

LENT DEVOTIONALS 2022
First United Methodist Church
McKinney, Texas

Lent is a forty-day season of preparation leading up to the Easter celebration. Wherever you find yourself during this season, it is our prayer that these devotions, written by members and friends of First United Methodist Church McKinney, may help guide you along the way.

Wednesday, March 2

By David Burroughs

Deliver me from violence, God, God of my salvation, so that my tongue can sing of your righteousness. Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will proclaim your praise. You don't want sacrifices. If I gave an entirely burned offering, you wouldn't be pleased. A broken spirit is my sacrifice, God. You won't despise a heart, God, that is broken and crushed. ~ Psalm 51:14-17

Today is Ash Wednesday. Many Christians around the world will go to church today and have a priest or pastor apply ashes to their forehead in the shape of a cross. Christians do this to mark themselves as penitent and to publicly claim their faith in Christ. In biblical times, when a person died, their family would put ashes on their faces and bodies to symbolize their mourning the loss of a loved one. These days, you may see a person wear a black arm band over their shirt or jacket to let us know they are mourning a significant loss. And nearly everyone wears black to a funeral or memorial service.

This Ash Wednesday symbol is to remind us that Lent is a journey – from today all the way to the cross on Good Friday. We are preparing to mourn and remember. I have learned that the journey will make the resurrection on Easter morning all the more beautiful. Whatever your situation today, walk the Lenten journey toward healing and comfort and resurrection.

- What are you looking forward to this Lenten season...where are you needing God most in your life?

Thursday, March 3

By Rob Mueller

The Lord God took the human and settled him in the garden of Eden to farm it and to take care of it. The Lord God commanded the human, "Eat your fill from all of the garden's trees; but don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because on the day you eat from it, you will die!" ~ Genesis 2:15-17

We have a lot of baggage in the Christian family around this story of Adam in the Garden of Eden. Because Adam disobeyed this command, the story is often used to emphasize how

terrible we are as human beings, disobedient, rebellious, and sinful to the core. And yet, God entrusted the creation to Adam. God saw him as good, trustworthy, and capable.

Too often I attribute my mistakes, sin, and selfishness, to my character. Yet, that is not the case. God's creations (you and me) are good and loving, in which God is well pleased. Yes, we sin and are in need of forgiveness, but at our core we are loved children of God. Lent is an opportunity to seek forgiveness and uncover the goodness God sees in us.

How can we hold an honest assessment of ourselves? How can we claim the good, the whole, and the beautiful alongside the broken, selfish, and self-centered? This is the challenge of honesty: to look with clarity at our lives, to see with God's eyes all that we are and all that we are not!

- Where do you need to be really honest with God?
- What change or transformation are you seeking God's help with?

Friday, March 4

By Michelle Phillips

Jesus returned from the Jordan River full of the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. There he was tempted for forty days by the devil. He ate nothing during those days and afterward Jesus was starving. The devil said to him, "Since you are God's Son, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus replied, "It's written, People won't live only by bread." ~ Luke 4:1-4

I sometimes joke that with a little butter, I could live on just bread. What else could I need? Ok, maybe that's not the greatest attitude to have.

I grew up in the church and have always known about Jesus. Now, that doesn't mean that I've had a perfect life... far from it. But I know Christ has provided peace and comfort in my many times of yuck. In fact, I can't imagine what my life would be like without knowing and having a relationship with Christ. (I also can't imagine my life without bread and butter.)

It is my hope that you use this day to reflect on who Christ is to you. Maybe Jesus has played a huge role in your life, or maybe he hasn't. (Be honest — it's okay!) Think about creating, maintaining, or improving your relationship with Christ. Ask questions, struggle with God, and look for answers. When you're awake and aware to being on a journey with Jesus, it makes those wilderness times a little easier and may provide you some peace.

- Who is Christ to you?
- If you were to share your relationship with Christ to someone else, what would you tell them?

Saturday, March 5

By Neal Smith

“And when you fast, don’t put on a sad face like the hypocrites. They distort their faces so people will know they are fasting. I assure you that they have their reward. When you fast, brush your hair and wash your face. Then you won’t look like you are fasting to people, but only to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ~ Matthew 6:16-18

As a youth ministry volunteer, I once had a youth student who chose to give up chocolate during the time of Lent. He was determined to follow through with this and show his peers he could be faithful. About half-way through Lent, he came to me and said, “I ate chocolate last Sunday. What will happen to me?” It took everything within me not to laugh, and I simply said, “It’s okay. Sundays don’t count.”

Fasting isn’t something that we have to do during Lent, the 40 days before Easter, and fasting isn’t always about giving something up. To me fasting is about letting go of the things that take more time than or even replace God in my life. Jesus isn’t telling us to fast to make ourselves better, but to fast in order to clear our hearts of the things that take priority over God. It’s about examining our hearts, not to set us apart from others, but to help us think about our relationship with Christ. So if you decide to “fast for Lent,” do it for yourself — for yourself to get closer to God.

- If you choose to fast (give up something) for Lent, how will you use the fasting time or resources to draw you closer to God?

Sunday, March 6

Since the late first century, Sundays have been known as “the Lord’s Day.” Each Sunday is a time to rest in the Lord and celebrate (worship) Christ’s resurrection. In other words, each Sunday is a mini-Easter. This year during Lent (and throughout all of life) focus on resting in God’s presence and celebrating the grace Jesus’ resurrection offers to you and all people.

Monday, March 7

By Stephen Mazingo

All of you who revere the Lord—praise him! All of you who are Jacob’s descendants—honor him! All of you who are all Israel’s offspring—stand in awe of him! Because he didn’t despise or detest the suffering of the one who suffered—he didn’t hide his face from me. No, he listened when I cried out to him for help. ~ Psalm 22:23-24

It seems these days that people believe that if you are Christian and you have faith, you should not have to suffer. Only bad people suffer and good people — well, they have good things happen to them. But what happens when something bad happens to someone who is good or faithful? Where does that leave us? These are questions a struggle with.

The writer of Psalm 22 has experienced a long period of sickness and imprisonment. Bad stuff. Yet at the end of this passage, it says that God listened. If the psalmist had faith, why would God just listen? Why not prevent the bad from happening?

It turns out, faith doesn't work like that. Suffering is a part of life, and the choices that we make and others make affect us. God does not prevent suffering from happening to anyone: good or bad, faithful or without faith. But don't be discouraged. The psalmist reminds us that God listens. God, the all powerful, listens, pays attention, and cares. We are not alone.

- What does it look like for you to rely on God during times of suffering and heartache?

Tuesday, March 8

By Keaton Melvin – youth

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." ~ Philippians 4:13

Our verse of the day is Philippians 4:13. What God is saying to me in this verse is that I can do anything with God's love on my side. In my years of being on this planet, I have struggled with not being bulky or ripped. Those days I was not motivated to do anything. I just wanted to watch TV and do absolutely nothing all day. One day God spoke to me, not in a big pep talk kind of way, but in a whisper, about changing my life. He said, "Keaton you are loved by me, and I will help you in any way possible," and He did. He has helped me grow in confidence and is helping me to become stronger in Him.

In the song called, "You Say," by Lauren Daigle, there is this part in the song that says, "You say I am strong when I think I am weak." That is saying You say I am strong with Your love, but I feel like I am not strong enough for Your love. This song speaks to me, because I have been in a situation where I was weak, and I felt not good. Now I am coming to you as a new person saying that God's love and grace makes you STRONGER.

- Where is your strength, in yourself or God?
- How can you share God's love to others in need of it?

Wednesday, March 9

By Grier Richards

The one whose wrongdoing is forgiven, whose sin is covered over, is truly happy! The one the Lord doesn't consider guilty—in whose spirit there is no dishonesty—that one is truly happy! When I kept quiet, my bones wore out; I was groaning all day long—every day, every night!—because your hand was heavy upon me. My energy was sapped as if in a summer drought. So I admitted my sin to you; I didn't conceal my guilt. "I'll confess my sins to the Lord," is what I said. Then you removed the guilt of my sin. ~ Psalm 32:1-5

You've heard it before, but it bears repeating: there's more to the season of Lent than solemnity. For 40 days we are invited by the Spirit to come clean before God and with ourselves, that we might breathe in the beauty of a clean slate and celebrate the gift of a fresh start.

Our journey begins with encountering and acknowledging our sins and shortcomings, transitions into confessing to God our brokenness and need for restoration, and ends in receiving God's forgiveness and reveling in the joy new life in Christ brings. And while God's forgiveness isn't contingent on our confession, it seems that our experience of how it feels to be forgiven and freed for new life just might be.

So as your journey through the wilderness continues, don't forget to breathe. Exhale all your fears, failures, and shortcomings and inhale the cleansing breath of God's forgiveness, mercy, and grace.

- Take a few minutes to just breathe. Allow this time to be a quiet time to worship and give thanks to our God who gives breath and life to all things.

Thursday, March 10

By Lorraine Brown

Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. ~ Nehemiah 8:5-6

Around 597bc, God's people, the Jews, had been taken and held for 70 years in captivity in Babylon, many miles from their beloved home in Jerusalem. At that time, the Babylonians had destroyed all they could see and all that the Jewish people had loved. Their homes, their walls, which protected them from their enemies, and their place of worship – the beautiful temple built long ago by King Solomon, had all been razed to the ground.

During that 70-year confinement, one of the most troubling issues they faced was the question of "where was God?". You see, they believed that God dwelled in the temple and now there was no temple. So where was God? One of the Psalms written during that time tells us, "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion."

Over the years, they puzzled out this question and others as they sat together and remembered the stories of all God had done for them over the years. They remembered who God was for them and how much God loved them and as they talked and prayed and wept, they began to feel God's presence among them. They began to understand that God was with them whether they were in Jerusalem, in the temple or far away in a foreign country.

When the Jewish people were allowed to return to their country to rebuild, the tasks seemed overwhelming. Their homes were gone, farms in ruin, and the temple and walls – a priority – needed to be rebuilt. The work was slow because few had returned from Babylon, only a remnant of the many who were taken. Many had died in captivity and new generations were born and raised. And there was great opposition to the rebuilding of the wall by the neighboring nations and people.

When the work was finally done there was much celebration. Can you even imagine? Ezra the priest (and scribe) had been commissioned to teach the people the Book of the Law of Moses. And so, he read to them – Nehemiah 8:3 tells us “He read it aloud from daybreak till noon”. And the people worshipped...

Lent is a time of looking inward, a time of preparing for the death and resurrection of our Lord. During this time of Covid, many of us have stopped going to church for fear of illness or because we have had illness in the family. It is easy to fall into the habit of finding other ways to fill our Sunday mornings...

Thinking about the excitement of the Jews as they listened to the Scriptures and worshipped (*all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground*), what do you need to do reignite your devotion and love for God? Maybe some time alone? A Bible Study? A retreat? A new place to serve? Returning to worship? What is your heart telling you?

- Take some time tonight as you lie in bed to read Psalm 63. Fall asleep praising Him as you contemplate how much God loves you.

Friday, March 11

By Molly Tucker

I offer praise in the great congregation because of you; I will fulfill my promises in the presence of those who honor God. Let all those who are suffering eat and be full! Let all who seek the Lord praise him! I pray your hearts live forever! Every part of the earth will remember and come back to the Lord; every family among all the nations will worship you. ~ Psalm 22:25-27

The psalms speak often about worship. Some descriptions of worship are in the present tense. But this psalm speaks about the future – and how it will look when we will all be worshipping God together!

The Psalmist writes that “every family among all the nations will worship you.”

In the past year and a half, for most of us, worship has looked different than we’d ever experienced before. We’ve live-streamed, worshiped in smaller numbers, and worshiped in face masks. I’m not sure what future worship will look like two years from now or twenty years from now.

But I find assurance that as differently as we all worship each week, as differently as we all believe or practice beliefs, as different as we all inherently are at our core – what will draw us together is our common love for the Lord. We may not be there today, but the psalmist seems hopeful for what the future may look like in the presence of our loving God. It’s something to be excited for!

- What parts of church worship do you love most? Why?
- Who could you invite to experience worship with you?

Saturday, March 12

By Ann Wells

As he was teaching, he said, “Watch out for the legal experts. They like to walk around in long robes. They want to be greeted with honor in the markets. They long for places of honor in the synagogues and at banquets. They are the ones who cheat widows out of their homes, and to show off they say long prayers. They will be judged most harshly.” ~ Mark 12:38-40

In today’s scripture, Jesus and his disciples are observing something that many of us may have also seen before – church show-offs. You may know them as the person who always likes to share their biblical knowledge, or the one who wants to be sure they were counted “present” on the Sunday School roster so that another year of Perfect Attendance may be added to their resume, or the one who wants everyone to know how much they give to the church. Whether or not they “walk the walk” outside of church is sometimes up for debate, as Jesus so clearly tells us when describing the “legal experts” who take from the vulnerable during the rest of the week.

Elsewhere in the gospels, Jesus tells us that it is better to take the lowest seat at the table and be invited to a higher one than to take the best seat and be asked to move when a more important person arrives. This is the example we should follow – being humble and genuine in our faith.

- Is there any place in your life that you like to “show off” to others?
- What would your life look like if your only goal was to show off God’s glory?

Sunday, March 13

Spend today resting in God's presence and celebrating the grace Jesus' resurrection offers to you and all people.

Monday, March 14

By Meredith Forssman

"When you pray, don't be like hypocrites. They love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners so that people will see them. I assure you, that's the only reward they'll get. But when you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you. ~ Matthew 6:5-6

During Lent, Jesus' teaching on prayer feels so freeing to me.

I have to be honest – there have been a lot of years when I have begun Lent with big plans for a super spiritual experience; I spent a lot of energy thinking about what I wanted to fast and what books I was going to read and how I was going to pray daily – oh, and don't forget the Lenten photo-a-day challenge! Somehow, the years when I have tried to make the most out of Lent, I've followed through the least on my plans. I think it's because I was too caught up in some idea of a spiritual experience, and my expectations (of myself and the experience) were unrealistic.

Prayer – the spiritual life – is not glamorous, is not entertaining, is not for show. "When you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is present in that secret place," says Jesus. No fancy plans, no flexing for an audience. God bids you to come – just as you are. Just the two of you. Just be.

- What could you give up during Lent (5 minutes of sleep, scrolling social media, a game on your phone) in order to take time to be in prayer?

Tuesday, March 15

By Ellen Di Giosia

Jesus went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. His mother cherished every word in her heart. Jesus matured in wisdom and years, and in favor with God and with people. ~ Luke 2:51-52

After the Passover festival, Jesus's family was returning home, but Jesus decided to return to the Temple without his parent's knowing. After Jesus' unscheduled temple visit, his parents must have wondered if they should keep him on a shorter leash. But when they went back to

Nazareth, he went back to the familiar routines of home and family. As he grew taller, he grew wiser, too, and God's grace in him was apparent to everyone.

For a mother, nothing could be better. Mary remembered all that had happened during those fateful days in Jerusalem. She had seen what God was doing in her son, and she kept those memories close to her heart. "Every word," says the scripture, was "cherished." I have read the words of Jesus many times. I repeat many of them. I feel confused by some of them. To be honest, I ignore some of them. But cherish? I'm not sure that I have ever given Jesus's words that kind of weight in my own heart.

- How might you take in all of Christ's words – the challenge, the comfort, the humor – and hold them close, to let them live in you?

Wednesday, March 16

By Shona Dunson

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ~ Philippians 4:6-7

I recently read a quote stating, "Don't nobody pray harder than parents with grown children." While grammatically incorrect and with the intention of some light humor, I find there to be profound truth in this statement. Philippians 4:6-7 became imbedded on my heart when my children became teenagers. They started driving, then went off to college, and the opportunities for me to be anxious grew exponentially. In Philippians 4:6-7, Paul echoes Jesus' teaching from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:25-34), when Jesus instructs believers against being anxious about their lives, but instead to trust the Lord for daily provision of their needs. This still applies today. We are to trust God with our daily needs, and yes, even with the needs of our children.

My children are all grown and married now. They have loving, wonderful spouses and have given me four amazing grandchildren. I am so thankful for each of them and the lives they are building with their families. I wish I could say that everything is perfect and now that they are grown and independent, I have nothing to worry about, but of course, that would not be true. Life still happens and struggles are real, so opportunities for worry still exist. When anxiety creeps in, I return to this verse, then offer my requests to God and rest in the truth that He is going before them in whatever challenges they may be facing.

Over the years my prayers have taken on a variety of forms. When the boys started driving, I whispered a breath prayer when I knew they were on the road: "Lord, keep him safe." I still lift breath prayers often and have also in recent years turned to expressing my prayers through journaling. My journaling might look different each day; sometimes I like to write about a significant event. I often reflect on a passage of scripture or devotional I've read. I include

thanks and praise, as well as prayers for my children and grandchildren, other family members, friends, and people I may only know by name and their prayer requests. I may never go back and read some of the journal entries or know how a certain situation turned out, but I am confident that whether I know the outcome or not, my prayers have been heard by my loving and sovereign God. If I fully embrace this truth and leave my concerns in the care of a loving Savior, then there is no room for anxiety; only peace that surpasses all understanding.

- What concerns are you carrying that you can leave at the foot of the cross this Lenten season?
- What passage of scripture can you memorize and call upon in times of anxiety?
- Consider journaling or keeping a simple list of joys and concerns in a notebook.

Thursday, March 17

By Paris Ball

“There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. On the earth, there will be dismay among nations in their confusion over the roaring of the sea and surging waves. The planets and other heavenly bodies will be shaken, causing people to faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world. Then they will see the Human One coming on a cloud with power and great splendor. Now when these things begin to happen, stand up straight and raise your heads, because your redemption is near.” ~ Luke 21:25-28

This passage finds Jesus nearing the end of his earthly story, and his teachings and warnings are quickly ramping up. He responds to his disciples’ questions around the timing of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. Rather than answering the question posed, however, Jesus opts to describe what it might look and feel like to live through such an event.

His words sound pretty disturbing, and when he begins to talk about “signs in the sun, moon, and stars,” (v. 25) I wonder if his disciples wanted to shout, “No more! I’d rather not have the preview!” Yet, after Jesus gives these predictions about destruction to come, he doesn’t offer words of comfort. Rather, he tells his disciples to “stand up straight and raise [their] heads,” (v. 28) because those will be signs that their redemption is near.

Change is rarely easy – even when it is the change we desire. Yet, Jesus reminds us not to fear the change to come but rather to attend to that change with our whole selves.

- What areas of your life do you need Jesus to change?
- What areas in the world need changing and how can you, led by Jesus, be a part of the change?

Friday, March 18

By Caroline Korst – youth

“Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel: 'My way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God?' Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. There is no searching of His understanding. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall.” ~ Isaiah 40:27-30

Recently I've been having a hard time understanding why some things in my life are happening; I don't understand why things aren't going how I want them to. I'm a competitive swimmer, and outside of church and school, swimming is almost all I do. I have times that are fast enough to qualify me for the Speedo National Meet, but recently, at every meet, I haven't swum well at all. I get so frustrated with myself when I don't perform well, and I sometimes get angry and blame it on God. I'll ask Him why He didn't let me go faster, or why He made me go slow. Lately, I got so frustrated that I had to mention it to my friend, Anna. After I told her, she told me to look at Isaiah 40:27-30 (shown above), so I did. I realized that God has been there the whole time; He's got things under control. “He gives power to the weak.” I'm understanding more and more that God's power is not there for me to swim a faster time, but to have the assurance God is with me no matter how well I do or don't do at swimming. That's exactly the power I need. In fact, I think everybody needs that.

- Have you ever had a time when you felt weak?
- How can turning to God help you when you are feeling down or life is not going how you hoped?

Saturday, March 19

By Madea Neyor

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” ~ Matthew 11:28-30

Wow ~ that's a few powerful verses! Sometimes life gets complicated, and we become conformed to the world. There's only so much you can have on your plate, so when I feel overloaded, I go to this Scripture. It shows me that I can overcome the troubles and hardships of this world and that God will never give me anything that I can't handle.

God says that when you're feeling overwhelmed, you can go to Him. I take time to pray and be alone with God. It's “a must” for me to have that time with God away from the world. When you're in prayer, you experience peace and find a time to rest. You can also look deep down and find out who you are, what you want to be, and who you're becoming.

When I read this Scripture, I wonder, what is God's yoke? His yoke is his authority and His way of life. By accepting God's yoke (teachings and truth), we accept that whatever happens during our time on earth will be light as God is with us every step of the way.

- How are you relying on the teaching of Jesus to lighten life's load?
- What on your "plate" is not of God and not good for you? It's time to let it go and yoke yourself to God's truth.

Sunday, March 20

Spend today resting in God's presence and celebrating the grace Jesus' resurrection offers to you and all people.

Monday, March 21

By Samantha LeBlanc – child

"Because you have little faith," he said. "I assure you that if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Go from here to there,' and it will go. There will be nothing that you can't do." ~ Matthew 17:20

One of the times I remember hearing this particular verse was during a family Bible reading at home. I chose this verse because it is such a strong and powerful verse. Whenever I had something hard to do I would remember this verse and it gave me the motivation to keep trying. I would keep pushing until I was done because I knew from this verse that I would be able to do it.

The verse says you can do anything if you have even just a little bit of faith, as small as the mustard seed. Imagine what a community of people could accomplish if each member had the faith of a mustard seed!

- What are some things in your life that you would need a mustard seed faith to do?
- What is something that your community needs to have faith in?

Tuesday, March 22

By Milligan Burroughs

Certainly the body isn't one part but many. If the foot says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not a hand," does that mean it's not part of the body? If the ear says, "I'm not part of the body because I'm not an eye," does that mean it's not part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, what would happen to the hearing? And if the whole body were an ear, what would happen to the sense of smell? But as it is, God has placed each one of the parts in the body just

like he wanted. If all were one and the same body part, what would happen to the body? ~ 1 Corinthians 12:14-19

I love a good rhetorical question. What would happen to the body if all were the same body part? Paul really is making us think with that when he wrote 1 Corinthians. It is important that we each understand we are most capable when we work as a team. This also looks like not biting off more than we can chew, so to speak. This can mean allowing yourself time to rest. When we think we can or have to do it all by ourselves, we can get burnt out very quickly. We need each other to continue as a human body for Christ.

When defining what “church” means, I believe it is the body of people who come together to worship and serve the community to which they belong. How are you serving your community? How are you offering to help those around you who may need a little extra support? Or, how can you ask others to help you get through the next week a little easier? Christ calls us to lean into the community we have been given for a reason.

- How are your “leaning into” the community?

Wednesday, March 23

By Stephanie Vance

A legal expert stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to gain eternal life?” Jesus replied, “What is written in the Law? How do you interpret it?” He responded, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus said to him, “You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live.” But the legal expert wanted to prove that he was right, so he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ~ Luke 10:25-29

Do you have this same question? Who is my neighbor? The answer is simple. Every human being on this earth is your neighbor. That’s pretty cut and dried, right? Easy to do, surely... Sometimes, yes. Sometimes, no!

One of the hardest things to do is love folks as we love ourselves when they don’t do the same. If we love only those who are loveable, we’re missing out on a great way to share the love of Christ with the world. There are those who make it difficult to love them but they are also created by the same loving God that created you and me. Loving those who aren’t easy to love is a living sermon, a profession of your faith, and definitely good for everyone – including you.

- Who do you have a hard time showing Christ’s love to? Why?
- How would this relationship be different if you loved the other in the same way Jesus loves you?

Thursday, March 24

By Peggy Moore

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens a friend. ~ Proverbs 27:17

One of the most memorable and happy experiences of my life was the time I spent working as a secretary for the Division of Evangelism of the General Board of Discipleship (GBD) of The United Methodist Church in Nashville, Tennessee. In June, 1983, the Rev. Leontine Turpeau Current Kelly came to the Board as Assistant General Secretary of the Division of Evangelism. The former staff person, Dr. George Hunter, had joined the faculty of Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky.

Mrs. Kelly asked us to call her "Leontine," and she spent time right away going throughout the office to have a personal conversation with each staff member, 20 or 22 individuals! No new employee had ever done that! At the first meeting of the entire group, she went around the table and asked each person to share how they had come to Christ, a question most unexpected. It brought us all closer together not only then, and later, as we went about our daily tasks.

Later, we learned that Leontine's father had been a Methodist minister. Because he was black, and because our denomination had a different structure back then, she had grown up in various areas of the eastern United States. When she was a baby living in Washington, D.C., the family asked the presiding bishop, Bishop Matthew Wesley Clair, to come to their home and baptize baby Leontine. According to family narratives, Bishop Clair, after baptizing the baby, uttered the following words: "Oh how I wish you were a boy do that my mantle might fall upon you."

Before coming to the GBD in Nashville, Leontine had been serving with her husband, Rev. David Kelly, at Galilee United Methodist Church in Edwardsville, Virginia. After he passed away because of cancer, and because the church members wanted her to become their pastor, she began classes at Union Seminary in Richmond, VA. Her mother had come to live with her, she had a small child that she and David had adopted, and she still had a son in college. Regardless of these circumstances, Leontine graduated from Seminary, her son graduated from college, her mother chose another place to live, and her little daughter continued to live with her!

Leontine was serving this pastorate when she was called to the position in the GBD. Throughout her tenure in the GBD, working throughout the denomination and gaining popularity as a pastor in many areas of service, women pastors desired that Leontine serve as bishop in our denomination without delay! I do not know how it happened, but I believe that it was the women pastors in our denomination who made it possible for Leontine to be elected bishop at a meeting of the Western Jurisdiction in Boise, Idaho, on July 20, 1984. Leontine was elected the first black woman bishop in The United Methodist Church. She was appointed to serve in the California-Nevada Conference, Western Jurisdiction, in San Francisco, where she served until her retirement. It was a genuine pleasure to serve as her secretary the short time she was a member of the GBD. I spent many hours with her not only in an office, but assisting her in

many events, as a guest in my home, just talking about her life with her large family, and getting to meet some of them.

After retirement, Bishop Kelly continued to make her home in San Mateo, California, near her daughter Pamela Kelly, an attorney. Leontine, a fervent and genuine servant of the Lord, pastor who preached beautiful sermons, and passionate church worker who never tired of helping where help was needed, passed away on June 28, 2012, at a retirement home in San Mateo, California.

- Who in your life is helping you grow closer to Jesus?
- Who are you helping grow closer to Jesus?

Friday, March 25

By Wanda Kidd

A little later Jesus went to a city called Nain. His disciples and a great crowd traveled with him. As he approached the city gate, a dead man was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow. A large crowd from the city was with her. ~ Luke 7:11-12

I have a young friend whose dad died unexpectedly a few months ago. She is a bright, articulate, and compassionate young woman who offers care to so many around her. However, it was her dad who was the person who offered support and unconditional love to her. He showed up when she needed him and did so with love and quiet kindness. Her internal grief and pain is hard for most people to see, but it is a constant in her life. We have talked and sent emails regularly since his passing, but there are no magic words to say to someone in that kind of agony.

If there's one thing I've learned in life, it is that sometimes it's better to just sit with someone and say nothing, than to say something that isn't true and doesn't help. The ministry of just being there in the presence of great sadness is very hard when we want to fix something, but sometimes it is what is needed and how we are called to care.

- Who do you know that may need you to just be present with them?
- Call, text, email or visit them today!

Saturday, March 26

By Ruth Lee

So then, say this to my servant David: This is what the Lord of heavenly forces says: I took you from the pasture, from following the flock, to be leader over my people Israel. I've been with you wherever you've gone, and I've eliminated all your enemies before you. Now I will make your name great—like the name of the greatest people on earth. ~ 2 Samuel 7:8-9

I have a favorite blanket. It was knitted for me by a dear friend. It's not the right shape to cover up in, but it is the perfect shape to wrap around me and snuggle down in my favorite chair. My friend calls it a prayer shawl, but I call it a blanket because it's so long that it covers my toes. She prayed for me the whole time she was knitting it. When I wrap up in it, I know I am being held. I am reminded of all the prayers she and others prayed for me. Most importantly, I'm reminded of God's love and presence right there with me.

As with David, God's love is always with us. God's love stretches around us, wrapping us up like my favorite blanket. God's love covers us so completely, it is almost like a second skin. No matter what we do, we cannot lose it or get away from it. God shows love for us in God's constant presence. God is always with us.

- Where do you need Jesus to wrap you in love?

Sunday, March 27

Spend today resting in God's presence and celebrating the grace Jesus' resurrection offers to you and all people.

Monday, March 28

By Kinsley Duncan – youth

A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed. Proverbs 11:25

Living generously is beneficial for yourself as well as others. Acts of generosity do not have to be difficult or grand, it can be something simple and easy. For example, for my 11th birthday, instead of presents from my friends I asked them to bring supplies for a school supply drive for Caldwell Elementary. This was something so simple, yet so beneficial for many people. I felt so happy to be able to make others happy. This also spread awareness to my friends and their families about the needs of others.

Sometimes, it can be overwhelming, and you feel like you have to have money or be a fancy person to live generously. But, in reality all God asks us to do is to do simple acts of generosity in our everyday lives. By doing that, we are living out what Jesus has taught us to do, and we will prosper.

- What is something you can do today to be generous towards someone?
- When is a time you were generous towards a person in need?

Tuesday, March 29

By Mary Johnson

The Lord is righteous in all his ways, faithful in all his deeds. The Lord is close to everyone who calls out to him, to all who call out to him sincerely. Psalm 145:17-18

I don't think we can ever hear it enough: God is righteous and faithful. I'm grateful that God is righteous and faithful no matter how many times I get it wrong. We get to trust our loving God to bring about good in the world despite all the times we mess up. The Psalmist also reminds us that God is always near to us.

But it is not enough to sit back and wait for God to do the work and to bring about good in the world. I see this as an invitation to join hands and move forward in the direction of love. God invites us to embrace our neighbors – the ones we know and the ones we do not know. We're invited to be a part of God's life-giving work in the world.

- Will you accept the invitation to be a part of God's life-giving work...how specifically?

Wednesday, March 30

By Philip Duncan – youth

"Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you" ~ Deuteronomy 16:17

God wants us to give to other people the same way that we have been gifted throughout our life. This doesn't necessarily have to be a financial donation. You can also give with your time and ability. As a youth, I can use my physical ability to help deliver furniture with the BedStart program. The BedStart program provides low-income families in Collin County with furniture for their homes. I travel with a group of people from BedStart to a house to pick up the furniture, and then deliver it directly to the families who need it. After the furniture has been dropped off, we gather with the family and pray. In this case, I am using my physical gifts that God has blessed me with to provide for those in need.

- What is one way that God has blessed you?
- How can you bless other people?

Thursday, March 31

By Abram Bae

Then the Lord stretched out his hand, touched my mouth, and said to me, "I'm putting my words in your mouth. This very day I appoint you over nations and empires, to dig up and pull down, to destroy and demolish, to build and plant." Jeremiah 1:9-10

I don't know about you, but I don't like to be told what to do – even if I agree with what I'm being told. The right to freedom of choice is an inalienable right after all... right?

Today's passage adds a nuanced understanding to that freedom. When God touches Jeremiah's mouth to put words in them, God is not forcing Jeremiah to say this instead of that; rather, God is giving Jeremiah everything he needs to fulfill his life's purpose as a prophet. Jeremiah can't go it alone – it's a daunting task!

God knows that. And God provides exactly what Jeremiah needs so that he can be faithful to the call. This same God will provide us with what we need to be Christ-like in our attitudes and behaviors. May we choose to live with and for this faithful God.

- How has God equipped you?
- How are you living out your God-given purpose?

Friday, April 1

By Meredith Forssman

“Be careful that you don't practice your religion in front of people to draw their attention. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. “Whenever you give to the poor, don't blow your trumpet as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they may get praise from people. I assure you, that's the only reward they'll get. But when you give to the poor, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that you may give to the poor in secret. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you. ~ Matthew 6:1-4

Between cold rain and clouds, we've had strong winds, bringing fresh air, blue skies, and with it, the smell of Spring. There's something special about Spring this year! Our days have been marked by collective fear and frustration, loss and sorrow. My soul has grown callous to it all. But the new season invites me to wake up, to shake off the cobwebs, to reach outside of myself, to hope.

A new season in the Church year is also here...Lent. Lent is a time to seek simplicity, a season of turning toward God through spiritual practices, forty days for reflection and reconnection. Spring cleaning for the soul.

How has your “soul cleaning” been going? Has given up or taken on new things during Lent helped you draw closer to Jesus? Whatever has been your practice, it's between you and God. Jesus says, it isn't about drawing attention to yourself. Just show up, and be you.

- Are you being the best “you” – living into who God created you to be?
- In what ways is the Holy Spirit inviting you to help and serve others?

Saturday, April 2

By Hannah Moore – youth

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” ~ Matthew 6:19-21

For weeks, I helped my parents around the house, babysat, and did every chore I could think of so I would earn enough money to buy my “dream jeans.” The fact that I could spend my \$150 on something more significant didn’t matter since all my friends had a pair of these cool designer jeans. After about a month, I finally had the money and purchased the designer jeans all my friends had. I must admit, I looked pretty good in those jeans the first day. However, there was not much excitement after that. I would wear my jeans once every week for about six months, and then they collected dust in my closet for the rest of their time with me. If I left those \$150 jeans in my closet long enough, those moths Matthew talks about would surely have had a feast!

What if instead I had used that \$150 to buy youth mission shares or nets for Imagine No Malaria, or food for the local pantry. All the effort it took me to earn that money could have gone towards sharing with others. Because of where we live, we are constantly bombarded with the pressure of “keeping up with the Jones’s.” What no one ever asks is, are the Jones’s really that happy? How full is their bucket of riches in Heaven right now? Earthly possessions keep us unsatisfied and always wanting more. A relationship with God and working for His Kingdom, though, brings us peace and joy that only He can give.

The season of Lent is associated with the sacrifice of our favorite foods or activities. Is giving up these material things really such a sacrifice, though? In the midst of Lent, let us not concentrate on the difficulty of giving up an earthly desire, but instead rejoice that we never have to be without the greatest treasure of all: life everlasting and a relationship with our loving God.

- What earthly things do you tend to treasure?
- Are you “giving up” anything for Lent? If so, what is your reason behind that sacrifice?
- How can you rejoice in the relationship you have with God and give yourself to the work of God’s kingdom?

Sunday, April 3

Spend today resting in God’s presence and celebrating the grace Jesus’ resurrection offers to you and all people.

Monday, April 4

By Elizabeth Jacobs – youth

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

The past two years have been troubling, and in times of troubles we can often face severe anxiety about the future. During the pandemic I experienced a high amount of anxiety and on top of that, for a time, I did not know what my life was going to look like. As a senior in high school I was searching for a college that's right for me. I was so concerned about the future and thinking of the worst-case scenario that for a time, I wasn't able to enjoy the present. The amount of anxiety I was experiencing was affecting my everyday life and I knew something had to change.

I turned to my favorite bible verse, Jeremiah 29:11- “for I know I have plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” This bible verse hangs in my room on a sticky note to remind me that even though I may not know my future, God is in control and will lead me in the right direction. After months of anxiety and waiting, I got into my dream school, God knew what He was doing. Today I challenge you to get a piece of paper and answer this question, what are the things in your life that you are carrying that you cannot control? Now give those anxieties to God because they are not serving you. Finally, rip that paper up to remind you that you have the power to overcome these anxieties and give them to God, even if it seems impossible.

Tuesday, April 5

Byron Vance

You are my friends if you do what I command you. I don't call you servants any longer, because servants don't know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because everything I heard from my Father I have made known to you. ~ John 15:14-15

My wife's uncle worked at a pickle packing plant when he was a teenager. The word was that he never ate a pickle after that summer. This is what seeing behind the scenes does to many of us. The ways we romanticize filming a sitcom, planning a worship service, passing a piece of legislation, building a skyscraper, or even eating a pickle are challenged when we see all that happens behind the scenes.

Jesus did a cool and generous thing. He rolled back the curtain on what love looked like as it was being lived and then said, “Go, and do likewise.” And as messed up as the world was then and is now, and as messed up as people were then (and are now), Jesus' love has always pulled people in. It doesn't turn us away from wanting to live it.

How hard do you have to look to see what Jesus' love might look like in your daily living? Don't you want to live in it?

- Who do you know that needs to be welcomed back to church, to Jesus?

- How and when will you invite them?

Wednesday, April 6

By Jillian Miskel – child

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ~ Matthew 6:19-21

Once in 3rd grade I was playing a game with my friends Kailey and Willow. Kailey suggested me and Willow race on the playground. I lost and I was so mad. I decided to spend the rest of my recess doing repetition of the same race over and over again without Willow. I think I might’ve done 10 or so minutes before I felt like fainting. My friends had tried to get me to stop but I wouldn’t.

Then Molli, a girl in my class from last year walks up to me and mumbled “Jillian, why are you doing this? I want to play and you are just running around on the playground.” It was then I realized how absurd I was being. Why was I wasting time trying to win a game when I can hang out with people I love? I promised to never do something like that again.

- Has someone you know done something like that?
- Have you ever done something like that?

Thursday, April 7

By Amanda Kelly

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ~ Hebrews 11:1

I am a planner. Sometimes I find it difficult to let go of my expectations to be spontaneous. I think it can be difficult for people like me to embrace an “assurance about what we do not see” because the world doesn’t always live up to our expectations.

The world might let us down, but God never does! Hindsight allows us to see how He is working in those situations. While painful at the time, I can look back at many disappointments and see the foundation for God’s greater plan being laid. I recently saw the quote “sometimes God breaks your heart to save your soul.” Boy, that’s powerful stuff!

Jeremiah 29:11 says “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” If we have faith in God’s plan

and trust what we cannot see, God will bring us to a future where we are living out HIS intention rather than our own.

- Has God broken your heart to save your soul?
- Are you in that place now? How can you pull from your faith to trust in God's plan?
- How can you serve as a witness in faith to someone experiencing a setback?

Friday, April 8

By Shaun Capps

Sing praises to the Lord, who lives in Zion! Proclaim his mighty acts among all people! Because the one who avenges bloodshed remembers those who suffer; the Lord hasn't forgotten their cries for help. ~Psalm 9:11-12

How often do we take the time to praise God outside of church worship? Praise is expressing to God our appreciation for God's worth. It is like saying "thank you" for who God is. When there is gratitude in our hearts, we will naturally want to express it outwardly. What we may not think about is that when we praise God, we are actually witnessing! It's a way we can tell others the story of the "mighty acts" of God in our lives. What David is praising God for in this Psalm is the nature of God who never forgets God's people's cries for help.

What we notice in David's story is that praising God allows him to let others know of God's faithfulness, especially those who are suffering. How can we, in our daily lives, be more intentional about praising God?

- How might you offer God praise in the everyday things of life and become a witness to others of God's faithfulness?

Saturday, April 9

By Kamal Hassan

Those whose way is blameless—who walk in the Lord's Instruction—are truly happy! Those who guard God's laws are truly happy! They seek God with all their hearts. They don't even do anything wrong! They walk in God's ways. ~ Psalm 119:1-3

It is hard to imagine anyone could live without doing anything wrong. Those who set this as a goal must live lives of constant frustration. Jesus was the only one who pulled this off, and he was both human and God. Living a blameless life is unattainable, but we should still aspire to do what is even beyond our reach, because each time we try we can move on up a little higher.

There is a verb used here that shows us the way – walk, walk in God's ways. Following God is a blessed journey because God's ways lift up the lowly and welcome the stranger. God's ways

bring good news to the poor and pardon the prisoners. When we walk this way as followers of Jesus, who went out ahead of us, we will find true happiness through solidarity with those who suffer.

- How has your walk with Jesus changed and shaped your life?
- Who can you walk alongside to show and share the love of Jesus with?

Sunday, April 10 (Palm Sunday)

Spend today resting in God's presence and celebrating the grace Jesus' resurrection offers to you and all people.

Monday, April 11

By Annalise & Abigail Pereira – children

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do what is right, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? ~ Micah 6:8

We chose this verse because we say it every day before we leave the car to go to school. It reminds us to be kind to people and to care for others. This is our goal for each and every day. This verse has lots of action words. These are words that remind us what we can do to show God's love to others.

To us, "do what is right" means that we stand up for others and make good decisions even when it's hard. When someone gives you an option of what to do, you should pick the one that shows love and kindness.

"Love mercy" means being kind and helpful to everyone. It means to forgive people even if it's a hard thing to do. It means loving your neighbor no matter what.

"To walk humbly" means to remember God in what you do and to rely on Him a lot. Sometimes it might seem like He doesn't, but God has a plan ahead for us. We can trust Him.

- What are some ways this verse can help your day?
- How can this verse help us show other people God's love?

Tuesday, April 12

By Chris Robertson

After these events, the Lord's word came to Abram in a vision, "Don't be afraid, Abram. I am your protector. Your reward will be very great." ~ Genesis 15:1

Over and over again, all throughout the Bible, we find this phrase, “Do not be afraid.” In today’s text, it’s Abram who is afraid. But it could have just as easily been someone else, because fear is a universal experience. We all know what it is like to be scared. But God doesn’t want us to live in fear.

For this reason we must trust that God will keep God’s promise, and that God will be our shield, just as God was a shield for Abram. In the midst of a fight, one’s shield offers protection; it provides one with a sense of security, and as a result, inspires courage. God wants to do those things for us as well. When we know God is our protector, ever with us, shielding us, we are less likely to give into fear. Instead, we are freed to live and love fully. Living this way, without fear, is in and of itself a priceless reward. So like Abram, shield yourself with God, and fear no more.

- Where has fear caused you to not experience the fullness of life God’s love offers?
- Where do you need to ask Jesus for more courage to love those who are hard to love?

Wednesday, April 13

By Gina Buckley

When they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus gave two disciples a task. He said to them, “Go into the village over there. As soon as you enter, you will find a donkey tied up and a colt with it. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that their master needs them.” He sent them off right away. Now this happened to fulfill what the prophet said, Say to Daughter Zion, “Look, your king is coming to you, humble and riding on a donkey, and on a colt the donkey’s offspring.” ~Matthew 21:1-5

“He is humble and rides on a donkey.” Not a G-wagon or scooter or SUV. What would a “donkey” be in 2020? Maybe the 15-year-old “safe family car” of your parents’ choice when you were born? Or maybe the “donkey” is the old mini-van of your pre-school days.

Jesus felt that a humble entrance was important as he neared what was to be his final week of life. We imagine that Jesus was teaching a lesson in this choice: that to be a person of God, one does not need flash.

We’d expect a popular speaker/teacher/rabbi to come in a fancier manner – maybe with servants and instruments leading the entrance. But Jesus chose basic. There is a lot of talk about being “basic.” Isn’t it weird how a simple word becomes a cultural description? But “basic” whispers something to us. It nudges us to let go of impressing others and to be ourselves.

Perhaps Jesus wanted to be seen as a human being, NOT a celebrity; as a man, NOT a superman. Perhaps Jesus wanted to be seen – just as he was. Just as you are and long to be seen as well.

- How do you view Jesus?
- How do people see Jesus in you?

Thursday, April 14

By George Yeager

Now a large crowd spread their clothes on the road. Others cut palm branches off the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds in front of him and behind him shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" And when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up. "Who is this?" they asked. The crowds answered, "It's the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee." ~Matthew 21:8-11

Why do people celebrate another person's arrival into the community, into their lives? For lots of reasons... Because they feel inspired by this person and wish to have more inspiration. Because they are curious and have questions and want to see for themselves the person they've heard so much about. Because they need relief from a problem and believe that this person can bring the relief. All of these reasons and more are likely behind the branches being waved and laid down for the passing of this person – of Jesus.

The question for you is: why do you celebrate Jesus' arrival into your day, into your life today and tomorrow and every day? Are you curious? Inspired? In need of healing and comforting? Skeptical? (Because surely the doubters were also by the side of the road and watching.)

Lay your reasons for seeking to see Jesus "on the road." Place your questions into Jesus' path. Let your reasons for needing Jesus be seen. Be approached by Jesus. Be a part of the story.

- Why do you celebrate Jesus' arrival into your life?
- How has Jesus' arrival into your life changed your life?