



Chevy Chase United Methodist Church
Lenten Devotional 2012

Lent 2012

Last summer when we began planning for Adult Education and Spiritual Formation for the year, we thought about how extremely busy people are. We have periodic bible studies and some wonderful on-going study groups. But it's hard to get people together. That's how the idea for this devotional was born. It can be used by individuals or small groups. We encourage you to be creative – maybe you can find a partner to talk with about the reflections a couple of times a week. Or maybe you have a friend who lives out of the area and you could email the devotional to them and share your Lenten journey online or by phone.

However you make use of this booklet, we commend it to you with our prayer that it will be a blessing to you. We were touched to read all the entries – each one reflects the unique and beautiful spirit of the writer. Together they form a glorious tapestry of our church's hopes, dreams, prayers, and devotion.

I thank God every time I remember you - (Philippians 1:3)

With our thanks to God for you, our church family,
Susan and Carol

Susan Hirsch, Chair of Adult Education and Spiritual Formation

Carol Armstrong-Moore, Director of Congregational Ministries

Acknowledgments:

We are most grateful to Ernie Torriero and Mina Wood for all their work
in helping to compile this devotional!

Wednesday, February 22, 2012

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Psalm 51: 10-12

There is so much clutter in life---visual clutter, noise clutter, things to pick up, emails to answer, errands to run---but there's also a lot of mental clutter---to do lists, expectations we think others have for us, our own preconceptions about what we need to be doing---that it gets awfully easy to lose sight of the big things that matter, and also of the little things---the encouraging word, the smile for people we know and also for those we don't. God doesn't cast us away from the presence of the holy; it's we who let the Holy Spirit slip from mind, pushed aside unconsciously as we let everything else well to the surface. But all it takes is a quick prayer, a brief moment, especially when things get hectic, to remember that Christ lives in the things we do and the way we do them. Joy, a willing spirit, and salvation are all God's gifts to us if we take time to make space for them.

In the busy-ness of our lives, O God, keep us mindful of your loving presence. When we begin to get caught up in things that really don't matter, call us back to You. Put a new and right spirit within me. Amen.

Virginia Mecklenburg

Joel 2: 1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12

Psalm 51: 1-17

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-21

Thursday, February 23, 2012

God is light and in God there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with God while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as God is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1: 5-9

Why do we want to walk in darkness? In darkness we cannot see our destination. We cannot see holes in the ground and low hanging branches. We can't see our friends or our enemies. But in the dark, we seem hidden; no one can see what we do, no one sees our weaknesses and shortcomings. But, even when we hide in the dark, God sees us.

Which comfort do we want? We can hide in the dark, imagining we are unseen or we can walk in the light, confronting each challenge with eyes open and a clear destination that gives our lives direction.

Sailing on the Chesapeake Bay at night is an awesome experience. From any place on the water, you can see beacons of light on buoys and towers that make it possible to know your exact location. These little lights can guide you home in spite of the night's darkness. Here is a wonderful truth. The darker it is, the more noticeable is the least little light. God is there to guide you even at the depth of despair or sin. Look to the light and shine for others to see.

In you, my God, I put my trust. Show me your ways, teach me to follow as You guide me to You in truth. My hope is always in You. Wipe away all record of my past sins. But, remember me, for you, LORD, are good. Amen.

Tom Hirsch

Psalm 25: 1-10

Daniel 9: 1-14

1 John 1: 3-10

Friday, February 24, 2012

*No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame...Show me your ways,
O Lord, teach me your paths... Psalm 25, selected verses.*

When I look back in time, I often see how you have rescued me, sustained me, delighted me or changed me. Yet, when I am in the thick of a problem, I am afraid to fail. Instinctively, I look to my own devices and plans. I rely on my own resources. Then I see those around me looking at me and wondering where is that Christian woman/man who so often praises God and points to what God has done? Why so anxious or controlling or busy with plans?

Why have I forgotten to pray for guidance? “No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame..” As I ask forgiveness for striking out on my own, I feel the tension leaving my body and my head begin to clear. You have promised to guide me. All I have to do is to choose to follow. Your Word is alive with direction that is trustworthy. You delight in showing me the truth and helping me to see even as others may shout out “this way, this way”, I can follow you and be led by your Word. As I open my Bible, I feel a sense of calm and excitement that I am finally talking to the right person for the job. You delight in teaching me and showing me your ways. And when the problem has passed, I have, yet another story to tell of your guidance and brilliance.

*God, help me to seek your guidance each day and to follow you with confidence and joy.
Amen.*

Gloria Vanderhorst

Psalm 25: 1-10

Daniel 9: 15-25a

I Timothy 4: 1-5

Saturday, February 25, 2012

And just then some people were carrying a paralyzed man lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven. Matthew 9:2-3

It had been a long hot day of doing health care in Nicaragua. The doctor had seen over 50 people, and the dentist had extracted over 20 teeth from about 25 patients. Just as the Health Team from la Iglesia de Cristo en Nicaragua was packing up for the two and one half hour drive back to Managua a huge crowd of men was rushing toward us. They had been celebrating – with a lot of rum – one of the Nicaraguan holidays. Knowing the likely state of their inebriation, we were quite apprehensive (actually scared beyond belief). But then we discovered why – they were bringing a man who, while trying to ride a bull, had been thrown and his cheek had been gored by the bull's horn.

"And just the some people were carrying a paralyzed man . . ." Matthew 9:2a

They wanted medical help. The doctor cleaned his gaping wound, and happened to have a couple of bottles of saline he could mix with antibiotics; and inserted an IV in his arm. The doctor later told us that the man had so much alcohol in him that no pain killers were necessary, While the doctor was doing this, some of his friends ran and brought two 20 foot long freshly cut trees they could use as poles. With the poles situated on the friends' shoulders, a hammock was suspended from the poles and a third friend held high the antibiotic drip. They had a daunting task – taking him down from the mesa their town was on to the main highway – about 10 kilometers and then finding a way to get him to the hospital in Managua – another 75 kilometers.

"When Jesus saw *their* faith, He said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." Matthew 9:2b

Somehow they made it. They started down the mesa about 45 minutes before we did and we did not see them anywhere along the way back home to Managua.

When we were back home in the states, we received word that 2 weeks after the incident the man walked into the church office of la Iglesia de Cristo, still heavily bandaged, and thanked them for saving his life and pledged his life to Christ.

"When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, Who had given such authority to human beings." Matthew 9:8

How have friends been helpful to you at a time when you needed healing? Do you believe that God has given you authority to forgive sins and heal someone in need?

O God, You come to us in so many ways. We give thanks that You became flesh and now dwell among us. Help us with Your transforming love so that "we may serve and be served, heal and be healed." Amen.

Dave Myers

Psalm 25:1 – 10

Psalm 32

Matthew 9:2 – 13

Sunday, February 26, 2012

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased. And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. Mark 1: 9-13

In this reading from Mark, Jesus is sent out into the desert. For those who love Arizona and New Mexico the desert may connote beauty, but for me the desert conjures up images of dryness, desolation, isolation, and looming danger. There have been times in my life when I've felt like I've entered a place of desolation and isolation: suffering from post-partum depression after having my third baby or hearing that my husband had lost his job during the recession with all the attendant stresses. I have friends who find themselves in the desert through divorce or serious illnesses. So many roads can lead to the desert.

If our reading were to end with the desert, there would not be much room for hope. The readings do not end there. Even within Mark the writer notes that "angels attended him." Jesus was not alone in the desert and neither are we. This message is in all four readings appointed for the day. All four readings focus on the covenants that God has made with His people. The commonality of these covenants that God has made with us is the promise of God's love for us and faithfulness to us even when we show ourselves to be an unfaithful people. I find this steadfastness of God in reaching out to us in the midst of our messiness as human beings in the desert to be deeply humbling and of great comfort. I find it even more inspiring to know that God calls us and enables us to help each other find our way out of the desert.

Dear God our faithful protector, You see us feeling vulnerable and isolated in our desert places. Please help us see and trust your presence so that with the joy of the Holy Spirit we may go out to be a blessing to the world. Amen.

Lee Walsh

Genesis 9: 8-17
Psalm 25: 1-10
1 Peter 3: 18-22
Mark 1:9-15

Monday, February 27, 2012

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what God has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. Ephesians 2: 8-10

“Why do bad things happen to good people?” I have been asking myself this question since I was a child and much more regularly the last few years.

I have a good friend who is fighting cancer. My friend was diagnosed with inflammatory breast cancer five years ago. This type of cancer is fast growing and very difficult to initially detect and conquer. At the time, my friend had a new baby, a toddler and contract work as a planetary scientist. Life was good. Why did she have to get cancer?

Thankfully, my friend took her diagnosis and uses her gift as a writer and researcher to educate herself, her family, her friends, and countless others through a blog she writes about being a mom, wife, scientist and cancer survivor. Her blog helps us all to cope and heal and live. Through her battle I am reminded that even when times are tough and there are many challenges, there is still hope. There are lessons and miracles in everyday occurrences. God is always here, especially when times are hard. We must stay faithful and trust in God’s never ending grace and constant source of light, even when we do not always feel it washing over us.

Unfortunately, my friend is nearing the end of her time with us here on earth, as the cancer is spreading throughout her body. She continues to show her absolute faith in God and her light resonates through everything and everyone she touches.

Dear God, Although we may sometimes question your presence, we always know that you are with us. We strive to keep the faith and prepare ourselves daily to do your will. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Lisa Moreau

Psalm 77

Job 4: 1-21

Ephesians 2: 1-10

Tuesday, February 28, 2012

Thy way is in the sea and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known. Thou leadest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. Psalm 77: 19, 20

During my time singing with the Girls Choir at the National Cathedral, every weekday evensong we would sing the Psalms. It seemed so mundane since it happened every time, but I always loved it the most of all.

I think I always loved them because they were comforting. Somehow it seemed so beautiful to take verses, often plain simple words, when there were so many, and float them up to on high through music. As though, through singing them, the prayers suddenly became important enough and real enough to be answered by God.

My own tendency is to ask for prayers to be answered by God according to my ideas instead of according to God's plan. Sometimes when things don't happen the way I want or when I am in pain or experiencing a frustrating, challenging situation, it is very difficult for me not to get upset and feel as though I have nowhere to turn.

I appreciate Psalm 77 in that the words are straightforward and honest. Asaph writes down his emotions while dealing with his problems, the same way I fret about my life when I'm experiencing a difficult situation. Asaph cries out to the Lord and seeks after him in the midst of turmoil. If you have ever endured a trial, suffering, emotional pain, or any life difficulties you can probably relate to his words.

Reading about his situation helps us relate to the feelings he has. I have found myself questioning God about life circumstances when I didn't understand why everything seemed to be happening a certain way. Often times when I feel very upset, nothing can be said that will make me feel better. Sometimes I let little things balloon so large in my worried head that a situation becomes seemingly impossible and there is no place to find comfort. Sometimes we feel numb toward everything except that worry and pain. We do not know what Asaph is enduring, but we can relate to the circumstance where we could not find any comfort or release.

Then Asaph recalls the positive, sunshine-filled days when God was there for God's people. It is amazing how often trials set apart a new time of life. We have to remember in life, when times are dark, soon we will be on the other side of the chasm. Sometimes it is these life chasms that forever change our life. To make it through, we must remember it is God's plan happening in our lives, even if we don't understand the reasons. Let us keep in mind Psalm 77.

Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God? Amen.

Melanie Gowen

Psalm 77

Job 5: 8-27

1 Peter 3:8-18a

Wednesday, February 29, 2012

Every word of God proves true; God is a shield to those who take refuge in God. Do not add to God's words, or else God will rebuke you, and you will be found a liar. Proverbs 30:5-6

God is a shield to us who take refuge in God. How does God protect us? How do we know what to do? By watching the actions of God's Son Jesus, we can discern God's desires for the obedient behavior of God's people.

Immediately following His baptism, Jesus is tempted by the devil. "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread." How might we answer?...".Who are you to tell ME what to do?" No one has more of a right to say that than Jesus. However, He responds with direct quotes from the book Deuteronomy in the Bible. God's word is our shield and refuge from temptation. He says, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." When the devil tries a second time, Jesus again responds with scripture. "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

Jesus does not add to the scripture, argue or explain it. He simply states the truth.

To follow Jesus' example we need to know what the Bible says. When we study it and store its truth away in our hearts, it returns to us in times of need. It guides, shields, and protects us. . In my own life, I have found this to be true over and over again.

We thank you God for the gift of your Son Jesus, for His example, and for your word the Bible. Soften our hearts and fill us with your Spirit, as we meditate on your word. Give us understanding and change us to be more like You. Amen.

Susan Hirsch

Psalm 77

Proverbs 30: 1-9

Matthew 4: 1-11

Thursday, March 1, 2012

Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Romans 4:3

Abraham, originally called Abram, heard a call from God to leave Ur, in ancient Mesopotamia, to proceed to Canaan or Palestine. He became the “father” of the people of faith— Jews. Christians and Muslims. He was a giant in the history of religion.

Was he a saint?

Hardly. His human weakness is apparent in the Genesis passage for today.

The childless Sarah worried that without an heir, his call and their family would come to nothing. So she turned over her Arab slave Hagar to him as “wife.”

When Hagar conceived, Sarah had second thoughts and fiercely attacked Abraham. The patriarch, perhaps feeling a bit guilty about the liaison, responded, “Do what you want with her.” Hagar was cast out into the desert with her baby; their lives were preserved only by God’s intervention.

Yet in his letter to the Romans Paul celebrates Abraham as “father of us all,” because “his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness.”

What was most important was that Abraham was faithful to God’s call upon him to undertake a life-long journey, despite its huge uncertainties and dangers, to be bearer of the covenant between God and God’s people.

Abraham was justified, that is, put into right relationship with God, because of his demonstrated faith in his call. Like Abraham, we too are made right with God when we seek out and follow God’s plan for us.

Holy and faithful God, help me to understand your call on my life. Prompt me to respond with courage and energy. Shore me up with your love and grace. Amen.

Dane Smith

Psalm 22:23-31

Genesis 16:1-6

Romans 4:1-12

Friday, March 2, 2012

What we read in Scripture is, "Abraham entered into what God was doing for him, and that was the turning point. He trusted God to set him right instead of trying to be right on his own." If you're a hard worker and do a good job, you deserve your pay; we don't call your wages a gift. But if you see that the job is too big for you, that it's something only God can do, and you trust God to do it --- you could never do it for yourself no matter how hard and long you worked --- well, that trusting-God-to-do-it is what gets you set right with God, by God. Sheer gift. Romans 4: 3-5. The Message by Eugene Peterson

I'll never forget that early morning phone call on a gray rainy day in November saying my brother Gary had been killed in a car accident. A semi-truck driver left his farm that morning and backed his truck that was loaded with 20' steel beams onto a country road, completely blocking the road from both directions. He did this rather than turning around his long truck in his yard so that he could look both ways before pulling onto this country road. And he had not bothered to replace the lights that were required by law for the rear and side of his truck. So my brother, on his way to meet his two sons for some early morning duck hunting at a game preserve, rounded a curve in this country road and ran right into the steel beams on the semi-truck.

Losing Gary was so painful to me. I almost called Gary the night before to tell him I was pregnant, but I let practicing the piano take priority (something I've always regretted not sharing with him). He was a huge support system for me and was always a guiding light for me. I was filled with such anger and hatred toward this truck driver. I felt that no matter how hard and long I worked at it, I could never forgive this man. But this **sheer gift** that this scripture refers to, the grace of God, filled me and led me to write a letter of forgiveness to the truck driver. I never heard from this man, but I know that this trust in God to lead, gave me the courage to "let go, and let God" heal. My son Gary Justin is named after my brother. In a way, my brother's spirit got a breath of new life in the birth of Justin that following May.

*Dear Jesus, Help us to put our total trust and will in your hands. Help us truly believe that any obstacle in our lives can be overcome by putting our trust in you, **completely**. For it is only then that we receive your **sheer gift** of grace. Amen.*

Maribeth Gowen

Psalm 22: 23-31

Genesis 16: 7-15

Romas 4: 1-12

Saturday, March 3, 2012

I was leafing through the Bible that I got years ago for the Disciple Bible study looking for today's scripture. In the Bible, the book that precedes Psalms is Job which is more like what my life feels like at the moment. I could really write an epistle comparing my life to Job's. But verse 23 of Psalm 22 says, "You who fear the Lord, praise him!"

Debbie: But, Lord, I don't feel like praising You right now.

God: Too bad, kiddo; that's the covenant. I love you; you praise me and tell people about me.

I love it. I don't know if that voice I hear is really God or just an inner voice of my own. Hagar didn't either. In Genesis, she says, "Have I really seen God and remained alive?" I think the answer is yes, it's God's voice and it comes to us in many forms – our own inner voices; friends and loved ones who gently remind us who we are and Whose we are; our study of the Word; our worship. These all reinforce the covenant that God makes with us. God loves us. Praise God. Tell others what you have seen.

I'm fortunate during this period of unexpected leisure that I have so many people in my life who love me enough to remind me to relax, enjoy my freedom, and to be open to the Word of God in whatever form it presents itself. All praise and thanks be to God!

Gracious and everlasting God, make us ever mindful of your love for us all and may our prayers and reflections during this Lenten season be directed toward praising You in all that we think, say and do. Amen.

Deb Myers

Psalm 22: 23-31

Genesis 16: 7-15

Mark 8: 27-30

Sunday, March 4, 2012

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers. Genesis, Chapter 17: 1,2

Abraham got his orders in a clear way. In our modern world, we seem to need to see a more expansive, complicated explanation of our role. It still remains simple, even when we try to blur the instructions. God is God, we are not. God is awesome, you and me, not so much. If all we try to do is walk in faith and be blameless, we have little time for anything else. It is simpler still. If you walk in faith, how can you **not** be blameless?

So, how do we "walk in faith"? Let's take each word, working backwards. Faith is not blind or unfounded. Faith is knowledge which is based on fact and experience. Look back in your life for the evidence of God's hand and presence in your life. Being faithful is following the direction of the Creator and modeling God's example of faithfulness in the life of Jesus. "In faith" means that you are surrounded by that faith, fully embraced and protected. "Walk" tells us that our faith should not be kept in a dark room or at the back of the church but rather be in motion, constant motion. Out we go into the world moving from place to place, clothed in our faith in God who created us. Go strut your stuff, in a humble way!

Mark, chapter 8 Jesus, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life^[a] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul."

Pray (paraphrase of Psalm 22)

Praise to our awesome Lord!

As descendants of Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Ruth, Paul and Martha, we see how your hand has been in all of our history both in triumph and despair, in blessing and suffering. Never have we been separated from You.

*For you have not despised or scorned
the suffering of my affliction;
Lord, you have not hidden your face from me
but have listened to my cry for help*

*Thy hand hath made me, thy Son has saved me and the Holy Spirit sustains me
All that I know, all that I have is from You. Amen.*

Tom Hirsch

Genesis 17: 1-7. 15-16

Psalm 22: 23-31

Romans 4: 13-25

Mark 8: 31-38 or Mark 9: 2-9

Monday, March 5, 2012

*Then God brought Israel out with silver and gold,
and there was no one among their tribes who stumbled.
Egypt was glad when they departed,
for dread of them had fallen upon it.
God spread a cloud for a covering,
and fire to give light by night.
They asked, and God brought quails,
and gave them food from heaven in abundance.
God opened the rock, and water gushed out;
it flowed through the desert like a river.
For God remembered God's holy promise,
and Abraham and Sarah, God's servants. Psalm 105: 37-42*

It's about the waiting. We are conditioned to think that having to wait is bad. We live in a world of multi-tasking, for if we can be doing one thing we must be doing another – and to have to wait? “God forbid!” one might say. But God does not. It may be difficult, but difficult is not a wrong to be fixed. The waiting is not a space to be filled. The waiting is enough. Because the reward of one's patience is God's promise. The promise of a son born to Sarah. The promise of the land of Canaan to Abraham and those who wandered. The promise of God's son to us.

Gracious God, please help me to see that Your work is not done in a day. Forgive me for my demands of immediate gratification, my lack of patience in understanding Your ways, and my unwillingness to ignore the clock. I thank you for Your constancy in my life, though I may not always have the ability to see the end result. I will wait upon you with gladness of heart and lightness of step and patience of mind. Amen.

Carolyn Greis

Psalm 105: 1-11, 37-45

Genesis 21: 1-7

Hebrews 1: 8-12

Tuesday, March 6, 2012

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. Hebrews 11: 1-2

We talk all the time about having faith – faith in the teenager next door to take care of our dog when we are away, faith in FedEx to deliver a birthday present on time, faith in an airplane to take us to our destination safely. What we mean is that our experience and the experience of others has taught us that these are people, organizations and things that have proven reliable and can be trusted. Our faith is based on what we have seen.

Today's scripture from Hebrews is about faith in God, described as an assurance about things we only hope for and a conviction about things that we have not seen. On what is this faith based?

The scripture, in reminding us of the faith of the ancients, points us towards one answer. The narrative that unfolds in the Bible, from beginning to end, has at its heart the one eternal God who is constant and unchanging. In every encounter with God, from Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, through the stories of Moses, Abraham, Jacob, David and the prophets, through the gospel accounts of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, to the work of Paul and the Apostles in building the church, God's promises are kept. God is the steadfast rock who can be trusted.

These stories are our inheritance. They are our stories, and remembering them can help us find the assurance about things we only hope for and the conviction about things we have not seen that leads to faith.

Gracious and loving God, keep the Bible stories of the faithful in our hearts as a reminder that, despite our fickleness and through all the vicissitudes of our lives, in good times and bad, whatever the challenges we face, you are our rock and we can always put our faith in you. Amen.

Jim Hinchman

Psalm 105: 1-11, 37-45

Genesis 22: 1-19

Hebrews 11: 1-3, 13-19

Wednesday, March 7, 2012

*Give praise to the LORD, proclaim God's name; make known among the nations what God has done. ²
Sing to God, sing praise to God; tell of all God's wonderful acts. Psalm 105: 1-2*

There is a lot about David that I can understand. He is a very fallible seeker of the Lord. I sometimes think that we miss how much David loved God and how much his Psalms were really part of his life.

Perhaps our psalms would not be about kings and nations but about our jobs, family and life - remember David did the same thing when he was preparing for Goliath. He talked about the successes in his job as shepherd.

Ours might sound something like this: Thank you, God for all you have done. Thank you for helping me complete that paper and having that great idea in the last meeting. Thank you that the subway arrived and brought me home. Thank you that I remembered that my son needed cupcakes before finishing my shopping. You are great and the overseer of all parking spots and I thank you that you give me favor in the parking lot. Glory in God! In you I rejoice.

Lord, help us remember all that you do for us. Let us sing your praises for it. Amen.

Patricia Hammar

Psalm 105: 1-11, 37-45

Jeremiah 30: 12-22

John 12: 36-43

Thursday, March 8, 2012

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. Psalm 19

How many times have I looked up to the sky to speak with God? Countless. What is it about the vast, open sky that draws me in during my time of need, or time of celebration, or in anger, or sadness or happiness? How can one part of my world (albeit, always appearing different) represent a place of solace, answers and peace at such radically different times in my life? It is my belief, God created "the firmament" as way for us to view heaven in an earthly dimension and to give us an opportunity to reflect with the feeling of being surrounded by God at all times.

I am also struck by how often the "word of God" is spread without the use of words. It is the gentle gesture of someone holding open a door for another person, making sandwiches on a Thursday for people you don't know, the parent who tirelessly supports their child's musical or athletic passion, or picks up trash in a park when no one is looking. This is the word of God I hear over and over, and am continually reminded how much more "speaking" the word of God I can do while not opening my mouth.

The heavens do proclaim your glory, loving God. Thank you for the beauty of the "firmament" and your presence all around us. Comfort us, inspire us, and help us to speak your holy word through our actions this day. Amen.

Kirsten Williams

Psalm 19

Exodus 19, 1-9a

1 Peter 2:4-10

Friday, March 9, 2012

Then the Lord said to him (Moses), 'Take off your sandal; the place where you are standing is holy ground.' Acts 7:33

For us, the “burning bush” may be a newspaper account about hunger, walking past a sleeping homeless person, or a stark photograph of an emaciated, dying child in a war-torn land.

It may be awareness of someone in the family emotionally distressed. It may be a friend stricken with a devastating illness or injury.

Whatever it might be, the awareness is for us a “burning bush” and the call is to realize that we are standing on holy ground.

Holy ground is all around us. Yes, God is out there.

But God is also in here, next to us, in those we meet, all around us. God beckons us to be the Moses, the Christ person who will respond to the call, meet the need, heal the hurt, dress the wound, or offer a sanctuary.

The call comes with no promise of success, at least not as we understand success.

The call is simply this: to be *obedient* - to stand in and stand up for God in whatever the situation.

In doing so, the response we encounter may be rejection. It often is.

But if the call is authentic, the ground is indeed holy and the spirit of our Lord—the Holy Spirit—the Christ within—will provide.

Gracious, loving and merciful God, may I see the burning bush you have lit for me and may I respond obediently, confident that Your Will be done and grateful that I may be your instrument. Amen.

Bob Gray

Psalm 19

Exodus 19: 9b-15

Acts 7: 30-40

Saturday, March 10, 2012

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them. Mark 9:2

Reading this passage from Mark made me wonder about what Peter, James and John witnessed on that mountaintop. What must that have been like in reality! They actually *saw* Elijah and Moses and then *heard* the voice of God??? This kind of thing does not happen to me so I wonder: how did that change them, how did it permanently alter them? My thoughts turned to the presence of the divine in the daily lives of the Old Testament people. Here in Exodus God is actually *talking* to Moses – “Don’t let those people come up here! I just vacuumed the place.” Again, I have never heard that kind of direct message from the Almighty. I haven’t even seen a burning bush that is not consumed.

Up until about a month ago I would have said I have never had a Transfiguration moment; God has not revealed anything to me that once experienced left me altered forever. That changed on Christmas Day when Rev. Carol Armstrong-Moore was giving a Children’s Moment. She had taken a manger scene down to the steps in the sanctuary and was explaining the roles represented by each figurine, and how in this very place we had acted out the Christmas story in a pageant the night before with real people portraying different parts. The Gee kids offered up that their Dad was a king in that pageant; Angeline said she was a sheep; Lance was the star leading the wise men to the manger. Carol explained how each part was important and that the story of Jesus coming to earth wouldn’t be complete without each one. She said each of them had a special part to play, as well and that she would place her hand on each child’s head and say the name of the part they would each play. (I thought, oh this could get interesting. Suppose someone is chosen to be a shepherd and doesn’t want to be a shepherd.) She stretched out her hand and placed it on the boy next to her and said “The name of the special part you will play is ‘Jake.’” THAT I had NOT expected! I was overwhelmed and overcome with emotion. She continued on down the line through all the kids there: “and the part you will play is ‘Jeremy,’ ‘Hilary,’ ‘Marianna,’ ‘Lance.’” This was my life altering Transfiguration moment -- the revelation that truly we are part of the reason for the birth of the Christ child and that through Jesus we receive God’s grace, love and acceptance. The realization that each of us is connected and part of the story swept away any doubt in my mind that the divine resides in each of us—that without each of us the story would be incomplete. I wiped a tear from my cheek. I couldn’t let on that this simple act of telling each child they play a part vital to God had laid bare my jaded, questioning heart and allowed God’s simple message to be heard: “I love you.”

I was inexorably altered on Christmas Day. I had been mistaken. Our Creator *is* present in our contemporary lives and unlike the people in Exodus I get to see God everyday in the face of every person I greet. (Still, it would be fun to see that burning bush!)

Holy One, Creator of the stars in the heavens, Creator of every blade of grass, I add my voice to the praise of the firmament—how wondrous is the vastness and variety of all you have made. Help me to be open to the inspiration of your creation and teach me to accept, as Christ accepts me, all whom I meet. Open my heart, my life to the divine that resides in each of us and may my life reflect your grace and love to all who greet me. Amen.

Psalm 19
Exodus 19: 16-25
Mark 9: 2-8

Jesse Parker

Saturday, March 11, 2012

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Psalm 19: 1

Whenever I saw the ocean constantly rolling into the shore, or awoke to a beautiful sunrise, or watched the sun set, I could not help but recognize the truth of this bible verse. Heaven does declare!

Even as a child, when I looked up at the mountains, or saw a beautiful flower, or watched the waves of the ocean constantly rolling into the shore, or awoke to a beautiful sunrise, or watched the sun set, I could not help but recognize the truth of this bible verse. Heaven does declare the glory of its Creator and the earth does reflect the beauty God gave us. We must also look for the beauty of God's creation in each person we meet. Do we reflect that beauty from within ourselves?

Psalm 19 ends with the verse, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer." If we can always practice that prayer we will be well on our way to reflecting His handiwork.

Please help me to recognize your handiwork, not only in the beauty of the heavens and earth but in my fellow human beings. Amen.

Ruth Powers

Exodus 20: 1-17

Psalm 19

1 Corinthians 1: 18-25

John 2: 13-22

Monday, March 12, 2012

Two of the prescribed biblical readings for today comment on each other unconsciously across the centuries. In Psalm 84 and in Paul's first letter to the early church at Corinth we encounter people at different stages on their paths toward spiritual maturity.

In First Corinthians, Coach Paul is giving his team a tough-love dressing-down on their inability to get past the limitations of their own natures. He tells them (in J. B. Phillips's *The New Testament in Modern English*) that he had to deal with them "as yet babies in the Christian life, and my practice had been to feed you, as it were, with 'milk' and not with 'meat.' You were unable to digest 'meat' in those days, and I don't believe you can do it now. For you are still unspiritual; all the time that there is jealousy and squabbling among you you show what you are---you are living just like men of the world." The message is clear, if not to them at least to us, that while we are living and functioning in the world, there are different levels of thought and action available to us. The Corinthians are obviously having a difficult time getting past a "worldly" level of self-interest and knee-jerk behavior in order to lay claim to a finer level of awareness. And yet, it is available to them---in fact, at their fingertips--- if they will just seize it. Why is it so sizeable? Because the work to get to that level has already been done. Paul exclaims, "Everything belongs to you! . . . the world, life, death, the present or the future, everything is yours!" And what is the basis of Paul's claim? "For you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God!"

In Psalm 84, the speaker is not a leader like Paul, but an individual human being, and one who is clearly far ahead of the yet-unborn Corinthians in his spiritual maturity. He knows in his depths that there is another level of being that is available, and he longs for it. In fact, when he declares, "How lovely Your dwellings, O LORD of Armies! My being longed, even languished for the courts of the LORD" he is invoking, as Robert Alter explains in notes to his much-heralded 2007 translation of the *Book of Psalms*, "a virtually erotic intensity" because "the term translated as 'lovely' is associated with the [words] 'lover' and 'lovemaking'. . . ." The speaker expresses his "powerful longing to enjoy the aura of God's presence in the temple." He shows, some centuries before Christ, a level of self-awareness apparently yet hidden from the Corinthians at the time when Paul is writing to them. And what does the psalm-speaker's self-awareness tell him? That if he can get past his personal limitations he can experience the transformational enhancement of being flooded by godliness. He envies the birds that seem to get to this point (described as in the temple, in other words in a companionship with God) simply, just by "doing what comes naturally." He points out that "Even the bird has found a home, and the swallow a nest for itself, that puts its fledglings by Your altars. . . ." He recognizes that he is not yet in the spot occupied by the "fledglings" and he is turned inside out by his desire to be there. He confesses, "For better one day in Your courts than a thousand I have chosen, standing on the threshold in the house of my God, than living in the tents of wickedness."

The pilgrim in Psalm 84 has attained at least an awareness of himself as one whose "ways" do not take him far enough toward the spiritual maturity that he craves and that he sees as possible, even necessary for his completion as a human being. It is this insight that Paul also craves, not for himself but for his fledgling congregation who are still caught in an insufficient realization of what is not only attainable but, in fact, already attained for them by Christ. The Corinthians as yet lack the self-awareness to see their behavior in relation to what is available to them, but the speaker of the psalm has been granted that self-awareness---only to seek to transcend it in God-awareness.

Neither Paul nor the psalmist refers directly to "the grace of God," and yet that is what the psalmist seems to be crying out to receive, and what Paul's expostulations declare to be there for the taking. May we join the yearning Jew of the Psalms and Paul's loose-cannon Corinthians, and claim that grace that can lead us to our transcended selves.

God of old seekings and present longings, create in us an expansion of ourselves that will take us from instinct to awareness to transcendence, and prove to us that the more godly we become the more fully human we will be. Amen.

Bradford Gowen

Psalm 84

1 Kings 6: 1-4, 21-22

1 Corinthians 3: 10 -23

Tuesday, March 13, 2012

Ezechias began to reign when he was five and twenty years old and he did that which was pleasing in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done. ... My sons, be not negligent. The Lord hath chosen you to stand before him, to minister to him, and to worship him. Chronicles 2: 1-2

As David taught his son Ezechias, indeed as our own parents taught us, we are to “do that which is pleasing in the sight of the Lord”. But what does this mean -- *to do that which is pleasing to the Lord, to minister to the Lord and worship the Lord?* -- when our daily lives are already overflowing with mundane tasks and responsibilities? How can we do this when all our daily busyness -- repetitive household chores, endless office meetings, countless interruptions, mountains of laundry, rush hour tensions, meal preparations, and so much more -- distracts us from our true destiny? To me this means we should live each day with unshakable confidence in God’s love. What matters in life is not so much doing great deeds, but doing ordinary tasks with great love and awareness of God’s eternal love for us. Our mission in life is to do *ordinary things, extraordinarily well.*

We can do this by reminding ourselves daily to live in the moment, to cultivate a positive attitude and a spirit of awareness. Look for Jesus’ love in everyone and everything we encounter, in every task we accomplish. Don’t dwell on the past, or worry about the future; live in the present with awareness. Remember -- the past is history, the future is a mystery, today is a Gift - that’s why it’s called “The Present”. Remain faithful, rooted in God’s powerful love, through sickness, disappointments, stresses, setbacks and even the mundane “administrivia” that make up our lives.

When we sweep that kitchen floor for the thousandth time, when we listen patiently yet again to that boring colleague at the office, when we drive thoughtfully and courteously during rush hour, as we accomplish the myriad tasks of daily life, we can say a 5-second prayer, reminding ourselves to be in the moment with God’s grace, to keep our eyes on the prize, God’s prize.

Hebrews reminds us that Jesus will come again to lead us -- *those who await* -- to our heavenly reward. It is our challenge to use all these mundane daily tasks to help us await His coming and to be ready.

Dear Heavenly Father, help me to do the little things of daily life well, to live each day as if it were my last, to keep me faithful, ready and waiting for Your call. Let me not “drug myself with the opiate of restlessness”, of busyness. Beneath the throb of my heart, help me feel the presence of Your space. O Lord, with Your soft touch of intuition, help me tune my soul radio and rid my mind of static restlessness that I may hear Your voice of cosmic vibration and the melody of Your love. Amen.

And just as it is appointed unto men to die once and after this comes the judgment, so also was Christ offered once to take away the sins of many; the second time with no part in sin He will appear unto the salvation of those who await Him. Hebrews 9: 27-28

Mary Levering

Psalm 84

2 Chronicles 29: 1-11, 16-19

Hebrews 9: 23-28

Wednesday, March 14, 2012

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself where she may lay her young. Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise. Psalm 84: 1-4

I'm about to embark on the next logical step in my life; I'm going to college. Psalm 84 really resonated with me. Knowing that God will always be with me, and will always be there to confide in is a very comforting feeling as I travel into the great unknown. As I move into the next phase in my life, the hardships, the joys and the bumps along the way will be made more bearable because of God. Verse six promises that God will be there to support me through even my darkest hour and hardest struggles. Verse eleven ensures God's forever protection. "For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor". For the majority of my life I've had a pretty good idea of what to expect. Now, moving away from my family and leaving the state of Maryland is a scary (but exciting) thought. Maintaining my connection with God is very important, and knowing that God will always be my shield, to protect me from any harm and uneasiness that may come my way makes all the difference. The next stage in my life will be both exhilarating and nerve racking, but with the help of God, knowing that God is by my side, I'll be able to accomplish all I've ever dreamed of and more.

Lord, stand by our sides as we walk through the unknown. Help us to know your love and protect us while we journey onward through our lives. Thank you for the assurance of your presence and your promise. Amen.

Emily Prigg

Psalm 84

Ezra 6: 1-16

Mark 11: 15-19

Thursday, March 15

God turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water. Psalm 107:35

The desert has its beauty. I love the wide sky and the sweeping sunsets. But the desert is also a harsh place. The animals and plants that survive there have to be tough as nails (almost literally – ever been up close and personal with a prickly pear cactus?) When we lived in Apache Junction, Arizona we often had poisonous scorpions in our house. Sometimes we had rattle snakes and coyotes in our yard. When you factor in the extraordinary heat that endures for many months and the dryness that parches every living thing and inanimate object, the desert is – how shall I say it – not my cup of tea.

Lent is forty days long because Jesus fasted, prayed, and wrestled with the devil in the desert for forty days before he began his public ministry. He willingly put himself in a desert place as a necessary step in his world-changing journey. When most of us land in a desert – a spiritually dry, lonely, scary place – we haven't gone there intentionally. We frequently do whatever we can to avoid the pain of our inner desert. Lent is an invitation to embrace the emptiness that is within us. It is a time to withdraw to a quiet place and confront the demons that keep us from being fully alive. The gift of Lent is that from such stark spiritual nakedness comes tender, remarkable, unforeseeable new life. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, 43:19:

*See, I am doing a new thing.
Even now it springs up;
Do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
And streams in the desert.*

*O God, you who make a way where there is no way, lead us into our desert places. Let us be honest with ourselves and with You. Make us capable of receiving the incredible gift of new life in Christ. All praise and thanksgiving to You, our Loving Creator.
Amen.*

Carol Armstrong-Moore

Psalm 107
Genesis 9:8-17
Ephesians 1:3-6

Friday, March 16, 2012

In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of God's grace lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight God has made known to us the mystery of God's will, according to God's good pleasure, set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. Ephesians 1:7-10

"Unfailing love": what an amazing phrase. Even when we've made bad decisions in our lives, God unfailingly loves us for who we are. It's incredible actually, when you realize what that truly means: nothing in the entire universe could separate us from God's love; it is always finds us and saves us, no matter what. We could make every mistake possible, mess up our entire lives, and God would still love us unfailingly. That's powerful to think about. Sometimes it's hard for us to pick out where God's love has shone through in our lives: we look for the grand miracles or the amazing occurrences that appear few and far between. But God's love is so much closer than that. Every time someone comforts you when you're sad, God's unfailing love has found you. Every time someone gives you a loving hug, God's unfailing love has found you. Every time someone says a kind word to you, does something nice for you, gives freely to you, helps you with anything, God's unfailing love has found you. Whether we know it or not, the love of God embraces us every day, and finds us in the most unexpected ways. God answers our every prayer in ways we don't even realize, and God is with us every step of the way in times of trouble. And even when it seems like everything is going wrong, we must always remember that God's unfailing love is right there, guiding us along, whether we can see it or not. So the next time you're feeling down, call out God's name and watch closely, because God's love will find you in the smallest ways, maybe even in some way you weren't expecting. But it will be there, and it always will be there, unfailingly.

God of unfailing love, please help me to remember that your love is always there, even if I can't see it right away. Help me to notice your love when it shines through in my life, and let me always remember to give thanks to you for it. And please allow me to be a vessel for you, so that I might be there and share your unfailing love with others. Amen.

Michael Oosterhout

Psalm 107: 1-3, 17-22

Daniel 12: 5-13

Ephesians 1: 7-14

Saturday, March 17, 2012

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

While I think of God working in specific instances in my life and others', I do not often think about God directing all that occurs in our lives. When we begin to go astray and need God's direction, God is there to provide it. God has the power to feed us when we are hungry, heal us when we are sick and help us resolve our problems when we have nowhere else to turn. This is why we give thanks to the Lord, because God is always there for us.

We give thanks to you Lord for all that you provide us. Your love is unfailing and never ending. Help us to better follow the path you have created for us so that we may enjoy everlasting life. Amen.

Jeff Jones

Psalm 107: 1-3, 17-22

Numbers 20: 22-29

John 3: 1-13

Sunday, March 18, 2012

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live. Numbers 21: 4-9

The story of Moses and the Israelites in the desert gives us precious guidance and insight into the how we separate ourselves from God and, as a result, experience suffering. So often we believe that our heart's desire is in the future, ahead of us; or in the past. We live in our imaginations, unsatisfied with the present moment, sure that we will be happy when external conditions comply. We glorify the past, wait for the perfect job, or imagine a better partner. We are in the forest planning and plotting our happiness in the land of milk and honey. We've convinced ourselves that the current situation must be improved. Yet as long as we rely on our external circumstances to make us happy, we are never satisfied. There is always something wrong.

Through the story of Moses and the Israelites, God teaches us that we suffer --- we stay in the forest --- until the external situation has no bearing on our happiness. There is no land of milk and honey except in our own hearts and minds. When we step out of our stories about what we believe will make us happy in the future or the past happiness we've lost, we begin to love our lives for exactly what they are. This is the true freedom from slavery – freedom from our impatience and expectations. Our imaginations are no match for the beauty of what God has already given us, for reality.

I pray today for awareness of how perfect my life is the way God has made it. For the wisdom to know that I am enough, that I have abundance, and that I am free. I ask that I see the perfection of God's love in every person and situation I encounter, no matter how poorly it matches what I think I need and want. I pray that I may learn to accept and surrender to what is. Amen.

Anne Tumlinson

Numbers 21: 4-9

Monday, March 19, 2012

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; God's love endures forever...for God satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things...God saved them from their distress. God brought them out of darkness, the utter darkness and broke away their chains. Psalm 107, selected verses.

We can all remember praying to God asking for that new bike, the newest G.I. Joe accessory, the newest Wii game. We can also (hopefully) remember praying for the health or well-being of friends, family and ourselves. In our travels throughout the world we have seen poverty at its worst and many who wonder where their next meal will come from. The streets of Washington, DC are often no different.

Sometimes our prayers have been successful, other times they seemed ignored. Perhaps even random in our eyes.

However, God's promise is a promise that requires faith. Faith is a concept which goes beyond what we learn through education. It requires us to go beyond "scientific theory" and believe that there's a higher purpose in each of our lives and in each of yours. "Faith" requires us to understand that God never promised us that life would be easy, but that God would help us make it through and leave "footprints in the sand" -- carrying us through our hardest times.

God answers all of our prayers. However, sometimes the answer is "no". We can only ask for God's guidance and assistance to be used as God's servants, to guide us in our faith, to grant us the intellect to comprehend our purpose and the strength to carry it out.

God, ensure we never forget that you will not let us fail and ensure we never forget the limitless bounds of your Love. Make us strong in faith so we will serve you and your greater purpose in everything we do. Thank you for the love you show us and we ask that you make your love and compassion obvious and known to the whole world so that all may believe in you. Amen.

Clyde & Mary Langley

Psalm 107: 1-16

Exodus 15: 22-27

Hebrews 3: 1-6

Tuesday, March 20, 2012

“The sun will no longer be your light by day, and the brightness of the moon will not shine on you; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and God will be your splendor.” (Isaiah 60:19)

For as long as I can remember, I have loved looking at the nighttime sky. There is a sense of wonder and amazement that the vastness and beauty inspire. There is also that sense of familiarity that comes from knowing where to look for certain stars and constellations. Even when travelling and in unfamiliar places, they stay the same (for the most part). In some ways it saddened me the first time I learned that the stars were going away. But then again, seeing what is replacing them makes it all worthwhile. The LORD will be the only light we need. God will be the only one sustaining and guiding us. God is unchanging and constant, familiar and visible everywhere.

Truly, the analogy also helps to give us a bit of insight into God and God’s character. What do we know about the sun, moon, and stars? They are our light and warmth. Without them life would perish. They are also grand in size and age. They are beautiful and house wonders untold. They are creative as well as destructive. In fact, I do not believe there is a better analogy for God that gives us as much information about our Creator.

In the scriptures we are told that Christ is the “light of life” (John 8:12) and that we are to be the “light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). How are we to do this? I’m reminded of one of the first songs we taught our daughter Jocelyn, “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.” “Hide it under a bush? Oh no!” “Won’t let Satan blow it out.” “Let it shine till Jesus comes.” For now, we hold the light of the world in ourselves through the indwelling of the Spirit. As we go through our lives, that light peeks (sometimes shines) out through what we do. Trust in Christ to use you. After all, “We are God’s creation, created in Christ Jesus for good works”.

Prayer – Hebrews 13: 20-21

Now may the God of peace, who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus – the great Shepherd of the sheep – with the blood of the everlasting covenant, equip you with all that is good to do God’s will, working in us what is pleasing in God’s sight, through Jesus Christ. Glory belongs to God forever and ever. Amen.

Jay Fryer

Psalm 107: 1-16

Numbers 20: 1-13

1 Corinthians 10: 6-13

Wednesday, March 21, 2012

The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Isaiah 60: 15-22

Seasonal affective disorder, or SAD for short, is a winter-time thing, not to be laughed at by those who suffer from it. It has a most appropriate and descriptive acronym – SAD. One theory says it comes from a lack of vitamin D from the lack of sunlight, and for those who suffer from the winter version of SAD often find renewed energy with the longer days of sunlight of spring and summer.

Isaiah talks about another cure, one that lasts forever. And for a different kind of disorder. In a world there are many people who have diminished hope for their lives. Perhaps they have faced the brunt of the economic downturn, perhaps they have experienced horrific tragedies. Others say they feel distanced from God. Others tell me they feel that the churches they attend don't meet their needs. Many people suffer from a "victim" disorder. But God helps the victims become victors!

In John's Gospel reading for today Jesus reminds us that He is the Light of the world, "and whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (verse 12) Notice that Jesus does not say, "whoever studies My teachings," "or whoever worships Me," but uses the rather active verb, "follows Me."

Following Jesus is not easy; it is much more than memorizing the Bible; it involves immersing ourselves in both study and times of doing for others. I have found "the light of God" most when I am engaged in mission or involved with groups seeking to know Jesus. It helps me get over my SAD.

Have you experienced days, months, perhaps years of darkness?

Have you tried to experience the "Light of the world" by following Jesus?

*O God, we give thanks for your light in the midst of the darkness in our lives. Help us to follow You wherever you might lead us so that we may have everlasting light.
Amen.*

Dave Myers

Psalm 107: 1-16

Isaiah 60: 15-22

John 8: 12-20

Thursday, March 22, 2012

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

Psalm 51 reminds us that the prospect of living without committing sin is not an option. We commit sin, and our sins are against God and God alone. Therefore, we ask God for the forgiveness of this sin, requesting it to be without rejection for our shortcomings. We ask for “a clean heart” and “a right spirit” with which to carry on, full well knowing that the cycle will re-occur. The goal is that we entertain the process having the “joy of salvation” and a “sustaining willing spirit”. These are our rewards. Consider the following: The virtues being requested here are substantial. We are looking at sustaining guaranteed failure leading to some reckoning with self-evaluation, followed by re-grouping, to an end with a greater good -- again and again and again!!! Have not all the great accomplishments in life by great people happened in the same way? How about all the little accomplishments by ordinary people? They happen the same way too. It is a process for improvement without holding grudges, of being able to let go of your ego, and, most of all, to find the strength to move on in spite of adversity with a healthy frame of mind knowing that failure is all part of the process.

You know our hearts, O God. You do not turn away from us even when we sin, again and again. And when we come to you, asking for a “clean heart” and a “right spirit” you bring about forgiveness and renewal. Thank you for these precious gifts of your grace. Amen.

Russ Phillips

Psalm 51: 1-12
Isaiah 30: 15-18
Hebrews 4: 1-13

Friday, March 23, 2012

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:14 – 5:4

We can get discouraged in our faith. This letter to the Hebrews is written to a dejected people. They have lost the initial excitement of a new and different religion. They are facing continued bigotry and persecution. They are considering returning to their original Judaism. It would be a lot easier!

Things haven't changed over the centuries that much. Here is a shining example that the Bible is living and breathing. We can read this passage and feel the same renewal that our predecessors in Christ felt. We (and they) are reminded that our faith has the good fortune to have Jesus, the Son of God, as our "high priest". This is a unique situation –our high priest has been tested and faced the same problems in life as we have and He has done so without sin. He is also the divine son of God. When we approach Him in our need we know that He understands our situation – He, too, has "been there".

Let us use this passage to help us get through those lapses of faith that we may have. Jesus came and lived and died for us. Let's not forget to take full advantage of this!

*Dearest God, I know that I forget to use the tools that you have made available to us. The greatest instrument of all is our Lord Jesus Christ. And another instrument that I tend to forget to use daily is the Bible. You have given these to us. I am truly grateful. Help me to remember to use them to their fullest!
Amen.*

Susan Denchfield

Psalm 51: 1-12

Exodus 30: 1-10

Hebrews 4: 14-5:4

Saturday, March 24, 2012

This day, 67 years ago, was one of the most terrible days of my life, marked by violence, death and destruction. As a young paratrooper, I dropped into Germany on the worst single day for the Allied airborne in World War II, when 1,070 were killed and 4,000 wounded. I asked myself why I had randomly been selected to comment on this day by others who had no idea of the day's significance for me. Was it the hand of the Lord?

The prophet Habakkuk prays for mercy before the power of the Lord, who tramples nations in anger. Habakkuk 3: 2-11 should cause us as individuals, but more importantly our nation's leaders, to reflect on America's role in the world today. Ostensibly with the best of motivations, we seemed to have entered into a period of "endless war," war in Iraq, war in Afghanistan, "War on Terrorism" and now "Humanitarian Wars" and possible war with Iran. Much of the fighting and casualties are borne by a small segment of our society, while an even smaller group profits, to the overall detriment of the well-being and prosperity of the nation. Trillions in debt, we continue on. How would Habakkuk pray for us today?

John 12: 1-11 reflects on events leading up to the suffering of Jesus. Jesus, whose life was the very personification of all that is good, is led by the people of our world to the cross. Lent is a time for contemplation and penitence. It is a time for reflection. My saintly, deeply religious mother would tell me: "Son, remember that often bad things happen to good people, while bad people go on to profit from their evil doing." The world is not fair. She would quote the Bible verse from Ecclesiastes to me: "...that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor riches to those of understanding, nor favor to those of skill, but time and chance happen to them all." She would then tell me that I will endure many hardships in my life. No one can be sure that disaster, disappointment, injustice, or humiliation will not come to them...often through no fault of their own. Nor can one be shielded from one's own mistakes and failures. But the way we choose to meet life is our own, and when dignity, courage, integrity, and compassion are our choice, the things that happen to us lose their power over us.

I have found that there is great wisdom in her words.....words worth sharing in this Lenten period.

John Kormann

Psalm 51: 1-12
Habakkuk 3: 2-13
John 12: 1-11

Sunday, March 25, 2012

Create in me a pure heart, O God. Psalm 51:10

Often, I find myself in a never-ending confusion of meetings, time-critical reports and the daily mix of setting and resetting of priorities between work and home activities. At other times, either while sick or faced with a personal or family crisis, I feel alone and don't know to whom to turn for strength and guidance. At those times I bow my head and pray to God to be with me and give me the strength to deal with these issues. I also reaffirm to faithfully live the values of Christ and to serve others as I would want to be served. I close my prayer by asking for all this in the name of Jesus Christ, my Savior. This quiet prayerful reflection always renews my spirit and faith, and removes my sense of loneliness.

O God, When I am overcome by the confusion of the day, please help me remember the suffering of Christ who died for our salvation. With his help I can deal with the tension and anxiety in my life. I ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, my Savior. Amen.

George Monk

Jeremiah 31: 31-34

Psalm 51: 1-12 or Psalm 119: 9-16

Hebrews 5: 5-10

John 12: 20-33

Monday, March 25, 2012

I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Psalm 119: 11

Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant - not of the letter but of the spirit; where the letter kills, but the spirit gives life. 2 Cor 3:5,6

The Word of God was given to us so that we can fulfill God's vision and reach our full potential. Keeping God's Word in our hearts is our protection against an impure world and a deterrent to sin. We must seek God by studying God's Word, and put the Word of God to work in our lives. But after holding the Word in our hearts we should not keep it hidden. If we truly trust in God we will not be ashamed to acknowledge our relationship with God. God tells us not to be afraid. God will help us and has promised us life everlasting. But in order to claim God's promise we must look not only to the letter of God's law but to the spirit of God's law as well. For as glorious as God's statutes appeared to Moses, they pale in comparison to the gift of Jesus Christ and the glory of the Holy Spirit.

Gracious God, give me a hunger for your Word and the passion to hold it in my heart. Help me to grow and nurture my relationship with You, and to live in accordance with your law so that I may rejoice in the life everlasting. Amen.

Tony Shore

Psalm 119: 9-16

Isaiah 43: 8-13

2 Corinthians 3: 4-11

Tuesday, March 27, 2012

Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one. Isaiah 44:8b

In a world where we see bumper stickers to COEXIST and we are to “accept everything”, one may lose sight of the true Rock.

As a family of four young boys and Star Wars enthusiasts, we love to hear about all things Star Wars. Recently, we learned that in the 2010 Czech census there was an option to check Jedi as your religion. This is not something that they write in. It is given as a choice on the form. Upon further investigation, there were more than 10,000 Czechs who claimed Jedi as their religion.

As enthusiastic as our boys may be about Anakin and Yoda, they realize that this is a fictional story. History has proven that the Bible is non-fiction. The clear and only choice is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as the Rock!

Dear Lord, please let us see clearly in times of great fog. As we look around the world, let us see all the great things you have created and let those things be constant reminders of how awesome you are. Help us to not be drawn to the “dark side”, but clear our vision to focus on You! Amen.

Tammi & Sam Cole

Psalm 119: 9-16

Isaiah 44: 1-8

Acts 2: 14-24

Wednesday, March 28, 2012

In my work as a writer for the Baltimore-Washington Conference, I feel I'm not just putting words on paper or fixing other people's words so they make sense. I've always seen my work as a mission from God, to tell God's story, to deliver God's message to others. That's what Haggai did. He was God's messenger.

If you're like me, you couldn't find the book of Haggai without looking at the Table of Contents. He was what we call a "minor prophet," who lived in 520 B.C. after the Hebrew people had returned from generations living in exile because of the Babylonian conquest. They had already settled, built homes and harvested grain. But their Temple, the center of all their activity before exile, was still in ruins. And God was not pleased.

So God sent Haggai to deliver the message to the governor of Judah and the High Priest and the people, to tell them to build the Temple again, to "do the work," and God assured them that God was with them. "When you came out of Egypt, I promised that I would always be with you. I am still with you, so do not be afraid (Haggai 2: 4-5).

Many centuries later, God spoke through Jesus to tell the people the same message. Jesus told the people that "whoever believes in me believes not only in me but also in (God) who sent me"(vs. John 12:44) Jesus explained that the message he was delivering, that in fact his whole life, was "from the Father who sent me (and) commanded me what I must say and speak."(vs. 49)

That's a pretty strong message to us. Do we listen enough to what God is telling us? And when we hear, do we say "yes" to the message and go do the work God wants us to do?

Both Haggai and Jesus offer words of encouragement "Do not be afraid." "Do not fear." This is the most common command in Scripture. But it's hard for us to accept, to really believe, and to turn our ears to listen to God's messages. And when we do hear, to do the work.

*With all my heart I try to serve you; keep me from disobeying your commandments.
I praise you, O Lord; teach me your ways. Amen. (From Psalm 119:10,12)*

Linda Worthington

Psalm 119: 9-16
Haggai 2: 1-9, 20-23
John 12: 34-50

Thursday Mar 29, 2012

God's steadfast love endures forever. Psalm 118: 1

When it was time for me to be confirmed, I was not ready. I actually went through the class with my friends and then told the pastor I would have to wait. I was 13 years old and had not been baptized – my Catholic dad and agnostic mom left that decision up to me.

I remember sitting on my parents' bed one morning with my sister and my mom, sharing my struggle about confirmation. It wasn't that I didn't have faith – I was deeply touched by the whole experience of being in the youth group, studying the bible, singing the great hymns of the church. But baptism and confirmation felt huge. And scary. I just had a sense that if I said "yes" to this, there was no telling where it might lead!!

Over the course of the next year I came to feel that the hugeness I was afraid of was at least in part the awesomeness of God's love. There is a little Hebrew word, *hesed*, that has an enormous meaning. It is often translated "steadfast lovingkindness". It's used to describe God's end of the covenant with the Hebrew people, and it appears throughout Psalm 118. "God's *hesed* endures forever."

My decision to be baptized and confirmed in the Christian faith required me to come to terms with the fact that despite my many flaws and failures, I am deeply and completely loved – a precious child of God. To be confirmed is to say, "Yes!" in response to God's steadfast lovingkindness made incarnate in Christ.

In a sense, we all confirm our faith every day – when we strive to greet each morning with a grateful heart; to receive God's incomparable love for us, and to extend that love to others in whatever ways we can.

This year there are 18 young people of our church in the 8th grade and above who are considering being confirmed on May 6th. They may not all be ready. But I pray that they all feel surrounded and upheld by God's steadfast love that endures forever.

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness! Morning by morning new mercies I see; all I have needed thy hand hath provided; great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me! (Thomas O. Chisholm, 1923). Amen.

Carol Armstrong-Moore

Psalm 11:1-2, 19-29
Deuteronomy 16: 1-8
Philippians 2: 1-11

Friday, March 30, 2012

God is working in you to make you willing and able to obey Him. Philippians 2:13

These words from Paul are a statement of God's promise of the Holy Spirit, and something in Paul's wording helped me to recognize what a radical promise this is. This is like a product warranty on God's love and grace, and boy is it inclusive:

Lifetime guarantee? Yes (and more!). Satisfaction guaranteed? Make that happiness guaranteed! And not just happiness – unspeakable joy! This promise is good even if we deliberately misuse the product! Even if we throw out the instructions, trash the product, and badmouth the “manufacturer.” We don't even have to be willing to learn to use the product correctly!

All we have to do is call customer service ... and guess what? There is an Agent right inside each one of us (how convenient!). The Holy Spirit will work in us to help make us willing. That's some guarantee! **The amazing part is that God will help us even with our unwillingness to be helped.**

The more I thought about that, the more important WILLINGNESS seemed to be, even when it seems not relevant. Looking back, even when I thought that I was willing to follow God, I really wasn't! I was merely willing to do what I thought God wanted me to do. I would pray for the ability to do what I'd decided needed to be done. Many times I was presumptuous enough to suggest what it was I needed ... and I don't ever recall asking for “the stone that the builders had rejected.”

Now it seems to me that I really never need to pray for the *ability* to do God's will – God will take care of that without my suggestions. I need to pray for WILLINGNESS and then MORE WILLINGNESS, focusing on God's goodness to me and my own gratitude. It may even be that the ability to do God's will is a natural result of extreme willingness.

In the future, if I am able, I want my prayers to be songs of praise and gratitude, saturating my heart and mind with awareness of God's goodness and love, so that I might achieve extreme willingness. And if I am not able or at all willing, I hope that I will have the confidence in God's promise to come to God with my bitterness and my frustration and my despondency, knowing that the Holy Spirit will work in me and break my heart of stone if only I turn to God.

Most loving Father/Mother/Creator-of-All-Things! It is so easy to love You and Your creation when I reflect on the ways in which all of life is a blessing! Help me to focus on all that I have to be grateful for so that I might be willing and more than willing to do Your will – and do it joyfully! Amen.

Bob Levering

Phil 2:12-18

Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29

Jeremiah 33:1-9

Saturday, March, 31

You have probably have heard and sung Psalm 118:24 many times. It is one of my favorites. It hangs on the wall in my home.

"This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

My life is good.

Everyday I rise and try to remember to rejoice in God's blessings in my life and the day about to unfold. I try to rejoice at the end of each day as I reflect on the many events of the day.

What is harder to do is to rejoice on those days that don't go so well. It is hard to remember that the Lord has also made those days too.

During the worst days of my life, after tragedy has struck, this verse has actually brought me great comfort. It can actually turn my tears to a smile when I reflect on this verse and I begin to sing it.

God makes every day and we should rejoice in every day, even when we may not understand God's reasons for what happens on the day.

In Mark 10, verses 32-34, Jesus told his disciples of what seemed to be bad days ahead.

"They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. 'We are going up to Jerusalem,' he said, 'and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, and kill him. Three days later he will rise.'"

Jesus was telling the disciples he was going to be killed. I suspect the disciples did not feel like rejoicing that day.

Yet, in retrospect, the day of sacrifice by Jesus came so that we may all have eternal life. It may be the day we should rejoice in most.

We do not always understand God's plan. But God tells us to rejoice in God, every day, as God has made every day for us.

Dear Lord, thank you for this day. Thank you for every day in this devotional. I rejoice today because it is a day you have made for me and all those around me. This is the day you have made. I rejoice and am glad in it. Thank you Lord. Thank you. Amen.

Bev Godwin

Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29
Jeremiah 33: 10-16
Mark 10: 32-34, 46-52

Sunday, April 1, 2012

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient to death, even death on the cross! Therefore God had exalted him to the place and gave him the name that is above all names, that the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God.

Philippians 2: 5-11

The scripture says that Jesus made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant. He humbled himself greatly, even to the extent of death on a cross. We have a hard enough time just humbling ourselves a little bit! It is almost unfathomable to imagine serving others to such a degree that we would trade our life for someone else, much less to suffer and die in such a horrific way. But, God was well pleased in God's only son indeed. He certainly deserves all the exaltation and praise that God Almighty bestowed on him. I take comfort when I remember that every knee will bow, every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and that His name will be above all names. And all this glorifies our God.

Hear us o God when we call your name, and help us to humble ourselves, making us servants to ALL that we may come in contact with, whether they be a member of our family, a neighbor, a co-worker, a friend or a stranger. Amen.

Lori Shore

Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29

Mark 11: 1-11 or John 12: 12-16

Isaiah 50: 4-9a

Psalm 31: 9-16

Philippians 2: 5-11

Mark 14:1 - 15: 47 or

Mark 15: 1-39 [40-47]

Monday, April 2, 2012

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. But Judas Iscariot...said, "Why was this perfume not sold...and the money given to the poor?" John 12:3-5

Whenever I read the story of Mary anointing Jesus' feet with the expensive perfume it reminds me of God's extravagant gifts to us. God doesn't cut corners when giving to us children and doesn't want us to be stingy either. I will always remember a gift like Mary's. I was going through a period of serious depression after returning from living overseas. Dane and I were visiting our youngest daughter Nita for Thanksgiving in Austin. She was dirt-poor, working at her first post-college job for minimum wage. It was unseasonably cold as we huddled together in her bare-bones apartment and she presented me with a belated birthday present. I unwrapped not one, but four books on depression and how to be happy. My first reaction was like that of the disciples to Mary's gift. "She shouldn't have spent so much money." But it must be very scary to see your mom depressed and I was moved by her generosity of abundance and extravagant love. I felt bathed in the warmth of her love like the fragrance of the spice that filled Mary's house.

*How precious is your steadfast love O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings and feast on the abundance of your house... For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.
Psalm 36: 7-9*

Dear God, we thank you for your extravagant love; help us to show it to others in abundant generosity. Amen.

Judy Smith

Isaiah 42: 1-9
Psalm 36: 5-11
Hebrews 9: 11-15
John 12: 1-11

Tuesday, April 3, 2012

He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his ¹life in this world will keep it to life eternal. John 12:25

I am not much of a golfer. But I have been taught how to grip the club correctly. And when I follow the instructions, I generally hit the ball well and it flies pretty straight. I usually stay in the fairway and out of trouble.

But I have a problem.

The grip doesn't *feel* right. And after a while, I move into more of a grip I feel comfortable with. And when I hit the ball with *my* grip, it usually goes a long way - and the wrong way. I find myself climbing through bush, thorns, muck, water and even over fences to find my errant ball.

In the 12th chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus predicts his death. It was probably around Tuesday or so of Passion week. He tells his flock that for his Father to complete his purpose, Jesus the Son must die. He needs to die so others can live. The gathered, as they would in the next coming days, can't comprehend it. Common sense tells them, it just doesn't seem right. Just a few verses before this prediction, John offers us another installment of what I call the doctrine of contradiction. Jesus basically says that for anyone to gain life, the person must lose it.

It just doesn't seem right. The seemingly contradictorily teachings of Jesus go further.

Want to get rich? Give away your money.

Want to be the greatest? Be the least.

Want food? Give some away.

Want to feel affirmed? Serve someone.

Like the proper golf grip, it just doesn't seem the way to stay on the fairway of life. But what generally happens when I leave my right feelings to the dust, I end up safe and out of trouble. Easy for me to preach, eh? Not truly. Two months ago, I made a yearlong commitment that I know is right but feels terribly wrong. I will admit to doubting myself several times a day because it does not seem the way to safety. I seem to be sinking deeper. And so far, I see not one shred of light that I am on the right path.

I scream inside and so deeply want to change my grip - and go back to my comfortable one. But there is no turning back for me because when I did for so many years, I ended up in trouble.

Lord help us to live not by common sense, but by the richness of your guidance. We know you are God and we are not. And we thank you for sending Your Son to the Cross for us - because you know, much more than we, what is truly right. Amen.

Ernie Torriero

Isaiah 50: 4-9a

Psalm 70

Hebrews 12: 1-3

John 13: 21-32

Wednesday, April 4, 2012

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, 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.
Hebrews 12: 1-3

How many gifts and graces You have given me! How many favors You have fed me from your hand! I look for your love in all directions, then suddenly its blessing burns in me. **Rabia Al-Adawiyya**

An act of love that fails is just as much a part of the divine life as an act of love that succeeds, for love is measured by its own fullness, not by its reception. **Harold Loukes (Quaker)**

I am reminded of God each morning as I sit in my kitchen and look at the delightful statuette that was a gift from my son. The morning sunlight plays on it in such a way that it appears quite different from moment to moment. Sometimes in the afternoon when there are no lights and shadows highlighting its beauty, it appears quite ordinary. But in the morning ...oh the morning! It becomes an instant reminder of God's gifts to me each day. Our lives are built on the light and shadows of everyday events. It is the shadows that define our motivations and spur us on to find new depths within us. The negative element – the one we often do not choose to identify with, yet blessed all the same, is even more defining than the light.

Without Judas' act of betrayal, the drama of the death and rebirth of Jesus would not have occurred. He was the yeast, the shadow, the catalyst. He accepted the mantle that we have bestowed upon him, and that he will bear forever, that of shame and spitting. His role in the miracle of Jesus' life was recognized by him (and blessed) by the simple words "What thou doest, do quickly."

Judas is the part of us that recognizes temptation and greed, and gives into it. We become Judas in every thoughtless act and cruel thought, in every careless word and senseless omission. Although we try to overcome our negative impulses they appear to plague us at every turn. Yet without these sins, our hearts cannot put on the rags of the poor and experience true humility in the presence of God. Because of the shadow of man, the Son of God was glorified by the Heavenly Spirit. We also, who are a mixture of shadow and light, can know the joy and forgiveness of our Father.

O Lord, we thank you for the light of your spirit. May the darkness within us we call "Judas" rejoice in your forgiveness and joy. Amen.

Elizabeth Vrenios

Isaiah 50: 4-9a

Psalms 70

Hebrews 12: 1-3

John 13: 21-32

Thursday, April 5, 2012

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself.

Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' Jesus said to him, 'One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.' For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'*

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servant₂ are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come." I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.' John 13:1-17, and 31b-35

This passage from John is the story of Jesus' last supper with his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion. What stands out to me as I read this passage is that although it's a time of great sadness, it's also a time of fellowship and instruction for the disciples and for us. In fact, we find in this passage all that's needed to live the Christian life and to be followers of Jesus. John reminds us in verse two that Jesus knew "He had come forth from God and was going back to God". This of course is also true for us. We are God's children. We live our lives beneath the shelter of God's love and we will someday go home to God. When we live our lives holding this truth close to our hearts like the treasure it is, we find strength and courage in times of trouble. This passage from the book of John also includes the great story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. By his example he teaches them and us all we need to know about the nature of servanthood. Lastly, of all the instruction and teaching Jesus gives in his short time on earth none is greater or more important than the instructions given in verses 34 and 35. He tells us to love one another as he has loved us and by this, people will know that we are his disciples. Wow. So simple, and yet so hard.

*Lord, help us to live by your example; to serve and love one another as you have loved us.
Amen.*

Henry Rowe

Exodus 12: 1-4 [5-10] 11-14

Psalms 116: 1-2, 12-19

1 Corinthians 11: 23-26

John 13: 1-17, 31b-35

Friday, April 6, 2012

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? Psalm 22:1 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds Hebrews 16: 23-24.

It's Friday, but Sunday's a Comin'

It is so dark.... I can't make out my way and I am scared. The small anxieties of life are piled on each other and it's too much for me. I have very little hope, very little faith that this day will be OK. It seems hopeless and I haven't even gotten out of bed yet. So I make up my mind that this is going to be a very bad day and then I get up determined to go out to prove it.

It's not just on Black Friday that I live that way. It's not just on Black Friday that I live guided by the fear that I'm on my own and I'm not up to the task. It's easy to slip into the dark view of my family, my work, my city, my country and my world. I can't make out the details of smiles of people who love me, the colors of nature that can give me hope and the readings of messages that would give me hope. Then sometimes, when I'm open to it, it comes to me. The message is simple- 'Rather than fumble around in the dark, go over and turn on the light switch. ' Sometimes the revelation that the switch is there and is waiting for me to take the simple, well-known actions of prayer, meditation, listening to people who have been through as much or more than I have and have seen light on the other side, transforms me.

Most of my fears of the future never occur and even when they do, I have always been taken care of. In many cases, my greatest blessing is that my prayers haven't been answered, because God' plan was much better than my selfish answer. I have a salvation from my self-created darkness, but I prefer to ask "God, why have you forsaken me", rather than switching on the light.

God of hope and grace, I am a believer. Help me in the darkness by shining your illuminating light on my unbelief. Amen.

Paul Green

Isaiah 52: 13-53:12

Psalm 22

Hebrews 10: 16-25 or Hebrews 4: 14-16; 5: 7-9

John 18: 1-19:42

Saturday, April 7, 2012

*In you, O LORD, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame;
in your righteousness deliver me. Incline your ear to me;
rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.
You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name's sake lead me and guide me, take me out of the
net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge.
My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors. Let your face shine
upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love. Psalm 31:1-4 and 15,16*

In January of 2011 on the CCUMC trip to Israel/Jordan, I stood on the heights of Armageddon in a once-mighty fortress, now beautifully sited and abandoned, enjoying the view. It was the eve of the Egyptian uprising which led to disappointment for many of our fellow travelers who had their trip to Egypt cancelled.

Today's Biblical passages assert God is our fortress and will not abandon us in crisis. No matter whatever wormwood and gall comes our way, each morning we will encounter God's promise of Love, Strength, and Renewal for us. Through heartaches, headaches, and family issues, I take comfort daily knowing God and God's son lead us through pain and suffering, and we will see God's face "shine on us", "even to the end of the world." Some of us may even get to see the "gift of the Nile" one day.

Janet Griffith

Job 14: 1-14 or Lamentations 3: 1-9, 19-24
Psalm 31: 1-4, 15-16

