

# THE WAY

Daily Devotions  
for the 2026 Lenten Season



Written by members of  
Grace United Methodist Church

## **Lent 2026**

Please join us in these opportunities for worship, prayer, study and reflection at Grace during the 2026 season of Lent. Visit [peopleofgrace.org/lent](http://peopleofgrace.org/lent) for additional information.

### **Ash Wednesday – February 18**

Imposition of Ashes (Sanctuary): 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Intergenerational Worship: 5 p.m. (Sanctuary)

- With Children's Music Ministry & imposition of ashes

Traditional Service: 7 p.m. (Sanctuary)

- With Chancel Ensemble & imposition of ashes

### **(Early) Holy Week Experience - Wed, March 25, 5 p.m.**

- Family Worship journey in the sanctuary, from Palm Sunday to the Cross, Children's music ministry
- early due to Spring Break

### **Palm Sunday, March 29**

8 a.m. Traditional Worship in the Sanctuary

9 a.m. Contemporary Worship in the Activity Center

10:30 a.m. Traditional Worship in the Sanctuary

### **Maundy Thursday - April 2 at 7 p.m.**

- Traditional service in the sanctuary, with hand-washing and communion

### **Good Friday - April 3 at 7 p.m.**

- The Seven Last Words of Christ by T. DuBois presented by the Chancel Choir, in the sanctuary

### **Easter Sunday - Sunday, April 5 (sanctuary)**

**7:30 a.m.\*** - Communion, Genuine Brass and Grace Bell Ensemble

**9:30 a.m.\*** - Communion, Genuine Brass, Chancel Choir and Grace Praise Team

**11 a.m.\*** - Communion, Genuine Brass, Chancel Choir and Grace Praise Team

**\*These times are different from our usual worship schedule.**

## Ash Wednesday, February 18

### Pastor Cindy Marino

**Joel 2:12-13 Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing**

So right now, even though we just want answers, God is asking us to sit in the ashes of our questions and doubts.

Ash Wednesday asks that of us. We need to feel the weight of uncertainty and sit with the pain of not being able to go forward or backward.

We may feel a bit like Ross, Chandler, and Rachel in a scene from the show “Friends.” Ross purchased his dream sofa, but he needed help from his friends to maneuver it up the narrow, U-shaped stairway to his apartment.

The three friends muscled it up the first half-flight and began the second turn, with Ross at the top and Rachel and Chandler holding the weight at the bottom. You can imagine the scene. Ross is completely invested in getting this mammoth thing to his apartment. Rachel and Chandler are willing to help, but they need to get the angle right, or it’s not going anywhere.

Ross starts giving directives ... “Pivot.” Rachel and Chandler wrestle the sofa a few more inches, and then Ross yells again, “Pivot.” And then he yells again, “Pivot, Piiiiivvvoooooot!!!!” as if by saying it louder and exaggerating the word, those at the other end will be able to make it happen.

But the sofa is too big and simply stuck. Chandler, at the lower end holding most of the weight, finally loses it and starts yelling ... “Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!” (sorry, I know that’s not appropriate language ... just quoting here). They all stop. Rachel and Chandler are sweating and glaring at Ross, who finally speaks, “I guess there’s no more pivot.”

Sometimes that’s how it feels. You run out of options. You’re stuck. We can’t fix whatever is stuck on our own. We can attempt to muscle that sofa up the stairs, but if it doesn’t fit, it doesn’t fit. This Ash Wednesday, God is asking us to come to Jesus with our stuckness and begin a journey with Him toward the cross. More than pivot, we are called to repent.

**Thursday, February 19**

**A Daily Way to Pray**

**Bob Tschirhart**

The “Bible in a year challenge” that pastor Eric led on each calendar day of 2024 was a remarkable blessing for my wife Jaci and me. We learned a lot, and some of it was tough sledding for me.... Book of Numbers, etc., but we got through it with joyful hearts at the end.

The greatest blessing of the challenge for me was establishing a daily cadence of scripture reading first thing in the morning. With a new year dawning in 2025, Jaci and I were a bit adrift on regular scripture meditation and longed for the cadence of the Bible in a year. Many people in Grace have daily devotional apps; friends and pastors recommended we explore “Lectio 365” which is a free daily prayer app. “Lectio” is Latin for “Reading”. Lectio 365 is a daily scripture reading with morning, midday and night devotionals. These devotionals are written and hosted by leaders and friends of the 24-7 Prayer movement from around the world.

Our daily cadence now is to start each day with a prayerful heart before exposure to the noise of our modern era. We are, however, thankful that the modern era enables access to daily devotional apps that so many in Grace benefit from. Lectio 365 is one of those apps and we are grateful for that centering. Each Lectio 365 devotional starts with a prayer to pause:

***“As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly, to re-center my scattered senses upon the presence of God.”***

Scripture is then read, often in repetition with different voices followed by thoughtful reflection that connects to our modern life. Each morning devotional then completes with a prayer that very much helps us throughout the day:

***“Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to you, in every way. Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet. Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say. Amen.”***

**Friday February 20**

**A Lenten Resolution**

**A Christian Pilgrim**

Well,... it's that time of year again, Lent. The time when we give up something to show our 'resolve.' Usually this goes one of two ways; either we give up something we'll never miss (for me, Brussel sprouts) or if we're more sincere, something we'd actually miss. Either way, it's usually something arbitrary and doesn't relate to spirituality. It has recently come to my attention that what I should be doing is something which will bring me closer to God. Ideally, all of you have already come to this conclusion and I'm the only one who needs to reset my goals, but I think not. So, what should we be doing?

We at Grace UMC are blessed in that we've already been given a blueprint for ways to be closer to God. Recently, as a Church, we studied 'Practicing The Way' through both sermon messages and small group discussion. Subsequently, we have also studied ways of 'Keeping the Sabbath' and 'Prayer.' Now, perhaps I'm the only one who hasn't been keeping the Sabbath faithfully or whose prayer leaves much to be desired but again, I think not. If so, have I got a radical idea for you! How 'bout if you set aside 'x' number of minutes per day solely for prayer/scripture reading/Bible study or just plain silent contemplation? We've already been given a possible scenario to follow: same time of day, same comfy spot, eliminate distractions, light a candle, take a few deep breaths and dive right in. For me, coffee is essential. It's easier than giving up desserts and the rewards are Heavenly. Besides, it will give you something to talk about on Sunday morning or in small group.

And who knows, perhaps this could grow into a year-round thing for you? Lenten Devotions have been known to be the gateway activity for other practices; ushering/liturgist/teaching/joining a small group or, dare I even say it,... a committee. The hardest part is taking that first step for the first time. (Actually, for me it was finding where we keep our candles but I digress.) You'll wonder why you didn't start this sooner. I know I did. As time went on, I've dedicated more and more time, joined some small groups and am looking for even more ways to improve my walk with Christ. Come, join me.

As Paul said in his letter to the people of Rome, 12:1-2, 'I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.'

**Saturday, February 21**  
**Finding My Way as a Teen**  
**John Bodine**

A great learning for me in my teens was to always expect the best of other people. So often we project our own uncertainties and fears onto others that then shape and configure following interactions and relationships. First impressions can be distorted by negative expectations.

I'm reminded of a kid I was friends with in Grade School, Greg, who ran into some trouble in his early teen years and spent some time in reform school. When he reappeared in Junior High, he had matured into a muscle-bound, swaggering personality that stalked the hallways between classes with a crew of tag-alongs. He strolled down the middle of the hallway, requiring other kids trying to get to class to get out of the way. Most everyone was intimidated, and the few who weren't were confronted in various ways.

I knew who Greg was from the past, but not who he had become. I was a bit nervous about running across him and his crowd. I managed to avoid crossing his path in the same hallway until one day there was no other choice. I walked on with some trepidation, wondering if he would recognize me from the past and whether there would be any trouble. We met up and looked at each other and stopped. He got a big smile on his face and said, "Hey, John!". For both of us it was trip back in time to the days we played together in Grade School.

The "swagger" melted away at the recognition of an old playmate, and we stood in the hallway talking until the bell rang. The Greg I knew was still there, though masked by his "tough guy" persona. I realized that his uncertainty about himself, and being a new kid in school with a troubled past was affecting how he was acting and presenting himself. I also realized, by the way he reacted when he saw me, that I could help him feel comfortable in the school by being a friend and finding ways to let his talents and capabilities shine. For me, Following the Way is to have a Christ-like positive mindset toward how we live in the world.

***Father, thank You for making us in Your image and in Your likeness. Since we all are reflections of You, we owe each other love and respect. Amen.***

**Sunday, February 22**  
**Lessons from Susanna Wesley**  
**Kristin Hartman**

As someone born into a Methodist family, I'm rather ashamed to admit that I only recently learned about the extraordinary Susanna Wesley, known as the "Mother of Methodism." Born in 1669, Susanna was a devout Christian and mother to 19 children—including John and Charles Wesley who would go on to establish the Methodist movement. Despite the difficulty and chaos of raising 19 children, Susanna still devoted time to each child, leading prayer groups (unusual for a woman at the time), and supporting the parish of her husband, Pastor Samuel Wesley.

I first encountered Susanna's story through the Lectio 365 app. The Lectio 365 team hosted a special tribute to her on July 23, the anniversary of her death in 1742. From this tribute I learned that even amidst the cramped conditions of their home, Susanna found a way to converse with God by draping her apron over her head. Her children knew that in this unusual posture, she was not to be disturbed.

Susanna's convictions of constant and sincere communication with God along with her belief in freedom of conscience, and the role of women in ministry no doubt laid the foundation for Methodism that was carried forward by her children. Nearly 284 years later, we still have much to learn from her.

***Help me, Lord, to remember that religion is not confined to the church, or the closet, nor exercised only in prayer and medication, but that everywhere I am in your presence. So may my every word and action have a moral content. May all the happenings of my life prove useful and beneficial to me. May all things instruct me and afford me the opportunity of exercising some virtue and daily learning and growing towards your likeness. Amen.***

***Prayer by Suanna Wesley (Shared in Lectio 365 on July 23, 2025)***

**Monday, February 23**

**God's Perfect Grace**

**Louise Barnard**

**2 Corinthians 12:9** But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

**Isaiah 41:10** So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

My sister Joan, two years older than me, was my absolute model. I followed her every footstep. She was bright, beautiful, talented, loving and a leader. She seemed to me to be perfect. At age 8 she became ill from pneumonia, at a time before antibiotics. Because our older sister Marian died of pneumonia at age 8, my parents and all the tiny community were in shock. Joan recovered finally and our country doctor decided to make sure those germs were all gone from her body by giving her radiation. She kept secret that sometime earlier, when we still lived on our farm, she was assaulted by our babysitter, my father's trusted farm manager. Later, as a result of the radiation, Joan was diagnosed with late-stage breast cancer. She battled through MD Anderson for many years, but lost her life at age 50. The poem below by Anne Johnson Flint provided my sister great comfort and strength through her trials on earth.

He giveth more grace when the burden grows greater,  
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase.  
To added affliction, he addeth his mercy.  
To multiplied trials, he multiplied peace.  
When we have exhausted our store of endurance,  
When faith seems to fail, ere the day is half done,  
When we come to the end of our hoarded resources,  
Our Father's full giving is only begun.  
His love has no limit, his grace has no measure,  
His power has no boundary known unto men.  
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus  
He given, and giveth, and giveth again.

***Heavenly Father, I am grateful for your boundless mercy and strength. Please walk with me all the days of my life. Amen.***



**Tuesday, February 24**

**Practicing Stillness**

**By Linda Prozialeck**

**Psalm 46:10. Be still and know that I am God.**

Most mornings, I wake before the sun. After attending to my fur-babies (two dogs, one cat), I enjoy the quiet house while I sip my first cup of coffee. But my mind is always restless—lists to finish, emails to read or delete, problems to solve, family worries...feeling guilty I have not made devotion and prayer a larger commitment in my daily life.

As I read the scripture above, the words: “Be still” stand out. Not “try harder.” Not “fix it.” Not “worry more.” Just be still.

Lent isn’t about proving my devotion through busyness or self-denial alone—it’s about making space for God in our daily lives. Lent is a wonderful time to intentionally work towards finding more time in your life for prayer.

Moving forward, I will work towards intentionally practicing stillness —not as an escape from life, but as an act of faith and recommit to finding time for devotion and prayer.

***Dear Lord, teach me to rest in You. Quiet my anxious thoughts and help me to find moments during an ordinary day to be still in your presence. Amen.***

**Wednesday, February 25**  
**Making Our Paths Straight**  
**Pastor Mark Himel**

**Proverbs 3:1-6** My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Why should I believe? The reason for believing in and following the teachings of God is focused on the real need for stability in an increasingly divided and complex world. Besides theological reasons, studies demonstrate increased mental, physical, and social benefits of a faith-based life. One who practices faith approaches life with a solid foundation of beliefs that guides them in both good and challenging times. Wisdom bestows well-being. Moreover, actively practicing one's faith actually increases one's life expectancy compared to those who rely on their own self-centered wisdoms. Believing in God and actively practicing your faith are proven to help minimize depression, anxiety, and stress. Prayer can lower blood pressure and reduce feelings of fear.

The Word of God provides holy standards that serve us far better than our own subjective ethics. We are also given clear direction as to right and wrong; this provides a strong foundation to approach the many challenges we must all navigate in this life. This whole purposeful process of shifting from a self-directed life to a life of trying to be more like Jesus will change one's mindset from a materialistic viewpoint to a mindset of thinking of others first. Thus, one will become a person who volunteers and gives generously to the church and missions that helps those in need.

***Heavenly Father, please help me to pray more, to read the bible, and to understand it better. Guide me and my family to attend services weekly and become more involved in church. I am grateful for the presence of the Holy Spirit in my life and want to be more like Jesus. Amen.***

**Thursday February 26**  
**“Discerning” My Faith Journey**  
**Larry Hartman**

**Jeremiah 29:13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.**

One Sunday in January, Pastor Cindy invited each of us to take a slip of paper with a single word printed on it as we left worship. The word I received was DISCERN. I later looked it up and found this definition: “to recognize, perceive, or understand something, especially when it is difficult or unclear.” It was a timely word for me.

I had been trying to make sense of a life-threatening medical emergency I experienced in late November. What began with symptoms that felt like a kidney stone—something I had endured before—quickly became much worse. I waited a couple of hours, hoping the pain would pass. Instead, the abdominal pain and nausea intensified dramatically. Barbara drove me to the Edward Hospital emergency room while I grimaced at every bump in the road.

Two doses of morphine finally eased the pain as I was evaluated in the ER. I was grateful when the physician ordered a CT scan, which revealed a congenital condition requiring immediate abdominal surgery. I was diagnosed with a rare condition called cecal volvulus—a five-in-a-million occurrence. The first part of my large intestine had twisted on itself, cutting off its blood supply. Without surgery, I could have died. Thanks to the skill of the on-call surgical team, my intestines were successfully repaired, though I was left with a long scar. After several weeks of recovery, I am now nearly normal.

So, when I received the word DISCERN, it brought me back to my ongoing effort to understand the meaning of that frightening experience. Why did I survive? Was it luck? What if we had been far from a hospital? What am I meant to do with my life now? What is God’s will for me?

I cannot say that I have received any dramatic revelation. Yet one passage from Thessalonians has spoken deeply to me: *“Rejoice always... give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”* (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18).

And so, I rejoice—and I give thanks to God.

**Friday, February 27**  
**The Gift of Connection**  
**Stefanie Abderhalden**

**Psalm 127:3. Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him.**

For the past few years, the Mom's Faith Formation group has met on Tuesday nights at Grace. It's an amazing group of smart, insightful women who want to do their best as moms and women of faith. I encourage any mom who may be interested to come join us!

This winter we've been studying the parenting book "Good Inside" written by clinical psychologist and mom, Dr. Becky Kennedy. In her book, Dr. Kennedy discusses the idea of "connection capital." This is the idea of spending daily time building a reserve of connection with your children so when times get tough, we can pull from those positive experiences to get through it as a team.

Building connection capital could look like putting your phone down and sitting down with your 4-year-old to paint for 15 minutes. Or this could be taking a walk with a child or spending a few minutes learning how to play a teen's favorite video game. We must do these things regularly to build a reserve of connection capital with our children. I find when I make a regular effort to do this with my daughters, my youngest is more likely to work with me when we have to get her shoes on and my oldest is more open to talking to me about problems or stressors at school. Connection capital works!

It's made me think a lot about how people of faith build connection capital with God. As one spends more daily time with God, whether through prayer, reading the Bible, or serving others, our connection capital with Him will build. Then when times get tough in our lives the reserve of connection we've built up will sustain us and show us the path to take. Our routine practices will be there to bring us closer. Instead of turning away from God we will rely on Him, understanding He is there with us through the struggle. As the ultimate parent, God yearns to build connection capital with us. This Lenten season is the perfect opportunity to continue to find ways to build it with Him.

***Heavenly father, thank you for the gift of our children. Help us to build a solid connection with them and also with You. Amen.***

**Saturday, February 28**

## **My Spiritual Journey**

**By Bill Fronk**

My spiritual journey, like most people's, has not been a straight forward trajectory. Fortunately, forward progress has become more consistent in recent years, thanks in large part to our "Hearts On Fire" Sunday School class, the "Read the Bible in a Year" experience, Grace Community Builders, and our "all church" "Practicing the Way" study. These important parts of my journey pointed out how central love is in our lives. In Matthew 22:37, "Jesus replied, 'love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment, and the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments'." This clearly points out to me how important relationships are in our lives. Without positive relationships there cannot be true love. This applies to marriage, family, friends and neighbors. Christ's unconditional love for us is my guide to how I need to approach my Spiritual Journey.

Another thing that has helped me is gratefulness and thanksgiving. I have come to realize that to be grateful, I first have to understand that I am truly blessed. Thinking about all of my blessings, writing them down, and identifying the amazing things that have happened in my life helps me to recognize that God is ever present. The blessings he has bestowed upon me pervade my whole life. These blessings don't come because of me, but they come upon me from God because of His everlasting love. Psalm 75 verse one sums it up beautifully. "We give thanks to you, O God, we give thanks for your Name is near."

Once I recognized how blessed I have been, I felt compelled to be a blessing to others. I felt the need to pray and to be aware of those nudges from God directing me to be helpful to other people. I felt the need to look for ways that I can serve Grace UMC, my family and my community. In Galatians 5 verse 13 Paul says: "You my brothers were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather, serve one another in love." Job 19 verse 25 states, "I know that my Redeemer lives." During this Lenten Season, may we fully appreciate the birth, death and resurrection of our LORD Jesus Christ.

**Palm Sunday, March 1**  
**A Long Walk to the Sabbath**  
**Bob Tschirhart**

As a kid I was one of six who worked the family business on Sundays. After our Catholic service in the morning, we then changed into work clothes and headed out. For my part, that was repairing washers and dryers and cleaning our two 24-7 laundromats in the Detroit suburbs. At the time I was aware of the Sabbath directive but didn't understand it, we had to do what we had to do. My parents knew the scripture directive, "Remember the Sabbath day, by keeping it holy (Exodus, 20:8)" and aimed to keep the day holy within the demands of keeping a family of eight afloat. For us that meant Dad making a big breakfast before church to give Mom a break, and after our Sunday workday we all chilled out as a family watching Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom and Wonderful World of Disney.

As my life progressed, Sundays were jammed with studying, partying, courting, parenting with the love of my life, and eventually church again, but in general stuffed with being a weekend warrior.

In early 2022 my then 92-year-old Dad broke his hip while still living in the Michigan family homestead. The clear path for our family was for Dad to come live near us in Naperville in an assisting living community. We established a pattern of Sunday afternoons and dinners with Dad, my brother Mark and Jaci's Mom Blaire while they were with us. Mark and Blaire continue in our hearts Sunday afternoons and dinner. These Sundays were and are a blessing, but there was a little selfish voice yapping in my head - didn't I have other weekend-warrior "important" stuff I could jam in?

After completing John Mark Comer's book "Practicing the Way: Be with Jesus. Become like him. Do as he did," Jaci and I took the class led by Pastor Eric focused on the Sabbath and what it means. The class was an eye opener for both Jaci and me on what Sabbath really means, about holding busyness at bay and the internal yappy voices that "Edge God Out (EGO)" – a phrase gifted to us from my dear late cohort brother Al Williams.

Thank-you God for the gift of having my Dad with us today, and the continuing opportunity he provides towards keeping the Sabbath holy as he strived when I was a kid.

**Monday, March 2**

**Forgiveness**

**Richard Newell**

**Colossians 3:13** Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

**Ephesians 4:31-32** Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Forgiveness loosens the chains that bind us and prevent us from being the people God intended us to be. It is safe to say that there is someone reading this today that is needing to forgive someone or will need to forgive someone or needing forgiveness from someone else. In your life there may be people who are unkind, impolite, and just plain rude. Or perhaps you may have been mistreated at work, or in your personal life by someone. Some things in your life should not have been said or happen to you, but they were said did occur. Without the power of forgiveness, your life could be governed by the endless cycle of bitterness, resentment and perhaps even retaliation. For personal growth and to live the life God intended us to live we need to learn to forgive.

In the scriptures above God tells us we need to let go of our resentments, anger, and grievances towards one another. The word "forgive" means to let go of, release or let loose of. Both scriptures remind us of God's forgiveness of our transgressions. Ephesians implores us to let go of bitterness, anger, any ill will towards others and replace it with being "tenderhearted kindness".

Forgiveness is not a denial of the hurt we feel, or lessening of the wrong committed against us. Nor is forgiveness ignoring the wrong or forgetting about the transgression committed. Forgiveness does not mean you are reconciled or should even try to in some instances. Forgiveness is not always something that can be done in an instant; it may be a process to forgive, but scripture makes clear that forgiveness is something we need to work towards.

***Heavenly Father, in these days of Lent and beyond, please help me to forgive others, as Jesus on the cross forgave us. Amen.***

**Tuesday, March 3**

## **Living “The Way:” Trusting God’s Gifts and God’s Timing**

**Kathryn Hoffman**

Early Christians were not known as “Christians,” but as followers of “The Way.” It was a way of living—walking daily in trust, obedience, humility, and surrender to God’s will. That calling feels especially relevant during the Lenten season, when we are invited to slow down, reflect, repent, and realign our hearts with God’s purposes.

A devotional from Our Daily Bread dated January 11, 2026, struck me deeply. A grandfather carefully selected what he believed was the perfect gift for his beloved granddaughter. Yet when the gift was opened, the child loudly expressed her disappointment. The joy he anticipated was replaced with hurt and sadness. The devotional gently turned the mirror toward us: how often do we respond to God’s gifts in the same way? How often are we disappointed—not quietly, but openly—when what God gives us, or when his timing does not match our expectations?

I have a vivid memory when my son was about four. My in-laws sent Christmas gifts to us each year and we videotaped the opening of the gifts to share with family later. David opened a Spirograph from his aunt and uncle. With the brutal honesty of a preschooler, he announced “Just what I DON’T want.” Oh my. Cringe. Some editing of those tapes was going to be necessary! As I reflected, I recognized myself. How often do I receive God’s blessings—carefully chosen, perfectly timed—and think, “This is not what I wanted” or “This is not enough?”

Yet, God has given us the ultimate gift: His Son, Jesus Christ. Even so, we are often dissatisfied; we fail to see the love behind the gift. Living “The Way” means trusting not only in God’s goodness, but in His wisdom. It means believing that His choices are better than our own. It means gratitude, not grumbling. Surrender, not striving.

This Lent, I am reminded that God’s timing is perfect, His gifts are purposeful, and His grace is sufficient. I may not always recognize it, but I want to live as one who follows “The Way,” with humility and trust.

***Dear Lord, in this holy season, help me to receive Your gifts with gratitude, Your timing with trust, and Your will with obedience. Forgive me for the times I have complained instead of praised. May I always be thankful for Your ultimate gift to us—Your Son, Jesus Christ—and may my life reflect a faithful walk in The Way. Amen.***



**Wednesday, March 4**

## **Welcoming the Stranger**

**Chamus Burnside-Savazzini**

**Hebrews 13:2 Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.**

One of the best journeys I have taken was to Singapore in January of 2025 with my high school best friend from Nassau, Bahamas. We had been planning this trip for over a year to celebrate my sorority sister's 60th birthday celebration and begin our "Road to 50." Prior to leaving, we received a well-thought-out itinerary advising us of what to expect, including a welcome dinner and karaoke, safari tour, high-rise brunch, silent party, official birthday party, sunrise yoga and a good-bye brunch.

After traveling 21 hours across the globe to Southeast Asia, we were ready to explore. I never thought I would see that part of the world but there we were! In between the official birthday events we learned about the culture. We took a boat excursion to see all of the historical landmarks. We learned more about Singapore from our many "Grab" drivers. Every driver was knowledgeable and ready to share about the history of Singapore. Hearing about how these three cultures came together and now live amicably was fascinating! Chinese, Malaysian and Indian natives all live together in peace, celebrating each other's cultural traditions. We visited the Singapore National Museum, which confirmed the information from the drivers.

But the experience I enjoyed most was attending service at Wesley Methodist Church, home to over 7,000 members. We were welcomed with a tea and pastry snack when we shared that we were visitors. We were given a tour after the service and even though we told them we were flying back that day, they received us warmly and sent us off with warm prayers for safety. Sometimes the journey is not about getting from one place to another, it's about welcoming strangers while they are on their journey. I will never forget how they welcomed us and made us feel like we were home across the globe.

***Lord, you have taught us to welcome the stranger, because we do not know who we are entertaining. It could be You. Amen.***

**Thursday, March 5**

## **Understanding Our Worldly Neighbors**

**Linda Bodine**

**Philippians 2:4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others.**

**Romans 13:9-10...Love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to its neighbor...**

Just recently I was watching a travel show suggesting ideas of places to travel, best seasons to travel and whether it's safe for Americans to travel abroad right now. The concern is that Europe and Scandinavia have been quite unsettled with America's political actions. The narrator said. "Yes, it's safe because the Europeans are good at separating the person from the politics but they may still have questions and be curious about your position." This led to a discussion about other cultures and how we are being coached in the United States to be fearful of anyone who looks or acts different from us, such as those coming from another country, or a different religion, or with different beliefs. This is happening in Europe also. The narrator went on to say many of the problems we are seeing today are because we are building walls to keep people out, and ourselves in, with only people who are just like us. When we wall people off, we become more afraid of them.

How much better it would be to build bridges which connect us and allow people to come together and learn from each other! When we make those connections, we discover we are more alike than we are different. Travel is one way that can be that bridge. It allows us to connect with people who may look different, have different customs, different foods, and different ideas. We don't even need to leave our country or our neighborhoods to find those who are different from us. How much more interesting is it when we can celebrate, rather than fear, our diversity!

***Lord, help me to begin tearing down the walls and building bridges with others that allow us to communicate and celebrate our differences. Amen.***

**Friday, March 6**

**Our Jesus Kitty**

**Jacalyn Green Tschirhart**

**Luke 12:25 "And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life's span?"**

**Pastor Bill Bryan "why worry when you can pray?"**

Losing a beloved pet is always difficult; this past year we lost our "Squeak. In December of 2021 our daughter found him in a road near her Texas home. He was dirty and bloodied. She took him in. Nine months pregnant, the following week she went to the hospital and I flew down. The cat was small, only 4 pounds, yet the vet identified him as 11 months old by his teeth. Whatever his age, he was trusting and loving. I flew him back to IL and he joined our home. When we left the house, Squeak was always at the door waiting. He leaped into friends' laps for pets. He let our toddler granddaughter touch him. Squeak liked nothing more than being with us, snuggling or sleeping. He did like to chase toy mice and quickly learned that if he returned them to a person, he could get them thrown again. In Spring of 2024 we left the cats for a little over a week with a caregiver. Upon our return he was thin and drooling. Our vet dispatched us to the animal hospital. Squeak was found to have progressive liver disease which could not be cured but could be managed with diet and medication, three times a day. The prognosis was poor and the timeline unknown.

We set about striving to make Squeak's time with us the best ever. We tried not to worry, but pray instead. Retired, we spent a lot of time with him. Squeak finally succumbed in Aug 2025; during his illness he always maintained his loving, friendly demeanor (and he never had an accident). While we have had multiple cats pass away, they were always at least 17 years old. Squeak was only 4 years old, and we loved him for a little over 3 years. We call him our Jesus kitty, because he loved everyone, was very forgiving (of the vet and of grasping toddlers), and we only had him with us for three years. We are grateful for his time in our lives.

***Gracious and loving God, thank you for our four-legged companions who share life's journey with us. They teach us many lessons and enrich our lives. Amen.***

## **Saturday, March 7**

### **The Micah Challenge**

**Phyllis Pepiot**

United Women In Faith has challenged its members to take the Micah 6:8 challenge: "Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God."

**Doing justice** is a call to action, especially in the way we treat everyone, not just the people we agree with, not just in the same racial group or class, or not the same gender, or not the same sexual orientation, even our enemies. All are made in God's image therefore all should be treated as we wish to be treated. (Matthew 25:40)

**Loving Mercy** – we cannot be cruel, we cannot discriminate. When we see wrongdoing, we should respond with Mercy as God has shown us mercy. (Luke 6:36) "Mercy triumphs over judgment." (James 2:13)

**Walking humbly** – Jesus is the greatest example. We must humbly ask God to empower, lead, and equip us for being like Jesus since we cannot do it alone. "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." (Philippians 2:3)

***Gracious and loving God, please help all of us to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with You. In Jesus' name, Amen.***

**Sunday, March 8**  
**The Blessing of Relationships**  
**Karen Hoopes**

Each time that I have written an entry for the Lenten booklet, it was a topic that came to me readily and about which I really felt I was being called to write. This year, however, I prayed and waited for direction and nothing came...and then it was announced that Pastor Eric was leaving to take a Senior Pastor position in Plainfield. As the information leading up to the announcement was occurring, I remember thinking, "Oh, no! I don't want anything to change! I love the four ministers we have! They seem to work so well together, and they work so well with our congregation!" But, quite honestly, the depth of my sadness surprised me. I had tears falling down my cheeks at the thought of this happening.

I have absolutely no doubt that Pastor Eric deserves this opportunity! His ministry at Grace has been extraordinary! His sermons have touched my heart and altered my thinking! His classes have been wonderful! I had never even considered attempting to read the whole Bible until he provided a daily reading for a full year! His wife, Becky, and his children are wonderful additions to our congregation. But even with all that, I kept pondering why this seemed so personal to me.

Then something occurred to me that I have heard Pastor Cindy say on more than one occasion, that Grace UMC is all about the relationships. The deep sadness that I feel is the realization that my relationship with Pastor Eric will change, and the relationship within the ministerial staff will change, and the relationships in the church as a whole will change. This is not to say that a new relationship with a new minister will not be wonderful! I believe the Lord has his plan for our church as well as for Pastor Eric in his new church, but, admittedly, relationships will change, and change is unsettling.

I am trying to embrace the positive aspect of this which, for me, is the realization of how much the relationships at Grace mean to me and how grateful I am for them. Members of Grace reflect the love of God to each other. I'm so thankful to be a part of God's community here at Grace. I so appreciate the spirit of love and hospitality that each person brings to Grace UMC to make it such a wonderful place.

**Monday, March 9**

**Walking Down the Road with Christ  
as we head into Lent**

**Ruth Allison**

**Hebrews 10:24-25. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching...**

**Romans 12:15. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.**

Many years ago, I joined a small group of like-minded ladies to hike around the Morton Arboretum on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings. Little did I realize how good that would be for my health! It all started in 2014, when Ginny Battle offered to hike around the arboretum with me as I tried to deal with my diagnosis of breast cancer. Now, almost twelve years later, we are still there for each other. When a crisis occurs, it is so vital for us to have a support group. Today, we finalized a writing group that has endured for just as many years. My Ruth Circle was another important group in my past life. As these groups end, it is important to be ready with a new support group to be with us as we age. Like-mindedness is important as is just showing up on time and being ready for your small group. The road ahead is uncertain. No one knows what tomorrow will bring. I do know that having a support group makes life much easier.

Lent is a time of reflection as we look to Jesus' dying on the Cross. His resurrection gives us hope for a beautiful life. I am so grateful for the friends provided through His church: Grace United Methodist Church.

***Heavenly Father, Thank you for the gift of my faith community. Help me to be a blessing to others, as so many have been a blessing to me. Amen.***

**Tuesday, March 10**

## **Guilt & Regret**

### **A Christian Pilgrim**

**Romans 2:23. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**

Well, I sure have. Great guilt and even shame over things done or left undone. Regret that past deeds and words spoken in haste or the heat of the moment can't be recalled. Of course, there's repentance and praying for forgiveness, but even if it's sincere, sometimes you just can't forgive yourself. And it eats at the very foundation of your faith.

Enter Reverend Don Bundy who ministered to our Methodist Church. Over the decades our church had had lots of ministers (in fact one of them was my uncle), each with their own style and approach to preaching. In that time I had heard a few thousand sermons. Of all those ministers, with all their different styles, and all those sermons, what stands out in my mind still today are Rev. Bundy's simple words of absolution. They would come near the end of the service as he was walking down the aisle to the rear of the sanctuary. On this occasion, and I'm paraphrasing, he said, 'The events of your life, both the good and the bad, have brought you to where you are. They have made you who you are and that is accepted by God. Repent of your sins. Pick up your bed and walk. Go and sin no more.' Near the end of this he would throw his arms in the air and have a huge smile on his face as if he had just shared the secret of life. I guess in a way, it was the way to salvation. Between the simple message, the sincere heartfelt emotion and the way he could make you feel as though he were speaking only to you, his message has stuck across the decades. Guilt and regret are less than useless. They're destructive. You can't change the past. Let it go. Learn from your mistakes and don't repeat them.

Even after hearing those words and believing them, it's taken me quite some time to accept they really applied to me. But as a wise man once said to me, 'If you can't forgive yourself, then you're saying that Christ's death on the cross was for nothing.' Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. How can we reject that gift of sacrifice?

***Heavenly Father, You gave your life upon the cross to take away our sins while we were yet sinners, a perfect sacrifice that we might have eternal life. May we never forget that Perfect Gift and our unearned Grace. Amen.***

**Wednesday, March 11**  
**The Way, in Jesus' Teaching Words**  
**(Pastor) Doug Bowden**

***John 14:6a I am the way, and the truth, and the life***

"The Way," our Lenten theme in Grace Church, is well grounded in the farewell words of Jesus to his disciples in the Gospel of John. Indeed, first, we see the larger Johannine gospel context for this teaching of Jesus, John 14:6a, in John 13:1-17:26, what biblical scholars call Jesus's Farewell Discourse. Jesus says, when the Greeks come to see him, "I have come to this hour." (John 12:27). Jesus, freely choosing, "glorification," meaning, giving his life on the cross. Here, Jesus teaches the real meaning of his leaving.

"Jesus' Farewell Discourse or final testament instructs his disciples about (keeping) faithful discipleship when he is not physically present." (The Discipleship Study Bible, page 1857). So, Jesus, in his final "I am" call, says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." This is who I am. Remember this always about me.

"The Way," in all its meaning, is "to be found within Judaism." (Gail R. O'Day). Hebrew Scriptures, our more thoughtful name for the Old Testament, honoring our Jewish beloved friends, in Psalm 119 (verse 1,3,5), we read. "Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD...who also do no wrong. But walk in his ways...O that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes."

So, pondering Psalm 119, maybe a Psalm Jesus memorized as a child in his Nazareth synagogue, like Psalm 22, Gail R. O'Day concludes: "In the Psalms, "way" is used as a metaphor to describe a life lived either in accordance with the law, or the will and desire of God." This biblical truth, leading us forward.

"I am the way," is then followed by these two predicates, "truth" and "life" in Jesus' teaching. (John 14:6) He is a Blessing to us, in new deeper understanding, again in Gail R. O'Day's pioneering scholarship. "Jesus reveals himself to be simultaneously the access to and the embodiment of life with God." "Truth" and "life" thus function as appositives in relation to the leading noun, "Way,"- that is, they clarify how and why Jesus is "the way." Jesus is the "way," because he is the access point to God's promise of life."

***Oh God, Jesus, your Son, may he always be with us on our journeys, as "The Way, The Truth, and the Life." Amen.***



## **John 14:6b - A New Understanding**

**(Pastor) Doug Bowden**

### **John 14:6b No one comes to the Father except through me.**

I begin, beloved ones in Grace Church, reading this devotion, with a prayerful hope, that we might each find new knowledge and understanding in a new interpretation of Jesus' teaching in John 14:6b, from the careful study of the writings of Professor Gail R. O'Day, New Testament Scholar on the Gospel of John.

"No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Jesus, speaking truth to his disciples in his Farewell Discourses (John 13-17). This truth, which for many years for those in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century church, seemed absolutely clear: only Christians have access to God through Jesus, God's Son.

Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and Buddhists believers do not have the same access to God. Yes, they are our friends, they are members of God's family, they are blessings for us. Indeed, we work closely together in Inter-Faith ministry in Naperville. Yet, John 14:6b, can be only understood, in this limited meaning.

So, our question for our Lenten Journey with Jesus to Jerusalem and the cross and Easter Morning: "How is the contemporary Christian to interpret this central claim of the Fourth Gospel?" One answer to this question is the traditional understanding I first learned growing up in my beloved childhood church.

Gail R. O'Day offers a new answer in these words. "Jesus' claim that 'no one comes to the Father except through me'" is the joyous affirmation of a religious community that does, indeed, believe that God is available to them decisively in the incarnation...It is important to try to hear this joyous, world-changing theological affirmation in the first-century context of the Fourth Gospel. This is who we are. We are the people who believe in the God who has been revealed decisively in Jesus Christ. The claim of John 14:6-7 becomes problematic when it is used to speak to questions that were never in John's gospel purview."

I find liberation here and a new joyful freedom. Mary and I are blessed by two Jewish daughters-in-law in our Bowden family. We will celebrate Passover within our family, at the same time we journey in Lent, on "The Way," in "the very core claim of Christian identity, through Jesus we have access to God."

***Oh God of all Your people, renew me as a disciple of Jesus, with the truth Jesus teaches here. Amen.***

Thursday, March 12

Life is a Journey

Linda Fronk

***Thessalonians 5:17 Pray without ceasing.***

***Romans 8:26. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes[a] with sighs too deep for words.***

Life is a journey and for a Christian, prayer is the guide to show us “the Way.

Our modern, western society has taught us that self-reliance, problem solving, and quick action are the attributes to live successfully. Prayer is counter-intuitive to all we have been taught and practice.

Prayer requires us to stop, to be still, and to quiet our minds. And perhaps, most importantly, it requires us to surrender and to submit. We see the example set by Jesus; we know The Way. However, we have to overcome our programming and the habits that are deeply ingrained in us.

For this reason, prayer (unless we are in a church service) often feels foreign, fake, and unnatural. It’s difficult for us to spend much time praying alone, let alone the dreaded praying aloud. Overcoming this inertia take self-discipline (which is one of the fruits of the spirit) and intentionality.

During Lent may we increase our self-discipline so we might learn to spend more time in prayer with the hope that it becomes a habit...a habit as natural as breathing.

***Dear Lord, may we sit in your presence and come to know the mighty power that awaits us spending time with you. Amen.***

**Friday, March 13**

## **The Way**

**Elaine Pauls**

What does “the Way” mean to me? It means to live my life like Jesus did. Does that mean that I pray at a certain time, using certain words? Does that mean that I must love everybody the same? Does that mean I must adjust my thinking and my values and my goals in life? No, of course not.

As we have been learning recently, it does mean that we must love like Jesus loved!! Agape Love!! To achieve this, I need to actively listen to others, understand their values, and learn about their goals. Does it matter what we value, what we want in life? I believe it does. It matters because that impacts how we act. If we really want to live like Jesus, we would want the best for everyone. How can we work together for all if we don't know what they want, what they are thinking about. With conversation we can determine that. Compromise is the bad word of our time, it seems that we are giving in, that someone must be the winner or the loser. That doesn't necessarily have to be the case. We can give and take and come up with a good solution.

I have learned that prayer is also a part of this process. When I pray, I pray to God for forgiveness of some sin I have committed, or for something I want to happen, such as healing for someone who is terminally ill or happiness for someone who is hurting from a relationship. My prayers now are focused on myself, my attitude, and my response. How can I help my friend who is dying? How can I be Jesus in her life? Often the response is to wait and listen to the needs of this person.

This is how I am living my “Way to become more like Jesus.” I am always seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, along with communion with my Christian community.

***Dear God, be in my heart and in my choosing always, so at the end of this day I can know I have chosen wisely. Amen.***

**Saturday, March 14**  
**Thumbs Out, Hearts Open**  
**Barb Ceruti**

For me, the word “journey” is inextricably tied to a very eventful (and decidedly foolish) trip I took with my boyfriend back in college. He suggested we go from southern Illinois to Minneapolis to visit his cousin. As neither of us had a car, I wondered how we would get there. My boyfriend’s response was that we would hitchhike, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Always game for an adventure, I agreed, and off we set...two green kids with our backpacks on and our thumbs out.

I can’t recall the details of every ride, but I do remember that it was a total of 14 when we arrived in the Twin Cities 660 miles later. Nearly all of the drivers told us they wouldn’t normally pick up hitchhikers, but we looked so harmless. Of those 14 rides, there are some that I will never forget. One was a devoutly Christian couple with a baby they announced was a “puker.” Oh boy, I thought, as the baby was in the back seat with my boyfriend and me. We escaped any upchucking, but the baby’s parents took this opportunity to share their faith with us. We listened intently to their witness for the three or so hours we were in their car. When it was time to leave, we thanked them profusely, while I wondered if God really was anywhere in this hitchhiking journey. We certainly needed Him!

Another potential ride was a frightening one. Night had fallen, and a motorcyclist pulled up. “There are two of us,” my boyfriend said. Looking menacingly at me, the biker declared that he’d take one of us. I dug my fingers into my boyfriend’s hand while the man on the hog stared me down. My heart was pounding. I remember praying for him to take off. A few eternal minutes later, he finally did.

The ride that brought us into Minneapolis was a luxurious one – a sleek Mercedes sedan. The driver was a man who’d recently divorced and had lost custody of his children. He spilled his heart out to two strangers, and by the end of the ride he was in tears, thanking us for letting him vent!

Everyone has a story on the journey of life. And every story shapes our own journey...if only we stop to listen.

***Lord, thank you for keeping us safe, even when we don’t use our best judgment. Amen.***

**Sunday, March 15**  
**Lessons from “Godspell”**

**By Bonnie Lewan**

**Stephen Schwartz (from “Godspell”): Day by day, Day by day,  
Oh, Dear Lord, three things I pray: to see Thee more clearly,  
love Thee more dearly, follow Thee more nearly, day by day.**

College was not a faith-front-facing time for me. I was by no means struggling with my faith, I was just a little distracted by the classes, the parties, the new friends, the new freedoms, to give it much energy. That, and I went to a predominantly Jewish college in central New York. So, although I was surrounded by the Old Testament ways (I even kept a Kosher kitchen with my Jewish roommates one year!), Jesus was not front and center in my daily life.

What was, however, was musical theater. I had the opportunity to direct several productions while at school - clubs at the college put on community shows, performed, directed and produced all by students. My senior year I directed the musical “Godspell.” If you haven’t seen it, you should. With music by the ridiculously talented Stephen Schwartz (who is currently enjoying wild success with his equally brilliant score for “Wicked”), Godspell is based on the Gospel of Matthew, with Jesus weaving a series of parables and songs together, teaching his flock, and ultimately ending in his crucifixion. I directed this musical. With a cast of college students. Almost all of whom were Jewish.

It was a blast.

It was so much more than just reading the stories in Sunday School at six years old. Staging the scene, saying the words, watching it happen was just so different, so vivid, so real. It was being part of the experience, not hearing about it later from those who were lucky enough to have been there. Never had I been so immersed in the stories, literally moving through them, singing about them, teaching them to those who did not know these words, who did not know The Way as I had been taught it growing up. Funny how my faith found me again, through a room full of Jewish college kids singing “Prepare Ye the Way of The Lord.”

Did I change anyone in that cast’s faith? Doubt it. Did I grow in mine, find my way back a bit? Definitely.

**Monday, March 16**

**Beautiful Feet**

**Leslie Stevens**

***Romans 10:15 And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"***

How beautiful are the feet! Beautiful feet? It's hard sometimes to see feet as beautiful. However, my guess is you know someone or maybe many people with beautiful feet. I do. And, I have seen many beautiful feet on my journey. The list is long of the people whose feet walked into my life to love me well.

Pastor Sandy was one of those people who walked into my life when I was broken to the point of complete despair. She encouraged me and lifted me up by sharing God's words of hope when I felt there was no hope left for me. She listened to me and sat patiently with me. She was patient, kind and compassionate. She never judged me and loved me where I was at that moment in my life. God sent her to me on those beautiful feet of hers to show me a different way and to bring another set of feet into my life, my husband Dave.

We are all worthy of being God's feet in this world. We can walk ahead and lead, we can walk beside and comfort, we can walk behind and gently motivate. In all circumstances, God calls on us to use our feet to go out and share the Good News so that every person will know Jesus Christ. Some of our feet will stay firmly planted right where they are and others will travel to the ends of the earth. But wherever our feet are located, we are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus through our actions, words, deeds, gifts and prayers. We must be willing to say, (Isaiah 6:8 NIV) "Here I am. Send Me!" and walk into this world on our own beautiful feet to love others and be Christ to them.

***Loving God, thank you for the people in our lives that show us we are loved and how to love. Help us to show this same love to everyone we meet. Amen.***

**Tuesday, March 17**

**“The Way.”**

**LeeShelle Short**

**John 14:6. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”**

As Christians, we believe that Jesus is the Way to God. Through Him, we are invited into a living, personal relationship with the Father—one grounded in faith, truth, and grace. Yet, we must honestly acknowledge that there are times when we lose our way. Distractions, burdens, fear, and the busy-ness of life can pull us off the path Christ set before us. Lent calls us to pause, reflect, and realign our hearts—returning to Jesus, who faithfully remains the Way, even when we wander.

***Gracious God, help me not to lose my way from Your path this season. Help me to stay focused, even when temptation stands before me. Use me as an instrument of Your love and purpose. In Jesus’ name, Amen.***

**Wednesday, March 18**

**Finding My Way**

**Barbara Hoch**

***John 14:27 I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. So don't be troubled or afraid.***

I have loved those reassuring words of Jesus for many years. They have rescued me often when I was trying to find my way through difficult times. Little did I know that God still had some polishing up of my faith. I felt He wanted to help me continue to be a shining light for His love in others around me.

I've been able to deal with troubling times by always being able to find joy in God's plan for bringing His will on earth. But, a few years ago I was caught off guard by a hurricane which destroyed my oldest daughter Pamela's home in Florida. She had lived there for twelve years and gone through several evacuations with little concern.

This time was different though. Her younger sister and I lost contact with her for three days. No phone call updates and no responses to our calls. We had no other phone numbers to call; we were helpless. So, Amy and I prayed over the phone together. We prayed for God to send people to find Pamela and keep her safe.

Two days later, after many prayers, I received a phone call reassuring me that Pamela was safe in the Sarasota Hospital. Her house was uninhabitable. She asked if she could come home temporarily to figure out her future. I was excited, as I thought she could be a help to me as I was getting older and beginning to need more aid. She had been here a few weeks when I realized God had sent her to me because she needed my help. I prayed to God for forgiveness in my misunderstanding His plan.

Here's where my Beloved Community of Grace Church came to my assistance to help Pamela deal with her great loss and trauma. She had grown up in this church and was welcomed with love and compassion. I thank God that so many friends played such an important part of her healing. I realized it was God's plan for her to move close to her son, Mark, and his wife and their four children. They had lived in different states before so it wasn't easy to be together often. Now Pamela has a new home and was able to spend Christmas with her grandchildren this past year.

***Heavenly Father, I pray with a grateful heart for all the blessings you have given me. I have been able to accept joy in my journey as I once again find my way back to trust You and Your plan for me. Amen.***



**Thursday, March 19**

## **The Fundamentals**

**Linda Fronk**

Let me be clear from the outset, I'm not an IU grad (I'm a Butler bulldog). But as a born and bred Hoosier, how can I not be ecstatic over IU's national championship! Everyone by now knows the story of how the unknown coach from James Madison and his underpaid assistant coaches brought undervalued team members with them and attracted like candidates along the way. Coach Cignetti is now 65 years old and suddenly he (and his IU team) are an overnight sensation and success.

When Cignetti was asked how he built such a turn-around program in such a short time he said, "We focus on the fundamentals every day. We don't worry about anything else."

His quarterback, Fernando Mendoza is the Heisman trophy winner. He was ranked something like 1,275th in the country going into college and he couldn't get a bid from any major football college. The only big-name school that would touch him was IU who had the worst football record in the Big 10. After winning the trophy, Mendoza took it to his priest. When the news reporter asked him why he did this, Fernando replied, "He has helped me so much through my entire life time here. I needed to share it with him."

Two thousand years ago Jesus built a rag-tag team as well. He was a lot younger than 65 when He arose on Easter morning. Yet there are many parallels in these stories. The toughest one for me to apply to myself is what Jesus (and Coach Cignetti) encourages us to do: "focus on the fundamentals"! For Christians that means "Loving the Lord with all your heart, strength and mind and your neighbor as yourself" and then doing what our "coach" requires...spend time with him daily and depend upon him to call our plays and for us to be ready to execute them. Make no mistake, the Bible tells us the game of life is not fair. We will indeed be knocked down, fouled, and penalized unfairly. We may even be jerked out of the game and sent to the locker room for unsportsmanlike conduct. But our coach has infinite patience and will work with us when we return to Him and practice the fundamentals.

Our reward far exceeds any Heisman Trophy or National Collegiate Title. Awaiting us is joining the crowd of heavenly saints singing, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty."

***Heavenly Father, when life gets tough and grueling, may our prayer life provide the foundation to sustain us. Amen.***

**Friday, March 20**

**The Short Club**

**Ginnie Battle**

**Psalms 32:8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.**

I know Katy Klepper is in God's loving hands and with her beloved husband. She left a lifetime of love here for us. Katy and I were in a bridge group together for a few years. When Katy had opening points, but no real suit, she bid one club, the lowest bid in bridge. Katy, who I might add, was the most congenial, kind and loving person in the group, waited for her partner's return bid. Any bid was fine, except maybe 2 clubs, however no return bid at all was unacceptable. We laughed many times over her thinking all of us should know how to return that bid. Sometimes our hand was really bad or we weren't sure what to bid. Katy was such a good bridge player that she could make almost anything work, but not always. After such a game, she would say, "I bid a short club, how could you not bid back to me?"

I wonder if God isn't just the same? He gives us the lead to do what He needs from us, then waits for our response. That lead is possibly a weak one (a short club), so we don't respond. God doesn't give up on us. It may be a little more difficult for us and for Him, but God just goes ahead with that short club and holds onto our hand at the same time. In this life, everything does not always fall into place the way we would like, but God is there, no matter the hand we are dealt, ready to give us another chance and another nudge if necessary. We only have to be open to Him.

I often hear a Bible verse, or hear a sermon, or hear a song. Then I hear the same message again almost right away. Then, I hear that same message a third time. That's when I say, "Lord I'm listening!" That first nudge wasn't enough, evidently. Sometimes, we get it right, even with one little short club lead, and sometimes it takes a little more. God is good and God is patient.

***Dear Father, We thank you for Katy and for those we have lost this year who touched our lives, but continue to live in our hearts Help us to be open to your will, to answer your call. In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.***

**Saturday, March 21**  
**Called for Such a Time**  
**Dan Draz**

**Esther 4:14** Perhaps this is the moment for which you were created.

Over the past three years, men at Grace United Methodist Church have committed themselves to a Christian leadership journey—growing in faith, discipleship, and brotherhood. On January 24, men from all three cohorts gathered again for fellowship, lunch, and encouragement in Christ. Halfway through the event, the church fire alarms sounded. We grabbed coats and prepared to step outside into the bitter cold—until we saw something even more urgent.

Water was pouring into the church through the ceiling!

Without hesitation, these men moved into action. Together we pushed water out of the building, used equipment to pull it from the carpet, dried what we could, salted icy walkways, placed fans, and moved furniture to prevent further damage. It wasn't planned. It wasn't convenient. But it was needed. And in that moment, it was clear: God had positioned us exactly where we were supposed to be.

Lent reminds us that discipleship isn't only something we speak about—it's something we live. Sometimes faith looks like prayer and fasting. Other times it looks like serving without being asked, stepping in without delay, and working together as the body of Christ.

That day grace didn't just fill hearts---it protected our home of worship.

***Heavenly Father, please guide me to where you want me, to be your hands and feet in the world. Amen.***

**Sunday, March 22**

**Convenient**

**Diana McIlvane**

God sometimes chooses the least likely to serve in his kingdom. Moses was a fugitive that stuttered before he led the Israelites out of Egypt. King David was a young overlooked shepherd boy. Even though I didn't understand why the creator of the universe would choose a second or third string quarterback, I had a chance to learn.

When I was 25 and newly married, I was lucky enough to get a job in DuPage County as a new learning disabilities classroom teacher. I had three years of experience in regular classrooms with young elementary school children. I had taken extra classes in college to earn a learning disabilities certificate to help all children succeed.

In winter that first year, I observed a child at another school. Tommy was a second grader struggling with attention, academics, and study skills. I sat in the back of his classroom and I immediately saw his poor attention as he was also distracting the kids around him. After school I listened to his teachers' concerns. They felt he was a smart enough child but had no self-discipline. The parents could do a much better job helping him with homework and turning it in. The parents were angry and disrespectful whenever approached about how they could help Tommy at home. Now Tommy displayed his parents' disrespect.

A week later there was a meeting scheduled with Tommy's parents, his teachers, me, and both the Superintendent and his assistant. When I entered the room, it was silent and tense. We began with present levels of performance and right away the parents began to accuse the school of not helping Tommy learn. I could see right away that someone needed to give Tommy's parents and teachers CALM but also HOPE. The Superintendent introduced me as Mrs. McIlvane, the learning disabilities teacher who had observed Tommy. Everyone turned to me and waited for me to talk. I felt nervous as I opened my mouth. But the words that came out were not from my brain. I knew right away that they came from an all-knowing power higher than myself.

"I see that Tommy is a very loved child who has so much support from both his family and his teachers that he will succeed. Everyone sitting around this table only wants what is best for Tommy and are willing to do anything to make that happen."

I immediately relaxed as I saw the people at the table breathe again and shake their heads in the affirmative. Tommy joined my classroom. I had learned a great lesson.

**Monday, March 23**

**The Way**

**Jean Ives**

Among the prompts for this year's Lenten essays was to consider how we find "alternatives to cultural norms that may challenge our faith." That spoke to me, because I struggle with cultural norms – at least, in my head, because I clearly show by my lifestyle that I am mostly not willing to live outside them. Or at least I haven't been willing to so far. Maybe 2026 will be my year.

Grace is a member of Faith in Place, an environmental nonprofit that works with faith communities. In September, Faith in Place featured Robin Wall Kimmerer, botanist and the author of Braiding Sweetgrass, in its annual summit that examined the intersection of environmental sustainability, spiritual practices, and social justice. Ms. Kimmerer wrote in Braiding Sweetgrass, that "[g]overnments still cling to the myth that human consumption has no consequences. We continue to embrace economic systems that prescribe infinite growth on a finite planet, as if somehow the universe had repealed the laws of thermo-dynamics on our behalf. It's so much more convenient to live conventionally."

That's an understatement. It is not at all convenient to live sustainably. I learned the painful lesson when I was sick with influenza throughout the holiday season and January that it's so much easier to live conventionally. Prior to my being sick, I had routinely gathered all the reusable plastic bags that we used for our meal prep at Hesed House so I could wash and reuse them; I saved my food scraps to take to the waste bins at the food pantry where a farmer picks up slop for his hogs; I took all my film plastic to a source that would convert it to park benches; and of course I did the easy curbside recycling. When I was sick, I stopped doing all of that, and just chucked it all. And now I am choosing to adopt that cynical view that recycling doesn't really make a difference. Believing this is so much easier than believing that it does.

Have I joined the land of conventional living permanently? I don't know. I just requested information from The Dancing Rabbit (dancingrabbit.org), an intentional cooperative community in Missouri where seventy people live sustainably on 230 acres. Among them, they keep a certain number of cars (8?) to carpool to work, they prepare meals communally, they govern themselves cooperatively. It all sounds very fraught. And very much closer to what Jesus intended.

***Lord, help us to care for your creation, even when it is hard to do so. Amen.***

**Tuesday, March 24**

**Know who you are and  
what your most important relationship is.**

**Coletta Hines Newell**

***John 1:11-12 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him to those who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God.***

When I graduated from college (1980) Pittsburgh was very depressed economically and I was not able to find employment nearby. I was lucky to have many job offers but none near home. I had never thought about moving away but realized it had to be done. Luckily my parents were supportive and off I went. First to Washington, DC, then Boston, Philadelphia, Cleveland, and finally, Chicago.

My father, a devout Catholic who was a wonderful role model for me growing up, wanted to give me advice for my move but was finding it hard to come up with the words. He finally said, you have been raised right and you know the difference between right and wrong and how you should treat others; you will be fine.

Years later I found this saying in a shop. It was written by Kent M. Keith as "Paradoxical Commandments" and promoted by Mother Teresa who hung a framed photo of it in her home. When I read this every day, I believe it is what my father wanted to say to me as I was leaving home.

"People are often unreasonable and self-centered. Forgive them anyway. If you are kind, people may accuse you of ulterior motives. Be kind anyway. If you are honest, people may cheat you. Be honest anyway. If you find happiness, people may be jealous. Be happy anyway. The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good. Give the world the best you have and it may never be enough. Give your best anyway. For you see, in the end, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.

***God, thank you for the role models we have in our lives that lead us in the right direction and let us remember that our relationship with you is what we have to rely on our whole life. Help us to take time daily to have a conversation with you and listen to what you want us to do with our lives.***

**Wednesday, March 25**

## **Lessons from my Dogs**

**Kristin Hartman**

Like many canines, my two dogs are devout members of a backyard squirrel patrol, which is home to several squirrel families. They dutifully sit at the base of my old maple trees watching for squirrels to make their way down, rhythmically looking from one tree to the next tree and back up into the canopy.

I'm often amazed at their devotion to the cause as they'll stand guard even in rain or snow. As much as they dedicate themselves to the cause, they're often so caught up in looking at one side of the tree — convinced the squirrel will descend when, often, they completely miss something happening on the other side of the tree trunk or yard.

Sometimes, to the perplexity of my neighbors no doubt, I've tried to help direct them with pointing and verbal instructions ("Not over there, THERE!"), but they don't understand.

One afternoon, I saw a squirrel quietly making its way down one side of the tree trunk as my dogs glanced up the other side. It was hard not to see the humor in their total miss. I can't help but think of the way we so often miss the direction God gives us.

Sometimes we're so sure that God will, or should, answer our prayers one way—generally in the way and on a timeline that \*we\* want—that we often miss what God is trying to tell us or the way God is showing us.

We are so fortunate to have a gracious and loving God who, despite likely trying to tell us, "Look over there! Over THERE," will never give up on us, even if we lose our way or look in the wrong direction.

***Loving God, help me to truly seek your guidance. Help me feel your direction in all that I do. Help me to surrender the control, safety, and predictability I cling to so that I might more closely follow you. Amen.***

**Thursday, March 26**

**Love Thy Neighbor (and their differences)**

**Linda Prozialeck**

**Matthew 22:36-40** ‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’ Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Loving God with all you heart and soul and mind is fairly straightforward. The “love our neighbor as yourself” is harder and it takes more work! Accepting differences and tolerating opinions is not always easy-when they conflict with your own, especially in our current tumultuous times.

I grew up in a very small, rural farm town north of Philadelphia. There was little diversity and variety among the people I grew up which was a liability when it came to recognizing differences. My family’s way of thinking and opinions were my viewpoints as well. It was not until I went to college, became a nurse and moved into a nearby city for work that I realized how little I knew about diverse cultures, ethnicity and lifestyles.

Not agreeing with another person’s perspective or choices is okay. Being accepting and receptive with opinions we don’t share is not easy. Tolerance towards others and the ability to accept other viewpoints while recognizing, justifying and expressing one’s own takes commitment and in my case, practice. I continually strive to do this daily.

***Dear God, help me understand others and their point of view when they differ from my own. Let me appreciate my opinions and understand others and why they believe what they do. Amen.***



**Friday, March 27**  
**A Prayer for Guidance**

**By Sandy Bray**

**Psalm 32:8 “I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.”**

Guide us through the darkest night,  
With your love, be our guiding light.  
Teach us patience, teach us grace,  
Help us see your holy face.  
In our struggles, in our pain,  
Be our shelter from the rain.  
With your wisdom, lead the way,  
Help us follow, day by day.  
When our faith begins to wane,  
Remind us of the joy in pain.  
With your mercy, heal our soul,  
Make us humble, make us whole.  
Through your guidance, help us grow,  
In your love, let our hearts glow.  
With your peace, our fears dispel,  
In your presence, we shall dwell.  
Amen

**Saturday, March 28**

## **The Way of Love**

**Leslie Stevens**

***Psalm 32:8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.***

My mother turned 94 this year. Her memory is not what it was. She watches reruns as if they were originals and repeats her stories over and over. For a long time, as she has progressed to this point, I fought hard to keep my mom the way I wanted her to be. I corrected her when she got memories wrong. I became frustrated with her and was stressed when I visited her.

Two things happened that changed the way I viewed the situation. First, I shared my frustration with a good friend. He said that it's hard to love so much and find yourself frustrated with the person at the same time. But they both can exist together and that's okay. I was not being a 'bad' daughter. Then, I was told by my brother that an aide at her residence told him to "step into her world". So, the next visit, I didn't correct her memory lapses, I cheered with her as we rewatched the NCAA woman's basketball final and I watched reruns of gameshows answering the questions along with her. It was one of the best visits I had in a very long time.

And it finally hit me that she was there the whole time.

Not in the way I wanted her to be or how she was once. I got her back in the present. I could be present with her and find joy in the time I have with her now. What a wonderful gift it has been!

***Loving God, thank you for the people in our lives who give us wise counsel and love in challenging times. Thank you for showing us the way we should go with love. Amen.***

# Palm Sunday, March 29

## The Way

### Pastor Kim Neace

The disciples did exactly as Jesus asked (Matthew 21:1-11). They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat upon them. As He entered Jerusalem, people spread their cloaks along the road, while others laid branches cut from the trees. Crowds gathered both ahead of Him and behind Him, crying out with hope and joy, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Throughout Lent, we have been preparing our hearts, minds, and souls. On Palm Sunday, that preparation becomes movement. We step onto The Way—the way Jesus walks toward Jerusalem, toward love, sacrifice, and new life. This day marks the beginning of Holy Week, a sacred and transformative path. The disciples prepare the way through obedience, trusting Jesus enough to follow His direction. The crowds prepare the way through acts of devotion, laying down cloaks and branches as signs of praise and honor. Their cries of “Hosanna,” meaning “save us now,” rise from a deep longing for hope and deliverance.

Yet not every heart along the road is ready. Some respond with fear, doubt, or resistance. When Jesus enters the city, the people ask, “Who is this?” It is a question that still echoes today, inviting reflection and honesty. Jesus comes not as a conquering ruler, but as a humble peacemaker. He brings The Way of love, grace, mercy, forgiveness, and justice. This is a way that reshapes how we think, how we live, and how we love. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3–11), Jesus prepared us for this countercultural life—a life that blesses the humble, the merciful, and the peacemakers.

As we begin Holy Week, we are invited to ask ourselves: What are we laying down along the road? Where is Jesus inviting us to walk more faithfully in His way? Our world can feel upside down, marked by pain, division, and fear. Yet Jesus enters gently, offering hope that endures. As followers of Christ, we are called to trust that hope and share it—walking The Way of love in a world longing for healing.

***Messiah, you are worthy of praise. Prepare our hearts, minds, and souls to walk in your way. Teach us to live your love and share your hope. Strengthen our world through your grace and deepen our understanding of your never-ending mercy. Amen.***

**Monday, March 30**  
**My Best Friend, Amy**  
**Trudy Andsager**

***Philippians 4: 6-7 Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs and don't forget to thank HIM for HIS answers. If you do this you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. HIS peace will keep your thoughts and your hearts quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus.***

I remember the first time that I truly experienced and felt God's peace that surpasses all understanding... It was Friday, April 28, 1995, when I received a call that my dad had died unexpectedly. Suddenly my life just stopped. It was so shocking and overwhelming. That Sunday we were supposed to be getting Matthew baptized at Grace and both my mom & dad were planning to be there. My in-laws were already in town from Florida for the baptism. Lindsay was 4½, Gretchen was 2½, and Matthew was 8 months old. Steve was at work, and I was at home with three little kids and house guests when I received the shocking news...a lot to deal with at 36 years old. Later that day Amy, my best friend from growing up, called and said what can I do for you? I had met Amy in 8th grade, and she and I had remained best friends going through all of life's ups and downs together. She was someone that I loved and trusted. I asked her if she could take care of my three kids during the visitation and funeral at my hometown-I just needed and wanted to be able to grieve without the distraction of little ones. She stepped in without hesitation and took over with my kids. I will forever be grateful to her. She is still my best friend today. I remember standing in the receiving line at the funeral home with my Mom and five siblings feeling God's peace just pouring over me. It was the most amazing feeling I've ever had. I knew at that moment that I would get through all the deep sadness of the days to come. I knew God would shelter me every step of the way and HE did. It was honestly an incredible feeling-one that I will never forget. Amy was definitely my Godsend. By her taking over with my kids, I was free to receive God's peace without interruption. Our God is so AMAZING & is ALWAYS there for us through the good & bad of life...always placing people in our lives who we need just when we need them. ❤️

***Dear Lord Jesus, thank you surrounding us with YOUR peace that surpasses all understanding. And thank you for sending us special people in our lives who help us get through difficult times. In YOUR name we pray. Amen.***

**Tuesday, March 31**

**The Battle-Turner Reunion**

**Ginnie Battle**

***Isaiah 42:18-19 Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."***

I was married to Charlie for 44 years and had a good marriage most of those years, but not so much the last few. In 2010, we divorced and went our separate ways. We both found happiness and a different life for a few years, then in 2019, Charlie became my next-door neighbor. We were already on really good terms, but now he didn't live 150 miles away, he lived next door. We had our four daughters and ten grandchildren in common, went to their swim meets, hockey games, volleyball, softball, soccer, art exhibits, together. Slowly, we became closer, we remembered our history together and this last December, we remarried.

I wasn't sure what to expect this time around as we had been divorced for 15 years and though we saw each other every day, did not spend all our time together, in fact, most of it we were apart. I sold my house and moved next door, deciding to give it a chance. After one week, I knew it was going to work. Charlie was so kind, so interested in my activities, fixed me breakfast every morning, and worked to be sure I was happy. I want to make him happy too. That's what love is, right?

God has given us this second chance in this new year. I read that only 6% of divorced couples remarry, so we are rare. But then, our love is rare. I thank God every day and night for this reunion. It makes my life so much richer and better every day. Charlie assures me he feels just the same.

Those years we were apart were important years for me. I became more independent, more confident, a better servant of God. Those years were a blessing, though not one I would have chosen. Truly, hardships can turn out to be blessings in disguise.

***Lord, we are in a new marriage, with you as our partner. We ask You to guide us, to bless us, and show us the way. We know you are patient, merciful and kind. Bless each of us, helping us to return the love you give to us to one another. In Jesus' name, Amen.***

# Wednesday, April 1

## Seeing Through God's Lens

### Rob Smucker

After my cataract surgeries in late summer and early fall, I was amazed at how clearly I could see with my new lenses. Colors were brighter, details sharper, and things I had grown used to seeing dimly were suddenly clear again. It made me think about how much our vision depends on the lens we're looking through.

I feel the same is true spiritually. When we look at the world only through our own lens—comfort, routine, or self-interest—we can miss what truly matters. But when we choose to look through God's lens, our vision changes. We begin to see people instead of problems, needs instead of inconveniences, and opportunities for compassion instead of reasons to pass by.

Through God's lens, we notice the hungry who need food, the unhoused who need shelter, the lonely who need kindness, and the hurting who need hope. These needs are no longer "someone else's responsibility"; they become God's needs placed before us. Clear spiritual vision calls us not just to see differently, but to respond differently—with love, generosity, and action. I am reminded of one of my father's favorite bible verses, Micah 6:8 — "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

There is also a beloved hymn that most Methodists know by heart written by Clara H. Scott that never ceases to move me when I am singing it:

*Open my eyes that I may see  
Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;  
Place in my hands the wonderful key  
That shall unclasp and set me free.  
Silently now I wait for Thee,  
Ready, my God, Thy will to see;  
Open my eyes, illumine me,  
Spirit Divine!*

***Lord, thank You for opening my eyes. Help me to see the world through Your lens—clear, compassionate, and attentive to the needs around me. Show me where You are calling me to help, and give me the courage to act. Amen.***

**Thursday, April 2**

**More Than a Trip**

**Barbara Hartman**

It has been said that travel changes you, and I completely agree. Seeing new parts of the world and experiencing different cultures can be eye-opening. We often return home with photos, memories, and perhaps a few souvenirs. Some trips, however, go much deeper. One such trip for me was in 2011, and it proved to be life-changing.

At the time, I was working as a dental hygienist and volunteering locally to provide free dental care to those in need. While that was rewarding, I felt called to do more. When I learned about a group traveling to Tegucigalpa, Honduras for a weeklong mission trip, I felt compelled to join. I had many questions and, admittedly, some fear. The area was known for high levels of violent crime, but I set aside my apprehension and committed to going.

It is difficult to fully describe the experience. People of all ages lined up for hours at a makeshift clinic set up in a school. I provided dental care one day, which was challenging under those conditions. To broaden my experience, I was assigned to other activities, the most memorable being helping pour a concrete floor for a small home. The house, made of tin walls and roof, had gaps and a dirt floor that turned to mud when it rained. The kitchen was outdoors, using a metal drum as a stove. The home belonged to an elderly couple, one of whom was bedridden. Chickens wandered freely, and the conditions were overwhelming. Though the labor was physically demanding, it was a joy knowing we were giving them something as basic—and meaningful—as a solid floor.

That experience humbled me and deepened my gratitude for the blessings God has given me. It also reminded me that serving others does not always require traveling far. As Jesus said, “The poor you will always have with you” (Mark 14:7). Today, I feel blessed to serve locally with the Grace Church volunteer group at Hesed House. I believe God calls each of us to serve where we are able, whether through action, compassion, or prayer.

***Lord, thank You for the opportunities to serve and for opening our hearts to the needs of others. Guide our hands, strengthen our faith, and help us follow where You lead. May all we do honor You. Amen.***

# **Good Friday, April 3**

## **A Gift of Light in the Greatest Darkness**

### **Ginnie Battle**

Over 50 years ago, there was an auto accident. Our youngest child Mary Catherine, just 2-1/2 years old, was killed on September 29, 1971. From that day until mid-February, 1972, I prayed every day that God would let me know that my daughter was with him.

One night, I had a dream. I saw Jesus at our local amusement park in New Jersey. He was on a children's train as the conductor in the first car, dressed in white robes. On the train were two children, Mary Catherine and a young boy. I felt I could not live one more day without her, so I stepped onto the tracks. Either the train would stop or it would run over me. Neither happened; instead, Jesus entered into my body. At that moment, I woke up. All I could see was the brightest white light blocking out everything else. I immediately opened my eyes, but when I did, I could no longer see the light, so I closed my eyes. I was so grateful the light was still there as bright as ever, though now I was awake.

I said to what I know now was the Holy Spirit, but still talking to Jesus, "I need my child. I can't go on without her." Jesus said, "You must go on. You can see she is with me." I saw on the train she was happy, but I missed her so much I could not see my way forward, even though I had two 4-year-old daughters depending on me.

Not only did I feel overwhelming grief, I felt overwhelming guilt, and rightly so. There were no seatbelts, no child locks on cars then, and our car was old. We let Mary Catherine sit in the back seat when she always sat in the front seat between her Dad and me. She opened the (locked) door by the handle, which unlocked it, rolled out and was hit.

I asked God to take me, not her, I bargained all I could, praying she would live, but to no avail. God doesn't bargain, but sometimes we try anyway if the hurt is deep enough. From the light came these words to me, "You are my good and faithful servant in whom I am well pleased. I take the guilt from you. You are to go forward with your life."

From that day on, I was relieved of the guilt. I was guilty, but God forgave me, lifted the burden from me and gave me peace so I could continue to live. Also, most of all, I know Mary Catherine is in heaven with Christ. The day I get to heaven, for sure Mary Catherine will meet me and I will have her in my arms again.

***Jesus, thank you for those 2-1/2 years and your light, peace and comfort in my greatest time of need. He will do the same for you. Amen.***



**Saturday, April 4**  
**Honoring the Sabbath**  
**Jacalyn Green Tschirhart**

**Exodus: 20: 8-11 Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.**

After completing John Mark Comer's book "Practicing the Way: Be with Jesus. Become like him. Do as he did," Bob and I took the class led by Pastor Eric focused on the Sabbath. I was thrilled to find that the first homework assignment was to sleep at least 8 hours a night the following week! This was homework I could get excited about! On the sabbath, we are really supposed to take a break from the frenetic pace of our daily lives, avoid the distractions of our modern world (like the internet, social media, and our phones), to enjoy meals in community, to take time to pray and study scripture, and to rest.

I found myself wondering, why was this a commandment? The commandments about loving and honoring God are listed first. Next is the rule to honor the Sabbath. The remainder are focused primarily on what not to do to other people: we are not to murder, commit adultery, lie, steal or covet. After pondering this, I believe that the importance of the Sabbath is that God knows it is much easier to do the right thing when we are rested! If we are tired and irritable, we are more likely to get angry quickly, and behave badly. By stopping to rest and to focus on God on a weekly basis, we are rejuvenated and more likely to react to challenging situations and people with patience and compassion...more likely to walk with Jesus.

***Dear Lord, Thank you for the gift of the Sabbath. Help us to stop, rest, read your word, and rejuvenate ourselves to be your hands in the world. In Jesus' name, Amen***

## Easter Sunday, April 5

### Pastor Eric Blachford

#### Luke 24:1–12

We've spent Lent walking "The Way" of Jesus. It has not been a comfortable path or a shortcut around suffering. The way led through betrayal, grief, silence, and a cross. It led to that place where the world's bad news feels final. And we know that feeling. Bad news is the water we swim in. Turn on the TV, open your phone, and there it is: another tragedy, another conflict, another reason to feel anxious or cynical. And that's before we even name the "private headlines" we carry: diagnoses, strained relationships, regrets we can't undo, grief that still hurts, or fear.

So, here's the question Easter asks us: Is there a way through this world that doesn't end in despair? The first witnesses of hope weren't the bold or the powerful, but women who walked to the tomb while the men stayed behind locked doors. They went with spices and grief and love—expecting death to be where death always is. But Easter begins with a disruption. The stone is rolled away. The body is gone. Confusion replaces certainty. And then the announcement: "He is not here... he has risen." God has done what we cannot do. This is the heart of Easter: the good news of Easter is better than the bad news is bad.

Because the resurrection doesn't deny the darkness—it defeats it. The risen Jesus doesn't return to a world without scars; he returns *with* scars, which means our pain is not erased but redeemed. The way of Jesus goes through Friday into Sunday...through the tomb into life. And once the disciples realize this; once Jesus begins appearing, speaking, eating, teaching, opening their minds and hearts...everything changes. Not because their circumstances instantly improve, but because their hope relocates. Their hope becomes "Even when life breaks, God is still faithful." Their hope is no longer "We'll be okay when the world finally makes sense." Their hope becomes "Jesus is alive, and his kingdom has no borders and no expiration date."

So today, if you feel ashamed of your past, disappointed in yourself, exhausted by the news, anxious about the future, or numb from too much loss...Easter doesn't scold you for feeling that. Easter meets you there and says: Your Good Friday is not the end of your story. The tomb is not the last word. There is always an Easter coming.

So, walk the way today. Walk the way of the women who dared to go to the tomb. Walk the way of Peter who ran toward the mystery. Walk the way of Mary who heard her name spoken by the risen Christ. Walk the way of disciples who traded locked doors for open lives. And if all you can offer today is a whisper, offer this: Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.

## From the Editor

Thank you to all who took the time, and in many cases, bared your souls, in the writing of these devotions. They are all here--the wisdom of the small epiphanies of daily life, the learning that comes from experiencing unbelievable grief and pain and coming out the other side, and lessons learned from bible study and contemplation. Our beloved church members have once again enriched our lives in Christ through sharing their thoughts and feelings. This collection is only possible through the efforts of many. I feel deeply privileged to be able to help this cherished Grace tradition continue.

It is my hope that in my editorial role, I have not made mistakes or altered the intended meaning of any of these stories. If I have done so, I'm sorry. I also hope I have not missed any contributions; if so, please accept my apologies and let me know. I am happy to start collecting for next year!

Thank you to Patti Cash who created the front cover art, and to Linda Fronk who contributed the photo below; this is a photo of Linda, taken by her daughter, Katharine Fronk Uhrich.

God's blessings to all who shared their stories, as well as to those who are reading them!

Jacalyn Green Tschirhart





**GRACE**

**UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

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*Gather in Christ. Grow in Love. Go to Share.*