

The Methodist Church

Lenten Devotional 2010

Week 1

*Psalm 86:11 Teach me your way, Oh Lord and I will walk
in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear Your name.*

The first day of the New Year was a day of putting away. The Christmas tree came down, all the ornaments and decorations stored neatly in their boxes. My Christmas decorations all hold wonderful memories for me, some from my childhood that have hung on my tree as long as I can remember, some more recent. I've packed all the memories away with great care, each in its special box and all recorded on a spreadsheet in my computer so they can be retrieved easily. I am organized. The house is ready for the New Year. I replaced the beautiful Christmas wreath over the mantle with our Mantle Clock. Now we can once more see the time and know how much time is left before... before what? Before I start dinner, before the movie I want to watch on TV comes on?

I treated my Christmas Decorations so carefully, but what about my future? Am I preparing for my future as carefully? As I read my Bible in the mornings and do my Bible studies, am I storing God's word in the compartments of my mind and heart as carefully as I stored my Christmas decorations? Am I ready to retrieve the Word of God when I need it to carry me through whatever is going to confront me next?

As I look at the clock on the mantle, I realize it can only tell me what time it is now. It can't tell me how much time I have left to do the things God wants me to do, to become the person God wants me to become. At Christmas we celebrated the first gift God gave us, His son, Jesus Christ. Am I prepared for the gift His Son died to give me, Eternal Life? Am I prepared to resist the temptations that confront me daily? Am I prepared for His return? As I go into this Lenten season, deciding what I am going to "give up" will it be something I can do easily, or am I willing to give up that something that keeps me from receiving all that Christ has to offer me – SELF?

Lord, as I start my journey through this Lenten season, prepare me through your word to give up "self" and resist the temptations I am confronted with daily. Keep me humble before you. "Teach me your way...give me an undivided heart," walk with me through these days so that I may be a witness for the Glory of your Resurrection. Amen.

Jan Lloyd

Lenten Service 2009

The day had overtaken me early on. The busyness was overwhelming, but none the less, the tasks had to be completed. I knew the Lenten service was taking place tonight, but it came sooner than I was prepared for. I found myself hurriedly driving down Akers in silence, trying to speed up the transition from Martha to Mary. Even the sounds of country music had to be gagged.

Dusk overtakes the inside of the church. The lighting is set as if darkness will soon be upon us, and it will. For the next 40 days, we will have to feel our way like a blind man walking down the sidewalk, cautiously poking with his white cane. When darkness comes and we cannot see, it is only then do we rely more heavily on our other senses. For me, my blindness forces me to rely on our God to safely help me to continue on my journey. By now I know that I will see even more clearly in the upcoming 40 days than I've been able to see all year. The tears I wept tonight have already begun to cleanse, not only my eyes, but my Spirit. I'm not afraid of the dark like I once was."

Nancy Robertson

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Week 2

Remember on the "Golden Girls" Sophia Petrillo was always saying "Picture this, Sicily 19__ ...well. picture this, Visalia September 2004, four friends embarked on a birthday journey to the coast. We stayed in Pacific Grove but spent most of our time in Carmel. It was wonderful wandering through the shops, eating in the great restaurants and in the evening we went to the outdoor theater for a fantastic play. It was our plan to attend the Presbyterian Church in Carmel on Sunday. Sunday morning we hurriedly dressed for the trip and away we went, only somehow the car made an abrupt turn onto a road we didn't know. There was a parking lot down the street where we could turn around. The parking lot was at the Methodist Church in Monterey. Why were we here? Well, we might as well go in. Obviously the Lord wanted us here instead of in Carmel.

The Church was small and had a rather ugly cross at the front made of railroad ties, however, something about it was mesmerizing. I was still grieving the loss of my husband and seeking purpose to my life. In the bulletin it mentioned Stephen Ministry. I had never heard of this ministry but my eyes kept coming back to the reference. Something about the whole experience had me feeling as if I was on fire. Could this be the purpose I was looking for? Why was it so fascinating; what is Stephen Ministry? Surely I wasn't being called to be a minister, are you joking? Was this the answer to all those prayers? All I know is that by the time the service was over, I felt completely consumed by this fire and I could hardly wait to tell my companions what had happened.

Why now, after 56 years of marriage and nurturing my family, did I feel this urge to step out of my comfort zone and risk the possibility of failure? Yet, it seemed that this was what He was asking me to do. I loved people and had always enjoyed helping them. I felt my personal experiences caring for Mel during his long illness as well as my nurses training could be useful to others. But was that enough? Did I have enough faith to share it with others? These questions needed to be addressed before I made the final decision. But through it all the fire continued to rage. How could I say no when it seemed that this was the Lords will for my life. I will claim Paul's words from Romans, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28

January of 2005 was the next week long seminar and after much soul searching and many a night on my knees seeking guidance I decided to step out in faith, knowing that what I lacked the Lord would provide. My companions were very supportive and even went to Orlando, Florida with me. However, they soon felt the call to serve, as well.

I was not prepared for this overwhelming experience. Of the 453 people in attendance, there was only a handful of us that were not trained Stephen Ministers. I had so much to learn. All week I kept praying that the Lord would guide me and use me. I learned that confidentiality was the key word. But the hardest part was learning to really LISTEN and be nonjudgmental.

That is the only way you can serve those that are hurting.

This has been the most meaningful experience of my life. Everyday that fire burns brightly. I have put my complete trust in Him and have found a true purpose for living. The adage that “if the Lord brings you to it, He will see you through it” has never been more true.

Marianne Faucher

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Week 3

Letting Go

*Will it always be Fall, that is?
Dropping its color at my heart's window.
Six years past mother began the last three months of her life;
And two years later, my youngest daughter,
Then only 20, attempted to take her own.*

*A time of haunting Fall, that is.
Thoughts seemingly locked into eternity's time,
Never shaking loose, until the chill of night sleeps.*

*I'm sure of it Fall, that is.
Times when life clung by a thread and God held both ends,
Screaming at my conscious never to forget. (10/15/06)*

How often it seems we mark time by the life events which rock our world inside-out – the tragic accident or death of someone close, coping with life-threatening and changing health issues for ourselves, family or friends, broken relationships, dealing with addictions, depression, parenting challenges, and the list just seems to go on and on.

It took a two minute phone call to turn our lives upside down and five years to let go of its hold on me. The turn of fall every year became my heart and mind's relentless replay of jumping into the car that foggy November night, with barely a word between us for the 5-hour drive to northern California, only to find her curled in a fetal position on her bed, melted in the exhaustion of her emotional pain. How could we have missed it? Where did we go wrong? As a parent, the weight of guilt hangs heavy on the heart of one who feels like they have missed the mark in meeting the needs of their child, who has been entrusted by God for care. And then there was the ensuing 24/7 obsession of feeling responsible for her happiness, constantly worrying when the next call would come, listening for every intonation of her voice... that somehow my arms were bigger than God's to carry her through a painful time in her life. She grew through her pain, but often I think it was God's season for me to learn to grow through mine, as well, and learn to trust him more.

My heart grieves when I hear of parents who face the tragedy of a child who has taken their own life, whether accidental or intentional, because I know, but for the grace of God, it could have been our story, too. It's hard to imagine the thought of such a loss, which we were miraculously spared, and it's also hard to imagine not having discovered that God will carry me through any difficulty if I just let go.

Sometimes I wish my faith was bigger to trust God with all the things which concern me. Letting go seems to be the first step. Lent is a good time to let go, so that God can carry on the good work he began in each of us until the day of Christ Jesus.

Nancy Stephens

Flame

The searching tip of flame faltered,
red source of fire pouring forth
from the innards of the candle,
as men's piercings drained the
Cylinder of Hope, and
darkness seeped over all.

Men, startled, began to search—
should the candle have been
extinguished—unlightable
Othello trick!

As drops of life slithered
down rough wood, earth
welcoming them, greedily,
men fled from that hill,
stumbling blindly to huts,
seeking flint to relight the world.
But the earth had taken the flammable,
all candles becoming impotent.

Forgive them, Father . . .

The empty container given grudgingly
by the splintery cross,
hopelessness descending as
flameless remains were entombed.
They know not what they do.

Quietly, a unique essence
flowed into the candle-corpse,
and light sprang from rock-hole,
charged with translucence.
But when will they learn?

Each spring fluid ascends
from the hesitant earth,
rushing through elm's veins,
putting out the first lacy green,
renewing the promise.

Perhaps, never.

The flame before the cross
rises and falls, reddens, yellows
while we watch, contemplating
the cup and accepting or
rejecting the offer of life.

Bill Decker

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Week 4

GOD'S TIME

Each day I begin with prayers that often ramble since I struggle to stay focused in the moment and not wander off in an "attitude of prayer" that is really already solving the challenges I anticipate at work later this morning. When I refocus on the Lord I usually end with prayers of friends and loved ones that are in need of physical healing, new jobs, or just a need for knowing Christ as their Savior. While the last request seems to be the most challenging and somehow I don't often expect to see short-term results, the other prayers I lift to the Lord come with an anticipation that something should be done now. There is an urgent need and if I can't make it happen myself then surely God can and will do it.

The one thing I have been slowly learning is that God's time is definitely not my time. I feel defeated somewhat when I find myself still praying for the same things after what I deem to be a "reasonable time" to allow God to act. My sense of urgency often conflicts with the reality of how God chooses to move. Then I realize that my disappointments are ridiculous and so misguided. Though I have, on occasion, witnessed in my own life the miraculous works of God, my experience is generally that He really does not have the same watch that I do and obviously his alarm notices from my Task Management Program are not synced with mine.

But why should they be? This is the same God whom the Hebrews cried out to for hundreds of years to deliver them out of their bondage in Egypt. It is the same God who didn't heal the blind man that was born at birth until well into his adult years. The examples go on and on. Why should "my God" be different from the one I fell in love with and committed my life to that is in the Bible.

The next time I pray and realize my friend who is terminally ill is still on my list to pray for, I am not going to feel defeated. I am going to realize that my friend who has been struggling with a terminal illness is "still on my list"...and for that I am grateful! God is moving....in His time.

Gary Artis

Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say Rejoice.

The Bible study lesson for my next meeting is entitled "SIN Doorway to Darkness." The main focus of the lesson is confession. After I had finished writing my responses to the questions, the verse above jumped into my consciousness.

Now it wasn't exactly the verse above but one that was more in line with the lesson I had just completed. It went: Confess I say, Confess to the Lord always. I had to look up in the concordance to find the exact verse and I was lucky enough to remember that it started with Rejoice.

I am in no way trying to rewrite the Bible but I did find it interesting that I was able to jump from my lesson to a Bible verse even if it didn't quite match up, or did it? If you really think about it they do seem to fit together.

Rejoice - vb – to be glad – to feel joy or great delight

Confess – vb – to tell or make known: to admit

In Psalm 32, David compares the happiness of being forgiven of his sins to the suffering of not confessing them to God. To confess transgression is to be right with God. In Verse 10 David says, "Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart."

When you ask forgiveness of your sins don't you feel joy and a lightening in your heart and mind? Can't we say: "I will Confess to the Lord always; again I say Confess", and come away saying, "I can Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say Rejoice."

Verne Miniaci

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Week 5

His Hands Are Upon Me

When does one recognize God is in your life? That he is your SAVIOR/MESSIAH? When does one realize that you are not in control? Leading your own path on life's voyage from unbelief to belief. When is it that awareness comes upon us? Feeling and acting different to others and yourself.

With most of us, it is a slow awakening not some moment or bang of light or an epiphany. The ups and downs throughout my now 80 years have been likened to a giant roller coaster or elevator. Starting, so very low, without the Guide, going up, up and then down with a bang stopping when we finally find him, GOD JESUS THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Feeling God's presence in your life can start the ride again. Not quickly like expected, gradually, having become aware of his hands upon me. Knowing they must have always been there, how else would I have made this journey from a non-believer to believer in our Savior-Messiah?

Trying to explain to those who wonder why and the wherefores of WHY I BELIEVE. These are some of the questions, asked of me: Why did you cross the line? How can you be a Christian and still be born a Jew? You just want to change because you think your life will get better ... How do you know you are forgiven, all this talk about being a sinner, etc...

I believe God sent his son to be born as a babe to a Jewish girl and her betrothed in the poorest of poor villages, in Bethlehem over 2,000 years ago. God choose this lowly start to let us know how we start our journey of belief as babes ourselves, given life, the stages of growing. He wanted us to be like the Savior. Learn his teachings, know we would have eternal life through him. If he came as a King he would not be approachable by the majority of us.

I know I should live the scriptures for the doubters. It seems the simple truth of my belief should be enough rather than bringing the book to insist they read it, until they feel ready. This works for me. And oh yes letting them know his hands have always been on me and can be on them if they reach up and believe.

And when they and I read, we look at the holy book together.
I AM SO BLESSED

*Sharing the love of Christ,
Elaine A. Atkinson*

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Week 6

My Favorite Holiday

*Oh, it's Easter again....
my favorite "holiday" of the year;
A time of rejoicing
and holding my Savior near.*

*Ah, but Christmas is wonderful,
with all the lights and good cheer;
A time to remember baby Jesus
and celebrate with those we hold dear.*

*But there's something about Easter
that brings such hope and love;
And we know that feeling
surely comes from above.*

*I have to get through Good Friday though,
as the lights of the cross grow dim;
And I must never forget that
it's really all about Him.*

*How He suffered and died
that agonizing death for me;
So that once and for all,
I could be totally free.*

*You see, I can't have Easter
without the reality of the cross;
Because everything I am
certainly came with a cost.*

*Oh, it's Easter again....
my favorite "holiday" of the year;
Let's hope this Easter I bring a smile to God's face not a tear.*

Charlotte Olinger