



Wandering Heart

Lighting our path
with Peter



Daily Devotions for the 2024 Season of Lent

From the family and friends of
Grace United Methodist Church



Opportunities for Lent 2024

Join us in these opportunities for worship, prayer and reflection at Grace during the 2024 season of Lent. Visit peopleofgrace.org/lent for additional information.

Ash Wednesday - February 14

9:00am-1:00pm Open imposition of ashes in the Sanctuary

5:00pm Ash Wednesday Experience for all, beginning in Fellowship Hall with resurrection garden creation and fellowship. **Registration is required** for the resurrection garden; please do so at peopleofgrace.org/lent. A suggested donation of \$10 for supplies is appreciated.

5:30pm Teaching time, children's choirs, and the imposition of ashes in the Sanctuary

7:00pm Traditional Worship in the Sanctuary

Palm/Passion Sunday - March 24

8:00am Traditional Worship in the Sanctuary

9:00 am Contemporary Worship in the Activity Center

10:30am Traditional Worship in the Sanctuary

Maundy Thursday - March 28

7:00pm Worship in the Sanctuary

Good Friday - March 29

7:00pm Worship in the Sanctuary

Easter Sunday Worship - March 31

8:00am - Brass and Grace Bell Ensemble

9:30am* - Brass, Chancel Choir and Grace Praise Team

11:00am* - Brass, Chancel Choir and Grace Praise Team

**Note: These times differ from our regular Sunday worship services!*

Grateful thanks to everyone who contributed to this year's Lenten booklet. We hope these daily devotions are an inspiration to all as we journey through Lent along with Peter.

Ash Wednesday, February 14

Peter, Paul and Cupid

Barb Ceruti



Read 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7

Oh, that most famous of Bible passages, written by the apostle Paul, read at countless weddings, and a most appropriate subject for this Ash Wednesday...which just happens to fall on Valentine's Day. Not since 1945 has that occurred!

As we travel through Lent with Peter, let's begin our journey by parsing apart Paul's ancient letter to the Corinthians and examining its timeless lessons as they apply today:

Love is patient – It does not demand instant gratification, pounding its keypad, blaring its horn, zipping through traffic at breakneck speed.

Love is kind – It leads with compassion, tearing down walls and caring for different others without protest of "Mine, not yours!"

Love does not envy – It does not compare the "haves" and "have-nots," succumb to FOMO (fear of missing out), feel "less than" scrolling through social media.

Love does not boast – It does not flaunt titles, wealth, or showcase extravagances few can enjoy. It does not speak endlessly of itself without curiosity about others.

Love is not proud – It admits weakness, personal flaws, wrongdoings. It can offer an apology without a "but" in its wake. It is not ashamed to ask for help.

Love does not dishonor others – It does not rant publicly on viral platforms against "the other side." It does not gossip pettily about a neighbor or friend.

Love is not self-seeking – It puts others first, considering their needs without concern for personal sacrifice or desire for congratulations.

Love is not easily angered – It does not fly into road rage, endangering self and others; it does not scream obscenities at strangers or let familiarity breed contempt for precious family and friends.

Love keeps no record of wrongs – It does not volley "what about-isms," sling mud, air others' words out of context. It does not lick old wounds or harbor resentment that poisons relationships and stunts personal growth. Love forgives.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth – It does not propagate "fake news" but seeks to hear all views and engage in respectful discussion with open hearts and minds. It understands that only when we do this will truth and goodness prevail, as God intends.

Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres... These final words of this passage reflect the way Jesus dealt with Peter's inconsistencies. Jesus protected Peter, trusted him to be the "rock" upon which the Church was built, hoped for him, and persevered in encouraging and supporting him, despite his missteps along the way.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for doing for us what you did for Peter. Help us to love in the way Paul so beautifully articulated centuries ago. Amen.

Thursday, February 15

Socks in the Snow

Rev. Cindy Marino

As I write this, I am reminded that we live in a climate where, at certain times of the year, the air can hurt our faces. I see memes on Facebook from those who declare they would never live in such a place.

They might have a point.

As I watch my dogs venture out, trying their best to kick off the socks that keep their feet from freezing, I am grateful for the warmth of a home, a car, a coat, for all the things that make life physically bearable in the Midwestern winter.

At the same time, I pray for those trying to keep warm on buses, in tents, on the city streets, far from home, where it is warm year-round. Grace Church offered the opportunity to purchase coats for those without homes on the City of Chicago website, which features an Amazon wish list. I purchased a few things. But it was so easy to do, it did little to ease the concern or the guilt. Why do these people have to suffer? And what can we do about it?

Life is like that, isn't it? While there's good in the world, there's always suffering.

My elderly parents are having a hard time following my mother's fall at Thanksgiving. At the same time, I wait with joyful anticipation; and, indeed, by the time you read this, I pray my son and daughter-in-law will have welcomed a healthy baby boy. It seems that suffering and gratitude go side by side. It's no wonder we find ourselves all over the place emotionally and spiritually.

We have a good partner in that in Peter, the disciple whose life certainly reflects those same ups and downs. Some days he felt strong enough to walk on water with Jesus, and other days he was shamed by his wandering heart. But Jesus never left him. And Jesus made sure Peter had a team surrounding him, just as we do.

So, on days when the suffering seems to win, we have others to support us. And on days when gratitude overflows, we can support those around us who are suffering. That's the way it works, I realize, as I watch my retriever out picking up the socks in the snow.

"In both your ups and your downs, you always belong to God."

Adapted from a prayer by Rev. Sarah A. Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC

Friday, February 16

Find Your Niche

Betty Long

Sometimes I feel like these frosty coneflower heads: dark, a bit prickly, and cold. I want to withdraw into myself and hide in a warm place. We all have these feelings occasionally. Especially during cloudy, short winter days, we may indulge those feelings. I am guessing that the Lord allows that, but not for too long!

The rhythm of worship calls us forth every Sunday. Also, at Grace there are all sorts of weekday activities that enliven our days. On Mon-Wed-Fri mornings, I choose to exercise with Temple Builders in the Activity Center or join with my Questors friends to walk

at the Morton Arboretum. Getting the blood circulating launches a more positive spin on any day. What activities are you taking advantage of?

Church friends serve as inspiration to think beyond myself. They seem to be always helping out others or the church itself in some way or another. Their examples encourage me. Sometimes that may mean saying “yes” to a request that I might otherwise have turned down. Other times it means volunteering or just doing something helpful without being asked. As a Trustee and Grace gardener, I have ample opportunities, but one does not need to be a Trustee or gardener to find them. There is a niche for *you* at Grace. Just as the Lord guided Peter, He will help you find it, if you just try!



Photo by Betty Long

Saturday, February 17

The Raging Sea

Melva Casillas

Matthew 14:29-31: Jesus said, "Come." And Peter left the boat and walked on the water to Jesus. But when Peter saw the wind and the waves, he became afraid and began to sink. He shouted, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught Peter. Jesus said, "Your faith is small."

Darkness, furious winds and thunder leave us trembling with fear and our souls spiraling down, sinking into doubt and disbelief.

In those moments, Peter comes to mind.

Peter had such faith, he was able to walk on water with Jesus for a few moments. But then fear and doubt seized him when he took his eyes off Jesus.

On my journey in faith, I have been so willing to follow Jesus. Many of us are. But when life gets hard, we can feel as if our prayers are not answered. Or they are answered, but not in the way we wanted.



At those times, we can find ourselves facing a crossroad. Do we continue walking, holding Jesus' hand, firm in our faith and fixing our eyes only on him? Or do we give in to our doubts, fears and unbelief, and sink to the bottom of the sea in despair?

This time of Lent, let us be mindful of fixing our eyes on Jesus, holding his hand when we are tossed about "The Raging Sea."

May our Lord Jesus Christ meet you and your family where you are on your journey. Happy Easter!

Sunday, February 18

Where Does Your Story Begin?

Gaye Lynn (Bennett) Loufek

Psalm 139:16-17: You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed. How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered.

The text I received read: "Decided to make a stop on the way home to meet some special people." If my heart has ever "wandered" and been in two places at the same time, these photos say it all: grief and joy, simultaneously.



While I continue to mourn and grieve the loss of two of the most important people in my life, my parents, I wholeheartedly praise God for sending us this little one whom we love and enjoy so deeply.

A pastor once preached from the Grace pulpit that we often think our story ends at the tomb, when in fact, it is where our story begins. As Christians, we experience this through Jesus. We celebrate His birth, but we have been saved by the story that began at His tomb, where *ours* truly begins.

Prayer: May God comfort you in your grief and celebrate with you in your joy. May, in everything, you feel His presence. Let your story begin...and share it with many! Amen!

Monday, February 19

Feeding God's People

Jacalyn Green Tschirhart

Luke 22: 61-62: The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

John 21: 15-17: When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

In the first passage, we find Peter feeling desolate after denying Jesus three times, just as Jesus predicted. It is easy to understand the root of Peter's denial – Jesus was captured, tortured, and destined for a horrible death. We humans have a strong desire to live. Peter is not wrong in thinking that if he admits to his association with Jesus, he might face a similar fate. How many of us in the same situation would do the same? Probably most.

In the second, we find the risen Jesus questioning Peter's love of him, in a pattern reminiscent of Peter's thrice denying Jesus. Jesus tells Peter to take care of and feed his sheep. Jesus is not telling him to go make disciples, or to preach, but he gives him a much simpler task: feeding and caring for his people.

I find this somehow comforting. While I know that as Christians our mission is to be evangelists, this is not easy. But feeding God's people? This seems easier. Feeding the hungry is a primary mission of Grace, with our monthly commitment to provide breakfast, lunch and dinner at Hesus House as well as our annual participation in the Feed the Need mobile meal packing event. There are many ways to help feed God's people.

Prayer: Dear Lord, give us the strength to share your word, as well as the opportunity to feed your sheep, wherever they are. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Tuesday, February 20

Wandering, Unruly, Passionate Heart

Nadia R. Kanhai

In general, I can probably safely say that I'm not known as being impetuous like Peter. I grew up a cautious and quiet kid, not wanting to do anything wrong, so no one would be disappointed and I wouldn't feel self-conscious. My passionate, fun-loving self was only revealed to those I trusted, very often people in my church family.

Fast forward decades of adventure, hardship, many bends and potholes on the path, mountaintops, prairie breezes, deep abysses, and mentors – God surrounding me with people who built me up and encouraged me to courageously expand my faith trajectory. Indeed, I could no longer hide my light under a bushel. I claimed my passions – working for social justice for God's marginalized people. This God-given passion sometimes freed me to throw caution to the wind.

My smile muscles easily stretch across my face as I think of Grace pastors (and laity) along the way, how they either took my passion in stride or didn't, how they gently reined me in when I envisioned unorthodox means for serving God's people. I began to grasp this Peter fella who acted on impulse and unbridled passion, rather than carefully crafting detailed plans and running them up the chain of command first.

I both admired and admonished these Peter types in my earlier years. Now I'm either one to be admired, admonished, or both. God loves and calls us all, and we desperately need each other, though our personalities and methodologies sometimes clash.

Honestly, I find myself at a crossroad where "church" is redefining itself for me. While feeling comfort within its walls, it also stifles me. My wandering heart isn't the only one. If the church, especially the United Methodist Church, is to survive and thrive, we must redefine how we live out our faith as Christ's body. This will take disciples of all kinds.

Fortunately, we have the chance to redefine a more relevant church body as the United Methodist Church General Conference finally rolls around in April.

Prayer: All-Loving and Gracious One, we pray for your servant leaders as they prepare for General Conference in Charlotte, NC. Bless our Northern Illinois delegates, especially delegates from faraway places like Africa and the Philippines. Fill us all, your church leaders/followers/doubters with faith, love, justice, mercy, hope, and open, strangely warmed hearts to serve as your imperfect but capable disciples. Amen.

Wednesday, February 21

Surely the Presence

Julie Baker

My faith journey, like Peter's, has certainly not been linear. There have been times when it has not been forefront in my mind, and going to weekly church was not in my plans. Yet, there was an extremely difficult time in my life when all I could do to survive was reach out to God continually through the day, seeking Him strongly and deeply to help me heal, to fill my heart, my soul and my being. Feeling the Holy Spirit in me when I was in church was so healing. I don't think I ever felt closer to God than at that time.

I have my favorite hymn framed and hanging on my wall next to the piano. When I walk by and see it, it reminds me that being in His place is an important part of my faith journey.

Surely the Presence of the Lord Is In This Place

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place

I can feel His mighty power and His grace

I can hear the brush of angel's wings

I see glory on each face

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place



Thursday, February 22

God's Eternal Faithfulness

Barbara Hoch

Genesis 50:20: The evil in the world tries to harm one, but God uses it for good to accomplish the purpose He has for my life.

This verse has always been an encouragement to me. I've used it often to explain to people how I can be so optimistic even when life isn't going well for me. Sometimes, I have to laugh at myself because for me it seems so simple to believe what God can and will do for us. My spiritual walk with God has shown me His steadfast faithfulness and love.

Looking back on my childhood, I could often see God working to show how much He loved me. God had given me a special love for His four-legged animals. When I lost one cat after another, I prayed to ask God what He wanted me to learn from these sad experiences. He reminded me that worldly things can come and go, but God's love would never leave me or forsake me. I can now rejoice with each new pet, knowing their love is only temporary, but God's love is eternal.

Later in life, my father was able to pay for my two older sisters to go to college. When it was my turn to go to college, he was running low on money. I really had to trust that God had something good planned for me. I was able to help work my way through school by serving in the kitchen at our dormitory to pay for my meals.

Because of that, I met my true love, Albert, who was working as a dishwasher in the kitchen to pay for his meals also. I probably would never have met him if my father hadn't needed me to help earn my way through college. Al and I were married soon after graduating. We raised five children and spent 60 wonderful years together before he passed away. God certainly turned a difficult situation into good.

(P.S. I earned my degree in occupational therapy. I worked for four years in special education for handicapped children before we started having our family, two of whom are handicapped. How's that for God's long-range plans?)

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for teaching me to trust You with all my heart, even when I don't understand what You have planned for me at first. Amen.

Friday, February 23

Messengers of Hope

Lauren Anderson

I've spent my entire 39 years of life in good physical health, taking pride in the fact that I've never struggled with physical pain. No broken bones, no surgeries, not even a single hospital stay. I've attributed this to living a healthy, athletic lifestyle, believing in the grace of God to allow me to live such a life of ease.

Until suddenly, almost overnight, I could no longer say this. An unexplainable herniated disc in my spine rendered me hunched over, in tears daily, unable to comfortably sit, stand, walk, or sleep. Initially, I believed this was some temporary fluke that I would quickly overcome. However, as the months passed and I endured multiple medical procedures to no avail, I began to question my belief in medicine, science, life and, ultimately, God.

I did everything right – why am I struggling like this? I prayed every day, begging for relief, but it never came. My entire life was thrown completely off balance, and I began to sink into a dark hole of not only chronic physical pain, but mental unsurety, grieving the life I formally knew of physical ease. I was no longer the happy woman who had a full life; instead, I was a woman who cried, complained around the clock, and pushed everyone away.

Eventually I woke up one morning, in excruciating pain as I had become accustomed to, and decided to stop wallowing in my pain. I'd had enough. I reached out to my network of friends in faith. Surely someone could relate, and I shouldn't need to suffer alone anymore. The outpouring of support, suggestions, prayers, referrals, and more was beyond anything I could have expected. I heard from people I haven't spoken to since childhood. I heard from friends of friends and family members of friends and complete strangers! Their advice was so heartfelt and positive that I began to believe that God is actually listening to me and sent me answers through these people. I felt rescued.

I'm grateful that today I am beginning to sit, stand, walk and sleep comfortably again. I've learned that I have a major network of people looking out for me, and I'll never need to feel alone again.

Saturday, February 24

The Abundance of God's Love

Rev. Dr. Thomas Aldworth

Some may remember the 1961 bestseller *Black Like Me*. This book by John Howard Griffin was a riveting account of a White man changing the color of his skin and then traveling for six weeks through the American South in 1959 to see how he would be treated as a Black man. *Black Like Me* had a tremendous impact on helping White people understand the reality of racism in America. I read it as a freshman in high school, and I believe the book helped me understand racism in a whole new way.

I bring up *Black Like Me* because it points out how difficult it was in 1959 for a Southern White man to really know the experience of Black people living all around him. Griffin needed to change his skin color to truly know what it was like to be a Black man and, in turn, to help heal the wound of racism. I believe his book helped heal at least a bit of the racism that plagued our country then and continues to haunt us still.

I mention this because what we see God do in the Incarnation is so beyond our imagining. God – the Maker of all there is, the Source of all life that ever was or ever will be – wanted to heal the wound that comes with being born human. Being born human is a great gift and grace, to be sure, but it carries a wound with it – the wound of alienation from our Maker and from one another. So, God decides to heal this alienation, this wound, by becoming human. God apparently loves humans so much that God decides to become a human. Can we really wrap our minds around this profound reality?

Some of us who accept the truth of the Incarnation of God may do so too readily. Yes, the Incarnation proves God's love many times over, but only if we are careful and thoughtful about accepting it. If we accept the reality of the Incarnation, then we must treat each other differently than we otherwise do. We must accept the fact that each one of us is precious, as God assures us through Isaiah. And if we are truly precious, then, for God's sake, we must act on the truth of this reality.

One way we can respond is by ceasing all oppression and violence against one another and by blessing each other with God's love.

Sunday, February 25

An Unlikely Gift

Phil Kapela

Pain.

You are back again.

With you I move slowly, which is good because of my tendency to move around too quickly and fall.

With you I move deliberately, one step at a time, good for the same reason given above.

With my walker or cane, I know that I need external assistance, for I cannot trust my body and physical skills alone.

My God has gifted me with you at this time in my life.

God has strengthened me because of you!

Pain, my companion, my gift from God.

"My grace is enough for you, because power is made perfect in weakness." (Ephesians 12:9), as Paul wrote from personal experience.



The Last Word

Phil Kapela

Read: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

As we age, some things change.

We walk slowly, behind people.

Yet the Lord says to ninety-nine-year-old Abram to "walk before me."

Our productivity lessens.

Yet the Lord says to Abram, "You shall be exceedingly fruitful."

And the Lord says, "Be blameless."

Sometimes people blame older people less, except for the driver behind you blaring on the horn because the senior driver follows the speed limit.

God speaks to us to do things which do not seem to match our age.

He chose Abram and Sarah to become parents no matter what the years say.

Yahweh calls, commands, and moves people no matter what the years say.

Yahweh has the last say!

While hearing may lessen with age, Yahweh still speaks.

DIN – "Do It Now!"

Monday, February 26

The God of Second Chances

Phyllis Pepiot

Matthew 22:37-39: Love God with everything within you and your neighbor as you love yourself.

When I think of Peter, the first thing I think of is his denial of being with Jesus. Yet, Jesus described him as the rock on which he would build his church. God is always giving second chances.

I must confess that there have been times when I haven't spoken up when I should have. I think of times when groups of people are labeled unfairly when the whole truth about them isn't known. Afterwards, I am sorry I didn't speak up with something like, "Would Jesus have said things like that or treated people like that?"

In reading over Peter's letters, I found two passages which especially spoke to me: 1) "You are better off to obey God and suffer for doing right than to suffer for doing wrong." (1 Peter 3:17); and 2) "The understanding which comes from Jesus will keep us growing in goodness, understanding, self-control, patience, devotion to God, concern for others and love. Keep in touch with God. Keep growing." (2 Peter 1:5-8 and 3:18) And in just a week of reading the "Bible in a Year," I have found new hope and faith. I find the voice of our Pastor Eric to be especially calming and centering.

The Rev. Jane Eesley (daughter of the late Mary and Dick Eesley, former members of Grace) is, as of this writing, in Jerusalem as a part of the Methodist presence there. After the October 7 attack by Hamas, a weekly Wednesday prayer meeting was set up (<https://zoom.us/j/93128483653?pwd=cDNtUE0rQnlUdGpFcFB0RUpnK29uZz09>).

Today, I was listening to the plight of Christians in Jerusalem and Palestine before the call to prayer. The presenter was a Lutheran pastor who said the percentage of Christians there grows smaller every day. He feels very strongly called to present the love of Jesus in the area, but he fears there will soon be no Christians to spread the message of salvation.

He went on to say hate only generates more hate. The war is producing thousands of losers on all sides of the issue. Peace is the only solution. He strongly urged everyone to pray for peace and, beyond that, to use our influence with the powers that be. I'm praying for peace. For we do it out of love. "O Love that will not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee."

Tuesday, February 27

Lose Control

Gaye Lynn Loufek

Matthew 6:34: Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

In my time at Grace Church, I have had the distinct blessing of getting to know someone who has influenced me greatly. In addition to his great influence, he has also given me this nugget: “Why pray when you can worry?” Yes, now many of you know about whom I’m speaking (but I won’t single him out here).

Worrying has always been second nature for me. Yes, second nature because wholeheartedly I know I am supposed to pray and turn my challenges, concerns, celebrations over to God. As a human who has “ideas” and “pre-planned outcomes” (good or bad), my “go-to” is worry.

While I am committed to my convictions, I know what I know to be true, and I continue to hold fast to my values. As I’ve gotten older, I realize that my true worry is that God’s pre-planned outcome just might not align with my own.

The older I get, both in chronology and my Christian walk, I recognize the true power of God. I know that I am to walk, talk, and serve in the way God is calling me to do. In doing so, I lose a bit of the control (ok, all the control). In prayer, “Your will be done” is the “back-scratcher” that must remain constant for me – that subtle reminder in my submission to what God has in store.

During this Lenten season and in our daily lives, may we wander less as we pray more (even though worrying tends to be so easy).

Prayer: Gracious and Loving God, clear our hearts and minds that we may hear Your voice, welcoming us to lay our worries at Your feet, and be free to do Your will. Amen.

Wednesday, February 28

Lessons in Lifelong Learning

Lisa Borton

“Do you think it’s possible to remain committed to your convictions but also open to new perspectives?”

As I prayed and pondered about what to share in my devotion, this question from the Lenten booklet guidelines jumped out at me. One of the tenets of my life is to be a “lifelong learner.” I am more of a generalist, wanting to know a bit about everything, but I challenge myself to learn from others who have spent perhaps a lifetime diving into one topic.

Listening to the voices of those with lived experiences very different than mine (either by reading books or listening to podcasts) is so valuable to my continuing education. I believe we become much more grace-filled toward others when we listen to their stories. It is easy to judge others when we see only their immediate, visible circumstances, but once we know why they are in a situation, our empathy and desire to help them come to the surface.

Lifelong learning applies to how I understand the Bible as well. We often get stuck in what we learned about the Bible in 2nd grade Sunday School. Not that those lessons were inaccurate, but as we delve more deeply into God’s word, we read it with a maturity and resources we did not have as children. Many scholars devote their lives to studying the ancient texts, discovering the context in which they were written, and trying to discern God’s message to us through the text.

I love reading the Bible stories with new eyes based on additional interpretations of the Word via these scholars. I am grateful to Pastor Eric for challenging us to read the Bible in a year with him in 2024. Each morning, his soothing voice reads a few chapters to me, and then I try to determine how that text can apply to the world we live in. (As of this writing, we are in Genesis, and if you ever think our modern-day headlines are outlandish, they don’t compare to the events in the Old Testament!)

Something one of my children learned from a campus pastor was this: Hold tightly to the truth of the Gospel but hold everything else with an open hand, ready to receive what God has for us *today*. Amen and amen.

Thursday, February 29

Leap Into Small Steps

Anonymous

2024 is a leap year! That's fitting, because I made a resolution (again!) to lose what has become a significant amount of weight and get in shape. I want to LEAP into good habits!

Trouble is, as I write this, I'm not having much success. There are a lot of fits and starts that get me down. Especially when I wake up in the morning determined to "do better" today, then by evening I've gone off track again.

I'm educated enough on this topic to know that losing weight is not a "diet" – it's a "live it." Maintaining good dietary and fitness habits doesn't happen overnight, nor should it. It's a lifestyle change, and it definitely doesn't happen in one giant leap.

As I looked over the questions to ponder before writing this devotion, I was struck by how my years-long up and down journey to get in shape is somewhat like Peter's wandering. He had good intentions, but sometimes his follow-through wasn't the best. I can relate to that!

Jesus' response to Peter's wandering heart was to be patient with him, give him another chance. I need that – every day. Not just from others, but from myself.

I need to forgive myself, learn from my mistakes, and not throw in the towel in disgust at my failures. "Dust yourself off and get back on the horse" is an expression my father said often to those who needed extra encouragement. "Try, try again."

So, that I will do. I will try, try (and try and try and try) again. Jesus wanted Peter to, and I believe he wants me too as well.

Prayer: Dear Lord, be with me each step of the way as I care for the "temple" that is my body. When I fall, pick me up, again and again. Amen.

Friday, March 1

Duct Tape or Thread?

Jean Hoyle

As I reflect on the wandering heart of Peter, I reflect upon my own life. There were times my commitment to God and our Lord Jesus was as strong as duct tape, but as I look back, I can see that it was merely a thread at times.

I remember when I was very young, I was late coming home from my grandparents' house. I ran across the field to our house knowing I was going to be scolded, at best. I remember getting to the yard and dropping to my knees to ask God to help me not get in trouble. I walked into the house, and nothing happened! Wow, he heard me! From that day on, our relationship was duct tape.

In my later youth and teen years, I walked with God, active in church and Christian youth groups. Then came college, and my attachment to God was threads. Sleeping, studying and being with friends was everything. I had just a few minutes for God here and there.

Coming back to God was a journey that I took with my husband. We eventually found Grace Church and loved the pastor as well as the strong youth program. We wanted our children to know God and Jesus; through Grace, they were involved from toddlers to college students. Our family was duct-taped to God. Yet, like Peter, we wander from time to time, holding onto our Lord by a thread.

But by the grace of God, our relationship strengthens. Now more than ever, I feel the bonds of our Lord Jesus and Heavenly Father. My husband, Grace Church and the 9G worship service keep me grounded. God is great, and so is the duct tape that binds us together.



Saturday, March 2

Take a Walk On the Wild Side

Rev. Darren CushmanWood

Read: Matthew 14

The boat is an ancient symbol for the church. In one case, our Methodist ancestors took this symbol literally. In 1845, the Methodist Episcopal Church in New York City launched a new outreach ministry to Swedish immigrants called "Bethelship." It was a ship docked in Brooklyn that served as a chapel for Swedish sailors, which became Immanuel Methodist Episcopal Church in Brooklyn.

Read between the lines in Matthew 14, and you'll see that this is a story about the church under duress. That first assembly of believers were rowing against the wind.

And where was Jesus when the disciples needed him? Not in the boat. He was out in the storm. And they reacted the way the church often reacts today. There were a few who ignored everything. They went down below, took a Dramamine and went to sleep. Then there were the realists who focused on preserving the boat.

And then there was Peter. He didn't worry about the seaworthiness of the boat. He just jumped overboard when he heard Jesus call him.

Jesus was calling him to take a walk on the wild side of faith. There was no proof prior to jumping that he would not sink. Faith involves risk. Jesus was calling Peter to take the risk and trust in his words that everything would be alright. Or in the words of the Velvet Underground, Jesus was saying to Peter, "Hey, Babe, take a walk on the wild side."

Jesus is saying to the church today, "Hey, Babe, take a walk on the wild side." It is so easy for our faith to become little more than treading water. There comes a time in the life of every congregation when they have to step out of the boat to meet Jesus.

Listen closely for Jesus to say to us what he told his disciples who were scared: "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid."

Don't be afraid. Don't fear the future. Don't be afraid of change. Peter's fear of jumping overboard was not taken away because he had more knowledge or planning or time than the other disciples. His fears were overcome because of the presence of Christ. When we take the risk of faith, Christ will meet us in the storm.

Will you take a walk on the wild side?

Sunday, March 3

His Will, Not Mine, Be Done

Elaine Pauls

I don't remember a time that I denied God. But there are many times in my daily life that I ignore or overlook Him. When I am praying, my mind is easily distracted by noises I hear, the phone ring or ding that I have a message, or a strange noise on the front porch. Even the furnace coming on can distract me. But most likely it is my cluttered mind with so many intrusions that causes me to lose focus. Oh! Is the laundry done? Did I pay the insurance bill, or when is it time to leave for that appointment?

How about the friends who now have a new address and they don't answer the phone because they didn't put my cell number into their contact list? I give up easily after trying to get in touch with them. Am I ignoring Jesus at these times? Am I just too busy to do the things expected of me to be God's hands and ears on this earth?

A friend told me about a visit with her family, and her eyes were just sparkling. Her grandson, a teen, lives in California; therefore, she sees him seldom and wanted to cook something at her home with him. She told me, "I told him what to do and he just did it all by himself." They had a tasty blueberry dessert. She also mentioned that his hair was "wild and unkempt" with a little smile in her twinkling eyes. The proudest grandmother you can imagine.

This reminds me of our relationship with God. He must be very pleased when we follow His lead and do what He taught us to do. Do we always pray by asking for direction or do we dictate to God what we want the outcome to be? "Lord, help me with the words"..."How can I help this person in their grief?"..."What can I do to give encouragement and permission to do the right thing?"

Instead, we often pray by asking God to do things for us. "Heal my friend...get my son the good job...help my daughter in her search for the perfect husband." Maybe we pray by dictating instead of asking for guidance.

Prayer: God, give me the wisdom and understanding to do Your will, not mine. Amen.

Monday, March 4

Go Figure Phil Kapela

I've been brash, impulsive, speaking without thinking – hardly a paragon of character – YET

He chose me and changed both my name and life.

My brother told me about Jesus.

I immediately left the boat and chose Him and the road.

I promised to follow Him no matter what and proceeded to deny Him three times, often stumbling.

Like another, I denied Him, yet I did not sell Him out for money, and I did not kill myself.

Later He asked me three times if I loved Him and I said that I did.

He then informed me that later in my life someone would take me to somewhere I would not choose.

He called me “rock.” Being stubborn and often bull-headed, this did not surprise me.

The surprise blossomed in being the most unlikely to be a leader later.

His faithfulness overcame my faithlessness. Go figure.

Yet, We Continue Phil Kapela

Memories, events, births, deaths, discoveries – these and many other items stand out in our memories, especially over the last few years.

“I will never forget when...” These few words contain so much.

“The baby was born!” These words bring joy to family of many generations.

“I'm coming home!” Good news of the release of a person from the hospital who was intubated, recovered enough to be released, brings joy and hope to a family.

“... has died!” This sort of news burns into the heart and brain and lasts – 500,000 deaths – heard so often and painfully by so many!

YET

We continue living, we continue believing, we continue hoping.

Centuries ago, when a community, a nation, was devastated, with no seen hope for the future, Jeremiah wrote because of his belief and life in a God who was in his life: “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jeremiah 29.11)

Tuesday, March 5

One In the Spirit

Jean Ives

This year's guidelines for Lenten reflections included the question, "Do you think it's possible to remain committed to your convictions but also remain open to new perspectives?" It was that question that prompted this reflection.

I grew up in a traditional Methodist household of the '50s. One day in high school, I announced that I had decided not to go to Sunday School anymore. My parents at first were very distressed. They finally said they would go along with it if, instead, I visited other churches on Sunday mornings.

In retrospect, I see how wise they were in giving me that space. A girlfriend and I visited many other churches over the next few months, all of them mainline Protestant. Although I thought I was very much a free spirit at the time, I later realized that visiting only other Protestant churches did not expand my horizons in any appreciable way.

Over the next 60 years or so (I am 72), I delved further into the space that unites all of God's creation. I feel a deep reverence for the traditions and theology of Theosophy (whose adherents were formerly known as free thinkers), Baha'i (whose form of democratic governance is a world class model), and Hindu (whose Lord Krishna shows infinite compassion toward all living things).

I begin every day with meditation according to Eknath Easwaran's program. The tenets of all these religions strengthen rather than weaken the beliefs I grew up with. My soul resonates most fully with the perfect love and compassion of Jesus, and I can see God's hand in the plan that other people's souls resonate more fully with other paths.

When I remarried in 2003, I became Catholic and remained so until 2017, several years after my husband passed away. I love the rituals of the Catholic Mass that go beyond doctrine: the single-pointed attention of working the beads of the Rosary, the sanctity of kneeling, the sensory experience of incense, the mystical meditation on the saints.

I returned to my Methodist roots mostly because I missed Methodist music, particularly congregants singing it with their whole hearts. And I was convinced by then (and to this day) that it doesn't matter what brand name you put on it: the recognition that we are all one in the spirit, one in the Lord, is the only point of every religion.

Wednesday, March 6

Grace, the Air We Breathe

Trudy Dartt Walters

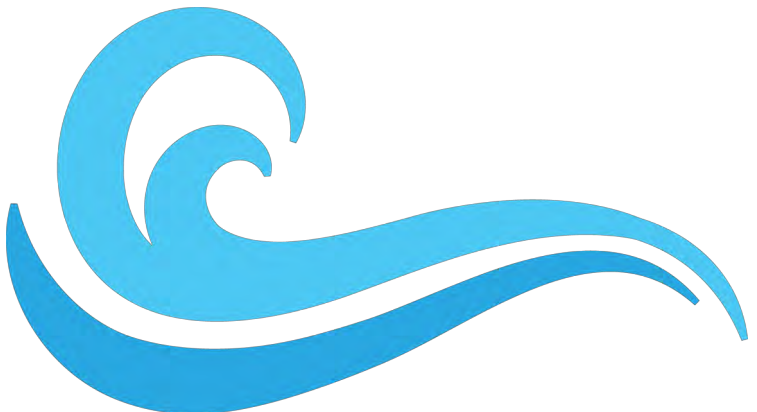
For almost 40 years, my professional career was in teaching, school administration and school culture and climate consulting. The combination of that work was to help lift up the youth in our schools to be their best selves.

I felt this work was my calling. I promised God to do and be my best. Yet, I often allowed myself to get frustrated and exhausted, not my best self. Every time I ended up with these deep feelings, there would be much fretting. Eventually, I would recall this Biblical promise: “And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.” (Romans 11:6)

I needed to remember God’s grace given freely. I needed to slow down. I needed to calm my heart. I needed to love and care for myself as God loves and cares for me. I needed to remind myself that we cannot lose or multiply grace. We can only forget for a moment the grace we have already received.

Grace is like the air we breathe – it is for our taking as much as we need. Remembering this allowed me to slow down, prayerfully and gratefully take the deep breaths needed for restoration and to be at my best. I could easily press on, focusing on the commitments I made for the children and their families out of love.

Prayer: Thank you, God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit for your unconditional gifts.



Thursday, March 7

Risen Jesus and Peter: His Restoration and Ours, Too Doug Bowden (Retired Pastor)

John 21:3: Simon Peter said to (his fellow disciples), “I am going fishing.”

Peter, disciple of the Risen Jesus, is our human soulmate with the words “I am going fishing.” Indeed, Peter, his life before us, as we ponder deeply what he is saying here.

Peter, first called by Jesus from his fishing boat and from his profession of fishing to follow him and be his disciple. Peter, first to profess that Jesus is the Christ. Peter, then immediately refusing to believe Jesus’ passion prediction of his suffering death and then his rising from the dead. “Get behind me, Satan,” Jesus’ words to Peter.

Peter’s denial three times of Jesus on the night of his arrest, we painfully remember. Even as Mary Magdalene and the other faithful women are the first to find the empty tomb and see the Risen Jesus, we wonder and are not sure about Peter in the 50 days now in the Easter season. Indeed, until this moment in this story of John 21, when the Risen Jesus finds Peter and the other disciples fishing. “I am going fishing,” announced Peter.

Gary D. Jones opens up Peter’s words with this sensitive insight: “It is a detail of the Gospel narrative that seems quaint and even quirky, coming as it does in the midst of such world-altering events. However, this is how human beings often respond to emotional overload, and the disciples’ decision to return to their former life and trade sets up to realize that, in some ways, there is no longer any escape. Wherever they go, the Lord will be with them. For, even as the disciples retreat to their familiar trade, as we might retreat to the office or to the mail or to the garden, what they ultimately discover is that Jesus is there, and he is waiting to serve and nourish them.”

Now, in this transformative Gospel story, the Risen Jesus restores Peter, not through judgment for his three betrayals, but graciously, with three restorative blessings to be an Easter shepherd, feeding God’s people. Pondering this, the Holy Spirit moving among us, empathizing with Peter, we begin to hear, trust and believe this good news. The Risen Jesus, whatever our sins, our silence, restores us.

Prayer: Risen Jesus, restore us, as you restored Peter, to be your Easter feeding disciples. Amen.

Friday, March 8

Peter, Cornelius, and the Gentiles: A New Church

Doug Bowden (Retired Pastor)

Acts 10:34: Then Peter began to speak to (Cornelius), “I truly understand that God shows no partiality.”

Peter is now a very different disciple from the one the Risen Jesus restored in an Easter breakfast on the Sea of Galilee (John 21: 1-19). While then deciding to return to his life before Jesus, Peter, now restored and commissioned to be a feeding shepherd, has been filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and is the leader of the Jerusalem Church.

Indeed, Peter, fearless and now certain of who he is and what he believes, as we read and hear in the first chapters of the Book of Acts. Peter, alive in Christ! Yet, in the wonders of God’s gracious providence, Peter has an even greater surprise coming to him. Indeed, perhaps just when Peter thinks he has it all figured out and everything is in his control, God brings Peter (the Jewish Christian leader of the Jerusalem Church) and Cornelius (a Gentile Roman centurion, “a devout man who feared God with all his household”) together through a “double vision.”

Peter, likely asking and perplexed anew, “How can this be?” This vision, as we read in Acts 10, has all sorts of “four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air,” seemingly calling him to violate or break the very sacred eating codes and practices of Mosaic Torah law. Then right after the vision, the men Cornelius has sent to Peter come and urge him to go with them to talk with Cornelius.

What is happening here that a Jewish Christian, Peter, committed to purify in all matters, would meet with Cornelius, a Gentile? What a meeting this is! Cornelius falls at Peter’s feet, worshipping him. Peter, seeing a whole new world, indeed a whole new church, of Gentiles and Jews, one in Christ.

Peter, definitely filled with the Pentecost Holy Spirit, preaches a second great Pentecost sermon. “God shows no partiality,” meaning that God, through Jesus Christ, is ready to welcome Gentiles into a “New Church,” where both are welcome in Christ. So, Peter baptizes Cornelius and his household in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 10:44-48).

This Acts 10 story connects so well to our Lenten devotional theme of “Figuring Out Faith with Peter.” Imagine ourselves, like Peter, meeting with Cornelius, in dialogue with new persons in a “New Church.”

Prayer: O God, may the grace of Peter and Cornelius meeting be the grace of our lives in Christ. Amen.

Saturday, March 9

Rainbows and Mom

Ruth Allison

I'm not sure how this got started, but my sister and I both swear that whenever we see a rainbow, we think of our mother. My sister can be in Arizona seeing a rainbow, while I look out my window in Illinois and see a rainbow. It unites us with Mom at the top!

I feel so blessed to have had such a positive mother. She loved Grace Church. One day, near the end of her life, former Pastor Larry Hilkemann asked if Grace could hold Mom's service. It was perfect.

May this next year bring a pot of happiness into your lives.



Watercolor by Cindy Buchanan

Sunday, March 10

Treasure in Heaven

Jacalyn Green Tschirhart

Matthew 4:18-20: Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee. He saw two brothers. They were Simon (his other name was Peter) and Andrew, his brother. They were putting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, “Follow Me. I will make you fish for people!” At once they left their nets and followed Him.

Matthew 19:21-22: Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then, come, follow me. When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

In the first passage from Matthew, we find that Simon Peter, later referred to only as Peter, abandons his profession and family and follows Jesus. While he was a young man, this must have been difficult – how easy is it to leave one’s profession and presumably his family and possessions – to follow Jesus? Later, we find that Jesus encounters a wealthy young man who is in the moment inspired by Jesus, but cannot abandon his worldly possessions to follow Him.

As Americans, we have a lot of stuff, and these items distract us from our relationship with God. After cleaning out two parental homes, I found myself overwhelmed. With my retirement, I vowed to systematically reduce our possessions. I do not want to leave our children the volume and chaos of stuff my mother collected. This is easier said than done. Apart from old typewriters and decades of *Readers’ Digests*, my mother saved many letters and diaries – her own, her mother’s, her grandmother’s – with handwritten notes of daily life predating my birth. That said, the details are often mundane.

Other items are useful, and I have begun donating them to thrift stores. A Facebook group that I recently discovered is called “Buy Nothing Naperville.” Here, people post items they do not want anymore; others ask for them. It is a fantastic way to give away things to those who truly want them. Many parents pass along clothing, furniture and toys. It is a community of people who support one another and make us better stewards of the earth.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for all our earthly blessings, and help us to generously pass them to others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Monday, March 11

Running Toward Hope

Sandy Bray

Romans 12:12: Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

One of the worst days in my life, and in many lives, was September 11, 2001. My nephew had been a New York City fireman. He was off duty due to cancer. His Ladder was the second company called in. He lost numerous "brothers" that day. I wrote the following that evening as I sat quietly and replayed the events that had occurred. I felt hopeless, confused and angry with God.

September 11, 2001

Can one really forgive the evil, Lord?

How does one forgive those who have caused such massive death and destruction this day?

My heart is heavy, God.

Why do things like this happen?

I cry for those families and friends devastated by this tragedy.

I want to strike back.

To hurt those who have caused this pain.

I want to see and hear their cries of anguish.

Where in my soul, Lord, do I find the mercy to forgive such evil?

Help me, God.

Open my heart and fill me with your love.

Let the sweetness of your grace
in this bitter time cleanse me of
my hate for these people.

Help me to find the courage to
not condemn but to pray for
them.

Amen.



Tuesday, March 12

An All the Time Thing

Bill Fronk

My late friend, Wayne, said to me many times, "Lord, I believe, help me in my unbelief." When I think about Wayne and his earnest, short prayer, I think about his devoutness and his shining example of what being a true Christian is all about. It reminds me of the apostle Peter. Peter was zealous in his love for Jesus. Yet, he had problems in his belief.

Just think about Peter and what the Lord said to him (Matthew 16:18): "I tell you that you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church." This was right after Simon Peter said in answer to Jesus' question, "Who do you say I am?" And Peter unhesitatingly answers, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." So, Peter clearly believed.

There was also the time when Peter, John and James went up the mountain with Jesus. Jesus was transfigured and they saw his full glory with Moses and Elijah beside Him (Luke 9: 28-36).

The apostles also saw Jesus do so many miracles. Yet, they abandoned Him at the time of His suffering and crucifixion. Then, the apostle Thomas (John 20:25), after Jesus' resurrection said, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my fingers where the nails were and my hand into his side, I will not believe."

And, what about those times that Peter expressed doubts? Peter responded to Jesus' call and got out of the boat and for a short while walked on water. Then, he lost faith and called out to Jesus to save him (Matthew 14: 22-31). Later, Peter denied knowing Jesus during Jesus' trial (Luke 22:54).

Yet, the Lord loved him and forgave him. He also loves each of us. But we need to stay close to Him. I know that when I have gotten away from Him, He was still there for me. I need to keep focus and remember that He died for each of us.

Keeping close is one reason I embrace Pastor Eric Blachford's challenge to read the Bible in one year. Keeping close is why I need to do my morning devotionals every day. As my friend Wayne used to say, "Faith is not a sometimes thing. It is an all the time thing."

Wednesday, March 13

A Word of Compassion

Elaine Johnson

When I think of Peter, I think of his great faith in proclaiming Jesus as “the Messiah, the son of the living God.” It was a stunning acknowledgement, and Jesus responded by calling him blessed and promising that “on this rock I will build my church.” It is to faithful and forthright Peter that Jesus gave the keys of the kingdom, with the power to bind and loose not only on earth, but also in heaven.

But when I think of Peter, I also think of the terrified man who abandoned Jesus in his time of trial and then denied his Messiah three times in order to save his own skin. This great saint, it turns out, was also just a man. And as such, he provides a powerful example to all of us. Like Peter, we are beleaguered by inexorable weaknesses and wobbly convictions. Yet, we are also capable of great courage and enduring faith.

Peter went on to build Christ’s church, despite his human frailty. To do that, he had to awaken each morning, not destroyed by his abject denial of the now-risen Christ, but strengthened by the knowledge that he was the man Christ chose to establish something immortal.

I think of Peter when I struggle with my own entrenched flaws. At my worst (and all too often), I can be witheringly judgmental, sharp-tongued and impatient. Characteristics suited only to panels of inquisition or dimly lit interrogation rooms, if at all.

Yet, I’ve come to recognize that a strong current of compassion also flows through me, allowing me to recognize the vulnerability, neediness and humanity in even the hardest case. Like liquid sandpaper, it smooths my rough exterior and fills me with the tenderness and resolve Jesus promised to bestow on all his followers through the Holy Spirit. “You know him. For he dwells with you, and shall be in you.” (John 14:17)

I have taken “compassion” as my word for 2024. I want to reflect on it, how I can nurture it and how I can direct the positive action it inspires. The older I grow, the more I’ve come to recognize the unmistakable presence of God in myself, in others, and in nature. And rather than cowering in fear under the weight of current events, I am encouraged by God’s presence to look for ways to further the work of Christ’s church in a broken and beautiful world.

Thursday, March 14

Follow the Nudges

John Stuart

I was raised at Grace United Methodist Church and raised my own kids here as well. However, I have *wandered* much during my 52 years. This devotion is for those, like me, who have *wandered*, are *wandering* now or may *wander* in the future. I challenge you to “follow the nudges.”

I was raised with a standard that you attend church every Sunday morning, like it or not. In college, I *wandered* away from attending except when home for breaks. My Dad would hit my feet while I was asleep, saying “Get up, time for church.”

After college, living alone, I’d wake “foggy” on Sunday mornings and leave for church (without Dad’s prompting). “What’s making me go to church?”, I’d ask myself. I now acknowledge it was the Holy Spirit’s “nudge.” Thanks, Mom and Dad, for instilling the habit of attending church.

In my early to mid-20’s, I felt a “nudge” to offer to do some chores at Grace. Pastor Stoner approached me, saying, “Instead of chores, John, why don’t you teach a confirmation class?”. Whoa, not what I expected to commit to! Years and multiple mission trips later, I experienced amazing times chaperoning the Grace high school youth. Thanks, Mike Stoner, for giving me a challenging “nudge.”

Later, with my young family attending Grace, the Trustees had their fall leaf raking at church. I trusted a thought to walk over and introduce myself to a guy raking alone that I had resisted meeting for years. Tom Schlegel eventually became one of my closest friends, and I was humbled witnessing his last breath in the hospital room. Thanks, God, for “the nudge” to go introduce myself to the nicest person I’ve ever met.

Later, my divorce and Covid gave me excuses to *wander* from Grace. Last month, I received a text from Pastor Mark inviting me to join a men’s group. I thought, “I’ve been five years absent from Grace; where did that come from?”. Thanks, Pastor Mark, for “the nudge” that I had *wandered* too far.

This week I actually read the GUMC Grace Notes for the first time in ten years. I saw that Barb, the editor of this booklet, needed more writers for devotions, and I felt another “nudge.”

During my *wandering* away from Grace, there have been “nudges,” but I’ve paid attention to only a few. What “nudges” have you missed, and can you acknowledge the next one coming? Thank you, God, for the “nudges” during my *wandering*.

Friday, March 15

9:00am Call

Nick Hoyle

My wife and I joined Grace when our daughter was born. We had been searching for a church, but we could not decide on one. When we first attended Grace, we were surprised and encouraged about the Sunday School program. There were a lot of kids in the program with lots of things to do. We thought this was the church for us because of the children's program.

Fast forward five years...our daughter is in kindergarten, and we are asked to be Sunday School leaders for her class. This turned out to be a longer commitment than we first anticipated because we added to our family with two boys and taught Sunday School for all three of our children.

It was a very rewarding experience being a part of our children learning about God and growing in their faith. After they were confirmed, we were done...at least that is what I thought. I was on a few committees, but nothing ever "stuck." I wasn't that interested, I was busy with work, home, family commitments, etc. Time went by.

And then I became involved in the 9G worship service on Sunday mornings at Grace. I don't really remember how it happened. Did I volunteer? Did Paster Cindy call and ask me if I was interested? I don't know, but one day I found myself in a meeting talking about the new service at 9:00am in the Activity Center.

It was going to be a non-traditional service, contemporary, led by lay people. I was intrigued. I was getting ready to retire, so I had some time on my hands, and I was comfortable talking in front of people. I had given many speeches, keynote addresses, and sales kickoff messages in corporate America, so being in front of people was okay with me. There was no set agenda/program; we were making it in our meetings. Once again, I was able to take what I had learned and done in my work career and apply that knowledge to this service. I was comfortable with the fluid and flexible parameters of what the service could be.

I feel that God used my work experience to be part of the 9G service.

Saturday, March 16

Love Without Condition

Dave Brewer

Of the many people in the Bible, the Apostle Peter is the one that I relate to most. He was so devoted and loyal to his literal best friend, Jesus Christ, yet he was so susceptible to his faults as a human being. He stood by Christ so loyally and unswervingly, yet at the most crucial time of Christ's life, he denied him not once, not twice, but three times.

This, of course, put Peter in the depths of despair, as it would anybody. How did Christ reward him, though? He loved him unconditionally. In fact, He gave him the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven!

Like Peter, I have my faults. I am prideful; I have struggled with addiction, marital problems. I am very insular, and I don't always let people in. I keep things to myself, as if I must shoulder the burden alone, despite having a loving wife who is also my best friend.

Yet, also like Peter, I turn to God in prayer and try to put Him first, regardless of the challenges I face. Amongst my prayers is a thanks to God for all that He does and all He will continue to do.

I do this especially when life throws me curve balls, like a couple of years ago when I lost my job. I didn't want to let my family down. I felt like I had failed as a man, emasculated. I had to find a new job – not an easy task when you are 48 years old and you have had the same career for over 20 years. In my darkest moments, I even contemplated suicide.

But, like Peter before me, I got through this tribulation. I got a new job in which I'm much happier. God pulled me through it because He loves me unconditionally, and He is always there for me.

Sydney, Australia

Sunday, March 17

Pioneers Who Blazed the Way for My Faith

Larry Hartman

Hebrews 12:1: Do you see what this means – all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running – and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in.

I am interested in family history as a hobby, as are many Americans. My curiosity was sparked after reading my Aunt Lois' memoir, written in 1978. She brought my ancestors to life through her narrative, detailing their hard-working, faith-based farming existence. She shared her experiences growing up in Wheatland Township in the early to mid-1900s, surrounded by many aunts, uncles, and grandparents.

I have carried on her family history interest through my own research of archival records, historical newspapers, and other records. I value the examples of Christian faith in their lives that I have uncovered.

In "History of the Illinois Conference of the Evangelical Church 1837-1937," I found my third great-grandfather, Adam Hartman, listed as one of the earliest members of the Naperville First (Zion) Church, now known as Community United Methodist Church in downtown Naperville. Adam and his family joined the church after arriving by wagon in 1844 from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, with eleven other families.

I found his name again scripted in an original hand-written document* created on December 26, 1860. This document listed donors who committed to fund construction of the first evangelical church in the settlement called Copenhagen (in far southwest Naperville Township). Also listed as donors are two other third great-grandfathers, Daniel Slick and John Lantz. The church was designed to be a modest thirty-six by fifty feet. This Copenhagen church evolved over the decades to become Wheatland-Salem United Methodist Church.

My second great-grandfather, Daniel Patterson, donated the land in 1907 for construction of Wheatland-Salem UMC (at its location from early 1900s to the 1980s). He was a devout Scottish immigrant farmer.

Daniel's son, my great-grandfather and prominent Wheatland farmer, William D. Patterson, was president of a group called "Young People's Alliance" at Wheatland-Salem church in 1908.* As mentioned in my Aunt Lois' memoir, every Sunday, William and his family sat in the front row. He also taught Sunday school for many years. These long-gone ancestors are the pioneers who "blazed the way" for my faith.

*Wheatland-Salem UMC in the regional archives at NIU DeKalb.



*Copenhagen Church at 83rd Street and Rt. 59. Circa 1860
(www.WheatlandSalem.org/about-us)*

Monday, March 18

Who's In Charge?

Judy Davis

Often times in life, especially when things are going our way, we forget about God. It's not intentional, but we get so busy in our day-to-day scurrying around, trying to manage the problems in our own little world, that we forget that God our Father is just waiting for us to ask for his help. Occasionally, someone may ask that we pray for God to intervene and solve a problem. We know that oftentimes prayers are answered, yet we forget to ask God for his help and guidance on a regular basis.

More often than not, we feel that he should only be called upon when the situation is grave. But how freeing would it be if every day, we would ask God for his help in *all matters*, whether they are simple or complex, having to do with us, or everyone around us...our country...the world? Think outside the box. Why only speak to God when things are dire?

I have lived in Naperville for 25 years. I have five married children and 11 grandchildren, all who live in Michigan, where I grew up and they were raised. They would often ask me to move back, so that I could be close to all of them. Yet, I struggled with leaving all my dear friends here that I had become close to over the years. I loved my home, and I didn't want to start my life all over and begin again.

I brought this dilemma to God, beginning my new journey with a prayer that God would help me with all the decisions I would have to make. That week, my second daughter, Christina, and her husband were transferred to England for two years with their three boys. They lived on Grosse Ile ("Big Island") in Michigan, where I grew up and my children were raised.

I asked Christina if I could live in her empty home while I sold my home in Naperville. She was excited about the idea of me taking care of her home, and my son and his family lived just three houses down. My house sold before it even went on the market!

I moved into my daughter's home thinking that I would be living in it for two years, when my realtor found a home on the island that was a downsized version of my Naperville home that I loved. I saw many of my old friends once again, as well as all of my children and grandchildren.

The old adage is so true: "Let go and let GOD."

Tuesday, March 19

Drifting Back Judy Cornett

Read Matthew 26:31-35

This is a familiar scripture, but as I read it with new eyes and tried to put myself in the shoes of Peter, I noticed several things. Christ told his tired disciples that they would all fall away, but Peter, in a *confident* rebuttal, said that he would never do that, and all the others agreed with him. Maybe the painful reality of what Christ was preparing them for was just too much to absorb.

I cannot identify with that confidence because I have “drifted away” at times and have readily accepted the beautiful ending of this story. Peter was forgiven and restored and went on to be a powerful witness and faithful follower of his Risen Lord.

My “drifting” can be subtle and comes easily. It is easy to grow weaker in my commitment to Christ if I drift away from prayer, scripture reading and daily devotion time.

What helps me get centered again is the fellowship that my Hearts on Fire Sunday School class provides. As we study the scripture together and share our faith walk openly, I feel an accountability that I need. It is helpful to see how devoted Christians keep themselves from drifting. Living a faith-filled life can be challenging, and I am very grateful for the reinforcement that I receive from my Grace Church community.



Happy 1st Day of Spring!

Watercolor by
Cindy Buchanan

Wednesday, March 20

Hidden Blessings

Mollie Ledwith

Obstructions abound in our personal and spiritual lives. Our all-too-frequent response to these challenges runs the gamut from mild, eye-rolling irritation, to muttering “here we go again,” to frozen inaction or avoiding, resisting or rationalizing our response, to doubling down on what we think will “work” or what we “know” is right and “should” happen, to self-justification, impatience or seething, to full-blown ranting and raving or retribution.

The longer we stay with these reactions, the longer the gift, or the hidden blessing, in these situations goes unclaimed. How can we observe and not immediately judge or react so that the wisdom, shimmering under the surface and waiting to be discovered, can emerge and lead us to new ways to see, to hear, to react, and to be? How can we trade in aversion to situations or people for acceptance of the gift that they encase?

Remembering “we cannot walk without hitting our shins against an altar” (Barbara Brown Taylor) and by claiming our gifts as the choice makers we are, we could...

Replace “Why is this happening **to** me” with “How is this happening **for** me”?

Ponder the wisdom of Hafiz: “Where you are right now, God circles on a map for you.”

Remember that “we are already in the presence of God. What’s absent is awareness.” (Richard Rohr)

Receive the insight of: “sharp, smooth, ugly, beautiful, painful, and healing.” (Richard Rohr)

Bow to holy listening as it dances with holy patience so that the hidden message seeps gently, yet compassionately, into our hearts.

Be open and quiet, exchanging our well-honed coping strategies and avoidances for a deeper truth.

Practice letting go and sitting empty rather than clinging to habitual ways of thinking and ways of reacting to objects or conditions.

Accept things as they are, realizing some blessings are beyond our immediate understanding.

Surrender to the lesson in humbleness and receive the insight and wisdom in holy surprise.

“Tolerate ambiguity rather than clarity and control.” (anonymous)

Trust the wisdom in “letting go of what I thought I knew in order to appreciate truths I had never dreamed of.” (anonymous)

Finally, we could “listen with a still heart, with a waiting, open soul, without passion, without desire, without judgment, without opinions.” (Hermann Hesse)

Thursday, March 21

“But Who Do YOU Say That I Am?”

Emma CW Ceruti

Matthew 16:13-20 (abridged here for space): Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Mark 8:27-30: Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.”

Luke 9:18-21: Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” They answered, “John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “The Messiah of God.”

Despite differing interpretations, most Christian denominations can agree on one thing: Peter is the “rock” of the church. In all three of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), Jesus confronts his disciples about the speculation regarding his identity. At first, Jesus asks about the opinion of others. *What do people say about me?* Like any good friend, his disciples answer truthfully, giving the various answers of “John the Baptist,” “Elijah,” or “one of the prophets.”

Then Jesus vulnerably, yet courageously, turns the question to his disciples and asks *them* to identify him. *But what do you say?* Slightly varied in each of the three gospels but essentially the same, Peter identifies Jesus as the “Messiah,” “Christ,” “Son of the living God.” In Matthew, Jesus blesses Peter, praising and accepting his honest answer. He proclaims Peter’s words as divine revelation: “For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven,” and as a result, selects Peter as the leader of the Apostles and “rock” of his church.

The unifying agreement among Christians of all ecclesial backgrounds demonstrates the significance of this declaration. Peter as “rock” is fundamental to Christology. Peter, in his own words with his own breath, names Jesus as the “anointed one” [Christ], “deliverer” [Messiah], eternal and embodied [the Son of Man]. It is the naming that is the foundation of the church.

No matter what comes after Peter’s confession – from papal doctrine to evangelical altar calls – what unites us all as Christians is the need for articulation. Something inside of us needs to be released. The unsaid said. Jesus pulls that out of us. Human faces human and divine speaks to divine. Like Peter, one cannot hesitate, but simply speak.

Friday, March 22

A New Day Dawning

Phil Kapela

The singing and chirping of the birds announce that a new day has begun. The morning sun slowly creeps over the horizon to usher in a new day...

Dark nights can be tough and even painful, wrenching the body and soul in pain. *Yet*, my morning alarm of the chirping robin reminds me that a new day of life and hope awaits to be embraced like a newly born infant, full of promise for the future.

I am a morning person. Brewing and drinking coffee accompany my time with God in the morning. The aroma enters my nostrils and delights my tongue, awakening my soul to a new day of life and hope, through God's word and Word to be shared with others.

A choice is out there to say either "Good morning, God," or "Good God, it's morning." Mourning and morning sound the same and may be the same unless...

Of this choice, a writer centuries ago offered the following: "Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning." (Psalm 30:5)

My prayer is we may see the joy, receive the joy, and be the joy for others!



*Watercolor by
Cindy Buchanan*

Saturday, March 23

But How Can This Be?

Linda Fronk

This is the response of everyone who hears the story of Jesus. Two thousand years later, Christian followers echo the statement of the father who comes to Jesus begging him to heal his son who suffered from convulsions. Jesus asks him if he believes. He immediately replies, "Yes, Lord, I believe; (then honestly adds) help me in my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24)

In John 3, Nicodemus meets with Jesus in the cover of night to discuss Jesus' teachings and miracles. Jesus tells him that he must be born again and, in essence, says that if Nicodemus does not believe the miracles he has seen with his very eyes, then how will he ever believe what Jesus has to tell him?

Belief and faith have always been difficult. The book of John was written so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ. Those who believe what is written there are said to have faith. Even the most learned and devout have reported struggling with their spiritual crises, which are termed "the dark night of the soul."

Some theologians cite that even Jesus, in his humanity on the cross, cried out, "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?" (Mathew 27:24)

Doubt or unbelief usually happens when we are experiencing ongoing trials and pain or when we see immense suffering and horror in our world. Yet the Bible is clear that this world is not our home and that until Jesus comes again, death and evil will be an ongoing part of our existence. Our job is to remain faithful and work with God to redeem his creation.

Henri Nouwen, the Dutch Catholic priest, theologian and author of many books, wrote in his book *Home Tonight: Further Reflections on the Parable of the Prodigal Son* that many times we leave Christ and return...often in the same day. It was his belief that those "leavings and returnings" are necessary to grow and strengthen our faith.

Perhaps that is what happened to Nicodemus. For we know that he went with Joseph of Arimathea to claim the body of Jesus for burial and is venerated as a saint in both the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches.

Palm Sunday, March 24

Extravagant Hospitality

Pastor Don Niswonger

Read Matthew 26, John 15:12

Jesus's life and ministry is a story of a journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, from the place of his primary ministry to the place of his death. It is written that he "steadfastly turned his face toward Jerusalem." He intentionally moved in the direction of confrontation with the oppression of the religious establishment (the stagnation of the status quo) and the oppressive imperialism of Roman occupation...nothing less than the symbol and metaphor of all systems of oppression and power over others.

When he called those to be his disciples, he simply said: "Follow me." And then for three years he lived out a way of life that was unique, so distinctive that the first disciples were not called "Christians" but, rather, "followers of the WAY."

That WAY was a life that exhibited extravagant hospitality... intentional inclusivity...radical grace...and a way of non-violence. These qualities of life are the mantra of any who would be a follower of Jesus. So, simply stated, the way of unconditional love. In Gethsemane, the struggle of Jesus was real as he saw what it cost to be fully human...to be the best being that he could possibly be...one who would "lay down his life for his friends."

In John 15:12, we have these words: "This is my commandment (to those who would be followers of the WAY): that you love one another as I have loved you."

For me, the message of Holy Week says there is nothing you can ever do to cause God to love you any more, and there is nothing you can ever do to cause God to love you any less.

Prayer: Just a closer walk with thee...Grant it, Jesus, is my plea...Walking daily close to thee...let it be, Lord, let it be. Amen.

*Reprinted from the 2012 GUMC booklet of Lenten devotions.
Pastor Don, Parish Pastor at Grace for many years, passed away on December 24, 2023.*

Monday, March 25

Right Here, Right Now

Barb Ceruti

I saw an ad on television recently that stated firmly, unequivocally that we can know for sure if we're going to heaven or not. The website advertised was simple: heavenornot.net. I won't be visiting this site for a few reasons. One, I don't want to get slammed by online marketing (likely of the fire and brimstone variety); two, I think it's a preposterous notion that we can know with complete certainty what is going to happen after we pass from this earthly life.

Does that make me untrusting or unfaithful like Peter was at times, or is it a reasonable doubt for all thinking humans to have?

I'm certain there are those of us who have zero questions about "what comes next." I've even met a few, of both the "Jesus is waiting for me" and the "to dust we return" schools of thought. But, who among us still living and breathing on this planet *really* knows?

That is not a question I spend much time pondering anymore, as I've come to focus less on eternal destinations and more on the gift of here and now. Despite the war, vitriol, hatred and heartache that seem to define the human condition, I perceive so much beauty in our corporal midst. Sometimes it takes my breath away.

Though blazing sunsets, majestic mountains, sparkling seas are the stars of the earthly show, there is also beauty in the everyday...even the gray, dreary dawn that seems to offer no value but to encourage us back to bed...even the subtlest acts of kindness, mercy, forgiveness and love that restore our faith in God and one another. This may just be heaven on earth.

Indeed, if this is "all there is," I'm okay with that. I believe we were designed by an infinitely benevolent One to fully experience all we can see, hear, feel, taste and smell in every moment and to trust that our Designer is right here among us, every step of the way, regardless of where we "go" when we die.

Heaven or not? I cannot pretend to know. I'd rather put aside preoccupation with the hereafter and celebrate, nurture and cherish all that we can be sure is given us – right here, right now.

Tuesday, March 26

Taking God for Granted

Mary Browning

Deuteronomy 31:8: The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

Throughout my life I cannot remember a time I did not have faith in God. Were there dark times when bad things happened? Of course. Were there times God did not answer my prayers? Yes. However, even during those times, I did not think that God had forgotten about me. In fact, unfortunately, it has been me who has sometimes forgotten about God.

I am embarrassed to admit that sometimes when things are going well, I have not talked to God, or did so less frequently. Instead of thanking him daily for all of my blessings, there have been many times that I have not prayed because all my needs were met.

It was only at times when I needed guidance, love, or a special favor that I would pray for help and communicate with him. I wouldn't call my behavior straying from God, as my faith in God was still alive; however, I took God for granted until I needed him. And even though at those times, I didn't praise God as I should have, he never let me down but instead showed me mercy, grace and love.

As I have grown, both in years and wisdom, I have gotten better at taking time out of my day to thank God for the many things he has blessed me with, whether it's a beautiful, warm, sunny day, a rainbow, food at my table, or the good fortune of loved ones. Do I still sometimes forget? Yes, but I am forever grateful and comforted in the fact that God will never forget me.

Holy Wednesday, March 27

As We Forgive
Merrill Litchfield

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

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

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

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

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

Reprinted from the 2019 booklet of Lenten devotions. Former longtime editor of the Lenten booklets, Merrill passed away on April 2, 2020.

Maundy Thursday, March 28

Let Us Serve as Jesus Did

Pastor Kim Neace

Passages to read: John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Key scripture verse: John 13:14: So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

Imagine sharing in the Passover meal and Jesus getting up, taking a cloth, and bending down to wash your feet. At first, in the passage, we see Peter not necessarily wanting Jesus to wash his feet. His thoughts and actions were wandering toward things other than the main focus of what was happening at that moment. Then, when he begins to understand and focuses on Jesus and his ministry, he wants his whole body cleansed.

I wonder how we would feel if Jesus were to bend down to wash our feet. Would our thoughts and actions wander? Would we feel unworthy? Would we feel nervous? Would we feel uncomfortable? Would we be humbled?

Maundy Thursday has always been dear to my heart, because in order to lead and disciple others, we must first be humble and servant-minded. There have been recent times in my life that this scripture is what has transformed me to serve in ways only possible through my relationship with Jesus and the example that Jesus gives. In 2020, we took my dependent father-in-law into our home for eight months after my mother-in-law's death. I have to admit, my mind began to wander on what that would look like. Thoughts entered my mind such as "I am not a nurse...I don't have the right skills...Our house is not big enough," etc. What I did not realize was God was seeking my heart and willingness more than my skills and abilities.

The first night we took my father-in-law in, I realized he did not bathe himself. We needed to bathe him from head to toe. Yet, we had no shower or tub downstairs, and he was unable to do stairs. So, we had to sponge bathe him. I was uneasy and a little nervous. Then, I was told he needed drops and cream for the fungus on his toes and feet. I remember praying and God giving me the image of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. It was from that instance that what could have been an uncomfortable moment became a very sacred moment. My fears and uneasiness left, and a sense of love, compassion, and humbleness replaced them as I envisioned washing Jesus' feet and serving the way Jesus showed.

In this situation and another with my daughter, I experienced Jesus in mighty ways I did not realize were possible. I had to change my focus from wandering in my own thoughts and abilities to trusting in Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. My heart was changed and enriched. There were some of the most precious and endearing times in my life.

As we prepare our hearts for Easter this Maundy Thursday, may we be reminded of Jesus' servant heart. May we be humbled to reach out and serve others the way that Jesus did. May our hearts and minds not wander away from Jesus, but toward Jesus and what Jesus brings to the world. Ask yourself today, "Who is God calling me to serve in Jesus' name?"

Prayer: Loving and Gracious God, we come before you to ask you to humble our wandering hearts and minds. Empower us to trust in you and your ways. Empower us to love the way that you have loved us and focus our wandering hearts and minds on you. Amen.

Good Friday, March 29

The Darkest Hour, the Brightest Redemption

Pastor Bill Bryan

Our forty-six-day Lenten pilgrimage has led us both up and down: up to the hill of crucifixion and at the same time down to the lowest point in human history. There is a curiously strange coming together of things here beneath Calvary's cross. Who would have thought that this loving teacher, compassionate healer, and prayerful Galilean Jew would finally come to such an end? Here, He bleeds and dies between two common criminals and before a jeering crowd. Who can abide life's tragic mysteries, and who is able to grasp them?

The man whose birth was celebrated by singing angels, announced by a brilliant star, and sought by magi from a distant land is rejected and hanging upon a rough-hewn wooden cross. Contrast the mid-afternoon darkness with the brilliance of His earlier transfiguration. There, the pure white intensity of His Shekinah glory became visible to His disciples. And as for the disciples, they have now scattered and abandoned Him. One of them denied Him, and another betrayed Him into the very hands of His enemies. So much for human loyalty! The brightness of God's presence and the darkness of the hour of His death are close, very close, together.

At the cross we see the dark reality of our sin, selfishness, and indifference to the pain of others, and we grasp how such sin – our kind of sin – leads to the crucifixion of Jesus. In the very same historical moment, we see the amazing and unstoppable love of God for us, a love that will not let us go in spite of our gross unworthiness.

**Prayer: O God,
whose love was so
great that You gave
Your only truly obe-
dient one, Jesus
Christ, for us,
forgive, heal, and
redeem us and set
our footsteps upon
the paths of peace.
Amen.**

*Reprinted from the
2010 Grace UMC
booklet of Lenten
devotions.*



Watercolor by Cindy Buchanan

Holy Saturday, March 30

The Playground

Bonnie Lewan

Psalm 38:2: I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

Parenting is by far the toughest thing I've had to do to date. Trying to guide a developing mind when, to be honest, I'm not 100% confident in my own evolution is tricky. Frequently, I'm reverted back to that same place in my childhood that my son is struggling with now, feeling that same trial as well. Remembering so vividly the difficulty in choosing the Godly way versus the easier way.

And then, of course, I'm often brought right back to the present. In my adult life, many situations will mimic his current predicaments, albeit more subtly and sometimes more complicatedly. These times test my ability to walk in the path that God would have me choose.

My son Joshua was having trouble with another child on the playground. A boy wanted to join Joshua and his friends in their game. I suspect the other child was having difficulty expressing his wants and needs, because it was coming out more aggressively than friendly. Nonetheless, he wanted to play. Joshua came to Jonathan and me – what should he do? The easier thing is to turn your back, not invite the boy to play. The kind thing, the path God would like us to choose, is to let the boy in. Looking back at my eight-year-old self, I'm embarrassed to admit I remember choosing to turn my back in a similar position. I'm proud to say my eight-year-old son did not.

I will try to remember this lesson when a younger physician stops me during my jam-packed day for some much-needed mentoring, when my neighbor's driveway is covered in snow and I'm freezing but more able-bodied, or at the end of the long day when my family is reaching out for me but the bed is so inviting. The path God would like us to choose, even in our small and everyday decisions, may not always be the easiest. But He will hold our hands as we walk it and forgive us our many missteps along the way.

Easter Sunday, March 31

An Easter Inheritance

Paul Ceruti

1 Peter 1: 3-4: Through the resurrection, Christ gave us new birth into a living hope and an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

My living hope – my faith – is that by following Jesus' teachings, my own inheritance will be a peaceful life. Peace of mind and soul, no doubts or regrets in the final accounting. To live with Christ is to make every effort to feel at peace with oneself and make peace with others.

When will my Gethsemane come? My final trial, when the *living* part of my living hope approaches the end? Will I know peace or terror? Heaven or Hell? My faith tells me I will know shalom, because it is my inheritance from God. His most gracious gift, an utmost peace that Christ taught us by his living example and death on the cross. The peace Christ knew on the cross is my living hope, that I too may know more peace than pain in life and in death.

As I live and breathe, my inheritance is kept in heaven. It does not await me, because it is already mine to know.



Watercolor by Cindy Buchanan



He is
Risen!
He Is
Risen
Indeed!

Grace
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



WE GATHER



WE GROW



WE GO

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