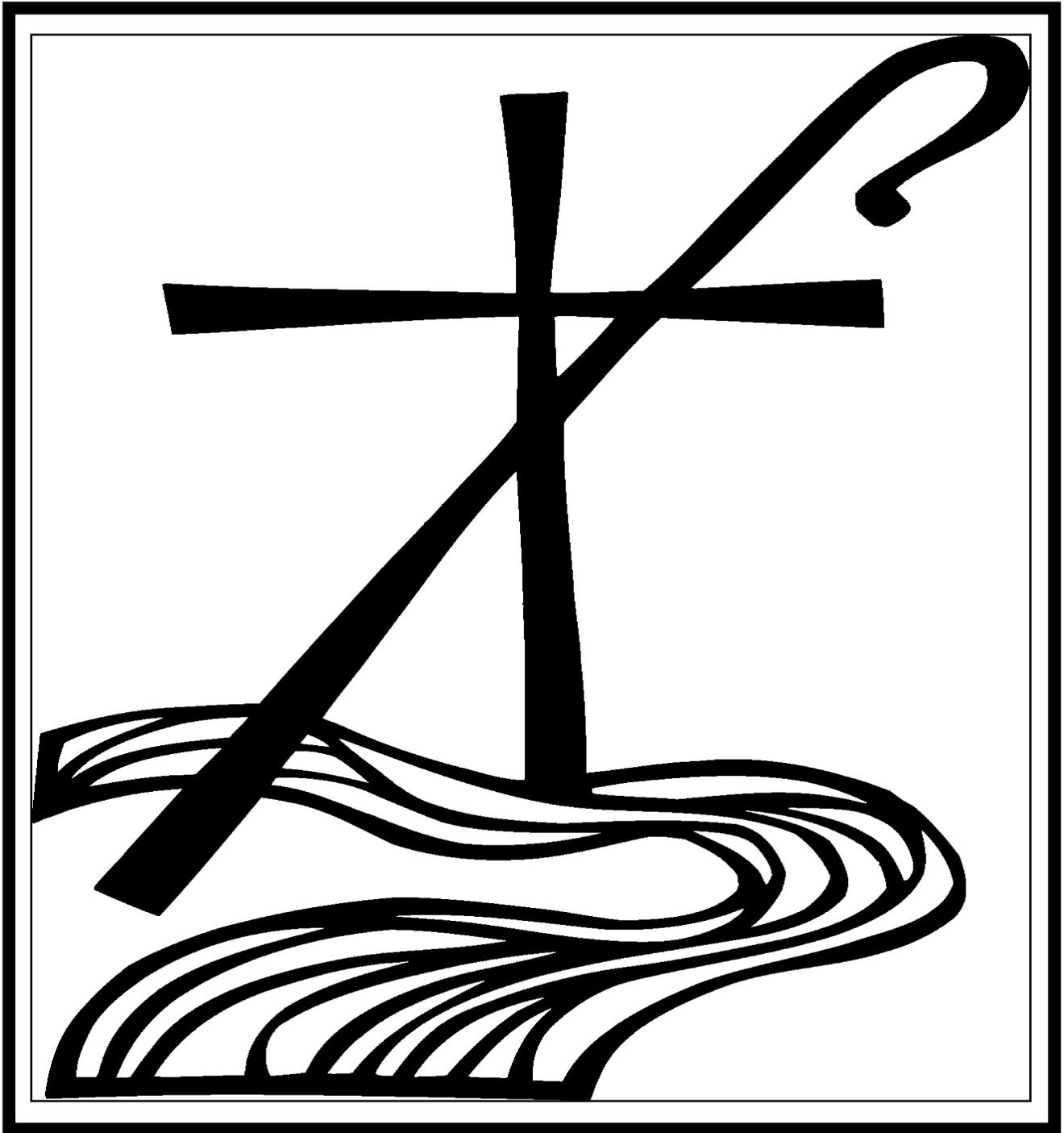


Great Blessings through Small Things

2018 Lenten Devotional



Grace Lutheran Church
205 S. Garner St., State College, PA 16801
www.glcpa.org

2018 Lenten/Easter Special Events and Services

Tuesday, February 13 - **Shrove Tuesday** Meal, 6:00 PM

Wednesday, February 14 - **Ash Wednesday** services, 12:15 PM and 7:30 PM

(communion and imposition of ashes at both services)

Wednesday, February 21—A Bible study on Sunday's Gospel, 11:00 AM

Wednesday, February 28—A Bible study on Sunday's Gospel, 11:00 AM

Wednesday, March 7—A Bible study on Sunday's Gospel, 11:00 AM

Wednesday, March 14—A Bible study on Sunday's Gospel, 11:00 AM

Wednesday, March 21—A Bible study on Sunday's Gospel, 11:00 AM

Wednesday, April 5—A Bible study on Sunday's Gospel, 11:00 AM

Sunday, March 25 - **Palm Sunday**, 8:00, 9:00 and 10:30 AM services

6:00 PM Contemporary Worship

Wednesday, March 28 - **Holy Wednesday Program**, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*:

Musical Inspirations from The Apostles' Creed, 7:00 PM in the Sanctuary

Thursday, March 29, **Maundy Thursday Worship**, 7:30 PM

Friday, March 30, **Good Friday Worship**, 7:30 PM

Sunday, April 1 - **Easter Sunday**

6:30 AM—Sunrise Service

7:30 AM—Easter Breakfast, Harkins Hall

8:00, 9:00 and 10:30 AM—Worship Services

6:00 PM—Contemporary Worship

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12:15 p.m. Wednesday Lunchtime Lenten Worship (until 12:45 p.m.)

with weekly celebration of Holy Communion. This short service should fit into a working lunch hour as well as allow our shut-ins the opportunity to attend weekday worship with out nighttime travel.

6:30 p.m. Lent Mid-Week Wednesday Evening Worship

This mid-week evening service is designed so that all Sunday worshipers will find many similarities, but there will also be some differences as well. We have tailored this service to be more accessible than ever before to young families and those new to the faith. Come and make these Wednesday worship opportunities part of your Lenten journey.

MID-WEEK LENTEN SERIES: Sermon series on Lenten Hymns

February 21—Hymn 347—*Go to Dark Gethsemane*

February 28—Hymn 338—*Beneath the Cross of Jesus*

March 7—Hymn 340—*A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth*

March 14—Hymn 349—*Ah, Holy Jesus*

March 21—Hymn 325—*I Want Jesus to Walk with Me*

*Thanks to our Congregational Care Lenten Devotional Team:
Lois Lynn, Ellen Campbell, Polly McWilliams and Anne Whitney.*

Welcome to Grace's 2018 Lenten Devotional!



Our devotional this year is entitled “Great Blessings through Small Things.” The title has multi-layered significance. First, all of the devotions are based on small, single-verse selections from the Book of Psalms. As you will see from our member-written devotions, those tiny snippets of Scripture inspired some moving and heartwarming reflections that we know will bless and inspire you. Each devotion reminds us of the power of even a small portion of scripture to bring about a great blessing.

“Great Blessings through Small Things” also reminds and assures us that God comes to us through the seemingly small and insignificant aspects of life. Too often we fall into the habit of only expecting God to be present in our lives through big, noisy events. We are sort of like the Old Testament prophet Elijah, who expected God to speak through massive fires, earthquakes, and winds. Elijah, however, ultimately found God in the humblest of all places – sheer silence. Likewise, God is speaking *to* you and *through* you in small ways that are easy to miss if we are not mindful, attentive, and hopefully expectant.

Maybe you have concluded that you are a small and insignificant portion of God's kingdom, with little to offer to God or God's people. If so, I pray that this Lenten devotional will help change your mind. God loves you. You matter to God. And you matter to God's people. Just as a single verse of scripture can change a life, the smallest acts of kindness, mercy, and patient listening can impact the life and happiness of another person.

I thank God that you are who you are. God has blessed you with unique gifts and has planted you right where you are, because you are just what is needed there. Perhaps in the view of the world, you are a “small thing.” In God's view though, you are a great blessing. Remember that eternal truth as you read each devotional this Lenten season. May it be a memorable and meaningful time of growth and peace for you.

Pastor Schul

Ash Wednesday, February 14, 2018

“The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.”

Psalm 19:1

As the story goes, when the famed 19th century naturalist, essayist, and thinker Henry David Thoreau was a young boy, he had a habit of lying awake in bed, long into the night. One evening, his mother asked him why he didn't go to sleep. He responded, “Mother, I have been looking through the stars to see if I couldn't see God behind them.”

The very stars that the young Thoreau conceived as *hiding* God are the very stars that, to the Psalmist, *reveal* God. As the opening verse to Psalm 19 implies, creation bears the fingerprints of God. To put it more directly, if you question whether God exists, look around you. Marvel at the quiet majesty of a primitive hemlock forest. Celebrate the richness of deep, dark, productive farmland. Wiggle your toes in the cool water of a swiftly running creek. Bask in the beauty of a blazing sunset. Creation is evidence and blessed assurance that God *is* with us.

God's loving presence, however, is proclaimed by more than mere landscapes and waterfalls. God's greatest creation is humanity, and it is in one another that we see the most profound reflection of God. After all, the very opening chapter of the very first book of the Bible – Genesis 1 – proclaims that we are made in God's image. That should have a profound impact on how we view and treat one another. The 20th century social justice activist Dorothy Day summed it up like this: “I really only love God as much as the person I love the least.”

Perhaps you are casting about for a purpose for your Lenten journey. Giving up something like candy or taking on a new spiritual practice constitute fine ways of growing in discipleship. But with Psalm 19:1 as a guide, perhaps this Lent you might benefit from engaging in some deep observation. Where are you seeing God? The trees, the rivers, the winds, and the person standing next to you can all be bearers of God. It is that last category – your neighbor – which is likely the most challenging. So find God in your neighbor. Do so, and I bet you'll find that very same God stirring in your heart with renewed vibrancy.

God, open my eyes to your presence all around me. Help me especially to see you in my neighbor. And as I do so, stir me to better love you by loving my neighbor. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Rev. Scott E. Schul

Thursday, February 15, 2018

“But you, Lord, are a shield around me.”

Psalm 3:3

This small statement, just the first half of verse 3, has been a great blessing to me. I first noticed it specifically many years ago right before our family of six was leaving on a rather long air flight.

I have always been fearful of flying, but I was determined not to pass my fear on to my children. My aim was to pretend to be fine, while inwardly consumed with anxiety. However, God, as He so often does, stepped in with a timely intervention.

The morning of the flight the Bible verse of the day in The Upper Room was Psalm 3:3. “But you, Lord, are a shield around me.” A shield – around me – the day that I needed it! Wow! God had this – I didn’t need to worry. He was a shield around me. Alleluia!!!

To further soothe my anxiety, the prayer for the day was one from St. Frances De Sales that said, in part, “Do not look forward to what may happen tomorrow; the same everlasting Father who cares for you today will take care of you tomorrow and every day. Either He will shield you from suffering or He will give you unfailing strength to bear it.”

So we boarded the flight, and each time the aircraft made one of its mysterious, frightening, bumps or noises, I thought “You, O Lord, are a shield around me. You have cared for me so far. You will continue to either shield me from suffering or give me strength to bear it.” And we arrived safe and sound, and I had felt calm, not fearful.

Many times in the years since, I have felt the need to call on the comfort and blessing of this verse. When faced with the fears and anxiety associated with the ups and downs of everyday life, I hold fast to the promise that the Lord is my shield.

Thank you for being a shield around me, for sheltering me from suffering. Thank you that when circumstances do cause me to suffer, you continue to be a shield around me and give me strength to bear the suffering. Help me keep this small verse close to my heart and call on it for comfort and blessing whenever I am felled by fear and anxiety. Amen.

Alice Griffin

Friday, February 16, 2018

“I will both lie down and sleep in peace;
for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety.”

Psalm 4:8

Two years ago, the women’s organization at Grace sponsored a spring retreat entitled “Living the Sabbath.” This daylong event centered on the third commandment – “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” During the retreat, we found open spaces in our day to connect with God. We rested in the scripture, created a personal journal, took a walk to Lederer Park and even enjoyed ice cream sundaes at the end of the day. What a way to follow God’s command to rest.

Why did we even have to have a retreat like this? Of all the commandments shouldn’t this one be the easiest to keep? After all, God is asking us to take a day off. Who wouldn’t like that? But sometimes living in the 21st century prevents us from resting. We are busy with our jobs, our families, our activities. We are busy giving ourselves to others. We are busy worrying about upcoming tasks and nagging anxieties. And sometimes Sunday is the busiest day of the week.

This verse at the end of Psalm 4 puts all our busyness into perspective. The psalmist, probably David the shepherd, had his own sorts of worries and concerns – feeding and caring for his sheep, providing them protection, fending off wild animals. Even so, he was able to rest in the Lord and the Lord’s promises. He was able to say I can lie down and sleep in peace because the Lord is watching over me and my charges. What a lesson that is for us.

Scripture tells us God rested and that Jesus took time off by himself to rest and pray. The need for rest is acknowledged and encouraged in the Bible. In Psalm 4:8, God is breaking into the clutter of our days and reminding us that He is in charge. He wants restful sleep for us. Just as we speak caring words to those we love, God is speaking His word of love to us. He is saying, “You can relax now. I am in charge. I will take care of you”.

As I go to bed, tonight, God, grant me rest. Relieve my anxieties. Thank you for the peace, love and grace that you offer in exchange. May I rest in that knowledge now and throughout eternity. Amen.

Lois Lynn

Saturday, February 17, 2018

“O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth !”

Psalm 8:9

This verse contains two important adjectives which describe God, our Heavenly Father. “Sovereign” means “superior,” “greatest,” “supreme in power and authority,” and “in control.” “Majestic” comes from the Latin word “maiestas,” which means “greatness or dignity.” It can be seen that both these adjectives are very similar.

As we know, He created all things and controls all things; there is no one who is more powerful or superior than Him. As the sixth verse in the twentieth chapter of the book of Revelation says, “He is above all things and before all things. He is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. He is immortal. And He is present everywhere so that everyone can know Him.” He is the ultimate source of all power, authority and everything that exists. His majesty and sovereignty are demonstrated again and again by what we read in the Holy Bible, starting with the creation.

In addition to Him being majestic and sovereign, He is also merciful and kind. That is why He sent His only son to the sinful world, to suffer in the hands of sinners and die for us, so that whoever believes in Him will be saved and will have eternal life. This is what we celebrate especially during the Lenten season.

Though He can make our lives free of worries and problems because of His sovereignty, He did not promise us a rose garden. We will face problems in our lives because we live in a sinful world. But in Romans 8:28, He promises that in all things He works for the good of those who Love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.

This promise is a testimony to His majesty, sovereignty, grace and mercy. Hence, we should never be discouraged or frustrated when we face hurdles or sufferings in our lives. We should always take comfort in the fact that He is majestic, sovereign and merciful.

Our majestic and sovereign Father! We are grateful for your mercy and grace, which was demonstrated in the coming of your son and our savior to this world to die for us and redeem us. Please help us to be always thankful to you and your son, Jesus Christ, and never forget your majesty and kindness. Please also help us not to be discouraged. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Jeya Chandra

Sunday, February 18, 2018

“I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart;
I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.”

Psalm 9:1

Sometimes life delivers unwelcome surprises. “When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.” We have a choice. If we embrace seemingly hopeless situations, we can uncover hidden blessings.

In 2002, while singing and teaching music in Germany, I received a truckload of lemons. For years I had suffered from severe reflux. Eventually, the acids created a sizable nodule on my vocal chords. I was asked to sing soprano solos for three local concerts, but my vocal range was decreasing by the week. Experts confirmed the problem, and my speaking voice quickly withered. Therapy didn't work. Surgery was the only option. For a singer, this is terrifying. There is no crystal ball to say how the voice will respond, and there is always a risk of not singing again.

Fortunately, an outstanding German medical system sent me to a throat surgeon in Munich who worked with singers and actors. For weeks afterward, talking was completely forbidden. A therapist gradually taught me HOW to phonate on vowels; speak; and, eventually, to sustain tones. It was grueling, and often I wondered whether I would ever truly sing again. I thanked God often for the gift of music, and I knew that if I would be granted a second chance to sing, I wanted to use my voice to glorify God where I got my start: in church.

As with many singers who have had invasive operations, my voice is softer, crankier, and has less flexibility than it did before surgery. Still, I can SING!

What does this have to do with making lemonade? I became more patient and compassionate. I refocused and broadened my musical skills from singing to leading others in the joy of expressing themselves through song, and my joy is greater than ever. Do I miss my old voice? YES. Did I nevertheless benefit from the unwelcome change? YES.

I give thanks to the Lord, my God, despite my vocal saga. It enabled me to put my heart and soul into worship in ways I had never explored before, and helped me to understand others' challenges better. I believe that is a very good thing. Thanks be to God!

Dear God, help us to see hidden blessings in the challenges we face and to share those blessings with others. Life sometimes seems unfair, but there are blessings in every circumstance if we allow you to guide us. AMEN!

Laurel Sanders

Monday, February 19, 2018

“Why, O lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?”

Psalm 10:1

Why, why, why...Why do bad things happen?

Trouble, trouble, trouble... Trouble seems to be everywhere.

What can I do about it? Lord, are you there? You don't seem to be near, but far away. Why aren't you answering my prayers? Why don't you answer the prayers of others?

These are questions we sometimes ask. We all have had bad days or a problem occurs that we didn't expect for yourself or to another, and we don't have an answer. We ask, “why God?” You know those days. You've had them. Doesn't it feel like God has abandoned you? You may try to fix it, or you have no control over the situation so you worry all night coming up with scenarios in your mind of what may happen, what could happen if you try this or that. Have you found in most cases that those scenarios never come true? You may have been praying for an answer yet you don't see one coming. Have you lost faith? Perhaps.

Today's psalm is one of discouragement but also hope. If you read past the first verse, you will see in verses 2-11 of the discouragement and evil in this world. The psalmist points out these evildoers; the wicked, the greedy, the prideful, those doing harm to others, and laments why God isn't doing anything about them for they seem not to care about God or His consequences. But in verse 14, he reminds us of HOPE. *“But you do see! Indeed you note trouble and grief, that you may take it into your hands; the helpless commit themselves to you.”* COMMIT themselves to you!

When you find yourself in trouble or feel life is unfair, remember to commit to the Lord. God IS listening, even when we don't think he is. He has promised to help in times of trouble and eventually this trouble will pass, usually with an outcome that you didn't expect. But remember, in all things, pray with thanksgiving.

Thank you Jesus for being with me always, even when I seem to not hear or see you. Allow me to know you are always with me and give me the faith and patience to wait to hear your voice. Amen.

Brenda Palmgren

Tuesday, February 20, 2018

“I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.”

Psalm 13:6

Job had everything- ten children, thousands of animals in his herds, many servants, and riches almost beyond measure. God had greatly blessed him.

But, God also tested Job's faith. He allowed Job to lose all his herds and all his children. And Job said, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Later, Job was afflicted with painful sores over his entire body. And through his terrible suffering, Job said, "Shall we receive the good at the hand of the Lord and not the bad?" In time, however, his suffering became so great that Job cursed the day he was born.

God admonished Job by saying, "How happy is the one whom God reproves—for he wounds, but he binds up; he strikes, but his hands heal." Job, in constant pain and having lost everything replied, "I will complain in the bitterness of my soul."

Job finally repented and prayed for relief. He reasserted, "I know that my redeemer lives and that at the last he will stand upon the earth. In my flesh I shall see God." We know the end of Job's story, for his fortunes were restored twofold.

We too receive God's bounty of love daily, and it is easy to sing his praises when our lives are flowing smoothly. Like Job, however, we are reminded that even in our darkest hours God is there to hold us, to support us, and to love us. As one who has survived cancer, I know that this is true. God was my strength when I had none of my own. He eased my fears and guided my way. I will sing praises to the Lord!

Lord, all glory and honor is yours. In sunny days and in troubled times you are our strength. Praise be to God. Amen

Nancy Reinert

Wednesday, February 21, 2018

“I keep my eyes always on the LORD.

With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.”

Psalm 16:8

There are several variations in the wording of this verse in different versions of the Old Testament. Some say, “I keep my eyes always on the Lord,” some “I have set the Lord always before me,” and others “I am always thinking of the Lord.” No matter which version you choose, the message is “God first.” If God is first, then, according to the various translations, you will not be shaken, you will not be moved, you will not be overtaken by fear.

This message could be considered the theme of the Bible. God first. Verses that echo this are scattered through the New Testament as well. Consider the following:

Matthew 6:33 “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness”

Colossians 3:2 “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth,”

Hebrews 12: 2 “Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith,”

We even sing this message in the great old hymn based on Hebrews 12:2, *Turn your Eyes Upon Jesus*. (Helen Lemmel, 1922)

The Psalmist seems confident. he says that he ALWAYS keeps his focus on God. He is NOT shaken. The New Testament verses seem more like my life – admonishments to keep trying to keep the focus on God, all the while letting my eyes wander while moving through sometimes very shaky circumstances.

Finally, consider that this advice is not just from the psalmist, or the New Testament authors. This advice is from the words of Jesus. It is, in fact, the heart of the “first and great commandment,” Mark 12: 30 “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” If I truly do that, then my eyes will always be on the Lord.

Dear Lord, Help me to keep my eyes on you, always, when things are good, and when things are bad. Help me keep my focus on you until, like this psalmist; it is my confident way of living. Amen.

Alice Griffin

Thursday, February 22, 2018

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?”

Psalm 22:1

Of the many things Jesus says on the cross, the opening line from our psalm for today is the most confusing. Jesus cries in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). This line can create some problems for us. The other gospels have Jesus talking about the promises of God being fulfilled in “It is finished” or “Today you will be with me in paradise.” But this line from Jesus sounds like he is having doubts about God’s presence and promises. What if this isn’t doubt, but instead the same confidence to declare, “It is finished”?

While we enjoy a distinctive number reference systems to draw us to certain places in the bible like John 3:16, this has not always been the case. The verse numbers, as we know it, were only added in the mid 1500’s and chapter numbers were added in the 1200’s. Before this time, to reference a place or message in the scriptures, you would have to say the starting line of a section. This would be like referencing the Easter story by saying, “Very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb” (Mark 16:2). We know what happens in the rest of the story. The women find the tomb empty and Jesus appears to them, miracle of miracles, death does not win! Talk about needing to know your bible!

So then our line “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” from Jesus isn’t a simple line of doubt, but instead a reference to the whole of Psalm 22. This small starting line then calls us to the great blessings of Psalm 22. This psalm contains immense trust in God who took me from the womb, protected me, and brought me through many sufferings even to the point of death. All the while, I will praise God seeing that “posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn saying that he has done it” (Psalm 22:30-31). Now if that doesn’t say “It is finished” I don’t know what does.

Dear God, give us the same faith that Jesus has to trust that you have and will protect and deliver us even in our doubt. Amen.

Peter Horn

Friday, February 23, 2018

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”

Psalm 23:1

As a teen, our pastor said memorizing Scripture could help us face life’s challenges. I learned the 23rd Psalm, reminding me not to worry—EVER—because I’m in God’s hands. What better place could there be?

Long ago I read a book about how shepherds care for their sheep. Sheep require constant care. They rely on their caretakers for their safety and well-being. If left unshorn, the weighty fleece atop their spindly legs can make it impossible to aright themselves if they fall.

In Jesus’s time, shepherds often had to enter caves to find water. They had to constantly watch for predators, listening acutely for a change in the sounds surrounding them. In nose fly season, shepherds applied a nose balm (traditionally olive oil) to each sheep’s nostrils regularly. Otherwise, flies would irritate the sheep and they would bang their heads against hard objects to get rid of them, sometimes hurting themselves extensively. In the warm months, tasty, poisonous flowers grew in the meadows. A wise shepherd ‘prepared the table’ ahead of the flock, removing temptation or guiding them around it, eliminating unnecessary suffering from those that couldn’t curb their desires.

Sheep are like people, aren’t they? Sometimes we don’t know what is good for us; sometimes we make choices that have negative consequences on our lives. Like the sheep and the nose flies, we may let irritating external forces take control over us. Occasionally we may (figuratively) fall on our backs, struggling to get up. Sometimes we don’t know how we will carry on.

Fortunately, Jesus is our shepherd. He doesn’t always provide what we *desire*, but our *true* needs are always met. We only see what lies directly ahead, but Jesus sees the pasture that surrounds us.

During the Psalm we read, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for thou art with me.” Shortly afterward the writer continues, “Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Yes, the Lord IS my shepherd. He will lead me through life’s valleys and rifts. Ultimately, I will enjoy an endless verdant pasture. Hallelujah!

Lord, thank you for the earthly shepherds who guide us toward you. Thank you most of all for Jesus, the Good Shepherd and our Savior. “I shall not want.” AMEN!

Laurel Sanders

Saturday, February 24, 2018

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

Psalms 23:4

This is possibly one of the best known verses of the Bible. The King James Version of this Psalm is the version that stirs my memory. The KJV was the version of the Bible that I often heard in school. Way back when schoolteachers read bible verses before the beginning of the school day, I remember my homeroom teacher, Miss Rock, reading this verse. Two issues about this verse stand out to me.

First, I remember the student rumor that Miss Rock was Jewish. In those early elementary school days, my mind divided the church world into Catholic and Jewish. Of course, this was not true except in the mind of a little boy. I thought that the bulk of the world was Catholic because my neighborhood was all Catholic. Using this same line of reasoning, Miss Rock represented the rest of the world to me because my friends said she was Jewish. She read the required bible verse every morning without a demonstration or voicing any discomfort. She just did it. To this day, I'm not sure if she was Jewish.

Second, as a dumb little kid, I could never understand the words “rod and staff.” Come on. You are walking through this dangerous valley and you are bothering to carry a rod **and** a staff? Why not one or the other? In my mind, they were the same thing. As an adult, I am now able to find six references to rod and staff in biblical verses, and the use of them together still made little sense to me. Thanks to this Lenten assignment, I now have an understanding of the difference. Jesus is called the Great Shepherd. He protects his charges with his rod by striking offenders using the rod as his weapon. He brings back his wandering sheep with the staff or shepherd's crook. The crook has a curved end that fits the neck of the sheep and can capture lambs and sheep. The shepherd can defend the flock with his rod, and He can keep the sheep close to with his staff. How simple when you open your mind to understand.

**Lord, thank you for helping an old man better understand your word, but also thank you for letting him review this life for those precious moments that seemed so trivial but now I understand make up the fabric of one's existence.
Amen**

Bob Griffin

Sunday, February 25, 2018

“Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.”

Psalm 25:6

This not only speaks of love but of trust. Our faith is all built around this one question: why should I trust God? None of you have ever seen God come down from heaven and say “I AM GOD!! LIFE IS PERFECT NOW!” So why do we trust God with our feelings, or that God is even really real?

It says in this line that God’s mercy and steadfast love have been “from of old.” We have seen all of God’s mercy and steadfast love in the past. Why would it be any different now?

I like to think about it as a timeline. At one end of the timeline is God’s mercy and steadfast love that have already happened. Because we see that in the past, we trust that it will also be in the future, on the other end of the timeline. The arrows of the timeline are pointing back infinitely and forward infinitely.

We are in the middle of the timeline, in between the past and the future with those arrows going out. You might be thinking, “is there mercy *now*? Is there steadfast love *now*? For me?” It’s not on hold. We see all these things that have been in the past and we believe will be in the future. They are here today in the little things, like family, your church congregation, and all of your friends. Mercy and steadfast love are *now*.

Dear God, Help me to trust that you will love me in the future—and that you are loving me now. Help me believe that your love is not on hold and that we can trust in you forever, no matter what happens. Amen.

Emily Whitney, age 10

Monday, February 26, 2018

“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid.”

Psalm 27:1

How has this verse in psalm 27 inspired me to write this devotional? Over a year ago I worked in a men's clothing as a seasonal sales assistant. To be honest I didn't know going into this job that it would fit my personality and my degree in Fashion Merchandising. The manager that I was working for was impressed with my job performance and personality. He knew the manager from another men's clothing store who was hiring at the time. He encouraged him to hire me as their permanent staff. Finally after struggling for over two years I was gainfully employed.

When you put your faith and trust in God, He is there as your guide to help discover what direction in your life you should be heading. When you are willing to listen for God's advice, He will give it because He cares about you and has your best interest in His heart. Even when you have obstacles in your life, He will guide you.

Life on Earth is so precious. I want to encourage you to live your life to the fullest it possibly can happen. I hope my story helps to show you that there is no need for worries or fears when you put your faith and trust in God.

Dear God, Please make sure that you are going to be there when I need your help and I make the right decisions when it comes to my life. Amen

Kathryn Kornacki

Tuesday, February 27, 2018

“You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing.

You have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy.”

Psalm 30:11

The theme for the Lenten devotional is how God brings great blessings through small things. Various times in my life, this has been revealed to me and continues to be a part of everyday living.

Depression in Webster’s definition is “a period of neurotic or psychotic condition marked by an inability to concentrate, insomnia and feelings of dejection and guilt.” These are all emotions that have been experienced by me.

Depression was my clothes of deep mourning. After the unexpected death of my second husband, our brief marriage of two years, short of three, was felt very deeply in my grieving. This was the second time that I had experienced death of a spouse, and the overwhelming sadness that engulfed my being was indescribable.

I struggled with the grief and mourning for several months and had not been able to resume my teaching career as a result, initiating a sabbatical for a year.

After several months of undergoing periods of reading the Bible and study, a great blessing was revealed to me of God’s love and care. Gradually, the mourning turned to joy. One day the blessing of God lifting the depression was likened to a light bulb being illumined with the turning of a switch. I felt myself returning, and the depression was extinguished.

One of the greatest blessings which came into being at this time was the news of a grandchild’s birth. I believe that was one of God’s ways of sharing love and enabling me to a renewed spirit.

Dear Father, Please give us the discernment to understand and acknowledge you through your blessings in our daily lives. Amen.

Kathryn Mackes

Wednesday, February 28, 2018

“You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.”

Psalm 32:7

Most every morning, once I've poured coffee and made my way to the sofa for a moment of adjustment to the day, one or both of my kids find their way beside me, crowding under the fuzziest couch blanket and pressing toward me. Their heads burrow into my ribs. Their feet shove into my legs. I call them “the lumps,” and for a few minutes, they simply smush me, wiggling and giggling.

They aren't running to me scared of anything. They're not there to ask for anything, or needing anything special. They just feel like snuggling. They want to be close to me because they want to be close to me, and that is all. They love me, and it feels good in there.

Do I ever go to Jesus like that? Is Jesus my hiding place, surrounding me like my kids are surrounded by mom and the blanket, just hanging out in coziness? I'm afraid not. Speaking honestly, I go to Jesus because I'm scared, or needy. Because I am struggling. Or because I've decided to schedule more time with him. Because I know I should, or am trying to do better.

What would change in my life if I also hung out with Jesus “just because?” If time with Jesus was just like cuddling on the couch? If my prayer life was less like doing exercises, and more like wiggling and giggling under a fluffy blanket?

Jesus, you are a hiding place, surrounding us with love. Bring me in close to you like kids snuggling under a blanket. Help me get comfortable being with you “just because.” Amen.

Anne Whitney

Thursday, March 1, 2018

“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.”

Psalm 34:18

There have been several times in my life that I feel I've been heartbroken and crushed. The first one that comes to mind is the death of a great friend at 25 years old. It was one of the most horrible experiences of my life. I wish I could say that I immediately turned to God for comfort and healing, but that's not what I did. I spent months trying to find comfort by my own means. Needless to say, none of those ways worked, they only left me more crushed. Finally I realized I couldn't do it on my own, I broke down and asked for God's help. Finally I began to feel like myself again. The healing process had begun. It was only then that I realized that through all my own ill-conceived attempts, God was there all along. God was near me all the time even though I didn't realize it.

Dear God, help us to realize that we cannot believe and trust on our own. Help us to know it is a strength, and not a weakness to rely on you. Thank you. Thank you for walking with us and holding us up during the times when we are brokenhearted and crushed in spirit. Amen.

Joe Belanger

Friday, March 2, 2018

“Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret - it leads only to evil.”

Psalm 37:8

Rather than focusing on anger, turn your attention instead to joy. Breathe, and choose happiness because God will take care of things. Being angry is okay - Jesus showed anger. Do not let the anger you feel lead to evil. Observe it, accept it for what it is, and turn to happy thoughts. Turn to God to help focus your energy. Remember to forgive for your own benefit as well as others. Do not waste time on being angry or on fretting. Ruminating on angry thoughts is futile - it accomplishes nothing. Choose joy instead.

Lord, please help me to turn away from anger and instead turn to joy because your love is what matters. Amen.

Abby Flanders

Saturday, March 3, 2018

"I confess my iniquity. I am sorry for my sin."

Psalm 38:18

What a drag it is to be a human being, hard-wired to foul things up.

One way to understand sin is as a "breaking in relationship." Of course it is easy to drift from our relationship with God, it is easy to damage the relationships we have with others, and it is also easy to break the promises we make to ourselves.

Iniquity turns away from love. It is ready to believe anything but the truth. It hates to repair a broken relationship. Iniquity finds every excuse for why we don't need to develop deeper relationships with God, with other people, and with ourselves.

The challenge in this Lenten season is to acknowledge iniquity and the barrier it presents from the happiness that is found in meaningful connection with God.

Dear God, help me to acknowledge my iniquity, and help me to receive your Grace and repair those areas in my life that are broken, for a new relationship with myself, with others, and with you. Amen

Jason Whitney

Sunday, March 4, 2018

“As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.”

Psalm 42:1

The image of a deer in the wild, having run to exhaustion, desperately needing a drink, finds a flowing stream...oh the joy! We've all had the feeling of a thirst so strong we desperately seek a cool, refreshing drink.

I was sick, lost, feeling like no one understood, for no one knew what was truly wrong. All the paths that I would typically take to remedy my situation were exhausted. I didn't know what to do. As I walked, this verse, recently read, kept playing through my mind until I broke down. It was then I realized how my soul was thirsting for God, how I needed to believe that God would have the answers I had failed to find. At that moment, I gave up the hopelessness of my situation and turned everything over to Him. It was then that I knew, live or die, everything would be okay. This didn't make the road I had to travel any easier, but I could sense that I would be carried through it all.

Shortly after, friends stepped in and directed me to the help that would ultimately heal my broken body. My friends and my church family nurtured me as I went through surgery and then treatment. All the while, God was healing my broken spirit and satiating my soul, for it wasn't only an illness that broke my body, but an emptiness in my soul that left me with an unquenchable thirst.

Thanks be to God, my body is healed and my soul is satiated. In the difficult times to come, I will be sure to look to God and his soul-quenching waters.

We all thirst in some way. What do you thirst for? Where is your flowing stream?

Dear God, Thank you for quenching the thirst in my soul. May all who thirst find solace in your ever-present flowing waters of love. Amen.

Gail Hoover

Monday, March 5, 2018

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

Psalm 46:1

When have I sought God as my refuge? Maybe not enough, but there are a few memories that stand out as times that I have felt like a tiny lifeboat in the raging sea with nothing left but to turn to God for strength.

One moment stands out in my life. Just before my 23rd birthday, my fiancé, a police officer on duty in Amarillo, TX, was in a major accident that resulted in a traumatic brain injury. At twenty-three, I was terrified, alone, and lost. But, in these very troubled waters, as I floated in a tiny life boat on the raging sea of hospitals, brain surgeries, and specialists, God did not leave me, God was my strength, God became my refuge. It was through this life-altering experience that God led me to my passion and future career. While living in Colorado at a rehabilitation hospital with my fiancé, I was introduced to the world of adapted sports. I had the opportunity to meet the USA quadriplegic rugby team, and the seed was planted.

God gave me strength to carry on after my fiancé later passed due to his injuries, and God gave me the refuge of a passion for inclusion in sports and society. Is there a time when God was your refuge, your strength, and your lifeboat in troubled waters?

Dear Lord, help me to turn to you when I need a place of refuge. May I open my heart to your guidance and find that place of refuge that is always waiting for me. Amen

Jonna Belanger

Tuesday, March 6, 2018

"Be still, and know that I am God!

I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth."

Psalm 46:10

I am the daughter and granddaughter of women who accomplished things. In her prime, my mother literally and figuratively took long strides through her day the length of which I, a woman with shorter legs, was hard pressed to match. She managed to balance beautifully home, family, and calling with elegance, grace and, to my eyes, perfection. My grandmother, bred of sturdy farm stock, cultivated vast gardens of flowers and vegetables, painted, sewed, canned, cooked, and served the Lord magnificently in all she did. Their days were long and filled with intention and purpose. As a result, I tend to measure my days by items crossed off lists and projects completed. Like Martha, distracted with busyness, I neglect time to sit quietly in stillness at the feet of Jesus.

I have committed a few Bible verses to memory and "Be still and know that I am God..." is one I can summon quickly and do so frequently. Almost as mantra, I use these words as an entry into silent prayer, a shield against anxiety, or a calming technique when my mind and heart race out of control. These words never fail to help restore the peace only found when my spirit is centered on my Lord.

Stillness, the absolute absence of movement or sound, seems almost nonexistent within the constant thrumming of life in the 21st century. Tethered to the urgencies of our phones, tablets, computers, smart cars, televisions, Siri or Alexa it is difficult to find a solitary, silent, or *still* moment. And yet we need it desperately to settle our souls and focus our gaze. My best time for that is early in the morning, in our sun-room, coffee on the side table, Bible on my lap and prayer beads in my hands. When I commit to that morning appointment of reading, prayer, and stillness, my heart is ready to attend to the day and my soul is prepared for whatever needs may come my way. When is your time?

Heavenly Father, May we consistently seek solitude, silence and the stillness that allows us to know You and take your peace and presence with us out into this world You have created. Amen

Ellen Herman Campbell

Wednesday, March 7, 2018

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.”

Psalm 51: 1

David wrote this psalm, after the prophet Nathan came to King David about how he would dare to approach God and ask for God’s forgiveness in light of his terrible sins of arrogance, adultery, deception and murder.

My sins, I pray, are not as horrendous as King David’s, but I know that I have sinned and still sin, and I beg for God’s forgiveness all the time. I need God’s steadfast love and compassion to take away my sins. King David had to pray hard and earnestly in his psalm, and I know that I have to pray hard also to ask for God’s forgiveness. This is my earnest prayer.

I humble myself with hopes of redemption, and I bow before you my God, and seek your grace. I fervently pray for your mercy and seek your steadfast love. Take away my abundant sins, and forgive me for having sinned before you again and again. I want to do your will and I ask that your son Jesus be my guidance and inspiration. Amen.

Paul Mackes

Thursday, March 8, 2018

“Create in me a clean heart, oh God, and put a new and right spirit within me.”

Psalm 51:10

Who doesn't love a new beginning, a fresh start? The opening of a new school year. Moving to a new town. January 1st. To me, the words from Psalm 51:10 seem to suggest a "beginning again."

Create in me a clean heart....

Someone once asked me why I go to church. My first response was “to give thanks.” With so many blessings, I feel drawn to gratitude. My second response was “to receive God's forgiveness.” After Communion, I feel renewed, blessed. But in that moment of trying to answer my friend's question, I realized I also have another need: to begin anew. And so I love the moments before and after Communion when I can sit quietly and meditate and feel refreshed. It soothes my soul.

...and put a new and right spirit within me.

When explaining the power of Shakespeare's words, actor Kenneth Branagh once suggested that we, as theatergoers, need not understand every word of the Elizabethan playwright to enjoy his plays. He felt that by merely being in the audience, Shakespeare's words were working on us. I feel a bit like that in church. While I may not immediately understand every word in the lesson, I know God is working in me. While I may not immediately grasp the meaning of the Gospel, I trust the ministers will carefully guide me to an understanding in the sermon. While I may not immediately put aside the outside world, if I open my heart and listen quietly to the music and vocal accompaniments, I will be transported to a quiet place. It soothes my soul.

Create in me a clean heart, oh God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

I am not the same person I was when I joined Grace many years ago. I am constantly being molded and shaped by life experiences and every Sunday service. Each week I take something away from worship. I learn something new. In a recent sermon, when Pastor Lynn discussed baptism and its significance—both Jesus' and his own—I began to understand the importance of my own baptism on a deeper level. Likewise, when Pastor Schul challenged us not long ago to be “signposts” toward Jesus—to live with love, joy, kindness, and peace—I felt affirmed and energized. Through their teaching and my prayers, I strive to be a better person.

When I leave church after Sunday morning worship, I always feel renewed and ready to begin again. My strength has been restored, and I know that God walks with me. That soothes my soul.

Lord, help me to come to church each Sunday with an open heart, ready to accept your love, and then help me carry your message with me in the coming week as I strive to live my faith. Amen.

Polly Dee Keiser McWilliams

Friday, March 9, 2018

“Lift up the Light of your countenance upon us, O, Lord.”

Psalm 4:6b

We celebrated my grandson’s Jack’s third birthday at my house. One of the gifts he received was a flashlight. After the candles, the cake, and the presents, while the grown-ups were talking over coffee, Jack got down from the table with his new flashlight. He started walking around the dining room and living room, shining it into corners and under furniture.

“Jack, what are you doing?” I asked him.

And he answered, “Looking for the dark.”

When Jesus got up each morning, that’s what He did. He went out among the people looking for “dark.” IN the light of His presence, darkness fled. That light was love. It was His nature—God *is* love.

Be The Light

Dear Heavenly Father, Fill us with your light so that we may love others. Amen.

Barbara Hackenberry

Saturday, March 10, 2018

“For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is in the Holy One.”

Psalm 62:5

We don't seem to wait much these days. Email, Instagram, Facebook, texts, Amazon overnight — all bring the latest to us in speedy fashion.

Nor do we experience much silence. Televisions and radios blare, Pandora, Spotify and Podcasts of every variety fill headphones, the web draws us in one click at a time, children quarrel. Phones ring, tweet, buzz and vibrate with an urgency that we allow into our lives.

Overbooked calendars, too, add to the noise in our lives with an unrelenting busyness that assures the Ego that we are important for we have things to do. Yet, this noise and lack of “white space” in our lives, leave no time to reflect on who we really are, what life is all about, and what our hopes and yearnings are. There is too much to be done it would seem.

Thomas Merton saw the rush and pressure of modern life as a form of violence. “To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of concerns, to surrender to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is to succumb to violence. Frenzy...destroys the fruitfulness of one's work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom.” Jesus heeded the call of the wilderness, Elijah found that God was not in the noise of earthquake, fierce wind or fire but in a quiet breeze, and Mary chose to wait in silence with Jesus while her cousin chose the frenzy of work.

When my children were young, I set an alarm to awaken before them. I needed to begin the morning with some silence before the demands of oatmeal, lunch boxes, and car pools carried me into the busyness of another day. This was a good practice for me, one I still abide many, many years later. I light a candle and sit in silence. This simple ritual grounds me each day.

Yogis breathe with awareness bringing stillness. Walkers know the rhythm of placing one foot in front of the other brings calm and focus. A friend of mine finds knitting to be a quieting practice. Another friend writes a simple Haiku each day (Haiku is a three line Japanese poem: 5 syllables, 7 syllables, 5 syllables.) Such practices allow us to rest in hope for the Holy One.

This is why the psalmist seeks silence. How do you invite silence into your life so that your deepest hopes are revealed and entrusted to God? What daily practice allows you to wait in silence with hope in the Holy One?

**The candle flickers
A new day calls from the East
I begin again.
Thank you God. Amen.**

Joanne Cahill

Sunday, March 11, 2018

“For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O LORD, from my youth.”

Psalm 71:5

Zion Lutheran Church in Boalsburg was my home congregation until I went to college. The building is small, two stories with a sanctuary on the second floor and fellowship rooms below. The sanctuary glows with the traditional stained glass windows along three walls and a painting of Jesus in Gethsemane behind the altar.

Our mother was organist and choir director, so we three kids sat with our dad, often in the balcony, for worship. We sang in the children’s choirs and eventually the adult choir.

The church family members were of a variety of ages including families with kids my age. Congregational life included meals, visiting after services, Sunday School, youth group and confirmation classes. To this day there are people I’m still friends with and others whose funerals I have attended.

Not all was bucolic. I remember my parents speaking of conflicts in leadership. My personal pet peeve was the policy that did not permit girls to acolyte. I was not a fan of the policy and expressed my displeasure, not that I remembering it changing.

But more than any conflict, I remember the congregational members’ faithful service in choirs, ushering, caring for the church property, preparing fellowship meals. This genuine steadfast nature along with my parents’ faithful guidance have led me to God from my youth.

There is a power in community to nurture and mentor young people. It was that community at Zion Lutheran Church that supported my parents as they sought to raise us with faith in God, to guide us to learn to lean on God’s hope and to trust God with our lives. Our faith community at Grace Lutheran Church has that same powerful opportunity. If you are a parent, we know how challenging parenting can be. If you aren’t a parent, or your children are grown, ponder where your gifts could be used to provide a model and where your gifts might lead you to mentor the children of our faith community. It takes a congregation to raise each child of God.

Thank you, Lord, for all who nurtured and mentored me in my youth. Lead me to do the same for others. Amen.

Dotty Delafield

Monday, March 12, 2018

“From the end of the earth I shall call to you when my heart is faint.

Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”

Psalm 61:2

So, I am known in my family as the person who always sees the glass half full. (You know – some of us see the glass half full and some half empty.) I especially saw bright beginnings – like a new year. This year, however, the dawn of 2018 my mood was anything but. By January fourth or fifth, I was convinced that not only did my 2017 priorities never come to fruition but they had little hope of doing so in 2018. Not only that, but I was another year older and more tired, and everywhere I turned was another problem.

Now let me tell you about my Dad. (It relates, I promise!) My Dad had a very deep and profoundly simple faith, nurtured in a little Lutheran congregation in Beaver Springs, PA. He was clear on the life God wanted him to live and what was waiting for him in the future. In the evenings he liked to sit in a lawn chair and watch the sunset. If, by chance, the sun peeked through the clouds, he would say it was the eye of God – checking on us and reminding us of his promises.

So, back to me. I was sitting in the family room on a particularly gloomy, cloudy day in early January. Usually I can see Tussey Mountain, but not that day. As I watched, a very small break in the clouds appeared – not a ray of sunlight, but an orange circle – a bit of the sunset. It was only there for a minute, but it reminded me that in fact, despite the clouds, there was a sunset just like every day, and Tussey Mountain was still there.

Now, this was not a grand awakening that suddenly my glass was full again. But gradually, as the days passed, little things happened... loving counsel from a friend, new doors opening, some “to do’s” finished. Do I think God heard me and sent down those blessings? No, I think His blessings were there all along, and God led me (or pushed me, or dragged me) to higher ground so that I could see them. So, my resolution for 2018 is to keep reaching and let God lead me to the higher ground.

Dear God, we ask you, as we let ourselves be mired in the tribulations of everyday life, that you continue to lead us to higher ground – always reaching to You, our Rock. Amen.

Lynn Rogers

Tuesday, March 13, 2018

“I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord; I will remember your wonders of old.”

Psalm 77:11

This verse is probably the most violated request in the Bible. Countless men and women have read this verse and immediately progress to the next line without assessing the meaning of the verse. How many times have we failed to give God credit for what has been accomplished and we treat every occurrence as a new and unique event? “I don’t care what God did in the past, I need his help RIGHT NOW!”

Only in our most troubled moments do we remember that God saved the Israelites from instant demise, or Jesus healed the man in the crowd (for example John 5:13). Certainly in the Easter story, we see the Apostles fail to understand the historical power of Jesus. History is relegated to the pages of old books, not to the most immediate regions of our mind. As believers, we don’t care what God has done in the past, our most immediate concern is what will God do for me now.

I am reminded of an image of my daughter-in-law. She is an accomplished veterinarian who saves the lives of animals daily. But history, the past, has little meaning to her. For example, when we were touring an exhibit at the Liberty Bell I forced her to let me see the same historical film that I had just seen one more time. She grudgingly agreed, and stood outside the viewing area leaning against the wall as only a disgruntled person can stand. The historical significance of the film was not important to her. What she cared about was what important things she could be doing with this “wasted” 15 minutes. The freedom of the country, that this film depicted, was of minimal significance at the moment. She had more important things, current things to be concerned about.

Despite the advice in this verse, we often fail to recall past deeds, because for us the present moment is the significant aspect to us.

Lord, help me remember the significance of all of the events of this life, those things that have gone before, those that are happening now and those that will happen. All of these are important to the fabric of life. We must understand them all to understand the true meaning of your way. Amen

Bob Griffin

Wednesday, March 14, 2018

Teach me your ways, O Lord, that I may live according to your truth.

Grant me purity of heart that I may honor you.

Psalm 86:11

This verse include two bold requests/petitions to God: to be taught His ways and be given a pure heart. In addition, this verse has a challenging promise following each supplication: to live according to His truth and honor Him. The petitions are made so that “thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth” in the same way as in heaven.

I selected this translation of the verse because it describes goals for my life every day and every minute. I should honor God in everything that I do. That does not mean that I need to stay in church all day and every day. It does not mean that I need to be praying all day and every day. I can and should go out into the world and live as God plans. It reminds me of what a father might tell his child: “Go out into the world and make me proud!”

I can honor God with “purity of heart”. Purity can refer to clarity, honesty, integrity, and goodness. Another translation of the verse describes “an undivided heart”. I think that all of these aspects are required to honor God-- a focus and one-mindedness in all that I do.

Having an undivided heart involves living all day with God’s love and guidance. There should be no division between “church time” and the rest of our lives. Besides scheduled prayer times, there are several ways that God touches me during the week. I find that the songs from church is the music in my mind as I continue through the week. (My practicing church music almost every day at home tends to cement these tunes in my memory!) An unexpected email announcing that Pastor Schul has posted a new Devoto also brings a time of reflection into my day. When one has these regular reminders, everyday interactions with others can be seen as opportunities to share an undivided heart to honor God.

**Dear Lord, I ask that you teach and guide me to give clarity of heart today.
Amen.**

Laura Pauley

Thursday, March 15, 2018

“But I, oh Lord, cry out to you, in the morning my prayers come before you.”

Psalm 88:13

Ok, tell me the last time you got awake in the morning ready to sing. Now add a smile on your face and a happy greeting for someone! Do you awaken and thank God for your blessings? I would imagine that the more we have, the less time we take to thank our Lord and Savior for our blessings. I hope I'm wrong, but how easily we become complacent.

I find more people seem to forget how lucky they are having four extremities that help them to do many things. Do you thank those veterans who have lost an extremity defending our freedoms? Does the phantom pain those veterans experience ever make you think of the pain Christ must have experienced when the spikes were driven into his hands on the cross? Where is their joy in the morning?

When my legs ache and my feet feel like they are on fire, I feel humbled when I think about the pain, suffering and ultimate death that Christ endured for me.

Do you pray for yourself or for others? Do you pray that there may be food to find to feed yourself and your children? Do you pray that you might find something to use as shelter for the coming storm?

Ask yourself if you know the difference between what you would like to have and what you want. I would like to have a small TV for the sewing room. However, when I think about the homeless population in our own community, I am humiliated to think of my selfishness.

And our list of true wants and needs flows on and on.....so what are you going to cry out to your Lord & Savior in the morning?

Heavenly Father, help me find a way to become less selfish. Help me find ways to use what you have blessed me with to serve you & to help others. Amen.

Cay Griel

Friday, March 16, 2018

“O come, let us sing to the lord,
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!”

Psalm 95:1

My five-year old son William has got the moves. If there's music, pretty soon he is dancing: He shimmies his shoulders. He bounces his knees. He flips his hair. He leaps; he slides across the floor like Mick Jagger.

And he sings! Loud and proud, knowing the words or making his own. Whether singing in the car or while at play in our family room, each of his songs are delivered at full volume, big and resonant.

His song and dance are uninhibited. He is not dancing for us, not trying to look a certain way, not trying to impress or pull off a certain effect. He's just moving and making sounds, just because there's music. This is the way of musicmaking I hear in this verse of the psalm. It doesn't say “let us perform to the satisfaction of all present.” It doesn't say “let us sing without making any mistake.” It doesn't say “let us hum quietly while others really get down.” No! It says make a joyful noise. To me that's big sounds, full sounds, using these instruments we have in our bodies and using these hearts God fills with joy.

Do I move to God's music the way William moves to any music at all? How can I make my noise more like William's: not focusing on other people and what I imagine they are wanting or thinking, but simply moving and grooving to God's music? How can I more truly celebrate what God is doing, and allow myself to get noisy about that?

God, you are indeed the rock of my salvation. Open me up. Help me to hear your music. Unlock my body, my voice, and my heart so that I am more joyful—and noisier! Amen.

Anne Whitney

Saturday, March 17, 2018

“As a father has compassion for his children,
the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.”

Psalm 103:13

Growing up I used to be terrified of my Grandfather. He was a Circuit Court Judge for 27 years and always seemed gruff and grumpy. He could be short and snappy in his communication and to a small child, this was scary. However, anytime we were visiting and it was time to say goodbye and give hugs, he would squat down on the ground at my level with a big smile and sparkly eyes and give me a big hug and tell me he loved me. When I was in Middle School my grandfather retired and mellowed out A LOT. What I realized in adulthood was that the stress and strain of his job as well as his staunch Norwegian upbringing, made him seem terser and grumpier than he really was.

When reading the Psalms and coming upon things like “As a father has compassion for his children, the Lord has compassion for those who fear him” it seems like God is terse and grumpy like I used to think my Grandfather was. Not like a loving and caring God at all. However, fear really isn’t what the Psalmist was getting at here... this was actually a designation used in the psalms, along with the righteous, the faithful, and the servants of the Lord, for those who seek to make the Lord the decisive orienting center of their lives. The fear of the Lord is simply reverence practiced in trust and obedience. This doesn’t mean that we earn preferential treatment through our trust and respect, but instead that because of the love, compassion, and forgiveness that we have received, we “fear” the Lord.

So God is not a terse and grumpy parent or grandparent whose harsh communication incites fear and trepidation from God’s children and grandchildren, but instead is a loving and compassionate parent/grandparent who is willing to get down on the ground, at our level, and give us a huge hug with a big smile and twinkly eyes, and tell us that we are loved.

Good and gracious God, we give you thanks that you are our parent who loves us beyond measure and reaches us in the places and spaces where we exist. Bless us and continue to enable us to “fear” you. We pray all of this in the name of the one who came down to our level, Jesus Christ, our savior and Lord. Amen.

Vicar Ariel

Sunday, March 18, 2018

“O Lord, how manifold are your works!

In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.”

Psalm 104:24

As I think about God's creation, I am overwhelmed. When I think of God's timeline, I am constantly astounded. God created the earth 4.5 billion years ago, life in the form of bacteria 3.8 billion years ago, photosynthesis 2.4 billion years ago, and we go on and on until the dinosaurs, 230 million years ago. And finally, the common ancestors for us human beings, Adam and Eve, only 200,000 years ago.

We think we human beings have been around a long time, 200,000 years. Well, the earth is 4.5 billion years old. If you place that 4 billion into a day of time, 24 hours, we humans have been around for only a few seconds. God created the earth and all that exists and the earth is one planet in our universe. How many universes may there be?

How manifold, numerous, diverse, legion are your works of Lord. Think how vast God's works are. I try to fathom that and I am confounded. So during this Lenten season, please try to fathom it with me, and be amazed and overwhelmed as I am. But always remember, God whose manifold works are all around, confounding and amazing, loves you. You, God chose to create you, in God's image. You, God chose to save you forever through the suffering and death and resurrection of Jesus. You, God chose to resurrect you from the dead so God could have a forever relationship with you. You, in all the vastness of God's creation, God wants that for you.

I hope you can find security and peace as you say, "How manifold are your works O God," and thank you for making me a forever part of them.

O Lord, how manifold is your work in all of creation. We are most humbled and grateful to be part of it. Help us to love and respect your creation as you do. In Jesus' name. Amen

Pastor Lynn

Monday, March 19, 2018

“Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I will observe it to the end.”

Psalm 119:33

Psalm 119 will rarely appear on anyone’s list of favorite Psalms. It’s easy to see why that is. First, it is the longest Psalm of all, with 176 verses. Second, it is focused on the Psalmist’s love of God’s law. We Lutherans tend to cringe at anything suggesting love for the law, because it implies a theology that is harsh, judgmental, and focused on works righteousness.

Psalm 119’s focus on God’s law, however, is not quite as theologically terrifying as we Lutherans might assume. It might be more accurate, in the case of Psalm 119, to speak of God’s *teachings* rather than God’s laws. Heard that way, the counsel of Psalm 119 is less concerned with exposing our shortcomings and humbling our pride, and more interested in revealing the magisterial beauty of God’s Word, the way we might stroll through the Penn State Arboretum and excitedly direct a companion’s attention to a gorgeous flower in full bloom.

When I was a young boy, just beginning to learn the finer points of baseball, my coach told me that to play the position of first base well, I would need to spend a lot of time working on the mechanics of my feet. Which foot goes to the bag at which time? And where is that foot positioned? It may seem trivial, but proper positioning can save a fraction of a second, which in turn can be the difference between a runner being safe or out. What the coach told me might be considered law – an imposition of rules that limited my freedom. But I treasured his counsel because I knew it would help me to be the best first baseman I could be, and to this day I remember those lessons and use them for the benefit of our church softball team. In the words of Psalm 119:33, I have “observed them to the end” and have done so joyously, for my benefit and the benefit of my teammates.

Similarly, God’s teachings guide us to a way of life and relationships that bless us and our neighbors. What’s not to like about that? Shouldn’t we find delight in such wisdom? By God’s

Loving God, teach me your ways. Fill me with your wisdom. Help me to accept and apply your counsel as the gift it is – a pathway to a more joyous and peaceful life for me and for those around me. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Rev. Scott E. Schul

Tuesday, March 20, 2018

“I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”

Psalm 121:1-2

I started a job in Bellefonte at the start of this school year. I have the privilege of driving from Park Forest to Bellefonte every morning. Those who know me well may think the previous sentence was sarcastic, however, it is not. The drive from Park Forest to Bellefonte on I-99 is a beautiful tour through Happy Valley. There are stunning mountains on both sides of the road and while driving my route, I have no doubt I am in the valley of these mountains. I have lived in State College since high school, and I have never noticed that this drive is so amazing and beautiful. I guess I never paid that much attention. But now, I have been blessed to see the change from summer to autumn and autumn to winter in those mountains. It is awe-inspiring and breathtaking. I am looking forward to watching spring pop out on those mountains. Every day I will notice something different. I am surprised by the subtle changes that catch my attention.

When I lift my eyes to those hills, I am aware of God’s hand in creating this world and me. I am reminded of this Psalm. I see, in those mountains, his strength. In those mountains, I see from where my help comes. When life throws it's challenging at us we know we should look to the Lord for help. But where do you see the Lord? If you only see him in church you are missing out!

Verse 2 of Psalm 121 tells us our help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. Where does your strength come from? Where do you see God in this earth that he made? I challenge you this Lent to look for the Lord in other areas of your life? Do you see his strength in the mountains on the drive to work? Do you see him in your child’s face? In the work you do? In art? In books? In the dark of night? I challenge you to find God in someplace new? Look carefully you may find him, and his strength and help in an unexpected place.

Dear Lord, As I take my Lenten journey, help me to discover your help in different places in this world. Help me to pay close attention, to the world and the people in it, to see you and your help and strength. Help me to show your strength through me. Amen.

Rachel Griel

Wednesday, March 21, 2018

“The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from
this time on and forevermore.”

Psalm 121:8

Early on in my faith journey, my family would watch Dr. Robert Schuler on Sunday mornings when we didn't go to church. He used the words of my assigned verse in his weekly benediction. They became familiar to me and later on when I spent more time with the Bible, I found comfort in all of Psalm 121. It is a beautiful hope-filled song that we should all keep in our hearts and minds as we live our lives.

The word, keep, can mean “watch over” or “guard”. In the Lutheran Study Bible, Rolf Jacobson assures us that the Lord watches over us through this world and into the next. In the second verse of the psalm, the writer tells us that our help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. WOW what more encouraging words could we read if we reflected on them at the beginning of every day.

So what should we do as Christians today? Since we know that our sins have been forgiven we have nothing to worry about as we serve him by being a “neighbor” to all whom we meet. We gain strength to do this because we know God is “watching over” us.

Lord Jesus Christ, you have prepared a quiet place for us in your Father's eternal home. Watch over our welfare in this perilous journey, shade us from the burning heat of day, and keep our lives free from evil now and forever. Amen.
(From For All the Saints, Volume 3)

Spence Garvin

Thursday, March 22, 2018

“May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.”

Psalm 126:5

When most of us read the Psalm about sowing in tears, we can see the beleaguered farmer walking his fields in the cold and wet, and we can feel his want for warmth and comfort.

This year, when choosing this Psalm, my first thought was of my nephew, Joseph. At three years of age, he was to start pre-school, and found it a shocking prospect. He did not like getting up so early in the morning and he did not like leaving behind his favorite toys. Entering a room full of strangers was intimidating. He would cry. I would cry. His mom would cry ...

We would talk to him about the wonderful adventure it could be, but he was hesitant to believe that doing something so drastic could be good for him. We wanted him to trust us and believe that this would be fun and that he would eventually enjoy going to school.

He, like the farmer getting ready to sow, had to buck up and prepare for what was coming.

For the first few days, Joseph would softly cry while preparing to go to school. We would get there, and the crying would continue as he checked in and started greeting his teachers and the other students; he did not argue, nor did he complain, but the crying tore at our hearts.

But we continued sowing Joseph's fields with seeds for his future ...

Within a week or so, Joseph was getting up for pre-school just like we were preparing for work. He would have his fake cup of coffee, a bowl of cereal, then get himself into his car seat, ready for his commute. When arriving at the school house, he would climb out, carrying his snack bag like a briefcase. As he formally greeted his teachers, all the other children stood around in anticipation; for after hanging up his coat, Joe would turn around, arms wide, laughing and cheering with all of the other children. They had all discovered that learning together was a wonderful adventure!

Lord, give us the strength to believe that leaving our comfort zone and preparing for the future is a good thing. Please, provide us with the fortitude to sow our dreams, nourishing them with honesty and confidence, hoping to reap with joy the achievements of the future. Amen

Barbara Vogler

Friday, March 23, 2018

“Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.”

Psalm 130:1

Out of the depths of my chronic back pain, I have cried to you O Lord (Psalm 130:1). I believe my cries have been answered by volunteering to help others at the Mount Nittany Medical Center. As a patient floor volunteer, I don't have time to dwell on my discomfort.

But an accident at the hospital left me questioning if my actions were triggered by the blue volunteer jacket and name tag I was wearing. I held a food tray for a wheelchair-bound visitor while she selected her soup and salad. I was aware of the stares we attracted, and I thought, “This volunteer jacket labels me as a helper,” and so I was.

But how pure was my motivation? Have you ever done a good deed because you felt you were expected to do so?

Jesus, I pray you will guide me in my search for a lifestyle that will help me cope with my pain while reaching out to assist others. Amen.

Phil Bucher

Saturday, March 24, 2018

“How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!”

Psalm 133:1

The words of this psalm sound like a dream, a fairytale, utopia. The ideal of treating all of our neighbors as kindred seems naive. The world we live in has been growing increasingly divisive. We are quick to judge one another, intolerant of differing views, and small-minded.

As we look deeper into this psalm, whom should we consider kindred? Is it our nuclear family, extended family, church family, local community, our nation, the human race? We must believe that God calls us to view our kindred as each and every person that we encounter.

In an era when folks would rather build walls than bridges, how can we promote unity? The answer is Jesus. He is the means of reconciliation. His death on the cross bridges the gap between our sin and walking in His light. At the Last Supper, Jesus said, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

Theoretically, this sounds easy, but realistically, the task is daunting. We are called to look for Jesus in everyone that we meet and to shine Jesus’ light everywhere we go. Small actions can have the largest impact. If you struggle to find Jesus in others, then you should be like Jesus. If you feel that division creeping in, reach out and promote unity. If we allow the love of Christ to unify us, then everything will be very good and pleasant.

Heavenly Father, Help us to recognize your love in the world and open our hearts and minds so that we may be unified in Christ. Amen.

Sarah Rodgers

Sunday, March 25, 2018

“Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.”

Psalm 150:6

Hear in the stillness the still silent voice,
The silent breathing that intertwines life.

Rabbi Arthur Waskow

Fairly often these days, I wake up in the middle of the night with a nagging worry. Did I ever let the dog in? I have to call the dentist. Did I look foolish yesterday?

To calm down and relax, I sometimes try to pay attention to my breathing, and with every exhale, I relax some part of my body. Breathe in, breathe out (relax my feet)... Breathe in, breathe out (relax my neck)... Before long, I forget whatever it was that bothered me, and I fell back asleep.

It always surprises me a bit, just how loud my breathing is. I mean, I do it all the time but never hear it unless I try to focus my attention on that simple act, on those muscles that constantly deliver new air to my lungs. It's really quite amazing.

In his meditation on an important Jewish prayer, Rabbi Arthur Waskow points out that the Hebrew word for “hear” (as in “Hear, O Israel”) is *shema!* And *shema* begins with SHH! If we're going to hear, we have to first be quiet, especially if we want to hear our breathing.

If we want to hear someone else breathing, we have to be really quiet. And the idea of hearing a deer, or a bear, or a skunk breathing is almost impossible to imagine. Yet all these animals have breath, and all are commanded to praise God.

But what about trees and other plants? Surely they breathe, too, but differently from us. When I'm hiking, I love to find a quiet spot and listen. I can't really hear the trees breathe, but I can imagine it. I feel my breath go out into the air and think of how all those green leaves absorb it and, with light, produce oxygen for me to breathe.

I imagine that rivers, lakes and oceans also breathe – even the rocks interact with the air all around them, and so, almost silently, all Creation breathes and praises God.

O Lord of all, you call on everything that has breath to praise your name. We do so with voice and song, but help us also to be silent and hear the praises that arise to you from the whole of Creation. Amen

Jon Brockopp

Monday, March 26, 2018

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

Psalm 51: 10

I met Pastor and Lois Lynn years ago when they lived in DuBois and he was the pastor at my parent’s church. Maybe that was a coincidence. I was surprised when he transferred to Grace and they became members of my community. Coincidence? This time, I’m not sure. Then, this morning, I was at church for our regular Sunday morning Bible study and ran into Lois. Coincidence? I doubt it now. As we spoke, I told her about a recent experience I’d had, and she said it would be good for our Lenten Bible study and asked me to submit it. Coincidence? You decide.

The story I related to Lois was that I had been praying the passage above from Psalms for the past year or so. But, more recently, it has become the central theme of my daily prayers. What a wonderful pair of gifts those blessings would be: a clean heart and a right spirit! Imagine how happy you could be if your heart was clean and your spirit was right and aligned with God’s spirit. But, for many months, it was just a prayer I spoke, an unanswered prayer...or so I thought.

Each day, I get a daily Bible passage on my computer. The passage always gives insights or advice to follow. Sometimes the advice just hangs there unconnected to my life or my concerns. Then, on occasion, the connection is obvious. And, sometimes it is very obvious. One morning, about three weeks ago, I repeated my prayer as I prepared for work. When I sat down at my desk and opened the daily Bible passage, I saw it was from Ezekiel 36: 26, and it said, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” Now, read my prayer above and the first part of that passage. Coincidence?

People tell me God works in mysterious ways. But, we are naïve to think He doesn’t work in obvious ways at times. He loves us, protects us, guides us and sometimes “speaks” to us. While we may not consciously hear His words, we can hear Him speak to us through the Bible. Take time today to open your Bible and “listen” to God and hear what He has to tell you.

God, we too often listen with our ears instead of our hearts. Teach us today to open our hearts and hear what You have to tell us. Let us learn to trust you and help us live with hearts cleaned and spirits renewed. Amen.

Pat Knobloch

Tuesday, March 27, 2018

“This is the day the LORD has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

Psalm 118:24

Sometimes I get overwhelmed. More often, I become... mechanical--my spirit drags and my thoughts flatten, grayed out by too much focus on the routine challenges of daily life. I stop noticing much of anything.

For me, this verse is a crutch – a way I can knock on the door. I repeat it in song, humming, repeating the words mentally and audibly, until my mood begins to lift, and I can focus enough to practice gratitude, to find specific things I can be thankful for – for friends, for kind words from strangers, for fresh water from my tap, new roots extending from a cutting of a houseplant on my windowsill. It can feel mechanical for a while, but, like a dandelion through concrete, gratitude (even when it begins in effortful practice) cuts through my hardened heart and grows into awe.

We live in a miracle. Day after day, we nourish our bodies with food that springs forth from the soil (or has eaten what has sprung forth). Warmed by sun (and Son), they have unfolded, pushed forth, blossomed, and fruited.

Where will your heart rejoice today?

As I step forward into the day before me, may I seek evidence of God’s love and persistent creation in unexpected places. In practicing gratitude, may I find awe and wonder, and may I live in grateful response. Amen.

Cricket Hunter

Wednesday, March 28, 2018

“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life; shall I be afraid?”

Psalm 27:1

If the Lord is with me and guiding me, then I should feel the strength of the Lord behind me. So why do I doubt my ability to go forward and do the daily tasks before me? Why do I focus on my imperfections?

Sometimes fear stands as a stumbling block to moving ahead. I get in my own way. Sometimes fear and doubt is whispered to me in dark shadows as I move along during my day. The negative words stick like a cloud above my head and follow me around. I can't shake the cloud. I can't make the worry and doubt go away.

But there is strength and peace in Psalm 27:1. It's a reminder that the Lord is your strength when you can't find it within yourself. Just let go and let the Lord fill the void. Only He can.

Lord, help me to remember you are always there to guide and hold me up when I feel weak. Help me to feel your strength and light and may it transfer to me and shine outward to others. Amen.

Linda Schul

Thursday, March 29, 2018

“You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.”

Psalm 139: 5

There isn't much good to say about being “hemmed in” is there? In fact, it reminds me of the Cole Porter song “Don't Fence Me In.” A cowboy's song written in the forties, it is all about being free and able to go wherever the heart desires. “I can't look at hobbles and I can't stand fences,” the lyrics say.

But isn't there something good about being “hemmed in?” I think of the horse pasture on my aunt's farm as I was growing up. The fence allowed the horses to be safe and protected. They were able to graze freely, socialize with their companion horses and come in to the barn at the end of the day where they were offered more protection. The fences on my aunt's farm prevented them from wandering too far and getting into danger. I think those horses were happy with their limited, yet not restrictive freedom.

God offers us a similar type of freedom by hemming us in. It is not a fence that keeps us prisoners, but a corral of protection. Being hemmed in by God is God saying, “Do you really want to go there?” when you are tempted to wander outside of what God wants for you. Being hemmed in is you realizing your own limitations and allowing God to be in control. Being hemmed in is God letting you know a task ahead is not too difficult. God will hold your hand and lay that same hand upon you to get through a responsibility that seems insurmountable. God may not grant your heart's desire, but he will give you whatever you need to face all experiences with hope and trust in him. For me, being hemmed in offers comfort and security. God does not want to hobble us. He wants to help us.

Heavenly Father, thank you for hemming me in. Thank you for your protection. Thank you for your guidance when I am tempted. Thank you for your healing hand that offers me wholeness and peace. Amen

Lois Lynn

Friday, March 30, 2018

“I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD; I will remember your wonders of old.”

Psalm 77:11

Pondering upon this verse from the Book of Psalms brought to my mind this scripture from Matthew 25: *for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.*

In 2000, Alexandra “Alex” Scott, a four year old girl with cancer wanted to raise money to give to her doctors “to help other kids, like they helped me.” Her idea was a classic summertime childhood favorite for many: a lemonade stand. Alex and her brother raised \$2,000 that first year. Today, Alex’s Lemonade Stand Foundation is a national childhood cancer foundation dedicated to raising funds for research into new treatments and cures for all children battling cancer, which to date has raised \$150 million.

Inspired by Little Free Libraries, Jessica McClard received a \$250 community service grant from Thrivent Financial that she used to build a cupboard, which was placed in front of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, an ELCA congregation in Fayetteville, Arkansas. With that little cupboard, which she stocked with canned goods, toiletries, and paper goods, the Little Free Pantry movement began. People are encouraged to “take what you need; bring what you can.” These little cupboard pantries, now located throughout the United States, are not intended to replace traditional food pantries, but instead to serve as a gap filler. McClard hopes that her Little Free Pantry “helps someone who may be in a tight spot and to let them know they’re not alone.”

Throughout the year, opportunities at Grace abound to do small things that will become a great blessing to others: State College Food Bank, Centre County Women’s Resource Center, Blanket Sunday, Jared Box Project, Mitten Tree, Out in the Cold Centre County, PA inmates through Centre Peace, just to name a few.

During this Lenten journey of 2018, be mindful of the ministry of Jesus and model His example. Not every deed we do will result in a national foundation or movement, but be assured when we respond to God’s love, even a small thing can be a great blessing to others.

Gracious God, help me to recall the deeds of Jesus and respond to Your unconditional love by helping those in need. In His blessed name, Amen.

Deanne Armagost

Saturday, March 31, 2018

"O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me."

Psalm 30:2

I was hoping the surgeries I had to open my spinal column and free my spinal cord from stenosis would have given me more mobility than I presently have. The surgeries certainly have kept me walking, but I was hoping for more. "Oh God I cried to you for help, and you have healed me."

I did not experience the physical healing that I was hoping for. Many of you have similar experiences. Perhaps you are not totally healed from a surgery, or from an accident, or from grief, or from some kind of pain. What about that?

Don't give up! Never give up! Adjust, but never give up. There is always hope with Jesus. I still pray every day for more healing, more mobility. I still hope for that. But in the recesses of my mind, I know that may never happen. It may never happen HERE. I may die with no more strength in my legs that I have now, and probably even less, as I age.

But when I run and skip and dance through the gates of heaven, then I can pray, "Oh Lord, I cried to you for help, and you healed me." I will be healed, either in this life, or the next. So will you!

Even though we feel Jesus' death so strongly now, on this Holy Saturday, just wait for a few more hours; because, psst-Jesus is alive!! He is! And because He is, that means you and I will be healed.

Thanks be to God. See you tomorrow.

Dear God, Help us to have hope for healing while we are here and help us know that ultimately we – and all of creation – will be healed and made whole when you take us all home unto yourself. Amen

Pastor Lynn

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Organizing Your Devotional Time

Just as there is no one way to prayer, there is no one way to make use of this devotional book. Some will choose to meditate on a devotional each day, at a set hour. Others will read more than one devotional at a time. Still others will combine these reflections with other discipleship practices. All of those approaches are valid and worthwhile. Do what works best for you.

One suggested format is as follows:

1. Pray the Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

2. Recite the Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Amen.

3. Read the Devotional

4. Conclude with either Luther's Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer

Morning Prayer: I give thanks to you, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son, that you have protected me through the night from all harm and danger. I ask that you would also protect me today from sin and all evil, so that my life and actions may please you. Into your hands I commend myself: my body, my soul, and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Evening Prayer: I give thanks to you, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son, that you have graciously protected me today. I ask you to forgive me all my sins, where I have done wrong, and graciously to protect me tonight. Into your hands I commend myself: my body, my soul, and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.