



GOD ON THE MOVE

LENT 2019



Mary Esther UMC

Preface

Recently I was prompted to suggest a church-wide devotional. I didn't think it would really go anywhere but the publishing team was supportive and we took off running with it as a Lenten devotional.

At the time I was feeling depressed and it was an effort to carry my part of the project. But as I persevered, got agreement from contributors, and started to receive the devotions, I was able to read what you, my church family, wrote; I began to get excited. The more excited I got the more my depression lifted and the fruit of joy began to grow within me and spill out onto those around me. I am so blessed to be in a new fruitful season by what all of you have shared with us. I am proud to be a member of God's loving family.

Thank you for being a blessing to me and to God.

Sincerely,

Carol Noe

Editor

Mary Esther UMC Member since 2003

SACRIFICE TO FEEL JESUS
Ash Wednesday, March 6

Read Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
Joel 2:12 {NRSV}

Today we begin our 40-day journey. It is time for our annual trek to the CROSS. It is a time set apart for us to return to the LORD. We are to go to Him through our actions; through fasting, weeping and mourning.

I didn't understand Mardi Gras; I didn't see how it tied to the Holy Season of Lent. Then God displayed to me the happiness of the festival next to the solemnness of Lent. Mardi Gras is a joyous celebration which brings us to the occasion of walking in Jesus' footsteps. A celebration of those things we will give up to get closer to God.

Often, people give up things they enjoy; chocolate, coffee, social media, something that they regularly enjoy. It is a chance to collectively sacrifice and receive a glimpse of Jesus' sacrifice for us. The items given up are temptations to do other than God's will just as Satan tempted Jesus during the 40 days in the desert.

Dani Peele

Thought of the day:

Utilize a sacrifice in Lent to become closer to God.

Prayer: Heavenly father, walk beside me as I work to be closer to you through my sacrifice over these next 40 days. Help me to see you in the absence of things I enjoy. In Jesus Holy Name, Amen.

CLEAN HEART = FRESH START

Thursday, March 7

Read Psalm 51:1-17

*Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit in me.
Psalm 51:10 {NLT}*

When I was 18 years old, I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior on the beach at Ocean City, Maryland. Since that time, I have been close to God and sometimes far away.

In those far away years I made bad choices, did the wrong things, ignored God, and sinned against God. I had to start over by putting God first in my life - again. Even today in my closer walk with God, my heart can get hurt, I judge someone or someone judges me, or I might have bad thoughts about a situation. When I find that I need to get close to God again, I pray for a clean heart so that I can get a fresh start.

When I was having a difficult time with a person at work trying to tell me how to do my job, I was having a hard time going to work every day. I dreaded days when I had to attend meetings with her about her project which only made more extra work for me. So I prayed for a clean heart where she was concerned. Psalm 51:10: "Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit in me." Forgive me for my sins, especially for sinful thoughts toward this person. Have mercy on me for my sins, O Lord.

Peggy Lynes

Thought of the day:

God cleans hearts for fresh starts.

Prayer: I pray for God to give me a clean heart so that I can have a different view of a situation and forgive people so that I can have a fresh start.

LISTENING TO YOUR HEART

Friday, March 8

Read 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Living 20 hours away by car from family has made me feel out of the loop, a lot! It's been over 15 years now since out of the blue I felt the need to call Mom. When she answered, I couldn't understand a thing she was saying, but she seemed to understand me. I told her I was going to hang up and call back so I could talk to my older sister – so just let the phone ring.

Mom was in the rehabilitation section of the retirement center, and somehow the phone in her room was connected to her apartment. Mom would normally answer the phone, but after so many rings my sister would answer it in the apartment.

When my sister answered I asked what was going on with mom! She asked what I meant. I explained I couldn't understand anything she was saying - all I got was gibberish. My sister didn't know, but said she go find out and hung up. When she called me back, Mom had gone to the hospital and she'd had a slight heart attack.

I've often thought about what would've happened if I hadn't "listened" to that need to call Mom. This is where that knowledge, kindness, and love of God comes in. He wraps His arms around us and carries us over those hard spots that are sure to come our way – more frequently to some than to others.

Betty Buchanan

Thought of the day:

Whenever wrong timing occurs or unfortunate obstacles happen to us, we must remember that God's love will embrace us.

Prayer: Dear God, help us pay attention when you prompt us to do something unusual. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.

SELFLESS DEDICATION

Saturday, March 9

Read Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Matthew 6:3-4 {NRSV}

As a coach with Special Olympics, I am awed by the behind the scenes involvement of a lot of individuals. These individuals remind me of the lesson in Matthew 6 - unselfish and Christian dedication.

The volunteers and supporters are an integral part of Special Olympics. Some are sponsors or donors, others are coaches, event volunteers and fans. All contribute, helping the athletes be the best they can be regardless of ability - or disability. Regular athletes (unified partners) play alongside Special Olympic athletes helping reinforce the experience. In addition to the games, a program called Healthy Athletes ensures the athletes get an opportunity to be checked by doctors, nurses and additional volunteers. In some cases, this program is the only opportunity the athlete has to be seen for health issues.

There are no rewards or pay for any of the volunteers, doctors, coaches, fans, or unified partners. No trophies, no assurance of a reward in heaven, just the personal satisfaction and the goal of positive enhancement for individuals wanting to be themselves.

Bob Kaye

Thought of the day:

Where can I volunteer?

Prayer: Thank you God for the selfless giving of ourselves to bring happiness and joy to others. Help us keep these goals in our lives to bring you glory. Amen.

IT'S TEMPTING
Sunday, March 10

Read Luke 4:1-13

Jesus was led into the desert where he was tempted by the devil for forty days. He ate nothing in all those days. The devil tempted Jesus to turn stone to bread. Jesus did not succumb to the temptation. The devil tempted Jesus with authority and splendor over all the kingdoms of the world. Jesus did not succumb to the temptation. The devil tempted Jesus to prove that He is the Son of God and again Jesus did not succumb. Even after fasting for forty days, Jesus, in human form, resisted temptation.

So, why, with this lesson, this example, do I fall short? Why am I so weak, that I am tempted? Why today am I struggling with envy when my blessings are overflowing? As I read the scripture once again, this narrative is so powerful that I can picture it *but had entirely missed the message.*

Being tempted isn't failure—Jesus was faced with temptation! Each time Jesus was tempted, He responded with scripture. That's our message; studying and absorbing scripture provides us with the armor we need to resist temptation. We don't have to be strong on our own.

Sharon Beck

Thought of the day:

How am I tempted?

Prayer: Today, as we pray the Lord's prayer and meditate on *Lead us not into temptation . . .* help us Lord to see where we need to stand strong against temptation. Amen.

GOD'S PROMISE
Monday, March 11

Read Deuteronomy 26:1-11

This is about a covenant, an agreement between the Lord and the people of Israel.

They are some of the last words of Moses to all of Israel in the wilderness. The Lord told Moses, and Moses told the Israelites, "I have set the land before you, go and take the land. The Lord your God swore to your fathers and their seed that follows, the land of milk and honey." To me this means a land rich with soil, nutrients, game, fowl, and fish – a land in which to prosper and grow.

God kept his covenant. The people were blessed with a rich land, first fruits, and the return of the inheritance back from those fruits to the Lord.

Fast forward to today, our fruits are the income of our jobs and talents and for the most part not the grains of the field. The covenant however has not changed. God is immutable in his word. He always keeps his promise. Our promise to him should be the same. It's not the amount that is promised but the covenant. Keep your covenant with the Lord as he has and always will keep his covenant with you.

Kevin Rogers

Thought of the day:

Am I keeping my part of the covenant?

Prayer: God, help us be faithful to Your covenant with us and stay faithful to Your Word. Amen.

SAFETY OF ABIDING IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Tuesday, March 12

Read Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

Where do you go when you feel like things aren't quite right?

I can remember as a child that whenever I was scared, whenever I was in trouble, there was always that safe place for me...home, my bedroom to be exact. That was where I would run and stay until Mom or Dad came home. When they did, I knew I would be comforted and reassured that everything was going to be okay. The problem was going to be dealt with, and with a little love and encouragement, they would send me back outside to face the world once more.

That's how it is in our Christian walk. When we feel like we're in trouble, we can always go to God for *protection*, (91:1-2) a safe place. Through prayer and reading God's word, we can find comfort and encouragement. By meeting with other believers on a regular basis we can find assurance and strength to make it through whatever the world may throw at us. And we do all this because we love Him and He loves us. He will always be there for us, that is His *promise* (91:14-16),

Tommy Usry

Thought of the day:

Don't wait for trouble to talk to God.

He is waiting to hear about the good things too.

Prayer: Father, thank You for Your unending love, mercy, and grace. Thank You for being my protector and provider. Thank You for the promise of always being there for us. In Your Son's name, we pray, Amen.

SHELTER FROM THE STORMS OF LIFE

Wednesday, March 13

Read Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

May 25, 2017 is forever in my family's memory. Twelve days earlier, we checked into a vacation home for six days honoring all the mothers in our family for Mother's Day.

Arriving home my wife came down with flu-like symptoms and four days later she was at the ER being diagnosed with pneumonia. Eighteen hours later, she died at 53 years old.

The hopelessness and despair we experienced the following days, weeks and months are indescribable. It felt like we were living our worst nightmare. We experienced storms before, but never with this intensity. We found ourselves asking "why" with no answers to be found.

We think God is supposed to protect us from the storms of life, so we say, "I don't understand why I'm going through this. I am trying to obey the Lord. Why is He allowing these things to happen to me?" It's as if we think being in relationship and following the Lord exempts us from trials. We know it's not true, the Bible makes it clear that godly people suffer intense storms. Shortly after my wife's death, I attended a grief share group and learned to "lean" into it; experience it. Not to stuff it and try to pretend everything is "ok", but trust and be. As I grieved, my awareness of the Lord increased. I became sensitive to His presence and the flow of life that comes only from Him. Like Paul, I was able to find joy once again (Rom 12:12). It isn't easy but I find that no matter what storm life brings, it's not so much the "why" as it is the "what". Now what?

Dave Manger

Thought of the day: Those grieving

Prayer: Lord, help me seek to dwell in your shelter and abide in your shadow. Be my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust!"

STUCK IN TRAFFIC
Thursday, March 14

Read Romans 10:8b-13

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.”

Romans 10:12 {NRSV}

Everyone knows how traffic on Highway 98 can back up. Sometimes one can sit for an extended time just to get onto the Highway. One day I was leaving for a doctor's appointment in Gulf Breeze when I was faced with a traffic jam at the end of my street.

I had already decided to give the office a call to tell them I was stuck in traffic and I would be late when the first car at the intersection left room and waved me into the traffic line.

It made me think of the above scripture. We confess our belief with our mouth but how do we confess it without words? When we do random acts of kindness, we are sharing love. The person who allowed room for me didn't confess with her mouth but with her actions.

Fredna Meyers

Thought of the day:

How can I confess my love without using my mouth today?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to confess not only with our mouths but also with our actions. Amen.

SHARING GOD'S LOVE

Friday, March 15

Read Romans 10:8b-13

For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him

Romans 10:12 {NIV}

On June 5, 2014, my best friend, my mother, was diagnosed with cancer. The first thing I remembered after the doctor told us was my mother's words of encouragement. She said with a smile on her face and conviction in her heart that whatever happens is God's will.

My mother knew with all her heart she was in God's hands. She lived out her faith every day and was willing to share her love for God with others. She knew God always had control of all. She saw the beauty in all things and was willing to share what she learned about the love and grace of God. She was always willing to learn more and share what she learned with others. My mother always believed in the power of prayer and would pray for all who asked her. To me, she was the example of how to love God and how to show God's love to others.

Having faith and following God isn't just about your words. It's about your actions and ultimately what is in your heart. If your heart doesn't know the love of Christ then you can't speak truly and honestly about the love of God.

Dawn Kahren

Thought of the day:

Have faith in your heart, believe the Lord is Lord of all, with your words tell ALL Jesus is Lord. All who believe and call on Jesus will be saved.

Prayer: Dear God, please help us remember to love you with our whole heart. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

THE TEST
Saturday, March 16

Read Genesis 3:1 and Luke 4:1-13

Have you ever felt God was testing you? Have you ever wondered if He placed tempting things into your life to see if you would do the right thing? To see if your integrity – the thoughts and actions that no one else will see or know – would be the thoughts and actions of His faithful servants? As an immature Christian, I had such notions. But as I studied and matured in my faith, I learned that nothing could be further from the truth. Isn't that where the Deceiver wants us to be? Far away from the truth? The truth is we are loved as God's children. He wants to be with us and would never taunt us with temptations to lead us into sin. He loves us so much He sacrificed his Son to redeem us from sin's ultimate consequence, death. Sinful temptations are counterproductive to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, and therefore it is impossible for temptation to be a test from God. Temptations come from Satan and he is well practiced and skillful in that trade! He will do ANYTHING to fool one of God's children into sin. One of the Deceiver's favorite tricks is to twist God's word. He deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden, and she fell into the temptation of having knowledge like God. Satan tried again with Jesus atop the temple in Jerusalem. He twisted scripture for his own purpose. He used scripture to taunt Jesus into proving that – as the Son of God – he could jump and God would protect him from harm. Jesus, full of the Spirit and knowledge of God and scripture, rebuked Satan.

For faithful servants, knowledge of scripture and guidance by the Holy Spirit will serve us just as it did Jesus in resisting Satan's temptations, his invitation to sin and death.

Ken Teter

Prayer: Dear God, help us to resist temptations of this life and to cling to you always. Amen.

GOD'S BLESSINGS TO ACTION

Sunday, March 17

Read Luke 13:31-35

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.

From the house of the LORD we bless you.

Psalm 118:26 {NIV}

As I awake each day, I do so with the feeling that this is the new day with which God has blessed me! Today, I might be able to complete what I was unable to finish yesterday. Or, maybe God has a new adventure planned for me. As God's people we receive blessings in many ways, for many things. Not all are blessed in the same way or amount, but blessings are abundant if you take a moment to look around and see them. He provides us family, friends, time for worship; these are blessings that God bestows on us.

When God blesses us, he has put his finger on us. Now it is up to us to carry his blessing forward. It might be in a very visible way, as when I will help lead worship by reading Scripture. More often, it is in small things, doing chores around His house, or offering up words of encouragement. It might not even be known at all, except by God. We come together in the name of the Lord, to share His good news with others.

Don Goodson

Thought of the day:

If God puts his finger on me, I don't get to just sit and wait.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the life you give us, and the blessings to live it. May I see and share your blessings today. Amen.

THE LORD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAM

Monday, March 18

Read Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Abram's belief in the Lord was a testament to his righteousness—that is, high moral correctness and understanding of God and his almighty power.

Who could imagine being very late in years, well beyond parenting age, being told your children will outnumber the stars in the sky? It is Abram's righteousness which allows him to have such a close and personal relationship with God. Who is your best friend ever? Who do you long to spend your valued time with?

Abram sought God's love and friendship, maintaining a tremendous faith, as a result found much favor from God. Paul teaches us that Abram's faith in God is something we all should model. Because of the relationship and as God continued to reveal Himself, Abram's faith continued to grow.

Can we grow our faith in God? Do we doubt ourselves; do we pray for His will and not our own? Do we believe God will answer our prayers in our time or in His time? Can we be like an anxious child on Christmas Eve, overjoyed with anticipation and excitement about a highly cherished present? We too can have this treasured joy if we choose to pray without ceasing, seek His will for our lives and listen when he speaks. Our devoted love to God can credit us with righteousness.

Mike Howell

Thought of the day:

We can grow our faith.

Prayer: Dear God, please help our faith to continue to grow as Abram's did. Help us to have child-like faith as we look at the world around us. In Jesus Name we pray, Amen.

THE LORD IS MY SHELTER

Tuesday, March 19

Read Psalm 27

*The LORD is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life— of whom shall I be afraid?
Psalm 27:1 {NIV}*

The first time I read this Psalm was in 1990 shortly after my husband died and I was having a very difficult time dealing with my grief, going to school, and preparing for my son's wedding. My Pastor suggested it as a Psalm I might find comforting. The very first verse had me. Who and what did I have to fear? God was and still is on my side.

I was also dealing with the surfacing of repressed memories of being sexually abused as a child and I was a total mess. As I continued to read further, I was given the assurance that God was my shelter and provided for me. Nothing any human could do to me could separate me from Him.

I am so thankful for Pastor Murphree for guiding me to this Psalm. Today I still cling to verse 14, "Wait for the LORD, be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD." I may not know when, in His timing, God will answer my prayers but if I trust Him, I can be sure that He will never reject me or forsake me. Trusting God's word and integrity I am confident that if I just wait, I will see God's goodness at work in my life.

Carol Noe

Thought of the day:

Trust God's promises.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for your promises to keep us safe in the face of the many earthly trials we face. Help us to be trusting and patient as we wait on You. In Jesus's precious name, I pray. Amen.

A MATTER OF TRUST
Wednesday, March 20

Read Philippians 3:17-4:1

*But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,
Philippians 3:20 {NIV}*

As I watched my son on life support, I knew the situation was not good. He had been without breath for too long. The anguish inside me was overwhelming. I could not pray, I could only say, "I don't know how to do this Lord." Later, I said to God, "I know you are in control God, I trust you." Then I heard that Still Small Voice, "you must witness to your faith and trust in me."

I was brought into contact with family, many friends of our family, different hospital personnel and even some people whom I had worked with over 15 years ago, all during those 4 long days at the hospital before the support was withdrawn. I could only repeat my trust in God to do what was best for my son. I could hear and see God moving in the situation. I knew He was at work to bring good from this no matter what. He brought complete healing to my Son whose body and mind are now no longer in pain or anguish.

The grief journey is harder than anything I have ever experienced. But through it all, He brings me comfort. My joy and peace remain because God is faithful and I know Whom I trust.

Joyce Seal

Thought of the day:

Heaven is our home and eternal life our glory.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help me to remember that you are in control and that I can always trust you in all situations to do what is best for your children. Amen

FINISHING THE RACE

Thursday, March 21

Read Luke 13:31-35

Several years ago, my daughter competed in the Florida State Special Olympics. While waiting for her events we watched others. The Boys 50 Meter Run made a lasting impression as amid the afternoon heat, the boys of various sizes and abilities lined up: "Charlie" caught my eye. He approached the line with his walker. When the starting gun sounded the runners started down the track, some sprinted, others walked quickly, then there was Charlie. Charlie, using his walker, methodically moved one foot then the other, clink, thud, thud; clink, thud, thud! As boys crossed the finish line, they waited there for the others yet to finish the race. When all others had finished Charlie still had half of the course to complete. They waited for Charlie to cross the finish line then gathered around him like a mother hen does her chicks. Charlie's perseverance (Hebrews 12:1) had the crowd standing and cheering for him as his fellow athletes hugged him and cheered too.

Christ's determination to continue His work, even under threat of persecution, and Charlie's perseverance to cross the finish line, remind me that no matter the obstacles, limitations, or lack of strength, if we stay focused on Christ, we can finish the race He has for us.

Mike Bushey

Thought of the day:

Stay focused on Christ not earthly distractions.

Prayer: Gracious Heavenly Father, please help us to eliminate distractions, obstacles and limitations that keep us from focusing on You and help us spread the Good News of your steadfast love. Amen.

I'M HERE!
Friday, March 22

Read Luke 9:28-36

We like to read stories from the Bible that feel relatable to our everyday lives. We seek out a proverb or one of Jesus' parables to get us through our situation. If you're like me, you want a concrete answer for what's going on and how God can make it better.

The Transfiguration can feel like one of the furthest things from a concrete answer that we have. It's not that we don't believe it – that's what faith is for – it's just that it's so hard to wrap our heads around or see how it possibly has anything to do with us.

The thing is, though, it has everything to do with us. It was no mistake that Jesus took Peter, James, and John – just three regular guys – up the mountain that day. He could've gone alone. He could've hiked up, chatted with Moses and Elijah, and made his way back down before they even noticed. But he wanted them there. He wanted them to see and to hear the words of God spoken straight from the source.

We can only imagine what that mountaintop experience was like for them. We can only imagine what it was like to see the face of Jesus transform as he spoke with the prophets who came before him.

But what I want to remember, and hope to carry with me, is that we can see the face of God every day, as long as we look for it. It's easy to only seek Him on the mountain top, but the incredible thing is that He's HERE. RIGHT HERE. He guides us through the most ordinary of days, he's with us and we forget to look for him.

Samantha Reynolds

Prayer: Dear God, help me to seek you today and every day. To look for you in the ordinary activities because you are here with me. Let me never forget that you are here. In Jesus' name. Amen

GROWING IN FAITH
Saturday, March 23

Read Luke 9:37-43a

“You unbelieving and perverse generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here.”

And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.

Luke 9:41 and 43 {NIV}

Without faith our lives are all wrong because we do not believe in the Great Power of God.

Our lives are filled with worry, fears, and powerful thoughts.

Only through our complete faith in God our Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit can we have a life of peace. All things are possible when we pray in Jesus name according to His Will. This means we live according to His purpose for our lives: we study God's Word, we fellowship with other Christians, observe Holy Communion, devote ourselves to prayer, serve, using abilities and gifts given us, tithe, give generously and become wise stewards of all we have been given.

Monette Walker

Thought of the day:

Today, we can live in peace through faith in God.

Prayer: Father strengthen my Faith in Your Amazing Power today. Amen

PRODUCING FRUIT FOR GOD

Sunday, March 24

Read Luke 13:1-9

“Sir,” the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it.

Luke 13:8 {NIV}

There seems at first glance to be two disconnected messages in this reading. One message is about repentance of our sins and the other about an unproductive tree. As I pondered these two seemingly different stories, I came to realize they are really one story.

No one’s sin is lesser or greater than anyone else’s sin.

Remember the old saying...a sin is a sin is a sin, and the other part of that is that just as the orchard owner gave the fig tree another chance, God keeps giving us another chance. What about when we become unproductive in and for His kingdom? God continues to feed us through His word, music, others, and even His very creation.

I was challenged to take a look at my life and see where God is nourishing me. Will I make full use of the spiritual food He provides or will I continue to lay fallow and unproductive? Where can I use the resources He has given me to make a difference for His kingdom? What can I do to make life a little better or easier for someone else? How can I grow and be fruitful thankfully bringing glory to God for all He has done for me and given me?

Carol Noe

Thought of the day:

How am I being fruitful for God?

Prayer: Thank you, God, for being a God of many chances. Thank you for giving us yet another season in which to grow and be fruitful. Help us, Lord, to be obedient and go where you lead us so that we glorify You. Amen.

THE COMPASSION OF THE LORD

Monday, March 25

Read Isaiah 55:1-9

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts

Isaiah 55:8-9 {ESV}

Find and listen to “Come and Listen” by David Crowder Band on your favorite music streaming app or YouTube.

We live in a society that conditions us to seek out the ear and advice of our friends or family whenever life throws curveballs. All the while, God is waiting for us to come to him – He who can give to us in ways that no other can. I have found when I seek God first, my troubles may not necessarily go away, but my heart is comforted and my soul is at peace in His understanding.

God has so much good he wants for us, yet we seek out all other avenues before we go to him. Verse 2 says, “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.” God knows what’s best for us, He created us. With this, he wants nothing more than to comfort us when we feel lost or downtrodden. I live in awe that God, who is powerful enough to create and control the universe, wants me to come to him with the smallest of my concerns.

This passage ends with our attention verse. These words should bring us comfort in knowing that God knows best for us. All he wants is for us to come to him and experience His love for us.

Chris Bennett

Prayer: Dear God, help us to seek you first and to listen to what you tell us. In Jesus Holy Name we pray, Amen.

GOD GUIDING US
Tuesday, March 26

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

God is faithful. He will not allow temptation to be more than you can stand.

1 Corinthians 10:13 {NIV}

The phone rang. It was my doctor, the family friend, calling to tell me I was diagnosed with cancer, and had to come in the next day. No big deal! I know many gals that have had breast cancer. I took a walk down to the pier, looked up at the exquisite sky, and prayed, “Thy Will be done.” He will not give me anything that I cannot endure.

I had a tumor removed and began the everyday radiation treatments. You lay on the table and stared at a happy face. The patient before me told the nurse that the happy face was boring. The nurse proceeded to get a ladder and remove the ceiling tile. She said, jokingly, “Paint something!”

When I came in the next day, there was a leapfrog staring down on me! I was given a tile to take home and I painted a lighthouse in a storm with a bright beacon of light illuminating the sky.

After I finished my thirty-day treatment the ceiling was full of painted tiles! What a blessing, what fun! I always avoided people who were sick or dying. My excuse was that I cry too loud. I learned that it is ok to cry and hug folks in the waiting room. We talked about the beautiful ceiling and our illness. I thank God for guiding me through this time of illness.

Penny Pike

Thought of the day:

God is faithful and will not give you more than you can endure.

Prayer: Keep us strong and faithful in our time of sickness.
Guide us according to Your Will. Amen.

FROM A MESS TO A MESSAGE

Wednesday, March 27

Read Luke 1:26-38

For nothing is impossible with God. ... I am the Lord's servant...

Luke 1:37-38 {NRSV}

This scripture depicts the conversation between Mary and the angel about her carrying the son of God. Mary was overwhelmed at the thought of this pregnancy, but the angel spoke and told her not to fear for she had found favor with God. After, the angel told her to have no fear she quickly responded, "For nothing is impossible with God. I am the Lord's servant."

What is God asking us to do? There have been times in my life when I thought, "how in the world can God use me?" Then I remember God takes my mess and turns it into His message and my test into His testimony. When we truly surrender and turn our lives over to Him, we gain His favor over our lives.

In today's world we need to quiet our minds and listen for angels who deliver God's message. When we listen to what He wants us to do and are then obedient, we can respond like Mary and say, "I am the Lord's servant."

Chesney Davis

Thought of the day:

Today I will listen for His "to do" list for me and respond as Mary, "I am your servant Lord."

Prayer: Dear gracious and heavenly father, I come before you listening for my calling. I know that nothing is impossible with you and that I can do all things through your strength. I pray that I always respond like Mary and know that I have favor with you.

Amen.

GIVE ME A SIGN
Thursday, March 28

Read Isaiah 7:10-14

Again, the Lord spoke to Ahaz, “Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.” But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.”

Isaiah 7:10-12 {NIV}

In Isaiah 7, Judah was going to be attacked by two different countries. Ahaz, the evil king of Judah, was told that if he just believed and trusted in God then he would be protected. Ahaz had asked for protection from Assyria showing his lack of trust in God. God told Ahaz that He would give him a sign, but Ahaz refused saying that he wouldn't put God to the test and on the surface that looks admirable, but God saw right through him and his lack of faith.

How often does God have our back, but we try and solve problems on our own? If we would just go to God in prayer and ask for help, then He would respond perfectly every time! How often do we try and say just the things that we think God wants us to say to try and fool him into thinking we are more faithful than we are? God still responds and shows us “a sign” even when we don't deserve it, even when He knows that we are turning our backs on Him, and even when we may not believe the sign. God is always faithful, whether it be in your time or His, and He always keeps His promises!

Linda Joseph

Thought of the day:

God is always faithful.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please help me to depend on you and not on my own doing. I need your perfect plan for my life. Amen.

CHANGING TRADITIONS FOR GOD

Friday, March 29

Read Hebrews 10:4-10

Have you read a Bible passage and found it so complex that you think only a lawyer could understand its meaning? That's how I felt after reading Hebrews 10:4-10. "It is impossible for bulls and goats to take away sins." After several readings of the verses and commentaries and time in prayer, here is my understanding of the passage.

The writer is making the argument that the long history of animal sacrifice was no longer necessary for the atonement of sins. The writer explains when Christ sacrificed his life on the cross that this act of love set aside the Old Testament sacrifices once and for all. Still the people were reluctant to set aside a thousand years of tradition and belief that animal sacrifices were necessary for the forgiveness of sins. They wanted assurance their sins were forgiven.

Changing a long history of tradition and belief is not an easy thing to accept. When I was a child, we were not allowed to swim for 30 minutes after eating. Our parents had a history of belief that if you did, you would cramp and drown. Even after this delay was not supported by evidence, parents were reluctant to set aside their belief. They needed assurance their child would not drown.

So, how do I know my sins are forgiven. I am assured my sins are forgiven by knowing that Christ is my savior. Because I believe, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Suzanne Troutman

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the assurance that our sins are forgiven through our belief in Jesus Christ, in his name, Amen.

FULL OF EXCITEMENT

Saturday, March 30

Read Psalm 45

My heart overflows with a beautiful thought! I will recite a lovely poem to the king..."

Psalm 45:1 {NLT}

The psalmist was so overwhelmed he couldn't contain his excitement! He wanted to proclaim the loving relationship of a king with his queen. It has been interpreted he is referring to Jesus as the king and the Church as the queen. Break it down a little more...we, the people of the Church, are the collective queen to Jesus as king. We are in a glorious committed loving relationship with Jesus.

Some fifty years ago, our little church was born. It was born out of love for Jesus. The families that came to be known as MEUMC, worked hard to establish that relationship...to be the queen in support of her king. Each generation has the continued duty and honor to work hard in maintaining and further developing that relationship.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if someone outside our church saw this committed loving relationship and became so full of excitement, they wanted to write a poem?

"...love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength." Mark 12:30.

Diana Reynolds

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for our church family growth. Help us to continue to grow and share our relationship with you with others. In Jesus precious name, Amen.

FOREVER CHANGED

Sunday, March 31

Read Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

“When he came to his senses...”

Luke 15:17 {NIV}

As the prisoner intake process was completed, I was handed a pair of stiff olive-green scrubs with the word "inmate" stamped in white ink across the back and awaited my escort to the small cement cell that would become my home in County jail for the next 5 months pending trial. I was temporarily numb, shuffling my feet, but slowly becoming aware of the physical illness and drug withdrawal that would soon dominate my every thought and my body. I was alone, covered in shame, full of regret, and becoming fearful. I began to replay all the bad decisions I had made in my life.

At that time, in my mid-forties, as a non-believer, I did what most hurt children will do when punished. I crumpled and I cried. I cried out to the Jesus I had heard about in my youth. I needed divine intervention, a touch to calm my body, to clear my mind, and to save my soul. I prayed with expectation and the Lord answered that prayer. An immediate physical deliverance with an internal spiritual awakening. Forever changed. I am a witness to the true character of our Savior. I responded to the healing touch he provided, I came to myself, and I received His forgiveness for all my sin.

Dawn Sigel

Thought of the day:

I will define myself as a child of God. Forgiven and free.

Prayer: Dear God, I pray that your children continue to respond to your gentle voice, reach towards your divine healing and receive your redemptive power. Increase our awareness of your presence in our lives. AMEN.

MY JOURNEY HOME

Monday, April 1

Read Joshua 5:9-12

Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you."

Joshua 5:9 {NIV}

It has taken me 40+ years to realize that my 'home' was not Jesus' home. I moved across the country and settled into a place that I can call home. Just as GOD lead Israel out of Egypt to their home, he brought me to a place where I could grow spiritually. My journey has been long and weary as I wandered thinking I knew what was best for me. Through life's ups and downs, I heard a calling for something more. I did my best to ignore it; I was good at it. Who knows more about what is best for me?

I'm a slow learner but given enough time, God knew he could get through to me. My life took a turn for the best when my adopted sister entered my life. It was through her that I saw Jesus again. God working in her heart made me realize I was missing something very special in mine. I have spiritually grown and feasted on the good Jesus has brought to me.

I know he is not done with me. I have plenty to learn and things to do for him. Every day that I put Jesus first brings me closer to being the Christian he wants me to be. Let's leave behind the things that make us slaves of the world and bring people to Christ.

Oliver Beaudoin

Thought of the day:

Let God lead you to the place you can do the most good in his holy name.

Prayer: Dear God, please make our journey for you a place we can do your great work. It is in Jesus' name I pray. Amen

SHOUT FOR JOY!

Tuesday, April 2

Read Psalm 32

Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart."

Psalm 32:11 {NRSV}

Growing up in South Alabama was a wonderful experience. However, summertime could be treacherous. Sweltering heat and high humidity were unbearable. Toiling in the fields, the heat would sap all strength and illness would sometimes occur.

David's Psalm 32 brings those days to mind (v. 4). But David's strength was sapped, not from toil, but from sin. He says that by not confessing his sins to God he suffered a wasting away, a kind of slow death (v. 3). Then in verse five he decides to stop hiding his sins from God. When he openly and honestly confessed them to God he was forgiven!

Like a cold glass of water on a hot summer day was the blessed relief I'm sure David felt. What glorious joy to know that by being open and honest with God we too are able to live a life knowing that God is ours and we are His. God will always be with us to teach us the way to go, to counsel us when we have misgivings and to watch over us (v. 8) throughout our life.

This is certainly a reason to "rejoice and be glad" - to sing and shout for joy (v. 11)!

Linda Dean

Thought of the day:

God forgives a repentant heart.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your unfailing love for us. Help us to be completely honest with You at all times and in all circumstances. Amen.

CHANGED HEART
Wednesday, April 3

Read Psalm 40:5-10

As I prepare for Lent this year, I've been reminded that my heart has slowly been changing from the man I once was to a person I never knew existed inside me. Life often felt like drudgery, was burdensome, toilsome and energy zapping before I met Christ.

I didn't begin to understand the power of Christ until many years after asking Him into my heart at age 32. Heading for 71, I find it miraculous to be alive because of health concerns. During all these years, I have been reading my Bible, and am more and more amazed by God's word. I have found that the power of God's word is transforming my heart and life. My thinking was at one time warped into the mold of society; a slave to the spectrum of delights that pass before my eyes, ears, nose, mouth and my mind. I especially give those to Christ this year and trust He will know what to do with them as I seek Him.

None of this is possible without faith. It was a long time before I began to understand what I was reading in my Bible, but by faith I continued to read it every night. However, everything in my life seemed to be falling apart until one day I read a Psalm of David and my heart was moved by his words.

Today I am encouraged by Psalm 40:5, "O Lord my God you have performed many wonders for us. Your plans for us are too numerous to list." and verse 8 which says "I take joy in doing your will, my God, for your instructions are written on my heart."

Ernie Carey

Thought of the day: God's word changes hearts.

Prayer: God, during this season of Lent, I pray my focus continues to be to bring justice for God, myself and my neighbors. Amen.

RECONCILED TO GOD

Thursday, April 4

Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

One year I decided to build a round end table to sit next to my Mom's favorite chair for her birthday. As a woodworker I knew there were many pieces to the project so I began 4 months before her birthday. I needed to plan the design; decide what wood and color I wanted; cut, shape, sand and smooth each piece before I assembled the table.

After the table was built, I began to look for a commercial finish, but when I was unable to find the color I wanted I made my own. After the fourth try I got the color I envisioned. However, I was heartbroken when the cherry wood repelled the stain.

I prayed for direction as too much effort had gone into the project just to scrap it. Several days later I was inspired to put cherry sawdust into the stain and I let it sit for 2 days, then I filtered the stain. The sawdust absorbed the impurities in the stain and the table now accepted its beautiful finish. With each coat of sealer, the finish became deeper and richer making the two components one indestructible whole.

As I read Corinthians, I immediately thought of that table and the way the sawdust achieved compatibility between the stain and the wood. God has reconciled me by sending his son, Jesus, to absorb my impurities so that I may be compatible with the Father. God's handy work surrounds me every day and all that's required of me is to recognize it, which I now do in the most trivial of things. It's a wonderful feeling to know God's presence in my life.

Jack Barclay

Prayer: Dear God, please help me to look for you in all aspects of my life. Pour into me the things needed to clean out the impurities. In Jesus name I pray. Amen

LOST AND FOUND

Friday, April 5

Read Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

In the parable of the Prodigal Son I see myself and probably most of us have been the prodigal sometime in our life.

The Prodigal finally comes to the realization that his way of living life is just not working. His life is a mess, he is a starving lonely outcast. At some point he found the courage to overcome his guilt, shame and lack of self-esteem and return home expecting nothing but a servant's job. But his father saw him from far off, ran to him with open arms and welcomed him home. God is like that. No matter how many times I stray and try to live in my own strength it eventually falls apart and when I turn back to God confessing my sins against Him, God welcomes me with open arms and amazingly my life straightens out and is once again productive and joyful.

Those of us in recovery know that joy of coming home. We know the freedom we get from building an ever-closer relationship with God and trusting God to be in the driver's seat of our lives. The debilitating guilt and shame are lifted as we KNOW that God loves us even more than the Prodigal Son's father loved him. To be able to believe and accept that miraculous gift of grace sometimes takes a while, but when it happens life is sweet and we are no longer starving outcasts.

Where are you in your relationship with God?

Carol Noe

Thought of the day:

Those that have lost their way will be found.

Prayer: God make your loving presence known to all of your prodigal children, help them to look to you and run into your open loving arms. Amen.

SELF SACRIFICE
Saturday, April 6

Read Isaiah 43:16-21

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
Isaiah 51: 15-17 {NIV}

In the days leading up to Lent, the Pastor had asked us to search our hearts for what would be an acceptable sacrifice for the season of Lent. As I pondered what would be a sacrifice worthy of all that God had done for me—there just seemed to be nothing that was a true sacrifice. I prayed and thought on it over the next week or so. Then during my morning devotional, I read the words from Isaiah: The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. I wept because here was the answer I had been searching for! Praise and thanksgiving flowed from my heart!

It is not good to become complacent in your estimate of yourself. God wanted me to look within to find, acknowledge, and confess my sins. He wanted me to do this so that he could not only forgive me but bring healing to me.

Joyce Seal

Thought of the day:

What sacrifice is God calling me to make?

Prayer: Most merciful and loving God, open my eyes to anything within me that grieves you. Help me to give you praise and honor in all that I say and do. Amen.

SOMEONE IN NEED

Sunday, April 7

Read John 12:1-8

Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair.

John 12:3 {NIV}

Mary illustrates her love and devotion to Jesus by washing his feet with an expensive perfume. Then she humbly dries his feet with her hair. A beautiful example of her unconditional love for Jesus. In our church such selfless love has been shown by serving others in Christ's name. One example of this was Carol Crosby's dedication to the Cold Night program. This ministry provided meals and a warm, dry place to sleep for the homeless whenever the temperature dropped below 40 degrees.

During a Disciple Bible Study, Carol felt challenged to find a way to serve others as Christ calls us to do. Carol researched the Cold Night program and presented a proposal to our church. After approval, she began organizing donations and training volunteers. Carol was completely committed to the ministry. She was here every time the Fellowship Hall opened to the homeless and greeted each person as they signed in. Carol was not blind to the poor choices some of these people made but rather than judge or criticize them, she offered unconditional love in Christ's name.

Just as Mary humbly showed her devotion to Jesus, Carol showed her love and devotion to Jesus by serving "the least of these" in our community. God has blessed each of us so much – shouldn't we be willing to share His love as Mary and Carol did?

Dottie Maloyed

Prayer: Loving Father, guide me that I will see someone who needs Your love and open my heart that I will be willing to share your blessings today. Amen

UNTIE ME LORD
Monday, April 8

Read Mark 11:1-11

Mark 11:1-11 is the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. In this passage Jesus asked two of His disciples to go into the village and bring him the unriden colt that they would find tied up. Jesus said that if anyone asked them and to tell them the Lord needs it and he will send it back later. The two disciples followed orders and the villagers released it without question. This was part of the fulfillment of the prophecy given by Zechariah. (Zechariah 9:9)

I grew up in church learning about God, but as I got older I strayed and struggled in the department of obeying authority. I tried and tried to do things my way and failed miserably. Two and half years ago I was at my bottom and ready to give up on life. I cried out to Jesus in a last-ditch effort and I heard him. He wanted me to be untied from this world of sin that kept me bound for so many years. I wish I would have obeyed Him years ago and without questioning Him. What if the two disciples or the villagers would have questioned or disobeyed. What is God calling you to do? What is He calling you to untie? God wants ALL of us without question and to put ALL our faith in Him for whatever He asks from us.

Chesney Davis

Thought of the day:

What is Jesus asking you to untie?

Prayer: Dear most gracious and heavenly father, I pray that you continue to increase my faith. I want to listen and do what you ask of me without question. I pray to continue to be untied from this world and tied to you in ALL that I do. Amen

HOUSE OF PRAYER

Tuesday, April 9

Read Mark 11:15-18

After entering the temple, Jesus threw out those who were selling and buying there. He pushed over the tables used for currency exchange and the chairs of those who sold doves. He didn't allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He taught them, "*Hasn't it been written, My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?* But you've turned it into a hideout for crooks." The chief priests and legal experts heard this and tried to find a way to destroy him. They regarded him as dangerous because the whole crowd was enthralled at his teaching.

What makes a church a house of prayer for all nations? We don't exclude people, for any reason. If we free ourselves of distractions, including our cellphones and tablets, we open ourselves to worship. We can really listen to what God's message is telling us. We can be welcoming to those we don't know or don't know well. Let's not become a clique that makes others feel like outsiders. Invite someone you don't know to sit next to you at church dinners or during the service.

Jesus also warns us about making the church a hideout for crooks. The money changers as well as the people selling doves were crooks. Instead of assisting people in worship, these merchants were stealing from them. Unfortunately, we've seen this scenario repeated by people claiming to be Christians, today. Jesus is telling us to be watchful within our own churches.

Linda Moriak

Thought of the day:

God's house is a house of prayer.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to stay focused on keeping Your church a house of prayer. Amen.

WHO ARE YOU?

Wednesday, April 10

Read Mark 11:27-13:37

In the days before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, he faced a lot of questions. When he arrived in Jerusalem, he was questioned by the chief priests, on his authority. Jesus spoke a parable against them and they looked for a way to arrest him. He was questioned by the Pharisees and the Herodians, they tried to have him speak against the imperial tax and catch him in his words. Jesus replied, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and God what is God's." Next, he was questioned by the Sadducees, who believed there is no resurrection. Jesus replied that those who rise are not dead, because our God is the God of the living.

The disciples had questions, too. They asked about the end times, they asked to understand, they asked to be sure they were ready. Jesus replied in great detail about what was to come.

Sometimes, I feel I could be in the first group. Right in there with the Sadducees and Pharisees. Not because I want to see Jesus hanging on a cross, but because sometimes I really want answers and I want him to show me He is who He says He is.

"Show me a sign, God." "Tell me you're here." "Give me the answers."

I'd like to find myself with the disciples, asking for understanding even if it won't make sense. Faith feels a bit bigger when you're stepping out on that limb. Instead of saying "tell me what to do," say, "I know this will be hard, but I believe You have a plan."

All of Jesus' answers for the disciples were daunting, but they listened with faith that He is who He says He is and that was enough. I pray for that to be enough, each and every day.

Samantha Reynolds

Prayer: Dear God, let your Word be enough for me. Help me to not question your ways but to trust in you. Amen.

GIVING THANKS
Thursday, April 11

Read Luke 22:7-23

After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you.

Luke 22:17 {NIV}

As I read this passage over and over again it finally came to me that even with Jesus knowing his enemies were plotting His death and He was about to suffer on the cross He was "Giving Thanks". He took the bread that represents His body broken for us and "Gave Thanks". He took the cup that represents His blood shed for us and "Gave Thanks". I don't know about you but I don't think to give thanks during bad times, and if I knew I was about to suffer and die on the cross I would find it hard to be in a thankful mood. Even though Jesus knew what was going to happen, He "Gave Thanks" knowing Gods plan was being fulfilled.

As we go through life, we face many hardships/struggles and it is during these times we should remember to give thanks to God for what we have and that He gave his one and only Son to die for us on the cross for our salvation.

"In everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Scott Schutter

Thought of the day:

Give thanks in all situations.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to remember to give thanks during not only the good times in our lives but the rough times as well for you have given us everything we need. Amen

STANDING STRONG

Friday, April 12

Read Mark 15

Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

Mark 15:39 {NRSV}

Little things add up. A little white lie in order to not hurt someone's feelings, not sharing a bit of information which could hurt someone we care about, holding on to information from everyone so that our pride stays strong and no one knows the real person inside.

Jesus said, "You say so," as Pilate questioned him on being King of the Jews. He said nothing as additional accusations and charges were leveled against him. He said nothing as the crowd screamed for him to be crucified. He said nothing out of love. He said nothing in order to fulfill his role.

When I say nothing, it isn't for the greater good but for self-preservation. Avoiding hurt feelings or difficult conversations is the way of today's world, but when Jesus went before Pilate for his life, He said nothing. He said nothing in order to lay down his life to SAVE US.

Dani Peele

Thought of the day:

Do I stand by Jesus no matter the cost?

Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for the example of your Son. Thank you for your sacrifice to save us all. Father help us to trust and love you enough to have the difficult conversations, to admit the realities of our humanity and to be your light in the dark world. Help us to remember the sacrifice and to realize the importance of small sacrifices we must make in order to die to pride and rise in you. In Jesus' holy and precious name, Amen

GOD'S LOVE OF CARING

Saturday, April 13

Read Luke 23:50-56

Then he took the body down from the cross and wrapped it in a long sheet of linen cloth and laid it in a new tomb that had been carved out of rock.

Luke 23:53 {NLT}

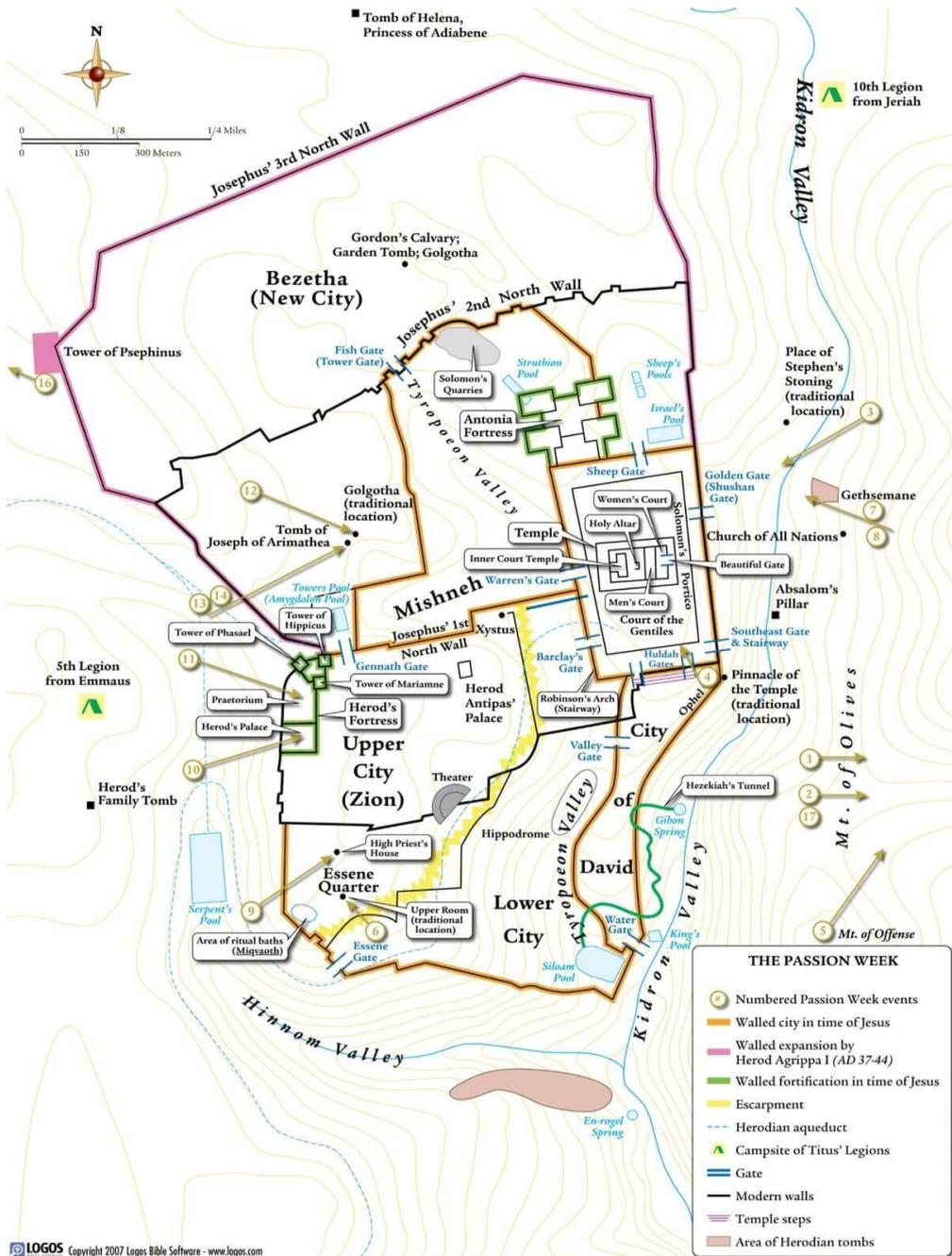
My dad has been a caregiver for my mom for many years. For the last 5 years, my mom has been a resident of a nursing home and dad travels to the next town to be by her side from before lunch until she has had her dinner every day. The staff respects my dad and listens to his ideas about the way the staff cares for residents. For example, many residents need to be hand fed on mom's floor. He observed the staff placing plates of food in front of all the residents when the food was ready. Meanwhile, the resident's food got cold before the staff could sit down to feed the residents who could not dig in and feed themselves when their plate arrived. My dad cared enough to speak up at one of mom's quarterly service meetings. The staff agreed to change how food was distributed to residents who could not feed themselves so they could eat a hot meal. In this small way, God's love of caring was expressed to all of the nursing home residents.

God's love of caring was shown through Joseph of Arimathea's generosity for Jesus' burial needs. Joseph boldly requested Jesus' body for burial from Pilate, delicately removed the body from the cross, lovingly wrapped the body in a long sheet of linen cloth, and protectively and properly placed the body in a new tomb.

Teresa Schutter

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for Your loving grace and the ability to care for others in my daily life. Open my eyes, ears, mind, and heart to show Your loving care for others with bold understanding. Amen.

HOLY WEEK JOURNEY



PARADE OF FOOLS

PALM SUNDAY, April 14

Read Luke 19:28-40

'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!'
Luke 19:38 {NRSV}

There are no palms in Luke's telling of the Triumphal Entry. No branches stripped from the trees strewn in front of the young colt. No great crowds according to Luke, just his disciples. Not a tiny group, to be sure, but not the spectacle of the other gospels. They call him "king" but they do not call him the more pointed "Son of David". The Pharisees seem to see it as an annoyance, not a threat. Luke doesn't say so, but, in my sanctified imagination, the shops don't close, the other Passover pilgrims are a bit amused, the authorities scoff. It's a silly act, a parade of fools in the face of Caesar's reign.

How many empires have faded while the parade of Jesus' disciples marches on! To proclaim Jesus as King in a world of presidents, governors, monarchs, premiers, and party leaders seems kinda silly at times. But it is a deeply political act. If I have no king but King Jesus, then all other loyalties wilt before my obedience to him. Let the nations, including ours, scoff at this Donkey King. Soon, not one stone will be left upon another, but the Word of our God will stand forever.

Rev. Sam Parkes

Thought of the day:

Let me have no allegiance that comes before my love, obedience, and commitment to Jesus Christ.

Prayer: King Jesus, as we enter Holy Week, give us peace in the face of violence, courage in the face of fear, and the will to shout our devotion even to the end...and beyond.

GOD'S ENDURING LOVE

April 15

Read Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

*"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever."
Psalm 118:1 {NIV}*

This passage begins and ends with the proclamation, "Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!" This is a concept that I have struggled with in life. Love is a word that our society throws around with abandon. It causes us to diminish the true meaning of the word love as used by and in relation to God. The Greek word used here is *agape*, a love that is always shown by what it does. Then it is modified by the word steadfast, resolutely or dutifully firm and unwavering. We worship a God whose love is there no matter what we think we have done to separate ourselves from him. But it is also a firm love. He is there with open arms to offer us grace, but we must live within the bounds of that grace. We are to offer *agape* love in return by living a life that reflects that same love back to him by being a living sacrifice in service to his will for our lives. We are also called to offer up *agape* love to everyone with whom we share life, no matter what they have done to us or things they do that we may disagree with.

Chris Bennett

Thought of the day:

I can count on God's love.

Prayer: Dear God, help me love with a love that is revealed in my actions. Help me to be unwavering to everyone I meet. Amen.

COMING TOGETHER

April 16

Read Isaiah 50:4-9a

*It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty?
Isaiah 50:9a {NRSV}*

Isaiah shares that as followers of the Lord, we are to teach, to listen, and to stand in the face of insult. God is with us when we face the realities of life.

As we move through this Holy Week, we must remember those things which Jesus has taught and live in the suffering that we share with Him in these days. Our King is going through his hardest days as he is betrayed, left alone, and put on the cross with no one standing for or with Him.

Isaiah questions, "Who will contend with me?" He invites us, those who believe, to stand together.

Let us stand together today and the days to come in our love and faith in our King.

Dani Peele

Thought of the day:

As the Body of Christ, we stand together in good times and in bad.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to remember that even when we disagree or things are hard, we have an advocate in heaven that understands pain. Let us support each other in remembering and loving through the hardness of this life. Amen.

A STONES' THROW

April 17

Read Psalm 31:9-16

*Let your face shine on your servant;
save me in your unfailing love.
Psalm 31:16 {NIV}*

In this psalm, David is so distressed. He is laden with sorrow and grief. Why? Because people are angry with him – so angry, in fact, that they want to kill him!

It seems everyone has stones to throw at him.

It was also true of our Lord. Plots and deviousness by the Pharisees and Herodians caused upheaval and torment in Jesus' life all the way to His death on the Cross.

But, just as David trusted God in the midst of trouble, so did Jesus.

David was robbed of a reputation but not of the comfort and confidence that God loved him, just as God loves all of us.

As David says in verse 16, all we have to do is trust in the Lord and His unfailing love will save us.

Linda Dean

Thought of the day:

I trust in You. You are my God!

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help us remember and be thankful that Jesus gave His all for us. Help us to continually trust Him in all circumstances. Amen.

THE DECISION

April 18

Read Philippians 2:5-11

*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus
Philippians 2:5 {NRSV}*

We are reaching the pinnacle of Jesus' journey here on earth. We have spent these 40 days in solemn reflection of who and whose we are as faithful followers of CHRIST. Now we must decide, do we have the same mind as Christ Jesus?

As we prepare for the reality, and pain, of tomorrow are we able to respond to our challenges as Jesus responded to those around Him? Scripture tells us again and again that to be wise is to know when to be quiet and when to speak up. But do we realize that wisdom may not be for our own good but for the good of the Kingdom and others?

We know that the joy of Easter is coming – Christ Jesus did too. But are we willingly and able to go through the pain of Friday to get to Sunday? Can we take the hits and keep our mouths closed and allow the world to get to Easter?

Dani Peele

Thought of the day:

I will open my mind to Christ today.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to have the mind of Christ and to remember that for the joy of Easter there is the pain of Good Friday. Amen.

A VERY GOOD DAY

Good Friday, April 19

Read Philippians 2:5-11

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Philippians 2:8 {NIV}

Today is Good Friday, when we remember Jesus' suffering and death. He was perfect and blameless, but took the punishment for our disobedience to God, in order to give all of us the opportunity to be right with God the Father.

If Christ was willing to humble himself like that, how much more we Christians, who call ourselves after his name, should display that same kind of humility to one another. Not exalting ourselves over each other, but considering the needs of others as more important than our own.

God's kingdom is open to all his children. He is granting us this day, an opportunity to commit or re-commit to Him, to serve His Kingdom in possibly a different way, by looking inward and giving us a time of self-reflection. He wants us to extend love to all who we meet in our daily path and share the "Good News" of Christ and His salvation. If each of us could make that commitment to one person, think how much stronger His Church would be.

Today, we all can make it a very "Good Day".

Rich Yahney

Prayer: Lord Jesus, it was for each and every one of us, and our sins that you humbled yourself to the point of death on a cross. You have taken our place. You have redeemed us. You have saved us. Give us knees that will fall in humble worship, prayers that will be unceasing, and lips that will constantly sing your praises, now and forever. Amen.

STAYING AT THE TABLE

April 20

Read Luke 22:14-23:56

When the hour came Jesus, with his apostles, reclined at the table and Jesus tells them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover meal with you before I suffer.”

As Jesus eagerly prepared to eat the last supper with the twelve, He tells them what will happen and that he will suffer and be betrayed in the days to come. At the same time, He teaches them about a new covenant. The breaking of bread to represent his body and the cup of wine to represent his blood poured out for us. This is the sacrament of the Lord’s Table that we continue to celebrate. We celebrate our freedom from sin unto death because Christ paid that debt, for us, in full. My salvation is why I participate in the celebration of Communion.

I am astonished, amazed, and bewildered because with the foresight of what was to happen, Jesus stayed at the table. Jesus stayed, how overwhelming is that? He stayed so you and I would have the Lord’s Supper as a remembrance; he stayed to teach his messengers about the message of the Last Supper. Jesus stayed to fulfill the scriptures of His death on the cross to pay for our sins. Nails held his body to the cross but LOVE kept him there. He stayed at the table for you and me. How can I not be humbled by all of this? Jesus’s love for mankind was so strong that he STAYED. How blessed we are that Jesus stayed because He first loved us.

Kevin Rogers

Thought of the day: Remember Jesus’ gift of our salvation.

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for our salvation. Thank you for the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper to remind us of how much You love us. Help me be an example of that love to others by “staying at the table” in the hard places in my life. Amen.

HOGSWALLOP, BALDERDASH, NONSENSE!

EASTER, April 21

Read Luke 24:1-12

*"Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened."
Luke 24:10-12 {NRSV}*

It sounded like "an idle tale" to Jesus' closest friends - the apostles. Actually, the Greek word, "leros," is *quite* a bit stronger than "idle tale"; it refers to garbage. In terms of a story or a testimony, one might say that it's utter nonsense, balderdash, hogswallop, a bunch of hooey. Silly women, you can hear them mutter, we know the truth. He's dead. He's dead-dead. Real dead. You don't come back from crucifixion. The crunching machinery of power could not tolerate the way this man loved people by telling them the truth about who they are - both beautiful and also deeply broken. He knew what was going to happen; he described it in detail to his friends, even this part (9:22, 18:33). They didn't want to believe the worst part, but they get it now. You'd think that if he told the truth about the worst that they might have some trust in this Sunday morning truth, that on the third day he would be raised to life. Nope. How stupid, these women! You don't keep moving on after crucifixion. Hogswallop, a load of crap.

But Peter runs to look anyway. Who could blame the boys for their doubts? We live in a world no less violent or cruel. We see people mangled by the jaws of power all of the time: refugees at the border looking for asylum, young school children gunned

down in their classrooms with firearms that no civilian could justify owning, thousands of deaths by opioids provided by those who care not for their lives only for the money. Some media outlets so often distort the truth that it's hard to know what to believe. Resurrection? Oh, really? Yes, really. Life is forever altered. The resurrection means that we are not living in a closed, fixed system where human power corrupts yet goes unchecked. A living, breathing human body is risen, glorified and forever a part of God's life. And that risen Jesus is at work in this world of ours to bring liberation, healing, salvation, and wholeness to the whole creation. He is still ON THE MOVE through his Church, and sometimes in spite of us. Really? Yes, it's hard to believe until, like Peter, we experience the amazement of leaning into the tomb and seeing it for ourselves. He is not there. He is risen, and he has gone into whatever Galilee we have to face tomorrow morning. We will see him there. Ever on the move. My beautiful and broken friends, Jesus is alive. I have chosen to listen to that balderdash and risk staking my life on it. Because in my Galilees I have seen him. And the women were right.

Rev. Sam Parkes

Thought of the day:

Let us build, each of us, our own testimony to the Risen Lord, and share it with love, mercy, and grace.

Prayer: Lord, I believe; help my unbelief! Help me live each day with confidence in your abundant love made manifest in the raising of Jesus, the fruits of them that have fallen asleep.