

Let My Prayer Rise Before You

2020 Lenten Devotional



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

205 S. Garner St., State College PA 16803

www.glcpa.org

Lent 2020

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. Lent is a penitential season of forty days (not counting Sundays), designed to prepare us for the joys of Easter. Grace will offer extra worship opportunities during Lent. Our schedule will be as follows:

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 worshippers the opportunity to attend weekday worship without nighttime travel.

6:30 p.m. Wednesday Lenten Prayer

This mid-week evening service is designed around the Church's traditional practices of evening prayer but includes materials for the inclusion of families and children. It is an inspiring and accessible 50-minute worship experience.

WEDNESDAY LENTEN WORSHIP: "The Heart Renewed"

Featuring Holden Evening Prayer

February 26 - Ash Wednesday- Worship 12:15 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.

March 4 - Worship at 12:15 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.

March 11 – Worship at 12:15 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.

March 18 – Worship at 12:15 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.

March 25 – Worship at 12:15 p.m.; Ecumenical Concert 7:00p.m.

April 1 – Worship at 12:15 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.

April 8 – Worship at 12:15 p.m. and An Evening of Renewing the Heart 6:30 p.m.

WEDNESDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDIES (11:00 a.m.)

February 26 - Lectionary Study

March 4 – Lectionary Study

March 11 – Lectionary Study

March 18 – Lectionary Study

March 25 – Lectionary Study

April 1 – Lectionary Study

April 8 – Lectionary Study

The Rev Scott E. Schul Senior Pastor
The Rev. Carolyn K. Hetrick Pastor

Welcome!

Welcome to the 2020 Grace Lutheran member-written Lenten devotional. This year our devotions center around the prayer petitions found in the Morning Prayer service in our Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW) hymnal, in four themes of thanksgiving and four themes of petitioning God:

Mighty God of mercy, we thank you for...
The sustaining goodness of creation...
The gifts of healing and forgiveness...
The gifts of relationship with others...
The communion of faith in your church...

Merciful God of might, we pray for...
Peace and harmony...
Places of strife and warfare...
The hurts of your children...
The church of Jesus Christ in every land...

Our devotional writers chose a Scripture prompt to reflect upon an experience of God in one of these ways and wrote a prayer to accompany it. May these devotions add to your preparation for Easter as you contemplate the life, death and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Thank you to every contributor who helped make this devotional a reality.

Pastor Hetrick

Thank you from Congregational Care Coordinator

Many thanks to all who wrote devotionals! Your individual contributions truly made this a project of the body of Grace Lutheran Church. We exceeded our goal of 40 devotionals, and received 43, so bonus devotionals are included.

So many heart-felt messages have been shared. I'm continually impressed by this very caring and loving congregation.

May these devotionals add to your preparation for Easter as you contemplate the life, death, and resurrection of our savior, Jesus Christ.

Sally Horn, Coordinator, Congregational Care

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.

Ash Wednesday, February 26, 2020

Goodness of Creation

Psalm 8:3-4: When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

Several years ago, on a hiking trip in the Southwest we stayed in Monument Valley, the Dine' (Navajo) Tribal Park. Just past the balcony of our room lay the vast expanse of the desert with stunning buttes formed 270 million years ago. Ice Age Paleo-Indian hunters occupied the area between 12,000 and 6,000 BC. The Dine' have lived there for 500 years.

Because of the lack of light pollution, Monument Valley is one of the few remaining locations in all of the United States and Europe with naturally dark skies. The only trick was getting up at 2:30 am for the best view. Was I ever rewarded! There from my balcony I saw more stars than my eyes could take in among the full arc of the Milky Way. I pondered the many sacred ancestral spaces there among the desert formations. I joined every other person across all of those years who stood and looked up at this marvel with the awe of which the psalmist sings. How many, like me, wondered about the Creator of such exquisite beauty and their tiny place in it all? I was transfixed by the lyrical image of One so powerful a mere fingertip traced these stars and formed all of life. In the presence of such vaunted glory, who, really, are we humans?

Even more so, who is this God who can literally move mountains, and yet fully embraces each of us with a love so tender it too is beyond compare? One who pronounced all of creation good, with everything arranged for abundance for all, clearly creating the goodness of creation for joy and out of love. This same God asks us in our thanksgiving to treat creation as holy and revered. What a gift and grace to be included in such a majestic vision!

Prayer:

To you before the close of day, Creator of the world we pray. Your grace and peace to us allow and be our guard and keeper now. A healthy life we ask of you, the fire of love in us renew, and when the dawn new light will bring, your praise and glory we shall sing. Amen.

Pastor Carolyn Hetrick

February 27, 2020 – **Goodness of Creation**

*Psalm 66:5: Come and see what God has done:
he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.*

How often do we really look at the beauty that surrounds us? As an early riser, I would often see the sun rise, but on my way to work would never really appreciate what I was seeing. In the fall I would see the early morning fog falling over the valley and in winter, would see the silvery world after a snowstorm. In spring, the blossoming trees were lovely, but they were the background of my very busy life.

Then came summer vacation. I had time to watch my garden grow; to see the perfect flowers, the butterflies collecting nectar, and the honeybees as they went about their daily business. I was amazed at the complicated way that nature works together to produce the beauty of the earth. I began to appreciate sunrises and sunsets and seasonal differences and feel grateful for the beauty that surrounds us.

Prayer:

Oh God, when the world seems so dark and angry, help us to focus on the true beauty that You have given to us. Help us to remember that You are the source of all these good things. Amen.

Joann McCormick

February 28, 2020 - **Healing and Forgiveness**

Growing up in my denomination, at every Sunday morning worship, we recited the Ten Commandments, apparently to remind us of what sin is and how we should live our lives. This had a great effect on me. I tried my best to live according to those commandments so that I could be a good person. But in doing so, the guilt I felt when I did break a commandment weighed heavy on me. *“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer” (Psalm 32:4).*

When I became seriously ill for the first time in my life I went into a tailspin. What had I done wrong? Was God punishing me? I studied the scriptures even harder trying to find answers. I talked with people about my illness, but I couldn't tell them the guilt that I was feeling. I prayed constantly for healing. In my search for understanding what finally jumped out at me was *2nd Corinthians 12:9* *“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”* I fell on my knees and prayed everything I was feeling about the guilt and the worry.

A simple voice in my head said, “It is going to be okay.” and I was at peace. God's grace was enough! God was with me no matter what. Eventually, by way of surgery, I was healed, and I never forgot that moment of grace. *“Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.” (Psalm 32:1-2)*

I have found following the Ten Commandments in spirit makes life less complicated, but when I fail, I always turn to God and ask for his forgiveness. His grace is always there, showing me His love and showing me what love is.

Prayer:

Father in Heaven, Holy is your name, Almighty is your power, Glorious are your works, Everlasting is your love, and Gracious is your mercy! Please forgive my sins and let your grace guide me through this life and all the blessings you give with it. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Phyllis Verderame

February 29, 2020

Gift of Relationship

Ecclesiastes 4:9-11: Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone?

Prayer:

Dear God, helps us to appreciate our friends and everything they do for us. Allow us to strengthen our relationships through Jesus. Thank you for leading us to our friends and closer to you. Amen.

Amy Shearer, Lydia Peters, & Maeve Flanagan

March 2, 2020 - **Communion of Faith**

Matthew 18:20: For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.

When a request to participate in the writing of this year's Lenten Devotionals was announced, we hesitated. We had just become members of this congregation, and thought we needed more time to learn about the workings of the Lutheran Church. Writing a daily devotional message wasn't exactly one of the first things on our list of church duties we thought we should do. Despite our apprehension we volunteered to participate in this ministry.

As it says in Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three are gathered in my name" Together we are two. How hard can it be to write from our hearts and share our thoughts and prayers with our new friends at Grace? Since becoming a member, we feel like a child on Christmas morning as the wonder of Grace Ministries continues to unfold in our daily lives. Grace is such a gift, a community built on faith, trust, and fellowship.

When we were married, Betsy was Roman Catholic and we agreed to marry in the Roman Catholic Church and agreed to raise our children in the Catholic Faith. There was never a question as to whether our prayers could be heard by God no matter where we were worshipping, and we did that together as often as our daily lives allowed. As the years moved along our worshipping together became less frequent. We became distracted from the weekly routine of attending Sunday mass.

As time passed our lives lead us to renewed friendships. When we think about it now, it was more of God's way of bringing old friends back into our lives at a time when we needed those friends the most. We get together, we travel together and eventually and thankfully we began to worship together. Our blessing is that they brought us to Grace. Together we worship; the two became four, and four became a wonderful congregation and in the midst of all...God is among us.

Prayer: *Mighty God of mercy, we thank you for the communion of faith that you have provided for us. Through your infinite wisdom and love, we pray that you will give us the strength to do thy will each day as we walk in the steps of your son, Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen.*

Dave and Betsy Will

March 3, 2020 - **Peace**

Philippians 4:4-9: Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Paul tells us “the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Peace! Where is this peace of which Paul speaks? I grew up during World War II to the sound of air raid sirens, darkened window coverings, and fear of a man named Hitler. Many years later I watched my beloved son being shipped out to Kuwait to fight in the first of the Persian Gulf Wars over oil rights.

The world’s people seem unable to live at peace with each other. The news overflows with conflicts in the Middle East, mass shootings in our own country as well as elsewhere, our own government officials treating each other with disdain and disrespect.

Where, then, do we find this peace of which Paul speaks? I believe that we find it by living “at the foot of the cross.” Paul tells us to “rejoice in the Lord always.” He reminds us that “the Lord is near.” But - the words that really speak to me from this passage are “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

God is there in the form of the one who created and loves us. God is there in the form of Jesus, who taught us how to live and then, in pure love for us, submitted to death on the cross. Living at the foot of the cross, then, includes praise, prayer, and trust. It means praising God, engaging in a rich prayer life, and trusting God to guide us.

Paul concludes with, “Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things you have learned and received and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Prayer:

Praise to you, creator God, savior God, God in whom we put our trust. May the peace of this world begin with each of us. Teach us how to live in peace and love. Amen

Nancy Reinert

March 4, 2020 – **Peace**

Matthew 5:9:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

How wonderful it is to wake up each morning waiting for another day to unfold. We hope that our day will be a fulfilling one, free of disagreements and free of discord with our family, friends, colleagues, and people that we will have contact with during our day.

We want to smile. We want to do the right thing. We want to say the right thing. We want to be kind and thoughtful. Sometimes that can be challenging, especially if things aren't going so well with our day.

We all lead busy lives every day, full of family commitments, responsibilities at home and in the workplace, as well as extracurricular activities. Living life can be busy. Living life can be messy. Living life can be perplexing.

Each morning I say this prayer: *“Dear Jesus, please help me to keep you in my thoughts, and in my words, and in my deeds. Amen.”* Some days I think I'm doing okay with my supplication, other days, not so much.

Often times it's difficult to “keep the peace” in our thoughts, words, and deeds. We fail at being a peacemaker.

Sometimes it's difficult to “keep the peace” with our thoughts. We think a “not so kind” thought.

Sometimes it's difficult to “keep the peace” with our spoken words. We say something that is “not so kind”.

Sometimes it's difficult to “keep the peace” with our deeds. We do something that is “not so kind”.

We are subject to human frailties. We fail at being the person that God wants us to be. He wants us to maintain peace where it exists and to strive to restore peace where it does not exist.

As we carry on through our day, wouldn't it be wonderful to keep only kind thoughts within our minds? As we carry on through our day wouldn't it be wonderful to speak only kind words? As we carry on through our day, wouldn't it be wonderful to perform only kind deeds?

Prayer:

Jesus, please help me to keep you in my thoughts, and in my words, and in my deeds. Please lead me in your way as I go forward today. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Susan DeMetrick

March 5, 2020 - **Hurts of Your Children**

Revelation 21:4: He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.

I first experienced death when my grandparents passed away when I was about 8 years old. The day I found out, my mother sat my sister and I down and gave us the news as soon as we came home from school. It came as quite a shock. Now, a part of me had known this would happen. I knew that since my grandparents were getting older, one day they would pass away. But when the moment came, I was completely taken aback. At first all I felt was shock; I didn't fully comprehend what had happened. Then, later in the day, I wept bitterly. I had realized the magnitude of the situation: My grandparents were gone. GONE. I would never see them on this earth again. I could no longer talk to my grandfather about his time in the marines or hear my grandmother's beautiful voice. And from day one, I missed them so much. It really is true what they say: you never know what you have until it's gone.

I was a changed kid after that day. I thought about death and finality more often, and it left me feeling empty inside. But it was in church that I found a source of healing. On All Saint's Sunday that year, the pastor said my grandparents' names and rang a bell to signify that they had passed into God's hands. Hearing the bell toll calmed me. It was as if God had touched my heart and told me all was well. It reminded me that my grandparents were not truly gone; they were with God in the spirit. I look forward to the day when I will be reunited with my grandparents alongside Jesus in heaven. And I look forward even more to the day when "Death will be no more" as foretold in the Revelation. Until then, when I miss my grandparents, I try to remember that through Christ, they're never really gone. As Jesus put it, "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (NRSV, Matthew 22:33).

Prayer:

Lord of the living, comfort us, your children, when the pain of death and loss put us into the house of mourning. May we remember that you sent your only son to conquer the grave, and that one day Jesus shall return and death will be no more. In his name we pray, Amen.

John Hall

March 6, 2020 - **Strife and Conflict**

The age-old question that often troubles believers is “What must I do to be a child of God?” The problem is we continually mistake the real question. The question should be “Since I already am a child of God, what should I do?”

This same question was one the children of Israel had resulting in the 10 Commandments, a perfect guide for life as the chosen children of God. They too misunderstood the question as they continually struggled attempting to earn a position they already held.

As much as we Lutherans constantly hear Luther’s (and first Paul’s) wonderful promise that we are saved by Grace through Faith and not by Works, we too often still believe we must earn God’s favor in an attempt to be his children that we already are.

Two excellent Bible passages lay the perfect groundwork for an answer to our question “What is expected of me as a faithful child of God?”

Micah 6:8 - ⁸ He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

John 6:28-29 - ²⁸Then they said to him, ‘What must we do to perform the works of God?’ ²⁹Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.’

In the Micah passage we see 3 major points for our expected behavior as God’s children, doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God. These are seemingly such simple requirements but extremely so difficult to constantly incorporate in our world.

In the passage from John we find Jesus himself responding to the question directly. Rather than a typical Jesus reply that often incorporates a parable or some major teaching moment, he responds with a simple command, “Believe in him whom he has sent”. While his questioners probably expected a list of commandments and lofty obligations Jesus quite simply says have faith! Wow! Suddenly Paul and Luther’s theology seems so spot on!

Prayer:

Dear Lord, help us to strive to be the child you desire us to be. Help us to always work for justice in the world, looking out for the marginalized and those who have no voice for themselves. Help us to always be kind in everything we do. Help us to always be humble. Most importantly, strengthen our faith. Amen

Don Widener

March 7, 2020 – **This Holy House**

Ephesians 2:19-22: So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²² in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Paul was able to discuss the thought of Jesus Christ as the cornerstone of God's house while locked in a cell in Rome. He was not able to be with his congregation but continued as God spoke within him. Through Paul, God reminds us that faith is not based on how your butt is placed in a pew, but that your pew is wherever you find Grace and can speak with the Lord.

Passionate gardeners understand some of this philosophy; we may choose to garden on a Sunday morning, rather than attend church-in-the-pew. This all came to mind a few weeks ago when Pastor Schul was discussing the religiosity of the garden experience, during his series on Emily Dickinson. I find God bursting forth in some of her poetry:

*It's All I Have To Bring To-Day,
This, and my heart beside,
This, and my heart, and all the fields,
And all the meadows wide.*

*Be sure you count, should I forget, --
Someone the sum could tell, --
This, and my heart, and all the bees
Which in the clover dwell.*

Imagine how it was for Jesus, as a young man, finding his way into and around the church with its doctrines of the day. Through the growth that was to come, he pruned and weeded, sowed and reaped, and even espaliered. He became the cornerstone of God's house on the solid ground of his apostles and prophets, carrying us all on his shoulders.

Prayer: *Let us pray: Heavenly Father, please, help us to share with all people our passion for Christ, no matter where we might be; remind us to support the church through worship and giving; and encourage us to reach out and bring others into God's household. Amen*

Barbara Vogler

March 9, 2020 - **Goodness of Creation**

Genesis 1:31: God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

On the sixth day of creation, God looked upon the world and saw it as perfect. How do we look upon the world we live in as imperfect people and know that despite everything we do; we will never be perfect? As a meteorologist and a lifelong perfectionist, this is a daily battle. If I want to make a perfect forecast for one location, I could spend hours studying the data and looking over all the variables. Even if I make a perfect forecast, the best I can ever do is tie the weather. With mounting pressure on everyone these days to perform at work, in various relationships, and at everything we do; does God really expect us to be perfect at everything in order to enter heaven. The short answer is no, God does not expect us to be perfect at all and we don't have to try. When God created man, it was known that we were not going to be perfect and that we were going to sin and fall short.

As humans living in the 21st century, the pressure in everything we do is all around us. Everyone wants to have the perfect family, be perfect at their job, have the perfect relationships, but are we really trying to be perfect in our relationship with God. Are we going to church regularly, praying, reading the bible, spreading God's word throughout the world? I assume many would answer no to many of these questions.

As you can see, it would be very hard to be perfect at all these things, let alone just be perfect Christians. Therefore, when you are feeling the pressure to be perfect at something, my hope for you is to know that regardless of the outcome, you are perfect in God's eyes. Even when you fail, God still sees you as perfect. You were perfect before you were even created, and you will be perfect even after you die and enter the kingdom of heaven. When you feel stressed, take a breath and rest assured, God is always on your side and regardless of the outcome God sees you as absolutely perfect.

Prayer:

Dear God, please help us to know that despite our failures and our attempts to be perfect that we are perfect in your sight. Please ease our burdens and our stresses and comfort us in our times of need. Amen.

Alyson Hoegg

March 10, 2020

Goodness of Creation

Isaiah 40:26: Lift up your eyes on high and see:

Who created these?

*He who brings out their host and numbers them,
calling them all by name;*

because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing.

Prayer:

Dear God, please help those who are trying to find themselves in you. Give them the strength to find you for you created every part of us. Amen.

Alexis Weyandt, Katy Fritz, & TJ Nelson

March 11, 2020 - **Healing and Forgiveness**

Matthew 4:23-24: Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them.

The past year has been challenging for my family. I suspect others in our church family are facing the same challenges. The effects of dementia and poor mobility have placed our wife and mother in assisted living. With each visit it feels that we are saying that long good-bye. On a good day we can talk a little, other days can be silent. On those days I hold her hand and she will give a bit of a squeeze to say I love you. On a good day she will respond to my "I love you" with "I love you more", that's a really good day.

I have often asked God why do bad things happen to good people. I suspect he gets that question a lot. God is great, God is good, why do the innocent suffer? God has been silent, but I have seen him in the goodness of physicians, care givers, other dementia sufferers, family and friends. Their goodness is a big help in facing the darkness of dementia. I don't believe this goodness can be explained outside of a God who loves us and blesses us with his grace.

I believe that someday God will make the darkness bright and the innocent will be set free. I wonder if this is what the cross of Christ is all about. I recall an old sermon which concludes that perhaps God took upon himself our sinful lives and the blame for having created a world where things can go wrong. The resurrection is God declaring that eventually things will go right.... pain and illness will disappear.

May God grace us with the strength to face the dark parts of our lives and also allow us to experience the bright goodness in this world.

Writing for my wife, from the Alzheimer's patient Prayer:

Pray for me, I was once like you.

Be kind and loving to me, that's how I would have treated you.

Remember, I was once someone's parent or spouse.

I had a life and a dream for the future.

Be considerate of me, my days are such a struggle.

Think of my feelings because I still have them and can feel pain.

Treat me with respect because I would have treated you that way.

Keep me in your prayers because I am between life and death.

The love you give will be a blessing from God and both of us will live forever.

Have a really good day. God loves you more.

Herman Herrington

March 12, 2020 - **Gift of Relationship** - The Value of Community

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10: Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help.

Sixteen years ago, when we purchased our home in State College, Mel Rockey, Grace member and our realtor, extolled the virtues of the small pond in back of the house. It was full of goldfish, had a small waterfall, and a stone bridge across the center. Steve initially told Mel that a pond was not a selling point. In fact, he said he would probably fill it in.

Fast forward to 2019. The pond remains. In fact, it has provided us much pleasure. Watching the fish and hearing the gentle waterfall has provided relaxation and entertainment. The fish became our pets.

The downside of the pond; however, is worrying about the fish over the winter months, when the pond freezes over. They become dormant and look dead. In fact, some of them do die. During the winter of 2019, we lost our last fish. When we buried him in the back yard in March, Steve and I discussed buying new fish. We decided to wait until the warm summer months.

Sometime in May, two fish mysteriously appeared. Did someone add these two fish to our pond? After all, we never saw any fish for three months. These two fish would be there and then would disappear for weeks. They never stayed in the open for long. We surmised they were hiding under rocks. When our pond man added 8 fish in June, he made fun of us. "There are no fish in your pond," he said. "I think you two are seeing things."

Shortly after he added the new fish, the two fish who had been hiding, suddenly reappeared. Ever since then, they have stayed in view. I think what caused them to reappear was community. They no longer hid under rocks. They had the community of other fish. Life was better when there were others to share that life with.

Isn't that true for us? We are better when we are not alone. We are happier when we live in community. We share that community at Grace Lutheran. We worship together, laugh together, cry together, play together, eat together, and work together. Thank God for community. It works for all of God's creatures.

Prayer:

Thank you, God, for the companionship of others. Amen

Lois Lynn

March 13, 2020 - **Communion of Faith**

Matthew 18:20:

*For where two or three are gathered in my name,
I am there among them.*

Prayer:

*Dear God, be with us as we gather together today. Remind us that you are
always present with us. Give us strength to bring others into our fellowship.
Amen.*

Mara Anderson-Skelly & Jacob Fritz

March 14, 2020 - **Peace**

*Isaiah 26:3: Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace —
in peace because they trust in you.*

Praying for peace should be an important part of our daily prayers. During our daily lives we are presented with many issues, most of which are minor and have minimal consequence. We usually handle these ourselves using our past experiences and I tend not to resort to prayers for minor issues. I don't want to "bother God" with my minor problems although I know that He is always with me and guiding me. We need to put everything into perspective. Our daily prayers should not only ask God for help, but also thank him for every day that we are able to wake up and get out of bed. We should not be complaining about the rain, snow, clouds, wind, cold weather, or daily personal issues. The rain and snow, although an inconvenience sometimes, provide us drinking water and water for our homes, farms, and gardens. The cold and warm days are part of the seasons that God created for us. Personal issues often resolve themselves or after we think about them, they were not really important after all. So, how and what should we be praying for?

The Book of Wisdom, *2 Chronicles 1:11* provides some guidance:

Then God said to Solomon: God answered Solomon, "Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked for possessions, wealth, honor, or the life of those who hate you, and have not even asked for long life, but have asked for wisdom and knowledge for yourself that you may rule my people over whom I have made you king,"

Prayers for wisdom can help us get through our daily trials and tribulations and more serious issues. Sometimes we are presented with major unexpected problems that could impact the lives of ourselves, friends, or relatives. We may need additional guidance on how to handle these problems.

A priest, who is a friend of mine, gave a sermon one Sunday and ended with these words. I always remembered them and have often said this prayer when I need additional guidance.

Here is a very simple, short, concise, and powerful prayer that we can use to guide us every day.

"Jesus, I place my trust in you"

Greg DeMetrick

March 16, 2020 - **Hurts of Your Children**

2nd Corinthians 1:3-5: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.

My brother, Steve, was eight years older than me. In 1957, he was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Disease, cancer of the lymph system, a terminal illness at the time. The prognosis was that he would live no more than three years. This sentence obviously changed his perspective on life. He turned to Christ more than he had in the past. Reading the Bible a couple of times every day was a necessity for him, to look for answers to questions he had as a 13-year old. He had his anger moments, weariness through spinal taps and chemotherapy and his moments at peace. He planned for the future anyway, in hopes that he could beat the prognosis. He stretched the three years to eight years. His specialist began testing terminally ill patients to see how they were dealing with their illnesses. He credited Steve's faith and resolve with extending his life that long. He died in January 1965.

I was not aware that his illness was terminal, as my parents didn't want to create an atmosphere of pity or pessimism at home. We young ones were shielded from the reality of the situation. I got the call from my mother saying he had passed away and spent the next few days in a fog trying to come to grips with it. Future conversations and my father's writings about Steve's life helped me see what he endured and how he handled it. His last words to my mother were, "Happy Birthday." She asked, "To whom?" He said, "To everyone." At that moment, he passed away. He had placed his trust in Christ and God and knew where he was going.

I have read my father's account of Steve's life several times as I have gone through life. My actions and thoughts have been influenced by how Steve dealt with the pain, hopelessness and disappointments by turning to God for comfort and compassion and healing. He passed the comfort he received to me and to many others. Of particular note was his effect on my parents and their ability to be at peace with his passing. I thank God for Steve's part in my life!

Prayer: *Dear God, help us all to look at troubles and losses in our lives as opportunities to search for you and ask you for help. Help us to see a loved one's passing as a time to focus on what that person's existence has meant to our lives and how they helped us get to where we are now. Amen*

Tom Horn

March 17, 2020 - **Strife and Conflict**

While the book of James isn't one of the more popular books in the Lutheran tradition — Martin Luther called it an “epistle of straw” — it is one that I have found quite meaningful. It provides some wonderful words about living out our faith, including the words from *James 1:19-20*: “... *let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness.*”

Much of my career has been about listening, whether as a journalist listening to the people I interview or as a seminary student listening to professors or to members of churches I have attended and preached at during the past few years. It's all about being present with someone and listening to them.

Too often today strife and conflict arise when we don't take time to listen to those who differ from our opinions and our ideas. We can be quick to speak our own thoughts and quick to let our anger take hold of us against others. We will likely see plenty of examples of that happening this year from all sides with a presidential election just a few months away.

But where some may take part in today's “cancel culture” or hit social media and want to show the worst in “the other side,” James's words — and, most importantly, Jesus's example — show us another way. It's a way that doesn't mean to *not* be angry or to *not* speak up against the wrongs in this world, but it is a way to do so with love.

When we think about it, God gave us two ears and just one mouth for a reason! We should always be listening (or reading if our communication is on our smartphones and computers) to others so we can hear their stories, their pains, their struggles, their fears. It's only after doing that can we speak out of love and compassion — not anger — for our neighbors, for our fellow children of God.

Prayer:

Christ, our savior, help us to produce Your righteousness on Earth by giving us the courage to be quick listeners to each other and to allow Your words of love to come out of us when we speak. Let these prayers rise up before You. Amen.

David Pencek

March 18, 2020 - **Goodness of Creation**

Mighty God of mercy, we thank you for...the sustaining goodness of creation.

Psalm 104:10-13: You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst. By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches. From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

In an effort to be more grateful, I have been more conscious of including more thank you in my evening prayer. I think back through the day and list all for which I was grateful. In Psalm 104:10-13, the psalmist is showing gratitude for water bursting forth from the ground in springs. The springs are life-giving; providing nutrients and sustaining life on earth.

I also am grateful for water gushing forth from the earth. When I was studying and working in aquatic ecology and sampling many rivers and streams, I became familiar with the incredible world living hidden beneath the surface of area streams and rivers. It is teeming with life! I enjoyed learning about the diversity of God's creatures and how they interacted and fit together. In this fascinating ecosystem God created, each creature depends on another and on the resources provided in that life-giving water. However, I also have seen times when these ecosystems were out of balance. For example, if a stream is affected by excess nutrient levels, then plant populations (like algae) overpopulate and use up too much oxygen in the stream, creating life-threatening low oxygen conditions for insects and fish that end up leaving or dying. The whole ecosystem and interactions then change, and important functions or links of the chain are missing.

I learned through my experiences about the importance of balance to an ecosystem. In a balanced ecosystem each creature has enough of what it needs, and populations are healthy. Jesus teaches us about loving and caring for our neighbors by making sure everyone has enough of what they need. Possibly loving our neighbor in this way will result in a healthier community for all of us to live. As we go through Lent, we might consider reflecting on balance and how we might find balance in ourselves, our lives, and in our communities by looking to God, the One who created balance.

Prayer: *Dear God, I am grateful to be able to get closer to you and to learn about this world through your creation. I am grateful for life-giving springs. You are like those life-giving springs. Please help me to come to you for balance in my life and learn through your examples how to care and live with others in harmony. Amen.*

Susan Buda

March 19, 2020

Goodness of Creation

*"Our father in heaven,
Guide your children throughout this Lenten season. Calm the rushing
waters that perverse our lives. Be the light in the darkness, and the ever-
broadening shield to protect us. Like you guided Moses across the sea, we
follow your guiding and teachings. Prompt us for each day, and all that
each day entails. As the sun rises in the east, and sets in the west, so too
shall your love be.*

*And all God's people said,
Amen."*

Andrew Rosenswie

March 20, 2020 - **Healing and Forgiveness**

Psalm 107: 19-22 Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress; he sent out his word and healed them and delivered them from destruction. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind. And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices and tell of his deeds with songs of joy.

“You’re in trouble!” From a very young age, we learn to fear those words. Most of us attempt to follow the rules so that we can stay out of trouble. But despite our best efforts, we all wind up in trouble at some point in our lives. Who do you rely upon when you need to be saved from destruction? Many of us would list family members, friends, members of our church family, and our community. How far up the list would you place God? Many of us frequently utter the knee-jerk reaction “OMG,” so why don’t we turn to the Lord first? In our culture of immediate gratification and searching for a quick fix, it’s not surprising that we don’t cry first to our Father in Heaven. Exactly how far away is Heaven and how long would it take for our help to arrive? Verse 20 says, “he sent out his word...” Perhaps when we’re reaching out to others for help, we are really calling upon the Holy Spirit to move within them. I believe that “his word” can take countless forms in our lives. It’s comforting to think about the Holy Spirit empowering us to answer the distressed calls of those on the brink of destruction. The second half of this reading juxtaposes trouble, distress, and destruction against love, thanksgiving sacrifices, and songs of joy. Verses 21 and 22 completely change the tone of the reading. God doesn’t ask us to pay Him back for the help that he provides us. Instead, we’re charged with the mission to share the good news and pay it forward. We can embody the work of the Holy Spirit by listening for troubled calls and saving others from distress. Perhaps one of the best ways that we can truly fulfill this call is to seek out trouble. Representative John Lewis recently said, “You must...get in the way and get in good trouble, necessary trouble... You have a moral obligation, a mission and a mandate... to go out and seek justice for all.” I believe these wise words beautifully connect to this reading from Psalms. God calls us to follow the command of the Holy Spirit by not just saving those in distress, but also actively seeking out good trouble so that we can offer our efforts as a sacrifice of thanksgiving while striving to thank the Lord for his steadfast love by showing that love to all humankind.

Prayer:

Dear God, in this world of uncertainty and divisiveness, urge us to strain our ears for the distressed cries of those around us. Empower us to extend a helping hand as a sign of your steadfast love. Guide us to seek out good trouble as we strive to embody your love in the world. In Jesus’s name we pray. Amen.

Sarah Rodgers

March 21, 2020 - **Gift of Relationship**

1st John 4:9-15: God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God.

Prayer:

Dear God, help us to find your love in the world around us. Even when we cannot see you, show us your spirit through the people we meet and their acts of kindness. Inspire us to share the generous love of your sacrifice with one another. Amen.

Joe Peters, Betsy Hunter, & Lydia Barber

March 23, 2020 – Communion of Faith

I recently experienced a devastating loss in my life. This loss was far greater than I have ever experienced or even comprehended. There was not possibility of reversing this loss, and I would have to experience this emotion the rest of my life. What were my choices? I could only envision the pain of this loss for rest of my life.

I have been a Christian all of my life and have remained active by attending church off and on for all of these years. I have been exposed to God through Christianity via Lutheran theology to varying degrees throughout this period of “ups and downs” typical of a middle class American. I always felt my faith was “adequate” as I sailed through life with the usual adversity. Now this has all changed!

During the past nine months, my outlook on life has changed completely. I feel much more “alone.” The warmth and compassion that I shared every day with my companion is gone. The world around me seems much colder. As I go about essential everyday living my environment seems very “mechanical.”

My world seems changed catastrophically. But then I realized that it was me and my altered outlook on life without my companion that had changed. I couldn't live the rest of my life in this manner.

For the first time in my life I was forced to turn to my faith in the God that I had kept at a distance all this time. What was my faith like now that I needed the help of God? I hoped that my faith would help me through this. In reality I knew that I had no alternative but to seek the God that I held at a distance through my life – not a truly noble response to my question of faith!

As I went through this experience during the passing weeks, I felt a greater relationship and strengthening of my faith that God would assist me if I allowed. This helped me realize that I needed to allow other people a greater role in my life. I have begun to seek an increased role of relationships with others – friends and family – in my everyday life. Grace Lutheran Church has played a role in this process. The combination of my welcoming others and the extent to which other parishioners have extended their warmth has greatly helped in my effort to develop a life without severe emotional pain. I feel that my acceptance of God's help in this process and the willingness of others to help, give me greater hope for the future where I can still feel love for my companion without desperation. The future remains in the hands of God and my acceptance of this assistance with regular prayer.

Tom Drake

March 24, 2020 - **Peace**

Colossians 3:12-15: As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

Throughout my life, I always had a plan: for each workday, evening, weekend, and vacation. I became annoyed if my actions weren't leading toward measurable results. Yet while focusing on planning, accomplishing, and measuring, I too often overlooked the purpose: caring for others.

When I was young, unclear paths made me uncomfortable. (It's hard to prepare for opportunities and challenges without knowing where a path is leading or what will happen next.) As I age, I reflect more on God's intent for my life and less on where I'm headed. Slowing down to listen to people's joys, fears, and needs reinforces my belief that the only thing that matters is loving all of God's people.

Learning to walk where there is no clear path is re-routing my energy and helping me to develop more compassion, kindness, gentleness, and patience. (I still have far to go!) When I walk on the rainbow of love instead of searching for a yellow brick road, my walk is peace-filled, and I can more easily see Christ's light in others.

Prayer:

Lord: Help me to look for Jesus in everyone I meet; be willing to help carry their burdens; and to do so joyfully. Amen.

Laurel Sanders

March 25, 2020 - **Hurts of Your Children**

*Isaiah 12:2. Surely God is my salvation;
I will trust, and will not be afraid,
for the Lord God is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.*

Church and God have always meant a lot to me. Recently, I've struggled with anxiety and depression and I've never feared talking to God about my worries and feelings. Whether it's praying every night while I lie in bed or asking for God's guidance during a class change at school, I've always found a feeling of safety when confiding in God. I have come to learn that nothing is too big to ask of God, he will listen no matter what. I trust that God hears me when I pray.

It's human to struggle with the question of "Where is God?" We've all had times in our lives where we've not been able to see God, but the truth is, he's there. I've struggled with questions like "Why does God allow bad things to happen?" and "Where is God when we need him most?" Something that sticks with me is what my mom always says: "Look for the helpers. That's where God is - in the helpers." Whenever something bad happens in your life, I challenge you to look for the helpers. I know I find God in my parents and my sister when I'm in a bad place. I find God in police officers, soldiers, and firemen and women. You'll find that the more you look for the helpers, the more you find them until you see God in everyone.

Prayer:

Saving God, help us to find trust in you and know you are always listening. Allow us to find you in the darkest times of our lives. Provide healing grace to all those who are struggling right now. Let us not be afraid to tell you anything and everything that is on our minds and in our hearts. Amen.

Mirabella Bills

March 26, 2020 - **Strife and Conflict**

Micah 4:3-4: He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

I walked into my little church in Iowa on June 12, 2016, not knowing what had happened in Orlando six hours before. I wasn't prepared for the announcements before the service, and I still remember the little slips of paper on coffee tables offering prayers for the victims at Pulse, the gay nightclub. There is no good way to hear such news, but I appreciate that instead of reading a headline in isolation, I learned of disaster amidst community that immediately lifted it up in prayer. God was there, among the grief, shock, fear, thoughts, prayers, and calls to action. The news and mass shootings have a complex relationship, and we can and should pray for places of strife and warfare that make headlines. However, we should also pray for places where strife and warfare are no longer "newsworthy" and the camera crew packs up. Haiti, ten years now after the devastating earthquake, is still rebuilding. Who have we forgotten when we only see what's in the spotlight?

In a world where the "swords" and "spears" make headlines, I am comforted that this scripture is prophetic, not merely metaphoric. It inspires the ministry of Raw Tools, who have visited State College to reforge guns into garden tools. It reverberates when weapons-grade uranium is diluted to produce life-giving power in reactors. And it rings out whenever we work towards a world of peace, where people coming to church will only have Good News to hear.

Prayer:

Merciful Lord of might, we pray for places of strife and warfare. We pray for places we remember now, for places we have forgotten, and for places we do not know but where You hear blood crying out from the ground.

Reshape tools of death into tools of life, and bend violence towards peace. Light the forge in our hearts and guide our hands in the craft of peace-making. We pray that we seek Your will, so that all may sit under their own vines and fig trees and no one will make us afraid. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Kevin Honz

March 27, 2020 – This Holy House

1st Kings 5: 4-5: But now the LORD my God has given me rest on every side; there is neither adversary nor misfortune. So I intend to build a house for the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD said to my father David, 'Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, shall build the house for my name.'

These two verses in 1st Kings open the story of the temple King Solomon built in Jerusalem. The back story leading up to this triumph begins in the wilderness. On Mount Sinai, God instructed Moses to construct the tabernacle. The tabernacle was made of layered curtains and wooden boards overlaid with gold and silver and housed the Ark of the Covenant. The tabernacle accompanied the Israelites on their journey through the wilderness and during the conquest of the Promised Land.

After King David conquered Jerusalem, he took the Ark of the Covenant into the city where he proposed to build the temple. God then forbade David from building the temple because of his sins, specifically his committing adultery with Bathsheba and arranging the death of her husband, Uriah, in battle. Thus, the task of building the temple fell to his son and successor, Solomon.

Solomon's temple housed the Ark of the Covenant and was to be the sole place of sacrifice by Israelites. From further information in 1st Kings, we know the dimensions of the temple, that the structure was made of cedar and the choicest stone and the foundation was made of hewn stone. The temple became the site of divine services in the kingdom.

Solomon was the first leader of the Israelites who faced neither adversaries nor misfortune. He had no enemies within the kingdom or without. How often in history have leaders blessed like Solomon turned away from God? How often do we as the people of God find ourselves in this happy state and turn away from God until the next adversary or misfortune appears? Do we remember to pray in the good times like we do in the bad?

Solomon did not turn away. When presented with this opportunity he was ready and active to let God's promises hasten. We too should seek to let God's promises hasten both through our actions and our prayers.

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for the times when we face neither adversaries nor misfortune. Keep us from taking you for granted in the good times; grant us the power to let your promises hasten in our time; and Please remind us to pray in good times just like the bad. Amen.*

Michael Hetrick

March 28, 2020 - **Goodness of Creation**

*Psalm 66:5: Come and see what God has done:
he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.*

Psalm 95: 4-5: In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed.

I am so thankful that God created Earth for our home. I marvel at its beauty, diversity, abundance, and resilience. But I worry that we have become detached from our connection to God's creation and I am baffled that caring for it seems to be yet another divisive topic in our current society.

I spend a lot of time outdoors, usually walking, hiking or bicycling. Most times, I notice stray plastic bags stuck in tree branches or other forms of plastic litter strewn along paths and curbsides. Many cars that pass by me are large and contain only a single person. Yet during winter when I use a bus to commute to work, there are rarely more than 5 or 6 people on board. As a society, we seem to have an insatiable appetite to consume and dispose of things rather than being good stewards of the world as God intended.

In her nonfiction book *Lab Girl*, author Hope Jahren states that in the past decade more than 50 billion trees have been cut down. In Tree Tenders, an online PSU extension class, I learned that 100 mature trees can remove up to 53 tons of carbon dioxide and catch up to 139,000 gallons of rainwater each year. It is sad that as the levels of CO₂ in our atmosphere rise and the risks of catastrophic flooding increase, we are destroying one of our best natural defenses - God's trees.

I recently read a West Asian Fable, seemingly appropriate for our current situation:

The forest was shrinking, but the trees kept voting for the axe.
For the axe was clever and convinced the trees that because
his handle was made of wood he was one of them.

Perhaps, during Lent, part of your devotions can be to spend time in God's creation. Enjoy it, marvel in it, and consider how your actions can sustain and preserve it. Thank God for it.

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for the wonderful world you created for us. Give us the wisdom to make good choices and to be wise stewards of the home you gave us. Help us to do all we can to keep it healthy for our children and future generations. Amen*

Carla Rossi

March 30, 2020 - **Goodness of Creation**

Psalm 19 – a Psalm of David

My wife and I go for a walk early each morning just as the sun rises. The morning sky provides a beautiful backdrop with all the pinks, oranges, purples, blues and reds. The breeze moves the clouds as we walk, changing the sky's canvas while the sun paints the morning into view. Sometimes the sun will catch just right on a plane or we see the sunlight reflect off the long string of its contrail. Many times, our neighbor's dog, Molly, runs out to greet us. We stop and happily give her her morning rub down. Once pleased, she scampers off as we continue on our way.

Later in the day after we finish our lunch, Thompson Woods and Walnut Springs Park beckon us to hike their leaf covered trails. The scent of oak leaves wafts through the air as we listen to the trees creak in the wind. A wild raspberry bush yields a crop of sweet, juicy berries and we stop to enjoy a small dessert. Every once in a while, I let my 61-year-old body pretend it's a boy again when I find a young sapling to go "bending birches". We see the remnants of the squirrels' dinner left behind on tree stumps. Left over acorns adorn their tabletops waiting for their return. As we emerge from the forest trees, the warm sun again hits our faces soothing our chilled skin.

During warmer months we sit on our back deck in the evening looking out over the southeast with Mt. Nittany and Tussey Mountain in the distance, our lemonade in hand. A bald eagle soars on the thermals, wings wide open to the air. Very soon after sunset, the sun reflects off orbiting satellites as they race across the night sky. On clear nights we watch the night sky as it explodes with constellations and take in the Milky Way showing off its brilliant splendor. Stormy nights are a whole other delight. Lightning blows away the darkness in glorious flash after flash. For just a split second, our surroundings are illuminated, revealing the hidden world of the shadows. Ultimately, the rain will catch up and chase us into the house as the water drops bounce off our faces.

The quietness of the evening has finally come and we climb the stairs to our bedroom. As our heads hit the soft pillows and we settle in for our nighttime respite, I can't help but wonder... How did David know the Lord would be right here in State College?

Prayer: *Let us pray...Heavenly Father, we thank you for this day and its many blessings. As we prepare for the Easter season, help us to see your everyday miracles that somehow seem to slip by us much too often. Your creation is far too important to take for granted and it's easy for us, in our weakness, to forget. In your strong name we pray, Amen.*

Kevin Borchert

March 31, 2020 - Gift of Relationship

Ecclesiastes 4:9: Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone?

Was it a full moon? Why were the residents at the nursing home where I worked nights all so irritable that week? People who were usually docile and sweet were lashing out. I got slapped in the face by a resident for suggesting she needed to wear nonskid socks to prevent another potential fall on slippery floors. Another resident had overstayed her welcome visiting another resident. The owner of the room was unsuccessful in persuading her it was time to go. My attempt to intervene was met with indignant exclamations that she didn't have to listen to me – while jabbing an angry finger at my chest for emphasis. Another resident took a swat at me while trying to maneuver him into bed...well that one wasn't out of the ordinary. Then the next resident who is normally sweet and agreeable refused to stand up from her wheelchair to transfer to the toilet. I had reached the limit of my patience and needed help. I went to the nurse's station to ask for someone to help me. The LPN was happy to oblige. As soon as the nurse approached the stubborn resident, she popped up out of her chair and happily agreed to comply. I stood there dumbfounded and the tears of frustration began to flow. My coworker gave me a hug and pointed out that I'm frustrated, and the residents can sense it. I should go take some time to collect myself.

My coworker joined me in the sitting area and asked what was bothering me. As I recounted my frustrations of the week, she provided tissues and words of understanding and encouragement. She told me of her love and admiration for me and the compassionate manner I normally have with the residents. Of course, hearing this required more tissues. She told me how this line of work requires prayer and the help of God to guide us. We both laughed as we discovered that we both pray in our cars before coming into the building. As we were sharing this moment a family member came by to let us know she was leaving. When she realized she interrupted an emotional conversation she apologized and said she hopes everything is ok and that she'll get out of our way. I explained I was just having a rough night. She said the words that perfectly explained how I was feeling. She said that the residents are essentially like family and when they act out of character it hurts our soul even when you know they wouldn't normally behave that way without dementia. When you love deeply you feel hurt deeply. As she left, I felt God had sent two angels to me to put peace back into my soul. I was reminded that I am loved and not alone. God provides friends and even people just passing by to remind us He is there.

Prayer: God we are grateful for the lessons you teach us. We're grateful for friends, family and people that come along to remind us of your presence with us as we walk this earth. Help those who are suffering to feel the warm hug of a friend who can convey your love for them. Amen.

Linda Schul

April 1, 2020 - **Communion of Faith**

Galatians 6:2: Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Matthew 18:20: For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.

1st Thessalonians 5:12 – 18

In the hymn, "O Master Let Me Walk with You", the author writes in the third stanza, "Teach me your patience; share with me a closer, dearer company, In work that keeps faith sweet and strong, In trust that triumphs over wrong." This expresses the thoughts that Paul writes to the church at Thessalonica telling the followers to be mindful of our need to live in peace with one another, encourage each other and be patient with all persons. Help the weak, be kind and joyful to all.

Give thanks always in all circumstances and prayer continually for this is God's will for us.

The need for us as followers of Christ is to strive to be faithful in our communion with others in our daily living. Faith is progressive as we live our lives and is grounded in hope and love. Paul states that we "receive the 'good news' of salvation through Jesus Christ and as a result of our faith we will act in Christ's name. Therefore, if we join together with one voice, we will have an attitude of faith through our whole being and enable us to overcome difficulties that we encounter.

Hebrews 11:1 states that "*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*"

As Martin Luther states, "Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times."

In communion with the fellowship of believers, we can become examples to others and truly follow Christ's footsteps in our daily interaction with one another and others.

Prayer:

Dear Father, help us to remember that our faith in you continues to grow as we mature in our walk with your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Kathryn Mackes

April 2, 2020 - **Peace**

*Isaiah 26:3: Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace —
in peace because they trust in you.*

I opened the email and my heart sank. After a season of wrestling with a complex bundle of challenges for our son (and those who interact with him on a daily basis), a solution seemed no closer to being found. Days spent on the telephone, hours spent at meetings or in conversations, attending appointments with doctors and therapists, all designed to gather data, input and diagnosis and yet, that light at the end of the tunnel seemed no closer. It is hard when questions concerning the lives of those I love are not easily answered. The line between my brows deepens, my stomach clenches and my shoulders hunch. Sleep eludes me and the clock by my bed turns slowly throughout the long night. I find it difficult to pray and difficult to trust.

When our children were in the throes of the challenges of growing, we often would counsel them to remember their history, to think about the hard times they had faced before and how they had made it through, sometimes even triumphing. We would retell the stories of the times they were able to do hard things during hard times. So, how do I listen to my own advice? How do I take my own counsel? How do I keep my mind steadfast when my heart is sinking?

Perhaps I can begin by meditating on the words of Isaiah and claim the promise of perfect peace. I can seek to slow a racing mind enough to begin to calm a flagging spirit. I can heed the counsel of family and friends who listen, know me, love me, and affirm me. I can go to the healing space of our sanctuary. And I can recount God's faithfulness to our family and to this son of mine whom God loves so fully and who is, as my friend Lois reminded me, "the apple of God's eye."

Prayer:

Dear God, Forgive me when my mind races and my heart sinks. Forgive me when I think it is all up to me and I turn my back on all I know to be true. Please take these fears and anxieties from me so I may trust in the perfect peace you promise to all your sons and daughters. Amen.

Ellen Herman Campbell

April 3, 2020 - **Hurts of Your Children**

2nd Corinthians 1:3-5: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, ⁴ who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. ⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.

When I had my children, someone told me, “the umbilical cord is never cut.” When they were little, boo boos could be cleaned and kisses given, then all was right with the world. Then growing up, school and the outside world invaded our lives. You learn early on that there is not a filter big enough to protect your children from hurt, pain, and bad choices at times. You love them, wipe the tears, cheer them on, try to teach life skills, and teach them how to remain strong. A parent’s heart holds an immeasurable amount of tears for everything that hurts their child. The cause of these trials and choices change as they grow and enter adulthood, but our connection to their pains and struggles do not change. I frequently feel like a barometer of my children’s lives. I can feel guilty and/or sad every time something goes wrong. They know that I love them unconditionally, and I hope they realize I would do anything for them.

Reading *2nd Corinthians 1:3-5* was very special to me for two main reasons. First, God loves us more than we can ever love each other. To think that someone loves me more than I can ever love anyone else is humbling to me. I can read this verse and know that God is with me in both good times and bad. He suffers with us when we go off the mark but offers guidance to return. I realized that if I can love a child, or other person, no matter what, then I am very blessed to have a God that loves me many times more.

Second, God will work with us and through us to care for our loved ones. I get my strength from God and He enables me to share that strength. I find that my most frequent prayer request is for my children to be held in God’s hand and guided to him. He is there always and will be there no matter what happens. He is holding them even when they are not aware of it. He assures us that, no matter what, He is there to love and comfort us all.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for always loving us and caring for us. Please help us to recognize your presence in times of struggle as well as times of happiness. Amen.*

Judy Rockey

April 4, 2020 - **Strife and Conflict**

Romans 12: 17-19: Do not repay anyone evil for evil.

I'm sure many of us would say this is much easier said than done. I know I do. Especially when we deal with the impact of trauma, including the loss of loved ones, we often deal with feelings of wanting someone to pay.

When my family and I lost our Ricky—my younger brother—to a drug overdose I wanted people to pay dearly for the loss of his life, the loss of his potential, and the loss of opportunity to help him. I still wonder, years later, if those who supplied my brother with the fatal substances know the impact of their choices. I wonder if those who ran away as he experienced his overdose instead of calling for help know what they did. But then I remember what God tells us in today's verse — *“Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath.”* To be fair, I do not think God is going to strike down the individuals who were around my brother. Instead, I pray there comes a day when they have an understanding of the impact of their choices and seek the help they need and truly learn.

When there is a loss of potential, there is also a feeling of loss for one more “I love you.” One more “I'm sorry.” Feelings of “Did I do enough?” “What could I have said to make it better?” still fill my heart on some sad days. But I have learned more and more on God and God's promise to love all of us and to always care for us. While I still ache for my baby brother, I know with certainty that he is so loved in heaven — he is so protected and so cherished. That to me is the best justice of all. I have total faith one day I'll get to hold my brother again and the veil of whatever caused strife on Earth will be lifted. I know because God told me so.

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for your promises and for your continued forgiveness when we choose to dream of revenge instead of leaning on you. You forgive us when we make mistakes, when we blame ourselves, and when we choose hate instead of love. You accept our moans, questions, and yelling upward and still keep us nestled in your ever-loving arms. Help us to remember that no matter what we do, we are your children and you will never leave us. When we lose loved ones on Earth, help us remember they are never alone and never cold. They are very warm and loved in the arms of their Creator. Thank you for the love. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Jennifer Pencek

April 6, 2020

Goodness of Creation

*Psalm 8:3-9: When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?*

*Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.*

*You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*

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

Prayer:

*Dear God, help us to preserve the wonders of your works in the universe,
all plants, and animals in the ecosystem we call Earth. Thank you for these
gifts. Help us appreciate these wonders! Amen.*

Robert Byers

April 7, 2020

**Gift of Relationship
Hurts of Your Children
Healing and Forgiveness**

Genesis 2:18: Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.'

Psalm 147:2-3: The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds.

Psalm 107:19-22: Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress; he sent out his word and healed them and delivered them from destruction. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind. And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices and tell of his deeds with songs of joy.

Prayer:

Dear God, in our times of need, where we are down and alone, please send us someone who will understand and help us. Please also allow us to console ourselves through your word. Thank you for sending us signs and people to help us through our times of struggle. Amen.

Declan Flanagan & Ethan Hardyk

April 8, 2020 - **Hurts of Your Children**

Psalm 147:2-3: The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

My oldest brother Michael died of ALS twelve years ago at the age of 41. I learned a lot about life, death, the strength of family, and power of faith in the 2½ years he battled Lou Gehrig's Disease. Upon his diagnosis, our family was heartbroken knowing his illness was terminal and that we would need to prepare to say goodbye. My parents were losing a child, and my brother and I were losing our oldest sibling. Inevitably, we all handled our pain and sorrow very differently – especially my mom and dad.

In situations like this, people often struggle to find the right words to bring comfort, so it was typical that a friend would hug my mom and simply say, "I'm so sorry you are going through this and I am keeping you and Michael in my prayers." Through her tears my mom would respond with, "Thank you. We will take all the prayers we can get. This is really hard on our family."

When someone shared those same sentiments with my dad, his tired eyes would become steely and he would snap, "Well, don't waste your time. It's clearly not working." My mom would shrink with embarrassment while my dad would stare off in the distance. He was angry, and he aimed that emotion at God. While my mom leaned on her faith and prayed for a miracle, my dad became an "exile of Israel". He stopped going to church and coldly advised people not to expend any energy praying for our family.

I distinctly remember one moment in particular when my mom made an attempt to heal my dad's heart on her own. After one of these exchanges described above, she looked at my dad and quietly said, "If anyone knows what it's like to lose a son, it's God." I thought she had a very valid argument. My dad, however, was still not convinced.

My brother died early on Sunday morning, February 24, 2008. The first person my dad went to notify was the pastor at my brother's church in Charlottesville. Pastor John had made many visits to my brother while he was in Hospice care and provided much comfort to him and his wife during this time of suffering and uncertainty. When my dad and I showed up at the church that morning, the pastor was just getting ready for the 8:00 a.m. service. The first thing he did was take my dad's hands in his and said a beautiful prayer about Michael. Then the three of us cried together.

This was the moment when I saw the Lord build up Jerusalem and gather the exiles of Israel. It was the beginning of healing for the brokenhearted. Twelve years later, the wounds are bound and my dad's faith in God is stronger than ever.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, your patience is unwavering. When we go astray and question our faith, you stand strong, meet us where we are, and welcome us back into your out-stretched arms. Thank you for gathering the exiles, healing our broken hearts, and binding our wounds through your unconditional love. Amen.

Miriam Powell

April 9, 2020 - **Peace**

Philippians 4:6-7: Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

I have struggled with my prayer life more than I would like to admit. I always thought that I had so much so I shouldn't ask God for anything, he would give me what he thought I needed or deserved, right? I thought that I should be able to take care of myself and so if I were lacking, I had to find it in myself to figure it out. I thought that I should pray for other people though because that is how you help and support others, right? Obviously, I had a lot of thoughts about how my prayers should be.

So, then I went through a series of events and knew I had to finally do something different in my life. Someone had suggested mediation and I thought, why not at this point? I never even thought about it in terms of my relationships with Jesus. But as I finally sat and got my brain to stop thinking.....my prayers just came rising to the top. Instead of being so anxious about what I was to pray about, I just opened by heart. I came to understand that those quiet moments are a time for me to check in with myself about what I need and a time to reflect on what all I have to be thankful for and that doing that, those are my prayers. I finally realized I didn't have to THINK about how to pray, I just needed to be still and it was in the stillness that I finally found the peace that passes all understanding that we are promised in Philippians 4:7.

Prayer:

Lord help me and others to not think so much about how to pray but just to be still and open our hearts so that we can know the peace that only you can give. Amen.

Michelle Thal

April 10, 2020 - **Goodness of Creation**

Psalm 95:4-5: In his hands are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also; The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed.

Bundled in wool sweaters and, for me, heavy mittens, my husband and I hiked around Walden Pond in Concord, MA, the morning after Thanksgiving. Exhilarating, wondrous, and peaceful are words that best describe that experience. As we walked the perimeter of the lake, I was in awe, as I always am, of God's creation. The psalmist reminds us of God's hand in the "depths of the earth" and the "heights of the mountains," in the sea and on the land.

It's easy to admire God's handiwork on a crisp fall day while on vacation, but it requires a more deliberate effort, I think, to do so in the midst of our busy lives. We hurry everywhere, it seems: to school, to work, to meetings and social luncheons and responsibilities. We walk briskly across campus and don't notice the new plantings; we drive through Boalsburg without noticing the nearby ridge. I'm convinced that we need—truly need—to see.

Nature gives us a chance to reconnect with God. Not long ago, at my husband's encouragement, I began walking. I found little joy, however, until I drove a few miles outside of State College to walk along lovely, rolling farmland. For my new-found activity, I set three parameters: I'd hold only positive thoughts, I'd pay attention to the landscape, and I'd meditate and pray. During these morning walks, I saw the natural beauty of this area where we live and, more importantly, I felt very close to God.

Nature also renews our spirit and reminds us of our faith. I vividly recall riding in a car with my maternal grandmother one evening when I was a teenager. As we approached the crest of a hill and looked west, we came upon a glorious, colorful sunset. After a moment of silent wonder, she remarked, "How can you look at that and not believe?" It wasn't really a question as much as a statement. How true, I thought.

The psalmist was wise to remind us of God's gift to us. Perhaps writer and transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau put it best, observing that "Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads."

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, we thank you for all your creation, for the beauty that is our earth. And we pray that we're mindful of its care—that we act responsibly to protect the natural resources we rely on and the beauty that we need to nurture our souls. Amen.*

Polly Dee Keiser McWilliams

April 11, 2020 - **Peace**

*Psalm 4:8: I will both lie down and sleep in peace;
for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety.*

This verse has become very dear to me over the years. I've shared it with many people as they've endured hardships, and I've likewise prayed it for the hardships in my own life. I prayed it most fervently when my daughter's health was at its worst as the result of concussions. I felt so helpless. I wanted to fix her problems and restore her health. I argued with God for moving too slowly. I pleaded with God to at least transfer *her* pain and suffering to *me*.

In the midst of all this, God was, for the most part, silent. But God was not inactive. Slowly and gradually, my daughter was healing. Though I could not always see it, God did, and so God gave me the gift I really needed, peace in my heart. That peace granted me the patience, trust, and assurance I needed to realize that even as we sailed in the midst of a storm, our Lord was with us. God's peace doesn't always mean that things will turn out exactly the way we wish. But God's peace does give us confidence that, in God's time and in God's wisdom, all will indeed be well.

Grace's staff meets every Tuesday morning. It's an important meeting because we carefully examine the church's master calendar to discuss logistics and assign roles. It's a complicated task because we have a busy building that people within and without our church want to use. When Pastor Lynn served as senior pastor, he always closed that meeting by saying, "We are blessed." It became a trademark of sorts for him and was an important reminder for us of the many ways that God had blessed us as individuals and as a congregation.

When I became senior pastor, I didn't want to merely parrot Pastor Lynn's saying. But I knew we needed a similar statement of vision as we closed our meetings. For quite a while I tried to imagine what I might say that would be as helpful as "We are blessed." At my first staff meeting as senior pastor I still wasn't sure. But as the meeting concluded, the Spirit gave me the simple words: "Peace be with you." I continue to say them at the conclusion of each staff meeting, because I can't think of any greater promise or blessing. May God's peace surround you as well.

Prayer:

Gracious Lord, in the midst of life's trials and tribulations, hold me close. Surround me with your peace. Grant me assurance that you love me and are always with me. And in that peace, let me rest comfortably, confident in the blessing that you are bringing. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Rev. Scott E. Schul

Bonus Devotional - **Gift of Relationship**

Ecclesiastes 4:9-11: Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone?

1 John 4:11-12: Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Have you ever done anything alone? Sure you have. Was it hard? Maybe. Does asking for help make you feel like a burden to another? "I can get through this alone! It may be hard but somehow I can do it." God hasn't meant for us to be alone, and especially when we are in need of help. Have you offered to help someone? How did it make you feel? Good I would suspect.

God has often put the right people in the right place at the right time. Maybe they didn't even realize it until later. Maybe they have been praying to God for help, and nothing happened. Then someone was introduced to the other who helped solve the problem. Maybe not instantly, but eventually. Relationships are like that, working together to solve a problem, or just to abide in one another, just as God abides with us.

When I read these passages, I thought about the how the Stephen Ministry program here at Grace has been helping people with their problems for ten years. I have been one of the leaders since the first training in January 2010. I have witnessed brokenness, hurt, and the healing that has come out of those caring relationships. I am grateful for those individuals who have committed their time and compassion to be a Stephen Minister so they can help another human being who is hurting. God wants us to be there to pick up another when they fall. *"For if they fall, one will lift up the other;"* I am also grateful to have seen these relationships form unexpected friendships that will last a lifetime to both parties. God certainly has bestowed many blessings on these relationships. My prayer is one of thanksgiving...

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for relationships of all kinds; for those that are struggling and the help that comes to those that find comfort in others and accept their help. Let them know that you are also the part of that relationship. Amen

Brenda Palmgren

Bonus Devotional - **Peace**

Philippians 4:6-7: Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Reflection

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, Our Lord.” This was the line that ended every sermon I heard as a child. My church, Pine Hall Lutheran, just down the road, had the same pastor for my growing years and this was his ending for every sermon. This line from the Letter to the Philippians brought me comfort as a child, and also comforts me in the turmoil and joys of adulthood. I hope this passage brings you comfort today as well.

Prayer:

O God of Peace, grant us thankful hearts for all things and a calm that only you can give when we worry. Continue to walk with us throughout good and our bad. Your presence brings us comfort. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Peter Horn

Bonus Devotional - **Peace**

1 Peter 4:8-11: Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

We are called to be good stewards of God's grace. This simplistic demand takes on a core virtue regarding daily Christian life. Peter, writing to early Christian communities, let them know each day will bring challenges, but we can honor God by using the gifts He so graciously bestowed upon us. We all have gifts; use them to serve your community. I believe LOVE is the single most influential act that can impact hardship, goodness, sadness, and emotions. Like the ripple effect, beginning with one individual love shared can multiply into a community that will love one another.

These verses resonated with a deep connection to both my ministry as well as my Faith Formation ideology. Young families, children, teens, adults, empty-nesters, widows, older adults, and couples can feel isolated in our daily lives. However, on Sunday morning, we come together to form a worshiping body, a community of believers. When we utilize our gifts and love, we create an inclusive community of believers. We are more than a worshiping community, in a world where we are isolated, siloed or labeled, honor God's grace using your gifts and love to widen your circle. As our acolytes tell us each Sunday, "Go in peace, serve the Lord!"

Prayer:

Good and Gracious God, Life is hard, but you have given us many gifts to support each other. Help us to contribute to our community positively. You have called us to love each other. The selfless act (of love) can overcome the wrongs we commit and heal those that have not been loved by others. With your help, we can be the change. Through all your grace, we are grateful and honor you. Amen

Cindy Fritz