the Genesis quote above and the verses from Psalm 27, and perhaps these same verses provided comfort and inspiration to our Savior Jesus Christ as he approached the end of his life in those last forty days. St. Patrick was surely comforted by the same faith that Paul, himself transformed, witnessed in this letter to the Philippians, "Stand firm in the Lord . . . He will transform you."

While a young slave, St. Patrick was also transformed and became one of the great apostles of history. We know that before Paul and St. Patrick, Christ was transfigured and then risen from the grave - all through the power of God Almighty, in whom both apostles had total reliance. They were lifted up, just as promised in the Psalm.

PRAYER: Kind and loving God, let us be ever mindful that your promises are to all believers. Enable us to believe as fully as Paul and St. Patrick. We ask for your protection and for your transforming grace. AMEN

Susan Meehan

Monday, March 18, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Romans 4:1-12

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he acknowledges the role of Abraham and his relationship with God in the privileged status assumed by the Jews. Abraham, while honorable and hard-working, arrived at his relationship with God late in life, after worshipping idols. When God promised the elderly and childless Abraham that his descendants would become a great nation and number more than the stars in the sky, he believed God. As unlikely as that seemed, Abraham had faith that God would make good on his promises. That faith alone justified Abraham's righteousness in God's eyes, not his long lifetime of good works, however impressive and helpful they may be to other people.

Paul reminded the church in Rome and reminds us today that the glory of good works is fleeting, self-gratifying, and serves only to impress others, but faith in God provides everlasting righteousness. Even one as blessed as Abraham could not erase his multitude of sins by all his good works. Nothing Abraham did physically justified his righteousness until he believed in God. He first needed to take God at His word and have faith in God's promise to make him a great nation in order to follow through with God's direction.

PRAYER: Lord, I pray for the faith that gave both Abraham and Paul the strength to follow through with your will. Lead my Spirit through as I encounter challenges. You see beyond my actions and into my heart. Remind me that my sins are far greater than my ability to erase them through any good work in my lifetime. I am thankful to be freed from my sins by your grace and forgiveness. AMEN

Bruce Ashbaugh

Tuesday, March 19, 2019

SCRIPTURES:

Numbers 14:10b-24; Psalm 105:1-42; I Corinthians 10:1-13

*“No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength...”
(I Cor. 10: 13, NRSV).*

One of the problems with the Lenten season is our inability to see anything of a positive nature. Traditionally, the question has been, “What are you going to give up for Lent”? Yes, I know, some of us insist upon such stoic choices, but today’s lessons offer some positive insights. Our God is one who remembers the promises of the old and the blessings of the future. And if you are being challenged and feel that you are losing ground in your spiritual “tug-of-war”, just keep reading I Corinthians 10:13. You will make it!

PRAYER: “The Lord is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty.” (Numbers 14:18) AMEN

Tom McKinnon

Wednesday, March 20, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 105:1-42

Psalm 105 tells the story of the rewards that the covenant people of Israel received following their wilderness wanderings and their leaving Egypt for their own land. Their suffering and doubts were coming to an end and their steadfast commitments were finally bearing fruit. We continue to be the benefactors of this desert journey.

As has become my tradition with Lenten devotionals, I look to my grandfather, the Reverend Wallace G. McGeoch, whose sermons my grandmother and mother assembled many years ago. On July 26, 1970, he preached a sermon entitled “The Christian Roadways” as a four-part metaphor of Christian experience. The Road of Awakening is symbolized by the road to Damascus. The Road of Service is the one to Jericho and reminds us to serve those who are suffering.

It is the third road, the Road of Commitment, that resonated with me with respect to Psalm 105. This is the road to Jerusalem taken by Jesus and the disciples in spite of – perhaps because of is better phrasing – the inevitable pain they were about to experience. They remained committed as did the exiled people of Israel.

The fourth and final road, the Road of Fellowship, is the Emmaus road where we are conscious of and confident in the risen Christ.

As Grandpa asked that day so I ask you today, “These are the four Christian Roadways: Road of Awakening, Service, Commitment, and Fellowship. Are you walking in them?”

PRAYER: God, make me willing to travel whichever road you have called me to walk. May I always know and understand that You, O LORD, are my constant traveling companion.

AMEN

Joe Shane

Thursday, March 21, 2019

SCRIPTURES:

Daniel 3:19-30; Psalm 63:1-8; Revelations 3:1-6

(Daniel): *Although King Nebuchadnezzar had praised Daniel's God as being "God of Gods and Lord of Kings", he demanded that his people bow down and worship a golden statue he had built. When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused, the King had them thrown into a blazing fire. What the King saw was that his own men were consumed by the fire, but he saw four men walking in the flames untouched – the three men who were tossed into the fire and a "being that had the appearance of a God." (Dan. 3:29). The King finally saw and believed because "there is no other God who is able to deliver in this way." (Dan. 3:29)*

(Psalms): *This Psalm shows David's total and absolute love for God, without doubt or reservation. It expresses his praise and appreciation of God's continuing gift of support. "My soul clings to you, your right hand upholds me." (Psalm 63:8)*

(Revelations): *John's message to the church in Sardis was to wake up and really listen to God's word. "Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches." (Rev. 3:6)*

The message we took from these Bible readings is that we need to focus more attention on our belief, love, and faith in God, and really LISTEN to HEAR the Word of God. And then, change our ways accordingly.

PRAYER: Our Father in Heaven, continue to live and heal within us, so that we will hear and follow your Holy Word as we live our lives as your disciples. AMEN

Dick & Ellen Darr

Friday, March 22, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 3:1-6

3 And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. 3 Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. 4 Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. 5 If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels. 6 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

Sometimes we tend to think of Lent as a sort of Advent before Palm Sunday and the triumphant resurrection of Jesus on Easter morning. In reality, Lent is the period when Jesus was alone in the wilderness 40 days, tempted by Satan. Jesus resisted Satan's temptation three times and the devil left Him until a more opportune time. In Revelation 3:1-6, John is saying to the church at Sardis: Jesus knows their deeds and they are spiritually dead. For some, things remain which are good and are not dead and though you are not perfect before God, hold fast and repent, God is watching. It is not too late! There is hope. He that overcomes temptation and sin will not be blotted out in the book of life. No one knows the day

when we will be called to meet God, so be watchful, repent, and sin no more until the day Christ returns.

PRAYER: Gracious God, remind us that you give us hope, it is not too late to reconcile with our family, friends, and world. Remind us, O Lord, that you are the one calling us to repent and turn around our ways. Remind us you are waiting for us with open arms and forgiveness. AMEN

David B. Killian

Saturday, March 23, 2019

SCRIPTURE:

Luke 6:43-45

“The good person out of the treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of the treasure of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.” (v. 45)

Bold letters on the front of a greeting card announce: “I know words. I have the best words.”

“Yes,” I thought when I saw the card, “and I also have words that are not the best; and both identify the abundance of my heart when I speak.”

So what kind of words will identify the abundance of my heart during this season of Lent? Which words will build up? Which words will knock down? Which words will become the fruits that identify the kind of tree I am, if I take Jesus’ teaching at his word?

The power of words for good or evil remains a daily choice. In her book *What Are We Doing Here?*, author Marilynne Robinson considers our present day “market for bleak and angry sensationalism.” We use words urgently intent on identifying “others”, setting them apart, making them different. We utter words which fail to respect the image of God in each other. We shout words which leave invisible scars and create painful consequences we did not intend.

We often lapse into words that, as Robinson puts it, “offer cynicism as ultimate truth.” We know words.

At the same time, we also know words that urgently respect others as those who, like our own selves, are made in the image of God. We know words that reflect the abundant grace and audacious beauty that are part of creation’s glory. We know words that reveal the fruit of the Spirit in us and in others: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (*See Galatians 5:22-23*) We know words.

During this Lenten journey, which words am I most tempted to use? Which words will identify the abundance of my heart? Which words will tumble out of our mouths, direct from the abundance of our hearts? What do you say?

The Psalmist provides this familiar, vital daily prayer:

PRAYER: “Let the words of my mouth – and the meditation of my heart – be acceptable to You, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.” (19:14) AMEN

Jon Black

Sunday, March 24, 2019

SCRIPTURES:

Isaiah 55:1-9; Psalm 63:1-8; Luke 13:1-9; 1st Corinthians 10:1-13

No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

(I Corinthians 10:13)

Have you ever heard someone say, “God never gives us more than we can handle”? Maybe even you yourself have said it at times. I usually hear these words in the midst of profound suffering or hardship: a cancer diagnosis, the loss of a job, the death of a loved one. Sometimes these things pile up, one after another after another, and we feel as though God has opened the floodgate and forgotten to shut it off.

And in the midst of it all someone says, ‘Well, you know, God never gives us more than we can handle.’ They certainly (okay, probably) mean well. But the implication is that you must be really strong, because God is really testing you.

So what if you don’t feel strong? What if you feel like the universe is trying to beat you down? What if you feel like everyone, including God, has forgotten about you in the midst of your suffering?

Suddenly those words don't sound very helpful. Maybe they even become harmful. You might think, 'If I can't handle what God gives me then maybe I don't have enough faith. Or maybe God doesn't exist...'

At first glance, this is what Paul seems to be saying to the Corinthians, 'God will not let you be tested beyond your strength.' But keep reading, because then Paul gets to the important part, 'but with testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.' Did you catch that? God provides! God provides! Just like God provided a ram for Abraham to sacrifice instead of his son Isaac. God provides! In hardship and weakness and distress and suffering, God provides.

But what does God provide? God provides Himself – Jesus Christ – to bear our burdens and share our sorrows. God provides Jesus Christ as the one and final sacrifice for the redemption of the world. God provides Jesus so that all who believe and trust in Him will be saved.

So when life is hard, when you face suffering and hardship and sorrow, when someone says, 'God never gives us more than we can handle' just remember this: maybe God is giving us more than we can handle, but in our suffering, in our

hardship, in our sorrow there is also an invitation to trust God and to allow Jesus to shoulder our burdens. God provides, He provides help in Jesus Christ, just don't be too proud to take it!

PRAYER: O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name. (Psalm 63:1-4) AMEN

Pastor Tony

Monday, March 25, 2019

SCRIPTURES:

Jeremiah 11:1-17; Psalm 39; Romans 2:1-11

It sounds like such a simple thing – being faithful. Why wouldn't we always be faithful to God? What could be a more wonderful promise? – God's faithfulness to us in return for our faithfulness to God. However, the Israelites had barely escaped from Egypt before they began questioning this promise. And a bit later, while Moses was up on the mountain deep in conversation with God, everyone else was busy making a golden calf. Years later, the prophet Jeremiah is warning the people about their lack of faithfulness. And Paul, in Romans 2, is STILL warning them!

Lent is a good time to practice faithfulness. However, if you are like me, you will find (as did the Israelites) that it is seldom easy. Sometimes we simply do not want to be faithful. Sometimes we may want to be faithful, but we may not know how. I get the feeling that this is what David is feeling in Psalm 39.

However, just because the way of faithfulness is a struggle does not mean we should not try. Some days we may see the path of faithfulness clearly. Other days, the path of faithfulness may be harder to discern, as all paths open to us may have elements that seem decidedly unfaithful and

elements that seem faithful. Surely it is in this discernment that we will grow.

PRAYER: Lord, teach us this Lenten season to be more faithful. Be with us, help us to set aside our fears as we try to discern what, exactly, is this path of faithfulness. May we always remember that, if we will be your people, you will be our God. AMEN

**Kathy Wells
Christian Educator**

Tuesday, March 26, 2019

SCRIPTURES:

Ezekiel 17:1-10; Psalm 39; Romans 2:12-16

Many years ago, I remember a Sunday school lesson that taught me about the Holy Ghost. How exciting! And how disappointed my Sunday school teacher must have been when I proudly declared that the Holy Ghost was probably the brother of Casper the Friendly Ghost. I now know that Christianity includes a faith in and acceptance of things we may not really understand.

Fast forward to 2019. I was given three scriptures to inspire a Lenten meditation. I read them each several times and I was stuck. I decided to read several different translations - still stuck. Next, I decided to turn to the Internet and study several different commentaries, sermons and meditations based on these verses. A conclusion at last! Just as with the Holy Ghost, some things are not immediately clear and will require time and faith to understand. There are many aspects of Christianity that we can't prove or explain. I have no doubt that one day, these scriptures will have a clearer meaning for me, but for now, the mystery remains.

William Cowper expresses these feelings of mystery in a text he composed in 1775. It was set to the tune Dundee (Scottish Psalter, 1655) and has become a great hymn of the church.

God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
and rides upon the storm.
Deep in unfathomable mines
of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
and works His sov'reign will.
Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
the clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy
and shall break in blessings on your head.
Blind unbelief is sure to err
and scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
and He will make it plain.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, help us to remember your words, and ways will be made clear to us even though it may require our time and patience to discern your plan for us. AMEN

Art Thompson

Wednesday, March 27, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Luke 13:18-21

Luke 13:18-21 contains the parable of the mustard seed. Jesus actually alludes to the tiny mustard seed three times in the New Testament. The other two can be found in Matthew 13 and Mark 4. All three have the same comparison, the growth of the tiniest of seeds into a bush or tree where birds of the air come and make their nests.

Jesus attempts to describe the kingdom of God as a tiny mustard seed planted in a garden. It was only Jesus, along with His disciples, who were the key to the kingdom. As compared to the world population at that time, the strength of this tiny band was the same as that tiny seed. It was from this small beginning that the kingdom of God (Christianity) has grown. When the seed has grown and becomes a tree, then the birds of the air come and nest in its branches. This implies that the kingdom of God has room for one and all, enough for all to have safe haven there.

Also in verses 20 and 21, He compared the growth of that seed (your faith) to that of yeast put into dough to make it rise into a loaf of bread. As you grow spiritually like the mustard bush (tree), your faith would allow you to move mountains by the power that the kingdom of God possesses, and the miraculous strength it can give His people.

PRAYER: Gracious God, in your wisdom and creative majesty, You have made a tiny mustard seed able to grow into a huge bush, please enable my little “mustard seed” of faith to grow to permeate my life. AMEN

Ron Richcreek

Thursday, March 28, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 32

Psalms are so personal, so real. This is why I love them. This psalm shows us God's blessing for those who are forgiven. It shows us that sin brings sorrow, but confession brings forgiveness, and forgiveness brings joy. It is so easy to understand the impulse to resist confession. It is natural to hide from our faults. By doing this we cause our self-agony. By keeping silent our "bones are wasted away." Sin is inevitable because we fall short of the glory of God. Sin abounds, but through grace, sin is not the final word. Blessings are given to the sinner, who, through confession, has his sin removed. It not only removes sin, but the effect of sin on us. "Blessed be the one whose fault is removed." This unburdening leads to freedom, to joy; not wagging fingers. I can leave sin and its guilty associations at the door. I can open another door in my life. If forgiveness is the door, and joy the room that I can enter, then confession is the key that opens that door.

PRAYER: Dear God, we know that you long to shelter us and surround us, but sin remains inevitable. Help us to put our trust in you, so you can forgive us. Help us to confess our sins, and experience that blessing of forgiveness. AMEN

Megan Crum

Friday, March 29, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 32:6-11

6That's why all the faithful should pray to you during troubled times, so that a great flood of water won't reach them. 7You are my secret hideout! You protect me from trouble. You surround me with songs of rescue! Selah 8I will instruct you and teach you about the direction you should go. I'll advise you and keep my eye on you. 9Don't be like some senseless horse or mule, whose movement must be controlled with a bit and a bridle. Don't be anything like that! 10The pain of the wicked is severe, but faithful love surrounds the one who trusts the LORD. 11You who are righteous, rejoice in the LORD and be glad! All you whose hearts are right, sing out in joy!

Most of us would not respond well to being called a mule (or possibly something worse!). The psalmist paints a negative picture of mules, claiming they carry on as stubborn, stupid, wild and unruly animals. The psalmist invites us not to be like mules. Be wise, learn from past mistakes, the poet urges. Follow God's gentle and sure leading. The psalmist pushes us to a deeper trust in God and invites us to shout for joy and be glad. The message rings clear: evil and wickedness bring grief, while trusting in God brings love.

PRAYER: O Great Leader, help us to see where you are leading us and to follow with joy and grateful hearts. AMEN

Source: Openings, Rev Larry Peacock

Saturday, March 30, 2019

SCRIPTURES:

Psalm 32 & Luke 15:1-10

(Psalm 32:5) Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." And you forgave the guilt of my sin.

(Luke 15:7) Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

In today's scripture readings, the Psalmist confesses his transgressions to the Lord and is forgiven. Then in Luke, Jesus tells the Pharisees and scribes parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin to illustrate how God rejoices in the one sinner who repents more than He does for the "ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

The season of Lent is a time for reflection and repentance. We think about how we have wronged others, ourselves, and God, and while such reflection can be rather difficult as we recall our wrongdoings, it is also a time for healing and for asking God's forgiveness. For it is in seeking forgiveness that we are forgiven for our sins so that we can become clean and start anew.

PRAYER: Gracious God, help us to acknowledge our sins and seek your forgiveness so that we can learn from our mistakes and become whole again. And as the Psalmist writes, “Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.”

Molly Shane

Sunday, March 31, 2019

SCRIPTURES:

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32 & Joshua 5:9-12

(Luke) When sinners and tax collectors crowded around Jesus, listening to him talk, he knew the Pharisees and Scribes were grumbling, “This man sits with sinners.” So he told them the parables so they would understand, one of which was the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

A father had two sons. The younger son asked his father for his share of the inheritance. After receiving it he traveled to a far land and squandered it all on foolish things. When he became destitute, he decided to go home, humbled himself to God and his father, and asked to be treated as a hired servant. Instead, his father welcomed him with open arms, gave him fine clothes and killed the fatted calf to celebrate. When the older brother came in from the fields and his father invited him in to celebrate his brother’s return, the older brother got very angry and says, “This son of yours wasted all you gave him, but you still killed the fatted calf for him. I have worked for you all these years, never disobeying your orders, yet you would not even give me a young goat to celebrate with my friends.” His father replied, “Son, you are always with me and everything I have is yours, but it is right

to celebrate your brother's return, for he was dead and is alive, he was lost and is found."

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank you for being such an awesome God, forgiving us for all our sins, no matter how great. AMEN

Dennis Husler

* * * * *

(Joshua) This passage reminds us that God will always provide for our needs, just as he provided for the Israelites as they wandered for 40 years in the wilderness. On the day after the Israelites kept the Passover in the lowlands of Jericho, they were able to eat the produce of the land, roasted grain and loaves made without leaven. The Lord saw this and the manna ceased, the Israelites ate food grown from the land from then on.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, we are ever so grateful for all that you have bestowed upon us your people. We know that you will always give us the strength, courage and guidance to make sure that we can survive on our own. Thank you for always watching over us. AMEN

Connie Husler

Monday, April 1, 2019

SCRIPTURES:

Leviticus 23:26-41 & Revelation 19:1-8

In Leviticus 23, God, through Moses, lays out an important part of the Jewish liturgical calendar for the Israelites - specifically, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Booths. While many of the esoteric details of the proper offering of sacrifices to God contained herein may seem archaic to the 21st century Christian reader, there are some obvious Gospel parallels relevant to the Lenten season. John the Baptist's call to repent before the coming of the Messiah echoes in some regard the message of the day of atonement, calling for us to acknowledge our sin and our need for God's forgiveness. Similarly, the Feast of Booths is a reminder of the journey of the Israelites out of bondage in the land of Egypt (during which they stayed in "booths" - or tents), and all that God had done for them while delivering them, finally, to the Promised Land.

During Lent, we are called to contemplate and prepare for what God has done for US, through his Son, Jesus Christ. Because of the death and resurrection of Christ, we no longer need to offer burnt offerings, for we have received from God Himself the perfect offering to atone for our sins: his only begotten Son.

As we prepare to commemorate once again the world changing events of Holy Week, Revelation 19 reminds us that God is not yet finished with His people and this world. Indeed, we are called to “rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure” (Lev. 19:7-8). Jesus, the Lamb of God, sacrificed for our sins for all time, will come again in final consummation of his “marriage” to the Church, often referred to as the “Bride of Christ.” Finally, we are reminded that we have work to do in order to prepare the “Bride” for the wedding: “for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints” (Lev. 19:8). I don’t know about you, but that reminds me that I still have some serious laundry to do.

PRAYER: Lord, we thank you for the grace of our salvation through your Son, Jesus Christ. Inspire in us, we pray, by the Holy Spirit and the example of saints past, the courage and will to do the work of the Church in this world, making her a worthy Bride of Christ. AMEN

JJ Patterson

Tuesday, April 2, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Leviticus 25:1-10

“Sabbatical Rest”

If you google “sabbatical”, you will find a variety of definitions of this word and, not surprisingly, contradictions within those definitions. A sabbatical is ordinarily a time of rest, a time apart to re-center and re-focus, and yet one of the subjects on Google revolves around what a person can “do” during a sabbatical. The very question misses the point. Sabbatical rest is not a time to focus on “doing”. By its very nature, it is intended to reinvigorate the one who takes the sabbatical.

Even the land in this Leviticus text is given time to rest. We know that farmers often rotate their crops so the ground can rest from its giving up of one kind of nutrient while still producing a crop that uses other elements of the earth that are in abundance. The rest is productive, but in an intentional way. In a similar way, a sabbatical – for a church professional, for example – is a time to allow those areas that are starting to be depleted to rest, while other aspects of a person’s life can grow and flourish.

Most of us need some kind of sabbatical – teachers may find summers a time of sabbatical (though usually unpaid); parents get brief sabbaticals when children go to camp or to

stay with grandparents. It's not the same as a vacation – it's a time to reenergize, to reimagine, to be ready for that time when the sabbatical ends. May you have sabbaticals in your life that renew you, also.

PRAYER: Lord of the Sabbath and the Sabbatical, thank you for giving us the example and the encouragement and the commandment to rest. May we heed your wisdom in our lives. AMEN

**Sue Moore
Nashville, TN
Retired Certified Christian Educator**

Wednesday, April 3, 2019

**SCRIPTURES:
2 Kings 4:1-7 & Luke 9:10-17**

At some point or another, we have all experienced the distressing sensation of feeling out of control of the world around us. In an instant, a life which felt secure, comfortable, and predictable can become something unknown, different, uncertain. A relative may become ill, a job may be lost, or you may endure challenges large and small. Your next step may seem unclear.

Both of today's passages contain stories of God's work amidst a moment of uncertainty. The widow in *Kings*, having just lost her husband, faces the prospect of selling her two sons into slavery and enduring a life of destitution. Elisha's response to the widow is, "What shall I do for you?" Elisha instructed the widow to gather empty jars from her neighbors. Then, God provided for her present and future needs by multiplying her oil supply, allowing her to pay her debts and live comfortably for the rest of her life.

Similarly, it is in the well-known story in *Luke* in which Jesus instructs His disciples to feed thousands of followers who gathered to hear Him speak. The disciples, having but five loaves of bread and two fish, must put their faith in Jesus.

Blessing the food, Jesus broke the bread, multiplied the food, and fed the masses. Whether for an individual as in *Kings*, or for thousands as in *Luke*, a solution was revealed by surrendering the problem to God. A new option, pathway, possibility became evident.

These passages reveal important truths about our own relationship with our faith in difficult times. Sometimes, we can forget to turn to God when the going gets tough. We can be shortsighted, resigned, and unable to see beyond what is in front of us. We can become frustrated, throw our hands up, and we may assume that all is lost. We are human, after all. But we learn from Scripture to put our faith in God. By surrendering our problem, and by recognizing our own limitations, we allow an opportunity for grace, for new pathways and possibilities to emerge.

PRAYER: Lord, in moments of confusion and discontent, let us not forget to turn to you. Give us the strength and wisdom to seek understanding from you and to listen. When a solution is hidden, the next step unclear, hear our prayers. When our world is uncertain, give us the discernment to hear you, as well. AMEN

Michael Gogoj

Thursday, April 4, 2019

SCRIPTURES:

Isaiah 43:1-7; Psalm 126; Philippians 2:19-24

“Coming Home”

I read these passages and they speak to me of coming home. When I was a girl, there were two meanings for the phrase "coming home". There was "home" with a little "h" meaning the house we lived in at the time - a happy place where family and friends would gather for a song and a meal. And there was "Home" with a big "H" meaning returning to our homeland, a place of belonging and extended family - in my case, West Virginia. Wherever we traveled, whenever we returned, as soon as I saw the state sign, my very soul would settle. I was coming Home!

These passages remind us, while we are residing here, we can enjoy the love, warmth, and laughter of home. But that will pale with the welcome we receive when we come Home to Heaven.

PRAYER: Thank you, Lord, for the warmth here and the welcome waiting for us when we come Home! AMEN

Samantha Gilbert

Friday, April 5, 2019

SCRIPTURES:

Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126; Philippians 2:25-31

*“Do you remember the former things, or consider the things of old?
I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth,
do you not perceive it?”* (Isaiah 43:18-19, NRSV)

We are in the final days of Lent and the holiest time of our journey as followers of Jesus Christ. The prophet Isaiah’s words open our hearts and minds to what is ahead; be careful not to take it for granted or concentrate on worldly things!

If you have read Psalm 126, you will see some familiar passages, but not so much in Paul’s letter to the Philippians. Who is this Epaphroditus and what is he doing in a Holy Week lesson?

This is the only place in the New Testament where he is mentioned and he was probably a convert from paganism, being named for the goddess Aphrodite. He turned his life around and has been sent to minister to Paul, who is in prison. It looks like his mission failed, he nearly died!! And you can imagine the murmurings of the church, “We knew we should have sent someone else. Was he really sick or just homesick?”

Epaphroditus risked his life to minister to Paul. Think about that. His efforts were not lost on Paul. “Welcome him then in the Lord with all joy, and honor such people, because he came close to death for the work of Christ...” (Phil. 2: 29-30). How do we stack up to that???

PRAYER: “May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.” (Psalm 126: 5) AMEN

Tom McKInnon

Saturday, April 6, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 12:21-27

(v. 26): “And when your children ask you,
“What does this ceremony mean to you?,” then tell them . . .

I am so grateful to not have to sacrifice a lamb and its blood for my sins. Our “lamb” Jesus already offered His blood on the cross for our sins and we are forgiven if we believe He did this for us.

We are then to share with others what this means in our life and be a faithful witness in our love for Him.

PRAYER: Thank you, Lord Jesus, for loving us so much that you gave your life for us. May others see you in our lives each day. AMEN

Jenneane Light

Sunday, April 7, 2019

SCRIPTURE: John 12:1-8

Dead and buried, Lazarus lay for four days in a stone-sealed tomb, until Jesus wept...and went to the tomb...and summoned the Spirit of Life...and commanded Lazarus, "Come out!" And he did.

The dead man came out of his tomb, wrapped in his grave clothes, but very much alive. And his sister Mary's world was rocked. Turned upside down by Jesus, who now sits at a table in her home. Lazarus is with them, and so is their sister Martha, when Mary takes a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anoints the feet of Jesus, and wipes them with her hair.

Costly perfume. Pure nard. Not the store brand. Not the nard past its expiration date. Mary took the best, most fragrant, purest essence of nard she could find, brought it to the feet of Jesus, broke it open, and poured out its contents. And, when she took this perfume ordinarily reserved for the dead, and spilled it all over the feet of a man who was very much alive, Judas called it a waste: extravagant, excessive, eccentric, expensive. Once it was gone, it was gone.

Or was it?

With Mary's act, a fragrance filled the house that allowed all of them to participate in her lavish offering. Although it may have smelled like death...to Jesus, it was the fragrance of extravagant love, a foreshadowing of the new thing God would do, when Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection turned their lives upside down, again.

I once heard about a church in North Carolina that had a "Coat Off Your Back" offering. On a particular Sunday, the congregation was invited to bring a coat or a pair of shoes that would be given away to those in need in their community. They were instructed to bring not a coat they had worn out, not a cast-off or cast-away, not a pair of shoes that have gone out of style, or are too tight, but a coat or a pair of shoes that were their best, a cherished possession, a costly treasure. At the feet of Jesus they would leave this coat, these shoes... pouring themselves out in an offering that surely filled the room and the community with its fragrance.*

*Tom Norwood, *Rethinking Stewardship*

This Lenten season, what costly treasures do you hold in your hands? What offering will you pour out, that the fragrance of God's love might fill the places you go?

PRAYER: Lord Jesus Christ, joy of our hearts, we kneel in gratitude and awe before you, thankful that our deepest needs are met by your over-flowing love. As you once received the anointing of a woman who bathed your feet with costly perfume, let our hearts be opened and our generosity be awakened by the fragrance of your self-giving love for us and for all. AMEN

**Rev. Cheryl D. Galan,
Interim Executive Presbyter
Carlisle Presbytery**

Monday, April 8, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 40:1-15

Then the Lord said to Moses: 2 “Set up the tabernacle, the tent of meeting, on the first day of the first month. 3 Place the ark of the covenant law in it and shield the ark with the curtain. 4 Bring in the table and set out what belongs on it. Then bring in the lampstand and set up its lamps. 5 Place the gold altar of incense in front of the ark of the covenant law and put the curtain at the entrance to the tabernacle. 6 “Place the altar of burnt offering in front of the entrance to the tabernacle, the tent of meeting; 7 place the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar and put water in it. 8 Set up the courtyard around it and put the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard. 9 “Take the anointing oil and anoint the tabernacle and everything in it; consecrate it and all its furnishings, and it will be holy. 10 Then anoint the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils; consecrate the altar, and it will be most holy. 11 Anoint the basin and its stand and consecrate them. 12 “Bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance to the tent of meeting and wash them with water. 13 Then dress Aaron in the sacred garments, anoint him and consecrate him so he may serve me as priest. 14 Bring his sons and dress them in tunics. 15 Anoint them just as you anointed their father, so they may serve me as priests. Their anointing will be to a priesthood that will continue throughout their generations.

As you can see, the “Children” of God had lots of Rules! As children, we also have lots of rules. What we eat. Where we sleep. What we wear. What we can play with, and what we cannot play with. The list is endless. I remember when I was a teen, rules were the one thing I wished I had fewer of. Growing up and becoming an adult is essentially stepping away from your parents’ rules, and I couldn’t wait. Now that

I'm an adult, I sometimes wish I had more rules. I find myself praying for God to give me a rule - tell me what to do (or not do).

This, I think, is the hardest part of Jesus' teaching. Throwing away so many rules and replacing them with the greatest commandment: Love your neighbor as you love yourself. Jesus told us that we are now adults. We know what is expected of us. It is up to each of us to live our lives "for the Glory of God" in our own way. We don't get a roadmap, but we do get support. We have the Bible, we have the Holy Spirit, and we have prayer. We also have a family of friends and believers to help us out. Sometimes we could still use a few rules.

PRAYER: Dear God, we thank you for the rich heritage of rules you have used to teach the "Children of God" what it means to be your children. Using this as a foundation, we know what you expect of us and what you have prepared for us. Please help us walk not with rules, but with love. AMEN

Steve Walker

Tuesday, April 9, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 20

A Psalm of David.

- ¹ *The LORD answer you in the day of trouble!
The name of the God of Jacob protect you!*
- ² *May he send you help from the sanctuary,
and give you support from Zion.*
- ³ *May he remember all your offerings,
and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices. Selah*
- ⁴ *May he grant you your heart's desire,
and fulfill all your plans.*
- ⁵ *May we shout for joy over your victory,
and in the name of our God set up our banners.
May the LORD fulfill all your petitions.*

The blessings in this Psalm were for a victory over enemies of David and the people of ancient Israel. I see it today as a blessing for the church and for all the individuals in the church. Prayer for its worship and mission and yet also for each individual in the community. May the Lord bless and keep each one.

**PRAYER: *Gracious God, protect and be with each of us.
May our lives be a sacrifice to you. AMEN***

Debby Madden

Wednesday, April 10, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Luke 18:31-34

These verses in Luke invoke a feeling of repulse for those who couldn't recognize Christ. Instead of acting with grace, as one would toward any other, the people were prophesied to condemn the Lord. No matter the good he would do, the end would be the same.

Those of that time are not unlike us. We too repeat empty phrases as if they mean something of import. Casual curses and dismissals of the plethora of suffering around us is not different from what the Gentiles did to Christ.

Remember to see God in one another, not condemn prematurely, and not crucify those who we simply disbelieve.

“Always seek to use humble love.”

PRAYER: Lord God, I am aware of my own inadequacy to understand your words and to obey your commandments. Help me to live the life of unselfish love you have shown and forgive me when I fail. Have mercy on me. AMEN

Duncan Crim

Thursday, April 11, 2019

SCRIPTURES:

Isaiah 53:10-12; Hebrews 2:1-9; Psalm 31:9-16

Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress. . . (Psalm 31:9)

Even those of us who find ourselves living lives of great blessings grieve over the illnesses and deaths of our loved ones and the aches and pains of aging. Add to that the deep division of a nation plagued by violence, greed and ignorance, and we might find ourselves telling God of our anguish and suffering. Because of the travails of life, sometimes it is hard to get through the day or listen to the evening news without becoming depressed. And there may even be those of us who wonder where God is.

But Psalm 31 begins and ends in praise and thanksgiving for the blessings that God has provided and a statement of faith that God, with his unconditional love of us, will stand by us and save us from any earthly crises we might face.

Isn't it wonderful to know that no matter what comes our way, our loving God will be there to lift us up and keep us safe? "But I trust in you, Lord; I say, 'You are my God.' . . . Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love."

PRAYER: Eternal God, help us to remember every day that you are standing right beside us no matter what difficulties may come our way: illnesses, losses, disappointments, temptations. Help us to find joy and faith in your unconditional love and the knowledge that you will ultimately lift us up to a better place where afflictions will be no more. AMEN

Deb Ryerson

Friday, April 12, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 54:9-10

9 These are like the days of Noah for me, when I promised that Noah's waters would never again cover the earth. Likewise I promise not to rage against you or rebuke you. 10 The mountains may shift, and the hills may be shaken, but my faithful love won't shift from you, and my covenant of peace won't be shaken, says the LORD, the one who pities you.

As God states in these verses, his everlasting love is for all people, young and old, male and female, and it will never leave us. We are God's sons and daughters.

Jane Patterson (Confirmation Class)

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In Isaiah 54, v. 10, the words really speak to me. It gives a promise from God, a promise of his everlasting love. I like how it says that even if a natural disaster takes place, like mountains shaking or hills shifting, God's love will last. I feel by saying "faithful love" it is a love which can be trusted. I find great hope in this trusting and faithful love.

PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for your presence in natural disasters and in our everyday lives. Thank you for the promise of everlasting love for all of your children. AMEN

Katie Crum (Confirmation Class)

Saturday, April 13, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Leviticus 23:1-8

“Resting on the Sabbath”

If you look back to the April 2 devotion, you will be reminded that God has instructed us to give the land and God’s servants a time of Sabbatical – a year or maybe a few months of rest. How is this different from Sabbath rest? Can we have both? Yes, of course, we can – and not only CAN we but we are told we MUST. On the seventh day God rested (Genesis 2:2); we are commanded to rest on the seventh day (Exodus 20:10). One day each week is set aside to rest – for the sake of God. Not because we earned the rest after working so hard, although some people certainly do, but because we need these mini-sabbaticals to give us new energy and new joy for the work of God that is ahead of us for the next six days.

Church professionals and others who work on our designated Sabbath (Sunday) have the most difficult time, we often find, having a day of rest. It is the responsibility of the rest of us to nurture that day of rest – holding off on that phone call or email or text that can wait another day; stepping in for them on their Sabbath days to visit hospitals or nursing homes; praying for them early and often; modeling for each other the beauty of a day of rest -- for these days are “a Sabbath to the Lord” (Leviticus 23:3).

PRAYER: Gracious Lord, in this hectic, whirlwind life we lead, remind us to rest. Help us to encourage each other in that rest; for your sake, we pray. AMEN

**Sue Moore
Nashville, TN
Retired Certified Christian Educator**

Sunday, April 14, 2019 (Palm Sunday)

SCRIPTURE: Luke 19:28-40

Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

²⁸ After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹ When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰ saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" ³² So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴ They said, "The Lord needs it." ³⁵ Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸ saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" ³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." ⁴⁰ He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

I can never read this passage without being transported back to the Mount of Olives and remembering walking this route from the Mount, going into the Lion's Gate of the city of Jerusalem. There were so many people, just like that first Palm Sunday; there was so much noise and chaos; young and old, men and women all trying to enter through this small gateway. And there were stones everywhere! Walls of stones, pathways of stones, stones in the soil, and maybe

even some stones in people's hearts. I can imagine, all of a sudden, the stones breaking out in song and praise to Jesus, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!"

PRAYER: Heavenly King, on this Palm Sunday may we sing out loudly and boldly, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Glory to God in the Highest!" AMEN

Debby Madden

Monday, April 15, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 42:1-9

Sunday mornings wake my heart and invigorate my soul. While I do enjoy my morning cup of coffee every day, Sunday morning provides so much more: thought-provoking discussions in Sunday school, sermons that challenge me to consider the Bible and our world in a new way, and, of course, fellowship with my Church family. On Sundays, I hear and want to fulfill God's calling in Isaiah 42:1-4 --

¹ Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

² He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street;

³ a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.

⁴ He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

Come Monday, though, it feels like the weight of the world is on my shoulders. Between family, work, and the demands of everyday life, I shrink from the strength I felt on Sunday. After all, this world needs a lot, and I am only one person.

How can I bring justice to the nations? For centuries (really, millennia), no one has been able to bring our world the justice we all covet. God has called upon many, but all have failed. God promises to imbue me with His spirit, but I often

feel like an empty vessel. How on earth can I bring justice to our land?

Well, first, I must stop looking for the answer here on earth. God promises to give me the stamina needed for this mission (Isaiah 42:4). God does not expect me to take a national stage in this effort: my work is to be quiet and unheralded (Isaiah 42:2). God also describes for me the justice He seeks: he wants me to protect the weakened and preserve the spirit that lies within them—no matter how badly bruised the reed or how dimly lit the candle wick (Isaiah 42: 3). God is not asking for a Nobel Peace Prize winner; God seeks a grateful servant willing to share a portion of what has freely been given.

I also must read the verses following God's call to action (Isaiah 42: 5-9):

⁵ Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: ⁶ I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, ⁷ to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. ⁸ I am the LORD, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. ⁹ See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.

God made everything...everything. There is nothing on this planet that God did not create. Yet, God chose me. Me? I have doubted and disappointed God more times than I can count. My frailties and fears would make anyone shrink from appointing me to a task like bringing justice to the world. Anyone but God, that is.

God's strength knows no bound, but neither does God's love. God wants me to succeed, and God stands ready to help — even when I stumble; even when I fall down. Even when I am ready to give up, God isn't.

With God, every day can be a Sunday. With God, every day can be tackled and conquered. With God, every day we can perform miracles that change the lives of others and own lives as well. With God. With God. With God.

PRAYER: God, help me not only to see and understand what is right but also to act on it. Help me not only to hear but also to listen and to do what is right in your sight. AMEN

Carlton Walker

Tuesday, April 16, 2019

SCRIPTURE: I Corinthians 1:18-31

It is written in scripture: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will reject the intelligence of the intelligent. (1st Corinthians 1:19)

This verse of First Corinthians tells me that God prizes more the things that defy logic, such as love, hope, and faith, than things such as intelligence and wisdom. To prove this point, God makes love, hope, and faith available to everyone. Every single person on Earth has the ability to love, have hope, and have faith. However, not everyone is specifically intelligent, and earning wisdom takes plenty of time and experience. Youth do not have this experience and therefore not everyone is wise. In Scripture, God tells us to love our neighbors. An example of this would be my friend taking my backpack home to give to me later when I had forgotten it at soccer practice. He didn't have to, but he did, and I think that's what we all should take from this First Corinthians verse. God wants us to love one another even though we don't necessarily or immediately gain anything from it.

PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for the message that intelligence is not the most important human quality. We can all pray that no matter how much wisdom we have, you delight in our faith, hope, and love. AMEN

Jack Patterson (Confirmation Class)

Wednesday, April 17, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 70

Hurry, God, to deliver me; hurry, LORD, to help me!

² Let those who seek my life be ashamed and humiliated! Let them fall back and be disgraced—those people who delight in my downfall!

³ Let those who say, “Aha! Aha!” stop because of their shameful behavior.

⁴ But let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you, and let those who love your saving help say again and again: “God is great!”

⁵ But me? I’m poor and needy. Hurry to me, God! You are my helper and my deliverer. Oh, LORD, don’t delay!

These verses tell me I am to be grateful for all I have and that everyone should do the same. We are to praise God in times of fear and in times of joy. Those who do not do these things for God should stop and think about all they have and learn to be grateful for who provides.

Camryn Thompson (Confirmation Class)

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In this Scripture it tells us that God will love and help us anytime we need it. Even if we are unhappy with someone he will help us to forgive and let go. God will lead us in the right direction and not let us hurt ourselves or others. Even if it seems like he is ignoring our needs, God is with us and responding to our prayers in ways we do not expect or understand.

PRAYER: Heavenly God, help us to be grateful for all that we have, even if we do not always recognize them as your gifts. We count our blessings of family, education, talents, friends, shelter, and church. AMEN

Sarah Sheperd (Confirmation Class)

Thursday, April 18, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 12:1-14

Until this point in the book of Exodus, God has caused nine plagues to try to convince Pharaoh to get the Israelites to leave Egypt. None have been successful (but then, God knew they wouldn't be successful). Now he informs Moses of the tenth and final plague.

However, there is a difference attached to this one. Prior to this, God has done all the work, and His people just watched them take place. This time they would have to participate. In the month of Nisan, the first month of the religious calendar (God seems to forget that traditionally, Tishri had always been the first month), a lamb or goat, one year old and without defect, was to be selected. Four days later at twilight, that animal was slaughtered. Blood from that animal was to be smeared on the sides and the top of the door frames of their house. That same night they were to roast the animal and eat it with bread made without yeast. The leftovers were then burnt. And finally, this meal must be consumed while all members of the family wore their traveling clothes. Their tasks were completed.

That night, God passed over Egypt and struck down every firstborn, man and animal, in houses that were not protected by the blood of the lamb. Similarly, we are saved by the

blood of the Lamb, Jesus, who sacrificed Himself in payment for our sins. This is why you see New Testament writers refer to Jesus as the Passover Lamb.

Other momentous events have been celebrated with the Passover feast. Joshua celebrated it when he brought the Israelites into the Promised Land. Ezra celebrated the Passover when the Babylonian captivity was ended. However, the most often remembered was when Jesus shared the Passover with His disciples before He was arrested and crucified.

The rest of the narrative of fleeing from Egypt and years in the wilderness contains many examples of Moses' and Aaron's problems with God's rebellious people. Fortunately, that was not the case in these verses from Exodus.

PRAYER: Dear God, thank you for saving and redeeming your people. AMEN

Ron Richcreek

Friday, April 19, 2019

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 10:16-25

When my oldest was little, he loved to narrate his days to me. I was never at a loss for what he was thinking because every single thought he had, he spoke aloud. When he would push his little trains around the table, I knew every single thing the trains were doing on the Island of Sodor, and I knew exactly what those trains were thinking and feeling. A thousand times a day, a new sentence would begin with, "Mama..."

The year he was two, one of his very favorite things to do was play hide and seek. A thrilling game at that age because they are never certain you are still in the house. One day I hid in the bathroom with the door wide open but just enough out of his sight. He looked all over our downstairs, talking to himself all the while. As he became frustrated, he said to himself, "Where can she be? Hmm. Let's go see." I knew where we both were the whole time, but he went through a whole range of emotions: excitement, nervousness, frustration, and a tiny bit of fear before I called out to him to reassure him I was still in the house. Then utter joy when he discovered me.

I sometimes think this is how it is with us and God, especially on Good Friday. He knows right where He is and where we are, what we need. We are looking for Him in all the wrong

places: in excitement, nervousness, and fear. The disciples and the women saw Jesus crucified and buried; they believed he was gone from them. As events quickly unfolded that week, I'm sure they were wondering what had just happened, where had their beloved Jesus gone. "Where can he be?" But he is faithful. When we can't see him, we know the promises he gave us. We know the hope that he will return, that he is now watching his flock. The waiting is hard, but he is faithful.

PRAYER: "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful." (Hebrews 10:23) AMEN

Tracy Easteadt

Saturday, April 20, 2019

SCRIPTURES: Matthew 27:57-66 & Job 14:1-4

The days leading up to Easter are now a time of hope for us as believers. We know that Jesus is coming back, and that He has already saved us. But, for the disciples this was a very dark time. They thought Jesus was gone forever, and for them, there was no hope.

But, as He always does, God helped them get through the dark times. In Job, we see Satan himself test Job, trying everything he can to get Job to curse God. But Job stays strong in his faith, and God helps him through it all. That's not to say it was easy, but he always had hope in knowing that God had a plan for him, whether he could see it or not.

In the same way, whenever we're having a dark time in our lives, God will be there to help us through it. As the disciples learned on Easter Sunday, if we trust in God and the plan He has for us, there is always hope.

PRAYER: Speak a prayer of praise and thanksgiving to the living Lord, who brought the hope of new life out of the tomb and into each of our lives. Pray for a fresh wonder of the gift of eternal life. AMEN

Drew Easteadt

Sunday, April 21, 2019

SCRIPTURES:

Isaiah 65:17-25; Psalm 114; Luke 24:1-12; Acts 10:34-43

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.

(John 20:1)

Walking around in the dark can be dangerous. You might miss a crack in the sidewalk and trip, or you might not remember the edge of the dresser and stub your toe. We can't always see what is happening in the dark, there are things we might miss, dangers we might not see, people we might not recognize, and blessings we might overlook.

Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb on that first Easter while it is still dark. It wasn't dark just because the Sun had not yet come up. For Mary and the other disciples the whole world had become a dark place after Jesus' death. They thought that the One who said, "I am that light of the world" was no more. Mary makes her report, some other disciples come to see the empty tomb, but no one understands what has happened. They are still in the dark.

And then Mary meets a man whom she supposes to be the gardener. But as soon as He speaks, she realizes that it is actually Jesus. The light has come back into the world!

Today we celebrate Christ's victory over death. The powers of darkness tried their hardest, but in the end they could not overcome the light of Christ. Today the grave is empty and the light shines brightly. By His death, Jesus forgives our sin and reconciles us to God. By His resurrection He gives us new and eternal life with God. And by His continued presence in our lives, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we have light for the journey. Thanks be to God. AMEN

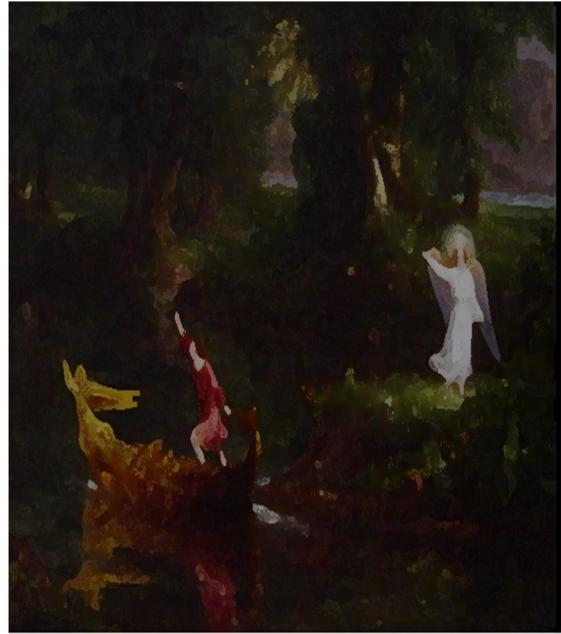
PRAYER: Almighty God, we bless you for the truth and love revealed in Jesus Christ – for his power to bring wholeness into broken lives, and to give peace where there had been fear and turmoil. We bless you for his sharing of our daily life, his offering on Calvary, his glorious resurrection, and the constant presence of his Spirit now within the church, his body. AMEN

Pastor Tony

~ Paintings Associated with March 9 Devotional ~



Childhood (Spring)



Youth (Summer)



Adulthood (Fall)



Old Age (Winter)