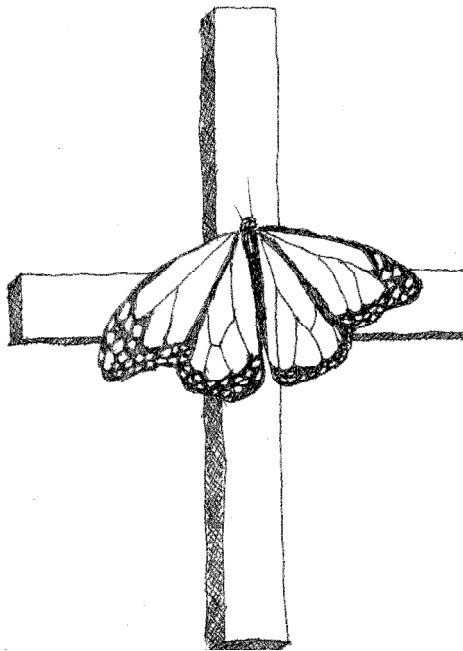


Lenten  
Devotional  
Guide  
2010



**Lenten Devotional 2010**  
**St. Paul United Methodist Church**  
**Gainesville, Ga**

Lent, in the Western Churches, was originally a period of forty days of fasting and penitence, readying the Christian soul for the great feast on the ensuing Easter Sunday. Today Lent is held as a period of sober reflection, self-examination, and spiritual redirection. Lent was derived from the Anglo-Saxon word Lencten, meaning spring. The Lenten season begins on Ash Wednesday and goes for forty days, excluding the Sundays, because Sundays are always the joyful celebration of the Resurrection.

Ash Wednesday, also known as the "Day of Ashes," marks the onset of the Lent. It is so called because on that day at church the faithful have their foreheads marked with ashes in the shape of a cross. The custom of marking the head with ashes on this day is said to have originated during the papacy of Gregory the Great. Gregory served as Pope from 590 - 604 A.D.

In the Old Testament ashes were found to have been used for two purposes: as a sign of humility and mortality; and as a sign of sorrow and repentance for sin. The Christian connotation for ashes in the liturgy of Ash Wednesday has been taken from this Old Testament biblical custom. Receiving ashes on the head as a reminder of mortality and a sign of sorrow for sin was a practice of the Anglo-Saxon church in the 10th century. It was made universal throughout the Western church at the Synod of Benevento in 1091.

Originally the use of ashes as a token of penance was a matter of private devotion. Later it became part of the official rite for reconciling public penitents. In this context, ashes on the penitent served as a motive for fellow Christians to pray for the returning sinner and to feel sympathy for him. Still later, the use of ashes passed into its present rite of beginning the penitential season of Lent on Ash Wednesday. Traditionally, the ashes for the Ash Wednesday service are created by burning and consecrating the palms from the previous year's Palm Sunday service. Putting a 'cross' mark on the forehead is in imitation of the spiritual mark or seal that is put on a Christian in baptism. This is when the newly born Christian is delivered from slavery to sin and the devil, and made a slave of righteousness and Christ (Rom. 6:3-18).

Thank you and a special blessing to the people of St. Paul who have graciously given of themselves by providing the devotions in this booklet. Should you receive a blessing from the devotions, you may choose to share your personal reflections in next year's Lenten Devotional.

Thank you, also to Mary Bosco, and Susan Page Bob Briscoe for their editorial help.

Harriet Briscoe

## Ash Wednesday

- A** — Acknowledge our mortality - “dust you are and to dust you shall return.”  
Gen 3:19 We only have one life to live—how shall we spend it?
- S** — search our hearts; sorrow for our sins. Let go of selfish and foolish desires.
- H** — humbly repent and ask God to have mercy on us as sinners and forgive us.
- W** — welcome Lent as an opportunity for self-examination and penance.
- E** — enter into God’s holy presence to examine our hearts and lives knowing that He created us and loves us—warts and all.
- D** — daily study His Word and deepen our resolve to live more faithfully and fully the way a Christian should live.
- N** — nurture our relationship with God and let nothing stand in the way of living and serving others or being loved by God and others.
- E** — engrave His Word upon our hearts and minds and souls and know that we are the beloved of God and that we are created for eternity.
- S** — sin separates us from God, but salvation is ours because God loved us and sacrificed His only Son for us while we were yet sinners.
- D** — death was defeated by Christ’s death on the cross on our behalf.
- A** — Alpha and Omega—the beginning and the end—our life begins and ends with and in God.
- D** — yearn for God; yield to His will and eternal life in His presence will be our reward.

## Holy Habits for Lent

Growing up I always heard that you should give something up for Lent, as we prepare for the very Holy time of Easter. Then one year someone said that instead of giving something up we should add some good deed or deeds during this forty day period. That is such a great idea as others will benefit from our good deeds, and they might even become a habit if we do them for this forty day period.

Let's think of some things all of us can easily do.

1. Call a friend.
2. Visit a shut in.
3. Send someone a card.
4. Bake cookies for firemen, policemen, etc.
5. Offer to drive someone to church, the grocery store or the doctor's office.
6. Spend more time each day reading and studying your Bible.
7. Add people to your prayer list.
8. Listen to someone who needs you.
9. Visit someone in a nursing home who doesn't have visitors.
10. Attend church more often and invite a friend.
11. Volunteer.
12. Adopt a pet.
13. Tell people you love them.
14. Discover your God given gifts and use them.
15. Pray that God will show you the plan He has for your life and live it.

Others....

I'm sure you get the point. See if you can add to the list until it reaches forty and choose some or all of the items on the list and do them. They will make you happy and you will make others happy as well.

The most important thing is to remember the terrible sacrifice our Lord Jesus Christ made for each of us and try, in some small way, to give back.

Prayer: Lord, Help us to remember the sacrifice you made for us through your Son, and help us to honor that sacrifice by helping us to develop holy habits that honor you. Amen

## Forty Days of Lent

What is significant about the number 40? There are many references in the Bible.

- 40 days Moses spent on Mount Sinai  
Exodus 24:18
- 40 days and nights Elijah spend walking to Mount Horeb  
1 Kings 19:8
- 40 days and 40 nights of rain afloat for Noah and his ark  
Genesis 7:4
- 40 years of wandering for the Hebrew people  
Numbers 14:33
- 40 days Jonah gave the city to Nineveh to repent  
Jonah 3:4
- 40 days of fasting by Jesus in the wilderness  
Matthew 4:2
- 40 hours Jesus lay in the tomb
- 40 hours of total fasting by the early church preceding Easter

Your mission, should you decide to accept it:

40 acts of kindness bestowed on others in remembrance of the life Jesus gave for you and me.

Prayer: Our heavenly father,

Help us to have a loving, giving and forgiving heart,  
especially in the 40 days of this Lenten season.

## ADDING TO

*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.* Psalm 119:105 NRSV

We typically give something up during the season of Lent. Last year I gave up midnight snacks and one year Rita gave up Diet Coke. Whatever we decide to give up, it's done as a reminder to focus on God and to prepare for the coming Easter celebration.

As I thought about giving something up it occurred to me that we could also approach Lent by "adding to." In other words what could I add to my life that would help me to focus on God and the events of that first Easter? Well the first thing would be personal Bible study. I could add intentional Bible reading to my daily life. How can the Bible become a lamp to my feet if I don't know what it says?

I could also add regular church attendance. I could pledge to be there every Sunday for worship and fellowship with my fellow Christians. Speaking of "pledge," I could also vow to be faithful in my giving and support my church and its ministries. When I am faithful, the word does indeed become a lamp to my feet!

I pray that we would add Bible study, attendance, and giving to our lives. Do that and the words of Psalm 119:105 will truly prove themselves over and over again in your life.

### Dear God

So far today I have done all right.  
I haven't gossiped.  
I haven't lost my temper.  
I haven't been greedy, grumpy,  
nasty, selfish or overindulgent.

I am very thankful for that!

But in a few minutes, Lord,  
I am going to get out of this bed,  
And from then on,  
I'm probably going to need a lot more help.

Amen

*Author Unknown*

## Thy Word

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet  
And a light unto my path.  
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet  
And a light unto my path.

When I feel afraid,  
And think I've lost my way.  
Still, you're there right beside me.

Nothing will I fear  
As long as you are near;  
Please be near me to the end.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet  
And a light unto my path.  
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet  
And a light unto my path.

I will not forget  
Your love for me and yet,  
My heart forever is wandering.

Jesus be my guide,  
And hold me to your side,  
And I will love you to the end.

Nothing will I fear  
As long as you are near;  
Please be near me to the end.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet  
And a light unto my path.  
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet  
And a light unto my path.  
You're the light unto my path.

**Sing and pray this song today! Do not fast today;  
rather, celebrate the fact that we are Easter people.**

## ENLARGE MY HEART

*I shall run the way of Thy commandments, For Thou wilt enlarge my heart.*

Psalm 119:32

For most of us marrying one person is easy for our heart because we fall in love and we cannot imagine life without that person. But then we start to have kids and I remember thinking do I have enough room in my heart to love another person. Four kids later I know the answer is yes...I love all four the same and equally unconditionally. Then I watch these reality shows where the bachelor or bachelorette gets to date 25 people or Jon & Kate have eight kids to raise and I still wonder about the capacity of our heart to love. On this season's The Bachelor, Jake said he was falling for five women! At first I thought that's not possible but then I think back to the Old Testament where Solomon has hundreds of wives. Did he love them? Was his heart capable of loving that many people? I am not advocating polygamy or having more kids than you can afford but I am just wondering about the capacity our heart has for love.

Jesus commands us to love one another, to love others as ourselves and to love God above all else. Is our heart big enough? The older we get we seem to focus our love and attention on our families and though those may grow our influence in the world and our relationship circles become smaller than when we were younger. We enjoy our group of friends and sometimes think we don't have room in our lives for more friends. But then what do we do with – 'God so loved the world'... and we are to love the world too! But then there comes the question again – is our heart big enough to love the world? Most of us are so busy with the demands and distractions of life that we don't even know our neighbor by name. When was the last time you had your neighbor over to your house or sat down for coffee with your co-worker? We are surrounded by people to love – the cashier at Wendy's, the bank-teller, our new boss or the stranger at the gym. God has put us specifically in a place where our hearts can be stretched to love all those around us and extend the hand of Christian friendship.

When I first came to St. Paul and we started building the new Sanctuary, I was shocked to actually hear this remark, "I don't want our church to grow!" I believe one of the reasons we maintain status-quo in life is from that type of mentality. We think we don't have more room in our life for anyone else! Our heart is a wonderful mysterious ever-enlarging extension of God in our lives. Pray daily that God will enlarge your heart and you will be amazed at how He brings people into your lives just to show love. Also pray that God will use you specifically to grow St. Paul Church. I understand the concept of not wanting to be a mega-church but if we are not growing in membership then remind yourself what the opposite of growth is? Ask God to show you people that need a loving church family and that need a relationship with Him. Ask God to use you and ask Him to enlarge our hearts!!!

## All Dogs Bite

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23*

Most of my patients have feathers, but I also see patients of the fur variety from time to time. As a veterinarian, I absolutely love animals of all kinds, but dogs hold a special place in my heart reserved for no other species. Dogs are some of the greatest teachers of hard life lessons.

Clients, especially the ones who treat their dogs like children, never fail to amuse me. These dogs are their fur babies, and they are inevitably offended if I dare reach for a muzzle. “Oh, he won’t bite,” is the defiant reaction I get almost 90% of the time. I am no Cesar Millan, but I have had my fair share of experiences learning to read the body language of dogs, so my response is usually, “Well, he has teeth, doesn’t he? If so, then yes, he *can* bite. That doesn’t mean that he necessarily *will*, but we’re not going to take the chance of his hurting himself, you or me.”

I admit that I myself am guilty of treating our dogs like children. Presumably like most parents, I tend to think that one of our little Italian greyhounds is superior to most dogs. Our two iggies, Sigma and Cinder, have completely different personalities. Although sweet natured, Cinder is all about herself. Her hobbies include eating excrement from both her brother and our cat, Cinco, and decorating our house with destroyed rolls of toilet paper shreds. The minute after her discipline, she is back to her antics and all the things doggies delight in. Sigma, on the other hand, has a heart of gold. A constant companion, he is a true lap dog and aims to please. He is more interested in what behaviors we expect from him and is therefore more inclined to obey. Just a look from us shot his way that indicates he might be getting out of line will make him lay his ears back, hunker down, and adopt a submissive posture.

But Sigma is not perfect like I sometimes think. He is still just a dog and enjoys mischief as all dogs do. Like most of my clients’ dogs, he also has teeth. One night Bryce was chasing him around the kitchen, as is their typical play routine. Sigma was barking and more tense than usual, and as Bryce reached down to pick him up, Sigma bit him. Bryce yelled, surprised, “Ouch! He bit me!” My retort was, “Well, of course he did. He’s a dog with teeth. Therefore, he can bite.”

I am struck by the similarity in these situations to the ones that we sometimes find ourselves in as Christians. We sometimes love a spouse, parent, child or friend so much that we think that he or she “wouldn’t do that!” Though we might expect certain less desirable acts from those who have a poorer track record, like Cinder, we are embarrassed to admit that even those we love and trust so much, like Sigma, could be capable of committing hurtful acts. We put our faith in them, rather than in Jesus, and then the shocking reality of being “bitten” is hard to take. Be it a thoughtless comment from a cherished friend, a first lie told from a small child, an unplanned teenage pregnancy, or a dissolved marriage that was thought to be rock-solid, people can and will disappoint us. And furthermore, sometimes we will disappoint ourselves. Let us be reminded that our Master Doctor, Parent, Spouse, Brother, and Friend might say, “Remember, sin is sin. All are capable of letting us

down. Therefore, fix your eyes upon Jesus, My Son, the only perfect One who is without sin.”

Prayer: Lord, we know that it is in our nature to sin. Help us to keep our eyes upon Jesus, your Son, who was without sin. Amen



## **JESUS MOVED BY A LOSS**

Read John 11:17-37

When Jesus saw [Mary] weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. John 11:33

A close friend dies. The family gathers. They mourn and they remember. Friends and neighbors stop by to give their condolences. They bring food. We have all been a part of this series of events in one way or another. Imagine if Jesus himself came to pay his respects as well. In the case of the death of Lazarus, that is exactly what he did. When Christ came to visit the grieving in Bethany, his compassion was clearly evident. He felt pain for the loss Lazarus' sisters were experiencing. He was so moved by their loss that he did something to reverse what had happened. He raised Lazarus from the dead.

Christ's compassion moved him to reverse what was happening in our lives as well. He saw how sin was destroying our lives, so he sacrificed himself to destroy the power of sin in each one of us. Not only that, but because of what Jesus did, death no longer has the sting it once did. Christ has converted the pain of losing someone into the joy of knowing that our loved ones are safe in heaven in the everlasting arms of our God.

Prayer: Lord, comfort us in our sorrows, just as you comforted Mary and Martha in the loss of their brother, Lazarus. Give to us the assurance that eternal life awaits us and our loved ones and that one day we will all rest in your eternal arms. Amen.

## Dear Lord, I Need to be 'Pruned.'

*I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:1-5 (NIV)*

Our daughters were in the Seattle, WA area for 3 months last year as travel nurses. My husband and I 'watched' their houses and took care of their animals for those 3 months. I had the time and the inclination to do a little yard work at their houses. One of the tasks was to prune two beech trees in our youngest daughter's front yard. At the base of the sturdy trees were many shoots, called suckers, which needed to be cut off. If the small shoots at the base of the tree were allowed to grow and develop, they would literally rob the tree of nutrients necessary for healthy growth. If the suckers are pruned, or cut off, the tree will grow stronger and more beautiful. The same is true for flowering and fruit trees and other types of plants. Bigger fruit, stronger branches and a more healthy plant or tree is the reward for careful pruning.

This pruning action is an analogy for what God our Father does in our lives. He helps each of us cut away things in our daily lives that keep us from growing strong and healthy in our faith and from producing good 'fruit.' When we follow Christ, God wants our lives to evidence 'fruits of the Spirit...'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...' (Galatians 5: 22-23). God will help us prune away the 'suckers' which rob us of the ability to live Spirit filled lives. To help us 'remove' the things in our lives which inhibit our Christian growth and development, He often uses our faith-filled Christian friends and situations, both good and bad, to mold and guide us into becoming strong followers of His Son, Jesus.

During this Lenten season, I am going to ask myself if there are 'suckers' in my life which are inhibiting my growth in faith, love and service in God's kingdom. Are there things or attitudes which keep me from bearing 'good' fruit of the spirit? I will ask God to help me prune away the useless parts of my life so that I can 'remain in Him' and bear good fruit.

How about you? Will you ask God, the 'gardener,' to prune your life so that you will produce good fruit?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, please help me get rid of the things in my life that are robbing me of producing good fruit. Help me to support my friends in their Christian growth. Amen.

## Conversation

*Jesus went on to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went about among the villages teaching.* Mark 6: 1-6

Help me, Lord, to notice how you are speaking to me. In this scripture Jesus returns to his hometown of Nazareth only to be met with skepticism in spite of all the miracles he has performed. It is both Jesus' wisdom and his mighty works that puzzle his relatives and the people of his hometown. We often judge other people because we think we know them. Perhaps we really don't. Conversation requires talking and listening. As I talk to Jesus may I also learn to be still and listen. I picture the gentleness in his eyes and the smile full of love as he gazes on me. I can be totally honest with Jesus as I tell him of my worries and my cares. I will open up my heart to him as I tell him of my fears and my doubts. I will ask him to help me to place myself fully in his care, to abandon myself to him, knowing that he always wants what is best for me.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, as I call on you today I realize that I often come asking for favors. Today I'd like just to be in your presence and let my heart respond to Your Love. Knowing that God loves me unconditionally, I can afford to be honest about how I am. How has the last day been, and how do I feel now? I share my feelings openly with the Lord.

Lord, may I never take the gift of freedom for granted.

You gave me the great blessing of freedom of spirit.

Fill my spirit with Your peace and Your Joy.

Lord please help me to open up my heart to others without judgement or skepticism.

Lord please help me to be still and listen and honor your wisdom.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end.

Amen

## DISCIPLE : BECOMING DISCIPLES THROUGH BIBLE STUDY

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God ? Micah 6:8*

During this season of Lent as we reflect on the dark before the dawn, the world's sin that sent Jesus to the cross I have chosen to share with you a program that encourages, yes requires daily Bible study and discovery.

Our group of twelve is discovering together in Disciple III the work of the Old Testament prophets in their historical sequence rather than in their Biblical sequence.

Together with the kings of their time, we have met Jeremiah, Amos, Isaiah, Micah, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Zechariah and Ezekiel thus far.

As God's chosen people continued to rebel against God's Will, these prophets were sent by God to encourage repentance. As God called them, He told the prophets that the people and their leaders would not listen – go anyway and share My message. Talk about "Mission Impossible" Prophets "envisioned" the future rather than "predicted" the it, leaving open the possibility of repentance.

The last half of our Disciple III program will be devoted to the "Letters of Paul". Here again we will study them in their historical sequence.

The material for these Disciple courses is well done. Each participant has a well written Study Manual that condenses the weekly study to the pertinent facts, gives the daily Bible reading assignment with questions for discussion. Unique to Disciple are the ten-minute video segments used at the beginning of each session. The presenters of each segment are Bishops and theology professors from throughout the United States.

This is a "self discovery" experience. We learn from our studies and each other. A variety of study Bibles with slightly different interpretations and other references adds to the fun.

This is the third year together for many of our group. We have grown to be warm Christian friends with a great appreciation for one another. You are encouraged to join the next session of Disciple.

Prayer ; God we thank you for the opportunity St. Paul offers us to study your WORD together in so many ways. May your WORD lead us to greater service in your Kingdom.

Amen

## Lead Me to Calvary

King of my life, I crown Thee now;  
Thine shall the glory be.  
Lest I forget Thy thorn crowned brow;  
Lead me to Calvary.

Chorus

Show me the tomb where Thou wast laid,  
Tenderly mourned and wept;  
Angels in robes of light arrayed  
Guarded Thee whilst Thou slept.

Chorus

Let me like Mary, through the gloom  
Come with a gift to Thee.  
Show to me now the empty tomb;  
Lead me to Calvary.

Chorus

May I be willing, Lord, to bear  
Daily my cross for Thee—  
Even Thy cup of grief to share.  
Thou hast borne all for me.

Chorus:

Lest I forget Gethsemane,  
Lest I forget Thine agony,  
Lest I forget Thy love for me,  
Lead me to Calvary.

**Sing and pray this song today! Do not fast today;  
rather, celebrate the fact that we are Easter people.**

## Story of My Journey on the Way Home

*I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest.* Genesis 28:15  
(KJV)

In the year 1937, in Washington, DC, my family moved next door to Frank's family. I was twelve years old. Five years later Frank and I became engaged. However, WWII had begun. Frank enlisted in the US Navy in June 1942. I began working at the Navy Yard in Washington – not as Rosie the Riveter, but as a purchasing clerk.

Frank came home Feb 1943 on a rest and relaxation leave for 5 days. We couldn't be married in our church; Gorsuch Methodist Church because five days were required for blood work, etc. Therefore we had a very plain marriage at a justice of the peace in Alexandria, VA with our parents present. Though the service was simple, the marriage lasted 56 years.

In December 1946, Frank came home. We bought our first home, a small white bungalow for \$7990 in College Park, Md. After two children and enlargement of the bungalow it was time to move on. So we left our friends from College Park Methodist Church and moved 30 miles to 19 acres of hilly Maryland ground near Annapolis. We became members of the Davidsonville Methodist Church, where both our children were members of the MYF and were later married. We build two houses there.

Then our five grandchildren were born and they brought us great joy. Our next stop, a smaller home and one acre, was only a few miles away. We began to realize that retirement time had come. We moved to Denton, MD on the Eastern shore and built a small home there and spent the summer in Maryland and winter in Florida. After one season we decided that was too expensive and too much work.

We agreed that N. Fort Meyers, Florida was our choice. So our Journey continued to Florida in 1974. We joined the N. Fort Myers UMC and became active members. Frank grew over 300 roses and provided roses for all the church functions. He also did quite a bit of carpentry work for the church. We both served on the board of trustees. I worked on Evangelism, had a Sunday School Class of twelve 12-year-olds, and worked with VBS for many years. We both enjoyed our retirement church greatly. Unfortunately, health problems slowed us down.

One unusual thing brought me pleasure. I drove a Florida school bus for eleven years. After working for the Federal Government for many years I wanted to work part time. The time with the school kids was great.

During the years of our Journey we had parents, sisters, brothers, grandchildren, and friends die and go to their eternal rest. Over the years we have had so many happy years spent with our grandchildren and later with our nine great grand-

children. During this long Journey the Lord was always with us. In 1999 Frank and I had to part. His health gave out and he went to be with the Lord.

After eight years alone I made the Journey to Gainesville, GA to be near my daughter and son-in-law because I have a heart problem. I joined St. Paul UMC in April 2008, and I feel the presence of the Lord here.

I have been loved and protected by the Lord all these years and I am sure he will be with me always. I am looking forward to the next phase of my Journey.

Prayer: Lord, help us to remember that when we choose to follow you, you are with



## Reflections on Lent

*Weeping may last for the night, But a shout of joy comes in the morning! Psalms 30:5b*

You've no doubt seen the bumper sticker "Yankee by birth, Southerner by the grace of God." Well, that's me. I made the decision to live in the South with only a single regret. I MISS SPRING!

When I was a child, it seemed like winter could last forever. Then, one ordinary, cold, gray, wet day, trudging home from school or play, I would know winter was truly going to end! Sometimes it might be only one or two days, but it was enough. Brave, yellow, shimmery, glorious daffodils were pushing through the snow announcing that winter would not last forever. There was life, beautiful life under that blanket of ice and snow. There was hope under the gloomy, gray skies. Spring would come!

Lent is, for me, the dead of Winter. It's sad and dreary and brings to mind death and sorrow. But it also signals the beginning of the end just like the daffodils. Death and sorrow are not unending. We know that Easter is coming soon! There is life, eternal life, under that gray shroud. There is hope. There is beauty. There is joy! We meditate on His journey to the cross during these forty days, but we do so with the full knowledge that He is Alive!

Prayer: Heavenly father, thank you for the bleakness of Lent which prepares us to celebrate the hope, beauty, and joy that comes with the promise of Easter.

## Worship the Lord your God and Serve Him Only

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. II Corinthians 1:3-4.*

A few weeks ago I sat with some other ladies of St. Paul at dinner on a Wednesday night. One shared that she had found some Buddhist chanting on the internet and found it very relaxing. I was shocked that a member of a Christian church would seek comfort from a false deity. My first impulse was to scream NOOOOOO!!!!!! Instead, I said nothing. I knew that there were good reasons not to seek comfort in such things, but I couldn't think of even one at that moment and so I followed the advice of Thumper's mother. Of course I had a clearly reasoned response several hours later. So here it is.

Our God is the God of *all* comfort. We should seek Him first and always because God the Father gave us God the Son to rescue us from our sin. We ought not sin against Him by worshiping other gods. When the practices of other faiths are soothing, we may think; the words are in a foreign language and a foreign language vocal is no different from any other instrument. But words have meaning, and we may not know what they mean but God does. The first commandment tells us to worship God alone.

Finding comfort in praise to false gods damages our witness. Paul tells us to seek God the Father, the God of compassion and of all comfort. We are to do this so we can comfort others with the comfort we found in him. My dinner companion's friend asked for more information about where to find the chants because she wanted to try it. Hopefully, both ladies will read this and reconsider the practice and seek their comfort in God's holy word. The Psalms are a good place to start. There isn't a human emotion that is not found there, and each cry to God for help is resolved in statements of faith in *the* God of all comfort.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for your comfort, thank you for showing me that sharing that comfort is a way to tell others about your love and care for us. Amen.

## ***How Does He Do That?***

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9)*

The coin that was in the magician's hand appears to be found behind someone's ear. The hat that had nothing in it suddenly has a rabbit pulled from it. We've all seen such feats and asked ourselves, "How does the magician do that?" We want explanations. We want to understand. If we have the opportunity to observe every move of the magician or to carefully look at his props, then we often can readily understand how what we initially thought was impossible was in fact accomplished.

It is possible for us to understand the above-described tricks, but what about God's mercies? They can be incomprehensible to us. How can God love us even as we violate His commandments? How can He accept us unconditionally? How can He, like the father in Luke's parable, after we have taken a journey into a far country and while we are yet at a distance, see us and have compassion and embrace us? How can God forgive us over and over and over again?

His merciful ways are not logical to us. His grace does not make sense. We do not understand His benevolence. His love for us is inscrutable. We don't understand it and we can't explain it. As we receive His gifts our response is not to understand, but rather to have overwhelming gratitude that God's thoughts and ways are as they are and to make a renewed commitment to our pilgrimage as we strive to become more and more like Him.

Prayer: Dear Father, help us to see that we are not meant to understand your gift of love for us, but rather to accept it with gratitude and a commitment to strive to be more like your Son. Amen

## **Glorious Freedom**

Once I was bound by sins' galling fetters;  
Chained like a slave, I struggled in vain.  
But I received a glorious freedom  
When Jesus broke my fetters in twain.

Freedom From all the carnal affections;  
Freedom from envy, hatred, and strife;  
Freedom from vain and worldly ambitions;  
Freedom from all that has saddened my life.  
Glorious freedom!  
Wonderful freedom! No more in chains of sin I repine!  
Jesus, the glorious Emancipator-  
Now and forever He shall be mine.

Words: Haldor Lillenas,; Music: Alfred Judson

## **Freedom and Truth**

*You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.* John 8:31-32

Chiseled into the stone façade of many libraries across our nation are the words, "YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH WILL MAKE YOU FREE." In these days of church and state separation, the inscription is usually not attributed to Scripture, but that is its genesis (so to speak). Attributed or not, it's true, but that's not the whole story.

John precedes these words with, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples." Then we shall know the Truth...the Truth that sets us free. So how do we continue in God's word and why is this so important?

Our basic understanding of God and his Son, Jesus, comes from the Word...the Bible. How can we even hope of being disciples (yes, that's what we're called to be) without knowing the Bible and the Truth that sets us free? Our goal is to know God's word. How? Through daily Bible reading, Bible study groups, Sunday school, and Sunday sermons. We can know God's Word...opportunities abound within our church and through personal study.

I pray that you would intensify your Bible study during this Lenten season. Make a commitment to become a better disciple, and experience the true freedom that only comes from God's Word!

## Open My Eyes That I Might See

*Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit to go out into the wilderness where the Devil tempted Him for forty days. He ate nothing all that time and was very hungry. Luke 4:1 – 2*

Lent is a time of preparation for Holy Week. It is a period for reflection, a time I intend to use for discerning the Voice of Truth amongst the many meaningless voices in the world.

Forty is a significant number in the Bible. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years until they were prepared to enter the Promised Land. There were floods for forty days in a purification of the world that was a temporary solution. Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness leading up to the permanent solution for our cleansing.

The wilderness is not the place I want to be. It is not a place of enjoyment and peace, but often is where I see beyond my limited vision and embrace God's majesty. This metaphorical desert of abstinence, struggle, and penitence is usually where I most feel His nearness and love.

Jesus was tempted and offered the opportunity to be the wrong kind of Messiah. He rejected each possibility. Daily I am offered the opportunity to be the wrong kind of father, husband, friend, brother and child of God. Usually I do not understand God's will as my Savior did. The desert is where my attachment to possessions, opinions, pleasures, my calendar and other idols are stripped away.

Illusions of my sanctity, my need, and God's truths are also brought into focus.

The season of Lent looks forward to Holy Week with hope. Jesus was the right Messiah and paid the price for my sins. God is with me and my relationship is restored. Satan and death are defeated. All glory be to God.

### Prayer

Father, I pray that during this time of Lent, I place Your will at the center of my life, not pushed to the edge by my many meaningless idols. I praise You that through Jesus and Your Spirit, I can reject illusion and know Your Truth. Amen

## BENEATH THE CROSS OF JESUS

I fain would take my stand,  
The shadow of a mighty rock  
Within a weary land;  
A home within the wilderness,  
A rest upon the way,  
From the burning of the noontide heat,  
And the burden of the day.

O safe and happy shelter!  
O refuge tried and sweet!  
O trysting place where heaven's love  
And heaven's justice meet!  
As to the holy patriarch  
That wondrous dream was given,  
So seems my Savior's cross to me  
A ladder up to heaven.

There lies, beneath its shadow,  
But on the farther side,  
The darkness of an awful grave  
That gapes both deep and wide;  
And there between us stands the cross,  
Two arms outstretched to save;  
Like a watchman set to guard the way  
From that eternal grave.

Upon that cross of Jesus  
Mine eye at times can see  
The very dying form of One  
Who suffered there for me;  
And from my smitten heart, with tears,  
Two wonders I confess--  
The wonders of His glorious love,  
And my own worthlessness.

I take, O cross, thy shadow,  
For my abiding place;  
I ask no other sunshine than  
The sunshine of His face;  
Content to let the world go by,  
To know no gain nor loss--  
My sinful self my only shame,  
My glory all the cross.

**Sing and pray this song today! Do not fast today;  
rather, celebrate the fact that we are Easter people.**

## REJOICE AND BE GLAD

*This is the day the Lord has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Psalm 118:24*

How many mornings do we wake and lift up those words to our God? I try but fall short so many days. There are all those things we must do. Not just the bathing, teeth brushing, breakfast things. Those are automatic. No time wasted on that. It's the big things.....

What we have to do at work.

The Doctor's Appointments.

The KIDS (Capital letters)

Our Spouses and family.

These are IMPORTANT!!!!!!!!!!

But what about the God who gives us this day to do all these things?

If something goes wrong, it is amazing how fast we can start praying. Shouldn't we start praising just as fast when good things happen? Mull that over a bit.

*“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;  
His love endures forever.” Psalms 118:29*

It is amazing how starting the day with rejoicing can lift you up. Our God is good and his love is forever. Strange, how many things don't mean quite as much when that thought starts off our day. Our priorities get changed around a bit and smiles come easier than frowns. We look at happenings differently.

We are so blessed. Let us give thanks and rejoice.

Prayer: Lord, I rejoice and know that you are my Savior. Thank you for this day and the wonders surrounding me. This is the day you have made and given me as a gift. Let me ever praise you.

## Reading the Bible with a Purpose

*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. Psalm 119:105*

The Bible is full of all kinds of stories. One can find history, war, prophesy, murder, wisdom, love, comfort and just about anything one wants to read. It's all available in the scripture.

Daily Bible reading and Sunday School were always things I participated in, but I wanted to know more about this Bible.

When the Disciple classes were offered at St. Paul in the day time, I signed up for those classes. It was amazing to see how all those stories I had read connected with one another. I was reading the Bible with a purpose and to know what this Bible is saying to me. That has been a blessing.

*All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*  
II Timothy 3: 16-17

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for Your powerful Word which gives us life and direction for daily living. Amen.

**The B-I-B-L-E,  
Yes, that's the book for me  
I stand alone on the word of God  
The B-I-B-L-E**

## ***Do You Hide Your Light?***

*You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on a stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:14-16*

One summer I helped my grandfather and a retired carpenter named John install soundproofing, wood siding, and trim in our church's community center.

I had known John all my life. He sat across the aisle from us at church, had been president of the United Methodist Men, served on several committees and was always helping out at the church fixing, painting, or building whatever was necessary. He had even made several silhouette goose decoys for me when I had complained that I didn't have enough to hunt with.

Toward the end of our work, John and I went to the lumberyard for some odds and ends. He went to pick out some wood while sending me to pick up hardware we needed to finish the project. A friend of mine, Mike, was working the hardware counter and asked what I was doing. When I explained, he was astounded with whom I was working. "He goes to church? Does he speak in church?" Mike asked. I was puzzled. Mike explained that some employees would visibly groan when they saw John's truck pull into the parking lot. John was a regular customer but was very demanding and always used abusive and bad language when addressing employees.

In a recent Sunday school lesson, the author of the lesson book discussed how people could be hypocrites by either professing a faith they are not living or by hiding deep Christian beliefs they hold to. I believe that the latter was true with John. Maybe he was afraid of being construed as weak. Perhaps he thought that it was the easiest way to communicate with laborers.

Do you hide your light also? In college, I found that the worst days to wait on tables at the pizzeria were Wednesdays and Sunday nights. The "church crowd" was always very demanding, and they were terrible tippers. What we do and say in public is a witness, good or bad, for our church and our relationship with God.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to remember that integrity is a seven-days-a-week job. Please help me to show your love, patience, and teachings in my day-to-day life as a witness to the world of your love and light. Amen.

## ***SMALL KINDNESSES***

*Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people. Galatians 6:10*

*But encourage one another daily. Hebrews 3:13*

*Therefore encourage one another and build each other up. 1Thessalonians 5:11*

All through the Bible, there are wonderful words of encouragement, love, compassion and caring. Also, there are many commandments for us to follow to try to walk in Jesus' footsteps.

So many times, we think we have to do great and marvelous things. That these deeds are difficult and hard. NOT SO!

You cannot know how encouraging the small kindnesses are. When you take the time to sincerely ask someone who is going through bad times how they are and are ready to actually listen. Not just .....Hey! How are you! And then on to the next person. That encouragement is a gift that is treasured.

You cannot know how much that card you took time to send, the phone call, a small gift, the loving hug, the compliment, the kind words mean. Until you are there. Until you are the one going through that hard time.

Then you remember how many times you had good intentions. You were going to write that note / send that card / make that call / say those encouraging words. But you didn't.

It truly is the little things that mean so much. When you are the one in that hard place, you remember every time you didn't tire of doing good because you didn't do good.

It is when those times come that you find out how wonderful the people around you are. They lift you up. They brighten your day. They make you feel warm and loved. You know that prayers really are being said for you because you can feel it.

So as Jesus instructed us, never tire of doing good. Your small kindnesses are the true manifestation of God's love in you. This is how others see Jesus in you. This is His true calling for us.....that we love one another.

Prayer: Dear God, you gave your Son to die on the cross for us. That wondrous incredible gift of love. Help us to be worthy, Lord. Help us to be worthy. Amen

## Anxious? Try Thanksgiving

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7*

I was anxious when I woke this morning. There are many things I need to do and I don't know where to start. I memorized Philippians 4:6-7 many years ago and chant it when I am anxious. Not that it helped. I wondered why the promised peace never materialized. Then I realized that there is one portion that I forget, the short phrase "with thanksgiving." I forget thanksgiving, when reciting the verses and I neglect the action the phrase represents.

My sister Joanne moved in with me on December 19<sup>th</sup>. For the past month I have had more to think about than my own need of a job, and I enjoy her company. Joanne has lost both of her legs below the knee and is in a wheelchair. Although she has prosthetics, a series of difficulties (a broken arm, detached retina, etc.), have prevented her from learning to use them. She receives dialysis treatments three days a week. She doesn't see well. Cataract surgery has helped and new glasses will help even more. She has reason to be angry, resentful, and bitter, but she does not hold grudges or wallow in resentment. Jo loves life and takes each day as it comes and gives thanks to God for this gift. Having Joanne here has reminded me that we are to "give thanks in all circumstances" I Thes. 5:18. We are to "give thanks *in* all circumstances" not *for* them.

Joanne has moved into an apartment that is wheelchair accessible. Doors are wider, sinks are open below to allow her to pull up and not have to strain to reach faucets. I thank God that she has moved to Gainesville where there are services that will allow her to be as independent as she is capable of being. I thank God for her example of a positive attitude **in** all circumstances. I thank God for the time Joanne spent with me and I look forward to the time we will spend together in the future.

Prayer: Father God, thank you for the many blessings we overlook every day. Thank you for family, friends and the beauty that is all around us. Thank you for the many things we do each day and never give a thought to, walking to the mail box, playing a video game, opening a bag of salad, reading a sign. Thank you for the gift of your son, Jesus Christ and his sacrifice on the cross. Amen.

## The Bible is Still Relevant Today

As I look toward Lent this year, it seems that as never before I question my faith and my beliefs. What does the Bible teach about this . . . or that? Is the Bible (all of the Bible) relevant in today's society?

YES!!!! The Bible is still relevant today. We still need to accept Jesus as our personal Savior and have a real relationship with Him in order to get to heaven. *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast."* Ephesians 2:8 – 9

A real and deep abiding relationship with Jesus will change your heart and you will become new. *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come."* 2 Corinthians 5:17

You will want the world to see Jesus in you; in your attitude, in your speech, in how you dress, how you treat other people and in how you handle every aspect of your life, including your money and your family.

In order to have spiritual growth, we must feed our faith through daily Bible study, prayer and fellowship with other Christians. If we neglect this then our faith will become weak as our bodies do when we fail to feed them properly.

Paul tells us more than once to *"pray without ceasing"*. To me this means to always be in the mindset to pray; always walking closer and closer to our Lord and our Savior. He answers our prayers . . . maybe not the way we wanted Him to but in the end, He answers them in the best way.

None of us are worthy of this precious gift from God, but He loves us so very much that He gave Jesus, His only Son, to die on Calvary's cross for our sins. God will never leave us, He promises that and I have never had Him fail me, have you? That's pretty awesome to realize!!!

One of the first things that we are called to do after becoming Christians is to give back to God out of the blessings He gives to us. We are called to tithe 10% of our money and I firmly believe that He also wants us to give of our talents and our time in service to Him. How we handle our finances also speaks of our faith in Jesus Christ.

God has richly blessed me and my family this past year and I owe all the praise and honor and glory to Him.

Prayer

## Tell Me the Story of Jesus

Tell me the story of Jesus,  
Write on my heart every word.  
Tell me the story most precious,  
Sweetest that ever was heard.  
Tell how the angels in chorus,  
Sang as they welcomed His birth.  
“Glory to God in the highest!  
Peace and good tidings to earth.”

Refrain

Fasting alone in the desert,  
Tell of the days that are past.  
How for our sins He was tempted,  
Yet was triumphant at last.  
Tell of the years of His labor,  
Tell of the sorrow He bore.  
He was despised and afflicted,  
Homeless, rejected and poor.

Refrain

Tell of the cross where they nailed Him,  
Writhing in anguish and pain.  
Tell of the grave where they laid Him,  
Tell how He liveth again.  
Love in that story so tender,  
Clearer than ever I see.  
Stay, let me weep while you whisper,  
Love paid the ransom for me.

Refrain:

Tell me the story of Jesus,  
Write on my heart every word.  
Tell me the story most precious,  
Sweetest that ever was heard.

**Sing and pray this song today! Do not fast today;  
rather, celebrate the fact that we are Easter people.**

## Sacrificial Giving in the Season of Lent.

When I think of the season of sacrifice, I am always haunted by the story of the young, rich man when he asked Jesus how he could make his way into heaven.

*And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.*

*He saith unto him, which? Jesus said, thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness. Honor thy father and thy mother: and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*

*The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?*

*Jesus said unto him, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all that thou hast, and give it to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me."*

*But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Matthew 19: 16-22*

Most of us at St. Paul don't feel materially rich. We believe we are a humble people of modest means. But Calvin made a great point some weeks ago in his sermon. Compared to the multitudes, billions of people on this earth, every one of us here at St. Paul's is in fact RICH!

Some years back when Peggy and I were shopping for a Methodist church, we sat in the loft of St. Paul's old sanctuary. We heard a great choir, enjoyed a beautiful sermon and wallowed in the friendly presence of the congregation. After moving 13 times, joining 13 growing Methodist churches and paying for 13 building programs, we looked at the old sanctuary and smiled. I leaned over to Peggy and said, "Praise the Lord! We've finally found a Methodist church that doesn't have a building program!" Since we were both approaching retirement and a fixed income, we saw such a small and friendly church a gift from God. We joined St. Paul the following week and, shortly thereafter, the construction cranes moved in. Not only that, a building campaign was launched, and it was clear the new sanctuary would need to be paid for. Not only that, now God has somehow called me to chair St. Paul's Financial Committee (no doubt a penance for past sins). Oh yes, God does work in mysterious ways!

Peggy and I love everything about this church and, whatever the burdens, we want to see it survive. St. Paul United Methodist Church is no less than a third family to us and, since our parents have now passed, it has become our primary family.

It's funny. When considering this church, I also remember saying how nice it was that we found a church that wasn't always talking about money. Well, now that I am financial chairman, I am certain we don't talk about money nearly enough. During Lent I pray that everyone in this church will make a mad dash for the checkbook. I've seen the numbers, and they are scary.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to remember that we are like the young, rich man. We have so much when others have nothing at all. Help us to remember that we must give sacrificially even in retirement. Amen!



## **Do you want to be used of God?**

*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. Corinthians 6:19 – 20 (NIV)*

*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)*

Do you want to be used of God? Before you answer that question, stop and think about it. Do not answer it lightly. As you consider this question, ask yourself what you think it would cost you to be used of Him. For if you say that you really do want to be used of God, surely you must realize that to be so used will require certain disciplines and efforts on your part.

If you have not done so before, it is time you faced this question realistically. And if you have already dealt with this question, you need to evaluate your progress – your life since you said “yes” or “no.”

So today God has brought you face to face with this question, “Do you want to be used of God?” Commit yourself verbally. It is God to whom you answer and to whom you give an account and not to man. Remember, if you are truly a child of God, you are not your own, you have been bought with a price. Therefore, you are to glorify God in your body, which is His. You are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works which He has before ordained that you should walk in! There are the truths of Corinthians 6:19,-20 and Ephesians 2:10!

Prayer: Lord, help me to listen to Your directions for my life, and give me the courage to do whatever You want me to do. Amen

## Redeeming Love

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

*Love never fails. ... And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. Corinthians 13:4-8 (NIV)*

This is a true story.

There was a family who had a son that was always in trouble...

His parents gave the boy anything and everything he wanted...

His siblings resented him even though they loved their brother...

The parents used all of their resources to bail the boy out. The father passed away leaving the mother and the boy to live alone. She often wondered why God had left her without her husband of over 60 years. A year or so passed during which time the son took very good care of his mother.

At a celebration of her life when she passed away, one of the older siblings got up to speak and said to this brother, "We want to thank you for taking such good care of Mother this last year, and we wanted you to know that you are redeemed in our eyes. Now we all know why the mother was left here, so that God's plan could be complete...to redeem that troubled son in his family's eyes. Sometimes we can't see it, but God always has a plan.

The love parents have for their children is an unconditional love, much like Christ's love for us. That love never fades or disappoints. When we put our trust in anything else, we are disappointed.

At this wonderful season of Lent, let us show love to others with the love that God has shown to use, the unconditional love of Christ.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for loving us. Help us to show your wonderful and amazing love to others. Let us strive to see others, with eternal eyes, as you see them. Amen.

## There Am I

*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. Matthew 18: 20*

Our family has been blessed with the opportunity for travel during summer vacations. We have visited many of our country's National Parks along with other locations where we were surrounded by the beauty of God's handiwork. The majesty of His works in creating this earth is astounding and leaves no doubt of his power.

While experiencing the wonders of His creation is awe inspiring in itself, it was not enough to just "commune with nature". The true blessings we received on our trips was in the fellowship with other believers in worship services in which we were able to join. We have gathered in corporate worship services in New York City in a large church with music fit for the most formal opera and in small country churches. Once two churches (one Methodist, one Baptist) joined together on the spur of the moment due to the small numbers in each church. In one Methodist church, the Japanese influence was so strong that we realized too late that everyone else had left their shoes at the doorway. There were parks where the services were held outside in majestic settings, and Easter sunrise services on the beach. God was in the midst of each of them.

One Sunday in Bryce Canyon National Park, Utah, the only attendees in the service were our family and another couple (the leader of the service never arrived). Yet, God was with the six of us. The husband of the other couple, Richard Kim, was an Episcopal priest from Detroit, Michigan. As we shared in our relationship with Christ, He was truly in our midst.

While the beauty of the earth validates God's love for us, our relationship with fellow believers is what satisfies the soul. While I am thankful for the freedom to worship wherever we are, it is in being with our family of believers at Saint Paul for which I am forever thankful.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the beauty You surround us with every day as a reminder of your power and love. And thank you for the fellowship of other believers wherever we go, and especially, here at St. Paul. In Jesus' name. Amen

## Called To Be A Servant

*Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must become your slave. For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many. Matthew 20: 26b - 28 (New Living Translation)*

Remember the story of the disciple brothers, James and John, who came to ask Jesus a favor? "Will you let us sit in places of honor next to you, one at your right & the other at your left?" Jesus responded that they didn't know what they were asking. Jesus then spoke the above words recorded in Matthew.

As we age, we change. We turn gray, we lose hair, we sometimes become stooped, we move more slowly, we tire more easily, our strength diminishes, etc. I've been told that you know you're getting old when you start reading the obituaries of people that you don't even know. Well, I've been known to do that. Not for any morbid curiosity, but to remind myself of all persons' worth. Everyone has something to contribute at all ages. Some have used their time on earth more constructively than others.

I found an obituary that touched my heart... the recorded death of Effie Sullivan. Not on the front page of the newspaper, not in 100 point bold type but a small announcement hidden in the back pages of the paper. I clipped it out and carry it in my Bible. I've read it many times. "Effie" often inspires me, even after her passing.

Her obituary read, "Effie Sullivan, 105, farm wife." She grew up on a farm in Gwinnett County, where she picked cotton, churned butter and fed the chickens. She wed at 18. She became the neighborhood caretaker. She went into people's homes and sat with the sick. It was like hospice care. She would iron their clothes, bathe them, hold hands, do whatever needed to be done. Her job in life was to look after other people. She moved into a nursing home at age 94, following the amputation of her left leg. Upon arriving at the nursing home, she looked around and remarked, "I think God sent me here to take care of these old people." She played shortstop for her nursing home's softball team. She entered the facility's beauty contest and won. It was the first time she had worn lipstick or had her fingernails painted. Effie Sullivan passed away at age 105.

Whenever I feel down or tired or think that I deserve better, I think of what Jesus said, that we are called to be servants to others. I also think of Effie. So, when you feel too tired or too apathetic to serve for whatever reason, remember Effie. One legged Effie, playing softball and taking God's call to heart to take care of all those other old people.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please give us the strength and courage to be servants to others. In Christ's name, Amen.

## Parables

*After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.*

*While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown."*

*When he said this, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Luke 8:1-8*

Thought: Why did Jesus teach using parables? Wouldn't he have been more effective if he'd just "told them like it is?" Without TV or print media, parables were the subject of conversation as people walked home, in their homes, in village gatherings. They asked each other, "What do you think he meant?" Jesus wanted people to search diligently to find meaning in his words. In today's reading, the sower throws out the seed. It seems to land everywhere. We assume the seed is the word of God, don't we? Take that beaten down path. Some people are like that. They aren't bad people. They just aren't interested. Their lives are like treadmills – constant movement and activity – but going nowhere. And they are not concerned.

Seed fell on rocky ground, too. There's not much depth for roots to penetrate and grow. Some people are like that – shallow minds and hearts – not much depth.

What about the ground overgrown with thorns? How many lives are filled with mostly clutter? So many things to do. So many places to go. So much stuff to accumulate.

And then there is the good soil. "Good soil" people produce fruit for God's Kingdom movement. They worship, give, plant, share, teach, model, and make a difference where they are planted.

Think about folks you know who represent the types of soil. Do you sometimes look a little like the thorns? That's one that gets us all occasionally. Was Jesus saying that God reaches out to us all?

Prayer: Thank you God for sowing the seeds. Help us to nurture them and make them multiply.

Questions: 1. In which soil are you involved in planting the seeds of God's grace?

2. In what ways has the love of God shown grace to you in your life?

## Feeling Fine

Well, I woke up this morning feeling fine  
I woke up with Heaven on my mind  
I woke up with joy in my soul  
'Cause I knew my Lord had control  
Well, I knew I was walking in the light  
'Cause I'd been on my knees in the night  
And I prayed until the Lord made it right  
And now I'm feelin' mighty fine

Chorus 1:

Well, I'm feelin', feelin' mighty fine (  
feeling mighty fine, yes I'm feeling fine)  
I've got Heaven on my mind (  
Heaven on my mind, Heaven on my mind)  
Don't you know I want to go  
(know I want to go, yes I want to go)  
Where the milk and honey flow  
(milk and honey flow, milk and honey flow)  
There's a light that always shines  
(light that always shines, light that always shines)  
Down inside this heart of mine  
(in this heart of mine, in this heart of mine)  
I've got Heaven, Heaven on my mind  
(Heaven on my mind, Heaven on my mind)  
And I'm feelin', feelin' mighty fine  
(feeling mighty fine)  
I've been walking with Jesus all the time  
We're walking and talking as we climb  
We're traveling the road to the sky  
Where I know I'll live when I die  
He's been telling me all about that land  
And He tells me that everything is grand  
And He says that the home will be mine  
And now I'm feelin' mighty fine

This song, "Feeling Fine" has a lot more testimony that I wish I could remember. It was always sung with a lot of joy and happiness.

## Wishes as Whispered Prayers

*If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. John 15:7-8 (NIV)*

Having signed a promise to write a devotional for this year's Lenten publication, my conscience was insisting that I must do so. However, no matter how hard I tried I could not think of a topic. My brain was still struggling two days before the devotional was needed in time to be printed. Where is my enlightenment? While walking from room to room trying to think of a topic I could hear myself praying softly, "I wish I could think of a topic." Suddenly there was my answer!

What does Jesus tell us about wishing?

As a child most of us have wished on a star at one time or another. And perhaps most of us have seriously wished for "things" including money, travel, a new car and many others. That is a different kind of wishing than Jesus was talking about. Christ promises us that as long as we remain in Him and His words remain in us, we have but to ask and our wish will be given to us. During and after this Lenten Season, may we all remain in Christ and know that Christ will remain in us. As children of God and Disciples of Christ, may we find comfort in knowing that our prayerful wishes in Jesus' name will be answered. Our loving God knows our needs. As Paul tells us in Romans 9:16 about God's compassion, he states, "It does now, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."

Prayer: Jesus, please remain in me and allow me to remain in you always. Amen

## What Makes You Happy

*"I am the vine and you are the branches. Those who remain in me and I in them will produce much fruit. My true disciples produce much fruit. I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you. John 15:5,8,12*

There was a 72 year study done by Harvard University. The study claims that a mix of love, work, and psychological adaptation seems to make us happy. But, the study concluded that in the end the only thing that really matters in life is our relationships with other people.

If we look to the Gospel of John, at the Last Supper, Jesus says "I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you". When we speak of relationships we often limit those relationships to our immediate circle of friends and family, basically those that we can easily love and those who are willing to return that love. If we apply what Jesus said in John's gospel to our life's goal, then we stay attached to his vine and remain in his love. We accomplish what Jesus says by loving others as he has loved us.

By adding the Gospel to the Harvard study we then can say: By living our relationships with others in the way Christ lives his relationships with us, that is what will really make us happy and makes life worthwhile. A happy life is achieved by faithfulness to others, generosity to those less fortunate and forgiveness of offenses, real or imagined.

What better way to make life worth living than in our service to others. By sharing Jesus' love we will remain in his love and then in turn we will be happy. The opportunity for sharing God's love with others is offered each day to us. Make an effort to form new Christ filled relationships. Smile, make others happy, then you will be happy also.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank you for the new opportunities each day to make someone happy so that I might be happy in your sight. Amen.

## How Can You Miss Me?

*They (the Jews) are the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised. Amen. Romans 9:4-5*

When reading this passage we sometimes ask ourselves, “how did the Jews miss it? Why didn’t they understand that the prophecies, covenants, promises, temple worship and the Law were all fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the long-awaited Messiah? Why don’t they get it today?”

Paul goes on in Romans to mention several reasons why only a small number of Jews (the remnant) see Christ as Messiah. Today, let’s just consider one reason: it is for our benefit, as Gentiles. Because of their rejection the message was extended to us! It is not the natural born children of Abraham who are God’s children but the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring. (Romans 9:8) Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Jesus, and me – we are part of the true Israel. Even with all the advantages the Jews of Jesus’ day had, only a few saw their fulfillment, saw God’s grace and mercy through the Promised One, Jesus the Messiah, and then put their faith in Him.

Jacob’s name was changed to Israel, which means *he struggled with God*. (Genesis 32:22-23) Lent calls each of us to self-examination and, as the new Israel, to struggle with God. Sometimes I hear God asking me the same question I ask of the Jews: “How can you miss Me in this situation? Why don’t you hear My voice or see My guiding in certain areas? Why don’t you get it?!?”

Like the Jews, I have many advantages: Christian parents and grandparents, a godly, Christian husband, a Christian education in Sunday School and a Christian college, membership in a beautiful Church with excellent, biblically sound preaching, Bible studies, baptism and participation in the Lord’s Supper. These are valuable and to be celebrated. They remind me of my new life in Christ. But am I letting my advantages become *disadvantages*? Am I relying only on past experiences of faith?

This Lenten season set aside time for a wrestling match...with God. It is in the struggles that God through Christ is growing a personal relationship with me and with you, the new Israel.

Prayer: Gracious God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Come to us in a new way. Open our eyes in the struggles that we might see You face-to-face. Never let us take our advantages for granted. Help us to use them to bless others. In the strong name of Messiah Jesus, Amen.

## Queen for a Day; Angel for Eternity

*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*

Matthew 11:28 (NIV)

May of 2003 was a sad month for the Briscoes. On Friday, May 17, my best friend's mother died after a brief illness. A week later, Bob's mother, Leone, passed away. Bob had been with her in Tulsa for several days in anticipation of her passing. I received the call from him and made plans to fly to Tulsa on Sunday. But my mother was also suffering from congestive heart failure in Americus. So I made a quick trip to see her and then left for Tulsa to be with Bob and his family.

After Leone's funeral, my brother called to say that I needed to come home as quickly as possible. Mother wasn't doing well. So I flew back to Georgia on Wednesday to find my Mother weak, swollen, breathless, and near death. Thursday, she was no better. So, you can imagine my surprise when I entered her room on Friday morning to find her sitting up in bed, smiling, talking, and a very different person from the one I had seen the two previous days. Later in the morning, my brother from Memphis arrived with his wife and two young boys. Throughout the day, friends of mine and of both my brothers stopped by to see her. Several of my cousins lived in in Americus, as well as my mother's sister. They all added to the steady stream of people who stopped by to say goodbye to my mother. Bob was on his way from Tulsa, as well.

Our home had always been a place where my brothers and nephews had gathered with their friends to eat my mother's cooking, listen to my father's jokes, clean their fish, and show off their hunting trophies. Now this nursing home room had the familiar feel of those gatherings from across the years as various men recounted tales of hunting or fishing stories that we had laughed over for years. Mother did her part to keep the conversations going. She had always been a quiet worker in our home, ready to serve a freshly baked cake, pie, or an entire meal to anyone who came through the door. Daddy was been the entertainer. But on this day, Mother was the center of attention, Queen for a Day, as those who loved her stopped by to pay her homage. My son's wife was due to deliver her third child any day, and he called to say that the baby would be born the next day. He told her the names that would be used. She wasn't fond of the boy's name and told him she was hoping for a girl.

Later that day, a nurse from Hospice came and listened as my mother dictated her wishes. She was certain of her salvation and was eager to see an end to this life's suffering. We left that evening and returned the next morning to find her in a coma. She never recovered consciousness. We took turns sitting with her throughout the day, and by 11 pm everyone was ready to go home except me. I sat with her, talked to her, told her about our new baby girl, and watched as she slowly sipped away.

My mother's life was pretty simple and often hard. As a child of the depres-

sion, she didn't have many special days. She rarely spoke of her faith, rather lived it like Martha, as a servant. She knew that her reward would be after this life, so she had little need for glory here. In this life she was seldom Queen for a Day. But I know that when she died, the doors of heaven flew open in welcome. She was an angel on this earth, and now she is an angel for eternity.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for giving us people like my mother, who live their lives as a witness to the knowledge that they will live with you in eternity. Amen



### **A Cross in My Pocket**

I carry a cross in my pocket  
A simple reminder to me  
Of the fact that I am a Christian  
No matter where I may be.

This little cross is not magic,  
Nor is it a good luck charm  
It isn't meant to protect me  
From every physical harm.

It's not for identification  
For all the world to see  
It's simply an understanding  
Between my Savior and me.

When I put my hand in my pocket  
To bring out a coin or a key  
The cross is there to remind me  
Of the price He paid for me.

It reminds me, too, to be thankful  
For my blessings day by day  
And to strive to serve Him better  
In all that I do and say.

It's also a daily reminder  
Of the peace and comfort I share  
With all who know my Master  
And give themselves to His care.

So, I carry a cross in my pocket  
Reminding no one but me  
That Jesus Christ is the Lord of my life  
If only I'll let Him be.

## Jesus' Passion

This Sunday is Palm Sunday, which marks the day Jesus entered Jerusalem, and the beginning of the week of his *passion*. The word 'passion' comes from a Latin word which means 'suffering'. The suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross has always been referred to as The Passion. In modern times, we have come to apply the word to any kind of strong feeling, or commitment, though more properly it describes a *suffering* for some worthwhile thing.

We have lost this sense of the word, in part perhaps, because there is so little of this kind of passion left in the western world. There is little we care enough about to suffer for. However, we are still prone to "suffering" ... but of another kind. The root meaning of 'suffering' that we find in the word 'passion' occurs also in the related word, 'passive'. And though we don't associate passivity with strong feelings, the passive person suffers as well. But this suffering comes from outside forces, and is the result of inactivity and lack of direction.

How different is the passion of Jesus: directed by God and willingly accepted. Jesus actively chose his path and the sufferings that followed. In Jesus we see not only the full depth of God's passion for us and the suffering that was a necessary part of it, but the full depth of one perfect human's passion for God: obedience that led to death.

How do we respond to God's call to follow him? Are we passionate? Or passive? Both ways lead to suffering: if passionate, we actively choose God's way and follow Jesus obediently, often suffering as he did; if passive, the suffering we experience is not part of God's plan for us, and is the pain of being distant from him, out of his will. To walk with Jesus, who said, "take up your cross and follow me", we must accept God's direction and choose to follow the path laid out for us. This is a path of certain passion (suffering), but also certain hope, because Easter always follows Lent.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your passionate love for me, that you would die for me. And thank you for your passionate love for the Father, that you would obey him, even to death. Lord, I am so often harassed and helpless, like a sheep without a shepherd—How can I find my way unless you help me? Have mercy on me. Lead me Lord. Come, and give me the strength I need to follow you in doing the Father's will. Bless the time I give to you this week. Pour your blessing over me. Give me a passionate love equal to yours, so that I would be willing to endure all for the glory of Easter.

## **The Triumphal Entry**

As the time approached for him  
to be taken up to haven,  
Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

**As he went along,**

**People spread their cloaks on the road.**

The whole crowd of disciples  
began joyfully to praise God in loud voices  
for all the miracles they had seen.

**“Hosanna to the Son of David!**

**Blessed is he who comes**

**In the name of the Lord!”**

“Blessed is the coming kingdom  
Of our father David!”

**“Hosanna is the highest!”**

When Jesus entered Jerusalem,  
The whole city was stirred and asked,  
“Who is this?”

The crowds answered,

**“This is Jesus,**

**The prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”**

Lift up your heads, O you gates;

**Be lifted up, you ancient doors,**

**That the King of glory may come in.**

Who is the King of glory?

**The Lord strong and mighty,**

**The Lord mighty in battle.**

Who is he, this King of glory?

**The Lord Almighty—**

**He is the King of glory.**

## NEVER TOO LATE

In the Parable of the Workers Paid Equally (Mathew 20), Jesus said in verse 13, "But he answered one of them, Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you."

Several years ago my brother's only son had a massive heart attack while at work and died instantly. My son and I attended the grave side service, held in a very old grave-yard, out in the country, next to open pasture land. The setting reminded me of the old western movies where they simply dug a grave and someone said a few words. During the service I was struck by the absence of scripture reading, no Christian hymns, and only one very short prayer. After the service while driving home, I remarked to my son that I had a very empty feeling and we both remarked about how my brother, Burton, must have felt. How lost he must have felt because at that time he was not attending any church and never spoke about his relationship with Christ, or belief in God.

The memories of my nephew's death and grave-side service came flooding back to me on the night I got a call from Burton's friend that he had died in his sleep. I had never talked with my brother about his faith, and did not know if he had Jesus in his heart. When we were growing up the whole family attended Sunday school and church services, but after he left home I think that he had never attended church until just recently. He remarked to me several times in his last year that he and his wife had been going to an old country church near their home and how he liked the good food after the service. I still didn't know if he believed.

Burton was a part time cattle rancher and he had become good friends with the local veterinarian who was also a part time preacher at the small church he and his wife had been visiting. Just minutes before the funeral the preacher took me aside and told me the story of Burton's transformation. He told me that several months before his death Burton had called him and asked that he come out to his house and visit. He said that he and Burton talked about Jesus, the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life. Burton started crying and asked if it was too late to be saved. He made a confession of his sins, asked the preacher to baptize him and he joined the church the next week. PRAISE THE LORD!!!

We will never know if the experience of placing his son into the grave without his knowing of God's love was the event that triggered Burton to start thinking about his own mortality and salvation, but we do know that he went to his grave peacefully and with hope.

Dear God. Thank you for my brother's life, and thank you for my knowledge that Burton died knowing of Your love. Amen

## Know Jesus, Know Peace; No Jesus, No Peace

Read Luke 12: 22-34

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life....Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?" (Luke 12, 22, 25 NIV)*

"Worrying is a useless exercise," my mom always said to me. When I was young, I couldn't quite figure out how she managed to remain calm in tense situations, or how she could appear unworried during my dad's final illness. As I've matured, however, I've come to know that I can rely on God to take care of my needs.

For years now, I've been a member of the church choir, and many of the songs that we sing for anthems Sunday after Sunday are reminders of the words we've received from God and the promises he has given us. Each one reinforces my understanding that I can count on God. Not one of them suggests that we should sit down and despair when the going is difficult.

Here's a sampling: "My shepherd will supply my need...Jehovah is his name." "The LORD has promised good to me, as long as life endures...." In Jeremiah 29:11, this is what the LORD says, "***For I know the plans I have for you—plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.***" In Jeremiah 6:16, we're told, "...***ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.***" Surely if our souls are at rest, we won't be worrying about things.

Ability to count on God (faith!) involves regular communication with God and listening to his answers. When David set out to meet Goliath, he didn't say, "Okay, God, I know you've protected me in the past. So I know you'll take care of that giant for me. I'll just sit over here on a rock and watch while you knock him over!" David remembered how God had strengthened him in the past, and he had faith in the LORD. He knew God could be depended on to help him, but in the meanwhile, he went ahead and picked up several smooth stones for his slingshot! (Perhaps you have heard the old adage, "God helps those who help themselves." We prepare through prayer.)

Years later, David penned these words, "*Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and He shall sustain thee....*" (Psalm 55:22)

Our job is to build a relationship with God so we truly CAN "cast our cares" upon God. (This is where prayer comes in.) We'll be able to do what Paul tells us in Philippians 4:6-7: "*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*"

Remember these words: "Know Jesus, know peace. No Jesus, no peace."

Prayer: Dear God, help us to remember to pray about everything and to turn our worries over to you so that we can spend our time praising your name rather than being anxious about what might happen. Amen

## God's Fools

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup>For it is written:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;  
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate. 1 Corinthians 1:18-19

Tomorrow is Maundy Thursday, the day we celebrate the Last Supper. It is also April Fools Day, and we all know that it is customary to use this day for pranks. I have often wondered where this silly tradition came from. It seems that one of the more popular theories about the origin of April Fool's Day involves the French calendar reform of the sixteenth century.

The theory goes like this: In 1564 France reformed its calendar, moving the start of the year from the end of March to January 1. Prior to this time, the French New Year had begun on Easter, which was already problematic since the date for Easter was a function of the lunar calendar. Those who failed to keep up with the change, who stubbornly clung to the old calendar system and continued to celebrate the New Year during the week that fell between March 25th and April 1st, had jokes played on them. Pranksters would surreptitiously stick paper fish to their backs. The victims of this prank were thus called Poisson d'Avril, or April Fish—which, to this day, remains the French term for April Fools—and so the tradition was born.

As Christians we see a different meaning in the fish. After Christ's crucifixion, when Christians were persecuted, the fish symbol was used as an identifying symbol that fellow Christians would recognize, but non-Christians would not. Therefore Christians could connect with each other through this secret code without revealing themselves to the oppressors. When I see the fish on a sign, or bumper sticker, or book, I immediately know that this person wishes to be associated with Christ and His kingdom. That, in a sense, makes the person wise, not foolish.

And yet, therein lies a danger. For if we see ourselves as wise for having chosen the path of the cross, we are already in danger of straying from that path. The Bible cautions us over and over again about relying on our own wisdom rather than God's. When we begin to judge others, when we begin to think that we are better than others, when we think we know the heart of others, we are being foolish, indeed, in God's sight. The passage from Corinthians reminds us that Christ is true power and true wisdom. In all things, we are to trust in him and let Him judge who is wise and who is foolish.

And so, on this April Fools Day, we should remember that if we have any wisdom, it comes from our dependence on Christ. And if we are to be fools, we should be fools for Christ.

Prayer: Lord, help me to remember that without You I am nothing, that when I rely on my own strength, I am powerless, and when I rely on my own wisdom, I am foolish. Give me strength to be dependent on you and give me wisdom to know your will. Amen

## Maundy Thursday

There are a variety of events that are clustered on this last day before Jesus was arrested that are commemorated in various ways in services of worship. These include the last meal together, which was probably a Passover meal, the institution of Eucharist or Communion, the betrayal by Judas (because of the exchange with Jesus at the meal), and Jesus praying in Gethsemane while the disciples fell asleep. Most liturgies, however, focus on the meal and communion as a way to commemorate this day.

During the last few days, Jesus and His disciples had steadily journeyed from Galilee toward Jerusalem. On the sunlight hillsides of Galilee, Jesus was popular, the crowds were friendly and the future was bright. Even his entry into Jerusalem had been marked by a joyous welcome. But in Jerusalem there was a growing darkness as the crowds began to draw back from the man who spoke of commitment and servanthood. There was an ominous tone in the murmuring of the Sadducees and Pharisees who were threatened by the new future Jesus proclaimed.

Even as Jesus and his disciples came together to share this meal, they already stood in the shadow of the cross. It was later that night, after the meal, as Jesus and His disciples were praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, that Jesus was arrested and taken to the house of Caiaphas the High Priest. On Friday He would die.

Traditionally in the Christian Church, this day is known as Maundy Thursday. The term Maundy comes from the Latin word *mandatum* (from which we get our English word *mandate*), from a verb that means "to give," "to entrust," or "to order." The term is usually translated "commandment," from John's account of this Thursday night. According to the Fourth Gospel, as Jesus and the Disciples were eating their final meal together before Jesus' arrest, he washed the disciples' feet to illustrate humility and the spirit of servanthood. After they had finished the meal, as they walked into the night toward Gethsemane, Jesus taught his disciples a "new" commandment that was not really new (John 13:34-35):

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, you also ought to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

In some church traditions all of the altar coverings and decorations are removed after the Eucharist is served on Maundy Thursday. Psalm 22 is sometimes either read or sung while the altar paraments are being removed. Since the altar in these traditions symbolize the Christ, the "stripping of the altar" symbolizes the abandonment of Jesus by his disciples and the stripping of Jesus by the soldiers prior to his crucifixion. This, like the darkness often incorporated into a Good Friday service, represents the humiliation of Jesus and the consequences of sin as a preparation for the celebration of new life and hope that is to come on Resurrection Day. Some churches only leave the altar bare until the Good Friday Service, when the normal coverings are replaced with black.

However it is celebrated, the Eucharist of Maundy Thursday is especially tied to the

theme of remembering. As Jesus and his disciples followed the instructions in the Torah to remember God's acts of deliverance in their history as they shared the Passover meal together, so Jesus calls us to remember the new act of deliverance in our history that unfolds on these last days of Holy week.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, come to us during this Holy week and renew in us our commitment to follow Jesus all the way to the cross. Amen



## Jesus Wept

*As He approached Jerusalem and saw the city, He wept over it. Luke 19:41*

Verses before and after this one point out that this was Jesus' triumphal entry. His followers were shouting His praise, spreading their cloaks for His donkey to walk over and rejoicing over His coming. However, as He approached the city, He wept. We could certainly understand weeping when He knew that in a matter of days this crowd would turn on Him. Even with this following, we are told that He slept on the Mount of Olives at night and taught in the temple courts each day. They might praise Him during the entry but were they hesitant to take a stand by offering Him shelter when He was teaching in the temple and facing the scrutiny and criticism of the highest Jewish leaders of the day? He certainly knew how fickle their loyalty was and that their appreciation was not for Him and the sacrifice He was about to make but for the miracles they had seen Him do. His tears were not even for the suffering and rejection He knew He would endure during these next few days.

As He approached the city, perhaps able to see the hill called "Calvary" in the distance, His grief was over the people of that great city and the terrible choices they were about to make. Don't we also look at our children, grandchildren, siblings, and friends and grieve when we see them make poor choices? We see them as they are about to make decisions that will adversely affect their future, perhaps even the rest of their life, and we would give anything in this world to change their mind if only that were possible. Jesus saw these, God's chosen people, knowing that they were about to reject God's gift of a savior....even the only begotten Son of God. Twice in the scriptures we are told that Jesus wept: First at Lazarus' tomb and then as He approached Jerusalem. Neither time were His tears due to the obvious situation. Both times it was due to the fact that people could not see the significance of the Savior before them.

Prayer: Father, let our prayer this day be that our decisions would honor Him and that our actions would never be a source of grief to the Master. Amen

## Easter Story Cookies

To be made the evening before Easter

1 cup whole pecans	1 tsp. vinegar	zipper baggie
3 egg whites	1 cup sugar	wooden spoon
pinch salt	Bible	tape

Preheat oven to 300 degrees (this is important-don't wait until you're half done with the recipe!)

Place pecans in zipper baggie and let children beat them with the wooden spoon to break into small pieces. Explain that after Jesus was arrested, He was beaten by the Roman soldiers. Read John 19:1-3.

Let each child smell the vinegar. Put 1 tsp. vinegar into mixing bowl. Explain that when Jesus was thirsty on the cross, He was given vinegar to drink. Read John 19:28-30.

Add egg whites to vinegar. Eggs represent life. Explain that Jesus gave His life to give us life. Read John 10:10-11.

Sprinkle a little salt into each child's hand. Let them taste it and brush the rest into the bowl. Explain that this represents the salty tears shed by Jesus' followers, and the bitterness of our own sin. Read Luke 23:27.

So far, the ingredients are not very appetizing. Add 1 cup sugar. Explain that the sweetest part of the story is that Jesus died because He loves us. He wants us to know and belong to Him. Read Ps. 34:8 and John 3:16.

Beat with a mixer on high speed for 12 to 15 minutes until stiff peaks are formed. Explain that the color white represents the purity in God's eyes of those whose sins have been cleansed by Jesus. Read Isa. 1:18 and John 3:1-3.

Fold in broken nuts. Drop by teaspoons onto wax paper covered cookie sheet. Explain that each mound represents the rocky tomb where Jesus' body was laid. Read Matt. 27:57-60.

Put the cookie sheet in the oven, close the door and turn the oven OFF.

Give each child a piece of tape and seal the oven door. Explain that Jesus' tomb was sealed. Read Matt. 27:65-66.

GO TO BED! Explain that they may feel sad to leave the cookies in the oven overnight. Jesus' followers were in despair when the tomb was sealed. Read John 16:20 and 22.

On Easter morning, open the oven and give everyone a cookie. Notice the cracked surface and take a bite. The cookies are hollow! On the first Easter, Jesus' followers were amazed to find the tomb open and empty. Read Matt. 28:1-9

Today is Easter Sunday  
He is Risen  
Hallelujah, He is Risen

**Up From the Grave He Arose**

Low in the grave he lay,  
Jesus my Savior,  
Waiting the coming day,  
Jesus my Lord!

Refrain:

Up from the grave he arose;  
With a mighty triumph o'er his foes;  
He arose a victor from the dark domain,  
and He lives forever, with His saints to reign.  
He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!

Vainly they watch his bed,  
Jesus my Savior,  
vainly they seal the dead,  
Jesus my Lord!  
(Refrain)

Death cannot keep its prey,  
Jesus my Savior;  
He tore the bars away,  
Jesus my Lord!  
(Refrain)

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

*There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.*

*The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."*

*So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."*

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. ...

*Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in<sup>[a]</sup> the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20*

### **Crown Him with Many Crowns**

Crown him with many crowns,  
the Lamb upon his throne,  
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns  
all music but its own.  
Awake, my soul, and sing  
of him who died for thee,  
and hail him as thy matchless King  
through all eternity.

Crown him the Lord of life,  
who triumphed o'er the grave,  
and rose victorious in the strife  
for those he came to save.  
His glories now we sing,  
who died, and rose on high,  
who died, eternal life to bring,  
and lives that death may die.

Crown him the Lord of peace,  
whose power a scepter sways  
from pole to pole, that wars may cease,  
and all be prayer and praise.  
His reign shall know no end,  
and round his pierced feet  
fair flowers of paradise extend  
heir fragrance ever sweet.

Crown him the Lord of love;  
behold his hands and side,  
those wounds, yet visible above,  
in beauty glorified.  
All hail, Redeemer, hail!  
For thou hast died for me;  
thy praise and glory shall not fail  
throughout eternity.