

THE METHODIST CHURCH

LENTEN DEVOTIONS

WILL YOU RISE?

“Will you Rise” I ask every week
motioning with my hands and expecting,
knowing that they will.
They will because they mistake it for a request
to stand while the
Offering is brought forward.

It goes deeper though, far deeper.
I want them to Rise again in His kingdom.
I want to ask them if they know with certainty...
That He will call their name from the life book.

Probably some should not rise in answer to my
question.

They would be at least honest in remaining
seated.
They could at last declare what they feel about
God.

He isn't real enough to help me.

But, rise they do, because they are supposed to
Everyone else does.

It saddens me to not have the courage to ask
what I mean.
It saddens me more knowing they are glad for
the deception.

“Will you rise?” Would you like to?

Steve Creel

Introduction

I am so glad that our church has put together the 40 devotionals in this booklet. It is important that as a church community we be aware of one another's stories. It is inspiring and humbling to come face to face with God working in lives that are playing out much differently than our own.

In this collection you will read stories of resurrection, of longing, of quiet confidence and sure faith. I read them through for the first time while waiting for an airplane. I just couldn't put them aside once I started. I wept, I laughed and otherwise acted in ways that made the others waiting for their planes nervous.

I commend them to you and I know that you will be blessed throughout Lent by your readings. We have set up the devotionals in a distinct way this year. Monday through Saturday of each week will be a regular devotional. Sunday's are set aside for prayers that have been written by laity in the church and used on Sunday Mornings during the pastoral prayer. We are hoping that on Sundays you will be lead to times of deeper prayer by starting with these.

If a reading touches you we ask that you share it with friends or family. Make a copy of that devotional or pick up the whole Lenten Devotional and share it as a gift. The more people who read about the powerful things God is doing in lives: the more people will seek a relationship with God.

God bless you on your Lenten Journey this year.

Pastor Steve Creel

I I C o r i n t h i a n s 9 : 1 1
II Corinthians 9:11

You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

Lord you are so generous and have blessed me in so many ways. Lord, help me to see and act on the opportunities that you provide to share your wealth and blessing with others. Lord, put me into contact with those in need in my community. I pray this vision for our church and that I might be a part of your will in our outreach to turn other's need for help into thanksgiving to God.

Stacy Hyde

Sitting alone awaiting my test results in the Cottage Hospital cafeteria on a bright, clear summer day in Santa Barbara, somehow I knew that my life would never be the same again. I was right.

I thought I had everything I needed... faith in God, a wonderful husband, four lively daughters, loyal friends, a good job, a comfortable lifestyle, hopes and dreams for the future, and "control" over my life. I didn't feel I was lacking in anything - yet I also sensed that something wasn't quite right.

I had been having some odd, mild symptoms, off and on for a year-and-a-half. I suspected they might have been due to my high blood pressure, which had been diagnosed only a few months before. While that proved not to be the case, I considered many other possibilities as to why I could be having brief, but regular episodes of feeling disconnected from my surroundings. Thinking it was probably nothing serious, I made an appointment for the Monday after my school job ended in June of 2006 to see a neurologist at the Sansum Clinic. The appointment that Monday turned out to be a consultation and I had to come back again two days later to have the tests done (a neurological exam, a brain MRI, and a CAT scan).

In some ways, the French-dip sandwich I was eating in the cafeteria felt, even then, like my own personal "Last Supper". After having a few hours from the time my tests were done to going back to get the results from the kindly old doctor who examined me, my level of anxiousness grew steadily. The serious look on his face when he called me back to his office and had me sit down to tell me about the brain tumor found in my right frontal lobe was a moment I will never forget. Blessedly, he told me straight and right away the news that would change me forever.

While I immediately feared and assumed the worst, I was also somehow able to turn into the arms of the God I had always known, but perhaps never really relied on. During what seemed like an eternal 4 1/2 hour drive home, I sought the Lord like I never had before. What I remember most is thinking, praying, and singing "Here I Am Lord"... I had held the reins of my life for 41 years and I realized that no matter how much (or how little) time I had left on this earth, this was a wake-up call from God for me to realize that He is the one who truly has my - and all - life in His hands. I was grateful to know that God was carrying me in a way that I never could; relieved that I didn't have to have all the answers or be all things to all people; and humbled and honored to become the tool He had always wanted to use (had I not kept getting in the way!).

From that life-changing day to the eight days following (before my surgery), God was so faithful, loving, and gentle. He spoke to me through many, many little "miracles" (some of which, previously I would have considered to be "coincidences"). By His grace, he saw me through the most terrifying time of my life and even allowed me to be able to enter into my church home to give Him thanks and praise 3 days after having a golf-ball-sized tumor removed from my head.

Sure, There were times during my chemotherapy and radiation treatments that summer when I resented the position I was in, but God was so good during it and He provided me with just what I actually deeply needed all along... a reliance on Him (instead of myself), a longing to know Him better, and a willingness to obey and serve Him however He calls me to.

Julie Mitchell

It was one of the hardest days I'd ever had as a mom. One Sunday in January, we took our oldest son to the recruiter's office; the day he left for boot camp. As we waved goodbye to Patrick, we were able to keep up a brave front, but once we got home, my husband and I were a mess. Just thinking about him being gone was enough to start the tears flowing. We knew we'd get to see him again in a little over three months, but each time we passed Patrick's bedroom, we felt like we were grieving. If we had had to rely on our strength, it would have been a horrible time for all of us.

Fortunately, we quickly remembered that we weren't walking down the hallway, past our son's room, alone. This didn't prevent a single tear from falling, but it sure helped us smile through the tears.

God's peace is always available to us.

Diana Matton

Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your minds in Christ Jesus.

Sunday

Abba father

We come to you as humble children seeking your loving guidance.

We know you thru the Holy Spirit but can not imagine your magnitude and power. We see the wonders of this life and yet cannot always acknowledge you. The complexity of a beating heart, of sight and sound, of the very air we breathe, all of which speak of your power and might but are often lost in the noise of this world.

We would seek to turn this present world back to your Eden. But we lack the wisdom and knowledge to do so. However we continue to believe we are like you, and in believing, we only prove that we are simply human and create newer and deadlier problems.

Allow us to walk with you today and marvel at the simple joys this world has to offer. Let us not stumble or fall or seek to expand beyond what you would have us be.

We acknowledge our sins and weakness and ask for your forgiveness. Let us seek your spirit and follow your word. Give us the ability to be a brother or sister to those who need our help. And as we open our hearts we ask that you keep them safe in your spirit.

We ask all this in the name of our savior and lord, Jesus Christ.

L E N T E N S Y M B O L S - T H E O L I V E B R A N C H

Genesis 8:10-11 ¹⁰ He waited another seven days, and again he sent out the dove from the ark; ¹¹ and the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth.

From the Book of Genesis, Noah released a dove three times. On the first trip, the dove returned with nothing, indicating that the waters had not yet receded. On the second trip, the dove came back carrying an olive leaf in its beak, which informed Noah that God had taken mercy on humanity and caused the flood to recede and physically showed there was some earth now above water level:

There are so many symbols for peace in this passage that it must have been a great relief to ancient readers after reading of such catastrophe. God wanted us to know that He is a God of peace, a God of covenant and a God of promise.

This was also communicated through the ministry of Jesus:

Luke 22:39-40 He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial."

In the midst of the olive grove, this symbol of peace, stands the Prince of peace exhorting His disciples, and us, to pray, to communicate with Him, to remain current with Him so that when something else comes our way and beckons us to become distracted, we can resist knowing that our "no" reveals a bigger "yes" to the One who is able to keep us.

*Have no fear of
sudden disaster or
of the ruin that
overtakes the
wicked, for the
LORD will be your
confidence and will
keep your foot from
being snared.*

P r o v e r b s 3 : 2 5 - 2 6

Children have given me such a perspective of how blessed I really am and how much I'm not in control! Sometimes, I'm overwhelmed by how much could potentially go wrong and I become very anxious. Lord, help me to place my confidence in you and to find the peace that you offer. Replace my worried thoughts with your words of assurance and trust in you. Remind me of Your hand on my life and all of its circumstances.

Stacy Hyde

We give God Glory, Praise and Thankfulness.

We were married five years and begin to think we could not have children so we put our name in for adoption. Shortly thereafter, it happened and we had a little boy. We named him Richard LeeRoy. He was an answer to prayer and we were very happy. Two years later we had a little girl, Stacie JoAnne. How wonderful, we had a boy and a girl, our family was perfect. About six months after Stacie was born our life changed dramatically. Richard had a seizure and it started a long, difficult, hurting time for our whole family, especially Richard. His seizures became very frequent, just about one every day. We took him to every medical facility available and nothing helped him. He continued to get worse and some days would have seizures all day.

He wanted so badly to play football, baseball and attend school like everyone else but of course this was impossible. We did everything we could to make his life as happy as possible. We had church in our home every Sunday. I taught the kids all of the children's songs, Joe gave a devotional and sometimes the kids would just read something from the bible and pray.

Both of our children accepted Christ during this time. One night Richard had a very bad seizure in his sleep and just didn't wake up. He was 15 years old. We had prayed very long and hard for his healing. For about one and half years I was very angry at God. I felt I had always been obedient, worked in the church, was the church pianist for years and God treated us and Richard badly. He let him die!!.....I was ready to give up and then God did a wonderful thing..... Our only other child, Stacie, 13 at the time in April just before her eighth grade graduation, was in a very bad accident. We were notified they had taken her by ambulance to the hospital. Joe & I went to the hospital and were greeted by our doctor.. He had been with us all through Richard's illness so he struggled to tell us Stacie was very injured and possibly would not live. She was in surgery with a Neurosurgeon and Orthopedic Surgeon. She had severe head injuries, three toes cut off, and broken collar bone. We were devastated and I was so scared. When they brought her out of surgery , I went into the room by her bed and got on my knees. I cried so hard and just told God how I felt. Why??? I had a very warm, gentle feeling come over me, and I heard the Lord saying, "Arvilla, you have been angry. Richard's death was meant to be and some day you will understand why. Now I want to get your attention back on me. I am going to give you a Miracle for Stacie. You, Stacie & Joe are my children and I love you. Stacie will come out of her coma in one hour. She will heal and never have any problems from this accident". I knew and felt her healing. It was an experience that is hard to explain but God was very much in that room I felt so much peace and I knew she was going to be OK. She entered High School, ran for cheerleader and won! She included me in every activity they had. She made sure I was always a part of her cheerleading. I had the privilege of chaperoning them to cheerleading camp every year for four years. Watching her at games made me cry. I knew she was there because of our Heavenly Father's love and mercy. I will never doubt His presence again. He gave me the strength, knowledge and ability to care for Richard. I know now that every day He had his hand on Richard and all of us because we all endured and completed the work that needed to be done for Richard. Yes, I miss Rich but as Joe put it so well on Rich's grave marker..."Don't be sad for God has made me well." Richard received his healing. Stacie received a miracle. She is now married to a wonderful man and has two great children. (The emotions at her beautiful wedding were overwhelming!)

Arvilla Boswell

Speaking to a room full of ambitious, college-bound, Christian high school students I asked this question: “How many of you are planning to major in becoming a servant when you attend your university next fall?” No one raised their hand. I tried again, using a little different approach: “How many of you are committed to a life of becoming nothing?” You can probably imagine the confused looks on those young people’s faces! That’s not why young people work so hard in high school—to get accepted to a great college so that they might become nothing!

Of course the Lord wants us to make the best of the opportunities he presents us with—college students should always work hard, getting the most out of their education. Still, all need to remember that we’re called to be imitators of God (See Ephesians 5:1) and that Jesus of Nazareth, the Eternal, Incarnate Son of God, came to serve—not to be served. (See 20:25-28)

I love Paul’s letter to the Philippians, especially the following verses:

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Philippians 2:5-8 NIV

A few years ago we created a special T-shirt for our summer college beach retreat. The T-shirt was black with the palm of a human hand on the front—there was a nail hole in the middle of the hand. Written across the palm were the words:

“Committed to becoming nothing.”

That T-shirt is still my favorite! Walking in the footsteps of our Savior, imitating him, requires that we die to ourselves—numerous times daily—committing ourselves to becoming nothing. John the Baptist understood that. When his disciples came to John with their concerns over the rising popularity of Jesus, John told them: “He (Jesus) must become greater; I must become less.” (See John 3:30) I’m making it my goal during this Lenten season to empty myself of “ME” so that there will be more room for Jesus—how about you?

Bro Jim

1 C O R I N T H I A N S 7 : 2 4

*Brothers,
each man,
as
responsible
to God,
should
remain in
the
situation
God called
him to.*

Pastor Steve told me I'm a better American than I am a Christian. Boy, that resonated with me. I often find myself thinking I'm in control and the outcome of my activities – even the one's God has chosen for me – are all up to me. I become so overwhelmed with my responsibilities and have a hard time prioritizing. Lord, help me to prioritize, spend time wisely, and trust in your guidance, your timing, your will. My commitment is to you and I trust in you.

Stacy Hyde

CAUTIOUS PRAYER

Each day I awake and commit to spend my “10 minutes of quality time” with God, reading my devotional book and praying. In this brief time of daily ritual I open my mind and heart to the workings of God. Then I ask Him to have His way in my life and the lives of my family and those near to me. I am much more comfortable using words like “bless” and “keep safe” when praying for my kids and loved ones. Yet when I read about Jesus and his calling of his disciples and his calling of me, I don't find many references to “blessings” and “being safe”. I find more expressions of “if you will trust and obey” and “can you drink from the cup I am going to drink”.

Jesus seems to be saying that it is in these actions of abandonment that we find his peace and his blessing. They are things that flow as a result of walking in obedience to God, rather than prerequisites for belief and faith.

My prayer has now become “Lord, may I trust you today in a new way. A way that doesn't always appear safe, doesn't always require me to know the end before I start the beginning, and trusts you with the lives of my family and friends beyond the circumstances of their lives.” May I no longer pray a cautious prayer of blessings and safety (whatever that looks like), but a bold prayer that asks God to have “His way...not mine” with my children, friends, job and ambitions.

Lord, today have your way in me and do “whatever it takes” to bring me and my loved ones into a closer walk with you. Amen

Gary Artis

Prayer

Our Precious Father in Heaven, Creator of Heaven and Earth, we love you and adore you and we praise you for all that you have given us. We see the vastness of your love and power in the beauty that you have created all around us. We see you Father in your creations both big and small. You have created the mountains and the oceans, and when we see their beauty we are reminded of what an amazing and awesome God that you are. We can look at a newborn baby and know that you are God, that you created that tiny little being just as you created each and every one of us. We cannot help but be reminded that you lovingly formed us, you know everything about us and yet you choose to love us anyway. We are reminded of the gift of Eternal life through the sacrifice of your one and only son, and we will never understand the depth of your love.

You love us even when we don't always deserve your love. You watch over us when we are not worthy. You bless us beyond what we can ever imagine, and though we may not always understand, we know that things work together for those who love you. We are placed in circumstances for which we have no choice but to look to you and to trust in you and it is in those times that we truly understand the power of your love. It is when we are the weakest that we are made strong. It is when we are hopeless, that we find hope through you, our loving Father and Creator. And when we foolishly doubt you, you find a way to make your presence known.

We know Father that you treasure each and every one of us and we have only to seek you and we will find you. You love us more than we could ever imagine. We pray Father that you will continue to guide us and that although we will make mistakes, they will be such that we will learn from them and through them and become what only you know that we can become.

Father, we ask that you continue to be merciful as we struggle with the decisions that we make. We pray for forgiveness and we pray to become more the people you want us to become with loving and gentle spirits, forgiving hearts and that people will know your love through us. We ask this in your most precious name, Amen.

Rooster

LENTEN SYMBOLS

Matthew 26:31-35 ³¹ Then Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ ³² But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.” ³³ Peter said to him, “Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.” ³⁴ Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” ³⁵ Peter said to him, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And so said all the disciples.

Peter meant it. He would not, ever in a million years betray Jesus, not now not ever. Yet, we know what happened:

Matthew 26:73-75 ⁷³ After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you.” ⁷⁴ Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, “I do not know the man!” At that moment the cock crowed. ⁷⁵ Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: “Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.

Peter’s experience, like our experience stands as an example of the futility of good intentions. While nothing is wrong with them, they will let us down, every time. They shine like the sun in our mind and we think, “We are invincible. We can do no wrong because we have good intentions.” No matter how sincere, how authentic our resolve, good intentions will consistently fail you. Only action nurtured by a re-ordering of your priorities will take you to a new level of Christ-likeness.

So who do you want to be? A person who swears not to and then does, or a person who only admits to doing the best they can with what one has, and then follows through.

It seems like an easy choice.

DAY 10

STORM CALMER

It's snowing now...
 I will push the shovel
 against the pile...
 Until, for a while, all is
 clear.

Inside again; peering out
 at my work...
 The snow continues...
 Laughing at my futile
 efforts.

If it were only snow...
 I wouldn't worry much...
 Storms outside abate in
 time...

But..
 winter visits my heart
 also...
 I fight against it and push
 it away..
 Until I think it can never
 win...

Feeling safe inside ;
 smugly looking at my
 world
 I feel the change
 coming....winds
 blowing...
 Circumstance washing
 away the false calm.

In those times when....
 My actions mock my
 will...
 And the storms of self
 prevail.

I pray that...

The promise is true...
 His son, my savior...
 Has the power to calm the
 storms...
 Outside and inside...

Steve Creel

Without Wax -

Long ago, the
 people selling
 marble to
 sculptors
 would put
 colored wax in
 the small
 holes to cover
 up the
 imperfections
 in the stone.
 This way, the
 marble
 appeared
 smooth,
 without
 blemish.
 Unless closely
 examined, the
 stone or the
 work of art
 looked to be
 pure (marble),
 also know as
 sincere
 (without wax).
 When dealing
 with others,
 it's important
 for each of us
 to be sincere,
 or without
 wax. Trying to
 fill in, or
 cover up our
 imperfections
 will only work
 until someone
 takes a close
 look at us.
 How many times
 have we tried
 to fill in the
 blemishes when
 we're dealing
 with God? Can
 you imagine
 someone
 thinking God
 doesn't see
 our blemishes,
 no matter how
 much wax we
 use?

***Knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.
Proverbs 9:10***

“Knowledge in biblical language never refers to what we call “head knowledge.” Biblical knowledge always refers to experiential involvement with what is known. We see this same sense when Jesus defines eternal life that He gives to His people as “that they might know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent” (John 17:3). Jesus is speaking of the close, constant interaction with the triune being of God that Jesus brings to the lives of those who seek Him and find Him.

One way I see us gaining knowledge is through the Extend the Table ministry at VUMC. The first Sunday of every month we take communion to people unable to attend our worship services. We greet them; inquire about their health and other important things. We pray, give a short litany and then serve them the bread and the cup. We are able to briefly converse with people and give them a sense that they are valued and that God is present in their lives through our visit and through the sacrament of communion. In this wonderful interaction we find ourselves growing in knowledge. We find our recipients growing in knowledge. We see the triune nature of God interacting with us, sharing His love, mercy and grace in the table.

It is an amazingly wonderful thing to become wiser in this way. We are able to bring something so precious, so transforming to people who are so thankful, so grateful, it makes me wonder why we didn't always do it. I think I know why – we just were not that smart yet.

May God continue to confound us this Lent that we might seek knowledge of the Holy One which *is* understanding.

Tom Buratovich

When I was a child I learned a verse in Sunday School that has stuck with me. It is found in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the work of truth" KJV.

As Sunday School teachers, we teach our students memory verses and hopefully they will learn and grow in God's Word and be able to trust Jesus in every part of their lives. I later learned another lesson that can be applied to this truth.

My family loved to go camping when we were growing up. Every summer Mom and Dad would load up the family car with camping gear, the four of us kids and our cat, Tandy, and head for the Grand Canyon for a week or two of camping and hiking fun. So when my brother, Roger, suggested that the two of us take our sons on an overnight hiking trip to Half Dome in Yosemite, it sounded like fun. We each had two boys, ages seven through twelve, and we all began making plans for our great adventure.

Finally the day arrived when we drove to Yosemite and begun our hike up to Half Dome. By now we were calling it a backpacking trip and had borrowed enough equipment to be able to stay overnight in the wild. We made it up to Little Yosemite campground above Nevada Falls, and everyone was tired but in good spirits. Roger and I helped our boys make camp and decided to find out how to cook this new freeze-dried food while the kids explored the campground. They discovered right away that metal boxes were provided to put food away from bears. Bears? HmMMM, no one ever mentioned about the possibility of bears up here!

As our great adventure turned out, everything went wrong that could go wrong. Our freeze-dried dinner turned out crunchy when we didn't add enough water and Roger couldn't get the stove to operate, we only had one flashlight, so had to take turns trying to find something in the dark, the campfire wasn't too great because the wood was green. It even started to rain and we didn't have a tent, later bears came sniffing around our camp in the night.

We managed to get some sleep in spite of all that was going on. The next morning we fixed breakfast and hung out our sleeping bags to dry. Roger and I decided to take a vote as to whether we should leave our things in the campground and try to make it up to Half Dome or should we just quit, pack up our gear, and hike back to the car. We all decided to continue our hike and were so proud that we made to the top of the rock.

As I thought back on this experience, I could only reflect that if we had so much fun when everything went wrong, it must really be rewarding if we knew what we were doing and had the right equipment. That's when I started to read, practice, and buy backpacking equipment. Eventually I joined a hiking club was able to make several backpacking trips across the Sierras, up to the top of Mt Whitney, and also into the Grand Canyon.

So when I remember that Bible verse, study to show yourself approved unto God, I have learned the importance of studying and growing in my Christian life. We have long ago given up backpacking, but have so many activities and hobbies that we can hardly keep up. Everyday I work out at the gym to be able to do the things I like to do. I have to keep my body and muscles in shape to be able to bicycle ride in the Colorado Rockies or to snorkel in the Caribbean. I also need to read and study God's Word daily to stay ready for the things that might be asked of me in my walk with Christ.

Lynda Fillmore

Day 15

I became a United States Marine in April of 1963, at the tender age of 18. It wasn't until I was 33, in September of 1977, that I became a Christian. A lot happened during those intervening 15 years—too much to go into detail about here!

It surprises most people when they hear me compare my experience in the Marine Corps with my continually growing Christian faith. Actually my experience in the Marine Corps closely approximates what I've experienced and learned as a Christian. Please let me explain.

In the beginning the Marine Corps assembles a bunch of selfish, raw recruits and over the course of a terrifying, confusing period of training called Boot Camp attempts to imbue those undisciplined young civilians with a sense of selflessness. The D.I.'s (Drill Instructors) have an outstanding success rate at this. You see, while individual Marines are highly valued, there is something that transcends the individual. That something is the unit and its mission. Selflessness is required for Marines to be successful. Selflessness is the 'secret' behind the Marine Corps' unparalleled and unqualified success since its founding in 1775. Likewise, for the Church—The Body of Christ—to fulfill the Great Commission of Christ—to.....

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Matthew 28:19 NIV

Individual Christians must learn selflessness—a trait that takes a lifetime of 'dying' to oneself for Christ's sake. Jesus was always upfront with those who thought they wanted to be his followers. Consider these words of our Savior:

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and the gospel will save it.”

Mark 8:34-35 NIV

Serving in the United States Marine Corps is not for the faint of heart—neither is following in the footsteps of Christ. Consider the cost and remember this:

“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God .”

Luke 9:62 NIV

And.....

“Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, ‘Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.’ Jesus replied, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of God has no place to lay his head.’”

Matthew 8:19-20 NIV

Bro Jim

Dear Father, we gather today to worship you – and to thank you for all that you are and all you have done. You are the Creator who planned every detail of our world. You chose the length of days and nights and seasons, and created life in the seas and on the land. You created us in your image and gave us stewardship over everything. The world you created was perfect – till we polluted it with our sin.

You saw our need for a savior and gave your son as the perfect sacrifice. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus you gave us the opportunity to choose eternal life.

We long to be the people you meant for us to be, but we are rebellious and fail to honor you with our actions. You are God and worthy of our unending praise, yet we think more often of ourselves.

Help us to see each new day as an opportunity to serve you and one another. Open our eyes to the needs of others and move us to action. Help us to see one another's suffering and cause us to stand together. We look to you as the source of all things and pray that we learn to see our needs as you see them. We live extravagantly in so many ways, yet we continue to pray for more. Help us grow into people whose yearnings become less selfish as we grow in knowledge of you. Help us to see our resources as gifts from you and learn to share them willingly.

Help us to recognize our selfish thoughts and sinful acts as offenses against you. Bring us to our knees to seek your forgiveness – knowing that when we're on our knees we're in no position to judge one another.

As we learn not to judge, help us also learn to forgive. You offer grace to us even as we continue to make sinful choices. Help us to follow your example and choose to offer that same grace to others.

Lord, it's so easy for us to follow the path of sin. Without a second thought we choose the selfish way and not the servant's way. We take pride in our accomplishments when humility would have us thanking you and giving recognition to those who have helped us.

Deliver us from our self-centered ways and make us more like you.

Dear Father, we worship you for all that you are and thank you for all you have provided for us. Help us to live so that our lives might bring others to know you. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Sunday

LENTEN SYMBOLS - THE FLAGRUM

In ancient Rome crucifixion was almost always preceded by the “flagrum” and thus it made the vision of the crucified criminal all the more dreadful. Cicero called crucifixion the “*extreme and ultimate punishment of slaves*”, and the “*cruellest and most disgusting penalty.*”, and Josephus called it “*the most pitiable of deaths.*” (*Jewish War 7:203.*)

The Romans would, scourge a condemned criminal before he was put to death. The Roman scourge, also called the “flagrum” or “flagellum” was a short whip made of two or three leather (ox-hide) thongs or ropes connected to a handle. The leather thongs were knotted with a number of small pieces of metal, usually zinc and iron, attached at various intervals. Scourging would quickly remove the skin. According to history the punishment of a slave was particularly dreadful. The leather was knotted with bones, or heavy indented pieces of bronze.

Jesus felt the pain of this device as John recalled “Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.” John 19:1. He felt unimaginable pain. Pain that would show the world how the heart of God aches over the sin of His people, pain over the things His church does and fails to do in His name, pain that some people know Him, yet act as if He didn't exist.

Jesus was flogged for you and for me.

“I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting.” - Isaiah 50:6

Cutting the Cord

***Free to sever cord,
Power of sin entangles,
Breath of Life now waits.***

Perhaps the analogy breaks down in part, but the imagery so graphic it cut to my heart. It's in the cord—freewill given the created, a tether to the Creator until the fullness of time gives birth to life in rhythm with the Spirit. But that which has been given to tether, can, in tragedy, bring death—life chocked by sin so entangled.

The apostle Paul states it so bluntly, “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23) How easy it is to believe the second part of that scripture, but ignore the first with excuses and justifications until we've stripped its gravity and exposed only our own nakedness.

I guess every sin, every choice made in opposition to God's will for our lives, is a near death experience. Her name was “Jane” and like many who fill the family law courtrooms every day her life seemed pretty crumbled—continued addiction to drugs, the children in father's custody with mother having supervised visitation by a professional program, Jane's live-in boyfriend a registered child sex offender, and the children in therapy, trying to deal with issues of a separated family and a parent who chooses drugs and addictive relationships over her children. Such cases are not unusual. Oh, the facts might change from case to case, but the road in and the road out are paved so much the same. Jane's choices, I'm sure, seemed innocent at first, rationalized until they became justified. It just started getting tangled and messy, and before she knew it her life over many years now was taking her down a road she had never planned—it just happened and everything that gave breath to her life was being cut off. Sin happens and keeps happening until a decision is made to cut the cord and live life according to God's will.

It's hard to cut the cord. Just ask anyone who decides to stop any addictive behavior, end a destructive relationship, stop illegal practices, change damaging ways of relating with others, etc., etc., etc. It's a matter of life and death. I know. I recently cut the cord after many years (more than I want to admit) of living outside of God's will for my life. If I can, you can, too. There is resurrected life to celebrate this Easter!

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” Hebrews 12:1

Nancy Stephens

A Lenten Devotion by Verne Miniaci

As I was thinking about the challenge of writing a Lenten Devotion, I developed writers block. If you think about it, it is really a “Well, Duh” moment. There is Lent, Easter, the Resurrection of our Lord, the Last Supper, the garden of Gethsemane, the suffering and humiliation of Jesus, I mean it’s like an endless list of topics one could write a devotional about, but there I sat.

It was shortly thereafter that I received an email with one of those lists of cute saying that children have made. It’s the type of list where children have been asked to define some word or concept. Then in their unsophisticated observations and language, they nail it. The concept for this list was “love”. As usual, the answers were a mixture of cute, funny, insightful and profound. There were responses like the one girl’s older sister gave her her old clothes so she could buy new ones and the Mommy who tastes Daddy’s morning coffee after she pours it to be sure it’s not too hot and the one that got me, “Love is listening”.

Love is listening! That was it. It was as if the Holy Spirit was thumping me on the forehead. What is the Lenten season but the ultimate time where God shows us his love by giving up his Son for sacrifice of our sins. Jesus shows us his love by doing as His Father asked.

Love is listening. It was earlier in the week when Alison was talking to me and I was reading and nodding like I understood. Finally, when I looked up I realized how much I had hurt her. How many time has God spoken to us and we’ve had our nose in a book or have been preoccupied by something and not listened? We pray and expect God to listen to us because He loves us. How un-Christ like is it for us not to listen to those who love us.

There are numerous examples in the Bible where we are asked to listen. In Matthew 11:15, 13:9 and 13:43, Mark 4:9 and Luke 8:8, at the end of a parable by Jesus, He implores that any one with ears should listen. At the baptism of Jesus, God speaks and tell us that Jesus is His Son and we should listen to him (Matt. 17:5 and Mk. 9:7). In Acts 14:9, Paul reminds us that if we fear God we are to listen. In John’s messages to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation, he closes each message that anyone with an ear to listen.

God loves us, sent His Son, and tells us to listen to him. Jesus loves us and wants us to listen to his stories. If we love someone, we need to listen to them. Even if we don’t love we still need to listen, we may learn something.

Prayer:

Oh, Mighty God, forgive us of our sins and shortcomings and open our hearts and ears so that we might hear. Help us to be more Christ like as we listen to those whom we love and who love us. In His most precious name, we pray.

Amen

Isaiah 29:13 ¹³ The Lord said: Because these people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote;

I use to think that knowledge was the solution for everything. I don't think that anymore. To know Christ more I need more than interesting sermons and fascinating and insightful prayers.

In the passage above it is obvious that you can know how to do something – even do it very proficiently, but yield no value to the kingdom of God. How can we get so far off track? How can we find ourselves in a place where we become so well put-together, so efficient, so slick that God's Spirit takes a backseat to appearances?

When the disciples asked Jesus, "Teach us to pray," they were not asking because they didn't know how. They were asking for Jesus to transform their thinking about the purpose of prayer. They grew up with the lofty words of Rabbis and Scribes etching out verbal masterpieces to God that were music to the ears, but empty, without heart, neglecting the soul.

By all means we should learn all we can learn, and learn it well. However, we must never allow our knowledge to substitute true knowledge of Jesus, the Anointed One of God. Knowing Him is experiencing His life, His suffering, His death and His triumph over death.

So when you hear sermons and prayers that are rich and profound in language and concept, listen with your ears, your mind, but listen most of all with your heart.

Prayer:

O, God, let me this day experience You in a way that takes me beyond knowing about You and strike at the heart of who I am. Take me to a place where I experience You in a new and different and transforming way.

Let my life be one experience of You after another and another — In Jesus; name. Amen

Tom Buratovich

FIND YOUR REST IN HIM

Exodus 20:8-11

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work.”

The Hebrew people diligently observed the Sabbath as a day of rest. As one of the Ten Commandments is it still important for us under the New Covenant to keep the Sabbath day holy? I obey the other commandments but when it comes to keeping the Sabbath day holy and abstaining from work, why do I view it as optional?

God set the pattern for the Sabbath rest in the very beginning when He created the heavens and the earth. “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.” I’m sure God didn’t need to rest, yet He did. Further since it’s recorded in the Bible I can’t help but think there must be some relevance in it for us today.

As a wife, mother, teacher and student, the work never ends. I think, “If I can just get caught up, get it all done, then I can start the new week on top of it and keep up.” But it never works that way. No matter how much I accomplish, there’s always more. Instead of starting my week refreshed, I am worn out and frustrated by the long list of chores that still looms over me.

At times I have succeeded in taking that whole day away from my work. Completely putting the list out of my mind and focusing on worship, prayer, fellowship and leisure time with my family. And I am blessed! I am rested, re-energized, and looking forward to the week ahead. Not overwhelmed by all that needs to be done, but filled with peace. And miraculously I’m prepared for the week. I proceed calmly through the week and it all gets done.

I think it’s pretty clear that setting aside that one day a week to rejuvenate is what God wants. This year I’m going to make it a life-long habit. For Lent I’m giving up work—on the Sabbath.

By Alison W. Miniaci

She Is Risen

Spring was beginning to show in Colorado, the harbinger lilacs sprouting buds, a few dark lavender blooms taking a chance that the frosty nights were over. But it didn't seem much like a Holy week, a time of renewal, rejoicing, and resurrection. My mother had been taken to the hospital in Greeley on the Saturday before Palm Sunday, staying at home as long as she could. On the second floor of the county hospital, she lay, laboring to breathe under the oxygen tent that barely expanded as she exhaled. My sister Pat, Dad, Marla and I spent most of our time there in the hospital, sharing stays in her room, helplessly hoping that the pain of breast, then bone cancer would soon end, but grieving at the same time, knowing that Mom, at age 62, would soon be gone.

Early Tuesday evening, the tent quivered for the last time, as her final breath expired, and the nurse checked her pulse and called a doctor. Dad answered the necessary questions, signed the necessary papers, and we left the hospital, to drive the 25 miles home to Ft. Lupton.

At 20, I had not had much experience with death and the dead. When I was 15, getting ready to go back to school in the fall, a friend drowned and I went to his funeral, a little late because I had debated with myself about even going. In the packed church, I could only find a seat in the choir loft. Having not gone to the mortuary, I was shocked at the bluish face that lay on the casket's pillow and only looked quickly at the corpse as the line filed past the coffin. And in October, my Great Aunt Artie died, and I remember, again, how shocked I was at her funeral, the yellowish, shrunken face in the casket looking so strangely unfamiliar, very little like the vital lady I loved and remembered and last saw 2-3 weeks before she went to the hospital.

Mom's funeral was arranged for Thursday, Maundy Thursday, because of Good Friday's service, and all the busyness that follows a death kept us occupied. We went to the mortuary on Wednesday morning to help Dad with some of the decisions, clothing and glasses and other options. Then on Wednesday evening, we went back to view Mom in the gentle gray casket we'd selected. As we readied to leave after spending time in the viewing room, I leaned over my mother's face and gently kissed her forehead. I had a startling epiphany—as much of one, anyway, as I can remember in my lifetime. When I kissed her, it felt like putting my lips on a cold, smooth surface, like kissing polished marble. And when I drew back, I KNEW, as I'd never known before, that death is not our end. The living being that was my mother—the one who gave me life late in her own life, the one who baked bread every week, the one who gave so much to church and friends and family—and me—who taught me Christianity by the way she lived her life—that one was not the cold piece of earthly substance that lay in that casket. The Spirit that was my mother had risen, was gone, and I had no doubt that she was with our Lord. The Scripture I'd heard read many times—and would hear again that Thursday—took on a new reality for me, at that moment—and that is the essential moment, I think, in my Christian life—where the Resurrection, the essence of our belief, became most real for me.

Dear God, we thank You for so many gifts, but we thank You especially for the gift of Your Son—His miraculous conception and birth, His miraculous life and teaching, and His miraculous death and resurrection, and most of all, we thank You for the resurrection of all those whom You select.

Prayer

Dear Father, we gather today to worship you - for it is in our worship that we remember all that you are and all you have done. You are the Creator who planned every detail of our world. You chose the length of days and nights and seasons. You created life in the seas and on land. You created us in your image and gave us stewardship over everything. You created a perfect world but we have polluted it with our sin.

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.

You saw our need and created a means of salvation for us. You provided your son as the sacrifice that would atone for our sins, once and for all.

We long to be the people you meant for us to be, but we are rebellious and fail to honor you with our actions. You are God and worthy of our unending praise, yet we think more often of ourselves. Help us to see one another's suffering and cause us to stand together.

Give us this day our daily bread.

We look to you as the source of all things and pray that we learn to see our needs as you see them. We live extravagantly in so many ways, yet we continue to pray for more. Help us grow into people whose yearnings become less selfish as we grow in knowledge of you. Help us to see our resources as gifts from you and help us to give willingly.

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Help us to see our selfish thoughts and sinful acts as offenses against you. Help us to consider thoughtfully the true impact of our decisions and actions, and forgive us when we put ourselves first. Bring us to our knees to seek your forgiveness – knowing that when we're on our knees we're in no position to judge one another.

As we learn not to judge, help us also to learn to forgive. Let the memory of the grace we receive from you be incentive for us to pass on that same grace to others.

Lead us not into temptation. Deliver us from evil.

Lord, it is so easy for us to walk down the sinful path. Without a second thought we choose the easy way and not the servant's way. We take pride in our accomplishments when humility would have us thanking you and giving recognition to those who have helped us. Deliver us from our self-centered lifestyles and make us more like you. Help us to see each new day as an opportunity to serve you and one another.

Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen

We gather this morning to worship you – Creator, Father, God.

You created a perfect world and put it into our stewardship. We have polluted it with our sin.

You created us in your image and gave us free will. We have been rebellious and failed to honor you with our actions.

You are God and worthy of our unending praise, yet we think more often of ourselves.

Open our eyes Lord.

Help us to see our selfish thoughts and sinful acts as offenses against you. Bring us to our knees to seek your forgiveness – knowing that when we're on our knees we're in no position to judge one another.

Help us to see one another's suffering and cause us to stand together.

Help us to see our resources as gifts from you and help us to give willingly.

Help us to see each new day as an opportunity to serve you and one another.

LENTEN SYMBOLS

Matthew 27:27-30 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. ²⁸ They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ³⁰ They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head.

The Roman soldiers were a bored group of people. I don't think we could call what they did displaying a passion for their job. On the contrary, they appear to me more angry – angry at Rome, angry at an empire who pressed them into service, to leave their homeland and come to this god-forsaken place with these rebellious, obstinate, stubborn Jews — angry at their superior officer who put them on the torture squad. The only excitement they got was when people lived through their routines.

They were accustomed to gambling as they did when they decided how to divide who got Jesus clothes. So they might have had wagers on how long someone might have lasted. Who knows, the fun they had with Jesus may have been the most fun they had in weeks – too bad it was at the expense of the Son of God. I don't think anyone else was laughing with them.

However, before we are too hard on these folks consider this: don't we do the same thing when we laugh at someone else's expense, when we withhold forgiveness, when we put someone down to make ourselves feel better? Aren't we laughing at the Son of God? I hope not. However, the possibility makes me want to think twice the next time . . .

My Visions

DAY

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3

In September 2005 I was admitted to Kaweah Delta Hospital seriously ill with Temporal Arthritis. After many days of testing and while awaiting more tests, I awakened in the middle of the night with the feeling 'someone' was in my room watching me. Suddenly in the corner of my room I saw a woman with dark flowing hair and a white gown. Each time I looked away and then looked back she was still staring at me. Finally I dropped off to sleep and when I awoke the next morning I looked for her but she was nowhere to be found. I didn't mention this 'visit' to anyone.

The next night I was really feeling bad and couldn't find out when I might go home. I dropped off to sleep and once again awakened to the feeling of someone in my room. I made sure I was covered and looked around for the dark-haired solemn lady. But, to my surprise another lady was in the corner – with long blonde hair, a beautiful white flowing robe, blue eyes and a smile on her face! She remained with me all night. A day later my minister, Harry Wood, visited and I told him about my 'visions'. He quietly listened and then theorized – "You have been visited by the Angel of Death and the Angel of Life!"

I recovered and returned home, sharing this story with my wife, and believing "my angel" still watches over me.

Frank Gunter

Day 24

Finding a balance between in our understanding of the fully human and fully divine natures of Jesus of Nazareth challenges us. It seems like most folks do one of two things—either they emphasize the human nature of Jesus at the expense of his divine nature or they do just the opposite, emphasizing our Savior’s divine nature at the expense of his humanity. The idea of the Eternal Son of God breaking into human history as a full-blown human being really stretches us, doesn’t it? But that’s exactly what happened—AMAZING!

As Jesus grew from an infant to a toddler—from a toddler to a young child—from a young child to a teenager—from a teenager to a young adult and from a young adult to a mature man he became more and more aware of his identity and mission as the Savior of the World!

Just try to imagine the excitement the human Jesus had to have felt when it was finally time for him to make the journey to the other side of the Jordan River to be baptized by John! At the same time, try to imagine the lump Jesus must have had in his throat as he said goodbye to his mother and his half-brothers and sisters! That had to have been an exhilarating and yet gut-wrenching day for him.

Now fast-forward to that oh so poignant scene in the garden at Gethsemane when Jesus prayed:

“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

Matthew 26:39

In his humanness Jesus recoiled at the idea of being nailed to that cruel cross—to say nothing of bearing all of the collective sins of man—past, present and future—upon himself. Jesus understood what that meant in ways that no one else ever could. Yet our Savior bent his will to the will of the Heavenly Father. The fully human Jesus of Nazareth learned obedience, setting the standard for us and, through his obedience he fulfilled his mission, becoming the Christ of God!

Yes, finding a balance in our understanding of the human and divine natures of Jesus of Nazareth is fundamental to our achieving a healthy relationship with him. I love the words of the author of Hebrews:

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who was tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Hebrews 4:15-16 NIV

Hallelujah! What a SAVIOR! I love Him so much!

Bro Jim

Sometimes faith is simple, I just believe. I don't always have a deep theological basis for my belief in Christ, sometimes it's just because. I know in my heart and soul that Christ is there and that God *is*.

So, when the diagnosis came, I didn't panic, I didn't cry, I wasn't afraid.... I just *knew* God would see me through. Each step of the way, from biopsy, to mastectomy, to reconstruction, (six surgeries in less than two years) the peace of Christ filled me with an unexplainable calm. Knowing whatever the outcome, God was in control and I would be healed, on earth or in Heaven, I would be healed.

It's easy to watch others go through crisis and think about how you would react, how you would act out your faith in this situation or that one. I'd always hoped that, no matter what, I had grown in Christ enough to live out a crisis with "Grace", to stand faithful in the worst of circumstance. But you never know, till the storm hits, what you'll really *do*. Now I know..... Sometimes faith *is* simple.

and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Phillipians 4:7

Kelly Deditius

Nancy Stephens

Thinking of the Heavenly.

*I can't believe, I can't believe, I'm standing with my Lord.
He looks at me, calls my name, bids me to come.
I can't believe, I can't believe,
He puts his hand in mine.
I feel the nail holes in his hands,
I can't believe for me.*

*I can't believe, I can't believe, he sets his crown on me.
Adorns me in his pure white robe, his righteous receive.
I can't believe, I can't believe,
He puts in hand in mine.
I feel the nail holes in his hands,
I can't believe for me.*

It was almost 20 years ago when God set those words and a simple melody in my heart. As they did then, the words come to mind in times when I consider the extravagance of Christ's love for me, in spite of all my disappointments to him.

I wonder what Christ feels in my hands. Is it scars of brokenness, still yet trusting him to heal? Does he feel the trembling of my fears, not trusting him to overcome? Does he feel the shame of sins I cling to, in doubt of his power to forgive? Can he feel the weeping of a heart, longing for the promises of a touch of heaven in earthly places? I think Christ just feels my hand in his and knows that is all I need to experience the power of his cross.

"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead." Phillipians 3:10-11

It's Lent but Easter is coming!

I needed quiet. I needed to be alone if only for a few minutes. I knew I couldn't be gone long since I was needed to help navigate the emergency room decisions that were going to need to be made. I walked outside of the ER to a brisk fall afternoon. I looked to heaven with tears starting to roll down my cheeks and asked one simple question of God: "Why, Lord?"

I waited for an answer but nothing was clear. I couldn't understand how a young, beautiful girl two days before her 18th birthday was going to die. How does anyone make sense of that? How do you look her parents in the eye and tell them that the doctors have said there is nothing that can be done to save her?

I knew that I needed to get back. I didn't yet have the answer that I was hoping for. I tried to listen, but heard nothing. What I didn't realize at the time was that God's answer to me was the strength that I needed to get through the next 48 hours. The strength that he gave me with the energy to get through the next several days. The strength to chose the right words when I was asked by Heather's parents if she was in pain. The strength to write her obituary. The strength to try to explain things to my own children as to why their cousin was dying. The strength to find God's will and to be able to understand it.

It's been over six years since Heather died. As I look back to those very difficult days I still have questions as to why Heather. But I have been able to understand God's grace and to trust that He will give me exactly what I need when I need it, including strength.

Isaiah 41: 29-31

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Mary Kay Akins

*Heavenly Father,
We see the imprint of your will all around us in this
Spring season. Trees that once were barren now come into
leaf and flowers begin to reach ever upward to praise and
thank you with their color and simplicity. Seeing these,
we are renewed in our hearts and souls. It is you, O God
who constructed this world so that in it we would see
reflections of our own lives and experiences. You are a
constant presence to those with eyes to see.
We are tempted to find evidence of our own desires and
hopes as we look at the natural world. But we know from
our own experience that your will is for us to develop
desires that reflect your will and not ours. So we ask you
to teach us to accept and desire the seasons of our lives
that are mirrored in the oppressive heat of summer and in
the slow death of fall. Lead us so that even when the cold
rains of winter drive us inside we can still feel your
presence and power and still have the faith to believe that
the spring will follow.
You have given us an abundance beyond measure. We eat
too much, drink too much, worry about how to train
ourselves to live with less. Teach us to live out the faith
of Jesus and learn to ask and desire nothing more than our
daily bread and a daily communion with you.
Our sins and failures are much more than taking the
abundance in our lives for granted. We have also failed to
love and to forgive. We have refused to seek forgiveness
even when we needed it. We ask that you would help us
to both seek to receive and seek to give forgiveness and
grace in our lives with others and with you.
You are the creator of the cosmos and the artist behind the
dandelion. You make seasons flow into and form one
another. You cause all rivers to run to the sea and the sea
to replenish the rivers by seeding rain. Because we see
your touch in the grand and the minutia we have
confidence that you can and will continue to make us into
people beautiful and faithful enough to be called by the
name of your son.
We would be Christians Lord, if you will lead us.
Amen.*

Nails

LENTEN SYMBOLS

Luke 23:33 ³³ *When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.*

While the Bible never mentions nails specifically, the use of nails is assumed in the word crucifixion. To be crucified means to be nailed to a cross. Jesus was nailed to a cross. The use of nails in our day has so many positive uses. We think of people creating things with their hands. Fasten things together with nails and making things secure so that they will stay, and remain.

However, when something so useful is used for something so brutal, so inhuman, it rattles our sensibilities. We also want to eliminate nails from the planet as if it is the nails that are evil when they are only a tool.

Nails were used, but people killed Jesus. In the same way we must resist blaming the tools of our sin – it was the situation, the circumstance, my upbringing, my genes, I have bad morning, or evening, or afternoons. Yes, all of that might be true. However, more than anything else being true we are sinners guilty of works of sin so evil that they are like the nails driven through Jesus' body, like the tools of death that He endured for us, and for our life. What a Savior. What a Lord!

DAY

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9

Walking in the Newness of Life

3 All we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him through baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. 1 Peter 1:3-5 ASV

This verse has often encouraged me as I awaken and face a new day. I am thankful to my Heavenly Father for another day of life . . . I wonder silently what does this day hold for me?

I know I am on a walk of faith, and from these verses I see that each day is a new day with the Lord and I walk in the newness of life. What does that mean to me? A life filled with new beginnings. Each day is a new day and it can be filled with purpose and meaning. I walk away from the discouragement or defeats of yesterday and embrace a new day with hope and confidence knowing that the Lord is with me at all times. I must not look back but forward. He has a path for me and He has promised to lead me. I must choose each day to follow Him. There is a glorious destination promised for me, I am not wandering aimlessly through life. Sadly there are times when I want to go my own way, and I choose other alluring paths. Inevitably, when I realize I am on a fruitless path and the way has become joyless, fearful or even dark, He is there, His Grace brings me back to the right path, His way.

The glorious Resurrection of Jesus Christ is more to us than an event to be remembered, it is God's gift of new life, eternal life. By faith that life surges through our bodies, the Holy Spirit has been sent to dwell within each one of us. We have been given power for life. There is every reason for us to walk daily in the NEWNESS OF LIFE.

Additional Scriptures:

2 Cor. 5:16-17, Psa. 128:1, Isa. 30:21, John 8:12, 2 Pet. 3:3-4

Prayer: Thank you Lord for this new day, for hope and confidence, for peace of mind and heart. My desire today is to live this day walking with you in obedience and joyful fellowship.

Donna Willems

T I M E

Do you ever feel like there is ever enough time? What do you with your time...where does it go? Here is a small sample of one of my days... I get up early in the morning, exercise, get breakfast for the kids, make lunch, carpool with a friend to get my two children to their respective schools. I run into Starbucks and order my venti carmel nonfat no foam extra hot latte, drive to the church and work on the day's problems, attend a few meetings, laugh, think about what lessons I want the children to learn from the Bible, get a call from the PTA president asking me to do something for the school, get a call from my husband letting me know he needs me to run an errand for him. Then I leave to pick up one child at school, home for homework, maybe a snack and then off to get another child, go to soccer, baseball or swim practice...depending on the season. Let's not forget the occasional play, after school science team, reading lab or art class. Wednesday nights there is church, Monday nights there is the class my husband teaches taking him away from home, there is Boy Scouts, music lessons and so on. Weekends are less then restful either...Saturday's are the day for those soccer games, the one's my husband coaches or referee's. We are usually remodeling some part of the house, or doing some yard project and there is always the need to run down to the church to get something ready for the kids who will be coming Sunday morning. Sunday morning arrives and it is off to the races...I like to arrive by 6:30 in the morning because it is quiet and I can get a lot done. Running and out of control is what the life of a young...or even middle aged...family has become. I know my life and my list of daily and weekly events is not all that different from many of my friends, coworkers or fellow church goers. So do you ever stop and wonder whose time is it anymore? Who are we doing all this for? Am I doing it for myself, for my children, for my church? Does God even understand how crazy my life has become...does He know that my time is not my own anymore? It think God does understand our crazy lives, I think God does understand how the time in our lives is being spent. In Ecclesiastes 3:1-4, Solomon wrote "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance." God knew my life and your life would be a life filled with "times" of life, stages and ages. God created us to be busy, productive, emotional, physical beings. God created us to love Him and to praise Him in all we do. So maybe our question shouldn't be what am I doing with my time but how am I showing with my time that God, and His Son Jesus are the center of my life? How can my crazy life and my crazy schedule further God's kingdom? How can I take this time, this age and stage in my life...whatever time that is... to show others Jesus is in my life? Let's look at my day with God as the center, Jesus as the focus. Up early in the morning to exercise...spending time in prayer and praise to my savior, home to make breakfast and lunch sharing with my children the blessings God has provided. Running into Starbucks in the morning and ordering that coffee while telling the Barista about my job at VUMC and asking if they went to Sunday school as a child, where do they worship? Do they worship? Driving to the church and tackling the problems of the day and the curriculum for the children with the joy that God wants me to use when teaching His children. While picking up my children take the opportunities God gives me to share with those around me how He is at work in my life and how He can be at work in theirs also. Make sure every day my husband and children, my friends and family know that I love them and God does too. It sounds simple really, make whatever time you have a time where God is there with you and around you.

Lisa Glass

Day 31

When I was a little girl I used to talk to God. When I was older I attended church but never more than twice a year. At the age of twenty-two I was married in a church and baptized my first daughter there. However, I still only attended church a few times a year for the next ten years and I wasn't baptized until I was 32 years old along with my one-year old daughter, who had survived a difficult pregnancy and birth. It was the difficult circumstances of life, and the kind and persistent invitation from a neighbor, which brought me to a women's Bible study group where I met Jesus and found my salvation.

The offer to bring food to our family every day for the six months of my required bed rest drew us to a church when our daughter was well enough to be around crowds. There I learned what it was like to have a church family that helps each other and the community. When my oldest child was in high school she started going to the youth group at VUMC. We wanted to go to church as a family so we started attending also.

When we decided to join the church you had to stand up in front and recite a Bible verse. I chose **Psalm 119:105, Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path**, because I had memorized it already but it has since become my life verse. I have learned that without knowing what God's word says, I cannot know him because it reveals who He is and gives me the knowledge I need to renew my mind to be more Christ like.

Then I came to understand that the enemy of my soul can use my wrong thinking to defeat me. **1 Peter 5:8, Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in your faith, because your brothers in the world are undergoing the same kind of suffering.** The Lord used new trials in my life to show me that I am not in control and it is through my faith (trust) in Him and His truth that I can find strength, hope and joy in all life's circumstances.

1 Thess. 5:16-17 says, Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. As I have given the Lord more control he has allowed me to change and be a new person; less controlling, fearful and selfish. **2 Cor. 5:17, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come.**

Watching the building of the Extreme Makeover Home Edition house in Fresno gave me a good visual of what Jesus does for us when we let Him. If we let him tear down our old way of thinking by getting into the Word of god, He will give us a new foundation to rebuild our house where the Holy Spirit can reside with us. Just like the house torn down in Fresno we must take out everything, go through it and get rid of what we don't want (anger, bitterness, selfishness, fear) clean up what we do want to keep (contentment, joy, peace, grace). Few if any of us will be able to make ourselves over with God's help in seven days like the Extreme Makeover crew does, but the more we are willing to do the work the faster it goes and how Extreme it will be is up to us.

Shelley Dever

A FAMILY PRAYER

Lord, our family is gathered here to thank you for our home and for the love that unites us; the blessings you give us each day; for the hope with which we look forward to tomorrow.

We are grateful for health, work, food, the beauty around us; and for our extended family and friends around the world.

Give us courage, joy and a quiet mind.

Help us to be a blessing to our friends and help us to see our enemies through your eyes. Bless us in all

we do. Give us strength to meet the future with boldness so that through all the changes in our

lives we may be faithful and loving to you and to each other. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen

I love the story related in the first part of the second chapter of Mark's Gospel—the one about the four guys who literally tore through the roof of a house in Capernaum in order to get their paralyzed friend close to Jesus. (See Mark 2:1-12) There's so much to this little story—much more than we have space here to discuss. What I want to emphasize is the sense of urgency that those four faithful friends felt over their friend's physical condition.

Imagine a room packed full of people, listening intently to Jesus teach. All of a sudden there would have been a commotion overhead—dirt and twigs, just a little at first and then an avalanche of the stuff, began to cascade downward onto the heads of Jesus and all those standing close by him. Think about the angry shouts (maybe even some choice Jewish cursing) that unexpected dirt bath had to have provoked! What had been a nice little teaching session must have suddenly turned into chaos—at least for a little while. Jesus, always in control of whatever situation he was in, recognized the opportunity the Father had provided him and, in obedience to the Father, pronounced the paralyzed man's sins to have been forgiven. Goodness—it seems like there never was a dull moment when it came to following Jesus! The paralyzed man and his friends got much more than they bargained for, didn't they? Those four guys were spurred into action by their friend's physical condition—they saw a need and responded to it! Good for them!

We're all familiar with the expression, "The more things change; the more things stay the same." It really isn't any different today, is it? People need the Lord! Folks are every bit as sin-sick today as they were 2000 years ago. During this Lenten prelude to the holiest of Christian days we should all be focusing on those friends and neighbors who don't know the Lord and so desperately need him. Who are those friends and, maybe, family members too, who continue to be paralyzed by sin? Who is it that you are ready and willing to figuratively, if not literally, tear through the roof of our church in order to bring them into the presence of Jesus? Come on Christian, where's your sense of urgency over those you know to be dead in their sin? What's it going to take to spur you into action? And just imagine, wouldn't it be great if the sanctuary was so packed on Easter Sunday that no one else could get in! And then—suddenly—we were to hear a scratching on the roof and pieces of ceiling tiles began to rain down on Pastor Steve and then.....

Bro Jim

Heavenly Lord,

You created the whole of the universe. Every bit of matter is an extension of your will and your word. You defy our ability to understand or comprehend, and yet what we can grasp simply amazes us. When we become aware of your presence through the revelation of nature or through the acts of charity that your people perform or through the souls hearing of your still, small voice, we are filled with hope. Hope that you have also made a plan that though too large to master can still be navigated in and through our living. Lead us into that plan Lord. Push us, pull us, call us, embolden us, until we are living and moving as you desire. We know that when our lives mesh with your desires that we may know peace. We also know that the price of such peace is to have faith enough to let go of things that seem certain to us and to grasp our way toward your will. Give us such faith father.

What we have already is enough. We are not hungry and we are not thirsty and we do not need clothing. Yet we refuse to see that there are others who lack all of these. Lift our eyes up Lord to acknowledge the needs in your world. Our daily bread is sufficient not only for us but for all; if only we would learn to share. So please continue to share with us until we are inspired to do the same.

When we stand in awe of you, Father we see clear reflections of ourselves. You have made us with so much beauty and we have corrupted it. We have destroyed so much of what you have given us. Thinking that houses and make up and new fashions would somehow improve how others see us. This is our great sin Lord; pretending to be something more than you made us to be. So lead us today into a new realization of the beauty of one another just as you willed. Teach us to be more honest about our faults, our needs, our failures until we have gained the true beauty of humility washed in grace.

It was long ago that you created this world for us. You have come through the prophets and your son and the church and we relish the signs of your presence. Yet even so...our hearts are filled with one desire above all others....

Even so, come quickly again, Lord Jesus! Come Quickly.

LENTEN SYMBOLS - PALMS

Psalm 92:12 ¹² The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

John 12:13 ¹³ So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord— the King of Israel!"

We wave the palm branches because He enters the city. We wave and yell but in doing so we deceive ourselves. Hosanna fades quickly into crucify Him. Why?

Our nature is to be fickle, to be poised to do evil. Our task in the kingdom of God is to unlearn our propensity for duplicity.

Most of us have no problem with saying "Hosanna and then Crucify Him." It just comes natural and you are right in saying that. However, discipleship is about making what is unnatural, natural – making the impossible likely, making the oft guffaw, a less likely possibility.

So wave the palm branches but with the knowledge that God is requiring you to not yell crucify Him as loud this time. Hopefully we will come to a day where we even want to say it, where it sticks in our throats, and we do not have the stomach for it.

That's vision, that's transformation. Hosanna in the highest!

1 Corinthians 15:33-34

Do not be misled:
"Bad company
corrupts good
character." Come
back to your senses
as you ought, and
stop sinning; for
there are some who
are ignorant of
God—I say this to
your shame.

Lord, protect me
from the bad
influence of other
people, negative
thoughts, and the
media on my life.
And even when I'm
confronted with it,
help me to resist
the urge to give in
to these
influences. Change
my thoughts to
prayer and praises
of you. I pray to
hear your voice
louder than those
that distract me
and to make good
choices.

Stacy Hyde

THE ZONE

Too often I see myself being watched,
 Standing at the entrance, ready to
 process...
 I straighten my shirt, brush my hair, and
 worry about...
 What they will think of me.

Those services are lots of things...
 Entertaining, illuminating, fun,
 boisterous, but also...
 Shallow, repugnant, worldly and false.
 When I am at the center stage in the
 sanctuary and my own thoughts...
 God has a hard time squeezing in.

But sometimes, somehow God sneaks in
 early...
 Replacing the me thoughts with
 thoughts of him and them...
 Then I stand at the entrance shaking,
 breathing quickly and
 Wanting nothing more than to share His
 power.

Those services are lots of things...
 Death defying, shocking, tumultuous,
 but also...
 Healing, sweet, gentle and hope filled
 When He is at center stage and I am
 content to serve
 God engulfs the sanctuary.

In sports they call such times of
 centering "being in the Zone".
 Times when things flow naturally and
 sweetly.
 Athletes say they aren't sure how the
 zone happens...it just does
 But I know how the zone comes to me...
 Choosing to serve others instead of self,
 praying instead of thinking,
 Letting Christ in to the depths.

Lord, push me until I have the maturity
 to let you rule in all things.
 Walk with me until I learn to follow
 instead of trying to lead..
 Lead me to the Zone and let me be
 nothing more or less than the
 Announcer of your presence. A sign
 pointing past myself and to your
 Engulfing presence.

The Last Supper

Mark 14:22-24

While they were eating,
 Jesus took bread, gave
 thanks and broke it, and
 gave it to his disciples,
 saying, "Take it; this is
 my body." Then he took
 the cup, gave thanks and
 offered it to them, and
 they all drank from it.
 "This is my blood of the
 covenant, which is poured
 out for many", he said
 to them.

DAY 38

Luke 23:44-46

It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

Day 39

Acts 1:4 *While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father.*

I hate to wait – I even hate waiting for something good. Imagine waiting for something that is not good. I understand why I have to wait, but that knowledge rarely translates into a more pleasant waiting time.

My dad was a farmer. He spent his life waiting – waiting for growth, for maturing plants, for water to start flowing, for harvest; he waited for it all. When harvest was over he waited for it all to start again.

There are a lot of figures in the first parts of Luke's Gospel who are waiting. Zechariah and Elizabeth wait, Mary waits, Anna and Simeon wait at the temple. All of these people have been given a promise about their lives that involved them in lesser and greater ways. However, before they had to wait they had received the seed of the promise. It was that promise that had to grow. So they waited, and waited until the seed planted inside them was ready for harvest.

In the same way we wait too for the harvest of something that is growing within us. Waiting in the Bible is never a movement from nothing to something, but a movement from something to something more, something better. All of Luke's participants were waiting on a promise. It was the promise that nurtured them, trained them, sustained them, and enabled them to stay where they were.

Waiting then takes on an active role. Many times we think about waiting as a passive activity that gives us an image of inactivity and disengagement. Not so. To wait on the Lord is to await the fulfillment of a promise that you have been given, to wait for the seed to germinate in your spirit. To strive, and work at what he has given you until the fulfillment of that promise. By waiting, the promise could gradually unfold and realized itself within and through them.

What promise is awaiting harvest within you? Strive this Lent to discover that.
Prayer:

O God, You have sowed and planted seeds of faith, of hope and of love within us. May we learn to nurture them patiently and boldly this Lent. Amen.

Tom Buratovich

CHOICES

I WONDER SOMETIMES WHY GOD GAVE US CHOICES....
ITS EASY TO SEE THAT PART OF THE REASON WAS TO DELIGHT US..
WHO DOESN'T RELISH CHOOSING BETWEEN....
CHOCOLATE OR VANILLA
WEST COAST OR EUROPE
WHICH COMPLIMENT TO GIVE....

BUT LIFE ISN'T ALL ABOUT THOSE CHOICES...
IT IS ABOUT CHOICES MADE IN THE HEAT OF EXISTENCE...
DO I DRINK TODAY OR STAY SOBER,
DO I STAND AND FIGHT, OR RUN ONE MORE TIME?...
WHAT PART OF THE TRUTH IS NECESSARY OR DO I EVEN KNOW THE
TRUTH AT ALL
SHOULD I CORRECT, OR HUG, AND HOW DO I DO BOTH?

AND THEN SOMETIMES THE CHOICES SEEM IMPOSSIBLE,
DO I ALLOW THE DOCTOR TO TURN OFF THE MACHINE,
LETTING THE ONE I LOVE DIE IN PEACE....
OR DO I MAKE THEM LINGER FOR A NIGHT AND A DAY HOPING...
THAT SOME PART OR ALL OF THEM MIGHT RETURN TO ME...

AND WHEN THE PRODIGAL RETURNS TO MY LIFE...
SHOULD I KILL THE FATTED CALF....
OR PROTECT MYSELF AND OTHERS FROM ANOTHER NIGHTMARE?
FORTIFYING THE WALLS OF PROTECTION THAT TOOK SO MANY
HOURS TO BUILD.

I HAVE FACED THESE AND I AM AWARE THAT THERE ARE MORE
CHOICES TO COME....
SOMETIMES I JUST WANT TO RUN AWAY AND HIDE AND REFUSE TO
SPEAK...BUT THAT IS ALSO A CHOICE.....A POOR ONE.

PERHAPS THAT IS WHY GOD HAS BURDENED US WITH SO MANY
CHOICES....
HE KNOWS THAT THE HARDER WE TRY THE MORE WE COME TO
UNDERSTAND...
WE NEED HIM, HIS GUIDANCE, HIS FOREGIVENESS, AND HIS
CONTINUING CHOICE...
TO LOVE US ANYWAY.

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