

The Water of Life

DAILY DEVOTIONS FOR THE
2019 SEASON OF LENT

*Cover photo by
Clancy Cone*

From the family and friends of
Grace United Methodist Church

Lenten Worship Opportunities 2019

Ash Wednesday, March 6

Family worship experience at 5:00 p.m.

Church-wide worship at 7:00 p.m.

Palm Sunday, April 14

8:15, 9:30, and 11:00 a.m.

Holy Wednesday, April 17

Family Service & Craft Activity, 5:00 p.m.

Maundy Thursday, April 18

7:00 p.m.

Good Friday, April 19

7:00 p.m.

Holy Saturday, April 20

5:00 p.m. in the Sanctuary

This is an Easter service!

Easter Sunday, April 21

8:15, 9:30, and 11:00 a.m.

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s we enter into yet another Lenten season, this time with a focus on our baptismal covenant (based on Chris Webb's book *God-Soaked Life*), I am so grateful to those who generously provided content for this year's booklet of daily devotions.

Many of you offered more than one devotion (former editor Merrill Litchfield wrote 12!). While space does not allow for publishing them all, they are available in their entirety online at www.peopleofgrace.org.

While I can't be sure of the exact year this project began, I know it is approaching its 50th birthday. What a wonderful tradition we celebrate each year! Lent is such a special time in the Christian Church, one that inspires deep reflection and, often, change in many of us. For Christ, it was an excruciating journey that ended with resurrected life for Him and new life for us all.

Thank you to everyone who offered a devotion(s) and allowed this booklet to continue yet another year. It could not have happened without you!

Readers, it is my hope that you will turn to this book each day of Lent and the Sundays in between. I pray that you will be intrigued, informed, moved, comforted, challenged, inspired, or all of the above by what the friends and family of Grace Church have shared within these pages.

Whatever the season of Lent means to you, may you be blessed by the hope of the Easter promise and cheered by the springtime that is soon to come.

—Barb Ceruti, Editor



Ash Wednesday, March 6

THE PROMISES OF GOD

Zink Sanders

I've been thinking lately about the juxtaposition of Advent and Lent. The events these two Christian observances recognize were some 30-plus years apart, and yet, we have managed to cram them into five or six months. It seems that almost as soon as the trees and decorations are put away, we are urged to prepare for Easter.

The joy of anticipation is routinely overcome by the seriousness of the Easter season—28 days of anticipation followed quickly by 40 of introspection and (for some) ritual denial. In my volunteering with adults in addiction treatment, there are parallels.

Many in treatment speak of the excitement of anticipation in acquiring their substance of choice. They speak of the planning, the anticipation, and the secrecy needed to "hide" their habit from others. Advent can be like that, or more correctly, Christmas as we know it today. "Black Friday," "Shop Local Saturday," and "Cyber Monday" encourage us to spend lavishly for our self-satisfaction and that of those close to us.

Thus, the true meaning of the holiday can be lost in the process, just as the lives of those who have the disease of addiction can lose themselves and those things dear to them. Likewise, these same people often speak of the dread of going without their drug of choice and how giving it up is akin to losing a dear friend. There is an expression in treatment that "nobody comes in on a roll." How true that is. Many people need to approach ruination before they seek help. Even Jesus asked that he be spared his fate in the garden.

And yet, once they admit to their powerlessness over their substance of choice, they begin to seek help from others, be it a treatment facility, a 12-Step group, counseling, etc. Invariably, this surrender to "*a power greater than ourselves*" leads them to a new focus and sense of well-being.



Jesus became calm and willing to do his Father's will in the most terrible situation.

Strange and unusual things begin to happen to those who surrender their addiction to a Higher Power. "The Promises" of Alcoholics Anonymous put it this way: "*... Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.*"

Just imagine how powerful this can be if, during Lent, we "give up" our self-will, rather than something tangible.

Thursday, March 7

"GIVE US THIS DAY"

Merrill Litchfield

Editor's Note: This devotion and three others written by Merrill Litchfield throughout this book are part of a series that explores The Lord's Prayer. Merrill's series can be found in its entirety online at www.peopleofgrace.org.

"Two things I ask of you, O LORD; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal and dishonor the name of my God." Proverbs 30:7-9 (NIV)

This phrase, "give us this day our daily bread," challenges me not to stop with just mouthing the words at their shallowest, hurrying to get the prayer over, but to meditate on them for the deeper meanings that lurk just out of casual sight, waiting for us to ask for them. For one, are we humble enough to ask only for the things we need, only one day at a time? Or do we try to sneak in "cake, and a Cadillac, too?" Or are we proud that our pantry's full, and we have our activities planned for the next few weeks? Are we in increasing danger—or are our children—of not seeing how God provides for us, because a simple glance reassures us that the supermarket has? Sometimes I've been moved to pray, "Lord, how long before I realized I was hungry did You begin to grow the food I need today?" Or another need: the oxygen we must have from the air we breathe—how long ago did God waft our last "exhale" past a plant that would pull the carbon out of its carbon dioxide to serve as the plant's own building blocks and release what we now inhale?

Or, even less tangible than food or air, we need a continuing supply of a loving, forgiving spirit to help ease our way through a contentious, competitive world, one more ready to hurt us than to heal us. Unless, of course, God's providing has helped us to a loving, supporting community. Like Grace Church, maybe? Or is it there that we can see most easily how much we need God to provide this kind of love for each other, maybe even more than we need our next burger?

Prayer: Lord, how much we need our daily hungers met, and You do it, day after day. You are the Real God, Whose real providing makes possible our apparent day-to-day success in providing for ourselves. Thank You for the times when, by Your Grace, we can also provide for someone else. Amen.

Friday, March 8

MNI WICONI - WATER IS LIFE

Nadia Kanhai

Indigenous people value water as sacred. In Lakota, *mni wiconi* means “water is life.” Human beings need water, as we are substantially comprised of water.

Chris Webb, author of *God Soaked Life*, might say God’s love is life. Human beings are created in God’s image and, therefore, substantially driven by love.

Water is symbolic of life and baptism, but also of the great flood and the Red Sea that parted for some, while swallowing up others. We’re blessed with running (and hot) water. Meanwhile, though no one is immune to extreme weather, the poor are adversely affected by flooding, hurricanes and pollution.



During the warm months, I walk to the river in the evenings. Proximity to the flowing water soothes me and helps wind down my day. Water as God’s creation is powerful, not just in nature, but in our spirits. God’s creation is wondrous!

Sharing water should be like sharing love. However, it gets politicized during times of injustice. “Justice is what love looks like in public,” says Brother Cornel West. Thus, the Standing Rock Sioux and Flint, Michigan, residents led struggles for clean water rights. Earth riders have a finite amount of water, though our physical existence depends on this life source.

God’s love is infinite. It grows through sharing. This love knows no bounds, yet it can be elusive. Sometimes we may feel abandoned by God, or we trivialize this love as a magic Band-Aid. “All you need is love” is simplistic as we grow to understand God’s love as justice, saving a hurting world through abundance, equity and us. A God-soaked life is relational. We’re called to love out loud.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for sharing your healing water and healing love. Teach us to do likewise. Amen.

Saturday, March 9

No Hiding From God

Ray Seidlitz

In 2003, the Chicago Cubs were on the verge of going to the World Series with a chance to win it all after almost 100 years. With only five outs between the Cubs and the coveted National League Championship, the Florida Marlins were at bat and a pop fly foul ball was hit into left field. As the Cubs' left fielder Moises Alou ran underneath to try to make the catch, a fan named Steve Bartman reached out and knocked the ball into the stands.

Moments later, the Cubs' lead disappeared and Cub fans entered the winter without the coveted prize. Bartman was blamed and actually had to hide from the public eye for a long time.

But then, in 2016, his (and my) beloved team won the World Series. The next year, owner Tom Ricketts and the Cubs' management team presented Bartman with probably the greatest gesture of forgiveness and grace baseball has ever seen: a personalized World Series ring.

Thank God we don't have to hide from Him, no matter our sin. We don't have to wait a decade or a lifetime for forgiveness. He gives it the moment we ask. And we have to forgive and extend grace to others just as God does, even though sometimes it can be very hard to do.



Sunday, March 10

THE WASHINGS Rev. Bill Bryan

Billy, wash your hands for supper
I already washed them, Mom
When did you wash them
When I heard you call me
 from my play by the tree in the yard
 I crossed the gravel drive
 to the pump, and washed
Let me see them, Billy
Not now. Can I have more time



Wash your spirit, Bill
I already washed, Lord
When did you wash
 When I heard you calling in my youth
 I went down the gravel road
 to the creek and they washed me
 in your water, Lord
Hold up your spirit and let me see
Not now, Lord. Can I have more time

Monday, March 11

Look to the Sky

Danielle Keethler

The Lord is my strength and my shield. My heart trusts Him. I was helped, my heart rejoiced, and I thank Him with my song. Psalm 28:7

I love to open the shutters of the window near my bed first thing in the morning. It's like saying good morning to God and asking Him how this day is going to unfold. Will it be filled with blue sky and sunshine or be gray and drizzly?

This morning I had a view of water...in its solid form. As I write this, we are experiencing a polar vortex. Frozen ice crystals have formed on the inside of our bedroom window and our heater struggles to keep us warm. When I went outside briefly to get the newspaper, it hurt to breathe.

For me, bearing witness to the change of seasons is a continual reminder of God's omniscience. Seasons, like life, have their ups and downs. Brutal cold and searing heat can be followed by a beautiful, cloudless sky. Through them all, God is there, walking beside us as we navigate unexpected changes.

As I read today's entry in the devotional *Jesus Calling*, by Sarah Young, Jesus was speaking to me. "I am your strength and shield. I plan out each day and have it ready for you, long before you arise from bed. I provide the strength you need each step of the way."

So, when I am faced with inevitable challenges, big or small, I need only to look outside my window to be reminded that I am not alone.

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for your continual presence in my life and for the glimpse of your power through seasonal change. Amen.

Tuesday, March 12

LEANING INTO THE TURNS

Vera McDonald

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11

The first time I ever rode a rollercoaster, I was probably about seven years old. The experience was so terrifying that I didn't attempt it again until I was about fifteen. My older brother, who never shied away from thrill rides, encouraged me, giving me words of reassurance that it would be lots of fun and not as I remembered it. Then he gave me some advice.

“When a turn is coming, lean into the turn. Don't resist it and stiffen up; lean into it. And when a drop is coming, lean forward and down into the drop. Don't resist and press yourself back into the seat. I guarantee the ride will be a lot less scary if you lean forward at the drops and into each turn.”

“Really?” I asked skeptically. “Lean forward *into* the drops?”

“Trust me. It will work,” he answered.

Well, I decided to take the plunge, so to speak, even though the part about leaning down into each drop sounded completely backwards. That meant I'd be staring down directly into each fall as it happened!

But, sure enough, he was right. I leaned into each turn and bent my body forward and down into each drop. And the rollercoaster ride was not terrifying, but in fact truly thrilling. At the end, I wanted to get right back on again!

It is like that with God. It seems like the hardest times are when we stiffen up and resist His plans for us. We get thrashed and whipped about during times of hardship and emerge beaten, weary, and terrified.

God implores us to have courage, trust Him, and lean into the turns and valleys of life with Him, so that even life's frightening moments can be molded into something transforming, to His glory, and to our amazement.

Wednesday, March 13

BAHAMIAN SUNDAYS

Chamus Burnside-Savazzini

Proverbs 27:1 Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring. (ESV)

I was so happy to read the helpful tips for our Lenten devotions, because one question asked, “Do you like being in or near water? Why? Why not?”

In my early formative years, I grew up on Freeport, Grand Bahamas Island, one of the closest Bahamian islands next to Florida. I lived there until I was 10 years old. I remember going to church every Sunday, coming home and eating an early “L-inner,” which is lunch and dinner, before taking an afternoon nap.

Once we got up from our nap, my parents would tell us to put on our shoes because we were going for our Sunday drive. This happened almost every Sunday. I remember the sun shining, the heat sometimes unbearable because my dad *never* used the air-conditioner in his car because it burned too much gasoline. In fact, not many people used it. They just enjoyed the fresh, *hot* air!

Some images that stand out for me are the coco plum trees, coconut trees, aquamarine water, white sand beaches, stray dogs, seagulls and the mirages of water on the road from the heat on the asphalt. Beautiful images, right?

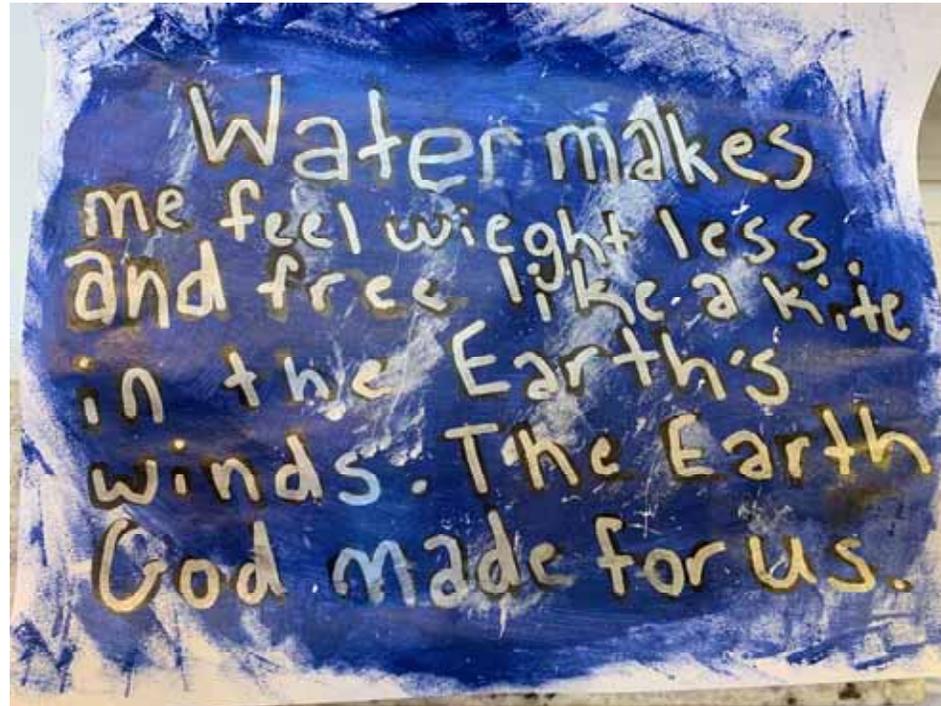
I really miss those experiences now, especially after this winter. I also ask myself sometimes, how could I be in a place so beautiful but take it for granted? Maybe I was too young to understand what it meant to “soak up” the blessing of *today*!

As I get older, I appreciate the fact that yesterday is gone and tomorrow has not come, so I need to live and serve for God’s glory today!

Thursday, March 14

The Feeling of Water

Ellen Hoover, age 11



Ellen Hoover is an active swimmer, involved competitively in both summer swimming at Farmstead Pool and Mavericks club swimming. She is a sixth grade student at Madison Junior High in Naperville and a member of the Junior Singers at Grace United Methodist Church. Her favorite stroke is the backstroke.

Friday, March 15

A Favorite Bible Verse in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament)

Rev. Doug Bowden

"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." Psalm 103:8

"Israel's core testimony," these words of the Psalmist, so called by Walter Brueggemann, our greatest Old Testament scholar. Indeed, as you may remember, these same exact words of the Psalmist are found in the Torah, Exodus 34:16, when Moses returns to Mt. Sinai, where God will give him new tablets of the Ten Commandments after he smashed the original tablets in anger for Israel's building of the golden calf. Such is the nature of God, that these words are the ones spoken by God to Moses there.

Thankfully, we remember that "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love," is also found in Nehemiah 9:17, 31, where Ezra and Nehemiah lead the Israelite people, now home in Jerusalem, from Babylonian exile in the rebuilding of the Temple of David and Solomon. Ezra and Nehemiah are teaching the Jewish people anew who God is, and because of who God is, they are home from exile and can rebuild the Holy Temple. "Israel's core testimony," here and also in Jonah.

This may surprise us from the story of Jonah: when God accepts the repentance of Nineveh, Jonah cries out angrily, "That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and ready to relent from punishing." (4:2)

So, in the praise and poetry of the Psalms, in the Torah law and story of Moses, in the temple rebuilding by Ezra and Nehemiah, and in the reluctant prophet, Jonah, we find "Israel's core testimony." Learning this, especially in my disciple teaching ministry at beloved Grace Church, I am finding great meaning, comfort and resilient hope in beginning my daily morning devotions by saying Psalm 103:8.

God of the Hebrew Scriptures is not a God of harsh judgment or stern, unending punishment, as we think from our first reading of the Old Testament. "God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." I invite you to join me in the mornings of Lent 2019 with Psalm 103:8.

Prayer: O God, we find peace and new life when we hold on to your mercy, grace, and steadfast love.

Saturday, March 16

WATER IN THE DESERT

Betty Long



He turneth a wilderness
into a pool of water,
And a dry land into
watersprings.

Psalm 107:35 (ASV)

*These beautiful photos of
water flowing in the desert were
taken by Betty Long last year
while she was hiking in the
Whitewater Preserve near Palm
Springs, California.*



Sunday, March 17

TURNING WATER INTO WINE

Jacalyn Green Tschirhart

"...a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." John 2:1-5

Since this Lenten devotional booklet is focused on water, it seems fitting to ponder Jesus' first miracle at the wedding of Cana. There are several aspects in this story to note. First, this was at a wedding, a happy celebration. We tend to think of Jesus as a rather sober fellow: hanging out with sinners, healing sick people, teaching his disciples...somehow he seems more human when one remembers that he celebrated events like marriages.

Also, while he was apparently not ready to start performing miracles, he succumbed to his mother's pressure and had the servants fill six large jars with water, which he subsequently changed into wine (and not just any wine, but "the best").

This story further illustrates the humanity of Jesus: he is prodded by his mother to fill a need which she knows he can fulfill, but which he does not want to do. One can sympathize—it would have seemed more fitting to have his first miracle be a healing, not the 30 AD equivalent of a beer run. On the other hand, this is the first of many stories in which Jesus takes a limited resource (bread, fish, water/wine) and provides for the crowd at hand. We see Jesus as both human and God.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for life's celebrations: for mothers and sons, for water, wine and, most of all, for the gift of your son, Jesus. Amen.

Monday, March 18

“AS WE FORGIVE”

Merrill Litchfield

Read: Matthew 18:21-35 “Peter got up the nerve to ask, ‘Master, how many times do I forgive a brother or sister who hurts me? Seven?’ Jesus replied, ‘Seven! Hardly. Try seventy times seven.’” Matthew 18:21 & 22 (The Message)

How well does your memory work? Or, for us senior citizens, should I say, “Still work?” One measuring stick that we’d just as soon not have is how often old hurts pop up again...and hurt just as much as they all did the first time. “But I thought I forgave that! How often do I have to keep forgiving that same, undeserving rascal?” And there we are, standing in Peter’s foot-tracks, wishing forgiveness were a one-and-done proposition, hoping a few lightly spoken words will let us go free. Free from the remembered hurt, free from those embarrassingly quick-to-appear wishes for revenge, free from our guilty fear of being on God’s bad side, just because somebody chose to wrong us.

I don’t know if it’d help to know we’re in good company on this issue. When C. S. Lewis was nine years old, he was shipped off to boarding school (only a month after his mother died). It didn’t help a bit that the master of that private school was erratic and brutal; after the school failed, “Oldie” was declared insane. I don’t think it helped much that Lewis himself escaped from being “Oldie’s” target, having to watch as one of his classmates was being beaten may have left Lewis with fewer bruises, but there was no disguising the wrongness of the beating, or the sense of one’s own helplessness. After Lewis accepted Christ, he tried again and again to forgive Oldie—only to have the memory come back, bringing with it the fear and hatred that again demanded his forgiveness. It wasn’t until late in his life that Lewis succeeded in forgiving “Oldie”...and had it stick.

Nobody wants to have Alzheimer’s, but as long as our memories still work, we may have to re-forgive the same hurt over and over, until we wonder just how close we’re getting to that 490. Thank God for His Grace, which persisted for us, even going as far as the Cross to reclaim us from our sin. And thank God, too, that His Grace will still supply us, even beyond number 491!

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for Your promise that You’ll forgive us if we also forgive, especially those who’ve hurt us. How much joy will surround us all in Your heaven, when there is no hate or hurt left around us! Amen.

Tuesday, March 19

NO EXCUSE FOR NOT PRAYING!

Pastor Mark Himel

Susanna Wesley, mother of John Wesley, took her relationship to God as seriously as she did her duties as a wife and mother. Early in her life, she vowed that she would never spend more time in leisure or entertainment than she did in prayer and Bible study. Even amid the most complex and busy years of her life as a mother, she still scheduled two hours each day for fellowship with God and time in His Word, and she adhered to that schedule faithfully.

The challenge was finding a place of privacy in a house filled to overflowing with children. Mother Wesley's solution to this was to bring her Bible to her favorite chair and throw her long apron up over her head, forming a sort of tent. This became something akin to the "tent of meeting," the tabernacle in the days of Moses in the Old Testament.

Every person in the household, from the smallest toddler to the oldest domestic helpers, knew well to respect this signal. When Susanna was under the apron, she was with God and was not to be disturbed except in the case of the direst emergency. There in the privacy of her little tent, she interceded for her husband and children and plumbed the deep mysteries of God in the Scriptures. This holy discipline equipped her with a thorough and profound knowledge of the Bible.

Prayer Leads to Teaching

When husband Samuel was away, as was often the case, a substitute minister delivered the Sunday morning sermon at the church. Susanna found these messages uninspiring and lacking in spiritual meat. She had a good-sized congregation of her own at home, so she began teaching them the Bible in her kitchen on Sunday afternoons. Soon neighbors began asking if they could attend. Word circulated and others from the area began asking permission to attend as well. So thorough was Susanna's knowledge of the Bible, and so gifted was she at communicating its truths, that on any given Sunday after church, Susanna would have as many as two hundred people in attendance at her informal family Bible study, which started in her home but soon moved to a larger venue.

Susanna passed away in 1742 at the age of seventy-three, living long enough to see her sons John and Charles become world-renowned leaders of the global Christian movement. This is her legacy, forged in large part in those diligent hours of intercession under that makeshift apron tent.

Wednesday, March 20

BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

Linda Fronk



Genesis 12:2 Blessed to be a blessing

Galatians 6:2 Bear one another's burdens

At Leawood United Methodist Church in Leawood, Kansas, I was a Stephen Minister and Leader for over 14 years. After we moved to Glen Ellyn and joined Grace UMC, I decided to get involved in other ministries. It's interesting how once God tunes our ears to other peoples' pain, we are called to respond.

So it was recently, as I hurriedly dressed to leave our health club. The lady next to me murmured something about the terribly cold weather as she, head down, pulled on her shoes. I responded glibly that the cold would be over soon and the days were getting longer; spring was on the way.

She said that she didn't think that would make any difference since she had recently lost her husband. By this time, I had put on my coat and, bag in hand, was about to close the door on my locker and leave. I did not have time for her; I was due at home. I turned and looked into her face and saw the pain reflecting from her eyes. It was time to slow down, to stop, to listen...to be the "burden bearer" for someone in pain.

She talked; I listened. After a few minutes she said, "I had been praying for help in how to move ahead. I think you are an answer to my prayer." I invited her to church, and we have plans to talk again.

We are all called to be answers to someone else's prayers. All we need to do is look and listen for those opportunities God presents to us each day.

Prayer: Lord, equip us to recognize and to understand how we can best minister to others.

Thursday, March 21

LOVED FROM A DISTANCE

Gaye Lynn Loufek

“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” Galatians 3:27 (NIV)

When you’ve lived in the same house for over 25 years, you tend to accumulate a lot of “stuff.” When you are deeply “connected” to your “stuff,” it becomes difficult to part with any of it. Hence, the 2019 goal of *purging* at our house.

Recently, while I began the trendy “*Tidying Up*” revolution in our home and tried to discern which things truly bring me joy and which things are just hanging around, I found a copy of a letter I had written to the pastor serving the final appointment at my home church in southern Illinois. That little church was forced to merge with another congregation, and the building was sold. It was a difficult end (or new beginning, depending on how you view that sort of thing) for many.

As part of the final day, the Pastor invited folks to offer a time of memory and testimony. I did so by means of a letter that he read to the congregation. In that letter, I referenced how our children had both been baptized there, even though at the time of their baptisms we lived more than 1,500 miles away.

We chose that church for various reasons: my Mom had been baptized there with her seven siblings and had grown up there; I had been baptized and grown up there; my husband and I had been married there. But the biggest reason we chose that church was because we knew, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that congregation would love, support, and cover our children in prayer whether near or far.

Witnessing a baptism is so much more than the “*oohs*” and “*aahhs*” expressed over the adorable baby or reciting the vows as a formality. The covenant of baptism is not just between the one being baptized and God; it is a commitment by the church family to nurture one another in Christian faith, to surround the person with love and forgiveness, and is a promise to live according to the example of Christ.

Though my home church closed, the commitment of its people to our children at the time of their baptisms has not waned. The foundation of faith began in southern Illinois, and it has grown and continued in Naperville. For that we are forever grateful!

Prayer: Dear God, may we be washed by the water of Your amazing grace and reminded that in You, and through You, love and forgiveness abide. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Friday, March 22

PRECIOUS WATER

Ruth Allison

Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” John 7:38

I took water for granted until I visited Kenya in 2014 with the Grace United Methodist Church mission team. We were led by Jan Cosgrove and Pastor Lisa Teloman. Each morning we would go down to get our clean water from local missionaries Jim Monroe and Sue Owens. Pastor Lisa reminded me that I was only going to get one glass a day...so don't waste any. On the way there, I noticed women next door with bowls of water washing their clothes.

One day, as Paul Ceruti was painting the upper corners of the school classroom, I noticed his precarious stool start to fall. His paint can landed on Florence Mubishi's granddaughter, who was helping to paint the door to the classroom.

Out in back, we had a pump that fed water into this school. It had been paid for by Jean Roche and our Methodist Kenyan fund. I probably would not have noticed it had we not needed to rinse the paint from the granddaughter's dress. Water...much needed. We supplied it.

For my 70th birthday this year, I asked for donations to Charity Water. You can Google it and find, like I did, how so many places in the world need water. They supply water to millions.



I'm proud to be a member of such a generous church. You are making a difference in the world.

Saturday, March 23

WATER'S FLOW

Cheryl Ameiss

When you are in a boat in Canada and the water becomes shallow—very shallow—someone needs to sit in the bow of the boat looking down into the water, watching for rocks, trees, or even just the bottom of the lake. We do this to protect the propeller from getting damaged, or it could be a very long, slow row home.

One year on a bright, sunny day, I had to do this very thing. As I was looking down in the water, I noticed the current that was near the bottom of the lake moving the plants towards the boat. But I also noticed, on the surface, the wind and waves from passing boats moved the water away from the boat. It was beautiful! Two different directions in the same place.

A thought then occurred to me. This is like our society. Christians are the water near the bottom going in one direction under the surface of society that is flowing in the other direction. We are their support, trying to push them in the right direction, but they sometimes flow their own way.

The thing to think about here is that even though the surface is what everyone sees and feels, it is the power of the current underneath that pushes the water/society the way God wants it to go. Of course, there are times when the surface becomes violent from storms or other factors that affect the “under current,” and we need to follow them unless we are in very deep water, but this is always temporary.

I am glad I am a Christian, part of a wonderful, large community that holds up society in God's direction. We help the other non-believers with the direction they need to go, and they don't even know we are carrying them with us. Just like God does with us. This is God's plan—discreet, always there, and powerful.

Prayer: Lord, You have given us life and direction. You have shown us the direction we need to go. Thank You for giving us signs in Your magnificent nature. Give us the strength to continue in the direction You want us to go, despite what is on the surface. In Your Jesus' name, Amen.

Sunday, March 24

DISTURB US

Rev. Cindy Marino

Sir Francis Drake was an English sea captain who lived from 1540-1596. He was the second sailor to circumnavigate the globe. This is his famous prayer. Let's make it ours today and see where God takes us.

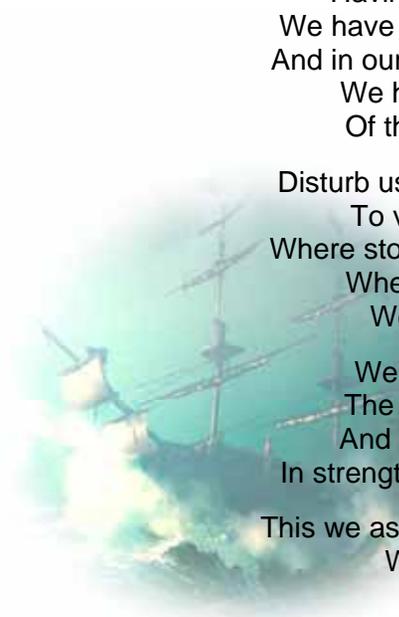
Disturb us, Lord, when
We are too pleased with ourselves,
When our dreams have come true
Because we dreamed too little,
When we arrived safely
Because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when
With the abundance of things we possess
We have lost our thirst
For the waters of life;
Having fallen in love with life,
We have ceased to dream of eternity
And in our efforts to build a new earth,
We have allowed our vision
Of the new Heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,
To venture on wilder seas
Where storms will show Your mastery;
Where losing sight of land,
We shall find the stars.

We ask you to push back
The horizons of our hopes;
And to push back the future
In strength, courage, hope, and love.

This we ask in the name of our Captain,
Who is Jesus Christ.



Monday, March 25

SIMPLY LOVE

Ray Seidlitz

Just these two things...

Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You must love your neighbor as you love yourself.’”

Matthew 22:37-39 (CEB)

Love God. Love others. In that order. Yep, that’s really all there is to it. These few words pretty well sum up what our lives are supposed to be about. If we do these two things, everything else—and I really mean everything else—will fall into place. No, life won’t be perfect, but it will be blessed.

How many times have you heard someone say, “I wish I would have told them how much I loved them”? Or, “I wish I would have gone to visit them more often or done ‘this’ or ‘that’ while they were still here“?

If you love someone, don’t wait. Tell them.
If you love someone, don’t wait. Show them.
If you love someone, don’t wait. Act like it.

Love is the most precious commodity we have here on earth, even more precious than time. Love gives us courage, strength, hope, confidence, security, and a reason to be. Whether your love is the kind of love we express toward friends, extended family, children, or spouses, it doesn’t really matter. Just make sure you don’t let love go unsaid.



Tuesday, March 26

SAVED

Barb Ceruti

When I was five years old, my Uncle Jim saved me from drowning in his family's built-in swimming pool. I have but a sliver of the memory, but by all eyewitness accounts, I would have never made it out of that pool alive without him.

I've always wondered if my recurring dreams about swimming pools, oceans, tidal waves and sea life are the result of this experience 50 years ago. If so, it's not because of any conscious fear of the water. In fact, I may not be cautious enough around deep water. As a bonafide "beach person," I am more than willing to jump head first into sparkling waters and cresting waves.

A few years ago, on a trip to Maui, I snorkeled for the first time. What a breathtaking underworld! Fish of all colors, shapes and sizes darted here—then there!—inviting me to follow them deeper into the coral caverns of the Pacific. A giant sea turtle gathered a flippered human crowd; bright green eels opened and shut their mouths along the ocean floor.

Later, on Kauai, my family and I sprinkled some of my mother's ashes into the clear, cerulean sea. Not long after, following a rainstorm, a double rainbow appeared in the sky. I like to think it was my mom and dad, both now passed away. Or perhaps it was said uncle, my mother's beloved brother.

Indeed, vast water thrills me. I know the dangers of it, and I often dream of menacing marine beasts circling me in the depths. I dream too of massive walls of water rising, rising until I'm sure to be engulfed and thrashed to pieces.

But I never am.

In my dreams, I have all the beauty and peril and mystery of the deep, but always the inevitable thrill of adventure and safety from harm.

Are my uncle's arms still my savior, even as I sleep? Or it is God's unsinkable comfort?

While I'm not yet brave enough to SCUBA dive (what if I get the Bends!), I hope to muster the courage before too long.

Until then, I'll float on the dream.



Wednesday, March 27

GOD KNOWS MY NAME

Ellen Burrows

I truly do not understand why I was christened at the age of three months, but to join the church I had to be baptized. My christening in my grandparents' home had been done by the same pastor who was going to baptize me. The first event gave me my name – Ellen Jessica Stewart – at the age of six weeks. The second was required to join the church.

The church knew my name from the Sunday School rolls. The second, I was told, was so the Lord would know my soul and, thus, I would be truly saved. I remember being the only one of 14 confirmands who was singled out to be baptized. Had I been a sinner all my early years? If I had died, would I have gone to “hell”? I told myself that God would know all my good deeds! But how could that be true, if he did not know who I was? I was a no-name sinner among all the others. I was “what’s her name?” on God’s book of lives.

Thus, my christening was not in the book. Only upon baptism did I have a place in God’s book. Only now could I answer the roll call when St. Peter met me at heaven’s pearly gates. What would have happened had I only been christened? That, I will never have to know. The church has always been my sanctuary!

Everyone knew me and knew my name. Everyone said, “Hello, Ellen” on Sunday morning. Now, God would say “Hello, Ellen,” when I got to see him. Oh, what a comfortable feeling it is to be “saved,” to be a name not just on the church’s book, but in God’s book of redeemed sinners.

I am reminded of the hymn “Just a Closer Walk With Thee.” Oh, Lord, may I now be better able to be “walking closer to thee,” now that you know my name. Thanks be, I am saved!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for saving a “no name” soul of this world! I am truly a saved soul. Jesus Christ took my sins away!

Thursday, March 28

“BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL”

Merrill Litchfield

Read: Psalm 51 “Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.” Psalm 51:12 (NIV)

In writing about this subject, I think I have to confess to having prayed one of the dumbest prayers ever to come out of the human mouth or mind: the “beat me up” prayer. Essentially, I confessed I was unwilling to accept God’s loving Spirit, ‘cause I liked my favorite things better, so I asked God to beat me up, to force me into loving and obeying Him. I don’t actually know whether God smiled at that kind of foolishness, or wept, but I’m grateful that His answer was to persist in loving me and providing for me until I had grown enough older to see my attitude for the raving bosh it was.

Nowadays, I mock that frame of mind, when I’m working on a jigsaw puzzle, by claiming I’m going to fetch a sledgehammer, “...and *then* it’ll *fit!*” But I’m afraid there are an awful lot of people who still put their first and deepest trust in some kind of force. Like the ones who try to testify to the love of God by citing the horrors of Hell, hoping to scare their listeners into repentance. As if it weren’t scary enough to realize that the freedom God gives us includes the freedom to choose Hell rather than His love.

As somebody I often quote says, “The door to Hell is locked from the inside.” So when my natural selfishness wants to exclude somebody from my life, my love, oh, how I need Him to show me again that His heaven is among all those who love Him, as well as everybody around them; how I need Him to deliver me from my own evil!

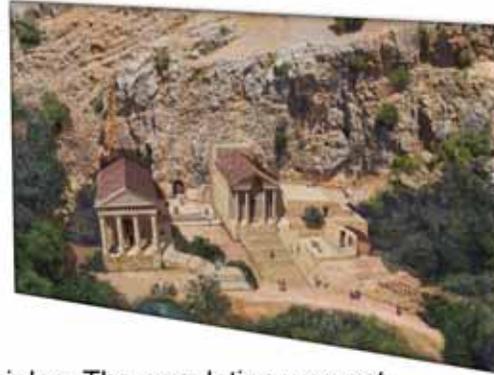
Prayer: Lord, like the psalmist, I ask You to give me a willing spirit, that I may be eager, not only to receive the joy of Your salvation, but also to share it with Your children, who are hungry, as I was and still am, for Your love, but foolish enough to choose against the food they are starving for. From all kinds of evil, including the ones we’d like to choose, deliver us, loving Father. Amen.

Friday, March 29

Awesome
Kathy Carey

Matthew 16:13-23

One of the places we visited in Israel was Caesarea Philippi. It is on the border of Syria. We were right next to the barbed wire fences. This was the northernmost extent of Jesus' ministry. He could go here and be alone with His disciples. The population was not Jewish, so Jesus could teach the twelve in peace.



Here, the city of "Banyas" (the Arabic pronunciation of Pnias) was located. Today, we see the excavations of the remains of the Temple of Pan. When I first walked into the area, I was awestruck. I probably stood there with my mouth open. I remember standing there for a period of time. The remains of the sanctuary to the god Pan had niches, which were very visible, but no statues!

In bible study, we had recently viewed Ray Vanderlann's DVD of his trips to Israel. He had taken his group to this exact same area. To think I was actually there, seeing the same place! He told us about the "evil" that was in this place; there would have been statues they used to worship baal.

Of more importance was what Jesus did. It was in this area that Jesus asked His closest disciples who they thought Him to be. Simon Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." This time Peter got the right answer. Here, Jesus told him He was going to build his church on the "Rock."

We must also ask ourselves that question: is He our Lord and Messiah? Jesus shared with His friends the secrets of the Kingdom of God. Do we share with our friends in the same way? John Wesley believed we must share our Christian faith with others.

Saturday, March 30

DROPLETS OF LIVING WATER

Gay Craig

**So God created humankind in His image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.
Genesis 1:27**

In Genesis 1:27, we learn that we are created in God's image, and in Hebrews 1:1-3, the Bible teaches that God has spoken to us through His Son, Jesus, Who is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, To me, these verses mean that humankind, at its best, is the embodiment of God's character, the "whatness" of God, as lived out by Jesus Christ two thousand years ago.

To almost all He encountered, Jesus was loving, joyful, patient, peaceful, kind, good, faithful, gentle, self-controlled, and so much more. He was a reflection of the presence of the Holy Spirit in His God-soaked life. As Christians, we are called to live such a life, too. That is easier said than done, and I challenge myself to follow Jesus' teachings and His example.

God pours out thousands of blessings in my life everyday, and in my better moments, I realize that I am drenched and sopping wet with His goodness. When I remember this, I praise and thank Him for His bountiful graces, but I must do and be more.

My faith requires that I dig deep and ask the Holy Spirit to help me be the best that I can be day-by-day. Progress, not perfection, is the goal. As well as I know that I am a beloved child of God, I must remind myself that each person in all of creation is also His beloved child, created in His image. He desires that I respond to others and to situations in the manner that embodies God's image of me. If I live in accordance with His will, not only can my life be God-soaked, I can sprinkle droplets of living waters in the lives of God's other children.

**Let the words of my mouth and the meditations
of my heart be pleasing to You, Lord, my rock
and my redeemer. Psalm 19:14**



Sunday, March 31

A FAVORITE BIBLE VERSE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Rev. Doug Bowden

"Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." Colossians 3:14 (NRSV)

The Apostle Paul is a master of metaphor, especially in these baptismal-centered words to the Church at Colossae. Indeed, Paul, educated and at home in both Jewish and Greek thought, chooses this soaring and illuminating metaphor to teach and help both Gentile and Jewish Christians to understand the transforming meaning of their baptisms and their new unified life in Christ, through their baptisms.

"Clothe yourselves with love," declares Paul. The baptismal imagery and history is so rich here. New Testament scholars tell us that in the earliest Christian house churches, like Lydia at Philippi (See Acts 16 and Paul's letter to the Philippians), this happened when a new Christian was baptized. As the great late scholar David Bartlett wrote, "(Paul) reflects the early Christian practice of baptism, where the candidate strips off the old clothes before entering the baptismal waters, emerges, and is clothed anew." So, Paul's metaphor is so clear and empowers us to rejoice in our Christian baptisms, whenever they were.

Baptism, in which God's love for us in Jesus, into whom we are baptized, (Romans 6), is the new clothes we wear. Thankfully, as in my devotion on Isaiah 55:12, my favorite verse in the Old Testament (page 13), my thoughts center in Christian marriage, for this most joyous and happy reason: Mary and I will celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary on June 14, 2019. Rejoicing and giving thanks for the almost 50 years God has given us in marriage, I center myself in these baptismal, metaphorical words of the Apostle Paul to the Colossians.

"Clothe yourselves with the love (of Christ), which binds everything together in perfect harmony." More and more, I have grown, over nearly 50 years of marriage with Mary, to love and forgive, as the Apostle Paul clearly means here. So, I pray for all of us, in our marriages and in our friendships and, indeed, in every human relationship, to "clothe (ourselves) with the love of Christ, which holds all together well."

Prayer: Disciples of Jesus, we thankfully are committed through our baptisms to love and live like him. O God, help us, through the baptismal waters we share with Jesus, to love and live like him. Amen.

Monday, April 1

BE LIKE SHEEP

Amy McDonald

“My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me.” John 10:27

I had a dream one night. My friends and I were volunteering at a hospital. In the hospital, there were glass elevators which were malfunctioning—moving at incredible speed and abruptly stopping, causing everyone inside to fly into the air and fall to the ground.

At one point, a lot of people crowded into the elevator with my friends and me while, over an intercom, a man’s voice read a list of people to keep in our thoughts and prayers. With us inside, the elevator began to speed up and abruptly stop, causing us all to crash into one another and fall down. Meanwhile, the Intercom Man kept repeating the same phrase to us: “Be like sheep.” Confused, we stood helpless as the elevator again sped up, faster than before, stopping so hard that everybody bounced off each other, trying to stay standing. Suddenly we realized what we had to do.

The Intercom Man told us to gather into small groups and talk. In my group, there was a friend of mine and two other girls whom I didn’t know. One girl opened up about her past with drug abuse and self-harm while another spoke about her parents’ divorce. I opened up about my past dealing with bullying. The other girls related to my story. Again we heard the voice: “Be like sheep.” But this time we responded, “Stick together.”

When the elevator sped up once more, we all held onto each other as it came to a violent stop again. We all flew in the air, laughing when we landed safely, keeping each other upright, so nobody fell down this time. The elevator slowed down, allowing us to wave to patients as we passed them. As I woke up, I was left with those words one last time: “Be like sheep, stick together.”



Tuesday, April 2

PEOPLE OF GRACE

Danielle Keethler

Rise up, you women who are at ease, And hear my voice; Give ear to my word, you complacent daughters. Isaiah 32:9

Just when I thought I was sailing smoothly through a period of calm, my complacency was interrupted. My three-year-old twin grandsons had come through a very rough beginning and were now healthy and thriving. My pregnant daughter was carrying a new baby to term. We rejoiced that we would not be visiting a baby in the neo-natal intensive care unit this time around. Little Addison Elizabeth arrived a week late, chubby and beautiful. I cried tears of pure joy. Two days later, we received another call from our daughter. The doctors discovered a dimple at the bottom of Addison's spine and, as they suspected, she had been born with spina bifida and a tethered spine. She would need MRI's and at least one neurosurgery, followed by physical therapy. She needed to stay well during the months before the scheduled surgery. Any infection would land her in the hospital again. No small task, with two active brothers who were regularly around other children.

I bathed her in prayer. I have to admit that I struggled to maintain my train of thought as I called out to God. I had become an emotional wreck and didn't know how to pray about my precious granddaughter. So, as I had done with my pre-mature grandsons years before, I turned to the people of Grace. Addison was placed on the prayer list and many voices lifted up petitions on her behalf. She was placed firmly in His hands. At the same time, I decided to pray out loud instead of silently...to talk to God as if He were right in the room with me. I visualized His presence. In the days ahead, I finally began to feel a sense of calm. As Addison's surgery approached, I knew with certainty that whatever the outcome, Addison was in good hands. She would not walk alone as she began her life's journey...and neither would her family.

The surgery was long and followed by infections, but the outcome is hopeful. The doctors joked that it wouldn't be long before we would be watching her play soccer. Addison is a remarkably happy baby and brings us so much joy. I suspect that, as she grows, she will use her birth defect to bring glory to God and bear witness to His healing hands.

The Bible tells us that God is invisible. In John 1:18, we are told that no man has seen God at any time. But, over the past few months, I have seen His face in the people of Grace. He shines through those who so faithfully lift others up in prayer. He walks alongside each of us, even when we can't find the right words to pray ourselves. Sometimes, we need to be jarred out of our complacency to be reminded of His faithfulness.

Prayer: Gracious God, I thank You for Your constant presence and Your promise that we are never alone. And, I thank You for the way You shine through the people of Grace.

Wednesday, April 3

HEAR HIS VOICE, AND LISTEN

Chamus Burnside-Savazzini

Pray without ceasing. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (ESV)

Living a God-soaked life for me means living into my calling. I have never questioned that my calling is to serve children. I thank God for all of the opportunities I have had to invest in the life of a child through teaching 10th grade biology in North Carolina, serving at various churches, and serving in my sorority. I was blessed to have a wonderful group of people speak into my life early on, and I feel blessed that they were God-soaked and some of that spilled onto me!

Throughout the course of my life, I remember high points and low points. During the low points, I remember being so close to God that I knew I had heard His voice speaking to me. It was not always what I wanted to hear, but I listened anyway.

I always wondered how I got back in the same spot that He already told me was no good for me. Why did I have to get to this low point again? Was I just hard-headed? I don't know, but what I do know now is that when I look back and see where God snatched me from, it could only be because He loves me and has bigger plans for me.

I pray that wherever this life takes me, may it continue to draw me closer to Him. This is my lifelong prayer.



Thursday, April 4

HURT PEOPLE HURT PEOPLE

Nadia Kanhai

“Hurt people hurt people.” - Shaka Senghor

Reflecting on what it means to live a God-soaked life and live in community with God’s broken people, I’m caught in a wilderness, a DMZ between despair and prophesy. What kind of Lord is revealed in Jesus’ baptism in the stirred-up muddies of the Jordan riverbank? We conveniently skip past that messiness to the happily-ever-after when the Spirit of God descends like a snow-white dove, resting on a dazzling, brilliantly clean Savior.

I’m haunted by images of police soaking non-violent black demonstrators with high-powered hoses and sicking dogs on them in the baptism of white supremacy. My heart shatters at the memory of police blasting non-violent Native American water protectors with fire hoses on a freezing Thanksgiving evening in Standing Rock, North Dakota. In Ferguson, Gaza and Tijuana, authorities teargassed black, Arab and brown demonstrators and observers with chemical weapons, making them tear up, gasping to breathe.

As my heart aches, I wonder, who are the broken? Are they the soaked or the soakers? Both? If hurt people hurt people, do broken people seek self-righteous justification in breaking demonized suffering people?

Written following the bloody Civil War, Julia Ward Howe’s *Mother’s Day Proclamation* begins “Arise, all women who have hearts, Whether our baptism be of water or of tears!” I don’t remember my baptism as an infant, but I remember well my baptism of tears. The act of becoming fully vulnerable, of accepting and living into our brokenness immerses us in a God-soaked life and beloved community.

Prayer: God, we are strong, proud and self sufficient, and yet you value meekness and humility. Help us to embrace our own brokenness and mutually heal, not hurt, our sisters and brothers. Amen.

Friday, April 5

A FAVORITE BIBLE VERSE IN THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES (OLD TESTAMENT)

Rev. Doug Bowden

"For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." Isaiah 55:12 (NRSV)

I am smiling and giving deep thanks to God, as I begin typing my devotional thoughts for Isaiah 55:12, one of my favorite verses in the Hebrew Scriptures of the Bible. Indeed, I am immediately uplifted and strengthened by these words God gives to the Biblical prophet we call Isaiah. God has already forgiven Israel for their sins of disobedience to the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Law, which was the primary cause of Babylon's conquering and destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE and the Israelite Jewish people being carried off into exile in Babylon, Egypt, and all across the ancient Middle East. We read God's healing and forgiving words to Israel, "Comfort, O comfort my people." (Isaiah 40:1)

So, forgiven by the Hesed love and full mercy of God, the people of Israel are coming home, across the plains, valleys and mountains of the Middle East, to Jerusalem. As Alan Johnson perceives, "This new exodus from Babylon means homecoming." Yes, God's people, never forgotten by God, are coming home. Their joy gives us, thankfully, some of the most soaring and uplifting language in all of the Bible.

These days of Lent 2019 are a time for us to read Second Isaiah, Chapters 40 to 55, and Third Isaiah, Chapters 56 to 66, and be moved and transformed by soaring, poetic and prose language as we gratefully soar with Isaiah's words. Indeed, these words of Isaiah 55:12 have become one of my favorite Biblical scriptures for homilies in services of marriage.

With the Spirit of God alive and working in me, I said to Caitlyn Mills and Martin Trainor at their June 29, 2012, wedding, my last wedding before pastoral retirement, "Go out in joy and come back in peace. Today, in your marriage and new life together in Christ, hear the mountains and hills singing for you. So great is God's joy for your love for each other in marriage, that especially the trees of the field shall clap their hands for you." Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayer: O God, in your mercy and Hesed love, you bring us home from exile. Joyfully we come in Christ.

Saturday, April 6

UNREQUITED, YET UNLIMITED

Kelly Scotti

Corinthians 13:4-7

Would you be able to love someone if they did not love you back? Could you love someone if they did not love you back? Should you love someone if they did not love you back? If we are truly stewards of Christ and believe in the Bible's teachings as proclaimed in the famous words of Corinthians 13:4-7, does it not stand to reason that we would, could and should love someone even if they do not love us back?

God first loved us so we could love ourselves and others. Oftentimes, this love is unrequited. Yet, God continues to believe and hope our moral compasses will eventually align with His word. His love endures, despite the many ways we may live our lives that we ultimately recognize are hurtful to others and harmful to ourselves. God loves us even when we do not love Him back through actions and deeds of love.

A parent's love is similar to that of God. We, too, lovingly raise our children—not always patiently or without irritability, perhaps. However, like God, we rejoice as our children learn life's truths, we believe in them as they conquer each milestone, we hope they achieve success and happiness, and we endure all the bumps along their journeys. We love them even when it is most painful, when their words or actions are contrary to those of love.

In our daily existence, we are provided a multitude of opportunities to share our love with God, our family and our community through our actions and deeds. It is simply living with the mantra of "choose kindness"—loving your neighbor as you love yourself. It is looking for simple ways to show kindness to others through your words, actions and deeds, even if they do not in some form love us back.

If we each resolved that we would, could and should love another, even if others do not love us back, what would that look like? We would greet each encounter patiently and kindly, we would rejoice in positivity, we would believe a single act of kindness can be of exponential proportion, we would hope our kindness inspires kindness in others, and we would proactively exist to make certain that kindness endures. And, even though initially our love for another may appear unrequited, imagine the impact it would ultimately disperse across the globe. The cost of kindness is of no consequence, yet its return in positive energy in the universe is incalculable.

Love Unconditionally

Sunday, April 7

CHRIST IN THE DESERT
Rev. Dr. Daniel Cochran

Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13

While Matthew and Luke provide us with more information about Jesus' time in the desert, Mark captures the fascinating irony of the situation. With his characteristic sense of urgency, Mark tells us in the span of two short verses that Jesus was baptized and then immediately driven into the wilderness. Wait, what?!? Let's revisit this sequence of events: in verse 10, Jesus witnesses "the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him." In verse 11, he hears the voice of God proclaim, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And then, in verse 12, this same Spirit drives Jesus out into no man's land where he is left without food or water to be tempted by the devil for forty days and nights! What are we to make of this turn of events?

In short, the story tells us a lot about the nature of God and Jesus. They are not here for power and glory; the devil tempts Jesus with these worldly incentives and yet Jesus rejects all three offers, staying true to his calling and honoring the nature of God and God's Kingdom. The story reminds us that Christ was fully human, as well as divine; he experienced the human feelings of physical and spiritual temptation, hunger, thirst, and abandonment.

I love the way Ivan Kramskoy captures this particular aspect of the story in his painting; here, Jesus is not a triumphant king but rather a lonely and abandoned man. Not only does this painting capture the humility of Christ and God's understanding of true power, but it does so in a way that speaks to our own experience of loss and loneliness. Life in general and discipleship in particular are not easy adventures, but we are assured that even in the deserts of our lives, God is with us, holds us, and will not let us go.



Christ in the Desert, Ivan Kramskoy (1872)

Monday, April 8

DOXOLOGY

Merrill Litchfield

Read: Matthew 6:5-15 “For yours is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” *Footnote to Matthew 6:13, NIV, with a note that is found in some late manuscripts.*

Do you get the impression that much of the Bible was written by men? Consider the above phrase, added to the original prayer in Matthew, which apparently hopes to both praise God and impress its hearers. It was drawn from I Chronicles 29:11, from a prayer of King David. I wonder what kinds of words would have been chosen if the ones doing the choosing were women, those who can share with God in the giving of new life and the nurturing of it? Those who live through the experience of discovering that the cost of that gift involves blood, pain, and unremitting love? I sometimes like to let my imagination overflow with the good words that the ladies might choose, that could also praise God: “...the glory, ...and the love and the mercy, the joy and delight, the blessing and the providing, the comfort and the reassurance...” We’d run out of pages before we’d run out of praises, I think. We’d be unlikely to include all of the possible words, but we’d be very likely to blow the current version’s *Reader’s Digest* brevity.

I don’t mean to urge that this prayer that Jesus gave us as a pattern needs to be “revised,” “improved,” or otherwise “monkey-wrenched.” I would urge (again) that when we pray together, we can value the unity this prayer offers to us. But when we’re praying by ourselves, we can use these prescribed words not as our jail cells, but as springboards to bound into God’s abundance with overflowing delight and gratitude. Bringing a few, fresh words of our own to add to those Jesus gave us just might help.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, how can we praise You enough? Thank You for getting us started, but we also ask for Your help in not quitting too soon. Thank You for the promise of eternity, so we can at least get a good start on all the praises You deserve. Amen.

Tuesday, April 9

WHO LIVES, WHO DIES, WHO TELLS YOUR STORY? Jacalyn Green Tshirhart

"And Jesus came and spake unto them...Go ye therefore, and teach all nations...teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Matthew verses 18-20
(King James Bible, the one our founding fathers read)

"Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?" Eliza Hamilton, from *Hamilton* (by Lin Manuel Miranda)

As much as we would like to believe otherwise, the story of the early Christian church is a messy one. After Jesus was resurrected, the remaining disciples had a big job ahead of them: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." (Matthew 28: 19-20) They had to choose a new disciple to replace Judas. They had to build and grow a new church. And faced with this task, they did what most people in groups do when faced with a daunting task: they immediately started arguing. Who should replace Judas as a disciple? Should new members be required to observe Jewish rites as well (and, therefore, become circumcised and observe the traditional dietary laws)? Of Peter and Paul, who understood better what Jesus would have done? It wasn't an easy task, but they persevered to spread the Word. About one third of the world's population currently identify as Christians.

Over two thousand years later, in Grace Church, we are faced with a similar challenge: to bring new people to Christ and to Grace. Alexander Hamilton, who died in his infamous duel at age 47, had Eliza (and more recently Lin Manuel Miranda) to tell his story. As Christians, we must continue to find ways to share our faith in an increasingly secular world.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please guide us in our words and our actions, as we tell your story. Amen.



Wednesday, April 10

IMMERSED IN CHOICE

Barb Ceruti

I was raised in the American Baptist faith, which is very different from the Southern Baptist variety and much more like other Protestant religions. In fact, except for a few liturgical variances, worship services at Grace United Methodist Church feel quite like those of my youth. (Though I still catch myself saying “debts” in the Lord’s Prayer instead of “sins.”)

There are, however, two significant differences between the Baptist faith and other Christian denominations: 1) baptism by total immersion; and 2) waiting until one is old enough to consciously and willingly accept Jesus Christ before being baptized.

For me, “old enough” was 14. I’d taken an extensive church class, much like our confirmation program at Grace, to understand exactly what it meant to be baptized and to decide whether I wanted to take the plunge, so to speak.

I was not an infant, squirming at the sensation of a little dampness on my head, but an emerging adult when I elected to be submerged.

It is interesting to me how people view baptism, not only in terms of how or when it’s done, but what it means for eternity. In some faiths, baptism (or the lack thereof) has earthly consequences, such as whether or not one can participate in communion.

I, for one, do not believe that un-baptized people suffer any greater eternal consequences than their baptized counterparts. In fact, I do not believe in eternal destinations *that depend on earthly behavior*. I italicize those last five words because I do believe in an “after,” a God-soaked life beyond this one.

I am grateful to have been raised in a church-going family that observed the sacraments of faith. Our own three children were not baptized until they approached adolescence, and it was at our encouragement. It was also to my devoutly Catholic mother-in-law’s great relief!

Is the way and time one is baptized a function of humans’ dictate, or God’s? Or is God simply pleased that we invite baptism, whether for ourselves or others, into our lives?

Thursday, April 11

FEARLESS...INTO THE DEEP

Rev. Cindy Marino

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and God, with a terrific east wind all night long, made the sea go back. He made the sea dry ground. The seawaters split. But the Israelites walked right through the middle of the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall to the right and to the left. Exodus 15:21-22

I was taught in my chaplaincy training days to watch for disparities between the circumstances one is currently facing and the person's reaction to those circumstances. A reaction that is out of sync with the way most people would respond is telling. There may be more happening underneath that needs to be explored. It's possible there is brokenness deep in one's soul that defies healing because it's not been clearly revealed. As long as the wound remains deeply hidden, it cannot be treated and will continue to erupt in unexpected ways.

The deep of the sea was a metaphor for evil in ancient days. The depths were mysterious and foreboding. The people of Israel had a fish-eyed view of the depths in the story related in the book of Exodus. God pushed back the waters to reveal the sea bottom on which the people could walk to safety and freedom.

The ground on which the Hebrew people walked to escape their captors had been under the water all along, but only under the power of God, working through the faith of the people, was it revealed.

It feels the same way for us. Before we can explore what lies underneath, we need to recognize God's power, have the faith to step into the journey and let God push aside the layers to reveal what's there. Only then will God lead us across the bottom of our pain to a safer place, and we will find healing and rest.

Prayer: Gracious God, give us attentive hearts and ears to hear the disparity, the faith to explore the depths and the safety of your love surrounding us, as you immerse us in your healing grace. Amen.

Friday, April 12

CRUCIFORM SCULPTURE

Rev. Dr. Daniel Cochran

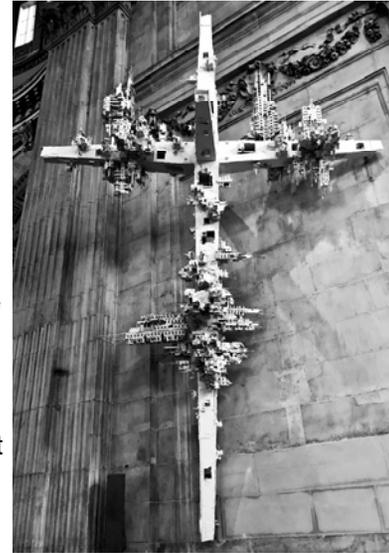
John 3:17

Commissioned to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the beginning of World War I, this large white sculpture is one of two hanging in the nave of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. I had the opportunity to see and photograph these two sculptures on a recent trip to the city; I had come to St. Paul's for morning worship, and upon entering the building noticed immediately these two works of art hanging on either side of the nave, framing the altar.

At first glance, they appear abstract, but as you draw closer you see that what appear to be "growths" on the crosses are in fact ruined buildings! According to the artist, the sculptures are intended to "recall the white crosses placed over the dead in the many war cemeteries across the world. Embedded on each sculpture are intricate models of cities and settlements decimated by contemporary conflict. They recall the waste, pity and devastation of war—both a hundred years ago and, in particular, today."

They are profoundly moving; suspended from the wall, hanging into the space of the worshipping community, these sculptures draw you to them. They disrupt the polished and refined art and architecture of the cathedral, providing a stark reminder that our Christian faith is meant to be lived (and is very much needed!) in the world around us.

There is another, more sobering meaning: hanging in a place of worship, these sculptures warn Christians not to let our faith be used in the interest of national conflicts that create such suffering and devastation. For the artist, Gerry Judah, these sculptures should encourage a sense of "hope for the future," since it is through the cross that God redeems such a broken world and promises us salvation; but it is our challenge to pick up such a monumental cross and follow Jesus.



Cruciform Sculpture, St. Paul's Cathedral in London
Gerry Judah (2018)

Saturday, April 13

TANGLES

Debbie Potts

I never cared too much
About my appearances
I played all day outside
Yet when mom combed my hair
I'd cry in pain
Always a thick head of hair
Tangles galore
Finally Mom discovered
"No More Tangles"
Johnson and Johnson's product
Tangles slowly broke free
One night
I slept with gum in my mouth
Unfortunately it didn't stay there
But instead got stuck in my hair
I dreamt that peanut butter would
Remove gum's hold
It worked out quite well
Sometimes as I grew
My heart got tied up in tangles
"No More Tangles" and peanut butter
Could no longer break me free
Instead, Church songs and hymns
Prayers, favorite Bible verses and godly friends
Broke the hold of fear, guilt and loss on my heart

Palm Sunday, April 14

HYMNS FROM THE HEART

Ray Seidlitz



One of the things I occasionally do after we get home from church is to look up the hymns we sang and see who wrote the words and music. Then I look on the Internet to find out more about them. I learned that the captain of several slave ships wrote "Amazing Grace;" a man who had just lost four daughters at sea wrote "It Is Well With My Soul;" a woman who suffered from serious illness most of her life wrote "Just As I Am," and I'm fairly sure the

only hymn in our hymnal written by a Catholic is "Here I Am Lord."

I found that Henry Van Dyke wrote "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee," but the music was composed by Beethoven. It was adapted from the final movement of his Ninth Symphony and completed just two years before his death when he was totally deaf. It was the first example of a major composer using voices in a symphony. The words in the symphony were sung during the final movement and were taken from Friedrich Schiller's poem, "Ode to Joy."

At the premier of the symphony in Vienna, Beethoven conducted the orchestra along with the real conductor, whom the musicians were instructed to follow instead of the totally deaf Beethoven.

At the end of the symphony, Beethoven was several measures off and still conducting. One of the singers had to walk over and turn Beethoven around to see the cheers, applause and standing ovation of the audience.

Van Dyke took Beethoven's music and wrote the words to the tremendously exuberant hymn, "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee," which was born out of Beethoven's silent world. Many of us have our own personal worlds that can constrain us if we let them, whether it be losing control of our capabilities, chaining ourselves to bad habits, or simply being afraid of something.

When we encounter these tests of our faith, we have to remember to keep trusting in the God we love, whether we can see him, hear him, feel him or not. Jesus doesn't take us away from our trials; He takes us through them.

Monday, April 15

GOD-SOAKED LIFE

Elaine Johnson

I wish I had a God-soaked life...a life spent basking in the constant awareness of His presence and the sure knowledge that the promises made at my baptism penetrated not just my soul, but my sinew and bones, and became an integral part of me. Instead, I spend large swaths of my life marinating in a stew of other, far more pedestrian concerns. What I should wear to work tomorrow or whether my car will start in the frigid early morning or if I should order that second glass of wine.

It seems Christ's living water must seep in around the edges of my mundane cares and occupations. But because God is God, He reaches where I am. When I'm feeling parched instead of soaked, I know one place that will always put things right, the place where I can always find Him.

Not church, although the message, music and liturgy are always a comfort, but the natural world, where nothing comes between me and my Maker. I go where I can find God in His most ephemeral creations: spring blossoms, autumn leaves, drifts of cold, blue snow, and creatures whose lives are measured in days or weeks.

Learning to recognize this subtle evidence of God was a personal turning point. It came when I began to look closely at insects instead of swatting them away, when I started to consider each gloriously arrayed bloom.

There I saw the hand of God. Is there any reason for an inconsequential bug to display a yellow face and pink- and teal-striped wings? Or for there to be so many kinds of flowers and trees and birds, all different in every detail? What about the garish, gorgeous fish who spend their lives in the depths of the sea? Why so many colors? Why such variety?

If we're lucky, we see these natural wonders for what they are: the work of a Maker whose love and care permeate every scintilla of the world around us as surely as water permeates the sand.



Tuesday, April 16

A FAVORITE BIBLE VERSE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Rev. Doug Bowden

"Grow in me and I will grow in you." John 15:4 (J.B. Phillips)

My call to ministry in the spring of 1966, in my junior year at the University of Michigan, became clearer and deeper to me when I found this translation by the English Biblical scholar, J.B. Phillips, of Jesus' teaching words to his disciples in the Gospel of John, Chapter 15. Remembering these chapters of the Gospel of John, 13 to 17, as Jesus' Farewell Discourse to his beloved disciples, before his crucifixion, helps us to find transforming meaning in Jesus' using the agricultural picture of vine and branch, as he does here in John 15.

First, Jesus said to his disciples, "Grow in me and I will grow in you," in J.B. Phillips' translation. Then, in this promise and assurance, Jesus draws the agricultural picture: "I am the vine, you are the branches" (John 15:5). John 15 is our great teaching assurance from Jesus, as his disciples.

I have gratefully felt, from the beginning of my ministry, that if I would give myself to Jesus, without condition, and commit myself to be his disciple, Jesus' promise would sustain and strengthen me. In moments of effective faithful ministry, where I have served well, I have held on to this promise of Jesus. In moments when I have struggled and failed to achieve what I felt were faithful goals, I have also returned to this promise of Jesus. After many prayers and much self-examination, and in the transforming time, I would recommit myself to this promise of Jesus: "Grow in me and I will grow in you" (John 15:4).

One such transformative ministry experience for me came in the fall of 1979, serving as pastor of the Elston Avenue UMC on the far northwest side of Chicago. This was the new church building that Paul and Freda Whittle built in their nine years of ministry there from 1953-1962. Hearing the call and promise of Jesus, the Elston Avenue congregation sponsored and welcomed the Thammavong family from Laos as refugees and future new citizens of America. Jesus' promise, then and now, was and is always with us. Alleluia!

**Prayer: Jesus, we hear your promise, in our Lenten journey.
You grow in us, as we grow in you.**

Wednesday, April 17

TO WORSHIP IN GOD'S PRESENCE

Barbara Hoch

As a deer longs for a stream of cool water, so I long for you, O God. I thirst for you, the living God. Where can I go and worship in your presence? Psalm 42:1-2

When I was a child, my sister and brother and I used to love to wade in the creek in the back 40 of our grandparents' farm in Indiana. We spent many summer days visiting with all the cousins on the farm. We would all take lunches, prepared by our Grandma, and often take books to read next to the banks of the creek. After a big rain, the creek gently flowed down to the pasture for the cows to enjoy a cool drink of water. The creek was a very peaceful, comforting place for us city kids, out of school for the summer.

Many years later, my husband Al and I went on a pond walk in Naperville and saw beautiful ponds with waterfalls in people's back yards. I wanted to experience the peacefulness of God's creation again. We were able to put a pond in our back yard, where we enjoyed many picnics with church friends and our neighbors. My therapy (and secret for staying young) is to wade in the shallow pond and fertilize the water lilies, clean out leaves from our oak trees, and feed our many goldfish.

The best part is the glider next to the water lilies, where Al and I would sit in the evening and review the day's activities. I also would often invite friends or Stephen Ministry care receivers to sit and talk beside the pond. The sound of the waterfall was always very inviting to rest, contemplate and give thanks to God for all the wonderful things He had created for us to enjoy.



The solitude often is shared with birds in our bird feeders, rabbits and squirrels scurrying around, and plenty of little chipmunks. Some summers, we have been blessed with watching little ducklings grow up in our pond. I feel close to God when I am resting beside the gentle waterfalls.

In front of the glider next to the edge of the pond is a stone with "zemský ráj" etched on it. The words are from the Czech National Anthem, which my husband learned as a child from his parents and translated for me. It means "paradise on earth." I can think of no better place than my pond to worship God.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, The deer knows he needs water to live, as we know our lives depend on You. You designed us to feel the need for a relationship with You. When we are troubled, we need to remember that Your goodness, kindness, and love are always with us.

Maundy Thursday, April 18

WASHING DISCIPLE'S FEET

Rev. Dr. Daniel Cochran

John 13:1-17

Who likes to have their feet washed by someone else? Who wants to wash a stranger's feet? Anyone? In my experience, congregations rarely jump at the opportunity for a good communal foot washing. And yet, during Holy Week, there is an entire day dedicated to this event: *Maundy Thursday*. The name refers to the commandment or *mandatum* (Latin) that Jesus gives to his disciples: "I give you a new commandment: that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (John 13:34).

This commandment follows the act of foot washing—an act of humility and servitude that Jesus models for his disciples. Just imagine: the Messiah, the Christ, God's Son, Love's True Light, bending down to wash the dirty, gnarled feet of his disciples; those feet had seen some adventures, they showed evidence of the miles upon miles walked with Jesus... and yet Jesus calmly takes those feet in his hands and washes them with water. He insists upon it! "Unless I wash you," he tells the defiant Peter, "you have no share with me."



Washing Disciple's Feet, He Qi (2007)

Jesus was pretty serious about this act of washing feet! The very fact that such an act makes many of us uncomfortable is surely part of the point: that we might all love our neighbor to such a degree that we will take their sweaty feet in our hands to wash them! That's our *mandatum*—the call to an uncomfortable discipleship of self-giving love in Christ's name.

Let's wash some feet!

Good Friday, April 19

BEFRIENDING DARK ENERGY

Rev. Dr. Thomas Aldworth

Scientists speculate our universe is filled with dark matter and dark energy. It is estimated that dark matter makes up some 25% of the “stuff” of the universe. Dark energy supposedly comprises 70% of the “stuff” of the universe. No one has yet discovered what dark matter and dark energy are.

Humans’ dark energy is comprised of what are considered “dark emotions,” such as grief, fear, despair, disappointment and the like. Because we don’t know what to “do” with the pain of dark emotions, we drive the energy of these emotions deep into our souls and deep into our psyches. We try to keep these dark energies at bay. But when we attempt to do this, we encounter all kinds of difficulties.

Many people, men especially, cannot tell the difference between various dark emotions, so that all the dark emotional energies are experienced as anger. We all need to feel all our emotions and to feel them deeply.

I remember not feeling much grief when my father died. I was 11. I don’t recall doing much grieving at that time. I didn’t want to upset my mother with my tears. It was only when I turned 30 that I came to recognize I had not adequately grieved my father’s death. So to help with the grieving, I would sit for 30 minutes each evening looking at a photo of my father and a photo of me at age 11 (a darling little boy, if I do say so! No trouble to anyone, if I remember correctly!). I would listen to sad music and just plunge into the ocean of sadness that swirled around my father’s death and the difficulties my family suffered because of his death. It took me some time, but I was finally able to sit quietly with my sadness. I am still very much struggling with the death of my beloved wife Beth two and a half years ago. I am still very much awash on a sea of sorrow.

We need to grieve! We need to allow our own dark emotions to teach us what we need to be taught. It takes time and effort to allow our dark emotions full access to who we are. But we need to take time and expend the necessary energy to allow the dark emotions full access to our deepest selves. Otherwise, healing is not possible.

Life is hard. Life is disappointing. Yet when we feel the emotional pain of life-bumps and life-disappointments, perhaps we need to feel these losses deep inside ourselves. We may need, in other words, to develop a higher tolerance for bearing suffering, for bearing sadness. It is important to be able to hold more pain and darkness in our hearts—in our bodies, in our souls—as we make our way through life. The more pain and sadness we can hold, the more likely it is that we will become people of compassion, people who feel others’ pain as well as our own. This awareness leads us to become a person of deep compassion, as was Jesus, our icon of care and compassion.

Holy Saturday, April 20

THE RIVER

Ruth Ann Parsapour

“Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” John 7:38 (NIV)

“The river,” as we called it, divided our apple farm. The young orchard stood to the south; the old orchard occupied the land to the north along with the old farmhouse where my family and I lived.

My oldest brother and I became acquainted with the bounty of the river long before we met it in person. Mother often prepared platters of sautéed bluegills, bass, or perch for dinner. In the winter, when our father trapped, the basement was filled with muskrat and mink pelts. In warmer weather we saw large carp and pike piled under young apple trees as fertilizer, the result of nighttime spear-fishing expeditions.

When we finally grew older, we were allowed to walk to the river with our homemade lilac branch poles and a can of earthworms. As fishers, we rarely caught anything except minnows, but we learned the ways of the river. We watched dragonflies inspect lily pads and heard red-winged blackbirds singing in the marsh. Always alert, we spotted small turtles in the water as mallards paddled nearby and then took flight. We remembered our father’s words to check the depth of the river and the current.

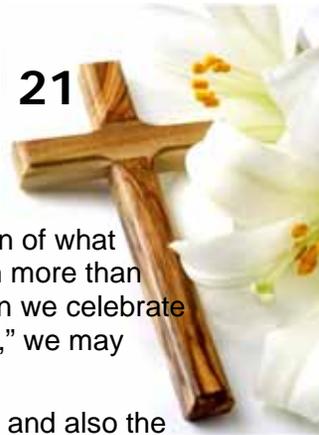
Today, I am grateful that I witnessed the power of the river and its gifts of beauty and sustenance. As a Christian, I find renewed strength in my childhood memories.

Prayer: Thank you, Heavenly Father, for your magnificent creation. Guide us in understanding and caring for our world and its people, so that we may be examples of the strength that comes from “rivers of living water.” Amen.

Easter Sunday, April 21

EASTER HOPE

Rev. Dr. Thomas Aldworth



Easter is a day of radical hope. It is a celebration of what took place long ago in Jerusalem. But it is much more than that. Often, we look back to the first Easter when we celebrate the Feast of Easter. Yet if we always “look back,” we may miss what lies in front of us.

Easter is both the celebration of that first Easter and also the expectation of the Easter awaiting each and every one of us. When Jesus Christ came out of that tomb, we came out of that tomb with him.

The simple truth of Easter is, Jesus lives! This faith statement relies not only on the testimony of those who witnessed the Risen Lord two thousand years ago in Palestine. This faith statement also relies on the experience of the Risen Lord in the lives of so many of our brothers and sisters. Jesus lives!

Easter, in the words of the theologian Karl Rahner, is: “God’s victorious self-promise to the world...Jesus’ resurrection is not the return of a deceased man to our space and time with all its limitations. It is something quite different...from the raisings of dead people to life recorded in both the Old and New Testaments.”

Jesus rose from the dead, but not back to the life he possessed prior to his death. Jesus’ resurrection was to a radically different life than the one he had previously experienced. If Jesus had just been given his life back, like Lazarus, death would still await him. Death would still stalk him.

Lazarus, given his life back by Jesus, still had to die a second time. Lazarus was not given a resurrected body when he came forth from his tomb. Death would still claim him in the future.

But this was not so with Jesus’ resurrection on Easter morning. Jesus, through the power of God, did not take back his mortal flesh. He took on immortal flesh. Something radically different happened to Jesus that had never happened before (or since!)

The frail human flesh of Jesus was reconfigured into immortal flesh. His human body, destined for disintegration, was radically transformed into a body that was free of every form of disintegration, every form of physical corruption.

At Ash Wednesday services, people are often told: "You are dust and unto dust you shall return!" This is the human condition. And Jesus, sharing fully in our human condition, was also heir to this sobering pronouncement.

Jesus—in his tomb, in his humanity—was certainly bound to this expectation. But because of the radical intervention of God, Jesus broke free from the constraints of the human condition.

Because God "reached" into the tomb of Jesus and freed Jesus' body from the physical corruption awaiting all human flesh, Jesus lives! And because Jesus lives, we also have the promise of living eternally with him.

Because of Easter, Jesus lives! Because of Easter, we are people filled with the promise, filled with the hope, of something more than "returning to dust" when we lie in death's embrace.

Without hope, all that remains is despair. If we live without hope, then all we can expect are the fleeting pleasures of this all-too-short human existence. Without Easter hope, we are entombed in despair. How could it be otherwise?

We are a church centered on Easter hope. Without it, we are living in delusion. But we must be willing to admit our hope, to admit our expectations of sharing in the transformed humanity that came upon Jesus in that long-ago tomb. Jesus lives!

Again from Rahner: "Easter is not the celebration of a past event. The alleluia is not for what was; Easter proclaims a beginning which has already been decided...the future. The resurrection means that the beginning of glory has already started."

We are caught up in the grand transformation of everything created. We are caught up in a lengthy process by which the death lying inherent in all flesh is being "squeezed out."

How long will this process take? I certainly don't know. But I know it is on the way. I know it has already been in movement for two thousand years. Jesus lives, and because Jesus lives, we know that death cannot be our final resting place.



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Worship at 5:00pm on Saturdays and
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